

## It's the Muntari show

AFP, Birmingham



Sully 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 contest.

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 danger should have been over.

Instead Wilfried Bouma sliced a clearance across goal towards Benjamin Mwaruwaru.

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.

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 inevitable they would equalise. The hosts had reckoned without James though.

The England veteran pushed away Agbonlahor's shot and then raced off his line to deny the livewire striker again moments later.

Villa had made all the running without reward and they were punished five minutes before half-time.

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## Drogba has knee op

AFP, London

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba underwent a knee operation on Saturday which could see the Ivory Coast forward miss several key matches for the English Premier League side.

Chelsea club doctor Bryan English said in a statement on Saturday: "Didier's knee locked yesterday (Friday) afternoon and the decision was taken to have the operation immediately in the medical interests of the player."

"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 Bernabeu sporting director Piedad 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 exit.

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 appearance in the FA Cup fourth round the following weekend.

## Frings pencils February return

AFP, Berlin

Germany international midfielder Torsten Frings, out with a knee injury since mid-October says he plans to return to Bundesliga action in February as his side prepare for their Euro 2008 campaign.

"I really want to be back and playing in the Bundesliga by February so that I can make sure I am ready for Euro 2008," the Werder Bremen star told German regional newspaper the Mittelbayerischen Zeitung on Friday.

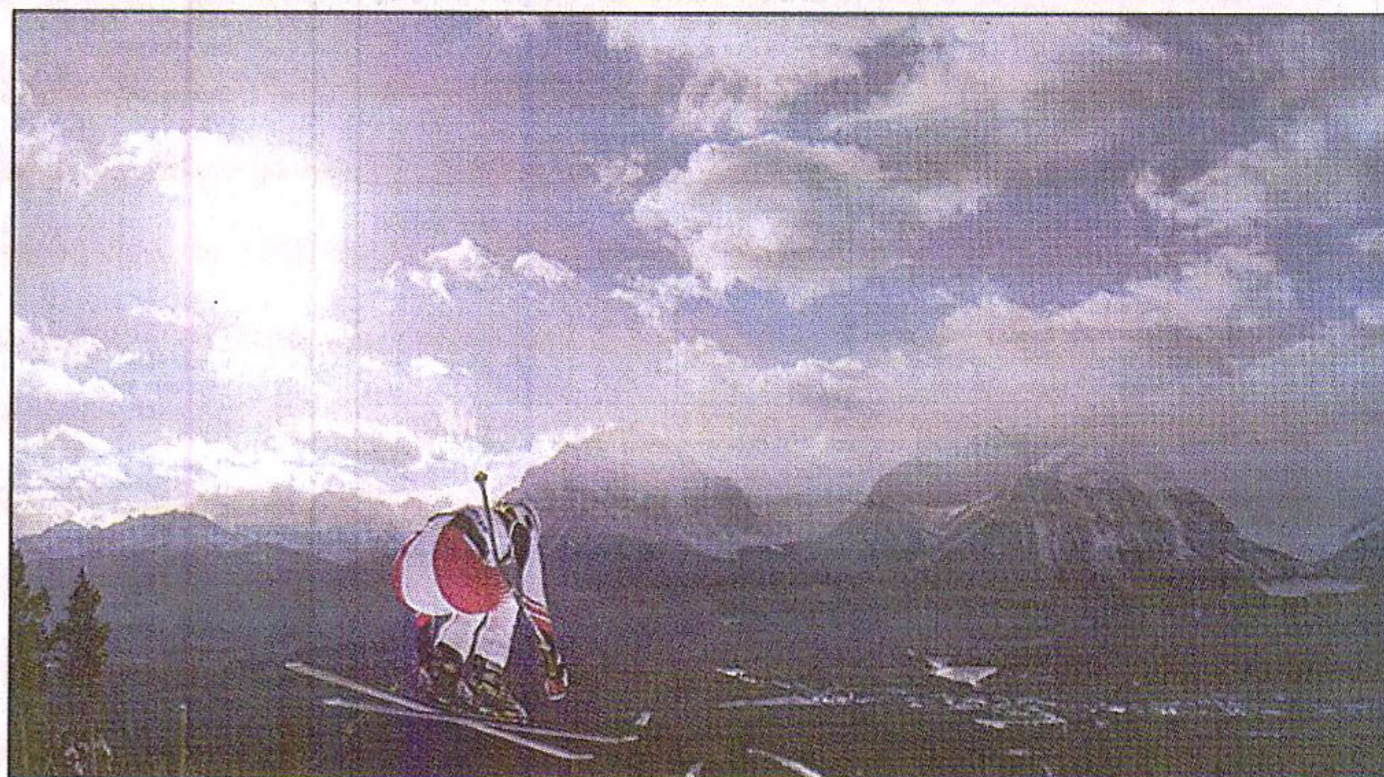
"I see no reason why I can't be back in action by then."

Frings was out from July to October because of a pre-season knee injury which then relapsed at the beginning of November and the 31-year-old has just resumed training.

The midfielder is one of the key elements in German head coach Joachim Loew's first-choice side with nine goals in 66 international appearances.

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## PICTURE OF THE WEEK



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 on December 2.

PHOTO: INTERNET

## 'Why not?' says Jose

Football

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho has given the first clear indication that he is seriously considering becoming England's next manager.

Asked on Friday if he could be the successor to Steve McClaren, the former Chelsea boss responded with a smile and a "Why not?" that will only consolidate his status as favourite to take on the challenge of turning England into world-beaters.

The English Football Association had earlier denied that any approach had been made to Mourinho or any other potential candidate.

The governing body has however confirmed that it has completed its process of canvassing opinions among senior football figures on how it should go about finding a new manager, which could clear the way for Mourinho to be interviewed for the position.

Mourinho's first direct comment on the subject was made at his home in Portugal in a brief exchange with a reporter from Sky Sports News.

In it, he confirmed that he had cancelled plans to travel to London this week.

Mourinho said: "I would like to be in London with my family for a couple of days but nobody would believe the reason why I am there-- just to see friends and do some Christmas shopping. So to try to stop speculation, we decided to stay here."

There has been speculation that Mourinho has encouraged the FA

to believe that he could be interested in the England job in order to prompt a leading club into offering him a job -- a suggestion he dismissed, according to Sky.

According to English media reports, the search for the next England manager has been whittled down to five candidates: Mourinho, Fabio Capello, Marcello Lippi, Jurgen Klinsmann and Martin O'Neill.

Of those, only Capello has unequivocally declared his interest in taking on the post.

Lippi, who led Italy to World Cup glory in Germany last year, and O'Neill, who was passed over when McClaren got the job last year, have both said they are not interested.

McClaren was sacked last month after England failed to qualify for Euro 2008.

## 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 FPF 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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## City in for Adriano

REUTERS, London

Striker Rolando Bianchi is the player Manchester City want to offer Inter Milan in exchange for Adriano, Italian media reported.

Manchester City chairman Thaksin Shinawatra said on Friday that the Brazilian forward, who is looking to do a swap deal for the Brazilian forward, who is at a training camp in his homeland to regain mental and physical fitness after suffering poor form.

Bianchi has failed to establish himself in the Manchester City starting lineup since joining the club from Reggina in July.

## 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.



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



lian 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 Krings 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 Krings' 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.

In the 55th minute the visitors hammered the nail in their own coffin as Petr 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.

Bielefeld seemed to collapse and on the hour mark the hosts went even further ahead with Krings tapping in Petric's cross from six yards out.

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.

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