

## Test for English calibre



AFP, Paris

English giants Manchester United and Chelsea face grueling examinations of their Champions League credentials on Wednesday with coaches Alex Ferguson and Claudio Ranieri desperately trying to outwit their own countrymen.

Scott Ferguson takes his United side north to Glasgow to face Rangers while Italian Ranieri welcomes Lazio to Stamford Bridge with both men needing wins after surprise defeats last time out.

United went down 2-1 at Stuttgart while Chelsea's multi-millionaires were humbled 2-0 by Besiktas at Stamford Bridge.

Ibrox Park will be the focus of the night's eight matches with another Battle of Britain instalment setting Rangers boss Alex McLeish up against his mentor Ferguson who was his boss at Aberdeen.

"There are probably a lot of things that have rubbed off on Sir Alex that I do without realising it," said McLeish.

"That's the case with any influence in your life. I don't think there's any one trait I have that I could say 'that's what Sir Alex does'. But has the greatest football influence I've had, absolutely."

Ferguson - whose no-nonsense approach to the game's officialdom landed him with a two-game touchline ban and 10,000 pound fine on Monday - has never had the chance to lead United against Scottish opposition in a competitive game since he left Aberdeen in 1986.

"We are not the bookies' favourites - we realise that - and we need to do a bit of work between now and Wednesday to make sure that we do a whole lot better," admitted McLeish.

Down in London, meanwhile, Chelsea have ground to make up as they sit third on three points ahead of their encounter against Group G leaders Lazio.

Chelsea went down 2-1 to Arsenal on Saturday with goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini handing the Gunners victory with a howler of a mistake when he failed to gather a simple low cross that presented Thierry Henry with the winner.

"I have been in football a long time. A lot of good goalkeepers make mistakes. It is normal. Sometimes it can happen," said Ranieri.

Defending European champions AC Milan host Bruges looking to edge closer to the last 16 with coach Carlo Ancelotti is making no apologies for tinkering once again with his squad to keep legs fresh for challenges ahead.

"Players are not machines, they need to rest, not only their legs but their minds too," said the coach.

Portuguese playmaker Manuel Rui Costa, who together with

Sao Paulo this summer with a string of scintillating displays playing behind the two strikers.

Daniele Tognaccini, one of Milan's trainers, believes Kaka can follow in the footsteps of Ruud Gullit and Marco van Basten and become a legend at the San Siro.

"We have been amazed by the way Kaka has adapted so quickly to our training methods," Tognaccini said.

"His vision, power and ability make him the perfect athlete. We have studied him at length at MilanLab (Milan's training camp) and reached the conclusion that he is unique footballer. He may only be 21 but there are no limits to what he can achieve."

Bruges must prise open a miserly defence if they are to take something from their daunting Group H clash.

Bruges, who dropped to third in the Belgian first division following their 3-1 defeat at Genk on Sunday, are bottom of the group with one point.

Elsewhere on Wednesday Spanish giants Real Madrid will be looking to consolidate their lead in Group F when they welcome Partizan Belgrade to the Bernabeu.

They warmed up for the match with a 2-0 win at Celta Vigo with Brazilian superstars Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos scoring. Both men are in top form and Ronaldo on Monday, added another feather to his already over-crowded cap and Carlos was not far behind.

Ronaldo was honoured by Efe Agency with the prize for the Best Latin-American player in the Spanish Primera Liga.

The trophy last year was won by Argentinian striker Javier Saviola (Barcelona). Three Real players had already got it in the past including Iván Zamorano (twice), Carlos and Fernando Redondo.

In fact Carlos only came second to Ronaldo in this season's ranking.

With such great players in prime touch, Real coach Carlos Queiroz can look forward to a tension free home outing.

In Wednesday's other matches, VfB Stuttgart face Panathinaikos, Marseille take on FC Porto, Sparta Prague meet Besiktas while Ajax play Celta Vigo.

| FIXTURES   |              |
|--|--------------|
| Champions League first round Group Phase fixtures on Wednesday (1845 GMT): |              |
| <b>Group E</b>   | At Glasgow   |
| Rangers (SCO) v Manchester United (ENG)                                    | At Stuttgart |
| VfB Stuttgart (GER) v Panathinaikos (GRE)                                  |              |
| <b>Group F</b>   | At Marseille |
| Marseille (FRA) v FC Porto (POR)   | At Madrid    |
| Real Madrid (SPA) v Partizan Belgrade (SEM)                                |              |
| <b>Group G</b>   | At London    |
| Chelsea (ENG) v Lazio Rome (ITA)   | At Prague    |
| Sparta Prague (CZE) v Besiktas (TUR)                                       |              |
| <b>Group H</b>   | At Amsterdam |
| Ajax (NED) v Celta Vigo (SPA)  | At Milan     |
| AC Milan (ITA) v FC Bruges (BEL)   |              |

Brazilian World Cup winner Rivaldo has vented his frustrations at being left out, is expected to start on Wednesday.

But Ancelotti will find it hard to leave rising star Kaka on the sidelines after another mature performance in Sunday's 1-0 win at home to Lazio.

The 21-year-old Brazilian has been a revelation since arriving from



Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo poses with the EFE Trophy in Madrid on October 20 after EFE named him the best Latin American soccer player currently playing in the Spanish league.

## Fergie banned for two games



AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has been handed a two-match touchline ban and a hefty fine after being charged with misconduct by the Football Association.

The charge relates to an incident in United's 2-1 victory at Newcastle in August when Ferguson was sent to the stands after letting rip verbally to the fourth official.

The fiery Scot was furious that referee Uriah Rennie failed to

penalise Andy O'Brien after the Newcastle defender brought Ryan Giggs down when he was clear on goal.

Ferguson leapt from his seat in the dug-out and angrily booted a ball before remonstrating with Winter. Ferguson's sanction, which also carries a 10,000 pound fine (17,000 dollars) means he will have to sit out two English Premiership games.

United non-executive director Maurice Watkins said on Sky Sports News: "It is fair to say that Sir Alex is a little disappointed with the outcome."

## Ferdinand faces misconduct charge



AFP, London

Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand locked set to be charged by the Football Association on Thursday with misconduct as a result of his failure to attend a drugs test.

Documents, including Ferdinand's mobile phone records, were sent to the FA headquarters here on Monday and the ruling body's compliance unit will spend Tuesday studying the evidence.

Ferdinand is certain to face at least one charge of failing to attend an anti-doping test and the FA will have to decide whether there is enough evidence to charge him with 'wilful' or deliberate failure to attend the drugs test on September 23.

That is a more severe charge and would carry a certain ban.

The FA have been frustrated by the delay in receiving the phone records, which were published in two Sunday newspapers.

It is now apparent his mobile phone was switched on during the afternoon of September 23 and raises questions as to why he did not respond sooner to messages from United telling him he had missed the test.

Ferdinand will hope the records support his claims that he did contact the FA once he realised he had forgotten the appointment.

According to reports, Ferdinand finally spoke to United's club doctor Mike Stone more than an hour and a half after leaving the training ground and immediately rang the FA.

## Figo to end at Euro 2004



AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese star Luis Figo will retire from the national squad after next year's European football Championships.

"I have already thought about when I will say good-bye to the national squad and that will happen after the European championships," he told Sport TV.

The 30-year-old, whose contract with Real Madrid expires in three years, said Portugal faced stiff competition next year.

"We have to be conscious of reality and there are teams which can be better than us," said the 2001 FIFA World Player of the Year.

"We can't compare ourselves to squads like France, Spain or Germany, who are used to winning championships.

"We are a good team but a lot is missing in terms of the quality and experience of those teams who have already been champions."

Brazil World Cup-winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was signed up last year but has produced only mixed results so far.

Portugal qualified automatically for the Euro 2004 finals which run from June 12 to July 4.

## Salgado in demand



REUTERS, Madrid

The future of Real Madrid right back Michel Salgado, who finishes his contract at the end of the season, will be resolved in the next week according to the club's sporting director Jorge Valdano.

The highly-rated Spanish international, who has been in outstanding form for Real over the past two years, is reported to be on the target list of a number of leading European clubs including Chelsea and Manchester United.

"Our aim is to sort out his future in the course of the next week," Valdano was quoted as saying by Spanish website Libredirecto.com on Tuesday.

"It isn't healthy to allow these things to drag on and we won't allow it to go on beyond the end of the month."

Real have made it clear that they want to extend the defender's contract, but say they will not be prepared to match the sort of money being offered by interested clubs from abroad who will be able to pick the player up on a free transfer at the end of the season.

The Spanish champions sold influential midfielder Claude Makelele to Chelsea for \$26 million at the start of this season after the player pressed for a move to the premier league side when Real refused to agree to his demands for an improved contract.

But Valdano issued a warning to Chelsea over making a similar move for Salgado.

"No matter how strong you are you have to respect the laws," he said. "We have already experienced a conflict over Makelele and if it is true that Michel (Salgado) has received a serious offer (from Chelsea) then we will report it to

FIFA."

The former Celta Vigo player, who turns 28 on Wednesday, has admitted that a number of clubs are interested in signing him up for next season and that Real may have made a mistake leaving the negotiations so late.

"I'm in a very fortunate position," he said in an interview with football magazine Don Balon this week. "I

have had five great seasons at this club. They want to extend my contract and there are several other big clubs who also want me. As a player I couldn't ask for more.

"They (Real) could have called me before now to negotiate over a new contract, but they didn't. They have only chosen to look at it now."



MICHEL SALGADO

## Alpay back at Villa!

AFP, Birmingham

Turkey defender Alpay was back at training with Aston Villa on Tuesday as the English Premiership club decided what to do about the most unpopular player in England.

The Aston Villa defender's future at the club has been shaky since coming under fire from England players and the media for goading David Beckham during Euro 2004 qualifier in Istanbul two weeks ago.

German outfit Hertha Berlin and Turkish side Galatasaray have been linked with the 30-year-old.

Alpay missed last weekend's Premiership derby against Birmingham City after being given time off by Villa manager David O'Leary who was worried about the reception he might get from the fans.

O'Leary has yet to decide whether to pick him for Villa's next match at home to Everton on Saturday.

## Premiership Charlton mount Rovers' woes

AFP, Blackburn

Herman Hreidarsson's first goal for two years gave Charlton a 1-0 win against struggling Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park on Monday as the Londoners moved up to seventh place in the Premiership.

His first-half strike, which condemned Blackburn to a fourth successive home defeat, will also pile the pressure on Rovers boss Graeme Souness who has been constantly touted as the man to take charge of Tottenham in the wake of Glenn Hoddle's sacking last month.

The defeat was also a personal setback for Blackburn striker Andy Cole who had been hoping to score his 250th career goal on Monday and he had plenty of chances to reach the milestone here.

Hreidarsson gave Charlton the lead in the 33rd minute against the run of play when Paolo Di Canio's corner was met with a flying header from the big defender.

It was a goal which would not have pleased Souness who had criticised his defenders on the eve of game.

Gary Flitcroft failed to pick up Hreidarsson's diagonal run and was left struggling to prevent the Iceland international from opening his account for the south London side.

It had been a poor defensive header by Andy Todd from Radostin Kishishev's cross which had put his side under pressure in the first place.

## Barca calling a legend?



AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has reportedly lost faith in Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard to turn around the club's fortunes and is considering calling in Johan Cruyff.

Cruyff had a successful if turbulent career as a player and coach with Barcelona, who won four Spanish titles under his guidance as well as their only European Cup in 1992.



JOHAN CRUYFF

He was sacked in 1996 but is a personal friend of Laporte who took over in June with the promise he would make Barcelona great again.

The Mundo Deportivo claims Laporte believes only a man of Cruyff's

stature can help Rijkaard revive Barcelona who slumped to 11th in the table after Saturday's 2-0 home defeat to Deportivo La Coruna.

Laporte would apparently keep Rijkaard as coach with Cruyff, who now is seen more often on a golf course or in broadcasting, working alongside him.

Laporta signed Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho for 30 million euros (34 million dollars) in July after losing out to Real Madrid for Manchester United star David Beckham's signature.

But apart from the occasional flashy goal he has failed to lift the team. The 40-year-old Rijkaard replaced Serbian coach Radomir Antic in June but has little managerial experience.

He coached the Dutch national team from 1998 to 2000 and Sparta Rotterdam from 2001 to 2002.

Rijkaard pleaded for more time. "We have to look to the next game and take things one at a time, but the team needs more time to turn things around," told the club website.

"The players are disappointed with how things are going in the league and we're going to have to work really hard to change the results," he added.

He says their main problem is failing to take chances - highlighted by Saturday's defeat to La Coruna.

"We had more possession, more comers and created more chances, but in the end, they scored and we didn't."

## Kanoute can breathe easy

AFP, London

Tottenham striker Freddie Kanoute will miss two months after damaging ankle ligaments but X-rays have revealed no break, his agents said Tuesday.

The French player's agent, Willie McKay, said it had first been feared Kanoute, 26, would miss six months with a broken ankle.

The Frenchman scored the winner in Spurs' 2-1 win at Leicester before being fouled by Muzzy Izzet and had to be stretchered off.

But McKay called for the Football Association to discipline Izzet.

"It was a vicious tackle. I believe it was malice," he told the Sun. "Freddie was past him and he took him out because it was the easiest thing to do."

An FAspokesman said: "We will wait to see the referee's report first."

Kanoute has scored seven goals since joining Tottenham from West Ham in the summer.

## Bellamy poised for sixth



AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle's Welsh international striker Craig Bellamy is to undergo knee surgery for the sixth time in his career, the Premiership club announced on Monday.

The 24-year-old will have the surgery in the United States and will be operated upon by Denver-based Richard Steadman, who saved teammate Alan Shearer's career.

Bellamy, who has been troubled by the injury since his first division days playing with

Norwich City, suffered the latest problem after playing for Wales in the 3-2 Euro 2004 qualifier defeat by Serbia and Montenegro in Cardiff.

That led to a furious row between the St James' Park side and the Welsh authorities.

"Newcastle United confirmed that Craig Bellamy has travelled to the USA for a further consultation with Richard Steadman," said a club spokesman on Monday.

"The club has been aware of the presence of tendonitis in Craig's left knee, similar to the condition he had in his right knee, for several weeks and therefore have been treating it

conservatively during this period."

"This involved resting the knee together with a special exercise programme which would usually have allowed the condition to settle down naturally."

"However, the problem flared up again during his last international duty and it was felt that, following further consultation, surgery would be the best option for Craig."

"It is anticipated the operation will take place within the next 24 hours, after which he will face a strict recovery regime."