

Maldini might play on

AC Milan skipper Paolo Maldini said on Thursday that he may not retire at the end of this season and keep going into the next campaign instead even though he will have celebrated his 40th birthday.



Bayern Munich midfielder Hamit Altintop (L) celebrates his stunning goal with teammate Bastian Schweinsteiger during their UEFA Cup match against Anderlecht in Brussels on Thursday.

Berlusconi wants Shevchenko

AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi believes Chelsea's unsettled striker Andrei Shevchenko will return to the Italian giants.

Hamburg shortlist three for post

Bundesliga title-contenders Hamburg are narrowing down their search for a successor to Dutch coach Huub Stevens who will quit the German club to coach PSV Eindhoven in the summer.

I will be fit: Beckham

LA Galaxy star David Beckham on Friday voiced confidence his bid for a 100th England cap was on track following encouraging signs from national coach Fabio Capello.

BAYERN RUN RIOT Bad day for English

REUTERS, London



Bayern Munich stamped their authority on the UEFA Cup on Thursday, hammering five goals past 10-a-n Anderlecht in Brussels in their last 16 first leg tie.

The result puts coach Juande Ramos's hopes of a UEFA Cup hat-trick in peril. Ramos took Sevilla to the title in 2006 and 2007.

Gunners seek title MU after the treble

Football

AFP, London

and I have heard that the pitch is not the Emirates." In Saturday's Cup clashes, Portsmouth will be hoping Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson decides to give Cristiano Ronaldo a rest as a reward for taking his goal haul for the season to 30 goals with a Champions League winner against Lyon on midweek.

FIXTURES

Table with 2 columns: Day, Match. Includes fixtures for Saturday FA Cup, Sunday FA Cup, and Premier League matches.

'Life-ban for dangerous tackles'

AFP, London

FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Friday called for lifetime bans and criminal charges to be brought against players found guilty of dangerous tackles.

Blatter believes reckless challenges are one of the biggest scourges of the modern game and he has demanded a "zero tolerance" policy ahead of the international soccer's weekend meeting at Gleneagles.

120,000 tickets for the poor

AFP, Berlin

Around 120,000 of the lowest-priced tickets for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa will be given away to allow people from the country's lower classes to watch, organisers announced Friday.

Italian referee into hiding

REUTERS, Milan

Italian referee Mauro Bergonzi was sent into hiding by police after thugs tried to attack someone he looked like, the head of the country's referees' association has said.

Resilience test for giants

REUTERS, Madrid



Real Madrid and Barcelona a resume the race for the Primera Liga title this weekend needing to demonstrate their powers of recovery after being hit by body blows in the Champions League.

Inter celebrate centenary

REUTERS, Milan



Serie A leaders Inter Milan celebrate their centenary against Reggina on Saturday although the festivities will be slightly more muted than they would have been given recent disappointments on the pitch.

1 in October. They overcame Valencia 2-0 last weekend to end a miserable run of three successive league defeats and need to make up lost ground.

"I don't like this idea that you go there to put on a good display and to put on a brave face when you lose. As the current champions and leaders Real are favourites, but that doesn't mean they will necessarily win," Valverde said.

Second-placed Barcelona lost 4-2 away Atletico Madrid last weekend to slip five points behind their arch-rivals.

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Depth will be the key

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld insists the Bundesliga leaders must use their strength in depth at home to Karlsruhe on Saturday if they want to tighten their stranglehold on the title.

No sentiments from Kahn

Football

AFP, Berlin

Never one for sentimentality, Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn will expect nothing less than three points on Saturday when his side faces Karlsruhe, the club where he began his career.

struggling with a groin strain and midfielder Mark van Bommel is still suspended.

"It's necessary to conserve some energy so that the team does not blow up in April," said Hitzfeld - who is on the verge of his 150th league win - when asked about leaving Kahn and Jansen behind.

"We always try and play our best team at all times so we have to use the resources we have.

"It's not just about the 11 players on the park, but the full squad and the 15 or 16 who may be involved on match day."

The clash of the round is on Saturday in Stuttgart where the defending champions take on second-placed Bremen.

Werder's coach Thomas Schaaf is

FIXTURES

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without suspended star Diego, while Germany midfielder Torsten Frings is still some way from a full recovery from his knee injury.

Stuttgart are ninth in the table and suffered the humiliation of a defeat by second-division strugglers Carl Zeiss Jena in the German Cup ten days ago.

Having lost all bar one of their Champions League group stage games, Stuttgart were dumped out of the German Cup and coach Armin Veh admits he would be happy "just to finish fifth in the league."

After Wednesday's Champions League heroics to reach the quarterfinals for the first time in their history by beating Porto 4-1 on penalties, Schalke 04 are desperate to break their run of three straight league defeats.

And under-fire coach Mirko Slomka will have some of the pressure taken off him if his side can win away at strugglers Bielefeld.

On Sunday, third-placed Hamburg will be looking to inflict more misery on relegation-threatened Nuremberg, while fourth-placed Bayer Leverkusen will have to beat Hannover at home to stay in the race for the Champions League places.

Christmas party early and ignored his duty to make the traditional captain's speech.

And he had no qualms about criticising the team's stars - France's Franck Ribery and Italy's Luca Toni - when he felt their performances last autumn were inconsistent.

As a consequence, he was fined and suspended for the last game of 2007.

The absence of the Argentina international, who has lifted the side since returning from a similar injury in January, will deprive coach Frank Rijkaard of his most effective player at opening up opposition defences.

"Messi's absence leaves a big gap. He is unique and his abilities are above and beyond the rest," Barcelona's Iceland forward Eidur Gudjohnsen said.

Barca face high-flying Villarreal at the Nou Camp on Sunday, who are seven points behind them in third place. Like Espanyol, Manuel Pellegrini's side have already inflicted a defeat on their hosts, having thumped Barca 3-1 back in October.

Elsewhere, Real Zaragoza's fourth coach of the season, Manolo Villanova, will be looking for an immediate reaction from his relegation-threatened side when he takes charge for his first game at home to fourth-placed Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

Zaragoza were expected to be challenging for a Champions League place this season, but are only kept out of the relegation places by goal difference after a run of four successive defeats.

League on Wednesday, visit Napoli on Sunday (1400) well aware of how difficult it is to play at the imposing San Paolo.

Promoted Napoli are 11th after an inconsistent season but have beaten Inter and Juventus among others at home while they drew 4-4 at Roma in a great game in October.

Third-placed Juventus are seven points behind Roma and one above Fiorentina, who beat them 3-2 in Turin last weekend.

Juve visit Genoa in Sunday's late game (1930) without the suspended Pavel Nedved while Fiorentina will again be without injured striker Adrian Mutu for their trip to Siena.

AC Milan in fifth must forget Tuesday's Champions League elimination by Arsenal when they travel to struggling Empoli, who won 1-0 at San Siro in October.

Seventh-placed Sampdoria begin life without in-form forward Antonio Cassano with Sunday's visit to Parma. The on-loan Real Madrid player has been banned for five games for abusing the referee after being sent off last week against Torino.

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