

Fergie let off with a warning

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was on Monday warned by the Football Association (FA) as to his future conduct in relation to recent comments about referee Howard Webb.

Ferguson was charged with improper conduct, relating to his pre-match media comments made about Webb ahead of Manchester United's key Premier League encounter with Chelsea last on May 8.

Ferguson is not believed to have offered a significant response to the charge.

And on Monday he has learned he will face no punishment, beyond a gentle reminder not to do it again.

"A Regulatory Commission has today warned Sir Alex Ferguson as to his future conduct," said an FA statement.

"Ferguson was charged with improper conduct, relating to his pre-match media comments made about match official Howard Webb on May 6, 2011.

"The chairman of the commission made the following statement following the hearing: 'This rule was brought in at the start of the 2009/10 season and this was reiterated formally to all Clubs again on 21 October 2010.

"This is a clear breach of the rule and it is the first time such a matter has been placed in front of a Commission."



Former England striker Alan Shearer (R) poses beside his wax work figure at Madame Tussauds in Blackpool on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

All-Portuguese final

AFP, Dublin



Andre Villas-Boas has a golden opportunity to underline his reputation as the new 'Special One' when his Porto team face Braga in an all-Portuguese Europa League final in Dublin on Wednesday.

Villas-Boas has only been in charge of Porto for a year and is already regarded as the brightest young coach to emerge in Europe since Jose Mourinho earned his stripes at the same club almost a decade ago.

Comparisons between Villas-Boas and the Real Madrid coach have more substance than just their early career path as the 33-year-old learned much from Mourinho during his time as the original Special One's opposition scout at Porto, Chelsea and Inter Milan. Villas-Boas - who has since fallen out with his mentor - could enjoy an even more meteoric rise than Mourinho judging by the amount of covetous glances he has received from some of the world's biggest clubs.

His team wrapped up the league title without losing a single league game - only the second club ever to do that in Portugal - and established domestic records for the most consecutive wins and points in a season in the process.

Porto also face Vitoria Guimaraes in Portugal's Cup final this weekend and are heavy favorites to finish a memorable campaign by winning the Europa League.

That could be the defining moment for Villas-Boas.

Mourinho burst onto the global stage by inspiring Porto to a 3-2 victory over Celtic in the 2003 UEFA Cup final - the Europa League's previous guise - and Villas-Boas's stock would rise even higher if he could emulate that achievement and become the youngest coach to win a major UEFA competition.

However, just because the likes of Chelsea, Juventus and Roma are eyeing a coach who has a higher win percentage at Porto than even Mourinho managed, it doesn't mean they will get their man just yet.

"My future, as you know, is completely linked to Porto," he said recently. "I do not know of any official interest from other clubs."

Although Villas-Boas never played for a professional club, he has been involved in the game at the highest level since he was a teenager after earning a role on Bobby Robson's coaching staff at Porto in 1994.

Then just 16, Villas-Boas wrote to Robson to protest about his decision to leave one of the club's strikers on the bench and his raft of statistics so impressed Robson that he offered him a trainee position coaching the youth team.

Spells in charge of the British Virgin Isles, aged 21, and Academica sandwiched his lengthy spell as Mourinho's scout before he took charge of Porto in 2010.

Villas-Boas has encouraged his players to express themselves in a more attacking system than the one employed by Mourinho, with the form of prolific strikers Hulk and Falcao - who has scored a record 17 goals in the Europa League this season - key to their bid to beat Braga.

Standing in Villas-Boas's way at the Aviva Stadium is 42-year-old former Porto player Domingos Paciencia, who will be taking charge of his last game with Braga.

Braga, whose only major silverware was the 1966 Portuguese Cup, finished a massive 36 points behind Porto in the league and are playing in their first European final.

Yet Villas-Boas refuses to write off a team who defeated Arsenal in the Champions League group stages this season and beat Liverpool and Benfica in the Europa League. "Being the first Portuguese final it brings something special to the game. Both teams know each other very well but anything can happen in the game," Villas-Boas said.

"I think it has nothing to do with what happened in the league and it's a challenge that is very difficult for us."

Paciencia agrees that Braga should not be underestimated and he added: "My side goes into every game determined to succeed."

"They simply do not give up and this has helped us go all the way to the final."

Japan pull out of Copa

AFP, Tokyo

Japan said Tuesday it had scrapped plans to play in the prestigious Copa America football tournament after initially deciding to compete in the wake of the devastating March 11 quake and tsunami.

"We are sorry to inform you that the Japanese team cannot participate in the Copa America 2011 in Argentina," the Japanese Football Association (JFA) said in a letter to the Argentine Football Federation. "We apologise deeply."

Japan and Mexico were invited as teams from outside South America to play in the regional tournament in July, where the Japanese had been drawn in Group A with the hosts, Bolivia and Colombia.

But their attendance was cast into doubt after the huge earthquake and tsunami laid waste to much of the country's Pacific coast.

Initially the JFA said it would send the national team in spite of the devastation, but it has struggled to convince European clubs to release their Japanese star players ahead of the start of the new season.

"Under the current circumstance, we cannot form a team competitive for Copa America," JFA President Junji Ogura told reporters in Tokyo.

"Based on the judgement, we have unfortunately decided to decline," Ogura said. "It is extremely regrettable."

Fracas at dinner party

AFP, London



Police said on Tuesday they were called to a luxury hotel in London after a fan reportedly clashed with players

from relegated West Ham at an end-of-season charity dinner.

The event at the Grosvenor Hotel on Monday -- the day after the club were relegated from the Premier League -- descended into angry scenes involving Hammers striker Demba Ba and defender Danny Gabbidon, The Sun tabloid reported.

An eyewitness at the £275-per-head (\$450-per-head) event revealed how Ba triggered the mayhem when a fan asked him for his autograph, the report added.

Ba replied, "I'm too tired" and the fan snapped, "I pay £60,000 a year for a box at this shit club, I'm not going anywhere," The Sun reported.

The fan squared up to Ba with Gabbidon stepping in to keep them

apart. A table was knocked over in the mayhem, the report said.

"The fan went berserk, shouting and screaming at Ba, hurling all sorts of racist insults at him -- and Ba looked like he was about to lash out when Danny Gabbidon separated them.

"A table was tipped over and security men raced into the room -- it was chaos. Within moments, police were all over the place," the eyewitness was quoted as saying.

"Everyone was there, including the club's co-owners David Gold and David Sullivan.

"Sullivan was furious and screaming, 'Why did this happen after everything we've just been through?'," the eyewitness reportedly said.

A vintage vase was broken in the melee as supporters marauded through the dining room, the report said.

But a security source told newspaper that the club "know exactly" who the supporters who sparked the trouble were.

Players quickly made their escape out of the hotel's back exits.

Police confirmed they were called to "reports of a disturbance" at the hotel.

"Officers attended. There were no offences alleged and no arrests," a spokesman said.

The players had been ordered to attend the event, which was attended by about 200 people, including corporate sponsors. It was aimed at raising money for the club's youth academy, the report said.

Sullivan said the incident was sparked by a drunken fan racially abusing a player.

He told Sky Sports News: "The whole incident has been blown out of all proportion.

"It was one individual who had too much to drink, sadly a problem in British society.

"A player was racially abused by the same drunken supporter, which is not acceptable. Sadly one drunken supporter let the club down."

Milan not interested in Pastore

AFP, Rome

AC Milan CEO Adriano Galliani on Tuesday denied the Italian champions are interested in signing Palermo playmaker Javier Pastore.

Pastore is one of the hottest prospects in Italy following two impressive seasons with the Sicilian outfit.

Although the Italian press has linked the 21-year-old with a move to Milan, Galliani said they had other priorities.

"No-one has ever thought about Pastore, I don't know why this story came out yesterday," Galliani told reporters.

"First we're thinking about renewing (the contracts of existing players) and then we'll deal with everything else."



PHOTO: AFP

Borussia Dortmund midfielder Nuri Sahin signs the 'golden book' at city hall in Dortmund on Monday.

A season of failure

AFP, Rome



While a lot of attention has been focussed this Serie A season on the surprisingly positive campaigns of Napoli,

Lazio and Udinese, there are three other teams whose failures have been just as notable.

While the other three were surpassing expectations and battling for a place in next season's Champions League, Juventus, Roma and Sampdoria have been the big losers this term.

And each one has staked their claim for the biggest of the under-achievers.

First there is Roma who finished second last year, missing out on the title by two points, paying dearly for a home defeat to Samp four matches from the end of the season.

They began this term with high hopes of going one further and strengthened with the signings of forward Marco Borriello from AC Milan and midfielder Simplicio from Palermo.

Last season, Claudio Ranieri took over from Luciano Spalletti after two games and two defeats with the club bottom of the table.

But the club would later go on a record 24-match unbeaten run, based on a rock solid defence.

But from the word go, this season was fraught with disappointments.

Roma never really looked like challenging for the title and when they lost four games in a row in February, Ranieri walked before he could be pushed.

Three of those defeats left Roma playing catch-up in the race for a Champions League finish while the fourth was a home loss to Shakhtar Donetsk that preceded their eventual elimination from Europe's premier competition.

Rookie Vincenzo Montella took over but could not significantly change the club's fortunes.

They crashed out of Europe in the last 16 thrashed 6-2 on aggregate by Shakhtar, then went their Italian Cup hopes in the semifinals and finally Sunday's 2-1 defeat at lowly Catania ended their Champions League aspirations.

Then there is Sampdoria, who surprised everyone in finishing fourth last season under Luigi Delneri and qualified for the final Champions League qualifying round.

That result earned Delneri a move to Juventus but things started to go wrong early for his successor Domenico Di Carlo.

Samp conceded a goal three minutes into injury time against Werder Bremen and then lost out in extra-time in their Champions League play-off.

Their league campaign was not as successful as the previous season but they were at least in European contention until a bust-up between star striker Antonio Cassano and president Riccardo Garrone.

Cassano was banished from the team in mid-October and sold to Milan in January, while Garrone also decided to cash in on Giampaolo Pazzini.

Selling their two best players and

successful strike partnership was a disastrous move for Samp, they scored a paltry 13 goals in 21 games since their attacking duo left.

With their form slumping, Di Carlo paid the price and was replaced by Alberto Cavasin.

Sunday's 2-1 home defeat to Palermo ensured Samp became the first team in Italy to be relegated the season after qualifying for the Champions League.

And lastly there's Juventus.

The Turin giants spent heavily in the summer, bringing in 10 new players and adding three more in January -- amongst them all were seven Italy internationals -- but even so they could not significantly improve on last season's calamitous campaign.

A seventh placed finish had seen them suffer a record number of defeats and goals conceded, although they did at least qualify for the Europa League.

This time they started out quite well and were briefly second but they started the new year with seven defeats in 11 games.

Their 1-0 defeat at Parma on Sunday means they have to beat Napoli in their last game and hope Roma lose at home to Sampdoria or they will miss out on Europe altogether next season.

One of Roma and Juve won't be playing in Europe in 2011/12 and their fellow failures Samp will have a say in their destiny.

It's a bitter irony in a forgettable season for all three.

Tevez shown the door



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi is Argentina's centre forward, coach Sergio Batista said on Monday as he closed the Copa America door to Carlos Tevez.

"My number nine is Lionel Messi," Batista told a news conference in which Argentina announced a new warm-up fixture at home to Albania for the South American championship they will host in July.

"There are no discarded players but if you ask about Tevez ... we have Messi in that position," he said while adding that the door to his team was not closed to anyone in the future with his long term sights on the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Gonzalo Higuain of Real Madrid was a second option as the central striker or he could play in a slightly different attacking role, the 48-year-old coach said.

Batista added his decision concerning Tevez was purely a footballing one, saying: "There's nothing personal."

"Argentina are not going to play like Barcelona but I want to surround Messi in the best possible way," Batista said. "We will play a controlled possession game with patience."

He said he was looking for players to fit into his tactical scheme and that any doubts he still had about who to include in his 22-man squad for the July 1-24 tournament depended on finding the right man for a particular position.

Argentina go on tour next month to play Nigeria in Abuja on June 1 and Poland in Warsaw on June 5 before facing Albania at the River Plate stadium on June 20 by which time Batista said he would have decided on his squad for the Copa America.

Later in the year, Argentina meet Romania in Bucharest on Aug. 10 and tour Asia in September with friendlies against Venezuela in Calcutta on Sept. 2 and Nigeria in Bangladesh on Sept. 6.

Guerrero out, Farfan in

AFP, Berlin

Peru striker Paolo Guerrero from Bundesliga side Hamburg is out of July's Copa America after tearing a knee ligament, while Schalke 04 forward Jefferson Farfan has been recalled to the squad.

The 27-year-old Guerrero tore the medial ligaments in his left knee during Hamburg's 1-1 draw with Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday and will miss the south America championships to be held in Argentina from July 1-24.

He picked up the injury in a tussle with Gladbach midfielder Marco Reus, who has been called into the German squad for the home friendly with Uruguay on May 29.

His club Hamburg report the forward, who has won 29 caps for Peru, does not need an operation, but will be out for between four and six weeks.

Meanwhile, compatriot Farfan is back in the Peru squad following a ten-month absence after he was suspended in October 2010 following a 1-0 defeat to Panama after leaving the team hotel for an unauthorised trip to a casino.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
In this season's EPL, who has been the best player?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote
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What to WATCH

SET Max
Indian Premier League
Chennai v Kochi
Live from 8:30pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
TEN Action+
UEFA Europa League Final
Porto v Braga

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Brothers Union v Mohammedan
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National