

Kenny, Fergie resume rivalry

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson and Kenny Dalglish will resume their ferocious rivalry on Sunday as Manchester United attempt to reassert their Premier League challenge against Liverpool at Anfield.

Ferguson and Dalglish have been on opposite sides ever since they faced each other in the 1960s while representing Rangers and Celtic respectively, an encounter Dalglish remembers mostly for Ferguson's flailing elbows.

When Ferguson took over at Manchester United in November 1986 -- a few months after Dalglish had led Liverpool to the double -- his famously stated aim was to knock the Merseysiders "off their effing perch".

Ferguson however would have to wait seven more years before landing the first League title of his United career; Liverpool under Dalglish added three more during that period, winning their last in 1990.

Fast forward 20 years however, and the fortunes of the two clubs could not be more different.

Two decades of steady decline at Anfield -- albeit studded with the odd memorable success in European and domestic cup competitions -- have contrasted with United's rise as the dominant force in English football.

United are now level with Liverpool on 18 league titles -- 11 won under Ferguson -- and need only one more to edge ahead of their rivals and lay claim to being the most successful club in English football history.

Until this week, league leaders United had looked to be moving serenely towards a coveted 19th league title.

But Tuesday's 2-1 reverse against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge has given their nearest rivals a glimmer of hope, and

Liverpool can blow the title race wide open on Sunday if they are able to inflict another defeat on Ferguson's men.

Dalglish however insists that his focus remains his Anfield rebuilding job rather than trying to thwart United's title challenge.

"We want to help ourselves first," Dalglish said. "If we help ourselves and it hinders somebody else then that's not our problem, that's theirs. If we get a result on Sunday it is more helpful to us than it is harmful to them."

Dalglish admitted however that he had never expected United to surpass Liverpool's haul of league titles when they won their first under Ferguson.

"I never considered they would catch us," he said.

"To their credit they have won a fantastic amount of Championships and it shows how successful they have been.

"But at the end of the day we've still got bits we can hang on to. We've still won five European Cups."

Dalglish's first match back in charge at Liverpool was an FA Cup defeat against United at Old Trafford in January, and the Reds boss is looking forward to locking horns with Ferguson again on Sunday.

"I've never had a problem with Fergie. I've got respect for the job he has done as a manager. I've never had a problem," he said.

The biggest beneficiaries of a Liverpool win on Sunday will be second-placed Arsenal, who can move to within a point of United with victory over Sunderland at the Emirates on Saturday.

Arsenal bounced back from their shock League Cup final defeat to Birmingham with a 5-0 thrubbing of Leyton Orient in the FA Cup in midweek, a result that manager Arsene Wenger believes has got the Gunners back on track.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT):

Saturday

Arsenal v Sunderland, Birmingham v West Brom (1245), Bolton v Aston Villa, Fulham v Blackburn, Man City v Wigan (1730), Newcastle v Everton, West Ham v Stoke.

Sunday

Liverpool v Man Utd (1330), Wolves v Tottenham (1600)

Monday

Kolo fails drugs test

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City's Ivory Coast international defender Kolo Toure has been suspended after failing a drugs test, his club announced on Thursday.

A statement on City's official website read: "Manchester City confirm that the FA has informed Kolo Toure that an 'A-sample' provided by him has tested positive for a specified substance.

"As result of this, he has been suspended from participating in all first team and non-first team matches pending the outcome of the legal process.

"There will be no further comment from the football club at this stage."

It is understood that Toure was not included in City's squad for Wednesday's FA

Cup win against Aston Villa because the club were aware of the situation.

The failed test automatically triggered the suspension, with City left with no option but to exclude him from their plans until the conclusion of proceedings.



KOLO TOURE

Toure, who turns 30 later this month, signed for City from Arsenal for £14mn (16.3mn euros) in 2009.

He was City's captain before Carlos Tevez and has 85 international caps to his name.

The most recent doping case in football involved Hamilton midfielder Simon Mensing.

The 28-year-old tested positive for the banned stimulant methylhexanamine at the end of January and missed five matches.

Mensing maintained he was unaware he had ingested the substance while using a dietary supplement - an explanation which was accepted by UK Anti-Doping.

Pique dating Shakira?

AFP, Madrid

Spanish World Cup star Gerard Pique on Thursday told reporters that he would prefer to talk about football than discuss his burgeoning romance with singing superstar Shakira.

The 24-year-old Barcelona centre-back has become the focus of intense media attention in Spain this week after pictures of him hand in hand with the 34-year-old Colombian singer were published in gossip magazines.

"I'd like it if people only talked about me from a sporting perspective but I get the impression that, ultimately, it's inevitable," said Pique during a press conference at Barca's training centre.

"I think that the other aspect sells more."

He added: "I accept that people can criticise me for sporting reasons but what I don't like is when they use an easy excuse and say that my performances are affected by my private life.

"If we're here it's to talk about football."

C'Ron picks up thigh Injury

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid star striker Cristiano Ronaldo will be off 10-15 days after picking up a thigh muscle injury in the team's 7-0 thrashing of Malaga, the club announced Friday.

Ronaldo had a scan at a hospital near Madrid which confirmed a grade I, or minor tear, in the left thigh muscle, Real said.

The injury had an estimated recovery time of "10-15 days depending on clinical developments," the club said.

Ronaldo left the field injured in the 76th minute on Thursday night after scoring his third goal in the match against Malaga at the Bernabeu, putting Madrid seven points behind league leaders Barcelona.

The Portuguese striker had earlier posted an optimistic message Friday on his Twitter account, hoping to be ready for Sunday's game against Racing Santander.

"I got injured last night after scoring 3rd goal but it doesn't look bad. I hope to be ok for next game and help the team," the message said. But the message was taken down later in the day.



Thai children look at the Barclays Premier League trophy displayed at a shopping mall in Bangkok yesterday. The trophy is on ten-day tour in Thailand to promote English Premiership.

PHOTO: AFP

Bayern eye recovery

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich begin their recovery from back-to-back defeats at Hanover 96 on Saturday determined to salvage something from the season as they pick through the wreckage of their title dreams.

Bayern, fourth in the league, were knocked out of the German Cup thanks to a 1-0 semifinal defeat to Schalke at Munich's Allianz Arena on Wednesday, four days after they lost 3-1 at home to league leaders Borussia Dortmund.

Having done the league and cup double last season, silverware has been slipping from their grasp in the last week alone.

Bayern are now out of the cup and 16 points behind Dortmund in the league with 10 games left to play this season and face third-placed Hanover on Saturday.

"If we win neither the league nor the cup, it's not a good season for Bayern," said captain Philipp Lahm.

"We must ensure we come second in the Bundesliga, but it'll be hard to salvage anything from this season.

"It's bitter and we're gutted. We set out to win both trophies. It can't be replayed and repaired, we've carelessly tossed it all away.

"The game on Saturday is extremely important to us, perhaps the most important of the season.

"Everything's at stake, second place is at stake. We have to go to Hannover and win, whatever it takes."

The defeat has left Bayern's stars in

despair, but second in the table will give them an automatic Champions League berth next season.

Consecutive home defeats were not part of their plan and chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge admits their cup exit has hurt the Bavarian giants.

"We were utterly determined to make the final in Berlin," he said.

"Every defeat hurts, it's bad for our confidence and for our image.

"We don't want to get used to it, but we have to stay calm."

Hanover 96 will be without Ivory Coast striker Didier Ya Konan, because of a knee injury.

FIXTURES

Saturday

VfB Stuttgart v Schalke 04, Eintracht Frankfurt v Kaiserslautern, Borussia M'gladbach v Hoffenheim, Hanover 96 v Bayern Munich, Nuremberg v St. Pauli, Bayer Leverkusen v VfL Wolfsburg

Sunday

Freiburg v Werder Bremen, Hamburg v

The 26-year-old has netted 11 goals in 21 games this season and also missed last weekend's 1-0 win at Hamburg's St Pauli.

League leaders Borussia Dortmund are hoping to take a step closer to their first Bundesliga title since 2002 when they host Cologne on Friday at their 80,720-capacity sold out stadium.

Cologne are unbeaten in their last four matches and are eager to become only the third club to beat Borussia in the league this season.

With ten league games left to play, Dortmund are 12 points clear of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen who host VfL Wolfsburg on Saturday night.

With midfielder Arturo Vidal banned after being sent off in last Sunday's draw with Bremen, Leverkusen coach Jupp Heynckes is likely to include former captain Michael Ballack in the team alongside Bayer skipper Simon Rolfes.

The 34-year-old Ballack has been struggling with a knee injury as he tries to win back his place in the national side.

Thinking it was the Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

The West Indies cricket team yesterday fell victim to a case of mistaken identity amidst widespread frustration when their team bus was hit by rocks and stones near the roundabout at Mirpur 10 by fans who thought that it was carrying the Bangladesh side.

Two windows of the bus were shattered, according to police officials who added that no players were injured in the incident.

"The fans thought it was the Bangladeshi team bus and they hurled stones at it. The window panes were shattered, but no one was injured," said Imtiaz Ahmed, deputy commissioner of police, Mirpur Division, and the information was corroborated by Jalal Yunus, chairman of Media Committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

The angry mob also set on fire tyres and papers at the same spot and hurled stones at the fire brigade who came to douse the fire.

Mirpur police detained 30 people from the spot suspected to be connected with the incident, said Kazi Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge of the station.

The Tigers however avoided any such incident as their bus made a safe journey from the stadium to Sheraton Hotel.

West Indies batsman Chris Gayle reacted angrily about the incident on his twitter page: "This is ridiculous. Damn. World Cup with so much security and this happens. Big joke. Trust me I am not keen here. Every player lay flat."

Not a Revenge

FROM PAGE 16 up a decent total on board for Bangladesh to chase.

No comprehensive West Indian win is complete without a reference to their heyday of the 70s and 80s and this press conference was no exception, but Sammy politely brushed away any claims to that end. "At the moment we are just looking to move forward as a team and be consistent," he said, stressing on the need to put results together.

He also brushed aside suggestions that they were now one of the favourites for the World Cup.

"We are focused on only the next game," he said. "We are not even looking as far as the quarterfinals. Our next game is against Ireland and our focus is on Ireland only, not England, not South Africa and not India. From this moment we will be looking to put a win on the board in that game."

Walk of fools, part two

FROM PAGE 16

shot-a-minute session as it landed in Ramnaresh Sarwan's waiting hands at mid-wicket. Junaed's eyes lit up after yet another rapid start but Roach trapped him with a yorker, the left-hander attempting a flick (of all shots) to this brilliant delivery.

After Shakib fell for eight in the 11th over, Rokibul Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful and Naem Islam had to salvage the situation but there was no Khaled Mashud-style survival act as the trio thought it better to give in than put up a fight.

Rokibul swung his bat in frustration after driving airily to Kieron Pollard at point and though the stage could not have been more perfect for an Ashraful revival, it never came. The right-handed batsman, who started dangerously, struck two boundaries, played out a few dot balls and then, the moment Roach was brought back, under-edges one to Devon Thomas for 11, the

second best score after Junaed's 25.

After the collapse against Ireland, it was hoped by everyone associated with cricket in Bangladesh (read the whole nation) that the batsmen would learn their lessons. But after that horrid collapse came another and as the Tigers fly off to Chittagong to play the double-header against England and the Netherlands, it is again expected that the unnecessary ego would be swallowed.

A backlash against England would be welcome but the fear remains of continuous complacency. Here's a recent quote from one of the middle-order batsmen after the Ireland win: "I played so well for my 30-odd and you guys (the media) don't write anything good about me."

If there are still batsmen in that dressing room who thinks a 30-odd is good enough, Jamie Siddons and Shakib Al Hasan have their hands full.