



Aston Villa striker John Carew (L) holds off Wolverhampton Wanderers defender Christophe Berra's challenge during their Premiership encounter at the Molineux Stadium on Saturday.

IN BRIEF

Atletico hire Flores

AFP, Madrid

Struggling Spanish league side Atletico Madrid on Friday named Enrico Sanchez Flores as their new coach, taking over from Abel Resino who was sacked earlier in the day.

Former Spanish international "Quique" Flores, 44, has previously been in charge of Getafe and Valencia as well as Benfca where he coached for a season before leaving this year.

Flores has signed a deal with Atletico which will see him through until the end of the season and will be officially unveiled on Monday.

Resino's assistant Santi Denia will take charge of the team for Saturday's visit of Real Mallorca.

Resino, 49, who was fired after the club's disastrous start to the Spanish league season, had been at Atletico since February when he replaced Mexican Javier Aguirre.

Atletico, who finished fourth in the Primera Liga last season, are currently in 15th place.

They were thrashed 4-0 by Chelsea on Wednesday in the Champions League and with just one point from three games are in danger of going out of the tournament.

Brazil line up Oman

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil will face Oman on November 17 in Muscat, three days after playing England in another friendly in Qatar, local media reported here on Friday.

The game with Oman, ranked a lowly 79 in the world, will be Brazil's last international of 2009, a year in which they qualified for the 2010 World Cup finals and claimed the Confederations Cup.

PSG duo tested for swine flu

AFP, Paris

Two players of Paris St Germain have undergone tests for swine flu, football officials said on Saturday casting doubts over Sunday's league game at Marseille.

Winger Ludovic Guilly and defender Mamadou Sakho have been unwell with flu symptoms for the last two days and they were tested on Friday afternoon.

"We should have the results on Saturday morning and we will decide how to proceed with the match during the afternoon," the French Football League said in a statement.

There have been isolated cases of swine flu among professional footballers, in France but as yet no top level game has been called off as a precautionary measure.

Rafa's rallying cry

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez believes Sunday's showdown with arch rivals Manchester United provides the perfect opportunity to stop his club's season spiraling out of control.

Benitez's team head into English football's premier grudge match at Anfield amid their worst run of form for 22 years after four successive defeats.

After beginning the campaign with high hopes of ending their 20-year wait to win the league, the Reds are already seven points adrift of leaders United and face the unpalatable prospect of having their title challenge effectively ended by their most despised opponents.

The woeful run has left Benitez fighting a rearguard action to convince increasingly sceptical fans and pundits that he is still the right man to bring the title back to Anfield.

A planned pre-match fans' protest against George Gillett and Tom Hicks, Liverpool's American owners, adds to the growing sense of a club in danger of imploding.

Yet if Benitez harboured any fears about the consequences of losing to United, he did a good job of hiding them as the Spaniard launched a passionate defence of his position in his pre-match press conference.

"I am really relaxed in terms of my position because I know how we are working on the pitch every day. In the past we were doing really good things and we haven't changed too much," Benitez said.

"It's a question of confidence. We know we have to improve but it's about winning the first game now."

"As a manager you know you will have good moments and bad moments. At this moment we know we have to improve, we have to win and it's a question of time. I'm sure once we win the first game everything will change."

"This game against United could be the right opportunity for us because it's a massive game against our rivals and the fans will be behind the team from the first minute until the last. We can change everything."

Benitez's cause isn't helped by groin injuries to Fernando Torres, Steven Gerrard and Glen Johnson that could sideline all three stars on Sunday.

Torres is the most likely to feature but even if the Spain striker misses out, Benitez points to last season's 2-1 win over United at Anfield -- a result achieved without Gerrard and Torres -- as proof that Liverpool have nothing to fear.

"Beating United last season is something positive we can use," he said. "Without Gerrard and Torres, the team was really good."

United have their own injury concerns as England forward Wayne Rooney, suffering with a calf injury, may not recover in time to play. If Rooney misses out then Michael Owen should make the United starting line-up, with the former Liverpool striker likely to receive a hostile reception from the Kop.

That kind of enmity is typical of a fixture that has been marred by unsavoury scenes on and off the field for years, but it is the game that United boss Sir Alex Ferguson has relished most since he made it his aim "to knock Liverpool off their perch" when he arrived at Old Trafford in 1986.

"Manchester United and Liverpool games, as I have said many times, are without question massive games. That will never change," he said.

"In my first derby game with them I got a complete sense of the history of both teams and it hasn't changed. It is still a massive game."

"It is 'the' game as far as I am concerned, that won't change."

However, Ferguson's side are just one point ahead of second-placed Chelsea and could be off top spot by the time they kick off at Anfield.

So keeping United in pole position, rather than adding to Liverpool's woes, will be Ferguson's motivation on Sunday.

"I'm not interested in Liverpool. I'm only concerned about what we do on Sunday," Ferguson added.

"I don't see that we have a point to prove. Different games are shaped by circumstances of games."

"You can't look at last season as a barometer of our form or Liverpool's form. Derby games are derby games and anyone can win it."

BUNDESLIGA Friedrich rescues Bayer

AFP, Berlin

German league leaders Leverkusen were held to a 1-1 draw at home to midtable Borussia Dortmund on Friday with ex-Germany defender Manuel Friedrich heading a second-half equaliser for the hosts.

With second-placed Hamburg playing Schalke 04 on Sunday, Leverkusen missed a chance to underline their status at the top of the table when they were forced to share the points at home to their tenth-placed visitors.

"We put Dortmund under pressure in the second half, but we didn't play well," admitted Leverkusen coach Jupp Heynckes.

"However, I am not dissatisfied with the 1-1 draw, because Dortmund played with plenty of spirit and they are on an upswing. Dortmund deserved to take a point home with them."

The visitors got off to the best possible start when Argentinian striker Lucio Barrios scored his third goal in his last three league matches as he headed home from a Nelson Valdez cross on eight minutes.

Leverkusen's ex-Liverpool defender Sami Hyypia's hesitation allowed Barrios to add to goals he scored against Borussia Moenchengladbach and Bochum.

Dortmund were cruising to their third consecutive league win before Leverkusen hit back in the 64th minute.

Tranquillo Barnetta crossed for Friedrich to head home across the face of goal and past Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller.

"We gave a good account of ourselves," said Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp.

"But I'm not happy that we didn't continue as we had started. We are improving in the league and a draw against the league leaders is not bad."

'Owen can handle flak'

AFP, Liverpool

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson insists that Michael Owen won't wilt in the Anfield pressure cooker when the former Liverpool striker lines up against his old side on Sunday.

Owen was once worshipped on The Kop after scoring 158 goals before leaving for Real Madrid in 2004.

He returned to England with Newcastle a year later but then joined Liverpool's bitterest rivals United on a free transfer in the summer.

"It will be interesting to see the kind of reaction he gets," said Ferguson ahead of the Premier League clash.

"There are very few players who have played for both clubs."

"Paul Ince obviously got a bad reaction from our fans when he went to Liverpool, and Michael might get that on Sunday."

"But he is experienced - that is important. Everyone likes to be liked but I don't think it will

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Wolves frustrate Villa

AFP, Wolverhampton



Wolverhampton striker Sylvan Ebanks-Blake kept his nerve to score the late penalty that earned a 1-1 draw against Aston Villa on Saturday.

Mick McCarthy's men looked to be heading for a derby-day disappointment when England forward Gabriel Agbonlahor put Villa ahead with just 11 minutes to play at Molineux.

But Steve Sidwell's rash challenge on Michael Kightly four minutes later conceded the penalty that allowed Ebanks-Blake to lash home his first Premier League goal.

Despite the point, Wolves remain dangerously close to the relegation zone.

The result was more frustrating for their West Midlands rivals Villa though as Martin O'Neill's side were on course for the top four when Agbonlahor hit his sixth goal of the season.

Agbonlahor had a glorious chance to put Villa ahead after less than two minutes when he sprinted on Brad Friedel's long clearance.

Agbonlahor had just Wayne Hennessey to beat but he shot tamely at the Wolves goalkeeper.

The hosts responded well and had a strong penalty appeal turned down by referee Peter Walton when central defender Richard Dunne held back Kevin Doyle as he looked to burst clear.

Wolves defender Christophe Berra was only just off target with a glancing header from Karl

Henry's cross.

Villa were finding it hard to recapture form that saw off Chelsea last weekend.

It took an alert clearance from winger James Milner to rescue Villa when Doyle diverted Kightly's corner towards goal.

Ebanks-Blake was next to threaten for Wolves as he hooked over from close range from another Kightly centre.

Blake had another chance before the break as Villa's defence, usually so solid, started to creak. This time the former Manchester United trainee met Kightly's free-kick with a header than failed to test Friedel.

But Villa's defence, revamped by O'Neill in recent months, is a tough nut to crack and they gradually snuffed out the danger posed by Doyle and company.

The visitors looked more vibrant as the match wore on and Ashley Young curled a shot wide before Agbonlahor almost turned in a cross at the far post.

Agbonlahor showed his pace as he surged away from Jody Craddock but Hennessey was equal to his shot.

It was a warning that Wolves needed to keep a close eye on Agbonlahor but he escaped their grasp in the 79th minute.

Emile Heskey played a low cross towards Agbonlahor and he turned neatly before planting his shot past Hennessey.

Villa's celebrations weren't to last long however as Sidwell carelessly crashed into Kightly in the 83rd minute and Ebanks-Blake drove home the penalty.

Wenger hungry as ever

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger celebrated his 60th birthday this week but the Arsenal manager's desire to end the club's four-year wait for a trophy shows no sign of abating.

Wenger is increasingly confident his current side is maturing into genuine title contenders and his players will get the opportunity to justify their manager's growing confidence by recording a fifth successive league victory at West Ham on Sunday.

Since suffering the shock of back to back away defeats at Manchester United and Manchester City, Wenger's team have recovered well, although AZ Alkmaar's stoppage time equaliser this week served as a reminder that Arsenal can be guilty of failing to finish teams off.

That is certainly an issue Wenger will have addressed in the wake of that Champions League group game and the manager admitted his hunger for success is as strong as it ever was.

"Am I happy with all that I have achieved? Certainly not," he said. "I expect always more and you can never be completely happy with what you do. The only credit that I give to myself is that I have worked very hard my whole career and always try to improve."

"I am very lucky to still be in charge today. If I

look at all my friends who started with me, I was very, very young when I started."

"I was in charge at 33 and to survive at that age is not easy. You could see with many young managers, it's difficult when you start with such a big responsibility. Overall I was very lucky. But always think you could have achieved more and make better decisions."

On paper West Ham should provide only limited opposition to an in-form Arsenal, with Gianfranco Zola's side rooted second bottom with just one league victory to their name this season.

Yet the intensity of a London derby will undoubtedly lift the Hammers and defender Matthew Upson with be particularly keen to impress and provide Wenger with another reminder of why the manager was wrong to let him leave for Birmingham six years ago.

Wenger admits he reluctantly sanctioned the transfer and revealed he has contemplated re-signing the England international on a number of occasions.

"I didn't stop him (going) because I knew he had qualities to play in the Premier League but he had players in front of him," Wenger said.

"I knew he would make it. He had Premier League quality and had the potential to be international quality."

"He is there now because he is at the right age for a central defender and for a few years

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Bayer Leverkusen striker Stefan Kiessling (L) congratulates teammate Manuel Friedrich on his equalising goal against Borussia Dortmund during their Bundesliga clash in Leverkusen on Friday.

Zanetti keeps going

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan captain Javier Zanetti will wrack up 139 consecutive appearances dating back three years when he plays against Catania on Saturday night.

And the 36-year-old Argentine revealed his secret is in his training, having not even taken a break on his wedding day.

"I was in Argentina during a break in the championship and as ever I did some training," he told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I've never cheated on (my wife) but I was like this when she met me and she chose me warts and all."

Zanetti's run of games is all the more remarkable given his age but the Argentine is almost never injured or suspended -- his last red card was more than 10 years ago -- and continues to be an integral part of the Italian champions' midfield.

And it is his example that Inter coach Jose Mourinho is hoping will rub off on younger players such as Mario Balotelli.

Mourinho criticised Balotelli in his Friday press conference saying that after a good performance last weekend against Genoa, he trained badly during the week.

Mourinho added that Balotelli would play against Catania but only because he has a striker

crisis and has no other options.

Zanetti had some advice for the young Italian, saying he needed to realise the opportunity he has been given.

"Mario is someone who listens, he's young, has phenomenal potential, has the right to make mistakes but also has the duty to capitalise on the incredible luck he has," he said.

"Not many people have the chance to grow, make mistakes and learn at a club like Inter, surrounded by great players who never deny him advice or a pat on the back, the coach included."

"Because Mourinho is always the first to encourage him and you can't say he hasn't given him time or opportunities."

It is Balotelli's attitude that has always been in question rather than his ability and he could do a lot worse than learning from his club captain.

Zanetti will join Inter legend Giacinto Facchetti on 476 Serie A appearances for Inter on Saturday night, putting him joint second in the club's all-time list behind Giuseppe Bergomi.

And Zanetti revealed his secret is quite simply dedication.

"You need the luck of not having physical problems or even catching the flu but then it's all down to hard work," he said.

"I approach every training session as if it was a final or a derby. It's during the week that you make your professional luck."

SA appoint Parreira

Football

AFP, Johannesburg

World Cup hosts South Africa appointed Brazilian Carlos Alberto Parreira as coach for a second time Friday, national football association president Kirsten Nematandani said.

Parreira returns to a post he relinquished in April last year when his wife became seriously ill in Rio de Janeiro, and he was succeeded by compatriot Joel Santana.

International novice Santana, 60, lost his first match in charge away to Nigeria, struggled to improve the team, and was fired after suffering eight losses in nine matches.

Parreira, 66, guided Brazil to the 1994 World Cup title when they defeated Italy after a penalty shootout in the United States, but fared less well three years ago with the South Americans making a quarter-finals exit to France.

That defeat cost him his job and he took over Bafana Bafana (The Boys) for the first time in January 2007, but battled to convert the African also-rans into a formidable force on the world stage.

His greatest achievement came in his final match, a 3-0 defeat of Paraguay in a Pretoria friendly, soon after a poor 2008 African Nations Cup showing that led to a first round exit.

South Africa snatched a late draw against Angola in Ghana, were outplayed by Tunisia, and managed to take only one point off a Senegal team demoralised by the resignation of their coach.

Nematandani told a media conference that Parreira would be assisted by compatriot Jairo Leal and South African Pitso Mosimane.

Parreira and Santana worked with the pair and another, unnamed South African would be added to the coaching staff for an eight-month race to lift a team that has slumped to a 16-year low of 85 on the FIFA world rankings.

Nematandani, who met Parreira in Brazil this week, refused to disclose his salary, saying only that it would be "less" than the 1.8 million rand (241,000 dollars) a month received during his previous stint.

The official said Parreira would be replaced by a South African coach after the World Cup, which runs from June 11 to July 11 2010 and will be the first edition staged in Africa.

Parreira's first game in charge will be a friendly against fellow World Cup qualifiers Japan on November 14 at Orlando Stadium in Soweto.



CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA