

IN BRIEF

Becks fears for WC place

SOCCERNET

England international David Beckham fears he may not get to realise his World Cup dream in South Africa this summer.

Beckham, who will be 35 when England kick off their campaign against the USA believes he is far from certain to be heading to his fourth World Cup.

Beckham said: "Am I banking on going to the World Cup? No, not at all. I am not guaranteed to go to South Africa. I have to work hard and hopefully win my place."

"There are a good few months left and plenty of games to play, but hopefully I can carry on playing well and get in the squad."

Should Capello include Beckham in his squad this summer, the former Manchester United midfielder will become the first England player to feature in four World Cup finals. Beckham currently shares the record of three with Bobby Moore and Peter Shilton.

Hiddink rejects Ivory Coast

AFP, The Hague

Guus Hiddink will not coach the Ivory Coast at June's World Cup finals in South Africa, the Dutchman said in a newspaper column on Saturday.

"I must admit that the Ivory Coast did not make the decision easy. Didier Drogba (who played under him at Chelsea) lobbied hard to get me and also (Ivory Coast Football Association President Jacques) Anouma came to me with an excellent proposal," the Dutchman wrote in the Telegraaf newspaper.

It was announced last month that Hiddink, current head coach of Russia, will take over the Turkish team from August for the Euro 2012 qualifiers.

Hiddink said he would have taken the Ivory Coast position had it not been for the fact that he wanted to finish his contract with Russia, which expires in July, and then "focus on my new employer, Turkey".

Hiddink has previously been in charge of the national teams of his native Netherlands, South Korea - both of whom he took to the World Cup semifinals - and Australia before taking over as manager of Russia.

Former Ivory Coast coach Vahid Halilhodzic was axed after the team failed to make the African Cup of Nations semifinals in January.



Arsenal midfielder Andrei Arshavin (R) volleys home the opening goal in their Premier League clash against Hull City at the KC Stadium in Kingston on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

BENDTNER KEEPS GUNNERS CLOSE  
Chelsea back on top

AFP, London



Didier Drogba sent Chelsea back to the top of the Premier League on Saturday but Arsenal stayed right on their heels thanks to a stoppage-time victory over ten-man Hull.

Nicklas Bendtner was again the Gunners saviour, following up his hat-trick against FC Porto in the Champions League in midweek with a strike three minutes into added-on time to seal a 2-1 win at the KC Stadium.

Chelsea's 4-1 win over relegation-threatened West Ham kept them above Arsenal on goal difference with Manchester United a point further back ahead of their meeting with Fulham at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Tottenham consolidated their hold on the final Champions League qualifying spot with a 3-1 win over Blackburn while Wolves won the day's big relegation battle, 2-1 at Burnley.

Arsenal, who have the easiest run-in of any of the top three, looked set for a straight-forward victory after Andrey Arshavin fired them ahead after 14 minutes.

But they were pegged back by Jimmy Bullard's penalty after Sol Campbell was deemed to have pulled down Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink.

Hull were reduced to ten men before half-time when George Boateng received a second yellow card but held

the visitors at bay until right at the death, when Bendtner slotted home the rebound following a Denilson shot.

"It's maybe not good for my heart, but for the championship it's not bad," said Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger his team's fifth straight win.

"We had a good reaction against Stoke and we improved again today. We had a bad day against Manchester City but we came back the right way."

Tottenham tightened their grip on fourth place after Roman Pavlyuchenko made it eight goals in his last six matches with a double in a 3-1 win over Blackburn.

Jermain Defoe put Tottenham ahead in the first half. Russian striker Pavlyuchenko struck soon after the interval and then netted again in the closing stages to ease the hosts' nerves following Christopher Samba's goal for Blackburn.

Tottenham are three points ahead of fifth-placed Manchester City, who travel to Sunderland on Sunday, and manager Harry Redknapp is growing increasingly confident about his side's prospects of joining the European elite.

"People have always got doubts about everything, all I've said is we have got a chance," Redknapp said. "It's not impossible, we have had a great year."

Aston Villa remain in the hunt for fourth spot but their cause was not helped by a goalless draw at Stoke.

Everton's strong recent form was reflected in a powerful start at Birmingham, Victor

last-16 second leg against Inter Milan.

"It was important to have a good reaction," said Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti in reference to the recent 4-2 home defeat his side suffered at the hands of Manchester City.

Cameron Jerome got Birmingham back into the match and Craig Gardner claimed the equaliser with his first goal since his January move from Aston Villa.

Bolton continued their resurgence under Owen Coyle with a convincing 4-0 win over Wigan.

Johan Elmander gave the Trotters a tenth-minute lead, before Bolton went on the rampage in the second-half.

Elmander's strike partner Kevin Davies converted a penalty after Tamir Cohen was brought down, Fabrice Muamba made sure of the points in the 53rd minute and Matthew Taylor turned the game into a rout with a fourth 17 minutes from time.

Wolves claimed what may prove to be an extremely important victory when they overcame relegation rivals Burnley 2-1 at Turf Moor to pull three points clear of the drop zone.

Matt Jarvis gave the visitors a first-half lead after a misjudged back header by Tyrone Mears and a Clarke Carlisle own goal early in the second half made it a doubly miserable afternoon for Burnley's defenders.

Steven Thompson pulled a goal back with 18 minutes left but Burnley were unable to salvage a point.

A nichebe and Ayegbeni Yakubu giving them a two-goal lead inside 22 minutes.

But they were forced to settle for a point after an entertaining encounter at St Andrew's.

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Real obsessed with Rooney

SOCCERNET

Real Madrid have an "obsession" about signing Wayne Rooney, but would need to fork out £80 million or more to do so, according to former president Ramon Calderon.

Madrid, who have spent £250 million assembling a team with stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Xabi Alonso, were knocked out of the Champions League in midweek by Lyon.

Current president Florentino Perez has been linked with potential moves for Jose Mourinho to replace manager Manuel Pellegrini and Manchester United striker Rooney.

Calderon said: "It seems that it's an obsession for the president to go for Rooney. I imagine Manchester United wouldn't like to lose a player like him."

"Sometimes it's a point of money and if there is a proposal maybe there will be a deal. You have to take into account that the most important thing is what a player wants to do."

"Ronaldo was a good signing. He is one of the best. He is a professional, a real professional and he is doing a really good job."

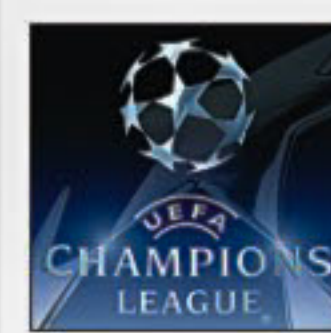
"I don't know if it is possible to spend again another 100 or 80 million more euros. I imagine in that case you (Manchester United) would have to sell."

Asked on BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek programme if Ronaldo regretted his move to Madrid, Calderon added: "I don't think so. He did what he wanted to do, he came to a big club. The idea was to win everything but you can't buy everything with money."

"Even though you think you've got a lot of very good players together, that's not the same as having a good team."

Dull draw for Sevilla

AFP, Madrid



Sevilla warmed up for Tuesday's Champions League clash against CSKA Moscow with disappointing 1-1 home draw against Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday, failing to make up ground on third-placed Valencia.

Sevilla trail Valencia, who face Barcelona on Sunday, by three points after being pegged back by Depor, two points behind in sixth, after Adrian (24 min) cancelled out Fazio's opener for Sevilla three minutes earlier.

CSKA Moscow are up next for Sevilla in the second leg of the last 16 Champions League tie on Tuesday with Manolo Jimenez's side holding a slight advantage after a 1-1 draw in Russia.

Sevilla had been beaten 3-2 by Real Madrid last time out - throwing away a two-goal lead - so were looking for a boost and took the lead on 21 minutes when defender Fazio flicked in a driven cross from Argentine compatriot Diego Perotti.

However, the lead was short-lived as Depor equalised three minutes later with Mexican Jose Guardado feeding a great pass for Adrian to prod home.

Perotti hit the post with another driven cross that evaded everyone and Sevilla were up in arms close to half-time when they felt Depor goalkeeper Daniel Aranzubia handled outside the area to block a Jesus Navas shot.

Substitute Luis Fabiano hit the crossbar on the hour mark for Sevilla but Depor almost went ahead themselves with Andres Palop forced into a fine point blank save to foil Juan Dominguez.

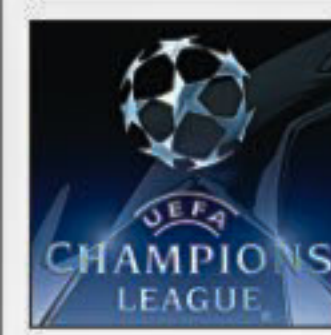
Earlier Champions League hopefuls Real Mallorca crashed to a 3-0 defeat at Getafe as their travel sickness struck again.

Spain Under-21 international striker Daniel Parejo headed Getafe in front before two goals in the final ten minutes put the game to bed.

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Robben bails out Bayern

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich suffered a Champions League hangover Saturday

before Dutch winger Arjen Robben scored twice to seal a 2-1 win over strugglers Freiburg to put the hosts back on top of the Bundesliga.

After Tuesday's away goals victory over Fiorentina, which saw them make the quarterfinals, Bayern were brought back down to earth by second-from-bottom Freiburg before Robben hit two second-half goals.

"Freiburg were very organised in the first-half, which made things very hard for us," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal. "We changed things in the second-half and were dominant."

"The victory is very nice, but we got off the hook, so we can only be reasonably happy."

Bayern went behind when Freiburg striker Cedrick Makiadi rifled in a 20-metre shot at Munich's Allianz Arena which gave the home side's goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt no chance on 31 minutes.

The hosts looked lethargic before Dutch international Robben scored his ninth league goal of the season, and his second in two games having scored Bayern's crucial second in Italy, when he drilled home a free-kick on 76 minutes.

And he then completed Munich's fightback when he converted an 83rd-minute penalty after Germany rising star Thomas Mueller was fouled in the area.

The result puts Bayern top of the league and two points clear of second-placed Schalke 04.

Earlier rock-bottom Bundesliga side Hertha Berlin slipped closer to relegation after suffering a 2-1 home defeat to fellow strugglers Nuremberg who grabbed an

SCORES

Bayern Munich	2	1	SC Freiburg
Borussia Mönchengladbach	0	4	VfL Wolfsburg
Hertha BSC	1	2	FC Nürnberg
VfL Bochum	1	4	Borussia Dortmund
Hannover 96	2	1	Eintracht Frankfurt
FSV Mainz 05	1	0	Cologne

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Ferrari reign in Bahrain

Schumacher finishes sixth

AFP, Manama



Two-times champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso dedicated his debut triumph with Ferrari on Sunday to the Italian nation, the team's workforce and president Luca di Montezemolo.

After leading Brazilian Felipe Massa home in an emphatic one-two for Ferrari that wiped away memories of their desultory opening spell in 2009, Alonso said it was a very "special day for me."

The 28-year-old former Renault star said: "For anyone to come to Ferrari, a team with so much history, it is a special thing to win and to be first and second is fantastic for everyone in the team."

Alonso's delight was shared by Massa, who bounced back in triumphant style in his first race since suffering serious head and eye injuries after a horror accident in Hungary last August.

In a keenly-anticipated race featuring four champions, three new teams, five rookie drivers and new rules



PHOTO: AFP

New Ferrari driver Fernando Alonso celebrates after winning Bahrain GP in Manama on Sunday.

that banned mid-race refuelling, the Ferrari duo outshone returning 41-year-old 'red baron' Michael Schumacher who was left among the chasing pack and finished sixth.

It was his first Formula One race after three years in retirement, having won a record seven drivers world titles, and he was beaten by his Mercedes team-mate and fellow-German Nico Rosberg, who came home fifth.

2008 champion, was third for McLaren, but his new team-mate, defending champion and compatriot Jensen Button battled to take seventh.

Alonso, who won the title twice with his former team Renault, delivered the 22nd win of his career -- and his third in Bahrain -- with a brilliantly-judged performance by preserving both his tyres and his engine on a sizzling hot day at the Sakhir circuit. Driving with meticu-

lous care, Alonso took full advantage of bad luck that hit German Sebastian Vettel when his Red Bull car suffered an exhaust failure and lost power dramatically after leading for the first 34 laps of the 49-laps contest.

Vettel, starting from his sixth pole, had led easily, but fell away and finished fourth.

His Red Bull teammate Australian Mark Webber came home eighth ahead of Italian Vitantonio Liuzzi for Force India and 10th placed final points-scorer Brazilian veteran Rubens Barrichello in a Williams.

For Ferrari, it was an emotional way to start the 60th anniversary season for the world championship -- last year they were in disarray in the opening races. For Alonso, it was a first win since he triumphed in Japan in 2008 for Renault.

And for the rookie teams, led by Lotus, it was a day to remember, too, as they joined in the first race without refuelling since 1993 -- with both Lotus cars finishing in the demanding race in high temperatures.

Some respite for Fiorentina

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina came back from a goal down to defeat Napoli 3-1 on Saturday, bouncing back in style from their shattering midweek Champions League exit at the hands of Bayern Munich.

Ezequiel Lavezzi gave Napoli the lead early in the second half, but Alberto Gilardino levelled on the hour mark.

Gilardino added a second three minutes from time before Stevan Jovetic scored Fiorentina's third in stoppage time.

It was Fiorentina's first win in Naples in 15 years and adding to their delight was the performance of 16-year-old Kouma Babacar who had a hand in both goals.

The result moved the Florence side into ninth place in Serie A while Napoli stay seventh, five points off the Champions League places.

"This victory has great significance and is one of the most important of the season," said Gilardino.

"We were determined and hadn't picked up many points recently, but today got three in an extremely difficult ground."



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich forward Arjen Robben leaps for joy after scoring a fantastic free kick during their Bundesliga match against SC Freiburg at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday.