

Terry denies allegations



Football

INTERNET, undated

John Terry has hit out at speculation blaming him as the cause of Jose Mourinho's departure as Chelsea prepare to take on Valencia in the Champions League.

The Blues travel to Spain next week knowing that nothing less than a victory is required to put their Champions League ambitions back on track.

Chelsea drew 1-1 with Rosenborg in their opening Group B game - the shock result was Mourinho's last match in charge.

Two days later Mourinho left the club by mutual consent, and some reports later claimed the Portuguese had had a bust-up over his concerns about Terry's fitness.

However, the angry England captain denies he was to blame and revealed he is taking legal action.

Terry declared: "It was a bit of a shock to us all and it has been a difficult time over the last week or so.

"We all realise how special and great the manager was but as a club we need to move on now. We can't dwell on that or it will affect our performances and our results.

"There have been some bad things written and some very false and untrue things written about me and about the manager's departure, associating me with it.

"It is complete rubbish. I would have liked to have spoken about it earlier but because we are taking legal action against two newspapers, it has been difficult.

"I know some fans have been frustrated that I haven't personally

spoken. I loved the manager, I can only say great things about him. He was great for me personally, and for the club with what he achieved here and what we achieved under him as a group of players.

"I think the fans know that I am very loyal to the club and everyone associated with Chelsea and I always will be. I will continue to love Chelsea and we will go from here."

Meanwhile Ukraine striker Andriy Shevchenko will be looking for more European goals against the Spanish side.

He has fond memories of his last visit to Valencia when he scored in Chelsea's 2-1 win in the Mestalla.

Shevchenko said: "It was a very difficult game and they are a good team. Last year was a good result in Valencia, 2-1. We'll try (to get) the

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Arsenal's pivotal season



Football

AFP, Paris

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has admitted the current season could be pivotal as the Gunners go in search of elusive silverware following a series of major changes at the club.

Arsenal are on a high and on top of the English Premier League having won nine of their past ten matches.

Financially, the club has left its rivals green with envy with figures unveiled last week showing the club's move to the Emirates Stadium has driven a near 50 per cent increase in turnover to more than 200 million pounds for the year

ending May 31, 2007.

Despite Arsenal being the subject of takeover speculation as Uzbekistan businessman Alisher Usmanov increased his stake in the club to 23 per cent, Wenger has waved off the significance of that eventual "threat".

But while one of his priorities is to guarantee football which entertains the fans, the Frenchman admits this season could come to nothing if Arsenal don't prove themselves against their big rivals at home and abroad.

"The real threat for us this season is the fact it could be a pivotal one for the life of the club," Wenger told Saturday's edition of L'Equipe sports daily.

"If the team doesn't click, then we won't go anywhere because no

matter what kind of money we have in the bank, if we don't go out and do well against our big rivals then we will have built this team for nothing.

"If the team isn't competitive this season it will be hard to follow up."

As well as progressing serenely in the League Cup and Champions League, ahead of Saturday's match at West Ham the Gunners are already two points clear at the top of the table with a game in hand over nearest rivals Manchester United.

It has proved a lightning start to the season for Wenger, who admits he endured a "tough summer" following the departure of striker Thierry Henry to Barcelona, and

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Schalke move to second

INTERNET, undated



Schalke maintain their winning run to leapfrog Leverkusen into second place following a 1-0 victory over Hertha Berlin at the Veltons Arena on Friday.

The performance was hardly impressive, but the three points were vital all the same.

Schalke's third victory in succession was secured through a first half penalty from Rafinha a minute before the break.

The first half saw Schalke the predominant attacking force in the game, with Berlin happy to defend and try to hit back on the attack through Pantelic.

Mirko Slomka was forced into a premature switch in the 9th minute with Hali Altintop limping off following a tough challenge from von Bergen. Dane Peter Lovenkrands was his replacement.

There were few clear cut scoring chances during the opening period. Bajramovic had a shot after six minutes which caused Drobný few problems, while substitute Lovenkrands didn't make the most of an opportunity after being well played in by Ernst.

Hertha's only real chance in the first period came through a Pantelic freekick which Manuel Neuer had covered.

Just as Hertha's defensive tactics looked like paying off and the first half drifted towards a 0-0, the home side won a deserved penalty.

Jermaine Jones was played in and the midfielder was clearly taken out by Steve von Bergen.

Brazilian Rafinha stepped up to coolly slot home his second penalty of the season.

Having defended for most of the first period, Lucien Favre's side was forced to take a more attacking stance in the second.

The opening twenty minutes were rather uneventful, but as the half proceeded, Schalke became

more nervous at the back and Berlin came more into the game.

On the hour mark, Westermann had a good chance following a goalmouth scramble, and Kuranyi had a rare opportunity on 75 minutes.

However the home side showed limited attacking thrust and were

forced to endure some nervous moments. Hertha's improved second half showing was not enough to get them back in the game and Schalke ended up winning their third win on the bounce, putting them one point behind Bayern-for 24 hours at least.



PHOTO: AFP

Schalke right-back Rafinha points to the heavens after converting a penalty-kick to give his side victory over Hertha Berlin during their Bundesliga clash at the Arena Auf Schalke in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

Hamilton takes pole

AFP, Fuji Speedway



Lewis Hamilton snatched pole position for the Japanese Grand Prix in a rain-hit Fuji qualifying session on Saturday, denying title rival Fernando Alonso with a thrilling final lap.

The championship leader punched the air in delight and gave himself the thumbs-up after taking pole for the fourth time of his stellar rookie season.

Hamilton, who leads McLaren teammate Alonso by two points with three races left, bagged top spot right at the end of the session by just 0.070 seconds as he defied the greasy conditions with a time of one minute 25.368 seconds.

The Ferraris of Kimi Raikkonen and Felipe Massa will line up on the second row of the grid after being outgunned by their rivals in a qualifying session that looked at one stage as though it would have to be postponed after practice earlier had been abandoned because of fog.

Hamilton, 22, said: "I'm feeling relaxed and with the way this weekend has gone I am even more relaxed.

"I know I have got two guys breathing down my neck but I am not bothered. But it is going to be a very close, tough race and the key will be getting to the first corner first.

"I knew it was my last chance at pole and I was delighted when I got it. That's why I punched the air.

"We had not had much practice

in the wet conditions and it was difficult to see the pit boards and know where you were. But it was good fun out there and I am sure if the conditions are changing during the race it will be exciting."

Double world champion Alonso said: "I really enjoyed driving here at Fuji for the first time. I liked those conditions. I think for everybody it was quite an exciting qualifying because of the fog this morning.

"It would have been better to be on pole but I am on the front row, which is important. It is very close between the top four drivers."

Raikkonen, 13 points behind Hamilton and needing to win Sunday's race to keep his title hopes alive, finished just a tenth of

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Real establish 'code of conduct'

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid have drawn up a players' 'code of conduct' to avoid the excesses attributed to Barcelona's Brazilian star Ronaldinho, Spanish media reported Saturday.

The code asks players "to pay attention to their public image" and "avoid risky situations which could put their health or physical fitness at risk".

It was presented Friday to all the players by club president, Ramon Calderon and was described as "anti-Ronaldinho", according to the Madrid daily ABC.

The Spanish media have focused on Ronaldinho's poor form so far this season and suggested his reported party lifestyle is the cause.

The Brazilian forward, who has missed the last two matches with a leg injury, was reportedly seen at a nightclub partying 48 hours prior to Barcelona's mediocre goalless draw with Osasuna earlier this month.

Real Madrid had to take disciplinary measures last season against Italian striker Antonio Cassano and the Madrid media have regularly reported the late nights in discos by some of the Brazilian stars of the club over the past few years.

Dutch striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy welcomed the code which reminded players of the "values of a great club" but said it was the first time such a code had been introduced in a club where he was playing.

