



ANXIOUS WAIT: Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo stretches during a training session in Madrid on May 11.

PHOTO: AFP

# Semifinal 2nd leg Everything to play for



AFP, Madrid

Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved is ready to play through the pain barrier to fire Juventus into the Champions League final.

Defending champions Real Madrid visit a sold-out Delle Alpi stadium on Wednesday for the second leg of their semi-final clash, protecting a 2-1 lead.

Brazilian duo Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos scored for the Spaniards at the Bernabeu, but a precious away goal from Juve's French striker David Trezeguet keeps the tie finely balanced.

Nedved, nicknamed 'The Cannon' because of his powerful shot, is a closely marked man and has the bruises to prove it.

But the elf-like 30-year-old is determined to grin and bear it for the final push, as the Italian champions seek to book their ticket to the Manchester showpiece and set up a potential double success.

"Perhaps I need a little rest as I've taken plenty of knocks this season but there's too much at stake," said the former Lazio

player, one of the favourites for the European Footballer of the Year award.

Not one to roll around theatrically when he gets clattered like many of his fellow professionals in Serie A, Nedved has played down the knee injury that forced coach Marcello Lippi to rest him in Saturday's 2-2 draw at home to Perugia.

Nedved did however come on as a substitute 11 minutes into the second-half in a match that saw Juventus retain their Italian title.

"I really wanted to play and was delighted when the coach let me come on. I wanted to make a contribution," he said.

"I don't have serious problems. I have a little pain in my collateral ligaments, but I've not considered surgery."

A visit to the hospital may not be one of Nedved's priorities right now, but Juventus' general director Luciano Moggi is determined to protect one of his best investments when the campaign is over.

"He may need an operation. We will see when the season ends," said the club's transfer guru, responsible for signing Nedved from Lazio two years ago for 41.2 million euros.

Nedved admitted Juventus don't have the flair of Real, but said his team possess many other qualities.

"We don't always play pretty football like they do, we have our own characteristics that are equally effective," he said.

"Collectively we are strong and when some players are not 100 per cent the others will raise their game to compensate, so the team is always on top."

The Czech Republic international said he was expecting an open match with so much talent on the same field.

"We won't be playing for a 1-0 win as that would be dangerous," he said.

"I'm sure there will be plenty of goals as there are so many world class players involved."

"Obviously winning is the main thing, but if we could put on a show against a team like Real would be fantastic, especially in front of our own fans."

Real's midfield grafter Claude Makalele will miss Wednesday's match after straining a left thigh muscle.

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo is in the squad and will have a late

fitness test. The 'phenomenon', who has already scored six goals in the Champions' League and 17 in the Spanish Primera Liga this season is confident however of making a miraculous recovery which had looked unlikely when he suffered a calf and thigh strain in the first leg.

"I'm well," Ronaldo said on his personal website on Tuesday. "I had a test today and the truth is I feel very well."

"With every hour I'm more optimistic and I now believe I'll be able to play. I'm eager to help the team in a game like this."

"I really want to win the Champions League, the only title I have never won. I still do not know if I will be able to take the field in Turin. What I do know is that the entire squad will give everything. We want to win and give another reason for joy to our unique supporters"

"Juventus are an extremely tough team, the new Italian champions. Still, Real Madrid does not fear anyone, regardless of their name and history," said the 26-year-old.

Real will also welcome back Zinedine Zidane, Raul and Luis Figo all of whom missed the 0-0

draw against Recreativo Huelvo on Sunday which cost them the leadership of the league to Deportivo La Coruna.

Real defender Francisco Pavon, who is expected to play in a back three against the Italians, said the return of Raul could swing the match their way.

"He is a player who has the personality to spur us on," he said.

Juventus have no injury problems ahead of Wednesday's do-or-die clash.

### PROBABLE TEAMS

**Juventus:** 1-Gianluigi Buffon; 21-Lilian Thuram, 5-Igor Tudor (or 7-Gianluca Pessotto), 4-Paolo Montero, 19-Gianluca Zambrotta; 16-Mauro Camoranesi, 3-Alessio Tacchinardi, 26-Edgar Davids, 11-Pavel Nedved; 10-Alessandro Del Piero, 17-David Trezeguet.

**Real Madrid:** 1-Iker Casillas; 2-Michel Salgado, 4-Fernando Hierro, 6-Ivan Helguera, 22-Francisco Pavon, 3-Roberto Carlos; 10-Luis Figo, 16-Flavio Conceicao, 5-Zinedine Zidane; 14-Guti or 11-Ronaldo, 7-Raul.

**Referee:** Urs Meier (Switzerland)

## 'Use your heads'



REUTERS, Turin

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi says determination will not be enough to overcome a 2-1 deficit when the freshly crowned Italian champions take on Real Madrid in their semi-final, second-leg match on Wednesday.

"We will need heart but also a lot of brains," Lippi told a news conference after training on Tuesday. "It will be important to have our fans, all 67,000 of them, on our side but the most important thing of all is to take charge of the game in the best possible way."

Lippi has no injury worries ahead of the game with defender



MARCELLO LIPPI

Alessandro Birindelli, who picked up a knock in the 2-2 draw with Perugia on Saturday which secured the club's 27th Italian title, named in the squad.

The Juve coach says he expects the defending European champions to play their trademark passing game.

"Real will play as they know how -- with the ball at their feet but we will make space for ourselves, in our way, as we did in the first game, indeed I hope a little bit more so," said Lippi.

Real are waiting on the fitness of their Brazilian striker Ronaldo but Juve forward Alessandro Del Piero said the appearance or otherwise of the former Inter Milan forward and World Player of the Year was not a factor for undue concern.

"If he won't make it there are many other great players but it would be nice to get through the tie with him on the field," said the Italy international.

## Xavier shown the door



AFP, Liverpool

Portuguese international defender Abel Xavier has been released by Liverpool their manager Gerard Houllier revealed on Monday.

Houllier said Xavier would be joined by injury-prone duo Patrik Berger and Vegard Heggem and French World Cup winning midfielder Bernard Diomede as he seeks to strengthen the squad following their failure to qualify for the Champions League.

Xavier, who was a member of the Portuguese side that reached the Euro 2000 semi-finals, was a shock 800,000-pound signing from cross city rivals Everton last season but his Liverpool career was hampered by illness and injury and he was loaned out to Turkish giants Galatasaray on a year's loan in

January.

"Abel Xavier has already left the club," Houllier told the club's official website.

Houllier said he would be seeking direct replacements for Berger, Heggem and Diomede despite lacking the funds that would have been available had they edged Chelsea for the fourth Champions League spot.

Berger has made just four appearances this season as injury has yet again plagued the elegant 29-year-old Czech international midfielder's seven year career at the club and is believed to be a target for a German and Czech club.

Heggem too has been beset by injuries and the 27-year-old Norwegian international defender last played for the League Cup winners three seasons ago.

He is set to have a trial with his former club Norwegian club Rosenborg.

## Pauleta best in France



AFP, Lisbon

Portugal international Pedro Pauleta said Tuesday he was surprised to be voted best player in the French first division by his fellow players for the second consecutive year.

"It was a tremendous joy, because I was not expecting to win unlike last year when I was practically sure of victory," he told Portuguese daily Correio da Manha.

The Bordeaux striker, who along with Monaco's Shabani Nonda is joint top scorer in France this season with 20 goals, received the top player award at a ceremony in Paris on Sunday.

It was the first time that a player had won the title for two years in a row.

The 30-year-old beat Monaco playmaker Ludovic Giuly who came in second place. Marseille defender Daniel Van Buyten and Monaco midfielder Jerome Rothen were the other two candidates for the best player title.

Pauleta, who joined Bordeaux in September 2000 from Deportivo Coruna, added he intends to stay on with the French team until the end of his contract.

"I have one more year on my contract and I want to complete this season and help Bordeaux reach its objectives. Then we will see," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Pedro Pauleta, Bordeaux' Portuguese striker, poses with his Best Ligue 1 player award on May 11 at the Olympia in Paris.

## Mandela on Eriksson's mind



AFP, London

England football coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said Monday he hoped he could meet former South Africa president Nelson Mandela later this month.

On May 22, South Africa host England in an international friendly in Durban and Eriksson, after announcing his squad at the Football Association's London headquarters, said: "I think politically the game is very important."

"We are going there because it was a request from Nelson Mandela. We are hoping we can meet him. We are working on it," the Swede added.

But David Seaman will not be meeting Mandela next week after being dropped from a squad which also covers the June 3 home friendly against Serbia and Montenegro and the June 11 Euro 2004 qualifier at Middlesbrough's Riverside Stadium.

Seaman's club manager at Arsenal, Arsene Wenger, suggested during the course of the season that the 39-year-old goalkeeper might stay on at Highbury in a coaching capacity.

And Eriksson said: "I talked to David a couple of days ago and told him for this time we stick to the goalkeepers we had against Liechtenstein and Turkey."

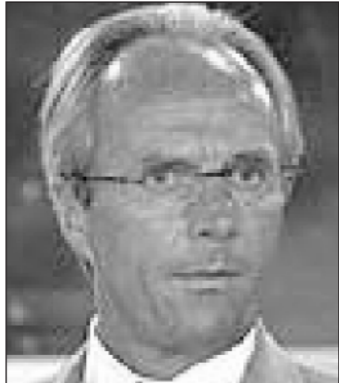
"David James has done very well and I do not know what is happening with David (Seaman) for next season."

Seaman has been England's first choice keeper for the best part of a decade but Eriksson said West Ham's James was now in pole position despite the east London club's relegation from the Premiership on Sunday.

"James is doing well and as long as we don't know what is happening with David, it is the right way."

But Eriksson left the international door open for Seaman by adding: "If David goes on playing you never know. If he is playing and playing well, he might come back."

Everton's teenage striker Wayne Rooney was included in the squad despite his club manager, David Moyes saying the 17-year-old forward would not be travelling to South Africa because of a knee injury sustained in the final league match of the season at home to champions Manchester United on Sunday.



SVEN-GORAN ERIKSSON

Rooney was due to have a scan Monday and Eriksson, who said he would not make a decision on the goalscorer's fitness to travel to South Africa until Sunday, insisted he had not picked him just to prove his authority.



NELSON MANDELA

"It's very important that we have a good relationship, David Moyes and me, and it's more important what happens with Wayne Rooney," Eriksson insisted. "It's important for Everton and England."

## Becks coming to Asia



AFP, Hanoi

Already a superstar in football-mad Asia, David Beckham will have a further opportunity to cement his iconic status next month on a whistle-stop promotional tour through the region.

The England skipper will put his skills on display, albeit from the sidelines, at a series of football festivals in Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam over a five-day period in the last week of June.

"I'm really looking forward to my Asia visit," said the Manchester United midfielder. "I had such a wonderful time during the World Cup last year. It'll be great to be back again."

Castrol, which is sponsoring the tour, said Tuesday the exact dates for Beckham's Asian swing have yet to be finalized.

A spokesman for British company in Vietnam's southern business capital of Ho Chi Minh City also declined to reveal how much the 28-year-old -- reputed to be the highest paid player in Europe -- would receive for the jaunt.



PHOTO: AFP

FOOTBALL NOT ALLOWED! An AFP photo taken on January 19, shows people playing football on the meadow in front of the Reichstag, the German parliament house in Berlin. Berlin city authorities since 28 April showed a collective red card to amateur footballers playing on the grass in front of the Reichstag. Those who defy the card, will have to pay a 50-euro fine if they continue following their cherished tradition.

## Football sent off!



AFP, Berlin

Berlin's Reichstag, no stranger to the vagaries of history, is at the centre of a new row after authorities in the city showed a collective red card to amateur footballers playing on the grass in front.

It has pitted the kickers seething about the loss of a cherished tradition against officials defending the symbolism of the historic parliament.

But the dispute also goes to the heart of the modern German male, for whom football is almost an official religion.

A sign at one end, sandwiched between the Reichstag and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's office, reads: "Warning: forbidden to dogs and footballers."

On Sunday, six policemen and seven City Hall officials turned up to enforce the ban. In footballing terms, it was a full team plus two substitutes.

The opposition couldn't even muster half a side. Just four had decided to ignore the ban, the rest of the scores of young people who usually kick around put off by the prospect of a 50-euro fine.

"You are committing an offence. Your papers please," somebody in the City Hall team said as they strolled toward the

opposition.

"But this is a tradition that has been going on for decades," retorted one of the footballers.

No longer. The city council, which cares for the grass, says the ground is being ruined and it cannot afford the running repairs.

It also has another argument: that since the German parliament returned to Berlin, playing football in front of the Reichstag detracts from its aura.

Joachim Zeller, mayor of Berlin Mitte which includes the city centre, said the ground had been abandoned until the middle of the 1990s.

"But since the end of (renovation) works around the Reichstag, maintaining this area has cost us 5.5 million euros," he told AFP.

"Playing football is ruining the new grass, the upkeep is expensive and our finances are disastrous."

The Reichstag has seen plenty of controversy in the past.

Inaugurated by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1894, it was from there that the first German republic was declared in 1918 at the end of World War I.

Hitler's Nazis used a fire which ravaged the building in 1933 to persecute Communists, and it was gutted in fierce fighting as his dictatorship perished in 1945.

Long a potent Cold War symbol abutting the western side of the Berlin Wall, the Reichstag was finally inaugurated as the parlia-

ment for reunified Germany in 1999.

The amateurs reply that football has been played in front of the building for decades and that it is a healthy sign of life.

"Where else are we meant to go?" asked Gregor Schaefer, whose club Cosmos plays here every Sunday. "We're not harming anyone by coming here, and we're continuing a tradition."

Schroeder, a keen former amateur footballer himself who often uses soccer metaphors, is said privately to oppose a ban. He can watch the games from his office window.

Parliament speaker Wolfgang Thierse said that "personally, I have nothing against people coming here to play."

But since the fines were imposed last month, "many amateurs have been put off and aren't come any more," Schaefer said as police noted the identities of his team-mates.

There were more the weekend before, but they were ordered to stop playing after 10 minutes.

Undaunted, Schaefer and his colleagues promised to return next Sunday. And if officials decide to impose the fines, "we'll take them to court."

"I hope the government will intervene," he added, pointing to Schroeder's chancellor. If so, it might yet take this dispute to extra time.