

Hungry for success



AFP, Paris

Arsenal, Juventus and Bayern Munich embark on their latest Champions League adventure on Wednesday determined to make amends for the misery they endured in the cash-soaked tournament last season.

Arsenal, who went into the competition as English Premiership and FA Cup winners, were dumped out in the second round while Bayern never got beyond the first group stage despite setting out as one of the favourites.

Juventus, twice winners of the tournament but runners-up three times in the last seven seasons, were beaten finalists losing to Italian rivals AC Milan after a bitterly disappointing performance.

Now all three start again from scratch, but the memories of last season burn deep.

Arsenal entertain Inter Milan at Highbury in a Group B which also includes perennial challengers Dynamo Kiev and Lokomotiv Moscow.

The Gunners were knocked out in the second round last year winning just one of their six matches. That came at Roma, followed by four draws and a crucial 2-1 defeat at Valencia in their last match.

It was the second time in three years that the Gunners had lost at the Metastella Stadium with the defeat coming on the back of boss Arsene Wenger claiming that the Londoners had matured into a stronger outfit.

"We are all responsible. It is a question of bad luck, but I thought we might be a bit mentally tougher," said the Frenchman after the match in which a double from Norwegian striker John Carew sunk his hopes.

Wenger has been cheered by the absence from Inter's ranks of

Christian Vieri for Wednesday's clash - a player capable of inflicting the same damage as Carew.

"I will not be crying about him not playing on Wednesday," admitted the Frenchman who knows the value of the Champions League.

Arsenal managing director Keith Edelman said last week they had three months to raise 50 million pounds towards the 400-million-pound (600-million-dollar) new stadium project or it would have to be scrapped.

The club wants to move to a new 60,000-seater ground and leave the 38,500-capacity Highbury behind.

Juventus begin their campaign at home to Group D rivals Galatasaray determined to redeem themselves after last season's final defeat to Milan on penalties that was a bitter blow after they had outclassed Real Madrid in the semi-finals.

Part of the reason why Juve failed to tick in the Old Trafford final was the absence of suspended Czech playmaker Pavel Nedved.

"I never want to go through that again," said the 31-year-old. "As a team are determined to make up for last season's disappointment. The will to win is even stronger."

The other Group D match on Wednesday sees Greek champions Olympiakos at Spanish side Real Sociedad.

Four-time winners Bayern Munich are also looking to make amends for their disastrous campaign last season when they host Celtic at the Olympic Stadium in Group A.

French champions Lyon, with former Bayern striker Giovane Elber in their ranks, take on Anderlecht in the night's other tie.

Bayern failed to win a single match in the first group phase last season - a slump sparked by an opening 3-2 defeat by Deportivo La Coruna, when their recent signing Roy Makaay scored a hat-trick for the Spaniards.

"With all three points we will have the self-belief and not put ourselves under as much pressure as we did last year," said coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

Celtic, winners in 1967, also had a poor Champions League losing in the qualifying round to Swiss side FC Basel.

"Bayern are one of the strongest teams in Europe and we need a good performance to take something home," said coach Martin O'Neill.

The German champions have a host of injury problems with Jens Jeremies and Sebastian Deisler out while doubts surround Michael Ballack, Claudio Pizarro, Willy Sagnol and Ze Roberto.

O'Neill has his fair share of problems too with experienced midfielder Paul Lambert and Ulrik Laursen sidelined.

The other two matches on Wednesday are in Group C where Spanish league leaders Deportivo La Coruna go to AEK Athens while 1988 winners PSV Eindhoven clash with Monaco.

The French side can call upon the experience of striker Fernando Morientes for the tie - he knows all about the Champions League having been a regular feature of the Real Madrid side which won three of the last six European titles.

FIXTURES

AFP, Paris

Champions League first round Group Phase fixtures on Wednesday:

Group A
At Lyon
Lyon (FRA) v Anderlecht (BEL)
At Munich
Bayern Munich (GER) v Celtic (SCO)

Group B
At Kiev
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Lokomotiv Moscow (RUS)
At London
Arsenal (ENG) v Inter Milan (ITA)

Group C
At Athens
AEK Athens (GRE) v Deportivo La Coruna (SPA)
At Eindhoven
PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Monaco (FRA)

Group D
At Turin
Juventus (ITA) v Galatasaray (TUR)
At San Sebastian
Real Sociedad (SPA) v Olympiakos (GRE)

Hargreaves not good enough for Kahn

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn claimed Monday that Owen Hargreaves was not disciplined enough to play in the midfield holding berth of the injured Jens Jeremies.

"Our problem is that we are relying on undisciplined football," Kahn complained after Monday's training.

"Owen runs a lot and is always involved but the first line of defence requires stability. We need someone who can do that."

Kahn feels England international Hargreaves, 22, is not up to the task of replacing Jeremies who is sidelined with a knee complaint.

"We are now seeing how important Jens Jeremies is for us," added Kahn.

Pires claims innocence

AFP, London

French forward Robert Pires denied Monday he dived to earn Arsenal a controversial penalty against Portsmouth on Saturday when the English Premiership leaders salvaged a 1-1 draw.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger avoided judging his player during TV interviews but Pires has insisted: "I am no cheat."

Serbian defender Dejan Stjepanovic was judged to have brought down Pires and claimed afterwards the Frenchman answered with a "that's football" comment when he asked if it was a penalty.

But Pires was adamant there was contact.

"I did not say that to him," insisted Pires. "We changed shirts at the end of the match and he asked me 'Was it a foul?' I said: 'I don't know. I am not the referee.'"

"All I know is that there was contact with my foot and there was a noise. I think that is what the referee heard to give the penalty. I did not dive and I am not a cheat. That is not the way I play."

Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp called the decision "embarrassing".

Rooney's fast recovery

AFP, Liverpool

Everton's England striker Wayne Rooney looks set to face Middlesbrough on Sunday after shaking off an ankle injury.

The 17-year-old England striker limped off in the first half of Saturday's 2-2 draw with Newcastle United.

"Wayne is okay. We don't think it is too serious and hopefully he will train in the middle of the week. It is a case of waiting and finding out," Everton manager David Moyes told the club website.

But goalkeeper Richard Wright will undergo exploratory surgery on his troublesome knee.

Wright, who visited a specialist on Monday, was substituted in the draw against Newcastle and replaced by Nigel Martyn.

Romeo's bleeding!



SUN, Madrid

Romeo Beckham was rushed to hospital on Monday with blood gushing from his head after falling over on a shopping trip.

David and Victoria's youngest son needed two stitches to his forehead after stumbling at the bottom of an escalator.

The horror happened in Madrid as one-year-old Romeo and brother Brooklyn, four, were taken out by David's mum Sandra, 49.

Posh and Becks dashed to be with Romeo and spent 70 minutes at a hospital in the city while doctors treated him.

England skipper Becks, 28,

rushed there after leaving a training session.

Sandra called him on his mobile to tell him about the accident.

Then she rang Victoria, 29, who was at a five-star hotel in the centre of the Spanish capital where the family have been staying.

Romeo tripped and tumbled near the base of an escalator at an El Cortes Ingles department store.

A family friend said last night: "Sandra took Romeo with her on a trip to the store."

"Romeo has only just started to walk so he is quite unsteady on his feet. As they came to the bottom of an escalator, he lost his footing, fell over and cut his head."

"There was quite a lot of blood."

"Sandra had two of the Beckhams' security guards with her and they drove Romeo to hospital."

"Sandra rang David and Victoria and they rushed to the hospital."

"Romeo needed two stitches to the side of his forehead but was allowed to go back to the hotel."

"David and Victoria were very concerned."

Last night all of the Beckhams were back at the Santa Mauro Hotel.

The family celebrated Romeo's birthday ten days ago at a party at the luxury hotel.

Beckham plays his first Champions' League match for Real Madrid tonight at the Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid against Marseilles on Tuesday.

Romeo's injury was sustained as the Beckhams stepped up efforts to protect themselves after a fan accosted Becks after a game in Spain.



TOTTI TO WEAR! Miss Italy 2003 contestant and AS Roma fan Erika Marinelli poses with the jersey of Roma superstar Francesco Totti in Parma during the Miss Italy beauty contest on September 15.



Inter Milan coach Hector Cuper walks past some players who are relaxing during a training session at the club's Appiano Gentile base yesterday.

