

Jose defends Pepe

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho defended Portuguese defender Pepe on Saturday saying he believed him when he declared his stamp on Lionel Messi's hand earlier in the week was unintentional.

The 28-year-old had been forced to go public and say his stamp on the Argentinian star's hand during the Spanish Cup quarter-final first leg clash with Barcelona had not been on purpose after he attracted widespread criticism for the gesture.

Mourinho too felt compelled to spring to his defence.

"If Pepe had said publicly that it was intentional and he had told me the same thing then I would have been really mad," said Mourinho, whose Cup holders trail 2-1 going into this week's second leg.

"But he said it was not on purpose and I believe him."

While replays showed that it looked like it was on purpose and Mourinho said it was everyone's right to either believe his Portuguese compatriot or not he used an

example of a previous bitter meeting between the two clubs last season where a Barca player was accused of something but his denial was accepted by all.

Sergio Busquets was accused of making racist remarks to Real defender Marcelo during the Champions League semi-final first leg match which Barca won 2-0 and went on to win the trophy.

"If some amongst you think Pepe is a liar, that is your right," said Mourinho.

"But I did not see you casting doubt last season on the player who denied making racist remarks. Quite to the contrary in fact, everyone believed him including UEFA."

Mourinho's Barcelona counterpart Pep Guardiola said he was more preoccupied with their game against Malaga on Sunday.

"Demand that he be punished? That is not my job," said Guardiola.

"If Pepe said it was not on purpose, then that is that. It is him who knows after all."

Mourinho, whose side lead defending champions Barca by five points in the title race, didn't say whether he would start with Pepe in Sunday's match with Athletic Bilbao.

Mancini warns City

AFP, Manchester

Roberto Mancini has warned his Manchester City players that their 5-1 victory over Tottenham will mean nothing when the title rivals clash again at Eastlands on Sunday.

Premier League leaders City would open up an eight-point lead over third placed Tottenham with a win this weekend, but Mancini is taking nothing for granted even though his side routed Harry Redknapp's men at White Hart Lane in August.

That win in north London announced City's arrival as genuine title contenders, but Redknapp has transformed his side into a force to be reckoned with since then, while Mancini's team have seen their form dip in recent weeks.

All of which explains why Mancini is so keen to downplay the result of the last meeting between the clubs.

"That was five months ago, their second match of the season and it was totally differ-

ent," he said. "You know when you start the season anything can happen."

"Everyone in the squad is not ready to play 100 per cent, everyone needs four, five, six games to be confident. Now it is different and I think Tottenham are one of the best teams."

"It is better to lose one game 5-1 than to lose five games 1-0. You can have one bad day when you concede three, four or five goals."

"We won 5-1 because it was only the second game of the season, for that reason only. Now it is more difficult."

Tottenham have rarely been involved in the title battle since they last won the English crown in 1961, but Mancini believes they could go all the way this season.

"Tottenham are a very, very strong team - they have 20-22 international players and not all of them are young players. For me, they can win the title," he said.

"I think at this moment three clubs - City, Manchester United and Tottenham - could win the title."

Gladbach stun Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Mönchengladbach blew the German league title race wide open on Friday with a stunning 3-1 win over leaders Bayern Munich with rising star Marco Reus dazzling against the Bavarian giants.

The 22-year-old Reus, who will join defending champions Borussia Dortmund next season, did his future employers a huge favour as the Bundesliga resumed after the winter break.

Reus scored the first goal before winger Patrick Herrmann added the second just before half time.

The pair then combined with 20 minutes left for the third goal to seal Bayern's defeat which capped a fine team performance before Germany star Bastian Schweinsteiger scored a late consolation.

Having also stunned Bayern with a 1-0 victory in Munich on the opening game of the season last August, Gladbach completed the double.

The three points saw Gladbach jump from fourth to second in the table and are just a point behind Bayern while both Dortmund, who play Hamburg on Sunday, and Schalke, who host Stuttgart on Saturday, can join Bayern on 37 points.

Just three points now separate the league's top four teams.

Munich's vastly superior goal difference means they will stay top of the Bundesliga this weekend regardless of other results, but their defeat helps all three of their rivals.

Bayern were missing suspended France wing Franck Ribery, but coach Jupp Heynckes still named a star-studded team.

The return of Schweinsteiger after breaking his collarbone in November was eagerly anticipated, but it was Reus who showed exactly why Dortmund are prepared to pay 17.5 million euros for him.

The game was just 11 minutes old when Herrmann put pressure on Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and when the German shot-stopper mistimed his clearance kick, Reus pounced on

the loose ball and curled his shot home.

It was his 11th league goal in 16 games and he is sure to add to his three appearances for Germany later this year with Euro 2012 beckoning.

Bayern responded as Dutch winger Arjen Robben curled in a cross but striker Mario Gomez -- the league's top scorer with 16 goals in 17 games -- was denied by a fine save from Gladbach's teenage keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

Herrmann then benefited from a defence-splitting pass from ex-Germany striker Mike Hanke on 41 minutes and the 20-year-old fired forward on his team pouring forward on the attack.

With a quarter of an hour left, Schweinsteiger netted a consolation goal, but it was too little, too late.



Chelsea defender David Luiz (L) fights for the ball with Norwich City striker Grant Holt during their Premier League encounter at the Carrow Road Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea slip at Norwich

AFP, Norwich



Fernando Torres' problems in front of goal continued as Chelsea were held to a goalless draw at Norwich City in the Premier League's Saturday lunchtime kick-off.

The £50million forward has only scored four goals this season and hasn't found the net for the Blues since October.

The Spain international should have ended that barren run in the second half but somehow managed to poke a shot wide when it looked easier to score.

The result means Andre Villas-Boas' side failed to gain significant ground on the three sides above them, although they would have stayed fourth whatever the score.

It was also Norwich's first clean sheet of the season and a result that further enhances the reputation of their manager, Paul Lambert.

There had been no place in the starting line-up for Gary Cahill, the England centre-back Chelsea had

recruited from Bolton Wanderers earlier in the week.

David Luiz continued as John Terry's central defensive partner as Cahill, who cost £7million, wasn't even named among the substitutes.

Daniel Sturridge was recalled in place of Oriol Romeu as the only change from the side that had narrowly beaten Sunderland the previous week.

Norwich recalled captain Grant Holt and midfielder David Fox as Lambert opted to change the side that had won 2-1 at West Bromwich Albion seven days previously.

Chelsea began imperiously with an exhibition of passing but the first chance of the game belonged to Norwich.

Steve Morison set up Anthony Pilkington, whose shot from a tight angle was blocked by goalkeeper Petr Cech. The rebound almost fell perfectly for Morison, the Wales forward, but Ramires was there just in time to poke clear.

Norwich came even closer in the 10th minute when Morison set up Holt, who fired just wide after getting past Luiz.

Juan Mata fired over from the edge of the box as Chelsea tried to regain their earlier poise but when Torres tried to set Sturridge up in front of goal he found only a Norwich defender.

Holt and Morison combined again as Luiz was again made to look second rate but Morison's shot from a tight angle hit only the side-netting.

Torres was working hard and was denied a 27th-minute opener by John Ruddy, the Norwich goalkeeper, who got his fingertips to an effort from the outside of the Spaniard's boot that would have gone in otherwise.

Frank Lampard limped off in the 35th minute with what appeared to be a calf injury and Chelsea almost fell behind before Florent Malouda came on to replace him.

Bradley Johnson's shot took a deflection off Terry but Cech was able to readjust in time to save and the half ended with Ruddy denying Mata and then Raul Meireles and Mata firing a clear chance over after doing all the hard work himself.

Luiz fired just over after the restart following an air kick from Torres, who then connected with his next try but could not hit the target.

'Messi not there yet'

AFP, Paris

Brazilian legend Pele insisted on Friday that Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, a Champions League winner with Barcelona and three-time Ballon d'Or king, cannot yet be considered as one of the world's greatest players.

Pele called on his own record of three World Cup triumphs as well as a career tally of 1,283 goals to reserve judgement on the little Argentine wizard.

"Some people will say that Beethoven didn't know how to play the piano, that Michelangelo couldn't paint and that Pele didn't know how to play football," Pele told Le Monde newspaper.

"When Messi scores 1,283 goals like me, when he wins three World Cups, then we can talk about it again."

"Football changes and records are there to be beaten, but it'll be very hard to beat mine. People ask me all the time: 'When is the new Pele going to be born?'"

"Never. My father and mother have closed the factory."

Barton slams Warnock

AFP, London

Combative QPR captain Joey Barton took to Twitter on Friday to lambaste former manager Neil Warnock as "embarrassing".

Warnock, who was sacked earlier this month as his team plummeted down the Premier League, had on Thursday claimed that the club's owners had been influenced by outside forces tweeting and texting.

The 63-year-old said that owner Tony Fernandes had been "slowly poisoned" against him.

Warnock did not name Barton, but the midfielder, a prolific 'Tweeter' wrote on Friday: "Neil Warnock saying I talk too much. Now that is funny. Lost his job and the guy is blaming everyone but himself! Embarrassing, time to look in the mirror mate. Last thing we need right. Big week."

SPORTS POLL

Will the BPL be a big hit?

Yes 76.8%

No 23.2%

TOTAL VOTES: 259

WEEKLY QUESTION

Can BPL take Bangladesh cricket forward?

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

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

twitter

www.twitter.com/dssport



STAR Sports

Australian Open

Men's/Women's 4th Round

Live from 6:00am

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Sri Lanka

Fifth ODI

Live from 2:00pm

ESPN

English Premiership

Man City v Tottenham

Live from 7:25pm

Arsenal v Man United

Live from 9:55pm

TEN Action

La Liga

Malaga v Barcelona

BPL 19 days to go... Starts from 10 February 2012



Moenchengladbach midfielder Patrick Herrmann celebrates one of his two goals during their Bundesliga tie against Bayern Munich in Moenchengladbach on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP



Bangladesh A v England Lions

First Twenty20

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur