



Chelsea winger Juan Mata (L) scores the opening goal against Fulham during their Premier League encounter at Stamford Bridge yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Enrique eyes Spain call-up

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool's left-back Jose Enrique insisted he deserves a place in Spain's national squad ahead of next year's European football championship, in comments published Monday.

"I think I deserve a chance," he was quoted as saying by leading Spanish sports daily Marca, while acknowledging that Valencia player Jordi Alba "is doing a very good job" in the left-back role for Spain.

"I think that just for the fact that I've managed to play for a team like Liverpool, they should be thinking of me" for the Spain squad, added the Spaniard, who moved to Liverpool from Newcastle in August.

## Cesc hopes for Barca ending

AFP, Barcelona

Cesc Fabregas said Sunday he hopes to finish his career with Barcelona, but if he were to leave the Spanish giants he'd only go back to Arsenal and nowhere else.

"Apart from Arsenal and Barcelona, I don't see myself playing anywhere else," the 24-year-old told Sky Sports News.

"I will definitely be going back (to Arsenal) whenever I have time to watch games and to see the guys, and you never know in the future, why not?"

"I hope I will stay here for a very long time, and maybe even retire here, but why not? In life, you can never say never, and if there is one place to go back to, it is Arsenal for sure."

## Wales mulls Giggs move

AFP, London

Welsh football chiefs are hoping to persuade Manchester United veteran Ryan Giggs to become national manager, replacing Gary Speed, who took his own life last month, mediareports said Monday.

The Welsh Football Association is set to make an approach next month, according to The Sun newspaper, which quoted a "Wales insider" as saying: "Ryan has never managed but he's seen as a natural successor to Gary. At 38, he's the right age to be on the same wavelength as our young team."

# Chelsea lose more ground

AFP, London



Chelsea blew a chance to move into third place in the Premier League after the spluttering Blues were held to a 1-1 draw by Fulham at Stamford Bridge on Monday.

Juan Mata gave the home side a 47th minute lead but Clint Dempsey levelled for Fulham in the 56th minute and Martin Jol's visitors stood firm to claim a much-needed point.

This was Chelsea's third successive draw, coming on the back of stalemates against Wigan and Tottenham, and denied Andre Villas-Boas's side the chance to force their way back into the title race.

Instead, another disappointment means they sit fourth, two points ahead of fifth-placed Arsenal 24 hours before the Gunners face Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Having moved to within seven points of leader Manchester City following victory over Roberto Mancini's side earlier in December, Chelsea have fallen well off the pace.

Villas-Boas restored Fernando Torres and Frank Lampard to his starting line-up, giving both the opportunity to restate their claims to a more regular start after being left on the bench for the Blues' more important games recently.

Torres in particular was unlucky not to mark his return with a goal when he carved out his side's best chance of the first half after 15 minutes. The striker did everything right after being picked out by a floated cross from his fellow Spain international Mata, cushioning the ball on his chest before hooking an acrobatic volley that was superbly saved by Fulham keeper David Stockdale.

Torres's effort came moments after Orlando Sa has spurned a much more clear-cut opportunity to open the scoring for Fulham with the striker heading from just six yards. Those two chances proved to be the

highlights of a disappointing first half that rarely sparked into life and that was played out in a tepid atmosphere that belied the game's status as a derby played out by west London neighbours.

Fulham lost 5-0 to Manchester United in their last match, but if they had been successful in repairing fractured confidence in the opening period, they reverted to type immediately after the restart, allowing Chelsea quickly to take control of the game through Mata.

The 47th minute move began with Ashley Cole on the left before the left back found Torres with his back to goal inside the Fulham area.

Torres rolled the ball back towards Mata and the former Valencia playmaker beat Stockdale with a crisp, left foot shot from the edge of the area.

Chelsea failed to build on Mata's effort, however, and were hauled back when a suspect defence contributed to Dempsey's 56th minute equaliser.

## Messi dreams big

AFP, Buenos Aires



Barcelona star Lionel Messi says he is convinced he can lift the World Cup with Argentina, the forward said in an interview published Monday with the Argentina Football Association.

Messi has won a host of top honours with Barca but has yet to taste major honours with the albiceleste, who are without a top title since 1993 and who flopped at the Copa America on home soil in July with many observers puzzled as to why his club form rarely appears at international level.

"I still have this dream and that is to be a world champion and lift the Copa America with the national side. And I know I'll do it, I am convinced I shall," insisted Messi.

"I don't have to demonstrate anything to anybody. I would love to win a title with the national team but I am just another one in the group who wants to do the best for Argentine football, nothing more," added Messi.

Under new coach Alejandro Sabella, Argentina got off to a mediocre start to

their World Cup qualifiers with an embarrassing loss to Venezuela but their recent win over Colombia put them on a more even keel and they are now level on points with regional group leaders Uruguay albeit having played a game more - and Venezuela.

"The group are doing fine. But we needed a win like that to strengthen ourselves. It has revitalised us," Messi said, recognising that "sometimes we don't quite get up to the mark either in terms of performance or the result. We are aware of that."

On the difference between playing for his country and Barca, with whom he has just won the world club title, Messi said: "They are two different things. Barcelona are the best team in the world - even non-fans admit as much. That is the result of years of hard work with the same teammates."

"It's more difficult with the national side and we've been through a lot of chopping and changing of coaches in recent years," he said pointedly.

"But we are growing and I know we are going to achieve a lot," Messi concluded.

# Fergie urges Giggs to carry on

REUTERS



Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has urged winger Ryan Giggs to extend his contract with the Premier League champions for another season.

Giggs, 38, is the most decorated player in United's history and last week he revealed plans to sit down with Ferguson before deciding whether to continue playing after this campaign.

"I think Ryan can play another year," Ferguson told reporters ahead of the visit of Wigan Athletic on Monday.

Giggs, who hold the club's appearance record having played in 891 games while scoring 161 goals since signing for United in 1990, remains a key player for Ferguson and showed his class once again during the 5-0 win at Fulham on Wednesday.

"There's no evidence at this moment in time that his energy, stamina or speed are decreasing. There's absolutely no evidence at all. In fact, it's exactly the same as it was the last two or three years. It's amazing," Ferguson said.

Welshman Giggs, who retired from international football in 2007, told United's website (www.manutd.com) last week he was "enjoying things more than ever" but needed to "see how I'm feeling" before making a final decision on whether to retire.

Ferguson, though, has made it clear he wants the 12-times Premier League winner to keep playing for the Old Trafford club.



forever, we know he can't go on forever," he said.

"But, on the evidence of what we're seeing at the moment, I think he can play for another year."

For the first time in Ferguson's 25-year tenure at the club, nearest rivals Manchester City are challenging for the title with United's bid to retain their crown hampered by injuries.

The midfield has been especially affected with Tom Cleverley and Anderson sidelined and Darren Fletcher on an extended break to battle a bowel condition leading Ferguson to challenge 30-year-old Michael Carrick to become the driving force.

"It's time Michael became the pivotal player of our team," he said. "Now is the time for him to establish himself in a long period of dominating the

centre of midfield like he has in the last few weeks."

City spent Christmas heading the top flight for the first time since 1929 but United trail by only two points and Ferguson said Carrick has been vital to the team's resurgence since October's humiliating 6-1 home defeat by their local rivals.

"Michael has been one of our best players. He has been instrumental in what's happening to the team at the moment," Ferguson said.

"He's grabbed the nettle - there's no question about that. In some ways, he has maybe seen the departure of Paul Scholes as his opportunity to be the main man in midfield now," he added referring to Scholes's retirement at the end of last season.

# Mourinho yearns for return

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho says he has his sights set on an eventual return to England - but only once he has made the most of the "great experience" of being at the helm of Real Madrid.

The former Chelsea manager has long stated his love of the English game and many observers feel he will ultimately be headhunted to replace Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United after the latter eventually retires.

Mourinho joined Real on a four-year contract in 2010 fresh from delivering a first European Cup for Inter Milan in four decades, having already won the competition with Porto.

Having landed the Spanish Cup in his first season Mourinho has now taken Real to the top of La Liga but he told the BBC on Monday he still dreams of returning for a second spell in the English Premier League.

"I am very, very happy to be in Real Madrid. It is a great experience for me," Mourinho stressed.

"I believe it is probably the biggest club in the history of football, I didn't want to miss the chance to work here."

"But my passion is England and my next step will be to go back, if possible go and stay for a long time. Get me a club in a couple of years, get me a good club."

Mourinho also said he believed success depended on genius - on the pitch but also in the dugout.

"I think the genius will make always the difference. And the genius in my sport is about some unbelievable players that can break every organisation and every work you can do."

"Genius in managing also exists. For me in football the most important thing is man-management. Football for me is a human science, it is about man."

"I try to prepare my players the best I can but in the end of the day they are the guys that decide everything in the right moment. They make the difference."

SPORTS POLL  
WEEKLY QUESTION

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**What to WATCH**

**TEN Cricket**  
South Africa v Sri Lanka  
Second Test, Day 2  
Live from 2:00pm

**ESPN**  
Sportscenter India  
Sports News  
From 8:30pm

**English Premiership**  
Swansea City v QPR  
From 10:55pm

Norwich City v Tottenham  
From 1:25am (Wednesday)

**STAR Cricket**  
Australia v India  
First Test, Day 3

**DAY'S EVENT**

**Federation Cup Football**  
Wari Club v BKSP  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium