

Spat doesn't stop Reds

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool manager Rafa 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."

"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 picked up just one point.

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

from barely five yards out."



PHOTO: AFP

Sharapova stunned

AP, New York



Pay no attention to what Maria Sharapova said after her US Open title defense came to an end 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.'"

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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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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 Manchester United were due to entertain Sunderland later on Saturday.

Liverpool at the summit

AFP, London

Liverpool

branded

their

credentials

as

a 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.

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.

Nikola 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.

Craig Bellamy paid back

another chunk of the 7.5 million

pounds it cost to sign him from

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

Russian number two seed Maria Sharapova wears a flustered look on her face as she rests after her shock third

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.

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 guaran-

tee of goals. It is a shame," Rijkaard

told reporters.

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