

# Barca misfire again

AFP, Madrid



The Spanish season has only just started but Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard will not be happy at playing catch-up with a 0-0 draw in Osasuna on Sunday leaving his team four points behind pacesetters Real Madrid.

Barcelona may have Thierry Henry, Ronaldinho and other attacking gems but they failed to score for the second time in three games and surrendered another two points.

With Real having their best start since 1992 - winning their opening three matches - the pressure was on Barca but they failed to respond with an ineffective display at Osasuna.

It does not get any easier for Barcelona who face French champions Lyon in the Champions League on Wednesday and then high-flying Sevilla next weekend in the first title clash of the new season.

Sevilla, who have played one game less, also have a perfect record and showed they are in fine shape ahead of Wednesday's tough Champions League match against Arsenal with an impressive

4-1 home win over Recreativo Huelva on Sunday.

With Lionel Messi suffering from muscular problems Rijkaard handed 18-year-old Giovanni, recently-capped by Mexico, his first league start and Argentine Gabriel Milito also made his Barcelona debut.

Giovanni went close to scoring in the 34th minute but Javier Portillo then missed the best chance of the first half after Lilian Thuram had slipped.

With the deadlock still not broken Rijkaard gave a late debut to 17-year-old forward Bojan Krkic, a star for Spain in the recent Under-17 World Cup, but to no avail.

Last season Sevilla were in the title race until the closing stages and they have started this season like potential challengers winning their first two games scoring eight goals in the process.

Russian Alexander Kerzhakov, who also missed a penalty, and Mali international Frederic Kanoute both scored twice to sink Recreativo.

It was Sevilla's first league match since the tragic death of their former Spanish international defender Antonio Puerta and they offered a fitting tribute with a terrific display of attacking football.

It was the perfect preparation for the UEFA Cup winners ahead of the testing Champions League match

at Arsenal - who are unbeaten and lead the English Premiership - on Wednesday.

"Right from the start you could sense Sevilla's superiority and I think 4-1 was a fair result," said Sevilla coach Juande Ramos.

"Arsenal know that Sevilla are a good team and they will respect us just like we will respect them."

Another boost for Sevilla was the brilliant performance of Brazilian Daniel Alves who appears to heal his rift with the club after they denied him a summer move to Chelsea.

Ivory Coast striker Arouna Kone also made his debut on a night of many positives for Sevilla.

While Real are beaming after picking up a maximum nine points fans of neighbours Atletico Madrid wait impatiently for their team's first win of the campaign following a disappointing 1-1 draw at Murcia on Sunday.

After splashing out millions of euros on the likes of Simao, Diego Forlan and Antonio Reyes in the summer Mexican coach Javier Aguirre is expected to have the club competing on all fronts and two points from nine is a poor start.

"We were satisfied with our goal and in the end that cost us dearly," bemoaned Aguirre.

Atletico's next test is in the UEFA Cup against Turkish club Erciyesspor on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona forward Thierry Henry (L) accelerates away from Osasuna midfielder Javi Garcia during their Primera Liga encounter at Pamplona on Sunday.

# Rafa sets high goals

AFP, London



Rafa Benitez has set Liverpool a 12-point target as last season's Champions League runners-up start their bid to reach a third final in four years at Porto on Tuesday.

Benitez believes Liverpool can guarantee qualification for the knockout stages if they take a dozen points from their six Group A matches against the Portuguese champions, Marseille and Besiktas.

The Spanish coach is well versed in the demands of Europe's elite club competition after winning the trophy in 2005 and leading the Reds back to the final in May.

Liverpool should be strong enough to reach the last 16 without too many alarms, but Tuesday's match may well be their toughest assignment of the first phase.

Benitez knows Porto have the ability to pose his side plenty of problems at the Dragao Stadium, so a win would set the tone for the rest of the campaign.

"We could need around 12 in this

group. I cannot say because sometimes you can pass through with fewer points. I want to be sure so I think 12 would be better than 10," Benitez told Liverpoolfc.tv.

"Porto have quality, players with ability. The workrate in the middle is important for them and also they have experience."

"They are a difficult team to play against, even more so because of the atmosphere in the stadium. It will be really difficult for us."

While Benitez would love to erase the bitter memories of last season's defeat to Milan in Athens, he has made no secret of his desire to end Liverpool's 18-year wait to win the English league title.

With that domestic ambition in mind it was surprising Benitez started without Fernando Torres, Steven Gerrard, Dirk Kuyt and Ryan Babel for his side's goalless draw at Portsmouth on Saturday.

Such a pragmatic decision shows how much regard Benitez has for Porto.

Gerrard's broken toe shouldn't stop him featuring, but Xabi Alonso, Steve Finnan and Alvaro Arbeloa face fitness tests after suffering knocks at Portsmouth at Fratton

Park.

If Benitez brings Torres back it will be a memorable moment for the Spain striker.

Torres has never played a European club match after spending his career until this season at success-starved Atletico Madrid.

The prospect of testing himself against the best in the Champions League was a major incentive for Torres to swap his boyhood favourites Atletico for Anfield.

"Everyone wants to play in Europe, to be among the greats," Torres said. "I did not come here because of money, I came for the challenge and the chance to win things and I believe I can do that with Liverpool."

"The chance to play in the Champions League and with great players is what matters. I want to contribute with my goals."

Few teams can match Liverpool's haul of five European Cups, but Porto have an impressive pedigree of their own after winning the competition in 1987 and 2004.

They enjoyed the ideal preparation for Liverpool's visit with a 1-0 win over Maritimo, thanks to a

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# Ronaldinho calls for calm

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona playmaker Ronaldinho believes the Catalan giants need to look ahead to Wednesday's Champions League game against Lyon and not dwell on Sunday's disappointing goalless draw at Osasuna.

Although still unbeaten, Barca have only managed to pick up one win from their opening three La Liga matches and are already four points behind leaders and arch-rivals Real Madrid.

With key strikers Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi missing against Osasuna, Barca looked toothless and they were jeered off the pitch by the travelling support following the clash.

Barca have a chance to make amends for that display on Wednesday though when they host Lyon in their opening Champions League Group E fixture, and Ronaldinho has already set his sights on that game.

"We need to think about the next match," said the Brazilian, who believes a draw in Pamplona is not that bad a result.

"After having so many players away with their countries (during the international break), it was a tough game away from home and our opponents waited to hit us on the counter-attack."

Ronaldinho was replaced by Xavi in the 65th minute of the encounter after an ineffectual display but the two-time former FIFA World Player of the Year, despite looking stunned at the time, admits he understood coach Frank Rijkaard's thinking.

"I was not surprised because there is another game in the middle of the week," he said.

Barca midfielder Deco insists it is too early to be worrying about the form of Real Madrid, who have won all three of their league matches to date, scoring 10 goals in the process.

"What matters is that we improve ourselves and we do not have to think about Madrid, there is still much of the season left," he said. "We must always look to improve, even when we win."

# Chelsea craving glory

AFP, London



John Terry is desperate to lead Chelsea to Champions League glory at last, and the Blues kick off this season's quest at home to Rosenborg on Tuesday.

Chelsea have been knocked out at the semifinal stage in three of the last four seasons and England and Blues captain Terry insists they are fixed on going all the way this time.

Norwegian champions Rosenborg are the first team in their way in Tuesday's Group B match at Stamford Bridge.

"We're so desperate to win it as a group," centre-half Terry said at the Chelsea players.

"It doesn't really come from me. It comes from the players within and that will win comes from inside."

"We're born winners here and that's going to keep us going over

the next few years, because we're desperate to win it, and it really sets the tone," Terry said on the forthcoming Blue Revolution documentary DVD.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho, who guided Portuguese side Porto to the 2004 Champions League title, said the time had come for the big-spending Blues to reach the final.

"Chelsea have been in three semifinals in four years: it shows where the club is and shows that the club needs to make the last step to be in the Champions League final. Having won every competition in English football they want to make that step," he told the uefa.com magazine.

"I feel Chelsea at the beginning of the season is a strong team. Trying and aiming to win every competition but being realistic, which means understanding that you can't win everything in modern football."

"It is very, very, very difficult to do it. And especially in the Champions League when you get into the

knockout phase. What makes the difference are little details," he added.

Chelsea are fifth in the English Premier League, Saturday's goalless draw at home to Blackburn Rovers leaving them two points behind leaders Arsenal.

The Blues were without strikers Didier Drogba and Claudio Pizarro, meaning Andriy Shevchenko got his first start of the season.

Ivory Coast hitman Drogba is struggling to shake off a knee injury in time to face the Norwegian champions, while England midfielder Frank Lampard, another key source of goals, could be fit enough to feature.

Pizarro should have recovered from his gruelling journey back from playing for Peru in time for Tuesday.

Rosenborg, without key midfielder Roar Strand, are not expected to cause Chelsea too much trouble. Former Tottenham s t r i k e r

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# DI NATALE DOWNS JUVE

# Roma at the summit

AFP, Rome



Roma went to the top of the Serie A Sunday when they extended their perfect start to the season to three out of three with a 2-0 win over Reggina.

Juventus went into the week-end's action in the lead on goal difference but slipped to fourth when suffering a shock 1-0 loss, their first defeat of the new campaign, to Udinese in Turin.

Inter Milan climbed four places to second with their 2-0 win, the second of the season, over San Siro visitors Catania.

On paper Juventus rather than Roma looked to have the better chance of maintaining their unblemished record for 2007/08 with the Romans mustering only one win from their last four visits to Calabria.

But they boosted that record after Brazilian Juan marked his topflight debut in the best possible way, putting Roma in front in the 50th minute with Francesco Totti adding the second six minutes from time.

Roma's cause had not been helped when goalkeeper Alexander Doni failed to come back for the second half after suffering an injury, the gloves being taken by Under-21 international Gianluca Curci.

The result was a timely confidence booster ahead of Roma's opening Champions League group tie against Dinamo Kiev.

"What interests me know is that my players keep their feet on the ground," said coach Luciano Spalletti.

"There are clubs with far greater resources than us. And like us there are other teams who can fight for the title, like Fiorentina."

In Turin Juventus, who face Roma next weekend, had a frustrating afternoon with Alessandro del Piero hitting the post three times against a Udinese side that had proved capable of holding Inter to a

1-1 draw at the start of the campaign, only to crash 5-0 to Napoli.

There was to be no such repeat of that lopsided loss here with Udinese taking the lead in the opening seconds of the second half in a three player move started by Giuseppe Dossena and completed

by the unmarked Antonio Di Natale's header.

Di Natale's heroics came after his two goals for Italy in their 2-1 Euro 2008 qualifier win over Ukraine last week.

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PHOTO: AFP

Udinese striker Fabio Quagliarella (top) jumps on top of his teammate Antonio Di Natale after the latter's match-winning performance against Juventus in their Serie A clash at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Sunday.

# Reds duo to miss out

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Mohamed Sissoko and John Arne Riise will miss the Champions League Group A match against FC Porto on Tuesday.

Defender Riise has a groin injury he picked up on international duty with Norway last week, while midfielder Sissoko and left winger Harry Kewell will also not make the trip to Portugal.

But defender Fabio Aurelio is back in the squad after a lengthy absence with an Achilles tendon injury.

"Fabio is back which is good news for us," said Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez. "He has worked hard to recover from his injury and could be a useful asset for us."

Liverpool finished runners-up last season to AC Milan.

# Germany, England in qtrs



AFP, Hangzhou

Defending champions Germany and England booked their places in the women's World Cup quarter-finals on Monday but there was despair for Japan who narrowly missed out.

Germany's Birgit Prinz and Renate Lingor scored the only goals of the game to shatter Japanese dreams in a hard-fought 2-0 victory here, while England walked all over South American champions Argentina 6-1 in Chengdu.

It means Germany top Group A

on seven points and will play the runner-up in Group B, likely to be North Korea, in Wuhan on Saturday.

England finished second with five points and can look forward to a clash with the winner of that group, expected to be the United States, in Tianjin on the same day.

Asian number ones North Korea take on a desperate Sweden on Tuesday and are confident of getting the result they need, while two-time champions America should easily beat basement team Nigeria, also Tuesday.

Prinz, a triple World Player of the Year, is a clinical marksman and proved once again on Monday why

she was the both player of the tournament and top-scorer at the last World Cup in 2003.

The talismanic 29-year-old, who once had the chance to become the first woman to play in Italy's Serie A, for Perugia, but turned down the offer, played a crucial role in Germany's victory.

She led the early charge as the Germans cut through Japan's defence like butter and bombarded the goal with shots.

Prinz got her reward in the 21st minute, lurking on the edge of the penalty box to meet Lingor's corner which she rifled into the net on her second touch.

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PHOTO: AFP

Germany players celebrate their second goal against Japan during their World Cup group match in Hangzhou on Monday.

# Silvestre out for season

AFP, London

Manchester United defender Mikael Silvestre will miss the rest of the season after injuring his cruciate knee ligament, the club confirmed on Sunday.

French left-back Silvestre, 30, was hurt towards the end of the first half of United's 1-0 victory over Everton on Saturday when he attempted to cut out a pass by Mikel Arteta.

He was taken off the pitch on a stretcher in agony, and Sir Alex Ferguson said later he was concerned about the extent of the injury.

Manchester United confirmed on its website that Silvestre "is likely to miss the rest of the season after scans confirmed that he suffered a cruciate knee ligament injury."

# Rui relishes Milan return

INTERNET, undated

Former Milan playmaker Manuel Rui Costa returns to his old stomping ground on Tuesday as Benfica prepare to visit AC Milan at the San Siro. The player revealed that he still holds a great deal of affection for the rossoneri, but will pull no punches as he lines up for the Portuguese champions.

Rui Costa returned to Portugal at the start of last season, signing on at Benfica after a mixed five year spell at the San Siro.

There were plenty of high points during his time with the rossoneri - the Champions League and Serie A being chief amongst them, but many of the Milan fans felt that he was overpriced after arriving for almost 40 million euros in 2001.

Nevertheless, he looks back upon his time with AC Milan with nothing but fondness, and the 35 year old attacking midfielder is relishing the prospect of a return to San Siro with Benfica.

"I'll be facing the team with whom I became a European Champion, and many of my friends are still there. Nonetheless, I'll give my all for Benfica at the San Siro in

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# Jol given ultimatum

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Martin Jol has been given an ultimatum of six games to save his job after his side fell to a 3-1 loss at home to Arsenal at the weekend, according to press reports here on Monday.

Jol's position has come under scrutiny as his side sit fourth from bottom with just one win from six games with speculation rife of a swoop for Sevilla's Juande Ramos.

While Daniel Levy has apparently ruled out an immediate parting of the ways, even a revival from Spurs in the next month may not be enough to save Jol.

The Dutchman is adamant he is the man to help break into the 'big four' and hit out at those who continue to undermine his position in the wake of the defeat by Arsenal on Saturday.

He said: "I'm not hurting inside. I will try to get the results and as long as the players show me the commitment they showed me again, there is no problem."

"People said in 2005 I was going to be out of a job but I am still here."

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# Wenger wary of Sevilla

INTERNET, undated

Arsene Wenger claims that Arsenal's UEFA Champions League opponents Sevilla are "one of the best sides in Europe".

The north London giants have enjoyed a terrific start to the season and now take on a quality Spanish side who have won the UEFA Cup two seasons running.

'Rojiblancos' moved into second place in La Liga at the weekend courtesy of a 4-1 win over Recreativo De Huelva, while the Gunners top the Premier League following their derby win over Tottenham.

Wednesday night's Group H match promises to be a mouth-watering encounter, and Wenger is aware that Juande Ramos' team will provide an extremely tough test.

"I know Sevilla very well and I think that they are one of the best sides in Europe," the French tactician told UEFA's official website.

"It is a match which, from the very start, will dictate the potential of the two sides."

"It is important for us to play well as we are at home and we will need to be very focused both to prove that we are good enough at this level and, more importantly, to put us in a good position to qualify."

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