



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) unleashes a shot on goal as Manchester United defender Nemanja Vidic looks to block during their FA Cup final at Wembley on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Blue is the colour

AGENCIES, London



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba scored a goal deep into injury time to settle the FA Cup final against Manchester United at Wembley on Saturday.

Both sides were locked goalless at the end of full time and a scrappy match was decided by a moment of brilliance from the Ivorian forward, who has been the stalwart for the Blues this season.

Drogba combined beautifully with midfielder Frank Lampard who lifted a pass over the defence for the front-man to poke past the advancing Van der Sar to score in the 26th minute of extra-time.

Chelsea then held on for the last few minutes despite some nervy moments to win the first final in the new Wembley.

With the Premiership champions close to full strength and Chelsea obliged to do without the injured trio of Ricardo Carvalho, Michael Ballack and Andriy Shevchenko, United's line-up appeared, on paper at least, to carry the greater attacking threat.

In practice, it was Chelsea, with Joe Cole and Shaun Wright-Phillips swirling either side of Didier Drogba, who displayed the greater attacking initiative in an opening half that never really sparked into life.

Wayne Bridge's dipping cross from the left offered Didier Drogba the opportunity to give Chelsea the lead as early as the third minute but Gabriel Heinze's close attention served to unbalance the Ivory Coast striker and his header sailed

comfortably over the bar.

Cole's delivery from the opposite flank proved equally unsettling with Wes Brown's weak clearance landing at the feet of Wright-Phillips, whose shot was charged down by Rio Ferdinand.

Jose Mourinho's pre-match insistence that his side would play the match in the correct spirit was hardly reflected in Cole's late, two-footed lunge at Wes Brown, for which the England midfielder was fortunate to escape a yellow card.

Referee Steve Bennett was equally indulgent when Heinze chopped Wright-Phillips to the newly-laid turf but those proved to be isolated incidents.

United's first sniff of an opening came after quarter of an hour when Darren Fletcher's header left Rooney with only Petr Cech to beat. The offside flag went up -- wrongly television replays suggested -- but Rooney, in any case, placed his shot wide of the target.

The England forward's touch was equally awry a minute later when he failed to get a clean contact on a volley after Michael Essien, standing in for Carvalho, miscued a clearance into his path.

At the other end, Drogba sent a long-range effort looping wide before Paulo Ferreira's surge into the box generated Chelsea's best chance of the opening period.

Having cut inside Heinze, the Portuguese right-back slipped the ball to Lampard on the corner of the six-yard box and the midfielder was able to squeeze a shot on the turn through Rio Ferdinand's legs, forcing Edwin van der Sar to get down smartly to his right to save.

An unusually subdued Cristiano Ronaldo finally got involved in the

contest ten minutes before the interval, shooting narrowly wide after collecting an astute long ball from Scholes, a minute before Lampard sent a 30-yard drive whistling narrowly over van der Sar's crossbar.

Half-time brought the introduction of Arjen Robben at the expense of Cole for Chelsea, but it was the increase in United's tempo that had a more profound impact on the pattern of the match and it took a superb double save by Cech to prevent them taking the lead within three minutes of the restart.

An uncharacteristic lapse by Claude Makelele allowed Rooney the opportunity to go round Essien on the edge of the area. The goalkeeper could not hold the drive that followed but he recovered quickly enough to keep out Ryan Giggs's follow-up effort. Ten minutes later, Scholes picked out Giggs at the back post with an angled cross from the inside right channel. The Welsh winger met the immaculate delivery with a volley but his strike was a foot too high to cause Cech any real concern.

Drogba went closer with a free-kick from the corner of the box that he curled onto the outside of van der Sar's near post -- although the United keeper appeared to have the danger covered.

With the game opening up, there were threatening bursts into the boxes from both Robben and Rooney, who was increasingly getting the upper hand in his personal battle with Essien.

But clear chances were extremely thin on the ground with a Ronaldo shot that found the netting the closest either side came to breaking the deadlock before extra-time.

Italy still on top

AFP, Paris

World champions Italy maintained their lead at the top of the official FIFA world rankings.

There was a notable change just below, though, with Argentina ceding second place to South American arch-rivals Brazil.

There were no other changes in the top 10 but Scotland rose five places to a highest ever 14th.

1. Italy	1606 pts
2. Brazil	1538 (+1)
3. Argentina	1520 (-1)
4. France	1507
5. Germany	1390
6. Netherlands	1309
7. Portugal	1300
8. England	1278
9. Spain	1238
10. Czech Republic	1170
11. Ukraine	1040
12. Croatia	1011
13. Cameroon	968
14. Scotland	953 (+5)
15. Roumania	930 (-1)
16. Greece	915 (-1)
17. Russia	908 (-1)
18. Poland	902 (+3)
19. Turkey	896 (-2)
20. Mexico	891 (-2)

Barca back in for Henry?

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona are in talks to sign Arsenal's star French forward Thierry Henry according to Spanish newspaper Mundo Deportivo on Friday.

The Catalan newspaper quoted

Revenge on Milan's mind

AFP, Rome



AC Milan are desperate to atone for their Istanbul nightmare when they face Liverpool in next Wednesday's Champions League final rematch in Athens.

Milan looked certain to beat Liverpool in the 2005 final after taking a 3-0 lead at half time.

But Milan inexplicably imploded in a bizarre six-minute spell in the second half in which they allowed Liverpool to score three times and level the tie.

Extra-time failed to separate the two sides, but Liverpool held their nerve in the penalty shoot-out to lift the trophy.

"It was something strange and a night that is hard to forget," said AC Milan's tough-tackling midfielder Gennaro Gattuso.

"It will stay in my memory forever and still hurts me thinking about it.

"But the thoughts and feelings of what happened that night can stimulate us. I believe it has given us strength and can motivate us even more."

So painful is the memory of that final, Gattuso has not been able to watch the video of the match.

"You need courage to watch it, and I haven't plucked up enough yet," said the 29-year-old Italian World Cup winner.

"I have seen bits of it, but not the whole match. It's something I just can't bring myself to do."

Gattuso's memories contrast starkly with those of Liverpool's attack-minded defender John Arne Riise.

"The final in 2005 was the best night ever for me personally and to win that trophy was just unbelievable," said the 26-year-old Norwegian.

"I remember everything from start to finish, and the celebrations afterwards were just amazing.

"All our heads were down at half-time, but the manager was very quiet and calm and explained what we were going to do.

"He said if we got a goal anything can happen. That is what we did and in the end, everything turned out okay.

"Once Steven Gerrard scored with the header (to pull it back to 3-1), you could see the change in the faces of the players. We all seemed to get extra energy and the fans were lifted as well. We knew we had a chance."

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said he felt his team were better prepared for this final than they were in 2005.

"Let's hope this time the story has a happy ending," he said.

"There is little to choose between the two teams, but we are in better shape coming into the final than we were two years ago."

AC Milan captain Paolo

Maldini, who is expected to play in the final despite still being troubled by a left knee injury, played down talk of revenge.

"The fact that we are playing Liverpool again could be seen as our vendetta, but we have nothing personal against them," said the 38-year-old former Italy international who has lifted the European Cup four times.

"Rather than thinking about them we must concentrate on ourselves and our game."

Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina has fully recovered from a shoulder injury and will line-up against the Italians, while Harry Kewell's bid to make the starting line-up has been boosted by an injury to Bolo Zenden.

Dutch midfielder Zenden turned his ankle during a training session in Spain and is doubtful for the match.

AC Milan have opted to wear their all-white strip for the final.

Milan were drawn as the home side for the final and could have worn their famous red and black striped shirts.

But just as in the 2005 final, Milan have chosen their second strip, allowing Liverpool to wear their traditional red kit.

Milan's white strip had proved lucky before they lost the Istanbul final two years ago. Before that the Serie A giants had won four European Cups wearing white, in 1963, 1990, 1989 and 2003.

Tevez targets summer exit

INTERNET, undated

West Ham striker Carlos Tevez has set his sights on signing for 'one of Europe's biggest clubs' in the summer.

The Argentina forward has loomed large over the Hammers' season, proving instrumental in keeping the club in the Premier League with his outstanding end-of-season form but also causing controversy.

He and international teammate Javier Mascherano, now with Liverpool, were signed on deals that an independent commission found to be in breach of rules regarding third-party ownership - with Tevez's economic rights owned by Kia Joorabchian.

The Upton Park outfit were fined a record £5.5million but their relegation rivals insist a points deduction would have been appropriate and are still pursuing an investigation into Tevez's eligibility to participate the Hammers' escape from relegation.

Now Tevez, 23, looks set to leave the club - with Spanish giants Real Madrid one of the possible destinations.

He told The Sun: 'I really want to join one of Europe's biggest clubs. That's what I've talked to my representatives about.

"I don't know about the interest from Real but it makes me happy that such an important club is interested in me.

Kaka seeks history

AFP, Rome



AC Milan star Kaka is determined to leave his mark on the Champions League final against Liverpool by adding to the 10 goals he has already scored in the competition and steering his team to victory.

"I want to write my name in AC Milan's history," said the immensely talented Brazilian who played in the heartbreaking 2005 final defeat to the Merseysiders when Milan threw away a 3-0 lead to draw 3-3 at the end of normal time, before losing on penalties.

"It's been my ambition since I arrived here. I want to be remembered alongside all those players who have made this club great.

"We are in the final and one game away from becoming European champions. Let's hope this time it's different to 2005."

With Liverpool's defence one of the meanest around, much is resting on Kaka's shoulders to open up the Premiership club's watertight backline.

But the softly-spoken 25-year-old, a devout evangelical Christian, welcomes the responsibility.

"My teammates have great faith in me and I consider that an honour," said the player whose full name is Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite.

"I am happy to hear that they regard me as the decisive player in

our team, and that tells me that I have their total respect.

"But I always say that one player alone cannot win a match, everyone is important."

Kaka said AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini was the player he

admired the most.

"Maldini is always the first to arrive at training and the last to leave, and he sets the example for

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KAKA

Stuttgart crowned champions



Football

AFP, Berlin

Midfielder Sami Khedira was the hero as he hit the winning goal which gave VfB Stuttgart their first Bundesliga title for 15 years on Saturday after a 2-1 victory at home to Energie Cottbus.

Having only re-claimed the Bundesliga's top spot the week before, Armin Veh's men came from a goal behind and held their nerve over Cottbus to pick up the valuable victory which gave them their third Bundesliga title.

By winning the Bundesliga's Championship Plate in his first full season in charge, Veh has succeeded where his more illustrious predecessors Felix Magath, Giovanni Trapattoni and German national coach Joachim Loew all failed.

But there was some early drama at Stuttgart's Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion after Cottbus' Romanian midfielder Vlad Munteanu deflected his shot past diving home goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand on 19

minutes.

With Schalke 04 winning 2-0 at that moment, the defeat would have sent the title to Gelsenkirchen, but Stuttgart settled and German international Thomas Hitzlsperger equalised on 27 minutes to swing the tie back their way.

But it was midfielder Khedira whose 63rd minute goal had Stuttgart's fans celebrating the win which gave them a two-point margin at the top of the league.

The win keeps alive their dream of doing a league and cup double for the first time when they contest the German cup final at Berlin's Olympic Stadium next weekend against Nuremberg.

Stuttgart's win made second-placed Schalke's 2-1 victory over Arminia Bielefeld irrelevant, even though they had a dream start to go 2-0 up after just 19 minutes and they finished runners-up.

Brazilian midfielder Lincoln smashed his shot past diving Bielefeld goalkeeper Mathias Hain on 11 minutes before Turkish striker Halil Altintop added a second eight minutes later, but it was

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(From L-R) Stuttgart goalkeeper Timo Hilderbrand is ecstatic after his team get the lead in their home game against Cottbus while Schalke 04 midfielder Lincoln walks back to the center circle with the ball after scoring in their final day Bundesliga clash against Bielefeld on Saturday. The Bundesliga final day is set for a climactic finish with either of Stuttgart or Schalke being able to grab the title.

PHOTO: AFP