English giants go for the top



AFP, Paris

England's Manchester United and Chelsea may have already qualified for the Champions League knockout stages but they could win their respective groups outright in Tuesday's matches against VfB Stuttgart and Besiktas.

Manchester United are level on 12 points with Stuttgart in Group E and both teams are already assured of a berth in the last 16 but have the incentive that the group winners will have an easier draw. Stuttgart need a draw to take top spot.

Chelsea meet Besiktas in Group G and a draw following their match in Gelsenkirchen, Germany which was moved from Istanbul due to the recent terrorist bomb attacks in Istanbul - would ensure the Blues win the pool.

Real Madrid host Porto in Group F and both clubs are already through but a draw for the Spaniards would ensure their crowning as pool champions. In Group H, AC Milan are

already group winners but any one of Ajax, FC Bruges and Celta Vigo could grab that second spot.

Premiership champions Manchester United go into their match against Stuttgart in a much better frame of mind than they were on Friday.

A 4-0 trouncing of Aston Villa, a likely four year contract renewal for manager Alex Ferguson and even more significantly the return of England star Paul Scholes has given them a huge morale boost after two successive defeats to Chelsea and then the League Cup clash with West Brom.

Ferguson confirmed that Scholes would start on Tuesday after he played half an hour of the Villa match in his first appearance since a groin operation on October 28 - which probably means it will be back to the bench for Uruguayan striker Diego Forlan despite scoring a brace of last minute goals against Villa on Saturday.

"It was a great day for us in terms of Paul Scholes," Ferguson

"He gets half an hour of play and he'll play on Tuesday now so that is him on the way back."

In the other Group E game, Scotland's Rangers must avoid defeat at home to Greek side Panathinaikos to ensure their UEFA Cup berth as a third-placed

Chelsea warmed up for the encounter with a 1-1 draw against Leeds United but Besiktas' preparations have been far from ideal with a knife incident casting a dark cloud over the Turkish camp.

Striker Ahmet Dursun reported to have thrown a knife used for cleaning football boots - at Italian team-mate Federico Giunti after a robust challenge.

Besiktas have kept quiet over the incident and will hope to do their talking on the pitch against Chelsea's galaxy of stars.

After defeating Chelsea 3-0 at Stamford Bridge, the Turkish outfit, currently three points adrift of the Londoners, can win the group, courtesy of their superior head-to-head record, with victory

at the Arena Auf Schalke. However Besiktas will be fired up knowing they need all three points to be 100 percent sure of qualification with the winners of the Lazio-Sparta Prague tie in the Czech capital still able to oust the

Lazio's former Manchester United defender Jaap Stam said: "No-one enjoys being in the position of relying on other teams and I'm praying Chelsea will not let us



"Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of Chelsea and Besiktas, there is no doubt in my mind Chelsea can win in Turkey but they must take a full squad with them for the game.

confirmed as the group winners and that should mean there is still motivation for them to win the match. They have the talent to do it and I hope they will also have the

the same to join AC Milan in the knockout phase.

Celta are currently level with the Dutch team on six points but have an inferior head-to-head record.

However the Spaniards' chances of qualifying have been boosted by the fact that Milan, who have already won the group, will field an under-strength team for the San Siro clash with one eye on their Intercontinental Cup final against South American champi-ons Boca Juniors in Yokohama on December 14.

Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Nesta, Marcos Cafu, Guiseppe Pancaro, Gennaro Gattuso, Andrea Pirlo and Andriy Shevchenko will all be missing for the European champions as they are flying to Japan on Monday.

FIXTURES

(all kick-off times 1945 GMT):

Group E At Old Trafford

Manchester United (ENG) v VfB Stuttgar

Rangers (SCO) v Panathinaikos (GRE)

At Belgrade

Partizan Belgrade (SEM) v Marseille At Madrid

At Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Besiktas (TUR) v Chelsea (ENG)

FC Bruges (BEL) v Ajax (NED)

WEDNESDAY

Group A

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

Group B

At Kiev Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Inter Milan (ITA) At London Arsenal (ENG) v Lokomotiv Moscov

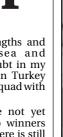
Group C

AEK Athens (GRE) v Monaco (FRA) At Eindhoven

Coruna (SPA)

At Juventus

At San Sehastian Real Sociedad (SPA) v Galatasaray (TUR)



Serie A

Football

win at Chievo.

delirious.

exhilerating.

Roma matched AC Milan stride for

stride, drawing level with the

European champions at the top of

Serie A on Sunday thanks to a 3-0

Milan threw down the gauntlet

by defeating Empoli on Saturday to

take sole possession of first place,

but Roma ensured top spot was

shared between the two title rivals

with an impressive victory in

half in which Roma scored three

goals in five minutes ended Chievo's plucky resistance which

had threatened the visitors'

Brazilian midfielder Mancini

was the architect of Roma's ninth

victory, setting up goals for Francesco Totti and Antonio

Cassano and grabbing one himself to send the 6,000 travelling fans

Mancini played down his con-

tribution from the wings which

stretched Chievo's defence and

provided the breakthrough for

week out in training," he said.

Capello praised his players

raising their game in the second

half and playing their usual passing

game which at times was

Alex Ferguson has agreed a new

four-year contract to stay on as

Manchester United manager, it

The United manager has

confirmed a deal to stay in the

job until 2007, taking him

through to the age of 65 when he

"It's something I do week in,

Fabio Capello's men.

Football

was reported Monday.

AFP. Manchester

unbeaten start to the season.

A purple patch in the second

"Luckily, Chelsea are not yet

In Group H, Spanish side Celta Vigo must better second-placed Ajax's result against FC Bruges on

Celta are expected to be without Russian international forward Aleksandr Mostovoi, who tore a thigh muscle in training last week.

Champions League fixtures on Tuesday

Group F

Real Madrid (SPA) v FC Porto (POR)

Sparta Prague (CZE) v Lazio (ITA)

Group H

AC Milan (ITA) v Celta Vigo (SPA)

At Athens

PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Deportivo La

Group D

Juventus (ITA) v Olympiakos (GRE)

Fergie till 2007

is likely to retire.

There were suggestions the club might withdraw its offer following treatment for a minor heart condition this week.

Inter Milan hotshot Christian Vieri (L) being checked by a Perugia defender on December 7 at the Maezza Stadium in Milan.

"We suffered a lot in the first half

and Chievo made it difficult for us

to play by pushing us back," he

the real Roma and class told in the

end. We scored three great goals

A dire first-half, notable only for

numerous misplaced passes and

clumsy challenges, sprang to life six minutes before the break when

Chievo came within inches of

A loose ball fell to Daniele

Francheschini just inside the

penalty box and his powerful shot

cannoned off the crossbar with

Roma goalkeeper Ivan Pelizzoli

for a disappointing first half, Roma

came out fighting after the interval

and their positive approach reaped rewards in the 67th minute

when Mancini's pinpoint right wing cross found Totti, who slotted

home his sixth goal of the season

Mancini put the game further out of Cheivo's reach three min-

utes later, collecting Totti's pass

before lashing a fierce cross-shot

last season was playing with

Venezia in the second division,

rounded off an eyecatching performance by setting up Cassano to

volley in Roma's third 18 minutes

Earlier Sunday Inter Milan's

And the tireless Brazilian, who

past a helpless Giorgio Frezzolini.

Determined to make amends

and deserved the victory.

taking the lead.

from close range

"But in the second half we saw

Roma rout Chievo

But Ferguson insisted this was never a threat to his future and eased any lingering worries after talks with chief executive David Gill

"I have spoken to David Gill and he understands the situation. This will not affect my

future here or the contract,' Ferguson said.

title challenge gained momentum after they chalked up their fifth

Serie A win on the trot with a

scrappy 2-1 victory over Perugia to

move to within five points of the

Italy international Christian Vieri netted both Inter goals before

Giovanni Tedesco's late consola-

tion goal ensured a few nail-biting

moments in the closing stages for

Inter, who face a do-or-die

Champions League match away to

Dinamo Kiev in the Ukraine on

Wednesday where they must win

to stand any chance of making it

through to the last 16, took the lead

Turkish midfielder Emre

Belozoglu burst into the box and

fed Javier Zanetti, who in turn teed

up Christian Vieri to fire a low left foot shot which crept in off the far

post off the outstretched hand of

Inter pounded Perugia's goal in the second-half but had to wait

until the 80th minute before dou-

the back as they poured forward in

search of an equaliser, and Julio

Cruz took full advantage of the extra space, threading an inch-perfect pass through to Vieri who

headed straight for goal and slotted

some poor Inter defending to

reduce the deficit two minutes

from time and Perugia nearly left with a point when Massimo

Tedesco took advantage of

The visitors were caught short at

Michele Tardioli.

bling their advantage

the ball past Tardioli

in the 25th minute at the San Siro.

Alberto Zaccheroni's men.

joint leaders.

We have agreed the details and I think it is basically straightforward. It wasn't going to be signed (Saturday) night but we are ready."

Ferguson had hospital treatment to correct an irregular heartbeat on Thursday, but the Scot said he had planned the visit for over two months.

Tibet China's neighbouring

AFP, Beijing

China by referring to Tibet as a neighbouring country on its 2006 World Cup website.

The website lists Tibet among countries that also include North Korea, India, Pakistan and

anger among net surfers and the newspaper had emailed FIFA to ask for an explanation.

Association had no immediate

China, the 2008 Olympic host, views Tibet as a part of its territory, maintaining that it was "peacefully liberated" in 1951. It has ruled the Himalayan region

Tibet's spiritual leader the

Ferdinand chalks up excuse

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United will claim Rio Ferdinand was never given the chance to take a routine drug test when he realised he had missed the controllers, it was reported

The Sun newspaper says his legal team will contend at a Football Association hearing on December 18 he could have complied with the regulations had he been given the chance.

Ferdinand telephoned the United doctors who were with the doping controllers at United's training ground 25 minutes before

Ferdinand, who was in Manchester city centre at the time he made the call, told club medics he would return and take the test. But he was told he was too late. The defence might save him

from a possible two year ban but it could drag the saga out even more -to the fury of FIFA president Sepp Blatter who wants tough action taken against Uniteds 30 million pound England defender and has vowed to act himself if, as he described it, the FA do not do the job properly.

Blatter has also slammed

United and the FA for the time it

has taken to convene a hearing. The testers are obliged to wait two hours from the time that a check is due to take place. After that, they are forced to make an official ruling that it has not been

carried out. FA executive director David Davies conceded regulations do not specifically cover a missed drugs test, as is the case with Ferdinand.

"It is fair to say that the pro-cesses we have, backed by UK Sport, were not introduced with the thought of people failing to turn up for tests. Clearly that has to be put right," he said. Ferdinand has been charged with failure or refusal to comply

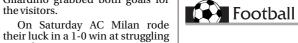
with the testing procedure and could be banned from playing for up to two years if found guilty. FA officials insist Blatter does not have the authority to intervene in the case.

FA chairman Geoff Thompson said: "The disciplinary committee will deal with the facts as they see fit and will not be influenced - by

Manchester can only blame themselves for Blatter's threat to

The FIFA boss was infuriated when United chief executive David Gill said Blatter's comments were "incomprehensible".

Lucio open to offers



AFP, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen's Brazilian World Cup winner Lucio has revealed he is willing to sit down and talk about a move if a big club such as Manchester United or Chelsea make a bid.

However the 25-year-old added he has no intention of following former team-mates Ze Roberto and Michael Ballack to Bayern Munich. The Leverkusen defensive

stalwart is the target of multimillion bids from wealthy Europe sids but insists he will only move to one of the European football powerhouses expressing his contentment with life at Leverkusen. "If a big club comes in for me and matches Bayer's valuation I

am willing to sit down and talk, Lucio said in an interview with German newspaper Welt am "Real Madrid, Manchester United, Barcelona, Juventus and

Chelsea, bankrolled by Russian oil magnate Roman Abramovich, have already registered their interest along with Champions League finalists Juventus. Sections of the German media

have even suggested that Lucio has already struck a deal to join the Italian champions in thé winter break. The fact that Ballack and Ze Roberto opted to move to Bayern

prompted speculation the Brazilian defender would follow suit, but the 2002 World Cup victor was quick to quash such talk.

"Bayern is a top club but one thing certain is that if I decide to change clubs it will not be inside the Bundesliga," declared Lucio. Although a transfer to one of

Europe's glamour clubs looks on the agenda Lucio has insisted he has doubts about risking his current family happiness in Leverkusen. "My family and I are happy in

Leverkusen and I sometimes ask myself whether it makes sense to move somewhere where my family might not like life so much," confessed the Samba ace.

Sheikh really interested

Football

Chelsea are big clubs.

AFP, Manama

Crisis Premiership club Leeds United have received an offer from a consortium headed by Sheikh Abdel Rahman Ben Moubarak Al-Khalifa he told AFP on Sunday.

Sheikh Al-Khalifa, a member of the Bahraini Royal Family, said the consortium made up of two Saudi Arabian businessmen and an Asiatic company had put the offer to the Leeds board - whose club is a reported 78million pounds (135million dollars) in debt - and were awaiting a response.

"The group put an offer to Leeds United and we are awaiting a reply in the next few days," Al-Kkhalifa, who is a lifelong Leeds fan, told

"The two Saudis are notable personalities and there are no Arabic shareholders in the Asiatic

"Our offer is in the hands of the Leeds board.

the club. "I would urge the Leeds directors to make a decision as quickly as possible so it would allow us to buy new players when the transfer

"Another group has entered the

race and also presented an offer to

window opens on January 1," added the Sheikh, who refused to divulge any details of the bid. Sheikh Al-Khalifa said the improved performance of the team on the pitch in their two latest matches - beating highflying Charlton 1-0 and a 1-1 draw with

leaders Chelsea - showed what a morale boost his interest in the club had had.



Mista (top), David Albelda (C) and Ruben Baraja after scoring against Athletic Bilbao at the Mestalla Stadium in Valencia on December 7.

Primera Liga Vicente lifts Valencia

Football

AFP, Madrid

A goal in either half by Spanish international Vicente put Valencia back into second place in the Primera Liga behind leaders Real Madrid on Sunday with a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao.

In a toughly-fought tie at home Valencia could thank goalkeeper Santiago Canizares for saving Ismael Urzaiz's injury-time penalty to move within two points of Real Madrid who beat Barcelona 2-1 Saturday to record their first league win in the Catalan capital since 1983. Valencia's goals came after 11

Santi Ezquerro having drawn Bilbao level after 52. The result leaves them on 31 points, one clear of third-placed Deportivo La Coru

and 65 minutes from Vicente with

Malaga 1-0 Saturday At the Nou Cam Real Madrid ende drought with goals

superstars Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo - Barcelona's consolation coming from Patrick Kluivert. In other games, Real Mallorca

made it five wins in a row with a 1-0 victory over Valladolid on Sunday, which puts them sixth just behind Atletico Madrid, who came away 2-0 winners over tailenders Espanyol, thanks to a Fernando Torres double.

Albacete moved out of the relegation zone for the first time this season with a 4-0 win at home over Racing Santander, with their place in the drop zone being taken by last season's runners-up Real Sociedad, who crashed to a 4-0 defeat at home to Real Betis.

Spanish league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

cia 15 rtivo 15 una 15 co 15	9 9 7 8	4 3 5 1	2 3 3 6	29 23 18 19	12 11 12 18	31 30 26 25
15	7	2	6	19	22	23
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Ronaldo, Zidane AFP, Madrid

country!

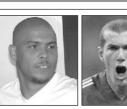
Football's world governing body FIFA has raised eyebrows in

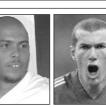
The Beijing Times Monday said the gaffe had provoked

The China Football

with an iron fist since then.

Dalai Lama fled in 1959 after an uprising against Chinese rule was crushed by the army.





Margiotta's header flew narrowly

win at Lecce where Alberto Gilardino grabbed both goals for

Parma leapt up to fifth with a 2-1

Brazilian midfielder Kaka saved

Milan's blushes by scoring the

winner nine minutes from time

with a 30-yard screamer which

Elsewhere on Saturday, reign-

Bernardo Corradi broke the

deadlock in the 21st minute at the

Olympic stadium before setting up

Defeat left Juventus in third,

four points off the pace while Lazio remain in sixth place.

TOP SIX

Standings in the Italian championship

after Sunday's matches (played, won,

drawn, lost, goals for, goals against

12 9 3 0 28 4 30 12 9 3 0 21 4 30

12 8 2 2 26 14 26 12 7 4 1 22 7 25 12 7 3 2 21 12 24 12 7 1 4 20 16 22

Stefano Fiore's for Lazio's second

goal in first-half stoppage time.

ing champions Juventus crashed to

their second consecutive league

defeat, losing 2-0 at Lazio.

maintained their unbeaten run.

over the crossbar.

Empoli.



face off

Juventus

Inter

Lazio

Real Madrid teammates Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane will captain opposing teams in a United Nations fund-raiser in Basel, Switzerland, on December 15.

The friendly, a sell-out with all 30,000 seats at the Jokob Park stadium already snapped up, is being staged to raise funds to finance UN projects to help the poor in Africa, Asia and south