

First signs promising



AFP, Paris

Roman Abramovich looks set to recoup a fair amount of the millions he has invested in Chelsea as they ran out 2-0 winners away at Slovakian champions Zilina in the first leg of the final qualifying round of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Entrance into the group phase of European club football's elite competition can be worth as much as 20million pounds and goals by Eidur Gudjohnsen - his first for six months - and an own goal by Michael Drahne virtually ensured that, after four barren years in Europe with first round exits, they would progress.

On a generally good night for British clubs Newcastle gained a hard fought 1-0 victory in Belgrade over Partizan Belgrade and a measure of revenge for manager Bobby Robson over his German counterpart Lothar Matthaus, who had been captain when the then West Germany eliminated England from the 1990 World Cup semi-finals on penalties.

There were differing fortunes for the Glasgow giants as Celtic look set fair for the group stage after an easy 4-0 victory in Hungary over MTK Budapest but cash-strapped Rangers will be sweating over the next fortnight after being held 1-1 at home to FC Copenhagen.

It was a good evening for Belgian sides as both Anderlecht and Club Brugge recorded home victories, the latter's 2-1 result over Germany's 1997 Champions League winners Borussia Dortmund being the most creditable.

Benfica's hopes of gaining some much needed income look doomed after slipping to a 3-1

defeat in Rome at the hands of Lazio with veteran Serbian defender Sinisa Mihajlovic rounding off the victory with a trademark freekick.

Another former winner of the competition Marseille returned to the fray 10 years after they won it and look good to make the next phase after a goal by Russian youngster Dmitri Sychev saw off Austria Vienna 1-0 in Vienna.

Austria Vienna's handler Joachim Lowe was not a happy man afterwards.

"We were lacking commitment everywhere, particularly in the tackle and we weren't sharp up front either," moaned Loew, who added nevertheless that the tie wasn't over in good old fashioned managerspeak.

While several of Chelsea's new signings impressed, 17million pounds signing Damien Duff was the standout star, who would have delighted 36-year-old Abramovich sitting watching him on his yacht off the coast of Alaska.

It was the 24-year-old Irishman who created the first goal in the 42nd minute as he played a delightful 1-2 with Finnish striker Mikael Forssell.

Forssell played in Duff into the penalty area and his low cross evaded the Zilina defence for Gudjohnsen to tap in at the far post.

"It felt really good to play a proper match together at last," said Duff.

"As the game went on, the passing got a lot better as we got to know each other more.

"It is always nice to set up a goal, but that is my job," added the down to earth Irishman.

Peruvian international Nolberto Solano struck the only goal of the game as Newcastle United clinched a vital victory against Partizan Belgrade.

Solano hit the target seven minutes before the interval when he was on hand to poke the ball

over the line after a cross from Laurent Robert had eluded skipper Alan Shearer who was celebrating his 33rd birthday.

The result was also sweet revenge for another reason for Newcastle as Partizan knocked them out of the 1998 Cup Winners Cup on away goals.

It was a special goal for Solano on Wednesday.

Playing instead of the suspended Lee Bowyer, he joined Gary Speed and Shay Given in playing a club record equalling 27th European tie for the Magpies.

Rangers' dreams of joining them suffered a major jolt with their draw.

Peter Lovenkrands had given the Scottish champions a seventh minute lead against his countrymen but Faroe Islands international Todi Jonsson levelled with a vital away goal six minutes after the interval.

Despite the draw, Gers boss Alex McLeish refused to give up hope.

"We are all disappointed not to have won the match," said the coach.

"But our heads are not totally down because this tie is still very much alive.

"We know, however, that it will take a much better performance from several of the players and another factor is that by the time the game comes around, the fitness levels will be higher.

"The players know themselves that they can give more in certain positions and I am looking for that improvement."

There will be several other managers mouthing those words in the next two weeks as their bank managers start worrying about where the next big cheque is coming from - Roman's one needn't worry.



Chelsea new signing Damien Duff (R) going past MSK Zilina's Dusan Sninsky at Zilina, Slovakia on August 13.

PHOTO: AFP

Makelele gets on Real's nerves



AFP, Madrid

Spanish champions Real Madrid have launched disciplinary measures against French midfielder Claude Makelele who is refusing to train with the team, the club announced on Wednesday.

The French player, who has been targeted by big-spending Chelsea in a deal which would double his 1.5 million euro salary, told Real coach Carlos Queiroz of his intention not to practise with his teammates.

Sporting director Jorge Valdano told reporters that as a result, an inquiry would be launched and a planned meeting with Chelsea, scheduled for next Monday, had been cancelled.

Earlier Wednesday, Makelele's agent Marc Roger had said Real and Chelsea were talking terms based on a ten million euro (11.3 million dollars) transfer fee with Makelele hoping to net a deal matching the reported 125,000 euros (141,000 dollars) he earns a month with Real.

Congo-born Makelele, 30, joined Real from Celta Vigo in August 2000 for \$13.7 million after two seasons with Celta, having earlier made his name with French league side Nantes.

He has been one of Real's most influential players in recent seasons, performing a vital ball-winning role in midfield and it would be a

major surprise if the club decided to release him.

Spanish media reports, however, later said Real would not be letting Makelele go, the club pointing out he has a clause in his contract running to 2006 that any buyer would have to break the bank and pay more than 90 million dollars to capture his signature.

Roger said Makelele was happy to stay on but wanted a better deal and put his chances of a move at 50-50.

"Real know he is the best player in the world in his position.

"In sporting terms he is happy but not economically.

"A player who is not happy is not a good player," he added.

Meanwhile, Makelele is set to continue his rebellion over his demand for a pay rise despite the club's decision to discipline him.

"Right now I am not even thinking of training or anything like it," the French international told sports daily Marca on Thursday.

"I don't feel right and when you feel like that it is best not to force yourself."

Roger said the player had started the protest because he felt undervalued by the club after they refused to grant an improvement in his contract.

"If they (Real) continue to pay him the same amount then I'm sure he will not stay. He can't carry on like this. There are players in the squad like (David) Beckham who are earning five times as much as him," Roger told reporters on Wednesday.

Next stop USA, India!



AFP, Madrid

Not content with conquering Asia both on and off the pitch, Real Madrid are to leave no stone unturned in their bid to leave rivals standing in the battle for the status of the world's top sporting club.

Real wowed millions of fans in China, Japan and Thailand on their Asia tour which ended with Sunday's 2-1 win over Thailand's national side.

But even before the Spanish season begins they are planning next year's charm offensive.

Next stop, the United States and India, where David Beckham and his exalted company could soon be rubbing shoulders with fans from Chicago to Calcutta.

The new agenda is the brainchild of club president Florentino Perez, who sees the conquest of new markets as vital to his game plan to

make Real the footballing 'brand' of choice in countries where the game has yet to reach the levels of popularity it has in Europe, Asia and South America.

In adding global icon Beckham to their ranks last month Real have stamped themselves into the consciousness of fans in English-speaking countries, where previously the England skipper's former club Manchester United were undisputed merchandising top dogs.

Now, with Beckham on board alongside Frenchman Zinedine Zidane, Brazilian World Cup winners

Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos as well as Portugal's Luis Figo, Real feel they possess across the board market appeal.

As club marketing executive Jose Angel Sanchez put it following Real's Asian tour "we now have millions of new fans gained on this tour.

"Now we have to go to the United States," AS sports daily quoted

Sanchez as saying Wednesday.

Real see a coast-to-coast US tour as a vital next step -- but India also has its appeal.

Although a footballing backwater given its traditional obsession with cricket, Indians are increasingly becoming interested in the 'global game' with Beckham having an indirect, if perhaps involuntary part.

The recent smash hit film 'Bend it like Beckham' starred British actress of Indian origin Parminder Nagra as an Indian adolescent in love with the game.

The film, directed by Gurinder Chadha, showed how the heroine, Jess, played by Nagra, was determined to play despite parental opposition as her family saw a girl taking up soccer as representing a break with traditional values.

Nagra practised with a women's professional side in England, the Fulham Girls, and the film turned into a major hit.

It is also credited with helping to awaken Indian interest in the game. According to AS commentator

Alfredo Relano criticism of Real's attempts to lap up the attention - and the cash - from their tours at the possible expense of wearing the players' outis water off a duck's back for Perez.

"The critics of the tour to China certainly don't seem to have made an impression on Florentino," according to Relano.

Last year Real visited New York, where they met Italian giants Roma and also visited the United Nations, where they were received by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Nearer home, Real, whose clutch of sponsors inject a reported 40 million euros (45 million dollars) annually, have launched a club card offering a variety of promotions and discounts which now has 300,000 adherents in Spain alone, though the scheme is to be extended worldwide.

The proud owner of the 300,000th piece of plastic? A Mr. David Beckham.

Five Beckhams in Makaay!

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeness claims that new signing Roy Makaay is five times more valuable than Real Madrid's 35-million-euro capture David Beckham.

The Dutch front-man, 28, cost the German champions a club-record 18.75 million euros from Deportivo La Coruna, but Hoeness believes the price-tag represents good value in comparison with other close season transfers.

"I would rather have paid five times as much for Roy (Makaay) than David Beckham," Hoeness said Thursday.

"He scored 29 goals in Spain, the highest league in the world," Bayern boss Makaay will be the final piece in the jigsaw and Hoeness is confident the former Vitesse Arnhem man can inspire Munich to glory.

"We want to be successful over the next four years and we believe the chances are greater with Roy," added Hoeness.

La Primera Liga's top-scorer made his debut for Bayern, donning the number 10 shirt, in a 2-0 win over Nuremberg on Tuesday and although the Dutch international did not score, he was happy with his performance.

"I was very happy with my performance because I had not played for three months," said Makaay.

"As a striker there is always pressure. But I am sure that I will score a lot of goals here."

Hoeness claimed Makaay needed time to settle at the Olympic Stadium.

"It is not about whether Makaay scored against Nuremberg but what comes out at the end of the season," insisted the Bayern general manager.

"We do not want to justify the millions after every match."

Makaay is likely to make his Bundesliga debut against VfL Bochum on Saturday with coach Ottmar Hitzfeld admitting: "If he is not injured he will play on Saturday."

Kaka heads for Milan

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian midfielder Ricardo Izecson Santos Leite, known as "Kaka", is being transferred to Italian Serie A side AC Milan, his club Sao Paulo announced here Thursday.

The 21-year-old midfielder, whose brilliant appearances in the Brazilian league last won him a place on the national team, is set to arrive in Italy on Friday where he will put pen to paper on a nine-million dollar contract following a medical.

Kaka has four goals in 10 games for the World Cup winners. The length of his contract has not yet been released.

German greats pass away



AFP, Essen

German World Cup winner Helmut Rahn, who scored the winning goal in Germany's 1954 World Cup final 3-2 victory over Hungary in Bern, died on Thursday at the age of 73, the German Football Federation (DFB) confirmed.

It was a sad day for German football as it was announced that another former German international Lothar Emmerich had passed away at the age of 61.



HELMUT RAHN LOTHAR EMMERICH

Rot-Weiss Essen forward Rahn, nicknamed 'The Boss', made 40 appearances for Germany, scoring 21 goals before a knee injury in 1965 forced him to retire.

1974 World Cup victor Franz Beckenbauer was one of the first to pay tribute to Rahn, who would have been 74 on Saturday, and the pivotal role he played in bringing German football to the forefront.

"The Boss contributed to the most important success in German football history," lauded

Beckenbauer. "Germany was somebody again. We gave ourselves a sense of value again. Rahn was and still is one of the last legends."

Hungary were firm favourites to win the 1954 final and went into a 2-0 lead before Max Morlock scored. But it was Rahn who became the hero in Bern after he netted the equaliser and then the winning goal for Germany.

Horst Eckel, Ottmar Walter and Hans Schafer are the only three members of the victorious 1954 German World Cup still alive.

After the 1954 World Cup final victory German coach Sepp Herberger famously declared: "Now we are someone."

The victory signalled the return of Germany to international competition after 12 years of Nazism from 1933 to 1945.

Rudi Voller's German national team will wear black armbands in honour of Rahn during the friendly match with Italy on August 20 in Stuttgart.

Borussia Dortmund forward Emmerich was a member of Germany's 1966 World Cup squad and played in the 4-2 final defeat by England in the final.

Twice top-scorer in the Bundesliga, Emmerich made 183 appearances for Dortmund between 1963 and 1969 scoring a total of 115 goals.

In the 1965/66 season Emmerich helped Dortmund to become the first German side to win a European club competition.

He has his own style

AFP, Lisbon

Manchester United's new teenage striker Cristiano Ronaldo may have been handed the club's fabled number seven jersey, which was recently vacated by David Beckham, but he does not want to be compared to the English superstar.

"I did not come to substitute Beckham. I know that everyone will demand a lot of me, but we are different players," he told Portuguese daily newspaper 24 Horas.

"I would have liked to have kept my number 28 but they gave me number seven."

Previous stars to wear the shirt include George Best, Eric Cantona and former England captain Bryan Robson.

Ronaldo signed from Sporting Lisbon on Tuesday for five years for 12.2 million pounds (20 million dollars), making him the most expensive teenager in British football.

"I am still thinking about what I will do with so much money. I am going to get advice from people who are close to me and will invest in various areas," he said.

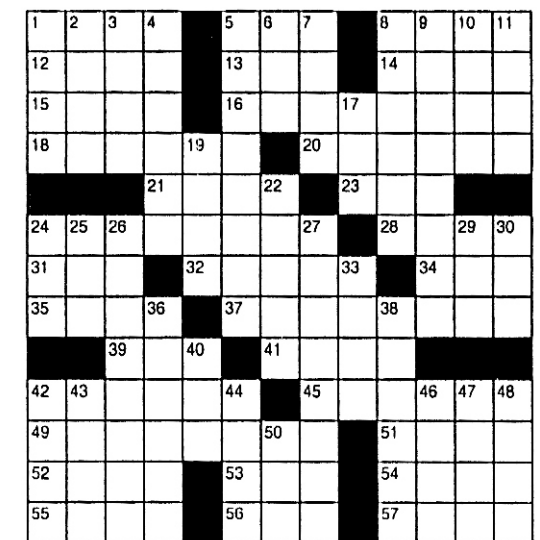
Ronaldo, who only turns 19 in February, said his mother and one of his sisters will come and live with him in Manchester and help him adapt to his new life.

The teen player speaks little English but said he expected that would not be a problem since Manchester United has also signed on Brazil's World Cup winner Kleberson, who also does not speak the language but is a fellow Portuguese speaker.

"We can help each other. We have already spoken about that," Ronaldo said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS 1 Seafood entree 5 Jongg preceder 8 Venomous vipers 12 Pumice source 13 Man-mouse link 14 Two-way inflamous 16 Faraway place, idiomatically 18 Arizona tribe 20 More stubborn 21 Dweeb 23 Pigpen 24 Apron-like garment 28 Hoard 31 Fuss 32 Swing about 34 Actress Delaney 35 Nasty stinger 37 Memory-loss sufferers (Var.)



CRYPTOQUIP

H D P L F A E N R S D H Q R Q X H L F Y H H D P L F U A F Y P N M H F X F Z U F X P E D P S F H R H Z F N M Y F X S Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHEN ALL WOMEN DECIDE TO DESERT A COUNTRY, I IMAGINE THAT RESULTS IN STAG-NATION. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals C The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



PHOTO: AFP

EARTH TODAY, MARS TOMORROW? Real Madrid's players (from left) Roberto Carlos, David Beckham, Luis Figo, Esteban Cambiasso, Raul Bravo, Santiago Solari and Ronaldo warm-up during a practice session at the team's Ciudad Deportivo training base on August 13.