



Southampton striker Jay Rodriguez (C) scores the opening goal during their Premier League encounter against Reading at the Madejski Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chico extends Swansea deal

AFP, London

Swansea City announced on Saturday that Spanish centre-back Chico Flores has extended his contract with the club until June 2016.

The 26-year-old arrived at the Liberty Stadium from Italian club Genoa for £2 million (\$3 million, 2.4 million euros) last year and has since become a mainstay at the heart of the League Cup winners' defence.

His previous contract had been due to expire in 2015.

"I'm very happy," Chico said. "Everything has gone better than I ever expected, considering I only arrived in Wales in the summer. I have found it easier to settle here than when I moved from Spain to Italy."

"The language issue can still be difficult at times, but I'm getting there. My English is improving all the time and I have good communication on the pitch alongside Ash (Ashley Williams), who can also speak a bit of Spanish."



SET Max
Indian Premier League
Pune v Punjab
Live from 4:30pm
Hyderabad v Bangalore
Live from 8:30pm
TEN Action
Family Circle Cup
Final
Live from 11:00pm
STAR Sports
English Premiership
Liverpool v West Ham
Live from 6:30pm
QPR v Wigan
Live from 9:00pm
La Liga
Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Live from 12:00am (Monday)
Serie A
Inter v Atalanta
Live from 12:45am (Monday)
ESPN
English Premiership



Bangladesh Premier League
Sk Jamal v Arambagh
Time: 5:00pm
Mohammadan v Abahani
Time: 7:00pm

Blatter eases tough stance



AFP, Zurich

FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Friday eased his headline stance on combating racial abuse and violence in stadiums.

Blatter previously said football clubs should be docked points or relegated if their fans were found guilty of racist abuse and violence, however he is now suggesting such measures would be difficult to enforce.

Blatter had said last January that slapping financial penalties on clubs or ordering them to play matches behind closed doors did not go far enough.

But in comments Friday he appeared to recognise the practical difficulty of enforcing harder-hitting measures.

"How far should we go? Where should we stop?" the boss of world football's governing body said at a meeting of the company Early Warning System, which monitors matches on FIFA's behalf to fight match-fixing.

"Can we bring an end to violence or racism by docking points or relegating a team? Or would such measures lead people to come to games to get the match abandoned," he said.

"We should do all we can but there's a danger that if we have matches replayed or if we punish clubs on the sporting front, it will open the door to hooligan groups who will come to deliberately cause trouble."

FIFA later released a statement insisting that Blatter had not backtracked on his previous stance but was merely asking rhetorical questions about the feasibility of implementing tough sanctions.

"FIFA President Blatter today reiterated ... the need for punishment that hits hard against any form of racism," said the statement.

"Such issues will be carefully examined and will in no way alter the FIFA President's very strong commitment towards the eradication of the racism scourge from football and his zero tolerance towards any form of racism."

"At no stage did the FIFA President say any words that could be interpreted as him backing away from his firm position to sanction actions of any form of racism."

Torres vows to return to his best

AFP, London

Spanish Euro and World Cup winning striker Fernando Torres pledged on Saturday to try his heart out to regain the form that saw him become one of the most feared marksmen in world football.

The 29-year-old - capped over 100 times by his country - has failed to replicate the form for Chelsea that earned him a £50million move in January 2011 from Liverpool.

However, a brace against Russian side Rubin Kazan on Thursday in their Europa League quarterfinal, first leg clash took him to 18 goals for the season and gave him hope that he is on the right track.

"I want to do the things I used to do all my life," he told the Daily Mail.

"I did them at Atletico Madrid, I did them at Liverpool and I am not doing them at Chelsea. I am working on it. If I knew the reason, I would fix it in one minute. But the only way to fix these things is to work at it."

"I am training every day and I will never, ever give up."

Saints cruise past Reading

AFP, Reading



Southampton dealt former manager Nigel Adkins a heavy blow in his bid to guide bottom club Reading to Premier League safety with an impressive 2-0 away win on Saturday.

Jay Rodriguez gave Southampton the lead against the run of play towards the end of the first half at the Madejski Stadium and, as the hosts' early momentum faded, Adam Lallana wrapped up victory in the 72nd minute.

It was Reading's seventh consecutive defeat and left them seven points from safety with six games to play, despite having played at least a game more than all the teams immediately above them.

While Adkins was left to contemplate the size of the task before him after defeat on his home debut, his successor at Southampton, Mauricio Pochettino, appears to have succeeded in steering the Saints to safety.

The south-coast club have now won three games in succession and sit seven points above the bottom three in 11th place.

Danny Guthrie is one of the players to have benefited from Adkins' arrival at Reading and he almost created the opener in the fourth minute with a free-kick that Sean Morrison headed over the bar.

Striker Adam Le Fondre was also handed a start by Adkins but he was culpable of a horrendous miss midway through the first half, hoisting the ball high and wide after a posse of visiting

defenders failed to clear the ball.

Reading winger Hal Robson-Kanu had a penalty appeal waved away after going down under the challenge of Jos Hooiveld, before Guthrie teed up Adrian Mariappa for a header that was well saved by Southampton goalkeeper Artur Boruc.

The visitors spent much of the first half hour penned inside their own half, but in the 34th minute they hit Reading with a classic sucker-punch.

From a central position, Rodriguez sprayed a pass wide to Rickie Lambert and then drove into the box to meet his teammate's lobbed return pass.

Adam Federici charged out to meet him but Rodriguez got there just before the Reading goalkeeper and bravely prodded the ball home.

Suddenly the Reading defence was full of holes. Rodriguez smacked a shot against the crossbar and then worked Federici with a low shot that the goalkeeper had to palm away.

The rebound fell kindly for Gaston Ramirez, but he somehow contrived to place the rebound wide of the open goal.

Pochettino's men maintained a firm grip on proceedings after the break and substitute Lallana put the game beyond Reading with 18 minutes left, steaming onto Rodriguez's chipped pass and calmly steering the ball inside the near post.

Boruc nearly gifted the hosts a lifeline moments later when he almost carried a header from Le Fondre over his own goal-line, but the assistant referee ruled that the ball had not crossed the line.

Betis thrash Granada

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Betis scored three goals in five minutes to keep alive their hopes of European football next season as they hammered Granada 5-1 away to climb to sixth in La Liga on Friday.

Striker Ruben Castro scored twice and set up a third, becoming the joint-highest Spanish scorer in La Liga alongside Sevilla's Alvaro Negredo with 15 goals.

With eight games left, Betis are level on 47 points with fifth-placed Champions League quarterfinalists Malaga who they trail due to an inferior head-to-head record.

Real Sociedad, who are fourth with 48 points and occupy the last Champions League qualifying berth, host Malaga on Saturday.

Castro, 31, showed great composure to pick his spot and fire past Tono in a crowded area in the 30th minute, opening up a typically intense regional derby at Los Carmenes.

Betis's Dorlan Pabon raced clear two minutes later only to see his lob come back off the crossbar but Castro was on hand to put away a second goal for the visitors.

Gignac guides Marseille

AFP, Paris



Marseille provisionally pulled to within four points of Ligue 1 pacesetters Paris Saint-Germain on Friday after a gritty 1-0 victory over Bordeaux at Stade Velodrome.

Andre-Pierre Gignac netted a decisive goal for the second successive match as he struck four minutes before half-time to take his tally for the campaign to 11 and extend Marseille's unbeaten run to five outings.

Defeat for Bordeaux left Francis Gillot's men languishing a disappointing ninth. Former England and Marseille winger Chris Waddle turned back the clock as he kicked off his former club's match, but there was no space in the hosts' starting line-up for Joey Barton.

The on-loan midfielder was only named among the substitutes a day after learning he would be summoned to French football's ethics committee for disparaging remarks about PSG defender Thiago Silva, while Mathieu Valbuena was sidelined by a groin injury.

With neither side renowned for being prolific in front of goal -- Bordeaux's total

of 29 goals scored only surpassing that of strugglers Reims and Nancy and Marseille (35) the lowest scoring team outside of Bordeaux in the top half of the table -- it was of little surprise that chances were at a premium throughout the evening.

Andre Ayew drew a good low save from Cedric Carrasso inside the opening 20 minutes before Gignac blazed two speculative efforts over the crossbar.

The burly Marseille forward did eventually find his range though on 41 minutes as he galloped down the right after being released by Benoit Cheyrou and took advantage of a slip by defender Ludovic Sane before coolly slotting beyond Carrasso.

Bordeaux failed to register a shot on target until the 70th minute when Nicolas Maurice-Belay stung the palms of Mandanda with Mali striker Cheick Diabate steering a difficult header wide from the rebound.

But the visitors best chance fell to Henri Saivet moments later as the substitute rose unmarked to meet a Ludovic Obraniak corner only to head the ball onto the roof of the net as Bordeaux failed to find the target for the fifth time in eight matches.



Olympique Marseille midfielder Andre Pierre Gignac celebrates his all-important goal against Bordeaux during their League One clash at the Velodrome Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP