

# No crisis, says Rafa

AFP, Liverpool



Rafael Benitez insisted he was not concerned about his future after Liverpool plunged into crisis with a humiliating 2-1 defeat to Barnsley in the FA Cup fifth round.

Having led 1-0 at half-time following Dirk Kuyt's first Anfield goal for six months, Liverpool self-destructed as their only realistic chance of a domestic honour vanished against a team 29 places below them in the league standings.

Already 19 points adrift of leaders Arsenal in the Premier League table, Benitez's only hope of finishing the season with something in the trophy cabinet now rests with the Champions League.

Yet the Spaniard faces a huge task lifting his shell-shocked players ahead of Tuesday's visit from Inter Milan after the team was booed off the pitch by their own supporters.

A small minority of fans demonstrated after the final whistle against the club's American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillett Jr.

But Benitez could soon find himself the target of fans demonstrations if Liverpool's season continues to descend into obscurity.

Benitez, who has been in charge since 2004, admitted he was frustrated after watching his players lose to a team which is anchored in the 14th spot in the second-tier of English football. He insisted his players only had themselves to blame for falling victim to one of the biggest Cup upsets in recent time.

"I'm frustrated because for the last month I have been saying the same thing," said Benitez. "We've had lots of chances and their keeper was the man-of-the-match. To lose is difficult to explain. If we'd taken our chances it would have been different."

"I said to the players at the end that in terms of work rate I couldn't blame them because they worked hard. "It's really disappointing, but we must think of the next game straight away. When you can't win games the pressure is normal. Everybody is disappointed."

"But we can't change anything now. We have to think about the next game." Benitez refused to risk 18-goal leading scorer Fernando Torres ahead of the Inter Milan game while the Liverpool manager also opted to rest first-choice keeper

Jose Reina and captain Steven Gerrard.

But that decision back-fired spectacularly as French keeper Charles Itandje produced an unconvincing display which helped Barnsley's cause.

"I cannot blame the keeper. The whole team was working hard," added Benitez.

"Torres wasn't fit. He wasn't 100 per cent but I think he will be okay for Tuesday."

Barnsley manager Simon Davey, who supported Liverpool when he was a boy, praised keeper Luke Steele, who only signed on loan from Championship rivals West Brom 48 hours before the tie.

Steele was excellent throughout as he frustrated Xabi Alonso, Peter Crouch and Ryan Babel with a string of fine saves.

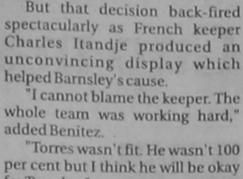
The visitors cancelled out Kuyt's goal through a Stephen Foster header before captain Brian Howard struck a dramatic winner in the final minute of the tie.

"We had to ride our luck, make some last-ditch tackles and the keeper made some terrific saves," said Davey.

"We got to half time and we were 1-0 down. I just told the players to go out and express their belief. This result is the highlight of my career."

"To have taken a team to a club I supported as a kid has got to be the highlight of my career."

AFP, Liverpool



Barnsley captain Brian Howard (R) scores in the last minute of their FA Cup tie against giants Liverpool for a famous win at Anfield on Saturday.

PHOTO AFP

## Still away with the fairies

THE GUARDIAN

Luke Steele, who signed for Barnsley on an emergency loan deal from West Brom only on Thursday, made a series of outstanding saves to help his new club knock Liverpool out of the FA Cup.

"I think it was Wednesday when there was a call from West Brom saying Barnsley wanted me on loan, and I accepted straight away," said the former Manchester United keeper, who was signed for 500,000 pounds by Sir Alex Ferguson in May 2002, but never picked for the first team.

The 23-year-old, whose other clubs include Coventry and Peterborough, has made only 47 senior appearances in his career, and had not played since 15 December in a 4-2 win for West Brom over Charlton. "It's been a couple of months since I turned out last, so obviously I was just so happy to be out there and at Anfield. It's great I got a chance to perform here. The lads defended brilliantly under a lot of pressure."

Simon Davey, Barnsley's manager, said, "Luke was sensational. He produced a long list of world-class saves and kept us in the game. But we all worked hard and got our reward."

Barnsley captain Brian Howard, who scored the winner despite injury time, described Steele's performance as 'unbelievable - just an unbelievable debut. We were hanging on defending, then we nicked it at the end.'

"I thought I should have had a penalty at first," he said of the incident just before the winner. "My ankle was grabbed by someone's hand. I was busy whingeing - then the ball fell to me and I thought about nothing but striking it. I can't even describe it. I'm still away with the fairies at the moment."

## Three die in Iraq poisoning

AFP, Amman

Three Iraqis, including two children, have died after eating thallium-laced cake delivered to a football club in Baghdad and eight others are recovering in Jordan, a hospital official said Saturday.

Britain has sent an antidote to help cure those recovering in Amman, Speciality Hospital director Fawzi Hammuri told a news conference.

