

Hamilton almost there

TIMES ONLINE



Lewis Hamilton produced an impeccable performance in the Chinese Grand Prix to stretch his drivers' championship lead to seven points with one race remaining.

The McLaren driver had a chance to win the title in Shanghai, but Ferrari's Felipe Massa made sure that the world championship would be decided in Brazil, his home country, in a fortnight's time after finishing in second place.

Kimi Raikkonen, Massa's teammate, took third with Renault's Fernando Alonso in fourth. BMW Sauber's Nick Heidfeld finished fifth ahead of his team-mate Robert Kubica, the only other title contender, who finished sixth to end his slim championship hopes.

Hamilton, 23, is bidding to become both the youngest and the first black driver to win the world championship. He threw away a commanding lead in the standings in his rookie season, but is looking forward to making amends at Interlagos where a fifth-place finish at least would guarantee him the title.

"This is a completely different situa-

tion to last year," he said. "Brazil will be very different this time."

The Briton will have silenced some of his detractors with a convincing display of smooth front-running. Hamilton avoided the fireworks seen at the start of the Japan Grand Prix last week in a clean start from pole position, followed by Raikkonen and Massa. He then produced a succession of fastest laps to establish a lead that he extended with comfort as Ferrari seemed to struggle with the softer tyres in the first sector of the race.

By the time the leaders began making their first pit-stops, Hamilton led by more than four seconds ahead of Raikkonen followed by Massa, Alonso and McLaren's Heikki Kovalainen.

Massa was the first to pit, but continued with his choice of softer tyres, after 14 laps. He was joined by Alonso and then Hamilton and Raikkonen came in after lap 15. This left Kovalainen, celebrating his 27th birthday, in the lead for a brief period before he also pitted and Hamilton took command again with Raikkonen second but stuck behind Toro Rosso's heavily-laden Sebastian Vettel.

Out after a swift stop in which he

reduced his front wing setting slightly to counter over-steer. Hamilton flew and delivered several rapid laps that extended his advantage to more than seven seconds.

When Vettel pitted, Raikkonen pressed on to cut into Hamilton's lead, but Massa, third, was unable to make much impression. Hamilton's advantage was cut from 7.2 seconds to 6.4 seconds over three laps to lap 28. But he pulled some of that back before the second round of stops led by Alonso on lap 36. Hamilton led by 8.9 seconds when he and Raikkonen pitted together at the end of lap 38.

By then, unfortunately for McLaren, Kovalainen had already been forced to come in with a front right wheel puncture that effectively ended his hopes of a good finish.

On exit, Hamilton led ahead of Heidfeld's BMW Sauber with Raikkonen third, a buffer that was sure to delay Ferrari's charge in the closing laps.

Hamilton remained unchallenged at the front with a 13-second lead and it was left to the Ferrari team to swap places after 49 laps when Raikkonen slowed enough to let Massa pass him on the back straight.



McLaren-Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton is understandably delighted as he jokes around with a cameraman after victory in the Chinese GP at the Shanghai International Circuit on Sunday.

Comeback L'pool style

AFP, London



Chelsea made light of their injury crisis to cruise to a 5-0 win at Middlesbrough on Saturday as Liverpool were forced to produce another fightback to beat Wigan and keep pace with the league leaders.

With Arsenal and champions Manchester United also winning, the Premier League table was left with a familiar look to it with England's Champions League representatives occupying the top four berths for the first time this season.

Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari was without seven first-team regulars but Boro still succumbed to a defeat their manager Gareth Southgate described as a "humiliation".

A first-half strike from Salomon Kalou put Chelsea in front and their hosts imploded after the break. Juliano Belletti's top-corner strike from the edge of the area triggering a burst of four goals in 16 minutes.

Kalou found the net again, Frank Lampard headed the fourth and Florent Malouda rounded off the London club's biggest win since Scolari took charge in July.

"We showed people that we have 23 or 24 good players," the Brazilian said.

The win ensured Chelsea

remain top of the table on goal difference from Liverpool, who scored twice in the last five minutes to secure a 3-2 win over a Wigan side that had been reduced to ten men following the sending off of Ecuadorian winger Antonio Valencia.

Egypt striker Amr Zaki found the net twice to give Steve Bruce's side a half-time lead.

The visitors however paid a heavy price after Valencia collected his second yellow card 15 minutes from time.

Within five minutes Liverpool were level through Spain winger Albert Riera and Kuyt's second of the afternoon five minutes from time kept the Reds level on points with Chelsea.

Arsenal also had to come from behind to keep their challenge on track, a 3-1 win over Everton lifting the Gunners into third place.

Everton took a ninth minute lead when Leon Osman got on the end of Steven Pienaar's cross from the left.

Samir Nasri equalised with a crisp 25-yard drive three minutes into the second half, Robin van Persie nodded Arsenal into the lead in the 70th minute and Theo Walcott came off the bench to wrap up a match Arsene Wenger had admitted his side could ill afford to lose.

"We showed personality and mental strength - and that will be important for the rest of the season," said the Frenchman.

Wayne Rooney's rich goalscoring run continued in Manchester United's 4-0 win over West Brom at Old Trafford.

Rooney's opener was his eighth in six games for club and country and further strikes from Cristiano Ronaldo, Dimitar Berbatov and Nani saw Sir Alex Ferguson's men cruise to a win that leaves them six points off the top two with a game in hand.

The derby clash between Bolton and Blackburn was one of three matches to finish goalless.

Bolton had the better of the possession but it was Blackburn who came closest to breaking the deadlock when Carlos Villanueva's drive came back off the bar shortly before half-time.

Ten-man Portsmouth held out for a point at Aston Villa but the home side could scarcely claim to have deserved any more from the match having relied on goalkeeper Brad Friedel to keep them on level terms before Sean Davis was sent off with nine minutes left.

The match at Villa Park was overshadowed by a coin thrown from the crowd which pole-axed the referee's assistant.

Sunderland left Fulham with a point but their manager Roy Keane was left fuming after Kieran Richardson found the net with a free-kick only to see his effort chalked off for an infringement in the wall.

Napoli move to table top

INTERNET, undated

Napoli took the lead in the Italian Serie A late Saturday rallying to beat 2-1 a struggling Juventus side who conceded a second straight defeat. Napoli moved on to 14 points from seven games, but may lose the leadership Sunday as they hold a single-point lead over Lazio, Udinese, Inter Milan and Fiorentina, while Juve lag behind on nine points.

At a San Paolo stadium without fans in the curves due to security reasons, Slovak midfielder Marek Hamsik and Argentinian Ezequiel Lavezzi reversed the score after Brazilian Amauri put the Turin guests one up with a great volley.

As both sides studied each other early in the game, Danish midfielder Christian Poulsen on seven minutes fired a fast drive that became dangerous after Amauri deflected it inside the area, forcing a great save from the Napoli goalkeeper.

There were no threats for Gennaro Iezzo as Pavel Nedved fired high off a good assist from Juve captain Alessandro Del Piero, nor when Amauri aimed two feeble headers.

Austria's Alex Manninger made his first serious save on 22 minutes as Hamsik nodded by the first post before his colleague deflected a Del Piero free kick on 37 minutes.

There was little thrill for the crowd at the San Paolo as the two sides battled mostly in midfield, but the game flared up on 61 minutes as Amauri fired home a wonderful volley connecting with a cross from Poulsen.

It took Napoli only two minutes to equalize through a header from Hamsik off a great cross from Ezequiel Lavezzi that cut off Juve's uncertain defence.

A further dithering on 80 minutes allowed Lavezzi to reverse the score as he pounced on a clearance and had the best of Juve's central defenders.

Earlier Saturday, Fiorentina hammered Reggina 3-0 thanks to a brace from Alberto Gilardino to move on to 13 points.

Lehmann wants England farewell

AFP, Berlin

Former Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann said Sunday he wants to make his final bow in the Germany shirt against England next month in the international friendly at Berlin's Olympic Stadium.

The 38-year-old announced his retirement from the Mannschaft on August 8 having played in June's Euro 2008 final, but the VfB Stuttgart goalkeeper now wants to make his final farewell against England on November 19.

"I would like to play against England, the opponent is one close to my heart after all these years in London (with Arsenal)," Lehmann told Sunday's edition of Die Welt.

"I am impatient to see how the people react if I say farewell at this game," he added.

Lehmann spent five years at Arsenal, but lost his place in the side last season and moved to Stuttgart last summer.

He won 61 caps for his country and is no stranger to Berlin's Olympic Stadium having helped Germany reach the 2006 World Cup semi-finals by saving two penalties to help beat Argentina there in the quarter-final penalty shoot-out.

Germany's goalkeeper trainer, Andreas Koepke, has said Lehmann's involvement for the friendly against England is possible, but not yet decided by national coach Joachim Loew.

'Coach right to drop me'

AFP, London

Tottenham winger David Bentley concedes England manager Fabio Capello was probably right to leave him out of the recent World Cup qualifiers.

Bentley has endured a difficult few months after Spurs' terrible start to the season following his high-profile transfer from Blackburn.

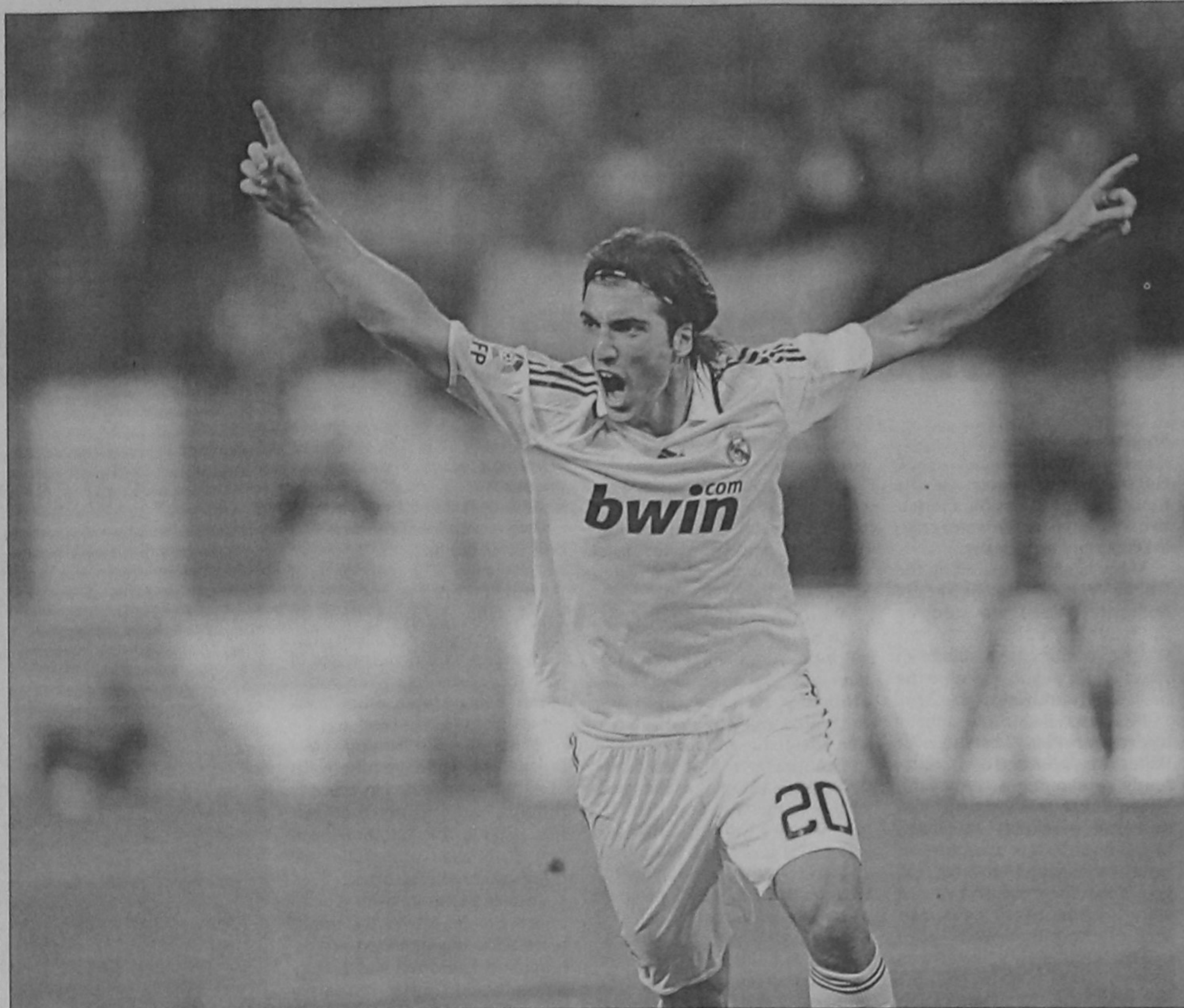
Bentley had looked set to inherit David Beckham's place on the right of England's midfield only for Theo Walcott to grasp his chance in the qualifiers and overtake him in the pecking order.

But Bentley - who insists he is still "loving" life at White Hart Lane despite the current problems - insists he can understand why he was not selected in the England squad for the matches against Kazakhstan and Belarus this month.

Speaking on BBC1's Inside Sport due to be screened on Monday Bentley revealed Capello has not contacted him since he was dropped.

He said: "No, he hasn't. But you know, I've been out of a couple of games, I've not played as well as I should have, the team (Tottenham) is not doing well."

"He's got to think of England and he's probably made the right decision."



Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain is ecstatic after scoring deep into injury time to hand his side a victory over city rivals Atletico Madrid in their Primera Liga clash at the Vicente Calderon on Saturday.

Higuain decides derby

AFP, Madrid



Argentine Gonzalo Higuain scored a penalty five minutes into stoppage time as Real Madrid defeated neighbours Atletico 2-1 on Saturday in a stormy derby

where both sides finished with 10 men and referee Clos Gomez came in for some stern criticism.

Portuguese winger Simao thought he had salvaged a point after curling in a 90th minute free-kick to cancel out Ruud van Nistelrooy's opener after just 32 seconds but there was a twist to come.

Higuain converted a penalty in the 95th minute at the Vicente Calderon to crush Atletico's spirits ahead of Wednesday's Champions League duel against Liverpool.

Real sit second in the standings with Villarreal a point ahead after a 0-0 draw at Espanyol on Saturday.

Villarreal goalkeeper Diego Lopez brilliantly saved a 70th minute penalty from Raul Tamudo to maintain his team's unbeaten start.

Atletico have lost four times already and their jinx against Real continues and they have not beaten their city rivals since 1999.

"It is devastating to concede a goal in the first minute and another one in the 95th," admitted Atletico coach Javier Aguirre.

"I don't think there is a mental problem but now we have to pick

the players up for the Liverpool game on Wednesday. We are doing well in the Champions League and this game deserves our full attention."

Real, in Champions League action against Juventus on Tuesday, took the spoils but Schuster could not resist a swipe at the referee.

"There were some question marks over the referee as he seemed to be with the home side (Atletico) for the second half," said Schuster. "That was a factor why we didn't win 5-1."

"We scored a penalty in the final minute and fully deserved to win. Late goals happen in football and as the saying goes the game is not over until the referee blows his final whistle."

After just 32 seconds, van Nistelrooy caught Atletico napping with a drilled shot to put Real ahead but the Dutchman's day went sour on 38 minutes when he was red-carded for a late tackle on Maniche.

"It was a mistake by the referee and I told him three times that it was just a yellow card," explained van Nistelrooy. "He also ruled out two perfectly good goals for us."

Eight minutes earlier Atletico had also been reduced to ten men when referee Clos Gomez claimed Colombian defender Luis Perea caught Wesley Sneijder with a stray arm.

Simao equalised with but Higuain had the final say in a game that had the spectators on the edge of their seats.

Confidence was low following Atletico's 6-1 rout by Barcelona and

Aguirre was relieved to welcome back first teamers Maniche and Diego Forlan.

Atletico were desperate not to concede an early goal after the Barca debacle - when they conceded three goals in the first eight minutes - but that plan went out the window with van Nistelrooy scoring after just 32 seconds.

The former Manchester United man caught goalkeeper Leo Franco off guard with a fierce snapshot. Then on three minutes Sneijder fizzed in a shot that Franco tipped on to the crossbar.

It was a frantic opening and van Nistelrooy thought he had made it 2-0 after 20 minutes but the effort was controversially ruled out for offside.

Minutes later Raul had the ball in the net only to be flagged offside in another tight decision.

Already against it Atletico gave themselves a mountain to climb when Perea was red-carded for catching Sneijder. It was hard to tell whether it was intentional but the referee had no doubt and brandished a straight red.

Eight minutes later the numbers were evened up when van Nistelrooy was issued his marching orders.

A late tackle on Maniche - who turned on the theatrics - saw Gomez pull out a red card when a yellow seemed more appropriate.

Simao thought he had saved Atletico from the jaws of defeat with his free-kick but Atletico stupidly conceded a late spot-kick and Higuain's penalty crept past the unlucky Franco.

Maradona owes millions!

AFP, Rome

Argentina legend Diego Maradona still owes the Italian tax-man 36 million euros, outstanding from his seven-year spell at Napoli from 1984-1991.

President of the Italian Tax Association Vittorio Carlomango, quoted by the Ansa news agency, said that Maradona had paid back about a 10th of one percent of what he owed.

"The Italian tax office has not managed to obtain from Maradona more than 0.11 percent of what he owes the public treasury: 36 million euros. It's deflating," he said.

"Of the 36 million euros, there's 22.4 million euros of interest."

He added that Maradona had only paid back 42,051.05 euros and two luxury watches.

Maradona joined Napoli from Barcelona in 1984 and helped the southerners to win their only two Serie A titles before his time in Italy came to an end following a positive test for cocaine that saw him cop a 15-month ban.

In recent years he has suffered severe health problems due to drink, drugs and over-eating.

Over the last four years he has suffered a heart-attack, undergone gastric bypass surgery, contracted hepatitis and been admitted to a psychiatric clinic.

Fergie confident of Tevez deal

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson expects Manchester United to tie up a permanent deal for Carlos Tevez despite interest from Real Madrid.

Tevez moved to Old Trafford on a two-year loan deal which expires at the end of the season and the European champions have first option on a permanent transfer.

But reports suggest United want to renegotiate the 30 million pounds fee being demanded by MRI, the company who own the rights to Tevez, while there have also been rumours that the Argentine forward is concerned about his lack of playing time this season. Spanish champions Real have been linked with a bid for Tevez, but Ferguson remains hopeful the 24-year-old will stay.

"I don't have to send any message to Carlos He knows where he is and how well we have treated him," Ferguson said.

"He's been a smashing player for us and I wouldn't want to lose him. I'm quite confident he will be staying."

"There's no deadline. Originally, we were looking at the end of the season, but that's been brought forward and we have been having negotiations for some time. Hopefully, it will be resolved soon, we are ahead of things."

"I don't know if it's true Madrid want him. It could be, but I am not worried about that. I think we will be okay. I don't have any worries about him going."



Liverpool forward Dirk Kuyt slides in to celebrate his late winner against Premier League rivals Wigan at Anfield on Saturday.