

Tie not over: Fergie

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson has warned his Manchester United side that they still have it all to do in their Champions League semifinal second leg against Arsenal next week.

The holders will carry the narrowest of advantages into the fixture, after John O'Shea's strike - only his second goal in 60 Champions League appearances - gave them a 1-0 win at Old Trafford in Wednesday night's first leg.

United might easily have won by a more comfortable margin and, although their manager was happy with his side's performance, he was quick to dismiss any notion that a place in next month's final in Rome is assured.

Ferguson is expecting a sterner test from Arsene Wenger's side at the Emirates Stadium but feels that scoring in London will be key to booking a trip to the Italian capital.

"We have given ourselves a good chance overall," the Scot declared. "The more pleasing aspect is that before the game we said try and win 1-0 and not lose a goal and we have done that."

"The performance level was very good, we have players who can score goals and we will be a goal threat at their ground but the tie is not over."

"Arsene (Wenger the Arsenal manager) will be thinking it's been a good day for him, he could be out of the tie but he is not and I suppose another way of looking at it is that we always do things the hard way."

"This is another night when we have got our fans frustrated where we maybe should be into the final but we are not but we have done that many times."

"We did it in the last round (against Porto) and we will have to go through the process of taking the game to the wire again probably."

Ferguson also rued the fact his side have to play in the Premier League against Middlesbrough on Saturday as they look to close in on the domestic title.

And he believes that will give Arsenal an advantage because they will be able to rest their players in anticipation of the rematch.

He added: "That's Arsenal's big advantage now, they could play (assistant manager) Pat Rice at right-back and Arsene at centre-forward at Portsmouth if they like because it doesn't matter to them."

"We have to play a team to win at Middlesbrough in a lunchtime kick-off, I don't think that's right but we will have to get on with it."

Goalkeeper Manuel Almunia was Arsenal's only truly impressive player as he made three stunning first half saves to keep the scoreline

respectable as the likes of Cesc Fabregas, Emmanuel Adebayor, Theo Walcott and Samir Nasir all produced woe-filled displays for the visitors.

Cristiano Ronaldo also hit the bar and Ryan Giggs had a goal ruled out for offside as United pushed and pushed for a nerve-settling second goal that would simply not arrive.

Yet despite watching his side look second best in all departments, Wenger remains in bullish mood ahead of the second leg and is confident Arsenal can still beat United.

"At home, I am convinced you will see a different Arsenal team and we still have a very good chance to reverse the result," he said.

"Football is like that and you can play tomorrow again and it will be a different game."

"We have the quality to do it and we believe that at home we can do that."

Wenger accepted that Arsenal had been outplayed at Old Trafford but insists his squad can make United rue their plethora of missed opportunities when they travel to London for the return fixture.

"I believe the tie is very open," he added. "They can have regrets because they didn't score a second and it's down to us to make them regret that they didn't score a second goal."

"When you play at home and you know you can go to a final, you will be up for it."



Real Madrid captain Raul (front) runs with teammates during a training session in Madrid on Thursday. Real Madrid will play 'El Clasico' match against arch-rivals Barcelona on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Gerrard set to play

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard is set to play against Newcastle United on Sunday, Reds boss Rafael Benitez told the club's official website here on Wednesday.

England international Gerrard is back in training following a groin injury and Liverpool will be delighted that their inspirational midfielder looks like being available for the closing stage of their Premier League title pursuit.

The Merseysiders could find themselves kicking off six points behind leaders and bitter rivals Manchester United if the reigning English champions beat Middlesbrough, who in common with fellow north-east side Newcastle are struggling to avoid relegation, on Saturday.

"Steven is doing well and is training with the rest of the team. I think he will be fit and available for Sunday," Benitez said.

"It is good news for the team and for him because he can be a key player for us over the remaining games," the Spaniard added.

"Without Steven the squad has been playing well and scoring goals, so that is positive."

Meanwhile Benitez was adamant he was not contemplating, for the time being at least, getting rid of any member of Liverpool's squad following reports linking midfielder Xabi Alonso with a move to Juventus.

"I was reading the press and they are talking about different players," Benitez said. "I can guarantee today (Wednesday) that we are not thinking about selling anyone. All we are thinking about is to do our job and to try and win the Premier League title, if possible."

"After that you never know what can happen in the market. Clearly, at this moment, we are just preparing for winning games."

Liverpool won the last of their record 18 English league titles - a mark United will equal if they top the table at the end of this season - in 1990 and so have yet to be crowned champions in the Premier League era.

Gourcuff fires Bordeaux

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux recovered from conceding a goal inside 20 seconds and having a man sent off to sustain their French title aspirations with a stunning 3-2 victory at French Cup finalists Rennes on Wednesday.

The freshly crowned League Cup champions were reduced to 10 men mid-way through the first half after falling behind straight from the kick-off, but equalised through Yoann Gourcuff before on-loan AC Milan playmaker Yoann Gourcuff put them ahead.

Moussa Sow appeared to have denied Laurent Blanc's side the points when he equalised with two minutes to play, but the inspirational Gourcuff struck again deep into injury time to keep the heat on league leaders Marseille.

The victory cuts Marseille's advantage to two points with five league games remaining, while Rennes

remain seventh and lose their unbeaten home record.

Bordeaux manager Laurent Blanc congratulated his players for paying little attention to his half-time team talk when he told them to play for a draw.

"My players didn't listen to me and bravo to them," Blanc said after the remarkable turnaround. "They did better. It was a great match to watch with lots of excitement and we all passed through highs and lows."

"Credit to the players in the second half, playing as though they were not a man down."

The visitors got off to the worst possible start, with Rennes taking the lead on 19 seconds when Sow's half-volleyed cross was bundled in at the back post by Romain Danze.

The goal was the fastest scored in Ligue 1 this season, shaving seven seconds off the mark set by Valenciennes's Jean-Claude Darcheville when he scored against Auxerre on April 4.

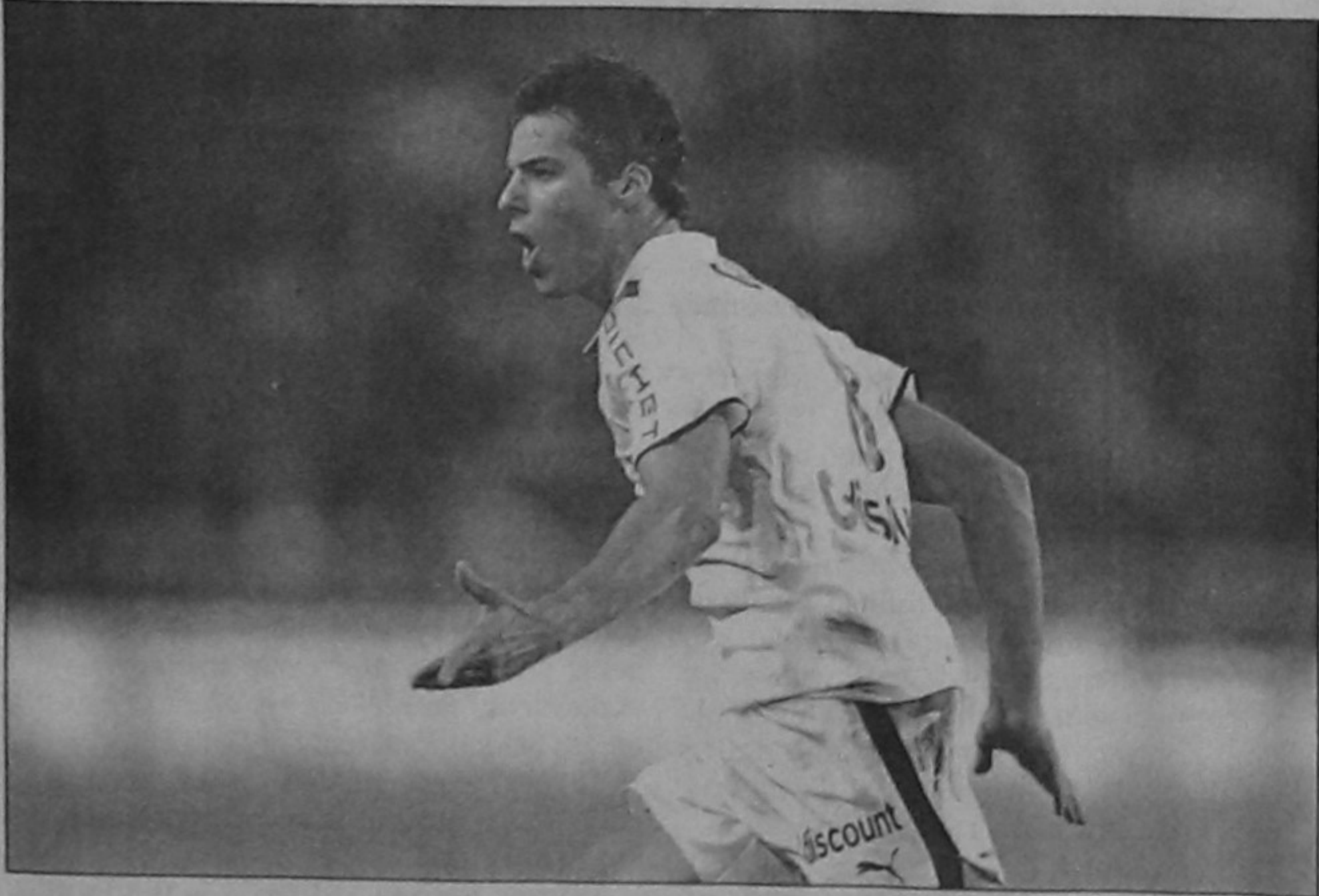
Bordeaux had won their five previous league games and went into the match on

the back of Saturday's 4-0 League Cup final victory over second-tier Vannes, but they were dealt a further blow when centre-back Marc Planus was red-carded in the 26th minute for sliding in on Sow.

The away side bossed proceedings thereafter, with Alou Diarra, Marouane Chamakh and Gourcuff all threatening before Gouffran chested down Petter Hansson's headed clearance and arrowed a fine volley into the net in the 62nd minute.

Eight minutes later Gourcuff found a gap in the wall to fire home a 22-yard free-kick, only for Sow - who scored the goal that guaranteed Rennes a place in the French Cup final when they beat Grenoble 1-0 last week - to equalise after Ulrich Rame had parried a shot from Stephane M'Bia.

Victory looked to have eluded the visitors at the last, until Gourcuff rammed home a shot from the edge of the box in the 93rd minute to snatch a brave and unlikely victory against his former club.



Bordeaux midfielder Yoann Gourcuff celebrates after scoring one of his two goals against Rennes during their League One encounter at the Route de Lorient Stadium in Rennes on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Lippi rules out Juve return

AFP, Milan

Italy coach Marcello Lippi on Thursday dismissed speculation he would return to Juventus after next year's World Cup in South Africa.

Lippi, who guided Italy to World Cup glory in Germany three years ago, has a contract with the Italian Football Association until the end of the next tournament.

But the coach who led Juve to five league titles and a Champions League during two previous spells at the club does not want to retrace his steps.

"I'm not going back to Juventus, neither as coach nor as a technical director, have I made myself clear," he said during a sporting press congress in Milan.

"Whatever anyone says, it's not true, I'm not going back to Juve."

"The reality is this and this alone... the only truth is that I went to lunch with (Juve general manager) Blanc just as I go to lunch with (AC Milan vice-president Adriano) Galliani, with the Lazio president (Claudio Lotito) and with (AS Roma general manager) Bruno Conti."

"I'm the coach of the national team and I'm thinking exclusively about that."

MU sweat on Rio

AFP, Manchester

Rio Ferdinand could miss the finale to Manchester United's season after suffering a suspected rib fracture in the 1-0 Champions League semifinal first leg win over Arsenal here on Wednesday.

"Rio has got a crack on his ribs," United boss Sir Alex Ferguson said. "We hope it is nothing broken but if it is he'll be out for two or three weeks. We will just have to wait and see."

Ferdinand was substituted late in the game and left Old Trafford in an ambulance, en route to hospital for a scan on his ribs.

Romania appoint Lucescu

AFP, Bucharest

Razvan Lucescu was on Wednesday named as the new coach of Romania, replacing Victor Piturca who was sacked at the start of the month.

Lucescu, 40, was handed the job of overseeing Romania's qualification to Euro 2012 after comfortably winning the vote to elect a new manager taken by the Romania Football Federation's executive committee.

"It's a great honour, I'm very proud, one month ago I never dreamt of becoming the national coach," said Lucescu who is also the boss of Romanian first division side FC Brasov.

Almunia confident

AFP, London

Manuel Almunia has admitted Arsenal got off lightly in their 1-0 defeat by Manchester United at Old Trafford.

But the Gunners' Spanish goalkeeper believes his teammates can overturn that deficit in next week's semifinal second leg and pass their way to next month's final in Rome.

An inspired performance by Almunia was the key to United's failure to turn their dominance into more goals on Wednesday evening but he believes the Londoners can take encouragement from an improved second-half display.

He said: "1-0 is not that bad a result because there are not that many teams who play at Old Trafford and go away with a clean sheet."

"We expected them to start with a high tempo, but in the second half we showed that if Arsenal can keep the ball, then we can beat them."

"We have to be more or less happy and look forward to the

second leg at the Emirates.

"It is our last chance to do something this year, so we will try to put all of the pressure on Manchester United and the fans will help as well."

Almunia's display was hailed by Gunners boss Arsene Wenger.

"It was a top-class performance from him," the Frenchman said. "His reading of the game was fantastic and his sharpness was superb."

Kolo Toure echoed Almunia's optimism about the second leg, although it is eight years since Arsenal beat United by two goals or more at home.

"It is going to be really tight, but we know we can beat any team at Emirates," the Ivory Coast defender said.

"The good thing from the game is that, after United took the early lead, we did not give up and still played our football."

"We will have to be on the top of our game to win against them, and we are not far away. We put Manchester under pressure but just did not have the decisive pass to create the chance to make the goal."

"We can score two goals at Emirates, we just need to defend better. We have made some good clean sheets at home already and beat Manchester there earlier in the season. That can give us some belief."

"We know we are still learning a lot so now we just need to play better and the second leg is going to be like a final for us - we will give everything, that is for sure."

Wenger meanwhile pledged to field his strongest side for Saturday's Premier League trip to Portsmouth, despite United boss Sir Alex Ferguson's prediction that he would rest key players ahead of Tuesday's second leg in north London.

Russian playmaker Andrey Arshavin is certain to start against Pompey as he is cup-tied in Europe while Croatia striker Eduardo, who came on as a substitute at Old Trafford, is also available.

Wenger expects to have injured duo Robin van Persie and Gael Clichy in his squad for the second leg and the pair could see some action at the weekend.

Guti to miss El Clasico

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid announced Wednesday that midfielder Guti would miss Saturday's 'El Clasico' against arch-rivals Barcelona due to injury.

"Jose Maria Gutierrez 'Guti' suffered a knock to his left ankle during Wednesday's training session and has been ruled out of Saturday's match against Barcelona," it said in a statement.

He "will be looked at again by the medical team to determine how much time he will miss."

Guti played in Real's last two matches after being sidelined for several games by coach Juande Ramos.

The Spanish champions are already without injured Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder.

The Barcelona match could be crucial in deciding the league title this season, as Real are just four points behind the Catalan giants at the top of the table with just five matches to play.

Doni out for 3 months

AFP, Rome

AS Roma's challenge for a top four Serie A finish and Champions League football has been hit after goalkeeper Doni was ruled out for three months with a knee injury.

Roma released a statement claiming the Brazilian needs an operation on the cartilage in his right knee, a process that usually requires three months of recuperation.

Roma currently sit sixth in Serie A, six points behind fourth-placed Fiorentina, who thrashed them 4-1 last weekend, with just five matches remaining.

Ribery threatens to quit Bayern

AFP, Paris

Franck Ribery on Thursday threatened to quit German giants Bayern Munich unless they qualify for the Champions League next season as the defending Bundesliga champions struggle to defend their title.

Bayern are third in the German league, three points behind leaders Wolfsburg with five games remaining, and must finish in the top two to be guaranteed a Champions League place next season.

A third place finish would mean they would have to play the qualification rounds and French midfielder Ribery says failure to reach the top tier of European domestic competition would mean he would be looking to leave.

"It would be surely difficult for me to remain, if this goal is not achieved," Ribery told L'Equipe.

Ribery, who is under contract at Bayern until 2011, has already made no secret of his desire to play for Barcelona and dropped several hints when the Spanish giants dumped Munich out of the Champions League quarterfinals.

Carlo's future unclear

AFP, Milan



AC Milan president and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi admitted on Wednesday that coach Carlo Ancelotti's future would be decided at the end of the season.

Ancelotti's future has been the subject of much debate over the course of the season as the 49-year-old has been linked with moves to both Real Madrid and Chelsea, while he himself admitted to learning English.

The coach has always maintained that he wants to stay at Milan while the club's vice-president Adriano Galliani has repeatedly said Ancelotti is contracted until the end of next season.

But Berlusconi told Sky Sport24 that Ancelotti could leave in the summer.

"My friendship with Carlo is beyond discussion but so too are the facts. I like him a lot and I'm sure the feelings are mutual," said the PM.

"Galliani is committed to sitting down with him at the end of the season to see if we will continue together or apart, regardless of results."

"We will decide together what is best for Milan."

"But I assure you that we have not discussed the name of an eventual successor. Until Ancelotti is no longer our coach there won't be a discussion."

Milan have not won the Serie A title since 2004 and just a month ago looked to be well out of the running for this season's scudetto.

They trailed leaders and bitter city rivals Inter Milan by 14 points back then but Jose Mourinho's team have suffered a recent blip and the gap has been cut to just seven points, sparking a glimmer of hope for Milan.

"The title? It's always legal to dream, in fact life is made up of dreams," added Berlusconi.

"For us it would be enough to finish second in a season beset by misfortune." But if Inter do slip up, and I don't believe that they will, we will try not to so we can finish strongly."

Magath thrashes rumours

INTERNET, undated



Wolfsburg coach Felix Magath refused to comment Thursday on reports he was set to join Schalke, saying rumours of a move were an attempt to destabilize the Bundesliga leaders. "The article on which the rumours are based appeared in Stuttgart. That is the crux," he told reporters.

"The intention behind it should be clear. Somebody is interested in causing unrest at the club."

With five games remaining, Wolfsburg lead the Bundesliga by two points over Hertha Berlin, and three ahead of Bayern Munich, VfB Stuttgart and SV Hamburg.

German media reports said Magath was close to a deal with Schalke after a first report appeared in the Stuttgarter Zeitung daily.

WDR television later said Schalke's supervisory board had confirmed it had reached "an agreement in principle" with the coach.

However Schalke would not comment on the reports.

"I fear you will find no member of the Schalke supervisory board who will confirm that," Magath said.

The coach said he would neither be issuing a denial nor a confirmation about the reports.

"Even in the past I have neither confirmed nor denied rumours. I am not commenting on this subject and this will be my stance until the end of the season," he said.

Magath, 55, has taken Wolfsburg to the top of the Bundesliga and close to a first-ever title this season.

However according to the media reports, there are differences between Magath and Wolfsburg's board over the coach's demands on wages and investment on new players in new contract talks.

"We are in talks on a contract extension. There has been no decision," he said.

Magath, who has a contract at Wolfsburg for another season, has wide-ranging powers as manager and coach at the club, and Schalke are reported to be ready to offer him a similar deal.

The Gelsenkirchen club dismissed Dutch coach Fred Rutten last month, and the team is currently under the care of a trio of caretaker coaches including former player Mike Buskens.

Magath won the league and cup double with Bayern Munich before being sacked by the club in early 2007.

The former Germany international midfielder, who won the European Cup with SV Hamburg in 1983, has also coached his former club, and has had coaching stints at Nuremberg, Werder Bremen, Eintracht Frankfurt and VfB Stuttgart.