



# Clinical Chelsea

AFP, London



Chelsea eased the pressure on beleaguered boss Andre Villas-Boas as the Blues gave a clinical display of finishing to beat Newcastle 3-0 at St James' Park on Saturday.

Villas-Boas has come under fire in recent weeks following a miserable run of results, but the Portuguese coach was able to silence the critics after goals from Didier Drogba, Salomon Kalou and Daniel Sturridge lifted the Blues into third place in the Premier League.

After Tuesday's League Cup quarterfinal exit against Liverpool, Villas-Boas -- whose side started the day in fifth place -- could ill afford to lose further ground in the fight for a top four finish.

He got an early break as Chelsea were fortunate not to be reduced to 10 men in the fourth minute when David Luiz hauled down Demba Ba.

Luiz was clearly the last defender but referee Mike Dean decided to book the Brazilian rather than send him off.

Dean ruled in Chelsea's favour again in the 14th minute when the official gave a penalty for Yohan Cabaye's trip on Sturridge.

However, Frank Lampard's low spot-kick was weakly struck and Tim Krul pushed it onto a post.

Chelsea took the lead when Drogba struck with a bullet header from Juan Mata's cross in the 38th minute.

Drogba almost scored at the wrong end in the second half when his attempted clearance hit the bar and John Terry had to clear off the line from Sammy Ameobi.

But substitute Kalou's 88th minute strike and a cool shot from Sturridge in stoppage time secured Chelsea's second win in their last five matches in all competitions and ended Newcastle's unbeaten home run.

PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba is ecstatic after scoring his opening goal against Newcastle United during their Premier League encounter at the Sports Direct Arena yesterday.

## Socrates in ICU

AFP, Sao Paulo

Former Brazilian soccer star Socrates was in "critical condition" in an intensive care unit early Saturday after suffering intestinal infection, his doctors said.

Albert Einstein Hospital announced in a statement here that Sampaio de Sousa Vieira de Oliveira, 57, "was in critical condition due to a septic shock of intestinal origin."

The statement added that he was breathing with a ventilator and using a dialysis machine.

He was taken to the hospital late Friday after suffering food poisoning, his wife said.

Socrates was hospitalized twice in August and September this year with bleeding in his digestive tract.

He recognized after these incidents he had problems with alcohol, especially in the era when he was playing.

Socrates played for the Brazilian national team in 1982 and 1986 -- during the World Cup tournaments in Spain and Mexico.

He also wore the strip of Brazilian club Timao (1978-1984) and Italian Fiorentina (1984-1985).

## Blanc's work cut out

AFP, Kiev



France coach Laurent Blanc has branded England the favourites to qualify from Euro 2012 Group D, but admitted that Friday's draw in Kiev could have been much worse for his side.

Sweden and co-hosts the Ukraine make up the pool, which will be contested in the Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Kiev and will kick off with France's match against England at Donetsk's Donbass Arena on June 11.

"We could have found ourselves in Denmark's place and when you see where they are in Group B (with the Netherlands, Germany and Portugal), it could have been very complicated," Blanc told AFP.

"We could have also been in Group A, which seems very open to me (with Poland, Greece, Russia and the Czech Republic). So much the better for our Polish and Czech friends.

"We have the co-hosts (Ukraine), who we know very well, having played them not that long ago (a 4-1 friendly win in June), but the context will be different.

"We know England just as well but that will be a different context too. And then there's Sweden, who are always very difficult to play against as they're very physical.

"There will be a favourite -- England -- and behind them, the three teams all have realistic hopes of qualifying."

Pending an appeal, England will be missing talisman Wayne Rooney for their three group games after he was sent off in his side's final qualifying match in Montenegro.

"They've made an appeal," said the France coach, a member of the France team that triumphed at Euro 2000 in Belgium and the Netherlands.

"The appeal could lead to something but, in any case, he'll be suspended for the first match against France.

"A player of Rooney's class not being in the opposition team, that could be good news."

Blanc had been concerned about the possibility of starting the competition on June 8, with France's Ligue 1 not finishing until May 20, and he admitted he was relieved to be kicking off three days later.

"It's true that it's good news because we could have played on the eighth and been obliged to be there on the third," he said.

"This gives us three extra days. It's a good thing, but I repeat: to have a good preparation and a preparation equal to our opponents, it would be good if the French championship finished on May 13."

Blanc is seeking to guide France back to the upper echelons of the world game, after the disappointment of their disastrous group-stage exit at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

They were also eliminated at the group phase in Euro 2008 and Blanc said that the relative kindness of the draw would not lead his side to under-estimate their opponents next summer.

"If we started changing (tactics) depending on our opponents, we'd never finish," he said.

"The best teams in world football are Spain, the Netherlands and Germany. We won't meet them in the first round so we'll see if we can impose our game. But there's work to do."

## Black Cats appoint O'Neil

AFP, London

Sunderland confirmed the appointment of Martin O'Neill as manager of the struggling Premier League club on a three-year contract on Saturday.

O'Neill, 59, replaces Steve Bruce, who was sacked earlier this week, and is back in management after a year out of work following his exit from Aston Villa.

"It's a very nice feeling to be back in football and to be the manager of Sunderland. It's a big moment for me," O'Neill told Sunderland's website.

## Rivaldo exits Sao Paulo

AFP, Sao Paulo

Former Brazilian international Rivaldo, a World Cup winner in 2002, left Sao Paulo on Friday, but the 39-year-old vowed to keep playing.

"This is not the time to say farewell to football. My aim is to finish my career at the end of 2012, I still have plenty to offer," said Rivaldo after Sao Paulo refused to offer him a new contract.

Rivaldo, who played in Brazil with Corinthians from 1993-1994 and Palmeiras until 1996, went on to enjoy a successful career in Europe.

## Milan go top

AFP, Rome



AC Milan went top of Serie A for the first time this season after a 2-0 victory against 10-man Genoa on Friday in a match which was suspended in the first half after tear gas clogged the ground.

Udinese or previous leaders Juventus could yet overtake the champions at the weekend but it was still an ominous warning from the rossoneri to their rivals.

They now have seven wins and a draw in their last eight league games.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored from the penalty spot after former Milan player Kakha Kaladze had been sent off for bringing down the Swede and earning a second yellow card.

Antonio Nocerino scored the killer second after being teed up by Kevin-Prince Boateng.

Ibrahimovic, however, denied this victory was a sign to their title rivals.

"In the first half we had three chances that we could have scored from and that would have opened up the game," he said.

That move forced the referee to suspend the match for 10 minutes just past the quarter-hour mark as gas seeped into the ground, causing breathing problems for players and fans.

The first half was a tame affair, although Nocerino was twice played in behind the Genoa defence.

His first chance was thwarted by a vital last-ditch tackle from Genoa captain Marco Rossi, while goalkeeper Sebastien Frey was out swiftly to block Nocerino's second opportunity.

Ibrahimovic presented Massimo Ambrosini with a clear shooting chance but the Milan captain somehow fell over as he tried to pull the trigger.

The hosts' best chance came when a suicidal pass from Milan's Brazil centre-back Thiago Silva across the box was cut out by Giandomenico Mesto, but he screwed his shot from an angle just past the far post.

Kaladze began the second half by picking up a booking for going through the back of Boateng and just minutes later he was late in on Ibrahimovic.

The referee showed a second yellow card and Ibrahimovic was ruthless from the spot on 56 minutes.

Robinho should have killed the game on the hour mark but incredibly blazed a shot over the bar from barely two yards out in a replica of a chance he missed against Barcelona last week.

The miss was so bad that Alberto Aquilani, who tied him up, flopped to the ground with his head in his hands.

Nocerino showed the Brazilian how it was done by making no mistake from Boateng's pass 11 minutes from time.

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
 Who do you think is the right candidate for future ICC leadership?  
 Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote  
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**What to WATCH**

**ESPN**  
 English Premiership  
 Everton v Stoke City  
 Live at 8:55pm  
**STAR Sports**  
 English Premiership  
 Wolves v Sunderland  
 Live from 9:55pm  
**TEN Action**  
 La Liga  
 Osasuna v Real Betis  
 Live from 10:55pm  
**SAFF Championship**  
 Nepal v Bangladesh  
 From 10:00pm  
**STAR Cricket**  
 Australia v New Zealand  
 First Test, Day 5

## Del Bosque wants repeat final

AFP, Madrid



Spain coach Vicente del Bosque wants his team to face Germany in the final of Euro 2012 after Friday's draw left open the possibility of a repeat of the teams' meeting in Vienna in 2008.

The side then coached by Luis Aragones beat Germany thanks to a solitary Fernando Torres goal to win the title, and Del Bosque's men then beat Germany 1-0 in the semifinals of last year's World Cup.

If Spain finish top of Group C, and Germany win Group B, then the pair will only be able to come up against each other in the July 1 final in Kiev, something that Del Bosque admits would be a mouth-watering prospect.

"That is something that would be great and I hope it does happen -- it would be a fantastic final," Del Bosque told Cuatro television after the draw.

"Group B looks like the strongest but the important thing is that this is going to be a very competitive European Championship.

"It would be great to see a Spain v Germany final, but we want to enjoy ourselves above all else."



Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic scores a penalty against Genoa during their Serie A clash at the Luigi Ferraris Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP