

FOOTBALL

## Benitez slams players attitude after Wigan loss

**WIGAN:** Rafael Benitez challenged his Liverpool side to improve their attitude to stand a chance of reaching the Champions League after they slipped to a 1-0 defeat at Wigan. With nine matches remaining, the Reds are a point adrift of Tottenham, but Spurs, Manchester City and Aston Villa all have games in hand as they battle it out for fourth place.

Liverpool travel to Lille in the Europa League on Thursday but could trail Spurs by four points by the time they return to Premier League action against Portsmouth at Anfield on Monday. Benitez was bitterly disappointed by the manner of the loss at the DW Stadium, which was Liverpool's ninth in the Premier League this season.

He was at a loss to explain why Liverpool had put in such a poor performance at a crucial stage in the campaign. And the Spaniard admitted that a repeat of that display will end their chances of reaching the Champions League.

"We didn't show attitude and we were behind and after that we were working very hard but working hard without game intelligence," said Benitez. "It is hard to explain because we prepared for the game properly. We talked a lot about how to approach it. We knew how Wigan would play but there are too many things that we cannot understand."

"At such a crucial moment we should do much better than that so we have to analyze why it happened. You have to be really disappointed. You cannot be happy after a defeat in this way. It was difficult to explain. When you approach the game like we did tonight (Monday) you cannot win these kind of games or maybe any game. Everybody in the dressing room is really low."

"We have players back now from injury but it is no good getting those players back and playing worse than before - we have to win games. It is hard to explain because we prepared for the game properly. We talked a lot about how to approach it. We knew how Wigan would play but there are too many things that we cannot understand. At such a crucial moment we should do much better than that so we have to analyse why it happened."

Fernando Torres hit the post for Liverpool, Hugo Rodallega scored the only goal of the game, making the most of Dirk Kuyt giving the ball away on the edge of the area. It was Wigan's first win in eight Premier League matches and their first-ever victory over the Anfield club.

With a trip to fellow strugglers Bolton to come on Saturday, Wigan, who were playing on a re-laid pitch for the first time, move four points clear of the relegation zone. Manager Roberto Martinez feels that his policy of playing attractive football has been vindicated.

"It was a huge win because it has been coming," said Martinez, who moved from Championship side Swansea last summer to replace Sunderland-bound Steve Bruce. "Too many times you try to judge performances by the results and we felt that we had been very close to wrapping up a good performance with a good result."

"I was extremely proud of the response of the Wigan players and many people thought the new pitch would work in Liverpool's favor. Too many people were starting to question the style of play and the way we play. It's huge for confidence but we're far away from our aim of staying in the Premier League and giving us the chance to carry on improving and growing." -AFP



Liverpool's Fernando Torres (left) and Wigan Athletic's Mohamed Diame battle for the ball during their English Premier League match at the DW Stadium, Wigan. Monday March 8, 2010. (AP)

### This Day in Sports History

March 10, 1985: Dallas Maverick coach Dick Motta is 4th NBA coach to win 700 games. John Richard "Dick" Motta is a former basketball coach whose career in the National Basketball Association (NBA) spanned 25 years. Motta continues to rank among the NBA's all-time top 10 in coaching victories. Although infamous for his quick temper and eccentricities, Motta was an effective strategist who knew how to bring the best out of his players. He became the first coach of the Dallas Mavericks, whom he led to a 55-27 record in 1986-87. Motta holds the unique distinction of being one of the very few coaches in the NBA who never played either high school, college or pro basketball. Motta once said in an interview that winning the 1959 Idaho state high school championship was his greatest thrill as a coach, even topping the NBA championship.

## Fans key to Real comeback against Lyon



Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo from Portugal (left) vies for the ball with Tenerife's Ayoze Garcia during their Spanish La Liga soccer match, Saturday, Feb. 27, 2010. (AP)

**MADRID:** Cristiano Ronaldo believes Real Madrid can overcome its 1-0 first leg defeat to Lyon and reach the Champions League quarter final on Wednesday for the first time since 2004, with some help from the fans.

"Lyon are a strong team physically, but it's our turn to play at home," the Portuguese winger told a news conference. "I was amazed by the fans on Saturday and I must thank them for their support. I hope we see the same kind of atmosphere on Wednesday because they will play a crucial role in our success. The stadium will be great to see so full and the players are ready."

Real lost 1-0 at Lyon in their last-16 first-leg match on February 16, and now have it all to do on Wednesday at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium - where this year's Champions League final will be played.

"Wednesday's match is do-or-die. We are playing very good football and we have proven that we are the strongest team in La Liga," said Ronaldo.

On Saturday, Real battled back from 2-0 down to beat Sevilla 3-2 and reclaim the top spot in the Spanish first division. Manuel Pellegrini's side are under pressure to bring

the Champions League trophy back to Madrid after spending vast sums on big signings such as Ronaldo, the world's most expensive player - Brazil's Kaka and France's Karim Benzema.

The Spanish giants have fallen at the last-16 stage in the past five seasons and have not won Europe's most-coveted trophy since 2002 when they beat Germany's Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 in Glasgow.

On Wednesday, they will be without Benzema, who misses the match against his old club with a groin strain, as well as midfielder Xabi Alonso and left-back Marcelo through suspension.

"Everyone knows how bad this club wants to win the Champions League," said Ronaldo. "It has nine titles and wants ten, and this year the final is being played here. I am sure we can turn this tie around... We have to prove to Lyon that we own the Bernabeu."

Real's French midfielder Lassana Diarra said an early goal is essential. "We must start the match strongly, and above all watch out for their counter-attacks so as not to concede a goal," he said. -AFP

## Adriano has fat chance of going to World Cup: Club chief

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Troubled Brazil striker Adriano will not go to this year's World Cup finals if he doesn't lose weight, said his club president Patricia Amorim. The 28-year-old former Inter Milan striker who failed to impress in last week's 2-0 friendly win over the Republic of Ireland has struggled with his weight over the years as well as battling depression but his present club Flamengo and national coach Dunga are losing patience with him.

"Each person reaps what they sow," said Flamengo president Patricia Amorim. "If Adriano wants to go to the World Cup finals in South Africa (they run from June 11-July 11) he has to change. We have already told him this."

Flamengo, who along with Dunga have expressed their displeasure at Adriano's repeated failure to turn up for training, have taken measures themselves in dropping the bar-

rel-chested forward - scorer of 27 goals in 48 international appearances - from the squad for Wednesday's Copa Libertadores match with Venezuelan outfit Caracas FC.

Adriano, nicknamed the 'Emperor', weighed 106 kilograms (almost 17 stone) on his last medical check-up - eight kilos (16 pounds) over weight - and despite scoring six goals since the turn of the year his on-field demeanor has not endeared him to the authorities either.

Adriano - who was part of the Brazil squad that were beaten by France in the 2006 World Cup quarter-finals - enjoyed a successful season last term with Flamengo following his transfer from Inter Milan in April last year, finishing top scorer with 19 goals. Brazil are in Group G at this year's renewal along with North Korea, Ivory Coast and old rivals Portugal, who they beat in the 2006 semi-finals. -AFP

## Terry tough enough to take taunts says Lampard

**LONDON:** Frank Lampard said the verbal abuse directed at John Terry by Stoke fans during Chelsea's 2-0 FA Cup quarter-final win would make his club and England colleague all the stronger in a World Cup year. Terry, 29, is still being taunted by opposition fans for his alleged affair with Vanessa Perroncel - the ex-girlfriend of his former Chelsea team-mate Wayne Bridge.

The fall-out from the British press revelations led Fabio Capello to strip Terry of the England captaincy although the Italian manager stressed the centre-back remained part of his plans for this year's World Cup in South Africa. Sunday's match at Stamford Bridge saw Terry respond to the jeers by setting up the opening goal for Lampard before scoring the second with a header that sent holders Chelsea on their way to an FA Cup semi-final against another Premier League side, Aston Villa, at Wembley next month.

"Sometimes the abuse oversteps the mark," said Lampard. "Strong players react in positive ways and that's what

John did. These things happen but we'll just move on. That's a good answer to it really."

Terry celebrated his goal by making it clear he was still Chelsea's captain - Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti has, unlike compatriot Capello, no problems with the defender in a leadership role and said after the match: "I was just giving the Stoke fans a bit of banter. That was all. They were giving me a bit of stick and I was just giving a bit back and that is what football is about. They are entitled to do what they do and so am I on the pitch as long as they take it in the right manner. I am sure they did."

"You just get on with it as a player. One way to get through it is to play well and to score was the icing on the cake. It has been a good week. It was good to get away with England, play 90 minutes (in the 3-1 friendly win over Egypt at Wembley) and then come back here and show the fans how disappointed we were by how we played in the 4-2 defeat by Manchester City last week." -AFP

## Milan striker Pato included in squad for United game

**MILAN:** AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato looks to have shaken off a thigh injury after being included in the squad on Monday for Wednesday's Champions League last 16 second leg at Manchester United. The Brazilian missed Saturday's 0-0 draw at AS Roma but a club statement said he would travel to Manchester, where the Serie A side need to overturn a 3-2 first leg deficit.

Pato is the key part of the three-pronged attack favoured by Milan coach Leonardo, who was forced to play strikers Marco Borriello and Klaas Jan Huntelaar as a front two at Roma. If the Brazilian is fit enough to start on the

right of the trio, Dutchman Huntelaar is likely to drop to the bench with Ronaldinho and Borriello filling the other forward positions.

David Beckham would have been a candidate to replace Pato but the 34-year-old is now more likely to play on the right of midfield if Leonardo decides to bring the England man back against his former club.

Midfielder Mathieu Flamini played instead of substitute Beckham against Roma while Gennaro Gattuso is available at Old Trafford after a ban and Clarence Seedorf returns from a knock. -Reuters

## Excited Beckham is certain Rooney will play against Milan

**MILAN:** AC Milan midfielder David Beckham returns to Old Trafford for the first time in seven years on Wednesday and fully expects to face Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney. In-form England forward Rooney, who scored twice in United's 3-2 first leg win, is a doubt for the Champions League last-16 return match due to a knee problem. "I'm sure Rooney will play. I think he's had some problems in the last few days but he had the whole weekend to recover," former United player Beckham told Milan's TV channel on Monday. "He's a fine player and he'll want to participate in the match. Alex Ferguson will certainly use the best possible formation."

Former England captain Beckham, 34, won the 1999 Champions League with United before leaving for Real Madrid in 2003 amid media reports of tension with manager Ferguson. "Alex Ferguson gives a lot of advice to players and he's one of the best football coaches. He protected his players but he made me understand when I was making a mistake," said Beckham. "If I play on Wednesday I won't be frightened but I will be excited because I played in that stadium for many years and I know what it means to be a Manchester United player. I know what it means for opponents to play there."

Beckham, who started the first leg, is not sure of playing on Wednesday as Alexandre Pato, Clarence Seedorf and Gennaro Gattuso are available again for Milan. -Reuters



AC Milan's David Beckham arrives with team mates at Manchester Airport, March 9, 2010. AC Milan will play Manchester United in their Champions League knockout soccer match on Wednesday. (AP)