

Rooney goal voted best

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney's stunning overhead kick in the Manchester derby in February 2011 has been voted as the greatest goal in the 20 seasons of the Premier League in a ballot of more than 300,000 fans.

England striker Rooney acrobatically volleyed home Nani's 77th-minute cross to take United eight points clear of City in the league standings en route to a record 19th English league title.

Supporters from around the world voted in the ballot, with Rooney's effort gaining 26 percent of the total votes cast.

Dennis Bergkamp's magnificent turn and finish against Newcastle for Arsenal in March 2002 was the second most popular with 19 percent and Thierry Henry's volley for Arsenal against Manchester United in 2000 was third on 15 percent.

Rooney said: "I grew up watching the Premier League so to be voted the best goal in the history of the Premier League is a great feeling."

"There's so many good goals in that shortlist, goals that I watched in my living room as a kid: Alan Shearer's goal, Paolo Di Canio's, Tony Yeboah's, David Beckham's."

"To be competing with them and winning is a great honour for me and something I'm very proud of. I'd like to say a big thank you to all the fans that voted for me."

Rossi says sorry

AFP, Rome

Delio Rossi on Friday apologised for attacking his own midfielder, Adem Ljajic, an act that saw him sacked as Fiorentina coach and hit with a three-month ban.

Rossi lost the plot after half an hour of Wednesday's 2-2 draw with Novara and leapt into the dug-out to punch the 20-year-old Serbian.

The coach had hauled off Ljajic with his team trailing 2-0 following a disastrous start.

The young midfielder took the move badly and sarcastically applauded his coach, who responded by leaping at Ljajic and throwing several punches before being dragged back by club officials.

"I ask for forgiveness from the city, the players, the club and the AIC (players' union)," Rossi said, deprecating the number of "self-righteous prigs" that had surfaced over the incident and refusing to answer any questions.

"It was a deplorable gesture, but understandable on a human level. I made a mistake and I'm sorry. I paid and will pay the price," added Rossi, replaced by Vincenzo Guerini, but still wearing his official Fiorentina clothing.



Real Madrid players celebrate aboard an open-top bus at Cibeles fountain during a parade after winning the Primera Liga title in Madrid on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Juve eyeing Inter favour

AFP, Rome



Juventus will be hoping their oldest rivals Inter Milan can do them a favour by winning their city derby against AC Milan on Sunday.

The Serie A title race has come down to the final two matches of the season with Juve leading the reigning champions by a single point.

Milan must beat their cross-city rivals to ensure they make it to the final game of the season in with a chance of taking the title.

If they fail to do so, Juve know they can claim a record 28th scudetto crown with victory at Cagliari, in a match being played in Trieste due to the Sardinians' unplayable pitch.

It's an awful position for Inter to be in as whatever they do, they will help one of their two hated rivals.

But they too have an objective, although one that has now become a little more distant following their 3-1 defeat at Parma on Wednesday.

Inter are chasing third place and a Champions League qualifying finish but they trail Napoli and Udinese by three points.

Even if they win their final two matches it may not be enough, although if they want to play in Europe at all next season, the minimum they must do is maintain their four-point lead over seventh-placed Roma.

And club president Massimo Moratti insists they will try to win and let fate decide which of their bitter rivals takes the scudetto crown.

"We'll play the derby with the usual spirit, it's a unique match and we're not favourites," said Moratti.

"This year it's one or the other (Milan or Juve) who will do it, I don't know which would be better (for us)."

Juve could have been already halfway there but they threw away victory at home to Lecce on Wednesday.

They led 1-0 from the ninth minute and played the last 35 minutes with a numerical advantage.

But despite creating a host of chances to finish off their relegation threatened opponents, they blew victory five minutes from time when a mistake from goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon gifted Andrea Bertolacci an equaliser.

Coach Antonio Conte admitted after that blip that his side may have let the sniff of glory get to them.

"The prize was a big one (had they won) and maybe that took away a bit of our lucidity," he said.

"I'm a fatalist, if things happen it's because they were meant to."

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri was simply relieved to have closed the gap at an unexpected time.

It also means they can guarantee they take the race to the final day by beating Inter, something that would not have been the case had Juve triumphed against Lecce.

FIXTURES

Saturday

Lecce v Fiorentina (1600GMT), Roma v Catania (1845GMT)

Sunday

(1300GMT unless otherwise stated)
Siena v Parma (1030GMT), Atalanta v Lazio, Bologna v Napoli, Novara v Cesena, Palermo v Chievo, Udinese v Genoa, Cagliari v Juventus (1845GMT),

Wenger joins 900 club

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger takes charge of his 900th game as Arsenal manager against Norwich on Saturday looking for the victory that will keep his side on course for Champions League qualification.

Away wins for Tottenham and Newcastle on Wednesday night brought both clubs to within a point of the third place Gunners, who host the Canaries on Saturday lunchtime in the only Premier League fixture of the day.

