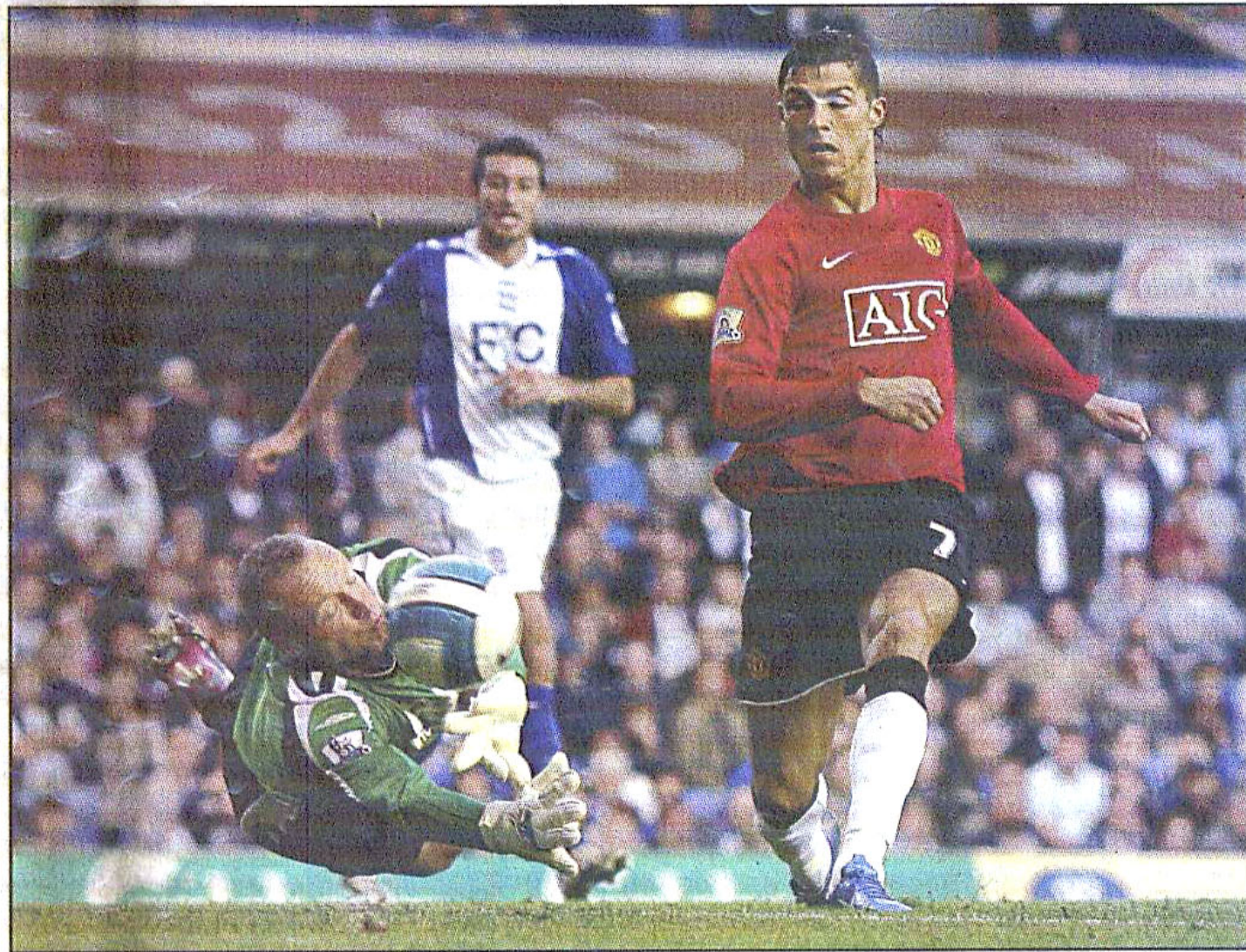




Manchester United midfielder Cristiano Ronaldo (R) slides the ball past the despairing dive of Birmingham goalkeeper Maik Taylor to score in their Premiership match at St. Andrews on Saturday.

HISTORY AT FRATTON PARK

Arsenal retain lead

AFP, London



Robin van Persie consolidated Arsenal's lead at the top of the Premier League as the Dutch striker's goal clinched a 1-0 win at West Ham on Saturday.

Van Persie's fourth goal of the season gave Arsene Wenger's side their eighth consecutive victory and maintained their two point lead over second-placed Manchester United.

Wenger's team have been playing some of the most eye-catching football in Europe and they gave another demonstration of their style to take a 13th minute lead.

Emanuel Adebayor's pass out wide gave Alexander Hleb the chance to cross and he whipped in a perfect delivery towards van Persie. Robert Green got a hand to the Dutch striker's header but it had enough impetus to go in off a post.

"This is traditionally a difficult place for us, so it was a good performance," Wenger said.

"We have belief and confidence now, that is the difference. We are hungry, have great solidarity and my job is to keep this going."

Cristiano Ronaldo ensured United remain hot on Arsenal's heels as the Portugal winger's goal

sealed a scrappy 1-0 win at Birmingham.

Ronaldo struck in the 51st minute after Franck Queudrue's mistake gave him a chance that he converted to mark his 100th Premier League appearance.

United were far from fluent however and Sir Alex Ferguson will be also be concerned by an injury to Edwin van der Sar that forced the Dutch goalkeeper to come off at half-time.

While Arsenal and United are going well, their title rivals Chelsea endured a difficult 0-0 draw against Fulham at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea manager Avram Grant saw John Terry forced off with a depressed fracture of his cheekbone after a challenge with Fulham's Clint Dempsey and then had Didier Drogba sent off for two bookings in the second half.

Dempsey and Paul Knochsky squandered chances to inflict a first home league defeat on Chelsea in 67 matches as Grant's 10-men managed to hold on for a point that leaves them seven points behind Arsenal.

Grant insists Chelsea can still make up the deficit.

"We can do it," he said "The points are not the problem; the problem is we need to score goals and we didn't do that in the last five or six games."

Yossi Benayoun came off the bench to give Liverpool a hard-fought 1-0 win at Wigan.

Israel midfielder Benayoun struck in the 75th minute with a deflected effort as Rafa Benitez's side won for the first time in three league matches.

Manchester City's dream start to the season gathered pace as Sven Goran Eriksson's side fought back from a goal down to beat Newcastle 3-1.

It is City's best start to a top-flight campaign for 30 years and Eriksson deserves immense credit for completely transforming a previously moribund team.

They showed great desire to recover from Obafemi Martins' excellent 29th minute opener for Newcastle.

A brilliantly crafted move gave Martin Petrov the chance to slot in the equaliser in the 38th minute. Then Petrov turned provider with a tremendous run and cross to Emile Mpenza, who dived to head home.

Brazilian midfielder Elano capped a stylish City display with a blistering 29th free-kick in the 87th minute.

Benjani Mwaruware's hat-trick gave Portsmouth a 7-4 win over Reading in the highest-scoring game in Premier League history.

The Zimbabwean striker has been criticised for his poor finish-

ing since joining Harry Redknapp's side, but his first goals for seven matches ended that run at Fratton Park.

He got his first in the seventh minute, then grabbed a second goal with a superb run and shot in the 37th minute.

Stephen Hunt got one back for Reading on the stroke of half-time and Kitson snatched the equaliser after a mistake by David James in the 48th minute.

Portsmouth regained the lead in the 55th minute when Hermann Hreidarsson got in front of Marcus Hahnemann to head home.

Benjani put the result beyond doubt in the 70th minute and Niko Kranjcar got a fifth before Shane Long struck for Reading.

Incredibly that wasn't the end of the scoring. Sean Davis made it six for the hosts in the 81st minute and then Sulley Muntari scored a 90th minute spot-kick. Then Shorey added a fourth for shell-shocked Reading.

Nicolas Anelka rescued Bolton as Sammy Lee's side held on for a 1-1 draw at relegation rivals Derby while Blackburn stunned Sunderland with two goals in two minutes to claim a 2-1 win at the Stadium of Light.

Everton host Middlesbrough on Sunday and Aston Villa travel to Tottenham on Monday.

Terry fractures cheekbone

AFP, London

England captain John Terry will have surgery on Sunday after suffering a depressed fracture of the cheekbone in Chelsea's goalless draw against Fulham.

Terry was hurt in the opening minutes after being caught by Fulham's Clint Dempsey at Stamford Bridge. The defender managed to carry on playing until half-time but did not reappear for the second period.

He is expected to have a plate fitted into his cheekbone. The club confirmed Terry was not concussed and he may be allowed to return to training as early as next week.

Chelsea manager Avram Grant believes Terry should be fit for England's Euro 2008 qualifiers against Estonia and Russia next month.

No Arsenal takeover forthcoming

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal managing director Keith Edelman has insisted Alisher Usmanov does not want to take over the club.

Chairman Peter Hill-Wood and Edelman met Farhad Moshiri - joint owner with the Russian billionaire of Red and White Holdings which now owns 23% of the club - on Friday in what was termed a 'constructive' get-together.

But coming less than a week after the Gunners announced hugely impressive financial results, with massive leaps in turnover and profit, Edelman remains adamant that Usmanov merely sees his shares in the north Londoners as a good piece of business.

He said to us he believes we are a very good long-term investment,' Edelman told BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek.

He did not want to take the club over and said he wants to regard it as an investment and he thought he was going to make a lot of money out of it.

'His advisors assured us that Mr Usmanov is an Arsenal fan, loves the club and it's a shareholding. Now we'll have to wait and see what happens over time.'

He added: 'As far as the board is concerned, we don't believe we are in any danger of being taken over, it's business as usual and we believe we'll be running this club for many years to come.'

'I don't think he will control Arsenal Football Club, and I don't think he wants to.'

Following Arsenal's stunning financial results, Edelman believes Usmanov might be questioning the wisdom of changing the current regime.

'Perhaps he's taking a look down the road at another club in London and seeing that the way we're running our club is good for his investment to produce good returns on the money he's put in the club,' he said.

'Possibly that's the reason he doesn't want to stop us running the club and operating it.'

'If you look at Chelsea and look at Arsenal, we are running our club in terms of our revenues and our

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Redknapp hails Pompey

AFP, Portsmouth



Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp saluted his magnificent seven after watching his side rout Reading 7-4 in the highest scoring game in Premier League history.

Redknapp's side went goal crazy in a sensational game at Fratton Park that featured 11 goals, a missed penalty and a hat-trick from notoriously shot-shy striker Benjani Mwaruware.

It was Portsmouth's biggest top-flight win for over 50 years and Redknapp was ecstatic.

"We were fantastic. We went in 2-1 up at half-time but we should have been four up," he said. "We had completely dominated the game and they had never even had a shot."

"Their keeper made an incredible save to deny Glen Johnson and then they scrambled a goal at the other end. It should have been game over but it was game on."

"But we came back at them, kept going forward and we played some great football today. There were some quality performances out there."

There was an early sign of the carnage to come when Benjani broke the deadlock for Portsmouth in the seventh minute, but the next goal took half an hour to arrive.

It was superb solo effort by Benjani and that opened the flood-gates.

Stephen Hunt and Dave Kitson had brought Reading level by the 48th minute.

Hermann Hreidarsson headed Pompey back in front, then Benjani's third was followed by a fine strike from Nico Kranjcar and, after substitute Shane Long had

pulled one back for Reading, Sean Davis netted a long-rang shot before Sulley Muntari made it 7-3 from the spot.

