

One last chance for Chelsea



With his job on the line, will Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti (R) be able to stop Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson (L) to take his side on the verge of a 19th Premiership title? A decision will be made in today's blockbuster at Old Trafford.

AP, London

Just two months after he was widely reported to be on his way out of Chelsea, coach Carlo Ancelotti has the chance to complete a remarkable comeback in the Premier League title race on Sunday.

Chelsea were 15 points behind Manchester United at the start of March following a dismal run of results but could now move top of the standings on goal difference with victory at the long time leader's Old Trafford home.

That would make Chelsea

strong favourites for a second straight title and likely end uncertainty over Ancelotti's future.

The importance of the game is underlined by the fact that Manchester United's Alex Ferguson is set to recall his top players for a match he had hoped until recently would be meaningless.

Wayne Rooney, Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic are all in the squad after sitting out Wednesday's 4-1 Champions League win over Schalke, which secured a 6-1 aggregate win and place in the May 28 final.

After dropping points with a draw at Newcastle and last week-

end's tepid 1-0 defeat at Arsenal, United's hopes are pinned on continuing what is by far the Premier League's best home record.

United have won 16 and drawn one of 17 games at Old Trafford, and have also beaten Chelsea there in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"Our home record is probably the best in Europe," Ferguson said. "It is the reason we are there. Some of the performances at home this season have been absolutely terrific.

"If we win, we should win the league."

Victory over Chelsea would

leave United needing only a point from their last two matches against Blackburn and Blackpool to guarantee a record 19th English championship, while even a draw would put them in control.

But Chelsea's return to contention was sparked by a 2-1 comeback win over United on March 1 and a repeat result would put the Blues top by the finest of margins.

"They will fancy themselves strongly," said Fulham manager Mark Hughes, who played for Chelsea and Manchester United. "They've come very much back to the fore. Maybe two or three weeks ago, everybody thought it

PHOTOS: AFP FILE

was done and dusted.

"But credit to Chelsea, they've kept going and got right back into the mix. It's a tough one to call."

Chelsea won the corresponding fixture 2-1 at United last April on their way to the title, ending United's three-year run of Premier League championships. That was the last time United lost at home.

A draw or win for Chelsea could also leave the door ajar, albeit only slightly, for Arsenal to make a late charge at the title although the leading pair would both need to collapse for the third-place Gunners to win a first title since 2004.

Ref rage isn't right: Ancelotti

AFP, Cobham

Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti insists he would never put pressure on referees in the same way as Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

Ancelotti knows the role of referee Howard Webb will be crucial when his side go in search of a victory at Old Trafford on Sunday that would put them in pole position to retain the Premier League title.

Ferguson believes Chelsea have benefited from mistakes by the officials in their last three league meetings with the Blues and he was handed a five-match touchline ban after launching an astonishing attack on referee Martin Atkinson following United's 2-1 defeat at Stamford Bridge in March.

The Scot has never been shy about criticising officials and often uses his press conferences to call for strong refereeing before big games.

But Ancelotti believes that kind of behaviour presents a bad image of the

sport and he is adamant managers gain nothing from taking out their frustrations on the officials.

"You don't get an advantage to speak against the referee. The decision is already taken," Ancelotti said.

"Also for the image of football you have a social responsibility. For the young kids who look at you as an idol, the image on and off the pitch is important.

"Sometimes when things are not good you can speak about things that go against you.

"But I don't want to put pressure on the referee. Howard Webb is a fantastic referee, he has the skills to handle the occasion.

"If the referee has no experience maybe you can be a little worried about this but with Webb there is no problem.

"I have trust in the referees in England. They make mistakes but this is normal, you have to accept that or you have to say there is a conspiracy and I don't believe that."

The stakes could not be higher on Sunday as a win means Chelsea will go top, ahead of United on goal difference,

with just two games to go, while a victory for Ferguson's team will leave them needing only one point to clinch a record 19th league title.

Ancelotti believes his team have a psychological advantage over United as they have nothing to lose, while the leaders would be shattered to surrender top spot after holding a 15-point lead over Chelsea at one stage.

"Mentally we can have an advantage because I think Man United hoped that they wouldn't have to play this kind of game against us," Ancelotti said.

"If they had more of an advantage they could have a different game, an easier one maybe. Now they have to fight again for the title, maybe two or three weeks ago they didn't think they would have to fight so much.

"They had a fantastic record at home this season and they drew just one game but now it is time for us to win."

If Chelsea do lose on Sunday, there will inevitably be renewed speculation that Ancelotti will be sacked after a barren season.

Real test for Beckham

AFP, Los Angeles

English star midfielder David Beckham will have the chance to play against his former club, Real Madrid, for the first time since joining the Los Angeles Galaxy in 2007 at a friendly in July.

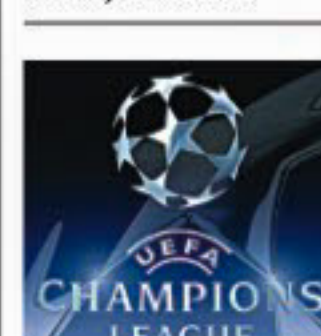
Beckham and the Galaxy will face Real on July 16 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. An injury that ended Beckham's World Cup dreams also kept him from playing last year in Real's 3-2 victory over the Galaxy.

"We are very excited to once again welcome back Real Madrid," said Galaxy president Tom Payne.

"The excitement for this rematch will surely capture the attention of all sports fans in Southern California."

Jose to boycott press

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho will boycott the club's press conferences until UEFA inform him why he has been banned for three matches, his assistant, Aitor Karanka, revealed on Friday.

UEFA handed a three-match European ban to Mourinho after he made allegations of favouritism towards bitter rivals and Champions League conquerors Barcelona.

Mourinho, already banned from the touchline for Tuesday's Champions League semi-final second leg at Camp Nou, which cemented Real's exit 3-1 on aggregate, will have a further one-match ban suspended for three years.

Karanka said Mourinho "would defend himself until the end" and announced that the outspoken Portuguese would make no further media appearances until European football's governing body justified the sanction against him.

"UEFA is the one imposing the punishment and as of today they have not said the

reason why the coach was punished," Karanka told a post-training session news conference.

"The idea is that until it is specified or (UEFA) comes out with a more concrete reason, he will not appear."

UEFA's Control and Disciplinary Body found that a string of comments from Mourinho alleging that Barcelona benefited from decisions in their favour at their rivals' expense had constituted "inappropriate statements".

The Portuguese coach, who had been hoping to become the first man ever to coach three teams to the European Cup after previous successes with FC Porto and Inter Milan, was also fined 50,000 euros (\$72,500).

Real defender Pepe, who was red-carded in the first leg, received a one-match ban but UEFA said it would consider this already served as he did not feature in the return leg.

Real furthermore received a 20,000 euro fine for poor conduct by their supporters.

Barcelona reserve goalkeeper Jose Pinto, red-carded in a half-time melee in the first leg, received a three-match ban.

Blanc resigned?

Football

AFP, Paris

French football chiefs on Saturday denied a report that national coach Laurent Blanc had tendered his resignation amid a controversial race row.

Blanc and suspended national technical director (DTN) Francois Blaquart are under investigation after the Mediapart website released a transcript of a meeting last November in which French officials allegedly discussed introducing quotas on the number of dual-nationality players at youth training centres.

Blanc, who took over as coach from Raymond Domenech after Les Bleus disastrous World Cup campaign in South Africa last year, is set to be interviewed by French football federation (FFF) officials on his return from holiday in Italy on Monday.

On Saturday the FFF denied a report in Ouest France newspaper claiming that Blanc had resigned from his post.

"I've spoken to him on the telephone," the FFF's chief press officer Philippe Tournon told AFP.

"We spoke about him coming to Paris for the hearing and about what could happen afterwards. But at no time did we speak about that (resignation)," he added.

A spokesman for the FFF added: "The French football federation formally denies any report which claims Laurent Blanc has tendered his resignation."

The Mediapart report has caused huge controversy in France this week, causing a split among the multi-racial France team which won the World Cup in 1998.

Late Friday Blaquart said it was possible that Blanc may not have heard him use the word 'quotas' and was therefore potentially unaware that the issue had been discussed at the meeting last November.

Eight-goal Bayern secure CL spot

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich secured Champions League qualification after an 8-1 goal-fest at St Pauli ensured they will finish at least third and Hamburg-based

relegated their hosts on Saturday.

Bayern's rout closes the gap on second-placed Bayer Leverkusen, who drew 1-1 at Hamburg, and means Bayern could now finish second when the season finishes next Saturday.

Bayern will need Leverkusen to lose at Freiburg next Saturday and pick up a win at home to VfB Stuttgart themselves to claim second, with only the top two teams qualifying for the Champions League automatically.

Third place in the Bundesliga means entry to the Champions League play-off round, the final stage before the group phase.

Bayern striker Mario Gomez opened the scoring after 10 minutes

for Bayern and then netted his second of the game with nearly an hour gone.

With St Pauli's defence in tatters, Dutch winger Arjen Robben netted twice and set up Gomez for the simplest of tap-ins with time almost up to give the Germany star his 27th league goal of the season and 38th in all competitions.

Just before the final whistle,

RESULTS

Schalke 04 1 (Huntelaar 47) **Mainz 05 3** (Schuerle 52, Holtby 82, Noveski 85)
Werder Bremen 2 (Silvestre 6, Pizarro 64)
Borussia Dortmund 0
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kiessling 54) Hamburg 1 (Westermann 2)
VfB Stuttgart 2 (Hajnal 58, Okazaki 61) Hanover 96 1 (Stindl 66)
VfL Wolfsburg 1 (Westermann 2) **Kaiserslautern 2** (Lakic 25, Amedick 44)
Eintracht Frankfurt 0 **Cologne 2** (Chihli 24, Podolski 90+3-pen)
Borussia M'gladbach 2 (Hanke 80, Reus 82) Freiburg 0
Nuremberg 1 (Wollscheid 16) **Hoffenheim 2** (Roberto Firmino 40, Sigurdsson 87)
St. Pauli 1 (Eger 78) **Bayern Munich 8** (Gomez 10, 52, 86,

France winger Franck Ribery completed the rout with his second goal of the game.

A header by Marcel Eger on 78 minutes proved to be no more than a consolation goal as St Pauli were beaten for the 20th time this season.

Having only come up last term, the north German side will be back in the second Bundesliga as they suffered another relegation to go with their drops in 1978, 1991, 1997 and 2002.

While his team goes down, coach Holger Stanislawski is at least guaranteed top-flight football next season as he will take over as Hoffenheim coach.

Fourth-placed Hanover's 2-1 loss at Stuttgart means Bayern cannot finish lower than third, while 2007 champions Stuttgart moved up to 11th.

Fresh from having been confirmed 2011 German league winners last Saturday, Borussia Dortmund suffered a 2-0 defeat at Werder Bremen, who are now assured of Bundesliga football next season.

Bremen's former Inter Milan

striker Marko Arnautovic missed the game after being suspended for disciplinary reasons.

The 22-year-old, signed by Bremen for six million euros (\$8.5m) in July, was dropped without the club specifying his offence.

Mainz will play Europa League football next season after their 3-1 win at Schalke 04, who were dumped out of the Champions League on Wednesday after a 4-1 defeat at Manchester United in the second leg of their semi-final.

Mainz cannot now finish lower than fifth.

At the bottom of the table, Borussia Muenchengladbach are on course to pull off one of the most remarkable escape acts after they beat Freiburg 2-0.

It was their third straight victory after previous wins over champions Dortmund and high-flying Hanover.

The win leaves them 16th and they are level with 2009 champions Wolfsburg, whose 2-1 defeat at home to Kaiserslautern has dragged them back into the relegation fight.

SPORTS POLL
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Bangalore v Kochi
Live from 4:30pm
Punjab v Pune
Live from 8:30pm
ESPN
English Premiership
Wolves v West Brom
Live from 4:55pm
Stoke City v Arsenal
Live from 7:00pm
Man United v Chelsea
Live from 9:00pm
STAR Sports
F1 World Championship
Turkish Grand Prix