

## 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 Schweglar 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 Vatcevic 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 sixyards.

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 Helmets' effort brushed the top of the crossbar from 12 yards.

Helmets 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 Schweglar's corner to Friedrich who headed home from sixyards.

And it was all over for Cologne in the 84th minute when Pedro Tunon Geromel shoulder barged Schweglar 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 tendinitis 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's 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 web site 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.



PHOTO: AFP

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.

Liverpool have gone 18 games 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.

"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

"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 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.

"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."

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## Gunners seek Euro form

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 at that principle, given the Arsenal manager's failure to lift the Champions League 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.

"Playing good football is good, but winning something is even better. Now all of our hope is to win something. We know it's the time to win something," Emmanuel Adebayor, the striker, said.

"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

fast, fluent attacking and porous defending - might be better suited to the inherently occasional nature of knock-out football rather than the long grind of an English league season.

That, combined with the unpalatable truth that Arsenal have failed to win any silverware since 2005, could just see a restructuring of the club's priorities this term, with the Champions League occupying centre-stage.

"I need to win something with the club. We have been playing great football and we all know it's the time to win something," Emmanuel Adebayor, the striker, said.

"It will tell my players that yes, these games are dangerous because you can lose at home. But your confidence is very high if you win because you have beaten a good team."

"You can use that for the rest of your season. You have got to have faith in your players and be brave enough to do things your way."

West Ham will be without midfield Mark Noble for Sunday's game after the England under-21 midfielder suffered a torn calf in training.

"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."

"Lee Bowyer and James Collins are available for selection. Arsenal will have both captain William Gallas (thigh) and fellow centre-half Kolo Toure (shoulder) back in their squad."

"We know that we can't be

perfect every game but we need to keep strong and push on to make sure the results stay good."

Arsenal's hopes rest, partly, on which West Ham turn up at Upton Park. The Hammers have produced mixed performances this season, swashbuckling one week but inexplicably limp the next.

Confidence buoyed by a fine start to new manager Gianfranco Zola's reign has dissipated with consecutive defeats to Bolton and Hull and suddenly the talk in east London is of revised ambitions.

"I will not lose any sleep about this game or the one against Manchester United on Sunday," said Zola. "These are the games that made me want to come to England," the former Italy striker added.

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## PSG join Ronaldo chase

Football

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.

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.

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.

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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."

## Blues block Ballack talks

Football

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.

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

told them