

Van Gaal throws down the gauntlet

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich boss Louis van Gaal said Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho should take note of his side's performance in the German Cup final ahead of the Champions League showdown with Inter Milan.

Bundesliga champions Bayern beat 10-man Werder Bremen 4-0 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on Saturday to take the second step on the road to the treble with the Champions League final set to take place in Madrid on Saturday.

Now Van Gaal says Inter coach Mourinho should take note of the high standard of football from his side in arguably their best display of the season.

"We produced an impressive performance against a very good team, it was perhaps one of our best games of the season," said Dutch coach Van Gaal.

"Our victory was well deserved. On Wednesday we will start our preparations for the Champions League final."

"Jose Mourinho will have to have seen that we can produce some good football."

Bayern are bidding for their first treble and with the second hurdle cleared, defender Philipp Lahm says Munich's performance showed how important winning the domestic cup was as they prepared for Madrid.

"The result shows how important this game was to us," said Bayern defender Philipp Lahm. "It has been nice to get the double, but the treble would be better."

"We still have business to attend to, but we certainly want to win the treble that was clear to see today."

Bayern boss Uli Hoeness said the German giants could now travel to Madrid to face Inter with nothing to lose.

"I am extremely proud of the team and of the whole club," said Bayern's current president Hoeness with Bayern hunting their first Champions League title since 2001.

"The team is playing better than in 2001. The great thing is that we are playing with real mental strength."

"Now we have won the double, so we have nothing to lose in Madrid. We will do everything we can to make the impossible happen."



Bayern Munich players celebrate after winning the German Cup with a 4-0 drubbing of Werder Bremen in the final at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Best season of my life'

Football

AFP, London

Didier Drogba insists Chelsea's Premier League and FA Cup double triumph means this season has been the best of his career.

Drogba scored the only goal of the game in Saturday's FA Cup final against Portsmouth to secure a first ever double for the west London club.

Drogba's goal was his 37th of the campaign in all competitions and came six days after his hat-trick helped Chelsea clinch the league title with an 8-0 victory over Wigan.

That treble ensured the Ivory Coast international won the Golden Boot award after netting 29 league goals. And his winner in the 1-0 victory against Pompey was his sixth goal in six appearances at Wembley.

"This season is the best of my career because I have never won a double," Drogba said. "To be champions last week and now to win the FA Cup at Wembley, it is the stuff of dreams."

"This is the best one because we achieved so many things together as a team and after that trophies came, but really it is because as a team we were so good, I had a chance to be Golden Boot."

"It's something very important for the team and me as well. I had the chance again to score in that stadium again and I'm really happy because we won the double and this is something big in England."

"To be the first team to have done that for Chelsea is unbelievable."

Chelsea dominated the game with Drogba hitting the woodwork twice in the first half, while Frank Lampard, Salomon Kalou and John Terry suffered a similar fate.

Relegated Portsmouth started the game as rank outsiders but had a great chance to take control of the game when Kevin-Prince Boateng saw his penalty saved by Petr Cech.

"We knew it was going to be hard, we don't

really think all the chances we created would hit the post or the crossbar but that's part of the game," added Drogba.

Now the forward is looking ahead to the World Cup where Ivory Coast face a daunting group that includes Brazil, Portugal and North Korea.

But Drogba believes Chelsea's success will provide him with the perfect springboard ahead of the finals in South Africa.

He said: "It's the best way to go to the World Cup and be confident - you know it's better to work with a big smile on the face than to be down."

Meanwhile, John Terry relished his role as the first Chelsea captain to hoist both league and cup trophies in the same season.

"To go down in the club's history, we're delighted," Terry said. "It's been a great season and this was just the icing on the cake."

"We were determined to win it with the incentive of going down in the club's history and we have done that."

"We hit the woodwork five or six times in the first half and we were unfortunate one of them didn't fall in."

"The message at half-time was just to keep it going and with the quality we have got it will open up and we will get a

goal.

"With Didier and Frank Lampard, players who can create something from nothing, we knew we just had to keep doing what we were doing."

"We felt we were in control of the game, bossing the game, and they didn't really have too many chances."

Like Drogba, Terry is now looking forward to the World Cup and he is convinced Chelsea's success can benefit England.

"I think it's great," he added. "Normally there is a break of two to three weeks before we go off. But we are fresh, we have played a lot of games but it's important we keep doing it."

"We will meet up on Wednesday and we feel good, especially with the momentum of coming off the back of winning the Premier League and winning here."



DIDIER DROGBA

IN BRIEF

Ronaldinho not bitter

AFP, Rome

Former world player of the year Ronaldinho insisted on Saturday that he was not bitter at being overlooked by Brazil coach Dunga for the World Cup.

"My response was here on the pitch, but if he doesn't pick me for the national team it's his choice and I respect that," said Ronaldinho, who scored twice in AC Milan's 3-0 Serie A win over Juventus on Saturday.

"I've done many good things this season and I don't want to compare myself to others to see if I've done much more or much less."

Ballack waits on scans

SOCCERNET

Michael Ballack could still be fit to captain Germany at the World Cup finals despite suffering an ankle injury in Saturday's FA Cup final victory over Portsmouth.

Ballack was substituted in the first half at Wembley after being on the receiving end of a strong tackle from Portsmouth midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng, who was booked following the incident.

Ballack looked in some pain following the challenge and after attempting to carry on, was forced off in the 44th minute when being replaced by Juliano Belletti.

Coincidentally, Boateng has been named in Ghana's 30-man preliminary squad for the finals in South Africa and could well face Germany, the country of his birth, in Group D.

But Ballack may be present at the World Cup after Carlo Ancelotti confirmed the injury is not serious, and should not prevent the midfielder travelling to South Africa.

"We don't think it is a bad injury," Ancelotti said. "We hope he will be ready for the World Cup."

Ballack was more cautious on his chances of making the World Cup, saying: "It's not that good at the moment, but I have to wait until tomorrow for the scan, and then we will know more. I went off and couldn't carry on, but it's not that bad."

Bayern expect full house

AFP, Munich

Up to 70,000 fans are expected at Munich's Allianz Arena to watch Saturday's Champions League final between Bayern Munich and Inter Milan on giant screens, the German club said.

The final is being held at Real Madrid's Bernabeu Stadium, but will be screened live at Bayern's stadium and all of the free tickets were snapped up within a few hours of being available on Friday.

Bayern, who secured their 22nd German league title last week and added the German Cup with a 4-0 win over Werder Bremen on Saturday, are now on course for their first ever treble.

Bayern last won the Champions League title in 2001 and are enjoying a stellar season under new coach Louis van Gaal.

Bayern turn on the style

Football

AFP, Berlin

Franck Ribery grabbed one of the goals as Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich stayed on course for the treble with a 4-0 win over 10-man Werder Bremen in the German Cup final on Saturday.

Ribery scored his first goal for nearly two months after a difficult few weeks for the 27-year-old who is due to hear on Tuesday if he is banned for next Saturday's Champions League final against Inter Milan.

The French international has kept a low profile since being questioned by police over his involvement in the underage call-girl scandal which has rocked his national team.

And he was handed a three-match ban by UEFA for being sent off in the Champions League semi-final first-leg win over Lyon which looks set to keep him out of the Champions League showpiece in Madrid.

Ribery's appeal will be heard at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Tuesday.

Having won the Bundesliga last weekend with a 3-1 against Hertha Berlin,

Bayern were back at the capital city's Olympic Stadium for the second phase of their treble quest and Louis van Gaal's claimed their 15th German Cup crown.

After Dutch winger Arjen Robben hit a first-half penalty, Croatia striker Ivica Olic stabbed home the second before Ribery hit the third to settle the tie before Bremen captain Torsten Frings was sent off on 77 minutes.

Having earlier been heavily fouled by Frings, Germany midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger had the last laugh with the final goal to seal the rout on 83 minutes.

Robben, who has scored 23 goals this season including 16 in the Bundesliga, nearly opened the scoring after three minutes when he smashed in a long-range shot and Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese just managed to tip the ball over the bar.

But Bremen attacked on eight minutes when Claudio Pizarro beat the Munich defence before Frings fully tested goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt.

Bayern captain Mark van Bommel earned himself a yellow card after just 11 minutes when he scythed down Tim Borowski, sending the midfielder tumbling to the sodden turf in a wave of spray after heavy rain in the German capital.

The opening was played at a frantic pace and having gone close twice, Robben opened the scoring on 35 minutes when Germany defender Per Mertesacker handled the ball and the Dutchman planted his penalty kick in the bottom right-hand corner.

Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf switched attacking midfielder Aaron Hunt for striker Hugo Almeida immediately after the break and he created two chances in the first two minutes of the second-half.

But Bayern put one hand on the cup on 51 minutes when Olic stabbed home his shot after Mertesacker headed on to Munich's Daniel van Buyten whose pass to Olic was drilled into the back of the net.

Ribery made sure of the league and cup double when he took a pass from Van Bommel and, having gone one-on-one with Wiese, drilled his shot past the Bremen goalkeeper into the empty net.

Frings was shown a second yellow card after he clattered Germany midfielder Schweinsteiger to earn the red on 77 minutes.

Schweinsteiger had the last laugh when he controlled a chip and slid his shot around Wiese for the fourth on 83 minutes.

Mallorca's despair

REUTERS, Madrid



For two sweet minutes, Real Mallorca dared to dream of Champions League soccer next season - until the cruellest twist of fate snatched it away.

After beating Espanyol 2-0 in their final match of the season, the players watched the end of Sevilla's game at Almeria on their stadium's

big screen.

With 10-man Sevilla locked at 2-2 and a huge bottle of champagne ready to be cracked open, it suddenly went horribly wrong as Sevilla snatched a 94th-minute winner.

Gathered around the centre circle in anticipation, Real Mallorca's players sunk to their knees in disbelief as Sevilla took the fourth and final Champions League spot.

Financially troubled Mallorca had begun Saturday a point behind Sevilla in fifth place with the two games being played simultaneously.

"I would have preferred Sevilla to have arrived at the 90-minute mark winning their game," Mallorca coach Gregorio Manzano told reporters.

"That way we would have finished with the feeling that we could never have achieved it."

"The games started at the same time but finished with two minutes difference, and these two agonising minutes of happiness turned into sadness at the end."

"It's the most unjust thing that could have happened to us all season," added Manzano.

Manzano transformed Mallorca into the surprise package of the season and they spent all 38 weeks in the top six of La Liga.

This despite a financial and institutional crisis raging through the early part of the campaign, and with a squad shorn of leading lights Jurado, Juan Arango and David Navarro last summer.

Mallorca last appeared in the Champions League in the 2001-02 season and a return would have helped ease their cash problems and also perhaps made it easier to hang on to the sought-after Manzano, whose contract runs out in June.

after being denied an unlikely place in the Champions League.

"Two minutes where our players, standing on the pitch, watched Sevilla score the goal and you can't describe the feelings. Two cursed minutes."

Manzano insisted fifth place and a berth in next season's Europa League was something the modest club should still be proud of.

"It shouldn't be a night of despair," he said. "We have written our name in capital letters on the podium for the 2009-10 season."

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Lyon finish on high

AFP, Paris



Lyon and Auxerre sealed prized tickets for next season's Champions League as Marseille capped their French title triumph with a 2-0 victory over Grenoble Saturday.

With Marseille already crowned champions and Grenoble, Boulogne and Le Mans relegated, the only issues to be settled on the final day of league action involved qualification for Europe.

And those stakes set the stage for plenty of drama with Lyon, Lille and Auxerre trading places throughout the night as they fought respective battles for one of the two remaining spots giving entry to Europe's premier club competition.

In the end Lyon, who beat Le Mans 2-0, finished second behind Marseille with Auxerre, 2-1 winners at Sochaux, pipping Lille, beaten 2-1 at Lorient, to the third and final Champions League place.

Meanwhile, two of the league's biggest names -- Bordeaux and Paris Saint Germain -- saw their respective campaigns fizzle out.

PSG won the French Cup only two weeks ago with a 1-0 extra-time win over Monaco, but any sense of achievement was blunted by a humbling 3-1 defeat at home to an impressive Montpellier side.

Montpellier held on to fifth place, and with it a place in next season's Europa League.

Last season's champions Bordeaux will miss out on Europe after their 4-3 defeat away to Lens.

Lille, sitting second before the match with a one-point lead on Lyon, had taken a step towards cementing their place in the Champions League when Ricardo Costa opened the scoring in the 33rd minute.

minute winner for Auxerre, his second of the game, dropped the northerners two places to fourth and in the Europa League.

At Lyon the prospect of playing already relegated Le Mans held no particular fears for the Stade Gerland faithful.

Still, when Bafetimbi Gomis fired home for Lyon on the stroke of half-time, a goal which looked suspiciously off-side, it naturally caused uproar among the Le Mans players.

They failed to react with goals, however, and Miralem Pjanic put the result beyond doubt in the 68th minute when he doubled Lyon's lead.

Marseille meanwhile finished the season with the league and cup double and already looking forward to next season.

Didier Deschamps' side opened the scoring thanks to a Mamadou Niang penalty in the 41st minute, and fellow forward Hatem Ben Arfa signed his season off with a superbly-taken strike in the 89th minute.

RESULTS

Paris SG 1 (Erding 79) Montpellier 3 (Dernis 16, 58, Compan 47)

Lens 4 (Maoulida 21, 64, S. Sow 37, Jemaa 57-pen) Bordeaux 3 (Wendel 41-pen, 87-pen, Bedimo 50-og)

Marseille 2 (Niang 41-pen, Ben Arfa 90+1) Grenoble 0

Lorient 2 (Gameiro 37, Jouffre 66) Lille 1 (Ricardo Costa 33)

Nancy 1 (Hadji 39) Valenciennes 1 (Angoua 65)

Nice 1 (L. Remy 2) Saint-Etienne 1 (Riviere 69)

Sochaux 1 (Brown 46) Auxerre 2 (Hengbart 5, 89)

Lyon 2 (Gomis 45+1, Pjanic 68) Le Mans 0

Toulouse 0 Monaco 0

Boulogne 1 (Thill 20-pen) Rennes 0

RESULTS

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Muniain 20, Martinez 77) Deportivo La Coruna 0

Aleatico Madrid 0 Getafe 3 (Soldado 13, 53, Parejo 86)

Real Zaragoza 3 (Eliseu 3, Colunga 29, Pulido 35) Villarreal 3 (Cazorla 40, 56, Rossi 77)

LATEST

Inter win Scudetto

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan secured a fifth straight Serie A title after Diego Milito scored the only goal in a 1-0 win at Siena on Sunday as AS Roma finished second, two points behind, despite their 2-0 win at Chievo.

It was Inter's 18th Scudetto crown and keeps Jose Mourinho's team on course for a historic treble, having already won the Italian Cup and with the Champions League final against Bayern Munich to come in Madrid on May 22.

Roma had the chance to be champions but they had to win and hope Inter didn't.

They briefly dreamed of lifting the title when they opened a 2-0 lead by half-time at Chievo, but Milito's 57th-minute strike in Siena settled Inter's nerves.

Meanwhile in Verona, Roma captain Francesco Totti was wasting a glut of chances.

He hit the outside of the post with a fierce right foot shot and then had a double opportunity, but goalkeeper Lorenzo Succi kicked away his left foot shot while his effort with the right from the follow-up was cleared off the line.

An inviting cross from Rodrigo Taddei then flashed across the six-yard box but neither Mirko Vucinic nor Totti could get a touch, the ball even passing between Totti's legs.

Back in Siena centre-back Walter Samuel's firm header was punched clear by Curci with Milito loitering.

And after Inter keeper Julio Cesar saved a rasping Massimo Maccarone effort, Balotelli hit the bar with an acrobatic volley from Maicon's cross.

But as the half wore to a close, Roma took a decisive advantage as Vucinic volleyed home Daniele De Rossi's lofted through ball on 39 minutes with Chievo's

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