

Saha spoils Keane return

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson will look to Louis Saha to kick-start Manchester United's season after the French striker made a goal-scoring return following his long-term injury problems.

Saha has struggled with ankle and knee injuries since the turn of the year and made his first appearance since early May in the single-goal defeat of Sunderland.

The forward's match-winner was his first Premiership goal since last December and with Wayne Rooney missing for at least another month with a broken foot, United manager Ferguson admitted he was relieved to have Saha back.

The champions have struggled so far with Rooney and the suspended Ronaldo, managing just three goals in five Premiership games.

And Ferguson believes the return of Saha will give United a major boost as he attempts to blend new arrivals Carlos Tevez, Nani and Anderson into his side.

"He needed someone like Louis against Sunderland," the manager said.

"He showed his penetration, his strength, his speed. He's a great asset to have and of course we have been missing him for the last eight months now.

"He has come through fine and we are delighted at that also because after being out for such a long time we are aware that kind of injury can come back again but thankfully he is okay."

"Our front four haven't played together before. It was Anderson's first game, Tevez playing through on his own when I think he is far better playing behind someone, Chris Eagles is a young lad, Nani, it's new to them."

Roy Keane admitted Sunderland's narrow defeat at Old Trafford meant much more than the rousing reception he received at Old Trafford on his first visit to his former club as a manager.

Keane's side have now suffered four straight defeats but the manager is convinced his promoted team have enough to survive their first season back in the top flight.

"The result overshadowed the occasion but I did enjoy the reception, it was very, very nice, but straight after the game it's all about getting the right result," he said.

"We didn't quite make it but overall there were good signs for us."

Bremen back in business

AFP, Berlin

BUNDES LIGA Finnish defender Petri Pasanen's second-half free-kick sealed a 2-1 win for Werder Bremen over Eintracht Frankfurt to catapult his side up the Bundesliga table on Saturday.

Leaders Bayern Munich, who play on Sunday, stay top but Bremen have now become title contenders having jumped from tenth to fifth.

Fresh from their 3-2 Champions League qualifier win at Dinamo Zagreb, Bremen took the lead when Brazilian Diego headed the ball into the path of striker Boubacar Sanogo who slotted home on 35 minutes.

Pasanen made the result safe when he smashed home his free-kick on 79 minutes, before the visitors grabbed a consolation goal through Michael Thurk with five minutes remaining.

After seeing his side claim their second win in four days, Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf said he was pleased with his side's climb up the table having recovered from their 4-0 drubbing at home to Bayern a fortnight ago.

"We have shown we are on the right path in the last 14 days," said Schaaf.

"The team has improved day by day and are seeing the rewards for their hard work."

"Frankfurt closed us down very well and gave us little room, but we stayed patient and that paid off for us."

"Our league position has improved dramatically and I think

things are on the up for us."

Second-placed Arminia Bielefeld were given a rude awakening as their aspirations to leapfrog Bayern and claim top spot were sent crashing by their 3-0 defeat at promoted Duisburg.

After Brazilian midfielder Maicon gave the home side the lead in the 64th minute, Duisburg made sure of the three points as Nigerian striker Manasseh Ishiaku scored two goals in as many minutes to lift them up to seventh.

"Duisburg deserved the points," said Bielefeld coach Ernst Middendorp.

"We had 15 to 20 minutes when we sat back and let them attack us and we were punished with the first goal."

"So it was hardly surprising we finally conceded three goals."

Hanover hauled themselves out of the relegation zone and into 11th as they bounced back from their heavy defeat at Bayern the week before with a hard-fought 3-2 win over VfL Bochum.

German international Mike Hanke had put his side ahead with an unstoppable shot from 18 metres before midfielder Jan Rosenthal made it 2-0 after 37 minutes.

But Danish striker Tommy Bechmann scored his fourth goal of the season just before half-time to make it 2-1 at the break.

A penalty by defender Marcel Maltitz just after the hour mark put Bochum level at 2-2 before Iranian striker Vahid Hashemian scored the winner with 20 minutes left.

Bochum stay second to Bayern

despite the defeat.

Energie Cottbus had a 1-1 draw at Nuremberg as Danish striker Dennis Soerensen converted an early penalty, but Andreas Wolf grabbed the equaliser five minutes from time to snatch a point.

Hertha Berlin took an early lead at home to VfL Wolfsburg when Serbian striker Marko Pantelic scored with a 38th minute header.

But Wolfsburg equalised thanks to midfielder Ashkan Dejagah's well-placed shot on 61 minutes only for Solomon Okoronkwo to rifle home the winner just before the final whistle.

Bottom side Hansa Rostock had their misery compounded as a late goal by Borussia Dortmund's Italian Giovanni Federico mid-fielder hit the winner on 76 minutes.

Greek striker Theofanis Gekas struck early in the second half to secure a point for Bayern Leverkusen in their 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 on Friday.

Gekas, the top flight's leading scorer last season, slotted home Simon Rolfes's pass when he rifled his shot past Schalke keeper Manuel Neuer on 53 minutes after Kevin Kuranyi had earlier put the home side ahead.

The draw leaves Schalke unbeaten after four games and puts Mirko Slomka's side fifth with Leverkusen seventh before the main bulk of the weekend's fixtures on Saturday.

League leaders Bayern are in action at Hamburg on Sunday and defending champions VfB Stuttgart take on Karlsruhe.



Entracht Frankfurt midfielder Junichi Inamoto (L) shields the ball from Werder Bremen playmaker Diego during the Bundesliga clash at the Weser Stadion in Bremen on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Owen gives double tonic

AFP, Newcastle

BARCLAYS Michael Owen gave watching England boss Steve McClaren and the Newcastle fans exactly what they wanted with a late winner against Wigan at St James' Park on Saturday.

Owen's 87th-minute header

was Newcastle's first league goal at home since February and proved enough to secure a 1-0 win over a Wigan side who had played most of the second half with ten men following the dismissal of Kevin Kilbane just after the break.

McClaren will be hoping for more of the same from Owen in the upcoming Euro 2008 qualifiers against Israel and Russia

and will have been equally cheered by the sight of his injury-prone star striker completing the full 90 minutes.

The 27-year-old produced a perfectly-timed run to meet a cross from Obafemi Martins and nod the winner past Chris Kirkland, following up his League Cup strike against Barnsley in midweek.

But his earlier profligacy had suggested he has yet to recover his best form and the vast majority of the 50,461 crowd must have been resigned to settling for a point after watching Steven Taylor hit the bar and both Nicky Butt and substitute Shola Ameobi squander superb chances.

Kirkland's goalkeeping was the basis of Wigan's resistance but former Magpies defender Titus Bramble also performed impressively against his old club.

Owen almost gave Newcastle an eighth minute lead after a deft flick from strike partner Mark Viduka but his well-struck shot was turned round the post by Kirkland.

The England striker should have done better with his next chance, gifted to him after Andreas Granqvist slipped. With

only Kirkland to beat, Owen lifted his shot over the target.

A frantic finale to the first half saw Kirkland save well from Butt before Taylor sent a header crashing into the crossbar.

Viduka was withdrawn at half-time, apparently with an injury, but soon after the restart it was Wigan who were forced into more significant reshuffling of their pack following the dismissal of Kilbane.

The Irishman had fully deserved his first yellow card for a lunge at Taylor before the break but may have cause for complaint over the second, issued after he raised his arm in an aerial challenge with Alan Smith.

Wigan boss Chris Hutchings withdrew former Newcastle favourite Antoine Sibierski and brought on defender Emmerson Boyce as his side attempted to hold out for a point.

The switch failed to prevent Newcastle from generating chances that substitute Shola Ameobi and Owen appeared determined to waste.

Butt also failed to find the target after being left with just Kirkland to beat but Wigan were finally broken down with three minutes left.

Ecclestone takes over QPR

AFP, London

Formula One bosses Flavio Briatore and Bernie Ecclestone have taken over English Championship club QPR.

Briatore, head of the Renault team, and Ecclestone, Formula One's president, have made a recommended offer that was been accepted by the London's side directors on Saturday.

Current QPR chairman Gianni Paladini will remain in position, with Briatore joining the board.

Briatore said: "Bernie and I were delighted to receive a recommendation from the board of QPR for our bid for the club and we look forward to working alongside Gianni Paladini and his team.

"We are fully aware of the history of QPR and the loyal fanbase that it has and are totally committed to bringing future success back to the club."

Paladini believes the investment was vital if QPR are to have a solid financial base to build on.

"This offer provides much needed investment and an excellent opportunity to move the club forward which will be translated into positive results on the pitch," he said.

"I am delighted that Flavio and Bernie have asked me to remain on the board and I hope to play a large part in the future of QPR."

Becks slams MLS critics

Football

AFP, London

Footballer David Beckham hit out at claims that his Los Angeles Galaxy side was "a pub team" and that the Major League Soccer was "a Mickey Mouse league", in an interview published Sunday.

Beckham also dismissed suggestions that the burden of travelling between the United States and England's international games would be too much for him.

The former Manchester United and Real Madrid star said he had felt the burden when around LA Galaxy's bosses, manager and coach "how much it hurt them when people who don't know anything were turning round and calling the Galaxy a pub team and calling the MLS a Mickey Mouse league."

Many sportswriters in Britain have criticised the former England captain's decision to join the club and criticised the standard of the game in the US.

"I don't know whether it's ignorance or snobbery or whether it's that the people saying these things have never played the game or watched it being played here, but they should be sitting here now, watching us beat a team that's won the Mexican league two years running," he added.

"The standard is nowhere near as low as people have been saying it is."

"For a start, you have to be

incredibly fit and physically strong to play here: America's a country, after all, that produces some of the best athletes in the world."

Beckham joined LA Galaxy at the start of this season in a deal reportedly worth 250 million dollars (183 million euros).

The interview in the Observer newspaper was apparently conducted before he suffered a knee sprain last week which will sideline him for six weeks, meaning he will miss England's two September Euro 2008 qualifying matches.

He admitted that the workload in recent weeks had been "starting to wear me out, to be honest".

But Beckham insisted playing for his country was still important to him, regardless of how much travelling it would entail.

"The Galaxy have made it clear that they'll do anything they can to help me play for my country. They know how passionate I am about it.

"Everyone's working together."

He also spoke of how happy his family, including his wife Victoria, a member of pop group the Spice Girls, was in Los Angeles.

"I can't think of many better places: for me, for the kids, for Victoria. I haven't seen Victoria happier than this in the 10 years we've been together," he said.

"That on its own makes having come here worthwhile."

"The house is lovely, the schools are sorted, the boys are excited."

Lyon fighting back

AFP, Paris

Champions Lyon's inconsistent start to the season continued Saturday but they showed title-winning fighting spirit to charge back from 2-0 down to beat Le Mans 3-2.

The six-time champions, who have dominated French football in recent years, looked to be heading for a first home loss of the season after a brace from Benin mid-fielder Stephane Sessegnon gave Le Mans a shock lead, but the Stade Gerland was left rocking by the home side's stirring fight-back.

In the space of seven second-half minutes, Lyon completely turned the game on its head.

Lyon boss Alain Perrin was a relieved man at the whistle.

"We saw tonight the realities of football - dominating doesn't mean winning," he said. "On the balance of play in the first half we deserved to be leading. (But) nothing is decided before the end."

"After half-time we went 2-0 down. There was a great reaction from the team once we got the first goal."

Sidney Govou started the comeback on 70 minutes, taking a pass from Brazilian mid-fielder Juninho before foxing centre-back Clement Pinault and then shooting past Yohan Pele in the Le Mans goal.

Five minutes later, France forward Karim Benzema headed home a free-kick from the inspirational Juninho.

And on 77 minutes the turn-

10x3



Newcastle striker Michael Owen celebrates his late strike to seal a victory in their Premiership tie against Wigan at St James' Park on Saturday.

around was complete as Benzema climbed highest to win the ball in the air from a Juninho corner, with Czech striker Milan Baros mopping up the loose ball and shooting home.

Having started the season with 10 points from their first four matches, Le Mans have now lost three in a row.

That victory allowed Lyon to keep pace with the front pack, still surprisingly lead by Nancy, who beat St Etienne 2-0 at home.

Brazilian striker Kim bagged his third goal in five games to opening the scoring for Nancy on 11 minutes and Marc-Antoine Fortune wrapped up the three points five minutes from time.

They have a two-point lead over the pack, with Lyon just two more points further back in fifth place.

Bordeaux, who under new boss Laurent Blanc, the former Barcelona, Inter Milan and Manchester United centre-back, have had an impressive start to their title challenge.

They beat Monaco 2-1 at home with goals from Marouane Chamakh and Lyon striker Sylvain Wiltord made his first start for Rennes but failed to get on the score-sheet as they drew 2-2 at home to Lille.

Toulouse beat lowly Auxerre 2-0 at home, Lorient drew 0-0 at Strasbourg while Caen and Sochaux shared a 2-2 draw.