

Didier hits back at jibes

AFP, London

Didier Drogba insisted he'd provided the perfect riposte to those who'd branded him "too old" by scoring Chelsea's winner in their Champions League semifinal first leg win over Barcelona.

The 34-year-old striker struck in stoppage time at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday with what turned out to be the Londoners' only shot on target of an extraordinary 1-0 win over reigning champions Barcelona.

For Ivory Coast forward Drogba, who could leave Chelsea at the end of the season when his contract expires, it was his second key goal in as many matches after he opened the scoring in the Blues' FA Cup semifinal rout of London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

"For those who said that I was too old, they saw that I could run maybe one, two or three more years!", Drogba said.

If Chelsea score an away goal in Tuesday's second leg, Barcelona will have to score three and Drogba said: "We have to go there now and try to score another one."

Drogba added Chelsea had ridden their luck in a first leg where Barcelona failed to convert several chances.

"That's football and I think we were a bit lucky. You have to work for luck to come and to happen. We worked a lot. We worked hard."

Fans pay tribute to Petrov

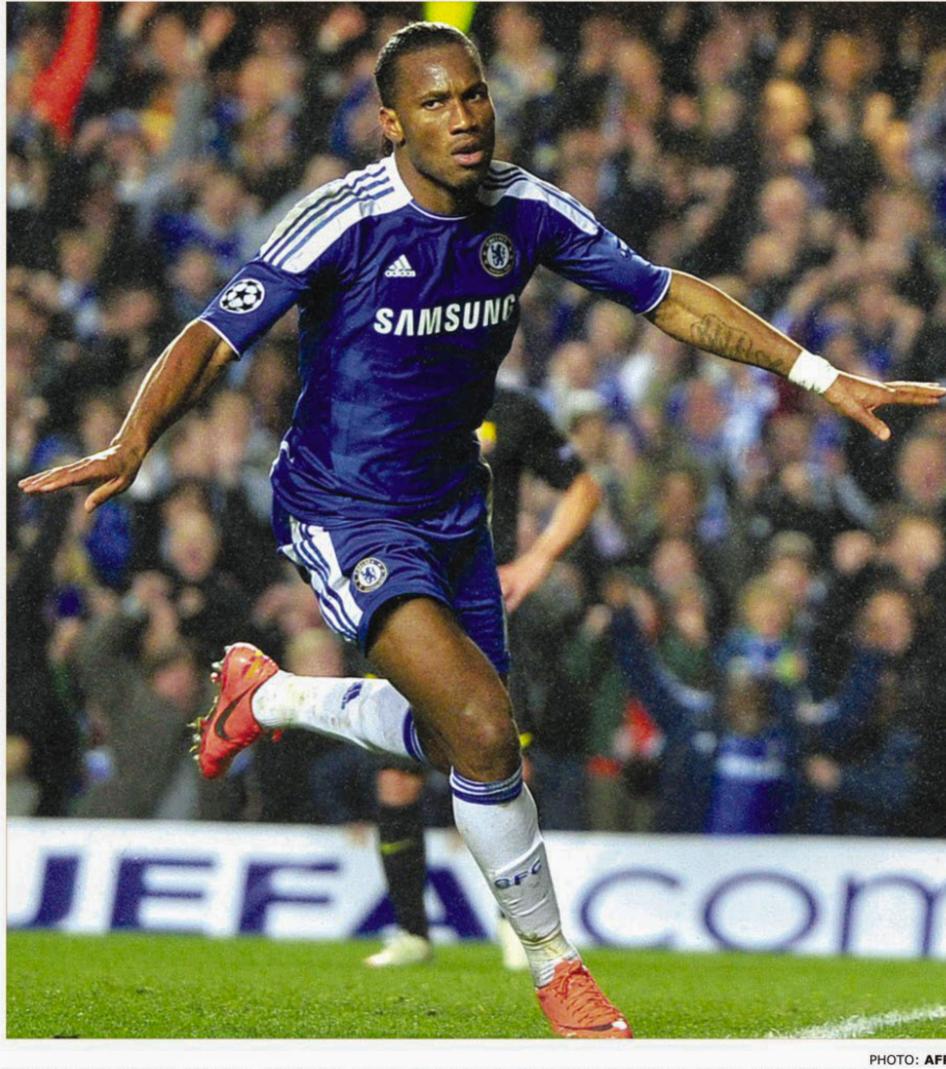
REUTERS, Sofia

Thousands of soccer fans and officials will gather at the Vasil Levski national stadium in central Sofia on Thursday to express their support for Bulgaria captain Stiliyan Petrov, who was diagnosed with acute leukaemia last month.

The time and date of the event - 1900 on April 19 - were chosen to commemorate Petrov's shirt number at his English Premier League club Aston Villa, with the fans being asked to wear shirts with number 19 on their backs.

Current and former players, coaches and top officials are expected to attend the 19-minute event which will be broadcast live on several TV channels.

"I know everyone thinks the same, but I'll write it here anyway...You'll Never Walk Alone," Manchester United striker and Bulgaria's all-time leading scorer Dimitar Berbatov wrote on his Facebook page on Thursday.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba celebrates his all-important goal against Barcelona during their Champions League semifinal at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Drogba stuns Barca

AFP, London



Didier Drogba scored the only goal as Chelsea stunned holders Barcelona to score a 1-0 upset victory in their Champions League semifinal first-leg match

here on Wednesday.

Drogba left Chelsea dreaming of advancing to their first final since 2008 in next week's return leg at Camp Nou after pouncing on the stroke of half-time as Barcelona suffered their first European reverse of the season.

Drogba's goal was Chelsea's only attempt on target in a match where Barcelona carved out chance after chance only to be denied by some desperate defending by their Premier League opponents.

Chelsea had taken the lead in first-half injury-time after an opening 45 minutes in which they had been comprehensively outplayed by the visitors.

Frank Lampard released Ramires down the left flank with a superb cross-field pass and the Brazilian threaded his pass across the area to Drogba, who swept a low shot past scrambling Barca goalkeeper Victor Valdes.

Until then, Chelsea had been clinging on as Barcelona dominated for long periods with their customary slick passing game.

The Catalans might have taken the lead after only nine minutes when Andres Iniesta picked out Alexis Sanchez with a delightful chipped pass, only for the Chilean international's lob over Petr Cech to hit the bar.

Chelsea, who had opted for the muscular presence of Drogba in attack ahead of Fernando Torres, signalled their intentions early on, pumping a series of long balls forward for the Ivorian.

However, genuine chances for Chelsea were few and far between while at the other end Cech was working overtime in the face of a relentless Barca.

Cech had to be alert on 18 minutes after

Lionel Messi darted into the box and cut back for Iniesta, whose fierce low shot was well saved by the Chelsea custodian before Cesc Fabregas scuffed his follow-up wide.

Fabregas tested Cech soon afterwards, his angled shot beaten away on 26 minutes.

Cech was pressed into action two minutes later, saving after Messi met a Sanchez cross with a downward header.

A goal seemed a certainty two minutes from the half-time when Messi won the ball in midfield and raced forwards menacingly.

The Argentinian threaded his pass through to Fabregas, who dinked his shot over the advancing Cech. The former Arsenal star's effort just appeared to be spinning in but Ashley Cole was on hand to hook the ball clear.

That appeared to be the final twist of the half until Drogba's dramatic strike shot Chelsea into the lead two minutes into time added on.

Unsurprisingly, Chelsea's goal was the cue for a sustained Barca onslaught after the break, yet the home side once again were able to frustrate the visitors despite their near-monopoly of possession.

Adriano was the first to test Chelsea again on 51 minutes, skipping over a challenge from Branislav Ivanovic and unleashing a venomous shot that Cech, diving at full stretch, parried to safety.

Moments later it was Messi's turn, advancing forwards only for his shot to be well blocked by John Terry.

On 57 minutes Barcelona threatened again when Fabregas lofted a sublime pass into the area for Sanchez, but a desperate covering tackle from Cole was enough to unbalance the Chilean, who shot wide.

Barcelona continued to dominate but with Chelsea defending deep and in numbers, they were unable to find a breakthrough.

In stoppage time Pedro struck the woodwork and then Sergio Busquets blazed over as Chelsea hung on for a famous win.

Di Matteo hails veterans

AFP, London



Roberto Di Matteo said Chelsea's old guard had silenced their critics after leading the club to a 1-0 upset of holders Barcelona in the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday.

The elder statesman of the Chelsea line-up -- 34-year-old Didier Drogba -- scored the winner as the Premier League side withstood a furious Barcelona onslaught to hang on for a memorable first-leg victory.

The win was a triumph for Drogba, Frank Lampard, John Terry, Ashley Cole and Petr Cech as Barcelona were sent crashing to their first European defeat this season.

"In the past a lot of the public opinion has been that these boys are over the line and too old to play two games at this level," Di Matteo told reporters, referring to Chelsea's FA Cup semifinal win over Tottenham on Sunday.

"It wasn't just (Drogba) -- we had other players on the pitch that you regard as old guard that have played two games in such a short period of

time. I think they gave their answer on the pitch tonight."

Di Matteo had surprised many pundits by electing to start with Drogba in attack ahead of £50 million man Fernando Torres.

However the interim Chelsea manager admitted he had chosen Drogba to start after being impressed by his goalscoring contribution to Sunday's 5-1 drubbing of Spurs at Wembley.

"I felt I had to be fair looking back at the game on Sunday with the way we wanted to play. For today's game he was the right man to play," Di Matteo said.

While praising the veterans of Chelsea's line-up, Di Matteo was at pains to pay tribute to a "tremendous" collective effort.

"I think that the balance has to be good within the team. It's not just the defenders defending -- it's the whole team," Di Matteo said.

"So I think you need to be able to close down the space as much as possible and limit their threat as much as possible. But ultimately with the quality of the individuals they have they will create some problems.

"But it wasn't just our defenders it

was a collective defensive performance.

"We're delighted with the performance of the team and the result we got today. We've won all our Champions League games at home this season and we've faced some tough opponents.

"I think tonight was one of the biggest challenges we've had for many years."

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola meanwhile said the defeat had left Chelsea as favourites to advance to next month's final in Munich.

"They are favourites," Guardiola said. "They have a good result but at least we have the challenge to play 90 minutes. And in that time we have the opportunity to create chances. But 1-0 is a very good result for them."

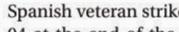
Di Matteo brushed off Guardiola's assessment of the tie however.

"I don't think it makes us favourites," he said. "It's 50-50 for both teams to go through to the final.

"You know what to expect when you go to the Camp Nou -- it's going to be very very difficult. We still have to believe that we might be able to score a goal there. It's going to be a tough game, it's a tough game for anyone going there."

Raul to quit Schalke

Football



AFP, Berlin

Spanish veteran striker Raul is to quit German side Schalke 04 at the end of the season after two years with the club which he joined after more than a decade of trophy-laden years at Real Madrid, Schalke said on their website.

At a press conference Raul explained he was eyeing new horizons.

"My future is not in Europe," he explained.

Without saying where that future lay, the forward merely indicated he would sit down "with advisors in the coming weeks" with a view to seeing out his playing days in a championship "whose level is below that of the main European championships and notably the Bundesliga."

But he insisted that "Schalke 04 will always be a part of my life."

Raul had a strong impact on his arrival at the club based in Germany's industrial Ruhr heartland, where their near-neighbours and rivals are champions Dortmund.

He helped them to the German Cup last season and also hit five goals as the royal blues reached the semifinals of the Champions League.

The 34-year-old Raul arrived in Germany in the summer of 2010 after averaging close on a goal every two games in 741 appearances with Real, with whom he won three European Cups.

Wolves lose keeper

AFP, London

Wolves suffered another setback in their seemingly doomed bid for Premier League survival when goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey was ruled out for six months on Wednesday with a knee injury.

The Wales international ruptured his anterior cruciate knee ligament during last weekend's goalless draw with Sunderland but did not realise the extent of the damage and finished the match.

Hennessey was due to have surgery on Wednesday and is expected to be out until October.

Wolves' head of medical services, Steve Kemp, told the club's official website: "Our worst fears have been realised."

Hennessey had made 58 consecutive Premier League appearances since being restored to the first team after regaining the number one spot from American Marcus Hahnemann in November 2010.

Dutch goalkeeper Dorus de Vries is now set to make his Premier League debut against Manchester City on Sunday.

Wolves manager Terry Connor said of Hennessey's injury: "Wayne just felt his knee during the game. He went to catch a ball right at the end and didn't think too much of it."

"But he felt slightly worse on Sunday so the medical guys wanted him to have a scan."

Wolves are five points adrift at the bottom of the table with four league games of the season left.

Van Persie wasn't sure

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal goal machine Robin van Persie has revealed how he feared he wouldn't be up to the task of leading the Gunners' forward line.

His comments appear extraordinary given the 28-year-old Dutch international striker is on course to score 40 goals this season.

However, van Persie insisted he was concerned about moving from the second striker position compatriot Dennis Bergkamp perfected during his time with Arsenal and becoming the focal point of the attack when manager Arsene Wenger sold Emmanuel Adebayor to Manchester City nearly three years ago.

"I never really thought that I would end up as a main striker," van Persie told Arsenal player.

"I actually never played there before -- I did it a couple of times at youth level but it was nothing really special. We only tried it when Adebayor went.

"The boss didn't buy someone else because he was convinced I could do it.

"I wasn't even convinced about it. I wasn't so sure, because I didn't really play there so much.

"Then, in pre-season, we had a game against Inter Milan. I scored a good goal, played well and he told me after the game, 'You see? It will work'.

"That was the first step to being a main striker.

"Sometimes, you just question yourself, if you're good enough at it. Those answers came.

"I have been for a while now convinced that I actually can play as a main striker. I just didn't know, and now I believe.

But with Arsenal set for yet another season without a trophy -- their last piece of major silverware was the 2005 FA Cup -- and van Persie having just one year left on his contract, many Gunners fans fear the forward could be following the likes of Adebayor and Barcelona's Cesc Fabregas in leaving the Emirates.

Arteta out for season

REUTERS, London

Mikel Arteta will miss the rest of Arsenal's season with an ankle ligament injury, British media reported on Thursday.

The Spanish midfielder, who has played an influential role in Arsenal's improved form in recent weeks, hurt his ankle while attempting a cross in the early stages of Monday's 2-1 defeat to Wigan Athletic at the Emirates Stadium.

Arteta received treatment off the pitch - during which time Wigan scored their second goal - but he could not continue. Scans showed the ankle was not broken but the ligament damage was bad enough to keep him out for Arsenal's final four Premier League matches.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, whose side face Chelsea at home in the league on Saturday, now has a gap to fill in midfield as he is without long-term absentee Jack Wilshere and Abou Diaby, who is not match fit.

Yossi Benayoun, on loan from Chelsea, is ineligible to play against his parent club.

Arsenal are third, five points ahead of their arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur who have a game in hand.



PHOTO: AFP

Schalke's Spanish star Raul

addresses a press

conference in

Gelsenkirchen

yesterday.

ইট তৈরিতে পরিবেশবান্ধব জ্বালানী সশ্রুয়ী আধুনিক প্রযুক্তি ব্যবহার করি নির্মল হাওয়ায় জীবন গড়ি

বায়ুদূষণ রোধ করি বাসযোগ্য ভবিষ্যৎ গড়ি

পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর

নির্মল বায়ু এবং টেকসই পরিবেশ (CASE) প্রকল্প

পরিবেশ ও বন মন্ত্রণালয়

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Should Bangladesh tour Pakistan?
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What to WATCH

SET Max
Indian Premier League
Punjab v Bangalore
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports
Monte Carlo Masters
Quarterfinals
Live from 2:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match)
Sylhet v Rajshahi
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur
Khulna v Dhaka
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium