

All eyes on Terry, Bridge

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry faces an uncomfortable reunion with Manchester City's Wayne Bridge on Saturday as the Blues bid to extend their lead at the top of the Premier League.

All eyes will be on Terry and Bridge at Stamford Bridge when they meet for the first time since the Chelsea star's alleged affair with Vanessa Perroncel, Bridge's former partner and mother of his child, came to light last month.

The fall-out from the scandal continues to reverberate through English football.

Terry has been stripped of the England captaincy and Bridge decided this week to turn his back on international duty to avoid the unpalatable prospect of playing in the same team as the man who has caused him so much pain.

Now they will come face to face on the pitch, with every

tackle and gesture involving the pair certain to be pored over for signs that the animosity lingers.

It has been suggested that Bridge won't even shake hands with Terry during the teams' traditional pre-match greeting, but the two managers will be far more concerned with the final result than the settling of any old scores.

For Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea, the match represents an opportunity to bounce back from their mid-week defeat at Inter Milan and move four points clear of second-placed Manchester United, who are in League Cup final action against Aston Villa on Sunday.

City boss Roberto Mancini will also be desperate for a positive result after Wednesday's FA Cup exit at Stoke.

Mancini's fifth-placed side have won just twice in their last eight games and the former Inter Milan boss, who hopes to have Carlos Tevez available, knows he must secure the top-four finish that guarantees Champions

League action next season.

If City lose at the Bridge, fourth-placed Tottenham, who host Everton on Sunday, will be able to increase their lead in the race for the final Champions League spot.

Harry Redknapp's side have enjoyed convincing wins over Wigan and Bolton over the last week, with previously out of favour Russian striker Roman Pavlyuchenko the unlikely hero.

Pavlyuchenko has scored four goals in two games to make an emphatic case for more regular inclusion.

Liverpool, who booked

FIXTURES

Saturday (1500GMT unless otherwise stated)
Birmingham v Wigan, Bolton v Wolves, Burnley v Portsmouth, Chelsea v Manchester City (1245GMT), Stoke v Arsenal (1730GMT)

Sunday
Liverpool v Blackburn, Sunderland v Fulham, Tottenham v Everton (1300GMT)

their place in the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday, host Blackburn with star striker Fernando Torres set to return to the starting line-up after five weeks out with a knee injury.

Third-placed Arsenal, who sit three points behind Chelsea, travel to Stoke hoping to keep in touch with the leaders and end their Britannia Stadium misery.

Arsene Wenger's team lost 2-1 at Stoke last season and were eliminated from the FA Cup at the Britannia in January, but Gunnars defender Bacary Sagna believes it is their destiny to win the title.

"There is destiny and I am sure this is Arsenal's one and I am sure we will celebrate at the end," Sagna said.

"Even if we are behind Chelsea and Manchester United today we have many games to play and we just want to win everything."

At the other end of the table, crisis-club Portsmouth travel to fellow strugglers Burnley, while Bolton host relegation rivals Wolves.

Real starting to click

AFP, Madrid

The Spanish league's top scorers Real Madrid hope for more goals at Tenerife on Saturday as they bid to close the two-point gap on leaders and defending champions Barcelona who host Malaga on the same day.

Real thumped Villarreal 6-2 at home in their last outing and in-form Argentine international forward Gonzalo Higuain believes they are starting to find their stride at a critical point in the season.

"We are playing the way we should," said Higuain. "This is a crucial part of the season and we are two points off the lead in the league. We control our own destiny in both competitions (the league and the Champions League), but both will be difficult to win."

Higuain is the club's leading scorer with 14 goals, two goals ahead of team-mate Cristiano Ronaldo, just three goals behind Valencia's David Villa who leads the goalscoring charts on 17 goals.

Real have won all 12 of their home matches in the league but their away form has been patchy in 2010 with a 0-0 draw at Osasuna and a 1-0 loss at

Athletic Bilbao while they also lost 1-0 at Lyon in the first leg of their last 16 Champions League clash with the return leg on March 10.

Coach Manuel Pellegrini is under pressure to deliver the Champions League crown with the final being played at the Santiago Bernabeu and last weekend's convincing win over his old club Villarreal was a major shot in the arm for the Chilean manager.

Promoted Tenerife lie second from bottom and could do with a morale-boosting win over Real to boost their survival hopes.

Barcelona were in European action on Tuesday when they secured a 1-1 first leg Champions League draw

FIXTURES

Saturday
Getafe v Real Zaragoza (1700 GMT), Tenerife v Real Madrid (1900 GMT), Barcelona v Malaga (2100 GMT)

Sunday
All 1600 GMT unless stated
Villarreal v Deportivo La Coruna, Valladolid v Real Mallorca, Sporting Gijon v Osasuna, Racing v Almeria, Xerez v Espanyol, Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao (1800 GMT), Atletico Madrid v Valencia (2000 GMT)

at VfB Stuttgart and on Saturday the treble winners take on an improving Malaga that has collected 10 from the last 12 points to surge away from the relegation battle.

Barca have looked a shadow of themselves of late so are glad to have midfield maestro Xavi back from injury with the Spanish international returning from a thigh injury in the Stuttgart draw.

Another boost for Barca is the return to form of club record signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic who made it two goals in as many games with his equaliser against Stuttgart.

Sevilla hope to close the four-point gap on third-placed Valencia when they host Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

On Sunday the erratic Atletico Madrid host Valencia in a game that should deliver goals with three of the league's sharpest finishers on show in Villa, Sergio "Kun" Aguero and Diego Forlan.

Valencia are a creditable third, although they are 10 points behind second-placed Real, and hope to continue their impressive away record to keep fourth-placed Sevilla at bay.

Atletico hoped to be contesting for third themselves but are way down in 13th place 19 points behind Valencia and closer to the relegation zone than the top six.

Spain name strong team

AFP, Madrid

Spain has announced a strong line-up for their friendly international against France at the Stade de France here on Wednesday.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Jose Manuel Reina (Liverpool), Diego Lopez (Villarreal)

Defenders: Raul Albiol (Real Madrid), Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid), Joan Capdevila (Villarreal), Gerard Pique (Barcelona), Carles Puyol (Barcelona), Carlos Marchena (Valencia)

Midfielders: Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid), Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal), Sergio Busquets (Barcelona), Xavi (Barcelona), Andres Iniesta (Barcelona), Marcos Senna (Villarreal)

Attackers: Daniel Guiza (Fenerbahce), Juan Manuel Mata (Valencia), David Silva (Valencia), David Villa (Valencia), Alvaro Negredo (Sevilla), Jesus Navas (Sevilla), Fernando Torres (Liverpool)

Bayern's Hamburg test

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich face a tough test to keep up with Bayer Leverkusen at the top of the German Bundesliga this weekend as they take on fourth-placed Hamburg at home in what increasingly looks a two-horse race.

In another top of the table clash, third-placed Schalke host Borussia Dortmund, in fifth, while Stuttgart, fresh from a hard-fought Champions League 1-1 draw with the stars of Barcelona midweek, battle with Eintracht Frankfurt.

Bayern Munich caught up with Bayer Leverkusen at the top of the table a month ago, and since then, the two rivals have been neck-and-neck.

Going into this weekend's games, Leverkusen have the

slimmest of advantages -- one goal ahead on goal difference. "Leverkusen are strong, but we're stronger," Bayern's German striker Thomas Muellersaid.

Last Saturday, Bayern looked to have slipped up after managing just a draw away at local rivals Nuremberg, who are last-but-one in the table, dashing hopes of what would have been a record-equalling string of 10 league victories.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1430GMT unless otherwise stated)
Herta Berlin v Hoffenheim, Mainz v Werder Bremen, VfB Stuttgart v Eintracht Frankfurt, Borussia Mgladbach v Freiburg, Bochum v Nuremberg, Bayer Leverkusen v Cologne (1730 GMT)

Sunday
Hanover v Wolfsburg (1430GMT), Bayern Munich v Hamburg (1630GMT)

But Bayern got a reprieve a day later when Leverkusen suffered the same fate in a 2-2 thriller away against Werder Bremen which saw the hosts snatch a draw with an injury-time header from German international striker Per Mertesacker.

This allowed dogged Leverkusen under veteran coach Jupp Heynckes to equal his own Bundesliga record of 23 straight games unbeaten -- first achieved when he was in charge of Bayern.

This weekend, it is the Bavarians with the tougher-looking game, with Hamburg unbeaten in a month and boosted by their new star signing, former Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy.

But the Dutchman could yet be unavailable with a thigh injury that ruled him out of this week's Europa League trip to his old club PSV Eindhoven and last Saturday's goalless home draw against Frankfurt.

Cech set for month on sidelines

AFP, London

Chelsea on Thursday said goalkeeper Petr Cech would be out of action for "three to four weeks" after suffering a calf injury during Wednesday's 2-1 Champions League loss away to Italy's Inter Milan.

The Czech international was taken off on a stretcher during the second half at the San Siro after damaging his calf fielding a cross and was replaced by Henrique Hilario.

Pompey face drop

AFP, London

Portsmouth on Friday became the first Premier League club to enter administration in a move designed to protect the heavily-indebted from going out of business altogether.

The move means Portsmouth will automatically be docked nine points, a penalty which virtually guarantees the top flight's bottom club will be relegated to the Championship at the end of the season.

The move into administration was confirmed at London's High Court following the failure of attempts by Portsmouth's Hong Kong-based owner Balram Chai to find a buyer willing to bail out a club which has debts in excess of 60 million pounds (90 million dollars).

Had Portsmouth not gone into administration, the 112-year-old club would almost certainly have been liquidated on Monday when a High Court judge was due to rule on a winding-up petition brought by the British tax authorities over an unpaid Value Added Tax (VAT) bill of 7.5 million pounds.

At a preliminary hearing on February 10, the judge in the case made it clear she feared Portsmouth were operating while insolvent but agreed a temporary stay of execution after being convinced there was a realistic chance of a buyer coming forward.



Liverpool midfielder Javier Mascherano is ecstatic after scoring the equalising goal against Unirea Urziceni during their Europa League encounter in Bucharest on Thursday.

Liverpool, Juve through

Roma, Shakhtar crash

AFP, Paris



Liverpool survived a big scare against Romanian underdogs Unirea Urziceni on Thursday night before securing a 3-1 victory that takes them into the Europa League round of 16.

Serie A giants Roma, however, crashed out of the competition after losing 3-2 at home to Greek side Panathinaikos, while defending champions Shakhtar Donetsk were eliminated by English Premier League side Fulham.

Fulham will play Juventus in the next round after the Turin side drew 0-0 in a draw game at home to Ajax to see out a 2-1 aggregate success.

German champions Wolfsburg thrashed Villarreal 4-1 for an aggregate 6-3 win, while Valencia needed two extra-time goals from Spain midfielder Pablo Hernandez to achieve a 3-1 victory against Belgian side Club Brugge.

Liverpool led 1-0 on aggregate following a tense first leg at Anfield and fell behind on the night to a 19th-minute header from Joao Bruno Fernandes, before goals from Javier Mascherano, Ryan Babel and Steven Gerrard took them through.

"I think it was a difficult game and the pitch was terrible so we knew it could be tough and very demanding for the players," said Liverpool coach Rafael Benitez,

who also revealed that centre-back Martin Skrtel had sustained a suspected broken toe.

"We conceded a goal and we then had to be calm and just keep playing our game."

Liverpool, five-time European champions, will face French side Lille in the next round, after their defender Adil Rami glanced in an 85th-minute free-kick to secure a 3-2 aggregate victory at Turkish heavyweights Fenerbahce.

Roma had seen a 20-match unbeaten run come to an end when they lost 3-2 at Panathinaikos in the first leg in Athens but they drew level in the 11th minute at the Stadio Olimpico thanks to a free-kick by John Arne Riise.

The visitors took control of the tie in a dazzling six-minute spell prior to the break, with Djibril Cisse -- the match-winner in the first leg -- scoring twice, either side of a fine effort by Sotiris Ninis.

"We wanted to do our best, the stadium was full but, unfortunately, there were a few minutes of madness, like in Athens," said Roma coach Claudio Ranieri, whose side are currently third in Serie A.

Panathinaikos will now play Belgian champions Standard Liege, who beat Red Bull Salzburg 3-2 on aggregate.

Fulham produced perhaps the shock of the evening after securing a hard-fought 1-1 draw at Shakhtar, winners of the last ever UEFA Cup last season.

Brede Hangeland secured a crucial away goal for Roy Hodgson's team in the 33rd minute, with Rodrigues Jadson

replying in vain 21 minutes from time.

"It was a marvellous display and we've eliminated one of the best teams in Europe," said Hodgson.

Everton were unable to join their Premier League colleagues in the last 16, however, as they were beaten 3-0 at Sporting Lisbon after winning the first leg 2-1.

Sporting will face Atletico Madrid in the next round after Quique Sanchez Flores's charges snatched a 3-2 aggregate victory over Galatasaray in Istanbul thanks to a last-minute goal from star striker Diego Forlan.

Elsewhere, Hamburg went through on away goals despite losing 3-2 at PSV Eindhoven in a game in which both sides finished with 10 men, Anderlecht thrashed Athletic Bilbao 4-0 to progress 5-1 on aggregate and Marseille completed a 6-2 aggregate victory over FC Copenhagen.

"I'm pleased with the result," said Marseille coach Didier Deschamps.

"It was a good evening, with no injuries, and we were able to keep some players warm on the bench."

Benfica, who defeated Hertha Berlin 4-0 on Tuesday to round off a 5-1 aggregate win, await Marseille in the last 16.

Wolfsburg will meet Russian champions Rubin Kazan, 3-0 aggregate winners over Hapoel Tel Aviv, while Valencia must take on last season's runners-up Werder Bremen, after striker Claudio Pizarro netted three times in their 4-1 win over FC Twente.

Defensive crisis hits Inter

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho will need to employ his greatest powers of tactical and motivational astuteness if his club are to maintain their four-point lead at the top of Serie A this weekend.

Inter embark on a tricky trip to Udinese facing the possibility of needing to play two midfielders or youth team players at the back.

The champions have centre-backs Ivan Cordoba and Walter Samuel suspended after being dismissed in last week's game with Sampdoria while Cristian Chivu, Marco Materazzi and Davide Santon are all injured, although Materazzi is a possibility.

That leaves Mourinho with possibly only two defenders at his disposal in Brazilians Maicon, a right-back, and centre-back Lucio, thus facing the prospect of having to field two midfielders in his back-line.

Javier Zanetti played much of his career at full-back and can easily slot in there but then Thiago Motta, another Brazilian, will probably have

to fill in at centre-half.

The situation is worsened by the fact that Esteban Cambiasso and Sulley Muntari are both suspended -- again for events related to the Sampdoria match -- leaving Mourinho short in midfield as well.

He still has stalwarts Dejan Stankovic and Wesley Sneijder but would probably have liked to rest one or both of those after the work they got through against Chelsea in the 2-1 Champions League win on Wednesday.

It means that bit-part players like new Kenyan signing McDonald Mariga, Slovenian winger Khirin and Portuguese winger Ricardo Quaresma could all be called upon.

Such turnover after a tough mid-week match spells trouble for Inter, who also saw their once nine-point Serie A lead cut to four on Wednesday thanks to Milan's last gasp 2-1 win at Fiorentina.

"Has the league re-opened? We will see. It will certainly be a difficult run for us," Inter president Massimo Moratti told his club's television channel.

"The players now know that it will be tough, compared to what it was a few weeks ago.

We have enough experience to know that our character will help us along."

Milan's win in Tuscany, while dramatic in its conclusion, has served only to heighten tensions surrounding Italian football this week with cries of foul being heard from Florence to Milan.

Fiorentina were denied what appeared to be a good shout for a penalty four minutes from time with the score 1-1 but referee Roberto Rossetti may argue that Riccardo Montolivo's theatrical fall after Thiago Silva had momentarily held his arm was unconvincing.

Milan went up the other end and Alexandre Pato scored the winner two minutes later.

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FIXTURES

Saturday
Catania v Bari (1700GMT), Lazio v Fiorentina (1945GMT)

Sunday (1400GMT unless otherwise stated)
AC Milan v Atalanta, Chievo v Cagliari, Genoa v Bologna, Juventus v Palermo (1945GMT), Livorno v Siena, Napoli v Roma, Parma v Sampdoria, Udinese v Inter Milan



Portsmouth's chief executive Peter Storrie (L) is confronted by an angry fan (C) during his arrival at the club's offices at Fratton Park on Friday.