



Liverpool striker Andy Carroll celebrates his goal against Oldham Athletic during their FA Cup clash at Anfield on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Cameroon slash Eto'o ban

REUTERS, Yaounde

Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o has had a 15-match ban reduced to eight months, meaning the former African Footballer of the Year will miss just four competitive matches before August.

The decision was taken in the early hours of Saturday following a lengthy meeting of the Cameroon Football Federation, who had been asked to reconsider the controversial sanction by Cameroon President Paul Biya, officials told Reuters.

Eto'o was punished for leading a strike in November when the Cameroon team refused to play a friendly in Algeria because they had not been paid promised bonuses.

The teams played two friendlies in three days in Morocco but then refused to travel to Algeria in protest at not receiving the funds.

Eto'o's punishment had been widely condemned in Cameroon, where the former Barcelona and Inter Milan striker enjoys widespread popularity because of his performances at both club level and with the Indomitable Lions.

Cameroon's federation has since agreed to pay \$500,000 to the Algerian federation in damages after the game, for which more than 40,000 tickets were sold, had to be called off.

Vice captain Enoh Eyong also had his ban reduced and he will miss just one game.

Mancini fears angry MU

AFP, Manchester



Roberto Mancini has warned his Manchester City players to beware an "angry" Manchester United as the two rivals go head-to-head in the FA Cup third round on Sunday.

City inflicted a humiliating 6-1 defeat on United when the clubs met in the league at Old Trafford in October, a result Sir Alex Ferguson later described as his "worst ever" day.

United go into Sunday's collision at Eastlands on the back of consecutive defeats that have allowed City to open up a three-point lead at the top of the table heading into the second half of the season.

While an early FA Cup exit for United on Sunday could give holders City a valuable psychological edge over their great rivals, Mancini has warned his

men to expect a ferocious response from Ferguson's team.

"Derbies are always difficult and maybe this one will be even harder because United are angry after these two defeats and because we beat them at Old Trafford earlier in the season," Mancini said.

"There are a lot of issues in this game. Two defeats in a row does not happen to them very often. But one thing is certain -- they have a strong mentality and always react positively after a defeat.

"Remember, after losing to us in the league they strung together seven wins and a draw. They have some injuries at the moment but they are still a strong team with good players. That is why they are always dangerous."

United, without an FA Cup win since 2004, have plenty to think about but Ferguson maintains he will not be discussing the 6-1 loss with his players.

"I won't be mentioning that," Ferguson said.

son said.

"I always say that in the FA Cup I would take anyone in a home draw and so the advantage is with City in that respect but it's a cup tie, a local derby and anything can happen in these games.

"It's amazing that (not having won since 2004). It's not a motivating force but it may be for the players that haven't got medals, particularly Rio Ferdinand.

"Rio mentioned that to me last year that he doesn't have an FA Cup medal and I couldn't believe that, because of the amount of time he's been with the club."

After seeing his team lose ground in the title race with consecutive defeats by Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United, Ferguson is confident of a response from United.

He also feels that the champions' experience will prove crucial in the final weeks of the season.

L'pool crush Oldham

REUTERS, London



Andy Carroll scored at Anfield for the first time this season to help Liverpool reach the fourth round of the FA Cup with a 5-1 win over League 1 (third division) Oldham Athletic on Friday.

England international Carroll, bought for 35 million pounds (\$53.93 million) from Newcastle United last January, pounced with injury time approaching to put Liverpool 4-1 up after they had gone behind in the 28th minute.

Oldham's Robbie Simpson produced an unstoppable strike from 25 metres in the 28th minute but Liverpool quickly drew level when a Jonjo Shelvey shot destined for the goalkeeper's hands deflected off Craig Bellamy into the corner of the net.

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard, plagued by injuries in 2011, then rifled home a penalty at the end of the first half to give his side a 2-1 lead.

Bellamy's pace unsettled Oldham as

Liverpool made it 3-1 after 68 minutes, the Welsh winger's cross after a dashing run dispatched by Shelvey.

Misfiring striker Carroll then grabbed his third goal of the season after a swivel on the edge of the box and a smart finish before Stewart Downing made it 5-1 deep into injury time.

"Downing scored, big Andy got a goal, Jonjo scored and Steven scored with a penalty so we've had a few positives but I don't think the scoreline reflects the distance between the two teams on that performance," said Liverpool boss Kenny Dalglish.

However, the game ended on a sour note when Oldham's Tom Adeyemi exchanged words with a spectator and the tearful midfielder needed a consoling word from Gerrard.

Liverpool issued a statement saying: "An incident occurred in the second half of the match which is now being investigated by both the club and the police."

Merseyside Police added: "The aim of the investigation is to establish the full circumstances surrounding the incident to ascertain if action needs to be taken."

Rooney going nowhere



Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United and Wayne Rooney moved swiftly on Friday to deny a report that the striker was poised to leave Old Trafford, dismissing the claim as "nonsense."

A report to be published in Saturday's edition of The Independent suggested Sir Alex Ferguson was ready to sell the club's talismanic striker after a breakdown in relations with the player.

However a joint statement issued by United and Rooney late Friday dismissed the claims as rubbish.

"Manchester United and Wayne Rooney have been made aware of the theme of an article in tomorrow's Independent newspaper," said the statement.

"We have not seen the detail but can assure all United fans that the manager and the club

are committed to Wayne Rooney and Wayne is committed to the manager and the club.

"The player and the manager have always had, and retain, the utmost respect for each other and look forward to working together in the coming seasons.

"Any suggestion that Manchester United and Wayne Rooney are to part company is complete nonsense."

Rooney meanwhile took to Twitter to deny the story.

"The Independent are talking absolute rubbish. My future is with Manchester United and the club and I am totally committed to each other..."

"The manager and I have no issues and anyone who says different don't know what they are talking about," the striker added.

Rooney was fined a week's wages after going out for dinner with his wife and fellow players Jonny Evans and Darron Gibson on December 26.

Ballack set to leave Bayer

AFP, Berlin

Michael Ballack has hinted that he will leave Bayer Leverkusen at the end of the season but does not intend to retire.

"I signed for two years and it was clear for both parties that it was for this period," the 35-year-old said in an interview with Sky Sport News broadcast on Friday.

"Afterwards, I wanted to do something different."

He added: "I don't want to stop completely. It was never a question of that. I still have six months to think about the situation."

'Real need Kaka'



Football

AFP, Madrid

The chances of seeing Kaka playing in the colours of Paris Saint-Germain receded slightly further on Friday when Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho said the Brazilian still featured in his plans for the rest of the season.

Sources close to PSG owners Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) have told AFP that the Ligue 1 leaders are lining up a bid for the playmaker, but Mourinho said: "I'm counting on him for the season."

New PSG coach Carlo Ancelotti is reportedly eager to bring Kaka to Parc des Princes, having enjoyed success with the Brazilian during his tenure as coach of AC Milan.

Mourinho also addressed the competition for places at the tip of the Madrid attack, where Karim Benzema and Gonzalo Higuain

continue to scrap over a single starting place.

Both players have been in fine form this season -- with Higuain having netted 12 goals in the league and Benzema eight -- but Mourinho intends to keep faith with his habitual 4-2-3-1 formation.

"I prefer to play with one central striker and wingers who cut inside into the middle," he told reporters at a press conference.

"But I also know that there is a possibility of playing Higuain and Benzema. In any case, in each match, the two of them have given me what I wanted."

The half-time introduction of Benzema to play alongside Higuain turned the tide in Madrid's favour in Tuesday's Copa del Rey last 16 first leg against Malaga, with the Frenchman inspiring his side to fight back from two goals down to claim a 3-2 victory.

Madrid, who lead La Liga by three points from title rivals Barcelona.

Wenger backs Henry



Football

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger backed Thierry Henry to enhance his legendary status at Arsenal after the New York Red Bulls striker rejoined the Gunners on a two-month loan deal on Friday.

The 34-year-old Frenchman has been training with the Londoners since the close of the MLS season in November and recently had a statue of him unveiled at the Emirates Stadium to underline his enduring popularity at the club.

Henry made 370 appearances for Arsenal during his previous stint and remains the club's all-time leading goalscorer with 226 goals.

Wenger believes Henry's return will be win-win for both Arsenal and the player.

"You cannot take away from people what they have done, and what he has delivered will stay forever. It can just make the statue a bit bigger. Let us hope he will do that," Wenger said.

"Thierry is a world-class player and even at this club, a player of that dimension is always very difficult to find, especially at this period of the season. He can just add something more to the team. Who would turn down a player of his quality?"

"We have a good spirit in the side and he will add something more, experience-wise, and on the nery side as well, when we are under pressure."



Bayern Munich players watch a tennis match between Rafael Nadal and Gael Monfils at the Qatar Open in Doha on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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TEN Action

La Liga
Villarreal v Valencia



Fed Cup Football

Abahani v Arambagh

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Feni Soccer v Police

Venue: Kamalapur Stadium