



AN UNSTOPPABLE SHOT: Hertha Berlin striker Adrian Ramos (L) scores the equalising goal during their Bundesliga match against Schalke in Berlin on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Schalke move to second

AFP, Berlin



Dutch striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar hit his 25th goal of the season to put Schalke second in the German league behind Bayern Munich and said the Royal Blues' aim is to keep the pressure on the leaders. Huntelaar scored in the 19th minute of Schalke's 2-1 win at Hertha Berlin on Friday as his team joined Bayern at the top of the German league on 31 points, but the Gelsenkirchen-based club are second on goal difference. The Dutchman netted his 25th goal in 24 competitive matches before 21-year-old Finland striker Teemu Pukki hit Schalke's winner in the 44th minute after Colombia's Adrian Ramos had equalised for Berlin at the Olympic Stadium. "Our goal is to finish amongst the top four and to play in the Champions League," said Huntelaar, who has scored 14 goals in 15 German league games. "We want to stay at the top, where we are now." Schalke have never won the Bundesliga title -- they were last German champions back in 1958 -- and their only defeat in their last 10 games has been at the hands of neighbours and defending German champions Dortmund. Under coach Huub Stevens, Schalke are now amongst the league's top teams with just a point separating fourth from first.

Rooney appeal slated

 Football

REUTERS, London

Harry Redknapp and David Moyes became the latest Premier League managers to round on the English FA on Friday in the aftermath of their appeal against Wayne Rooney's Euro 2012 ban. Redknapp said the FA's stance had "opened up a can of worms" while Moyes described his experience of the governing body's appeals process as a "kangaroo court". Kenny Dalglish said on Thursday the FA had failed to set an example in appealing the England striker's suspension. Rooney, who was banned for kicking out at Montenegro's Miodrag Dzudovic in a qualifying match, had his three-game suspension reduced to two by UEFA on Thursday following a successful appeal from the FA. "For them to get it from three to two, it opens up a can of worms," Tottenham manager Redknapp told reporters. "There will be clubs appealing against bans and they will want to know why they aren't getting it cut from three to two for similar situations. "People will look at it and think, 'Hang on, the FA have gone and appealed against his red, why can't we?'" Everton manager Moyes contrasted the Rooney situation with his experience of appeals to the FA. "You should see us when we try to appeal - it's absolute murder," he said. "I've got to say, the times that I have been in front them, it's like a kangaroo court, you've got no chance." In response to Dalglish's criticism, the FA released a statement defending their decision to appeal on the grounds that UEFA's disciplinary system was different to theirs. "The FA's system allows clubs to make a claim of wrongful dismissal - to reduce a sanction to zero - or appeal the severity of a sanction, both of these processes are dealt with prior to the player's next fixture," the FA said. "UEFA chooses to operate a different process for European matches, based on a sliding scale, under which each sanction is determined individually by a disciplinary panel."

Leboeuf writes off French hopes

AFP, London



Frank Leboeuf, a World Cup winner with France, has written off his country's 2012 European Championship hopes. France have been going through a transitional period under new manager Laurent Blanc after a wretched campaign at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, which was blighted by trouble on and off the pitch. Many though have tipped Les Bleus to be dark horses in Poland and Ukraine next year, citing Greece's shock against-the-odds triumph in 2004 as an example of what can be achieved. Although a 17-match unbeaten run has raised optimism in France, Leboeuf believes escaping out of a competitive group that includes England, Ukraine and Sweden is the best they can realistically aim for at Euro 2012. "It's good that France have qualified and we can give major international experience to the players," former Chelsea defender Leboeuf told AFP in an interview here on Friday. "That's the only use we can put the competition to as we don't expect to win. We want to be ready long-term for the World Cup in 2014," added the 43-year-old, in London as an ambassador for English Premier League title sponsor Barclays. "It's going to be tough as people forget we had to start from scratch," explained Leboeuf, winner of the both the World Cup (1998) and European Championships (2000) with France during his 50-cap career. "We have done well, but we don't know the value of the team yet. Everyone talks about the past with France, but we lost a lot. "A lot was destroyed with the spirit and the view of the fans towards the team during that World Cup (in South Africa). "For France, with the likes of Thierry Henry and Zinedine Zidane long gone, getting out of the group stage would be seen as good progress."

Veron puts off retirement

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Juan Sebastian Veron has delayed plans to end his glittering career until the close of the Argentine season after being persuaded to change his mind by Estudiantes team mates and fans. Veron, who shone in Europe for a decade with Sampdoria, Parma, Lazio, Manchester United, Chelsea and Inter Milan, was set to play his last match for Estudiantes against Union on the final weekend of the Apertura championship on Sunday. Instead, the 36-year-old who has been plagued for months by ankle problems, told reporters in La Plata on Friday he would play for another six months and finish when the Clausura championship ends in June. "I've taken the decision to carry on. I'm happy to stretch it to six more months at the club," said Veron, who last Sunday had told about 500 fans chanting "Veron's not going" at the club's training complex that he would think about staying on. He said it was not a sudden decision but rather the result of talks with team mates and club staff since he said in September he would retire at the end of the Apertura. "During this time we talked a lot and I gave them my reasons (for quitting) because I suffer a lot from my ankle and its something that limits me whatever others may say about it not showing," Veron said.



FIFA president Sepp Blatter (L) is greeted by Japanese children at the re-opening ceremony for a football field at Matsushima city in tsunami affected Miyagi prefecture yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

CLUB WORLD CUP

Esperance dreaming of Barca

 Football

AFP, Toyota

The coach of African champions Esperance admitted on Saturday that it was a problem getting his players to focus on their Club World Cup opener when they know Barcelona await them if they win. The Tunisians take on Asian winners Al Sadd, from Qatar, at the intercontinental showpiece on Sunday, with a glamour tie against the European and Spanish champions the prize. Coach Nabil Maaloul said on the eve of Esperance's debut at the tournament in Japan: "Our players are think-

ing about Barcelona but we are trying to stop them from thinking ahead. "It's been difficult to try to get Barcelona out of their minds, but we have been trying to get them to focus only on tomorrow's match." Maaloul, whose side enjoyed a historic season, wrapping up three titles including the regional crown, said the popular revolt in Tunisia which toppled the country's dictator and sparked the Arab Spring was a "big motivation". Football was suspended in Tunisia during a mass movement which resulted in the overthrow in January of longtime ruler Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. "We had to be quite strong during that time," said Maaloul, 49, a former midfielder with the national side. "For two-and-a-half months we couldn't practise but we were determined to get to the final (of the African Champions League). "Football in Tunisia is connected to domestic politics but we tried not to be affected by that. We just focused on ourselves and tried not to be diverted." Underlining the difficulty Maaloul faces in trying to stop his men thinking of Lionel Messi and company at Barca, captain Ousama Darragi told media in Toyota: "Al Sadd are another Arab team and we are expecting a tough game. "But after we win we want to play Barcelona."

Statue tribute stuns Henry

 Football

AFP, London

Former Arsenal striker Thierry Henry was overcome with emotion after seeing a statue of himself unveiled outside the Emirates Stadium here on Friday as part of the club's 125th anniversary celebrations. Statues of Tony Adams, who twice captained Arsene Wenger's men to the domestic league and FA Cup double, as well as Herbert Chapman, Arsenal's successful manager of the 1920s and 1930s, were set alongside those of Henry. Henry, who scored a club record 226 goals during his time with Arsenal and helped the club win two Premier League titles and two FA Cups, left the north London side for Barcelona in 2007. He won the Champions League with the Spanish giants before moving to the United States and Major League Soccer side New York Red Bulls. But the 34-year-old former France striker, the bulk of whose Arsenal career was played out at the club's nearby former home at Highbury, insisted the Gunners were still his side. "I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would have a statue like this in front of the stadium of the team I love and support," said Henry. "The way the statue is gives the perfect example of the love I have for the club -- me kneeling facing the Emirates Stadium and Highbury behind is amazing. "I also have to thank the fans, you have always been special, and I always try to give my best, I know times it was not enough, but I always give it all out there on the field for you guys and the club. "It is kind of weird to think of the amount of great players who have played for Arsenal, and for me to be right here, I have to say thanks to all of them, because I would not be able to be right there kneeling in front of this stadium, without them. "Also, I must give a special thanks to my close friends....." Henry added: "I know some of the press used to kill me for not showing emotion -- well, there you go, I am showing emotion for the club I love. "Whatever I do, I do it with my heart that is the way I am. "It was not always easy to cope with the pressure of delivering, but from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank Arsenal Football Club for giving me this opportunity to be here in front of this club I love -- once a 'Gooner', always a 'Gooner'. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I played with some great players too and it would not have been possible without them."

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Who is Bangladesh's sports personality of 2011?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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BTv
Bangladesh v Pakistan
First Test, Day 3
Live from 9:30am
NEO Cricket
India v West Indies
Fifth ODI
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
English Premiership
Sunderland v Blackburn
From 7:25pm
Stoke City v Tottenham
From 9:55pm
TEN Action
La Liga
Bilbao v Racing Santander
Live from 12:40am (Monday)
STAR Cricket
Australia v New Zealand



National Cricket League: 2nd Phase
(Round 1, Day 1)
Khulna v Rajshahi
Venue: Fatullah Stadium, Narayanganj
Dhaka Metro v Sylhet
Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium