

## Giggs loses claim

AFP, London

A damages claim lodged by Manchester United midfielder Ryan Giggs against The Sun newspaper was dismissed by a High Court judge in London on Friday.

Giggs claimed the Rupert Murdoch-owned tabloid "misused" private information and argued that he was entitled to claim damages for distress and breach of a right to privacy enshrined in human rights legislation.

But lawyers for The Sun argued that Giggs's claim - made after the newspaper published an article about a relationship with reality television star Imogen Thomas - was "dead in the water".

Hugh Tomlinson, acting for Giggs, argued at a hearing last month that The Sun misused private information in the article, in which the Wales international was not identified.

The lawyer said Giggs was claiming damages for the republication of information in other newspapers and on the Internet which had generated "a large media storm", and his claim should go to trial.



England's caretaker manager Stuart Pearce gestures during their international friendly against the Netherlands at the Wembley on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Euros harder to win than World Cup'

AFP, London



England caretaker manager Stuart Pearce believes the European Championships will be harder to win than the World Cup and says the Three Lions cannot afford to make a slow start to the tournament.

England, beaten 3-2 by the Netherlands at Wembley on Wednesday, have just two friendlies left before their opening Euro 2012 game against France in June and have little time to fine-tune their preparations.

Pearce, who has indicated a willingness to lead England at the finals if a permanent successor to Fabio Capello is not found, said the concentration of quality at the Euros made it a tougher challenge than the World Cup.

"The French are in there, Ukrainians on home soil and obviously the Swedes," Pearce said, referring to England's first round opponents.

"The one thing a World Cup would probably throw up is a match against a lesser nation that would allow you to gather momentum by getting out of the group," he added.

"In the Euros you have to hit the ground running. And make no mistake, with France in the first game we have got to be running very quickly."

While France's Euro preparations got a timely boost in midweek with a 2-1 win in Germany, England's build-up has taken on a chaotic look, with the team still looking for a manager and a captain.

Football Association director Trevor Brooking has suggested England could wait until a few days before Euro 2012 before installing a manager for the tournament, a disclosure that has added to the sense of disarray.

Pearce however is adamant that England's situation is not as serious as has been portrayed.

"It's not the message I am getting from the public," Pearce said.

"They were a little bit excited by the team we put out (against Holland). How they view and decode the performance is down to them.

"I will look at the performance when the dust settles.

"Over-expectation always follows the England team. Under-expectation as well.

"We have to handle that within the group."

## Barca without Messi

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona must live without the inspirational presence of Lionel Messi when they tackle Sporting Gijon on Saturday as the Argentine superstar serves his first La Liga suspension.

Messi was booked in last weekend's 2-1 win at Atletico Madrid, his fifth yellow card of the campaign.

His absence will be a huge blow to Barcelona, who trail Real Madrid by 10 points in the title race, as his value was shown in midweek when he smashed a wonderful hat-trick in Argentina's 3-1 friendly win in Switzerland.

Real Madrid, who face Espanyol on Sunday, also have their own worries with the club facing more speculation over the future of coach Jose Mourinho.

The colourful Portuguese was spotted in London in midweek, fuelling rumours of a return to the English Premier League next season.

While some media reports say the trip was to purchase a property in the British capital, Spanish newspaper Marca claimed this is for Mourinho's own investment purposes and not a signal that he will be coaching in Lon-

don next season.

Espanyol will provide another stern test of Madrid's dominance in La Liga.

Currently sitting eighth, just two points from a Champions League place, the Barcelona-based club have their own objectives.

"I won there with Seville and I think we can do it again. It was a nice feeling, very intense and difficult but I think we

FIXTURES	
<b>Saturday</b>	Mallorca v Osasuna (1700 GMT), Getafe v Malaga (1700 GMT), Rayo Vallecano v Racing Santander (1700 GMT), Barcelona v Sporting Gijon (1900 GMT), Sevilla v Atletico Madrid (2100 GMT)
<b>Sunday</b>	Zaragoza v Villarreal (1100 GMT), Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad (1500 GMT), Granada v Valencia (1700 GMT), Real Madrid v Espanyol (2030 GMT)
<b>Monday</b>	

can repeat that if we stick to our game," said midfielder Koffi Romaric.

"We want the points for our own goals, not to do Barca a favour."

Portuguese international Fabio Coentrao joined Madrid's injury list when he pulled up with a muscle problem in his country's friendly with Poland on Wednesday.

He will be out for three weeks and

joins Angel Di Maria and Karim Benzema, both also out for similar periods with muscular injuries.

Although Madrid can welcome back Turkish stars Nuri Sahin and Hamit Altintop into their ranks they will have to do without the services of central defender Pepe who is suspended.

Barca's opponents Sporting Gijon are six points from safety in La Liga's penultimate position but have turned a corner since ex-Spain manager Javier Clemente has taken over.

Two draws in two games under the new coach have halted a sequence of one win in seven for the north coast club.

With only 14 games to go Barca can't afford to drop any more points in their pursuit of Madrid, with a home fixture to come against the leaders in late April.

One player who will be looking for a good performance against Sporting is Pedro Rodriguez, who was left out of Spain's squad for the 5-0 victory over Venezuela in midweek.

"All players want to go to Euro 2012, I hope I can too but it is going to be difficult, they played great the other day but we'll see what happens," he said.

One player who could be going to Euro 2012 is Valencia forward Roberto Soldado who grabbed a hat-trick in Spain's victory on his return for 'La Roja'.

## Jack Charlton breaks hip

AFP, London

England World Cup winner and former Republic of Ireland manager Jack Charlton is to undergo surgery after breaking his hip in a fall at home, reports said Friday.

Charlton, 76, suffered the fracture after falling down the stairs at his home earlier this week, the Daily Mirror quoted his son as saying.

"The stairs in his house are a bit tricky and awkward and he basically fell down them on Monday night," he told the paper.

Charlton was a member of England's 1966 World Cup-winning team, playing alongside brother Sir Bobby Charlton.

He later enjoyed a successful career in international management, feted in Ireland for leading the country to the World Cups in 1990 and 1994.

### SPORTS POLL

#### WEEKLY QUESTION

Which youngster has impressed you the most in the BPL?

Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote

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#### NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa  
Third ODI  
Live from 7:00am

#### ESPN

English Premiership  
Liverpool v Arsenal  
Live from 7:00pm  
Man City v Bolton  
Live from 9:00pm

#### STAR Sports

English Premiership  
West Bromwich v Chelsea  
Live from 9:00pm

#### TEN Sports

Serie A  
Juventus v Chievo  
Live from 1:40am (Sunday)

#### TEN Action

La Liga

## Wenger blasts friendlies

AFP, London

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger on Friday blasted the international friendlies schedule after claiming Belgium made injured defender Thomas Vermaelen play a full midweek match against Greece despite his recent fitness woes.

Wenger said the Gunners, in action at Liverpool Saturday as they chase down a Champions League qualifying slot, are considering lodging an official complaint against the Belgian Football Association over the issue.

Vermaelen's case is not the only one vexing Wenger with Arsenal skipper Robin van Persie having turned out for Holland against England at Wembley despite battling a groin problem.

Referring to centre-half Vermaelen, Wenger said: "It looks like Belgium has made a decision which I still do not understand and we will look to see if we can put a complaint in."

"Firstly they forced the player to travel, then they forced him to play 90 minutes after being injured and had a centre-back on the bench who did not play at all, in a friendly game knowing they do not even go to the European Championship. For me, that is difficult to understand."

## It's tight at the top

AFP, Rome



After last weekend's nailbiting affair between the two left AC Milan a point clear, Juventus will hope to take command in Serie A on Saturday with a seemingly easier fixture than their rivals.

The 'Old Lady' were lucky to escape from the San Siro with a point after Sulley Muntari had a header ruled out despite crossing the line and now the Turin outfit will look to beat midtable Chievo.

Milan, having played a game more, head for Palermo a point clear of Chievo and clearly a tougher proposition in front of their partisan fans, whom they have treated to 10 home league successes for only two losses.

A win for Juve and a draw for the rossoneri would put Antonio Conte's men top of the heap as they chase down their first Scudetto since 2003 - since when seven coaches have come and gone before

the arrival of Conte, a veteran of more than 400 league games in the black and white.

As the leading pair jostle for glory the ripples from last weekend's confrontation saw the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) investigate alleged misconduct by Milan's Philippe Mexes and Muntari and Juve's Milan old boy Andrea Pirlo.

French centre-back Mexes punched former Roma colleague Marco Borriello to earn himself a three-match suspension, while his Ghanaian team-mate Muntari escaped sanction after shoving Stephan Lichtsteiner.

Pirlo likewise escaped punishment for elbowing Mark van Bommel.

Juve remain unbeaten but have drawn 11 of their 24 games.

They finished the match at San Siro with 10 men after Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal was shown a late red card for a nasty foul on Dutch enforcer van Bommel.

As well as being without Mexes, Milan must also come through a fortnight without forward Alexandre Pato with a thigh strain - his 13th injury in barely two years.

Sunday sees the Rome derby between AS Roma and Lazio.

Lazio, who won the season's first derby right at the death, will expect to bag full points as they chase down the top two -- they are currently level on 45 points with third-placed Udinese, who take on Atalanta.

But Roma, blowing hot and cold under Luis Enrique, can overhaul Napoli and move into fifth with a win.

The Neapolitans, likely to rest several key names ahead of their potentially season-defining Champions League visit to Chelsea, host Parma looking to cut the five-point gap on Lazio.

As AC Milan chase the title and set their sights on a place in the Champions League quarterfinals with a four-goal cushion protecting them in their Arsenal return Tuesday, local rivals Inter can only pray for a win over Catania.

A dreadful run of seven defeats and a draw in their last eight outings has heaped pressure on coach Claudio Ranieri with the team nine points off the Champions League qualifying places.



Corinthians' latest signing Chinese midfielder Chen Zhi Zhao attends a training session in Sao Paulo on Thursday. Zhi Zhao will be Brazilian Serie A's first ever Chinese player.

PHOTO: REUTERS



#### Premier League

Abahani v Team BJMC  
Time: 3:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium  
Soccer Club, Feni v Farashganj  
Time: 3:00pm