

Alex hits out at Chelsea

SOCCERNET

Former Chelsea defender Alex has aimed a thinly-veiled dig at his old teammates, claiming big egos disrupted team morale at Stamford Bridge.

Alex, 29, left London for Paris Saint Germain in January after being frozen out by Andre Villas-Boas, who was reported to have clashed with senior players.

Villas-Boas has since been axed and Chelsea appear to be on the rise under interim boss Roberto Di Matteo, but Alex has suggested that some players felt they were more important than others.

"I feel better at PSG than I did at Chelsea," the Brazil defender was quoted as saying in the Daily Star. "Chelsea's squad had a lot of big names - and that entails a lot of egoism."

"Nobody at PSG feels more important than the others. We're at the start of a big adventure and we're all pulling in the same direction."

The Premier League is widely considered to be one of the best in the world, but Alex believes life in Ligue 1 is harder than English football.

"The French first division is a very defensive-minded and difficult league," he said. "It is often tougher than in England, where certain teams feel beaten before the start when they play Manchester United or Chelsea."

Cassano given all-clear

REUTERS, Milan

Antonio Cassano, the Italy and AC Milan forward who underwent heart surgery last year, has been given the go-ahead to start playing again following a scientific legal evaluation.

Cassano was passed fit following an examination at the Institute of Sports Medicine in Milan on Tuesday, the club said in a statement.

"Cassano can immediately and legally line up with the team again," the Serie A champions said.

The 29-year-old underwent minor heart surgery in November after falling ill on the plane back from a match Roma, sidelining him just as he had hit one of the best spells of his career.



Real Madrid forwards Karim Benzema (L) and Cristiano Ronaldo smile during a training session at Valdebebas in Madrid on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Madrid threaten massacre

REUTERS, Madrid



Real Madrid's prolific trio of Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Gonzalo Higuain are likely to sweep aside

APOEL Nicosia in the Champions League on Wednesday, needing one goal to reach the 100 mark between them this season.

Jose Mourinho's men had no time for sympathy as they won their quarter-final first leg 3-0 in Cyprus last week, all but securing a semi-final place and ending tiny APOEL's valiant first foray into Europe's elite club competition.

The Cypriots failed to muster a shot on Iker Casillas's goal in front of their own fans, and will face an onslaught from three strikers in rampant form at the Bernabeu.

Portugal's former World Player of the Year Ronaldo has amassed 47 goals in all competitions this year, and scored two and set up two more as Real routed Osasuna 5-1 in La Liga last Saturday.

French international Benzema

opened the scoring in Pamplona with a sumptuous volley reminiscent of Marco van Basten's famous effort for Netherlands in the Euro 1988 final, and took his tally for the season to 28.

Argentina's Higuain bagged two and took his season total to 24 as leaders Real closed on the league title, six

held high, and will take some comfort from having held the Spaniards at bay for more than 70 minutes in the first leg.

They received a boost to morale with a 2-1 victory over bitter rivals Omonia Nicosia on Saturday, which left them second in the domestic league behind AEL Limassol.

"It is a very important win for us at a crucial stage of the league," APOEL coach Ivan Jovanovic said.

"We still have a long way to go, but I am pleased that my players responded the way they should. We had a tough week and we have another one ahead of us."

Jovanovic will have Sunday's game for the play-offs against Anorthosis Famagusta on his mind, but is likely to give his regulars the opportunity to play in what will probably be their final match in Europe this season.

Defender Marcelo Oliveira, whose early exit from last Wednesday's game was a major setback, will be sidelined for several weeks after tests showed ruptured knee ligaments.

Ivan Trickovski will also miss the game after breaking his arm during the first leg.

PROBABLE TEAMS:

Real Madrid: 1-Iker Casillas; 17-Alvaro Arbeloa, 3-Pepe, 4-Sergio Ramos, 12-Marcelo; 5-Nuri Sahin, 6-Sami Khedira, 10-Mesut Ozil; 7-Cristiano Ronaldo, 9-Karim Benzema, 20-Gonzalo Higuain
APOEL: 22-Dionisis Chiotis; 7-Savvas Poursaitides, 98-Boaventura, 3-Paulo Jorge, 29-Nectarios Alexandrou, 23 Helio Pinto, 26-Nuno Morais, 10-Constantinos Charalambides, 8-Ailton Almeida, 21-Gustavo Manduca, 31-Helder Sousa

points ahead of Barcelona with eight goals to play and having scored 100 goals in their 30 matches.

Mourinho will have one eye on Sunday's league clash against third-placed Valencia and will probably use the occasion to rotate his squad.

APOEL will want to bow out of the Champions League with their heads

Chelsea seek a tonic

REUTERS, London



A revitalised Fernando Torres is expected to lead Chelsea's attack on Wednesday when they try to sweep Benfica aside to claim their sixth Champions League semi-final

appearance in nine years.

Torres, 28, who scored his first Premier League goal since September in Saturday's 4-2 triumph at Aston Villa, has netted three times in the last four starts and is set to continue at the expense of the injured Didier Drogba.

The Spain striker's renewed sharpness has helped boost Chelsea's team spirit in recent weeks as he has provided a series of key assists including one for Salomon Kalou in the 1-0 quarter-final first leg victory at Benfica last week.

"Strikers feed off goals but apart from that Fernando's been playing very well, even without the goals, by assisting on other goals," interim manager Roberto Di Matteo told reporters.

"He works so hard for the team. He's enjoying himself. He's enjoying playing. He's got a smile on his face and he's confident."

Ivorian Drogba, 34, who picked up a toe injury in training on Friday, is fighting to

prove his fitness for Wednesday's game, as is Brazil centre half David Luiz.

Former Benfica player Luiz limped off at Villa Park with an ankle ligament injury and is likely to be replaced by England international Gary Cahill.

Chelsea have lost just once in eight matches since Italian Di Matteo replaced the sacked Andre Villas-Boas last month.

The Londoners have won six of those games to rekindle ambitions in the Champion League, the FA Cup - they face Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-finals of that competition later this month - and the Premier League where they occupy fifth place.

Chelsea will attempt to extend a 100 percent home record of four wins in the Champions League this season against Jorge Jesus's team who knocked Braga off the top of the Portuguese league at the weekend.

Benfica are now second behind Porto.

Twice European Cup winners Benfica demonstrated their potential for an upset when they drew 2-2 at Manchester United in the group stages in November.

Coveted Argentine winger Nicolas Gaitan will be out to repeat his outstanding performance in the 2-1 win over Braga on Saturday and further impress the scouts from Europe's biggest clubs.

PROBABLE TEAMS:

Chelsea: 1-Petr Cech; 2-Branislav Ivanovic, 24-Gary Cahill, 26-John Terry, 3-Ashley Cole; 5-Michael Essien, 8-Frank Lampard; 7-Ramires, 10-Juan Mata, 21-Salomon Kalou; 9-Fernando Torres
Benfica: 1-Artur Moraes; 14-Maxi Pereira, 4-Luisao, 6-Javi Garcia, 3-Emerson; 28-Axel Witsel, 21-Nemanja Matic, 20-Nicolas Gaitan, 8-Bruno Cesar; 10-Pablo Aimar, 7-Oscar Cardozo



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester United Ashley Young (R) blasts home against Blackburn Rovers during their Premier League clash at Ewood Park on Monday.

Patient United build on lead

REUTERS, Manchester



Manchester United took a big step towards retaining their Premier League title after in-form Antonio Valencia struck nine minutes from time to set up a typically patient 2-0 win at relegation-threatened Blackburn Rovers on Monday.

Second-placed Manchester City's 3-3 home draw with Sunderland on Saturday had given United the chance to ram home their advantage and with seven games remaining they

are five points ahead and now look odds-on for glory.

Ecuador winger Valencia, a driving force all game, ended Blackburn's resistance after prolonged United pressure when he came inside and sent a swerving effort into the far corner although he acknowledged it was "50/50" a shot and a cross.

Substitute Ashley Young grabbed the second in style on 86 minutes.

"It was a great result and great performance. We knew we were always going to create chances," Young told Sky Sports.

"It is a massive lead for us. We've just got to take each game as it comes."

United, who lost to local rivals Blackburn at home in December, also have a patchy record at Ewood Park but won a record 19th English title there last season and always looked dangerous.

It was a professional display that fans expect of experienced title contenders United at this stage of the season and they never panicked despite time ticking away.

Pundits agree that United's side is not as strong as some of their other championship teams and there could still be more twists in the run-in, especially with City hosting United on April 30.

আপনি জানেন কি?

সর্বোচ্চ মুনাফা
নিরাপদ বিনিয়োগ
মাসিক/ত্রৈমাসিক ভিত্তিতে
মুনাফা উত্তোলনের সুযোগ।
সুতরাং আর বিলম্ব নয়,
আজই জাতীয় সঞ্চয়পত্রে বিনিয়োগ করুন।

জাতীয় সঞ্চয়পত্রের স্কীমসমূহ হচ্ছেঃ-

- ০১। পরিবার সঞ্চয়পত্র (৫-বছর মেয়াদী); মুনাফার হারঃ ১৩.৪৫%। ১৮ বছর বা তদূর্ধ্ব বয়সের যে কোন বাংলাদেশী মহিলা একক নামে এ সঞ্চয়পত্র ত্রয় করতে পারবেন।
- ০২। পেনশনার সঞ্চয়পত্র (৫-বছর মেয়াদী); মুনাফার হারঃ ১৩.১৯%। অবসরপ্রাপ্ত সরকারি, আধা-সরকারি, স্বায়ত্তশাসিত, আধা-স্বায়ত্তশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানের সামরিক ও বেসামরিক কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারীগণ একক নামে এ সঞ্চয়পত্র ত্রয় করতে পারবেন।
- ০৩। ৫-বছর মেয়াদী বাংলাদেশ সঞ্চয়পত্র; মুনাফার হারঃ ১৩.১৯%। সকল শ্রেণী ও পেশার বাংলাদেশী নাগরিক একক অথবা যুগ্ম নামে এবং স্বীকৃত ভবিষ্য তহবিল ও কর অবকাশপ্রাপ্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহ এ সঞ্চয়পত্র ত্রয় করতে পারবেন।
- ০৪। ৩-মাস অন্তর মুনাফাভিত্তিক সঞ্চয়পত্র (৩-বছর মেয়াদী); মুনাফার হারঃ ১২.৫৯%। যে কোন বাংলাদেশী নাগরিক একক অথবা যুগ্ম নামে এ সঞ্চয়পত্র ত্রয় করতে পারবেন।
- ০৫। ডাকঘর সঞ্চয় ব্যাংক মেয়াদী হিসাব (৩-বছর মেয়াদী); মুনাফার হারঃ ১৩.২৪%। যে কোন বাংলাদেশী নাগরিক একক অথবা যুগ্ম নামে এ সঞ্চয়পত্র ত্রয় করতে পারবেন।

আপনাদের সেবায়



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SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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What to WATCH

TEN Cricket

Sri Lanka v England
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 10:30am

SET Max

Indian Premier League
Chennai Super Kings v Mumbai Indians
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League
Real Madrid v Apoel Nicosia
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN Action

UEFA Champions League
Chelsea v Benfica
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League

Farashganj v Abahani
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium