



BREAKING THE CHELSEA HEARTS: Aston Villa's Zat Knight (top) leaps above Chelsea striker Didier Drogba to head home during Sunday's Premiership match at Villa Park, Birmingham.

Juve ride on Chiellini

AFP, Rome



A last minute goal from Giorgio Chiellini gave Juventus a 3-2 win at Cagliari and allowed the disgraced former champions to hold onto top spot in Serie A on Sunday.

Juve are back in the top flight after romping to the Serie B title last season following their demotion, and points deduction, for match-fixing. They were also stripped of their two titles in 2005 and 2006 for the offence.

They did not produce the free-flowing football of a week ago when they blitzed Livorno 5-1, but their second straight victory allowed them to stay ahead of Roma, who eased past Siena 3-0, at the top on goal difference.

But despite the victory in Sardinia, Juve's former Chelsea and Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri was far from happy.

"We still need to improve. We

are under construction at the moment with a new squad, a new tactician and I cannot even say how long it will take to reach the full potential of this side," he said.

"I can only say we still have to do better. I'm not happy yet and the players know that.

"We are winning, but winning is not everything. I want to see an intense, fast-paced match that is a 90-minute advertisement for football."

Juve twice took the lead, only to be pegged back by stubborn opponents before defender Chiellini rose highest at the back post to head home a Mauro Camoranesi freekick in the last minute to earn the Old Lady of Turin a victory they scarcely deserved.

France forward David Trezeguet continued his fine start to the season, notching his fourth goal in two games, and 99th in Serie A, in the 54th minute and captain Alessandro Del Piero restored Juve's lead on 77 minutes but both times it lasted only a few minutes before Pasquale Foggia restored

parity from the penalty spot.

In the capital, Roma eased to victory against Siena with Italy midfielder Alberto Aquilani giving the hosts the lead on 17 minutes.

French forward Ludovic Giuly scored his first goal in Serie A eight minutes from time after being set up by Aquilani before Francesco Totti put the gloss on the victory a minute from the end with a fine individual effort.

Roma boss Luciano Spalletti said the match had been tougher than the scoreline suggested.

"After the opening goal Siena did well to snap at our heels. We had the chances to extend our lead, but didn't finalise them," he said.

"After the break our roles were reversed and we sealed the points."

In other matches, Palermo bounced back from their home defeat to Roma last weekend by cruising to a 4-2 win at Livorno.

Udinese were humiliated 5-0 at home by promoted Napoli, with Uruguayan forward Marcelo Zalayeta, formerly of Juventus, scoring a double.

In Sicily, Catania made their first return to the Angelo-Massimino stadium since its closure following the death of policeman Filippo Raciti during violence during the aftermath of a derby game against Palermo last season.

But the return home could not inspire the home side who were held to a 0-0 draw by Genoa.

In Sunday's late game Lazio were held to a 0-0 draw at Sampdoria.

On Saturday, Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored both goals as champions Inter Milan beat Empoli 2-0.

Inter, still missing injured pair Marco Materazzi and Patrick Vieira, were in front after 13 minutes when Ibrahimovic volleyed in a Maicon cross.

Inter made sure of the three points with seven minutes remaining as Ibrahimovic finished off a sweeping move.

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.

Candela hangs up his boots

AFP, Paris

Former international defender Vincent Candela, who figured in France's 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000-winning squads, has called time on his career at the age of 33.

"There's a time for everything," the player whose last club was Messina told L'Equipe sports newspaper on Monday.

"Eighteen years as a professional, that's good, the last three less so. It's a good time to stop. Football has changed. It's more physical, less tactical and technical."

"Players are bigger and faster but with less brains," said Candela, who wants to become a players' agent.

Candela won 40 caps for France and played the majority of his career at Roma.

QPR worth 14m pounds

AFP, London

Details of Flavio Briatore and Bernie Ecclestone's 14 million pound (20 million euros) takeover of Queen Parks Rangers were released on Monday.

The Formula One duo will pay one million pounds for the club's shares, and 13million to clear QPR's debts, with a further 5million available to invest in new players.

Confirmation of the takeover by Renault chief Briatore and F1 supremo Ecclestone was released in a club statement prior to the kick-off of their home game with Southampton on Saturday.

Briatore, who took his place in the stands for QPR's 3-0 defeat, said: "We are fully aware of the history of QPR and the loyal fan base that it has, we are therefore totally committed to bringing future success back to the club.

Wife leaves Henry

Football

AFP, London

The British wife of French football star Thierry Henry divorced him in London's High Court on Monday, citing his ongoing "unreasonable behaviour."

British reports speculated the big-earning striker, who plays for Spanish giants Barcelona, could face the biggest ever divorce payment by a footballer following the split from model Claire Merry, his wife of four years.

The mother of their two-year-old daughter Tea is expected to be entitled to a large chunk of his wealth -- estimated at around 25 million pounds (50 million dollars, 35 million euros).

The "quickest" divorce was one of 34 decrees nisi granted in just under a minute by a judge at the Principal Registry of the High Court's Family Division.

None of the parties was present, and it will be at least six weeks before a final decree absolute will be granted.

Henry, 30, and Merry, 27, who models under the first name Nicole, met when they worked on television advertisements for a car firm.

The couple shared a plush six-bedroomed house in the well-to-do north London suburb of Hampstead, which Henry bought for 5.95 million pounds in 2002.

Merry was granted a decree nisi on the grounds of Henry's "unreasonable behaviour," court papers showed.

Details of Henry's behaviour were not specified, but Merry confirmed the activities in question were "continuing."

Asked whether his behaviour had affected her health, she replied that the question was not applicable.

Henry stated he had received the divorce petition on July 17. He confirmed he had also received a "statement of arrangements" con-

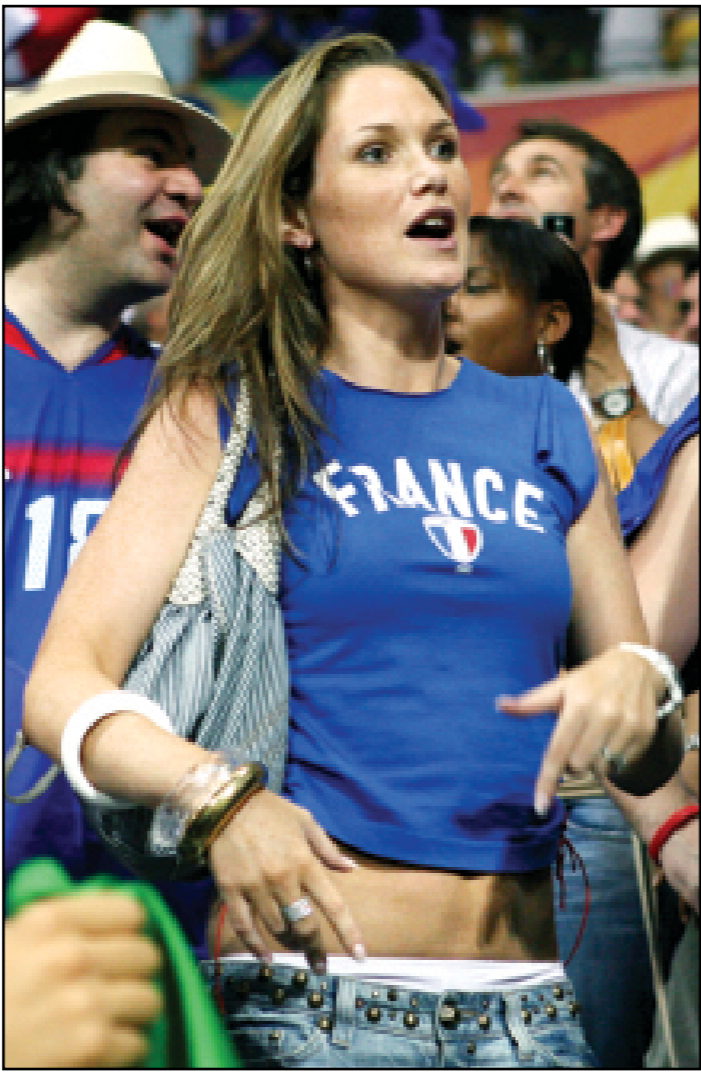
cerning their daughter from Merry's solicitors -- but did not agree with her proposals.

Asked whether he agreed, he stated: "No. I will shortly be applying to the court for a defined contact

order."

Henry announced he was splitting from Merry in June, shortly before his transfer from London's

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This AFP filephoto dated July 1, 2006 shows the wife of Thierry Henry, Claire Merry, during the World Cup quarterfinal between Brazil and France at Frankfurt.

Villa stun Chelsea

AFP, Birmingham



José Mourinho admitted he could not blame Roman Abramovich for leaving early after Martin O'Neill's Aston Villa became the first side to beat Chelsea this season.

Abramovich, Chelsea's Russian owner, departed seconds after Villa scored their second goal to condemn the Blues to their first defeat since late January.

Debutant Zat Knight and Gabriel Agbonlahor, both local boys and lifelong Villa supporters, scored in the second half to leave Mourinho still waiting for his first Premier League victory at Villa Park.

It was a performance that suggested Chelsea might struggle to reclaim the league title this season, but Mourinho insisted that there was no great significance in Abramovich's early exit.

The Portuguese said: "Can I blame him for being frustrated? No.

McClaren brings Lescott as insurance

AFP, London

England have called up Everton defender Joleon Lescott for crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers against Israel and Russia after veteran centre-back Sol Campbell withdrew with injury.

Manager Steve McClaren has already lost David Beckham, Frank Lampard and Kieron Dyer in the last week as he prepares for the two matches, on September 8 and four days later, that could make or break his England reign.

Portsmouth defender Campbell has a hamstring problem and will report to England's London Colney training base to be assessed by Steve McClaren's medical team, but Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp admitted his player has no chance of playing.

"Sol's not fit to play for England," Redknapp said of the former Arsenal star after Sunday's 3-1 defeat at Arsenal. "We spoke to the doctors and they know he's not fit."

"I think he will report and then come back to us. He had a groin problem and now it's his hamstring. He definitely won't be fit to play for England. It is a shame for sure."

Torres plans long stay

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Spanish striker Fernando Torres said he plans to stay with the English Premiership club "for many years to come."

The Spaniard, a 20million-pound summer capture from Atletico Madrid, has been a big hit since arriving at Anfield.

And he made himself an even bigger favourite with the Kop by netting twice as the Reds crushed Derby 6-0 to go to the top of the Premier League.

Afterwards the Spanish international told the club's official website: "I am learning quickly and my teammates have played an important role, along with everyone at the club who have all gone out of their way to help me."

"I feel as if I have been at Liverpool for a long time. I intend to stay here for many years to come and I am really pleased with everything - my new teammates, the fans, the city, the stadium and, of course with my first goal at Anfield versus Chelsea."

"The experience is more fulfilling when things work out and if we can maintain our recent form, I am sure that everything will continue to move along nicely."

Second arrest warrant

INTERNET, undated

Manchester City owner Thaksin Shinawatra today had a second set of arrest warrants issued against him in his native Thailand.

The former Thai prime minister and his wife are the subject of a police inquiry into the couple's alleged violation of stock-trading laws.

Last month saw the country's Supreme Court issue a first warrant after the pair failed to return home to answer corruption charges relating to a land sale.

Thaksin is accused of abusing his position by helping his wife buy land from a state agency at a favourable price.

The Department of Special Investigations have also been looking into allegations Thaksin, who bought City this summer, and

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The owner leaves the stadium when he wants to leave. I went to see England play Germany the other week and left early because I wanted to run away from the traffic.

"But my congratulations go to Villa because we made a mistake we cannot make and got punished. We played well in my opinion."

"I'm not used to losing games which is a good thing. It is good because it means we win more than we lose and it's more difficult to live with a defeat."

The defeat means Liverpool and Arsenal have already established an early edge over Chelsea in the title race and Mourinho admitted: "The league will be tighter this year because a lot of teams have spent a lot of money."

"In my opinion there are a lot of good teams and a big improvement. It is more normal for the big teams to lose matches now."

"It's more difficult to play against teams like Villa because they are better. It is the first weekend of September and five games in so this means nothing yet."

Villa fully deserved their victory

with an effervescent performance and are surely certain to make a marked improvement on their first season under Martin O'Neill.

Villa have avoided defeat to Chelsea since 1999 and Martin O'Neill was determined to pile on the agony.

O'Neill is convinced that Villa's inability to claw their way higher up the table has been a result of their failure to beat the more established sides.

Liverpool have already accounted for Villa this season but their hoodoo over Chelsea showed no sign of abating at an exuberant Villa Park.

They could have gone in front early when Agbonlahor, the England under-21 international, nearly stunned the visitors in the eighth minute with a clever turn and shot but Petr Cech produced an excellent save.

But Chelsea responded strongly with Scott Carson, the England international goalkeeper, frustrating long-range efforts from Michael Essien and Shaun Wright-Phillips.

Villa's start to the second half was equally impressive and Ashley

Young forced more heroics from Cech with a fine 20-yard effort.

From the resultant corner, Villa took the lead. Gareth Barry's corner was powerfully met by Knight and Ashley Cole on the goal line could not prevent it from finding the net.

Chelsea's misery was complete when Agbonlahor diverted Ashley Young's fierce cross cum shot past Cech a minute from time.

"We needed a good result against a good team like Chelsea to give us a boost," said O'Neill.

"We need it to give us some belief. But if you ask me if this team is better than it was last year I would say absolutely no question."

"We are getting better all the time and we've got loads of talent in the team. We've got that desire that Chelsea have shown in abundance again and again and again."

"I don't mind the expectation because this club should be built on it. We're not as good as the top four sides but we aspire to be."

"I'll now just wait and worry while my players are on international duty!"

Ronaldinho inspires Barca

AFP, Madrid



Brazilian Ronaldinho scored twice as title favourites Barcelona notched their first win of the new season with a convincing 3-1 victory over

Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

French international forward Thierry Henry, a 24-million-euro summer signing from Arsenal, made his first league start in

Barcelona's colours but it was Ronaldinho who took the headlines.

Ronaldinho scored a trademark free kick after just eight minutes, the club's first goal of the season, to ease the tension caused by last weekend's disappointing 0-0 draw against Racing Santander.

With the deadlock broken Barcelona poured forward and their slick passing too much for Bilbao and were awarded a penalty on 34 minutes when Henry was felled in the area.

Ronaldinho, the club's top-scorer last season with 21 goals,

converted the penalty with aplomb to make it 2-0.

Henry came off to a standing ovation just after the hour mark with just a goal missing from a stellar display.

Bilbao pulled a goal back with 20 minutes left but Ivory Coast international Yaya Toure scored his first league goal shortly afterwards to clinch the spoils.

Barca could have scored many more but another stylish performance, following the 5-0 demolition of Italian champions Inter Milan on Wednesday, will encourage their fans and coach alike.



Barcelona's Brazilian star Ronaldinho takes a penalty to score his second goal against Athletic de Bilbao during Sunday's Spanish league match at the Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona.

Italy recall Panucci

Football

AFP, Rome

Veteran Roma defender Cristian Panucci was recalled to the Italian squad for the first time in three years on Sunday for the crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers against France and Ukraine.

The 34-year-old, who has 48 caps to his name but hasn't featured since June 2004, was named by coach Roberto Donadoni in a 25-man squad as a replacement for Marco Materazzi, who was injured in the 3-1 friendly defeat to Hungary in August.

Cagliari midfielder Pasquale Foggia, who has scored three penalties in his last two Serie A games, is the other new name in the World Cup champions' squad.

Roma midfielders Daniele De

Rossi and Simone Perrotta, who were both rested for the defeat to Hungary, are also included as is Juventus's Mauro Camoranesi, who missed that game through injury.

In defence, 23-year-old Juve star Giorgio Chiellini, who scored the late goal in his team's 3-2 win over Cagliari on Sunday which kept the Turin giants on top, was chosen ahead of Cristian Zaccardo, who was part of the World Cup squad.

Another World Cup player, striker Alberto Gilardino, was also overlooked with former Serie A top scorer Cristiano Lucarelli, who plays for Shakhtar Donetsk in Ukraine after leaving Livorno, being recalled.

Italy take on Group B rivals France at the San Siro in Milan on Saturday before travelling to face Ukraine in Kiev on the following Wednesday.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Christian Abbiati (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Marco Amelia (Livorno), Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus)

Defenders: Andrea Barzagli (Palermo), Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid/ESP), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Alessandro Gamberini (Fiorentini), Fabio Grosso (Lyon/FRA), Massimo Oddo (AC Milan), Christian Panucci (Roma), Gianluca Zambrotta (Barcelona/ESP)

Midfielders: Massimo Ambrosini (AC Milan), Alberto Aquilani (Roma), Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Pasquale Foggia (Cagliari), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Simone Perrotta (Roma), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan)

Forwards: Alessandro Del Piero (Juventus), Antonio Di Natale (Udinese), Filippo Inzaghi (AC Milan), Cristiano Lucarelli (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Fabio Quagliarella (Udinese), Luca Toni (Bayern/GER)