

Nic: We won't fold without Drogba

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NICOLAS ANELKA insists he is ready to take the strain in the absence of strike partner Didier Drogba.

Chelsea's deadly duo have banged in 26 goals this season.

But Drogba has just two matches left before he leaves for the African Nations Cup next week - disrupting the link they have forged.

The Ivory Coast hitman could be away for up to a month in Angola along with Michael Essien, John Obi Mikel and Salomon Kalou.

But French ace Anelka insists he is the man to keep the table-topping Blues on course for the title.

And he believes Drogba's suspension earlier this season - when he was hit with a three-match Champions League ban - only served to strengthen the team spirit and show Chelsea could cope without him.

Anelka, 30, said: "When Didier was out earlier in the season, and then when we were hit with the transfer embargo, some people expected us to falter.

"But we play as a team and we all want to win the Premier League and the Champions League - and if anything it helped the team spirit.

"Obviously it's better when Didier is here but I will do my very best to score the goals."

Anelka has bagged 30 goals in 101 games, including eight so far this season, since a £15million move from Bolton almost two years ago. His form has earned him the Sportsman of the Year gong at the Francais of the Year awards - which celebrate French people who work in the UK - ahead of Arsenal's Gael Clichy and Manchester United's Patrice Evra.

Anelka expects to be back for the Boxing Day visit to Birmingham after missing Sunday's 1-1 draw at West Ham with a muscle strain.

He added: "When I first came here I said I want to play with Didier because I knew we'd work together.

"I play behind him and I am trying my best to give him assists plus he wants me to score as well.

"I feel more settled now than I've ever been and it shows out on the pitch."



FLYING SOLO ... Anelka