



Arsenal striker Robin van Persie (L) sees his shot go wide as Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech dives during their Premier League encounter at the Emirates Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Stalemate at the Emirates

AFP, London

Chelsea failed in their efforts to break into the top four before they head out to face Barcelona in the second leg of the Champions League semifinal after Roberto Di Matteo's side played out a 0-0 draw with Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium here Saturday.

A solitary point for Arsene Wenger's side, meanwhile, meant the Gunners missed out on the opportunity to tighten their grip on third place.

Arsenal striker Robin Van Persie - who denied before the game he had

met with Barcelona officials to discuss a possible transfer - was unable to break the deadlock with two late opportunities.

Chelsea, though, can take heart from a resolute defensive display that they must repeat next week of they are to protect their slender 1-0 first leg lead and progress into the Champions League final.

And the draw means they have lost just once in 14 games since Di Matteo took temporary charge of the side.

The team sheet confirmed where Chelsea's priorities lay with Di Matteo making eight changes to the line-up that stunned Barcelona midweek.

After two challenging games - the

Blues beat Tottenham in the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley just three days before they faced Barca - it was inevitable Di Matteo would seek to freshen up his side.

But with keeper Petr Cech and centre back pairing Gary Cahill and John Terry the only players to retain their places, it was clear the manager's thoughts were already on the trip to Spain.

It was no surprise then that the visitors took time to settle although Arsenal were similarly unconvincing.

The first meeting between these sides this season last October produced eight goals as Arsenal pulled off a remarkable 5-3 victory at Stam-

ford Bridge.

By those standards, however, this was a surprisingly tame encounter with both keepers surviving the first half largely untested.

Robin Van Persie was inevitably Arsenal's biggest threat and the Dutch striker struck the post from Theo Walcott's free kick although the effort may well have been ruled out for offside had Van Persie found the target.

Van Persie's future had once again been the subject of debate before kick-off following Arsene Wenger's insistence a decision on the forward's next contract would be resolved before he joins up with Holland for the Euro 2012 finals.

Fergie defends Young

REUTERS, London



Ashley Young's theatrical antics on the pitch have earned him comparisons with British Olympic diver Tom Daley, but they may be at an end after Manchester

United manager Alex Ferguson said on Friday he had "had a word" with the player.

Young has been accused of diving during United's recent matches against Queens Park Rangers and his former club Aston Villa with critics rounding on him for going down too easily to earn his side penalties.

Chelsea's Didier Drogba fuelled the debate about simulation with his regular bouts of rolling around in apparent agony against Barcelona in midweek, although his manager Roberto Di Matteo saw no problem

with his antics.

Ferguson, speaking to reporters at United's Carrington training ground before Sunday's match against Everton at Old Trafford, said he had spoken to the 26-year-old England winger about his actions.

"I have had a word with Ashley," said Ferguson.

"He understands where we are coming from. Hopefully it makes a difference."

Ferguson added: "Last week (against Villa), if the player doesn't bring Ashley down he is going to score. It was a clear goalscoring opportunity."

"He caught him and he did overdo the attempt to get a penalty. I am not sure he tried to get the penalty but he certainly went down quickly."

"But people have reacted because it is Manchester United."

Rooney sues News Corp

REUTERS, London

England soccer star Wayne Rooney and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie are among a new group of 46 people suing over alleged phone-hacking by Rupert Murdoch's News of the World newspaper, court documents showed on Friday.

Other celebrities listed included singer James Blunt, soccer players Ryan Giggs and Peter Crouch and former England rugby union player Matt Dawson.

The new list of people filing claims for damages against the News Corp subsidiary that published the now-closed News of the World was disclosed after a hearing at London's High Court on Friday, the Press Association reported.

Murdoch faces a two-day grilling at the High Court next week by a judge investigating whether the political ties of the world's most powerful media tycoon created a company culture where illegal phone hacking could flourish.

Hugh Tomlinson, a lawyer representing many of the claimants, told the High Court on Friday there were a total of 4,791 potential victims of phone-hacking, adding police had contacted 1,892 of them.

The claims for alleged invasion of privacy are due to be heard at the High Court next February unless they are settled first.

News Group Newspapers, publisher of some of News Corp's British titles, has reached out-of-court settlements with dozens of people whose voicemails were illegally intercepted by the Sunday tabloid.

Most of the payouts have been in a range of roughly 30,000-60,000 pounds (\$48,000-\$96,000) but a small number have been much higher. Singer Charlotte Church received 600,000 pounds, half of those covering legal costs, while actor Jude Law accepted 130,000 pounds and actress Sienna Miller got 100,000.

Murdoch's UK arm News International had claimed for years that the hacking of voicemails to generate stories at the News of the World tabloid was the work of a single "rogue" reporter who went to jail for the crime in 2007.

However, faced with a wave of evidence last year, it finally acknowledged the problem was widespread, sparking a scandal that has rocked the company, the British press and the political establishment.

British police have handed prosecutors four files of evidence against 11 suspects in the Murdoch phone-hacking scandal, a prosecutor said on Wednesday, bringing closer the likelihood of charges.

Mancini stays pessimistic

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini still insists the Premier League title race is over despite several of his

players believing otherwise as they prepare to face Wolves on Sunday.

City could find themselves eight points behind leaders Manchester United before they take to the pitch at Molineux should Sir Alex Ferguson's men overcome Everton at Old Trafford earlier in the day.

A number of City players have come out this week to claim the race for the title is still very much on ahead of their trip to Wolves, including England goalkeeper Joe Hart, but Mancini continues

with his stance that United have already secured their 20th English league crown.

Mancini puts City's title bid apparently failing down to the recent injury of Sergio Aguero who missed their draws with Sunderland and Stoke last month - two games which allowed United to open up a five point gap on their rivals.

"I meant it (that the title race is over), I think that for me I think it will be very difficult. The situations that have happened in the last three or four games have made it very difficult for us," Mancini said.

"We should go for our way only, I'm staying with my opinion about the title for the next few weeks, that it has gone."

"There were some mistakes, but when we lost Sergio for those two

games that was a key moment. We drew those games, if we had had Sergio we would have a better chance."

Former Wolves defender Joleon Lescott returns to Molineux on Sunday knowing victory for City could relegate his old team.

And while the England international, who joined Everton from Wolves before moving to City, has a lot to thank his mentor Terry Connor for, Lescott won't be looking to do his struggling former team any favours as City hope to keep the pressure up on United.

He said: "I owe a lot to everyone connected with Wolves, none more so than Terry Connor the manager. When Terry first arrived, I was just coming out of the youth team and was just going into the reserves."

Slaughter of stray dogs protested

AFP, Berlin

Dortmund coach Juergen Klopp and former Germany star Lars Ricken on Friday called for an end to the slaughter of stray dogs by Euro 2012 co-hosts Ukraine.

The two men posed for a photograph to denounce "these massive and cruel slaughters," said Ricken, who retired in 2009.

"It's not about boycotting the Euro but to have a humane attitude towards all living things."

The pair believe neutering strays would be the best long term solution.

Artificial turf for San Siro

REUTERS, Milan

Milan's famous San Siro stadium could be given artificial turf after suffering for years with poor natural grass pitches.

The 80,000-seater arena, shared by Serie A sides AC Milan and Inter Milan, could join fellow Italian top-flight side Cesena in having fake grass if proposals get the go ahead.

"We are very favourable to the idea, especially as we have just had to lay down new turf this week," Milan chief executive Adriano Galliani told reporters without giving a timeframe on any change.

The turf gets a pounding from soccer matches at least every weekend during the season while the height of the stands means not enough sunlight and rain comes in.



French striker Nicolas Anelka (C), newly named player-coach for Shanghai Shenhua, talks to his teammates during a training session in Dalian on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

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Serie A

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Serie A

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