

Kovalainen wins maiden Grand Prix

AFP, Budapest

Finn Heikki Kovalainen secured his maiden Formula One motor racing victory in dramatic circumstances Sunday when he won the Hungarian Grand Prix for the McLaren Mercedes team.

The 26-year-old McLaren driver took full advantage when luckless Brazilian Felipe Massa pulled up and retired with three laps remaining after the engine on his Ferrari car blew up on the main straight.

As smoke billowed from his car, Massa slowed and stopped, gifting the quiet Nordic driver his first win in his first season with the McLaren team after spending his rookie year at Renault last season.

Massa's Ferrari team-mate, defending drivers world champion Kimi Raikkonen, came home third behind the amazing German Timo Glock who was second for Toyota just a fortnight after leaving the German Grand Prix in an ambulance following a big crash.

Two-times world champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso, the man who swapped seats with Kovalainen, was fourth for Renault ahead of championship leading Briton Lewis Hamilton in the second McLaren.

Hamilton, who started from pole ahead of Massa, was out-paced off the grid and passed at the opening corner. He ran second for a long period until a puncture after 41 of the 70 laps wrecked his hopes of completing a hat-trick of wins.

Massa led brilliantly until three laps from the finish when he was hit by misfortune and had to pull out leaving Kovalainen to grab the best result of his career.

The result left Hamilton five points ahead of Raikkonen in the drivers championship with Massa now eight points behind.

Real see off Hamburg

AFP, London

Real Madrid defeated Hamburg 2-1 in the Emirates Cup on Saturday then set their sights on completing a swoop for the German club's playmaker Rafael van der Vaart.

Van der Vaart was left out of the Hamburg line-up for the pre-season friendly at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium while negotiations continued over his proposed move to Real.

Hamburg are willing to sell the Holland midfielder if Real meet their 10 million euros valuation and, with the discussions close to a conclusion, there was never any chance van der Vaart would be on show in north London.

The 25-year-old could be confirmed as a Madrid player by early next week according to reports in Spain, but it was young midfielder Daniel Parejo who took centre-stage for Bernd Schuster's side here.

Ruud van Nistelrooy, booed by Arsenal fans who still remember his time at Manchester United, broke the deadlock in the 25th minute with a simple tap-in from Michel Salgado's low cross.

Mohamed Zidan brought Hamburg level when he curled a superb strike into the far corner of Jerzey Dudek's goal from the edge of the area in the 53rd minute.

But Parejo, 19, won it with five minutes left when the Spaniard found space to head in Juan Miguel Callejon's cross from close range.

Rio backs Rooney

AFP, London

Rio Ferdinand believes that his Manchester United and England teammate Wayne Rooney will step out of Cristiano Ronaldo's shadow and be the star of Old Trafford this season.

The 22-year-old was forced to take a supporting role last season as the Portuguese winger's 42 goals made him the leading man at Old Trafford.

But Ferdinand, United's captain last season in the absence of Gary Neville, believes Rooney's contribution to the team has been underrated.

And if manager Sir Alex Ferguson plays Rooney in his favoured position more often from now on, the centre-half is confident the striker will soon be the main man.

"We've got to wait to see what will happen in the transfer market with regard to signing a new striker, but what Wayne did last season was staggering," Ferdinand told The People on Sunday.

"He had to take the responsibility of leading the line on his shoulders and he was awesome."

He added: "He played out of position a lot. He played on the left and sacrificed himself so many times for the team."

"I know the manager wants to see Wayne playing in his more accustomed position, just off the front."

"Maybe that will happen if we sign a striker and then you'll see how dangerous he can be."

Chelsea thrash Milan

Football

INTERNET, undated

Four goals from Nicolas Anelka helped Chelsea claim 3rd place in the Railways Cup tournament in Moscow after AC Milan were thrashed 5-0. Milan's Brazilian star and Chelsea target Kaka did not feature as his team put in a miserable display, typified by some comically inept goalkeeping by Zeljko Kalac.

A strong Chelsea line-up saw Michael Ballack make his first appearance of the Blues' pre-season following his late return to the squad after Euro 2008 duty with Germany.

But it was his central midfield partner Frank Lampard who put Luiz Felipe Scolari's side ahead in the second minute when his curling free-kick was missed by everyone and the ball flew in through Milan keeper Kalac's legs.

It was two in the eighth minute when Anelka latched on to a poor defensive header to fire home low from the edge of the area.

The Frenchman added a third 10 minutes later when Kalac's day went from bad to worse.

Attempting to clear a routine backpass, the Australian kicked nothing but air, allowing Anelka to steal in and tap into an empty net.

Chelsea were utterly dominant and Shaun Wright-Phillips very nearly headed a fourth soon afterwards as they sought to make amends for their shoot-out defeat to Lokomotiv Moscow two days ago.

A Milan side with no recognised strikers, but featuring former Arsenal star Mathieu Flamini in midfield, were providing little resistance and Anelka completed his hat-trick six minutes after the restart.

Deco played in Florent Malouda down the left and the winger's cross found his countryman, who headed accurately into the corner of the net.

Remarkably it was four for Anelka and five for Chelsea in the 58th minute when another flowing move down the left ended with Malouda centring once more for the former Bolton striker to volley home.

The Premier League runners-up took their foot off the gas in the last quarter but still dominated and the lively Malouda fired narrowly over with a good long-range effort.



Chelsea midfielder Micheal Ballack (L) is challenged by Milan captain Paolo Maldini (R) during their pre-season Russian Railways Cup tournament in Moscow on Sunday.

C'Ron saga destabilising Real

AFP, London

Real Madrid's Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy believes that the constant speculation over the future of Cristiano Ronaldo has had an unsettling effect on the team.

Whether Ronaldo will follow Van Nistelrooy's path from Manchester United to the Bernabeu has been an ongoing debate this summer.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson is determined to hold on to the Portuguese star, while Real coach Bernd Schuster admitted Saturday that the club has not given up hope of luring Ronaldo.

"It got a bit too far maybe, it is such an issue at the moment in Spain. It gets a bit over the top," Van Nistelrooy told BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek programme.

"A couple of our players, they made the comment that there was only talk about him and not about the current team and stars, and everybody's waiting for the next rumour without anything concrete."

Asked whether he expected Ronaldo to stay at Old Trafford for the forthcoming campaign, the Dutchman added: "I think so, if you hear the statements from United, it doesn't really sound like they'll let him go."

MU win Ole's testimonial

Football

AFP, Manchester

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's testimonial saw Manchester United beat Espanyol 1-0 on Saturday though the 68,868 crowd saw little in the way of goalmouth action.

Reserve forward Fraizer Campbell got the goal for the European champions against the mid-table Spanish side at Old Trafford.

The game did, however, serve to illustrate the increasingly pressing need for manager Sir Alex Ferguson to advance with his efforts to add a big-money forward to his squad this close season.

With the proposed acquisition of Tottenham's Dimitar Berbatov

seemingly at an impasse, and the start of the Premiership season now less than two weeks away, the position remains the one glaring weakness in terms of United's strength in depth.

Against Espanyol, with Wayne Rooney suffering from a virus and French international forward Louis Saha absent, presumably injured, Carlos Tevez played as lone striker and United lacked any real clinical touch in front of goal.

Tevez's performance was decent enough but, also, marred by his reaction to a foul from Daniel Jarque late in the first half.

The Argentinian forward leaped up and pushed his assailant in the throat before thinking better of pressing home his retaliation. In competitive football, Tevez would have certainly been dismissed.

The striker issue becomes all the more pressing as Cristiano Ronaldo, who returns to the club on Tuesday after a summer of high controversy over a possible move to Real Madrid, is injured following ankle surgery and expected to be out until the end of September.

Ronaldo scored 42 goals in all competitions for United last season, exactly the same tally as Rooney, Tevez and Saha combined, and his loss could be a key factor in the early part of the new Premiership campaign, should United fail to sign a productive new forward.

When Solskjaer, who officially retired one year ago, came on for the final 22 minutes of his testimonial, the situation concerning United's problems were underlined even more glaringly, given that the Norwegian looked the best forward on the field.

In the 77th minute, after a selfless assist by his old teammate Ryan Giggs, Solskjaer's strong shot flew just wide of the left-hand post and, seconds later, Espanyol goalkeeper Alvarez Cristian required two attempts to keep out another shot from the man of the moment.

Finally, nine minutes from time, a pass from Giggs gave the electrifyingly quick Campbell the edge to get ahead of his markers and slot a clinical finish past Cristian.

After an impressive Championship campaign on loan at Hull last season, United may be well advised to keep Campbell around rather than sell him to Hull as appears likely this week.

United should have taken the lead far earlier in proceedings. In the 19th minute a chip from Paul Scholes struck the post and Nani ran in to place the rebound into the side-netting.

Moments later, Darren Fletcher skied the ball over from a threatening position with Tevez doing the same thing shortly after.

The best move of the game saw Tevez free Nani down the right and his cross found Scholes whose effort was scrambled off the line by Francisco Rufete just after the half-hour.



PHOTO: AFP

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer of Manchester United waves to the fans after the final whistle during his testimonial match against Espanyol at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Liverpool floor Rangers

Football

AFP, Glasgow

A classy Liverpool comprehensively swatted Rangers 4-0 in a pre-season friendly at Ibrox on Saturday.

The English Premiership giants cruised to victory with a first-half strike from Fernando Torres followed by second-half goals from David Ngog, Yossi Benayoun and Xabi Alonso.

Both teams had fielded strong line-ups with Liverpool coach Rafael Benitez opting to try out his new strike partnership of Torres and Robbie Keane for the first time and Rangers manager Walter Smith had to admit he had no complaints about the result.

"We didn't take a lot from the game apart from the fact we were well beaten. There are no excuses from our point of view."

"Overall Liverpool were better and I have no complaints about the result."

Benitez agreed his side controlled the match.

"From the start of the game we wanted to press and we wanted to win against a good team."

"In the second half, Rangers needed to go forward in front of their supporters and they left more spaces and we have the quality to

play the counter attack," said the Spaniard.

The home side had the better of the opening exchanges, with Lee McCulloch unlucky to see his low drive from the edge of the box go just wide of Liverpool keeper Diego Cavalieri's left-hand post in the fourth minute before Scottish international Kenny Miller blasted a shot over the bar.

Liverpool soon settled and Euro 2008 hero Torres' pace was soon causing problems for the home side.

The Spanish striker had a great opportunity in the 10th minute when Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard found him with a pass in the box. But Torres' touch was heavy and Gers' keeper Allan McGregor rushed out to save at his feet.

The Spaniard soon had the better of McGregor though, when he opened the scoring in the 23rd minute.

The Rangers keeper could only palm a powerful shot from 30 yards out from Frenchman Damien Plessis into the path of Torres, who tapped the ball in from six yards.

McGregor's gloves were stung again in the 30th minute when Gerrard fired a shot at him.

But Rangers should have gone in at half-time level when Nacho Novo missed a chance to equalise.

The diminutive striker was

played clear into the box by a clever ball from Kenny Miller, but after knocking the ball past Cavalieri his shot was somehow blocked on the line by Italian defender Andrea Dossena.

Both teams made five changes at the break but it made little difference to the pace of the game.

Rangers came close in the 50th minute when Jean-Claude Darcheville, on for Miller, played the ball across the box which Cavalieri did well to get to before the advancing Novo.

But it was another substitute, teenager Ngog, who increased Liverpool's lead in the 57th minute.

The summer signing from Paris St Germain strolled past three Rangers players before slotting the ball in the bottom left-hand corner.

Liverpool soon made it three when McGregor could only palm a cross into the path of Israeli Benayoun, who tapped in from a couple of yards out.

Worse was to come for the home support in the 71st minute when Kirk Broadfoot conceded a penalty after fouling substitute Christian Meneth in the box.

Spanish international Alonso buried the ball low into the right-hand corner of the net with Alexander, who had replaced McGregor minutes earlier, getting close to it.

Drogba ready for new deal

AFP, London

Ivory Coast international striker Didier Drogba said Sunday he was ready to sign a new contract at Chelsea.

Drogba has been in contact with new Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari and seems likely to sign a big-money deal that will see him remain at Stamford Bridge until 2012.

"I am confident talks with Chelsea will lead to a positive resolve about my future," Drogba told the Sunday Mirror.

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon last week revealed his confidence that their big name stars, including Drogba and captain Frank Lampard, would remain at the club.

Drogba has two years remaining on his current contract but insists a move for more money is not his top priority.

"Chelsea want to speak and I am open to talk," he said. "Things have not changed but I am a Blues player."

"Money is not the main factor and if Chelsea show they want me it is possible to accept a proposition."

AC Milan, Barcelona and Inter Milan are all reported to be interested in signing the 30-year-old, who joined the London club four years ago.

Bordeaux edge Lyon

AFP, Bordeaux

French league runners-up Bordeaux on Saturday ousted champions Lyon to win the Champions Trophy traditional curtain-raiser 5-4 on penalties after a goalless draw over 90 minutes.

Souleymane Diawara converted the winning spotkick at Bordeaux's own Stade Chaban-Delmas venue to thrill a 30,000 home crowd after Brazilian Cris had missed for Lyon, who this season will target an eighth straight league title.

Normally, the champions and French Cup winners compete for the Trophy, but the French league invited Bordeaux, coached by World Cup winner Laurent Blanc, to face Lyon as the latter won both the championship and the Cup last season in once again dominating the domestic scene.

VDV wants dream move

AFP, Madrid

Dutch international midfielder Rafael van der Vaart, who has been linked with a move to Real Madrid, said Sunday a transfer to the Spanish giants would be a dream come true.

"For me to play at Real Madrid is a dream, and if this agreement is eventually sealed I will be a happy man," the midfielder told Sports daily As.

The 25-year-old said that Real's Dutch star Wesley Sneijder had told him "it was a very good club who are waiting for me".

On Friday Van der Vaart, under contract with German side Hamburg until 2010, was the subject of a nine million euros (14 million dollars) swoop by Real.

That was an improved offer after an earlier bid was batted back by Hamburg boss Dietmar Beiersdorfer, who wants to keep the playmaker as the club challenge for a Champions League berth.

Juve setback for Gunners

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal's uncomfortable pre-season shows no signs of improving as Emmanuel Adebayor was jeered by his own fans during Saturday's 1-0 defeat against Juventus in the Emirates Cup.

Coach Arsene Wenger will want to forget this pre-season friendly in a hurry after David Trezeguet's first half strike punished a subdued display from the young stars he has placed so much faith in.

More worryingly for the Gunners manager, he had to endure the unsettling sensation of hearing his star striker given a hostile reception before kick-off.

Adebayor's revelation that he is set to sign a new improved contract after weeks of speculation that the Togo striker wanted to leave didn't seem to appease the Gunners faithful, who loudly booed his name when the stadium announcer read out the teams.

It has been that kind of close-season at the Emirates, with discontent never far from the surface despite the team's undoubted potential.

The departures of Alexander Hleb, Mathieu Flamini and Gilberto Silva haven't shaken Wenger's belief that Arsenal can mount a sustained challenge for the title.

But while it is far too soon to write off Arsenal, the feeling remains that Wenger's policy of signing gifted young prodigies instead of proven talent will leave Arsenal destined to enthrall the purists rather than carry off major honours again.

Several of the likely key figures in Arsenal's season including Adebayor, William Gallas and new signing Samir Nasri were among the substitutes ahead of Sunday's clash with Real Madrid, while Cesc Fabregas was absent from the squad.

So a bumper crowd of over 60,000 got a glimpse of some of Wenger's starlets in a youthful side including Welsh teenager Aaron Ramsey, a five million pounds signing from Cardiff, and Spanish striker Carlos Vela, the stand-out of Arsenal's pre-season to date.

Ramsey was tidy but relatively anonymous but Jack Wilshere, one of the few English graduates of Wenger's academy, caught the eye early on when the 16-year-old tested Gianluigi Buffon with a fine

volley. Although both teams are preparing for Champions League qualifiers in two weeks time, it was Juventus who played with more intensity.

Trezeguet had the ball in the net in the 35th minute but his header was ruled out for offside.

The Juventus striker appeared to be offside again when he turned in a 37th minute free-kick but this time, while Arsenal's defenders appealed in vain for a flag, Trezeguet's toe-poked effort was allowed to count.

Adebayor came on at half-time, to another mixed reception from crowd, and gave Arsenal's attack a more threatening look.

Emmanuel Eboué shot wide from Adebayor's pass before Wenger sent on France midfielder-Nasri for his Emirates bow.

Nasri, a 12 million pounds signing from Marseille, showed a couple of nice touches but it was Adebayor who continued to cause Juventus more concern.

He brought Buffon into action with a towering header from Bacary Sagna's cross, then shot over from close range when he should have hit the target.

It was a miss that summed up his and Arsenal's day.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal starlet Theo Walcott (L) tries to go past Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini during their Emirates Cup match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Saturday.

Djokovic stuns Nadal

Tennis

AFP, Cincinnati

Novak Djokovic handed number one in waiting Rafael Nadal his first defeat in nearly three months, stunning the Spaniard 6-1, 7-5 to reach the final of the Cincinnati Masters.

The Serbian number three seed snapped a 32-match win streak for Nadal, who was last defeated on May 7 by compatriot and former No.1 Juan Carlos Ferrero in Rome, with Nadal suffering from foot blisters.

"I played the best summer hard season in my life, so I'm very happy for that," said Nadal, who is 64-8 on the season with seven titles. "Today he played unbelievable in the first set."

In the second set I felt well and in some moments I felt I was playing better than him. Finally, he beat me. I just congratulate him because he's

playing well."

Djokovic is re-emerging as a force in the game just two days after Roger Federer lost his grip on the top ranking after four-and-a-half years. The Swiss star lost in the third round to Ivo Karlovic.

Djokovic has defeated Nadal in four of their six matches on hardcourt.

"Day after day I'm getting stronger in the segment of my game which is really important coming up to the final stages of the tournament," said the winner.

"Rafa always gives 100 per cent in every match and on any surface. It was a challenge and I accepted it."

Djokovic will line up in a revenge repeat of last week's losing quarterfinal in Toronto when he takes on Andy Murray.

Despite his loss and whatever happens at the Beijing Olympics, Nadal will take over the top ranking from Federer on August 18 as computer points drop off.

Djokovic, the Australian Open champion and winner of two Masters shields already this season, will climb to second in the 2008 season points race.

Djokovic ripped off from a standing start, reaching a 5-0 lead after just 19 minutes before second seed Nadal got on the scoreboard. The Serb won the opener in 25 minutes, with 11 winners versus only two for Nadal.

Djokovic, who won the first eight points of the evening, lost only four points on serve in the opening phase.

Nadal lifted slightly in the second set, but Djokovic answered by saving the lone break point he faced in the sixth game to level 3-3.

The third seed ended that game with his fifth ace after coming from 0-30 and broke Nadal in the penultimate game of the match.

"I feel happy because for sure I will be number one," said Nadal. "It's been hard work for a long, long time."