US women's soccer doomed?

AP, Atlanta

The cash-strapped WUSA called it quits Monday just five days before the Women's World Cup, bringing an abrupt end to a soccer league built on the success of the 1999 tournament.

The decision was made by the league's board of governors at a meeting in New York.

The eight-team WUSA was filled with the world's best female players, including U.S. stars Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain and Julie Foudy. Chastain provided the signature moment in the '99 tournament when she ripped off her shirt after scoring the championship-winning goal against China.

But the attention the Women's World Cup received faded over the years, leaving the WUSA floundering. TV ratings were almost nonexistent and the league had trouble finding fans who weren't under 18 and play on a soccer team. Average attendance slipped from more than 8,000 the first season to about 6,700 a game last season.

"This is a sad day for women's soccer and women's sports," Foudy said.

The WUSA hoped another World Cup this fall would bring last-minute corporate sponsorships to save the league, but that hasn't happened, said John Hendricks, chairman of the WUSA board of governors.

Hendricks blamed weak corporate support for the league's failure.

"I was intoxicated by what I witnessed in 1999, and I mistakenly believed that level of support would flow over into the league," Hendricks said.

The WUSA's owners have invested more than \$100 million to fund the league, and some of the top players took pay cuts this season to help keep it afloat. Even after cutting costs, the league was about \$16 million in the red.

Hendricks said the league needed eight sponsors to spend \$2.5 million each per year. The WUSA recruited only two sponsors willing to spend that much, Hyundai and Johnson & Johnson.

"If we only had six or seven CEOs in America that had stepped forward in the past year," Hendricks said. "An independent

women's professional league can survive -- if it has corporate support."

The league conceded the timing of the announcement was awkward but said the WUSA had to consider all its employees and players who aren't in the World Cup.

"We couldn't keep the doors open even another 24 hours without jeopardizing a decent and

fair severance package for our employees," Hendricks said.

Foudy said the announcement will be a distraction to players on the U.S. national team. Every member of the 1999 World Cup champions was a WUSA founding player.

"Yeah, I wish we had the opportunity to not have this distraction," she said from Charlottesville, Va., where the

U.S. team is training for its opener Sunday in Washington.

"That's true for all the WUSA players in the World Cup."

"But we are not just going to give up, even though the odds are stacked against us. We will still hold out the possibility of reviving this."

The league employed 375 people, including players, and had franchises in Boston, Atlanta, San Diego, Washington, New York, San Jose, North Carolina and Philadelphia. The Washington Freedom won the title last month.

The Women's World Cup begins Saturday in Philadelphia, and the U.S. team opens the next day against Sweden in Washington, D.C. Fifty-six WUSA players are to compete, representing 11 of 16 countries in the tournament.

WUSA players took an active role in the league's management and were involved in the decision to close the league.

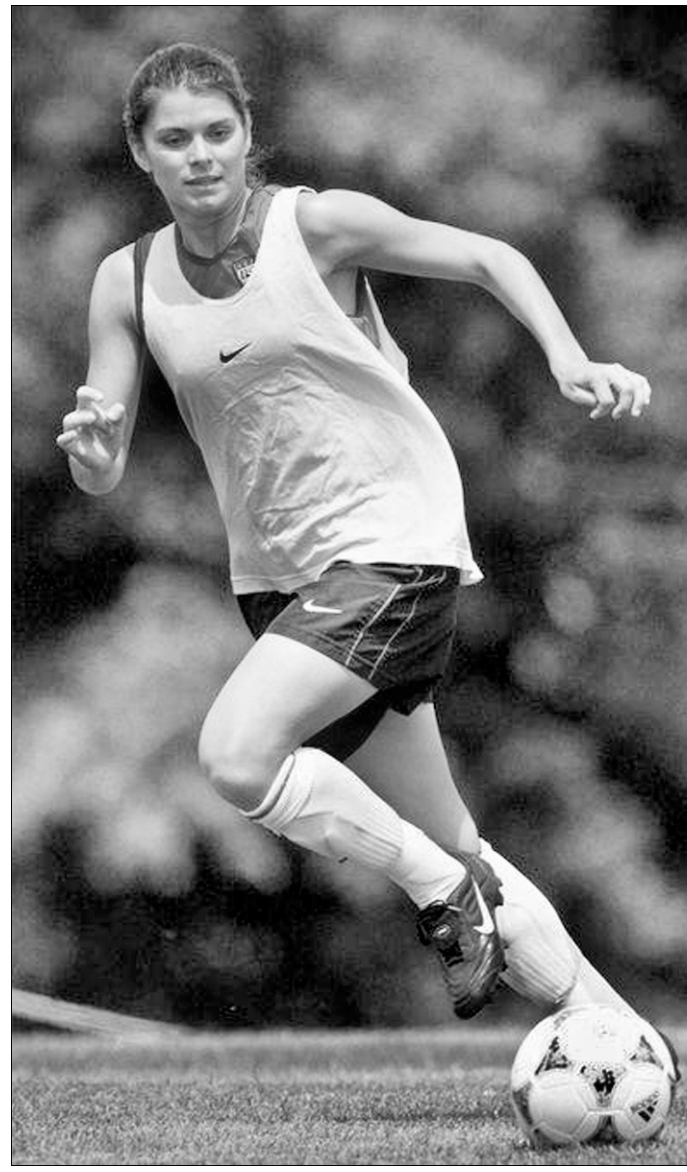
"The impact of the WUSA on women's sports and millions of fans has been extraordinary," said Foudy, captain of the San Diego Spirit and U.S. team, and a member of the WUSA board of governors.

"The players remain hopeful that more sponsors will recognize the value of associating their brands and products with the wholesomeness of the WUSA," added Hamm, the sport's biggest star and career scoring leader. "Major sponsors committed to bringing back world class women's soccer could enable a successor league to launch in 2005 or perhaps even earlier."

The WUSA will not dissolve entirely until next spring, Hendricks said.

"There is a glimmer of hope that a few months down the road the phone will ring" from a deep-pocketed sponsor, Hendricks said.

The folding of the WUSA leaves Major League Soccer as the sport's only top-level professional league in the United States.



United States ace Mia Hamm was one of the key attractions of the WUSA.

Premiership Leicester's answer



AFP, Leicester

Newly promoted Leicester defied the critics predicting their swift return to the First Division by thrashing a poor Leeds side 4-0 here on Monday.

A wonderful volley from Frenchman Lilian Nalis, a strike on the turn from Paul Dickov, along with a skilfully curled second goal, and a header from the unmarked James Scowcroft secured Leicester's first Premiership win of the season.

They could easily have scored another, as Ben Thatcher hit the crossbar with a header from a second-half corner.

Leicester showed impressive finishing, but Leeds manager Peter

Reid was furious at the lack of aggression from his listless side.

"Football is not rocket science, it's about attitude and they had a lot more of it than we did. Sadly we were lacking in every department," said Reid.

Leicester manager Micky Adams said he had enjoyed a "terrific" performance.

Adams praised Nalis, who joined the club this year, but joked about his first-time volley that he had "just tried to explain to him what fluke is in English".

World Cup winner Roque Junior made his Leeds debut just three days after joining up with the side after international duty with Brazil, but he was clearly tired and found it hard to adjust to Premiership life.

Leicester had already come close when Gerry Taggart's close-range

attempt was blocked by the head of Leeds keeper Paul Robinson. From the resulting corner Thatcher headed narrowly over the bar.

Then came Frenchman Nalis's wonder goal. He connected with a header out of the Leeds defence and the volley from way outside the penalty area arced over Paul Robinson.

The second half began in the same vein, with a long ball setting Marcus Bent off on a solitary course for goal but Robinson rushed off his line and headed the ball away. Bent should have done better with a header minutes later.

Roque Junior appeared fortunate to escape with a yellow card when he pulled back Bent. The Brazilian was later substituted.

Dickov's second goal followed a flowing move which ended with a well-placed shot beyond Robinson's reach and Scowcroft leaped to head in the fourth, almost unchallenged by Leeds defenders.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Arsenal	5	4	1	0	11	3	13		
Man Utd	5	4	0	1	9	2	12		
Man City	5	3	1	1	12	6	10		
Chelsea	4	3	1	0	10	6	10		
Portsmouth	5	2	3	0	8	3	9		
Southampton	5	2	3	0	5	2	9		