

Chelsea edge Milan

Football

SOCERNET

A wonder strike from Didier Drogba and a goal for debutant Yuri Zhirkov allowed Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti to get the better of his former club AC Milan in Baltimore.

Drogba produced a stunning shot from distance with just seven minutes on the clock which was cancelled out by Clarence Seedorf before half-time.

Russian Zhirkov then restored Chelsea's lead midway through the second half and this time there was no way back for their Italian opponents.

Juliano Belletti gave Milan a scare with just three minutes on the clock, unleashing a shot from outside of the box which forced a save from Zeljko Kalac.

There was little the Milan goalkeeper could do to stop Drogba's opener four minutes later, however.

The Ivory Coast striker took everyone by surprise with a sublime strike from around 35 yards out which blazed into the top left corner.

It took a while for Milan to recover from the blow, but they slowly worked their way into the contest and Petr Cech made his first save after 19 minutes, using his feet to turn away Ronaldinho's effort.

The alarm bells really started to ring for Chelsea 10 minutes later when a lovely passing move set up Seedorf for a chipped shot which came back off the crossbar.

And the Serie A side were back on level terms after 37 minutes thanks to Seedorf, who hit a first-time strike from Ronaldinho's lay-off which sailed into the net from 18 yards.

Milan hit the woodwork for the second time after 57 minutes with Ronaldinho unlucky not to add his name to the scoresheet.

But Chelsea kept their heads, and their patience was rewarded 11 minutes later when Zhirkov capped his first appearance with a goal.

The Russian capitalised on a game of pinball in the Milan area which began when Andriy Shevchenko's shot was parried by Kalac to Frank Lampard.

His effort was also cleared by the Milan defence but only as far as Zhirkov who finished the job from the edge of the area.

Milan could have snatched a draw in stoppage time but Cech tipped Filippo Inzaghi's effort over the bar.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (L) controls the ball as Milan defender Gianluca Zambrotta looks on during their friendly encounter at B&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore on Friday.

Coach fired for playing 12-year-old

AFP, La Paz

The father of a 12-year-old boy who last week became the world's youngest professional footballer has been fired as coach of the Bolivian first division side.

Former World Cup star Julio Cesar Baldvieso has been forced out by bosses of his club Aurora for refusing to obey orders from club directors to leave the boy out of the squad.

Baldvieso also withdrew his son Mauricio, who turned 13 years on Wednesday this week, from the club.

"For internal club reasons, we've decided to part company with coach (Julio Cesar) Baldvieso," Aurora president Jose Luis Montano said.

This followed the controversy which surrounded Mauricio's appearance as a substitute for the final ten minutes of a 1-0 defeat against La Paz last Sunday. There is no minimum age limit in professional football in Bolivia.

"My dad told me that he'd start me if we won, things turned out differently but he brought me on," said Mauricio.

After participating in four crosses Mauricio was stretched off after receiving a knock to the back of his ankle before returning to the pitch, an incident which resulted in uproar.

His father was severely criticised by doctors in particular who believe the growing youngster could suffer serious long term injuries which could eventually hamper his career.

Baldvieso, however, insisted that Mauricio would stay at the club until the end of the season at least.

He slammed club bosses for failing to recognise his son's potential and accused Bolivian footballing authorities of "cutting down young talent" in favour of foreigners.

Mauricio said he was committed to the game.

"There's no age for football. I am determined to make it, 200 per cent," Mauricio told AFP from Cochabamba in Bolivia.

"My father is my hero. But one day I want to play in Spain or England - for Real Madrid or Manchester United."

Vieira keen on Spurs

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp has admitted that former Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira is keen to quit Inter Milan for a shock move to White Hart Lane.

Vieira earned hero status at Arsenal during his nine-year spell with the Gunners, but the France midfielder is looking for regular first-team action after falling out of favour at Inter and Redknapp believes he would gladly join his former club's bitter rivals.

If Vieira does sign for Spurs, he would risk angering Arsenal fans who regard him as a legend, but Redknapp insisted that wouldn't stop the 33-year-old returning to north London.

"I'm still interested in Patrick. I would like him," Redknapp said. "What's he done wrong? He hasn't killed anyone, he's just a great player who played for Arsenal."

"If he wants to come to Tottenham it shows you about his character. He's not interested in money. He wants to come and play, he's a fantastic player and wants to play here."

Redknapp's priority at the moment is to find cover at centre-back after Jonathan Woodgate joined Ledley King and Michael Dawson on the injury list this week.

All three could miss the start of the season but Redknapp also wants a defensive midfielder to protect his back four and has enquired about Real Madrid's Lassana Diarra as well as Vieira.

Redknapp also admitted he would still consider buying Peter Crouch from Portsmouth if his former club lower their asking price for the England striker.

"I'm still interested in Crouchy but the whole package looks a bit expensive at the moment," Redknapp said. "I don't want to tell Portsmouth how much to ask for Peter, that's up to them."

Bolt lights up London

Athletics

AFP, London

Sprint superstar Usain Bolt won the 100m at the London Grand Prix here on Friday in astounding style on a day when it was announced five of his fellow Jamaicans had tested positive for drugs.

Despite running into a stiff head wind, world record-holder Bolt, the Olympic 100m and 200m champion, still clocked a time of 9.91sec even though he clearly slowed down in the closing stages.

Bolt, who in Beijing last year set a world record of 9.69sec while winning gold, was not the quickest away from the start but once he was into his stride no-one in final at the Crystal Palace track in south London ever looked like catching him.

It was a display to worry rivals ahead of next month's World Championships in Berlin but Bolt, who finished second in his heat, told the BBC afterwards: "I am ready for anything that comes my way. I am not invincible, I am not unbeatable. Other people will have a good day when I don't, but until then I'll keep winning."

Reflecting on the race, he added: "Overall the main aim for me was the first 50m and I did well. I got it right so I'm happy."

"I knew it was going to be a headwind so I wasn't worried about the time. I got a good start, the transition was good so I'm happy with myself."

"I'm still at 85 per cent and after this it's all training. I've got two or three weeks of good training to put in so I guess I will be 100 per cent by Berlin," he added.

Fellow Jamaican Yohan Blake was a distant second to Bolt in 10.11 secs with Antigua's Daniel Bailey third.

Jamaica's former world record-holder Asafa

Powell, who before this race insisted Bolt could be beaten, finished well down the field in sixth place.

In the women's pole vault Russia's Yelena Isinbayeva suffered her first defeat in a major event since the 2003 World Athletics finals.

World record holder Isinbayeva was beaten on countback by Anna Rogowska of Poland after only clearing 4.68m, the height at which she entered the competition, at her third and final attempt.

Mo Farah failed to break the 27-year-old British record for 5,000m but did at least win the race in a time of 13 minutes 09.14 seconds.

Dave Moorcroft's mark of 13mins 00.41secs - a world record at the time - has stood since July 1982 and Farah, running into a headwind, was always going to be struggling to go under that time.

"It was pretty windy but I just wanted to win if I couldn't run a time and I'm really happy with it," Farah said.

Britain's Nicola Sanders, a silver medallist behind compatriot Christine Ohuruogu in the last World Championships in Osaka, continued her return from an ankle injury to win the women's 400m ahead of the American duo of Shana Cox and Monica Hargrove.

"I was exhausted coming into the home straight but I'm pleased with the win," Sanders said.

Olympic silver medallist Phillips Idowu could only finish third in the triple jump, with America's Brandon Rouhac winning and Cuba's David Giralt in second place.

Earlier Friday, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) confirmed that five Jamaican sprinters - four men and one woman - had tested positive for a banned substance at the country's world championship trials.

The five do not include Bolt or Powell or any of the country's top sprint stars.

Becks slapped \$1000 fine

AFP, Los Angeles

Los Angeles Galaxy's David Beckham was slapped with a 1,000 dollar fine Friday for provoking his own team's fans during the Galaxy's 2-2 draw with AC Milan at the Home Depot Center.

Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber fined the Galaxy midfielder for his part in an ugly halftime scene where he allegedly challenged abusive Los Angeles fans to come down onto the field.

"We support our players interacting with fans, whether it is at clinics, charity events or by high-fiving their supporters in the stands while celebrating a goal," Garbers said.

"However, our players should never engage in conduct that can be interpreted as encouraging fans to come out of the stands and onto the field, regardless of the reason."

Video footage of the incident of the July 19 exhibition game also apparently shows Beckham trying to climb over a sideline railing before being stopped by security guards.

Police arrested a fan who left the stands to meet Beckham's alleged challenge.

Beckham has incurred the wrath of Galaxy fans who say he is overpaid and refer to him a part-time player because of his sidetrips to Europe to play for other teams.

'Ibra was never loved'

Football

AFP, Rome

Jose Mourinho has fired a parting shot at Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, claiming he was never loved by the Inter Milan fans.

Ibrahimovic is due to wrap up a switch to Barcelona when he agrees personal terms with the Spaniards, with Cameroon forward Samuel Eto'o heading in the opposite direction.

But Mourinho clearly feels let down by the big Swede and told Saturday's Gazzetta dello Sport that the club's fans would have more affection for Eto'o.

"I thought he would stay because only Real Madrid -- and they weren't interested in him -- could spend such crazy money, but then Barcelona did too," said Mourinho of the deal which will see the Italian also net Belarus winger Alexander Hleb on loan and 50 million euros.

"If, as his agent said, this deal has been in the pipeline for a year, then there's something strange going on."

"If it was a recent thing, that's ok. He gave everything he could for me and for Inter, always. Even though he was never loved by the fans,

who aren't crying over his sale and are ready to love Eto'o.

"Inter had two possibilities, tell Ibrahimovic: 'we're not selling you', or take Eto'o, plus Hleb on loan for a year for free, plus 50 million euros."

"To me that seems like an incredible deal, a deal worth 100 million euros, the deal of the summer."

"Kaka 70, Cristiano Ronaldo 96. For me this is worth 100 million because Eto'o is worth not even one euro less than Ibra."

Mourinho also explained why the deal for Chelsea pair Ricardo Carvalho and Deco fell through.

"We were supposed to exchange Carvalho for one of our defenders and to have Deco for free, then Chelsea asked for 15 plus five million euros."

"From zero to 20 million, that's a bit too much and I'm not blaming my club."

Instead of Carvalho, Inter signed Brazil centre-back Lucio from Bayern Munich.

"He wasn't second choice but a great surprise," admitted Mourinho. "He doesn't have great feet but he defends well, he's quick and he's knows how to push the team up the pitch. He doesn't talk much but he knows how to get himself heard."

Barca won't bow to Real

Football

AFP, London

Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola has warned big-spending Real Madrid that his side won't give up their reign as European and Spanish champions without a fight.

After playing second fiddle to Barcelona last season, Real have spent over 180 million pounds to sign stars like Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema during the close-season.

The Bernabeu club's spree has led many pundits to predict they will take Barcelona's Spanish title and replace them as Champions League winners as well.

But Guardiola sees no reason why Barcelona can't retain both trophies because his squad still has the same skill and spirit that inspired their treble triumph last season.

"We are going to try (to win everything)," Guardiola said after his side's 1-1 draw against

Tottenham in the Wembley Cup.

"We know Madrid paid a lot of money to get marvellous players but we are willing to attack and I am convinced we have the spirit to play good football and get something at the end of the season."

Guardiola admitted talks to sign Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic from Inter Milan are still on-going but he expects a positive conclusion to the negotiations soon.

The transfer moved closer to completion when Ibrahimovic agreed personal terms on Friday and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o is set to move to the San Siro as part of the deal.

"Eto'o has made his decision but they are still making the negotiations. In the next few days we will know exactly what happens," Guardiola said.

Another player who could be leaving the Nou Camp is Eidur Gudjohnsen, one of the few experienced Barcelona players to feature against Tottenham.

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Benitez hails Gerrard

Football

AFP, Singapore

Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez hailed Steven Gerrard Saturday after he was cleared of an alleged assault, voicing confidence that his captain would be mentally ready for the new season.

Gerrard was accused of being part of a group that injured a man at the Lounge Inn nightclub in Southport, near Liverpool, northwest England, on December 29.

Gerrard was found not guilty on Friday and celebrated his high-profile acquittal by playing for the Liverpool reserves just hours later.

The England star scored a goal in their 2-2 draw against neighbours Tranmere Rovers, but Benitez said he will not travel to Singapore to join the rest of the squad for the final days of their Asian tour.

"We are really, really pleased with the news which means he can now play football and focus on football," said Benitez.

"But the plan is to rest him and he will start again next week."

His non-appearance in Thailand and Singapore put a dampener on their much-hyped Asian swing with some fans upset after his image was used prominently in promotional material to sell tickets.

His court date was set before the trip to Asia was announced.

Benitez said he hoped supporters understood that, despite the trial being over, Gerrard needed to be treated with care as the new season was just weeks away.

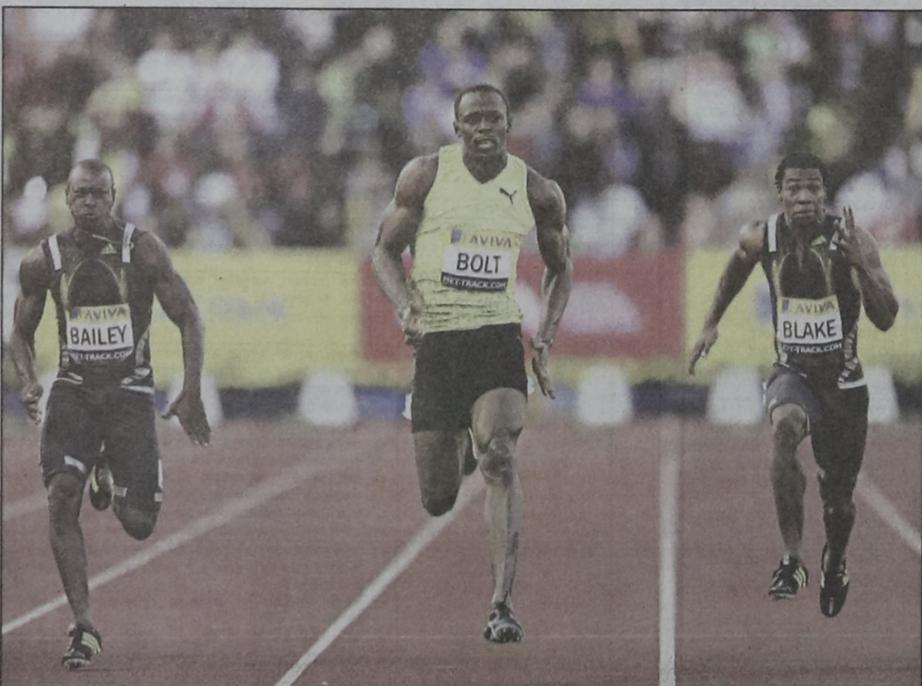
"We were in touch with him every day and knew what was happening and we were confident everything would be okay," he said.

"Now we need to take care of him, he must rest."

"I have to protect my players. We have already lost two to injury (defender Martin Skrtel and forward Nabil El Zhar). I'm sorry for the fans that we can't bring Gerrard but he is the captain of the team so he is a key player for the rest of the season."

"I hope the fans can respect the decision. We have other big names like (Pepe) Reina, (Xabi) Alonso, Fernando (Torres) and (Javier) Mascherano and they are all here."

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Jamaican sprint king Usain Bolt (C) competes to win the Men's 100 metres during the first day of the London Grand Prix at the Crystal Palace Stadium on Friday.