A home win would therefore extend that advantage to four points ahead of Newcastle's home game with Manchester City on Sunday and Tottenham's trip to Aston Villa the same afternoon.

Tottenham are currently fourth, ahead of Newcastle on goal difference.

Chelsea, who are in sixth, could still catch all three of the teams above them and would further complicate matters by winning the Champions League, which would mean only the team that finishes third will qualify for next season's competition, provided it is not Chelsea.

It was no surprise therefore that Wenger, who saw his side draw 1-1 at Stoke City at the weekend, wanted maximum points from the two remaining games, the last of which is a

trip to West Bromwich Albion.

"For us it is important to win our remaining games," said the Frenchman, whose first game as Arsenal manager was a 2-0 win at Blackburn Rovers in October 1996.

"Anything less will not guarantee third place and automatic qualification for next season's Champions League group stages."

"I feel that this year the players have shown fantastic mental qualities and we have improved. You could see again at Stoke that this team is ready for a fight. Defensively I thought we were solid and we are now fully focused on finishing the season strongly and claiming third place."

Norwich have little to play for except pride and finishing as high as they can in their first Premier League season since 2005 as they are now safe from relegation.

That had never been a real threat anyway for Paul Lambert's side, who had given Arsenal a tough time at Carrow Road earlier in the season when the Gunners came from behind to win 2-1 thanks to a brace from top-scorer Robin van Persie.

The Canaries have wobbled of late, losing at Blackburn in between heavy home defeats by Manchester City and Liverpool but winger Elliott Bennett promised the fans they would not be going through the motions at the Emirates Stadium.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba eyes the ball during a training session at Cobham yesterday on the eve of their FA Cup final against Liverpool.

PHOTO: AFP

Drogba not Shanghai bound

AFP, Shanghai

French striker Nicolas Anelka on Friday hinted that his former Chelsea teammate Didier Drogba would not be joining him at the Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua.

Anelka, player-coach of Shenhua, previously expressed hopes that the 34-year-old forward could join him in a lucrative move to Shanghai.

Anelka confirmed he had spoken to Drogba and the Ivory Coast international had reached a decision over his future, but Anelka said it was "inconvenient" to tell people what that might be.

"Even if Drogba finally chooses to stay with Chelsea, that can only prove Drogba himself wanted to stay and Chelsea also wanted to keep him," Anelka said, as quoted by Shanghai Internet portal www.online.sh.cn.

"If Drogba cannot come to Shanghai, then there are no regrets because the world still has many other fine players," said Anelka, 33, according to a transcript of a news conference.

The former French international joined the Chinese Super League side in January and was named player-coach shortly before Shenhua sacked French head coach Jean Tigana last month, after a poor start to the season.

Chronicles of a Pep foretold

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

Much column inches have been spared in both foreign and local presses over the last week extolling the virtues of Pep Guardiola's Barcelona.

And with good reason too.

In a week when the former player and now legendary manager announced that he would be stepping down from the melting pot that is the Barcelona hotseat, tributes have flown in from across the world for a man who has forged with his might a team that can challenge for honours as 'the best the world has ever seen.'

Barcelona's famed tiki-taka has

brought a farmhouse in Catalunya to international acclaim and in the process also fostered an almighty domination of football that just fell short of the true gold standard a repeat Champions League triumph, a feat last accomplished by Arrigo Sacchi's AC Milan team who can also lay claim to that heady accolade.

But despite that near miss, Guardiola's record of triumphs is jaw-dropping, almost to the edge of sanity. This is perhaps what makes questions about his legacy both so surprising, and at the same time intriguing. And so in the wake of his departure, the question of whether Guardiola will ever be as successful anywhere else was one that struck out like a sore thumb both for its fallacy and its intrigue.

There are of course many answers to that question, all of which will be drawn from subjectivity, but the correct answer in the opinion of yours truly will be short - no, Guardiola will not be as successful anywhere else as he has been with Barcelona.

Why you ask? Well it's simple. Pep's Barcelona is perhaps the most successful football team of the last two decades, one of the greatest teams the world has ever seen. Really, what odds are there on Pep repeating this trick with any other side? Almost nil, in my opinion. And even if he were to go on to manage another club with great success, he will almost always be unfairly measured against the Barcelona yardstick, rendering any future success infinitesimal next to what he has achieved with the Catalans.

But the above should in no way be seen as a slight towards Pep. Guardiola's success in revolutionizing the game of football and in forging Barcelona into a unit capable of such utter domination should not just be lauded but also revered. The blue litmus test for Guardiola's often doubted coaching career is easy. Just ask yourself would any other coach have achieved so much success with this Barcelona squad? The answer to that question should be a resounding no.

Guardiola is a football thinker of the

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SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think BFF president Kazi Salahuddin can make a difference to Bangladesh football in his second term?

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SET Max

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TEN Action

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