

Leverkusen see off Cologne

INTERNET, undated

Bayer Leverkusen will be top of the Bundesliga table at least until Sunday afternoon after a comfortable 2-0 victory over Cologne on Friday.

Leverkusen stepped up a gear after an uneventful first half and eventually broke the deadlock in the 68th minute, thanks to Manuel Friedrich.

Theofanis Gekas sealed the win six minutes from time with a penalty after Pitmin Schwegler had been brought down in the area.

With the top two playing each other on Sunday, Leverkusen knew three points would see it take top spot at least temporarily, but it was Cologne who started the brighter.

Nemanja Vucicevic could have given the visitors the lead in the 20th minute as he found himself unmarked on the right flank, but his powerful effort flew over the bar.

Teammate Miso Brecko went even closer in the 38th minute as he headed a corner narrowly wide of the top-right corner of the goal frame from six yards.

Fans began to show their frustration at such dull football in a derby and Cologne captain Milivoje Novakovic and teammate Youssef Mohamad both went to calm visiting fans after a firework the supporters had let off exploded next to Leverkusen defender Michael Kadlec.

The hosts came out after the break with renewed vigour and almost took the lead five minutes into the second half when Patrick Helmes' effort brushed the top of the crossbar from 12 yards.

Helmes did better eight minutes later with a fierce right-footed shot which Cologne goalkeeper Farid Mondragon did well to save.

The breakthrough eventually came in the 68th minute as Simon Ralfes nodded on Schwegler's corner to Friedrich who headed home from six yards.

And it was all over for Cologne in the 84th minute when Pedro Tunon Geromel shoulder barged Schwegler over in the area.

Gekas stepped up to send the keeper the wrong way and place a perfect penalty into the bottom-left corner.

'Hargreaves not for sale'

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson said on Friday that injury-hit England midfielder Owen Hargreaves was not for sale.

Hargreaves arrived in an 18-million-pound deal from Bayern Munich last year with the 27-year-old playing a major role in the Champions League final defeat of Chelsea in Moscow.

But he is now experiencing a second season wrecked by tendonitis and reports have emerged that Ferguson is looking to offload the Canadian-born player.

"For Owen's sake it is important we say he is not for sale," said Ferguson.

"Selling the boy is not even under consideration. It is a good story. The fact he has been injured a few times since he has been at the club.

"But United people remember what a contribution he made to us winning the European Cup. He was available in the second half of the season and played some important games for us."

Becks confirms Milan deal

AFP, Los Angeles

England midfielder David Beckham finally confirmed on Friday he is in talks for a short-term loan to AC Milan in early 2009.

The former England captain will play his final game of the MLS season for the Los Angeles Galaxy here on Sunday and intends to be back in a Galaxy shirt by the start of next season in late March or early April.

"Although nothing is confirmed at present, we can confirm that talks are taking place with Milan with regard to a short-term loan move at the start of next year," a short statement on Beckham's official website said.

"David very much remains a Galaxy player and he will be in Los Angeles for the start of the 2009 MLS season."

Beckham, 33, has 107 England caps and wants to stay in match-fit shape by playing for AC Milan during the MLS off-season, hoping to prove himself worthy of inclusion on the English national sides coached by Fabio Capello.



Bayer Leverkusen defender Manuel Friedrich (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Cologne during their Bundesliga match at the Bay Arena Stadium in Leverkusen on Friday.

Scolari confident of win

AFP, London



Luiz Felipe Scolari believes Chelsea can win Sunday's clash of the

invincibles against Liverpool and go on to become his dream team.

Scolari's side have yet to lose in 12 games since the Brazilian took charge, while Liverpool travel to Stamford Bridge undefeated in all competitions this season.

After the anguish of missing out on the Premier League and Champions League to Manchester United last season, Chelsea have started the campaign filled with a renewed sense of purpose by Scolari.

The Blues look the team most likely to end United's two-year reign as English champions, but Liverpool can make their own case to be taken seriously in the title race after their best start to a Premier League campaign.

With Chelsea ahead of Liverpool at the top of the table on goal difference, Scolari claims the stage is set for the match of the season so far.

"The clubs have the same spirit. They fight until the last minute to win the game," Scolari said. "They don't accept that they might lose."

"Sometimes they have been in bad condition in the last 10 minutes but changed the result. This is the best thing. They have spirit. They play as a team."

"This is what I want from my team as well and it is what they give me. That's why Sunday will be a fantastic game - a clash of the

AFP, London



One of Arsene Wenger's most

dearly held tenets is that a domestic league, and not European competition, is the true litmus test of a team's

talents. There has always been a whiff of self-interest in that principle, given the Arsenal manager's failure to lift the Champions League is in painful contrast to his three English Premier League crowns, but do not be surprised to see Wenger revise his belief system as the season wears on.

It might still be October, but already Arsenal appear better placed to thrive on the continent than on their native turf.

The north Londoners have progressed serenely through their Champions League group, rattling in 10 goals in three matches and making light of the supposedly fearsome Sukru Saracoglu stadium on Tuesday by thrashing Fenerbahce 5-2.

Yet the club's swaggering confidence in Europe has not been replicated in the Premier League, where they travel across London to West Ham on Sunday.

They slumped to an abysmal defeat at Fulham in August, saw their proud home record crushed by newly-promoted Hull City and dropped crucial points at Sunderland.

There is no suggestion of panic yet, but it is not premature to suggest that Arsenal - with their

invincibles.

"I know it's more difficult than other games, maybe. But it's the same three points as when we played against Stoke, Hull or Fulham."

Former Portugal and Brazil coach Scolari, whose club are unbeaten at the Bridge in 86 league matches, believes Chelsea are quickly maturing into the best team he has ever managed.

"This team I'm coaching now, I think it's one of the best teams I've worked with in my life," Scolari said. "Maybe they can even play better than the games we've played up to now."

"We play and we think about winning. One day, maybe we'll lose. But we don't think about the home record. We must think about the competition and think about winning trophies."

While Scolari is focused on making his players believe they are invincible, Benitez was taking a typically understated approach to the game of the season so far.

Liverpool have gone 18 years without a league title, but expectations at Anfield are growing that this is the team to finally end that drought.

Benitez, who has won just four of 19 meetings with Chelsea, accepts that success in west London would be seen as further evidence of Liverpool's burgeoning title credentials, but the Spaniard has no intention of talking up his team just yet.

"It is too early to talk of titles, but we have the confidence to beat anyone," he said.

"We could go top, which would

be a good problem for me then having to keep expectations down."

"Before the game to talk a lot is not good, afterwards maybe we will have to keep our people calm."

With Fernando Torres set to miss out through injury, Benitez won't make any bold predictions that leave him a hostage to fortune. But the Reds boss knows his team have already beaten Manchester United without Torres this season, so they have no reason to fear Chelsea.

"Everyone knows Torres is a key player for us, he scores and we win games," Benitez said. "But we have won plenty of games without him, and we have enough confidence in our squad to do so again."

"Without him it will be a different style of play, but we know we can manage. I believe we have the firepower to beat Chelsea."

"We have the mentality to win this one, maybe after so long unbeaten at home for Chelsea in the league, it is time."

"We are at the top of the table with Chelsea having not played our best yet."

Liverpool midfielders Steven Gerrard and Xabi Alonso are expected to be fit after suffering injuries during the midweek Champions League draw against Atletico Madrid, but Irish striker Robbie Keane faces a late fitness test on his groin strain.

Ashley Cole is set to return from a hamstring injury for Chelsea, while Didier Drogba, Michael Essien and Michael Ballack remain sidelined.

Real give up on C'Ron

AFP, London

Real Madrid said on Friday that their pursuit of Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo is over.

The 23-year-old Portuguese winger, who is under contract at Old Trafford until 2012, was heavily linked with a switch to Spain earlier this year.

But Real president Ramon Calderon told the BBC: Manchester United would not like to lose him - that is the situation. They are very clear about that so now it is a situation we have to forget."

Ronaldo scored 41 goals last season for United to spark a Premier League-Champions League double and Calderon admitted that the player is unlikely to move to Spain.

"Manchester didn't want to sell over the last three or four months but we don't want to get into trouble with them as they are one of the biggest clubs in the world," he said.

"You can never be sure what will happen in the future but Real Madrid want to have a good relationship with Manchester."

"We do not want disturb them in any way over any possible signing that they are not willing to accept."

"We know it is not easy to sign players from big clubs in the middle of the season."

"I don't think we'll sign anyone unless we have any serious injuries."

Jaukovic breaks 50m butterfly WR

AFP, Sydney

Adopted Australian Matt Jaukovic broke the 50-metres butterfly short course world record on the opening night of the Sydney leg of the World Cup on Saturday.

The former Montenegro swimmer, competing in his first meet for Australia, clocked 22.50 seconds to lower the previous record of Brazilian Kaio Almeida by 0.1 seconds.

The 22-year-old law student picked up 11,500 US dollars in prize money for his performance in the final swim of the night.

"It is going to be different now because before I was an underdog and now people are going to be after me," Jaukovic said.

"That is a different perspective but I think I can handle it."

Jaukovic moved to Australia three and a half years ago to study at Sydney University and improve his swimming.

His parents still live in Montenegro but are hoping to catch up with him at the Moscow round of the World Cup.

Jaukovic said he had been closing in on the world mark and was delighted to have done it in Sydney.

"I think this was my fifth go at it, including the nationals and I am quite happy to have got it at home," he said.

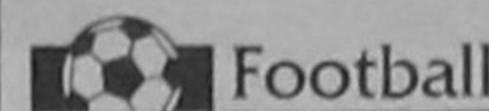
Beijing Olympic 1500m freestyle gold medalist Oussama Mellouli won three finals on the opening night.

The Tunisian took the 400m freestyle in three minutes 40.49 seconds, and the 100m and 400m medley in 53.84secs and 4:06.47 respectively.

Nick D'Arcy, who was kicked off Australia's team for the Beijing Games to answer still pending serious assault charges following a late-night bar incident, returned to the pool to share the 200m butterfly title.

D'Arcy went out hard and just held on as fast-finishing compatriot Chris Wright dead-heated with him in 1:53.37.

PSG join Ronaldo chase



AFP, Paris

French league side Paris Saint Germain have joined the race to sign Brazilian star Ronaldo, who according to a report Saturday could end his latest injury nightmare in less than two months' time.

The career of the former Real Madrid and AC Milan striker, who is currently without a club, came to a shuddering halt earlier this year when he seriously injured knee ligaments.

After returning to full training with Brazilian side Flamengo at the end of September, the two-time World Cup winner hinted he would welcome a spell at PSG in a bid to relaunch his career.

Speaking to Saturday's edition

of L'Equipe newspaper, the player's agent Fabiano Farah, said Ronaldo has been training with Flamengo's first team and was "almost certain" to soon regain full fitness.

And he said the former Ballon d'Or and world player of the year would be looking to join a club with ambition.

"Ronaldo is making huge sacrifices to regain full fitness, and at this point we're practically sure he will succeed," Farah told the paper.

"Given his status and what he has achieved he is looking to join a club with ambition that will give him the chance to win titles."

"I've already spoken to PSG."

Although PSG sent their chief scout, Alain Roche, to Brazil last week the French side are likely to face stiff competition for Ronaldo's signature.

Manchester City, who signed

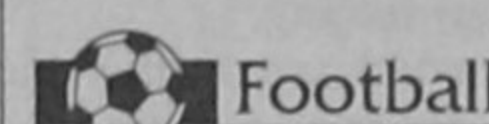
Brazilian Robinho from Real Madrid earlier this season, are said to be in the hunt while Serie A side Roma are also watching the situation closely according to L'Equipe.

PSG are battling to end years of under-achieving in both the French league and Europe, but Ronaldo's mind could be made up by the practicalities.

He already owns an apartment in Paris and, according to the report, wants his partner, Bia Antony, who is pregnant, to give birth in the French capital this December.

Farah added: "We can see that PSG is on its way back to being a big team. That could interest Ronaldo."

"But before thinking about signing for anybody, he has to concentrate on getting back to 100 per cent, and being competitive. That's the priority."



AFP, Berlin

English Premier League leaders Chelsea have refused to allow Michael Ballack to travel to Germany to meet coach Joachim Loew for crisis talks which could determine his international future.

The London club's coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said that with Ballack still recovering from surgery on his feet, the player will stay in England to continue his fight for fitness.

"Ballack plays for Chelsea. If Loew wants to talk to Ballack I invite the coach to come here and stay with us for one or two days and talk to him," said Scolari.

"But it's impossible for Ballack to travel now. He is in recovery and is with the doctors. It is not good for Ballack or the Germans."

The German football federation (DFB) confirmed that Chelsea had

told them of their decision.

"We have received a fax from Chelsea informing us that the club will not allow Ballack to go to Germany for health reasons," DFB spokesman Harald Stenger told the SID news agency.

Loew wants to meet Ballack after the Germany skipper claimed the coach didn't show enough respect and loyalty to his senior players.

Earlier Friday, Bayern Munich coach Jurgen Klinsmann told Ballack to apologise for his damning criticism of Loew.

"The situation is very simple. Michael must apologise for his comments on the coach and the players," Klinsmann said.

Loew had demanded that Ballack return to Germany to explain his outburst, with both men speaking to each other on the phone Thursday evening.

"What will become of Michael is 'Jogi's' business. He is the boss, he decides for himself," said

Klinsmann, who took Germany to the World Cup semifinals in 2006.

Former Germany captain Lothar Matthaus urged Loew to punish Ballack, saying that he had breached the team's code of conduct.

"Every discussion between a senior player and the coach should happen behind locked doors. But Ballack does not seem to adhere to a code of conduct anymore."

Matthaus added: "He runs everything past the media. The trust in him has been lost."

The incident began on Tuesday after Ballack told the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper that "Experienced national players deserve at least some respect and loyalty."

"There was a group of experienced players in that squad like Torsten Frings, Miroslav Klose and me whose achievements have suddenly been questioned and we find ourselves under attack," added Ballack.

Despair for Modric

THE GUARDIAN



As Tottenham prepare for three Premier League matches in six days that will shape their future, another forlorn voice can be heard from the gathering of dissenters that passes for a dressing-room these days. It is that of Luka Modric, the 16.5 m pound Croatian midfielder player who was one of the substitutes against Udinese on Thursday night.

"I did my best but I was all alone in the middle," he said. "I couldn't do any more. I was disappointed to start on the bench but it was the coach's decision."

Modric's despair follows that voiced by David Bentley ("We look like we don't know what we're doing") and the respected figure of Jonathan Woodgate, who says the team is rudderless ("We're worse than the Leeds team that went down").

Modric has looked a misfit in the Premier League, as predicted by the Arsenal manager, Arsene Wenger, and appears no more at home in Europe. The Croatian added: "We started very well but it was an unfortunate goal we conceded and

it was at the key moment in the match. In the second half we also started well but the red card [Jamie O'Hara was sent off in the 57th minute] was also unfortunate and after that it was very difficult to create chances. The red card made a mess of the team."

But the German referee, Felix Brych, should not be allowed to take all the credit. Football, perhaps, should feel grateful to the Spurs chairman, Daniel Levy, who has unwittingly produced a template for how not to run a football club. First, a good manager in Martin Jol was sacked. Then, a director of football, Damien Comolli, was appointed even though such a role has never worked in British football. Then, crucially, the best players were sold and inferior ones brought in. That's Spurs for you - very attractive but not very bright.

Now they must face up to playing Bolton followed by Arsenal on Wednesday and Liverpool on Saturday. Defeats in these three matches would leave the club's position at the bottom of the Premier League looking hopeless and might seal the fate of manager Juande Ramos as well as that of

Comolli.

The latter has been seen as the more vulnerable of the two but the position is now so desperate that even his removal would be unlikely to change anything apart from placating the critics who say that if he knows better than the manager why not put him in charge?

To make matters worse, Woodgate hobbled off on Thursday night while Ledley King made what is likely to be his cameo appearance for October. Spurs have now had three players sent off and conceded three penalties in two games.

Ramos's record at Seville earned him respect but he did not look in the mood to inspire anyone when he shuffled out of the Udinese stadium after the match. When he was asked how long he had got, he replied: "I don't know because I don't control that. The Bolton game is very important for us now. It's a game with big tension on the pitch. We need to win. We must work each day in training to help the players get their confidence back." Should Comolli be sacked? "I don't know anything about this," he said. "Only the club knows what will happen to people."

Gallas faces Wenger wrath



THE GUARDIAN

Arsene Wenger has revealed that he was once a smoker but his liberal attitude is not expected to spare William Gallas, the Arsenal captain, from a club fine after he was photographed in the small hours of Thursday morning leaving a London nightclub with a cigarette in his mouth.

Wenger will check the authenticity of the pictures and speak to Gallas to remind him of his responsibilities. The French defender was among a host of celebrities at the reopening of the Movida club, which was also attended by the Chelsea players Florent Malouda and Mikel John Obi.

"First, I have to speak to Gallas," said Wenger, before his own previous as a smoker came out. "I did smoke but never a lot and never when I played. After, when I became a young coach, I sometimes had one [cigarette] because my assistant was smoking at three o'clock in the morning, when we had lost a big game."

"In France, we all smoke. I have seen buses in France that you would not believe, you do not see each other. When I was a player, nobody would ever tell you that you should not smoke. We were

driving home in coaches. You had to open the windows in winter to see each other."

Gallas is due to return to the team for tomorrow's visit to West Ham United after a thigh complaint and Wenger gave his full backing to the centre-half. But he did point out that his aversion to smoking was based on the affect it might have on the player's fitness and his reputation as a professional. "Gallas has a responsibility as captain and that cannot be accepted," insisted the Arsenal manager. "It is a public job with public responsibility. But there is smoking and there is smoking. I am sure you had players who were smoking 40 cigarettes a day."

Wenger went on to claim that West Ham might now be title contenders had they hung on to their young stars years ago. "They had a team to win the championship, if you take the players now [when they have matured]," he said. "[Joe] Cole, [Frank] Lampard, [Michael] Carrick, Rio Ferdinand, [Paolo] Di Canio played, too. They had an unbelievable team."

He believes, though, that the club's new manager, Gianfranco Zola, can guide them towards success. "Zola was an Arsenal player, he just went in the wrong direction [to Chelsea]," remarked Wenger with a smile. "I like him as a player and as a man."

Brazil veterans arrive in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

A team of Brazilian footballers including two veteran World Cup players arrived in Myanmar Saturday to take part in charity matches to raise funds for cyclone victims.

The 1994 World Cup star Paulo Sergio was among the 19 players who arrived at Yangon airport, an AFP reporter saw.

"We are aware of what happened in this country. We are here sacrificing our time and bodies to help," Marcos Grava, the team's manager, told AFP.

Cyclone Nargis hit the country in early May, leaving at least 138,000 people dead or missing when it ripped through key agricultural areas in the south.

The Brazilian squad will play against local teams on October 26 and October 28 at two football stadiums in the main city Yangon, according to state media.

On October 27 they will visit the Irrawaddy Delta, the area worst hit by the cyclone, where hundreds of thousands of people are still struggling to rebuild their lives.

"I'm very glad for their arrival here especially when our people are in difficulty. They came from very far away. I really thank them," Zaw Zaw, chairman of the Myanmar football federation, told AFP.

The Sunday match will be shown live on state television and all profits from the entrance fee will go to a fund for cyclone victims.