

Vienna stun Villa

Football

AFP, Paris

Aston Villa have work to do in the Europa League after losing their playoff first leg on Thursday away to Austria's Rapid Vienna 1-0.

The Austrians caught Villa cold as Nikica Jelavic netted the only goal in the opening minute to floor the English Premier League side, who began their league campaign last week with a surprising home loss to Wigan.

Villa coach Martin O'Neill shrugged off the defeat.

"We knew this was going to be exceptionally difficult - so will the return tie - but we are going to try to win," said O'Neill, a European Cup winner with Nottingham Forest.

"Of course we can overturn it. It was never going to be an easy match but this time next week we will be fitter again."

Another top flight English side, Everton, had a much easier time of it as they swamped Czech club Sigma Olomouc 4-0 in their first game of the Europa League, a revamped version of the UEFA Cup.

Louis Saha and Jack Rodwell both scored twice, either side of half-time to bolster Everton's morale after an opening Premier League mauling by Arsenal, 6-1 at Goodison Park.

Fulham won 3-1 at home to Russian unknown quantities Amkar Perm with Andy Johnson, Clint Dempsey and Bobby Zamora all on target.

There was heartbreak for Scotland's Hearts, however, after a 4-0 thrashing at Dinamo Zagreb.

Slovakian side Kosice meanwhile gave glitzy Italian rivals AS Roma a fright as they shared six goals with the hosts' Jan Novak bagging a brace,

to add to a four-goal haul last week in a league loss to Spartak Trnava.

Francesco Totti also hit a double for Roma. One side almost guaranteed the win over two legs, and a place in the group stages, are Germany's in-form Hamburg, who swamped Guingamp 5-1 in France with Croatian playmaker Mladen Petric scoring a hat-trick.

Jose Paolo Guerrero and Marcus Berg were the Germans' other scorers.

There looks to be no fairytale for Irish side St Patrick's Athletic, on the evidence of their 3-0 loss away to Romania's former European champions Steaua Bucharest.

The Irish were undone after the break by goals from Banel Nicolita and then a brace from Bogdan Stancu.

Spain's former Champions League semi-finalists Villarreal and Switzerland's Basel both scored 3-1 away successes at Holland's NAC Breda and Azeri outfit Baku respectively - Marco Streller took the plaudits for Basel with at two-goal show.

Two Israeli sides enjoyed contrasting fortunes as Hapoel Tel Aviv won 2-1 with a last-gasp winner at Czech opponents Teplice but city rivals Bnei Yehuda Tel-Aviv went down to an Ibrahim Afellay goal as PSV Eindhoven clinched a 1-0 away leg success.

Elsewhere, Dutch side Heerenveen would appear to be in the driving seat after a 1-1 draw away to PAOK Salonika of Greece.

Litex Lovetch of Bulgaria won by the only goal at Belarus rivals BATA Borisov and the Austria versus Ukraine matches between Sturm Graz and Metalist Kharkov and Metalurgh Donetsk and Austria Vienna both ended in scoring draws.

CSKA Sofia of Bulgaria and Dinamo Moscow ended a goalless stalemate in the Bulgarian capital.



Valeri Domovchiyski (L) of Hertha Berlin scores past Brondby goalkeeper Stephan Andersen during their Europa League play-off at the Brondby Stadium in Copenhagen on Thursday. Berlin lost 2-1.

PHOTO: AFP

'Bayern on right path'

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich travel to Bundesliga minnows Mainz on Saturday with midfielder Hamit Altintop insisting the German giants are on the right path despite being without a win from their first two games.

Bayern have failed to beat Werder Bremen and Hoffenheim in their opening two matches, but Mainz will be battling to make sure Munich's Dutch coach Louis van Gaal does not pick up his first Bundesliga victory since taking charge in July.

"Our results haven't been good," acknowledged Altintop. "But we shouldn't read too much into it. I reckon we're heading in a very, very good direction."

Bayern dominated the first 30 minutes of last Saturday's 1-1 draw with Bremen and van Gaal says he is seeing signs of improvement.

"That was the Bayern I want to see - dominant, controlling the opposition and the

match. The problem was a lack of goals," he said.

With chief playmaker Franck Ribery expected to pick up more game time, Bayern are looking to take the next step forward with a first league win of the new season and no other result will be acceptable, said Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger.

"We just need to watch ourselves a little now. We need all three points on Saturday. That is exactly what Bayern will get," the midfielder said.

Defending champions Wolfsburg have been hard in training since Tuesday for Sunday's sold-out game against Hamburg.

The Wolves have laid down

the gauntlet to the rest of the teams in the league, taking all three points and scoring five goals in their first two games after a 2-0 win over Stuttgart and the 3-1 success away to Cologne.

"I think Hamburg are very similar to Stuttgart, as a team on a level with us," said coach Armin Veh.

"I'm absolutely convinced that they will be one of the top sides at the end of the season. It's sure to be a very tight game."

Borussia Dortmund are home to Stuttgart on Saturday as they lick their wounds after being hammered 5-0 by Real Madrid on Wednesday in an exhibition game to mark their centenary.

Schalke 04 will be looking for three more points to maintain the 100 per cent record they share with Wolfsburg when they travel to Hoffenheim on Friday.

And Bremen take on Borussia Muenchengladbach on Sunday fresh from their 6-3 win over FK Aktobe in the Europa League as new signing Claudio Pizarro scored on his first appearance since rejoining from Chelsea on Tuesday.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Borussia Dortmund v VfB Stuttgart, Cologne v Eintracht Frankfurt, Freiburg v Bayer Leverkusen, Mainz 05 v Bayern Munich, Nuremberg v Hannover 96
Sunday
VfL Bochum v Hertha Berlin, Wolfsburg v Hamburg, Werder Bremen v Borussia Muenchengladbach

'United missing C'Ron'

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United would have to sign Barcelona star Lionel Messi if they ever hoped to fill the hole left by Cristiano Ronaldo, says Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard.

Ronaldo ended his five-year spell with United when he moved to Real in the summer as the Spanish giants launch an expensive rebuilding process after playing second fiddle in the popularity stakes to arch rivals Barcelona.

But Lampard believes United's loss could be the Premier League's gain as the fight for the league trophy is now somewhat closer.

"It is very difficult to replace Ronaldo," Lampard told the club's website www.chelseafc.com.

"I saw Alex Ferguson say that himself and I don't think he will look to replace him. He will look to make the team strong as a whole by not having him. That is the only thing they can do."

The amount of times I flicked on the telly and saw Ronaldo had scored and they had won one or two-nil. (Lionel) Messi is probably the only player you could replace Ronaldo with.

"That is probably one of our big pluses this year - we didn't lose our big players."

Lampard believes that without Ronaldo at United the league race is now closer. That belief was backed by United's 1-0 defeat to league newcomers Burnley on Wednesday.

Lampard added: "The league is probably closer now, which has been a bit of a natural thing over the past few years."

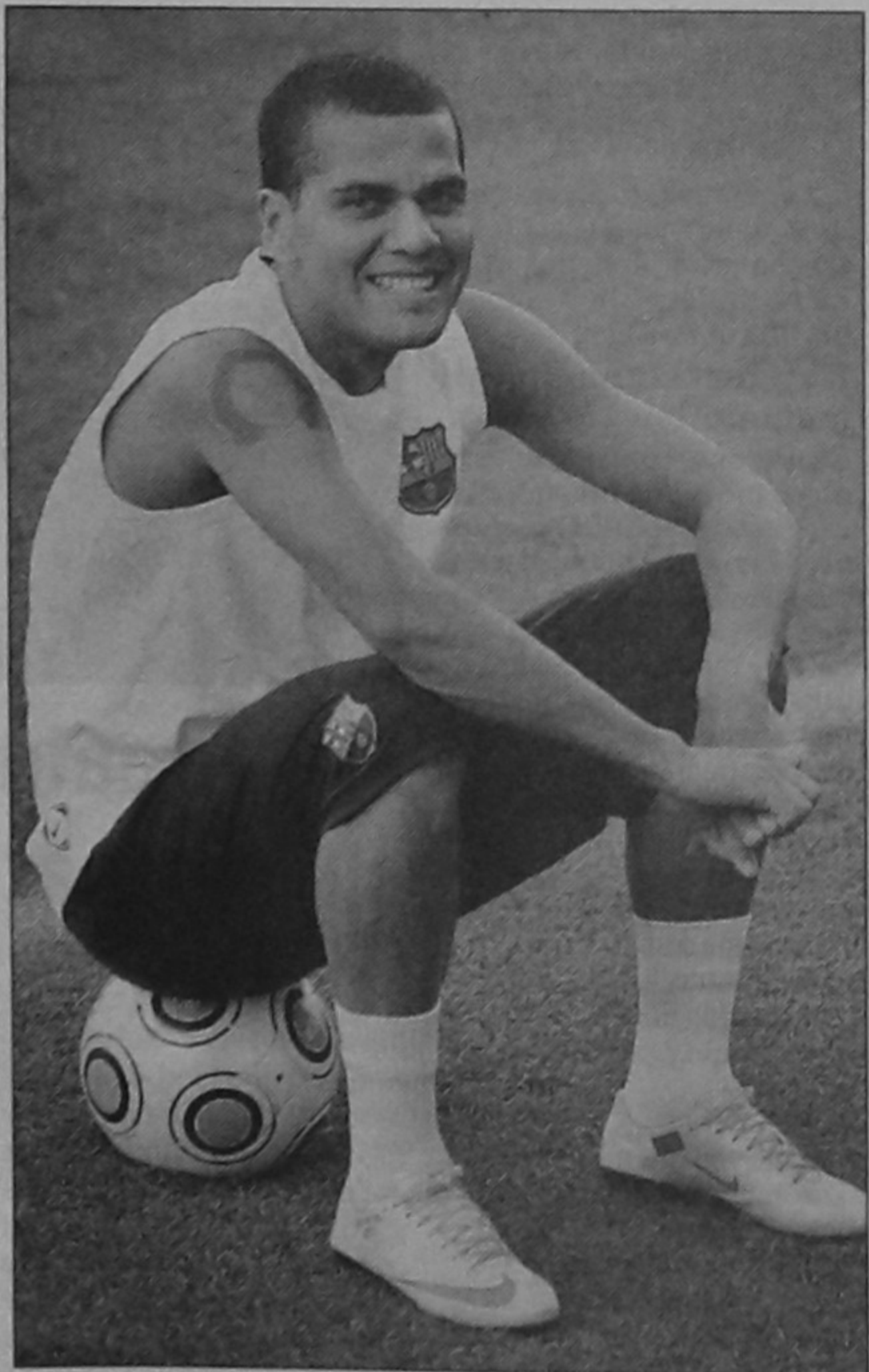
"In United's case, you don't want to draw the promoted teams so early in the season. They come out of the blocks to try and get some points. It (the defeat to Burnley) wasn't completely unexpected. I thought it might be a difficult game for them."

Tottenham sit ahead of Chelsea in the league after two games thanks to superior goal difference while Arsenal,

because of their Champions League duties in midweek, have played only one game and sit in third on three points.

While Spurs and Chelsea have won both their games so far, Liverpool and United have won one from two.

Lampard added: "We have now got a little bit of a lead over them and Liverpool. It is nice to get your noses in front."



Barcelona defender Daniel Alves sits on a football during a training session at the Sports Center Joan Gaspart in Barcelona on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Brazil recall Adriano

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Dunga on Thursday called Flamengo striker Adriano into his squad along with new face Deportivo La Coruna's Filipe Luis to face Argentina and Chile in upcoming World Cup qualifiers.

Adriano, 27, was last in the auriverde squad for an April qualifier against Peru when he was still at Inter Milan, whom he quit mid-season citing personal problems. He has since netted ten goals for new side Flamengo.

Leaders Brazil face Argentina, who trail them by five points, on September 5 and then host Chile, just a point behind them in the regional standings, three days later.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Julio César (Inter Milan/ITA), Victor (Gremio)
Defenders: Maicon (Inter Milan/ITA), Daniel Alves (FC Barcelona/ESP), Andre Santos (Fenerbahce/TUR), Filipe Luis (Deportivo La Coruna/ESP), Lucio (Bayern Munich/GER), Miranda (Sao Paulo), Juan (Benfica/POR), Luisao (Benfica/POR).
Midfielders: Gilberto Silva (Panathinaikos/GRE), Josue (Wolfsburg/GER), Elano (Galatasaray/TUR), Kaka (Real Madrid/ESP), Ramires (Benfica/POR), Felipe Melo (Juventus/ITA), Julio Baptista (AS Rome/ITA), Lucas (Liverpool/ENG).
Strikers: Luis Fabiano (Sevilla/ESP), Nilmar (Villarreal/ESP), Adriano (Flamengo), Robinho (Manchester City/ENG).

Rio out for a month

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United announced Friday they would have to do without central defender Rio Ferdinand for another three to four weeks.

After their shock 1-0 defeat away to Premier League newcomers Burnley on Wednesday United had some good news Friday with another defender, Nemanja Vidic, now fit and set to line up for the match against Wigan on Saturday.

However that has been offset by the loss of Ferdinand. He suffered a minor muscle tear in his thigh last week and was set to be sidelined for two weeks. But it has emerged that he needs more time to recover.

"Rio is going to be out for three to four weeks," said Ferguson.

Ferguson added: "We don't have any new injuries from Wednesday night. They're all fit," he said.

"The one position we're hoping for an improvement in is with Vidic. He's trained now for ten days and he is ready for a game. Hopefully he'll be OK for Saturday."

Gary Neville played 15 minutes at Burnley and he could be ready too, and that gives us experience at an important time after defeat on Wednesday.

As well as missing key matches for United Ferdinand now seems certain to miss the next two England games, a friendly against Slovenia on September 5, then a World Cup qualifier against Croatia four days later where victory would book England's place in South Africa next summer.

MU look to bounce back

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson expects Manchester United to erase the memory of one of the most embarrassing league defeats in the club's history when the Premier League champions face Wigan on Saturday.

Ferguson's team were humbled by Burnley on Wednesday as the promoted minnows claimed a famous 1-0 victory at Turf Moor thanks to Robbie Blake's superb finish.

It was a chastening experience for United's superstars, who have made a slow start to the season as they adjust to life without Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez.

With Nemanja Vidic, Rio Ferdinand and Edwin van der Sar all sidelined through injury, there was a makeshift look to United's defence in midweek that gave Burnley a glimmer of hope which they gleefully exploited.

Wigan will hope to do the same at the DW Stadium but Ferguson is confident his players will be determined to bounce back.

"Our players are all disappointed, it was a bad result for us. But I'm sure we'll get a response on Saturday at Wigan," Ferguson said.

"We were too frivolous with the chances we had. But hopefully we get as many on Saturday."

Chelsea's 100 per cent start under new boss Carlo Ancelotti will get a stern test

on Sunday at Fulham, whose home record last season made Craven Cottage into a daunting venue for even the big four.

The Blues, having come from behind to beat Hull and Sunderland already this term, look in dominant form however and midfielder Frank Lampard is keen for his team to set the pace in the title race.

"It's a long way to go in the League and it's just a good start," Lampard said. "Of course you want to get your noses in front early on and if we can get a good start and not have the mid-season we had last year then we'll have a great chance."

While Chelsea have made a fast start, Liverpool, who host Aston Villa on Monday, are still making lost ground after their opening weekend defeat at Tottenham.

Rafael Benitez's side responded to the Tottenham loss with a 4-0 rout of Stoke on Wednesday that served as a rebuke to sceptics who claimed the Reds were still short of title-winning quality.

One of the stars of that victory was England right-back

Glen Johnson, who marked his home debut with a goal.

"At a club like Liverpool you don't want to lose any match, so to lose the first game of the season was disappointing," Johnson said.

"But the lads showed great character to put that behind us and hopefully we can go on a good run now."

No team in England has confounded the critics more than Arsenal.

Arsene Wenger's team, who take on struggling Portsmouth at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday, were widely written off after the close-season departures of Emmanuel Adebayor and Kolo Toure.

Yet Wenger's youthful squad are more harmonious now Adebayor and Toure - two combustible personalities - have left.

A stunning 6-1 victory over Everton was followed by Tuesday's Champions League play-off victory at Celtic and Gunners goalkeeper Manuel Almunia admits the improved morale has made all the difference.

"We have a better relationship with each other and, if the dressing room works, then, on the pitch, the team works as well," Almunia said.

"Everybody comes into the dressing room with a better mood. It's true that this season we don't have any trouble or any problems inside and we appreciate that."

Elsewhere, table-topping Tottenham will look to maintain their best start to a season for 44 years when they play London rivals West Ham at Upton Park on Sunday.

FIXTURES

Saturday
(1400GMT unless stated)
Arsenal v Portsmouth, Birmingham v Stoke, Hull v Bolton, Man City v Wolves, Sunderland v Blackburn, Wigan v Man Utd
Sunday
Burnley v Everton, Fulham v Chelsea (1500GMT), West Ham v Tottenham (1230GMT)
Monday
Liverpool v Aston Villa (1900GMT)

Serie A kicks off today

AFP, Rome



Milan facing searching questions over the potency of their armoury and depth of their creativity following the loss of Brazilian superstar Kaka to Real Madrid.

Milan, as well as champions Inter and fellow powerhouses Juventus, begin their campaigns with relatively gentle openers this weekend before facing their first big challenges in only the second week of the season.

The two Milans will clash in their city derby while Juventus will travel to the capital to tackle AS Roma, only sixth last season but the runners-up from the previous three campaigns.

But first there are some potential banana skins to negotiate and most eyes will be on Milan following their torrid summer.

The seven-time European champions lost Kaka to Real Madrid and have failed to replace him with anyone even approaching the Brazilian's quality.

Dutch striker Klaas Jan Huntelaar, while a regular goalscorer, is not a direct replacement.

Added to the departures of Paolo Maldini (retirement) and David Beckham (end of

his loan spell) Milan are looking decidedly weaker coming into this campaign.

And a tricky trip to minnows Siena will provide a distinct test of their championship credentials.

If they put the Tuscans to the sword it would be a huge boost to their fragile morale.

But pre-season has suggested they face major problems.

Milan lost eight out of 11 matches ahead of the new season, with their only victories coming on penalties and against lower league opposition.

They even drew with Beckham's Los Angeles Galaxy and lost clashes against credible opponents such as Inter, Juve, Chelsea, Club America and Boca Juniors.

In the close season they did little to address the problems of an ageing squad and once again will be reliant on veterans such as Gennaro Gattuso and Massimo Ambrosini in midfield.

At the back they will be hoping a season on the treatment table has not adversely affected Alessandro Nesta.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Bologna v Fiorentina, Siena v AC Milan
Sunday
Catania v Sampdoria, Genoa v AS Roma, Inter Milan v Bari, Juventus v Chievo, Livorno v Cagliari, Palermo v Napoli, Udinese v Parma

IN BRIEF

Ronaldo to be a father again

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian striker Ronaldo confirmed Thursday he is to be a father for the third time, at the start of 2010.

The two-time World Cup winner, who has recently resurrected his injury-plagued career with Sao Paulo side Corinthians, told TV Globo television his partner is expecting a boy which they, according to reports elsewhere, plan to name Romeo.

The 32-year-old Ronaldo, who made his name with club sides Barcelona, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and AC Milan, already has a boy and a girl.

Ronald, 9, was born during Ronaldo's four-year marriage to female Brazilian footballer Milene Domingues.

His current partner, Maria Beatriz Antony, gave birth to their daughter Maria Sofia in December 24, 2008.

Ronaldo's deal with Corinthians is set to expire at the end of December.

Altdore set for debut

AFP, Hull

Hull's US striker Jozy Altidore is set to make his Premiership debut in Saturday's meeting with Bolton with the on-loan youngster from Spain's Villarreal having missed the Tigers' losses to Chelsea and Tottenham owing to red tape problems.

Craig Fagan is also in contention after recovering from a summer hernia operation but midfielder Dean Marney is still out with a knee injury while Jimmy Bullard and Ian Ashbee are long-term casualties.

Having just stayed up in their first top-flight season Hull are seeking to bounce back after their unlucky loss at Stamford Bridge and then a midweek home mauling by Spurs.

Real sell Negredo

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have sold highly-fancied striker Alvaro Negredo to Spanish league rivals Sevilla, both clubs announced Friday.

Negredo heads to the southern coast club for five years but for the first two years of that deal Real, who have recently signed a string of top forwards including Kaka, Karim Benzema and Cristiano Ronaldo, have the option to buy the player back.

Negredo was set to undergo a medical on Friday morning at Sevilla, who are delighted with the deal.

Sevilla have recruited one of the best strikers in Europe," said Sevilla in a statement.

Neither club revealed financial details of the deal. Real had initially bought Negredo earlier this summer for five million euros from Almeria, where he scored 19 goals last season.