Nicky Shorey, who had earlier seen a penalty saved by David James, had the last word with a deflected fourth for the visitors.

Reading manager Steve Coppell admitted it was the most incredible experience of his football career, albeit one he would like to forget as soon as possible.

"I have never been involved in a game like that before," Coppell said. "It's hard to remember anything like that either as a player or a manager."

"There were 11 goals in the game and there could have been more. There was no indication at half-time that it was going to explode into life like that."

"It seemed as though when either side attacked it was going to end up in the back of the net."

BARCA TURN ON STYLE

Henry hits hat-trick

AFP, Madrid



Thierry Henry scored a sensational hat-trick, his first league goals for Barcelona, as they nudged rivals Real Madrid off the summit with a

crushing 4-1 win over Levante on Saturday.

French superstar Henry had been waiting patiently for his first goal in the Spanish championship since his 24-million-euro summer move from Arsenal and like the buses three came at once.

Henry broke his duck on 17 minutes sliding the ball home after Lionel Messi's initial shot was saved.

The second arrived seven minutes later when the Frenchman raced on to a brilliant pass from Messi and produced a trademark side-footed finish.

Henry capped a fine game with his third after 48 minutes before Messi scored two minutes later and the Argentine now tops the scoring charts with five goals.

"I am delighted for Thierry," said Messi. "It is great that he is off the mark and we are happy to get another three points from a great display."

It was Barcelona's first away win of the season and on this evidence there will be many more as bottom side Levante were pulverised by the marauding runs of Messi and Henry.

Barcelona now lead the 20-strong table although Real, just one point behind, can reclaim top spot with a draw or win at Getafe on Sunday.

There is no rest for Barcelona who travel to Germany to face VfB Stuttgart in the Champions League on Tuesday.

If the German champions watched this display they will be quaking at the prospect of containing Argentine Wunderkind Messi who was sensational with his mesmerising runs reminiscent of Diego

Maradona in his pomp.

The Spanish media hailed Messi, 20, as the greatest player on the planet this week labelling him the 'Messi-ah' and he was simply unplayable at times.

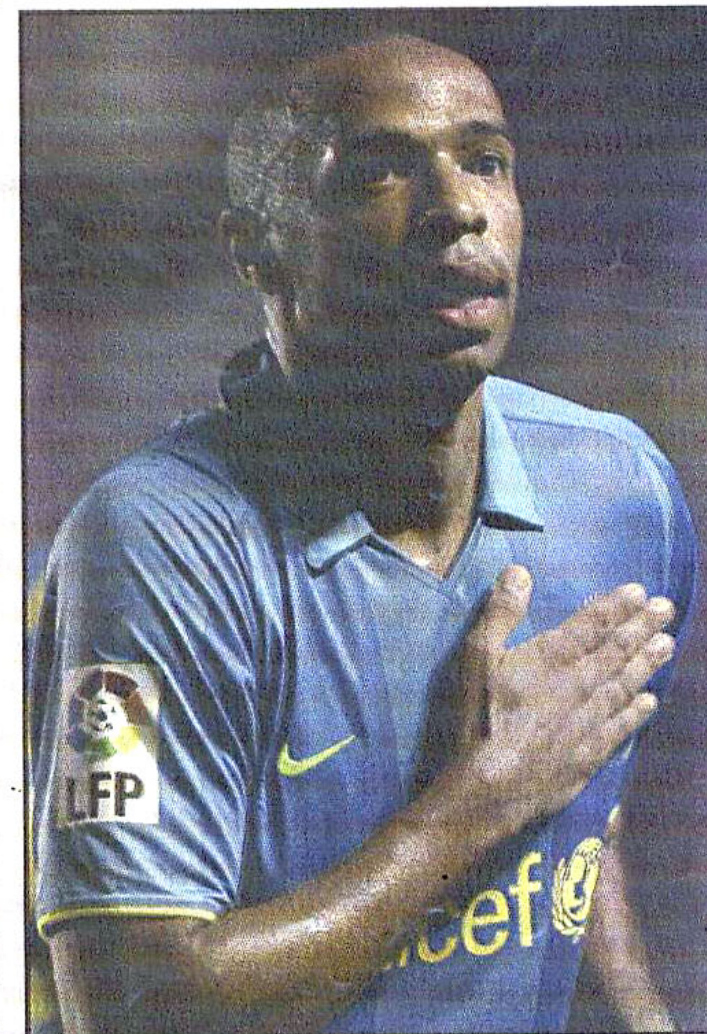
A year ago Ronaldinho was regarded as the world's finest but the Brazilian, who has had a difficult time with loss of form and reports of inappropriate off-the-field antics, was again missing due

to a calf injury and Barcelona have now won three games in a row in his absence.

Another boost for Barcelona was the return of captain Carles Puyol who came on for his first appearance since suffering a knee injury in June.

While Barcelona are flying title hopefuls Sevilla are showing no sign of recovering from their current

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Barcelona striker Thierry Henry holds the club badge while celebrating his hat-trick in their Primera Liga clash against Levante at the Ciudad de Valencia Stadium on Saturday.

Chelsea slam racist fans

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck has accused some fans of racism and anti-Semitism in the wake of protests against manager Avram Grant.

The Israeli, whose father is a Holocaust survivor, has been the subject of abuse from supporters angered at the departure of Jose Mourinho.

Buck said: "We welcome all constructive points of view. But there have been a few which could be viewed as racist and anti-Semitic and that must stop immediately."

"This is one thing we will not tolerate, whether in written correspondence, on the chat pages, on posters or banners, or through singing and chanting."

"It unfairly smears the reputation of the vast majority of Chelsea fans who rightly do not want to be associated with such activity."

Club owner Roman Abramovich is also Jewish, as are numerous senior figures at the club including directors Eugene Tenenbaum and Eugene Shvidler.

Grant has proved staggeringly unpopular since his appointment 10 days ago. Fans at Stamford Bridge on Saturday chanted Mourinho's name throughout the game and held up banners hailing the Portuguese.

Ramos left speechless

INTERNET, undated

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos was near-speechless after his side's 2-0 defeat at the Romareda, insisting that, despite the scoreline, the visitors were by far the better team.

The Romareda loss comprised the fourth consecutive loss in all competitions for the Sevillistas, the coach being astounded that his side returns to Andalusia without the three points yet again.

"In the last two matches, against Espanyol (2-3) and Zaragoza, we'd like to play every week like that and have eight to ten chances," he said.

"We were infinitely superior here, but did not score. If we didn't have the luck to convert our numerous chances, it's because soccer is like that."

"It's difficult to explain - we attacked and defended well - but soccer is thus and it's goals that count."

"That Zaragoza ended up obtaining goals despite having so few chances is surprising and, since there is no logical explanation, I cannot give one."

The disbelief was etched on the manager's face as he continued. "To give an overview of the game, we dominated, had more chances, more occasions to win, but they easily managed to score and we did not, despite the numerous opportunities."

Despite the poor run of results, Juande insists that his side will turn the corner presently.

He said, "This will pass. We're one of the best-scoring teams of the championship but, right now, soccer throws up some things that are hard to explain."

The manager added, "We're not losing due to a lack of attitude, nor even ability, since the team is responding well."

"Rather, the players are doing everything asked of them, but still end the evening with a feeling of misfortune."

Inter thrash Roma

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan won 4-1 at 10-man AS Roma on Saturday for a convincing victory in this top-of-the-table clash to surge two points clear of the Italian championship.

Ahead of Sunday's clashes, the highlight of which will be the Turin derby between Torino and Juventus, unbeaten Milan have a two-point cushion on Fiorentina who also kept their slate clean with a 3-0 win at tailenders Livorno.

The Romans were quickly reduced to 10 men to hamper their task when Frenchman Ludovic Giuly was sent off.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored from a 29th-minute penalty to put the visitors ahead at the Olympic stadium, though Simone Perrotta equalised for Roma in the 53rd minute.

However further goals from Milan by Hernan Crespo, Julio Cruz and then Ivan Cordoba meant Inter had scored their four with more than 20 minutes to go till full time.

For Roma, the defeat was particularly badly-timed with midweek European action looming.

Following two draws against Fiorentina (2-2) and then Juventus (2-2), Luciano Spalletti's men travel to England on Tuesday to face Manchester United in the Champions League where they had been humiliated by a 7-1 defeat in the quarterfinal, second leg of last season's competition in April.

Reigning Italian champions Inter, still handicapped by the absences of injured players Patrick Vieira, Marco Materazzi and Cristian Chivu, and a suspension to Brazilian Maicon, made the most of a major mistake by Giuly, who did a handball in the middle of his own area following an Inter counter-attack leading to the first goal.

Giuly was shown the red card and Ibrahimovic stepped up to score from the spot.

Sweden Ibrahimovic has now scored five times within a week to put him on top of Italy's goalscoring charts with seven, one ahead of Juventus striker David Trezeguet.

Inter made numerical superiority count and gave themselves the luxury of resting Ibrahimovic after

the break when they brought on Hernan Crespo and Julio Cruz, for Frenchman Olivier Dacourt, as Roberto Mancini perhaps had one eye on Tuesday's home match against PSV Eindhoven which has taken on even more importance since Inter's opening defeat to Turks Fenerbahce in the Champions League group stages.

Mancini's substitutions proved decisive as both Argentinians got on the score sheet before Colombian defender Cordoba added Inter's fourth.

Meanwhile, a double from Argentine striker Pablo Daniel Osvaldo helped Fiorentina to victory against long time Tuscan rivals Livorno.

Osvaldo put Fiorentina ahead at the stroke of half-time in a bad tempered clash which saw the visiting coach Nando Orsi sent off for dissent during the break.

Livorno were reduced to ten men after Massimo Loviso fouled Gianpaolo Pazzini after 63 minutes, allowing Osvaldo net his second when he chested down Mario Alberto Santana's pass and fired over the goalkeeper. Santana sealed Fiorentina's win three minutes later.



Inter Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic (L) squirms away from the challenge of AS Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi during their Serie A clash at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday.

Hamilton closer to dream Wins Japanese GP

AFP, Fuji Speedway



Britain's Lewis Hamilton took a massive step towards winning the world championship with victory on Sunday in a rain-lashed Japanese Grand Prix as title rival Fernando Alonso crashed out.

The McLaren-Mercedes driver, who would be the first rookie to win the title, leads by 12 points with two races left after seeing teammate and reigning champion Alonso smash into a wall 42 laps into the chaotic 67-lap race.

Hamilton won by more than eight seconds from Finland's Heikki Kovalainen, who finished on

the podium for the first time in his Renault career, with Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen third.

The 22-year-old could become the youngest driver and the first black driver to win the title in next Sunday's Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai.

Hamilton survived being knocked off the track mid-way through the race to claim the fourth victory of his maiden season.

"It was a very eventful race. There were so many times during the race when I am sure it went through drivers' heads that should we stop the race. There were times when it was tricky," he said.

"I collided with Robert (Kubica). I could not see in my mirrors, my

visor was all fogged up and could not see he was inside and I was fortunate to finish."

"There were lots of things going through my mind. During the last few laps I was thinking about races that (Ayrton) Senna and (Alain) Prost did. I'm feeling I am getting somewhere to achieving something similar to them."

Alonso was already struggling after being hit by Toro Rosso's Sebastian Vettel when he skidded off the slippery track, leaving his McLaren stranded on the circuit with debris all around it.

"I'm not throwing in the towel, but unless there is a retirement from Hamilton we have to be realistic and

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