



North Korea's Ri Jun Il (R) controls the ball under pressure from Jose Granados of Venezuela during their international friendly in San Felipe-Yaracuy on Thursday. The match ended 1-1.

PHOTO: AFP

## Bosingwa out of WC

AFP, London

Chelsea and Portugal defender Jose Bosingwa is out for the rest of the season with a knee injury and will miss the World Cup, his club confirmed on Friday.

The fullback had been back in light training after surgery but has now been told he needs another operation.

The news is a further blow to Chelsea's hopes of winning a Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League treble in the wake of the loss of first-choice goalkeeper Petr Cech, who will be sidelined for a further two weeks at least with a torn calf muscle. Chelsea are also currently without two other first-choice players, Michael Essien (knee) and Ashley Cole (broken ankle).

## BUNDESLIGA

### Bayern look to consolidate

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich will be looking to cement or even extend their newly gained place at the top of the Bundesliga this weekend as second and third-placed Bayer Leverkusen and Schalke snap at their heels.

A scorer of a goal from French striker Franck Ribery was enough for Bayern to beat fourth-placed Hamburg 1-0 last Sunday and take the Bavarian giants top for the first time since winning the title in 2008.

Leverkusen, who had been neck-and-neck with Bayern for a month and just ahead on goal difference, were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Cologne -- Bayern's opponents on Saturday.

"We expected Leverkusen to slip up, of course, and they did us the favour," Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said.

Bayern will travel to Cologne without Argentinian defender Martin Demichelis, out for three weeks after colliding with Michael Ballack's knee in Wednesday's 1-0 victory over Germany. He has multiple facial fractures.

Leverkusen and Bayern goalkeeper Rene Adler will be keen to keep a clean sheet as his team take on second-from-bottom Nuremberg away on Sunday, after his disastrous slip-up led to Argentina's only goal on Wednesday.

The other main contender for the Bundesliga title is third-placed Schalke, four points behind Bayern and two points shy of Leverkusen. The next-closest, Hamburg, are 12 adrift of the leaders Bayern.

Schalke, with one defeat in their last 10 games, travel to seventh-placed Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

## Sevilla visit Bernabeu

AFP, Madrid



Sevilla winger Diego Perotti is confident that they can spring a surprise as they face the ominous task of playing Real Madrid at the Bernabeu this weekend.

While leaders Barcelona have started to stutter, Real have really hit form domestically, scoring eleven goals in their last two games.

They are proving to be more than just the one-man show, which critics claimed earlier in the season, and Cristiano Ronaldo has been complemented well by Gonzalo Higuain and Kaka in attack.

It is a crunch game for Sevilla who cannot afford to drop points in the chase for a Champions League place. Their form though has been inconsistent since Christmas and while they have beaten Valencia and Mallorca they have also let points slip against lesser opposition.

"All the teams in the top flight are capable of beating each other and no one is invincible. We did very well in the first half of the season and now we really need to pick up three points to try and get third spot," said Perotti.

"It will be essential to mark their key players tightly. Higuain is playing very well but there is also Cristiano and Kaka, so we have to be very careful and make the most of the chances that we have."

Barca have not been at

their best and are desperately holding onto their two point advantage with many citing the showdown in April at the Bernabeu between the top two sides in Spain as the championship decider.

There was an improvement in the 2-1 win over Malaga and Andres Iniesta realises that this is the path they must continue against Almeria.

"The match against Real will be important but there are a lot of points in play before and afterwards. Following several poor matches we gave a better showing against Malaga and caused more danger," he said.

"It is normal that during a whole season you are not always at your best but as a squad it is the job of us all to play a part and if someone doesn't play well then another can come in."

Valencia were well-beaten by Atletico Madrid 4-1 but they still have a three-point cushion above fourth place ahead of their match with Racing Santander as Sevilla only managed a draw with

### FIXTURES

<b>Saturday</b>	Deportivo la Coruna v Tenerife 1700, Almeria v Barcelona 1900, Real Madrid v Sevilla 2100
<b>Sunday</b>	Malaga v Xerez 1600, Espanyol v Villarreal 1600, Mallorca v Sporting Gijon 1600, Osasuna v Getafe 1600, Athletic Bilbao v Valladolid 1800, Zaragoza v Atletico Madrid 2000
<b>Monday</b>	Valencia v Racing Santander 2000

Athletic Bilbao.

Mallorca are enjoying a remarkable season and they will be looking to maintain their strong home form, which has seen them lose just once all season, against Sporting Gijon.

The battle for a European place is fierce and Villarreal, under new coach Juan Carlos Garrido, got back into the frame with victory over Deportivo la Coruna.

"Garrido has tried to give the team more balance and he knows a lot about defending and how to maintain possession. It was not normal for us to concede so many goals before. I hope we can get in the Europa League," said defender Gonzalo Rodriguez.

Villarreal play Espanyol with still a lot of ground to catch up on sixth-placed Deportivo who face a Tenerife side that although second from bottom, are no walk-overs. In between them in the table, Athletic Bilbao entertain Valladolid.

Xerez's hopes of survival have appeared forlorn for some time and as they prepare for the game against Malaga they are 12 points from safety.

Zaragoza, also in trouble on the edge of the relegation zone, have been boosted by the news that their in-form striker Humberto Suazo is fit for the tricky clash with Atletico Madrid.

Just one point from their last three games has left Osasuna once again looking over their shoulder at the relegation zone and they will be looking to get back on track against Getafe.

## All eyes on Rome

AFP, Rome



All eyes will be on Rome's Stadio Olimpico on Saturday night as Inter Milan's two Serie A title rivals fight it out to see who will earn the right to pursue the champions to the end.

AS Roma host AC Milan with both sides knowing defeat could signal the death of their championship chances.

Milan trail Inter by four points with Roma a further three points back.

Neither team can afford to lose but even victory might not be enough to keep either side in the hunt and Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani suggested as much as he took a begrudging dig at Inter.

"From an aesthetic point of view, this match is the best that Serie A has to offer at the moment," he said.

"The two teams have to put on a show because the stadium will be full. I'm not worried about these big matches, I'm just delighted to be able to watch them."

If Roma win they will draw level on points with Milan but will have momentum on their side as they still have not been beaten in the league since October -- 16 matches ago.

Having been dumped out of the Europa League last week they have only an Italian Cup semifinal next month to distract them from their title bid while both Milan and Inter still have at least one eye on the

Champions League.

If Roma were to lose it would surely spell the end of their hopes, while if Milan were to lose it would be hard to see how they could still retain some realistic hope.

It is in exactly these kind of tests that teams demonstrate their championship mettle and with Inter still to visit Roma's ground, the giallorossi can still hope to deal a blow to Jose Mourinho's team's hopes of recording a fifth title in a row.

But even if a victory would leave Roma and Milan on equal points, it would show once again that Milan are not capable of taking that final step towards a sustained challenge to Inter.

Whereas Roma, whose form has been magnificent since October, would have more hope simply because it was only due to a poor start that they are not at least neck-and-neck with Inter.

Their run over the last 16 matches has also included trips to Inter, Juventus, Fiorentina, Napoli and Sampdoria -- notoriously difficult away trips.

And this run could have

### FIXTURES

<b>Saturday</b>	Fiorentina v Juventus, AS Roma v AC Milan
<b>Sunday</b>	Atalanta v Udinese, Bari v Chievo, Bologna v Napoli, Cagliari v Catania, Inter Milan v Genoa, Palermo v Livorno, Sampdoria v Lazio, Siena v Parma

## Fergie counts on character

AFP, Wolverhampton



Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson feels his team's character will give them the edge in a three-way fight for the Premier League title with Chelsea and Arsenal.

Chelsea let United and the Gunners off the hook last weekend with their surprise 4-2 home defeat to Manchester City.

Carlo Ancelotti's side are in FA Cup action against Stoke on Sunday and United could move two points clear of the Blues with a victory over Wolves at Molineux.

Arsenal will also be strong favourites to pick up three points as they entertain struggling Burnley at the Emirates Stadium, setting the stage for a hard-to-call climax to the season.

United responded from their sixth Premier League defeat of the campaign, a 3-1 loss at Everton a fortnight ago, with a 3-0 victory over West Ham and a 2-1 win in the League Cup final against Aston Villa.

Ferguson feels that Arsenal have the most straightforward of the run-ins, with their next three matches seeing them come up against three bottom-half teams.

But the United manager, who is looking to win an unprecedented fourth consecutive Premier League title, thinks

that his team's mentality will give them the edge in the final weeks of the campaign.

Ferguson said: "Arsenal are bang in the frame now. They have the easiest programme on paper and it will be an interesting run-in."

"Chelsea losing (to Manchester City) was a good result for us, but there are a lot of hard games left."

"You have to focus at the turn of the year and make sure you don't make mistakes."

"We lost to Everton and we were a bit tired. But we recovered against West Ham and we recovered again."

"We have shown time and time again that this football club has determination."

"They don't give in and that is a good quality. You will see that in the remainder of the season. We won't give in."

United will be without Michael Owen at Molineux due to a hamstring problem sustained in the League Cup final, while Rio Ferdinand is also set to miss out with a back problem.

Ryan Giggs is not ready to return from a broken arm but United can console themselves with the fact that Wayne Rooney is in the best form of his career.

Rooney has already scored 28 goals this season and club captain Gary Neville feels the England striker can deal with the extra attention coming his way.

Neville said: "Wayne can handle all the praise and accolades, and any criticism. He is important to us. We have two

months of important matches now and we need him fit for them."

"He's done the lot - playing in Europe Cup finals, FA Cup finals, World Cups and European Championships."

"He is maturing now and going through a peak time in his career. He looks dangerous whenever he plays and can score lots of goals."

Wolves are only outside the relegation zone on goal difference but midfielder Dave Jones is still confident that their strugglers can pull off a shock against the champions.

Jones came through the ranks at United and feels that Ferguson is the key reason for their sustained success.

He said: "We faced them in the League Cup and in the league at Old Trafford. I think it will be different at home and we have to believe we've got a chance."

"If we put in a good performance as we've done in previous weeks and with the crowd behind us then we've got a chance of picking something up."

"Sir Alex is the type of manager that just wants to keep going and get success. While he's been at United there have been changes in the teams."

"The core has probably stayed the same but there have been changes around that over the years and they just keep winning trophies. They've got that winning mentality and will want to keep going in the league so they will be well up for the game."

## Owen's WC dream over

AFP, Manchester

Michael Owen will be out injured until the end of the season after learning he needs surgery to repair the hamstring injury that forced him out of last weekend's League Cup final.

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson revealed Friday that the striker's injury had been much more serious than initially thought, definitively ending any lingering hope Owen had of making England's squad for the World Cup in June and July.

Owen limped out of Sunday's 2-1 win over Aston Villa at Wembley just before half-time and will have an operation on Monday.

"It is a terrible blow for the lad," Ferguson said. "It is more serious than we thought."

## EPL shelves UCL play-off idea

AFP, London

English Premier League bosses have shelved plans to introduce a play-off to decide which club takes England's fourth and final Champions League slot.

At an EPL board meeting on Thursday, the chairmen voted against any further study of the proposal, which would have seen the teams finishing the season between fourth and seventh place in the table playing a mini-knockout tournament to decide which of them went into the Champions League qualifiers.

Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal, who have dominated the Champions League spots in recent seasons, were adamantly opposed and there were also reservations about adding fixtures to an already crowded schedule.

The current 'big four' have filled the top four positions in five of the past six seasons.

Only Everton, in 2005, have broken their stranglehold but there seems a good chance that Tottenham, Manchester City or Aston Villa could squeeze out Liverpool this season.

## Heinze out for 3 weeks

AFP, Marseille

Marseille's Argentine defender Gabriel Heinze will be out for around three weeks after injuring himself in his country's friendly with Germany, his club announced on Thursday.

An X-ray revealed "a small crack at the top of the right fibula", according to a Marseille statement.

Heinze sustained the injury in a tackle by Germany striker Lukas Podolski in the 48th minute of Argentina's 1-0 victory in Munich on Wednesday and was unable to continue.

This latest setback comes shortly after Heinze returned from a five-week stint on the sidelines with a hamstring strain sustained in his side's 1-1 draw at Bordeaux on January 17.

Heinze's unavailability falls at a bad time for Marseille coach Didier Deschamps, whose team face a tight schedule in March when they will take on Lorient, Toulouse and Lyon in the league, Benfica home and away in the Europa League and Bordeaux in the League Cup final on March 27.

Depending on how they fare, Juve's Champions League hopes could look either very rosy or very bleak.

## Chelsea look to rebound

AFP, London



The scale of the hangover from Chelsea's traumatic defeat by Manchester City will become apparent when the FA Cup holders entertain Stoke in the last eight of this season's competition this weekend.

Carlo Ancelotti's squad remain on track for a league, cup and Champions League treble but the 4-2 home defeat by City has been interpreted by some as heralding the imminent collapse of their challenge on all three fronts.

Ill-discipline, ragged defending and poor goalkeeping all contributed to Chelsea's first home defeat since November 2008 and Ancelotti will expect an immediate response from his players when Stoke visit Stamford Bridge on Sunday in the last of the quarterfinal ties.

Reading, the only survivors from outside the Premier League, entertain Aston Villa earlier on Sunday while Saturday sees Fulham take on

Tottenham in a London derby and financially-stricken Portsmouth face Birmingham.

Chelsea will once again be relying on the services of backup goalkeeper Hilario, who was at fault for two of City's goals last weekend, with Petr Cech still at least two weeks away from a return after tearing a calf muscle.

Juliano Beletti and Michael Ballack will also be missing after being sent off against Stoke although Ancelotti will have been cheered by captain John Terry's composed performance for England in midweek.

The centreback's form has dipped noticeably in recent matches for his club as he grapples with the fallout from an extra marital affair with former team-mate Wayne Bridge's ex-partner, but his morale should have improved after he was praised for the way he handled his first match for his country

since being stripped of the national team's captaincy. Stoke will be without influential central defender Ryan Shawcross who is suspended as a result of the tackle which left Arsenal's Aaron Ramsey with a broken leg last weekend.

Reading remain in danger of being sucked into the relegation fight in English football's second tier, the Championship, but they have repeatedly belied their poor league form with confident displays in the Cup.

Portsmouth, the 2008 winners, will seek to lift some of the gloom shrouding the club at the expense of Birmingham's cup ambitions.

Pompey were effectively condemned to relegation when they went into administration last month.

Israeli centreback Tal Ben Haim and South Africa captain Aaron Mokoena are both expected to return from injury for the lunchtime clash.

Tottenham meanwhile will be hoping Peter Crouch carries his England scoring form into the clash with Fulham. The tall striker scored twice in a 3-1 midweek win over Egypt, outshining club-mate Jermain Defoe in the process.

### FIXTURES

<b>Saturday</b>	Tottenham v Tottenham (1720 GMT), Portsmouth v Birmingham (1230 GMT)
<b>Sunday</b>	Chelsea v Stoke City (1600 GMT), Reading v Aston Villa (1345 GMT)

## Zuma promises safety

AFP, London



South African President Jacob Zuma promised visitors would be protected at the 2010 World Cup as he sought to allay fears the country's crime rate would blight the tournament.

"The fact is we have brought down crime already," he said during his state visit to Britain on Thursday.

"We are therefore very confident on this. And when we say we are ready now for the World Cup, we include security in that."

"They will come to South Africa safely and leave safer," he added.

"At the beginning many people said it would be very difficult for South Africa to host the competition."

"For the last six years we have worked very hard to ensure we are able to welcome the world to South Africa."

"We can say now without fear of contradiction that we are ready, if not more than ready, to receive those who come to South Africa," he insisted ahead of the first World Cup ever to be staged on the African continent.

Zuma spoke after visiting Wembley Stadium, the home of English football, where he met officials involved in England's bid to stage the 2018 World Cup.

Earlier, Danny Jordaan, the chief executive of South Africa's organising committee, said the 2010 event was involved in a journey of "perception and reality".

"The perception is South Africa will never be ready, the infrastructure won't be complete, the stadiums won't be complete, we will run out of money, no-one will come to South Africa, it is too dangerous, no-one will buy tickets," Jordaan said.

Jordaan, speaking at Chelsea Football Club, also confronted fears surrounding spectator safety at the World Cup. "Our responsibility as an event organiser is to have a plan safeguarding everyone coming to the event," he said. "That is why we will have 45,000 additional police recruits and 41,000 additional police."

He added: "This world is uncertain and unstable, not just for one country. If you look at the track record of South Africa, it has hosted more than 150 major events since 1994, including the Rugby World Cup, the Cricket World Cup, and last



South Africa president Jacob Zuma takes a penalty kick at the Wembley Stadium in London on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

year we hosted the Indian Premier League after India was deemed unsafe and (rugby union's) British and Irish Lions and (football's) Confederations Cup -- and there was not a single incident.

"We are comfortable but we will be vigilant."

Jordaan also predicted FIFA, football's world governing body, would generate 3.5 billion dollars from this World Cup, making it the most successful financially in the tournament's history.

"In Germany (at the 2006 World Cup), it was only 2.6 billion. This will be the highest revenue ever for a World Cup."