



Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien (R) breaks away from Blackburn winger Morten Gamst Pedersen during their Premiership match at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea held at home

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho could not hide his frustration as Salomán

Kalou's disallowed goal meant his side failed to keep pace with their Premier League title rivals after Saturday's goalless draw with Blackburn at Stamford Bridge.

On a day when Arsenal and Manchester United recorded away victories, and Liverpool picked up a point at Portsmouth, Chelsea might have shrugged off the defeat at Aston Villa a fortnight ago if they had been more clinical in front of goal.

The game's moment of controversy occurred in the 59th minute when Kalou had the ball in the net from a cross by Juliano Belletti. Video replays showed that while the striker was stood in an offside position, he was behind the ball when it was played in and therefore not causing an infringement.

Chelsea were denied again with five minutes left when a world class save from Brad Friedel kept out Andriy Shevchenko, who had been restored to the starting line-up owing to the absence of Didier Drogba and Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro.

"Why the goal was not given is a question for the linesman," said Mourinho.

"It is not a question for me, or the fans, or Mark Hughes. To me it was an obvious goal and I think everyone knows the answer to the question.

"The fourth official has no other responsibility in the game, and this is a sport where technol-

ogy could instantly tell you whether it was a goal.

"I have no answers and I do not know why the linesman or assistant referees are not required to explain their decisions after the game.

"I have only good things to say about the players. We were without ammunition because Didier Drogba, Claudio Pizarro and Frank Lampard were not playing.

"My team played well against a good team, a team I respect. Blackburn fought hard for the clean sheet and came to take home a point."

The game took time to warm up as both sides struggled to find their feet in the first 20 minutes. It was almost ignited when Michael Essien dug a fine 26th minute volley out from under his feet and drew an excellent flying save from the outstanding Friedel.

In the second half Rovers showed more attacking invention as their confidence grew at ground that has not witnessed an away victory since February 2004.

And after the disallowed goal, Robbie Savage robbed Jon Obi Mikel of the ball 25-yards out and his strike was dealt with well by Cech, who tipped the ball over his bar, prompting the Wales international to hold his head in anguish.

Chelsea nearly won it with Shevchenko's header, but as Rovers defender Christopher Samba scrambled to clear the loose ball he suffered a head injury which resulted in a five minute delay. Mark Hughes' side held on to claim an impressive point as their unbeaten start to the season continued.

"In the second half we showed some great qualities," said Blackburn manager Mark Hughes.

"I said before the game that I sensed a different mentality in the dressing room. The qualities that the group is showing at the moment enable you to come to a place like Stamford Bridge and get something out of a game that you might not expect to get anything from.

"The one negative from our point of view is the injury sustained by Chris Samba. We hope it is not going to be too serious. He is talking in the hospital so that is a relief."

In other games, Sunderland put some breathing space between themselves and the relegation zone with a 2-1 win over Reading that ended a run of three successive defeats for Roy Keane's side.

Kenwyne Jones marked his home debut for the club by opening the scoring just before the half hour mark and Ross Wallace doubled the lead before Dave Kitson headed in a late consolation effort for the visitors.

Dean Ashton scored for the first time since the 2006 FA Cup final as West Ham climbed into the top half of the table by beating Middlesbrough 3-0.

Aston's strike was preceded by a Craig Bellamy volley and an own goal by Luke Young.

French midfielder Olivier Kapo was Birmingham's match-winner with the only goal against second-from-bottom Bolton, while a Jason Koumas penalty allowed Wigan to salvage a point at home to Fulham, who had taken an early lead through American striker Clint Dempsey.

Nistelrooy will face Bremen

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster said Dutch international striker Ruud van Nistelrooy would be fit for the Champions League opener with Werder Bremen on Tuesday after being left out of Real's 3-1 win over Almeria on Saturday.

Schuster said the Dutch star, the league's top scorer last season, had been feeling the effects of international duty with the Netherlands and the club did not want to risk a minor injury flaring up. "Van Nistelrooy came back with a few minor problems and we didn't want to take a chance on him," explained Schuster.

"It has worked out well for Ruud because he will be in perfect shape for Tuesday."

While van Nistelrooy is pencilled in to face Bremen at the Santiago Bernabeu his compatriot Arjen Robben is still waiting anxiously to make his debut and Schuster refused to say whether the wideman would face the Germans.

"Robben is gradually getting his match fitness and working with the ball but we - that is the medical team, the player and myself - have to decide when is best for him to play," said Schuster.

"Will he play against Bremen? It is too soon to say."

Robben arrived from Chelsea for 30 million euros in the summer but lacks match sharpness.

Jol vows a fight

AFP, London

Martin Jol has vowed to fight on as Tottenham head coach, despite seeing his job prospects suffer another major blow in Saturday's 3-1 defeat to arch-rivals Arsenal.

The Dutchman was warned last month by his chairman Daniel Levy that he would no longer tolerate Spurs failing to challenge the Premier League's established top four and his position was further undermined after it emerged that the north London club had sent a delegation of officials to speak with Juande Ramos, the Sevilla manager.

Jol has always maintained a bullishly optimistic approach to the rumours surrounding his future and his determination to turn Spurs into a genuine Champions League contender was evident again after this damaging defeat, which meant that he has gained just one win in six league games this season.

"I was put under pressure from day one but I always think positively," he said. "If you see the players' commitment today, there is no problem. The only thing we have to do is get results as we did before."

"I think we have the same points now as we did at the same stage of last season so our season starts now. We have probably 50-odd games left and after that we can make a judgement."

Whether Jol is granted that time remains highly questionable. The

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Rooney back for opener

AFP, Liverpool



Sir Alex Ferguson has signalled that Wayne Rooney will make his return to action in Wednesday's Champions League clash with Sporting Lisbon in the Portuguese capital.

The England forward has not played since suffering a metatarsal fracture on the opening day of the season and, although he returned to full training last week, Ferguson declined to risk him against his old club Everton on Saturday.

United came through the encounter without him, Nemanja Vidic's late header proving enough

to secure all three points courtesy of the club's third straight 1-0 win.

Afterwards United's manager revealed that he was planning to involve Rooney in Lisbon.

"He will be fit for Wednesday," said the Scot. "We have taken medical advice and they said it was a little bit too early for Everton. And after only five days he is a bit short of fitness but he will be training through until Wednesday."

After a shaky start to the season, Ferguson has been relieved to see his squad start to grind out results in tight matches.

"We all know we have not got our strongest side out at the moment due to injuries, but there is a good togetherness in the squad and it was a strong team effort, which it has to be at the moment."

"We defended well. They had one chance at 1-0 but Edwin van der Sar made a terrific save, and Rio Ferdinand made a fantastic block from the rebound.

"When we get our forward players back from injury we will be all right."

Cristiano Ronaldo's return to the United line-up after a three-match suspension was marred by a yellow card for diving and Paul Scholes was also booked by referee Alan Wiley -- both decisions which infuriated Ferguson.

"The crowd got Scholes that yellow card, the referee's view was blocked but he heard the crowd and showed him a card.

"Carlos Queiroz has watched the video (of Ronaldo's tumble), which it has to be at the moment."

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Klose keeps Bayern atop

AFP, Berlin



Miroslav Klose spared Bayern Munich's blushes with a second-half header as the Bundesliga leaders stayed top of the table with a 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 at the Allianz Arena on Saturday.

This was Klose's fourth league goal of the season and calmed Bayern's nerves to maintain their unbeaten record as his equaliser gave his side their narrow one-point lead over second-placed Arminia Bielefeld.

Schalke had taken the lead

against the run of play when Croatian midfielder Ivan Rakitic slammed home his shot from the edge of the penalty area on 35 minutes to beat Bayern's goalkeeper Oliver Kahn.

Bayern's Italian striker Luca Toni had earlier squandered three clear chances to give his side the lead, but it stayed 1-0 to the Royal Blues at half-time.

But the German giants, chasing their 21st crown as national champions, got back on level terms when a Franck Ribery free-kick was headed into the path of Klose and the German striker, the top scorer at last year's World Cup, headed home on 54 minutes.

"We had planned to take three points from this game to put some

distance between us and the rest of the table, but we didn't manage it," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"The first half an hour was good, but we missed our chances and we were a bit too timid.

"In the second half, it was a much tighter game and Schalke demanded a lot of us. I think that both teams earned the draw."

Schalke boss Mirok Slomka, who celebrated his 40th birthday in midweek, acknowledged his side squandered their chances.

"After the first 20 minutes, it didn't look like we would win, Bayern were all over us and exposed some of our problems in defence," he said.

"But once we got our goal, we

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Bayern Munich players (From L-R) Bastian Schweinsteiger, Luca Toni and Miroslav Klose celebrate the latter's goal against Schalke during their Bundesliga clash at the Allianz Arena on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Colin McRae dies in helicopter crash

AFP, London

British rally driver Colin McRae and his five-year-old son were among four people killed in a helicopter crash this weekend in Scotland, police said Sunday.

Tributes poured in from the sporting and political arenas in honour of McRae, who in 1995 was the first Briton to win the world rally championship.



COLIN MCRAE

Scottish police said the 39-year-old driver, who was a licensed pilot, his son Johnny and two family friends including a six-year-old boy were killed in the crash in the grounds of McRae's home in Lanark on Saturday.

"We believe that the group were just returning from a visit to the nearby village of Quarter around 1605 (1505 GMT) hours yesterday, when it appears that the helicopter got into difficulty and crashed within the grounds of Mr McRae's family home," Chief Superintendent Tim

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Heskey's England dream shattered?

INTERNET, undated

Emile Heskey's England recall could prove to have been painfully brief after the striker was whisked to hospital today with a suspected broken fifth metatarsal.

Heskey limped out of Wigan's 1-1 draw with Fulham at the JJB Stadium after just nine minutes and it initially appeared the striker had simply turned his right ankle.

But it is now feared Heskey could have suffered a more serious injury which could lead to more than a month on the sidelines - and rule him out of England's Euro 2008 matches against Estonia and Russia next month.

While Wigan officials privately feared the worst, boss Chris Hutchings said: "Emile has gone to hospital to have an X-ray and obviously we will just have to wait and see how bad it is."

"He just came down and rolled his ankle and whether he has also broken anything we don't know. He tried to carry on but it was too painful."

It is very disappointing for Emile. He didn't want to come off because everyone who knows, Emile knows if he can stay on he will stay on. But we didn't want to do any more damage and think long-term."

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's flawless start to the season continued with a 3-1 win over Almeria on Saturday as the Spanish champions warmed up for Tuesday's Champions League opener against Werder Bremen.

Man of the moment Wesley Sneijder continued his record of scoring in every league game curling in a trademark free-kick on 68 minutes for his fourth goal of the season.

Earlier Javier Saviola, starting in place of the rested Ruud van Nistelrooy, had opened the scoring with his first league goal for Real before Sneijder doubled their advantage.

Kalu Uche pulled one back for ten-man Almeria on 73 minutes but substitute Gonzalo Higuain scored late on to clinch another win for Real.

Real now have a perfect nine points under new German coach Bernd Schuster and, although it is early in the season title rivals Barcelona, five points adrift, are certainly under pressure to win their game in hand against Osasuna on Sunday.

"We had to work hard and we lacked that match sharpness after a complicated week with players away on international duty," said Schuster.

"We gave away a silly goal and made it hard for ourselves but we won and if we want to win titles at the end of the season we have to win games like this."

For Real the Champions League is up next with their opening match a tricky home tie against resilient German side Bremen on Tuesday.

Schuster has hinted that he will rotate his team again believing Real now have the strength in depth to

rest key players.

"This year it makes more sense to rotate players because the squad is well balanced," Schuster explained.

"Everyone is capable of playing in the league, cup or the Champions League. We have a squad for competing in all competitions."

Club president Ramon Calderon said Real were the best team in Europe in midweek and they now

have a chance to prove it against Europe's elite.

Nine-time European champions Real were beaten by Bayern Munich at the last 16 stage last year and Schuster will be under pressure to do better than his predecessor Fabio Capello.

Valencia needed an 89th minute strike from winger David de Silva to secure their first home win of the campaign with a 2-1 victory over

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PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid forward Javier Saviola points to the heavens after scoring his first goal for the club in their Primera Liga match against rivals Almeria at the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday.

Nesta saves Milan blushes

AFP, Rome



AC Milan were held to their second successive 1-1 draw in Serie A which resumed Saturday after last weekend's time-out for Euro 2008 qualifier action.

The European champions missed out on the chance of taking temporary possession of the Serie A summit ahead of Sunday's programme when only Alessandro Nesta's late late equaliser avoided an embarrassing slip up at struggling Siena.

AC Milan, who won the European Super Cup against Sevilla in Monaco at the end of last month, were held 1-1 by Fiorentina on their last league tie at the start of the month.

And they were short of full

strength for this away fixture as Kaka, Andrea Pirlo, Massimo Oddo were left out in preparation for their Champions League opener against Benfica.

The injured Ronaldo was also missing.

Siena, lying fourth from the foot of the table, took a 24th minute lead thanks to Massimo Maccarone, who pounced on some comedy defending as Nelson Dida fumbled an effort from Cristian Bucchi and then Kakha Kaladze tripped over the ball as he attempted to clear it.

That let in Maccarone although the former Middlesbrough player was lucky not to be caught up for offside as he slotted in from close range.

The Tuscany club were heading for a valuable maximum points until Nesta popped up in the 91st minute to level from a volley after a move started by a freekick

awarded when Leandro Grimi felled Clarence Seedorf.

The result left AC Milan in third, on five points, one behind Juventus and Inter Milan.

In Saturday's match Lazio were held to a goalless draw by Empoli, who climbed a place to third from bottom.

On Sunday Juventus and Roma are out to defend their perfect record against Udinese and Reggina.

Juventus have scored eight goals in their two matches so far against Livorno and Cagliari, and their home match against off-form Udinese will give them a chance to add to their tally.

Udinese have yet to win this season though the form of Italy international striker Antonio Di Natale, who scored twice in Wednesday's 2-1 Euro 2008 qualifying victory in Ukraine, will be a plus.