

Spat doesn't stop Reds

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has admitted that he has fallen out with his assistant Paco Ayestaran but vowed that the boot-room bust-up will not interfere with the club's quest for their first title since 1990.

Ayestaran looks set to leave Anfield after reports that his working relationship with Benitez has reached breaking point.

A permanent fixture next to Benitez on the Liverpool bench, Ayestaran was absent as the Reds took Derby apart in a 6-0 victory at Anfield that sent the Reds to the top of the Premiership for the first time in five years.

Benitez admitted that the win came at the end of a draining week but is hopeful that the situation with his long-time deputy will soon be sorted out.

The Spaniard said: "As a football manager, to win 4-0 (against Toulouse in a Champions League qualifier) and 6-0 is not a bad week as a manager but my personal situation and the problems that we had is disappointing."

"But we need to keep going and the club is more important than anyone."

"It's not finished yet and the club is

talking with him and hopefully in the next week it will be done."

On the pitch, a Liverpool side missing injured pair Jamie Carragher and Steven Gerrard made light of the uncertainty behind the scenes as they coasted past the Premier League's bottom club.

Xabi Alonso, who opened the scoring with a free-kick from 40 yards, scored twice, as did 26-million-pound striker Fernando Torres. Ryan Babel, with his first for the club, and Ukrainian striker Andriy Voronin also found the net.

Benitez, who doubts Gerrard's chances of featuring in England's forthcoming matches against Israel and Russia, believes the firepower that he has at his disposal - Peter Crouch did not even make the bench on Saturday - gives him a wealth of options.

He added: "We have four players with quality and different skills. As a manager you know they will all score goals."

"You can't say that Torres will score more goals than Kuyt or Voronin or Crouch."

Derby boss Billy Davies meanwhile is adamant the Rams can still stay in the Premiership despite losing four of their opening five matches, from which they have picked up just one point.

"I've said before that we can't afford to be making the mistakes

that we're making at this level," the Scot said.

Iain Dowie said that it took six matches before his Crystal Palace team to realise they were in the Premier League and we're showing signs of that.

"We're showing a lack of respect that is costing us dearly but all I can ask is that they give me what they've got."

"Without a doubt, some of them are freezing at the moment. They're not coming out and playing their natural game."

"They're not brave enough and they're still standing back and admiring."

Liverpool were initially kept quiet by the stubborn Derby side but Alonso put Liverpool ahead with his 26th minute free-kick and Babel doubled the lead in first-half injury-time - his first goal since joining in an 11.5-million-pound move from Ajax this summer.

Torres nicked a third after the interval and Alonso added his second before substitute Voronin came on to score the fifth and set up Torres for the final goal.

It is not just up front that Liverpool have hit form. Benitez's men have yet to concede a goal in open play in the league this season - although that would have been different if Craig Fagan had not sliced a late chance for Derby wide from barely five yards out.



Liverpool's Spanish forward Fernando Torres celebrates after scoring the first of his two goals in their Premiership match against Derby County at Anfield on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sharapova stunned

AP, New York



U.S. Open title defense came to an end Saturday.

This was a case of actions speaking far louder than words, and the way things slipped away, so suddenly and stunningly, Sharapova clearly was flustered - by the swirling wind and bright sun, by her errant strokes and, most of all, by the Krakow Kid across the net who kept moving way up to receive serves.

Sharapova reeled off eight consecutive games to go up a break in the third set, then dropped the final six games and lost 6-4, 1-6, 6-2 to 18-year-old Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland in the third round, the earliest exit by a No. 2-seeded woman at the U.S. Open since 1981.

"I don't know if it was a combination of the circumstance or the wind or the opponent playing well. I don't know what it was," said Sharapova, who double-faulted a whopping 12 times. "I just didn't quite feel like me out there."

The braces-wearing, big-hitting

Radwanska isn't exactly a nobody. She won junior championships at the French Open in 2005 and Wimbledon in 2006, took home her first tour title this month and came to New York seeded 30th. Still, she understood the circumstances Saturday.

"I had nothing to lose. She was the favorite - and I think she was more nervous," said Radwanska, who will fulfill a prematch promise to her younger sister, this year's Wimbledon junior champion, by buying them matching Louis Vuitton handbags to celebrate the upset.

She wasn't the only 18-year-old from Eastern Europe who pulled off a big win Saturday: Victoria Azarenka of Belarus beat 1997 champion Martina Hingis 3-6, 6-1, 6-0, and Agnes Szavay of Hungary eliminated No. 7 Nadia Petrova 6-2, 6-3. Plus, 16-year-old Tamira Paszek of Austria knocked off No. 11 Patty Schnyder 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (1). All of which means 2004 U.S. Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova has to like her chances in the bottom half of the draw.

"You can see the new generation coming up," Hingis said. "They're very dangerous. I knew it's not going to be easy. My mom texted me. She said, 'Watch out.'"

Sharapova had lost a combined two games in her first two matches, but could have used some similar advice before facing Radwanska. If that was the most surprising result of the tournament so far, what happened later in Arthur Ashe Stadium almost would qualify: Three-time reigning men's champion Roger Federer lost a set against 6-foot-9 American wild-card John Isner, who only a few months ago was leading Georgia to the NCAA team title.

For one glorious set, the 184th-ranked Isner stayed right with the man who's been at No. 1 for a record 187 straight weeks. And when Isner ended a 13-stroke exchange with a big forehand approach shot, then smacked service winners at 134 mph and 124 mph, he took that first set in a tiebreaker.

Isner punched the air and strutted to the sideline chomping on his white towel, while his supporters, some in Georgia Bulldogs regalia, jumped and yelled and barked their approval. The partisan home crowd rose, too; pretty much the only people in their seats at the ensuing changeover were the family and friends in Federer's guest box.

Remember: Federer has won 11

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PREMIERSHIP

Arsenal turn on style

AFP, London

Arsenal turned on the style to beat Portsmouth 3-1 on Sunday and underline why Arsene Wenger believes he can succeed without help from any Russian billionaires.

Wenger's side completely overwhelmed Portsmouth at the Emirates Stadium to extend their unbeaten start to the season despite playing most of the second half with 10 men.

Emmanuel Adebayor opened the scoring from the penalty spot and Cesc Fabregas added a second before Philippe Senderos was sent off.

Tomas Rosicky put the result beyond doubt and Nwankwo Kanu's instant reply was no consolation for the visitors.

It took only seven minutes for Arsenal to take the lead. Gael Clichy closed down Lauren on the edge of the Portsmouth area and the momentum of his challenge sent the ball through to Robin van Persie.

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AFP, London



Liverpool brandished their credentials as potential Premiership champions with a 6-0 thrashing of Derby that sent them to the top of the league for the first time in five years on Saturday.

The Anfield romp against the league's bottom side was enough to lift Rafael Benitez's men to the summit, although only goal difference divides them from Chelsea and Everton, who continued their fine start to the campaign by snatching a last-minute winner at Bolton.

Chelsea can reclaim top spot when they visit Aston Villa on Sunday while champions Manchester United were due to entertain Sunderland later on Saturday.

In Saturday's other action, the pressure on Tottenham boss Martin Jol increased after his side blew 2-0 and 3-1 leads to draw in a six-goal thriller at Fulham.

Michael Owen gave England boss Steve McClaren cause for optimism ahead of next week's important Euro 2008 qualifier against Israel with a late winner for Newcastle at home to Wigan.

There were also wins for Middlesbrough and West Ham, over Birmingham and Reading respectively.

Liverpool boss Benitez was without assistant Paco Ayestaran following the revelation earlier this week that his long-time number two wants to quit the club.

But any unrest behind the scenes was papered over by a slick performance from a side missing injured duo Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher.

Midfielder Xabi Alonso and 26-million-pound forward Fernando

Torres both scored twice while Ryan Babel, with his first goal for the club, and Ukrainian hitman Andriy Voronin also found the net.

Nicolas Anelka celebrated signing a new contract for Bolton with a spectacular goal which looked like earning his side a win at home to Everton, who had gone ahead through Ayegbeni Yakubu's 11th-minute effort on his debut for his new club.

But Everton's resilience was underlined once again as Joleon Lescott popped up in the final minute to snatch all three points for David Moyes's side.

Goals from Younes Kaboul and Dimitar Berbatov had put Tottenham in control at Fulham with less than half an hour played.

Clint Dempsey pulled one back for Fulham just before the break but when teenager Gareth Bale scored his first Spurs goal just after the hour mark, Jol looked to have secured some badly needed

breathing space.

It was not to be: Alexei Smertin reduced the deficit with 13 minutes left and a last-minute overhead kick from Diomansy Kamara looped over the head of Paul Robinson to give the Cottagers a badly-needed point.

Mark Viduka and Owen started together for the first time in Newcastle shirts but, despite that stellar strike force, it was still not until the 87th-minute that they broke the resistance of ten-man Wigan, who had Ireland midfielder Kevin Kilbane sent off for a second yellow card offence early in the second half.

West Ham exorcised the demons from last season's 6-0 thrashing at Reading with an accomplished 3-0 win at the Madejski Stadium.

Craig Bellamy paid back another chunk of the 7.5 million pounds it cost to sign him from

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PHOTO: AFP

Russian number two seed Maria Sharapova wears a flustered look on her face as she rests after her shock third round exit to Polish Agnieszka Radwanska at the US Open in Flushing Meadows on Saturday.

Eto'o out for two months

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona confirmed on Saturday that injury-plagued striker Samuel Eto'o will be out of action for two months following successful surgery on his injured leg.

The Cameroon international was injured in his team's 5-0 win over Inter Milan in the Gamper Trophy on Wednesday just two minutes after coming onto the pitch at the Nou Camp.

"Eto'o underwent surgery on Saturday morning on the partial rupture," said a club statement.

"After the operation, the recuperation period of eight weeks was confirmed."

The 26-year-old Eto'o was out of action for four months last season because of an injured right knee.

Coach Frank Rijkaard admitted the injury was a big blow, even if he has Thierry Henry to fall back on.

"It's a problem, first of all for the player and secondly for the team. It is Samuel, who has scored a lot of goals and who is a virtual guarantee of goals. It is a shame," Rijkaard told reporters.

Murcia move to top

INTERNET, undated

Real Zaragoza's disappointing start to the Primera Liga season continued on Saturday as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Racing Santander.

Hopes were high at La Romareda heading into this season following Zaragoza's sixth-place finish last term, but Victor Fernandez's men have been slow out of the blocks with this draw following on from last weekend's defeat to newly-promoted Real Murcia.

In contrast, Racing will be happy with their return so far having taken two points from difficult games against Barcelona and Zaragoza to start the campaign.

Racing took the lead when a corner was cleared only as far as Oscar Serrano on the edge of the

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Zlatan shows his worth

AFP, Rome



Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored both goals as champions Inter Milan beat Empoli 2-0 on Saturday to go top of Serie A.

Inter had endured a disappointing start to the season last weekend when they were held to a 1-1 draw at the San Siro by Udinese in a game where goalkeeper Julio Cesar was sent off.

He was suspended Saturday which meant a rare start for the experienced Francesco Toldo, who was kept busy by the battling Empoli.

Inter, still missing injured pair Marco Materazzi and Patrick Vieira, were in front after 13 minutes when

Ibrahimovic volleyed in a Maicon cross.

Empoli had a penalty appeal turned down after 15 minutes when Luca Saudati was sandwiched between Ivan Cordoba and Walter Samuel, but the referee waved play on.

The home side continued to press in the second half and Toldo was called upon to keep out a Davide Moro drive and then denied Vittorio Tosto and Nicola Pozzi in quick succession.

But against the run of play Inter made sure of the three points with seven minutes remaining.

Dejan Stankovic combined with substitute Luis Figu down the right and Cesar touched on for the unmarked Ibrahimovic to sidefoot home.

Inter's city rivals AC Milan must wait until Monday to play Fiorentina

having wrapped up the European Super Cup against Sevilla in Monaco on Friday.

On Sunday, Juventus, who topped the league on goal difference ahead of AC Milan at the start of the weekend, go to Cagliari who beat promoted Napoli 2-0 in their season opener last Sunday.

Cagliari's defence however will have to be focused on the threat of inform French striker David Trezeguet who hit a hat-trick for Juve in their 5-1 thrashing of Livorno.

Like Juventus, Roma face another side which is being tipped for relegation in Siena.

Roma won the corresponding fixture 1-0 last year, and the fans at the Olympic stadium will be keeping a keen eye on midfield maestro Alberto Aquilani, who scored a superb long-range effort to seal the points against Palermo last week.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Inter Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic (L) shrugs off the attentions of Empoli defender Guillermo Giacomazzi to score during their Serie A encounter in Empoli on Saturday.

'MU not for sale'

AFP, London

Manchester United's owners, the Glazer family, on Sunday moved to dispel rumours the club could be sold to overseas investors.

Rival groups from China and Dubai were reportedly preparing a one billion pounds (two billion dollars) takeover bid for the Red Devils.

But the Glazers moved quickly to stress that no bid has been made and that in any case the club is definitely not for sale.

A spokesman for the family told PA Sport: "Manchester United is not for sale."

"The Glazer family are not engaged in any discussion with any prospective bidder and it is not courting bidders for Manchester United."

It is understood that an unnamed Chinese consortium approached the club - rather than the Glazer family - months ago to see if the Glazers would be interested in selling United and were told the club was not for sale.

The Chinese consortium made contact only to establish if the Glazers would consider a bid and, as they were told the club was not for sale, no bid followed.

Reports have suggested that the Glazers might be tempted by a takeover bid in the region of one billion pounds but privately the Glazers have made it clear that one billion undervalues United.

The Glazers paid 790 million pounds (1.593 billion dollars) for United over two years ago to complete a takeover that was initially controversial with a section of the club's fans.

But the Glazers appear to have won over some of the less antagonistic members of the United support by backing Sir Alex Ferguson very strongly in the transfer market since taking control.