

SPORT



Racist abuse, record fees and praying for an England recall

Darren Bent is On The Spot: Page 68

Liverpool turkeys facing an early exit

BY DAVID KENNEDY

LIVERPOOL'S hopes of qualifying for the knockout stages of the Champions League are hanging by a thread after a humbling return to Istanbul last night.

Two-and-a-half years ago Liverpool completed an amazing comeback in the Turkish city to beat AC Milan and win the Champions League final.

But Rafa Benitez's side now need another fightback of epic proportions after a Sami Hyypia own goal and Bobo strike handed Besiktas a 2-1 victory - Steven Gerrard scoring late on for the visitors.

The Reds now prop up Group A and probably need to win their final three



Sitting pretty: Malouda, left, and Bridge

games to go through. But Chelsea remain on course to qualify from Group B after a 2-0 victory over Schalke.

Florent Malouda and Didier Drogba scored to keep Chelsea in top spot.

Reports: Pages 70-71



No dream return: Gerrard could not rescue Liverpool

Picture: Getty

Sepp says England's World Cup bid is on

FIFA president Sepp Blatter yesterday opened the way for England to campaign to host the 2018 World Cup and said he expected a strong bid from the Football Association.

Blatter met Prime Minister Gordon Brown in Downing Street and told him he expects rotation of the tournament to be scrapped next week.

FIFA's executive committee will make the final decision in Zurich on Tuesday but it should just be a case of rubber-stamping Blatter's proposal, which would mean any country not from South America - Brazil are staging the 2014 event - could bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

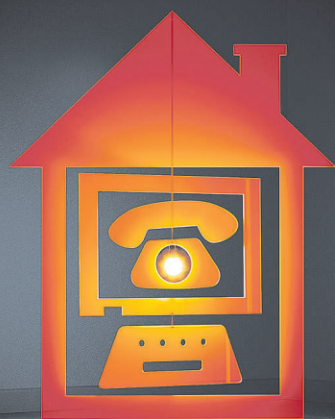
England would be up against China, Russia, Australia as well as joint bids from Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg and the US and Mexico. But Blatter hinted that England are already front-runners.

'It's an item we will be discussing on Monday and Tuesday at the FIFA executive committee in Zurich, on how the World Cup is to be presented to the world,' said Blatter. 'Definitely, if it happens then I can say England and the FA will present a really strong bid.'

Brown's backing: Page 69

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