

Slow start for Roma

AFP, Rome



AS Roma coach Claudio Ranieri was reflecting on mixed emotions following his side's 0-0 home draw with newly promoted Cesena in their Serie A opener.

On the same day that last season's league runners-up failed to beat a team that two years ago were plying their trade in the third tier of Italian football, Roma signed Argentina centre-back Nicolas Burdisso from Inter Milan.

And Ranieri described Burdisso's signing, for eight million euros, as the final piece in his defensive jigsaw.

"I had expressly asked for him to complete our defensive resources, now I'm happy," said Ranieri before reflecting on his team's nearest rivals, Inter Milan's European Super Cup defeat to Atletico Madrid.

"We already knew they were beatable but we have to work and think about ourselves because we must improve."

As for the game against Cesena, Ranieri admitted that wasn't what he expected.

"We weren't dreaming about starting the season with a draw, we wanted to win and maybe we were too eager, but we have to accept this draw."

"We were too ruffled, monotonous. Too often we gave Cesena time to turn around and get back and they did well in closing down the spaces."

"Unfortunately we didn't have players getting inside and finishing things off, too often we were flat."

Both Mirko Vucinic and Jeremy Menez had several chances but neither could find a clinical finish.

"They can't be the only two given crosses, they did what they could do but of course they're two great players and they could have done better," added the coach.

One of the main reasons, though, that the score remained scoreless was former Roma goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli.

He was the first choice goalkeeper when Roma last won the title in 2001 but now holds the honour of being the oldest stopper in Serie A.

"We didn't expect Cesena to be so well organised nor a goalkeeper who at 41 (Antonioli will turn 41 on September 14) could make saves like those," said Roma's Chilean midfielder David Pizarro.

"We're disappointed, we gave everything, we created clear opportunities but for us the goal was blocked."

Antonioli made crucial stops in the first half from Daniele De Rossi and from Vucinic after the break.

Roma captain Francesco Totti felt that his team would have won with a bit of luck.

"Every match in this championship is tough, there are no weak opponents but we were unlucky against Cesena," he said.

"We had many chances to score but every which way we must and we can improve."

RESULTS

Udinese 0 Genoa 1 (Mesto 81)
Roma 0 Cesena 0

Milan's Ib-Ro-Pa

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri said on Saturday that the acquisition of Zlatan Ibrahimovic would give him the best strike-force in Europe.

Milan are in negotiations with Barcelona to bring the big Swede back to Italy, just a year after he left Milan's arch rivals Inter.

And if they can complete the transfer, Allegri believes a trident of Ibrahimovic, Ronaldinho and Alexandre Pato would be the best in Europe.

"Yes, I think it would be," he said. "And when you add (Marco) Borriello, (Filippo) Inzaghi and (Klaas-Jan) Huntelaar, who is still with us, they represent attacking resources that would

make any coach in the world jealous."

However, Allegri insisted that the whole Ibrahimovic affair would not distract his side's preparations for Sunday's Serie A opener against newly-promoted Lecce.

"Right now the most important thing is the match against Lecce. With any luck we'll celebrate Ibrahimovic's arrival with a victory," he said before giving a message to his current forwards.

"The other strikers shouldn't be worried, I have faith in them. Borriello had a great season (last season), there are many games and it's impossible to always play with the same XI."

However, Allegri did suggest that should Ibrahimovic arrive, Huntelaar would be likely to leave.

"I haven't yet thought about Huntelaar. For now he's with us and Ibra isn't. I'll confront the problem when it arrives."



AS Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi (R) reacts after a missed opportunity during their Serie A opener against Cesena at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Saturday.

Milan tie up Ibrahimovic

AFP, Rome

AC Milan has signed Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic from Barcelona for 24 million euros, the Italian club announced on Saturday.

The former Juventus and Inter Milan striker will join initially on a year-long loan before signing a permanent deal at the end of the season.

He is due to undergo a medical on Monday, after which he will sign a four-year contract.

"I'm delighted that everything has been resolved for the best, even if the situation was not easy," said Ibrahimovic.

"Now I will return to Milan but for a different team, to Inter; things are going forwards."

"Milan are one of the best teams in the world because of their team and their tradition. With (Alexandre) Pato and Ronaldinho we have a fantastic strike-force, now it's down to us."

"I think Milan's fans will have fun in the stadium with us three."

"This situation, which was created at Barcelona, has given me a lot of adrenaline and now my dream is to win everything with Milan."

Ibrahimovic was Barca's marquee signing a year ago but was considered a disappointment in his first season in Spain and essentially became surplus to requirements in Catalunya following the 40-million-euro acquisition of Spain forward David Villa from Valencia.

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani, who had been in Barcelona since Wednesday to try to find an agreement, explained how the deal works.

"We've come to an agreement with Barcelona for the loan with the right to buy for 24 million euros, which will be paid in three eight-million-euro payments over the next three seasons (after this one)," he said.

"Ibrahimovic will sign a four-year deal which will be ratified after his medical on Monday."

Pirlo added to Italy squad

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli has recalled AC Milan midfielder Andrea Pirlo to his squad for next month's Euro 2012 qualifiers against Estonia and Faroe Islands.

But the squad does not feature a single player from Inter Milan, the reigning Serie A and Champions League title holders.

They play away to Estonia on September 3 before hosting the Faroes on September 7 in Florence.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Antonio Mirante (Parma), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo), Emiliano Viviano (Bologna)

Defenders:

Luca Antonelli (Parma), Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus), Cesare Bovo (Palermo), Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Lorenzo De Silvestri (Fiorentina), Daniele Gastaldello (Sampdoria), Cristian Molinaro (Stuttgart)

Midfielders:

Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Andrea Lazzari (Cagliari), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan), Simone Pepe (Juventus)

Attackers:

Antonio Cassano (Sampdoria), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria), Fabio Quagliarella

England miss Blues duo

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea pair Frank Lampard and John Terry will both miss England's Euro 2012 qualifiers against Bulgaria and Switzerland next month after being ruled out by their club due to injury.

Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti revealed after the Blues' 2-0 defeat of Stoke that Lampard will undergo a hernia operation next week and the London side later released a statement saying Terry had glute and hamstring problems.

"John has spoken personally to the England management team, and Chelsea and England medical staff have also been in touch," read the Chelsea statement.

"All are agreed that John's injuries, that he has carried since pre-season, would benefit from a period of rest and rehabilitation."

Adding to England coach Fabio Capello's selection headache, strikers Peter Crouch and Bobby Zamora both sustained injuries in action for their clubs on Saturday that make them doubtful for the qualifying matches.

Crouch suffered a suspected broken rib in Tottenham's 1-0 defeat at home to Wigan, while Zamora left the pitch early in Fulham's 2-2 draw at Blackpool after picking up a knock.

Central midfielder Lampard was forced off in the second half of Chelsea's win against Stoke at Stamford Bridge as a result of the hernia injury and will undergo an operation on Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

The 32-year-old is expected to be out for a fortnight, meaning he will be unavailable for the start of England's bid to reach the Euro 2012 finals.

Ancelotti said: "It is a very easy surgery but he has started to feel pain and he needs to have the operation."

"We have already spoken with the national team to explain the situation."

England host Bulgaria at Wembley on September 3 and travel to Switzerland for their second group match on September 7.

Spurs manager Harry Redknapp, meanwhile, fears Crouch may have broken a bone, which would rule him out of Friday's match against Bulgaria and the game in Switzerland four days later.

Chelsea set the pace

AFP, London



Chelsea maintained their superb start to the season with a 2-0 win over Stoke on Saturday that kept the Premier League champions on top of the table.

But Arsenal and Manchester United also won and moved into Chelsea's shoulders in second and third place respectively.

Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea side have been in fine form in the opening weeks, romping to successive 6-0 wins over West Brom and Wigan, and Stoke were unable to halt their momentum at Stamford Bridge.

Florent Malouda struck in the first half and Didier Drogba converted a late penalty to extend Chelsea's 100 percent start.

Frank Lampard wasted a chance to give Chelsea an early lead when his penalty was saved by Thomas Sorensen after Ryan Shawcross fouled Malouda.

Lampard's miss didn't hinder Chelsea for long as France winger Malouda opened the scoring in the 32nd minute with a fine strike

from John Terry's pass.

Ivory Coast striker Drogba drove home a 77th minute spot-kick after Sorensen fouled Nicolas Anelka.

"It wasn't our best performance but it was an important result," Ancelotti said.

"I am happy because we won, we didn't concede a goal, we kept a clean sheet we maintained our position at the top of the table."

Manchester United moved to within two points of Chelsea after Wayne Rooney's first goal since March set up a 3-0 win over struggling West Ham at Old Trafford.

Rooney had gone 13 matches without scoring since netting against Bayern Munich last season, but the England striker put United ahead in the 33rd minute.

Ryan Giggs was fouled by Jonathan Spector in the penalty area and Rooney sent Robert Green the wrong way from the spot.

United had squandered the lead twice in their draw at Fulham last weekend, but Sir Alex Ferguson's team went further ahead this time in the 50th minute when Portugal winger Nani collected Rooney's pass and lashed his shot past Green.

Dimitar Berbatov condemned West Ham to a third successive defeat when he volleyed home Nani's cross in the 69th minute.

Ferguson saluted Rooney's display and said: "The performance was the thing that stood out for me. He's not had a lot of football lately with a virus that has

midweek win over Young Boys.

But they seemed to be suffering a hangover from that result as Rodallega fired home a deflected effort from Hendry Thomas's pass in the 80th minute to seal the points.

It was Wigan's first goal of the season after two successive heavy defeats and went some way to avenging last season's 9-1 defeat in the corresponding fixture.

Andy Carroll underlined his growing reputation with Newcastle's equaliser in their 1-1 draw at Wolves.

Chris Hughton's Newcastle had scored six against Aston Villa last weekend, but they fell behind at Molineux in the 43rd minute when Sylvan Ebanks-Blake converted Jelle van Damme's pass.

England Under-21 striker Carroll, the hat-trick star of that Villa demolition, netted Newcastle's equaliser in the 62nd minute with a powerful header from Joey Barton's free-kick.

Fulham rescued a 2-2 draw against Blackpool as Dickson Etuhi's late equaliser denied the hosts a win in their first top-flight game at Bloomfield Road for 39 years.

RESULTS

Blackburn 1 (M. Diouf 27) Arsenal 2 (Walcott 20, Arshavin 51)
Blackpool 2 (Pantsil 71-og, Varney 76)
Fulham 2 (Zamora 35, Etuhi 87)
Chelsea 2 (Malouda 32, Drogba 77-pen) Stoke 0
Man Utd 3 (Rooney 33-pen, Nani 50, Berbatov 69) West Ham 0
Tottenham 0 Wigan 1 (Rodallega 80)
Wolverhampton 1 (Ebanks-Blake 43)

L'pool rope in Meireles

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool have acted quickly to fill the void left by the departure of Javier Mascherano and Alberto Aquilani, announcing on Sunday the capture of Porto's Raul Meireles.

The 27-year-old midfielder has joined Roy Hodgson's side on a 14 million euro, four-year deal, a statement on Liverpool's official website reported.

His arrival at Anfield follows Mascherano's transfer to Barcelona and Aquilani's loan move to Juventus.

Meireles, quoted in The Sunday Express, said: "Roy Hodgson was key to me coming here because he worked so hard to sign me."

"I am Meireles and not Mascherano and that will be clear to the fans. I hope one day the Liverpool fans will remember me for being successful."

Meireles has won four titles with Porto and been capped 38 times by Portugal, playing in all four of his country's games at the World Cup in South Africa.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba lines up a free-kick in their Premier League match against Stoke City at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

Sevilla start well

AFP, Madrid



Sevilla bounced back from their Champions League failure with a 4-1 win over promoted Levante on Saturday to ease the pressure on coach Antonio Alvarez.

A brace from Frenchman Abdoulay Konko and further goals from Alvaro Negredo and Renato gave Sevilla and Alvarez a much-needed boost after the disappointment of losing to Braga in the Champions League qualifier four days ago.

Sevilla got off to a nightmare start with debutant Luca Cigarini handballing to concede a penalty after just 10 minutes and Ruben Suarez made no mistake from the spot.

Alvarez looked a worried man on the touch-line but his side replied two minutes later with Konko bundling home and Negredo then put them ahead through a 28th minute penalty.

Konko grabbed his second on 62 minutes and Brazilian Renato bagged a fourth late

on to give the visitors a convincing win.

In other matches, Valencia showed there was life after David Villa as a quick-fire Joaquin brace helped the Champions League hopefuls to an opening 3-1 win over Malaga on Saturday.

Winger Joaquin, 29, inher-

RESULTS

Hercules 0 Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 46)
Malaga 1 (Fernandez 44) Valencia 3 (Aduziz 9, Joaquin 70, 74)
Levante 1 (Suarez 10-pen) Sevilla 4 (Konko 12, 62, Negredo 28-pen,

ited Villa's number seven shirt following the striker's 40-million-euro move to Barcelona and he took on the goalscoring mantle by scoring twice in four minutes to seal victory for Valencia.

Earlier, Spanish World Cup winner Fernando Llorente scored the decisive goal as Bilbao won 1-0 at promoted Hercules in the curtain-raiser to the 2010/11 La Liga season.