Rafa snaps up 'new Messi'

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool have pulled off a major signing coup by poaching Argentine-born football prodigy Gerardo Bruna from Spanish giants Real Madrid, according to reports Saturday.

According to AS sports daily Bruna, 16, who had played for Real Madrid's junior side and was considered one of their hottest talents, has signed a three-year contract with the English club coached by Spaniard Rafael Benitez.

Benitez reportedly offered Bruna the chance to train with the Reds' first team while playing competitively for the Liverpool reserves.

"That was an offer I just couldn't refuse," Bruna told the paper.

Liverpool took advantage of Real Madrid's delay in signing a new contract with the young midfielder, who has been compared to the Argentine star Lionel Messi of Barcelona.

Bruna arrived in Spain from his native Argentina at a young age, and has yet to decide which country he wants to represent.

Kalle wants Ottmar to stay

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said on Friday he will make Ottmar Hitzfeld an offer over the winter break to stay on as coach of the German giants.

The 58-year-old returned to coach Bayern last February after Felix Magath was sacked and after a 69 million euro summer spending spree, Hitzfeld's side sit undefeated at the top of the Bundesliga.

A twice Champions League winner, Hitzfeld has said he will retire at the end of this season, but Rummenigge is delighted how well he has blended new signings Frank Ribery, Miroslav Klose and Luca Toni into the current squad.

"We are very content with the work he does," Rummenigge told German channel DSF. "We play superb football now. He has done a great job integrating the new players.

"In only a short period back at the club, he has done really well and he is the correct man to run this team. We will have discussions in the winter break and will see how they go.

"I believe we both have a sufficient sense of responsibility and confidence in each other to work well together."

And Rummenigge repeated his concerns that German international Lukas Podolski still has to prove himself after his recent return to the Bayern side following a knee injury.

Podolski arrived at Bayern last summer from Cologne, but struggled last season with just four goals to his name.

In contrast, current striker Klose and Toni have 13 goals between them after just seven games.

Rummenigge also added Bayern have rejected a bid for Podolski.



PHOTO: AFP

BRAZILLIANCE: Manchester City's Brazilian star Elano (R) celebrates his wonder-goal with teammate Martin Petrov (L) in their Premiership clash with Newcastle at the City of Manchester Stadium on Saturday.

City maul Magpies

AFP, Manchester



Sven Goran Eriksson's side fought back from a goal down to beat Newcastle 3-1 on Saturday.

City moved into second place, behind leaders Arsenal only on goal difference, ahead of Saturday's 1400GMT matches after Martin Petrov, Emile Mpenza and Elano helped Eriksson's team overturn Obafemi Martins's opener at Eastlands

Eriksson has inspired a remarkable resurgence at a club that has spent years in the shadow of their more successful neighbours.

It is City's best start to a top-flight campaign for 30 years. Even Manchester United can't match City's 100 percent home record.

If they continue to progress at

their present rate, a place in the Champions League could be within their grasp.

Eriksson certainly believes the best is still to come from City.

"I'm delighted and I hope we can do even more," he told Sky Sports. "I always said that we are a good team.

"When they play more games and train together more they will be even better. They are all starting to speak English as well.

"I like to see them play good football because they can do it very well.

"You could have given the man of the match to so many different players because they all played well."

Eriksson had opted to drop Kasper Schmeichel in favour of Joe Hart and the young City goalkeeper was called into action early on to turn Mark Viduka's shot around a post.

Brazil midfielder Elano showed why Eriksson believes he can be

one of the most influential players in the top-flight, when he cleverly worked space for a fierce shot that seemed destined for the top corner until Shay Given dived to his left to superbly parry the shot away.

Stephen Ireland nearly gave City the lead in fortuitous circumstances when his miss-hit cross deceived Given and cannoned off the crossbar.

City had enjoyed the better of the early skirmishes but they were lucky not to concede a penalty when Micah Richards rashly slid in on James Milner.

Newcastle didn't have to wait long for the breakthrough.

Martins has frustrated his managers with some less than committed displays at times, but when his mind is on the game he can be unstoppable.

In the 29th minute the Nigerian was fully focused. He got ahead of Richards and showed superb technique to control Geremi's lofted

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GERMANY V BRAZIL

Clash of styles



Football

AFP, Shanghai

Rock-solid Germany are confident they can blunt the magic of Brazil and their sensational striker Marta as they go in search of a second successive World Cup title on Sunday.

Germany's watertight defence anchored by goalkeeper Nadir Angerer, have yet to concede a goal in their five matches so far, an unprecedented achievement in the tournament's 16-year history.

But if anyone can open the floodgates it is Marta, the 2006 World Player of the Year whose flamboyant skills against the United States in their semifinal set the tournament on fire.

At the core of the German

defence has been veteran Kerstin Stegemann, who will have the task of putting a lid on Marta.

Stegemann, who has 164 caps, turned 30 on Saturday but celebrations were put on ice with the biggest game of her life looming.

"I'm sure that we can defend our title, but the final will come down to whoever plays better on the day, and that's why we need to make

sure our preparation for it is perfect," she said.

"There will be enough time for celebrations afterwards."

With successive 3-0 wins over two highly regarded opponents in North Korea and Norway, Germany can look forward to the match with a genuine sense of optimism.

Silvia Neid's squad have struggled on occasion but always raised their game when circumstances required.

But Brazil will be a different challenge, showing both aggression and style in their stunning 4-0 crushing of the world's top-ranked team, the United States, on Thursday.

German captain Birgit Prinz, herself a former World Player of the Year, believes her side are well-equipped to deal with the South

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PHOTO: AFP

The Brazil women's team members move a goalpost during a training session in Shanghai ahead of today's World Cup final against Germany.

Swift return for Owen?

AFP, Manchester

Michael Owen could be fit for England's crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers, according to his Newcastle manager Sam Allardyce.

Owen had been expected to miss his country's matches against Estonia and Russia next month after having two operations on Friday and Saturday.

But the surgery in Germany has been so successful that the England striker could be back in action in the next few days.

"The second operation on the weaker side of his stomach today (Saturday) has been very successful as we know from the girl in Munich," Allardyce told Sky Sports.

"Only a few days in terms of recovery we're talking now and then there's the abductor (muscle) to think about with the tear.

"He is with the best in the world and that is why it's only a few days' recovery."

Allardyce believes Owen could be fit for Newcastle's Premier League match against Everton next week, which would be the perfect boost for England coach Steve McClaren.

"With what we've heard from Germany it might be a shorter recovery than we thought," Allardyce said.

"Taking that and the abductor into consideration, who knows? He may even be fit for Everton next week.

"There's a possibility, the surgeon said. There was such little damage, hardly any at all, it wasn't really a hernia, it was just a threatening of one and she has tied that up now.

"We think the recovery will be days rather than weeks.

"We'll make the sensible decision for us and England, we have got to get both of them the injuries really cleared up and strong."

Mourinho exit stuns Drogba

AFP, London

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba has admitted he was stunned by the severity of the way in which former manager Jose Mourinho departed the club.

Drogba is set to return from injury at home to Fulham on Saturday but will do so under a new boss in Mourinho's successor, Avram Grant.

It is a turn of events which has taken the Ivory Coast striker by surprise.

"I have found Jose Mourinho's 'eviction' pretty hard to take. It changes an awful lot of things," he told The Daily Mail.

"I'm on my way back from a knee injury - and at the moment, I am in the sort of nervous state I've never even dreamed about before.

"His departure destroys a certain familiarity we had at the club. Mourinho's mentality suited us, and it perfectly fitted the image that Chelsea had given off for a number of years."

Drogba reports the Blues must find a way of retaining their winning mentality, even though the man they played for has gone.

"I could not see the blow coming so brutally," he said of Mourinho's departure by mutual

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