him to throw young Argentinian

fray at the Riverside.

for players like him."

sharply reduced.

forward Franco Di Santo into the

minutes or 45 minutes whenever

we can," Scolari said of the 19-year-

old. "He needs to understand the

way we play but we have chances

Arsenal's title credentials have

taken a hammering already this

season as a result of having suffered

defeats at the hands of Hull City and

Fulham before they have had to face

Everton visit the Emirates and

Arsene Wenger will be acutely

aware that his attractive side's

margin for further error has been

London buoyed by manager

David Moyes having finally

signed a new long-term contract

and the Gunners will be weak-

ened by the loss of French

defenders William Gallas and

Bacary Sagna and Nicklas

Bendtner, all of whom picked up

injuries while playing for their

ers, entertain West Ham on Sunday

looking to sustain an extraordinary

start to their season which has seen

them beat both Arsenal and

Rock-bottom Tottenham visit

Stoke City in Sunday's other match

while crisis club Newcastle enter-

tain Manchester City on Monday

latest injury to his right knee, sus-

tained against FC Cluj, is not as bad

Drogba escaped ligament dam-

But he also revealed he was never

He missed large chunks of the

"Last year I was struggling to be

"I was never 100 per cent fit last

"The second one, this latest one,

year even if I produced some good

was unlucky. But I am not so worried

because thank God, it is not as bad as

know what I can bring to my team-

mates and I know what I am capable

rest of the season and for the next

Champions League final against

Manchester United in Moscow last

May prevented him from taking a

that would have earned Chelsea

their first Champions League tri-

umph and when Nicolas Anelka also

missed, United went on to make it a

losing the final than being red-

Drogba has more regrets about

"You have a lot of regrets when

"I have more regrets about losing

the final than being sent off. But the

team was affected by the sending off

Drogba is determined to win

more glory with Chelsea but he also

has one eye on the 2010 World Cup in

very important for the continent, not

chance for an African team to win

the World Cup but it is not going to be

go to the 2010 finals and it is going to

ers abroad and they have improved a

lot. They still create problems even

though you are supposed to be

beabigbattleforus.

better than them."

just for me and the Ivory Coast.

"I think this World Cup in Africa is

"This is going to be the best

"Ivory Coast still have to qualify to

"Every African country has play-

hattrick of European triumphs.

you go to the final and lose it."

andwelost on penalties."

John Terry missed the spot-kick

penaltyinadramaticshoot-out.

"Injuries are part of our job and I

"I hope I will be injury free for the

Drogba's red card in the

age and is now working to get back to

fully fit during last season's cam-

paign when he underwent an opera-

season under Mourinho's replace-

100 per cent," admitted Drogba.

action as soon as possible.

tion on his left knee.

ment Avram Grant.

performances.

it could have been.

years."

carded

South Africa.

Hull, the high-flying newcom-

countries in midweek.

Tottenham away already.

evening.

ashefirstfeared.

Everton will arrive in north

That changes on Saturday when

a club from last season's top six.

"We are trying to give him 20

Liverpool lose Torres

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool on Thursday confirmed that Spanish international striker Fernando Torres will be out for "between 10 and 15 days" after injuring his right hamstring.

Torres was already expected to miss Saturday's Premier League match against Wigan, next week's trip to face Atletico Madrid in the Champions League and the following Sunday's crunch fixture at Chelsea.

The scan confirmed the Euro 2008 winner will be out for at least 10 days after doctors detected a tear in his right hamstring suffered in Spain's World Cup qualifying win in Belgium on Wednesday.

Torres, who went off after just 16 minutes of the match, has been joined on the Anfield sicklist by Dutch attacker Ryan Babel who sprained his left ankle in his country's win over Norway.

Reds spokesman Ian Cotton said: "A scan on Fernando Torres has shown a tear in his right hamstring which will sideline the player for between 10 and 15 days.

"Ryan Babel has sprained his left ankle and is a major doubt for Wigan on Saturday."

Tevez dismisses unhappy claims

AFP, London

Manchester United's Argentinian striker Carlos Tevez on Thursday distanced himself from reports which suggested he was not happy with his current form in the English Premier League.

Tevez has scored just once this season and had reportedly suggested his form had been affected because of the work he has to do with the European champions.

However, a statement released to the Press Association read: "I have not given any interviews saying I have any difficulties in the Premier League. I love playing in the Premier League and I am very happy at Manchester United.

"I want to help the team win and am not worried where I play on the pitch, neither do I feel any extra pressure playing in the Premier League compared to other leagues.

"I have absolutely no idea where the reports came from. I have given no interview saying I have any difficulties at all with my form or the Premier League itself."

Petrov facing long lay-off

AFP, London

Manchester City and Bulgaria winger Martin Petrov is facing a lengthy lay-off after suffering knee ligament damage, City boss Mark Hughes revealed on Friday.

Petrov, who only recently returned to the City side following a hamstring strain, was injured in his country's midweek draw with Georgia.

"Martin is going to see a couple more specialists over the weekend. But the view is, he has a significant injury and could be out for quite some time," Hughes said.

"He has ligament damage and the initial scans do not look good. Martin had 10 minutes in one game and 20 minutes in another before going to play for his country.

"It is a big ask for players and they are at risk on occasions if they have not had the required time on

the pitch beforehand." Hughes was expecting Brazilian forward Robinho back in Manchester on Friday after he was substituted with a thigh injury during a draw with Colombia in midweek.

"We have heard nothing from their medical department, so we are assuming he is fit and well," said Hughes.

"We have seen the incident where he had the injury and had to come off. It does not look like a significant injury, just a clash."

Robinho will have the weekend to recover his fitness and shake off his jet lag with City not in action until their Monday night clash with Newcastle at St James' Park.

against champions Inter Milan.

Italian Cup holders this season and

picking up a paltry seven points

from six matches, leaving them

well off the early pace of leaders

points at the top, Udinese and

more importantly Inter, meaning

that Roma must win on Sunday or

risk seeing their title hopes go up in

smoke less than a fifth of the way

he's also their talisman and main

Two other teams are also on 13

and city rivals Lazio.

through the season.

MU count on Rooney

AFP, London



Manchester United are hoping to reap a dividend from BARCLAYS Wayne Rooney's goalscoring form for England as they seek to close the gap on

Premier League pacesetters Chelsea and Liverpool this weekend. Rooney's midweek double against Belarus made it five in three internationals and the United

striker has also hit the net in his last three matches for his club. All of which augurs badly for

West Brom, visitors to Old Trafford on Saturday. Having endured a fallow spell,

Rooney is delighted with the turnaround in his form in front of goal. "I've worked a lot on my finishing and it's starting to pay off on the

pitch now which I'm happy about," said the 23-year-old. "I believe I'm going to score in any game anyway. I'm a confident person and I'm delighted they are

going in at the moment. Hopefully I can keep it going." United kick off the weekend six points adrift of the leaders but with a game in hand over rivals who

both have serious injury problems.

Liverpool are likely to be without both Fernando Torres and Ryan Babel for the visit of Wigan following injuries picked up on midweek international duty, a turn of events that has left manager Rafael Benitez fuming and keen for radi-

Didier Drogba says Chelsea is the

club that suits him best, a comment

that may raise eyebrows given the

Ivory Coast striker's often stated

version of which was launched at the

north London club on Friday,

Drogba is frank about his wish to

happiness under new boss Luiz

Felipe Scolari and wants to remain a

But now he insists he has found

In his autobiography, the English

desire to leave Stamford Bridge.

Football

AFP, London

move on.

cal change in the way international fixtures are organised.

"Too many international games are putting the players at risk of injury," the Spaniard said.

"Maybe the answer is for there to be a two-tier qualifying system, because there are too many games in the qualifiers for the World Cup and the European Championships which are not competitive but which still place great demands on the players.

Liverpool's injury woes pale into insignificance however when compared with the situation at Chelsea, who could be missing eight first team players for their trip to Middlesbrough, where they have lost on two of their last three visits.

Captain John Terry and Didier Drogba are among the walking wounded but manager Luiz Felipe Scolari is refusing to be downbeat about a situation which could force

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

Sunday

Drogba.

friends."

Arsenal v Everton, Aston Villa v Portsmouth, Bolton v Blackburn, Fulham v Sunderland, Liverpool v Wigan, Manchester Utd v West Brom (1630) GMT), Middlesbrough v Chelsea (1145

Hull City v West Ham, Stoke City v Tottenham (1500 GMT) Monday

Newcastle v Manchester City (1900

Drogba happy at Chelsea

"Yes I am glad I stayed," said

"Last year I said I wanted to leave

"This is the club which suits me

and every season I have said I have

best. This is the only club where I

won all the titles I have now. I am

happy to be here and to stay with my

His future was under the spot-

light again earlier this year when

there were strong rumours the 30-

year-old would be rejoining former

from full fitness but is relieved the

Drogba is still a few weeks away

boss Jose Mourinho at Inter Milan.

wanted to leave but I am still here.

UEFA postpones Atletico ban

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool's Champions League match against Atletico Madrid will go-ahead as scheduled in the Spanish capital after UEFA said it had postponed a two-match European stadium ban on the home side.

The governing body of European football said its appeals body "decided to grant the request for suspension of the sanctions" against Atletico, due to "the organisational and logistical difficulties related to relocating" the Liverpool match to another venue at short notice.

"Consequently, UEFA can confirm that the Champions League match between Atletico Madrid and Liverpool will take place as scheduled on October 22 at the Vicente Calderon Stadium in Madrid."

Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry expressed his satisfaction that UEFA had listened to the club's

concerns. Parry told the club's website, www.liverpoolfc.tv: "We're delighted at the decision because it means our fans can travel to the game as previously planned without additional expense or inconvenience.

"Liverpool are grateful for the help the FA have provided and pleased UEFA have listened to and acted on the arguments we put forward this week."

UEFA on Tuesday ordered Atletico to play their next two European matches at a stadium at least 300 kilometres (200 miles) from Madrid as punishment for crowd disturbances and racist insults against Marseille players during a Champions League match on October 1.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said in Brussels earlier Thursday that Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos had made a direct appeal to UEFA president Michel Platini to allow the game to go ahead at Atletico's stadium.

"The government has been concerned by this decision and has been in direct contact with UEFA, Zapatero told journalists on the sidelines of an EU summit.

"Minister Moratinos talked to Mr Platini while the interior ministry is preparing to send UEFA a full explanation on why the police action was correct.

"We want them to understand that they have come to a decision on the basis of incorrect information." But UEFA emphasized that "the suspension of the sanctions does

not mean that the decision of the Control and Disciplinary Body has been set aside. "The decision remains in force pending a full hearing of the appeal which will now take place on Friday

31st October 2008 at the UEFA

Headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland." Atletico has slammed the sanctions as "completely unfair and

disproportionate."

Hleb back for Barca

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's Belarus winger Alexander Hleb will be available for this weekend's match with Athletico Bilbao after four weeks out injured, the club said Thursday. Hleb, signed from Arsenal in the

summer, picked up an ankle sprain in a September 14 match with Racing Santander. But Icelandic international

Eidur Gudjohnsen will be out for at least the next two matches due to a thigh injury. He is to undergo tests on Friday

to determine the extent of the injury, said Barca, who are currently fourth in the Spanish first division.

Deportivo in financial

AFP, Madrid

Spanish first division side Deportivo La Coruna has asked the regional government in Galicia for help to overcome its desperate financial situation, the club's president was quoted Friday as

Xunta (the Galician government),' Augusto Lendoiro said, according to the AS newspaper, adding that the club would reimburse any payment with interest.

with the club, which were Spanish champions in 2000 and are currently 10th in the Primera Liga.

"All clubs receive help from the government and town halls, but for us..," he said.

The club, known locally as players in recent years. Spanish international striker

playing like schoolboys.



qualifier at the National Stadium in Santiago on Wednesday. Basile handed his resignation a day after the defeat to Chile.

Basile steps down

Football

AGENCIES, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Alfio Basile has stepped down from his job for "personal reasons", the country's football federation announced.

Basile, 64, has been under fire since his team's lacklustre showing in the World Cup qualifier against Chile on Wednesday, a game Argentina lost 1-0 to leave them third in the group.

It was Chile's first ever qualifying success over the albiceleste and first of any description since 1973. Argentina's poor form stretches

back over seven games, however, with only one win notched up in that time: a 2-1 victory over and Caribbean region. Uruguay last week. Basile signed up in his latest

stint as Argentina coach in July

previously been national coach from 1991 through to the 1994 World Cup in the United States. Basile took over from Jose

2006 from Boca Juniors. He had

Pekerman, who quit following Argentina's quarterfinal elimination at the hands of hosts Germany on penalties in the World Cup. Basile has quit just after the

halfway mark in the 18-match South American 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign, with Argentina third in the ten-team group on 16 points, ahead of Chile on goal difference, but seven behind leaders Paraguay. The top four teams qualify directly for South Africa and the fifth plays off against the fourth-placed team from the North, Central America

Basile was in charge for 28 games, winning 14, drawing eight and losing six. The high point was a

run of five stylish wins at last year's Copa America. However, the campaign ended with a crushing 3-0 defeat by arch-rivals Brazil in the final, as Argentina extended their 14-year wait for a trophy.

He came under increasing pressure after a run of six successive draws, but appeared to have weathered the storm with a 2-1 FIFA World Cup qualifying win over Uruguay on Saturday. However, fans were shocked by the way their team were outclassed by Chile on Wednesday as they lost to their neighbours for the first time in 35 years.

During his previous stints, Basile won the Copa America in 1991 and 1993 but was also in charge for a historic 5-0 home defeat by Colombia in a FIFA World Cup qualifier. His team reached the second round at the 1994 FIFA World Cup, where they lost to

Spotlight on Calderon

AFP, Madrid



Madrid has been in the headlines this week with Champions League match against Liver-

The venue takes centre stage on Saturday when Atletico host Real Madrid in an eagerly-anticipated

derby match. Atletico have had a fortnight to lick their wounds after their 6-1 Camp Nou drubbing by Barcelona when they were 5-0 down after just 18 minutes - and hope to hit back in the best possible way with victory

over their neighbours. "We will be facing a wounded animal," acknowledged Real defender Michel Salgado.

The build-up to the fixture has been overshadowed by UEFA threatening to switch Atletico's European game against Liverpool to a different venue as punishment for apparent racist remarks and heavy-handed police in their last Champions League home match against Marseille.

UEFA seem set to overturn the decision leaving Atletico to focus on their problems on the pitch and on the evidence of the Barcelona defeat there are some things still to

Atletico coach Javier Aguirre shouldered the blame for the Barca humiliation but full back Antonio Lopez urged his teammates to stop

"We were asleep at the start. Our heads were down and there was no talking on the pitch. We played like schoolboys," explained Lopez.

A reaction is expected against

Real as Atletico, who have slipped

to seventh after a strong start, aim to show they are ready for Liverpool and give their fans something to cheer by toppling rivals Real. "After getting beaten 6-1 by Barca what better way is there to

get that result out of their system than beating us?" asked Real captain Iker Casillas. Champions Real drew 2-2 with Espanyol in their last league outing

points off the lead. After their worst league start for 35 years Barcelona have recovered well to climb to fourth, level on points with Real, and travel to Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in high

spirits after the Atletico mauling. "Atletico are a Champions League side that are playing well and the result shows we are very serious title contenders this season," explained Barca defender

Gerard Pique. The goals have been flowing for Pep Guardiola's side and they are the league's joint top-scorers along

Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid (1800 GMT), Espanyol v Villarreal (2000 GMT) Sunday

(all 1500 GMT unless stated) Valladolid v Recreativo Huelva, Malaga v Getafe, Real Betis v Real Mallorca, Sporting Gijon v Osasuna, Racing Santander v Deportivo La Coruna, Valencia v Numancia, Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona (1700 GMT), Almeria v Sevilla (1900 GMT)

with Real with both sides averaging an impressive three goals a game. It is unusual, and somewhat

refreshing, not to see Barca or Realwho were top for most of last season - at the summit with Valencia and Villarreal the early paces etters. Both teams have collected 16

Valencia top courtesy of their superior goal difference. Valencia host promoted Numancia on Sunday with striker David Villa, on target for Spain in their midweek 2-1 World Cup

points from a possible 18 with

ing for caution. "We are at the top and we want and lie fifth in the standings, three to continue winning week in week out," said Villa. "When there are two months to go we will see who is in the title race. I hope we are one of

qualifying win over Belgium, call-

those teams still in contention." Villarreal finished second last season and travel to Espanyol on Saturday looking to maintain their unbeaten start to the new cam-

paign. "Getting 16 points from 18 is an impressive statistic. Our objective is always to try and fight for the title and get closer to the big clubs," explained Villarreal coach Manuel

Pellegrini. "Unfortunately, Real had a great campaign last season because we actually got enough points to be champions under other circumstances."

Elsewhere, bottom side Real Betis go in search of their maiden win of the season at home against Real Mallorca on Sunday. Osasuna are the only other team

yet to win in the league but new manager Jose Antonio Camacho, former coach of the Spain national team, hopes to change that at Sporting Gijon on Sunday.

Roma hope for Totti return AFP, Rome source of creativity and inspira- more goals than the giallorosso suspension against Inter after tion, and Spalletti is confident he is this season despite their lowly

"He seems ready to me. Totti's division.

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba launches his book 'Didier Drogba: The

Autobiography' during a press conference at Stamford Bridge on Thursday.

is praying club readiness is there for all to see: the captain Francesco intensity with which he is training Totti will be fit to gives us some interesting options play in this weekfor the Intermatch," said Spalletti. end's crucial clash "We're evaluating his fitness

AS Roma coach

Luciano Spalletti

day by day but having seen him, he Totti has barely figured for the seems ready to me." And the coach admitted that his they have clearly felt his absence, return will come not a moment too soon following three defeats in

their first six matches.

fit and ready to return.

"As a team we're trying to reorganise because we've lost a bit of ground. These things have happened but the players are working hard and I can see their desire."

While Totti's return would be a welcome boost and should improve morale and confidence in the camp, it is not actually up front Totti is not just Roma's captain, where Roma are suffering most.

Only five teams have scored

Fiorentina v Reggina, Napoli v Juventus Sunday AC Milan v Sampdoria, Bologna v Lazio Catania v Palermo, Chievo v Atalanta,

Genoa v Siena, Lecce v Udinese, AS

Roma v Inter Milan, Torino v Cagliari

position of 14th in the 20-team

choice centre-half Juan has started

only one of six games while regular

partner Philippe Mexes has played

Mexes begins a three game

in only half the matches.

suspensions.

insulting the referee who showed him two yellow cards against Siena two weeks ago. Unfortunately for Roma vet-

It is at the back where Roma's problems are starkest, mostly due eran defender Cristian Panucci to a string of injuries, and now was also dismissed in that match meaning the capital-based club Other than the bottom three, have an even bigger defensive only one team has conceded more headache. goals than Roma for whom first

And it could not have come at a worse time as they play an Inter team that although only shining sporadically under Jose Mourinho, have nonetheless suggested they should be at the business end of things when the silverware is handed out in May.

One match that would not normally be expected to attract too much attention outside of Sicily also takes place this weekend with added significance.

Catania play Palermo in a local derby which last year was shamed by the killing of a policeman.

trouble

"I am asking for an effort by the

Lendoiro is in his 21st season

"Depor", has been forced to sell

Albert Luque went to Newcastle in 2005 for 14 million euros and Argentine defender Fabricio Coloccini was also bought by the Magpies this summer for an undisclosed fee.

pool next Wednesday would be played at their Vicente Calderon stadium.