



AIR HENRY: Arsenal striker Thierry Henry controls the ball as Inter Milan's Ivan Cordoba looks on during their Champions League match at Milan's San Siro stadium on November 25.

MU, Chelsea join elite



AFP, Paris

Manchester United and Chelsea clinched qualification for the knockout stages of the Champions League on Wednesday but Rangers failed miserably in their quest to reach the last 16 after defeat to VfB Stuttgart.

Uruguayan striker Diego Forlan hit a late goal to beat Panathinaikos 1-0 in Athens and secure United's passage, while Stuttgart took the other qualification spot from Group E when Timo Wenzel got the only goal of the game to end Rangers' hopes in Germany.

United and Stuttgart will fight it out at Old Trafford for the valuable group winner's spot in their final first phase game next month.

Chelsea saw the first tangible reward for the tens of millions spent on new players when they booked their place among Europe's top 16 clubs despite being held to a goalless draw by Sparta Prague at Stamford Bridge.

Claudio Ranieri, the Chelsea coach, said: "Maybe we were a little anxious to score a goal. We found some good space to score, but that little bit of luck was not with us."

"When the players show that sort of attitude and the movement is good everything is all right."

Reigning champions AC Milan kept on track to defend their title when they qualified from Group H after a 1-0 victory over Ajax courtesy of an Andrei Shevchenko goal in the 52nd minute.

South African striker Benni McCarthy scored both FC Porto's goals as the Portuguese side beat Partizan Belgrade 2-1 to book their ticket for the knockout phase alongside Real Madrid.

David Beckham curled in a brilliant free kick and Ronaldo finished off a neat move with Real's 200th goal in the Champions League as they beat Marseille 2-1 at the Velodrome.

The French side's only hope now is to avoid defeat in Belgrade and clinch the UEFA Cup spot awarded to teams finishing third in their group.

Zinedine Zidane, greeted as a hero on his return to his native Marseille, said it was a bitter sweet night.

"Real have to be satisfied with our tournament so far. We produced the performance we needed and we deserved victory," said Zidane.

"I would have been delighted if Marseille had qualified too and no one

is more sorry than I am for them."

In Athens, United had one eye on Sunday's big Premiership clash against Chelsea and rested Roy Keane while Gary Neville, Phil Neville and Ruud van Nistelrooy started on the bench.

In front of just 6,890 spectators, Forlan, who had wasted a host of chances throughout the match, finally netted in the 85th minute when he latched onto a fine through ball from substitute David Bellion.

"We improved in the second half in terms of penetration and we could have scored more goals," said United boss Alex Ferguson.

"But we won the game and have qualified and that's the important thing."

Rangers went to Stuttgart's Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium knowing that only a win would keep them in the running.

Fernando Ricksen looked certain to put the Scots ahead midway through the first half but Stuttgart keeper Timo Hildebrand somehow got his legs in the way.

Rangers were pinned back from then on and Stuttgart grabbed the winner on the stroke of half time.

Alexander Hilleb deftly chipped over the defensive wall, allowing Wenzel to steal in and poke the ball home past Rangers keeper Stefan Klos.

On Tuesday, Arsenal dramatically injected new life into their hopes of reaching the Champions League knockout phase with a 5-1 demolition of Inter Milan.

Thierry Henry set Arsenal on their way midway through the first half but Christian Vieri equalised.

Freddie Ljungberg put the visitors back in front and Henry added his second goal before Robert Pires and Edu completed the rout.

Having started the day bottom of Group B, Arsenal know that a victory over Lokomotiv Moscow at Highbury in their final game will see them through to the second stage.

Henry was in buoyant mood after defying the critics who had predicted another European flop for the English Premiership leaders.

"People speculated about our commitment and desire but before tonight we didn't have all the luck," said Henry.

"We didn't show the true face of Arsenal in the Champions League until tonight. Everyone was waiting for us to do something in Europe and tonight we did it."

Celtic endured a frustrating night in Glasgow where Bayern Munich held them to a scoreless draw which, combined with Anderlecht's 1-0 defeat of Lyon, means that any of the four teams

in Group A can qualify.

Bayern revived their own chances of avoiding another humiliating first round exit with solid defending backed up by the authority of goalkeeper Oliver Kahn against a Celtic side that failed to show a genuine attacking edge.

Celtic top the group with seven points, the same number as both second-placed Anderlecht and Lyon in third while Bayern only have six.

A point for Martin O'Neill's Celtic in Lyon's Gerland stadium on December 10 will be enough to see them through providing Bayern beat Anderlecht in Germany.

"It's really, really tight," acknowledged O'Neill.

"I suppose at the start of the group we all thought that Bayern would go away and we would be battling for second place."

"But that has not happened and it shows how far we have come that they were happy to come here and go away with a draw."

"Maybe we didn't create enough clear cut chances but it is still there for us and we will travel to Lyon with confidence."

Monaco were the only team to secure qualification on the night after a 1-1 home draw with Guus Hiddink's PSV Eindhoven in Group C.

Fernando Morientes, on-loan from Real Madrid, headed Monaco ahead after 34 minutes but Dutch forward Jan Vennegoor levelled towards the end of a bad-tempered second half which saw three players sent off.

Even if Monaco slip up at AEK Athens in their final match they are already qualified by virtue of their head-to-head record against Deportivo La Coruna and PSV.

Deportivo are virtually certain to join Monaco in the next phase after recovering from their 8-3 defeat by the Principality side to overcome AEK Athens 3-0. Like Monaco, the Spaniards have ten points and play PSV at home next.

In Group D, ten-man Real Sociedad battled to a 2-2 draw with Olympiakos but face an agonising wait to see whether they will join Juventus in the knockout stages.

Galatasaray, whose match against Juventus was postponed because of the suicide bomb attacks in Istanbul this month, could still snatch the second spot if they win their two remaining games.

Liverpool owe Kewell one



AFP, Paris

Australian international Harry Kewell kept Liverpool's faltering season on track as the Merseysiders reached the third round of the UEFA Cup on Thursday but fellow Premiership giants Manchester City crashed out in a humble Polish backwater.

On a mixed night for British clubs, Newcastle also moved on but Hearts joined City on the sidelines when they lost at home to Bordeaux.

Kewell's 49th minute headed goal was enough to give Gerard Houllier's Liverpool a 1-0 win and 2-1 aggregate victory over Steaua Bucharest at Anfield.

Houllier, whose team are struggling in the Premiership in ninth spot, acknowledged his side had been given a tough workout.

"We have beaten a good team. They had some good chances at the beginning and the end but overall I think it was a deserved win," said the Frenchman.

Former Liverpool star and coach Kevin Keegan was left with just regrets after his Manchester City side were held to a 0-0 draw by little Groclin with the Polish side going through on the away goals rule following the 1-1 draw in England two weeks ago. City had two good chances to win but both Nicolas Anelka and Robbie Fowler missed the target while, at the other end, Sun Jihai, Fowler and Richard Dunne had to make crucial interceptions to keep the scoreline blank.

"We lost it in our stadium when perhaps we should have scored more goals," admitted Keegan.

"From that point on Groclin have been the equal of us. We had chances, so did they. It was that sort of game."

Newcastle enjoyed a 1-0 second leg win over Swiss side Basel at St James' Park for a 4-2 aggregate win.

A 14th minute own goal from Basel defender Boris Smiljanic helped Bobby Robson's men through to the third round on what proved to be an

eventful night for skipper Alan Shearer.

He was booked after just 17 seconds but was instrumental in the goal when he got a toe to a Laurent Robert corner only for Smiljanic to deflect the ball into his own net.

"Because of our elimination from the Champions League we feel we have to go on and achieve something in this competition," said Shearer.

Hearts saw their hopes of making the third round shattered by Bordeaux who clinched a 2-0 win despite having lost the first leg 1-0.

The French side stunned the Tynecastle crowd with goals from Albert Riera after eight minutes and Pascal Feindouno in the 65th.

"It's a big disappointment," admitted Hearts coach Craig Levein.

"But Bordeaux are a very strong side with much more experience of Europe than us."

German giants Borussia Dortmund also saw their European campaign halted for another year when they were unceremoniously dumped out by Sochaux, the French outsiders beating the former European champions 4-0 after a 2-2 first leg draw.

"It's true, what's happened to us is very negative," said Borussia coach Matthias Sammer.

"If we'd been making a film the director could only be Guy Lacombe (his Sochaux counterpart)."

On a forgettable night for Germany, Schalke 04 were knocked out on penalties by Danish outfit Brondby.

Gillespie, MacGill return

REUTERS, Melbourne

Fast bowler Jason Gillespie and leg-spinner Stuart MacGill were recalled to the Australian team on Thursday for next week's first Test against India at the Gabba in Brisbane.

The pair missed Australia's last Test against Zimbabwe in October as well as the triangular one-day series in India because of injury but have been passed fit to play in captain Steve Waugh's final series.

AUSTRALIA: Steve Waugh (captain), Justin Langer, Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting, Damien Martyn, Simon Katich, Adam Gilchrist, Andy Bichel, Jason Gillespie, Stuart MacGill, Brad Williams, Nathan Bracken (12th man to be named).

Eng hit form

AFP, Colombo

England go into next week's opening cricket Test against Sri Lanka with their confidence high after gaining the upper hand in a drawn tour match here on Friday.

Opener Mark Butcher slammed an unbeaten 151 to help the tourists post 314-9 declared in their first innings in reply to Sri Lanka Cricket President team's total of 181 on the third and final day.

The hosts were 135-4 in their second innings when rain washed out the last session for the third successive day in England's only practice game before the first Test starting at Galle on Tuesday.

SCORES IN BRIEF Sri Lankan Cricket President's team 181 and 135-4 (M. Vandort 42, C. Silva 31); England 314-9 decl (M. Butcher 151 not out, A. Flintoff 47, G. Thorpe 35, A. Giles 30, D. Fernando 3-79). Match drawn.

Zim lead series

REUTERS, Harare

Andy Blynnat completed career-best figures to bowl Zimbabwe to victory in the third one-day international against West Indies on Wednesday.

Fast bowler Blynnat delivered a fiery second spell to take four for 43 as Zimbabwe won by 21 runs and took a 2-1 lead in the five-match series. Zimbabwe made 229 for five after losing the toss but dismissed West Indies for 208 in the 48th over.

West Indies opener Chris Gayle top-scored with 61, including seven fours, his dismissal in the 40th over effectively ended the tourists' challenge.

SCORES IN BRIEF ZIMBABWE: 229 for five (Vermeulen 66, Streak 65 n. o., Taibu 37; Hinds 2/43)

WEST INDIES: 208 all out in 47.2 overs (Gayle 61, Lara 34, Samuels 25; Blynnat 4/43, Streak 3/45) Result: Zimbabwe won by 21 runs. Series: Zimbabwe lead five-match series 2-1

Man-of-the-match: H Streak.

Ponting handed

FROM PAGE 13 Wednesday he would be retiring after the four-test series with India ends in January, said Ponting would make a great captain.

"I've always regarded Ricky as an outstanding leader," Waugh said. "He's been a very good captain in one-day cricket and an impressive deputy at test level. His promotion to test captain seems the logical move."

Wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist, at one time Australia's vice-captain and who has led the side in Waugh's absence, also endorsed Ponting.

Premiership preview

Battle at the Bridge



AFP, London

Chelsea flunked the first examination of their Premiership title ambitions when a rare blunder by goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini gifted Arsenal victory at Highbury last month.

But since then Claudio Ranieri's expensively assembled squad have been assiduously doing their homework and they get their chance of a resit when champions Manchester United visit Stamford Bridge on Sunday for the biggest game of the season so far.

There may be only three points at stake with a little over a third of the campaign gone. But if Ranieri's men are to stay the distance in this season's three-way title race, they know they can ill afford the blow to their self-belief that a home defeat by United would inflict.

England midfielder Joe Cole however is confident that Chelsea can come through their latest test with flying colours.

"It will be a real test of how far we've come as a team," Cole acknowledged.

"That is how people are going to look at it. But there is no reason why we should be afraid. We think we have got enough to trouble them and we will be looking to give them a real game."

Cole was Chelsea's most inspired performer in Wednesday's drab goalless draw with Sparta Prague in the Champions League and could retain his place in the starting line-up even if Juan Sebastian Veron recovers from a back strain in time to face his former club.

Whoever starts, Chelsea will have to produce a more clinical edge in front of goal than was on display on Wednesday night.

"It shows we want to become a dominant force." Regardless of the outcome at Stamford Bridge, Arsenal will stay top

of the table if they reproduce anything like the stunning form they displayed in their 5-1 massacre of Inter Milan in the San Siro on Tuesday night.

The experience of recent season's suggests that Arsenal's best matches tend to come in clusters and Fulham could be excused a few nerves en route for Highbury.

But having already beaten Manchester United at Old Trafford this season, manager Chris Coleman insists his side, currently lying in a pundit-defying fifth place in the table, will not be overawed.

Arsenal will again be without defenders Lauren and Martin Keown as they serve the second match of three and four-match bans respectively.

But the assured performances of Pascal Cygan and Kolo Toure in Milan have eased concerns about the impact of the bans on the Gunners' defence.

Skipper Patrick Vieira is back in training but after a month on the

sidelines is not expected to have attained sufficient match fitness to start on Sunday.

With the top three all in action on Sunday, as well as Liverpool, the highlight of Saturday's programme is Wolves' lunchtime appointment with Newcastle.

Cash-strapped bottom side Leeds will move another step closer to administration if they fail to get anything out of their trip to high-flying Charlton.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated) Saturday: Wolves v Newcastle (1230 GMT), Aston Villa v Southampton, Blackburn v Tottenham, Bolton v Everton, Charlton v Leeds, Portsmouth v Leicester Sunday: Arsenal v Fulham (1400 GMT), Liverpool v Birmingham, Man City v Middlesbrough, Chelsea v Man Utd (1605 GMT)

Mission impossible

FROM PAGE 13 minutes with only 10 men when Azmol Hossain Biddut was sent off after the midfielder committed his second reckless challenge within a minute.

Although his team lost the match, Bangladesh coach Tipu expressed his satisfaction over his side's performance.

"They were very strong opponents. We were unprepared that's why I'm happy in a way because my injury-hit team could play for full ninety minutes."

On the other hand, Tajikistan coach Nazarov Sharif said that he was very satisfied.

"We missed lot of easy chances but I am happy with the overall performance. The team will do even better in the next match," he said.

Red card: Biddut (Bangladesh) Yellow cards: Denis and Sukhrob (Tajikistan), Saiful (Bangladesh).

Right time

FROM PAGE 13 eventually succeeded Mark Taylor as Test captain in 1999.

However, it was clear the end was drawing closer when he lost his place in the Australian one-day team in February 2002, despite playing 325 limited-overs internationals for Australia.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with numbers 1-56.

CRYPTOQUIP V G K J V K M K S L X Z C Z I H O S L X E J Z H K M K P Y I U K Y V Z C I U K Z, G E C C L K A O X Y I U K Z X Y K G X X - G X X Z. Yesterday's Cryptquip: THE FUNNY BREAD BAKERY WORKERS ALL SEEM TO BE BLESSED WITH A RYE SENSE OF HUMOR. Today's Cryptquip Clue: Y equals M