

Nistelrooy has ankle op

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy underwent surgery Wednesday to repair an ankle injury and could be out of action for six weeks, the club announced.

Van Nistelrooy "today underwent an exploratory arthroscopic operation on his right ankle due to the chronic synovitis which he is suffering," Real said in a statement on its website.

It said the operation, which took place in Amsterdam, was successful. Real said the striker may be out of action for the next six weeks, but could be fit in time for the club's home match with rivals Barcelona on May 7.

The Dutchman, league top scorer last season, has not played for almost a month already.

This season van Nistelrooy has hit a dozen league goals, but has not found the target since January 20. Raul is the club's top marksman this season with 13 in La Liga.

Despite a weekend loss to La Coruna, the meringues, who are defending champions, have a seven-point lead over second-placed Barcelona.

Carquiefou shock Marseille

AFP, Paris

Amateur side Carquiefou pulled off one of the biggest upsets in French Cup history late Wednesday by defeating mighty Marseille 1-0 to reach the quarterfinals.

Playing in Nantes' Beaujoire stadium as their own ground was too small, the winning goal came from veteran Senegalese international Papa N'Doye after just seven minutes.

Marseille, who crashed out of the UEFA Cup in St Petersburg last week, besieged the minnows' goal for the rest of the game but were unable to get the equaliser that would have saved them from humiliation.

The fifth division side reached the quarterfinals for the first time in their history having previously seen off second division Gueugnon and first division high-fliers Nancy to get to the last 16.

"It's just unbelievable - a crazy dream," N'Doye said.

"When I saw I had the goal at my mercy, I just told myself to go for it and afterwards I didn't know what to do."

The defeat leaves Marseille with the sole consolation that they can still secure a Champions League slot for next year.

Maria storms through

AFP, Indian Wells

Australian Open champion Maria Sharapova ended Daniela Hantuchova's hopes of a second straight Pacific Life Open title Wednesday with a straight-sets quarterfinal victory.

Sharapova, seeded fourth, shrugged off a slow start to post a 7-6 (7/2) 6-1 victory over the fifth-seeded Slovakian, booking a semifinal meeting with second-seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova in the 5.7 million-dollar WTA and ATP Masters Series event.

Sharapova also preserved her perfect 2008 record, taking her match winning streak to 18-0. The impressive run includes her Australian Open triumph in January and a victory at Doha.

"The first set I was playing like I didn't belong on that court," said Sharapova, who had to claw her way out of a 2-5 hole. "My level was so low in that first set."

"She had that first set in her hands, and she didn't take it," Sharapova said, adding that her ability to fight back buoyed her in the second set.

"The second set was probably the best that I've played this tournament," she said.

Hantuchova, who has won two of her three WTA Tour titles here starting with her first title in 2002, had said before the match that she considered the stadium court here her home.

"Obviously, I feel like it's my tournament, so I'm very disappointed," she said. "I had my chances and I didn't take them today. I feel like I lost my concentration in that first set and she took advantage of that. But she's playing very well, hasn't lost this season."

Kuznetsova, runner-up to Hantuchova last year, defeated Agnieszka Radwanska 6-2, 6-4, gaining a measure of revenge for her third-round loss to the Pole at the Australian Open.

"It was a good win for me after playing her in Australian Open," said Kuznetsova. "I was more dictating my game, I was more focused and calm."

The remaining quarterfinals were scheduled for Thursday, when top-seeded Serbian Ana Ivanovic took on Russian Vera Zvonareva and third-seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic met American Lindsay Davenport.



Chelsea winger Joe Cole (R) evades a sliding tackle by Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Steed Malbranque during their Premiership match at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

Rome coloured blue

AFP, Rome

AS Roma's Serie A title hopes suffered a cruel blow as Valon Behrami scored an injury time winner to give Lazio a 3-2 victory in the Rome derby at the Stadio Olimpico on Wednesday.

Second-placed Roma were hoping to capitalise on Inter Milan's 1-1 draw at Genoa earlier in the day but instead dropped to seven points behind the leaders.

AC Milan's hopes of securing Champions League football next season took a hit as they crashed 2-1 at home to 10-man Sampdoria.

Fifth-placed Milan's only saving grace was a 2-0 defeat for fourth-placed Fiorentina at Napoli, leaving the gap between the pair in the race for Champions League football pegged at four points.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti summed up the day's football.

"It's a day of regret for all the teams," he told Sky Sport. "For us, for Fiorentina and also for Juventus (who drew 0-0 at Empoli) who could have put a foot in next season's Champions League."

"But also for Roma who were dreaming of closing in on Inter. In fact, tonight, only the nerazzurri (Inter) are smiling."

In a thrilling match in Rome, the

nominal visitors Roma took the lead in bizarre fashion on the half hour as Bahrami's clearance cannoned off Rodrigo Tadel's shoulder and rebounded into the goal.

Lazio were level a minute before half time through Macedonia striker Goran Pandev and a Tommaso Rocchi penalty just before the hour mark after Juan was adjudged to have brought down Rolando Bianchi in the box.

Simone Perrotta restored parity just minutes later but Behrami turned from villain to hero in injury time to volley home from close range.

Roma, who were the form team in the league coming into the match, now have only nine matches left to try to close the seven-point gap on Inter, who are struggling having won only two of their last eight games.

The champions were also reduced to 10 men for the seventh time since the league resumed in January.

Inter took an early lead when Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic escaped down the left and put a cross on a plate for his Honduran strike-partner David Suazo to shoot home.

Inter's cause wasn't helped when young Portuguese midfielder Vitor Pele was sent-off on the half hour mark for a second booking, although it looked harsh.

Genoa laid siege to the Inter defence which finally cracked five minutes from time as Julio Cesar pushed out a cross only for Marco Burriello, now Serie A's top goalscorer on 17 goals, to fire home an acrobatic volley.

At the San Siro, Milan's turbulent season took a down-turn as world player of the year Kaka was taken off injured after less than 10 minutes.

Cristian Maggio prodded home for Samp when a scuffed shot-coming-cross from Paolo Sammarco found him unmarked six yards out on 12 minutes.

On 25 minutes, things got worse for Milan as Gennaro Delvecchio finished off a sweeping Samp move that started on their own box when a Clarence Seedorf back-heel failed to find it's target.

The move was helped by some woeful defending from Kakha Kaladze and Massimo Ambrosini, culminating in Delvecchio firing home off Zeljko Kalac's legs, although the Australian goalkeeper probably should have done better.

Milan's goal was fashioned by two 18-year-olds with Brazilian Pato crossing for Alberto Paloschi to head home in a crowded box. Samp had Stefano Lucchini sent off in injury time.

Fiorentina failed to capitalise on Milan's slip as they went down at Napoli, with Ezequiel Lavazzi scoring both goals.

Nadal avenges defeat

AFP, Indian Wells

Rafael Nadal eked out a victory over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga on Wednesday, avenging an Australian Open defeat and reaching the quarterfinals of the Pacific Life Open.

Nadal, the men's defending champion and second seed at the 5.7 million-dollar WTA and ATP Masters Series event, defeated France's Tsonga 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, rallying from a 2-5 deficit in the third set to snatch the win.

"The important thing is to be there all the time, to believe in the victory," said Nadal, who has held the world number two ranking for 139 straight weeks - all behind Swiss Roger Federer.

Federer, in search of his first tournament title of 2008, punched his quarterfinal ticket with relative ease, defeating Croatian Ivan Ljubicic 6-3, 6-4.

But the drama occurred earlier in the day as Tsonga tried to reprise his stunning semifinal win over Nadal at the Australian Open, where his runner-up finish catapulted him from 38th to 18th in the rankings.

Tsonga, now ranked 17th in the world, lost his only other meeting with Nadal, at the US Open last September. But he appeared poised for victory in the rubber match when he broke Nadal for a 4-2 lead in the third set, then held for

5-2.

But he was broken himself as he served for the match at 5-3, his deep forehand attempt missing wide on break point.

Two games later he dropped his serve again to hand Nadal a 6-5 lead, and the Spaniard duly served out the match.

Both players said the contest differed greatly from their Melbourne match, which Tsonga won in straight sets.

The slower hard court of Indian Wells played to Nadal's strengths, while Tsonga was more erratic. The

Frenchan's big serve faded as the match wore on, with none of his 12 aces coming in the third set.

"It was not the same Jo," Tsonga said. "I'm not at my best, but today I fought. I'm not that far away, so that's really a positive point."

Nadal downplayed the revenge aspect of the match.

"It's always important to beat a player that beat me the last time," he said. "But it's not revenge."

More important, Nadal said, was to pull out a match he came so close to losing.



Russian star Maria Sharapova exults after her win over Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova during their Pacific Life Open match at Indian Wells on Wednesday.

It's a recall for Beckham

AFP, London

David Beckham was recalled to the England squad on Thursday, putting the midfielder on track to win his 100th cap in next week's friendly against France in Paris next week.

Head coach Fabio Capello has also recalled Arsenal teenager Theo Walcott, nearly two years after he won his one and only cap as England's youngest ever player, and handed Middlesbrough defender David Wheeler a first international call-up.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: David James (Portsmouth), Scott Carson (Aston Villa), Chris Kirkland (Wigan)

Defenders: Wayne Bridge (Chelsea), Ashley Cole (Chelsea), Glen Johnson (Portsmouth), John Terry (Chelsea), Wes Brown (Man Utd), Joleon Lescott (Everton), Rio Ferdinand (Man Utd), David Wheeler (Middlesbrough), Jonathan Woodgate (Tottenham), Matthew Upson (West Ham)

Midfielders: Gareth Barry (Aston Villa), Ashley Young (Aston Villa), David Bentley (Blackburn), Joe Cole (Chelsea), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Chelsea), David Beckham (Los Angeles Galaxy/USA), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Owen Hargreaves (Man Utd), Stewart Downing (Middlesbrough), Jermaine Jenas (Tottenham)

Forwards: Theo Walcott (Arsenal), Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa), Peter Crouch (Liverpool), Wayne Rooney (Man Utd), Michael Owen (Newcastle), Jermain Defoe (Portsmouth)

Thriller at the Lane

AFP, London

Chelsea lost ground in the Premier League title race as Arsenal's side blew the lead three times in a dramatic 4-4 draw at Tottenham on Wednesday.

The Blues had only themselves to blame for failing to keep pace with leaders Manchester United after leading 3-1 and then 4-3 with five minutes to play in one of the games of the season at White Hart Lane.

Didier Drogha opened the scoring early on only for Jonathan Woodgate to equalise. Michael Essien and Joe Cole put Chelsea in charge but Dimitar Berbatov and Tom Huddlestone levelled for Spurs.

Cole's second goal looked to have won it but there was a sting in the tail when Robbie Keane equalised two minutes from full-time.

Instead of sitting level with Arsenal and within touching distance of United, Grant's team are now five points off top-spot and two behind Arsenal, who they face on Sunday. This could be the night Chelsea regret most if they don't reclaim the title.

Grant said: "It's very disappointing. One of our strengths is we defend well against corners and free-kicks but in the last two games Spurs scored five goals from set-pieces. I don't know how to explain this."

"We wanted three points but we are still in the race and we will continue fighting like we did before."

Juande Ramos was more concerned with Ashley Cole's nasty tackle on Alan Hutton and the referee decided it was a yellow card but we've seen tackles that were much less serious given red cards."

Memories of their League Cup final defeat to Spurs were still raw for Chelsea but the chance to maintain their pursuit of the title was more important than settling old scores.

They got the perfect start as Drogha opened the scoring after three minutes.

John Terry was the unlikely provider as the Chelsea defender looped a perfect cross to the far post, where Drogha had space to direct his header back past Paul Robinson into the net.

It was an electrifying start by the Blues. Joe Cole had the ball in the net again moments later, but this time it didn't count as the England winger strayed offside before sliding in the rebound from Drogha's shot.

Just as Chelsea were beginning to play with a swagger, Spurs levelled in a manner that was painfully familiar for the visitors.

Woodgate had won the League Cup with his first goal for the club and he tormented Chelsea once more. In the 12th minute, Jermaine Jenas curled over a free-kick and Woodgate rose above Drogha to power home a close-range header.

But Chelsea hit straight back. Cole's penetrating run in the 20th minute took him towards the Spurs penalty area and he squeezed a pass through to Essien, who cleverly lifted his shot over Robinson to restore the lead.

The temperature of an already fiery clash rose when Cole caught Hutton with a nasty lunge. The tackle drew an angry response from both benches, with Spurs

demanding a red card, while Grant had to be restrained after trying to berate Hutton for exaggerating the foul.

Referee Mike Riley eventually booked Cole but the argument was still continuing as the players went down the tunnel at the break.

It would have been easy for Chelsea to lose their focus. To their credit they emerged after half-time with renewed vigour and took the first chance that came their way in the 52nd minute.

When Claude Makelele's pass found Joe Cole on the edge of the penalty area the England winger still had plenty of work to do. He did it with aplomb, holding off Pascal Chimbonda before scoring with a shot which crept in over Robinson.

Tottenham have little to play for and could easily have thrown in the towel. Instead they reduced the deficit nine minutes later when Berbatov looped a header over Carlo Cudicini from Keane's corner.

Grant's side were creaking now and they were undone by a set-piece for the third time as Spurs levelled in the 75th minute. Keane's corner flashed across goal to Huddlestone and he lashed a superb strike past Cudicini.

Incredibly that wasn't the end of the drama. With 10 minutes to go Joe Cole skipped past Chimbonda and calmly buried his shot into the roof of the net.

Still Spurs refused to accept defeat and Keane broke Chelsea's hearts in the 88th minute when he beat Cudicini with a brilliant curling shot from 25 yards.

Berbatov should have completed a remarkable encounter in stoppage time but Cudicini somehow kept out his powerful shot.

Klose propels Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Miroslav Klose scored his 20th goal for Bayern Munich to book his side's place in next month's German Cup final after Wednesday night's 2-0 semifinal win over VfL Wolfsburg.

Since his switch to Munich from Werder Bremen last summer, Klose now has ten Bundesliga goals to his name, plus five in both the UEFA Cup and German Cup - but still lags behind top-scorer Luca Toni who has 24 goals for Bayern this season.

Klose, 29, added Bayern's second from close-range in the 66th minute after French midfielder Franck Ribery had broken the dead-lock on the hour mark to put Bayern just one win away from lifting the cup for the 14th time.

The top scorer at the 2006 World Cup, Klose is set to shine in June's Euro 2008 tournament as his side booked their final spot against Borussia Dortmund on Saturday April 19 in Berlin with a solid team performance.

"The team played very well from the first to last minute," said Bayern manager Uli Hoeness after the final whistle.

"It will be a great experience to face our old cup rivals in the final again."

The semifinal win was good news for Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld as his side bounced back after their UEFA Cup defeat by Anderlecht the week before and the humiliation of the 2-0 league defeat at strugglers Energie Cottbus last weekend.

There were changes after the Cottbus debacle with Italian World Cup winner Toni rested and German striker Lukas Podolski given his chance up front alongside Klose up front.

Bayern got off to a bright start as early as the second minute when Ribery found himself behind the Wolfsburg defence, but his header trickled wide.

Both Klose and Podolski squandered chances early on, but Ribery got the all important breakthrough just before the hour mark.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Loew calls back Huth

AFP, Berlin

German head coach Joachim Loew on Thursday recalled Middlesbrough defender Robert Huth for next Wednesday's Euro 2008 warm-up friendly against Switzerland in Basel.

The 24-year-old, who has won 17 caps for Germany, last played for his country in the 2006 World Cup group stage 3-0 win over Ecuador but was blighted with injury last year.

The 21-man squad also includes Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack, who spent most of last year suffering from an ankle injury, but captained the side in the 3-0 friendly win over Austria in Vienna early last month.

Loew has named three goalkeepers as his first-choice shot-stopper Jens Lehmann from Arsenal alongside Valencia's Timo Hildebrand and Hannover's Robert Enke.

Three defenders missing from the squad for the win in Vienna - Hertha Berlin's Arne Friedrich, Werder Bremen's Clemens Fritz

Loew calls back Huth

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Marcell Jansen - are back in the side.

There is a huge amount of competition up front with Bayer

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Robert Enke (Hanover), Timo Hildebrand (Valencia/ESP), Jens Lehmann (Arsenal/ENG)

Defenders: Arne Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Robert Huth (Middlesbrough/ENG), Marcell Jansen (Bayer Munich/GER), Philipp Lahm (Bayer Munich/GER), Per Meretesacker (Werder Bremen), Heiko Westermann (Schalke 04)

Midfielders: Michael Ballack (Chelsea/ENG), Clemens Fritz (Werder Bremen), Thomas Hitzlsperger (Stuttgart), Simon Rolfes (Bayer Leverkusen), Bernd Schneider (Bayer Leverkusen), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Piotr Trochowski (Hamburg)

Forwards: Mario Gomez (Stuttgart), Stefan Kießling (Bayer Leverkusen), Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich), Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke 04), Lukas Podolski (Bayer Munich)

France name four rookies

AFP, Paris

French coach Raymond Domenech has called up four new faces into his 39-strong squad for full and A Internationals against England and Mali next week.

Lyon midfielder Mathieu Bodmer, exciting Marseille striker Mathieu Valbuena, and defenders Mathieu Delpierre (Stuttgart) and Adil Rami (Lille) all make the enlarged squad for the March 25 and 26 games at Stade Charley and the Stade de France respectively.

The games offer the last chance for players to impress on the international stage before the squad announcement for Euro 2008 in early May.

Two notable omissions were those of Bayern Munich defender Willy Sagnol, who was on the bench in Saturday Bundesliga action but whom Domenech described as injured, and Juventus striker David Trezeguet.

Trezeguet, who has winners medals from the 1998 World Cup and

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4