



Barcelona forward Thierry Henry slots the ball home to score his side's only goal against Sevilla during their Copa del Rey match against Sevilla at the Sanchez Pizjuan on Wednesday.

PHOTO AFP

## Schuster feels for Ronaldinho

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster has hit out at the fans of bitter rivals Barcelona for what he feels is their unfair treatment of Brazilian star Ronaldinho.

Schuster, a former player with both Spanish giants, told AS sports daily that Barcelona midfielder Ronaldinho was being "treated exactly the same way as I was treated" in his time at the club.

Ronaldinho has become a target for unhappy fans at the Nou Camp this season, partly due to their relative lack of form but also because of reports earlier this season detailing his supposed love of nightclubs and partying.

But Schuster believes Barca's fans are being too harsh on the 2006 Ballon d'Or, who in recent months has been linked with a move away from the Catalan club.

"They (the fans) are treating him exactly the same way they treated me," Schuster said Wednesday.

"It's really unfair. Ronaldinho helped them become great again, to get out of the vicious cycle they were in, and was instrumental in them winning the Champions League and two consecutive league titles.

"What do they expect from him now?"

After 18 matches Barcelona are second in the Spanish league table, seven points adrift of Real.

Schuster added: "The worst thing is, seeing how things are going at Barcelona; he (Ronaldinho) won't be the first or the last to get such rough treatment."

## Tevez can face Brazil

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina striker Carlos Tevez can play against Brazil in June's World Cup qualifier after his international ban was cut from two matches to one.

The decision was announced by the Argentina Football Association (AFA) on its Web site (http://www.afa.org.ar).

Tevez was banned after being sent off against Colombia in November's match in Bogota for petulantly kicking Ruben Dario Bustos in an off-the-ball incident. Colombia won 2-1.

The AFA said world soccer's governing body FIFA had halved the ban following an appeal and Tevez will only have to sit out the Ecuador on June 14.

Argentina visit Brazil three days later.

Manchester United striker Tevez's recent Argentina performances have been disappointing, leading to speculation that coach Alfio Basile could favour Hernan Crespo or Sergio Aguero to partner Lionel Messi in the team's next games.

Argentina are second in the South American group with nine points from three games, one behind leaders Paraguay.

## Barca hold Sevilla

REUTERS, Madrid

Thierry Henry's first-half strike gave Barcelona a valuable away goal and earned his side a 1-1 draw with holders Sevilla in their King's Cup last-16, first leg on Wednesday.

The France international broke away to put Barca in front but Sevilla hit back through Diego Capel just before the break.

The home side showed a greater desire to find the winner but failed to put away their chances.

Earlier, Joaquin returned to haunt his former club Real Betis, scoring both goals for Valencia in a 2-1 away win that gave Ronald Koeman's side a much-needed lift.

The Spain winger, better known

for his footwork than his aerial prowess, scored with two headers in the first 12 minutes.

Betis cut the deficit early in the second half when Valencia's Juan Manuel Mata thumped Mariano Pavone's header into his own net.

Last season's finalists Getafe swept aside struggling Levante 3-0 at home, and Recreativo Huelva held on for a 1-0 win at home to high-flying Villarreal after Martin Caceres scored with a fourth-minute header.

The matches between Real Zaragoza and Racing Santander, and Athletic Bilbao and Espanyol both ended 1-1.

Primera Liga leaders Real Madrid visit Real Mallorca on Thursday, while Atletico Madrid are at home to Valladolid in the final two ties of the round. The return legs are next week.

Barca took the sting out of the first half when Henry raced onto Rafael Marquez's long pass and scored in the one-on-one after a deft piece of control in the 24th minute.

But as halftime approached the home side had Barca pegged back and when a corner flew across the area Sevilla youngster Capel drilled in a low shot at the far post.

Sevilla sought to up the tempo after the break, Ernesto Chevanton rattling the crossbar with a powerful header and Victor Valdes was at full-stretch to turn Luis Fabiano's freekick round the post.

Barca appeared content to settle for the draw though Edmilson cracked a 30-metre shot against the upright midway through the second half, and Giovanni dos Santos flashed a shot just over.

## Magpies part with Big Sam

AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle United have parted company with manager Sam Allardyce with immediate effect and by mutual agreement, the English Premier League side announced here Wednesday.

Newcastle chairman Chris Mort said in a statement on behalf of himself and owner Mike Ashley: "Mike and I would like to place on record our thanks for Sam's efforts and wish him well for the future."

He added: "A new manager has not yet been appointed at Newcastle United. We will make a further announcement on the managerial position when appropriate."

Allardyce, who only took charge on May 15 on a three-year deal, left with Newcastle 11th in the Premier League table.

He won eight, drew six and lost 10 of his 24 games with the north-east side after replacing Glenn Roeder.

Although Newcastle did not appear in danger of relegation, that wasn't enough to prevent Allardyce becoming the eighth Premier League manager this season to lose his job.

A run of three straight league defeats and last weekend's goalless FA Cup draw with Championship side Stoke City appear to have eroded any confidence Ashley, who inherited the 53-year-old former Bolton boss from previous Newcastle chief Freddie Shepherd, had in Allardyce.

"I am disappointed to be leaving Newcastle United, but I wish the club all the best for the remainder of the season and for the future," said Allardyce.

First team coach Nigel Pearson will take charge for Saturday's game away to champions Manchester United.

Allardyce, who had spoken of formulating a long-term plan for Newcastle's success which could take three to five years to implement, took training earlier Wednesday seemingly oblivious to his impending exit.

Barely a fortnight ago Mort said

reports Allardyce was set to be replaced were wrong. "All this makes me laugh and I find all this speculation tedious. There is a different name every week and there is just no truth in it."

But the manager's style of football, which some fans deemed insufficiently attacking, alienated sections of the "Toon Army" who began calling for former Newcastle and England striker Alan Shearer to replace Allardyce.

Even though Shearer has no managerial experience he was installed as the 4/6 favourite to replace Allardyce by leading British bookmaker Ladbrokes.

For all they are one of English football's best-supported clubs, Newcastle have not won a major trophy since lifting the Fairs Cup, the forerunner of the UEFA Cup, back in 1969.

Newcastle's last domestic trophy



Sam Allardyce speaks to journalists outside his home in Durham after leaving Newcastle United by mutual consent on Thursday.

## Wenger concerned

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger is facing an injury crisis that threatens to derail Arsenal's Premier League title challenge.

The Gunners extended their unbeaten run against north London rivals Tottenham to 21 games after Theo Walcott rescued a 1-1 draw in the League Cup semi-final first leg on Wednesday.

But Wenger left the Emirates Stadium counting his walking wounded after Robin van Persie, Philippe Senderos, Johan Djourou and Theo Walcott were all injured.

Van Persie was forced off at half-time after suffering a thigh problem. The Dutch striker had been sidelined with a knee injury since October and Wenger will wait nervously for an exact diagnosis on Thursday.

Even more worrying for the Gunners manager were Senderos's knee ligament problem and Djourou's groin strain. With Kolo Toure, Alex Song and Emmanuel Eboue on African Nations Cup duty, Wenger is short of defensive options as the title race heats up.

If Senderos and Djourou don't recover in time for Saturday's home game against Birmingham, the league leaders will be left with William Gallas as his only fit centre-back.

"We had no injuries before the

game started but now we have lost three players and we have three at the African Nations Cup," he said.

"Basically we lost six players in two days. That is very difficult for us." Djourou came back from Birmingham with a groin problem. Senderos has a little medial knee ligament that he got in the first half.

"We have problems with the central defence. Who will play against Birmingham? Me!"

"We have to assess everything. I cannot tell you how long they will be out. It could be one or two days or one or two weeks."

In the circumstances Wenger was satisfied to escape with a draw from a match that Tottenham dominated for long periods.

Jermaine Jenas gave Juande Ramos's side the lead when he tapped in Robbie Keane's pass in the 37th minute.

Tottenham, without a win at their bitter rivals' home since 1993, were in charge for most of the second half but couldn't deliver the killer blow.

Walcott made them pay when he ran onto Eduardo's pass in the 79th minute and chested the ball past Radek Cerny after a deflected tackle by Lee Young-Pyo.

Arsenal knocked Spurs out at the same stage of the competition last year and Wenger is confident they can do the same again in the second leg on January 22.

"I believe it is a good result considering Tottenham created more chances. We had to be resil-



tant. We could never have thought that after four months we still would not have won a home match in the league," he said Thursday.

"We hope our two new signings, Pato and Ronaldo, will help us."

Pato was actually signed in August but he was only 17 at the time and Italian rules prevent teams from registering non-EU players under 18.

The talented striker's 18th birthday came in September, by which time the transfer window had closed and he could not be registered, until now.

Ronaldo has played only one official match this season, hitting the post and winning a highly dubious penalty against Cagliari in late November, due to thigh and calf injuries.

But he played the first half of a friendly in Dubai on Tuesday

## Rino counting on duo

AFP, Rome

AC Milan's battling midfielder Gennaro Gattuso is counting on a pair of Brazilians to end the European champions' dismal home run.

Milan face Napoli at home on Sunday in their first match following the winter break, yet incredibly they have not won a single league match at the San Siro this season.

In seven home encounters, Milan have drawn five, lost two and scored a paltry three goals.

But Gattuso believes that new teenage starlet Pato and a rejuvenated Ronaldo will prove the difference during the second half of the season.

"We expect January to be impor-

tant. We could never have thought that after four months we still would not have won a home match in the league," he said Thursday.

"We hope our two new signings, Pato and Ronaldo, will help us."

Pato was actually signed in August but he was only 17 at the time and Italian rules prevent teams from registering non-EU players under 18.

The talented striker's 18th birthday came in September, by which time the transfer window had closed and he could not be registered, until now.

Ronaldo has played only one official match this season, hitting the post and winning a highly dubious penalty against Cagliari in late November, due to thigh and calf injuries.

But he played the first half of a friendly in Dubai on Tuesday

## Berbatov best in Bulgaria

AFP, Sofia

Tottenham striker and Bulgarian international Dimitar Berbatov has been named footballer of the year for the fourth time, the Bulgarian football union announced Thursday.

The 26-year-old, who also captains his national side, already won the title in 2002, 2004 and 2005.

He was followed in the Bulgarian football union's listing by Manchester City striker Martin Petrov and Levski Sofia's goalkeeper Georgi Petkov.

Berbatov, who joined Tottenham from Bayer Leverkusen in July 2006, is currently the subject of intense transfer speculation, with Chelsea and Manchester City reportedly in the hunt.

But Tottenham manager Juande Ramos has said any offer would have to top the British transfer record of 30 million pounds (40 million euros, 58.6 million dollars).

Berbatov's 10.9-million pound transfer fee to Tottenham in 2006 made him the highest paid Bulgarian footballer of all time.

## Robben injured again

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid said Arjen Robben will be unavailable for Thursday's Spanish Cup match against Mallorca due to a muscle strain, the latest injury to the club's costliest pre-season signing.

The Dutch midfielder has now suffered four injuries and failed to make an impression since joining the club from Chelsea for 36 million euros (52 million US dollars) on a five-year contract.

The 23-year-old has made only five starts since joining Real Madrid, two of them in the league, the newspaper El Mundo noted on its website.

It said Robben, who gets paid around 10 million euros a year, has thus lived up to his reputation of being as fragile "as glass".

El Mundo said his frailty contrasted with the robustness of countryman and clubmate Ruud Van Nistelrooy, 31, who on Wednesday extended his contract for two years to 2010.

Coach Bernd Schuster said last month that Robben was suffering from "anxiety" resulting from his desire to prove himself.



Arsenal forward Theo Walcott (C) skips over a challenge with Tottenham defender Young-Pyo Lee hot on his heels during their League Cup tie at the Emirates Stadium in London on Wednesday.

PHOTO AFP

## CARLING CUP Walcott saves Gunners

AFP, London

Theo Walcott came to Arsenal's rescue as his late goal frustrated Tottenham and earned a 1-1 draw in the League Cup semi-final first leg here on Wednesday.

Juande Ramos's side looked set to end a nine-year winless run against their north London rivals when Jermaine Jenas scored in the first-half at the Emirates Stadium.

But the Gunners hadn't suffered a defeat in this fixture for 20 matches and they extended that run thanks to Walcott's equaliser with 11 minutes to play.

It was cruel on Spurs after they dominated for long spells but at least they have the consolation of going back to White Hart Lane for the second leg on January 22 with the tie still in the balance.

"Tottenham played well but we came back," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger told Sky Sports. "In the second-half they were on top of us because we weren't at our best physically but we came back to 1-1

so that's a positive result."

Spurs captain Ledley King, one of several young English players who would have impressed watching England manager Fabio Capello, said: "I thought we deserved to win the game."

"We knew they would come back at us, they always seem to come back and we are disappointed we didn't get the win."

"It's half the job done at the moment. It will be a tough game (in the second leg) but we're ready for it."

Ramos finally lost patience with Paul Robinson, dropping the goalkeeper to the bench after his latest error-strewn display against Reading on Saturday.

Robinson, who has already lost his England place this season, was replaced by Radek Cerny, the Czech keeper making just his fifth appearance this term.

As usual in the League Cup, Wenger fielded a mixture of precocious youngsters and experienced reserves, with Robin van Persie, back from a knee injury, in the starting line-up for only the second time in three months.

If the prospect of losing to Arsenal's understudies in the League Cup seems two years in a row wasn't motivation enough, Spurs were also trying to reach their first cup final since 2002.

After a slow start they turned the screw on Arsenal with Dimitar Berbatov again the catalyst.

Berbatov has repeatedly been linked with a move away from Spurs and the elegant Bulgarian showed why he is such a tempting target.

His superb control and run ended with a crude block by Philippe Senderos and, although Jamie O'Hara curled the free-kick wide, Spurs were on top.

They should have been in front when Berbatov's pass picked out Robbie Keane. Senderos's challenge only deflected the ball to Steed Malbranque, who had an open goal to aim at but somehow shot wide.

Malbranque headed wide from Keane's chip to the far post moments later before Berbatov's long range strike forced a fine stop from Lukasz Fabianski.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 8