

# Schalke at the summit

AFP, Berlin



A first-half goal from Peruvian star Jefferson Farfan lifted Schalke two points clear of previous Bundesliga table-toppers Leverkusen on Friday in cementing a 1-0 win over Mainz.

Farfan kept his cool to finish with aplomb and notch his sixth goal of the campaign after taking a neat pass from German under-21 international Lewis Holtby, who, along with his English father, is a staunch Everton fan.

Schalke now have 34 points from 17 games as they bid to go into the winter break top of the heap - though Leverkusen will expect to leapfrog them with victory Saturday at home to midtable Moenchengladbach.

Third-placed Bayern Munich will bid to keep up their solid recent run by beating rock bottom Hertha Berlin which would put them on 33 points.

The 19-year-old Holtby has been making a name for himself in recent weeks with a series of promising showings and again showed his class with his assist.

Holtby is on record as saying that if he graduates to full international football it will be with Germany and not England.

After last week's away success against fellow high-fliers Werder Bremen the leaders, from Germany's Ruhr industrial heartland, have been cementing their credentials as genuine contenders for an eighth championship - but first in half a century.

Indeed, their 1958 success was the only time the Royal Blues - coached by Felix Magath, won led Wolfsburg to glory against the odds last season - have been champions since the Third Reich era.

Magath, out to win the title with three different clubs as a coach (he won three as a player with Hamburg) was being cautious after his side's latest success.

"We still lack that killer instinct when we go a goal up. But that one goal was enough. We still have to keep on working," Magath told reporters.



Schalke players congregate in celebration after scoring the all-important goal in their Bundesliga match against Mainz 05 in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

# No hate from Lampard

AFP, London



Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard won't take any pleasure from plunging West Ham deeper into relegation trouble even though the former Hammers star faces another hostile reception at Upton Park on Sunday.

Lampard has been public enemy number one in east London since quitting West Ham to join bitter rivals Chelsea for 11 million pounds (12.3 million euros) in 2001.

The 31-year-old, who spent nine years at West Ham, has suffered vicious abuse from the Hammers fans every time he has faced his old club and he knows it will be no different this weekend.

But despite all the taunts, Lampard is sad to see the Hammers languishing second bottom of the Premier League because of former Chelsea favourites Gianfranco Zola and Steve Clarke - now manager and assistant at West Ham - who worked with the England international at Stamford Bridge.

"I have a lot of respect for Gianfranco and Steve Clarke. It's been difficult for them. They have a lot of financial difficulties and have had to

sell a lot of players," Lampard said.

"I don't want to see them do badly at all. They're great lads. It's difficult, but then it's a difficult league."

While Lampard would genuinely like to see West Ham prosper, he will show no compassion on Sunday as Chelsea bid to cement their position as league leaders going into the busy Christmas programme.

By the time Chelsea kick off on Sunday, they could be ahead of Manchester United only on goal difference if the reigning champions win at Fulham 24 hours earlier.

After recording a string of convincing victories last month, Carlo Ancelotti's side have spluttered of late.

They won for the first time in five matches against Portsmouth on Wednesday, but their victory against the league's bottom club was less than convincing.

The Blues have conceded 11 goals in five games and looked nervous at the back again against Portsmouth.

Yet Lampard is adamant his side are still on course to win the title and he expects them to rediscover their dominant form soon.

"I'm sure people would have been talking again if we hadn't beaten Portsmouth, but that's why it was important to win," he said.

"We're having a patch at the moment where we're not pulling away from teams when we might do and every free-kick and corner seems to drop to them in a funny way. We are being punished every time and it is just a phase we're in."

"We went a long time without conceding goals, and that was fantastic, but now we're having a patch where we are."

"It's important we just keep going. We're three points clear at the top and we need to pick up wins. I think we can move on and put this all behind us."

Chelsea's hopes of a second successive win will be boosted by Didier Drogba's return to action after the Ivory Coast striker missed the Portsmouth win with a back problem.

West Ham welcome back Matthew Upson from a hamstring injury, but will be without Carlton Cole, Valon Behrami, Zavon Hines and Kieron Dyer.

Those injuries have only added to the gloom around Upton Park after three consecutive defeats.

The tame manner of the loss at Bolton in midweek was especially worrying for Zola, but the Italian has no intention of changing his purist principles.

Zola, who played for

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## Tevez backs Hughes

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City's Argentine striker Carlos Tevez has backed coach Mark Hughes as the man for the job amid reports the club are interested in former Chelsea interim coach Guus Hiddink.

Tevez, on target twice in last week's draw at Bolton, reacted to reports that Hughes is fighting for his job with the club eighth in the table despite massive summer outlay and only two league defeats to date.

Ahead of Saturday's game with Sunderland, Tevez, who arrived in the summer from rivals United, said: "When I first joined the club I had along chat with Mark Hughes and he gave me a vision of how the club was going to go forward."

"The reason I joined was because I believe in his vision. I believe in what he had to say," Tevez told the Daily Telegraph.

"I believe in the club. I also believe in Mark. We will be a big club. I'm 100 per cent behind the manager. I'm really surprised that a question about his future even exists at such an early stage."

"Every team in the Premier League will say they can do better and we are no exception. But the team is in transition with a lot of new players coming in and we have had a lot of injuries."

## Benitez's praise for Carragher

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez praised Jamie Carragher's "passion" and "character" as the defender prepared to make his 600th appearance for his hometown club.

Carragher, who joined Liverpool as a schoolboy, is set to reach the landmark away to Portsmouth on Saturday.

Benitez said he did not see Carragher's feat ever being repeated in future.

"Maybe someone will do it but it will be very difficult. Now there is too much money around the world in football," the Spaniard said.

"If you have a good player normally someone will make a good offer and the agents have too much power."

"Modern football is more difficult so 600 games in a top side for a local player is a massive achievement."

Turning to the 31-year-old Carragher's qualities, Benitez added: "He is a very good example for the younger players. He trains 100 per cent in every session and that is good for the mentality of the team."

"Carra has a strong character, passion, he likes to win every game, and that is the type of player you are looking for."

"The last five and a half years have been really good. He was playing as a left-back, right-back and now he has settled down as a centre-back."

"He knows he can help the others and is always talking. That is now one of his main strengths as he can organise the defence."

"He has improved his game and, because he is a centre-back, he has time and he will play for a long time."

## Juve-Ajax pick of draw

INTERNET, undated



UEFA Cup holders Shakhtar Donetsk face Premier League side Fulham in the draw for the last 32 of football's Europa League in Nyon, Switzerland on Friday. The Ukrainians, who play the first leg in London, will then come up against either Juventus or Ajax in the last 16 if they go through.

Big names come together in the meeting between four-time European champions Ajax and two-time European winners Juventus, who have twice met in European Champions Cup/League finals.

Two former European champions SV Hamburg and PSV Eindhoven were also drawn together, while last season's losing UEFA Cup finalists Werder Bremen were paired with FC Twente in two German-Dutch duels.

Hamburg, hoping to reach the final in the northern German city, face the prospect of a match between Athletic Bilbao and Anderlecht if they overcome PSV.

German champions Wolfsburg are up against Spain's Villarreal in one of the most attractive ties of the last 32, while the Bundesliga's remaining representative Hertha Berlin meet Benfica.

The winners of the Villareal-Wolfsburg game will come up against either Russian champions Rubin Kazan or Hapoel Tel Aviv in the last 16.

England's Liverpool face Romanians Unirea Urziceni in a meeting of two teams eliminated from the Champions League, while city rivals Everton take on Sporting Lisbon.

Like Athletic Bilbao, Spanish hopes Valencia also have Belgian opponents in Club Brugge, with the winners taking on Twente or Werder Bremen.

Round of 32 matches will be played on February 18 and 25; Round of 16 played March 11 and 18.

## Evra eyes Becks battle

AFP, Manchester



Patrice Evra is looking forward to playing against former Old Trafford hero David Beckham after Manchester United were drawn against AC Milan in the Champions League.

England midfielder Beckham, who made his name with United, is set to begin his second loan spell with Italian giants Milan from US Major League Soccer side the Los Angeles Galaxy in January.

Beckham won the Champions League with United in 1999 before moving to Real Madrid four years later.

"I am happy for David Beckham because he did a lot for United and I know he wanted to play again at Old Trafford," France international defender Evra told the club's official website following Friday's draw for the last 16.

"I will say 'welcome home' to him but I will make sure he doesn't have an easy game! I like him because I have met him and he is a good person, a real gentleman."

"He's a professional and that is why Milan wanted him. I'm sure all his old team-mates who are still here are looking forward to welcoming him back," Evra added.

"But I'm looking forward more to playing against Milan rather than just Beckham, because Milan are much more than one man," insisted Evra,

a member of the United side that lost last season's Champions League final 2-0 to Barcelona in Rome in May.

As well as wanting to go up against Beckham, Evra was equally keen to banish the memory of United's 2007 semi-final loss to Milan when the Italians won 5-3 on aggregate.

"I remember it was a very frustrating tie. We won 3-2 at home but we didn't play very well. In the second game I was suspended and watched it on TV."

"It was very difficult to see my team lose 3-0 in that way, but after that game we had more experience and we won the Champions League (beating English rivals Chelsea on penalties in the Moscow final) the next year."

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## 'Lehmann is unsettling squad'

SOCCERNET

Defender Ludovic Magnin claims eccentric goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has become an unsettling influence in the Stuttgart dressing room in recent weeks.

Magnin yesterday agreed a transfer to Zurich and is expected to make his final appearance for Stuttgart in the derby with Hoffenheim today.

But before his departure on January 1, the 30-year-old has taken a swipe at goalkeeper Lehmann, whose recent behaviour has left him isolated from the rest of the squad.

"Jens is not a person to set the tone off the field," Magnin told the Bild newspaper.

Lehmann was given permission to take an extra day off per week in the contract he signed with Stuttgart in 2008, while he can also travel home alone from away matches if he wishes.

Magnin revealed Lehmann's "privileges" have not been welcomed by his team-mates.

"Football is a team sport and whenever things aren't going well, then these privileges are made out to be the problem," Magnin said.

"What may not be an issue when you are successful becomes more disturbing than an elephant when things aren't going well. I told Jens this in a chat four weeks ago."

"He demands a lot from his team-mates and I would have expected him to show up for training the following day."

Lehmann is suspended for the next three matches following his red card against Mainz last weekend.

### IN BRIEF

#### Graf, the player to Graf, the photographer

INTERNET, undated

Steffi Graf, the 22-time Grand Slam-winning tennis player, has turned her focus from the net to the viewfinder and published her first photo-reportage on Friday. Under the title "The Children of Asmara" the 40-year-old mother of two's photographs represent the lives of kids living in slums in the capital of Eritrea, one of the poorest countries in Africa.

The pictures accompanied an article in the German-language edition of National Geographic Magazine.

Graf, who runs a foundation for the mental health of children called "Children for Tomorrow", said that "I am not a person of many words," according to a statement from her publisher.

She said that as a teenager she had seriously considered becoming a photographer, rather than pursuing a career in tennis.

Graf was accompanied on her trip to Asmara by seasoned photo-journalist Gerd Ludwig, who instructed her in the art.

"She is really very modest, but decidedly curious," said Ludwig in the online edition of the magazine.

"If she takes pictures with the same passion and intensity as she once plays tennis, she will become a great photographer," he said.

# Party-pooper Redknapp

SOCCERNET



Tottenham boss Harry Redknapp is set to punish players involved in a Christmas party organised behind his back last week and Robbie Keane's role as skipper could be under scrutiny.

Redknapp was furious to learn about reports of 16 of his squad travelling to Dublin days before he insisted they would not be allowed to celebrate excessively during the festive period. The Spurs boss will wait until after this week-end's Premier League trip to Blackburn before deciding what action to take.

"It was wrong and it will be

dealt with. Severely. It will be dealt with," Redknapp insisted. "It's being dealt with internally and we'll keep it in-house. I will be dealing with it after the weekend. We've got a game to concentrate on - we'll sort the game out, then I'll sort them out. Believe you me, it will get sorted out."

"I'm not happy. I'd be lying if I said I was happy. I didn't know anything about the trip at all if I'm perfectly truthful but it's done now and will be dealt with on Monday morning."

Keane was said to have orchestrated the trip near to Dublin, so Redknapp is likely to take a dim view if that is the case. Keane could find himself on the bench at Ewood Park as Peter Crouch and Jermain

Defoe combined well during the defeat of Manchester City on Wednesday. Redknapp did select Keane for the defeat to Wolves - four days after the Christmas party.

"It was the Tuesday and didn't affect the result against Wolves, we worked our socks off, but it doesn't make it right," Redknapp added.

Redknapp has taken a strong anti-alcohol stance, particularly after Ledley King's arrest outside a London nightclub, and believes Christmas parties should not be on the agenda.

"They are my views on it," he said. "They are more trouble than they are worth and it happens at every football club unfortunately. Every club has had problems with it."