

Lampard signs book deal

AFP, London

England international midfielder Frank Lampard is set to put pen to paper but, before Chelsea fans sigh with relief, it is to write five children's books, it was announced on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old -- whose current deal expires in the summer and who has not been offered a new one -- said that he first got the idea when he was reading stories to his children.

The stories will follow the adventures of a school boy, Frankie, his football-loving friends, and pet dog Max.

Lampard said the stories were "loosely based on friends and team mates".

"I first had the idea of Frankie and his Magic Football when reading stories to my own children," he said in a statement.

"Sport and reading are two essentials for us at home, so I decided to make up my own football stories and adventures."

Lampard, who is considered one of the most intelligent footballers around and is believed to have an IQ of 150 -- placing him in the top 0.1% in Great Britain -- will publish his first book, *Frankie Versus The Pirate Pillagers*, in June, followed by two more this year and another two in 2014.

SA coach in hospital

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa coach Gordon Igesund has been admitted to hospital due to severe abdominal pain, a national football association spokesman said Wednesday.

The doctor treating the 56-year-old said initial tests showed he might be suffering from appendicitis and that further investigations would be done to confirm the diagnosis.

Igesund, winner of the South African Premiership with a record four clubs, became national coach six months ago and guided the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations hosts to the quarter-finals last month.

What to WATCH

Channel 9

BPL

Barisal Burners v Rangpur Riders

Live from 3:30pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Chittagong Kings

Live from 7:30pm

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Pakistan

Second Test, Day 1

Live from 2:30pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Europa League

Sparta Prague v Chelsea

Live from 12:00am (Friday)

Atletico Madrid v Rubin Kazan

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

TEN Action

UEFA Europa League

Zenit v Liverpool

Live from 11:00pm

Tottenham v Lyon

DAY'S EVENT

BPL

Barisal Burners v Rangpur Riders

Time: 3:30pm

Dhaka Gladiators v Chittagong Kings

Time: 7:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

Bangladesh Premier League

Mohammedan v Team BJMC

Time: 4:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National



Juventus striker Mirko Vucinic slots home the third goal during their Champions League last sixteen clash against Celtic in Glasgow on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

English lead hopefus

AFP, Paris



Traditional European heavyweights Chelsea and Liverpool headline a quartet of English clubs harbouring Europa League dreams as the round of 32 gets underway on Thursday.

Two-time champions Tottenham also join Newcastle among the Premier League hopefuls seeking to make their mark in the competition's knockout phase.

Defending European champions Chelsea infamously made history when they became the first Champions League title-holders to exit the competition in the group stage, but the Blues are now aiming to enter the record books in a far more positive light.

"It is true the Europa League is not the same as the Champions League because that is the top but the Europa League is a big competition, an important competition, and now we have the chance to win it. Never in the history of Chelsea have we won this cup and we are going to try to do it," said Spanish

FIXTURES

Thursday
(All 1800GMT kick-offs unless stated otherwise)
Zenit (RUS) v Liverpool (ENG) (1700), Anzhi Machkala (RUS) v Hanover (GER) (1700), Sparta Prague (CZE) v Chelsea (ENG), Levante (ESP) v Olympiakos (GRE), Napoli (ITA) v Viktoria Plzen (CZE), Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Bordeaux (FRA), Bayer Leverkusen (GER) v Benfica (POR), BATE Borisov (BLR) v Fenerbahce (TUR), Ajax (NED) v Steaua Bucharest (ROM)
(All 2000GMT kick-offs)
FC Basel (SUI) v Dnipro (UKR), Inter Milan (ITA) v CFR Cluj (ROM), Newcastle (ENG) v Metalist Kharkiv (UKR), VfB Stuttgart (GER) v Genk (BEL), Atletico Madrid (ESP) v Rubin Kazan (RUS), Borussia Moenchengladbach (GER) v Lazio

defender Cesar Azpilicueta.

The Londoners travel to Sparta Prague on Thursday to face a Czech team playing their first competitive fixture since the winter break.

Rafael Benitez's stuttering side have won just once in five outings -- a 4-1 pasting of strugglers Wigan on Saturday -- but Sparta goalkeeper Tomas Vaclik conceded the Czech outfit still have a monumental challenge on their hands.

"Even if Chelsea are not having their best period right now, they have the winning mentality of a big club and self-confidence. To succeed, we'll have to play our best football."

Liverpool's quest for a record fourth title takes them to Saint Petersburg for a first-leg tie against double defending Russian Premier League champions Zenit.

Liverpool lie ninth in the table after a dismal 2-0 home defeat to West Brom on Monday, but first-year boss Brendan Rodgers hopes his players can quickly put that setback behind them against the 2008 Europa League winners.

"We just have to keep striving and look towards the next game. We've got the Europa League game on Thursday night."

Paris St Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti said he was surprised at the decision to send off Zlatan Ibrahimovic late in Tuesday's 2-1 Champions League last 16, first leg victory at Valencia.

The Sweden striker got a straight red card after lunging at fullback Andres Guardado with his studs up but Ancelotti said he felt it was harsh on the volatile Ibrahimovic who suffered his third sending off in Europe's elite club competition.

"I did not understand it," Ancelotti told a news conference.

"He was out on the wing, he made a tackle and he did not deserve to be sent off," the Italian added. "That's football."

Ancelotti said he was satisfied with the result despite Valencia's 90th-minute goal giving the La Liga club a sliver of hope for the return leg in Paris in three weeks' time, when the talismanic Ibrahimovic will be suspended.

He dismissed suggestions his players had eased off towards the end of the game.

"I don't think we relaxed and we could even have scored a third on a couple of occasions. The team played a good match, we controlled the ball well and I'm pleased with our performance."

Drogba gets green light

AFP, Istanbul

Didier Drogba has been given the go-ahead to play for Galatasaray, a Turkish football federation source and the club said on Wednesday, after his former club Shanghai Shenhua disputed his move from China.

"(World governing body) FIFA's authorisation arrived yesterday (Tuesday). There's no problem. Drogba will be able to play on Friday," a source at the TFF told AFP.

Galatasaray meanwhile said on their website that the TFF had told them that "Didier Drogba's temporary licence is ready".

Ivory Coast striker Drogba, 34, signed an 18-month contract with top-flight Galatasaray at the end of January but Shanghai Shenhua, with whom he signed on a two-and-a-half year deal in June last year, opposed the move.

He will be paid 10 million euros (\$13.5 million) to play in Turkey with a bonus of 15,000 euros for every match played.

Clinical Juventus

AFP, Glasgow

Juventus all but clinched their place in the last eight of the Champions League after a clinical display from the Italian champions earned them a 3-0 win over Celtic at Parkhead here on Tuesday.

Celtic manager Neil Lennon surprised everyone before kick-off as he handed Efe Ambrose a starting place despite the defender playing in Nigeria's Africa Cup of Nations final win over Burkina Faso on Sunday.

But the gamble went horribly wrong with the defender at fault for two of Juve's deadly away goals.

Celtic got off to a nightmare start when Ambrose was caught out by the flight of Federico Peluso's long ball in the third minute, allowing Alessandro Matri to get in behind him and fire the ball over the line despite Kelvin Wilson's desperate attempted clearance on the line.

The Hoops then showed the intensity they had produced to pick up a famous win over Barcelona in the group stages as they laid siege to the Juve goal, with Victor Wanyama and Kris Commons both testing Gianluigi Buffon with strikes.

But the Italians weathered the storm and increased their lead in the 77th minute when Marchisio smashed past a shot past Fraser Forster.

Mirko Vucinic finished low through Forster's legs in the 83rd minute after Ambrose had been caught in possession by Marchisio as Juventus ended any remaining Celtic hopes.

Things could have been different for the home side, however.

Celtic had forced a corner within 60 seconds as Buffon pushed a thunderous

strike from Wanyama round the post, and Ambrose then tried his luck with a long-range strike that went harmlessly wide as the hosts swarmed forward in the early stages.

But their good work quickly came undone as a lapse of concentration from Ambrose allowed Matri to give Juve a third-minute lead.

Celtic rallied after the goal and Buffon had to be alert to stop a fiercely drilled Wanyama strike from 25 yards.

The SPL leaders continued to press forward and Kris Commons was inches away from an audacious equaliser in the 28th minute when his overhead kick from Mikael Lustig's cross bounced just wide with Buffon beaten.

Ambrose missed a golden chance to atone for his lapse at the Juve goal at the hour mark when Charlie Mulgrew's cross from the left found him lurking in the box, but the Nigerian sent his weak header bouncing into the turf and straight to the grateful Buffon.

Juventus looked content to defend deep and hit Celtic on the counter-attack but they served the home side a warning in the 66th minute when Vucinic connected perfectly with a cross from the left and Wilson brilliantly blocked his shot in the six-yard box. The home side didn't heed the warning, though, and Juventus grabbed a killer second with a well-worked goal.

Matri flicked a pass into the path of Marchisio, who cut inside Scott Brown and smashed a shot beyond Forster at his near post.

Ambrose had only arrived back in Glasgow from South Africa early on Tuesday morning, but the Celtic fans must have been wishing he had missed his flight when he was again at fault as the visitors landed a knock-out blow.

PSG gain advantage

AFP, Valencia

Paris Saint-Germain will take a 2-1 lead into the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Valencia, but a dramatic late turn of events handed the Spanish side a lifeline.

Going into the 90th minute here at the Mestalla on Tuesday, the French league leaders appeared in cruise control thanks to first-half goals from Ezequiel Lavezzi and Javier Pastore.

However, French international centre-back Adil Rami found the net in the final minute to keep Valencia in the tie, before PSG had Zlatan Ibrahimovic controversially sent-off for a studs-up challenge on Andres Guardado.

The Swede, who has been criticised in the past for failing to produce his very best in the Champions League knockout stages, will now miss the return leg at the Parc des Princes next month, but at least PSG will have a lead to defend in that game.

Despite the ending, for much of the evening this was a classic away European performance from the French league leaders, as Carlo Ancelotti's side ceded possession to their hosts but were always a threat on the counter-attack.

History suggested that this would be a major test for PSG, who were playing a knockout tie in Europe's top club competition for the first time since 1995.

Since then, Valencia had reached two

Champions League finals, and had never been beaten by French opposition at their Mestalla home.

However, PSG backed by massive investment from their Qatari owners are emerging as a major continental force, and they travelled to Spain with their confidence buoyed by a run of 12 matches without defeat in all competitions.

Valencia have considerably improved since Ernesto Valverde took over as coach two months ago, and they had held Barcelona to a 1-1 draw in their last home outing.

However, they got off to a nightmare start to this game, with the lively Lucas Moura crashing a shot from 25 yards off the post as a prelude to the visitors' opening goal.

Lavezzi has been outstanding during PSG's superb recent run, and it was no great surprise to see the Argentine break the deadlock as he played a lovely one-two with Pastore before sending in a shot that Vicente Guaita in the home goal really should have kept out.

PSG allowed Valencia to dominate possession after that, but they were always a menace on the break, especially down the home side's left, where the attack-minded Guardado had been forced to fill in for the injured Aly Cissokho and Jeremy Mathieu.

Lucas forced a save from Guaita at the end of a quick break, and Pastore was also denied after again combining neatly with Pastore, while all Valencia could offer in return was a Jonas header that passed high over the bar.

Carlo mystified by Ibra red card

REUTERS, Valencia



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Paris Saint Germain playmaker Javier Pastore is ecstatic after scoring the second goal against Valencia during their Champions League second round clash at the Mestalla on Tuesday.

Hoffenheim punish pair

REUTERS, Berlin

Bundesliga strugglers Hoffenheim have fined two players after they were thrown out of a carnival event for unruly behaviour, the club said in a statement.

Goalkeeper Tim Wiese, who was dropped from the squad for an unspecified spell in January due to poor form, and midfielder Tobias Weis were kicked out of the event by security men, Hoffenheim said.

"Generally we understand that players are entitled to a private life and deserve a break from their professional duties," said general manager Andreas Mueller.

"However, Tobias Weis and Tim Wiese definitely went too far. They have neglected to act as role models and failed to leave a professional impression."