



Manchester United goalkeeper and hero-of-the-night Edwin van der Sar (L) holds aloft the Community Shield trophy after beating Chelsea on penalties at Wembley on Sunday.

Fergie thrilled

INTERNET, undated

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson was delighted with his side's performance and believes the work-out will stand them in good stead for the big kick-off next weekend.

"It was a difficult game," Ferguson told Sky Sports 1. "I don't think both teams are 100% ready but I think you get that in a Community Shield final.

"Both teams use it as a stepping stone for next week to start the season. It's always nice to win, no matter what competition you are playing.

"A lot of the players are tired but it does bring them on a great deal towards the sharpness and tempo needed to win matches.

"I thought both goals were good - Malouda took his goal very, very well. The build-up to our goal was excellent, it was a marvellous finish from Ryan."

The Red Devils begin their title defence against Reading next weekend and Ferguson expects to give his summer arrivals - including Carlos Tevez - a run-out in midweek.

"Next week at Reading hopefully we will have a stronger squad available," he added.

"(Owen) Hargreaves, Anderson and Nani will all play on Wednesday, that helps me, Tevez will play on Wednesday. We are getting closer."

Ballack dismisses Real report

AFP, Berlin

Michael Ballack insisted Monday that he had no intention of leaving Chelsea despite a report from Germany in which his agent revealed he was in discussion with the Spanish champions about a move.

Ballack's agent Michael Becker told Kicker magazine that there was "indirect contact" with the Spanish giants, although he said he had advised Real to contact Chelsea to continue negotiations.

Real's new coach Bernd Schuster has said that the reigning Spanish champions need a player with the qualities of Ballack, 30, who had a disappointing first season with Chelsea after moving from Bayern Munich last year.

But the midfielder, who played no part in Chelsea's defeat to Manchester United on penalties in the Community Shield on Sunday, issued a strong denial that he was interested in a move to Real.

"I am totally committed to Chelsea," he told the club's website.

"I came here to win trophies and be successful in English football, I want to assure the Chelsea fans of that.

"I am very happy in London professionally and for my family. The speculation about me leaving is not true.

"I have no interest in leaving Chelsea and I have had no contact with Real Madrid whatsoever. I am frustrated by my injury at the moment but I am working hard to be fit and hope to be back very soon to join my teammates."

Mourinho defiant

Football

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho insisted Chelsea have nothing to fear from Manchester United despite losing the Community Shield to the Premiership champions on Sunday.

Edwin van der Sar's penalty shoot-out heroics won the annual pre-season curtain-raiser after a 1-1 draw at Wembley, but Mourinho took comfort from the way his injury-ravaged side completed.

Ryan Giggs gave United the lead but, despite being without John Terry, who could be sidelined for a month with a knee injury, as well as Didier Drogba and a host of others, Chelsea hit back to equalise through Florent Malouda.

Van der Sar denied Claudio Pizarro, Frank Lampard and Shaun Wright-Phillips in the 3-0 shoot-out victory, but that was not enough to stop Mourinho claiming his team were United's equals.

"To lose on penalties is different

to losing in 90 minutes," he said. "In 90 minutes normally the best team wins but penalties are details that can decide matches.

"If I analyse the game with penalties I have to say they had an outstanding goalkeeper and the three boys who played very well couldn't score their penalties.

"If I give my opinion on the match without penalties, Chelsea didn't deserve to lose because we controlled the game for 90 minutes in quite an easy way.

"The situation was not easy to prepare this game but what makes me happy and confident is we were playing a team at near their maximum power except Paul Scholes.

"We are speaking about more than 50 percent of the team being out but we competed against them. I'm not going to say we were better than them but it is fair to say nobody was better than anybody else."

Mourinho refused to say when he expected Terry and Drogba back and instead heaped praise on their replacements.

"When you ask me about John Terry and Drogba and all the boys

who were not here, I don't want to go in that direction because I want to respect the boys who were here," Mourinho said.

"They played very well for me, so I prefer to speak about them, not the players who weren't involved in the game."

Sir Alex Ferguson played down the implications of a morale-boosting win for his side on the eve of the new season.

The United manager knows full well that Chelsea will be his side's main rivals again.

"We're always happy if we win these type of matches but it's not a great gauge because both teams were missing some players," Ferguson said.

"I always use it as a stepping stone towards the first game of the season. It was a very warm day, but it will bring the players on to the required pace of our game."

"There was not much between

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PSV brush aside Real

Football

INTERNET, undated

PSV Eindhoven won the Russian Railways Cup after a convincing display saw them defeat Real Madrid in Moscow thanks to goals from Ismail Aissati and Mike Zonneveld. Javier Saviola pulled one back, but Friday's comeback

was not quite replicated.

Bernd Schuster was hoping to build on his side's win in the semi-final against Lokomotiv, but Real found themselves up against a determined Dutch side in the opening stages.

Jerzy Dudek was given the whole game ahead of Iker Casillas and the Polish custodian had a busy evening as he was forced to repel several good

chances from PSV.

The opening exchanges were slow, but the game sprang into life when Miguel Torres produced a save from Heurrelho Gomes before the impressive Jonathan fired over at the other end.

Ronald Koeman's side were looking adventurous and their period of pressure paid off after 33 minutes when Aissati fired home the opener from outside the area.

It was a fine effort and Madrid almost fell further behind soon after, but Dudek was on the money to prevent Otman Bakkal from scoring two minutes before the break.

Having prevented that shot, the former Liverpool keeper was probably looking forward to the break when Zonneveld lined up a free-kick on the edge of the area and curled the ball into the far corner of the net for PSV's second.

Madrid came out after the interval with a renewed vigour and Saviola looked lively. It was the diminutive Argentine who delighted Schuster when he reduced the arrears in the 57th minute.

Guti took a short free-kick from the by-line and the former FC Barcelona striker steered the ball inside Gomes' near post.

That goal ought to have given Madrid a lifeline, but they were unable to find an equaliser in the remaining half-an-hour. In the 69th minute PSV almost put the result beyond doubt when Bakkal's shot cannoned back off the crossbar.

Los Merengues raced up to the other end and could have levelled when Robinho went close.

Saviola saw a shot kept out by the keeper, as they tried to find that equaliser.

In the closing minutes Diarra had a low drive fly wide, while Dudek had to make two saves to deny Danko Lazovic. Real Madrid finish second, with PSV the surprise winners, having defeated both Milan and Madrid on the way to the title.

Platini fears identity crisis

INTERNET, undated

UEFA president Michel Platini is concerned about the growing trend of foreign ownership in England and admitted 'if it was in France, I would fight it'.

Eight Premier League sides are now controlled by foreign owners following Thaksin Shinawatra's investment in Manchester City this summer.

And France legend Platini, recently elected head of the European governing body, has questioned the motives of some overseas investors.

"I would be worried if I were English because of all the foreign ownership," said Platini in a Sky Sports interview to be broadcast tomorrow.

"They could be rich people coming to help English football and develop it, but they may just want to make money."

"I fear your clubs will lose identity. If it was in France, I would fight it."

GERMAN CUP

Schalke delight Slomka

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04 coach Mirko Slomka was delighted as the Bundesliga runners-up blitzed fourth-division side Eintracht Trier with a 9-0 demolition on Sunday in the first round of the German Cup.

Striker Gerald Asamoah led the way with a hat trick with the 2002 World Cup finalist opening the scoring with an eighth-minute goal.

Defender Marcio Rafinha hit a penalty then Asamoah struck again in the 31st minute before wrapping up his hat-trick three minutes after the break.

Asamoah was part of an all-international Schalke forward-line alongside current German striker Kevin Kuranyi and Turkey's Halil Altintop, who had a penalty saved before half-time.

It hardly mattered as Kuranyi grabbed a second-half goal along with midfielders Ivan Rakitic and Mesut Ozil before defenders Christian Pander and Heiko Westermann poached late goals to seal the rout.

"The early goal helped to settle us down and we put together some good passages of play," said Slomka.

"I have quite a few players in my team I can trust and our game is adaptable, we are ready for the start of the Bundesliga next weekend."

After Bundesliga sides Bayer Leverkusen and Energie Cottbus were the victims of first-round giantkillers on Saturday, there were no surprises on Sunday.

Defending champions Nuremberg had a comfortable 6-0 win over fourth-division Victoria Hamburg as 25-year-old Slovakian striker Robert Vittek bagged a hat-trick and Greek striker Angelos Charisteas weighed in with two goals.

But Nuremberg coach Hans Meyer was impressed with Victoria's spirit as they pushed his side for the full 90 minutes.

"I have seldom seen a side like Victoria work so hard for so long without getting a goal," said Meyer.

"It was a good game, but our

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Liverpool held

INTERNET, undated

Feyenoord and Liverpool scrap out a 1-1 draw in an ill-tempered friendly in Rotterdam, while Newcastle beat Sampdoria.

Royston Drenthe opened the scoring in the first half by tucking in a rebound but Steven Gerrard finished from an acute angle late on.

Pepe Reina saved a late penalty which was incorrectly awarded for a handball when the ball actually struck Alvaro Arbeloa in the face.

Several players were booked and both Drenthe and Gerrard, plus Feyenoord defender Theo Lucius, were lucky not to be dismissed for fighting at the end of a match that saw some tough tackles draw aggressive reactions.

Reina also made a good save from a Giovanni van Bronckhorst free kick deep into injury time, while Dirk Kuiyt saw a shot rebound off the crossbar and over the goal-line in the first half, although the officials missed the goal.

Alan Smith scored on his Newcastle debut as they triumphed over Serie A side Sampdoria 1-0 in a pre-season friendly.

The former Leeds striker only joined from Manchester United on Friday and scored with a header set-up by a cross from another new Sam Allardyce signing, Geremi.

Smith converted the corner just before the hour mark and played up front alongside fellow new-boy Mark Viduka before later moving back into midfield.

Focus on Torres

AFP, Liverpool



Fernando Torres is being touted as the missing piece in Liverpool's jigsaw but fans are reserving judgement on whether 'El Nino' can warm up Anfield.

Although the club record 21-million-pound capture of Torres has created a wave of excitement at the club ahead of Rafa Benitez's fourth season in charge, the phrase "the final piece of the jigsaw" has become synonymous with Liverpool after 17 title-free years.

There is no doubting the talents of the fresh-faced Torres.

David Beckham faced him when at Real Madrid and labelled him as one of the best strikers in Spain.

His record of 75 goals in five seasons in the Spanish top flight suggest a natural goal scoring instinct and Spain's national coach Luis Aragones hinted at his range of skills by once saying: "Torres never scores the same goal twice."

But this is the Premiership where big-names strikers have failed in the past and where Torres is untested.

Andrei Shevchenko has hardly

set Stamford Bridge on fire since arriving at Chelsea while Benitez gambled and lost with three-times Champions League winner Fernando Morientes.

Benitez will hope his 18th import from La Liga will turn out to be considerably more successful yet despite his outstanding talent, it is still asking an awful lot of Torres to provide the sort of golden goal touch Liverpool have lacked since the heady days of Kenny Dalglish, Ian Rush or Robbie Fowler and Michael Owen in more recent times.

The 23-year-old Spain striker has been drafted in to provide the goals that have been lacking under Benitez's leadership.

Despite a miserly defence and an array of midfield talent, Liverpool have struggled for league goals.

While Manchester United have clocked up an impressive 213 Premiership goals since Benitez moved to England in June 2004, Liverpool have managed just 166.

It is a statistic that hurts Benitez and one he is determined to put right.

Craig Bellamy was shipped out after one season because he was not up to the job and, while Dirk Kuyt may have established himself with fans, he is hardly ruthless.

Peter Crouch remains Liverpool's most reliable striker, but Benitez would not trust him with a starting place in the Champions League final.

Torres will be under pressure to deliver - but this deal has as much riding on it for Benitez as it has for Liverpool.

The arrival of Torres is as much a defining test of Benitez's title credentials as it is of the young Spanish striker's glowing reputation.

There can be no more excuses if they fail to threaten Manchester United and Chelsea this season after Liverpool's American co-owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett summer backing for Benitez in the transfer market.

Torres is A-list and expensive; a symbol of the sort of player Benitez claims has been out of his reach before.

Now he has got him, bought and paid for in a record-breaking manner, he can no longer use finance as his shield against expectations.

Torres must come up with the goals his price tag demands.

If it comes off, he could actually be, well, the last piece of the jigsaw.

Lyon off to flyer

AFP, Lyon



French champions Lyon on Sunday got their title defence off to the ideal start with a 2-0 home win over

a timid Auxerre side.

Czech international, and former Aston Villa striker, Milan Baros scored the opener for Lyon, who are hunting a record seventh consecutive title, on the 34th minute after dribbling his way into the box and deftly chipping Auxerre goalkeeper Olivier Sorin.

Karim Benzema doubled the scoreline twenty minutes from time with a left-footed thunderbolt that screamed past Sorin.

Auxerre failed to take advantage of Lyon's frailties in defence that was missing first choice goalkeeper Gregory Coupet and central

defender Sebastien Squillaci.

Summer signing Kader Keita and France international Sidney Govou looked dangerous on occasions going forward on the flanks but struggled when needed in defence.

"It was a good night in the sense that we didn't pick up more injuries," said Lyon coach Alain Perrin.

"We had good chances and didn't give much away."

Meanwhile, France's Champions League contenders Marseille and Toulouse both failed to fire on Saturday.

Last season's runners-up Marseille were held to a 0-0 draw at newly-promoted Strasbourg while Toulouse, who will face English giants Liverpool in their Champions League qualifier, slumped to a 3-1 defeat at Valenciennes.

Despite having his high-profile summer signings of Gael Givet, Benoit Cheyrou, Boudewijn Zenden, Djibril Cisse and Karim Ziani on the pitch Albert Emon's

Marseille side struggled to break down the home team.

Ziani, who was brought from Sochaux to fill the gap left by Franck Ribery's move to Bayern Munich in midfield, was the only new recruit to show glimpses of class.

"To be satisfied with an away draw, why not? But we can't be satisfied with the rhythm of the match," said Emon.

"We didn't win good balls in midfield to feed our strikers and up front there was some poor communication, because we didn't get three or four passes between our strikers."

Toulouse were undone by Valenciennes striker Johan Audel who hit the French season's first hat trick.

Audel opened the scoring in the sixth minute for Valenciennes, who

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PHOTO: AFP

Lyon forward Milan Baros (C) tussles for possession with Auxerre defenders Antonio Marcos (R) and Jean Sebastian Jaures during their French Ligue 1 clash at the Gerland Stadium on Sunday.

The youngsters league

AFP, London



Every year a host of star players arrive in the Premiership touted to be the league's main attraction only to find themselves upstaged by a teenage prodigy with talent to burn.

Andriy Shevchenko and Michael Ballack were expected to provide goals and assists as well as name recognition when they joined Chelsea, but they were completely outshone by Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portugal winger was voted Footballer of the Year after inspiring United's title success. But now Ronaldo is an established name himself, so which young upstart will take his mantle?

If the likes of big money signings like Fernando Torres and Owen Hargreaves are to be kept in the shadows, it's a safe bet the new wonderkid will come from north London.

Arsenal and Tottenham have amassed the Premiership's greatest concentration of promising players.

Tottenham manager Martin Jol has made no secret of his plan to snap up Europe's most promising

starlets and this close-season he signed Younes Kaboul, 21, Gareth Bale, 18, Adel Taarabt, 18, Kevin-Prince Boateng, 20.

Jol has compared Taarabt to Zinedine Zidane and believes the Moroccan-born French midfielder, who he signed from Lens, could become the best player at the club.

Bale, the youngest player to win a full cap for Wales, was courted by United before deciding a 10-million-pound switch from Southampton to White Hart Lane offered him a better chance of immediate first-team action.

The left back's deadly free kicks have earned favourable comparisons with David Beckham and that weighty fee is likely to look a bargain by the end of the season.

At the opposite end of the Seven Sisters Road, Arsene Wenger presides over a remarkably prolific youth academy at Arsenal.

Cesc Fabregas, Robin van Persie and Emmanuel Ebou are the cream of the crop and have the potential to emerge as major players this season.

That trio have only just established themselves as first-team regulars, but there are plenty of eager new recruits already pushing them for their places, including Brazilian midfielder Denilson, 19, and Danish forward Nicklas

Bendtnier, 19.

Manchester United and Liverpool opted to look abroad for an injection of youth this close season.

Sir Alex Ferguson knows United cannot afford to stand still after winning a first title in four years, so he spent over a combined 32 million pounds on Porto's Brazilian playmaker Anderson, 19, and Sporting Lisbon winger Nani, 20.

United's success in the 1990s was built on a crop of brilliant home-grown players and Chris Eagles, 21 and Lee Martin, 20, have been earmarked by Ferguson as the best of his British youngsters.

Few of Liverpool's Youth Cup winning team are regarded by Rafa Benitez as first-team calibre yet, so he spent 11.5 million pounds on 20-year-old Ajax winger Ryan Babel, who has the power and skill to be a big hit.

Outside the top three, there are some intriguing prospects on the verge of becoming household names.

Sven Goran Eriksson has spent big money to a host of new players, but he may come to rely more on

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PHOTO: AFP

PSV Eindhoven defender Manuel de Costa celebrates with the Railways Cup trophy after beating Real Madrid in the final in Moscow on Sunday.