

# Gunners' do or die battle

AFP, London



Arsenal's fading English Premier League title ambitions face a make-or-break moment on Sunday when they visit leaders Chelsea for a London derby at their Stamford Bridge fortress.

A third straight league defeat could leave the Gunners in freefall and a huge 13 points behind the Blues just 15 games in.

But equally, winning at Stamford Bridge -- where Chelsea have been beaten just once in 89 league games -- would send an impressive statement to the rest of the top flight that Arsenal are back in the race.

Despite the Gunners' dismal league performances on the pitch and dressing-room dust-ups off it, manager Arsene Wenger is relishing the challenge.

"This season we have played better against the top four," he insisted.

"We cannot deny that because we lost against the teams who are not maybe favourites to play in the top four. Why? Maybe because they play a different type of football."

"I believe as well that some teams like

Manchester City and Aston Villa have strengths and can give a game to anybody."

"We have to go with extreme desire and express our strong points and not hide. We can play and win everywhere in the world. We know Chelsea are a great side with great players but we can beat them if we play at our best."

And in his hour of crisis, Wenger has received support from the unlikeliest of sources going into the Chelsea clash -- Blues boss Luiz Felipe Scolari.

"Arsene is a coach who has been there 12 years. He's a man that builds teams. Sells this and that, then puts in other players," said the Portuguese.

"Arsene are very good every year. And when you change two or three players in one season, you need time."

"The time, I think, for Arsenal and Arsene is now. They can play very well and win many games."

Stamford Bridge could prove to be a hostile venue for players on both sides and Wenger has appealed for calm.

England left-back Ashley Cole is still reviled for making the switch from Arsenal to the Blues, while France defender William Gallas, who went in the other direction, has recently caused a furore for criticising his own team-mates -- an outburst which saw him stripped of the club captaincy.

France striker Nicolas Anelka, the Premier League's top scorer with 12 goals, faces his old club Arsenal, which he left in 1999.

Arsenal will have leading striker Emmanuel Adebayor, attacking midfielder Samir Nasri and right-back Bacary Sagna available again after recent injuries.

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba is banned, while midfielder Joe Cole could miss out after sustaining an ankle injury in the 1-1 draw at Bordeaux on Wednesday.

Chelsea won the last clash between the London sides, two Drogba goals cancelling out Sagna's opener at Stamford Bridge in March.

Last weekend's matches left the Blues top of the table with 33 points and the Gunners 10 points behind them in fifth place.

Beckenbauer had initially refused to entertain the idea of allowing Podolski to leave, but has now changed his tune.

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**Zlatan snubs Didier move**

INTERNET, undated

Inter Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic has poured cold water on reports linking Chelsea's Didier Drogba to the San Siro by claiming the Ivorian's services are not needed.

Drogba has been heavily linked with a move to join his old boss Jose Mourinho at Inter since the Italian media claimed the Ivory Coast star had held a meeting with Mourinho's agent Jorge Mendes earlier this week.

Mourinho has already denied any knowledge of the alleged meeting, and Inter president Massimo Moratti has also told the Italian press his side do not need any more strikers.

Now Ibrahimovic too insists between him and Brazilian forward Adriano the Nerazzurri have more than enough firepower to defend their Scudetto.

"He [Drogba] is a great player, one that thanks to his physical strength scores so many goals," the Sweden international told Corriere dello Sport.

"But when it comes to great strikers we already have plenty. Adriano for example can make a massive difference if he's fit. I really enjoy playing alongside him and he creates a lot of space for me."

Michael Meier, chief executive of Cologne, said the football league had achieved an "outstanding result" in view of the financial crisis and the cartel office's ruling which had "put professional football in Germany at a massive disadvantage" against other European leagues.

## New TV deal for Germans



INTERNET, undated

German football has agreed a new television deal over four seasons which will earn the country's first and second division clubs 412 million euros (524.6 million dollars) per season. The German Football League (DFL) said Friday the new 1.65-billion-euro deal was an increase of about 7 million euros per season for the 36 first and second division clubs.

The deal from next season retains current broadcasters but will introduce a later Saturday kick-off for one first-division match. It also enables German armchair views to continue watching Bundesliga highlights early on Saturday evenings in the traditional ARD Sportschau.

Pay-TV broadcaster Premiere retains the right to live football in both divisions and will also screen the late Saturday match, which will kick off at 6.30 p.m. (1730 GMT). The two matches scheduled for Sunday will kick off at 3.30 pm and 5.30 pm instead of the current parallel kick-off time of 5 pm.

A match will also continue to be broadcast live on Friday evening by Premiere.

Sirius would have produced and marketed the Bundesliga package, was effectively a price cartel.

Raiball said: "In view of the fact that we are dealing with an extremely difficult media market, and have also been put at a disadvantage by incomprehensible rules from the cartel office, the possibilities of growth for the Bundesliga are limited.

"On top of that we have a downward general economic development with a global financial crisis which is also causing a problem for media undertakings."

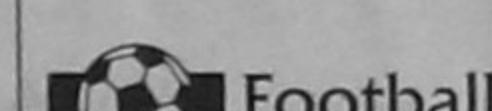
Friday's agreement was welcomed by both broadcasters and club managers.

ARD chairman Fritz Raff said the fact that the Bundesliga remained in the Sportschau was "good for ARD, good for the Bundesliga and very good for the viewers and sports fans."

He said there was hardly a programme in German television that attracted both young and older viewers in the same way.

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## Made in Japan



INTERNET, undated

When Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari and Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger go head-to-head in Sunday's Premier League showdown, they will briefly put on hold a friendship forged in a decade ago.

Scolari first met Wenger during a brief spell in charge of J-League club Jubilo Iwata in the late 1990s, while Wenger was running the show at Grampus Eight.

Although Wenger left for Arsenal soon after Scolari's arrival, they met several times and quickly established a bond.

Wenger would go on to mould Arsenal into his own vision of a total football academy, while Scolari won the World Cup with Brazil playing an equally eye-catching style.

Scolari's arrival at Chelsea earlier this season was greeted with pleasure by Wenger and now they will meet for the first time in the Premier League.

"This is the first time I'll have played against Wenger -- he's been my friend for 10 or 12 years now," Scolari said. "I met him in Japan for the first time and we are big friends."

"I came sometimes to London to watch Arsenal and, after the game, we discussed



ARSENÉ WENGER

things in his house.

"He invited me to his home, we had dinner, we spoke about football and what I think about my team and about Arsenal."

"Our personalities are different -- I was born in Brazil, he in France, our families are different. But we have the same ideas about football."

The cordial relationship between the managers is a far-cry from the bitter words of words that erupted whenever Chelsea played Arsenal during Jose Mourinho's reign at Stamford Bridge.

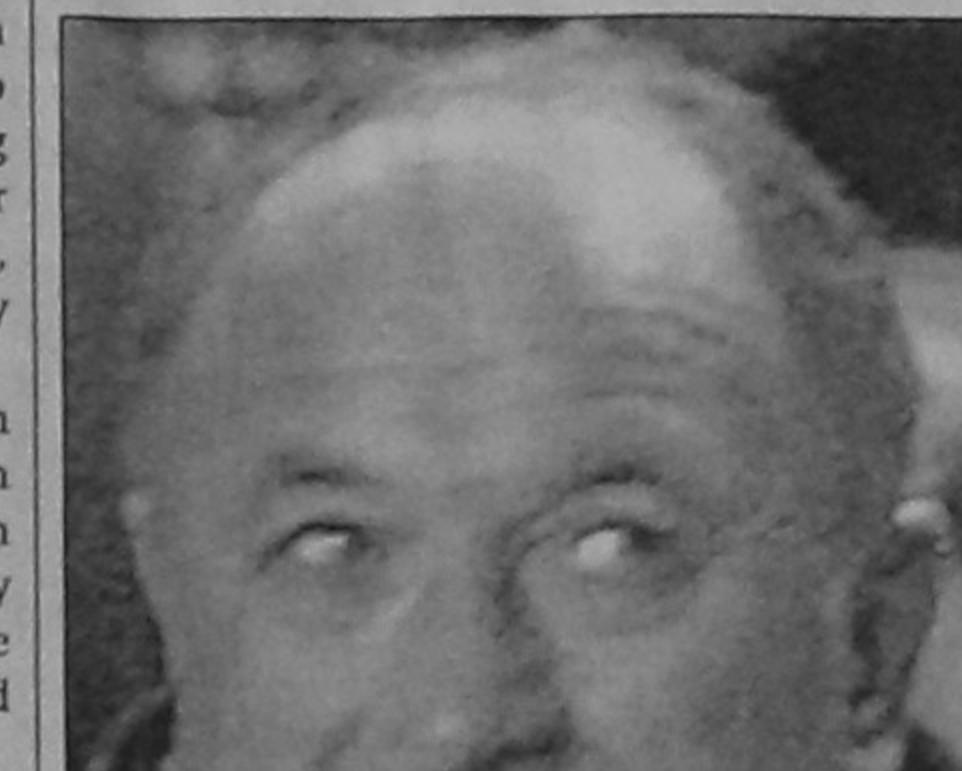
Wenger has always preferred to let his players speak for him and he is delighted with the more civil tone to the pre-match build-up.

"I met him in Japan because he was over there for a while," Wenger said. "After that I met him when he was national coach of Portugal because he had some players in England and we kept good relations."

"He is good for English football. First of all you want managers who have a positive attitude towards the game."

"Is he a breath of fresh air? I don't know. It looks like the press is always in need of fresh air, some fresh oxygen."

"I believe the most important thing is the quality of the job you do."



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

## Bayern set Podolski price

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has confirmed his club will allow Germany striker Lukas Podolski to move on for a fee of 19.3 million dollars.

The 23-year-old has struggled to hold down a regular starting spot during more than two seasons with Bayern and has been linked with a return to former club Koln for some months.

Beckenbauer had initially refused to entertain the idea of allowing Podolski to leave, but has now changed his tune.

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PHOTO: AFP  
Hertha Berlin midfielder Gojko Kacar (R) celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Cologne during their Bundesliga match at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Friday.

## Hertha edge Cologne

INTERNET, undated



Hertha Berlin striker Marko Pantelic came off the bench to head a late winner and lift the capital club up to second in the Bundesliga table with a 2-1 victory over Cologne on Friday.

The unsettled frontman proved his worth to coach Lucien Favre by scoring four minutes from time as Hertha moved to within a point of leaders Hoffenheim.

Mondragon had to be alert again to keep out Kacar's header from Voronin's corner, but the Serbia defender did make the breakthrough in the 24th minute, slotting the ball in to the bottom right corner from 12 yards after being picked out by Voronin's

tonight, but his introduction in the 69th minute proved key as he earned the home side its fourth straight win after Cologne's Milivoj Novakovic had canceled out Gojko Kacar's opener.

Hertha has not dropped a point since its 5-1 thrashing at Werder Bremen and look to have transformed itself into a surprise title contender.

The started like an in-form side and Andriy Voronin tested visiting goalkeeper Faryd Mondragon in the 11th minute.

But it was left for Pantelic to decide the game in the 86th minute as he strengthened his claim for a recall to the starting lineup.

Patrick Ebert swung in a corner from the right which the substitute headed into the top corner.

Pierre Wome tested Hertha keeper Jaroslav Drobny with a 30-yard effort after the break, while at the other end Marc Stein crossed for Raffael, whose shot was off target.

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## Arshavin closer to exit



INTERNET, undated

Zenit St Petersburg have raised the stakes in their battle with Andrei Arshavin over his transfer from the club, after they claimed that it would be end of his career if he went on strike.

Arshavin has made no secret of his desire to leave Zenit in the January transfer window and earlier this month the 27-year-old said: "If they do not put a realistic price tag on me and let me go, I'll stay at Zenit but only on paper. I do not want to play for them next year and I won't."

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