



Manchester United striker Carlos Tevez (C) scores the equalising goal with an acrobatic header against Blackburn Rovers during their Premiership encounter at Ewood Park in Blackburn on Saturday.

## Tevez rescues a vital point

AFP, London

Blackburn Rovers handed Chelsea a shock lifeline in the English Premier League title race by holding leaders Manchester United to a 1-1 draw on Saturday.

The champions were heading for defeat but Argentina striker Carlos Tevez rescued a precious point with just two minutes to go.

The result leaves United three points clear of the Blues ahead of their crunch clash at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge on April 26.

Liverpool prepared for the Champions League semifinals by winning 2-0 at Fulham, while Arsenal restored some pride, beating visitors Reading by the same scoreline.

Elsewhere in the fight to avoid relegation to the Championship, Bolton Wanderers hauled themselves out of the drop zone with a 1-0 win at Middlesbrough and Wigan drew 1-1 with Tottenham. West Ham beat visitors Derby 2-1.

United's lead at the top of the Premier League was cut to two points by Chelsea after the Blues won 1-0 away to Everton on

Thursday.

It seemed Paraguay striker Roque Santa Cruz had scored the winner with his 21st-minute effort at Ewood Park, before Tevez equalised.

Liverpool, with one eye on Tuesday's Champions League semifinal first leg at home to Chelsea, rested eight players at relegation-threatened Fulham but nonetheless claimed a 2-0 win.

Winger Jermaine Pennant scored in the 17th minute at Craven Cottage and England striker Peter Crouch completed the victory in the 70th.

Fourth-placed Liverpool need two more points to be certain of earning a Champions League qualifying place via the league, while Fulham are five points from safety with three games remaining.

The Cottagers' relegation fight rivals Bolton gave their chances of avoiding the drop a big boost with an impressive 1-0 win at Middlesbrough.

Gavin McCann, once capped for England, finished off a simple tap-in in the 61st minute at the Riverside Stadium.

Bolton are one point and two places above the drop zone. Third-placed Arsenal at least gave their fans something to cheer

with a 2-0 win over the Royals.

At Emirates Stadium, Emmanuel Adebayor scored in the 30th minute with an assured finish, before Gilberto fired in a deflected shot eight minutes later.

"We are all disappointed for the season, how it finished. I think we did pretty well all season but at the end it was disappointing," Gunners midfielder Francesc Fabregas told Sky Sports television.

"We needed a performance like this to try to finish as best we can. 'We don't want to always say 'next year, next year'. I think it is a mistake. We want to do it now."

Reading drop to one point and one place above the relegation zone, with the team below them, Birmingham City, having a game in hand.

Wigan Athletic were held to a 1-1 draw by visitors Tottenham Hotspur at the JJB Stadium, though the hosts could have done with a victory to quash their relegation fears.

Tottenham's Bulgaria striker Dimitar Berbatov, who could leave White Hart Lane once the season ends, scored in the sixth minute.

Emile Heskey scored a shock injury-time equaliser to earn Wigan a 1-1 draw at Chelsea on

Monday and it was the former England striker who equalised against Spurs, six minutes after Berbatov's opener.

The League Cup holders were unlucky not to get a first-half penalty when Latics captain Mario Melchiot pulled down Berbatov in the box.

West Ham beat rock-bottom visitors Derby County 2-1 at Upton Park.

The hosts' Bobby Zamora had not scored since April 21 last year but he headed in a 20th minute opener. Defender Tyrone Mears equalised in the 65th minute but Carlton Cole scored from two yards out 12 minutes later.

"The season has been one of frustration for everyone. It has been a catalogue of disasters," said West Ham boss Alan Curbishley.

Derby manager Paul Jewell said: "This season has been horrendous and there is no getting away from it. The only consistent thing about us is our inconsistency."

In Sunday's fixtures, Birmingham travel to city rivals Aston Villa, Newcastle host Sunderland in the north-east derby, while FA Cup finalists Portsmouth visit Manchester City in their quest for a UEFA Cup spot.

## Hosts draw Brazil

AFP, Beijing

Hosts China were drawn alongside Brazil in the men's Olympic football tournament on Sunday but avoided defending champions Argentina and European powerhouse Italy.

Also in Group C with China are former champions Belgium and Nigeria.

Argentina will be pleased with the way the draw here panned out for them, pitted in Group A with Olympic newcomers Ivory Coast, surprise European qualifiers Serbia, and Australia's Olyroos.

Group B comprises three-time bronze-medallists the Netherlands, the United States, Nigeria, and Asian stalwarts Japan, while Italy take on South Korea, Cameroon, and Honduras.

The top two in each group progress to the quarter-finals of the August 6-23 tournament that will be played in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenyang and Qinhuaangdao.

The women's competition, which features full-strength international squads, will be the biggest in history following a two-team increase to the field.

Brazil became the final qualifier when they beat Ghana 5-1 in a play-off match at Beijing's Workers' Stadium on Saturday.

The teams were split into three pools, with the top two teams in each and the top two third-placed teams moving to the knockout rounds.

China, a World Cup quarterfinalist last year, take on Canada, Argentina, and Sweden in Group A.

World Cup winners Germany will meet the team they beat to lift the cup last year, Brazil, in their group, with North Korea and Nigeria making up the numbers.

Group C sees former Olympic champions and one of the favourites in Beijing, Norway, up against defending champions United States, Japan and New Zealand.

## GROUPS

The draw made on Sunday for the men's football tournament at the Beijing Olympics. The top two teams in each group progress to the quarterfinals:

**Group A**  
Ivory Coast  
Serbia  
Argentina  
Australia  
**Group B**  
Netherlands  
USA  
Nigeria  
Japan  
**Group C**  
China  
Belgium  
New Zealand  
Brazil  
**Group D**  
South Korea  
Italy  
Cameroon  
Honduras

## Gerrard in doubt for Chelsea tie

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard has a neck injury and is a doubt for Tuesday's Champions League semifinal first-leg tie with Chelsea.

The 27-year-old midfielder missed the 2-0 Premier League win over Fulham on Saturday and coach Rafael Benitez is unsure if the England star will be fit to face the Blues at Anfield.

But the Spaniard did have some positive news on defender Sami Hyypia who should be fit to play despite being withdrawn at half-time after a clash of heads which left him feeling dizzy.

Benitez said: "I was talking with the physios today and he (Gerrard) is improving but it is still too soon to say if he will be fit for Chelsea."

"You always have to be careful with the neck. I think Hyypia will be okay - he felt a little bit dizzy after a knock to the head but I think it's okay now."

## Espanyol hold Barcelona

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's chances of winning the Spanish title looked doomed on Saturday after a 0-0 draw in the local derby with Espanyol.

"We haven't thrown in the towel but we need to win the next matches and I'm going to motivate them to win the next game," said Barca coach Frank Rijkaard.

Despite dominating the game for long periods, the Spanish giants failed to find the net in their Nou Camp stadium thanks to a combination of poor finishing and solid defending from Espanyol.

"It's a disappointment because we had chances, we didn't score but we also had some bad luck. But we did try everything we could to get a goal," added Rijkaard, whose men have drawn their last three league games.

Real Madrid now have an eight-point advantage over Barca at the top

## Villa crush Birmingham

AFP, Birmingham



Ashley Young was the inspiration for Aston Villa as they thrashed city rivals Birmingham 5-1 at Villa Park here on Sunday, leaving the visitors in dire relegation trouble.

Young provided a scintillating performance for the watching England manager Fabio Capello to contemplate as the striker made sure Blues boss Alex McLeish's first taste of the second city derby was a bitter defeat he will want to forget in a hurry.

Young scored twice and also played a part in two other goals for towering Norway striker John Carew before Gabriel Agbonlahor added a fifth 78 minutes in.

Finland striker Mikael Forsell scored in the 67th minute for Birmingham but it was no consolation as the Blues were sent spinning to their fourth successive defeat in this fixture and closer to relegation from the English Premier League at the home of their greatest rivals.

McLeish will not have suffered too many more embarrassing days as his side stayed third from bottom in the table and one point from safety.

Just two points from their last 10 games away from St Andrews indicates just why the Blues are in such dire straights at the wrong end of the table.

Villa have scored 14 goals in their last three victories and will travel to Goodison Park next Sunday in confident mood to face Everton in what will be a direct contest for a UEFA Cup place next season.

The Villains are three points behind the Toffees, who occupy fifth place in the table - good enough for a UEFA Cup berth.

The 115th Birmingham derby was nothing like as intense as the Old Firm arguments McLeish and Villa boss Martin O'Neill had when they were in charge of Scottish giants Rangers and Celtic respectively.

Birmingham were simply outclassed, out-thought and out-fought in an opening 45 minutes of Villa dominance.

Gareth Barry, playing in what could be his last second city derby, was infectious with his driving enthusiasm and could easily have had two goals himself before Villa finally made their superiority tell in the 28th minute.

Barry was involved again, with Liam Ridgwell failing to clear his cross adequately at the near post and when Juventus-bound Olof Mellberg returned the ball into the area, Young swept a powerful shot beyond goalkeeper Maik Taylor.

Birmingham had arrived at Villa Park with the knowledge of how to win there, having been successful in four of their previous six visits.

However, on this occasion they

simply collapsed without the fight McLeish had asked for prior to his first taste of this West Midlands derby.

Villa, filled with confidence, saw Carew add a second three minutes before half-time with a glancing header from Young's free-kick. Birmingham wilted and simply did not recover.

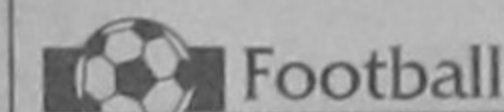
The damage limitation exercise lasted only eight minutes of the second period before Barry, latching on to Young's clever pass, defeated Ridgwell far too easily before providing Carew with the simplest of tap-ins from 10 yards, for his 12th goal of an increasingly productive season.

Birmingham simply could not handle Young and he collected his eighth goal of the season 10 minutes later when Taylor was only able to parry his initial shot back to him, following a devastating burst into the area and he succeeded at the second attempt from an acute angle.

Birmingham substitute Forsell had only been on the field for seven minutes when he rounded off some fine approach work by Gary McSheffrey and James McFadden to spoil Villa's attempt for a fourth successive clean sheet.

However, it was a minor irritation for O'Neill's men and Agbonlahor's solo effort rounded off a perfect day for the claret and blue half of the city.

## Toni double fires Bayern



AFP, Berlin

A Luca Toni double put Bayern Munich firmly on track for a treble this season as they clinched a 2-1 German Cup final success over Borussia Dortmund in front of 73,000 fans at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Saturday.

Toni, revisiting the venue where in 2006 he captured the World Cup with Italy, struck in the 11th minute after being fed the ball by Frank Ribery, the France international who had opposed his teammate in the World Cup final.

That goal appeared to have decided the affair only for Dortmund's Mladen Petric to snatch an injury time equaliser, to force extra time.

But Toni, who like Ribery joined Bayern last summer, had the last word when he grabbed the winner in the 103rd minute to hand coach Ottmar Hitzfeld and goalkeeper

Oliver Kahn the perfect end to their Cup careers.

"Obviously, leading the team out one last time here in Berlin is a tremendous farewell," said Hitzfeld.

"There's no chance to make up for losing a game like this, you can't come back again next year, so we had to win there or never."

"I'm overjoyed, because it was a dramatic game which had everything. Dortmund battled away and would equally have deserved to win. At the end of the day, we were the luckier of the teams," added Hitzfeld who previously had a seven-year spell as manager of Dortmund.

Bayern's win was the first leg of what they hope to be a treble.

They are sitting comfortable in the Bundesliga, 10 points clear of the chasing pack and face Saint Petersburg in the UEFA Cup semifinals.

And Toni warned: "Fantastic, cracking. Winning is always good. Now we'll try and win the title and go for the triple."

This was a final Cup appearance for Bayern talisman Kahn with the

goalkeeper retiring at the end of the season.

For him it was a sixth Cup success.

"I'm feeling a pleasant mixture of sadness and joy, because I know it was my last final, but I'm certainly enjoying it all at the moment," said Kahn.

"But this ominous 90th minute, it's been pursuing me for 20 years now. All the things I've experienced in the last minute, but after you've been through it so often, you become robust."

"After they equalised we still had another half-hour, and we had luck on our side. In a final like that, you need mentally strong players in the decisive situations, and a bit of luck on top."

Dortmund coach Thomas Doll was left to rue a missed opportunity which would have given a bright finish to the season for his team who are lying just 13th in the Bundesliga.

"Losing like that is bitter. We were close to winning it in extra-time. My players are very, very down," said Doll.



Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (R), his wife Wahiba Ribery and Italian striker Luca Toni (C) pose with the German Cup during the club party on Sunday. Bayern Munich defeated Borussia Dortmund 2-1 at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Saturday.

## Livorno dent Roma's hopes

AFP, Rome



Serie A bottom side Livorno dealt a potentially fatal blow to AS Roma's Serie A championship hopes by holding the title challengers to a 1-1 draw at the Stadio Olimpico on Saturday.

The result will have been all the harder to take for Roma with Francesco Totti suffering a serious knee injury which reports suggest could bring a premature end to the talismanic captain's season.

Roma went into this game aiming to close the gap on leaders Inter Milan to just one point and victory looked assured as their domination was finally rewarded when Mirko Vucinic's looping header put them into a 54th minute lead.

But gutsy Livorno, fighting for their top-flight lives, stunned the complacent capital side when Alessandro Diamanti's cannon ball curving left-footed freekick, awarded after a foul by Juan, flew past keeper Doni.

With only seven minutes left a frantic Roma went desperately close to finding the precious winner but despite on target attempts by Daniele De Rossi and Christian Panucci's injury time header Livorno's keeper Marco Amelia kept the hosts at bay.

Roma were forced to play the last hour of the game without Totti after he limped off the pitch having picked up an injury to his right knee.

Totti, who was replaced by Amantino Mancini, was taken to a nearby clinic for a scan with news agency ANSA suggesting he could be out for as long as five months.

With two vital points squandered Roma are now three adrift of Inter who can extend the gap to six points with success away to troubled Torino on Sunday.

"The disappointment is total," said Roma manager Luciano Spalletti.

"The team were in front, and they were worth the lead even if they weren't that dangerous in the first half."

"And then, at 1-1, they created three or four shots worthy of goals."

We should have been more aggressive. We've squandered an opportunity."

Roma defender Philippe Mexes added: "That's the way it goes. We're really disappointed because we didn't merit a result like that."

"To lead 1-0 is never enough. We

should have done better, regardless of the opposition."

"It's a great pity. The Scudetto is won also by beating smaller sides. And if we always produce a draw against them (this stalemate followed a draw away to Livorno earlier in the campaign) we can't think

about winning the title.

"And now, unfortunately, we have to wait on results elsewhere."

For Livorno, who had only mustered one draw (in 1933) and one win (in 1947) from their last 15 visits to the Stadio Olimpico, this unexpected point will give them renewed hope of beating the drop with four games of the season to go.

They jumped above fellow relegation strugglers Reggina and Empoli but could find themselves back at the bottom depending on results Sunday.

In Saturday's late game fourth-placed Fiorentina beat mid-table Palermo 1-0 courtesy of a fine 20 metre shot from Marco Donadel in the 29th minute.

## Totti undergoes knee operation

AFP, Rome

AS Roma captain Francesco Totti underwent a knee operation on Sunday to repair damage sustained during Saturday's disappointing 1-1 home draw against lowly Livorno.

Totti's season had already been declared as over after he suffered the injury, which saw him limp off during the first half on Saturday, and he is now expected to be out for four months, meaning he faces a race against time to be fit for the start of next season.

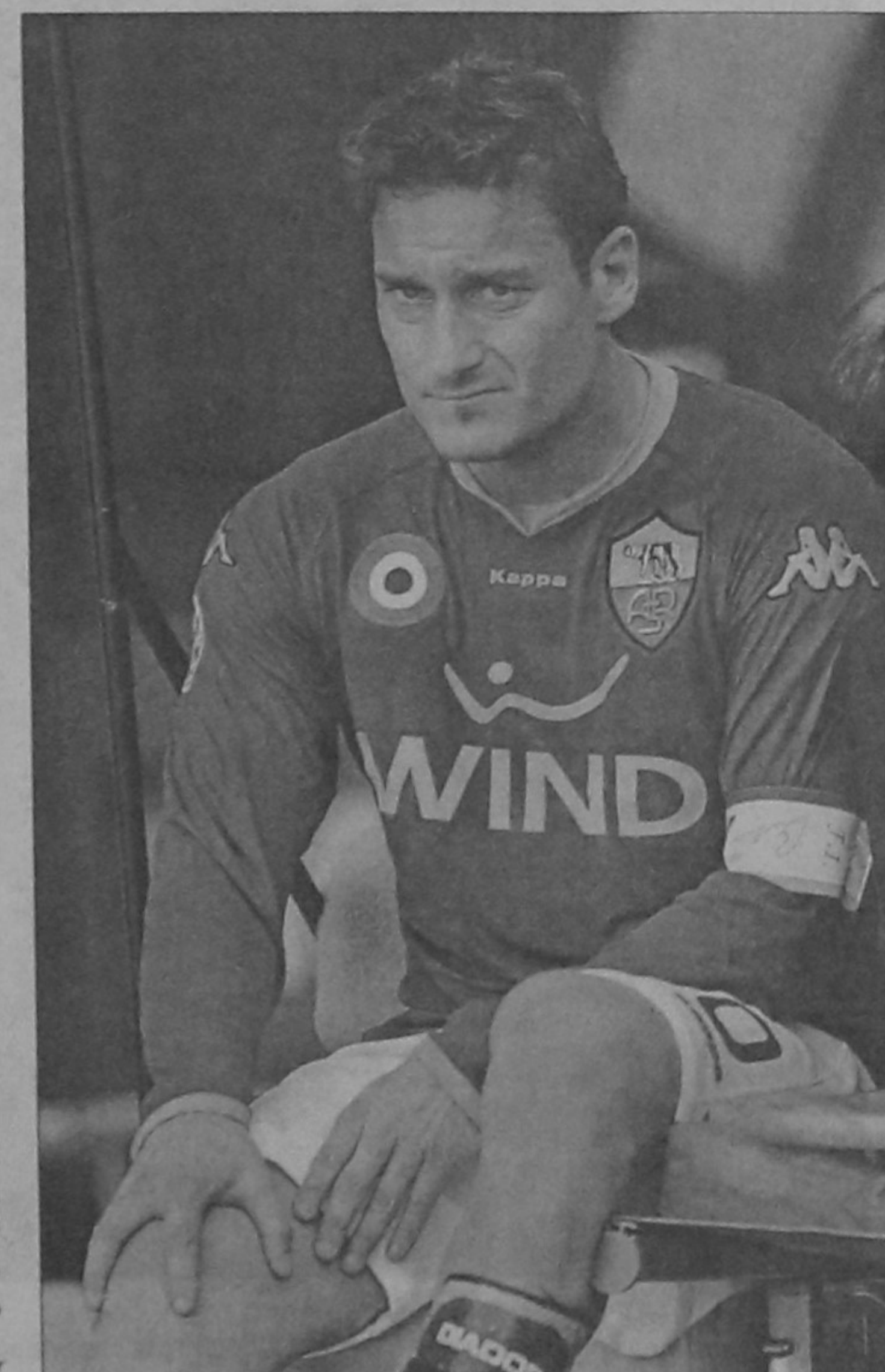
"After examining the player, professor Pierpaolo Mariani (Totti's surgeon) confirmed the primary diagnosis: that he has partially ruptured his cruciate knee ligament," said Roma club doctor Mario Brozzi in a statement.

"Roma have already had to deal with this kind of injury and we believe that four months is enough recovery time."

The 31-year-old Totti had vowed earlier in the day that he would come back stronger than ever.

He also explained how he felt in the moment he was injured.

"I was a little scared because I heard a crack. Even so, I've had worse happen to me," he said on Sunday morning.



Roma star Francesco Totti leaves the pitch holding his right knee after being injured during their Serie A match against Livorno at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday.