



Alonso

Alonso fears a slow start at Chelsea will be costly for Reds

Xabi Alonso can see danger at every turn when he thinks ahead to facing Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on Sunday - but he is more worried about Liverpool's own weakness.

Four times this season, Liverpool have had to win the hard way, after going behind, and Alonso senses a similar show of generosity on Sunday could prove fatal to an undefeated run that stretches back to an epic Champions' League semi-final at Stamford Bridge last April.

There were few other misgivings from the 26-year-old Spaniard, though, as he reflected on Liverpool's progress.

Manchester United are one of the teams to have been overhauled after going ahead, Liverpool winning 2-1 at Anfield last month, and midfielder Alonso said: 'The United game was our first big test of the season, and beating them was very important for

our confidence. Chelsea is going to be another one.

'They haven't lost at home in the League for 86 games over four years, but our aim is to put an end to that and let everyone know what we are about.

'Being the first team to take three points at Stamford Bridge after all this time would send out an important statement as well as putting us in a great position at the top of the table. Winning there could spur us on for the rest of the season.

'That is the main incentive, rather than any thoughts of revenge for last season's Champions' League defeat. Chelsea have a new manager, and there are different players in both teams, so we can only look forward to Sunday, rather than think back to last April.

'But we won't be going there with any fear. We will go out expecting to win, just as we have in every game this season.

'What we cannot afford to do, though, is start as slowly as we have in some games. That could prove costly, because the quality of Chelsea's players means they can punish you at any moment. We have to be on top of our game for the full 90 minutes.'

Both teams consolidated their positions as group leaders in the Champions' League on Wednesday night, though Liverpool returned from Madrid with their strike force looking depleted after Robbie Keane joined Fernando Torres on the injury list with a groin strain that makes him a doubt for the weekend.

'Fernando will be a big loss against Chelsea, but we know we have to manage without him, and we will,' added Alonso, who is expected to shake off a knee problem.

'The great thing is we have more strength in depth this season.'

Woodgate warns Spurs losing mentality could bring relegation



Woodgate

Jonathan Woodgate warned that Tottenham are on the verge of disaster after they took their dismal Premier League form into Europe last night. Goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes blundered again and Jamie O'Hara was reckless in getting himself sent off as Spurs lost 2-0 to Udinese and sank to the bottom of Group D in the UEFA Cup after their first game.

With more bad news to take home from Italy, Woodgate claimed Tottenham are thinking like losers. He said: 'One million per cent we are in a relegation battle. I have seen it before at Leeds, and Leeds had a better team than we have got right now.'

'We are good enough to get out of it if the players start concentrating. If we don't then we will go down.'

'If you don't have the winning mentality you get the losing mentality like we have at the moment. We really have got to start working and give each other good kick up the a**e.'

'This is happening because the way we have been playing we deserve to be at the bottom.'

Even Juande Ramos finally showed some emotion after watching Gomes gift Udinese a first-half penalty scored by Antonio Di Natale.

O'Hara was sent off after the break for a second yellow before substitute Simone Pepe sealed Udinese's win four minutes from time.

A clearly agitated Ramos said: 'I am very angry. I do not like to lose. The mistake (by Gomes) and the goal changed the game totally in the wrong direction. It is difficult to win if you do not score goals.'

Ramos also showed a ruthless streak before kick-off by dropping David Bentley from his squad following the former Blackburn winger's description of Tottenham's start to the season as 'a bit s***'.

However, he ducked the issue afterwards. Ramos said: 'I just had to choose 18 players from out of 20. I don't know about his comments.'

'My country always comes first': Terry slams critics who question his commitment to England

John Terry today hit back at the critics who questioned his commitment to the England team and insisted he will always put his country before Chelsea.

Captain Terry showed his leadership qualities in a Chelsea shirt last night, scoring his first goal at Stamford Bridge for two years to earn a vital 1-0 win over Roma in the Champions League.

But the 27-year-old was seething at continued speculation over how he missed both of this month's World Cup quali-

fiers against Kazakhstan and Belarus with a back injury only to return for his club's next two games.

He said: 'People should know what I'm like as a player and as a character. It's just disappointing that anyone would question my determination to play for my club or country.'

'No one was more gutted than me, as England captain, to walk away from the squad last week and watch them travel to Belarus.'

'I did everything to get fit but my back just wasn't right. I have worked hard

my whole career not to miss any games. It has been frustrating the last two years because I've picked up a few injuries.'

'But England is the ultimate. You get picked for England by playing well for your club. England is far bigger than Chelsea, far bigger than Manchester United because you're representing your country and we're all very proud to do it, no one more than me.'

Terry is also determined to end fears that his back, which was operated on in 2006, is having a detri-

mental effect on his career.

He added: 'I don't understand where all this is coming from, the back is completely fine. I've had no bad responses since the operation and I've been doing exercises since then, which I need to continue doing. But I'm in a fit condition and raring to go. I have just had a stiff back which we can all get.'

Terry is hoping to take more of his frustration out on title rivals Liverpool in the League on Sunday, but he admits the Reds

have now developed the same characteristics that Chelsea had under former manager Jose Mourinho.

He said: 'One thing that has impressed me so far [this season] is they have something we had under Mourinho in that there have been a couple of games where they have not been playing well and you think that will do us and then they have come back scoring late goals. That is something we have to be aware of. They are showing a real determination and belief this year.'



Terry