



Aston Villa midfielder James Milner's (L) free-kick is defended by Hull City players during their Premiership encounter at Villa Park on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

CHELSEA (0) v BARCELONA (0) Old scores to settle

AFP, London



As if a place in the Champions League final isn't motivation enough for Chelsea and Barcelona to win their semifinal second leg at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday, both sides will also be fuelled by the chance to settle a few old scores.

For Barcelona, the frustration of being stopped from scoring at the Nou Camp for the first time this season in last week's first leg was exacerbated by the feeling that Chelsea had emerged unscathed from the Catalan cauldron by resorting to the game's dark arts.

It is a source of pride to Barca's fans that their team has always remained true to their purist principles. So to see Chelsea play in such a negative, niggly manner and still avoid defeat drew a furious response from Pep Guardiola's players.

Xavi led the protests against Chelsea's "anti-football" but, inevitably the Blues were unrepentant and Barca would relish the chance to reach the final by eliminating a club who present such an affront to their beliefs.

Losing in the semifinals to Manchester United last season was painful enough but the prospect of bowing out at the same stage to Chelsea is too awful to contemplate.

But that desire won't guarantee Barca get their wish as Chelsea have plenty of additional incentive to complete the road

to Rome themselves.

The Blues were one kick away from winning Europe's elite club competition last May when John Terry ran up to take a penalty in the teeming Moscow rain.

If Terry had converted that spot-kick, Chelsea would have won the shoot-out against Manchester United, but the England captain slipped up as he struck the ball, saw his effort clip the post and it was United who took the trophy.

Chelsea winger Florent Malouda admits the squad are still haunted by that agonising near-miss and he knows only a victory over United or Arsenal in this year's final can erase those bitter memories.

Last year, to be in the final, was a very good experience but also bad," Malouda said. "It was a shame to lose. We are all determined now to get to Rome and win the trophy because we have come close before.

This now means that our desire is even stronger than it has ever been. The Champions League is a very important competition for any player.

"We all know going to Rome is going to be difficult but we have ambition and the ability to win the competition. We know we can do it. We need to stay focused on our target and achieve our goal."

Barca will go through with a score-draw however and the Spanish league leaders arrive in west London in great spirits after thrashing Real Madrid 6-2 in the Bernabeu on Saturday.

That win all but sealed the title for Barca and Argentina forward Lionel Messi, who scored twice, is convinced

they are capable of putting Chelsea to the sword in similar fashion.

"We will play in the same way against Chelsea as we did against Real and, playing like that, we will have many chances," Messi said.

"If we do things as we did on Saturday then we will score and go through."

"This was a massive boost. We're going to London with great spirit and desire to fight and with a lot of belief that we'll go through. We've come out of this with a renewed confidence and strength."

Barca's hopes of claiming the away goal that could prove so crucial would be dented if France striker Thierry Henry is unable to recover from a knee injury suffered against Real.

Reports suggesting Henry would be out for two weeks have been denied by Barca, but the Catalans are definitely without suspended centre-back Carlos Puyol and injured fellow defender Rafael Marquez.

Those absences leave Barcelona dangerously short of defensive options but, lest his players start to feel over-confident, Chelsea boss Guus Hiddink was quick to emphasise their opponents' strength in depth.

"They can replace the two players rather easily," Hiddink said. "They are well equipped to bring a team which is able to play well. It won't make a huge difference."

Hiddink has his own injuries problems with Portugal internationals Ricardo Carvalho and Deco sidelined, but England left-back Ashley Cole is available after missing the first leg through suspension.

Henry misses training

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona striker Thierry Henry was forced to skip a Monday training session due to a knee injury but will face Chelsea in the second leg of their Champions League semifinal, the club admitted on Monday.

Henry picked up the knock on Saturday in the first half of Barca's 6-2 romp over arch-rivals Real Madrid, in which the influential Frenchman scored a brace of goals before being replaced half an hour from the end by Seydou Keita.

According to the club, the French international underwent unspecified treatment on Monday.

The first leg in Barcelona finished scoreless.

Deschamps to take over at Marseille

AFP, Marseille

France World Cup hero Didier Deschamps is to take over from Eric Gerets as manager of Marseille next season, the club announced on its website on Tuesday.

The Belgian has guided the southern giants this season to within striking distance of their first league title since 1992, but he made it clear to his players last week that he would leave no matter what.

Deschamps, who skippered France to the World Cup title in 1998, has previously been coach at Monaco and Juventus. He will take over from Gerets in June.

A club statement said that Deschamps had agreed to a two-year deal after chairman Papa Diouf and majority share-holder Robert Louis-Dreyfus had decided he was the man they wanted to replace the popular Gerets.

"The choice of Didier Deschamps, whose career both as a player and a coach prove his merits, was a natural one to make," the statement said.

Le Guen will stand down

AFP, Paris

Paul Le Guen will stand down as coach of Paris St Germain when his contract expires at the end of this season, club sources told AFP on Tuesday.

A former France international defender who made 343 appearances for PSG, Le Guen began his coaching career at Rennes but made his name in a three-year stint at Lyon during which he led the side to three league titles.

After a disastrous eighth-month spell in charge of Scottish giants Rangers, Le Guen returned to PSG in January 2007, narrowly sparing the team from relegation in his first two seasons and securing the League Cup in 2008.

Villa secures Europe

APP, Birmingham

"It was relief at the end that we have won a game," Villa manager Martin O'Neill told Sky Sports. "We've thrown away leads against Stoke and West Ham, and tonight it was nice to keep a clean sheet."

Norway striker Carew grabbed the only goal of the game in the 34th minute when he turned in an Ashley Young cross from close range.

There was a suspicion of offside regarding Carew's 14th goal of the season but the forward said: "It was very good, the referee made the right decision."

"I wasn't sure but it was good to see it wasn't offside."

"It was a brilliant ball, I just had to put my foot on it."

Hull manager Phil Brown refused to be downcast and believes his team - who have been in freefall for several

months now - can avoid relegation.

"We deserved something from the game, no doubt about it and if we get the same effort on Saturday, Stoke have got a game on their hands," said Brown.

"I can't fault the players commitment in the second-half."

Hull goalkeeper Boaz Myhill made several fine saves to deny Villa, who fielded eight England players as England boss Fabio Capello looked on, a more emphatic victory, including a fine point-blank stop from Gabriel Agbonlahor.

The Tigers rarely threatened as the hosts won at Villa Park for the first time in the Premier League since mid-January, a run which helped cost them a top four finish and a Champions League spot.

Stars buying vineyards

Football

APP, Paris

"We've received a silver medal for my Costa Brulada and I am very proud of that," added the 41-year-old.

Jean Tigana - another former French star, who was part of the feted midfield quartet that inspired France to the 1984 European Championship - was one of the first high-profile players to see the attraction of making his own wine.

Indeed, he has enjoyed more success in the wine business than he did during an unhappy spell as coach of English side Fulham, where his biggest victory was the three million pounds in damages he won from club owner Mohammed Al-Fayed.

Tigana, who sold a vineyard in Bordeaux before snapping one up near Marseille, rarely speaks in public, but back in 2000 he laid out how he was approaching the ultimately unsuccessful task of rebuilding the Fulham side.

"It's like wine. In Bordeaux I rebuilt an abandoned property, I improved it bit by bit and now I have eight hectares."

"I'm proud that there is recognition of what I have done," said Tigana, who was reportedly in talks with Manchester United manager and wine connoisseur Sir Alex Ferguson over buying another vineyard together.

Such appears to be the trend these days of footballers tending the vines that it can have beneficial ramifications for other winemakers in the most unlikely circumstances.

Liverpool fans returning from their Champions League last-16 first-leg victory over Real Madrid in February were quaffing beer on the plane when one of their number noticed a wine bearing the label 'Fernando Torres'.

Thinking that it was the produce of their Spanish striker, they loyalty - if ill-advisedly - switched beverages, only to find out later that the Fernando Torres who made the wine was their hero's namesake and not the real deal.

Juve to fire Ranieri

Football

APP, Rome

the weekend.

Juve themselves have constantly repeated that Ranieri's job is safe, while the former Chelsea and Valencia boss is contracted until the end of next season.

But Italian football presidents are notoriously fickle and with a run such as Juve's, and with a tough trip to Milan up next, a defeat would probably suffice to see a changing of the guard.

Ranieri's job has long come under speculation but Gazzetta now claim that he will definitely be fired at the end of the season and maybe even sooner if Juve lose to Milan at the weekend.

FA to examine crowd trouble

APP, London

The Football Association (FA) are to examine incidents of crowd trouble during and after Saturday's Premier League match between Stoke City and West Ham at the Britannia Stadium on Saturday.

Police officers had to break-up clashes between rival fans and there were some scuffles inside the stadium. There were also incidents outside the ground after a match visitors West Ham won 1-0.

An FA spokesman said: "We will investigate the incidents."

MU in £62m Ribery bid

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Manchester United have made an offer of about 70 million Euros (£62.5m) for the Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery as they close in on a deal that would shatter the world transfer record.

Sources in Munich confirmed the bid has been received for the France international, who has made his desire to leave Germany known in the past few weeks. United scouts have repeatedly watched the 26-year-old in recent Bundesliga matches and sourced out his friends and entourage in Munich.

United's remarkable offer, which comfortably eclipses the record 44 million pounds paid by Real Madrid for Zinedine Zidane in 2001, is contingent on the sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to Madrid this summer but the approach to Bayern has been firm enough to suggest that the Portuguese's departure is a near certainty. Although Bayern are understood to have turned down United's offer, it is considered the first serious move in a negotiation that will eventually bring the winger to Old Trafford.

Ribery, who earns 8 million Euros a year at the Allianz Arena, the equivalent of 134,000 pounds a week, is set to replace Ronaldo as United's highest-paid player. Due to the unfavourable exchange rate and taxation levels in Britain, the Champions League holders will have to spend closer to 145,000 pounds a week to match his net wages at Bayern. Money, however, is not the determining factor for Ribery. The former Marseille player, who moved to Munich in 2007 for 25 million Euros plus add-ons and is contracted to Bayern until 2011, has repeatedly turned down offers to renegotiate a contract extension on improved terms.

Bayern's general manager, Uli Hoeness, who has ruled out a sale of Ribery throughout the season, softened his stance over the weekend. He confirmed Bayern were already eyeing up Werder Bremen's Brazilian midfielder Diego, 24, as a possible replacement "in case Ribery were to go".

Barcelona recently came close to an agreement with Ribery but negotiations halted when news of their interest was leaked to the French press by sources close to the player last week. Although Barcelona have not officially pulled out, United are now best placed to entice Ribery abroad. Relations between Bayern and United are cordial despite displeasure at Sir Alex Ferguson's aggressive pursuit of Owen Hargreaves in the summer of 2006. The English international moved to Old Trafford for 17 million pounds in July 2007.

In an interview with the French sports paper L'Equipe last week Ribery indicated that he would leave Bayern if his team did



FRANCK RIBERY