



Tottenham striker Darren Bent (C) goes airborne to score the winning goal against Wisla Krakow during their UEFA Cup match at White Hart Lane on Thursday.

Mayor upset at Lehmann's chopper ride

AFP, Berlin

A German town mayor has taken umbrage over former Arsenal and Germany keeper Jens Lehmann's means of transport to get to training at this new club VfB Stuttgart.

Photographs of Lehmann emerging from a helicopter at Stuttgart's ground at Berg appeared in the German press on Friday, with the cost of the 250km hop from his new home near Munich put at 1000 euros.

While his chopper ride may serve to beat the traffic to leave the veteran 38-year-old keeper fresh for training it has not gone down well with Rupert Mann, the mayor of Berg and some of the town's 8,200 residents.

"A number of people have complained," reported Mann.

"I truly hope that Mr Lehmann won't land in this area (near the stadium) again - if he does I'll go and speak to him myself."

Lehmann left Arsenal after his contract ran out at the end of last season and signed a one year contract with Stuttgart, the 2007 Bundesliga champions.

Magpies lose Smith for 3 months

AFP, Newcastle

Managerless Newcastle's problems deepened on Friday when it was confirmed former England forward Alan Smith will be sidelined for three months with a stress fracture in his foot.

Smith joins an injury list that also includes Jonas Gutierrez, Habib Beye, Mark Viduka and Jose Enrique and caretaker boss Chris Hughton is also without suspended Giey Barton and Danny Guthrie for Saturday's trip to West Ham.

Ireland winger Damien Duff is fit again after a knee injury however and Nigeria striker Obafemi Martins looks set to make the squad after resuming training on Thursday.

Socceroos will select Cahill

AFP, Sydney

National coach Pim Verbeek said Friday he will select fit-again midfielder Tim Cahill for Australia's home World Cup qualifier against Qatar next month if the Everton star remains injury-free.

Cahill scored the match-winning goal for Everton in his first game back from a six-month lay-off with a broken foot in the English Premier League against Stoke City last weekend.

The Socceroos, who downed Uzbekistan 1-0 in their opening Asian group game in Tashkent on September 10, play Qatar in Brisbane on October 15 and Verbeek said he will pick the influential midfielder if he remains injury-free.

"I'm very pleased with Tim," Verbeek told reporters here Friday. "He played for 80 minutes last Saturday so let's hope that he will stay fit in the coming weeks."

After five months not playing and scoring such an important goal we know how important he can be for us, so hopefully he will remain fit. "And if he's fit, for sure I will select him for the Qatar game."

Spurs, Milan finally win

AFP, Paris



salvage their UEFA Cup dreams on Thursday.

Tottenham, rooted to the bottom of the Premier League, beat Poland's Wisla Krakow 2-1 at White Hart Lane while Everton twice came from behind to secure a 2-2 home draw with Belgian side Standard Liege in their first round, first leg.

Elsewhere, Manchester City and Aston Villa needed to battle back to clinch crucial away victories in Cyprus and Bulgaria respectively while FA Cup winners Portsmouth marked their first European tie with a 2-0 home success over Guimaraes of Portugal.

Darren Bent grabbed the winner for Spurs in the 73rd minute to hand coach Juande Ramos his first win of the season.

David Bentley had given the Londoners the lead in the first half but Tomas Jirask levelled within a minute to give the Poles a vital away goal.

"It will be a tough game in Poland and we have to make sure we do not lose there," said Spurs assistant manager Gus Poyet.

"It will be a totally different game. We are not in a good position so we need to win."

At Goodison Park, Liege, who lost narrowly to Liverpool in a Champions League qualifier in August, were in front against Everton after just nine minutes through Dieumerci Mbokani.

Yakubu equalised before Joseph Yobo's own goal put the Belgians ahead again. Ecuador's Segundo Castillo, making his home debut, levelled for Everton with a long-range drive seven minutes before the interval.

"Hopefully we will play better and defend better (in Belgium)," said Everton manager David Moyes. "Let's hope we can go there and keep a clean sheet and score."

Manchester City, now bankrolled by the petro-billions of a Middle East sheikh, fell behind to a 49th-minute goal from Klodian Duro at Cypriot minnows Omonia Nicosia.

But they were rescued by Brazilian striker Jo who grabbed his first goals since his move from CSKA Moscow in the summer.

Jo overshadowed his illustrious compatriot Robinho with crucial strikes in the 59th and 72nd minutes to secure a 2-1 win.

"They were two good finishes and he will settle down now," said City boss Mark Hughes.

"When a new player comes to a club it is important to get off the mark and make an impression and he did that."

England international Gareth Barry scored on his 400th club appearance as Aston Villa came from behind to defeat Litex Lovech

3-1 before the Bulgarians went on to finish the tie with nine men.

Ivelin Popov gave the home side a 10th-minute lead from a free-kick before Nigel Reo-Coker levelled for Martin O'Neill's team.

Barry converted a 72nd-minute penalty to edge Villa in front before Siliyan Petrov added a 90th-minute third goal to give the English side a vital two-goal cushion.

At Fratton Park, Lassana Diarra opened the scoring after 39 minutes with Jermain Defoe adding the second for Portsmouth on the hour mark.

In between, Defoe also missed a penalty while Guimaraes also fluffed a spotkick when Fajardo hit the crossbar.

Struggling AC Milan, the seven-time European champions, earned their first victory of the season in a 3-1 success over FC Zurich at the San Siro.

Goals from Marek Jankulovski, Patric and Marco Borriello gave Milan a three-goal start before Dusan Djuric pulled one back for the visitors.

Australian international Harry Kewell and fellow former Liverpool teammate Milan Baros (2) were on target as Turkey's Galatasaray won a 4-3 thriller at Swiss side Bellinzona.

Ex-England manager Steve McClaren saw his Dutch side Twente lose 2-1 at French hosts Rennes while former European champions Benfica went down 3-2 at Napoli.

Sevilla, champions in 2006 and 2007, saw off Salzburg 2-0 while Scotland's only representatives Motherwell lost 1-0 at AS Nancy.

Real look to step up

AFP, Madrid



Spanish giants' lacklustre start to the season.

Schuster was furious with his players for taking their foot off the gas in Wednesday's 2-0 Champions League win over minnows BATE Borisov and also expressed his annoyance at Real leaking five goals in their opening two league matches.

"We are not happy about the number of goals we are conceding," admitted German defender Christoph Metzelder.

"We have problems with dead-ball situations and we have to improve on that but it is only the second weekend into the season."

"We have a lot of players who were at the European championships and had a short pre-season. I am sure we will improve."

Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola finally got his first competitive since taking charge with a 3-1 Champions League triumph over Sporting Lisbon on Tuesday and now wants to break his duck in the league.

"I am very happy to have won. I can't deny that it was an important win, and winning always helps," said Guardiola.

Barca have endured their worst start for 35 years with one point from six and lie 15th in the table going into Sunday's match at bottom side Sporting Gijon.

Belarus winger Alexander Hleb is sidelined after sustaining an

ankle injury against Racing last weekend but other than that Guardiola is spoilt for choice.

Meanwhile, Sunday will also see a fiercely-contested Seville derby with Real Betis entertaining city rivals Sevilla at the Manuel Ruiz de Lopera.

In recent years Betis have been in the shadow of neighbours Sevilla - who have won two UEFA Cups and challenged for the league title in the last three years - and Betis will be out for revenge after Sevilla did a league double over them in the last campaign.

Sevilla are unbeaten with four points from six but have looked uneasy in defence - conceding three goals in their narrow 4-3 win over Sporting Gijon - and coach Manolo Jimenez claims it is due to new players needing time to settle.

"I have a lot of faith in our defenders," said Jimenez.

"They have come from a different league and sometimes it takes time to adapt to the style of the Spanish strikers."

Atletico Madrid are brimming with confidence going into Saturday's home match with Recreativo Huelva after destroying PSV Eindhoven 3-0 in their Champions League group match.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Atletico Madrid v Recreativo Huelva 1900 GMT, Espanyol v Getafe 2100 GMT

Sunday
(all 1600 GMT unless stated)

Almeria v Malaga, Athletic Bilbao v Valladolid, Real Betis v Sevilla, Numancia v Villarreal, Deportivo La Coruna v Real Mallorca, Valencia v Osasuna, Racing Santander v Real Madrid 1800 GMT, Sporting Gijon v Barcelona 2000 GMT

Blues test for Red Devils

AFP, London



The season may only be a month old but Manchester United are already facing a crisis point in the defence of their English Premier League title.

Defeat at Chelsea on Sunday would leave Sir Alex Ferguson's squad trailing their London rivals by nine points and, on the evidence presented so far that is a deficit that, even with a game in hand, will take some closing.

Liverpool, provided they put top flight newcomers Stoke City to the sword at Anfield on Saturday, would also find themselves nine points clear of the champions in the event of a Chelsea victory.

Yet Ferguson insists he is relaxed about a sluggish start to a campaign in which the Champions League holders have not won since the opening weekend.

United's boss insists the post-summer torpor that has afflicted his side will soon give way to the verve that characterised last season's march to a league and Champions League double.

"We have been a bit short in terms of real sharpness and clinical finishing but I think the games will bring that on," Ferguson said. "By October I think you will see the real Manchester United."

Ferguson was unusually critical of his own players, particularly the back four, following last weekend's defeat at Liverpool, and he is expecting a reaction against Chelsea.

"It's always a big game when the top sides meet," he said. "That is why we were so disappointed with last Saturday, particularly the way we gave goals away. But we will go down to Chelsea very positive, no doubt about that."

Ferguson is hoping to have 30-million-pound signing Dimitar Berbatov fit and faces a couple of tough selection decisions for a trip to face a Chelsea side that have looked intimidating and impressive in their first outings under Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Centreback Nemanja Vidic is suspended so Ferguson must decide whether to gamble on youngster Jonny Evans or opt for the more experienced Wes Brown as a partner to Rio Ferdinand in a defence that could be facing Didier Drogba, who is ready for his first start of the season.

The Scot also faces a dilemma over whether to start Cristiano Ronaldo, who only made his return from ankle surgery in the final half hour of United's midweek goalless draw with Villarreal in the Champions League.

Ronaldo did enough in that time to suggest he would be enhance United's chances of claiming all three points at Stamford Bridge but Ferguson was keeping his cards close to his chest, insisting it would be a "big ask" to expect the Portugal winger to start such an important match barely two months after undergoing ankle surgery.

Chelsea's form so far this season has been underpinned by some

superb displays from Frank Lampard, and the England midfielder insists the Blues are good enough to handle United with or without Ronaldo.

"I don't know what the situation is with him and I'm not too concerned really," Lampard said. "He's probably the best player in the world, having done what he did last season, you can't take that away from him. If they put him back for our game then we'll have to deal with that."

"But we are good enough to deal with Manchester United at their strongest, we shouldn't want them weakened. If they are strong they are strong and we still want to beat them."

Arsenal kick off the weekend a point adrift of Chelsea and Liverpool and Arsene Wenger's men will be confident of staying in touch with the leaders by beating Bolton at the Reebok Stadium on Saturday evening.

Fourth-placed Aston Villa face a derby clash at West Brom on Sunday while Tottenham, with just one point from four matches, desperately need to take all three points from Wigan, visitors to White Hart Lane later that day, to relieve the pressure on manager Juande Ramos.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

Saturday

Blackburn v Fulham, Bolton v Arsenal (1630 GMT), Liverpool v Stoke, Sunderland v Middlesbrough (1145 GMT), West Ham v Newcastle

Sunday

Chelsea v Manchester Utd (1300 GMT), Hull City v Everton, Manchester City v Portsmouth, Tottenham v Wigan, West Brom v Aston Villa (1100 GMT)

Rosicky on road to recovery

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has voiced cautious optimism that Tomas Rosicky will be back in action before Christmas but admitted that the Czech midfielder's injury has been far more complicated to treat than first anticipated.

Rosicky, the captain of the Czech Republic's national team, missed the second half of last season and Euro 2008 after limping off in a Premier League match against Newcastle in January.

Eight months later, Wenger cannot say with any certainty when the 27-year-old will return and Czech media have started to speculate that his career may be over.

"He is not close to playing again and he has not had any real setback, but the evolution (of his injury) is very slow," Wenger admitted.

"The recovery process is slower than we expected at the start. It doesn't look worrying but the delay is longer than expected."

"He had a re-attached tendon that was loose in his hamstring, and that demands a lot of time to re-coordinate the movements of the hamstring. That makes it very difficult to predict exactly one week more or less how much time it will take."

"But I am optimistic that before Christmas you will see him in a good shape."

In contrast to Rosicky's woes, the rehabilitation of Croatian striker Eduardo following a horrific leg-break and ankle dislocation in February is going faster than expected, with Wenger confident he will be back in the first team by the end of the year.

Fahim in trouble over hot pictures

AFP, Dubai

The Emirati architect of the takeover of English football club Manchester City is at the centre of a controversy over pictures showing him with models and actresses, a report said on Friday.

Sulaiman al-Fahim, who bought the Premier League club earlier this month on behalf of the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment, was selected by the company to finalise the deal but was not named to head the club, the Al-Emarat Al-Youm newspaper said.

It said the news coincides with the appearance on electronic sites and in newspapers of "sensational" pictures of the 31-year-old entrepreneur in Las Vegas in the company of "actresses, dancers and models," including Playboy cover girl Kim Kardashian.

But Fahim told Al-Emarat Al-Youm by telephone from the United States that "all there is to it is that I was invited to the opening of a restaurant in Las Vegas and the actresses took these shots with me."

Such pictures would be considered inappropriate in the United Arab Emirates, a Muslim country whose native population remains generally conservative despite hosting millions of foreigners, including large numbers of Westerners and other non-Muslims.

Fahim shot to world fame when he bought Manchester City for the Abu Dhabi company of which he is board member and emerged as spokesman for the deal in international media.

The buyout of the English club was seen as part of efforts by Abu Dhabi, an oil-rich emirate and capital of the UAE, to propel itself onto the tourist and sports map.

Football

AFP, Paris

Former AC Milan and Real Madrid star Ronaldo, one of Brazil's most decorated footballers, wants to play for French side Paris St Germain, according to press reports here Friday.

In an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe, the three-time World Footballer of the Year (1996, 1997 and 2002) stressed his willingness to play in the capital.

"I love Paris. I have a flat and often go there," said the 31-year-old, who is without a professional club but is currently training with Brazilian team Flamengo.

"PSG are in the process of building something good. They have recruited good players and con-

structed a team capable of winning the title."

The most prolific goalscorer in the history of the World Cup (15 goals, and twice winner) Ronaldo is recovering in Rio de Janeiro following knee surgery in February.

Despite Manchester City earlier denying reports linking him with a move to Eastlands, Ronaldo again mused about hooking up with countryman Robinho in the English Premier league.

"Yes, it's a big possibility. We are in the middle of talks. We'll see."

That went counter to a statement from City on Tuesday that said they had been interested in signing Ronaldo but after speaking to his agent they decided not to pursue his signature.

In the interview Ronaldo said he was confident of a successful comeback, but admitted he was going through a difficult recuperation

period.

"This is a challenge I cannot totally control. This time I cannot have power over everything. It's not like before when I was on the pitch and knew I could score a goal at any moment."

"Now it's different. I control nothing."

Speaking about criticism levelled at his weight problem, Ronaldo said: "It's normal that people say I'm overweight. There's no surprise there."

"I've stayed here (Rio) for five months without my trainer so there's nothing illogical in having gained a few pounds."

Paris St Germain - long served by Brazilian players such as Ronaldinho, Rai and Ricardo Gomes - beat Turkish team Kayserispor 2-1 in the UEFA Cup first round, first leg on Thursday.

Pressure on Ancelotti

AFP, Rome



start which has seen them slump to second from bottom in Serie A.

Milan, who have lost both of their opening games, on Sunday entertain first place Lazio, one of only two teams to have won their two matches.

The pressure is mounting on Ancelotti who knows that a title challenge is the minimum he needs to produce this season to save a job that is looking increasingly precarious.

Despite beating a desperately poor FC Zurich in the UEFA Cup on Thursday, a result that will have been a welcome boost to confidence, it is in the league where Ancelotti needs to succeed.

He has been doing his best to convince all and sundry that things will soon start looking up.

"This is a difficult period but I can see a desire amongst everyone to get out of it," said Ancelotti.

"The club is particularly closely bonded together, we're going through a period of self-assessment."

"At the last meeting there was a lot of self-criticism from everyone,

I have also made mistakes. But we're on the right path to get ourselves back up."

Lazio's Serbia striker Goran Pandev thinks this is a good time for his team to be facing Milan, though, and he suggested that the northerners have lost a certain sense of fear they used to inspire in others.

"I expect it to be a difficult match against Milan, they're a great team even if they've started badly," he said.

"They'll be even more agitated than normal and will want to win at all costs but we just need to believe in ourselves and play our game."

"This team is young but we're strong and we don't fear anyone. We'll show what we're worth."

While Milan are in turmoil, city rivals Inter look to have already started to take shape and resume their dominance, just three matches into the reign of former Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho.

After a 1-1 opening day draw at Sampdoria, Inter beat Catania

despite playing half the match a man down and then went to Greece in midweek and beat Panathinaikos in the Champions League.

Owner Massimo Moratti is feeling good about the new season and hopes of securing a fourth Serie A crown in a row.

"It's important to do well in this early part of the season. It was important to understand when the team had adapted to the tactics and psychology of the coach," he told local media.

"I think they have, everything is fine. We're going forward with enthusiasm and the right sense of caution."

It's not just Milan suffering, though, as last season's cup winners Roma have only one point from their first two league matches and lost at home to Champions League outsiders Cluj from Romania on Tuesday.

Coach Luciano Spalletti is not worried.

"Now we have to keep working even more seriously and professionally than before," said Spalletti, who dismissed any notions of quitting.

"I have spent four years building up contacts and relationships and an atmosphere within this group here and if I didn't have that I might behave differently."

"Here we have everything we need to pick ourselves up."



Milan forward Ronaldinho (R) runs past Zurich midfielder Silvan Aegerter during their UEFA Cup encounter at San Siro on Thursday.