

Chelsea's D-day

AFP, London



Carlo Ancelotti heads into the final game of the Premier League campaign insisting his Chelsea side deserve to land the title and that it would be a "tragedy" if they were to fall at the last hurdle.

Last weekend's 2-0 victory over Liverpool at Anfield has put Ancelotti's team in pole position ahead of Sunday's final game of the season and a home victory over Wigan will mean the championship is theirs.

Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United will be waiting expectantly for the London club to slip up but, having seen his side head the table for almost all of the campaign, Ancelotti believes anything other than a Chelsea triumph would be cruel.

"We did a fantastic job but we've still got one game to go," said Ancelotti, whose side are one point ahead of United. "We have to do our best, have the same behaviour in the last game."

"Until now, we've deserved to stay at the top of the list. It would be a tragedy if we lost the last game after 10 months of a good, fantastic job. Every day, it would be a tragedy, a disaster."

Ancelotti has experienced disappointment at this stage of the season before when he was in charge at Juventus in Serie A ten years ago.

Then, Juventus conceded the title to Lazio after losing a storm-delayed game in Perugia but Ancelotti insists there is no chance of a repeat this time.

"It wasn't rain, it was a storm," he said. "We lost. But it'll be different. I don't think there'll be a storm at Stamford Bridge, and I was away with Juventus. We (Chelsea) play at home on Sunday."

Chelsea's dominance this season has been largely due to their impressive firepower that has so far delivered 95 league goals, two short of the Premier League record set by Manchester

United in 2000.

With nine goals in their last two games, there would appear to be a possibility of the Blues beating that record and even becoming the first team to pass the 100-goal mark.

Ancelotti, though, has dismissed any suggestion that the milestone interests him.

"We just have to win," he added. "We have to score one more goal than Wigan. We're not interested in the other records."

"We're not thinking about this record. We want to win and be champions. That's all."

Wigan manager Roberto Martinez insists his side are not heading to Stamford Bridge simply to play a supporting role in Chelsea's march towards the title.

Martinez knows Wigan's performance will come under scrutiny and while they have nothing of significance left to play for, the Spaniard believes his players' pride will ensure they test Chelsea fully.

"There are no expectations on us," he said. "Everyone expects Chelsea to win and so for us we are going to be together, we need to be really close and help each other and perform."

"We are capable of going to Stamford Bridge and making things difficult."

"For our football club to perform well when the whole football world is watching is going to give us special memories and that is what you play football for," he added.

"Our season is finished but Sunday is something more special than that."

"It is more than a football game for us because we know the whole football world is watching and for the youngsters they could learn more in 90 minutes than they could for two or three years."

He added: "We want to represent Wigan Athletic in the right manner by making sure that we can cause an upset, and that's the approach of the players."

"As a player, to be part of that sort of game where you have a say in the opposition winning the title or not, those are the great memories."

It's heating up

AFP, Rome



The Serie A title run-in between Inter Milan and AS Roma is heating up with just two games left amid accusations and legal threats providing an intriguing back-drop.

Reigning champions Inter entertain mid-table Chievo on Sunday while Roma host Cagliari, who have nothing left to play for.

Then next weekend Inter travel to already relegated Siena while Roma will be at Chievo.

And as if the tension was not already stoked to breaking point during Wednesday's fractious and ill-tempered Italian Cup final between the two scudetto protagonists - which Inter won 1-0 - comments from the champions' coach Jose Mourinho following that match have done nothing to calm the situation.

Mourinho was commenting on a rumour that Siena president Massimo Mezzaroma will give his players the bonus they would have got for escaping relegation if they beat Inter.

"We have two difficult matches left, Chievo and Siena who don't deserve the position they are in," he said.

"If it's true that Siena's president will be happy if they beat us and has promised them the same bonus they would have had for staying up, they would have an extra motivation."

Coming on the back of the fall-out from Roma club captain Francesco Totti's violent kick at Inter teenage forward Mario Balotelli - for which he earned a red card during the Cup final - it is clear there will still be much noise made before the season is up.

Totti came out and accused Balotelli of having insulted and provoked him while the Italian of Ghanaian origin reported that the

veteran had racially abused him.

Roma darling Totti also seemingly criticised his own club for not backing him, saying that he was wrong but had been abandoned since the incident on Wednesday night.

On the pitch both Inter and Roma could be feeling the effects of a bruising encounter with Inter's playmaker Wesley Sneijder a doubt for the weekend and both teams likely to be feeling fatigued.

Their's are not the only crucial encounters on Sunday though as there is a huge game being played in Sicily with mammoth financial implications.

Fifth placed Palermo host fourth-placed

FIXTURES

Sunday

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

Sampdoria with Champions League football at stake.

If Samp, who head Palermo by two points, win they will have qualified for the money-spinning competition, if it's a draw or the Sicilians win it will be decided on the final day of the season.

Samp have a tough home match against Napoli while Palermo will travel to Atalanta.

Depending on how Atalanta fare away to Napoli on Sunday, they may still be fighting for their Serie A lives next weekend.

They are five points from safety and if they fail to win or if Bologna and Lazio both win, they will be down this weekend.



Australian driver Mark Webber races his Red Bull through a corner during the Formula One qualifying session for the Spanish Grand Prix at the Catalunya Circuit on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mexico draw with Ecuador

AFP, East Rutherford

Mexico played to a scoreless draw with Ecuador in a World Cup tuneup for the Aztecs on Friday, the first pro sports event at the new Meadowlands Stadium.

A festive atmosphere at the brand new venue, which will be home to the NFL's New York Giants and Jets, didn't translate onto the pitch, where the play was sloppy.

Mexico coach Javier Aguirre made do without many of his regulars, including attackers Giovanni dos Santos and Carlos Vela.

Their best scoring chance was in the 51st minute, when Ecuador goalkeeper Marcelo Elizaga deflected a blast from Jorge Torres.

Mexico have two more friendlies in the United States as they prepare for next month's World Cup finals in South Africa.

They play Senegal in Chicago on Monday and take on Angola on Thursday in Houston, Texas.

Mexico open the World Cup against hosts South Africa on June 11.

Not only will the crowd be less friendly, the opposition can also be expected to be stronger, as Ecuador, Senegal and Angola all failed to qualify for the World Cup.

Mexico's first-round group also includes France and Uruguay.

Webber blitzes rivals

AFP, Barcelona



Australian Mark Webber stormed to his second pole position this season as Red Bull swept to another front-row lockout in Saturday's qualifying session for Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix.

In the fifth race weekend of the 2010 season, but the first in Europe, the Red Bull team continued to pulverise their rivals with the speed of their cars - Webber clocking a best lap of one minute and 19.995 seconds to take pole.

It was the first sub-1.20 lap of the weekend and left a clear window of a second in speed between him and the best of the rest.

Briton Lewis Hamilton, the 2008 champion, was third fastest for McLaren ahead of his former team-mate and rival two-times champion and home hero Spaniard Fernando Alonso of Ferrari.

Defending champion Jenson Button, struggling with a little understeer, was fifth in the second McLaren and seven-times champion German Michael Schumacher, 41, maintained his revival by taking sixth for Mercedes.

This left him ahead of his 17-years-junior team-mate and compatriot Nico Rosberg for the first time this year after outpacing him in all sessions so far this weekend.

Pole Robert Kubica was seventh for Renault ahead of Rosberg, who was eighth, with Brazilian Felipe Massa ninth in the second Ferrari and Japanese Kamui Kobayashi of Sauber snatching a remarkable 10th on the grid, thanks to a spirited effort in Q2.

Hamilton was out early to record a quick lap for McLaren, but it was not long before the Red Bulls responded with Vettel taking a second out of the Englishman's best lap - and then watching as his ultra-competitive team-mate Webber trimmed his time with a lap in one minute and 20.239.

Alonso caused trouble when he darted out of the Ferrari garage and narrowly avoided a

collision with Rosberg, the German immediately protesting to his team on their radio: 'He should get a penalty for that.'

After overnight rain, the qualifying session began in balmy conditions with a track temperature of 35 degrees Celsius and an air temperature of 20 degrees in front of a decent crowd of more than 70,000 spectators at the Circuit de Catalunya.

The first mini-session Q1 saw the usual men consigned to exit the contest, but it was a surprise that Brazilian veteran Rubens Barrichello failed to make the cut to Q2 in his Williams.

Barrichello was hindered by traffic problems and could only clock the 18th best time to finish ahead of the two Lotus men Italian Jarno Trulli and Finn Heikki Kovalainen, German Timo Glock and Brazilian Luca di Grassi of Virgin Racing and the two Hispania drivers Indian Karun Chandhok and Brazilian Bruno Senna.

In Q2, the Red Bulls began to show their speed and eased clear at the top, but behind them, notably during a furious finale, there were fewer surprises among those fighting for a place in the top-ten shootout.

This session saw the elimination of German Adrian Sutil of Force India in 11th place ahead of Spaniard Pedro de la Rosa for Sauber, German Nico Hulkenberg of Williams and Russian Vitaly Petrov of Renault.

Also out with them went Swiss Sebastien Buemi of Toro Rosso and his team-mate Spaniard Jaime Alguersuari along with Italian Vitantonio Liuzzi of Force India.

It was a minor triumph for German rookie Hulkenberg, 22, after he had suffered a heavy accident and wrecked his car during Friday practice. This had left him to use the team's spare - a car without any of their latest modification, but good enough for him to leave Barrichello, in the up-to-date chassis, embarrassed.

IN BRIEF

Kewell might miss WC

AFP, Sydney

Australia's Harry Kewell is in doubt for next month's World Cup with a recurring groin injury, his Turkish club coach Johan Neeskens has said, it was reported Saturday.

Neeskens, the Galata - saray assistant coach, said it would be "very difficult" for the injury-plagued Kewell to overcome the groin injury in time for the tournament in South Africa.

Neeskens, who assisted head coach Guus Hiddink in Australia's campaign at the 2006 World Cup, has confirmed Kewell will miss Galatasaray's remaining two matches this season after aggravating the groin injury at training this week.

"Right now, I think it's going to be very difficult," Neeskens told The Sydney Morning Herald.

"Stage by stage he got better but then he fell back again. He chose to stop practising and take treatment but sometimes after three or four days and he stops treatment and starts training again, it comes back again."

"I don't know if he really is to make the World Cup at this rate. First of all it's up to himself and the doctors in Australia. If he cannot participate, it's a big loss for Australia."

MU after Lloris

INTERNET, undated

Olympique Lyon goalkeeper Hugo Lloris is a top target for Manchester United.

Despite Edwin van der Sar signing a new 12-month contract, the Daily Mail says United still intend to bring in Lloris from Lyon.

The France international's arrival is expected to see Ben Foster move on from Old Trafford this summer.

Abramovich wants Pato

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is willing to bankroll a bid for AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato.

The Times says Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti held a meeting with senior executives before the club's player-of-the-year dinner on Thursday night and pinpointed the Brazilian as the player he would most like to add to his squad.

Chelsea have already made an informal inquiry to Milan, with whom they enjoy a close working relationship, about Pato's availability and have not been discouraged.

The Italian club are beset by financial difficulties and, given their ageing squad, have concluded that selling Pato could be the best way to raise funds.



2010 WORLD CUP CORNER

Carra set for return

AFP, London

Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher could be set for a dramatic return to international football by joining Fabio Capello's squad for South Africa, according to press reports on Saturday.

The 32-year-old Anfield stalwart walked away from the England setup three years ago, after venting his frustrations at his lack of appearances.

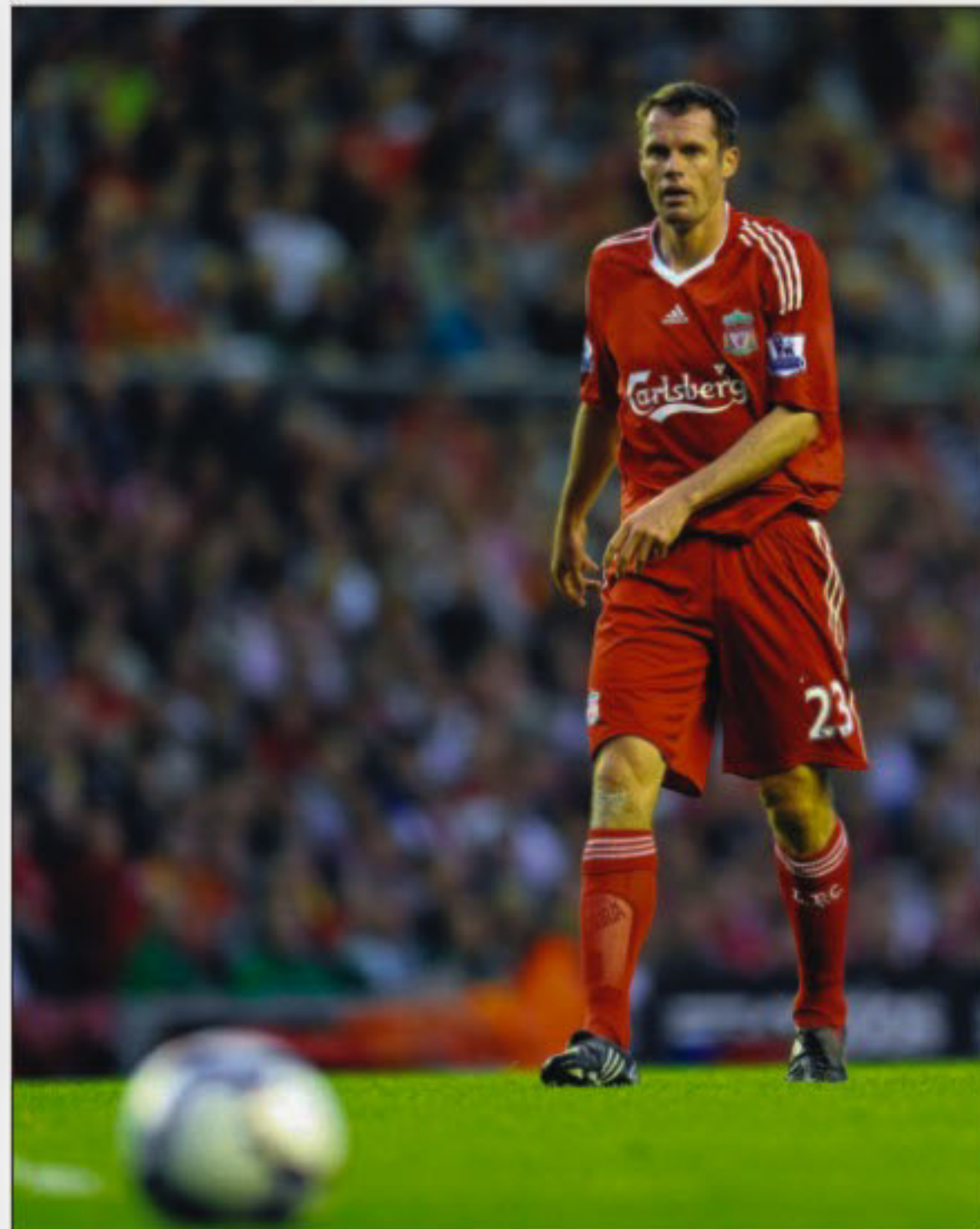
He won the last of his 34 caps against Brazil in May 2007, but was already harbouring serious doubts over his future, having been consistently overlooked, first by Sven Goran Eriksson, then Steve McClaren.

Carragher has repeatedly said that has no regrets about that decision, but Capello reportedly never gave up hope that he would change his mind in an emergency.

That emergency appears to have arrived with Joleon Lescott and Wes Brown major doubts after missing the latter part of the season through injury, Rio Ferdinand only just recovered from a groin problem and Ledley King unable to train due to chronic knee trouble.

papers claimed that Capello, who is due to name his 30-man provisional squad on Tuesday, is set to include Carragher. It is also believed King could be named in the squad.

Two training camps in Austria and friendlies against Mexico and Japan offer the perfect chance to see how both men fit in to the Italian's planning. The final 23-man squad is announced on June 1.



JAMIE CARRAGHER

Ghana pick Essien

AFP, Accra

Ghana coach Milovan Rajevac on Friday unveiled a 30-man squad for a May 24-29 training camp in France ahead of the World Cup finals.

Four players, including three goalkeepers, who play club football in Ghana are included in the squad alongside Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien, currently recuperating from a knee injury.

Portsmouth's Kevin-Prince Boateng was also named in the squad, having chosen to represent the country of his birth despite previously playing for Germany at youth level.

His final inclusion for the June 11-July 11 tournament in South Africa depends, however, on a green light from world governing body FIFA.

Ghana, making their second World Cup appearance after that in 2006, have been drawn in Group D for football's showpiece event, and will play Serbia (June 13), Australia (June 19) and Germany (June 23) in their pool matches.

A black man's game

AFP, Johannesburg

In the packed stands of South African football stadiums, it's almost impossible to spot a white face, a legacy of the white apartheid government's isolation of the sport as a black game.

Despite efforts to create a "rainbow nation" in the 16 years since the end of white-minority rule, local lovers of the game say the 2010 World Cup -- running from June 11 to July 11 -- is unlikely to integrate the stands.

"Soccer is a racial enclave here," said Joe Latakomo, a sports journalist who worked under apartheid and wrote a book called "Mzansi Magic" (Southern Magic) on South African football history.

"The World Cup will create an awareness of soccer not being a bad thing. But it won't get white parents to encourage their kids to play soccer," he said.

"You have to build a whole new generation of supporters," said Matthew Booth, a defender on the national side and one of the country's few prominent white footballers.

In the 1960s, local clubs such as Cape Town City FC and Hellenic drew tens of thousands of white fans, and some of Durban's best footballers came from the Indian community.

Even today European teams on tour draw large audiences, but the white clubs have disappeared. The national side Bafana Bafana ("The Boys" in Zulu) has no Indian players.

The political machinations of the apartheid government confined football to the townships, black ghettos on the outskirts of cities to house the labourers who fuelled the segregated economy.

The white South African Football Association (SAFA) was banned from interna-

tional sport by FIFA in 1976, after a 14-year suspension.

SAFA pushed to break up the multi-racial federation, embarrassed by its appeals to international bodies, by directing sponsorships and facilities toward an exclusively black federation.

When the white regime began to crumble under international sanctions and internal unrest, and the country slowly moved toward full democracy, white clubs began fielding integrated teams.

Clubs that had been built around a specific fan base -- the Greek and Portuguese communities, for example -- lost their traditional identities as whites shunned integrated football.

All formerly white-only teams are now extinct, sold off to black businessmen or simply gone out of business.

Today, white South Africans have all but abandoned local football in favour of rugby and cricket.

"There is a certain element of fear. A lot of these stadiums are in townships. Perhaps people are not feeling comfortable going there," said Booth, who is married to a former Miss South Africa finalist born in the township of Soweto.

He attributes his own love of the game to his father, who was also a footballer. "At school we were forced to play rugby and cricket. That's what white boys preferred to play," he said.

Most traditionally white schools still do not offer football, one reason for the racial divide in sport.

"It goes back to the history of soccer not being played in white schools," said Latakomo. "That is the tragedy of our soccer development."