

Bayern eye up van Gaal

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich team manager Uli Hoeness revealed on Saturday Louis van Gaal, who won this season's Dutch championship with AZ Alkmaar, is one of Bayern Munich's targets to replace Jurgen Klinsmann.

Ex-Germany coach Klinsmann was sacked as head coach of Bayern last Monday after just ten months in charge and 57-year-old's van Gaal's name - along with fellow Dutchmen Martin Jol and Frank Rijkaard - has already been linked to the vacancy.

"Van Gaal is one of the candidates we are interested in," Hoeness told daily newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung on Saturday before adding there is a list of possible candidates Bayern's bosses want to have coach their side.

According to the Munich newspaper, Bayern have already contacted van Gaal who is under contract with AZ Alkmaar until 2011.

Van Gaal, who has a reputation for discipline, has coached European giants Ajax, who he guided to Champions League success in 1995, and Barcelona as well as the national Dutch side.

Bayern have Jupp Heynckes as caretaker coach for the last five league games of the season and are third in the Bundesliga, three points behind leaders Wolfsburg.

But Hoeness says the defending Bundesliga champions are determined to find a German-speaking coach as a matter of priority.

"It is an enormous handicap if the trainer must constantly pass on his ideas through a translator," said Hoeness.

"There are only a few cases, for example Rafael Benitez at Liverpool, who would make you rethink, but he is not available."

Italian clubs plan new league

AFP, Rome

Serie A's 20 clubs on Thursday voted to break away from their Serie B counterparts and form a new competition along the lines of the English Premier League.

The new league, which would not involve second-tier clubs in its decision-making process, is to be called Lega Serie A.

Only Lecce, who are in the relegation zone and look set to drop to Serie B next season, voted against the motion to split from the Lega Calcio, which currently organises the top two divisions in Italy.

The new organisation has picked Maurizio Beretta, a former director of Italian television channel Rai Uno, as its new head.

"We've agreed a new A league. Am I satisfied? No, but it was necessary," said Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini following the meeting in Rome.

Briton smashes keepy-uppy WR

AFP, London

A British man on Friday smashed the world record for keeping a football in the air after tapping it up and down for a marathon 24 hours, an AFP reporter said.

Dan Magness, 25, played keepy-uppy using his feet, legs and head in the popular tourist spot of Covent Garden. He sailed past the previous record of 19 hours and 30 minutes at 0830 GMT and just kept going.

Just seconds away from reaching the 24-hour mark, Magness relaxed as the crowd cheered him on, and almost lost control of the ball - but he managed to regain his composure in time.

As the magic milestone flashed up on the clock, an exhausted Magness raised his arms in delight and embraced his wife as 200 spectators applauded wildly.

"It feels good," he said, before revealing he had been worried after ten hours that he would be unable to continue as tiredness took hold - but he gritted his teeth and fought on.

A representative for Guinness World Records - which allowed him only a few brief pauses, to relax his muscles - was on hand to confirm the feat and present him with a certificate.

Magness, from Milton Keynes in southern England, describes himself as a professional exponent of "freestyle football" and says he is the "David Blaine of football" after the US magician who stages high-publicity stunts.



GETTING BETTER WITH AGE: Manchester United's veteran midfielder Ryan Giggs (L) shoots past Middlesbrough defender David Wheater to score the opening goal during their Premiership encounter at the Riverside Stadium on Thursday.

MU in box seat

AFP, Middlesbrough



Manchester United extended their lead at the top of the Premier League to a commanding six points as goals from Ryan Giggs and Park Ji-Sung sealed a comfortable 2-0 win away to Middlesbrough.

Giggs struck his fourth goal of the season before the break here at the Riverside Stadium on Saturday to help double United's points advantage over title rivals Liverpool, who host Newcastle on Sunday.

And South Korea international Park deservedly doubled their advantage early in the second-half as reigning champions United, seeking to equal Liverpool's record of 18 English titles, strolled to a fifth consecutive league victory.

United couldn't have asked for an easier warm-up for Tuesday's Champions League semifinal trip to Arsenal, where they defend a single-goal first-leg lead, as they showed little sign of fatigue despite clocking up their 60th game of a season that could yet see them win four trophies.

Despite United winning at a canter, there had been little to choose between the teams before Giggs - almost a week after his peers the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) voted him player of the year - broke the deadlock midway through the first-half.

Middlesbrough's Jeremie Aliadiere spurned the best chance to open the scoring, when he saw his shot blocked by the feet of goalkeeper Ben Foster after the forward, under pressure from defender Nemanja Vidic, had been put through by Marlon King.

Giggs, one of seven United changes from the team that started in the 1-09 Champions League victory over Arsenal on Wednesday,

showed the Frenchman how it should be done after 25 minutes.

The former Wales international produced a clinical finish left-footed into the bottom corner from 20 yards after Federico Macheda had squared England striker Wayne Rooney's centre back across the edge of the area.

Middlesbrough appeals that Dimitar Berbatov fouled Matthew Bates as the ball made its way through to Giggs were ignored by referee Mark Halsey as United sealed a third league and cup victory over Boro this season.

Macheda should have doubled the advantage straight after the break when Rooney beat Tony McMahon to provide an inviting cut-back, only for the teenage striker to poke the chance wide at the near post from five yards.

United didn't have long to wait for their growing dominance to be rewarded as Park claimed their second in the 51st minute.

Rooney was again the architect, with a sublime slide-rule ball into the area which wrong-footed the Middlesbrough defence to allow Park to fire home his third goal of the season from 12 yards past stranded keeper Brad Jones.

Only a desperate late block from Bates, the hosts' best player, prevented John O'Shea - the goalscorer from Wednesday's Champions League clash - from adding a third from close range inside the last 10 minutes as Boro left gaps at the back in a fruitless bid to find a way back into the contest.

A first home defeat for more than four months left Middlesbrough second from bottom and three points adrift of safety with just three games remaining, starting with the crucial derby trip to Newcastle on May 11.

But after just two victories in their last 23 league games, the Teesside club need to show a vast improvement in form if they are to extend their 11-year stay in the top flight.

UEFA Cup Fernandinho rescues Shakhtar

AFP, Kiev

Shakhtar Donetsk will take a slight advantage into the second leg of their UEFA Cup semifinal against fellow Ukrainians Dynamo Kiev after drawing 1-1 against them here in the first leg on Thursday.

Fernandinho equalised teammate Dmytro Chyhyrynskiy's first-half own goal to make Shakhtar favourites to become the first Ukrainian side to qualify for a major European final since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Shakhtar are the reigning Ukrainian champions but Dynamo lead the current domestic standings by 12 points from their rivals and it was the home side who drew first blood when Chyhyrynskiy deflected Oleksandr Aliyev's driven free-kick into his own net in the 22nd minute.

Neither side had shown much attacking endeavour in a muted opening and the visitors didn't threaten until Brazilian winger Fernandinho tested Dynamo goalkeeper Stanyslav Bohush with a low shot on the half-hour mark.

Bohush then raced from his line to deny Luiz Adriano as Shakhtar grew bolder, but in first-half injury time Dynamo almost increased their lead when Correa's deflected strike brushed the right-hand upright.

Artem Milevskiy glanced a header wide from another Aliyev set-piece in the early stages of the second period before defender Ognjen Vukojevic diverted an Aliyev long-ranger inches wide shortly afterwards.

Dynamo were firmly in the ascendancy, but in the 68th minute three of Shakhtar's Brazilian contingent combined to craft a priceless equaliser.

Jadson sprang the offside trap with a pass to substitute Willian on the right and his low cross was slid home by Fernandinho, putting Shakhtar firmly in the driving seat prior to the second leg on May 7.

Park agrees new deal

AFP, Manchester

South Korea winger Park Ji-sung has agreed a new deal with Manchester United, according to reports in England.

Park had 18 months left on his current deal but Sir Alex Ferguson was keen to keep him at Old Trafford for even longer.

The four million pounds signing from PSV Eindhoven admits he never considered leaving a club he thinks is the biggest in the world.

Park, who has agreed his deal verbally, will officially sign his new contract later this month.

"I have no reason to move," he told The Sun. "I play at the best club in the world."

Hiddink hits back

AFP, London



Chelsea boss Guus Hiddink has hit out at claims Chelsea used "dirty tricks" to secure last week's goalless draw with Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal.

The Catalans voiced criticism of what they saw as an overly physical approach to the encounter but Hiddink has no intention of apologising.

"It was a man's match," he said on Friday. "There were some collisions, but from either side. It's a man's game. They were controlling and dominating the game and I'd have liked to have had some more initiatives, but they controlled it."

"I don't like to give in that easily. We were well organised and played well, defensively. I'd like to have taken a little bit more of the initiative, but they are a disciplined team as well."

"Under Pep Guardiola, they know how to defend firmly and their centre-back, too, isn't afraid to make the game tough. On top of that, they can play."

"We would, of course, have liked to play more, but we were playing the best team in their concept of football."

"We didn't want to play 'anti-football'. This team has proved for several months, and at the

beginning of the season, that they can play football."

"But we were not able to start a good attacking game in Barcelona - you can blame us for not starting well and they made it difficult."

"We don't like to allow them to take the victory. This team has the character to fight as well."

Hiddink's comments reflected the extent to which Chelsea are preoccupied by Wednesday's second leg. But the Dutchman must first focus on Saturday's clash with local rivals Fulham, who are chasing a place in next season's Europa Cup.

Chelsea cannot afford to be too complacent about their occupation of third place in the Premier League with Arsenal, who they will face at the Emirates on May 10, only six points behind them.

"There might be one or two changes for the Fulham match," Hiddink said. "But it's not that we're going to decrease the quality of the players coming in."

"We have players on the bench with the quality to perform well. Maybe one or two will start tomorrow. We take this game very seriously."

"Roy Hodgson is doing a tremendous job at Fulham. He's one of the older managers, like me, who knows that the job is difficult."

"I respect the job he's doing. He's a man with a lot of experience and dignity."

Piotr fires Hamburg

AFP, Bremen



Germany winger Piotr Trochowski drew first blood for Hamburg in the first leg of the 1-1 German UEFA Cup semifinal as his winning goal sealed a 1-0 win at Bundesliga rivals Werder Bremen on Thursday.

"My team did particularly well in the first half and even though Bremen were better after the break, we still created

one or two chances," said Hamburg coach Martin Jol after the diminutive Trochowski's first-half header.

"That was a good result for us - I have never seen Trochowski score with his head before!" added the former Tottenham Hotspur manager.

But Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf insisted it will be a different matter at Hamburg next week.

"My team needs to understand that a game consists of two halves and we must do well in both periods," said a disgruntled Schaaf.

"Although it was an entertaining game, I think the replay will be a classic."



Hamburg midfielder Piotr Trochowski celebrates after scoring the all-important goal against Werder Bremen during their UEFA Cup semifinal first-leg match at the Weser-Stadion in Bremen on Thursday.

Ferdinand on track

AFP, London

Rio Ferdinand should be fit for Manchester United's Champions League semifinal second leg clash with Arsenal next week, Sir Alex Ferguson revealed on Friday.

Ferdinand was substituted in the final minutes of the 1-0 first leg victory at Old Trafford amid fears he had broken a rib. The England defender left the field in visible pain and had to spend a night in hospital.

However, although he will miss United's Premier League tie with Middlesbrough on Saturday, Ferguson is confident he will be back in United's starting line-up for the decisive second match at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

Ferguson said: "We have assessed the situation and the good news is that there is nothing cracked or broken which is terrific news."

"There is some bruising which caused a bit of coughing of blood when it happened but nothing has happened since so hopefully we will be able to get him ready for Tuesday."

"When you see someone getting a crack in the rib area you fear the worst with that, particularly when he's coughing blood, but that has passed over now."

"We just have to try and get him training by Sunday I think and hopefully he will be ready."