



Blackburn Rovers midfielder Vincenzo Grella (L) and Blyth Spartans' Alex Gidea fight for the ball during their FA Cup encounter at Croft Park in Blyth on Monday.

## Blackburn edge Blyth

Football

AFP, Blyth

A brilliant freekick by Chilean international Carlos Villanueva proved the difference between Premiership side Blackburn Rovers and non-league Blyth Spartans here on Monday as Rovers ran out 1-0 winners.

Villanueva's 58th minute effort produced a justified result against a side 181 places below his team and earned them a fourth round clash with Premiership rivals Sunderland while extending their unbeaten record under Sam Allardyce since he took over four matches ago.

Allardyce -- who fielded virtually a second string side -- admitted he had been a little nervous towards the end with just the one goal advantage.

"It was comfortable until the last few minutes, but having not converted our chances they were bound to get a chance at some stage.

"I was frustrated we didn't see the game out completely. They (his side) need the mentality to change the way they play," added Allardyce, who replaced Paul Ince after he was sacked last month.

His Blyth Spartans counterpart Harry Dunn said it had been a wonderful experience.

"I'm so proud of the players, this has been a really fantastic experience for us."

The hosts -- who memorably reached the fifth round 31 years ago losing in front of 42,000 spectators in a replay against Wrexham -- had started off in combative fashion with both Kenny Boyle and Shaun Reay clattering into

Matt Derbyshire and Martin Olsson respectively in the first two minutes.

However, it failed to knock Rovers confidence too much as they poured on the pressure with Carlos Villanueva having three shots on goal in the first 10 minutes while Blyth keeper Mark Bell was forced to save from Keith Treacy and Olsson.

Blyth -- who had not scored in their three previous matches -- at last got in a shot at Rovers goal in the 19th minute but Alan Judge's effort went wide.

Somehow, though, Blyth managed to make it through to half-time tied at 0-0 through either a mixture of hardtackling by them or mediocre play by the visitors.

However, Allardyce's half-time talk must have sparked something in Rovers -- who have reached the semifinals twice in recent years in 2005 and 2007 -- as they came out in much better fashion in the second period.

Villanueva was their standout player as he had been before the break as he twisted and turned early on in the second-half and unleashed a stunning shot which had the keeper beaten but unfortunately for the South American it went just wide of the post.

However, the 22-year-old was to make no mistake a few minutes later as having won the freekick he curled in a brilliant strike to beat Bell -- and a minute later Allardyce decided he had done enough by substituting him.

Rovers went close to doubling their lead two minutes later as Treacy volleyed brilliantly but it took a deflection off Boyle, clipped the crossbar and went for a corner.

## Tevez might leave MU

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Carlos Tevez has warned he will leave Manchester United if he gets a suitable offer after becoming frustrated at the lack of progress over talks to turn his loan deal at Old Trafford into a permanent contract. The Argentine also risked the anger of Sir Alex Ferguson by saying he would like to play for Real Madrid.

As Ferguson tried to increase the pressure on Liverpool by claiming that Rafael Benítez's team will get "nervous" during the run-in for the Premier League title, United's manager found himself in an uncomfortable situation of his own thanks to Tevez's remarks.

The Argentine forward rejected suggestions that he had turned down an offer from United and reiterated his desire for a swift resolution. He joined the club on loan from West Ham in 2007 and has become tired of waiting for that temporary deal, which runs out next summer, to become a long-term arrangement.

"Now all clubs are on an equal footing. If a club comes to me and offers me a five-year deal, I will accept it for peace of mind," the 24-year-old told a radio station in his homeland. "I will sign my last contract, and then I figure that I'll go back to Boca [Juniors]. That could be in four or five years. I want everybody to know no offer has been made. I don't like that they are play-

ing with our fans, who show their love to me in each match."

The Argentinian also made remarks about Real likely to displease his manager. "Who wouldn't want to play for Real Madrid," he said. "Like Manchester, they are one of the best clubs in the world and it would be a pleasure to play for them."

Tevez said that if he leaves United he wants to "quit on good terms" but indicated he is unhappy with Ferguson's comments the manager made regarding his contract. "I

didn't like him [Ferguson] saying I didn't like the offer I was made because neither my agent nor me were given one," he said. "I don't know anything on my future. United know what they must pay if they want me to stay. I want to stay but the club have not made any offer. I've been waiting for them for a year and a half."

There is an agreement in place with Tevez's agent, Kia Joorabchian, for United to secure Tevez for 32 million pounds but the Premier League champions may be reluctant to pay that.



CARLOS TEVEZ

## Milan in for Pennant

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Milan have offered Jermaine Pennant the chance to move to San Siro on a free transfer next summer but have been warned by Liverpool that they will not succeed in any bid for Daniel Agger this month.

Pennant is surplus to requirements at Anfield and has been offered a pre-contract by the Italian club which would see him join at the end of the season. However, Rafael Benítez is determined to hold on to Agger as he tries to keep the core of Liverpool's title-chasing squad intact.

Reports in Italy yesterday claimed that Milan would capitalise on Agger's stalled contract negotiations by making an 8.5 million pound offer for a player who will be available under a 7 million pound release clause in the summer. Liverpool insist that no such clause exists, however, and have informed the Denmark defender and his agent, Per Steffensen, they will resist any approach for the 24-year-old as they concentrate on trying to win a first league title in 19 years.

Milan's need to find replacements for their veteran defend-

ers Paolo Maldini and Alessandro Nesta and Agger's contract situation has alerted the Italians to a possible transfer. Agger is in the final 18 months of his contract and talks between the parties have proved problematic, although Liverpool deny they have offered the 75,000 pounds-a-week deal that he has reportedly rejected.

Benítez is determined to avoid any disruption this month and insists that Andrea Dossena, the left-back signed for 7 million pounds from Udinese in the summer, still has a future. The 27-year-old has been unimpressive in his debut season and has not featured in Liverpool's last four games, fuelling the belief that Benítez will seek to cash in. The Liverpool manager, however, said: "I have not considered selling Andrea Dossena. I think it is important to keep people together now."

Benítez's stance follows news that Liverpool will be without Emiliano Insua, the 19-year-old who has replaced Dossena in the side for their last four games, until 8 February. Insua is expected to miss Liverpool's league games with Stoke City, Everton, Wigan and Chelsea, plus the FA Cup fourth-round date with their Merseyside rivals, due to his involvement in the Under-20 South American championship with Argentina.

## Jose backs Adriano

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho has backed Adriano to regain his place in the Inter Milan team.

There has been speculation that the Brazilian striker will be heading for the San Siro exit midway through a season which for the striker has been plagued by controversy.

The 26-year-old was left out of Inter's side for five games earlier this season after a disagreement with boss Mourinho.

Inter recently rejected reports that the player had turned up to training under the influence of alcohol.

Mourinho said: "I believe he will remain. I always said that I wanted to end the season with the same group of players that I began the campaign."

Adriano is working well and I believe he could make an appearance in one of our first three games this year."

Adriano, who has made just seven Serie A appearances for Inter this season, has fully recovered from a muscular injury which he sustained last month.

His agent, Gilmar Rinaldi, has dismissed reports Adriano is a target for Mourinho's former club Chelsea.

Rinaldi said: "No-one at Chelsea has contacted us. If they don't make a move it's useless to speculate."

Adriano's wish is to remain for another year and a half at Inter in order to complete his contract."

## Defoe on way to Spurs

AFP, London

England international striker Jermain Defoe is set to leave Portsmouth and rejoin Harry Redknapp at Tottenham, the London club said on Tuesday.

A fee has been agreed on what is thought to be a five-year contract and the 26-year-old Defoe only needs to clear a medical to clinch the deal.

Spurs chairman Daniel Levy and Portsmouth chief executive Peter Storrie had been in talks over the weekend to negotiate a transfer fee in the region of 15 million pounds (16 million euros).

"Personal terms have been agreed and the striker will undergo a medical," a statement from Spurs said.

Tottenham boss Redknapp bought Defoe for Pompey in the 2008 January window and his return had been suggested since the change of manager at White Hart Lane two months ago.

He went on a run of eight goals in his first seven games for Portsmouth and has added nine goals this season so far.

"I wouldn't have sold him if I was manager at Portsmouth and Tottenham came back in," Redknapp admitted. "I'd be keeping him."

Redknapp has prioritised a striker and a left-sided midfielder in the current transfer window, with Middlesbrough's Stewart Downing also subject of a bid from Spurs.

Ghana international midfielder Stephen Appiah is on trial at White Hart Lane this week and could sign until the end of the season.

## Football games cancelled in Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Football Association on Monday cancelled all league matches due to the army's operation in Gaza and rocket fire against the south of the country.

"It would not be appropriate to continue holding the matches while citizens in the south of the country are under the threat of rockets and are living in shelters," the association said in a statement.

The FA called off all matches in the different leagues at least for the coming weekend, it said.

Israel launched a massive air and ground offensive in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip on December 27 in a bid to stem rocket fire.

Militants have since fired hundreds of rockets that have struck deeper than ever across the south and centre of the country, placing some one million Israelis within their range.

## Focus on league prize

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benítez has told the Premier League leaders not to be distracted from their quest to win the English title by the hype surrounding their derby FA Cup tie with Everton.

The Merseyside rivals will clash twice in a week, in the Premier League on January 19 and then in the fourth round of the Cup the following weekend.

Both matches are at Liverpool's Anfield home ground and Benítez told the club's official website on Monday: "It is a draw which will excite everyone in the city, because everyone knows

about the great rivalry that exists between the two clubs. "But we must remember that we have some big games coming up in the league before the cup tie -- and we will be taking one game at a time," the cautious Spaniard added.

"Only when the cup game comes around will it become our focus. Before then we play Stoke and Everton in the league, so we must keep our attention on those matches.

"But it is good to have so many important matches, because it shows that your team is doing well."

Liverpool have been boosted by the return of fit-again Fernando Torres, who scored on his comeback in last weekend's 2-0 Cup win over Preston.

about the great rivalry that exists between the two clubs.

"But we must remember that we have some big games coming up in the league before the cup tie -- and we will be taking one game at a time," the cautious Spaniard added.

"Only when the cup game comes around will it become our focus. Before then we play Stoke and Everton in the league, so we must keep our attention on those matches.

"But it is good to have so many important matches, because it shows that your team is doing well."

Liverpool have been boosted by the return of fit-again Fernando Torres, who scored on his comeback in last weekend's 2-0 Cup win over Preston.

Reds defender Jamie Carragher said that Torres' absence had perhaps been a help to the Spanish star.

"Having Torres back has given everyone a big lift. It is great when you see a player of that calibre coming back for the second half of the season," said Torres.

"We hope the time he has been out will refresh him, because he had a long season with the Euro 2008 finals last summer.

"A lot of players have played a lot of games this season, because the manager hasn't changed it around so much."

"It has been a feather in the cap for everyone concerned with the club that we have reached the top of the table without having the best striker in the world in the side."

## Downing not for sale

AFP, London

Middlesbrough made it clear to Premier League rivals Tottenham on Monday that Stewart Downing would not be leaving during the January transfer window after rejecting the England winger's transfer request.

"We received a written transfer request from Stewart this (Monday) morning," said Boro chief executive Keith Lamb. "It was considered before being rejected."

"Prior to receiving the transfer request, we received an improved offer for Stewart from Tottenham."

"We immediately rejected this offer and informed Tottenham that Stewart Downing is not for sale and any further interest they have in the player will not be entertained."

Downing handed in his transfer request after Boro chairman Steve Gibson insisted the 24-year-old was not about to quit the north-east club.

Although he signed a new five-year contract with Middlesbrough in February last year, Downing has grown increasingly frustrated with what he regards as his home town club's lack of ambition.

Downing's father, Stewart senior, told Middlesbrough's Evening Gazette on Monday: "Stewart's been frustrated since the summer, really."

"When he signed his new contract he was assured that there would be significant investment in the squad."

"He feels that the club haven't matched those expectations. He's also frustrated that the team is once again struggling in the Premier League."

"Obviously as a Middlesbrough lad, he's thought long and hard about the decision to hand in a transfer request, and he also hopes the fans will understand his reasons for doing so."

Boro, only above the relegation zone on goal difference, are understood to want 15 million pounds (16.5 million euros) for Downing with Spurs opening their bidding at only 11 million pounds.

## Angeleri set for Inter

SOCCERNET

Estudiantes defender Marcos Angeleri looks set to join Italian giants Internazionale during the current transfer window.

Speaking to Argentinian newspaper Clarin, Estudiantes finance secretary Marcelo Malaspina suggested that the 25-year-old right back could soon be moving from La Plata to Milan.

"It seems premature to make the announcement, but I do not rule out that the information is reliable. I am amazed by the speed of the news," said Malaspina.

Argentina national coach Diego Maradona is reportedly interested in calling up Angeleri, who helped Estudiantes to win the 2006 Apertura title.

## Giggs hints at retirement

Football

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United midfielder Ryan Giggs has given a strong hint that he could retire when his contract expires in the summer.

The 35-year-old Welshman has not yet been offered a new deal and admitted that, after 19 years of loyal service to the reigning Premier League champions, he may be forced to hang up his boots.

"I will keep playing as long as I enjoy it, I am fit and the manager wants me," Giggs told The Sun.

"If one of those three things stops, I will consider retiring."

"It could be at the end of this season. Or it could be the next one. I am at the end of my contract in May, so we will see.

At the minute, there hasn't been any contact with United.

"I am as fit as I have ever been. The only difference is recovering from games."

"Two days after a game, I am still tired. Before, I could play Saturday-Wednesday, Saturday-Wednesday no problem."

"Today, I would be a lot less efficient at doing things. Nowadays, I only play once a week, it's very good that way."

Giggs has won every possible trophy during his time at United, with 10 Premier League titles and two Champions League crowns representing the pinnacle of his achievements.

He admits that he would slip into retirement as a contented man, should he be forced to do so, with age having mellowed him and allowed him to appreciate how fortu-

nate he has been.

Giggs added: "Today, victories and titles make me happier than when I was younger, because I know that they could be the last ones."

"The Champions League win last season made me a lot happier than in 1999, for instance."

"I am lot more confident than I was before. My relation to stress has changed over the years."

"When I was first in the first team, at 17 or 18, I felt no pressure at all. Nothing. It lasted for three to four years."

"Then things changed, injuries happened, I had poor games, and suddenly I started feeling the pressure. It weighed on my game."

"But since I turned 30, I don't think about anything any more, there's no pressure."

## Wenger ends Inler hunt

Football

SOCCERNET

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has confirmed that he has put an end to his pursuit of Udinese midfielder Gokhan Inler and will target a player with "special class" instead.

The Gunners boss had been widely tipped to trigger the Swiss international's buy-out clause with an £8 million bid but Wenger has now turned his attention elsewhere.

Asked if he was interested in signing the talented 24-year-old midfielder as a replacement for Mathieu Flamini, who signed for AC Milan in May, Wenger said: "Yes, in the summer. But not anymore."

Instead, Wenger will turn his attention to signing a

world-class player who may be currently cup tied for this season's Champions League but could benefit the club in the Premier League.

Wenger said: "I feel that if we do add somebody, we add somebody who has a special class."

"And I would like to think longer term than just whether that player is eligible for the Champions League this season."

The Arsenal boss' comments has led to much speculation in the UK press that he was alluding to a £20 million move for Russian star Andrei Arshavin.

Arshavin has already represented Zenit St Petersburg in this season's Champions League and Wenger is reported to be an admirer of the want-away 27-year-old.

The arrival of the Russian forward would provide a

much needed morale boost to Wenger's young squad following the long-term loss of injured skipper Cesc Fabregas.

And although the Gunners boss said last week he would not spend "silly money" on transfers club chairman Peter Hill-Wood has suggested there is money to spend.

Meanwhile, midfielder Jack Wilshere has signed a professional contract with Arsenal.

Wilshere, who turned 17 on New Year's Day, became the youngest player to represent the Gunners in league football when he came off the bench against Blackburn in September.

Wilshere scored his first Arsenal goal in their 6-0 Carling Cup win over Sheffield United in September and is also the youngest player to have turned out for Arsenal in Europe.