Hammuri said the incident occurred on January 21 in Baghdad, where 11 people became ill after eating cake containing with thallium, a highly toxic substance used in pesticides and rat poisons.

"A five-year-old child died from the poison and a week later, on January 28, the other 10, including five children, were flown to Amman for treatment," Hammuri said.

"Unfortunately we lost two more people during their hospitalisation in Jordan, including a child. Eight people are still recovering. One is in a coma while the others are in moderate condition," Hammuri said.

He identified the victims as Mohammed Rasool, the secretary general of the Baghdad Air Force Football Club, as well as two of the children of the club's administrator Sattar Jabbar.

Club president Samir Kazem told AFP in Baghdad that the cake was delivered by a coach who had quit the club in a row with the management and later returned.

## Crespo unhappy at Inter

INTERNET, undated



Inter may be flying high, but not everyone is happy about it, as Hernan Crespo bitterly criticised Coach Roberto Mancini.

"I have been altruistic for seven months, trying to hide the sadness of being in a situation I was not accustomed to," said the former Chelsea striker.

"My teammates are not to blame and it would be wrong of me to behave in a way that could disturb them."

"The squad and the fans all do everything they can to make me feel loved, but it is not easy to always wear a mask. I have to confess I am not happy, there is no point hiding it."

Crespo has dropped down the

pecking order at Inter this season, despite Adriano's loan move to Sao Paulo.

Against Livorno on Saturday afternoon he made only his ninth Serie A appearance of the campaign just six from the start and has never played an entire 90 minutes.

Although the Argentine sustained an injury during the summer, he assures that is not the reason for his absence.

"It can be convenient for some to bring out the story of the injury, but it simply isn't true. I hurt myself in July during the Copa America and now I feel fine."

"Considering last season as well, I did not expect to have so little playing time. I thought I would play more and be more involved in the squad."

"A striker needs confidence, to feel important and Mancini is the first to admit I have been the most

penalised."

Following the Livorno match, Mancini did comment on Crespo's campaign, but tried to put the blame on physical problems.

"Crespo has been the most penalised of all by injuries this season," said the Coach. "He needs to improve and he knows that, but he was on the field for almost the whole game and that is important. We know at the right moment, he'll be ready."

However, that is not an approach that sits well with Crespo, who responded sarcastically to these statements.

"Mancini said I'd be there when it matters? If he says so... All I know is that I don't think of myself as a player reserved only for the Champions League, but also Serie A."

"I hit my record today a whole 85 minutes! Shame we're in February already..."

## Flamengo in for Ronaldo?

AFP, Rome

Brazilian club side Flamengo are desperate to get their hands on Ronaldo should he make a full recovery from the knee injury he sustained on Wednesday that has curtailed his season according to Italian agency Ansa.

Flamengo tried to sign the former three-time world player of the year during the January transfer window before 'Il Fenomeno' opted to stay with European champions AC Milan.

But his contract is up at the end of the season and his ruptured knee tendon means he will not play again for nine months to a year, making it unlikely a new contract will be offered.

But Flamengo's vice-president Kleber Leite is still determined to bring Ronaldo back to the country of his birth.

"The dream of having Ronaldo with us is still alive and in the coming days we will put a proposal to him through his agent Fabio Farah," Ansa quoted Leite as saying.

"We will present it to him in written form to show just how much we want him to play for us."

"We will wait for him to recover and in the meantime we will try to finalise our plan."

When Ronaldo injured his knee, which was subsequently operated on in Paris on Thursday, some feared he may never play again.

He is already 31 and suffered the same injury to his other knee back in 1999, which saw him spend the best part of 20 months out of the game.

However, this week he expressed his determination to come back, which has alerted Flamengo.

Merkel fails to inspire Cottbus

AFP, Berlin

Having cheered heartily for her country's national team at the 2006 World Cup, Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel was at the far-less glamorous Energie Cottbus on Saturday to be made an honorary fan.

Merkel won over many voters by cheering her side to victory at the 2006 World Cup third place play-off in Stuttgart when Portugal were beaten 3-1.

But the 53-year-old was slumming it in the lower echelons of the Bundesliga when she took her seat in the stands at the Energie Cottbus stadium having been presented with her own Cottbus football shirt before kick-off.

She was presented with a scarf in her team's colours, as well as an engraved silver plate, but her presence in the stands was not enough to inspire struggling Cottbus who slipped to a 2-0 defeat, their tenth of the season.

"I am naturally very proud and wish the team plenty of luck in the next few games," said Germany's first female chancellor, with her side second from bottom and firmly in the relegation zone.

"I really hope Cottbus stay in the Bundesliga and will keep my fingers crossed."

The special visit to Cottbus came around after Merkel wrote to the club to congratulate them on their promotion to the Bundesliga in May 2006 and the club returned the compliment by asking Germany's leader to become an honorary fan.

## S Korea better China again

AFP, Chongqing

Kwak Tae-Hwi's injury-time goal lifted South Korea to a 3-2 win over hosts China in the opener of the East Asian championship here Sunday, preserving a 30-year unbeaten record against their rivals.

FC Seoul striker Park Chung also scored twice in a chilly afternoon match at the Chongqing Olympic Sports Centre stadium.

The win means South Korea have not lost to China in 27 encounters and it was their 16th victory, adding to a so-called "Koreaphobia" in their neighbours across the Yellow Sea.

The other teams in the four-nation tournament, Japan and North Korea, were due to clash later Sunday.

"We are happy to win this game," South Korean coach Huh Jung-Moo said, sidestepping a question if he was concerned about the record.

"I made a lot of substitutions because we should give chances to many players to learn and grow," said Huh, whose squad included nine hitherto uncapped players and none of three Koreans who play in the English Premier League.

"We yielded goals but in the world even the best club and the best national team yield goals," he said.

China's Serbian coach Vladimir Petrovic, who was also missing Charlton Athletic midfielder Zheng Zhi and Manchester United forward Dong Fangzhuo at the peak of the European season, said: "The tradition has given us a little bit pressure."

"It was a very competitive, wonderful game and our players gained great experience," said Petrovic who added six under-23 players to his squad ahead of the

Beijing Olympics in August.

Park opened the scoring in the 42nd minute as he headed home a cross from the left by striking partner Yeom Ki-Hun.

But Zhang Shui equalised two minutes after the break with a 25 yard scorcher, and Liu Jian put the hosts ahead with a header in the 61st minute.

Park put the visitors on level terms with a curling free kick from just outside the area on 64 minutes.

Kwak struck the winner a minute into stoppage time as he slammed the ball in past Chinese goalkeeper Zong Lei.

South Korea squandered chances with Lee Keun-Ho and Kim Nam-Il both going close, while Kwak had a header ruled offside near the end.

South Korea won the inaugural East Asian Cup in 2003 and China were champions in 2005, with Japan runners-up in both.

## Bremen level on top

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf was a pleased man as his side sealed a 2-0 win over strugglers Nuremberg to draw level on points with Bayern Munich at the top of the Bundesliga.

Bremen striker Markus Rosenberg scored on the half hour before Croatian forward Ivan Klasnic's 82nd minute header put Bremen on 40 points alongside Bayern - who stay top by virtue of a superior goal difference.

"I am happy with the result," said Schaaf, with league leaders Bayern at Hanover on Sunday.

"It was not a shiny, high-entertainment game like the fans want to see, but it was the sort of game you have to win."

"We didn't always keep the tempo high and we were a bit ponderous at times."

After sacking their coach Hans Meyer at the start of the week, ten-man Nuremberg failed to make an impact after Russian striker Ivan Saenko was sent off in the 20th minute.

Meyer's replacement Thomas von Heesen had already lost his first game in charge when his side were beaten 1-0 by Benfica in Thursday night's UEFA Cup clash and his side are third from bottom and deep in the mire.

Hansa Rostock had former

Germany midfielder Christian Rahn to thank as his 76th minute header gave his side three precious points at home to Eintracht Frankfurt and the win takes them up to 14th.

And Hertha Berlin picked up three points as Brazilian striker Rafael struck in the 93rd minute to light up a dull tie at Olympic Stadium in Germany's capital.

There was a battle royal at Karlsruhe as German internationals Simon Rolfes and Steffen Kiessling put Bayer Leverkusen 2-0 up midway through the second half.

But the home side fought back with second-half goals by strikers Sebastian Freis and Joshua Kennedy put them level.

The draw leaves Bayer in third, five points off the top pair.

Energie Cottbus' most famous fan - German chancellor Angela Merkel - was in the stands in the former East German city to see her side lose 2-0 at home to Borussia Dortmund after she was presented as an honorary fan before kick-off.

Croatian international Mladen Petric became the league's top-scorer to take his tally up to 11 as he netted twice and the result leaves Energie Cottbus second from bottom with Dortmund in 12th.

On Friday, Schalke 04 slid to fourth when they suffered their first defeat in seven games as Brazilian striker Grafite scored two late goals to give Wolfsburg a 2-1 away win.



PHOTO AFP Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez (R) manages to catch a celebrating Thomas Hitzlsperger (2nd from L) after the midfielder scored a late winner in their Bundesliga match against Duisburg at the MSV Arena in Duisburg on Saturday.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 25 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 grid of letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP SCL GXWJM KIS IZMNDKK WINN XK LTRLBS OLKKS. KJD FXBB CTBS LKD MCFDBK GIRD CO MDNX ZBCM J. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I WOULD THINK THAT ANY EXPERT COXSWAIN HAS TO BE SUPERBLY SKILLED IN OAR-CHESTRAION. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals S