

## It's the Muntari show

AFP, Birmingham



**S**uley Muntari hit a superb double strike to help high-flying Portsmouth romp to a 3-1 win against Aston Villa on Saturday.

Harry Redknapp's side took the lead through Craig Gardner's early own goal at Villa Park before Muntari staged his own goal of the season.

The Ghana midfielder blasted a ferocious shot past Scott Carson late in the first half before adding his second and Portsmouth's third with another exquisite long-range effort after the break.

Gareth Barry's late penalty was little consolation for Villa, who paid the price for failing to turn their domination into goals.

Muntari's heroics ensured Portsmouth extended their

unbeaten run to 11 matches and won for the sixth consecutive away game.

Portsmouth have moved into fifth place and the delight Redknapp showed after Muntari's goals underlined the growing belief that this could be the season when his side finally qualify for Europe for the first time.

The visitors got the perfect start in the 10th minute.

Niko Kranjcar's corner reached Pedro Mendes on the edge of the box but when the Portugal midfielder scuffed his shot the hosts had reckoned without James.

Instead Wilfred Bouma sliced a clearance across goal towards Benjani Mwaruwari. Gardner attempted to block the Zimbabwean but only succeeded in turning the ball into his own net.

Villa responded well to that setback and Gabriel Agbonlahor headed just over from Ashley Young's cross.

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## Eriksson dreams big

AFP, London



**S**ven Goran Eriksson believes Manchester City can take another step towards a place among the Premier League's elite by winning at Tottenham on Sunday.

Eriksson has never been one for dramatic statements when a cautious word will suffice, but confidence is sky-high at City and the Swede is reflecting that in his unusually upbeat approach.

Season after season the English top division has been dominated by the same mega-rich clubs.

Now Eriksson, backed by Thai owner Thaksin Shinawatra's substantial investment, is determined

to give Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool a run for their money.

With new signings Martin Petrov, Elano and Vedran Corluka blending well alongside home-grown youngsters Micah Richards, Michael Johnson and Stephen Ireland, City have been the season's surprise package.

They slipped out of the Champions League places for only the second time this season after their draw at Wigan last weekend and Eriksson has no doubts a top four finish is well within their capabilities.

"We have not given up returning to the top four, why should we?" he said. "I don't accept that we are now playing for fifth place, why should I do that?"

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Dortmund midfielder Tinga (L) celebrates with striker Nelson Valdez after scoring the first goal in their drubbing of Bundesliga rivals Arminia Bielefeld at the Signal Iduna Park on Friday.

## Dortmund run riot

INTERNET, undated



Christina came early for a goal-hungry Borussia Dortmund side as they crushed a woeful Arminia Bielefeld 6-1 in the Westphalian derby.

Paulo Cesar Tinga gave the hosts the lead before Markus Schuler's own goal doubled their advantage.

Dortmund went goal-crazy in the second half with Mladen Petric nabbing the third before three goals in 12 minutes from Nelson Valdez, Florian Krueger and Giovanni Federico gave them an unassailable lead.

Dortmund keeper Roman Weidenfeller gifted a consolation goal to Oliver Kirch 10 minutes from time.

The hosts began piling on the

pressure right from kick-off and took a deserved lead in the 13th minute.

Jakub Blaszczykowski picked up Krueger's defence-splitting pass and crossed the ball to Tinga who fired it into the bottom left corner from 12 yards.

Bielefeld strove for an equaliser but it was never going to be easy for a team who have only scored four times on their travels.

And five minutes later the hosts doubled their advantage.

Petric beat the offside trap and went on a great run down the left-hand side before putting in a low cross which the unfortunate Schuler turned into his own net.

And there was worse to come for Bielefeld as just two minutes after the restart Petric headed Dede's cross into the top-left corner from the edge of the six-yard box.

Weidenfeller seemed to have caught Kirch's tame shot but the ball somehow slipped through his legs and into the back of the net.

In the 55th minute the visitors hammered the nail in their own coffin as Petri Gabriel was adjudged

to have handled the ball in the area.

Valdez stepped up to the spot and put the penalty right down the middle as keeper Rowen Fernandez dove to his right.

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And seven minutes later they sent the home fans into raptures as Federico dribbled his way past the woeful Bielefeld defence before firing into the bottom right corner for the sixth of the night.

The thrashing was no surprise for a team who had conceded 22 goals on their travels - by far the worst in the Bundesliga - but Bielefeld did manage to pull one back in the 80th minute.

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## Drogba has knee op

AFP, London

Young's teasing deliveries were causing Portsmouth problems and the England winger picked out Martin Laursen's run, with the defender's header well held by David James.

The same pair linked up again and this time Laursen should have scored. Young's free-kick reached Laursen eight yards out but he headed wide with the goal at his mercy.

