



Chelsea's latest signing, Brazilian defender David Luiz (R) is pose with manager Carlo Ancelotti during a press conference at their training ground in Cobham yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Vieira fears backlash

AFP, London



Patrick Vieira is expecting Manchester United to be even more fired up than usual for their derby match against his Manchester City side at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Premier League leaders United's shock loss to relegation-threatened Wolves ended their unbeaten run and dreams of an 'invincible' season.

It also allowed second-placed Arsenal, who squandered a 4-0 lead in a 4-4 draw at Newcastle, to close to within four points with City, who are third, five points off top spot.

"We must expect a backlash and a battle," Vieira told Abu Dhabi-based paper The National.

"Big clubs like United always talk about the importance of never losing two times in a row," the veteran France midfielder added. "They will want to bounce back to winning ways immediately."

His words were echoed by City assistant manager David Platt, who said: "We can't go to Old Trafford, win the match, and then hope that a team which has never capitulated under pressure in ten or 12 years of the Premier League will do so."

"We should be hoping to do something we can control, which is win every football match we play between now and

FIXTURES

(1500GMT unless stated)

Saturday

Arsenal v Wolves, Birmingham v Stoke, Blackburn v Newcastle, Blackpool v Aston Villa, Liverpool v Wigan, Manchester United v Manchester City (1245GMT), Sunderland v Tottenham (1730GMT), West Brom v West Ham

Sunday

Bolton v Everton (1600GMT)

Monday

the end of the season.

"That's a tall order but you take each game as it comes, and that starts at Old Trafford. If we can take the three points we will take them."

"But we aren't looking over the road and thinking that dressing room, with the experience it has got, and the winners it has got, will capitulate just because it loses a game," Platt told the Manchester Evening News.

Much will depend on former United striker Carlos Tevez, who has scored 18 league goals so far this season, one short of the tally of new Old Trafford favourite Dimitar

Berbatov.

Relegation-haunted Wolves meanwhile will look to add Arsenal to a list of scalps that already includes Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City and United this season.

The Gunners are bound to be still smarting from their remarkable match at Newcastle and Wolves defender Ronald Zubar said: "I know a bit about Arsenal with there being some French players there."

"They were very disappointed about the draw with Newcastle and having been 4-0 up it felt like a loss."

"They will want to put that right by beating us and it's their home game with the chance to show something positive to their fans."

"But we've just beaten Manchester United and can go to the Emirates and try to get another positive result."

Inter test for Juve

AFP, Rome



Struggling Juventus host high-flying Inter Milan in the 'derby of Italy' this weekend with Juve's midfielder Felipe Melo insisting the Old Lady of Turin must win if they are

to turn their season around.

Juve are down in eighth place after losing five of their nine matches in all competitions since the turn of the year.

Rejuvenated Inter, on the other hand, are on a run of nine wins in 10 matches under new boss Leonardo and sit third in the table but with a game in hand on the two teams above them.

If they win that they would go second, only two points behind leaders and bitter city rivals AC Milan.

It has been a remarkable comeback from Inter who trailed Milan by 13 points (with a game in hand) in mid-December.

But Juve are hoping to use this game as a catalyst for their own return to form and winning ways.

"The game against Inter is very special, it's eagerly anticipated," said Brazilian star Melo.

"It's the derby of Italy and it could have an effect on morale as well as on the table. A defeat could leave you on your knees but a victory could send you to the stars."

"We're training well and hard because we want to win this match, at all costs."

But while Melo doesn't believe Juve are in any shape to challenge for the title this season, he says they need to focus on achieving a top four finish and playing Champions League football next season.

Although their recent form has been poor, they did at least win 3-1 at Cagliari in their last outing.

"The victory over Cagliari put us back in the running for a Champions League finish and now we have to fight in every game," he said.

"It's too early to say where we could finish, the numbers will be counted up in two months' time, but we have to try to go as far as we can."

Inter for their part are focussing on catching Milan and controversial centre-back Marco Materazzi aimed an unobtrusive dig at previous boss Rafael Benitez for their poor start to the season whilst also mocking those who hail their neighbours' strengths.

"The championship is long and ahead of us we have a team that is too strong to catch and us, poor little ones, we're doing everything to make up for the mistakes made in the first six months," he said.

Milan host Parma on Saturday night but even so, coach Massimiliano Allegri's thoughts invariably turn to Inter.

"I've never known the title in Italy to be won two months before the end of the season," he said.

"Everyone would have liked that but right now we're in good shape."

"We know how Inter have come back into the title race, Napoli are having a great season and Roma are in there too."

"What we need to do is concentrate so we can do our best in the decisive part of the season."

Allegri may believe Roma are still in the hunt but following last week's 5-3 defeat at Inter, they dropped to 10 points off the pace, although with a game in hand.

They host Napoli in a huge clash at Rome's Stadio Olimpico on Saturday and, realistically, a defeat would all but mathematically end Roma's interest in the scudetto crown.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated):

Saturday

AC Milan v Parma (1700), Roma v Napoli (1945)

Sunday

Palermo v Fiorentina (1130), Bari v Genoa, Brescia v Lazio, Cagliari v Chievo, Catania v Lecce, Cesena v Udinese, Sampdoria v Bologna,

Roy succeeds Roberto

AFP, London



Former Liverpool coach Roy Hodgson has been appointed head coach of West Brom, the Premier League club confirmed Friday.

West Brom, who fired Roberto Di Matteo earlier this week, hired Hodgson just over a month after he was sacked by Liverpool.

Hodgson, 63, was voted English football's manager of the year last season, after successfully guiding Fulham to the Europa League Final.

His new contract with the Baggies runs until June 2012, West Brom announced on their website.

"West Bromwich Albion are delighted to announce they have appointed Roy Hodgson as the club's new head coach," the statement read.

"The 63-year-old former Inter Milan, Switzerland, Fulham and Liverpool boss has committed himself to the club until June 2012."

Hodgson won the job ahead of the likes of former Newcastle boss Chris Hughton and ex-Albion star Martin Jol.

The former Inter Milan and Switzerland manager may have failed at Liverpool, but his successful spell at Fulham persuaded Albion that he could thrive again at a smaller club.

He took over at Fulham in December 2007 and led the



ROY HODGSON

club to survival that season before a seventh-place finish in 2008-09 secured the Cottagers a place in Europe.

An unlikely run to the Europa League final followed, where they were beaten by Atletico Madrid, with Hodgson leaving for Anfield soon after.

Hodgson is back in management just over a month after his departure from Anfield and he will not have to wait long for a chance to exact some revenge on his former club, with Liverpool due at The Hawthorns on April 2.

Puel faces sack

AFP, Paris



Lyon coach Claude Puel could be sacked if he fails to end the club's three-year wait for silverware this season, club president Jean-Michel Aulas revealed on Friday.

Puel arrived at Lyon from Lille in 2008, when Lyon had just won their seventh consecutive Ligue 1 title.

The club are yet to win any trophies under his tenure and, despite reaching the Champions League semifinals for the first time ever last season, Lyon are currently seven points behind leaders Lille in the French top flight.

"I don't know. Honestly, I don't know," said Aulas when asked about Puel's position in an interview with French sport daily L'Equipe.

"He has a four-year contract. There is strict governance at Lyon and decisions are taken by the board."

"It depends on Lyon's position at the end of the season and the quality of what is to come. We'll have to evaluate all that."

Puel's contract is due to expire in 2012.

Lyon, sixth in Ligue 1, meet fifth-placed Saint-Etienne on Saturday in the 101st Derby du Rhone.

Real top rich list again

Football

AFP, London

Real Madrid may be trailing their arch-rivals Barcelona in La Liga but financially they still have the edge on their old foes after topping the table of the world's 20 richest football clubs, compiled by accountants Deloitte.

Real finished top for the sixth straight year with Deloitte's table for the 2009/10 season saying the Spanish giants had revenues of 438.6 million euros.

Barcelona remained second on 398.1 million euros while Manchester United, one of seven English clubs in the top 20, stayed third.

All the 20 clubs represented were from the "big five" European leagues, with Germany contributing four clubs, Italy four, Spain three and France two.

Real remained top despite a disappointing season, coming second in La Liga again and being knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Lyon.

"In the coming years, particularly as UEFA's financial fair play rules take effect, Real Madrid's revenue prowess should, in theory, translate into a competitive advantage on the pitch," said the report editor, Dan Jones.

Real's revenues were boosted by the staging of the 2010 Champions League final at their Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

UEFA's fair play rules are designed to force clubs taking part in European competitions to spend only what they earn rather than rely primarily on the patronage of wealthy owners.

TOP 10

1. Real Madrid: 438.6m euros
2. Barcelona: 398.1m euros
3. Man Utd: 349.8m euros
4. Bayern Munich: 323m euros
5. Arsenal: 274.1m euros
6. Chelsea: 255.9m euros
7. AC Milan: 235.8m euros
8. Liverpool: 225.3m euros
9. Inter Milan 224.8m euros

IN brief

Bruce slams Capello

AFP, London

Sunderland manager Steve Bruce has slammed Fabio Capello after Darren Bent claimed the England coach told him his decision to leave the Black Cats had boosted his international prospects.

Bent made a surprise £24 million transfer from Sunderland to Aston Villa last month and the striker has been in fine form since, scoring his second England goal in Wednesday's 2-1 friendly victory in Denmark.

The 27-year-old later revealed Capello had told him the switch to Villa had helped his England chances and that claim has not gone down well with Bruce.

"That's a frustration for us all and it is hugely disrespectful if he has said those sort of things," Bruce said.

"Darren Bent scored 24 Premier League goals for us and played an unbelievable season, and yet didn't go to the World Cup, so I find that a harsh statement."

Real eyeing Fabregas

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are preparing a 60-million-euro offer for Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas, a deal that could also see the transfer of France striker Karim Benzema to the Gunners, a Spanish sports newspaper said Friday.

Fabregas, who has been in the sights of Real as well as rivals Barcelona for some time, is now the Madrid club's "number one objective" for next season, the daily Marca said.

The 60-million-euro fee that the big-spending club is proposing is more than that offered by Barca for the 23-year-old midfielder, the paper said.

The out-of-favour Benzema could be transferred to the London club as part of the deal.

Chelsea contact Hazard

AFP, Paris

Chelsea have contacted Lille's highly regarded Belgian winger Eden Hazard over a summer move to Stamford Bridge, claimed a report in French sport daily L'Equipe on Friday.

"According to our information, the London club are planning to recruit Eden Hazard, who they've been following for many months," wrote the paper, without identifying its source.

L'Equipe claimed that Hazard is "tempted" by the Chelsea offer and said that he has instructed his advisors to study the possibility of a switch to the reigning Premier League champions.

Felix's charm offensive

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Schalke 04 coach Felix Magath has launched a charm offensive on Facebook in a bid to win back the support of the club's disgruntled fans.

Schalke supporters are upset at what they perceive to be Magath's dictatorial style and his transfer policy, in particular the mooted sale of keeper Manuel Neuer at the end of the season.

Schalke's main supporters' association has written an open letter to Magath urging him not to "sell the club's soul".

In reply Magath opened his own page on the internet social networking site Facebook on which he wrote in his first posting: "Dear fans of Schalke 04, I am delighted to be able to regularly share ideas and

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Have the organisers done a good job with the World Cup preparations?

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ESPN

English Premiership

Man United v Man City

Live at 7:00pm

Liverpool v Wigan

Live from 9:00pm

Sunderland v Tottenham

Live from 11:30pm

STAR Sports

English Premiership

Arsenal v Wolves



ICC WC Warm-up Match

Bangladesh v Canada

Time: 2:30pm

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium

Bangladesh League

Brothers Union v Farashganj

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa