



Nigeria midfielder Michael Enemaro is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against the Republic of Ireland during their international friendly at Craven Cottage on Friday.

Keane rescues Ireland

Football

AFP, London

Robbie Keane saved the day for Ireland, the Tottenham captain producing the equaliser to earn Giovanni Trapattoni's side a 1-1 draw with Nigeria in Friday's friendly at Craven Cottage.

Michael Enemaro bought beleaguered Nigeria coach Shuaibu Amodu some precious breathing space with a fine goal in the 30th minute to put his team in front.

Eight minutes later Keane plundered a deserved equaliser for Ireland.

Trapattoni will have been reasonably satisfied with his evening's work as he prepares for next Saturday's World Cup qualifier in Bulgaria, where they can all but rubber-stamp a top-two finish in qualifying Group Eight.

Even so, the Italian might have been disappointed that his in-form side could not have disposed of a Nigeria team stripped of John Mikel Obi, Joseph Yobo, Obafemi Martins and Chinedu Obasi through club commitments or injuries.

In truth, most of the players

looked as if they would rather be on the beach resting their aching limbs than turning out in south-west London, and entertainment was at something of a premium for the supporters who turned the stadium into a sea of green.

What little urgency there was came mostly in the first half. Ireland might have taken the lead early on when Keane's canny through-ball almost set up Leon Best, only for the debutant to be beaten to it by goalkeeper Austin Ejide.

That set a suitably frustrating tone for Best. The Coventry striker, making his international debut, was then denied in the 27th minute by a last-gasp sliding tackle by Sam Sodje and then hit the post with a header from point-blank range.

Best was given a masterclass in finishing from Enemaro. The midfielder swept in a fine first-time shot after being picked out 12 yards out by Femi Oluwayo's fine cross from the right.

That should have given Nigeria a platform for victory, but Ireland were level by the break. A cute pass from Keith Andrews found Keane in the area and, once the Ireland skipper had rounded Ejide,

the equaliser was inevitable.

Ireland might have been ahead before half-time, only for Best to strike the post from point-blank range with a header, but they maintained their momentum after the break.

In the 52nd minute, Ejide's poor clearance was seized by Shane Long and the Reading striker lobbed back towards goal. The goalkeeper only just made his ground in time to palm behind.

There were few chances worthy of the name as the game ground to a close, as both teams made a spate of substitutions to keep legs fresh for more pressing engagements in the days to come.

Amodu, who was severely criticised after Nigeria opened their World Cup qualifying campaign with a goalless draw against Mozambique, has a high-profile friendly with France in Saint Etienne on Tuesday but of even greater importance is the World Cup qualifier against Kenya in Abuja on 7 June.

Defeat there cannot be countenanced, so Nigeria's sturdy performance here - albeit with a largely second-string side - will have cheered the coach.

Terry denies Makelele's accusation

AFP, London

Chelsea skipper John Terry has denied claims made in former team-mate Claude Makelele's new autobiography that he had a role in Jose Mourinho's September 2007 dismissal.

As Chelsea on Saturday attempted to see off Everton in the FA Cup final and win their first trophy since the Portuguese coach left Stamford Bridge, Terry's lawyers released a statement which read: "It has been claimed that John was in some way involved with the removal of Jose Mourinho as manager.

"This is categorically untrue and there is no foundation in this allegation.

Makelele has alleged in a new autobiography just published in France that Mourinho, whom the Frenchman deemed "untouchable," and Terry clashed over the latter's fitness and that Terry then asked for a transfer.

According to Makelele, the club hierarchy, including owner Roman Abramovich, would not countenance Terry leaving with the result that Mourinho had to go instead.

Chelsea reject Makelele's account. "This is not a true version of events with regards to the transfer request as there was no one," a Chelsea spokesman said.

"Nor was the captain responsible for the departure of Jose Mourinho, which was mutually agreed between Jose and the club."

Portugal recall Boa Morte

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz on Friday called up Jose Castro of Deportivo La Coruna for the June 6 World Cup qualifier against Albania in Tirana and also recalled West Ham striker Boa Morte.

Portugal are facing a battle to qualify as they currently stand third in Group One, seven points behind pace-setters Denmark and Hungary.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Daniel Fernandes (Bochum/GER), Eduardo (Sporting Braga/POR), Beto (Leixoes/POR), Moreira (Benfica/POR)
Defenders: Jose Bosingwa (Chelsea/ENG), Bruno Alves (FC Porto/POR), Goncalo Brandao (Siena/ITA), Jose Castro (Deportivo La Coruna/ESP), Miguel (Valencia/ESP), Pepe (Real Madrid/ESP), Ricardo Carvalho (Chelsea/ENG), Rolando (FC Porto/POR)
Midfielders: Deco (Chelsea/ENG), Duda (Malaga/ESP), Eliseu (Malaga/ESP), Joao Moutinho (Sporting Lisbon/POR), Raul Meireles (FC Porto/POR), Tiago (Juventus/ITA)
Strikers: Boa Morte (West Ham/ENG), Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United/ENG), Edinho (AEK Athens/GRE), Hugo Almeida (Werder Bremen/GER), Nani (Manchester United/ENG), Simao Sabrosa (Atletico Madrid/ESP)

Milan need a point

AFP, Rome



AC Milan come into the last game of the Italian Serie A season with a very real risk of missing out on a top three finish and facing the ignominy of playing Champions League qualifiers next season.

Milan play away to Fiorentina in their final match of the season on Sunday knowing that a defeat could see them drop to fourth place in the table and next season's qualifiers.

The rossonero are level on points with second-placed Juventus with fourth-placed Fiorentina three points further back.

If Fiorentina beat Milan they will draw level on points with them but the final league positions are determined by head-to-head records rather than goal difference.

Milan beat Fiorentina 1-0 at the San Siro earlier in the season so if La Viola win by a bigger margin than that, they will leap-frog Milan.

However, if they were to win by a single goal Milan's better goal difference would

count and Fiorentina would finish fourth.

The confusion comes if Juve lose at home to Lazio as then all three teams would finish on 71 points.

Then there would be a three-way head-to-head, which would still see Juve finish second but would then also guarantee that Fiorentina finish above Milan.

It all means that Milan need a result and the current speculation surrounding the futures of Brazilian playmaker Kaka and coach Carlo Ancelotti cannot be helping their focus.

Kaka, who has been strongly linked in the Spanish press with a summer move to Real Madrid, says he is desperate to get Milan back into the Champions League, after their fifth place finish in Serie A last season saw them miss out.

But Milan come into the game off two straight defeats and without a win in their last three matches.

"We want to get back to winning ways and to feel the emotion and pressure of the Champions League again," he said.

"This is a very special week, delicate, we're in a tough spell at the moment but we have to

come through that to qualify for the Champions League.

"In the last three matches our level has gone down but now there's just one left and we can't let slip our objective."

However, it has been suggested that finishing fourth and playing in the qualifying rounds wouldn't be such a bad idea for Milan.

In fact their last two Champions League triumphs in 2003 and 2007 came after they had to battle through qualifying.

However vice-president Adriano Galliani doesn't want to take that risk.

"It's essential, we absolutely have to get into the Champions League without walking into the Caudine Fork of the preliminaries," he said alluding to a famous Roman military humiliation.

"Even if the last two times

we won the Champions League coming through the preliminaries that doesn't mean we'll do it a third time."

The match against Fiorentina will also mark Paolo Maldini's last as a professional footballer but his party has already turned sour and risks getting even worse if Milan lose.

His last home game a week ago was marred by a small section of fans chanting against him as well as a 3-2 defeat that has put Milan in this precarious position.

One which Fiorentina midfielder Marco Donadel believes his team can capitalise on.

"We've already achieved our primary objective in a top four finish but now we're in the running for third and we have to believe in ourselves," he said.

The only other undecided situation in Serie A is who will join Reggina and Lecce in being relegated.

Torino and Bologna are level on points but the Toro, who play away to AS Roma, have to better Bologna's result at home to Catania if they are to survive due to their inferior head-to-head record.

FIXTURES

Sunday (1400 GMT)
Bologna v Catania, Fiorentina v AC Milan, Genoa v Lecce, Inter Milan v Atalanta, Juventus v Lazio, Napoli v Chievo, Palermo v Sampdoria, Reggina v Siena, AS Roma v Torino, Udinese v Cagliari

Figo set for farewell

Football

AFP, Milan

Portugal legend Luis Figo on Saturday announced his definitive retirement from the game.

His final match will be on Sunday when the Italian champions entertain Atalanta at the San Siro.

It will bring down the curtain on a glorious career that saw the 36-year-old win eight league titles, four national cup competitions, the Champions League and the now defunct European Cup Winners' Cup.

"Tomorrow, May 31 2009, will be my last Sunday as a footballer. I'm happy that my last Sunday as a footballer will be a party for me and for everyone at Inter after our fourth successive scudetto," he said on the Inter website.

"Winning was always the only real objective of my career. Winning everything that I could win, from practice matches in training to championships, cups and personal trophies.

"And I have known only one road on the path to victory, that of sacrifice and hard work.

"They taught me that as a young lad at Sporting (Lisbon) and everything I've achieved didn't happen out of chance but due to many sacrifices."

Figo certainly has won a lot, starting with a Portuguese Cup with Sporting in 1995, the same year he moved on to Barcelona.

There he won two La Liga titles, two Spanish King's Cups and the European Cup Winners' Cup.

However, he then committed the most heinous of crimes in the eyes of the Barca faithful by quitting the club for their hated rivals Real Madrid in 2000 for a then world record transfer fee.

Such was the chagrin of the

Barca fans that two years later when the winger returned to the Nou Camp with Real, he had a pig's head thrown at him.

However, he achieved even more success at Real, winning two more titles and the Champions League.

Five years after that move he came to Italy to join Inter and his four seasons with the club have seen them land the

title in every one -- although initially through default when in 2006 Juventus and AC Milan were penalised for match-fixing and the scudetto was awarded to Inter, who had finished third.

He also achieved great personal success, winning the world player of the year title in 2001, a year after he was given the Ballon d'Or.

He was named Portuguese player of the year six times but success escaped his country despite reaching the European Championship final on home soil in 2004, where they lost to Greece.

A member of Portugal's golden generation alongside Rui Costa and Joao Pinto, Figo won the European under-16 Championships and World under-20 Championships and made his debut for Sporting in the 1989-90 season.

Two seasons later he was a regular first teamer and he went on to be a crucial player at all his clubs until the last couple of seasons when he could only command a bit part role at Inter -- although he has forced his way back into Jose Mourinho's side in the last couple of months.

"Football has given me so much but most of all it has given me the opportunity to meet incredible people, lifelong friends," he headed.

Figo, who is married to Swedish model Helen Svedin, earned a remarkable 127 caps for Portugal, scoring 32 goals while playing almost 800 club games.



LUIS FIGO

Genoa sign Crespo

AFP, Rome



Genoa have completed the signing of Inter Milan forward Hernan Crespo, the club's president Enrico Preziosi said on Friday.

Preziosi met with the 33-year-old Argentine's agent Fernando Hidalgo in the afternoon and afterwards proclaimed Crespo as a Genoa player.

"It's an important signing, we're very happy. Crespo is a great player, a serious lad who we've been following for a long time," said Preziosi.

Hidalgo said his client had also had an offer from Fiorentina but they only wanted to give him a one-year deal.

"We have agreed on a two-year contract and that's an important demonstration of confidence in Hernan," he said.

Crespo had increasingly become a bit-part player for Inter this season as he found himself behind Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Mario Balotelli and Adriano (until he left the club) in the striker pecking order.

Preziosi also claimed that the proposed signing of Inter's Portuguese winger Ricardo Quaresma was only a signature away.

"The Quaresma question is very simple, there is an agreement between the two clubs, all we need is the player's signature," he told Radio Kiss Kiss.

"I don't believe there will be any big problems but we'll meet next week to resolve everything."

Quaresma only joined Inter at the beginning of the season but was a complete flop and was loaned out to Chelsea in January.

However, he couldn't force

his way into their team either and has hardly played this season since joining from Porto for 19 million euros last August.

It is the second time a move to a big club has gone sour for the Portugal winger after he also struggled at Barcelona in 2003-04.

Another forward who has signed for the club is Atalanta's Sergio Floccari, who has scored 12 times for the Bergamo based club this season.

"Floccari already signed last night. There's just the formality of the exchange of contract with Atalanta but there's no problems because the lad as already signed and everything's ok," added Preziosi.

Genoa came close to qualifying for next season's Champions League this season but just missed out on a top four finish.

OPEN SECRETS

INTERNET, undated



Jelena Jankovic, never short of an opinion, has now become something of a dieting expert after dropping six kilograms in her off-season bulking-up to build muscle. Now that the svelte Serb is back down to her optimum fighting weight, she can dispense tips. And she now has a few extra bits of nutritional information to hand after lunching with her county's president Boris Tadic at the French Open.

"Did you know if you eat fruit after the meal you get fat - but not in the morning," said Jankovic, who revealed that the political leader gave her that jewel of knowledge. "If you eat it late in the afternoon or in the evening, it turns into fat. That's sugar. This is something I heard for the first time."

The number five said that she feels much better on court after losing the weight which she gained during a December programme of high-altitude training and weights in Mexico.

"I think you burn much more calories when you play a match an hour and a half than when you practice for three or four hours, because of all those nerves you have playing."

And there is another hidden benefit of her new regime for Jankovic: "I have been eating a lot of chocolate, as well, and I kind of lost weight. So I don't know what it is, what kind of metabolism it is."

SHARAPOVA SHINING IN CLAY

Maria Sharapova believes her comeback from a shoulder injury couldn't be going any better after reaching the last 16 of the French Open for a sixth consecutive year.

"Especially this year, I'm just thrilled I'm really thrilled to be here and sit here," said the former number one currently ranked 102 after not playing since last August.

"Every single result, no matter how easy or tough, I learn so much from it. I have had really difficult matches here, and I had really exciting ones."

While her game best matches up to faster courts after winning Wimbledon, the US and Australian Opens, Sharapova does not discount her chances on clay after playing the Roland Garros semi-finals two years ago.

"Even though it's a challenge playing here, I really enjoy it. I have a lot of respect for the tournament. It has so much history and so much tradition. I certainly want to be one of the girls holding the trophy one day."

No Iniesta at Confed Cup

INTERNET, undated

Andres Iniesta is doubtful for the upcoming Confederations Cup after aggravating the muscle injury in his right thigh in Wednesday's Champions League defeat of Manchester United. According to Catalan dailies Sport and Mundo Deportivo on Saturday, Iniesta might need two or three weeks to recover.

They both quote Barca coach Josep Guardiola as saying, on Friday, that "we should be careful with this injury to Andres, it is in a very dangerous place."

Iniesta - who is well placed to be chosen as the best player in the Spanish Liga this season - originally tore the muscle at the back of his right thigh on May 2, in Barca's historic 6-2 win away to Real Madrid.

He seemed to have recovered in time for the Champions final, and turned in another of his lively displays linking up midfield and attack - and setting up Samuel Eto'o for the first goal.

However, he has been in considerable pain since Wednesday, and has been treated by the Barca doctors.

On Monday Spain manager Vicente del Bosque will name his squad for the Confederations Cup, in which European champions Spain make their debut on June 14 against New Zealand.

chopped and changed coaches and sporting directors at will, failed to win anything - and resigned under a cloud in mid-season?

In an interview on Tele 5 on Friday night, Perez said that "I have learned from my mistakes" and that "it was a mistake to resign like that" (in February 2006).

He promised to sign "some of the best players in the world", but without going into detail about who they will be and who will be their coach.

According to AS and Marca, Manuel Pellegrini will be presented to the media as the new Real coach on Tuesday, after he winds up his contract at fifth-placed Villarreal.

Perez and Jorge Valdano, his sporting director from 2000 to 2004, would have preferred either Arsene Wenger or Jose Mourinho, but they have decided to stay at Arsenal and Inter Milan respectively.

Valdano, a man who has fulfilled just about every possible role at the Estadio Bernabeu over the years, will be assisted by Zidane, a popular figure amongst "madridista" fans.

Perez - unlike disgraced predecessor Ramon Calderon - has good relations with the different Spanish media groups, and is well known for

"feeding" transfer stories to sports dailies AS and Marca.

On Saturday AS claims that Perez and Valdano want to "Spanishize" Real, by bringing in Xabi Alonso from Liverpool, plus David Villa and David Silva from cash-strapped Valencia.

Marca, for its part, suggests that they are also interested in Valencia defender Raul Albiol, that the signing of playmaker Kaka from AC Milan could go through "within a few days" - and that Cristiano Ronaldo is keen to leave Manchester United and come to Madrid.

Calderon - president from 2006 until this January, when he was forced to resign because of the false delegates scandal revealed by Marca - talked endlessly about signing Kaka and Cristiano, but failed to deliver the goods.

Perez knows that he will be judged on his ability to overturn the domination of "treble" winners Barcelona, within a couple of years at the most. Real supporters are never happy at living in Barca's shadow.

On Friday Perez said that Barca's success "will serve as a stimulation for me."

Also on Friday, Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas said that "our intention is to make things harder for Barca next season."

Football

INTERNET, undated

The imminent return of Florentino Perez to the presidency of Real Madrid has raised massive expectations amongst the media and supporters. Perez, 62, will be invested as president on Monday, without the need for elections, because no other candidate has managed to produce, by midnight on Friday, the bank guarantees for 15 per cent of the club's budget that the statutes of the club insist upon.

If there were elections, the billionaire construction magnate would almost certainly have scored a comfortable victory, according to all opinion polls.

Now the question has to be: what kind of Perez are we going to see this time?

Will it be a rerun of his first term, from 2000 to 2004, when he put the club's finances in order, built a handsome new training ground, signed "Galactico" stars Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo and David Beckham - and led Real to two Spanish Ligas and one Champions League?

Or will it be the hesitant, erroneous Perez of his second term, from 2004 to 2006, when he signed mediocre players,