

Blues crash to Villa

AFP, Birmingham



Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti was sent crashing to his second successive Premier League defeat away from Stamford Bridge as Aston Villa won 2-1 here on Saturday.

James Collins delivered the killer blow with his first goal in four seasons to extend Villa's unbeaten home run to six games and heighten optimism that Martin O'Neill's side can unsettle the established order.

But the worry lines on Italian boss Ancelotti's forehead will become more pronounced with more performances like this, despite Didier Drogba's seventh goal of the campaign having given the league leaders the advantage at Villa Park.

Richard Dunne capitalised on dreadful defending to equalise and Collins pounced early in the second half to condemn Chelsea to another defeat on the road.

Defeat saw Chelsea remain top but reigning champions Manchester United will be back at the summit if they beat Bolton later on Saturday at Old Trafford.

Two seasons ago Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich stormed out of Villa Park in a rage after a 2-0 defeat, with then manager Jose Mourinho sacked days later.

Ancelotti is under no immediate danger but the alarm bells will surely be ringing already, following their insipid defeat at Wigan.

This was no more than Villa deserved, however, and victory saw them go fifth in the table.

England coach Fabio Capello certainly picked a cracker to attend this weekend. He did not see Villa's Emile Heskey, though, until nine minutes from time.

Whether he was misquoted or not, England striker Heskey's rant about spending too much time on the bench fell on deaf ears. While his

place with Capello's squad seems relatively assured, he still cannot find a way into O'Neill's starting XI.

Referee Steve Bennett was taken ill before the game, with fourth official Kevin Friend swiftly promoted.

And Friend was given his first major test in the 12th minute, following a scrappy start, when Gabriel Agbonlahor appeared to fall under the challenge of Jose Bosingwa, but he waved away the home side's penalty appeals.

Chelsea then increased the frustration for a furious, fidgeting O'Neill when Drogba swivelled 35 yards from goal before unleashing a speculative shot that somehow caught out Brad Friedel to find the net.

The ball took a savage dip just before Friedel but the American goalkeeper should still have done better.

It seemed a case of how many Chelsea would score for a period after that as Villa looked well short.

But Villa found an equaliser 13 minutes before half-time through Dunne as Frank Lampard mistakenly flicked on Ashley Young's corner into the path of the Republic of Ireland international, who could not miss.

The second-half was looking delicately balanced until the 51st minute when Villa took the lead, thanks to more suspect defending from Ancelotti's side.

Young's corner somehow bypassed John Terry and Ricardo Carvalho to find Collins lurking at the far post and he had the simplest of tasks heading into an unguarded net, with Petr Cech stranded.

Friedel repelled close-range efforts from Deco and Florent Malouda but Chelsea's afternoon plumbed further depths when Bosingwa limped off.

The late rally the Londoners needed never really materialised and these are worrying times for Ancelotti.



Aston Villa defender Richard Dunne (L) celebrates scoring the equalising goal during their Premier League encounter against Chelsea at Villa Park in Birmingham on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Arshavin wants belief

INTERNET, undated



Andrey Arshavin believes Arsenal need to gain confidence and improve their character if they are to compete with the best.

The Russian, who joined Arsenal from Zenit St Petersburg in January, is enjoying life with the north London side. But he feels they must believe in themselves to improve their chances of ending a trophy drought which stretches back to 2005 - citing August's defeat by champions Manchester United at Old Trafford as an example.

He explained: "We must improve our character. When we played Manchester United this season, they just showed character and it was enough to beat us. We must have confidence in each other."

He added: "We are very friendly off the pitch

but we must be stronger and trust in ourselves a little bit more.

"We must believe more. The confidence is coming but sometimes it seems to me we don't have enough."

Arshavin insists he is happier playing football which is pleasing to the eye.

The 28-year-old continued in the Daily Telegraph: "Arsenal play beautiful football. If I was in a team that kicked the ball long and I had to run, I would never smile."

"When you play against Birmingham or Blackburn, they play very simple. Long ball, fight."

"If you have strong defence, no problem. They intercept the ball and we start to play good football."

However, he added: "Chelsea play very defensively - but if I know after a season I have a trophy, okay - I am ready to play football like Chelsea. In modern football you must get results."

Roy linked with Sweden

Football

AFP, London

Fulham manager Roy Hodgson insisted on Friday that he has not been approached about becoming Sweden's new coach.

Hodgson has been linked with the job since Lars Lagerback's nine-year reign as Sweden manager ended on Wednesday following the team's failure to qualify for the World Cup.

The 62-year-old Hodgson began his managerial career with Swedish club Halmstad in 1976 and also had spells with Malmo and Orebro in the Swedish league.

He admitted he was flattered to be mentioned as a candidate but played down any suggestion he might be interested in leaving

the Premier League club.

"I haven't been contacted about the Sweden job," Hodgson said. "I have a contract until the end of the year here so I'm not free to take a job until June or July."

"Firstly, as far as I know Sweden have always gone for Swedish coaches and I would be very surprised if they don't go for another Swedish coach."

"And secondly I'm quite happy here so hopefully my time here will continue a bit longer."

Hodgson confirmed he has not held any formal discussions with Fulham's hierarchy about a new deal but he believes his future remains in west London.

"I would like to think the job that I have done here, and am doing here, is a good one," he added.

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PHOTO: AFP

Samantha Stosur of Australia pumps her fist after winning a point against Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark during their Japan Open semifinal in Osaka on Saturday.

Police charge Serbia leader

AFP, Belgrade

Belgrade police charged Serbian President Boris Tadic for allegedly violating anti-hooligan laws by opening a bottle of champagne to celebrate Serbia's World Cup qualification, they said Friday.

Tadic and a number of other officials uncorked the champagne in a VIP lounge at Red Star Belgrade stadium last Saturday after Serbia's victory over Romania qualified them for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Police filed charges to a magistrate in Belgrade against Tadic, Serbia's Football Association chief Tomislav Karadzic, Sports Minister Snezana Markovic-Samardzic and other officials for "violating the law preventing violence and indecent behaviour at sports matches," the statement said.

The law, aimed at suppressing violence at sports events in Serbia, prohibits the sale or consumption of alcohol in stadiums and arenas.

Tadic has already said he would pay a fine if a magistrate found him guilty of the misdemeanor.

In the past weeks, Serbia has seen a surge in extremist violence, notably by ultranationalist extremist groups and football hooligans.

The spate of attacks coincided with plans to hold a gay pride parade on September 20, the first for nearly a decade since the last one in 2001 broke up amid violent clashes with right-wing extremists.

Organisers cancelled the event after authorities said it should be moved from the city centre for security reasons following a series of threats by the extremists.

Just days before the scheduled parade, a French fan of a visiting team died after being severely beaten by a group of football hooligans on September 17.

Stosur dumps Wozniacki

AFP, Osaka

Australian third seed Samantha Stosur on Saturday dashed Caroline Wozniacki's title defence to reach the final at the Japan Open women's tennis tournament.

The 25-year-old Stosur, who also eliminated 2002 champion Jill Craybas of the United States on Friday, fired 12 aces to score a 6-0, 4-6, 6-4 victory over the Danish top seed.

Stosur, ranked 15th against Wozniacki's sixth, has yet to win a WTA title, but has won four ITF titles, three of them in Japan, including one here in Osaka.

In the final on Sunday, Stosur will play fourth seed Francesca Schiavone of Italy, who defeated Indian star Sania Mirza 6-2, 6-1 in the other semifinals earlier in the day.

Ghana stun Brazil

Football

AFP, Cairo

Ghana overcame Brazil 4-3 on penalties in the final of the Under-20 World Cup at the Cairo International Stadium here on Friday to become the first African side to win the tournament.

Emmanuel Agyemang-Badu struck the winning spotkick in sudden death after substitute Maicon had spurned the chance to give Brazil their fifth title by placing his penalty over the crossbar.

Ghana fought manfully after the controversial first-half dismissal of Daniel Addo, taking the game to extra-time and then riding their luck in the shootout after 120 goalless minutes.

Goalkeeper Daniel Aygei kept Ghana in the game earlier in extra-time with a point-blank save from Maicon, who had been teed-up 10 yards out by Alex Teixeira's cut-back.

Reported Manchester United target Douglas Costa twice went close in the additional 30 minutes, while Aygei was also called into action by Wellington Junior.

The game changed with the straight red card shown to Ghana centre-back Addo, who was very harshly dismissed for a halfway-line foul on livewire striker Teixeira in the 37th minute despite the presence of a covering defender.

Ghana's numerical disadvantage handed their opponents the initiative after an attritional first 45 minutes and Brazil dominated the second half.

Striker Alan Kardec scored Brazil's winner in the 1-0 semi-final victory over Costa Rica but he was in profligate form against Sellas Tetteh's men.

He spurned four chances inside 12 second-half minutes, first diverting a cross straight at Aygei before twice heading over and also firing into the side netting after a burst down the left.

Tetteh punched the air at the end of extra-time, proud to have kept the favourites at bay despite being a man down.

His joy turned to delirium when Agyemang-Badu slotted his penalty into the bottom-right corner after Maicon had fluffed his chance to give Brazil an unassailable 4-2 lead

in the shootout.

Earlier, Hungary secured victory in their third-place play-off match against Costa Rica after heroics from goalkeeper Peter Kulacsi in another penalty shootout.

Marcos Urena's fine 81st-minute opener for Costa Rica was cancelled out by an injury-time penalty from Vladimir Koman and in the ensuing shootout Kulacsi saved three penalties and saw one strike the crossbar to earn the Europeans a 2-0 spotkick victory.



PHOTO: AFP

Ghana players celebrate with the U-20 World Cup after beating Brazil in Cairo on Friday. Ghana became the first African side to win the tournament.

Carlo keen on Cole deal

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti wants England winger Joe Cole to become the latest Blues star to commit his long-term future to the Premier League leaders.

Ancelotti's club are desperate to get as many of their top players as possible to agree new deals in the aftermath of FIFA's transfer ban, which prevents them from making any signings in the next two windows.

The west Londoners are appealing against the ban but are concentrating on tying up senior members of Ancelotti's squad in case the verdict goes against them.

Alex and Salomon Kalou put pen to paper this week, joining John Terry, Ashley Cole, Didier Drogba and Michael Mancienne in committing themselves to the club.

Cole, who is out of contract

next year and has been linked with Tottenham, is next in line for an extended deal and Ancelotti said on Friday: "We want to keep Joe Cole because he's in the same situation as Alex and Kalou."

"They signed new contracts because they are good young players and we want to keep them in our squad."

"We want to maintain the squad because that will ensure it stays very competitive. We need these players for the future."

"They are young but are also experienced because they have played a lot of important games."

"The fact Alex and Kalou want to stay is a good sign for the club. Our aim is to maintain the squad and maybe change one or two players at the end of the season."

Chelsea were found guilty by FIFA of inducing teenager Gael Kakuta to breach his contract with Lens two years ago, resulting in their transfer ban.

But they are confident the

punishment will be reduced or overturned when their appeal is heard by the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"We hope the appeal will be successful but we'll have to wait for the decision of FIFA," Ancelotti said.

Blazevic eyeing French revenge

AFP, Zagreb

Bosnia coach Miroslav Blazevic said he wants his team to draw France in the European play-offs for the 2010 World Cup to avenge Croatia's semifinal defeat in 1998 when he was in charge.

"Even if it's maybe the most respectable team in the qualifications, I'd still like to play against France more than the others," Blazevic told Croatian newspaper Vjesnik.

"When I led Croatia to the 1998 World Cup we did not

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IN BRIEF

Maradona says sorry to world's women

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona apologised to the world's women on Friday for his explicit, foul-mouthed rant which followed Argentina's World Cup qualification, but refused to say sorry to journalists.

"I apologise to women, to my mother, to Argentinian women, to Uruguayan women and to women throughout the world. But only to them, not the others," Maradona told TyC Sports television.

Maradona is facing censure by FIFA after his now infamous rant at the media following Argentina's 1-0 win over Uruguay in Montevideo on Wednesday which guaranteed the country's place at the 2010 World Cup.

Maracana to undergo facelift

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Rio's iconic Maracana stadium will shut for three years in February to undergo a 250-million-dollar facelift ahead of the 2014 World Cup finals and 2016 Olympics.

To comply with FIFA guidelines, work will be carried out on access to the stadium, which has been classified as an historic monument, security improvements and spectator comfort.

The oval-shaped Maracana was opened on July 24, 1950 with room for 200,000 fans, although its current seated capacity is 88,992.

The Maracana will stage the 2014 World Cup final as well as the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2016 Olympics which were awarded to Rio two weeks ago.

As well as work on the venue, it's also expected that the nearby favelas (slums) will be demolished.

Benitez hoping Masche can settle

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez says World Cup qualification for Argentina will help Javier Mascherano's form.

Mascherano has struggled so far this season and been linked with Barcelona and Juventus.

He said: "I feel that it will be good for Javier Mascherano now to know the Argentina have qualified. It is always difficult when you struggle and the whole country is watching, but now he can concentrate on Liverpool."

"Javier was under pressure as captain, and with Diego Maradona saying Argentina were Javier and 10 others."

"For the players who have now qualified, it is a weight off their minds."