

## Ferguson impressed

Football

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson believes Manchester United's emphatic 4-0 FA Cup victory over Arsenal could have a major impact on the Premier League title race.

United's win took Ferguson's side into the quarterfinals of the competition and the manager is convinced the fall-out from the clash will be felt when the Gunners return to Old Trafford for the league meeting on April 12.

Two goals from Darren Fletcher and efforts from Wayne Rooney and Nani completed a one-sided win that came just five days after Arsenal extended their lead at the top of the table over reigning champions United to five points.

"It was a really fantastic performance," said Ferguson. "We played with great verve and tenacity. The passing was terrific and I think everybody should be pleased with themselves."

"I hope it has an impact on the title race, I really do. It shows that when Arsenal come here in April they are going to have a game."

"April is two months away and you don't know what position the two clubs will be in but it's certainly whetted our appetite for the future games."

"There are not many teams who will beat Arsenal 4-0 so we have to take that perspective also," the Scot added.

Both Ferguson and Arsene Wenger opted not to risk key players before this week's Champions League fixtures.

"It was difficult to have a go at the players because we had no physical resources to come back into the game and we need to recover quickly because we will need to be at our best to beat Milan," said Wenger.

"Nobody on the bench was fully fit. I am not sure if Gael Clichy will play against Milan but Emmanuel Adebayor and Mathieu Flamini should be okay."

"I am very confident we can pick ourselves up. When we lose in the Cup it's unbelievable, we seem to get a hiding. We don't concede many goals but when we do, we do it well."

Ferguson will also make changes for United's visit to Lyon on Wednesday with Cristiano Ronaldo expected to recover a stomach upset and Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes set to be recalled after being rested.

Arsenal were 3-0 down before half-time on Saturday and there was further misery for the Gunners four minutes after the break when Emmanuel Eboué was sent-off for a high challenge on Patrice Evra.

Wenger, who rarely admits in public his players have done anything wrong, condemned United winger Nani for a spot of 'showboating' towards the finish when, with the game over as a contest, the Portuguese kept pos-

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ICING ON THE CAKE: Manchester United midfielder Darren Fletcher (C) heads home the final goal during their rout of Arsenal in their FA Cup clash at Old Trafford on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## MU TROUNCE ARSENAL Cup magic scalps L'pool

AFP, London



CUP

Humble Barnsley produced an FA Cup sensation on Saturday when they came from behind to beat Liverpool 2-1 with virtually the last kick of the game to advance to the last eight in dramatic style.

Brian Howard's 20-yard strike, moments after the Yorkshire club had had a penalty appeal turned down at Liverpool's Anfield home, sealed a memorable victory for the Championship side and added to the pressure on under-fire Reds boss Rafael Benitez, who controversially left out several key players.

Meanwhile Manchester United, last season's losing finalists, surprisingly thrashed Premier League leaders Arsenal 4-0, the Gunners playing most of the second-half with 10 men after Emmanuel Eboué was sent-off.

The Old Trafford match was effectively over before half-time as United, five points behind Arsenal in the league table, stormed into a three-goal lead thanks to Wayne Rooney, Darren Fletcher, who scored again after half-time, and Nani.

Liverpool, who twice fell behind at home to non-league Havant and Waterlooville in the last round, were left having to rebuild their already fragile morale ahead of Tuesday's Champions League clash with Italian giants Inter Milan.

"We are throwing away games

because we cannot take our chances and finish matches," said a frustrated Benitez.

"I'm really disappointed. They scored in the last minute. Sometimes this is football, this is the Cup. The only thing we can do now is prepare for the next game. We know it's an important match so we must keep our heads up."

Barnsley boss Simon Davey was delighted by his team's attitude.

"The players have been fantastic. I always felt we were in the game. We kept going right until the end and scored two great goals," he said.

Liverpool, the five-time European champions, didn't go ahead until the 32nd minute when striker Dirk Kuyt poked in a cross from fellow Dutchman Ryan Babel.

But Barnsley were level before the hour mark when Stephen Foster headed in a cross from Martin Devaney.

Australia's Harry Kewell almost wrapped up the tie for Liverpool when his shot hit the crossbar.

Goalkeeper Luke Steele, who only arrived on loan from West Brom on Thursday, had a Barnsley debut to remember with several fine saves before Howard struck.

At Old Trafford, England striker Rooney put United in front with a 16th minute header in a match where both the Premier League champions and Arsenal were resting key players ahead of midweek Champions League clashes.

Four minutes later midfielder Fletcher flicked in a header as he jumped alongside Arsenal defender William Gallas and Portuguese forward Nani then

made it 3-0 with a well-taken shot. Arsenal's plight was made worse when Eboué was sent-off for a studs-up jump into United defender Patrice Evra four minutes after the break before Fletcher scored his second header in the 74th minute.

"It was a really fantastic performance," said United boss Sir Alex Ferguson. "The players looked great. They showed tenacity and the passing was terrific."

"They were so disappointed with themselves (after losing 2-1 last weekend to Manchester City) on a really important day. But today they've made amends for that with a marvellous performance."

In the day's other fifth round ties, holders Chelsea beat Huddersfield 3-1 while League One Bristol Rovers were the lowest-ranked team left in the Cup after a 1-0 win at home to Championship side Southampton saw them into the quarterfinals for the first time in 50 years.

Also through to Monday's draw were Cardiff City, who beat fellow Championship side Wolves 2-0, as they reached the last eight for the first time since becoming the only non-English club to win the FA Cup in 1927.

In Saturday's other all-Championship fifth round clash West Bromwich Albion beat 10-man Coventry City 5-0.

Frank Lampard put Chelsea ahead at Stamford Bridge with an 18th-minute shot - the England midfielder's 100th goal for the Blues.

But Huddersfield, who knocked

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## Di Stefano honoured

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's legendary striker Alfredo Di Stefano was honoured by the Spanish giants and European football's governing body UEFA on Sunday.

At the Bernabeu stadium, the 81-year-old Di Stefano received a trophy from UEFA president Michel Platini who described him as "a great among greats."

Then Di Stefano - honorary president of the club - witnessed the unveiling of a statue of him at Real's training centre at Valdebebas in the suburbs of Madrid.

The statue - whose unveiling was also witnessed by FIFA president Sepp Blatter as well as other footballing greats Eusebio, Raymond Kopa and Just Fontaine - captured a moment when he scored a goal against Hungarian side Vasas in April 1958.

Di Stefano, nicknamed the 'blond dart' and who became a Spanish citizen in 1956, played for 'the meringues' from 1953-63 after beginning his career with Argentinian outfit River Plate.

Di Stefano was capped 31 times by his adopted country and scored 49 goals in the European Cup for Real, a spell that saw them win European club football's most prestigious trophy five times.

He was twice named European Footballer of the Year in 1957 and 1959, won the Spanish title eight times and was five times top scorer in the domestic league.

## Ronaldinho's no to Italy

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldinho has told the Italian media that even if Italy's top clubs are interested in him, he has no interest in joining them.

For months there has been widespread speculation suggesting the Barcelona forward is set for a move away from the Nou Camp at the end of the season, following a year in which the former world player of the year has been dogged by poor form and below-par performances.

Italy - and Milan in particular - has long been touted as his most likely destination, but the Brazilian claims he only has an interest in playing for his current club.

"What would I say to any offer from Inter or AC Milan? No thanks," Ronaldinho told Italian television show 'Studio Sport'.

"Knowing that a great club appreciates your work is highly motivating, but I'm trying to reach my best form to be able to give my best to Barcelona."

"It's normal that there is some criticism, if we were top of the league things would be different."

"When I go out into town [in Barcelona] I can feel the support of the people, and I hear them singing my name in the stadium so I know there is a lot of affection there."

On Saturday, Ronaldinho scored the winning goal in Barcelona's victory over Real Zaragoza, his first goal since December 12 for his club.

## BETIS OPEN UP RACE

# Barca take the cue

AFP, Madrid



Ronaldinho converted a late penalty to give Barcelona a 2-1 win at Real Zaragoza on Saturday which cut the gap at the top of the Spanish league to five points after leaders Real Madrid had slumped to a shock 2-1 loss at Real Betis.

The Brazilian superstar, who has endured a tough season in which he has been dogged by injury as well as poor form, scored from the spot in the 83rd minute after Zaragoza defender Juanfran had been penalised for hand ball.

Ronaldinho had entered the action off the bench in the last 15 minutes with his team being held 1-1.

Thierry Henry had given Barca a 34th-minute lead scoring from a super pass from Deco for his seventh goal in 19 league games this season.

Zaragoza's Diego Milito then blasted a penalty over the top of the crossbar before Brazilian striker Oliveira brought the home side level in the 53rd minute.

Earlier, champions Real Madrid suffered their fourth league defeat of the season at Betis, a result that saw the southerners exit the bottom five.

Real's German coach Bernd Schuster claimed his men deserved a point.

"I think we sat back and relaxed too much. I think a draw would have been a fair result," said Schuster, adding that a more charged-up side would come out midweek against Roma in the Champions League.

"That's a very important game and the players will have a lot more motivation - it'll be nothing like today."

Oozing confidence after last week's seven-goal mauling of Valladolid, Real chose all out attack from the start and took just five minutes to break the deadlock with a goal which had a distinctly Dutch flavour.

Winger Arjen Robben fed ever-green Spanish international Raul, who found himself crowded out, but Royston Drenthe was on hand to tuck home.

The Robben-Drenthe axis almost produced another goal on the quarter hour but Betis keeper Ricardo was alert to the former's through ball.

Former Liverpool man Mark Gonzalez did his best to stir the hosts into a riposte when it looked as if the Seville-based side might be overrun and inside four minutes around the half-hour mark the tide turned.

Argentine Hugo Pavone did well to hold off a tigerish challenge from Michel Salgado to cut in from the left flank and whip over a perfectly-weighted cross for Edu to flash an instinctive header past Iker Casillas for the equaliser.

Then Gonzalez climbed above Marcelo to nod Betis into the lead, Edu this time the supplier.

Suddenly, Real were on the back foot as they reverted to the sloppiness of their last away Liga outing, a 2-0 reverse in Almeria, leaving Casillas' earlier comments to Spanish media that the meringues have "the best defence in the world" open to some doubt.

Rearguard nerves almost handed Betis a third eight minutes after the restart with Casillas having to make a point blank save from Pavone.

At the other end, Ruud Van Nistelrooy was the width of a post away from levelling on 66 minutes with a right-foot flick.

Seville scored a fine 4-2 away win at Espanyol built on goals in the opening ten minutes from Luis Fabiano and Freddy Kanoute.

A left-foot strike from Luis Garcia gave Espanyol some hope five minutes before the break but the hosts then found themselves down to ten men after Zabaleta was sent off midway through the second period following a foul on Diego Capel.

Danish midfielder Christian Poulsen promptly restored the two-goal lead with the visitors' third after 73 minutes and, although Coro netted for Espanyol two minutes later, Sevilla held their nerve in a pulsating finale as Capel struck with the clincher 13 minutes from time.

On Sunday, Champions League aspirants Villarreal, currently six points behind Barca but one ahead of Atletico Madrid, must get past sixth-placed Racing Santander while Atletico themselves host struggling Athletic Bilbao.

## Metz to sue supporter

AFP, Paris

The French league and first division football club Metz have announced they will be taking legal action against the spectator who issued a barrage of racist abuse at Moroccan international defender Abdellam Ouaddou this weekend.

Metz president Carlo Molinari and Frederic Thiriez, president of the league (LFP), said they would be taking legal action following the Metz/Valenciennes fixture on Saturday.

Thiriez said that the strongest possible action would be taken against the individual, so such acts were not repeated.

"In the light of such deviant behaviour, there is only one answer, it is to respond in the strongest manner possible," he told French radio.

"I do not want this type of person in our stadium. That means taking legal action and we will be filing a complaint along with the player against the person in question on Monday."

"In the long term it is imperative we do our utmost to ensure that we ban such individuals from the stadium for long passages of time. Such behaviour is intolerable."

The Valenciennes player was so upset at the barrage of abuse he suffered in the game with Metz that he marched into the Stade Saint-Symphorien stands at half-time and was booked.

Thiriez admitted that the behaviour of the match referee would be looked into, especially as he had the option to stop the match early.

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Roma goalkeeper Doni's dive goes in despair as he sees Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero's (not in picture) wonderful free-kick find the top corner of the net during their Serie A clash at the Comunale Stadium in Turin on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## It's Inter's to lose Juve down Roma

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan took another huge step closer to the Italian title after extending their lead at the top of Serie A to 11 points on Saturday.

Defending champions Inter saw off Livorno 2-0 at the San Siro while closest challengers Roma lost 1-0 at third-place Juventus.

There was also disappointment for AC Milan who could not provide veteran defender Paolo Maldini with a victory on his 1,000th match in professional football as they drew 0-0 at lowly Parma.

Honduran forward David Suazo scored both Inter goals within four minutes of each other in the first half.

Inter had rested first-choice strike pair Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Julio Cruz ahead of their midweek Champions League trip to Liverpool, giving Suazo and Argentine Hernan Crespo a rare start up front.

France captain Patrick Vieira was suspended and Chilean midfielder playmaker Luis Jimenez was out injured but it made no difference as Inter proved too powerful for opponents who only three days earlier had come away from the San Siro with a 1-1 draw against Milan.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini turned his attentions to the Liverpool match on Tuesday but refused to get carried away by the English team's embarrassing FA Cup defeat to second tier Barnsley on Saturday.

"The important thing was to win and now we can concentrate on the Champions League," said Mancini.

"Cup football is like this, you can lose despite coming close to scoring on many occasions," he added referring to Liverpool's defeat.

Inter had the game sewn up after 18 minutes as Suazo headed home a delightful inswinging free-kick from Romanian centre-back Cristian Chivu.

He was then on hand to tap home the loose ball after two defenders got in each other's way and failed to clear a cross from

Brazilian left-back Maxwell, who had done well to skip past two challenges and get to the byline.

Inter have won 18 and drawn just five of their 23 matches this season. They also have the best attack and the meanest defence.

Roma missed the chance to keep pace with the champions as veteran Juve forward Alessandro Del Piero's bullet free-kick on the stroke of half-time settled the match.

"We knew we could play a great match and that's exactly what we did," said the match-winner.

It means Juve are just one point behind Roma in third now and will rest up in midweek as Roma tackle Real Madrid in the Champions League.

Del Piero rifled an unstoppable shot into the top corner after Czech winger Pavel Nedved had drawn a foul from French centre-back Philippe Mexes just over 20 yards from goal.

The closest Roma came to equalling was straight after the goal as Juve defender Nicola Legrottaglie

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## Maldini gets to 1,000

Football

AFP, Rome

When veteran defender Paolo Maldini replaced Marek Jankulovski after 68 minutes of AC Milan's 0-0 draw at Parma on Saturday he surpassed 1,000 games for club and country.

It was the latest feat in a remarkable career for the veteran pin-up of Italian football.

Maldini has now played 861 club matches for AC Milan, earned a record 126 Italy caps, made one appearance for the Italian Olympic team and played 12 matches in the Italian under-21 team.

Incredibly, of those 1,000 games, he started 981 of them and

completed 916 from start to finish - but not against Parma.

If anything it was an inglorious way for such a model professional to reach that milestone but Maldini wasn't going to let that deflect from his achievement.

And he isn't about to let his last few months in football slip by without making the most of it either.

Asked what he will do next he said: "Everyone asks me this question but I don't know how to answer it."

"That means that I still have a few more months to enjoy this great adventure which begun so many years ago."

"I would like to enjoy it right to the end and I hope to finish at the end of May (with the Champions

League final)."

The 39-year-old Maldini revealed what keeps him going after all these years.

"You have to be strong, if you don't train well you won't be ready to play against guys many years younger than you," he added.

During Maldini's incredible career he won the Serie A title seven times, the Champions League five times, the Italian Cup once, the Club World Cup and its predecessor the Intercontinental Cup three times, five European Super Cups and five Italian Super Cups.

Incredibly, though, he never won any international honours with Italy having retired from playing for his country before their 2006 World Cup victory.

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ON THE COMEBACK TRAIL: Barcelona star Ronaldinho (R) points to the away faithful after converting the winning penalty during their Primera Liga match against Real Zaragoza at the Romareda Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP