

Saha sinks Pompey

AFP, Portsmouth



Louis Saha condemned Portsmouth to a seventh successive Premier League defeat as the France striker's clinical finish gave Everton a 1-0 victory at Fratton Park on Saturday.

Saha's seventh goal of the season in all competitions came following an error by Younes Kaboul that summed up Portsmouth's dismal start to the campaign.

Paul Hart's team had already made the worst opening to a Premier League season and their fortunes show no signs of improving despite a spirited second-half showing against Everton, who have now won four games in a row.

Everton striker Ayegbeni Yakubu was left on the bench as the Nigerian struggled with a groin strain picked up in the midweek League Cup win at Hull.

Fergie hails Giggs

AFP, Manchester



to prepare himself in the right way.

"He has to look after himself and do the right things."

Ferguson added: "It is not a matter of him defying his age. It is more a case that there is no discernible deterioration in his game at all. It is remarkable."

"I don't know what else there is to say about him! His form is just the same as it was

UEFA probes 40 match-fixing cases

AFP, London

European football's governing body UEFA are investigating some 40 cases of suspected match-fixing involving games in the Champions League and UEFA Cup.

Peter Limacher, UEFA's head of disciplinary services, told a conference here that most of the cases were from eastern Europe and involved the early qualifying rounds of the Champions League and UEFA Cup.

Limacher said: "It is mainly clubs from eastern Europe that are being investigated."

"The horrible part of being a footballer is that at some stage you are finished with the game - it catches us all," Ferguson said.

"When someone like Ryan is playing at the level he is at, he realises to stay there, he has

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

South African midfielder Steven Pienaar and Nigerian defender Joseph Yobo both passed fitness tests and were able to start.

Saha led the Everton assault from the start and drove a long-range effort just wide.

Then Pienaar crossed for Tim Cahill but the Australian glanced his header over the crossbar.

Portsmouth finally threatened when Tommy Smith threaded a perfectly-weighted pass to Aruna Dindane.

Ivory Coast forward pulled the trigger only for Tim Howard to produce a fine save.

But Everton were back in the ascendancy when Marouane Fellaini's header forced David James to save.

Moynes' team made the breakthrough in the 42nd minute. A high ball into the penalty area was completely misjudged by Kaboul and Saha pounced to lash past James from close range.

Boateng was denied by Howard four minutes into injury-time as Everton clung on.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea star Frank Lampard (L) skips past a lunging Wigan Athletic midfielder Hendry Thomas during their Premier League match at the DW Stadium on Saturday.

Maradona picks Higuain, Aimar

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Diego Maradona has called up uncapped Real Madrid hitman Gonzalo Higuain and Benfica midfielder Pablo Aimar for the country's final two World Cup qualifiers against Peru and Uruguay.

Higuain has benefited from the absence through injury of Lyon's Lisandro Lopez to join 17 other players in the squad, none of whom play in the domestic Argentinean league.

"As normal you built it up to such a state," he said. "I watched the press conference Mark Hughes was in and I think he did fantastic because some of your questions were a disgrace."

"That's all I can say. You tried to lead him into all sorts of controversy and I think the boy did well. I think Mark Hughes did very well in that press conference last week and I think you've had enough."

"We move on now, we've got games right until the end of the season. You can start all your stuff again when we play them (City) next time, but at the moment I think it's best left alone. I watched the press conference and you tried to lead him into controversy all the time."

Failure to finish among the top four would force Argentina into a two-leg play-off to secure their ticket for the finals in South Africa next summer.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar/NED), Mariano Andujar (Catania/ITA)

Defenders: Emilio Insua (Liverpool/ENG), Fabricio Coloccini (Newcastle/ENG), Gabriel Heinze (Marseille/FRA), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City/ENG), Nicolas Pareja (Espanyol/ESP)

Midfielders: Javier Mascherano (Liverpool/ENG), Luis Gonzalez (Marseille/FRA), Jonas Gutierrez (Newcastle/ENG), Angel Di Maria (Benfica/POR), Pablo Aimar (Benfica/POR)

Strikers: Lionel Messi (Barcelona/ESP), Sergio Aguero (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Carlos Tevez (Manchester City/ENG), Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid/ESP), Diego Milito (Inter Milan/ITA), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli/ITA)

Trial changed Gerrard

AFP, London

Liverpool and England midfielder Steven Gerrard revealed Saturday how his trial over an alleged assault in a bar was "very frightening" and has changed the way he will behave in public.

In an interview with the Daily Mail newspaper, Gerrard said he regretted that some people would always now associate him with the behaviour he was accused of -- despite the jury finding him not guilty after a trial in July.

"The whole experience was very frightening and intimidating. I have never been through anything like it," he said.

He added: "The trial changed me. I had to learn from it, learn from being in the wrong place at the wrong time. What hour I am out, where I go out -- I will be more careful in future."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Lucio wants more

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan centre-back Lucio insisted on Friday that the Serie A leaders could have done better despite having got off to a good start this season.

Reigning champions Inter went top of the table in midweek following a commanding 3-1 defeat of Napoli, replacing historic rivals Juventus at the head of the pack.

It was an ominous sign from a team that has dominated Serie A over the last few years, winning four scudetto crowns in a row.

But Lucio, who was sent to Friday's pre-match press conference ahead of Saturday's trip to Sampdoria by coach Jose Mourinho, says there is still more to come.

"It's been a good start but it could still have been better. I was very happy to be able to begin the year with Inter, how we've begun the season and also to have played every game," he said.

"But the championship is still long, there's many more matches to play and if we give our all every day we'll be able to fulfil our objectives."

One of those will be to retain the Serie A title

but with Juventus level on points with the champions, already it looks likely to turn into a two-horse race.

However, Lucio insists it is too early to say who will be competing for silverware come the season's end.

"Without a shadow of doubt Juventus are a quality team and they've shown that but as I said before there's too many matches still to play to start giving predictions."

"There's a rivalry between the two teams because we're both big teams that are fighting for the same end: winning the title," he said.

"Juventus are a quality team but Inter are the Italian champions and we'll fight all the way for the title."

Lucio joined Inter in the close season from Bayern Munich and the Brazilian says the change back to a Latin culture from an Anglo-Saxon one is to his liking.

"The main difference between the two populations is the warmth with which they treat those close to them," he said.

"Here in Italy people are happier, more communicative, they like to have fun. That's very different from the Germans who are more serious."

Van Persie in diving storm

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal striker Robin van Persie stumbled into the diving controversy on Friday by admitting he has exaggerated a penalty area fall if he felt the challenge warranted a spot-kick.

Although the Dutchman insisted he is against diving, he admits it is defensible to embellish a tumble if he has been pushed by a defender.

Van Persie's comments come after his teammate Eduardo was banned for alleged diving against Celtic in a Champions League qualifier although his UEFA suspension was subsequently overturned.

Asked by the Times newspaper if he had exaggerated a fall, Van Persie said: "Yes, I did."

"Sometimes when you are in the middle of an action and you get a little push and you know there's nothing more to take."

"Then you are in the right to show in a way to the ref that you are pushed."

"That's not really diving. It's just showing... 'Come on, he just pushed me, so I can't score now.'

"You sometimes have a little movement with your arms or with your body, but I don't think that's really cheating."

"It's never my intention to dive, anyway. It is a bit tricky I have to say because I am against divers. It is just not honest."

"But it is difficult because, sometimes, like I had a little moment against Manchester United in the 2-1 defeat at Old Trafford last month."

"I had the ball on the right side and I cut it back. (United defender Patrice) Evra gave me a little push but it sort of unbalanced me. I just fell down and the whole stadium started to boo me. I was like, 'Come on, can't you see he pushed me?'

"Some people don't see these little pushes and they can give you a whole different picture to what the situation really is."

"It doesn't play on my mind, never, because I always have the intention not to dive. But sometimes you are out of balance, it looks a bit funny."

'Belief bringing goals'

AFP, Liverpool

Rafael Benitez has brushed off a suggestion he has switched to a more attacking system, insisting greater confidence is behind Liverpool's high-scoring start to the season.

The Spaniard's success as a coach has been founded on his skill at making his teams hard to beat but the Reds have appeared a little shaky defensively this season -- nine goals conceded in six league matches -- while displaying sharper cutting edge at the other end of the pitch.

"It is similar to last season -- we are creating more or less the same situations but now we are scoring more goals because the accuracy is better," Benitez said ahead of Anfield on Saturday.

"The whole experience was very frightening and intimidating. I have never been through anything like it," he said.

He added: "The trial changed me. I had to learn from it, learn from being in the wrong place at the wrong time. What hour I am out, where I go out -- I will be more careful in future."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

about us needing to score more goals because we were good in defence.

"Now they are saying we are scoring goals but conceding goals -- so we can never win. Maybe it is because we are more offensive -- but it is not because we are changing the system."

That said, Benitez does accept that the 18-million-pound acquisition of England right-back Glen Johnson has given his side an added dimension going forward.

"Glen Johnson likes to go forward all the time," he said.

"Alvaro Arbeloa defended a bit better so he had more balance."

"Yossi Benayoun, Dirk Kuyt, Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard are all going forward, maybe it is more than last year but they have confidence and are playing well."

Benitez also feels the players have grown in stature after pushing Manchester United to the wire in last season's title battle.

"It is true we score a lot of goals. It's funny because people were talking before

we won a lot of games in a row at the end of the season because we had a lot of confidence and we wanted to be good to them as possible."

"You can take it as a positive because we were so close."

"This season it has almost been a problem because from the first day people were expecting us to win and score five goals in every game."

"Now, despite not starting well, we are in a good position and everyone has more confidence to play better."

"We know the teams at the top of the table will not make too many mistakes so we have to keep winning games."

"Jamie Carragher has been blamed for Liverpool's defensive frailty this season but Benitez insists the former England defender has not slipped past his sell-by date."

"We have conceded some goals and he has made some mistakes but Carragher is okay," he said. "It is a question of the team defending better, not just one or two players."

"It was very important for

IN BRIEF

Gunners end Chamakh pursuit

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said on Friday that he will not continue his pursuit of highly-rated Morocco striker Marouane Chamakh when the transfer window reopens in January.

Arsenal, as well as Premier League rivals West Ham, were linked with a move for the Bordeaux player in the summer before the 25-year-old opted to stay with the French champions.

"No, we don't go anywhere," said Wenger. "We have plenty of strikers. Eduardo has made a recovery and Nicklas Bendtner has extended his contract; that means we have strikers."

Atletico chairman backs coach

AFP, Madrid

Coach Abel Resino is staying at Atletico Madrid all season, despite a disastrous start to the Spanish league campaign, club chairman Enrique Cerezo said Friday.

Fans have voiced anger and media reported that Resino is under threat with Atletico one off the bottom of the table boasting just two points from four games.

But Cerezo told the players: "Abel can rest easy, he will be the coach all season. Why should we give him an ultimatum?" the club's website quoted him as saying.

Geovanni signs new deal

AFP, London

Brazilian midfielder Geovanni has signed a new two-year contract with Hull committing him to the club until 2011, the English Premier League side confirmed on Friday.

The 29-year-old former Barcelona and Benfica player arrived on a free transfer in July 2008 after being released by Manchester City.

He was one of the stars of Hull's first season in the Premier League scoring 10 goals in 44 appearances, including their first in the top flight against Fulham 13 months ago.

Manager Phil Brown said: "It's fantastic, great news for me and great news for the club. He has committed for another two years and, who knows, maybe further."

"Maybe that could be a catalyst. He was a big player for us last year. I'm not just happy with his form, I'm happy with his work-rate."

"He has certainly shown me that he has learnt the English way, the game we play it. He has fitted in very nicely this year."



PHOTO: AFP

Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova poses to promote a US shoe brand at a Tokyo hotel on Friday.