

## Tevez sinks Liverpool

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's hopes of wresting the Premier League title away from Manchester United suffered a major setback on Sunday when they allowed the champions to get away from Anfield with a 1-0 win.

Carlos Tevez's goal just before half-time settled a contest that Liverpool dominated for most of the 90 minutes and could, with better finishing, have had wrapped up by the time the Argentinian claimed his ninth goal of the season.

The defeat means that Rafael Benitez's now trail United by nine points and, while they do have a game in hand, their margin for further error in the title race has been significantly reduced.

For United, who have not lost a league match at the home of their biggest rivals since 2001, the lacklustre nature of their limited offensive efforts will quickly be forgotten as they savour a win that can only bolster their belief that the Premiership trophy is on its way back to Old Trafford.

From the outset, Liverpool had looked the sharper of the two sides and the predictably robust opening exchanges were punctuated by a couple of decent half-chances for a side that was unchanged from the line-up which started the 4-0 demolition of Marseille in the Champions League last week.

Dirk Kuyt sent a half-volley spinning over the bar after Fernando Torres had hooked a clearance back into the box and the Spanish striker, having got the better of Owen Hargreaves on the left of the box, was a yard off target as he tried to find the far corner of the net.

United's early moments of menace were restricted to a goal-bound strike by Cristiano Ronaldo, which was charged down by John Arne Riise, and with Javier Mascherano increasingly stamping his authority on the midfield battle, Liverpool should have gone ahead just before the half-hour mark.

A weak punch by Edwin van der Sar fell to Harry Kewell ten yards out and although the Australian's shot was blocked on the line by Anderson, the rebound popped up invitingly for Torres, who contrived to nod the ball an inch the wrong side of the post.

United had another let-off three minutes later, when van der Sar charged off his line and clattered into the back of Rio Ferdinand, who inadvertently deflected the ball goalwards. Only a smart intervention by Evra prevented it from trundling into the net.

United's discomfort was reflected in the bookings collected by Evra and Wes Brown for checking the runs of, respectively, Yossi Benayoun and Harry Kewell.

The free-kick awarded Brown's tug on Kewell yielded another good chance for Torres, who volleyed wide after Gerrard's shot was deflected into his path 12 yards out.

But with the half-time whistle approaching, United suddenly found another gear and after Hargreaves had won a corner on

## Robben overeager

REUTERS, Madrid

Dutch winger Arjen Robben's desire to impress his new club Real Madrid is hindering his return to full fitness, his coach Bernd Schuster has said.

He joined the Spanish champions from Chelsea in August, becoming one of their most expensive signings at 36 million euros (\$52.32 million) but has been prevented from establishing himself in the side by a string of physical problems.

The 23-year-old was left out of the squad to face Osasuna in the Primera Liga on Sunday after picking up a muscle strain in his left leg following a substitute appearance in Tuesday's 3-1 Champions League win over Lazio.

"He's had a couple of problems this week, but he trained with the rest of the team today and feels much better," Schuster told a news conference on Saturday.

"All this is simply a result of anxiety. He wants to play and demonstrate why he is here. That anxiety has worked against him. It's nothing serious, but we have to try and control it."

Robben has only made two league starts since he arrived in Spain after struggling to recover from knee surgery he had had earlier in the year.

He was sidelined for five weeks with a torn thigh muscle in mid-October and had just returned to action again before the latest setback.

Argentine defender Gabriel Heinze returned to the squad after recovering from a knee complaint but German defender Christoph Metzelder was left out with a left foot injury.



TURNING ON THE STYLE: Milan offensive players Kaka (R) and Filippo Inzaghi celebrate the latter's goal during their sparkling victory over Boca Juniors in the final of the World Club Cup in Yokohama on Sunday.

## Press dissect Capello

AFP, London

Fabio Capello will be unveiled officially as England's new manager on Monday, but he is already proving to be a major talking point here -- and not just for his considerable footballing pedigree.

Britain's Sunday newspapers sought to shed light on the man who will take on what the former partner of the second-to-last incumbent called the country's third most important job.

"After the monarchy and the prime minister, being the England coach is the most important job in the country," Sven-Goran Eriksson's glamorous ex Nancy Dell'Olio told The Observer newspaper.

Dell'Olio, almost as much in the limelight as Eriksson, offered advice to her fellow countryman, telling Capello to expect inclement weather, a surprisingly warm welcome but a tough time from the British press.

"People in England are much more obsessed with football than in Italy. It's like a religion and that produces incredible pressure on the England manager," she said.

"The Impossible Job they call it, and you have to take everything which goes with that."

But the author and academic Germaine Greer warned success-starved England fans that Capello might not be all they expect, using a vocabulary rarely, if ever, heard on the terraces.

"The English like to think that Italian men are volatile, fiery and impulsive; in reality they are more

likely to be stolid, pernickety and valetudinarian," she wrote in the Independent on Sunday.

"Capello looks like the kind of Italian man who takes out a clean handkerchief and dusts a seat before he sits on it," she added.

She wished the 61-year-old manager luck but warned that, like making proper pasta, pizza or a cappuccino, "the best of Italian cannot survive transplantation to England".

Valetudinarian concerns from Australian feminists aside, reports suggested Capello was made of strong stuff: a strict disciplinarian who has no truck with prima donnas and under-achievement.

"Tough, ruthless, fearless and famously grumpy... hard as nails," said The Observer in one of many profiles alongside musings on the

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## Milan set new title record

AFP, Rome

In beating Boca Juniors 4-2 in the Club World Cup final in Tokyo on Sunday, AC Milan set a new record of international titles.

Two goals from veteran Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, one from Ballon d'Or winner Kaka and another from centre-back Alessandro Nesta secured a fourth triumph in the Club World Cup and its predecessor the Intercontinental Cup for Milan.

That, added to their seven Champions League/European Cup victories, two Cup Winners' Cups and five European Super Cups, took Milan's total of international titles to 18 -- one more than their defeated Argentine foes.

Next in the list come Real Madrid and Argentina's Independiente on 15 with Egypt's Al Ahly fifth with 13.

Despite their remarkable success abroad, Milan are well behind Juventus in terms of domestic success.

They have won 17 Italian titles, five Cups and five Super Cups (27 trophies) compared to 27 titles, nine Cups and four Super Cups (40 trophies) for the Old Lady of Turin.

## CLUB WC WINNERS

AFP, Yokohama

Winners of the Club World Cup: 2007 - AC Milan (ITA) They beat Boca Juniors (ARG) 4-2 in the final at Yokohama.

2006 - Internacional (BRA) They beat FC Barcelona (ESP) 1-0 in the final at Yokohama.

2005 - Sao Paulo FC (BRA) They beat Liverpool (ENG) 1-0 in the final at Yokohama.

2004 - Corinthians (BRA) They beat Vasco da Gama (BRA) 4-3 on penalties after a 0-0 draw at the end of extra time in the final at Rio de Janeiro.

Y The 2000 tournament was contested as the inaugural FIFA Club World Championship intended by football governing body FIFA as a replacement for the Intercontinental Cup, an annual contest between the champions of Europe and South America.

After plans to stage a next edition failed, it was revamped as the Club World Cup in 2005 and replaced the Europe-South America championship. On Saturday, FIFA redefined the 2000 event as the first Club World Cup.

## Hurst gives his thumbs-up

AFP, London

Sir Geoff Hurst, whose hat-trick propelled England to their lone World Cup trophy, believes Fabio Capello is the right man to revitalise the fortunes of the ailing national side.

The Italian is set to give his first news conference as England manager in London on Monday with Football Association chiefs confident they have secured a "world-class" coach to replace Steve

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## Boca bow to Kaka

AGENCIES, Yokohama



crown.

Prolific striker Filippo Inzaghi scored twice either side of goals from Kaka and defender Alessandro Nesta, as Milan added to their 1969, 1989 and 1990 titles.

Boca's Rodrigo Palacio was on target in the first half and Milan's Massimo Ambrosini conceded a late own goal to keep the scoreline respectable for the South American champions.

Kaka capped a virtuoso performance by scoring his side's third goal and setting up two as the Italians became the first European side to win the revamped tournament.

"This was the one trophy I hadn't won," Kaka told reporters. "It's

magical to finally get my hands on it. I can't describe how happy I am. I've won everything now -- it's amazing."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said: "I really thank God for this year as we won the trophy which is so hard to get. This is the very end of our long and tough road. We were able to finish the task with the best result. All of my players had believed that we would win."

He added: "It was really a difficult season, but it was a season I will never forget. Nobody can say we cannot repeat it again. Several players will leave the team, but our main force will remain the same."

"This trophy gives us a lot of satisfaction, especially as we lost to Boca Juniors when we played them last, and we avenged that loss today."

Record European marksman Inzaghi opened the scoring from a rebound in the 21st minute. However the strike was cancelled out by Palacio's leaping header a minute later.

Nesta met a Clarence Seedorf free-kick shortly after half-time to

put Milan ahead, with Kaka doubling their advantage with a superb dribble and shot before Inzaghi's second on 71 minutes.

Palacio and Martin Palermo were confounded by Milan's Brazilian goalkeeper Dida before Ambrosini put one in his own net with five minutes left.

It was Milan's 18th international victory after their seven Champions League and European Cup titles, two Cup Winners' Cups and five European Super Cups.

The win also avenged Milan's penalties defeat to the Argentinians in the final of the 2003 Intercontinental Cup, the Club World Cup's previous incarnation.

"It was a close match. After Milan scored the goal, everything changed. We had some chances at the end, but a small difference made a big difference in the score," said a dejected Boca coach Miguel Russo.

"It was 50-50 in the first half and Milan were better in making space in the second half. We couldn't. We wanted to add more goals at the end, but we didn't have the luck today," he added.

## Good year for Asia

AFP, Singapore

Asian football can boast of a successful year in 2007 with the staging of an entertaining Asian Cup amid growing interest in the game, but it wasn't all a bed of roses.

The AFC Champions League continued to gain momentum with a Japanese team -- Urawa Reds -- lifting the trophy for the first time, beating Iran's Sepahan 3-1 on aggregate over two legs.

And English Premier League fans were kept happy with teams like Manchester United, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Fulham and Bolton playing pre-season games in the

region. Asian qualifiers for the 2008 Beijing Olympics were decided with Australia, Japan, and South Korea representing the region along with host nation China.

But corruption again reared its ugly head with Vietnamese and Malaysian officials jailed for match-fixing.

If 2007 will be remembered for one thing, it was the against-the-odds triumph of Iraq in the Asian Cup final, where they beat traditional heavyweights Saudi Arabia 1-0.

The victory sparked joy and celebrations in the war-ravaged country, uniting its bitterly divided communities in a rare moment of jubilation.

A gutsy South Korea took third place ahead of Japan, with the top three automatically qualifying for the 2011 Asian Cup in Qatar.

While the tournament was broadcast to record television audiences, it drew a mixed response in the host countries -- Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Some stadiums were full and others depressingly empty.

And logistical problems dogged the event, which was staged in more than one nation for the first time.

Three Thai players -- Suree Sukkha, Kiatprawat Saiwao, and Teerasil Daengda -- earned themselves a move to Manchester City, which was bought by former Thai

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SUPER ETO'O: Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o (C) leaves Valencia defenders Carlos Marchena (L) and Ivan Helguera in his wake during their Primera Liga encounter at the Mestalla on Saturday.

## Barca thrash Valencia

AFP, Barcelona



Lionel Messi ruled out of 'El Clasico' with a foot injury.

Messi, the club's top-scorer with eight goals, limped off shortly before half-time and Barcelona confirmed that an injury to his left foot will rule him out of the mouthwatering title tussle.

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o brought some relief to his team by scoring his first league goals of the season as Barcelona moved just one point behind Real who are in action against Osasuna on Sunday.

Eto'o had been out since the end of August with a serious knee injury but showed his value with a brace in the 12th and 26th minutes to make it three goals in four days.

Eidur Gudjohnsen added a third. It was only Barcelona's second away win of the season and the win puts pressure on Real to beat Osasuna.

For Valencia it was a sixth defeat at their Mestalla Stadium where some home fans left after Gudjohnsen's goal after the hour

mark. Valencia coach Ronald Koeman was hoping to plot the downfall of the club where he is still adored -- making close to 200 appearances and scoring the winning goal in the 1992 European Cup final -- but was not helped with the loss of striker David Villa to injury.

In contrast, Barca coach Frank Rijkaard had the luxury of omitting Ronaldinho with Spanish international midfielder Andres Iniesta included to provide more steel.

After just three minutes, Eto'o had a great chance but his lack of match sharpness showed with his control poor.

But in the 13th minute he more than made amends with a brilliant individual goal. Showing quick feet to shift the ball Eto'o fooled two defenders and drove a fierce left-footed shot into the corner.

It was just a matter of time before the second goal arrived and it did on 26 minutes with Eto'o producing a clinical finish from a great Messi pass.

Messi then limped off but it did not stop Barca with Gudjohnsen completing the scoring on 61 minutes.

Espanyol plan to be challenging for a Champions League place come the end of the season and they are well on course following a 1-0 win over Levante on Saturday that lifted them to fourth place.

A goal from Jarque after eight

minutes clinched the points as last season's UEFA Cup finalists moved level with Atletico Madrid.

Levante fell to their 13th defeat in 16 games and are eight points from safety.

## Messi out of 'clasico'

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona forward Lionel Messi will miss the 'clasico' against Real Madrid next weekend after picking up a thigh injury in Saturday's 3-0 win at Valencia.

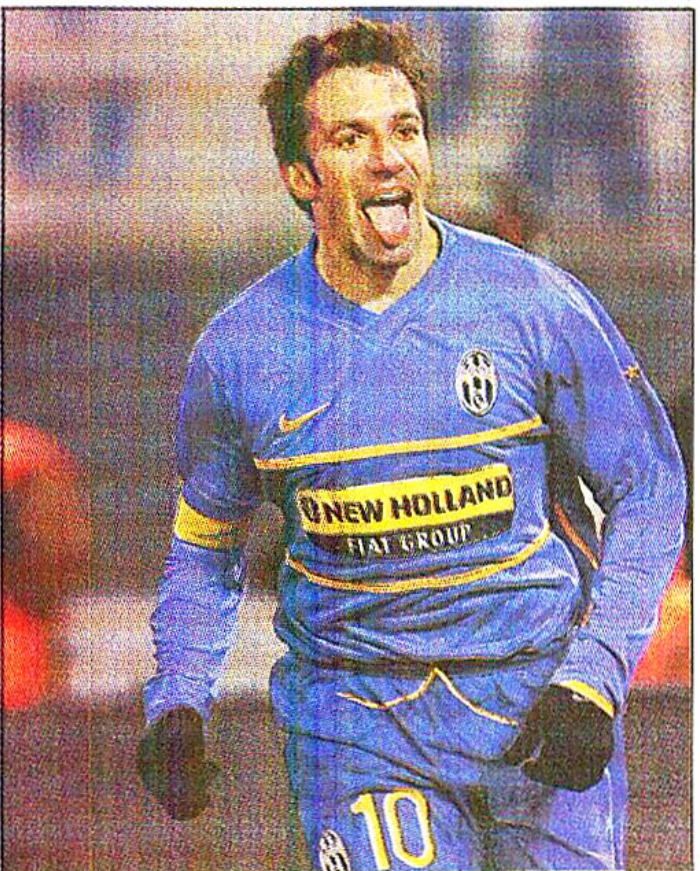
The Argentina international pulled up in the 42nd minute holding his left thigh and was substituted soon after.

The club's initial diagnosis was that he had torn a muscle and would be out of action for about a month.

"It's the worst thing that could happen to Barcelona. He is a player who can turn a game and is in form. We hope he recovers as soon as possible," sports director Txiki Begiristain told the club's Web site (www.fcbarcelona.com).

"It's bad news for him and for the team," coach Frank Rijkaard said after the game.

The 20-year-old is Barca's leading scorer in the Primera Liga with eight goals. Second-placed Barca host arch-rivals and league leaders Real at the Nou Camp next Sunday.



Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero embarks on his trademark celebration after netting a brace in their Serie A clash against Lazio at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

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