

## Henry losing scoring touch

REUTERS, Paris

Thierry Henry fears his scoring instincts have been dulled by playing on the left wing instead of centre forward at Barcelona.

"Honestly, it can be a problem," Henry told French sports daily L'Equipe in an interview on Friday.

"When (France) played in Spain in February, I was lost up front, I didn't know where to run. My reflexes in front of goal are not what they used to be.

"Hopefully, I will play up front again with France before the Euro (2008) finals," he said.

Henry became France's all-time top scorer in October and has netted 44 goals in 98 international matches.

He remains coach Raymond Domenech's first choice for the Euro 2008 finals in June despite competition from Lyon's Karim Benzema and a resurgent Nicolas Anelka.

The former Arsenal forward joined Barcelona last year but has failed to live up to expectations from fans and media.

"You can't compare with what I used to do with Arsenal. It is impossible," Henry told L'Equipe.

"Here, I am the guy who plays on the left, only the guy who plays on the left. Once again, you can't score as many goals whether you play in the box or, like I do, you start running 60 metres from goal.

"I have never run so much in my whole career."

## Toni saves the day

AFP, Paris



Getafe.

The Italian World Cup winner's late extra time double in this quarter-final second leg left Bayern and Getafe all square at 4-4 on aggregate with the German giants going through on away goals.

Ottmar Hitzfeld's men will face Zenit St Petersburg in the last four after the Russians overcame Bayer Leverkusen 4-2 on aggregate, despite a 1-0 second leg reverse.

In Portugal Scottish heavyweights Rangers stunned Sporting Lisbon with a 2-0 victory to earn a last four match up against Fiorentina, who beat PSV Eindhoven 2-0 for a 3-1 aggregate success.

French striker Jean-Claude Darcheville put Rangers ahead during the run of play in the 60th minute and in injury time substitute Steven Whittaker scored a brilliant second to clinch the historic victory.

Rangers have never reached this stage in the competition before but their success came at a price.

Captain Barry Ferguson will sit out the first leg of the semi final after receiving his second yellow of the competition. And Kevin

Thomson will also miss out after he too picked up another caution for a late challenge.

But at the end of the match Rangers manager Walter Smith was in no mood for negative thoughts.

He said: "Obviously we're delighted to be in the semi-finals. We worked very hard and played really well right from the off.

"I always thought we looked as we could get that killer pass which could give us a goal but we never quite got there.

"Thankfully eventually we did get one to get the goal and then it was a terrific run by Steven for the second goal.

Over in Madrid Getafe took Bayern Munich to the wire despite losing the aptly named Ruben de la Red to a red card in the sixth minute.

Cosmin Contra's late away goal for Getafe for a 1-1 first leg tie in Germany last week gave the Spaniards hope of adding Bayern to a list of victims this season that includes Anderlecht, AEK Athens and Tottenham.

Contra it was who put Getafe 1-0 up on the night in the 44th minute, with Bayern's France international Franck Ribery securing an 89th minute equaliser to force extra time.

Getafe stunned Bayern when play resumed with midfielder Casquero and striker Braulio scoring in the 91st and 93rd minutes.

Toni though was to have the last word, or two as it turned out, as he first pounced on a mistake by Pato and then headed Jose Ernesto Sosa's cross past the Getafe keeper.

Hitzfeld could scarcely believe his eyes.

"To come back after letting in two goals in two minutes of extra time is exceptional! It shows the mental strength of this team.

"We tried to make use of our numerical strength but we made too many mistakes.

"We'll have to raise our game considerably on this performance in the semi-finals."

Zenit's 4-1 first leg stroll rendered academic the only goal scored by Leverkusen's Russian star Dimitri Bulynin on 18 minutes.

Leverkusen keeper Rene Adler saved a late spotkick from the hosts' Anatoli Timoshchuk to give the Germans the win on the night but it was not enough to make up for their home hammering as Dutch coach Dick Advocaat steered Zenit through.

Zenit's Dutch coach Dick Advocaat hailed a "historic moment" for the club.

"Fully deserved, I must say," he said.

"We didn't play well in the first half and looked nervous. Leverkusen outplayed us in fact, and we were lucky to stay only one goal down by half-time. But we were a better team after the break and I feel we deserved a draw.

"It is too early to think about winning the UEFA Cup but we definitely have a chance. At the moment, though, I'm just pleased to be in the semi-finals."

Leverkusen coach Michael Skibbe reflected: "They fully deserved to go through. At the same time I'm really pleased we were able to win today to redeem ourselves for a dreadful performance in the first leg."



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich striker Luca Toni (C) silences the home crowd after scoring their third goal against Getafe during the UEFA Cup quarterfinal match at the Alfonso Perez Stadium on Thursday.

## Rijkaard under strain

AFP, Madrid



the Champions League semi-finals.

Barcelona will face Manchester United for a place in this season's Champions League final but that has not appeased the club's demanding fans, who have watched their team fall seven points behind Real Madrid in the title race.

"I realise the jeers were aimed at me but I make my changes based on my ideas," said Rijkaard. "My job is just that and I take my own decisions."

Barcelona, who will be without the injured Andres Iniesta, travel to struggling Recreativo Huelva on Saturday needing three points to put pressure back on Real.

Recreativo will not lack motivation with the club a mere three points clear of the drop with just seven games left.

"We want to win the seven games we have left," said Yaya Toure.

"We have had a lot of bad luck this season and we have not won a lot of matches due to a lack of efficiency but we are all united towards the same goal."

Real Madrid players have to watch the Champions League on the TV - after being eliminated by Roma - but are in a strong position

in the league and will be well rested for Sunday's home match against Real Murcia.

"The league is a different competition because you can make a mistake and rectify it but in the Champions League there is no room for error," explained Brazilian Julio Baptista.

"I am happy with our league position and we have to continue showing that we want to win the title again."

Real have slipped up several times since the turn of the year but their mistakes have gone unpunished with Barcelona unable to capitalise.

Murcia are seven points from safety but new coach Javier Clemente has started a mini-revival to give them hope of staying up.

Villarreal are also seven points behind Real although their management and playing staff have insisted that beating Barca into second is the main objective.

Villarreal travel to Almeria on Sunday and defender Santi Cazorla hopes Barca's Champions League run can benefit them.

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Valencia v Racing Santander (1900 GMT), Recreativo Huelva v Barcelona (2100 GMT)

**Sunday**  
(all 1600 GMT unless stated)  
Valladolid v Atletico Madrid, Real Betis v Levante, Getafe v Real Zaragoza, Espanyol v Osasuna, Deportivo La Coruna v Athletic Bilbao, Mallorca v Sevilla, Real Madrid v Real Murcia (1800 GMT), Almeria v Villarreal (2000 GMT)

## Bayern, Dortmund double-header

AFP, Berlin



of Sunday's Bundesliga clash.

Bayern face Dortmund on Sunday in the league at Munich's Allianz Arena before the sides meet six days later on April 19 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium to contest the German Cup final with a UEFA Cup place at stake.

With just seven Bundesliga rounds left, Bayern are nine points clear at the top of the table and their march to their 21st crown as German champions looks unstoppable.

So far only VfB Stuttgart and Energie Cottbus have claimed their scalp in the league and Doll insists his side are capable of becoming the third side to lower Bayern's colours this season.

"At this stage of the season, teams don't have anything left to hide from each other," said Doll on the Dortmund website.

"We want an away win in Munich and then a 1-0 win over Bayern to reach the UEFA Cup next year."

Bayern go in to the weekend having booked their place in the UEFA Cup semi-finals with an away goals success over Spanish side Getafe.

Meanwhile Schalke 04, second in the league, have no time to lick their wounds after their Champions League exit in Barcelona on Wednesday when they take on fourth-placed Werder Bremen in Saturday's league clash.

Bremen are waiting on the fitness of Germany midfielder Torsten Frings who is recovering from a third injury to his right knee this season and fighting to regain his fitness with Euro 2008 less than sixty days away.

Frings, 31, missed training this week with a toe injury, but says he is slowly recapturing his form.

"I think I still need a few more games to get into top form and after such a long time away, it will take

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Werder Bremen v Schalke 04, VfL Bochum v Hertha Berlin, Energie Cottbus v Arminia Bielefeld, Hannover 96 v Eintracht Frankfurt, Karlsruhe v Hansa Rostock, Hamburg v Duisburg

**Sunday**  
Bayer Leverkusen v VfB Stuttgart, Bayern Munich v Borussia Dortmund

time," said Frings.

After they were beaten 1-0 at VfB Stuttgart last weekend, Hamburg have a chance to re-claim second in the league when they take on bottom side Duisburg on Saturday.

And having slid towards the relegation zone, Hertha Berlin need a win at VfL Bochum who are also hovering just above the relegation dog-fight.

Berlin's top-scorer Marko Pantelic who has 11 league goals is out with a calf injury and Brazilian striker Andre Lima will take his place.

With three wins in their last four games, Energie Cottbus have dragged themselves out of the bottom three but have a tough battle against Arminia Bielefeld who are also just below them in the relegation zone.

Bielefeld have been beaten just once in the last six games and are fighting hard to stay up.

Nuremberg will be looking to bounce back from the 50,000 euro fine they were handed by the German Football Federation (DFB) this week when they take on VfL Wolfsburg on Friday night.

After 3-1 win at Eintracht Frankfurt last week was stopped for 20 minutes after some visiting fans threw flares onto the pitch and Nuremberg were fined by the DFB, but have a tough task at home to inform VfL Wolfsburg.

## Messi back for Barca

REUTERS, Madrid

Argentina forward Lionel Messi returned to the Barcelona squad on Friday for the trip to face Recreativo Huelva in the Primera Liga this weekend.

The 20-year-old tore a muscle in his left thigh at the beginning of March during the 1-0 Champions League win over Celtic at the Nou Camp.

The return will be a boost to Frank Rijkaard's side, who are third in the standings, as they seek to close the seven-point gap on leaders Real Madrid, with seven games left. Barca have only won once in their last six outings.

It also puts Messi back in the reckoning for the Champions League semi-finals against Manchester United later this month.

France striker Thierry Henry and youngster Bojan Krkic were left out suffering from knocks following the midweek win over Schalke 04. Spain midfielder Andres Iniesta is injured with a knee problem.

Barca play relegation-threatened Recre on Saturday.

## C'Ron leads PFA nominations

AFP, London

Cristiano Ronaldo has the chance to retain his English PFA Players' Player of the Year award after being named one of the six nominations for this season's prize on Friday.

Ronaldo's dazzling form for Manchester United has taken Sir Alex Ferguson's side to the top of the Premier League and into the Champions League semi-finals.

The Portugal winger won the prestigious award, voted for by his fellow players, in 2007 and has been nominated alongside Arsenal duo Cesc Fábregas and Emmanuel Adebayor, Liverpool pair Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres and Portsmouth goalkeeper David James.

Ronaldo, who has scored 37 goals in all competitions this season, is also up for the Young Player of the Year award. Torres and Fábregas have also received Young Player nominations, alongside Aston Villa pair Gabriel Agbonlahor and Ashley Young and Manchester City defender Micah Richards.

The stakes will be high all round with leaders Inter Milan hosting Champions League chasing Fiorentina while second-place AS Roma travel to in-form Udinese, seventh but only five points away from a top four spot.

Meanwhile in the game of the weekend in Turin, Juventus will continue their pursuit of second-placed Roma while Milan are desperate for a victory to try to snatch the final Champions League qualifying berth away from Fiorentina.

The big danger for Milan, though, is that they seem already to be looking ahead to next season - and which players they want to sign in the summer - whereas they risk missing out on Europe's top competition if they cannot find some late season form in their final six matches.

They don't just have to claw back four points on Fiorentina, they also need to stay ahead of Sampdoria, who they lead on goal difference and who travel to lowly Reggina on Sunday, and Udinese, just a point behind the reigning European champions.

What's more, Samp and

French midfielder Franck Ribery is an injury concern for Bayern Munich as the league leaders prepare to face Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga on Sunday.

Ribery, who scored in Bayern's incredible 3-3 UEFA Cup draw with Getafe in Spain on Thursday night which put them in the semi-finals, injured his right foot and faces a race against time to be fit for Sunday.

The Frenchman played the entire match in south Madrid, which was decided by Luca Toni's 120th minute header at the end of extra time, but was limping by the final whistle.

On his return to Munich on Friday, the club confirmed Ribery will be Bayern club doctor Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wohlfahrt.

## Make or break for Gunners

AFP, London



weekend when they face leaders Manchester United at Old Trafford.

The Gunners, looking to recover from the body blow of their Champions League exit at the hands of English rivals Liverpool on Tuesday, will kick-off six points behind champions United and only a win at the 'Theatre of Dreams' will keep them in with a chance of topping the table.

Arsenal are often portrayed as a sublimely gifted side but one lacking the grit of a champion team.

Critics point to their lack of English players saying, that for all the skill of their foreign stars, this leaves Arsenal dangerously deficient in traditional local virtues such as work-rate and stubborn determination.

However, that analysis ignores Arsenal's recent win at Bolton Wanderers where, belying their reputation as a 'soft' side away from the Emirates Stadium and one especially vulnerable 'up north, Gunners came from 2-0 and a man down to triumph 3-2.

Arsenal and Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor said the team would not lack resilience against United.

"The most important thing now is to stay focused on what we can achieve this season," he said. "We are still playing for the title and we

still believe we can win something at the end of the season."

Adebayor added Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger would have no trouble rousing his multi-national side for a match where they will be without French midfielder Mathieu Flamini, who sustained an ankle injury against Liverpool.

"He knows the words he will use so that we can come back on the pitch to be more successful and want more."

Reigning English champions United head into the match on the back of their Champions League success over Roma that set up a semi-final clash with Spanish giants Barcelona.

Unlike last season, where AC Milan ended United's European dream in the last four, Old Trafford supremo Sir Alex Ferguson is confident his side can triumph on two fronts this term.

"I think the energy of the team is far ahead of where it was a year ago," Ferguson said.

In-form strikers Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney are set to return against Arsenal after being rested in midweek.

Winning, however, may not be enough to keep Chelsea manager Avram Grant in his job. The Blues, at home to Wigan on Monday, are currently second, just three points behind United and are in the semi-finals of the Champions League after seeing off Fenerbahce.

But their Israeli manager has failed to capture the hearts of the London club's fans in the way that his charismatic predecessor Jose

Mourinho did and now it seems that the supporters' sentiments have found their way into the Stamford Bridge boardroom.

"I don't think the football is where we want to be, but everybody wants to improve," said Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon in a less than ringing endorsement of Grant's methods.

Everton will go level on points with fourth-placed Liverpool, their rivals for a Champions League place, ahead of their near neighbours' match against Blackburn on Sunday, if they beat Birmingham City on Saturday.

Victory for Birmingham would all but assure them of safety but the match at St Andrews was overshadowed Friday by the news that co-owner David Sullivan and managing director Karren Brady had been interviewed by police as part of an ongoing investigation into football corruption.

Off-field turmoil has been a

### FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

**Saturday**  
Birmingham v Everton, Bolton v West Ham, Derby v Aston Villa, Portsmouth v Newcastle (1615 GMT), Reading v Fulham, Sunderland v Manchester City, Tottenham v Middlesbrough

**Sunday**  
Liverpool v Blackburn (1230 GMT), Manchester United v Arsenal (1500 GMT)

**Monday**  
Chelsea v Wigan (1900 GMT)

feature of life at Liverpool this season and fans will be grateful for the distraction of a match after Tom Hicks, not content with falling out with American co-owner George Gillett, called Thursday for club chief executive Rick Parry to be sacked.

At the other end of the table second-bottom Fulham face fellow strugglers Reading desperate for points after defeat by Sunderland while already-relegated Derby are at home to Midlands rivals Aston Villa.

Bolton, four points adrift of safety, will fancy their chances at home to a West Ham side beaten by Portsmouth in midweek.

FA Cup finalists Pompey, who are sixth in the table, will look to keep pace with Everton when Newcastle come to Fratton Park for Saturday's late kick-off.

Croatia midfielder Niko Kranjcar, who scored their winner at Upton Park, believes the south coast club can still finish fifth and so qualify for the UEFA Cup without having to beat Championship Cardiff in next month's FA Cup final at Wembley.

"I really believe our squad is good enough to overcome Everton and we will certainly give it our best shot to finish fifth. We just aim to keep winning all our games," he said.

Sunderland can take a big step towards staying up at home to Manchester City while Tottenham take on fellow mid-table side Middlesbrough at White Hart Lane.

## A blockbuster weekend

AFP, Rome



programme.

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Udinese are two of the in-form teams of the moment as both are unbeaten in their last seven matches - with Sampdoria having won five to Udinese's four.

It's building up to be a dramatic finale, not just in the race for the title, where champions Inter have looked a bit more steady recently after a spell of only two victories in nine games.

Roma's elimination from the Champions League at the hands of Manchester United on Wednesday will allow them to concentrate on the league but they will probably need to win all their remaining games to overhaul the nerazzurri.

They need to rebound from the disappointment in Manchester but midfielder Daniele De Rossi, who missed a penalty at Old Trafford, believes they can.

"There's only one way to forget it: the league because Roma are very close to winning both at home and in Europe," he said.

But it is in Turin that the biggest waves could be made as a defeat for Milan could effectively end their hopes of sneaking into Europe's premier competition next season.

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Juventus v AC Milan, Palermo v Catania

**Sunday**  
Empoli v Parma, Genoa v Torino, Inter Milan v Fiorentina, Lazio v Siena, Livorno v Cagliari, Napoli v Atalanta, Reggina v Sampdoria, Udinese v Roma

## Cech returns to training

AFP, London

Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech is back in training after his horrific facial injury and waiting for the green light to return to action.

Cech needed 50 stitches in his chin and lip after an accidental training-ground collision with team-mate Tal Ben-Haim on Sunday, fuelling reports he would miss the rest of the season.

But the Czech international, who already wears headgear after suffering a fractured skull in 2006, believes he will be able to return sooner than expected if his latest injury can be protected.

Chelsea boss Avram Grant is desperate to have Cech back as soon as possible after Carlo Cudicini limped out of Tuesday's Champions League win against Fenerbahce, leaving Hilario as their only first senior keeper.

"I can still train. The problem is I cannot afford any contact so I can run, I can do some stuff in the gym and I am waiting for the solution from the surgeon to get me back on the field," Cech said.

"As soon as we can get the solution, hopefully there will be a chance for me to play. It looks much better, it feels much better and it is not that swollen. The recovery is going well at the moment."

"There are still plenty of games to play and I have been missing games for a long time and I can't wait to be back."