



Chelsea stars (from L-R) John Terry, Frank Lampard, Claude Makelele, Joe Cole, Michael Essien and John Obi Mikel celebrate with the FA Cup Trophy which they claimed after beating Manchester United 1-0 at the new Wembley Stadium in London on Saturday.

Mourinho staying

APP, London



Jose Mourinho gave Chelsea supporters double cause for celebration after their dramatic FA Cup triumph over Manchester United by moving to quash any lingering suspicion that he could leave London this summer.

Speculation that the Portuguese would quit or be forced out this summer has swirled around Stamford Bridge throughout Mourinho's third season in charge, fuelled by a mid-season breakdown in his relationship with the club's Russian owner, Roman Abramovich.

But after watching Didier Drogba's extra-time winner secure the only English trophy to have eluded him in the first final at the new Wembley, Mourinho insisted he would be staying on.

"My feeling was that we could be here three hours and they would not have scored a goal," he said. "We controlled the game so well defensively. We know the way they want to play and we did not give them that game."

Mourinho's interpretation was disputed by Ferguson, who described the contest as a "stalemate" while admitting that some of his players, including Cristiano

country and I don't want to leave," Mourinho said after adding an FA Cup triumph to the two Premiership titles and two League Cup trophies he has won with Chelsea.

"If you have doubts, what can I do. I can't do anything about it. I have a contract, I want to stay, the club told me they want me to stay. I look at them as honourable people, not as liars, so when they say publicly they want me to be manager next season, I have no reason to doubt."

"The only way to stop this (speculation) will be on July 9 in Los Angeles (when Chelsea begin a pre-season tour) and it will be there."

Although United had enjoyed the better chances in the 115 minutes that preceded Drogba's winner, Mourinho insisted that Chelsea had deserved their victory on Saturday and could not resist a jibe at Sir Alex Ferguson's side.

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Ronaldo, had looked jaded at the end of a hard season.

"You can't do much about goals when they come as late as that," he said. "We were too tired to mount any challenge but that is football."

"I didn't think we played well. We didn't deserve to win the game, or lose it -- it was one of those games. There was not enough attacking momentum from either side to deserve to win the match."

"We had the better chances but it was a stalemate really. The pitch was slow which didn't help and we had two or three players who looked tired. They have played a lot of matches and it is understandable. Cristiano looked a bit tired, he has had a long season for a young lad."

In a match of few clear chances, United came agonisingly close to taking the lead at the end of the first period of extra-time, when Ryan Giggs slid in to meet a low Wayne Rooney cross.

Petr Cech saved but Giggs's momentum carried him into the goalkeeper and the ball crossed the line in his arms.

Ferguson acknowledged that the linesman would have been unable to see clearly that the ball had crossed over, but he insisted referee Steve Bennett should have awarded

a penalty for what he saw as a foul on Giggs by Michael Essien.

The United boss went on to suggest that Mourinho had succeeded in influencing the official with his pre-match comments.

"He does it before every big game. There's 22 players out there and he's talking about the referee all week -- maybe it works for him. I was disappointed with the referee, for an FA Cup final I would have expected better."

Despite his disappointment at missing out on a fourth league and cup double at the helm of United, Ferguson said the club had had a fantastic season and achieved their main goal of reclaiming the Premiership title.

"To lose so late in the game is very hard to take but I have seen it time and time again in football. You can't accept it. The thing is to accept it and get on with it. I want to wake up tomorrow and get on with life."

Even Ferguson, whose sides have always made a habit of producing late winners, was resigned to penalties when Drogba collected a pass. Michael John Obi, played a slick one-two with Frank Lampard and then beat the sprawling Edwin

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Billy bids goodbye

APP, Rome

AC Milan veteran Alessandro Costacurta scored in his last home match before hanging up his boots but his goal could not prevent the Champions League finalists from losing 3-2 to Udinese in Serie A on Saturday.

The 41-year-old centre-back is to retire at the end of the season after 20 years at the club, who next Wednesday face Liverpool in the Champions League final in Athens.

Costacurta, who will stay on at Milan to assist head coach Carlo Ancelotti, was overcome with emotion.

"It was a great celebration and I want to thank everyone -- the club, my teammates and the fans," said the player best known as 'Billy' who did a lap of honour after the final whistle before getting the bumps by his colleagues.

"Now the moment has arrived for me to do something new, and I think the challenge of my new profession will be enough to keep me from dwelling on the past."

"I had many other options, but I wanted to remain a part of this glorious club."

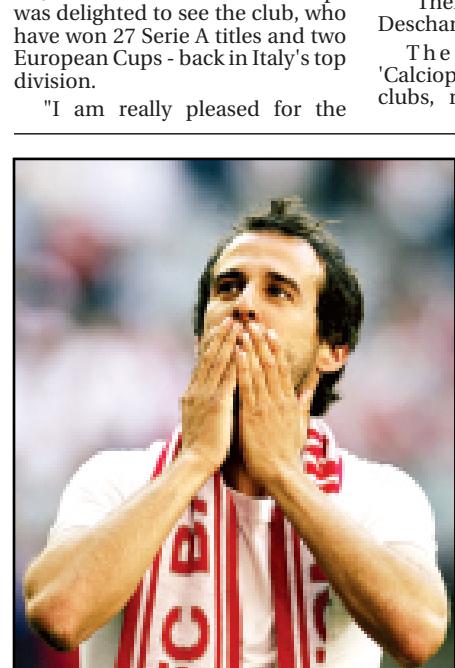
A former Italy international, Costacurta scored a penalty to make it 2-2 in the 57th minute before receiving a standing ovation from the San Siro crowd on his substitution moments later.

Unfortunately his goal wasn't enough to earn a point as Udinese's Brazilian striker Barreto scored the winner in the 61st minute.

With Milan having already clinched a place in the third qualifying round of next season's Champions League and the Athens final just four days away, Ancelotti picked a side that will bear no resemblance to the one that takes the field in the Greek capital.

Asamoah Gyan put Udinese

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THE LONG GOODBYE: Veteran stars (L) Bayern Munich playmaker Mehmet Scholl and AC Milan defender Alessandro Costacurta both salute the fans on their final appearance for their respective clubs on Saturday. Scholl played in his last Bundesliga match at home with relegated Mainz while Costacurta played his last Serie A home game against Udinese. Both men scored in their farewell games, which followed glittering careers laden with silverware.

PHOTOS: AFP

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Lamps salutes spirit

APP, London



Frank Lampard hailed Chelsea's never-say-die spirit as his side snatched the FA Cup from Manchester United.

Jose Mourinho's side claimed their second trophy of a dramatic campaign as Didier Drogba's late extra-time goal earned a 1-0 Cup final victory over United on Saturday.

It was a season-saving triumph for Lampard and company after they had surrendered their Premiership title to United and crashed out of the Champions League in the semifinals.

Failure to win either of those trophies had fuelled speculation that Mourinho would be sacked if Chelsea lost at Wembley. But Lampard's astute pass set up Drogba to poke in the winner and send the Blues off to their holidays in high spirits.

"It's great to go out on a high," Lampard said. "The FA Cup is a huge trophy and one that I and this group had never won."

"To win it is a fantastic feeling and there were some big celebrations in the dressing room."

"That's the strength of this group. We showed it today and a lot

of times this season. We've fallen short on a couple of occasions but not for the want of trying. We've been very stretched today and we kept going."

"There was a real determination with the lads after what's gone on this season. After losing the league to United, this was a game for us to go out on a high."

"I felt we deserved to win the game. It was tight and there was no clear winner but we had enough chances that I felt we would score."

Lampard admitted Chelsea's failure to win the Premiership or Champions League had placed an extra burden on them going into the final.

"There is always pressure but understandably more today because people would probably enjoy the fact that Chelsea have spent millions and had only won the League Cup. That is the reality of life."

"But we have gone out there today and shown that we are a strong bunch who will keep going until the end and I think people will respect that."

"We will be happy with the two cups. If you want to disrespect those competitions then you shouldn't be in football."

"We have had great experiences in the League Cup and the FA Cup was the one outstanding trophy I

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Stuttgart springs a surprise

APP, Berlin



Although VfB Stuttgart were crowned Bundesliga champions for the third time on Saturday, it was not a smooth ride for Armin Veh's men whose early-season form showed little title-winning potential.

The new German champions got the season off to a terrible start when they were beaten 3-0 at home to Nuremberg on the first game of the season on August 12.

It took until week two of the Bundesliga to pick up their first win when they poached a 3-2 win at Arminia Bielefeld as Brazilian striker Cacau netted two second-half goals.

But a 3-1 home defeat by Borussia Dortmund followed at the end of August which left Stuttgart hovering just above the relegation zone, only before an impressive 3-2 win at Werder Bremen on September 16 turned their fortunes around.

Having gone 2-0 down, Stuttgart fought back with 21-year-old striker Mario Gomez hitting the winning goal three minutes from time.

Draws against Eintracht Frankfurt and Hertha Berlin were followed by a 3-0 hammering of Bayer Leverkusen on October 14 which lifted them up the table to eighth.

But Stuttgart only really got into the title-contenders

when they made German football sit up and take notice with a 3-0 win over Schalke 04 at the end of October as Sami Khedira hit goals either side of half-time.

Another goal bonanza followed the following week against Alemannia Aachen with a 4-2 win which took the side to second in the table as Marco Streller hit two late goals.

Comfortable victories over Hamburg and Hanover followed which put them in top-spot at the end of November, only for Bayern Munich to burst the bubble when they beat Stuttgart 2-1 at the Allianz Arena on November 18.

The defeat dropped Stuttgart to third and allowed Schalke and Werder Bremen to leap-frog them and the Red-and-Whites dropped further down the table to fourth at the Christmas break.

In January, a 3-2 win over Bielefeld at the end of January put them third and Stuttgart stayed in touch with Schalke and Bremen throughout February.

A 4-0 win over Dortmund gave them some revenge for their opening-day defeat and they closed the gap between themselves and Bremen in second with a 4-1 win at home to Werder on February 10.

They moved into second with a 4-0 win at Eintracht Frankfurt on February 16, but March began badly as Armin Veh's men slipped back to third again when they were 2-0 down at half-time at Bayer Leverkusen and lost 3-1.

Although they still managed to pick up a point, Stuttgart lost influential 21-year-old striker Mario Gomez on March 10 when

he picked up a knee injury which kept him out for the next two months.

A 1-0 defeat at Schalke on March 17 left Stuttgart in third, seven points off the victors who stayed top and with eight games left, their title challenge looked to be fading.

But a 3-1 win at Aachen, on the same day Schalke were well-beaten 2-0 at Bayern Munich, narrowed the gap to just four points.

Then at the start of April, a 4-2 win over Hamburg kept them in touch as Schalke and second-placed Bremen both won.

Three points came in the win over Hamburg, but Cacau was to prove the star of the day on April 21 when he netted twice in as many minutes to give Stuttgart a 2-0 win over Bayern Munich which all but guaranteed them a Champions League place.

And the door to the top of the table was flung open in style on week 31 when Schalke lost 2-1 at Bochum on the Friday, Stuttgart beat relegated Borussia Moenchengladbach on the Saturday while Bremen were shocked 3-2 at Bielefeld.

The results put Stuttgart second and just a point behind leaders Schalke.

Then on May 12, their 3-2 win at Bochum, as Schalke were well-beaten 2-0 at Dortmund and Bremen were beaten by Eintracht Frankfurt, put Stuttgart back on top again by two points with a game left to go.

And their home win over Cottbus on Saturday had the home fans partying long into the night.

Valencia move into third

APP, Madrid

Joaquin Sanchez's late goal shot Valencia to a 1-0 victory at Real Mallorca and into third spot in the Spanish first division table on Saturday night.

Real Madrid and Barcelona fill the top two places with 66 points with Valencia now a point behind and Sevilla two points adrift.

Valencia, who were without injured striker Fernando Morientes, left it till the 89th minute before they got the winner.

Real Betis, coached by Frenchman Luis Fernandez, could only manage a 1-1 draw at home to bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona but at least it eased their relegation fears.

The first goal came in the 89th

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Nedved mulling future

APP, Prague

Juventus' Czech midfield star Pavel Nedved will decide by the end of June whether to end his top-flight football career, the Czech agency CTK reported Sunday.

"Now that I have time to think things over properly we will decide quickly over my next move. At the moment I do not know what I will decide," the former Czech captain told the agency following Juventus's promotion to Italy's Serie A on Saturday.

Nedved's contract runs out next year. "Before the season I was twice offered an extension but I refused with thanks each time," added the 2003 European player of the year.

The 34-year-old Czech added that he felt he owed Juventus a debt

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and that he had given the club a lot of his time.

But Stuttgart only really got into the title-contenders



Stuttgart players celebrate their Bundesliga title victory amidst a sea of confetti at the Gottfried-Daimler Stadium in Stuttgart on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP