



MANU HELD AT HOME Rooney out for two months

AFP, Manchester



Wayne Rooney will be out for two months with a hairline fracture in his left foot, Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson said Monday.

The striker will therefore miss Sunday's derby against Manchester City at Eastlands, England's friendly with Germany on August 22 at Wembley, and the 2008 European Championships qualifiers there against Israel on September 8 and Russia on September 12.

He is also likely to miss the qualifiers away to Estonia on October 13 and Russia on October 17.

"It's a hairline fracture of the foot. Hopefully he will be back in two months," Ferguson said.

"It's a bad blow for him and it's a bad blow for Steve McClaren," the Scot said of the England boss, his former assistant at United.

"I'm disappointed for Steve but England should cope without him."

Rooney sustained the fracture during Sunday's 0-0 draw at home to Reading, the opening game of United's title defence. He left Old

Trafford with his left foot in plaster. Ferguson has ruled out bringing in a new forward to fill in while Rooney recovers.

Ferguson is expected to hand Argentina forward Carlos Tevez his debut for the English Premier League champions in United's match at Portsmouth on Wednesday.

But the veteran boss is short on fit strikers, with both France forward Louis Saha and Norway attacker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer only just returned to training after long-term problems - and Tevez lacking match fitness.

"Carlos Tevez is available now and Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer are training," Ferguson said after the Reading game.

"I was considering using Carlos at Portsmouth anyway but, obviously, he will come into our thoughts even more now."

"With Wayne as well, we have four strikers so I am not looking at a situation where I have to add to that number."

The transfer window closes at the end of the month.

United sold strikers Alan Smith to Newcastle United and Giuseppe Rossi to Villarreal in the pre-season.

PHOTO: AFP

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Arsenal accused of simulation

AFP, London



Furious Fulham manager Lawrie Sanchez accused Arsenal of diving during the first half of the Emirates stadium and suggested that referee Phil Dowd's failure to punish them had contributed to his decision to award Arsenal a crucial equalising penalty.

"I was at the same Premier League meeting with Arsene Wenger and (referees' chief) Keith Hackett last Tuesday, and it was agreed that simulation was going to be a big no-no this year," Sanchez said.

"Yet here there were three simulations that went unpunished. That gives people the impression they can get away with it and it didn't

surprise me when the penalty was given.

"It's a bit harsh, as a small club coming here to a big stadium and not getting those decisions."

Sanchez's frustrations in the aftermath of a galling defeat were understandable, but his accusations weren't backed by TV evidence.

Replays suggested that Arsenal were not guilty of gamesmanship and Fulham were fortunate to avoid conceding a 20th-minute penalty when Alexander Hleb was felled by Steven Davis.

Arsenal boss Wenger launched an impassioned defence of his players in the face of Sanchez's claims but revealed that he had a policy of speaking privately to any of his players found guilty of diving.

"I am totally against simulation but I don't think this was," he said.

"You cannot be a coach and encourage these things. I have spoken to players about it in the past and I am for the use of video in any way. But the only way to cut it out is

to allow people to receive red cards after the game."

Wenger preferred to focus on his side's thrilling two-goal comeback in north London - which was sealed in the last seven minutes of an absorbing contest - and claimed that it proved Arsenal's spirit was still in tact, despite the summer departures of Thierry Henry and Freddie Ljungberg.

After falling behind to David Healy's first-minute debut goal - comically gifted to the Northern Irishman after goalkeeper Jens Lehmann made a hash of clearing Gael Clichy's back-pass - Arsenal hit back through Robin van Persie's penalty, awarded after Kolo Toure had been fouled by Carlos Bocanegra, and Hleb's last-gasp drive.

"We had a horrible start and were playing against a good Fulham side but we were resilient and physically and mentally strong," Wenger said.

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'Germany not yet there'

AFP, Berlin

Germany's head coach Joachim Loew said on Monday his side still have some way to go if they are to challenge Europe's elite at next summer's European Championships.

Germany are top of their Euro 2008 qualifying group with a five-point lead and face away games against Wales, as well as the Republic of Ireland in the next two months.

The Germans - with world-class players like Bayern Munich's Bastian Schweinsteiger, Miroslav Klose and Philipp Lahm - are amongst the favourites to be crowned European champions in Austria and Switzerland next summer.

But although Germany have shot up the FIFA world-rankings from 22nd in March 2006 to their current fifth place and finishing third at last year's World Cup, Loew says his side are not yet amongst the world's best.

In order to compete with the top teams, Loew says German talent has to be identified early, trained properly and promoted to the top tier to widen the pool of players competing for places in the national team.

"In Brazil and Argentina, consistently good players are constantly promoted to the best sides and we must also do the same," the 47-year-old told German sports magazine Kicker.

As far as he is concerned, Germany have five world-class players and need more if they are to

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Jose fearful of injuries

AFP, London



Just when Jose Mourinho thought his injury worries were starting to fade, Michael Essien has joined the ranks of Chelsea's walking wounded.

Essien suffered a knee ligament injury in Sunday's record-breaking win over Birmingham and the Ghana midfielder is a doubt for Wednesday's trip to Reading.

After a pre-season scarred by injuries to a host of key players including captain John Terry, Mourinho must have thought things were looking up as Didier Drogba made a quicker than expected return to fitness against Steve Bruce's side.

Instead he could be facing a spell without his most versatile player.

Essien's value was underlined against Birmingham. He capped a dynamic display with the winner that ensured Chelsea extended their unbeaten run in league matches at Stamford Bridge to 64, beating Liverpool's previous top-flight record.

"It was something in the knee ligament," Mourinho said. "He (Essien) was limping and the doctor was saying he was in pain."

"I had two midfielders on the bench so I made the change immediately. If you ask me if he is ready for Wednesday I don't know."

"Claude Makelele will train with me on Monday, so will Paulo

Ferreira. But Andriy Shevchenko, Terry, Wayne Bridge and Michael Ballack will be out."

Mourinho knows he cannot afford to take Reading lightly on Wednesday. Steve Coppell's side earned a gritty draw at Manchester United on Sunday and will fancy their chances of upsetting Chelsea.

As a result, Mourinho will resist the temptation to make significant changes to his team ahead of next Sunday's clash at Liverpool.

"These are different games, so maybe different choices but basically this is a moment when the players need to play," he said.

"I'm not going to make rotation like I would do if we were in February or March with Champions League matches around the corner."

"Reading played on Sunday like we did and it is the same for Liverpool next weekend. We play against Reading on Wednesday and they play Toulouse the same day."

Chelsea had to work hard for their record in a dramatic match. They fell behind to Mikael Forssell's early header, but Claudio Pizarro equalised two minutes later when goalkeeper Colin Doyle let his shot trickle in.

Florent Malouda finished a fine move to put Chelsea ahead before Olivier Kapo unleashed a stunning equaliser for the visitors.

Essien won it in the 50th minute when his curling drive was weakly palmed into the net by Doyle.

Mourinho is already setting his sights on reaching a personal

milestone when Portsmouth visit on August 25.

If Chelsea avoid defeat in that match he will have got to a century of unbeaten home league matches during his time at the London club and Porto.

"I'm on 99 with my personal record and I hope my friend Harry Redknapp (the Portsmouth manager) does not kill my record of 100 in the next game at home because I would love to get there."

Birmingham boss Bruce took plenty of positives from the way his newly promoted team went toe to toe with Chelsea.

"If we keep producing performances like that we will make a fist of it that's sure," Bruce said. "We know it will be difficult but if we keep showing that attitude we've got an outstanding chance."

One source of optimism for Bruce was the performance of France midfielder Kapo.

Bruce said: "I thought he was arguably the best player on the pitch. I saw him playing for Auxerre against Arsenal four years ago and he was fantastic."

"He got a big money move to Juventus but it didn't quite work for him."

"He is a natural footballer and put in a good shift for us. He will enhance the Premiership and we are delighted we've got him."

Hamburg deny van der Vaart offer

AFP, Hamburg

Hamburg have not received an offer from Spanish first division side Valencia for their Dutch captain Rafael van der Vaart, a spokesman for the Bundesliga club said on Monday.

Since signing for Hamburg in July 2005 from Ajax, van der Vaart, 24, has been courted by several top European sides including Spanish giants Real Madrid.

"We will not release van der Vaart, everyone at the club is very firm on that," Horst Becker, Hamburg's president of the board of trustees told daily newspaper Hamburger Morgenpost on Monday.

According to the paper, Valencia are eager to sign the attacking midfielder for a reported 14 million euros (19 million dollars).

Van der Vaart is under contract with Hamburg until 2010, but has refused to start negotiations with club bosses about an extension.

With a Spanish mother, van der Vaart, who has scored six goals in 40 appearances for the Netherlands wants to play in the Champions League and has said he "could not refuse an offer from Real."

Despite frequent injuries, van der Vaart has scored 17 goals in 46 Bundesliga appearances for Hamburg who finished third in 2005-06 and were seventh last season.

Delight for debutants

AFP, Berlin



Bundesliga new boys Karlsruhe and Duisburg marked their arrival in Germany's top flight with convincing away wins on Sunday but Bayern Munich finished the opening weekend on top of the table.

Having won the second division title last season, Karlsruhe had Hungarian international midfielder Tamas Hajnal to thank as his goals either side of half time sealed the 2-0 win at German Cup holders Nuremberg.

"We have only won one game, but the three points is important to us," Karlsruhe coach Eduard Becker.

"We have still 33 difficult games ahead of us. We made mistakes, especially in the first-half and we still

have a lot of work to do."

Fellow promoted side Duisburg enjoyed a convincing 3-1 win over Borussia Dortmund thanks to Nigerian striker Manasseh Ishaku who bagged goals either side of the break.

Ishaku put his side 1-0 up after eight minutes before Romanian midfielder Mihai Tararache converted a 62nd minute penalty.

The Nigerian then struck again two minutes later before Dortmund's Florian Krings grabbed a late consolation goal.

Dortmund coach Thomas Doll was bitterly disappointed with his side's performance.

"The football we showed today was more akin to the sort of thing you see on a practice field," the coach grumbled.

And his Duisburg counterpart Rudi Bommer also had his feet firmly on the ground.

"We played well in places, but we have nothing to celebrate. This was

only the first game of the season and we only have three points," he said.

On Saturday, Bayern Munich's 23-million-euro strike force of Luca Toni and Miroslav Klose gave their employers an instant return as newly-promoted Hansa Rostock were beaten 3-0 at the Allianz Arena.

Bayern top the Bundesliga after the opening weekend on goal difference as they start their campaign to win their 21st crown as German champions.

Bayern's 69 million euros summer spending spree was rewarded after just 14 minutes as Klose, a 12-million-euro signing from Werder Bremen, drew the goalkeeper for 11-million-euro man Toni to knock the ball into an empty net.

Klose, the top-scorer at last year's World Cup, put Bayern 2-0 ahead as he followed up defender Philipp Lahm's shot to slot home on 66 minutes, before adding his second on 84 minutes, heading

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Pretenders fire blank

AFP, Paris



Title pretenders Lens and Paris St Germain did little to inspire faith in their own fans with a dire 0-0 draw on Sunday.

Lens, led by the legendary figure Guy Roux, and PSG, whose coach Paul Le Guen previously led Lyon to three successive titles, were believed to be among the hopefuls to wrest the championship trophy away from Lyon this season.

But both are still waiting for their first win following this uninspiring stalemate.

PSG dominated the first half creating a plethora of chances but Pegguy Luyindula wasted the best of them, dinking the ball over the bar under pressure from goalkeeper

Vedran Runje.

It was a different story after the break as Lens's Nenad Kovacevic fired over from inside the area on 50 minutes.

The hosts' Kanga Akale came closest to breaking the deadlock in the last 10 minutes but he hit the bar from Abdoulrazak Boukari's pull-back.

In the day's other match, Lille won for the first time this season, claiming a 2-1 success at newly promoted Metz.

In Saturday action, Johan Elmander gave Toulouse a welcome boost ahead of their crucial Champions League clash against Liverpool in midweek with a last-minute winner against Lyon.

Toulouse are embarking on their first ever season in Europe's premier competition and will host last season's finalists in the third qualifying round on Wednesday.

And Elmander's strike will see

them in buoyant mood having quickly recovered from their opening day 3-1 defeat to Valenciennes a week ago.

"All week we worked on rediscovering our virtues, our desire, our solidarity, and that was the case this evening (Saturday)," said Toulouse coach Elie Baup, who was nevertheless worried that his team would struggle to recover from the match in time for Wednesday.

"It was very hot today," he added. "It won't be easy to play again in the same conditions on Wednesday."

Anyone hoping that this reverse may herald a changing of the guard in French football may be bitterly disappointed, though.

The six-in-a-row champions never gave anyone else a chance last season, almost wrapping up the title by Christmas, but this defeat owed much to the dismissal

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Chelsea's Michael Essien (C) jumps his way through Birmingham City's Gary McSheffery (L) and Mikael Forssell during their Premiership clash at Stamford Bridge in London on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP