

INTER MILAN V CHELSEA

Jose plots Blues downfall

AFP, Milan



The prodigal son returns, well not quite yet as the first leg of the Champions League, second round tie between Jose Mourinho's Inter

Milan and Chelsea actually takes place in Italy.

But nonetheless it will be the first time that Mourinho faces his former employers since his acrimonious departure from Stamford Bridge in September 2007.

The Portuguese enjoyed three glory-filled years in west London and that was all it took for him to become the most successful manager in their history, winning two Premier League titles, the FA Cup and two League Cups, as well as guiding the Blues to two Champions League semifinals.

That alone ensured that this tie needed no extra build-up but Mourinho has never been one to shy away from controversy and recent comments in the press attributed to him have certainly stoked tensions.

Mourinho has apparently claimed that the current team is still the one that he built and that if anything they have even gone backwards since his days in charge.

And the former Porto boss claimed that the current line-up loses too many games.

In his three full seasons, Chelsea lost a total of nine matches, an average of three

a season while Ancelotti's team have already lost four this campaign.

"The Premier League is never easy - every game normally is difficult. But when a team is strong, strong, strong, strong, strong, it doesn't lose so many matches, so many points," claimed Mourinho, possibly forgetting that his title winning side in 2006 actually lost five times.

Ancelotti, who locked horns with Mourinho last season in Italy when in charge of AC Milan and with whom he enjoyed a fractious relationship at best, hit back claiming Mourinho's successors have also done well - although they have won only one FA Cup since he left.

"I don't know, I think that Chelsea did a fantastic season also after he was there because Avram Grant did fantastic work here, they qualified to play the (Champions League) final, so Mourinho won a lot of trophies here but also the other managers did a very good job," said Ancelotti, who suggested the pair do not get on too well.

"I never said he is my friend, we didn't go to eat together and to drink wine together (when both were living in Milan).

"Usually when you go to eat and to drink one, two, three glasses of wine, usually you have a good relationship about this, but we didn't."

"In Italy we are not used to this, in England, maybe, no problem. It could be a good moment to improve our friendship, no?"

While Chelsea have certainly been the best team in England this season, that is in part due to Manchester United's inconsistency and Arsenal's continued failure to turn promise and potential into genuine substance.

Inter, for their part, have been head and shoulders above the rest in Italy and their home and away victories over AC Milan - with an aggregate score of 6-0 - proved that they are truly dominant in the country.

While superficially they may appear to be experiencing a blip in form, they have drawn three matches in a row and seen their Serie A lead cut to five points, there are mitigating circumstances.

Firstly they drew away to Parma and Napoli, both tricky grounds to visit and Mourinho will point out that they were denied a penalty in Naples.

Last weekend they were held at home by Sampdoria but they earned that point despite being reduced to nine men by the 38th minute, and they still had the best chances in the game.

Inter have earned a reputation in recent years of failing to reproduce their best form in Europe but if ever there is a feeling that they can overcome that, it is this team led by Mourinho that should be able to do so.

Nothing would dispel the myth better than a victory against one of the top teams on the continent.

And no-one knows Chelsea - their strengths and their weaknesses - better than Mourinho.

Ronaldo to retire next year

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Double World Cup winner Ronaldo said on Monday he would retire from professional football at the end of next year but still had hopes of appearing for Brazil in the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa in June.

The 33-year-old three-times world footballer of the year - widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time - told a media conference in Sao Paulo he was finally calling time on his illustrious but injury-hit career.

Currently playing for Corinthians in Sao Paulo, the player known as 'El Fenomeno' during his prime said he had agreed with the club to play until the end of 2011.

"I've renewed for another two years and they will be the last of my career. I want to give my all. I hope to have fun and end with some big wins," he said, according to the G1 news website.

That could include a final appearance for Brazil in the June 11-July 11 World Cup in South Africa, said Ronaldo, who scored 62 goals in 97 appearances for Brazil.

"We'll see. I still have a chance to go (to South Africa). For the next one (in Brazil in

striker helped Brazil to victory in the 1994 and 2002 World Cup, shrugging off injury to end the latter tournament as top World Cup scorer of all time with 15 goals.

He last played for his country in the 1-0 defeat to France in the quarterfinal of the 2006

was overshadowed by injury and fitness issues. He was sidelined while playing for Inter by a knee injury in 1999 only to damage the same knee in his comeback for the club in February 2000, effectively keeping him out of action until March 2002.

Ronaldo was a favourite with fans at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium during a prolific spell with Real Madrid, helping them to the Spanish title in 2003, his debut season.

That year he also scored a hat-trick in the Champions League quarterfinal, second leg win over Manchester United. But injuries and his failure to control his weight led to his departure in 2007 for AC Milan.

In February 2008 he ruptured a tendon in his right knee playing for the club against Livorno, an injury that ended his career with the Italian club and triggered his return to Brazil where he signed for Corinthians last year after a long battle to regain form.



RONALDO

2014), it's impossible. It's so far away and time is passing - including for me," he said.

The former Barcelona, Real Madrid, AC Milan and Inter

World Cup in Germany. He scored his last goal for Brazil four days earlier in the 3-0 win over Ghana.

Ronaldo's stellar career

CSKA up against it

AFP, Moscow



Russian champions CSKA Moscow will go into Wednesday's Champions

League last 16 round home clash with Spanish high-flyers Sevilla seriously lacking match practice.

The Red Army side have just returned to snow-covered Moscow from Belek in Turkey, where they set up a training camp as the Russian league is still on a winter break and will not kick off before March.

Last week at Belek CSKA suffered a 3-0 defeat in a friendly match with Ukrainian top flight side Dnepropetrovsk, but the Moscow side's manager Leonid Slutsky said he was not worried about the result.

"A win in such a friendly match could play a much more negative role for us than a defeat," Slutsky said. "It could cause us to lose our focus."

Slutsky added that he was much more worried about his team's lack of match practice ahead of the showdown with Sevilla.

"We have not played any official matches since our last Champions League clash with Besiktas in December," he said. "We have lost our rhythm and that specific feeling of true rivalry."

Slutsky added that he was confident that Sevilla would play defensive style football on Wednesday adding that the Spanish side were extremely dangerous on the counter-attack.

will be decided in the return leg match at Sevilla," Slutsky said.

"And to be honest it's very much important for us not to lose a goal in the home match. Sevilla are stout in defence and are very dangerous on the counter-attacks. We should stay concentrated throughout the match."

On Wednesday CSKA are expected to field a full-strength line-up with one possible exception. Their 19-year-old Russian international midfielder Alan Dzagoev has failed to regain his top form after overcoming a knee injury.

Sevilla meanwhile battled

back from a goal down to clinch a morale-boosting away 3-1 win at Mallorca condemning the hosts to their first home defeat of the season.

Sevilla's goals came from forward Jesus Navas, Serbian defender Ivica Dragutinovic and Argentinian midfielder Diego Perotti. The win left them in fourth place in La Liga behind Barcelona, Real Madrid and Valencia.

The team left for Moscow on Monday without the injured Luis Fabiano and Diego Capel, who both played in the Mallorca match, but with Frederic Kanoute who is fit to play

once again.

Sevilla President Jose Maria del Nido spoke to the players before they left and stressed upon them the importance of the match.

"If we can make into the quarterfinals, it would be a positive season," he said.

"We have to remember it will be cooler in Moscow, which our team is not accustomed to so it's important for our team to adapt quickly to the temperature early in the game.

"We are going to see a team who has a lot of skill with fresh players, which will be difficult for us."



Disabled players belonging to a Turkish amputee football team train during a practice session in Ankara on Monday. The players are all soldiers wounded in the line of duty.



Valencia midfielder David Silva (L) goes airborne to control the ball ahead of Getafe's Torres during their Primera Liga match at the Mestalla on Monday.

Nesta set for int'l return

INTERNET, undated

Alessandro Nesta is considering coming out of international retirement to play for Italy at the World Cup, coach Marcello Lippi said on Tuesday.

The AC Milan centre back, whose side can cut Inter Milan's Serie A lead to four points with a win over Fiorentina in Wednesday's game in hand, quit international in 2007 because of injuries.

The 33-year-old was out for a year with a back problem but had been in top form this season before being slightly exposed in last week's 3-2 Champions League defeat by Manchester United.

"He is in credit with the national team because he was injured at two World Cups. It would be great," Lippi told Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I've talked with him and during the week we'll talk again. We'll see."

Nesta had always ruled out returning for the world champions but has softened his stance after striker Francesco Totti indicated he would be willing to end his international exile if injuries cleared up.

Pienaar arrested

AFP, Liverpool

South Africa star Steven Pienaar has been charged with drink driving after a night out to celebrate Everton's 3-1 win over Manchester United at the weekend, police said Tuesday.

The Everton midfielder was arrested in the early hours of Sunday morning and charged later that day. He faces a fine and a ban from driving if convicted at a court hearing scheduled for March 9.

Loew puts faith in 'keepers

INTERNET, undated

Germany coach Joachim Loew is keeping faith with the trio of goalkeepers in his national squad set-up despite poor performances by all of them at the weekend.

Loew told the Kicker magazine website that Rene Adler, Manuel Neuer and Tim Wiese would all be included in his squad for next week's home friendly against Argentina.

"All three goalkeepers have maintained a high level of quality over the season as a whole," he said. "I know their qualities and have watched them carefully in training."

Bayer Leverkusen's Adler was the most heavily criticised after he allowed a free kick to slip through his legs to gift Claudio Pizarro an easy goal during the Bundesliga leaders' 2-2 draw at Werder Bremen.

Loew is scheduled to announce his full squad on Friday.

Villa fires Valencia

AFP, Barcelona



Spanish international striker David Villa scored twice to keep Valencia on course for a Champions League place as they beat Getafe

2-1 on Monday despite being reduced to ten men.

Valencia - who are in third place in the table eight points clear of fifth placed Deportivo La Coruna - recorded their fourth successive home victory and deserved the three points despite never being at their best.

Alejandro Dominguez twice went close to giving Valencia the lead before Villa struck after 39 minutes.

Villa appeared to have wrapped the game up with his second after the re-start to move to the top of the goalscoring charts with 17 for the season.

However, the game took a twist with the sending off of defender Alexis Ruano for a second yellow card although

there looked to be little if any contact.

Manu Del Moral pulled a goal back for Getafe but for all their pressing they were unable to get the equaliser.

Valencia coach Unai Emery accepted that Villa's clinical finishing had been the difference between two fairly evenly-matched sides.

"It was a game in which Getafe created openings but our finishing was crucial to the result," said Emery.

"When we play, we are concentrated on that game and not speculating about the following ones. Barcelona and Real Madrid are a long way ahead of us and so realistically we have to look at third place."

His Getafe counterpart Miguel Gonzalez saw good aspects from his side's performance but generally he was disappointed.

"I cannot feel good about the result because we haven't been able to pick up any points but we did dominate possession and our problem was that we did not press forward enough," he said.

On Sunday Real Madrid

showed their championship credentials with a 6-2 destruction of Villarreal that put them back on the shoulders of Barcelona at the top of the table.

A Cristiano Ronaldo opener was followed by braces from Kaka - one of them a penalty - and Gonzalo Higuain before Xabi Alonso rounded off the scoring with a penalty to give Real coach Manuel Pellegrini victory over the side he left last summer and leaves his side two points adrift of Barca.

Despite missing several key players, Barcelona cruised to a 4-0 win over Racing Santander on Saturday.

Andres Iniesta scored the opener and then Thierry Henry and Rafa Marquez added to the lead with free-kicks before substitute Thiago Alcantara made the win more emphatic with a deflected goal.

Sevilla hold the fourth Champions League spot after they condemned Mallorca to their first home defeat of the season as they ran out 3-1 winners also on Saturday.

Milan play catch-up

AFP, Rome



AC Milan will be hoping to spark renewed life into the Serie A title race when they

travel to Fiorentina on Wednesday to play their game in hand on leaders Inter Milan.

Milan sit third in the table, seven points behind the champions but would go second, a point ahead of AS Roma, if they were to win in Florence.

However, the match is as vital for their hosts who need three points to propel them back into the race for a top four finish and Champions League football for a third season in a row.

Inter moved top of the table at the beginning of October and have stayed there ever since, enjoying at times a lead of up to nine points on the rest but that was cut to five at the weekend following their third draw in a row and Roma's seventh successive success.

But Milan could shave another point off that with a victory and vice-president Adriano Galliani believes that would be in the best interests of everyone watching Serie A.

"If that happens it will be interesting for all the media world, the newspapers, television, the fans," he said.

"I don't know if the title race is on again, five points isn't a huge amount but Inter

have been ahead for several years now.

"We'll see but this match against Fiorentina is very important for us."

Inter have won the last four Serie A crowns, although the first of which came due to sanctions imposed on Milan and Juventus for match-fixing.

That hit both those two clubs and neither has been able to recover enough to seriously challenge Inter in the league since then.

The closest anyone has come was two years ago when Roma lost the league by three points but Juventus were a distant third that season and Milan finished fifth.

Inter have drawn their last three matches to offer some hope to their rivals but they earned a point on Saturday against Sampdoria despite playing more than half the match with only nine men following the dismissals of centre-backs Walter Samuel and Ivan Cordoba.

Milan have recovered well since their morale-sapping 2-0 loss to Inter in January, when the champions also finished with nine men but still dominated the match while Ronaldo missed a penalty for Milan.

That result knocked the rossoneri out of their stride and they followed it up with poor draws against Livorno and Bologna.

But wins against Udinese and away to Bari have at least given them some hope.

But this match won't be easy against a team that finally managed to bounce back at the weekend after a long dip in form.

Fiorentina had not won in five matches before Sunday's visit of Livorno and were in danger of dropping out of contention for the European places.

Things looked bad too when they fell behind but La Viola hit back to win 2-1 and a win would bring them to within four points of fourth placed Juventus.

The other match to be played on Wednesday sees relegation-threatened Udinese host Cagliari.

Udinese sit one point above the drop zone and on Sunday fired coach Gianni De Biasi and replaced him with his predecessor Pasquale Marino.

Both these games were postponed in December due to the weather.

FIXTURES

Wednesday (1730 GMT)
Fiorentina v AC Milan, Udinese v Cagliari