

# Carlo relishes MU challenge

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti knows his first Premier League clash with Manchester United will provide the acid test of his title credentials, but he believes the champions have weaknesses that can be exploited in Sunday's summit meeting.

Ancelotti's side have become the top pick to win the English crown after an impressive start under the Italian suggested he has recaptured the magic missing from Stamford Bridge since Jose Mourinho's departure.

But Ancelotti is well aware that only when he has emerged unscathed from a head to head duel with United boss Sir Alex Ferguson will he truly be able to feel like a major player in the Premier League.

The likes of Mourinho and Arsenal's Arsene Wenger earned their stripes - and Ferguson's grudging admiration - by defeating United in individual matches and then the title race.

Now Ancelotti, whose side are two points clear of second placed United, must do the same.

While most of Ferguson's managerial opponents will inevitably suffer from an inferiority complex when they compare their achievements with the Scot's, Ancelotti can draw inspiration from his previous battles with United.

He has knocked Ferguson out of the Champions League twice during his time with AC Milan, with the 2007 semifinal rout at the San Siro a particularly fond memory, and has won a Community Shield penalty shoot-out against United in 2003.

The Blues chief believes Sunday's match will

go his way as well if Chelsea take advantage of the flaws in Ferguson's defence and midfield.

United, who haven't won at the Bridge since 2002, were unusually timid in their 2-0 defeat at Liverpool two weeks ago and their porous defence has conceded 11 goals already in the league this season.

And, with England defender Rio Ferdinand ruled out with a back injury, Ancelotti suspects Chelsea maybe able to expose United's soft centre in the same way as Liverpool.

"Liverpool played a fantastic match (against United), a strong match and put a lot of pressure on. That's why they won," Ancelotti said. "They didn't give United any possibility to play like they want to play. It was a good lesson for us because Manchester can suffer when there's pressure on their midfielders."

"I think Ferdinand is a very good defender. Without Ferdinand they lose something."

"But I don't want to work just against other team's weaknesses. We want to put our own qualities on the pitch."

"The best thing is to maintain a balance. They have fantastic strikers. Wayne Rooney is one of the most intelligent strikers in the world."

Ferguson will hope the return to fitness of Serbia centre-back Nemanja Vidic shores up a defence that conceded three times against CSKA Moscow in midweek, while Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov could feature after a knee injury.

The United manager, who can point to a famous 1999 Champions League victory over Ancelotti's Juventus as proof that he doesn't need to fear the Italian, has seen Chelsea bosses Avram Grant, Luiz Felipe Scolari and Guus

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PHOTO: AFP

Bayer Leverkusen striker Stefan Kiessling (2nd from R) scores the opening goal against Eintracht Frankfurt during their Bundesliga clash in Leverkusen on Friday.

## Queiroz to defy Real

AFP, Lisbon



Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz insisted Saturday that he intends to call up Cristiano Ronaldo for the crucial World Cup play-offs against Bosnia-Herzegovina despite the opposition of the player's club Real Madrid.

Real Madrid doctors have estimated that the striker will be out of action for at least two more weeks as he recovers from an ankle injury which has forced him to miss the club's last seven matches.

Ronaldo initially injured his right ankle in Real's 3-0 Champions League victory over Marseille at the end of September and aggravated the problem while playing for Portugal on October 10.

But Queiroz is not convinced that he is unable to play, and said that the Real Madrid star "will be examined by doctors who will decide if he can or not contribute to the national team."

"I'm going to call up Cristiano Ronaldo. He's an important player for us and I hope he can help us even if it's only for a few minutes," Queiroz told television channel TVI24.

"We want a great Cristiano, in form, and that's our priority

-- to know if he is fit," said the Portugal coach.

"Can he miss the first leg and play the second? It's still too early to know," said Queiroz, who is expected to name his team on Sunday to play Bosnia on November 14 in Lisbon and November 18 in Zenica.

Real Madrid have told Queiroz in no uncertain terms they will not make the star striker available.

"It's impossible for Ronaldo to play with Portugal," said Real coach Manuel Pellegrini. "I feel sorry for the Portugal squad and for the player, but he hasn't trained for a long time now and he is still in pain."

## Leverkusen rout Frankfurt

AFP, Berlin

League leaders Bayer Leverkusen opened a four-point gap at the top of the Bundesliga on Friday with a 4-0 demolition of Eintracht Frankfurt after scoring three goals in the first 11 minutes.

Having been named in the Germany squad for the first time since February earlier in the day, Leverkusen striker Stefan Kiessling netted in the second minute after Frankfurt failed to cope with a cross from striker Eren Derdiyok.

With the visitors still recovering from the early blow, 20-year-old defender Stefan Reinartz headed home on six minutes and then 19-year-old Toni Kroos rifled home a shot into the top right-hand corner on 16 minutes.

It was a night for youth when substitute midfielder Lars Bender, 20, came off the bench for Derdiyok in the 83rd minute and hit the fourth goal just three minutes later.

The result leaves Leverkusen on 26 points, with second-placed Werder Bremen, who are on 22 points, playing Dortmund on Sunday and third-placed Hamburg, also on 22 points, at Hanover the same day.

Fourth-placed Schalke had a chance to move into second-place if they won at Bayern Munich's Allianz Arena on Saturday.

## Benitez counting on Torres

AFP, Liverpool



Rafa Benitez is refusing to rule Fernando Torres out of Liverpool's match with Birmingham City on Monday - despite telling Spain to forget about playing the striker in next week's prestigious international friendly with Argentina.

Torres travelled to Spain following Liverpool's 1-1 draw away to Lyon in the Champions League on Wednesday to see a specialist in an attempt to ascertain whether the groin injury that has troubled him for the past month requires surgery.

Benitez has confirmed that the striker is suffering from a sports hernia, a problem that was sustained while the 25-year-old was on international duty with Spain last month.

Having picked up the injury, Torres missed Liverpool's matches against Sunderland in the Premier League on October 17 and Lyon at home in the Champions League three days later.

Since then he has been substituted in each of his club's past three matches as Benitez has attempted to stop the problem becoming more severe.

Benitez revealed on Saturday he had been in touch with Spain to inform them that he does not think Torres is fit enough to face Argentina in Madrid on November 14.

Yet with Liverpool's season in danger of imploding, Benitez admitted he may have to turn to Torres for Birmingham's visit of Monday.

The Merseyside club have won once in eight outings to leave themselves in danger of being eliminated from the Champions League while they started the weekend nine points adrift of Premier League leaders Chelsea after losing five of their first 11 games.

"Yesterday I was talking with the Spanish clinical director and fitness coach and they know that Fernando needs to work hard with the physios and improve his fitness condition," the Liverpool manager said.

"Torres has gone to Spain to see a specialist," added Benitez. "We know that he was a little bit better than before. There are still some problems

and he will be working with the physios."

"We'll have to make a decision whether he can play against Birmingham."

Asked whether Torres, who has scored 10 league goals this season, will require an operation, Benitez replied: "It's a question of carrying on and seeing how he reacts."

Benitez is also refusing to rule influential captain Steven Gerrard out of his plans for Birmingham even though the England midfielder has missed 15 days of training.

"There's a big difference between players being fit and players being available," added the Spaniard.

"Gerrard was training yesterday on his day off with the physios, so he is improving. Will he be fit? We don't know. Will he be available? We don't know."

"He has not been training with the team for 15 days. Can he be on the bench? Can he play? We don't know at this moment in time."

Glen Johnson and Albert Riera are also doubts for a match Benitez has labelled a must-win game.

But Alberto Aquilani could get his first taste of Premier League action following his 20 million pound move from Roma in August.

"The league is a long race so we have to keep going," added Benitez. "I am confident the team will be in the top four and will do well."

"Birmingham have a good manager and they know now what the Premier League is about because they have some experience."

"I think they are a good team and will have a good season. But we have to win on Monday."

Despite Liverpool's struggles, Birmingham manager Alex McLeish is under no illusions as to the task facing his side at Anfield.

"It's at Anfield, they have a pretty good record there, they won their last game there against the champions (Manchester United) so we are under no illusions about how tough a task it is," said McLeish. Birmingham's on-loan Manchester City keeper Joe Hart is available after being ineligible to face his parent club last weekend.

Winger Keith Fahey is battling to overcome a knock to his knee in training, but striker Garry O'Connor is still troubled by a groin problem.

## FED CUP FINAL

# Italy draw first blood

Tennis

AFP, Reggio Calabria

World number 11 Flavia Pennetta cruised to a 6-3, 6-1 victory against American Alexa Glatch to give hosts Italy a 1-0 lead in the Fed Cup final on red clay here on Saturday.

Glatch may have won the pair's only previous meeting but here the gulf in class between the two, who are separated by 121 places in the world rankings, was obvious.

The 20-year-old American simply made too many mis-

takes to even give herself a half-chance at victory and the result never looked in doubt.

Pennetta set up a break point in the third game with a delicate drop-shot to move 40-15 ahead before closing it out.

Glatch then played a loose game at 3-5, culminating in a wayward forehand error to hand Pennetta a second break and the set.

She came out determinedly in the second set and after a marathon game she broke the Italian at the fifth attempt.

But that proved a false dawn as it was the last game she won. Pennetta broke back

with a cross-court passing shot following a winner down the line to set up the break point.

A Glatch error handed her another break and a winner down the line gave her a 5-1 lead.

Pennetta then held serve to love, securing the win with a service winner as she avenged her embarrassing 6-1, 6-1 defeat in the first round at Roland Garros earlier this year.

The second singles on Sunday will see world number 16 Francesca Schiavone of Italy take on 18-year-old American Melanie Oudin.

## Ferrera not under fire

AFP, Rome

New Juventus president Jean-Claude Blanc insisted coach Ciro Ferrara's job is not on the line but said the team must close the gap on Inter Milan.

Ferrera is in his first full season as Juve boss, or indeed as a coach, having taken over the hot-seat from sacked Claudio Ranieri two games before the end of last season.

And while he won his first six Serie A matches in charge of Juventus, the team has struggled since and sits seven points behind champions and leaders Inter in the table.

It has led to discussions in the Juventus boardroom, but not about Ferrara's future.

"The discussion was not about Ferrara but just to say that the distance in terms of points after 11 matches is big," said Blanc.

"We're committed to working hard and Ciro knows that we all have faith in him."

"As the table shows it's a big gap but the championship is long. For a team with big ambitions it's important not to let them get too far away."



PHOTO: AFP

Italy's Flavia Pennetta returns against Alexa Glatch of the United States during the first match of the Fed Cup World Group final in Reggio Calabria yesterday. Pennetta defeated Glatch 6-3, 6-1 to take a 1-0 lead in the 5-match rubber.

## Becks raring to go

Football

AFP, London

England midfielder David Beckham is relishing the chance to play Champions League football again once he returns to AC Milan on his second loan spell in January.

Milan missed out on Champions League qualification last season but are on course to progress from the group stages this time around, allowing the 34-year-old to be eligible for the start of the knockout phase in February.

"I've not been involved for a few years now but I always enjoy Champions League games," said Beckham, who first joined the Serie A side from the Los Angeles Galaxy at the start of 2009.

A Champions League winner in 1999 with Manchester United, Beckham's last appearance in the competition came for Real Madrid in 2007, prior to joining the Galaxy that July.

"They're different from playing the majority of league games," he said.

"They're always special nights and there's always a different atmosphere, especially at big clubs like Manchester United, Real Madrid and Milan."

Beckham has been keeping an eye on Milan's early season form in Serie A under new head coach Leonardo.

"Unless I've been playing or training I've watched every game," he said.

"I watch every Milan game, every Manchester United game and every Madrid game being an ex-player and a fan of all three teams. It's great to watch teams like that and learn from players and teams."

"It was a tough start (for Milan) but that was going to happen but Milan are a great team and it was never going to be a problem."

Beckham must firstly try to help the Galaxy reach the MLS Cup final, which determines the American league champions and he is committed to the cause, even if

means missing out on a 116th England cap later this month.

Should the Galaxy defeat Los Angeles rivals Chivas USA in their Western Conference semifinal second leg on Sunday night, the next round of the play-offs will clash with England's friendly against Brazil in Doha on November 14.

"Of course I'd a lot rather the Galaxy progressed in the play-offs more than anything," Beckham said.

"We've got to this stage and done well so far this season but everybody knows how proud I am about playing for my country."

"Ideally it would be great if they were separate but they're not so it will be good if we progress."

Beckham said he and his teammates would have to step up their game from last Sunday's 2-2 draw with Chivas.

"We know we can play better than we did in the first game and we have to if we want to progress. We have to play a lot better," he said.

## IN BRIEF

### Pohang win AFC Champs League

AFP, Tokyo

Pohang Steelers of South Korea shocked two-time champions Al Ittihad of Saudi Arabia 2-1 to capture the AFC Champions League title here on Saturday.

After a scoreless first half, the opening goal was scored by forward No Byung-Jun, who netted from a free kick in the 57th minute after the team's top Brazilian scorer Denilson was fouled.

The Koreans doubled their lead just eight minutes later from another freekick. Midfielder Kim Jae-Sung played the ball into the box and defender Kim Hyung-Il headed in to leave the Saudi giants with an uphill task.

Although Al Ittihad clawed a goal back through Mohammed Noor in the 74th minute they could not find another goal, with Morocco midfielder Hicham Abouchrouane's free kick in injury time going wide.

### UEFA opens Unirea probe

AFP, Paris

European football's ruling body UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings into Romanian club Unirea Urziceni following the violence-marred Champions League match with visitors Rangers on Wednesday.

UEFA said Friday it would be looking into the club's "lack of organisation" during the match, which ended 1-1 in Bucharest after scuffles broke out between Rangers fans and security officials.

It was reported that some visiting fans arrived late in the stadium and were shepherded to a section already decked out with banners from home fans, leading to scuffles and police intervening with tear gas.

### Jagielka's injury lay-off

AFP, Liverpool

Everton defender Phil Jagielka could be sidelined until January after undergoing a second knee operation, the Premier League side revealed on Saturday.

Jagielka, 27, has been off the pitch since damaging knee ligaments in April but had been hoping to return to action before the end of November.

However he underwent surgery again on Wednesday on a small cartilage tear and Everton manager David Moyes said his return could now be pushed back.