

Raul fires Schalke

AFP, Berlin



Former Spanish international great Raul scored a brace as Bundesliga strugglers Schalke 04 finally ended their jinx at the Veltins-Arena with a 3-0 home defeat of St. Pauli on Friday.

Schalke finished runners-up last season but have made a disastrous start to the 2010 campaign with one win in their first 10 games, prior to this victory, leaving them hovering precariously around the relegation zone.

Raul moved to the German side in July on a two-year deal after making over 500 appearances for Real Madrid, and has come in for criticism in recent weeks despite scoring a brace in the Champions league against Hapoel Tel Aviv last month.

Felix Magath's side went into this match with plenty of pressure -- it is Schalke's worst ever start to the season -- but showed enough composure and determination to keep their first clean sheet since February 2010.

Raul opened the scoring on 14 minutes, with Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, a former teammate of Raul's at Real Madrid, doubling the lead in the 53rd minute.

Raul put the match well beyond reach of St. Pauli with his second goal of the game nine minutes from regulation time.

"It's a relief to win at home and I'm very happy for Raul, who as well as scoring two goals showed he can play alongside Huntelaar," said Magath.

Central defender Christoph Metzelder, who has been a target for some Schalke fans in recent weeks, was more than happy at having conceded no goals.

"I hope this will be the start of better things for us. In any case, it has given us a confidence boost and showed that our defence is becoming a bit more solid," said Metzelder.

Schalke were second from bottom and moved up two places to 15th on nine points, 16 adrift of league leaders Borussia Dortmund. St. Pauli remain in 13th on 13 points.

German champions Bayern Munich are seventh, 10 points off the pace, ahead of their away match Saturday to Borussia Moenchengladbach.



PHOTO: AFP

Schalke's veteran striker Raul is over the moon after scoring against St. Pauli during their Bundesliga clash in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

Evra eyeing Real move?

SOCCERNET

Patrice Evra could be set to leave Manchester United in the summer as reports suggest that he is keen to move to Real Madrid amid concerns over investment in the squad.

Evra, who joined United for £5.5 million from Monaco in 2006, has a current deal that ends in the summer of 2012 and Madrid have been monitoring his situation as coach Jose Mourinho continues his search for a world-class left-back.

The Glazer family are set to invest in United over the summer - possibly to the tune of £50 million - but, after the Wayne Rooney contract saga, Evra has admitted to friends that he is keen to move on.

"Patrice originally wanted to leave in January but now he is happy to sign a new contract and leave at the end of the season," a United source told Goal.com. "He is concerned about where the club are heading and is attracted by the possibility of playing for Real, a club he really admires."

Evra claimed during the Rooney saga that "if one player doesn't trust the others he should not play in the team," but it now seems that the Frenchman could become the next United player in the spotlight.

The source added: "Evra was the most angry when Rooney said he was going to leave and criticised the quality of the squad but that doesn't mean he swears blind loyalty to Manchester United. Like any player, he wants what is best for himself and his family and sees Real Madrid as the perfect move."

Ribery return delayed

AFP, Berlin

France midfielder Franck Ribery's return to the Bayern Munich side after a six-week break has been further delayed by another week after the funeral of his aunt, it was revealed on Saturday.

The 27-year-old had been due to return to the Bayern squad for Saturday's Bundesliga game against bottom side Borussia Moenchengladbach, but the death of his aunt in France on October 28 saw Ribery miss more training.

The France star flew back to Boulogne in northern France, reported German daily Bild, to be with his family last Friday and he returned only on Tuesday.

Bayern coach Louis van Gaal said Ribery's return from the ankle injury he suffered against Hoffenheim on September 21 needs to be further delayed while he catches up on the missed training.

"The funeral in France was more or less the problem," van Gaal told Bild.

"He's not fit in my eyes. He can train better."

After six weeks out of football, Ribery said he is itching to return to Bayern's first-team.

"The ankle tingles when I get near a football," he said.

Vieira inspires Wilshere

AFP, London



Arsenal teenager Jack Wilshere has vowed to add bite to Arsene Wenger's midfield by emulating Gunners legend Patrick Vieira.

Wilshire has caught the eye with his range of passing since breaking into Wenger's squad last season and is regarded as a potential successor to Cesc Fabregas if the Spanish star leaves the Emirates Stadium.

But the 18-year-old, who is likely to start in Sunday's Premier League clash against Newcastle, wants to be known for more than just his silky skills and is working on the more destructive side of playing in midfield.

Wilshire had just joined Arsenal during Vieira's final years at the club and, even though he lacks his stature, he saw enough to know it is vital to reproduce the kind of aggressive displays that became the Frenchman's trademark in England.

"I was on the books when Patrick was still here and I think the way he tackled and intercepted play is something I would add to my game," Wilshire said.

"The strongest part of my game at the moment is my passing and my weakest is probably my right foot, but I'm working on that."

Another of Wilshire's idols -- former Arsenal star Liam Brady -- fits more closely with the youngster's current playing style and Brady worked with the teenager in his role as an Arsenal youth coach.

Wilshire, one of the few Arsenal players to emerge with any credit from the midweek Champions League defeat at Shakhtar Donetsk, also takes advice from Fabregas about the midfielder's art.

"Liam Brady is my role model. He has always

been there in my career. He has helped me a lot and people have said I am a similar player to him," added Wilshire.

"Cesc talks to me and tells me what I need to do. He was 16 when he burst on to the scene so you just need to talk to the senior players like him and they help you through."

Meanwhile history is against Newcastle as they go in search of a third consecutive Premier League win for the first time in two and a half years.

They have yet to taste victory at the Emirates Stadium, and have lost their last five games to the Gunners, including last month's comprehensive 4-0 League Cup exit at the hands of a youthful Arsenal side.

Chris Hughton's team travel to the capital -- where they have won both their previous games so far this season, at Chelsea in the League Cup, and at West Ham in the League -- with confidence levels high after their stunning 5-1 demolition of North-East rivals Sunderland.

Victory left the recently promoted St James' Park club safely embedded in the top half of the table going into this weekend's round of games.

Cheik Tiote, their Ivory Coast midfielder, is confident Newcastle can end a near five-year wait for a three-point haul against the Gunners.

The 24-year-old said: "It's important we don't get too carried away after beating Sunderland, so we're very focused on this game."

"Of course Arsenal are a good side, but we have a chance of getting a result there because of the way we're playing. There's no reason why not if we put in the same kind of display as we did against Sunderland."

Hughton is likely to name an unchanged line-up, meaning veteran former Arsenal and England defender Sol Campbell, 36, will have to settle for a place on the bench if he overcomes a thigh problem.

Diego set to visit Iran

SOCCERNET

Reports that Diego Maradona is keen to manage Iran are wide of the mark as the former Argentina boss prepares to visit the country.

Maradona is believed to favour a move to the English Premier League where he has been linked with Aston Villa of late, but he has also been linked with the coaching position in Iran.

However, Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) president Ali Kaffashian confirmed that Maradona will just be visiting the country after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hailed him as "His Excellency" for his support of the Islamic republic.

"He is not coming to Iran to coach but to visit, since he had previously shown interest in seeing Iran and meeting with Mr Ahmadinejad," he told the IANA news agency.

"Maradona showed interest in visiting Iran some two years ago, but due to his engagement as Argentina's coach, he could not come. But recently some people who were arranging his visit said that they are on it and we said fine and so the necessary paperwork has started."

Maradona, in 2007, gave a gift of one of his football shirts to the "Iranian nation," on which he wrote a slogan expressing his support and affection for the country.

Bayern agree compensation over Robben

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge admitted Saturday the German giants are close to agreeing a compensation deal with the Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) over Arjen Robben.

Play-maker Robben is not expected to return to Bayern's colours until at least January and has missed the entire season so far after damaging his thigh helping Holland reach the World Cup final in South Africa.

Bayern are angry the Dutch allowed the winger to play most of the tournament despite suffering the injury in a World Cup warm-up win over Hungary on June 5 and the Bavarian side have been chasing the Dutch for compensation since August.

The Germans had threatened to take the matter to the court, but Rummenigge says he is confident the German club and the KNVB can now reach a deal without taking legal action.

"I am cautiously optimistic that we can reach agreement without going up in court," Rummenigge told the German press.

"We have agreed to meet again in the near future," said Rummenigge after revealing the Dutch have acknowledged some responsibility for Robben's injury.

Heinze blasts fan ban

AFP, Marseille



Marseille's Argentine international defender Gabriel Heinze on Friday blasted a decision to

deny access to visiting fans for Sunday's crunch showdown with old rivals Paris St Germain at the Parc des Princes, accusing the authorities of "knowing nothing about football."

"There are things going on which I don't like. Without fans there is no spectacle - and football is about the fans. I don't like playing like this (without visiting fans)," said the former PSG, Manchester United and Real Madrid defender after police backed a French League (LFP) move to keep visiting fans out.

"The person who has decided this knows nothing about football and as for it being a 'clasico', well it's the supporters who make a real 'clasico'," Heinze said.

He made his comments after the Paris police prefecture wrote to PSG officials saying that, given a perceived threat to public order, the visitors enclosure would be closed to away fans - upholding an earlier decision by the French League.

The initial LFP decision indicated that away fans would not be admitted either to Sunday's game or March's return match at Marseille's Stade Velodrome.

Heinze was biting in his criticism of the decision.

"I agree that security should be paramount in life but in that

case why not play in the afternoon, which carries less risk? The match is at 9pm as it's television which holds the whip hand there and everyone knows that," he insisted.

Marseille coach Didier Deschamps also criticised the move to deny access to travelling fans.

"A big game of football, whether in Germany, Italy or Spain, is played in a stadium packed with fans from the two teams," said the 1998 World Cup-winning French captain.

"So it's somewhat nonsensical that we can't have Marseille fans here and the Parisians can't come to the Velodrome."

"From the players and backroom staff's point of view, we're obviously aware of the frustration and anger of all Marseille fans who would delight in travelling up to cheer us on for this match."

He added: "There's Milan-Juventus, Barca-Real Madrid, games with rivalry and hatred, but that happens. I think we should be capable of reaching that point in France as well."

"Moreover, we're going to organise Euro 2016 when security will have to be ensured."

A Marseille court was set later Friday to examine the LFP move which came as the latest round in a bout of legal ping-pong between the game's authorities and the courts.

Last month, a Marseille court suspended an initial LFP decision to ban Marseille fans from their club's match at Paris Saint-Germain on November 7 after nine Marseille supporters groups contested the legality of the decision.

PSG and reigning champions Marseille are France's two best-supported teams and recent matches between the clubs have been marred by fan violence.

Supporters clashed in central Marseille in October 2009 after a league game between the clubs was cancelled at short notice due to an outbreak of swine flu in the Parisians' squad.

Marseille fans were banned from travelling to the return match, in February this year, but rival groups of PSG supporters fought each other after the game and one fan was beaten to death.

Operatic twist to Bundesliga encounter

AFP, Berlin

December's classic Bundesliga showdown between rivals Schalke 04 and defending champions Bayern Munich will be televised with an added twist next month when an improvisation opera group will sing along.

The game at Schalke's Veltins Arena on Saturday December 4 will be screened by German sports channel Sky and viewers will have the option of hearing improvisation group 'La Traviata' sing along to the live action.

Due to a split-screen, viewers will also be able to watch the singers perform while also watching the live football action.

Mission: Stop Gerrard

AFP, Liverpool



Carlo Ancelotti has told his Chelsea stars that stopping in-form Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard is the key to victory at Anfield on Sunday.

Ancelotti's side will stay at least five points clear at the top of the Premier League table if they return from Merseyside with a win this weekend.

The Blues will once again be without midfielder Frank Lampard, who is still struggling with a groin problem, but Michael Essien and Florent Malouda are both expected to return and Ancelotti is confident his team can emulate last season's crucial victory against Liverpool.

He believes midfield trio Essien, John Obi Mikel and Yuri Zhirkov will play a major role in Chelsea's gameplan by keeping a close watch on Gerrard, who was described by team-mate Jamie Carragher as the best player in Liverpool's history after his midweek hat-trick against Napoli in the Europa League.

"It's not enough to play at 90 percent. We have to play 100 per cent to win there because now Gerrard is in fantastic condition," Ancelotti said.

"This victory (against Napoli) was important in improving their confidence, so we have to be ready to fight and stay focused for the whole game."

Referring to that 2-0 victory over Liverpool in early May, Ancelotti said: "It was the most important game of last season, and the key to winning the title."

"We have to play against a different team, of course - they've changed the manager and have had some problems since the beginning of the season. But they've moved on and won the last three games."

"We have to think they're one of the best teams in England. There'll be a fantastic atmo-

sphere there and they'll have the support of their fans. To win there we have to do our best."

While Chelsea have taken the title three times in the last six years, Liverpool have not won the league for two decades and Ancelotti is baffled by their lack of success.

"I'm surprised," he admitted. "A side able to win the Champions League should be able to win the Premier League. That surprises me."

"Some clubs, like Milan, have more confidence playing in the Champions League with their history than in the Premier League."

"It's difficult explaining, but it's true. Milan were more comfortable in the Champions League. Liverpool have that history and tradition as well, and it's the same."

Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson has struggled to establish himself since succeeding Rafael Benitez, although three successive victories have at least lifted some of the gloom.

Hodgson is confident Fernando Torres will soon be back to his best but he has warned the rest of the squad he expects others to step up to the mark and support the efforts of the Spain striker and Gerrard.

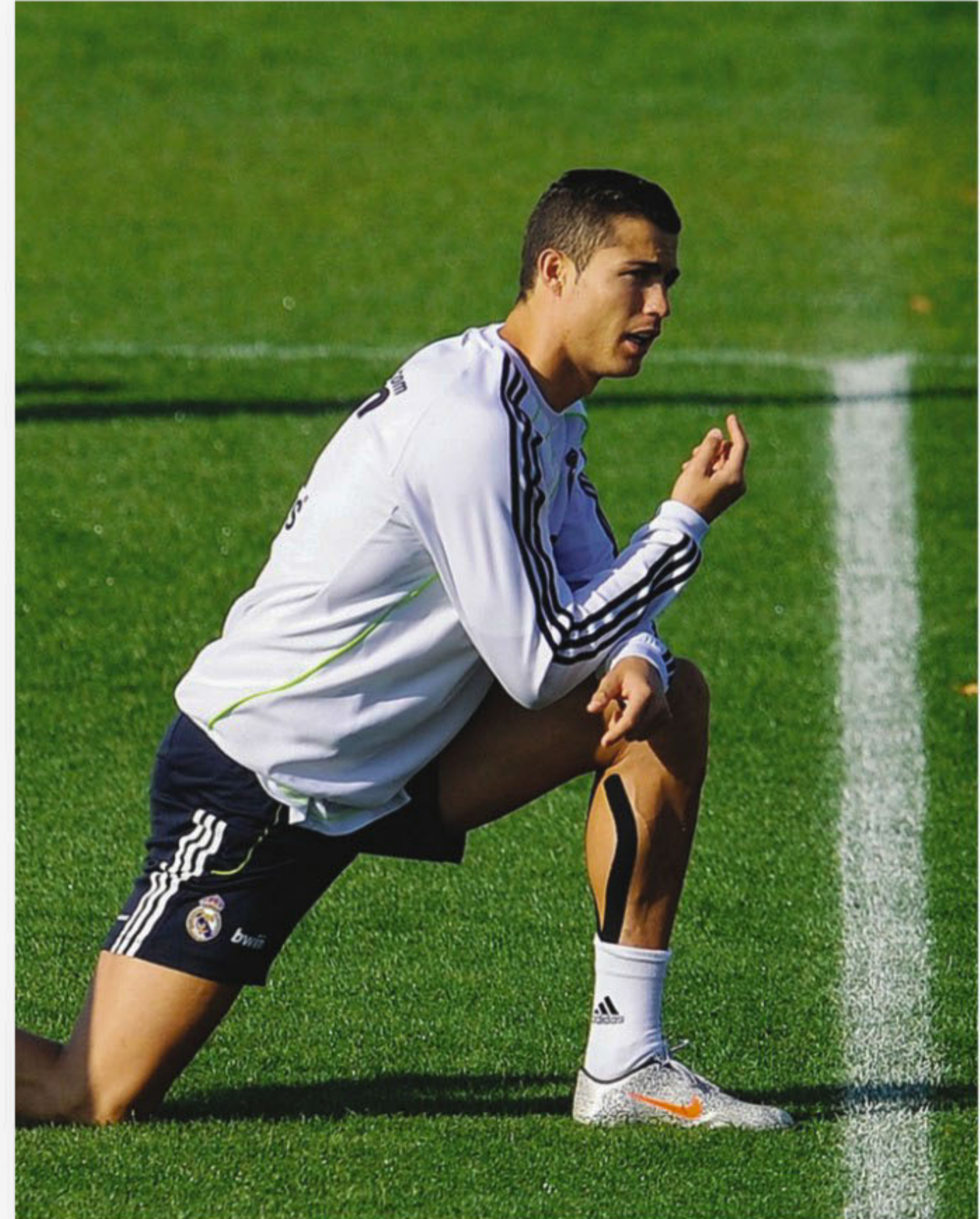
"It was a magnificent hat-trick from Steven against Napoli and I'm hoping he hasn't taken too much out of himself before Sunday, because we are going to need him to do that for the whole of the game against Chelsea," Hodgson said.

"Fernando is working hard in training and he's looking more like his old self. It's a pleasure to have a player of that quality to work with."

"Steven and Fernando are two wonderful quality players, but other players have got to start stepping up to the plate as well."

"We can't just rely on Fernando and Steven in every game because if ever one or two of them has a slightly lesser game we need to show we will not throw the towel in."

"We've got to have a few people nailing their colours to the mast and making certain they step up and make sure we are a good team."



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo stretches during a training session at the Madrid sport city yesterday on the eve of their Primera Liga derby against Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: AFP