



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho (R) engages in a war of words with referee Graham Poll during their Premiership clash against Manchester United at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Mourinho pours scorn on Poll

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho launched a bitter attack on Graham Poll after being infuriated by the referee's decisions during Chelsea's bad-tempered goalless draw against Manchester United.

Mourinho believes Poll has been a constant thorn in his side this season and admits he would be happy if he never took charge of another Chelsea match.

The Portuguese coach's anger is rooted in Poll's decision to send off John Terry during a defeat at Tottenham in November and was piqued again at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

United's Chris Eagles was lucky to escape with a booking for a nasty two-footed lunge on Shaun Wright-Phillips, before Wes Brown hit Scott Sinclair with a challenge that left the young winger with a broken metatarsal bone in his left foot.

Mourinho stored up his rage at Poll's failure to dismiss Eagles and took it out on the official after a clash between Claude Makelele and

Wayne Rooney.

He sprang from the bench to aim a furious tirade at Poll, who initially appeared to send off Mourinho. The Chelsea manager retreated to a seat behind the dug-out before returning moments later after realising he had not been dismissed.

"I was telling Mr Poll a couple of things I have had in my heart since the Tottenham game at White Hart Lane. But it was nothing special. I was cleansing my soul.

"I thought I was being sent off but I wasn't. I walked to the stands but then my assistants were saying 'you can stay in your position.'

"I think he (Poll) was what he is always. He had a normal performance when he is refereeing a Chelsea match.

"I just say he is a referee Chelsea has no luck with. If we can have another referee we are happy. We do not like to have Mr Poll."

In truth, Mourinho should have been grateful to Poll for not sending off John Obi Mikel following the Chelsea midfielder's reckless foul on Eagles.

But once again Mourinho was in the mood to see conspiracies everywhere. The Premier League were

next to feel his wrath as he complained that the decision to originally schedule Chelsea's home fixture against United for the same day as the FA Cup semi-finals had done his side no favours.

With both clubs reaching the last four of the FA Cup the match was rescheduled for Wednesday, by which time the title race was already over.

"The Premiership is the best league in the world and they can't afford this kind of mistake," Mourinho said. "If we had played in the middle of April there would have been six or seven more matches to play."

"This should be the game that every football fan around the world is eating on TV. But instead it was the kind of game that people change for a soap or something more interesting."

With United already crowned champions and both managers opting to rest key players, a match that had for so long been billed as a title decider was more like a reserve fixture.

Chelsea gave a guard of honour to United before the match, but neither side deserved to win the phoney war

ahead of their next meeting in the FA Cup final on May 19, which Mourinho confirmed Ricardo Carvalho and Michael Ballack are certain to miss through injury.

At least Mourinho's men managed efforts from Shaun Wright-Phillips and Salomon Kalou that forced Tomasz Kuszcak into action.

United, who gave a debut to China striker Dong Fangzhuo, didn't manage a shot on target, but Sir Alex Ferguson was understandably relaxed about his team's display.

"I have to be pleased at the result, some of the performance was good at times but we tired in the last 15 minutes," he said.

"When people saw our team, they maybe thought, 'they're not interested'. But we were interested okay because this club has to win all its games.

"It was very competitive. In the first half, I think the boy Mikel was lucky to be on the pitch, I think that was a bad tackle.

"At times it became a bit feisty and hard to handle for the referee. But that just shows you the level of competition between the teams."

Besiktas win Turkish Cup

AFP, Ankara

Istanbul giants Besiktas clinched the 2007 Turkey Cup Wednesday with a 1-0 victory in overtime over league laggards Kayseri Erciyesspor in the western city of Izmir.

The winning goal came in the 102th minute with a header by Brazilian striker Bobo from a right wing cross. Besiktas won the cup for the seventh time.

With three matches to go before the season closes, they are second in the league, trailing five points behind Fenerbahce.

Reds livid over ticket allocation

AFP, London

Liverpool officials and fans are up in arms over UEFA's insistence that there will be no increase in the 17,000 tickets they have been allocated for the Champions League final against AC Milan in Athens.

The eagerly-awaited clash will take place at the 63,000-capacity Olympic Stadium in Athens on May 23 and the demand for seats from Liverpool is already immense with prices over 1,000 pounds (1,470 euros) being quoted on some agency websites.

A statement from Liverpool given to BBC Radio Five Live read: "The bottom line is that UEFA have not supplied anywhere near enough tickets for the Champions League Final.

"Liverpool have expressed their disappointment and frustration to UEFA -- but have been told categorically that no more tickets will be allocated to the club, not even the returned tickets from Milan -- they will go into a UEFA ballot.

"Liverpool Football Club understands and shares the disappointment of their fans in what is a very frustrating situation.

"Our policy on tickets was available right from the start of the season and has not changed.

"The ballot for Liverpool fans was drawn up to be as fair as possible to fans, but the bottom line is that UEFA have not supplied enough tickets for the match."

Liverpool have operated a fancard policy this season whereby supporters earn a point for each European game attended this season -- or more accurately, ticket bought.

Those with seven or more points qualified while those with less -- in many cases season-ticket holders who have been unable to travel abroad -- have been entered into a ballot.

UEFA have insisted that their allocation is fair.

Apart from the 17,000 given to the clubs, 20,000 tickets have been allocated to the "UEFA family" and a further 9,000 have gone into a ballot.

UEFA spokesman William Gaillard told the Liverpool Echo: "If we built a stadium with a million seats, the match would still sell out and supporters would not be able to see the pitch.

"It's impossible more will be released in the coming weeks -- 17,000 is the final figure."

Sevilla in Cup final

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla, still on course for a treble of titles, beat Deportivo la Coruna 2-0 on Wednesday night to qualify for the Spanish Cup final 5-0 on aggregate.

Sevilla, who scored through Duda and Javier Chevanton in the first half, play Espanyol in the UEFA Cup final on May 16 in Glasgow and are still in the hunt for the Spanish league title.

Barcelona played Getafe in the other semifinal on Thursday with the Catalonians having won the first leg 5-2 at home.

Becks quick to de-blonde

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham appeared for training on Wednesday with close-cropped hair, less than two weeks after the former England captain unveiled a new platinum blond hairstyle.

Beckham, who turned 32 last week, said he cut his hair because of the arrival of warm weather in the Spanish capital and he did not like his new look.

Now a fashion icon as much as a footballer, Beckham's platinum hairstyle -- which he unveiled on April 26 -- made the front pages of Spain's daily sports newspapers. It was the player's tenth hairstyle since joining Real in 2004, according to sports newspapers AS and Marca.

Nantes relegated

AFP, Paris



Nantes, who had played 44 consecutive seasons in the French first division, were relegated on Wednesday night even though they won 1-0 at Bordeaux.

Nice's 1-0 victory at home to Paris Saint Germain and Valenciennes' win by the same scoreline against St Etienne meant basement club Nantes, who were the last team to win the first division title since the run of reigning six-times champions Lyon, mathematically had to go down.

Dennis Oliech scored in the 78th minute for Nantes but it was not enough to stop the eight-times champions falling into the second tier to cause a shock to the French footballing establishment. Nantes keeper Tony Heurtebis had even saved a penalty

from Alejandro Alonso in the 17th minute.

Nantes' relegation comes after a chaotic season which saw them use four coaches, continually change line-ups and put in less than average displays in the tactical department.

Max Bossis, a three-time French league champion with Nantes during the 70s and early 80s, said: "My first reaction is extreme sadness, but I also get the feeling of a big waste in sporting and human terms. I remember all the great times, the titles, the exceptional moments we shared while playing with this jersey."

Sedan, who lost 2-1 to Lille, were relegated with Nantes but they are more accustomed to yo-yoing between the elite clubs and the second division.

At the other end of the table, already-crowned champions Lyon showed no pity on second-placed Lens, thrashing them 3-0 with first half goals through Sidney Govou, Juninho Pernambucano

and Alou Diarra.

That meant Marseille, who beat Nancy 2-1 with goals from Djibril Cisse and Mamadou Niang, took second place on their own which would be enough to take one of the two automatic qualifying berths into the group stages of the Champions League.

Marseille coach Albert Emon said afterwards: "We suffered tonight but we won. Nancy have made it difficult for many teams this season so it was not a surprise they did the same to us tonight. This was an important victory for us."

Meanwhile Sochaux coach Jean-Claude Plessis had stern words for Marseille on the run-up to Saturday's French Cup final between the clubs, saying they had made an unauthorised approach to midfielder Karim Ziani.

"I don't know if they are trying to destabilise us but I do not appreciate these methods before playing the French Cup final," said Plessis.

Owen future in doubt

AFP, Newcastle



The chances of Michael Owen still being a Newcastle player at the start of next season appear to have been reduced after a scathing outburst by Freddy Shepherd, the Magpies chairman.

With speculation over Owen's future swirling around St James' Park, Shepherd has demanded a public expression of loyalty from the England striker to the club where he has played just 13 matches since being signed for 17 million pounds two years ago.

But the chances of that happening look slim in light of Shepherd's public criticism of the player's advisors, whom he accused of attempting to "flog Owen from under our feet," and his claim that none of England's Champions League clubs were interested in buying the England striker -- a suggestion which seems unlikely and may be regarded as gratuitously insulting by Owen.

English media on Thursday reported that a clause in Owen's contract which would allow him to leave Newcastle for a cut-price nine million pounds (18 million dollars), and Shepherd clearly believes the details have been leaked by people close to

Owen.

"These suggestions will not impress our fans after what has happened in the last couple of years," he fumed.

"This report was a very thinly-disguised attempt to flog Owen from under our feet, sourced very close to the player or those who look after him. The information must have come from there, not from our club."

Shepherd added: "I'm telling Michael he has two choices: he either comes out and tells our fans, who have taken him to their hearts, that he is happy here -- or I tell him that not one of the big four clubs, Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal or Liverpool are interested in him. Because that's the case.

"The loyalty this club has shown him over the last two years, when he had injury problems in his first season and had missed virtually all of this season, deserves something in return.

"He has had a really serious injury and no-one, least of all one of the biggest clubs, is likely to take a risk at this stage.

"He has to prove to everyone, himself and Newcastle United included, that he is fully recovered and not about to break down again."

Owen only returned to action this month after damaging his anterior cruciate knee ligament during the first

moments of England's 2-2 World Cup draw against Sweden last summer.

He has however declared himself fitter than ever following ten months of rehabilitation work and is planning to return to the national squad for their friendly against Brazil and a key Euro 2008 qualifier in Estonia at the start of June.

Good performances in those matches will inevitably trigger fresh interest in the striker and it is not inconceivable that, contrary to Shepherd's claim, all of the top four clubs could be interested in signing him: Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United will all be looking to sign at least one new striker this summer.

Shepherd meanwhile rubbished suggestions that Sven-Goran Eriksson is in the running to become the new Newcastle manager following the resignation of Glenn Roeder.

Former Bolton boss Sam Allardyce is widely expected to get the job, despite a claim from Eriksson's agent Athole Still that 51 percent of Newcastle fans backed the former England boss for the job.

Shepherd said: "Where he gets that figure from, I can't imagine. I think 51 percent of Geordies might like the idea of Sven's girlfriend Nancy Dell'Olio on the Newcastle Quayside."



Sevilla players Ernesto Chevanton (L) and Daniel Alves take part in an innovative celebration after the former scored a goal against Deportivo La Coruna during their King's Cup match at the Sanchez Pizjuan in Seville on Wednesday.

Federer shocked out of Rome

Tennis

AFP, Rome

World number one and top seed Roger Federer was sensationally knocked out in the third round of the Rome Masters by Filippo Volandri on Thursday.

A two-time beaten finalist here and the reigning Australian Open champion, Federer uncharacteristically made 44 unforced errors in his shock 6-2, 6-4 defeat to the Italian wildcard ranked 53rd in the world.

Defeat means Federer has now gone four tournaments without winning a title, his longest stretch without a trophy since he became world number one in February 2004.

"I played shocking," was Federer's brutal assessment of his own performance.

"I just couldn't get into the game. I was serving horrendous, and you don't get any free points on clay if you are not serving well.

"It is very disappointing to go out at this stage of the tournament, but it does happen in tennis.

"But everyone's talking about me, but give credit to Filippo. He played a great match."

Asked if he could take any positives from his shock exit, Federer replied: "It gives me more time to practise for the French Open."

Volandri said it was a dream come true to defeat Federer on

home soil.

"It's more than a dream, more than I could have hoped for," said the 25-year-old.

Earlier on Thursday American third seed Andy Roddick was bundled out 6-0, 6-4 by Argentina's Juan Ignacio Chela.

Roddick, a semifinalist here in 2002, struggled with his serve and made 27 unforced errors as Chela recorded only his second victory over the former world number one in eight meetings.

Ranked 23 in the world, Chela will now face the winner of the all-Chilean clash between sixth seed Fernando Gonzalez and Nicolas Massu.

Roddick admitted he gave himself too much to do after his poor first set display.

"I dug a hole for myself in the first 10 minutes," said the 24-year-old.

"After that it was an uphill battle. I started playing better in the second set, but it was too little, too late."

Chela, who has never reached the Rome quarterfinals before, was delighted with his performance at the Foro Italico.

"I played the perfect match," said the 27-year-old, winner of four ATP titles.

"The first set was fairly straightforward and allowed me to save some energy for the second.

"That helped me a lot as Roddick played much better in the second set."

The Rome Masters is a warm-up event for the French Open, the second Grand Slam

of the year which starts on May 27.

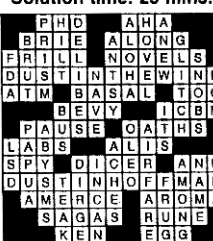


Real Madrid star David Beckham sports a close cropped look after shaving off his recently acquired platinum blonde look during a training session in Madrid on Thursday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS										DOWN									
1	Harmonization	35	Squeak remover	21	"Big Blue"	23	Tex-Mex recipe	24	Honeycomb chamber	1	Overconfident	2	Days gone by	3	Unless (Lat.)	25	Dispatch	26	Get ready
5	Sound of disgust	37	Tuning needs	40	United nations	41	Turn accessory	45	Deuce	5	Sub of WWII	6	Bush league?	7	Small axe	8	Calyx	32	Address ender
8	Tater	40	United nations	41	Turn accessory	45	Deuce	5	Sub of WWII	6	Bush league?	7	Small axe	8	Calyx	32	Address ender	33	Discernment
12	Drudgery	41	Turn accessory	45	Deuce	5	Sub of WWII	6	Bush league?	7	Small axe	8	Calyx	32	Address ender	33	Discernment	35	"Eureka!"
13	Feathery	41	Turn accessory	45	Deuce	5	Sub of WWII	6	Bush league?	7	Small axe	8	Calyx	32	Address ender	33	Discernment	35	"Eureka!"
14	Facility	41	Turn accessory	45	Deuce	5	Sub of WWII	6	Bush league?	7	Small axe	8	Calyx	32	Address ender	33	Discernment	35	"Eureka!"
15	Bear in the air?	47	Man-mouse link	49	Donate	50	Eventual plant	51	First St.	52	Wastes	53	Skin opening	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade
16	Make a decision	49	Donate	50	Eventual plant	51	First St.	52	Wastes	53	Skin opening	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade
17	Blueprint	50	Eventual plant	51	First St.	52	Wastes	53	Skin opening	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade
18	Japanese entertainer	52	Wastes	53	Skin opening	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade
20	Florentino	52	Wastes	53	Skin opening	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade
22	Devoid of illumination	54	Shade	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade
26	Combustible	55	Shade	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade
29	Height of fashion?	56	Shade	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade
30	Floral adornment	57	Shade	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade	65	Shade
31	Cross	58	Shade	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade	65	Shade	66	Shade
32	Pimple	59	Shade	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade	65	Shade	66	Shade	67	Shade
33	"... have to do"	60	Shade	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade	65	Shade	66	Shade	67	Shade	68	Shade
34	Id counter-part	61	Shade	62	Shade	63	Shade	64	Shade	65	Shade	66	Shade	67	Shade	68	Shade	69	Shade

Solution time: 25 mins.



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CRYPTOQUIP

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HA QHLLIOIAK JDNF, QZ
NZE FERRZFO KMON FRODW
D QHLLIOIAK YDACEHFM?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SCI-FI FILM IN WHICH ALIENS ATTEMPTED TO SELL REAL ESTATE ON OTHER WORLDS: "LOTS IN SPACE."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals P