



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba celebrates scoring the opening goal against Coventry City during their FA Cup clash at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry on Saturday.

## Blues march into semi

AFP, Coventry



Guus Hiddink's campaign to add silverware to Chelsea's so far unconvincing season gathered momentum with a 2-0 victory over Championship side Coventry City in their FA Cup sixth round tie at the Ricoh Arena here Saturday.

Chelsea were sent on their way with a trademark Didier Drogba goal and sealed their semifinal place thanks to defender Alex's second-half effort.

It was a comfortable victory for Hiddink's team, whose quality always gave them the edge, and a gentle workout ahead of the serious business of Tuesday evening's Champions League second leg clash with Juventus.

All of Hiddink's key players came through unscathed and there was the added bonus of seeing Michael Essien finally return to action after his six-month injury lay-off.

The most relieved player before a ball was kicked must have been Ashley Cole.

The Chelsea full-back was selected by Hiddink despite the public ticking-off he received from his manager this week after being arrested for being drunk and disorderly outside a London bar.

Coventry fans, though, were quick to let Cole know what they thought, jeering the England defender every time he touched the ball.

Any theories that Hiddink would rest key players ahead of Tuesday's European tie were dispelled when he named a full-strength line-up.

The Dutchman was clearly taking the FA Cup seriously, and his decision was almost vindicated as early as the second minute when Drogba easily held off Stephen Wright's challenge before dragging his shot wide.

The Frenchman was a constant menace to the home defence in the early stages and it was no surprise when he fired Chelsea into a 15th minute lead, albeit with a huge helping hand.

Sky Blues skipper Scott Dann dallied with the ball just outside his 18-yard box and the alert Drogba dispossessed him before rounding Wright and goalkeeper Keiren Westwood and lifting his shot high into the net.

Coventry might have crumbled, but almost found a way back into the tie ten minutes later. Leon Best outsmarted John Terry, but lifted his left foot shot high over the bar.

Westwood boosted his confidence with a brilliant save to keep out a Frank Lampard freekick and Freddy Eastwood finally gave Petr Cech something to think about with a stinging effort.

There was no doubting the

home side's spirit, but Chelsea were given too much room to play and their Premier League class allowed them to control the game at their own pace.

Drogba had the sniff of a second goal early in the second-half, but turned a difficult chance wide of the near post.

There was a landmark for Essien in the 65th minute when the midfielder replaced Jon Obi Mikel - his first appearance since he featured against Tottenham Hotspur on August 31 last year.

Moments later Coventry wasted their best opportunity to equalise.

Aron Gunnarsson's huge throw sparked uncharacteristic panic in the Chelsea defence, but Best and Clinton Morrison both failed to turn the ball home at the far post.

Coventry were punished in the 72nd minute with a breakaway Chelsea goal. Essien played a part before fellow substitute Ricardo Quaresma was released on the right and the unlikely figure of Alex, who had just returned to the field after treatment for a clash of heads with Drogba, met the cross and fired firmly home.

Coventry had their best spell once the tie was beyond them. They appealed for a penalty when Morrison was dragged down by Alex and Cech saved from Jordan Henderson but the visitors' defence remained intact.

## Laporta eyes up Cesc

SPORTINGLIFE

Barcelona president Joan Laporta believes Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas would be a 'big player' for the club.

Fabregas has repeatedly been linked with a return to Barcelona, having originally left the Catalan giants as a 16-year-old to join Arsenal.

Reports have claimed that Barca will launch a big-money bid to bring the midfielder back to Camp Nou at the end of the season.

Though Laporta would not be drawn on any imminent attempt to sign Fabregas, he expressed his admiration for the 21-year-old.

"Although he is with another club, I have always praised Fabregas," Laporta told Spanish radio station Punto Radio.

"He was born in Catalonia and has become a better player since leaving the club."

"But I feel he has this club at his heart and understands the type of passing football we like to play."

"The technical staff will decide on any movement for him, but there is no doubt he would be a big player for us."

Fabregas is currently sidelined with a knee injury suffered against Liverpool in December, but the Spain international is targeting a comeback early next month.

## Schalke edge out Cologne

SPORTINGLIFE

Schalke bounced back from their shock cup exit to second division Mainz with a 1-0 victory over Cologne on Friday night.

The Royal Blues' poor season hit a new low in the week when they were knocked out of the DFB Pokal, but on Friday Jermaine Jones' first-half strike was enough to send them to within six points of Bundesliga leaders Hertha Berlin.

Cologne started the stronger, Nemanja Vucicevic testing keeper Manuel Neuer with a shot from distance and Milivoje Novakovic firing wide from similar distance.

Jones made the telling contribution in the 28th minute when Ivan Rakitic chested the ball into his path and the midfielder sent his shot from the edge of the area into the bottom-left corner.

Petit fired over the bar at the other end before Kevin Kuranyi wasted a chance to put the hosts two up three minutes before the break.

The striker's first effort was saved by keeper Faryd Mondragon and he fell on the follow-up, clearly knocking the ball into the net with his hand and the effort was disallowed.

Cologne had a monopoly on chances after the break but were denied by a combination of poor finishing and fine keeping from Neuer.

The young stopper punched Petit's fierce freekick away 11 minutes after the restart.

Petit was involved again when his cross from the left was just missed at the far post by Yousef Mohamad.

Mohamad went close again three minutes into stoppage time when Neuer saved his first effort with his foot and then grabbed the ball before the Cologne man could knock it home at the second attempt.

## Guus fires booze caution

Football

AFP, Cobham

Guus Hiddink has warned Chelsea's stars to ensure they don't become victims of England's booze culture.

Blues boss Hiddink got his first taste of the controversy that can blow up when a high-profile player is out drinking late at night after Ashley Cole was arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct at a west London restaurant this week.

Cole, who was with Chelsea teammates John Terry and Michael Mancienne at the time, was fined 80 pounds for abusing police officers who he claimed wouldn't help get rid of photographers harassing him at South Kensington's Collection restaurant.

Although Hiddink did not leave Cole out of Chelsea's squad for their FA Cup quarterfinal at Coventry on Saturday, he did give the England left-back a stern talking to.

Hiddink knows the tendency to drink to excess in England will inevitably lead players into compromising situations and he has been quick to remind his squad of their responsibilities to the club.

"He highlighted the way Real Madrid players would always have wine with their pre-match meal during his time with the Spanish club, but were self-policed by senior players to ensure drinking never got out of hand."

"If you drink too much it has a setback on your physical condition," Hiddink said. "Physically you can harm yourself when you drink too much and then you can harm the team as well."

"It is to do with culture. At Real Madrid when we went to away matches, the captains -

Fernando Hierro and Manuel Sanchis - would load a box of wine onto the bus."

"I thought 'what is going on here?' I came from 'sober' Holland and I was amazed."

"On every table at the meal the captain would put a bottle of wine. I was not used to this but they said it was normal to do that and I didn't break that rule because they were used to doing it. Hierro and Sanchis controlled it so I didn't have to do anything."

When Arsene Wenger arrived at Arsenal he immediately banned the players from having any alcohol, but the culture of binge drinking remains prevalent in English society and football.

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp has recently tried to quash any drinking among his squad, but although Hiddink is often a strict boss, he admits he wants Chelsea's players to understand the risks and make the decision not to drink for themselves.

"I fully agree with Redknapp and Arsene Wenger. But I cannot and I will not control their private lives," he said.

"Players in this fantastic job have a responsibility to themselves and their club."

"I am not a police officer. Nor am I a father figure. I want to be able to have a very open relationship with them."

"I want to be able to speak very directly with them. Sometimes to hug them and sometimes to be tough."

Even Hiddink, however, was forced to admit he was amazed that players as experienced as Cole and Terry had been out in such a public place until the early hours.

Both have been involved in late-night scandals before in their careers and Hiddink said: "I am not coming from an innocent country. It is not my first year in this business and I have some experience of these situations."

## Pep calls for more Messi protection

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola on Friday once again called for referees to do more to protect Argentine playmaker Lionel Messi from hefty tackles and fouls.

"One day they will really do some damage. Lately, he has been knocked to the floor almost every time he receives the ball," he told a news conference.

"The referees have an obligation to protect players that are having that done to them. Not only Messi, but anyone," he added.

The 21-year-old, who has been in top form for Barcelona since the start of the year, is frequently manhandled by the defenders of opposing teams.

He was especially targeted by Real Madrid players during the "classico" between the two arch rival teams in mid-December which the Catalan giants won 2-0.

Messi struck a late goal to help Barcelona secure a spot in the Spanish Cup final on Wednesday with a 1-1 draw at Real Mallorca that completed a 3-1 aggregate victory for the Primera Liga leaders.

## Chelsea lose Ferreira

SOCCERNET

Chelsea full-back Paulo Ferreira has damaged his anterior cruciate ligament and will be sidelined for the rest of the season.

Although Ferreira has only been on the fringes of the first team this season, having been displaced by summer arrival Jose Bosingwa, the news will come as a blow to Blues boss Guus Hiddink.

The Portuguese defender is the third Chelsea player to suffer a serious knee problem this season, with Joe Cole and Michael Essien also affected by ACL injuries.

Ghana international Essien is back in training with the reserves and has been included in Hiddink's squad for Saturday's FA Cup quarter-final against Coventry, while Cole is out for the rest of the season.

Ferreira, who joined Chelsea from Porto in 2004, has started just one Premier League game and appeared as a substitute in a further six matches.

## Walcott set for return

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger hopes Theo Walcott's return to action in Sunday's FA Cup fifth round clash against Burnley will give Arsenal the momentum to keep their season alive.

Walcott is back after surgery on a shoulder injury sustained during training with England before their November friendly against Germany.

The 19-year-old, who last played for Arsenal on November 15, was in fine form before the injury and Wenger believes he can have a significant impact on a big week for the Gunners.

Victory over Championship club Burnley at the Emirates Stadium would set up a winnable home clash with Hull in the quarterfinals. Then Wenger's side travel to Italy for Wednesday's second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Roma hoping to hold onto their one-goal lead.

Wenger knows Walcott's shoulder will be tested by the physical demands of top-level competition but he expects the teenager to cope.

"It is very important to see how he will respond with his shoulder and I think he looks to be nearly there. To have him back is great and he can be very good for us," Wenger said.

"However, the difference between training and competition is different."

"Theo is very fit, but after that you have to get used to tackles and go into the challenges."

Walcott's return, and that of Croatia striker Eduardo from a hamstring injury, are perfectly timed for Wenger,

who has seen his side struggle to score in recent weeks.

Arsenal ended a run of four successive goalless league draws by beating bottom of the table West Bromwich Albion in midweek, but Wenger knows he needs as many attacking options as possible for the sterner tests that lie ahead - starting with Owen Coyle's Burnley.

"Wenger will not underestimate the challenge posed by the Claret, who knocked Arsenal out of the League Cup at Turf Moor in December and also beat Chelsea and Fulham in the same competition."

"It is an important game and not one we will treat lightly. We treat it with respect and focus," Wenger said.

"We know Burnley well and

that they are a good side. The Championship teams are now a serious candidate in every game."

"They have shown that recently, and we have the experience of playing Championship teams."

"The gap has been reduced between Championship teams and the Premier League - you see that in the results of the FA Cup and League Cup."

Wenger is set to rotate some of his personnel on Sunday, with goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski given another chance to impress but defender Kolo Toure, who has a calf injury, will not be risked.

Top striker Emmanuel Adebayor is unlikely to be match fit in time for the Roma game as he battles to recover from his own hamstring injury.

"I have to measure the consequence of resting one or two players more and having a bad game, and of making sure we get through," Wenger said.

"You give your best and make sure it works, so we will give our best and it will work."

"The best way to prepare for the next game against Roma is to win on Sunday."

Burnley have impressed with their fluent passing football this season and Coyle insists he has no intention of playing for a draw at the Emirates.

"Whoever plays for Arsenal, you can guarantee they'll be an international player and that in itself tells you the enormity of the task," Coyle said.

"But we're going to look to be positive in the game, commit players forward at each and every opportunity and see where it takes us."

"I've said before, I'm not going to set a team out to go and stop the game. We're taking over 5,000 fans and it would be remiss of me to just sit behind the ball and not offer anything in terms of an attacking threat."

## Jose rules out exit

Football

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho on Friday dismissed speculation that he is set to walk out of the club.

Rumours have spread this week that Mourinho will leave Inter if they fail to win the Champions League this season, despite the club being odds-on favourites to win a fourth straight Serie A crown.

But Mourinho dismissed any such concerns and said he could not determine how long he would stay in Italy.

"Me, leave Italy? In football you never know, you can stay two, three, four or ten years, it all depends," he told a press conference in Milan ahead of Saturday's trip to Genoa.

"But one thing's for sure, I'm not trying to provoke a change of coach."

Mourinho was questioned about his future in Italy because in midweek he launched a tirade against Italian football and the drama surrounding it, particularly the manner in which every refereeing decision is analysed and reanalysed in

the press.

However, he reacted in typical Mourinho fashion on Friday.

"Am I fed up with Italian football? No, the only adjective I would use to explain how I feel right now is not angry but proud, proud of myself," he said.

"I'm neither angry nor tense, that's your feeling. I like to change, sometimes I change my hairstyle."

"Once I cut it all off, now I'm letting it grow out. Once I turned up with a long beard."

"But right now I'm absolutely perfect. I like to change but I'm not angry."

Mourinho was also in belligerent mood regarding his comments on Tuesday: "What I said on Tuesday is what I wanted to say."

The former Chelsea boss landed himself in hot water with Italian football bosses over his comments about Juventus earning many points due to refereeing errors.

He could yet face a fine and/or touchline ban for what he said.

to AS Roma.

His outburst against Juventus came when he was told that Juve coach Claudio Ranieri had agreed with Roma coach Luciano Spalletti's assertion that the incident should not have resulted in a penalty -- Inter forward Mario Balotelli had gone to ground very easily in the area as he tried to slip between Daniele De Rossi and Marco Motta.

"While Ranieri says he is behind Spalletti, I am on the side of coaches who have dropped points against Juve - and also on the side of those who are going to meet Juve in the coming weeks," Mourinho had said on Tuesday before slating all his main rivals.

"Roma, with their great players, so many players that I'd like to have, will end the season with zero titles."

(AC) Milan will finish the season with zero titles when the club has everything it needs to win - as will Juventus, who have won a lot of points thanks to refereeing errors."

For now, Inter face a tough trip away to Genoa, who alongside Inter are one of only two teams unbeaten at home this season.



Milan star Kakha Kaladze meets fans amongst the student-athletes at the ASPIRE sporting academy in Doha on Thursday.