Martin O'Neill's side were pressing hard and it seemed the tide would turn in their favour. The hosts had reckoned without James though.

"The procedure went well and he will begin his rehabilitation as soon as possible," English added.

Drogba will miss Saturday's league match at home to Sunderland and is also set to be sidelined when Chelsea play Valencia in the Champions League on Tuesday and go up against fellow London club and league leaders Arsenal a week on Sunday.

But by having the operation now, Drogba has increased his chances of being fit to captain the Ivory Coast in next month's African Nations Cup.

Chelsea started this weekend third in the Premier League, six points behind Arsenal.

## 'We don't need Ronaldinho'

AFP, Madrid

Unsettled Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho wouldn't fit in at Barcelona's bitter rivals Real Madrid, said Bernabau sporting director Pedja Mijatovic on Friday.

Ronaldinho has been substituted in Barca's recent games amidst reports of dressing room unrest and even speculation that the Brazilian could be heading for the Nou Camp.

But Mijatovic told Cuatro television that the 27-year-old would be a Real Madrid misfit and that the Madrid dressing room had a "better atmosphere" than Barcelona.

"It's not normal that a player as important as Ronaldinho is so inactive. Perhaps he could leave as he would find it hard to cope with being replaced," said Mijatovic.

"Real has very good players. A player like Ronaldinho, we wouldn't sign him. There wouldn't be a place for him."

Real lead the Spanish league with a four-point advantage over Barca whom they meet in two weeks' time.

## MU to train in Saudi Arabia

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson will take his Manchester United squad to Saudi Arabia for a training camp and exhibition match in mid-January, the club announced on Friday.

The English champions will be guests of Prince Abdullah bin Mosaad bin Abdulaziz al-Saud and will play Al Hilal in Riyadh on January 21 in a testimonial match for Saudi legend Sami al-Jaber.

Ferguson said: "This is a great chance for the players to escape the harsh realities of winter for a few days, while keeping up their fitness levels and taking in the exhibition match.

"I hope we will come back from this refreshed and ready to continue the challenge for honours."

United will leave immediately after taking on Reading at the Madejski Stadium on January 19 and be back in time for an anticipated place in the FA Cup fourth round the following weekend.

"I think it's not easy to find a place where you can fill in Riquelme's place," Boca coach Miguel Russo said. "But we have many wonderful players."

"We have waited so long and we are glad to take part in the event,"

## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

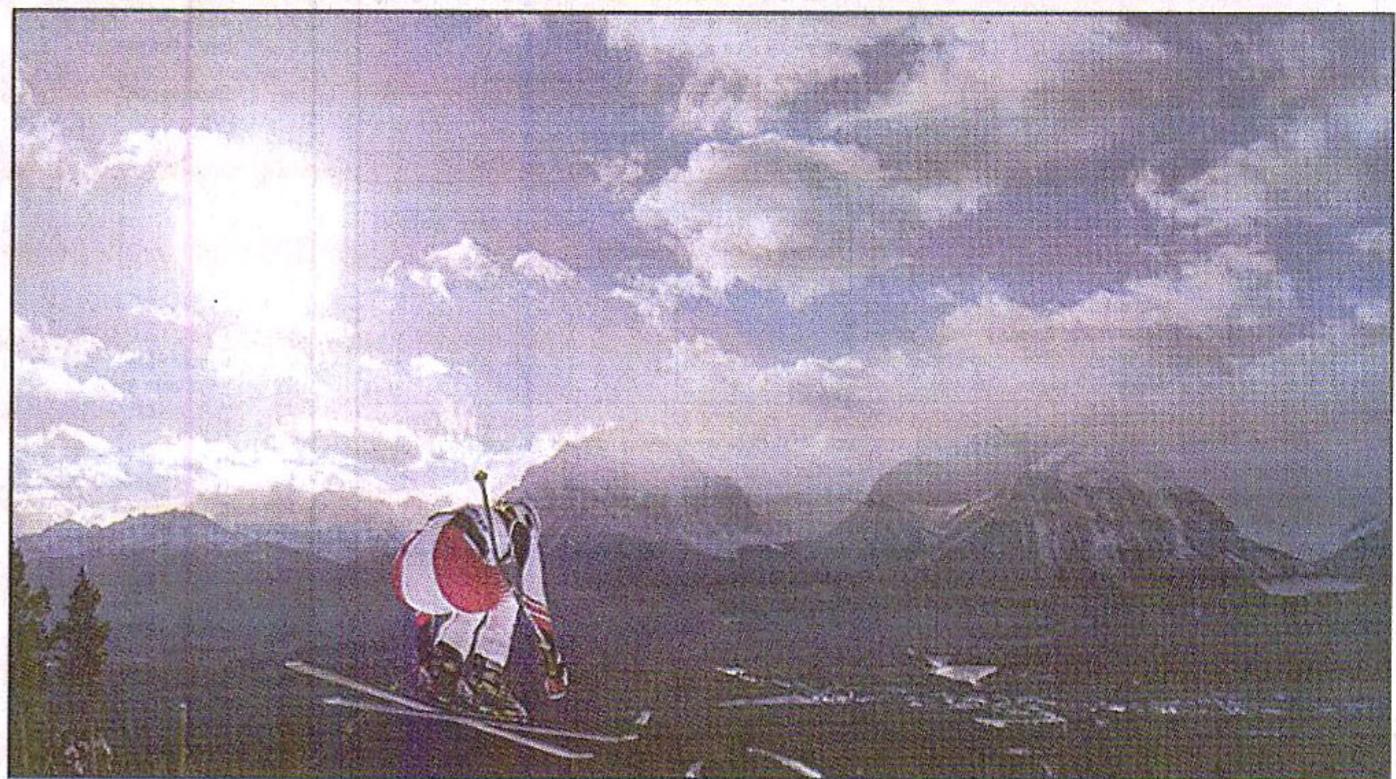


PHOTO: INTERNET

The sky is the limit for Austria's Alexandra Meissner as she goes airborne during the women's downhill run at the Lake Louise World Cup in Alberta

## Peru suspend Pizarro

REUTERS, Lima

Chelsea striker Claudio Pizarro has been suspended by the Peruvian Football Federation, pending further investigation, for indiscipline following last month's World Cup qualifier against Brazil.

Fellow European-based player Jefferson Farfan of PSV Eindhoven, along with defender Santiago Acasiete and forward Andres Mendoza have also been banned provisionally, the Peruvian Football Federation (FPF) said.

"The analysis of the information available has allowed us to determine that there are indications...of misconduct," the PFP said in a statement.

It said the investigation was prompted by a report aired on a television programme and the decision was based on information supplied by employees of the hotel where the team were staying.

"The hotel has given us valuable information, although unfortunately they have refused to do it officially and in writing," said the statement.

Peru held Brazil 1-1 in their match on November 18 and crashed to a humiliating 5-1 defeat in Ecuador three days later, when Farfan was left out of the starting lineup.

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## Boca ready for battle

AFP, Tokyo

the coach added. "We hope to make history in our long history."

The 29-year-old Riquelme, who played for Boca 1996-2002 and helped them win six league and international titles, also played on loan from Villarreal for the Argentine side's victory in South America's Libertadores Cup.

Boca executive Luis Buzio said Riquelme would be on hand to help the Club World Cup.

Boca and AC Milan, who bowed to Argentina's most crowned club in the 2003 Intercontinental Cup final, are taking a bite into the semi-finals in the middle of next week with the final scheduled for December 16 in Yokohama.

Boca captain and striker Martin Palermo said Riquelme's absence was "very unfortunate and heartbreaking."

"He is an old mate of ours and seems unlikely to crack under pressure. We must find his substitute."

and want to go on winning with the members available now."

AC Milan, determined to avenge their 2003 defeat by Boca, are fielding a star-studded side including Brazilian playmaker Kaka, winner of the prestigious French Ballon d'Or for player of the year; goalscorer Filippo Inzaghi, and Ronaldo, who is coming back from injury.

Asked how Boca would cope with Kaka, midfielder Sebastian Battaglia said:

"I know he is a formidable player. But we have great players in our defence and they will never let him be free... If Kaka comes forward, we will stop him as we have always done against any big players."

Both Boca and Milan have won the Intercontinental Cup, the predecessor of the three-year-old Club World Cup.

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PHOTO: AFP

Boca Juniors players (from L-R) Carlos Buelmo, Matias Silvestre and Alvaro Luengo smile during a training session at Yokohama on Saturday.

## Big Phil wants to stay on

AFP, Lisbon

Luiz Felipe Scolari says he'd be keen to sign a new deal that would see him stay on as Portugal manager up to the 2010 World Cup.

"The decision to stay on or not is down to the (Portuguese Football) Federation. If it was left to me I'd reply that I'd do it without any problem," the Brazilian told AFP at a press conference here Friday.

"I love Portugal even more than Brazil. I have a really good life here. My family loves this country. If I were to move it's by no means certain I'd find the same conditions elsewhere."

Scolari took control of Portugal in 2003, six months after leading Brazil to a fifth World Cup, with his current deal ending after Euro 2008.

Under Big Phil's guidance hosts Portugal made it to the Euro 2004 final only to lose to Greece.

He then masterminded Portugal's run to the semi-finals of the 2006 World Cup for the first time in 40 years.