



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia's Spanish duo Fernando Morientes (L) and Joaquin Sanchez joke as they stretch during a training session in Valencia on Tuesday.

Giants look for boost

AFP, Paris



European giants Barcelona and Inter Milan go into battle on Wednesday looking to boost what has been a disappointing start to their Champions League campaigns. Barcelona travel to Chelsea for what promises to be another epic battle between the two sides after two bruising encounters in successive seasons which has seen Chelsea knockout Barca out two terms ago and the Catalan giants get their revenge last season. Inter have a virtual do or die game in their bid to qualify for the knockout stages as they have yet to register a point but must fancy their chances at home to Spartak Moscow, who have only got a point. Barcelona trail the Premiership champions by two points in the group but may well be licking their lips at the thought of their strike force squaring up to third choice keeper Hilario. Hilario, who is in line to play because Petr Cech suffered a fractured skull against Reading and second choice Carlo Cudicini was concussed in the same match, has shipped six goals in two previous meetings with Barcelona when he was at Porto. Despite this Chelsea manager

Jose Mourinho has given him his full backing. "Hilario is a goalkeeper with experience," said Mourinho. "When he was at Porto he played two Champions League matches against Barcelona. So no problem, I trust him and the team trust him." Another man with something to prove but with a much more glittering career is Barcelona's world player of the year Ronaldinho, whose under par performances at the World Cup finals have been followed by reports that he had fallen out with club coach Frank Rijkaard. Ronaldinho insists he had been inspired by criticism of his displays. "If they (the media) criticise me it is because they know that I can do more and I am motivated to continue working and improving," said Ronaldinho, who showed glimpses of his best form at the weekend scoring twice against Sevilla. "I listen to constructive criticism and do not pay attention if they do not contribute anything useful. "I am happy because things have gone well. Although I am not at 100 percent, I know that I can improve and my only motivation is to work more to get close to my best." Adriano is another Brazilian international who has struggled this season but will be expected to step up to the plate for Inter against Spartak, who they have not lost to in four meetings.

Adriano's last goal came against Villarreal in the Champions League on March 29, but Inter Milan chief Massimo Moratti refused to criticise the 24-year-old striker. "It's a difficult moment for him, but he is not the only player in the team who is having trouble scoring," he said. "I'm sure he will turn it around soon." Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez would also like to see his 2005 Champions League winners turn around their away form as they travel to French side Bordeaux. Liverpool have yet to win away from home in all seven matches this season and not scored an away goal since the end of August. Benitez puts it down more to

some of his players being below their best rather than a fear of playing away from home. "It's clear some of our more established players need to be at the top of their game," Benitez said. "If you look at our formation for the Blackburn game (a 1-1 home draw on Saturday), we had the same back four, with Xabi Alonso in front of the defence, that has done so well for us last season. We had the same players there, but we need to get the balance right when we are attacking because, like the Galatasaray game, we were vulnerable to counter-attacks. "Saturday was disappointing again, but for 30 minutes of the second half we played much better football, we attacked well and the crowd was really behind us. The problem is we are only playing like this for 30 minutes now when we know we must do this for 90." While Inter may have problems in even getting a point thus far fellow Italian giants AS Roma have at least got three on the board - they trail Spanish side Valencia by three points - but travel to Greek side Olympiakos with four key players unavailable. Midfielder David Pizarro has flown back to Chile for personal reasons while Brazilian winger Mancini, French defender Philippe Mexes and striker Vincenzo Montella are all injured.

WEDNESDAY'S FIXTURES

- GROUP A**
Werder Bremen (GER) v Levski Sofia (BUL)
Chelsea (ENG) v Barcelona (ESP)
- GROUP B**
Inter Milan (ITA) v Spartak Moscow (RUS)
Sporting Lisbon (POR) v Bayern Munich (GER)
- GROUP C**
Bordeaux (FRA) v Liverpool (ENG)
Galatasaray (TUR) v PSV Eindhoven (NED)
- GROUP D**
Valencia (ESP) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)
Olympiakos (GRE) v AS Roma (ITA)

Double eludes Del Piero

INTERNET, undated

Juventus chipped further away at their 17 point penalty for match-fixing by winning 1-0 at Treviso on Monday, their fifth straight victory in Serie B. Former Inter Milan midfielder Cristiano Zanetti scored the only goal of the game, sweeping home Mauro Camoranesi's right-wing cross in the 31st minute. Italy international Alessandro Del Piero, looking for his 200th goal in a Juventus shirt, had several chances to score but lacked his usual accuracy. Treviso started the game brightly as Juventus took their time to settle at the Stadio Omobono Tenni. However, once the Old Lady did find their feet then they dominated the rest of the first period. Alex Del Piero found the back of the net but it was rightly ruled out for offside. The captain then should have scored for real when he was one on one with Avramov, yet the 'keeper did well to deny him. Juve did take the lead though soon after when Mauro Camoranesi's cross was met by Zanetti in the 38th minute. The half ended with Russotto and Camoranesi exchanging shots. The home side started the second period well, but an inspired Gigi Buffon kept out efforts from Vascaz, Viali and Fava. And as the tie went on, Juventus who also had a David Trezeguet strike disallowed played down the clock and almost doubled their lead late on with Trez and a Del Piero chip. Juve's win left them on minus one point after their six matches played, 16 points behind leaders Genoa who have played one game more.



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus forward Alessandro Del Piero shimmying with the ball during their Serie B match against Treviso at the Teni Stadium on Monday.

Cudicini ruled out

THE GUARDIAN

Carlo Cudicini has ruled himself out of Chelsea's Champions League match against Barcelona tomorrow night despite making a quick recovery from concussion. Cudicini was knocked out during a challenge with Reading defender Ibrahim Sonko during the 1-0 win at the Madejski Stadium on Saturday. Although he was back at the club's Cobham training ground yesterday, he said he was not fit enough to face Barcelona, leaving third-choice keeper Hilario to make his Chelsea debut. Cudicini said: "I hope next Saturday [when Chelsea play Portsmouth at Stamford Bridge] will be a good day for me to return. For the next two days I'm doing a couple of tests with the doctors and hopefully Wednesday I will start to train again." But he was still shaky yesterday and only able to manage a gentle half-hour in the gym.

Gerrard misses Bordeaux clash

AFP, London

Liverpool's England midfielder Steven Gerrard has injured his hamstring and will miss their Champions League match at Bordeaux on Wednesday. The Liverpool captain suffered the injury during Liverpool's 1-1 draw with Blackburn at Anfield on Saturday but completed the match. Gerrard has had treatment since but the problem has not responded so he will not join the Reds' trip to France for the Group C match, although he may be fit in time for Sunday's Premiership clash with Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Liverpool's Mohamed Sissoko and Dirk Kuyt, who suffered ankle injuries playing for Mali and Holland respectively, will travel but Dan Agger (broken hand) and Robbie Fowler (back) are ruled out.

Injury crises for Roma

AFP, Rome

Roma will be missing four key players for Wednesday's Champions League clash away to Greek side Olympiakos. Midfielder David Pizarro has flown back to Chile for personal reasons while Brazilian winger Mancini, French defender Philippe Mexes and striker Vincenzo Montella are all injured. Mancini strained a thigh muscle and Montella picked up a groin strain in Sunday's 1-0 Serie A defeat at Reggina - a loss which cost Roma first place in Italy's top division. Mexes missed the Reggina match due to a right calf strain and is still short of match fitness. Roma are second in Group D with three points from their two matches played, three adrift of leaders Valencia, Olympiakos and Shakhtar Donetsk both have one point.

Robson recovers

AFP, Dublin

Former England manager Bobby Robson has been given a clean bill of health by doctors to continue his job with the Republic of Ireland. International football consultant Robson on Tuesday spoke with Football Association of Ireland chief executive John Delaney to

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Chelsea, Barca: Act Three

AFP, London



Henrique Hilario could have been forgiven for expecting a quiet life when he joined Chelsea, but now he is preparing for a baptism of fire against European champions Barcelona. Portuguese goalkeeper Hilario, 30, was signed by Chelsea only as a back-up to Czech international Petr Cech and his highly-rated under-study Carlo Cudicini, so he would not have counted on making many appearances this season. But, after Cech and Cudicini suffered serious injuries during Chelsea's win at Reading on Saturday, Hilario will find himself thrust firmly in the spotlight when his side host Barcelona in the Champions League on Wednesday. Cech is still in hospital as he recovers from emergency surgery on a depressed fracture of his skull sustained in a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt. And Cudicini is also ruled out after suffering a concussion and swallowing his tongue in an aerial challenge with Ibrahim Sonko. That leaves Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho with no option but to turn to his third choice keeper for the English champions' biggest match of the season so far. Hilario is an unknown quantity in England as he has yet to make his competitive debut for Chelsea following his pre-season move from Portuguese club Nacional. He has played against Barcelona

twice during his time at Porto but his record of conceding six goals in those two matches, as well as four in a clash against Manchester United, will hardly inspire confidence among Chelsea supporters. Facing a Barcelona team including world-class talents like Ronaldinho and Lionel Messi would be enough to give most goalkeepers sleepless nights. But Mourinho is convinced Hilario will prove to be a more than adequate stand-in. "Hilario is a goalkeeper with experience," said Mourinho. "When he was at Porto he played two Champions League matches against Barcelona. So no problem, I trust him and the team trust him." Chelsea winger Joe Cole backed his manager's verdict. "He is a very good goalkeeper. It is a possibility he will play and if he comes in, he won't let anyone

down," said Cole. "He looks good in training and is an experienced goalkeeper." One player certain to be licking his lips at the prospect of facing Hilario is Barca's majestic midfielder Ronaldinho. The Brazilian had been well below his best in the early weeks of this season amid rumours he had fallen out with Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard. But he looked close to recapturing the form that made him the FIFA World Player of the Year in 2005 as he scored twice, including a superb free-kick, in Barca's win against Sevilla on Sunday. Ronaldinho insists he had been inspired by criticism of his displays. "If they (the media) criticise me it is because they know that I can do more and I am motivated to continue working and improving," said Ronaldinho, who was below his best as well at the World Cup finals. "I listen to constructive criticism and do not pay attention if they do not contribute anything useful. "I am happy because things have gone well. Although I am not at 100 percent, I know that I can improve and my only motivation is to work more to get close to my best." With Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o out with a long-term injury, former Chelsea striker Eidur Gudjohnsen is likely to feature

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TEAMS

CHELSEA: 40-Hilario; 20-Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho, 26-John Terry, 18-Wayne Bridge; 5-Michael Essien, 13-Michael Ballack; 8-Frank Lampard, 4-Claude Makelele (or 16-Arjen Robben); 15-Didier Drogha, 7-Andriy Shevchenko
BARCELONA: 1-Victor Valdes; 11-Gianluca Zambrotta, 5-Carles Puyol, 4-Rafael Marquez, 12-Giovanni van Bronckhorst; 20-Deco, 6-Xavi, 24-Andres Iniesta or 3-Thiago Motta; 19-Lionel Messi or 8-Ludovic Giuly, 10-Ronaldinho, 7-Eidur Gudjohnsen or 22-Javier Saviola.
Referee: Frank de Bleeckere (Belgium).

'Cech out for a year'

Football

AFP, London

Petr Cech's father has estimated his son and Chelsea keeper will be out of action for a year following surgery on a depressed fracture of his skull. The Chelsea goalkeeper is recovering from an operation on the serious head injury he suffered in the early stages of Saturday's 1-0 Premiership victory at Reading. The 24-year-old was involved in a collision with Royals midfielder Stephen Hunt and both Cech's parents have given their reaction to the incident. His father Vaclav told the Times: "My son will be out of football for a year. At first, I didn't realise how bad it was. When I heard the diagnosis, my knees trembled. I couldn't believe my ears." Cech's mother Cechova added: "I thought maybe he was suffering from some kind of concussion, but after speaking to his wife (Martina), we were told that his injuries were getting worse. It was terrible to see." Hunt, whose knee connected with Cech's head during the challenge, insists the collision was completely accidental. A leading neuro-surgeon on Monday warned that rushing Cech back into action could prove fatal, claiming his injuries would require at least six months out of the game. Meanwhile Arsenal keeper Jens Lehmann told Tuesday's Daily Mail that greater care needs to be taken regarding keepers before another horrific injury happens. German Lehmann told the newspaper: "Yes it's a man's game, but what you have to consider as well is that these men have children and wives and their children don't want to end up seeing their fathers

end up with lifelong damage, driven around in a wheelchair or not being able to work anymore." Chelsea number two keeper Carlo Cudicini was also knocked out in a clash with Reading's French defender Ibrahim Sonko later in the same game though his head injury was much less serious. Lehmann added: "I feel sorry for both keepers, but it made me really angry too. I'm still upset because it happened to (Mark) Schwarzer and (Shay) Given as well. They are very

brave and they never went to challenge or harm the striker, but all four got knocked out due to "clumsy" challenges. "I have never injured a player in my life and I want to retain that record because I respect my opponents, but if they want to have a go at me I will have to change my game because there is no protection from the referees."



PHOTO: AFP

Petr Cech being stretchered off the field during the match against Reading.

Rafa demands improvement

Football

AFP, Bordeaux

With his side's stuttering form the cause of growing concern, Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has demanded more from his senior players ahead of Wednesday's Champions League visit to Bordeaux. Benitez and his players travel to the Parc Lescur, home of the French club, still smarting from their latest domestic disappointment, a home draw with Blackburn Rovers that leaves the Merseysiders trailing Premiership leaders Manchester United by eight points. More worryingly than the weekend stalemate though, is the fact that Liverpool have so far failed to win on any of the seven occasions they have ventured away from their Anfield home this season and, having failed to score an away goal since August, the trip to Bordeaux will inevitably be viewed with trepidation. Benitez undertook a major overhaul of his squad this summer, drafting in six new recruits including the strikers Dirk Kuyt and Craig Bellamy, and wingers Mark Gonzalez and Jermaine Pennant, and the evidence of the opening months of the cam-

aign are that the newcomers will take time to bed in. The Spaniard, though, believes the root cause of his team's current problems lies not with the summer signings, but with the established core of his team. "It's clear some of our more established players need to be at the top of their game," Benitez said. "If you look at our formation for the Blackburn game, we had the same back four, with Xabi Alonso in front of the defence, that has done so well for us last season. We had the same players there, but we need to get the balance right when we are attacking because, like the Galatasaray game, we were vulnerable to counter-attacks. "Saturday was disappointing again, but for 30 minutes of the second half we played much better football, we attacked well and the crowd was really behind us. The problem is we are only playing like this for 30 minutes now when we know we must do this for 90." Benitez could at least draw comfort from the fact that Bellamy registered his first Premiership goal for his new club - ironically against his former employers - and the pattern of the coach's previous two seasons at the club have seen his side turn things around when they need to, especially in Europe.

"There were positives from the weekend," Benitez added. "It was good for Craig to score and at times we played better. It's been difficult, but we will improve. I have confidence because we know we have good players who will start to play better. Maybe we will have to be more patient. It will take time, but I'm sure we will do it." Liverpool's cause in France will not be helped by continuing doubts over the fitness of a clutch of key players including Momo Sissoko, the midfielder credited by Benitez as performing a crucial, underrated role for his side. "I'm more optimistic Kuyt, Daniel Agger and Robbie Fowler will be fit, but they're still doubtful at this stage," the coach added. "Momo is the biggest worry of all because he's still having treatment on his ankle." Benitez will face a reunion with one of his heroes from the Champions League final victory over AC Milan last year in Czech midfielder Vladimir Smicer. Smicer has not played competitively for Bordeaux since February when a knee injury not only held back his club ambitions but meant he could not play in the World Cup finals in Germany. Eight months on the sidelines has been tough for the 33-year-old. He is relishing a dream return

however to face the club where in the 2005 Champions League final, he came on as a substitute to score, and then find the net in a shootout too as they made an astonishing comeback from 3-0 down at half-time to win on penalties. It was his last match for the Reds. Smicer had won a number of other trophies with Liverpool, including the 2001 UEFA Cup, the FA Cup and two League Cups but made a new sweep of the brush as he signed for Bordeaux on a two-year contract at the start of the 2005/06 season. He went through some low times while injured that season, having also had previous knee problems. "I was sure this would not be the injury that would stop me," he said. "I had the support of the club and on top of that I love football and the life that comes with it." Bordeaux go into the match after a morale boosting 1-0 win at the weekend against former Champions League finalists Monaco which sees them lying fifth in the title race, though 10 points adrift of leaders Lyon.