

Clubs to follow the money

AFP, Paris



Five-time European champions Liverpool and 2006 runners-up Arsenal will Wednesday look to bolster their coffers by ensuring they reach the lucrative Champions League group stage.

Liverpool's summer was largely characterised by their so far fruitless quest to land Aston Villa's England midfielder Gareth Barry with Liverpool unwilling to shell out 18 million pounds (32 million dollars) for his services and Arsenal have since also courted the player.

Failure to reach the group stage - the fate of Scotland's Rangers - would blow a hole in the region of 15 million dollars in the season budget and leave respective coaches Rafa Benitez and Arsene Wenger facing up to their own version of the credit crunch. In reaching the final two years ago, Liverpool earned almost 40 million dollars along the way, more than enough to land Barry and pay his wages while also placating the Anfield faithful by keeping Xabi Alonso, who interests Arsenal though Juventus were favoured to land him earlier this summer.

Notwithstanding back-to-back, albeit narrow, Premiership wins

over Sunderland and Middlesbrough, Liverpool certainly need some kind of inspiration when they take on Standard Liege at Anfield having negotiated a barely-deserved goalless draw in Belgium, Liege missing a penalty.

New signing Robbie Keane says at this stage of the season results outweigh the actual level of performance. "When you don't play as well as you know you can but you are still getting results then that is a sign of a good team," he told Liverpool's official website - a comment which was as true of the game in Liege as the one against Boro.

Arsenal, their Premiership title tilt already rocked by Saturday's loss to Fulham, at least have the cushion of a 2-0 win achieved over Steve McClaren's FC Twente in the Netherlands but Arsene Wenger has demanded a massive improvement on Saturday's drab far in Craven Cottage.

"We have a big game on Wednesday night and we have to respond with a top class performance because we did today (Saturday) was just not good enough," said Wenger on arsenal.com.

The Dutch are competing among Europe's elite for the first time but offered little in the first game to suggest that they are capable of raining on an Arsenal parade

- which will at least mean McClaren has no need of the infamous umbrella under which he sheltered as England exited the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

The first leg goals from William Gallas and Emmanuel Adebayor meant Arsenal were able to set themselves up for a second leg stroll despite the absence of hamstring victim Cesc Fabregas.

Twente's chances of an upset have not been aided by the losses of both Marko Arnautovic, who came close to a consolation goal in the opening encounter but suffered a torn hamstring in midweek playing

FIXTURES

Select second leg fixtures (1st leg scores in brackets):
Tuesday
 Armedia Petzalka (SVK) v Juventus (ITA) (0-4)
 Wisla Krakow (POL) v Barcelona (ESP) (0-4)
Wednesday
 Fenerbahce (TUR) v Partizan Belgrade (SRB) (2-2)
 Slavia Prague (CZE) v Fiorentina (ITA) (0-2)
 Steaua Bucharest (ROM) v Galatasaray (TUR) (2-2)
 Marseille (FRA) v SK Brann (NOR) (1-0)
 Atletico Madrid (ESP) v Schalke 04 (GER) (0-1)
 Arsenal (ENG) v FC Twente (NED) (2-0)
 Liverpool (ENG) v Standard Liege (BEL) (0-0)

for Austria's Under-21 side, and also Blaise Nkufo, club top scorer for the past five seasons.

Given the competition's pot of gold status beyond the qualifiers there is a pressing need for four other former champions - Liverpool aside - to make it through this week.

Barcelona and Juventus are both as good as home and dry after respective 4-0 wins over Poland's Wisla Krakow and Slovakia's Armedia Petzalka.

Marseille, the only French side to lift the European Cup, should build on the 1-0 scoreline they brought home from Norway's Brann, while Steaua Bucharest, who denied Terry Venables' Barcelona in the 1986 final, should also complete the job after their 2-2 draw away to Turkey's Galatasaray.

Elsewhere, Germany's Schalke 04 will seek to cement their 1-0 advantage over Spain's Atletico Madrid while Ukraine's Dynamo Kiev, 4-1 up from the away leg, should secure regional bragging rights against Russia's Spartak Moscow.

As Arsenal try to go one better than their 2006 final loss to Barcelona their former coach, ex-Scotland international Bruce Rioch, will attempt to steer his Danish club Aalborg past Lithuania's Kaunas, who must overcome a 2-0 deficit.



Chelsea star Anderson Deco (jersey number 20) scores the all-important goal against Wigan from a stunning freekick during their Premier League encounter at the JJB Stadium in Wigan on Sunday.

Ramos wants quick resolution

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Juande Ramos wants to get the unsettling Dimitar Berbatov transfer situation resolved this week, suggesting the Bulgaria striker will get his wish to move to Manchester United.

The Bulgaria striker was left out of Spurs' 2-1 defeat to Sunderland on Saturday after it was decided he was in the wrong frame of mind to play amid interest from United.

And with just a week to go until the closure of the transfer window, Ramos has called for the saga to be brought to an end so that he can bring in a replacement.

"We need to get this matter resolved before the transfer deadline," the Spaniard told the club's website.

"If Berbatov goes, we will need time to sign a replacement. We want to have the best centre forward we can possibly get."

A meeting was held between the manager, player and club directors on Sunday in a bid to bring the saga to a conclusion.

Berbatov arrived from Bayer Leverkusen two seasons ago for a fee of 15 million euros.

What was done for clear skies!

AFP, Beijing

Meteorologists dispatched eight planes to release rain dispersal chemicals and fired 241 rockets into incoming clouds to ensure a dry Beijing Olympics closing ceremony, state media said Monday.

Rain clouds from the north of China had started to move towards the capital on Sunday afternoon, Guo Hu, head of the Beijing Observatory, was quoted by the official Xinhua news agency as saying.

"We decided to use planes to cover a larger area, along with firing rain dispersal rockets from the ground," said Zhang Qiang, an official at the Beijing Weather Modification Office, according to Xinhua.

Meteorologists also fired more than 1,000 rockets into clouds on August 8 to prevent showers from ruining the opening ceremony -- the biggest-ever operation of its kind by China.

China has long dabbled in rain dispersal and rain-making technology, using a vast array of chemicals to either induce or prevent rainfall.

Scientists have viewed the technology as promising, but acknowledge that no method has been developed to objectively prove that such techniques work.

Laporta survives vote

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's under-fire president Joan Laporta will complete the remaining two years of his mandate after he survived a vote by the club's general assembly on Sunday.

The 45-year-old lawyer received the backing of 55.8 of the votes cast by delegates, Barcelona said on its website.

"As a result he will continue his mandate until 2010," it said.

Laporta has come under pressure with the Catalan club having ended the past two seasons empty-handed after winning the 2006 Champions League and on July 7 he narrowly won a confidence vote.

An emergency board meeting three days later narrowly approved him staying on in the post, but eight leading officials resigned in protest at the decision.

Laporta has headed the club since 2003 and was re-elected in 2006, then decided to put his mandate to a vote of the general assembly in August.

Deco's moment of brilliance

INTERNET, London

Chelsea beat Wigan Athletic 1-0 on Sunday to keep up their 100 per cent start to the season, while Manchester City secured their first win of the season, beating West Ham 3-0.

Deco scored Chelsea's only goal in the third minute - his second goal of the season and his second from outside the box.

The win gives Chelsea two wins from two games, and lifts them above Liverpool, the only other side with two wins out of two, on goal difference.

For Wigan it was a second successive good performance, but a second successive defeat.

After last Sunday's emphatic 4-0 victory over Portsmouth, Chelsea made just one change, Michael Essien returning in place of Mikel John Obi.

Wigan lost their goalkeeper, Chris Kirkland, to a back injury incurred in the warm-up and replaced him with Mike Pollitt.

For Kirkland it is yet another blow caused by his fallible body.

Given England's goalkeeping problems, any sort of run of form could bring him into contention for the forthcoming World Cup qualifiers.

It took Chelsea just three minutes to take the lead, Deco bending in a free-kick after Lee Cattermole had fouled Nicolas Anelka just outside the box.

They didn't have it easy, though, against a purposeful Wigan side.

Petr Cech saved with his feet from Amr Zaki after seven minutes, and Wigan's impressive Egyptian signing was denied by Chelsea's goalkeeper again midway through the first half.

After a lively first half came a more sluggish second, with a surprising number of misplaced passes.

Chelsea had nothing of the fluidity of a week ago, but then in Wigan they faced far stiffer opposition than Portsmouth had provided.

Frank Lampard almost added a second from Essien's cut back 23 minutes after the break, only to be denied by a fine tackle from Cattermole.

Wigan stole a late equaliser at Stamford Bridge to check Chelsea's title charge last season, and they

almost managed something similar again, Cech making a low fingertip save ten minutes from time to deflect Olivier Kapo's drive wide.

By the end, Chelsea had retreated deep, all thoughts of being the great entertainers apparently gone. Crucially, though, they took the three points.

In the other game, only one result looked likely from the moment West Ham midfielder Mark Noble was sent off after collecting a second yellow card seven minutes before half-time.

Martin Petrov had already hit the post with a free-kick, but it wasn't until the 65th minute that City took the lead.

Danny Sturridge got the opener as he capitalised on a weak clearance from Matthew Upson.

The second and third then followed the same pattern: Vedran Corluka releasing Stephen Ireland down the right, who then cut the ball back for Elano.

But City's day was marred by a head injury to centre-back Micah Richards, that led to him being stretchered off after lengthy on-field treatment.

Wolfsburg earn a draw

INTERNET, Hamburg

Wolfsburg came from two goals down to earn a 2-2 draw at Bochum while promoted Cologne and Eintracht Frankfurt finished 1-1 in the German Bundesliga on Sunday.

Bochum went ahead through Stanislav Sentak in the 12th minute and Christoph Dabrowski with a header five minutes after the break before Wolfsburg came to life.

The visitors immediately got back in the game through Ricardo Costa in the 51st minute and levelled with a well-taken goal from Mahir Saglik in the 69th.

Wolfsburg, who finished fifth last term, have been the Bundesliga's biggest spenders this summer with an outlay of 25 million euros (37 million dollars) on new players.

Felix Magath bought two Italian internationals in Andrea Barzagli and Cristian Zaccardo to strengthen the defence, but the back four was exposed by a simple through ball from Daniel Imhof which enabled Sentak to run clear to give Diego Benaglio no chance.

Wolfsburg's defence was again caught going forward and Mimoun Azouagh crossed from the left for the unmarked - and offside-looking - Dabrowski to head a second for Bochum in the 50th minute.

The visitors immediately pulled one back through Costa in a scramble in front of goal before Turkish striker Saglik equalized. Wolfsburg

pressed for a third and Saglik saw an effort five minutes later cleared off the line by Christian Fuchs.

Cologne and Eintracht Frankfurt earned their first points of the season in a 1-1 draw, but the home side were left to rue a penalty miss.

Milivoje Novakovic put Cologne ahead in the 33rd minute and Roda Anter had the chance to make it two from the penalty spot six minutes later but his shot hit the inside of the post and rebounded out.

Frankfurt, who were beaten 2-0 at home by Hertha Berlin last week, responded nine minutes from time when Czech striker Martin Fenin headed the equalizer.

After two matches, promoted Hoffenheim top the table as the only team with a maximum six points.

Inter lift Supercup

Football

AFP, Milan

Jose Mourinho said he has not yet imposed his style on Inter Milan despite making a winning competitive debut on the Serie A champions' bench on Sunday by beating AS Roma on penalties in the Italian Super Cup.

The Portuguese coach was not happy at the way Inter twice surrendered the lead at their San Siro home before clinching the season's curtain raiser 6-5 in a shoot-out with the scores locked 2-2 at the end of extra time.

"No (this is not yet my Inter), my Inter finishes the match at the right time, they win 2-0 and not by a narrow margin," Mourinho told reporters.

Inter captain Javier Zanetti scored the decisive spot-kick after Roma's Mirko Vucinic and Daniele De Rossi had cancelled out goals by 18-year-old striker Mario Balotelli and new midfield signing Sulley Muntari in regulation time.

Mourinho shared the credit for Sunday's win with his predecessor Roberto Mancini, who was sacked in May despite having won a third consecutive Serie A title, and said the match was a good advert for Italian football.

"They say that it is not possible to play beautiful football here, but Inter and Roma showed exactly the opposite - four goals, lots of chances and enjoyable moves," he said.

The former Chelsea boss admitted that he hopes to sign Porto winger Ricardo Quaresma before the transfer window closes, but he

added that he will not get upset if the transfer does not come about.

"Coaches are all the same, they always ask for more and another winger could be useful," he replied when asked about Quaresma.

"He would give us another option, with two advanced wingers and a centre forward. Anyway, it won't be a drama if Quaresma does not arrive."

Inter are looking to sell players to finance the move and, even then, club officials have said they would only take the Portugal international if he comes at the right price.

Mourinho also greeted his former player Andriy Shevchenko, who

is about to rejoin AC Milan after a miserable two-year stint at Chelsea.

But in doing so the coach, who contributed to the Ukraine forward's unhappy spell in London by frequently leaving him on the bench when he was in charge there, also took a sly swipe at Inter's cross-town rivals, who will play in the UEFA Cup this season after finishing fifth in Serie A last term.

"I'm happy if he is happy now," Mourinho said.

"I certainly cannot wish him victory in the championship, but I'd be very happy to see him be the top-scorer in the UEFA Cup."



Inter Milan captain Javier Zanetti is ecstatic after scoring the winning penalty in the Italian Super Cup against Roma at San Siro on Sunday.

Thaksin staying

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City owner Thaksin Shinawatra is committed to the club despite speculation over his financial muscle raised by corruption charges in Thailand, club chairman Garry Cooke said on Monday.

The former Thai Prime Minister is taking refuge in England after refusing to return to answer the charges against him and Cooke insisted Thaksin was not looking for a buyer for City.

He told BBC Radio Manchester: "When these things get thrown at you, you actually try that much harder."

"He (Thaksin) is even more adamant now, because this is his love, and he wants to show people he is really committed. I asked the question as well as everyone else - 'is the club for sale?' and he is quite adamant this club is not for sale and he is here for the long haul."

Massa revives challenge

AFP, Valencia

Felipe Massa won Sunday's European Grand Prix for Ferrari on the new street circuit around the harbour in Valencia and revived his challenge for this year's drivers' championship.

The 27-year-old Brazilian came home ahead of championship leading Briton Lewis Hamilton in a McLaren-Mercedes with Poland's Robert Kubica third for BMW Sauber.

Massa's win lifted him up to second in the drivers' championship with 64 points, six fewer than Hamilton on 70, with six of this year's 18 races remaining.

It was Massa's fourth win this season and helped him wipe away the disappointment of his enforced retirement, while leading with three laps remaining in the Hungarian Grand Prix three weeks ago.

The win was the ninth of his career and was achieved in exemplary fashion as he drove from pole position to the chequered flag without a worry apart from a problem at his second pit-stop.

Then Ferrari released him a little early and dangerously and this resulted in a stewards investigation that was scheduled to take place after the race.

In another incident, his Ferrari teammate, defending champion Finn Kimi Raikkonen, was involved in a disastrous pit stop that left a mechanic injured two laps before his engine blew and forced him to retire.

Hamilton's McLaren team-mate Heikki Kovalainen of Finland came home fourth ahead of Italian veteran Jarno Trulli in a Toyota and 21-year-old German Sebastian Vettel who was sixth for Toro Rosso.

Timo Glock of Germany was seventh for Toyota and another German Nico Rosberg eighth for Williams.

On a hot day with the sun blazing, Massa and Hamilton both set a blistering pace over the opening 15 laps, trading fastest laps, until the Brazilian came into the pits for the first time.

Massa had built up a lead of 4.8 seconds before his stop and that cushion served him well as after all the leading drivers had made their first stop the Brazilian led by three seconds ahead of Hamilton.

Behind the leading duo, it was a sad story for the Spanish fans packed into the temporary grandstands around the Mediterranean harbour as their local hero Fernando Alonso was forced to retire after the opening lap.

The two-times world champion was hit, from the rear, by the Williams' of Japanese Kazuki Nakajima and suffered serious damage to his Renault car. He pulled into the team garage in a bid to rejoin the race after repairs, but was forced to retire.



Real Madrid players celebrate with the Spanish Super Cup after defeating Valencia at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hleb pleads for more time

AFP, Madrid

Belarusian international midfielder Alexander Hleb, who joined Barcelona from Arsenal last month, said Sunday he needs more time to fully adapt to the Spanish giants.

"It takes time to adapt. It's important for me to learn Spanish and to be able to communicate with my teammates and make myself understood on the pitch," he said in comments published on the club's website.

The 27-year-old added that he felt most comfortable playing "in the middle, behind the striker" but was able to shine in other positions.

"I've learned to play in a lot of positions, on the left or on the right and in the middle of midfield, or further forward, wherever the manager needed me," he said.

The Belarusian, who joined Arsenal from German side VfB Stuttgart in 2005, scored only 10 goals in his three seasons at the London side.

He joined Barcelona for four seasons in July for a reported fee of 11.8 million pounds (14.8 million euros/21.9 million dollars).

Real's rousing comeback

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid won the Spanish Supercup for the first time since 2003 with a 4-2 win at home over Valencia with goals by Ruud van Nistelrooy, Sergio Ramos, Ruben de la Red and Gonzalo Higuain.

The Spanish champions headed into the return leg of the tournament -- which is contested each year between the league champions and the winners of the King's Cup -- with a 3-2 deficit.

Valencia midfielder David Silva, who helped Spain to win Euro 2008, opened the scoring in the 32nd minute with an accurate shot that slipped in the left side of the net as Real keeper Iker Casillas looked on helplessly.

Real striker van Nistelrooy equalised four minutes into the second half with a penalty kick that slid past the right side of Valencia goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand.

The Spanish champions were awarded the penalty due to a goal-

line incident involving Valencia defender Raul Albiol.

Real Madrid took the lead in the 77th minute with a confusing and contested goal by defender Sergio Ramos from close range.

De la Red scored in the 85th minute from 35 metres with Higuain adding the club's fourth goal three minutes later.

Morientes managed to score a second for Valencia in the dying minutes of the match following a pass from David Villa.

Players and observed a minute of silence before the start of the match as a mark of respect for the 154 people who died after a Spanair jet crashed Wednesday at Madrid airport shortly after takeoff.

Amongst the victims of the Crash, Spain's worst aviation accident in 25 years, was the Bulgarian mother of 15-year-old Martin Kozuharova who was recently recruited by Real Madrid's youth team.

Real coach Bernd Schuster was without a number of players. Midfielder Wesley Sneijder, defender Fabio Cannavaro, striker Javier Saviola and defenders Michel

Salgado and Christoph Metzelder missed the match due to injury.

Argentine midfielder Fernando Gago and Brazilian defender Marcelo were absent due to their participation at the Olympics in China for their national squads.

Schuster included Real's Brazilian forward Robinho, who on Friday called on the club to let him join Chelsea before the transfer window closes at the end of the month, in his squad but did not include him in his starting line-up.

The player was jeered by a small group of fans as he left Real's team hotel and as well as when he arrived at the club's Bernabeu stadium.

"Robinho don't be ungrateful, stay," read one black and white sign that was hung from the stands of the stadium by fans during the match.

Pepe returned to the squad after being suspended for the opening encounter.

Rafael Van der Vaart started for Real and received a red card in the first half during in his first appearance in front of the Madrid fans since joining the club from Hamburg earlier this month.