



PHOTO: AFP

TAKE THAT: Glasgow Rangers midfielder Nacho Novo celebrates after scoring against AS Livorno during their UEFA Cup match at Livorno on Thursday.

Safe sailing for Brits

AFP, Paris



Newcastle, Tottenham, Blackburn and Glasgow Rangers made it a British night to remember when all four sides triumphed in their opening UEFA Cup group matches.

Newcastle needed an Antoine Sibierski goal 11 minutes from time at St James' Park to ensure a 1-0 win over Fenerbache while Spurs also got the best of Turkish opposition with a 2-0 win at Besiktas.

Blackburn came from behind to defeat Wisla Krakow 2-1 in a match marred by allegations of racist taunts aimed by some of the Polish team at Rovers' black striker Benni McCarthy.

Rangers, meanwhile, made history when they became the first Scottish team to win a European tie in Italy with a 3-2 victory at Livorno with all their goals coming in an eight-minute spell in the first half.

Against opposition of such evident quality, Newcastle would probably have settled for a draw, but in a tough group that also includes Palermo and Celta Vigo, winning the home matches could prove vital.

Blackburn will complain to UEFA after their South African striker Benni McCarthy was allegedly subjected to constant racial abuse in their 2-1 win at Wisla Krakow.

Rovers boss Mark Hughes said: "Benni was upset because a number of comments were made to him."

"They were of a racist nature. We will speak to UEFA and make it clear to them who we think was involved."

Blackburn had trailed at the break to a Roberto Cantoro drive. Rovers were level 11 minutes after the interval when former Welsh international Robbie Savage headed in a David Bentley cross.

The visitors then snatched a dramatic last minute winner when Bentley was first to react after

struggled to turn possession into chances, but as Steven Taylor headed Nolberto Solano's corner back into the middle, James Milner's air-shot created confusion, allowing Sibierski to prod home.

Wisle keeper Emilian Dolha had failed to hang on to the ball.

Spurs opened the scoring at Besiktas through Egyptian international Hossam Ghaly in the 32nd minute with Dmitar Berbatov sealing victory in the 63rd minute.

In Livorno, Charlie Adam gave Rangers a 27th-minute lead with a smart volley before Kris Boyd made it two from the penalty spot on 30 minutes.

Cristiano Lucarelli then pulled one back with a controversial penalty on 32 minutes before recalled striker Nacho Novo drilled home Boyd's headed pass.

Lucarelli scrambled home his second in the 90th minute for a Livorno consolation.

There was better luck for Italian clubs elsewhere with Parma beating Odense 2-1 and Palermo also enjoying a 2-1 win at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Holder Sevilla of Spain were held to a 0-0 draw by Czech side Slovan Liberec.

Three sides from each of the eight five-team groups will qualify for the next round where they will be joined by the eight clubs finishing third in their Champions League groups.

Bernabeu to follow Alonso

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid fans will not have to miss Fernando Alonso's attempt to retain his world title in the Brazilian Grand Prix, as the club will show the race live in the stadium before taking on arch-rivals Barcelona on Sunday.

The Spaniard, a confessed Real fan, is 10 points clear of Michael Schumacher in the Formula One driver standings going into the season-ending race in Interlagos.

With massive interest in Alonso across Spain, Real have said they will open their doors half an hour before the deciding race, which starts at 1700 GMT, and show it on their internal screens. The sell-out Primera Liga match against leaders Barca kicks off at 1900 GMT.

Sunday could be another big day for Spanish sport with Alonso going for the world title, Rafael Nadal closing in on a place in the final of the Madrid Masters, and the 'clasico' between Real and Barca, all being watched across the world.

Peru suspend Pizarro

REUTERS, Lima

Peru suspended striker Claudio Pizarro indefinitely on Thursday saying he had broken soccer federation rules by failing to play in a friendly against Chile this month.

Pizarro returned to Germany to train for Bayern Munich, missing a second friendly with Chile in southern Peru on Oct. 11 which Chile won 1-0. Peru lost their away match with Chile 3-2 on Oct 7.

The player had said he had the full agreement of Peruvian football federation directors. The federation denies that he was given permission.

"The player is suspended from the national Peruvian football team," the federation said in a statement. "He returned (to Germany) without the permission of the coaches."

Pizarro, who angered Peruvians by not playing the second friendly, courted controversy on Tuesday by saying he would not play for his country as long as coach Franco Navarro was in charge.

Navarro, a former Peruvian international forward, took over as coach earlier this year and has failed to win any of his five games in charge.

Moratti to be reinstated

REUTERS, Milan

Inter Milan owner Massimo Moratti is to return to his role as president of the club, replacing the late Giacinto Facchetti.

"I will return to being president," Moratti told Gazzetta dello Sport's Web site on Friday. "Largely because there is no alternative, my son Mao (Angelo Mario) would prefer to avoid the job."

"The truth is that we have lost the perfect president for Inter and I miss him very much," Moratti said in reference to Facchetti.

Moratti, whose father Angelo was president of the club during their years of success in the 1960's, took over as president in 1995 and remained in the role until he handed over to Facchetti in January, 2004.

Moratti is expected to be formally voted as president at a meeting of shareholders on November 6, Gazzetta said.

Red rules the roost

REUTERS, London



Emotion and passion are never in short supply when Manchester United host arch-rivals Liverpool but expect United defender Gary Neville to keep his feelings in check on Sunday.

The England defender and United captain famously ran the length of the pitch at Old Trafford to celebrate Rio Ferdinand's late winner in front of the Liverpool fans last season by screaming, clutching his shirt and pointing to the United badge.

He was fined 5,000 pounds (9,318 dollars) for his exuberant celebrations and warned about his future conduct.

"Are you meant to smile sweetly and jog back to the halfway line?" Neville said of the incident. "People want footballers to be whiter than white. Do they want a game of robots?"

League leaders United, who have 19 points along with champions Chelsea, are full of confidence after a midweek Champions League victory over FC Copenhagen all but ensured their passage to the knock-out rounds.

Liverpool, who beat Girondins Bordeaux 1-0 on Wednesday, have again struggled for consistency in

the league and sit in mid-table on 11 points after eight games.

They should welcome back captain Steven Gerrard after the England midfielder was rested in midweek after suffering a hamstring injury.

Chelsea host fourth-placed Portsmouth at Stamford Bridge with the aftermath of Petr Cech's head injury sustained against Reading still rumbling on with coach Jose Mourinho calling for an inquiry.

The Czech Republic goalkeeper is likely to be out for several months after suffering a fractured skull in a challenge with Reading's Stephen Hunt. With deputy Carlo Cudicini also injured, third-choice Hilarion was handed a debut for Wednesday's Champions League win over Barcelona at Stamford Bridge.

This weekend Reading are at home to an Arsenal side whose run of six consecutive wins in all competitions ended with a Champions League defeat at CSKA Moscow in midweek.

Inconsistent Tottenham Hotspur should need no motivation for their home clash with West Ham United on Sunday.

Spurs lost their final match of last season against their London rivals to miss out on a place in the Champions League qualifiers after a virus decimated their squad.

An early season relegation "six-pointer" takes place at The Valley where bottom side Charlton Athletic,

on three points, host a Watford side who occupy one place above them.

Charlton manager Iain Dowie, who made an acrimonious departure from Crystal Palace in the close season, knows he is under real pressure to turn the club's season around.

"If there are any brickbats to be thrown, throw them at me. I understand that's going to happen because of the position we're in," Dowie said.

"But I always keep believing. I'm a believer that always sees the good in people."

Watford have played some entertaining football on their return to the Premier League but are still seeking their first win.

FIXTURES

(1400GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday
Aston Villa v Fulham (1615GMT), Charlton v Watford (1500GMT), Chelsea v Portsmouth, Everton v Sheffield Utd, Wigan Athletic v Man City (1145GMT)
Sunday
Blackburn v Bolton, Manchester Utd v Liverpool (1200GMT), Middlesbrough v Newcastle, Reading v Arsenal (1500GMT), Tottenham v West Ham

500 beckons Scholes

INTERNET, undated

Twelve years after marking his Red Devils debut with a League Cup brace against Port Vale, Scholes will become the ninth United player to reach the appearance landmark, following the likes of Sir Bobby Charlton, Bill Foulkes, Denis Irwin and current team-mates Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville.

During the intervening period Scholes has established himself as one of the finest players of his generation.

An intensely private individual, Scholes has always done his talking on the pitch and, even at 31, has shown enough ability this season to persuade England coach Steve McClaren to make two unsuccessful attempts to bring him back into the international fold.

His refusal only emphasises how precious Scholes values time with his young family. But the spin-off for United is a fresher player, whom Ferguson believes can extend his career for quite a while yet.

"Paul's lifestyle leads you to think he will be okay for a few years yet," said Ferguson.

"He will need a bit of luck with injuries but he has something you could not possibly coach, which is a marvellous football brain."

"He is able to sense the speed of the game and the openings. It is something he has been able to do since he was 14 and I don't believe there is anyone better at it."



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes (L) hugs Argentine sensation Lionel Messi during a training session at the Nou Camp on Friday. Barcelona play Real Madrid on Sunday.

Clash of the titans

REUTERS, Madrid



Nothing hurts Real Madrid more than having to live in the shadow of arch-rivals Barcelona and a victory in this Sunday's 'clasico' at the Bernabeu would go a long way to healing the wounds from the last three seasons.

The last time Barca visited Real Madrid's stadium they dealt the home side a humiliating 3-0 defeat which ended with Ronaldinho being given a standing ovation by the irate home fans after he scored a sublime double.

That defeat was, in many ways, the low point of Real's so-called Galactico era and was one of the events that prompted the eventual exit of former president Florentino Perez.

After witnessing the collapse of their attempt to put together an all-star team based on glamorous big-name players and attack-minded football, Real have now opted for a back-to-basics approach under new coach Fabio Capello.

The Italian has been charged with the task of introducing a disciplined, conservative approach based on a solid defence and a well ordered midfield rather than the more anarchic style that has characterised the team's performances in recent years.

The change has yet to produce consistent results and the new-look team slumped to their first league

defeat of the campaign when they lost 1-0 at Getafe last Saturday.

Ronaldo, the club's leading striker for the last four seasons, was sent off for back chat to the referee and will miss the Barca match through suspension.

But the team were a completely different proposition in Tuesday's 4-1 away win over former European champions Steaua Bucharest, the presence of Brazilian forward Robinho adding a new dimension to the Real attack.

"We saw a team with quality and spirit and that is what counts," said Capello. "Now I'm happy."

"I said we had to forget the performance against Getafe because we can't play like that ever again. Instead, we saw a Real Madrid that played with pace and skill."

After back-to-back league titles and victory in the Champions League last season, Barcelona appear to have lost some of their edge.

A humiliating 3-0 defeat by Sevilla in the European Super Cup was an early sign of vulnerability and Wednesday's morale-sapping 1-0 setback at Chelsea exposed another chink in the previously impervious Barcelona armour.

Without injured striker Samuel Eto'o, Barca no longer find it so easy to punch holes in opposition defences.

Also, coaches like Juande Ramos and Jose Mourinho have shown that tight marking of Ronaldinho and suffocating pressure in midfield are the secret to success against the Catalans.

Although they are not firing on all

cylinders, Frank Rijkaard's side still have a three-point lead at the top of the Primera Liga, and are five points clear of Real after last Sunday's morale-boosting 3-1 victory over Sevilla.

Barca know another victory over Real will dispel any doubts about the team.

"The Chelsea defeat was an accident against a very good team, nothing more," said skipper Carles Puyol. "Things can be sorted out with a victory at the Bernabeu."

Real's biggest enemy could be overconfidence after their comfortable win against Steaua.

"I've told the players that we have the best squad in the world, that no one can beat us if we put our minds to it," Real president Ramon Calderon told Marca on Thursday. "I'm certain that we will beat Barca."

FIXTURES

(1500GMT Kick-off unless stated)

Saturday
Villarreal v Levante (1800), Real Zaragoza v Real Betis (1800), Deportivo La Coruna v Atletico Madrid (2000)
Sunday
Athletic Bilbao v Celta Vigo, Espanyol v Racing Santander, Real Mallorca v Real Sociedad, Recreativo Huelva v Getafe Sevilla v Gimnastic Tarragona, Valencia v Osasuna, Real Madrid v Barcelona (1900)

Cole fired up by Barca win

INTERNET, undated

Ashley Cole insists Chelsea's victory over Barcelona will inject new momentum into their season.

It is an ominous warning from the England full-back ahead of Saturday's Premiership game at home to Portsmouth.

Jose Mourinho's Blues have been struggling to find their most fluent form but could click after the huge psychological impact of a 1-0 win against European champions Barca.

Cole, 25, said: "It's always a great confidence-boost to beat a great team like that."

"We've had a lot of confidence through the season and we have been grinding out one-nil, like the lads did at Reading and this is a good step for us."

"We spoke a couple of days ago about how a good result should stand us in good stead. We got a great result and showed a positive attitude."

Chelsea have a maximum nine points from their first three European games to put the pressure on Group A rivals Barcelona and Werder Bremen.

The champions of England and Spain meet again in two weeks, in the Nou Camp.

Cole said: "We are in a great position now and of course it's down to Werder Bremen and Barcelona to try to catch us."

Blues bidding for Buffon

Football

AFP, London

English champions Chelsea are set to make an audacious bid to bring Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon to Stamford Bridge during the January transfer window.

However the official agent of the Italy international says there is little chance of Buffon moving to London before next summer.

Jose Mourinho's side are facing a potential goalkeeping crisis with Petr Cech sidelined until next year after fracturing his skull in the 1-0 away win over Reading at the weekend.

With Chelsea looking good for the knockout stages of the Champions League, Mourinho has recently admitted he is looking for a highly-rated keeper to keep both their domestic and European ambitions on track.

And according to The Sun, Italy's World Cup keeper Buffon, 28, could be the man to step in.

A member of Buffon's entourage, Paolo Fabbri, told the newspaper: "We are aware (Chelsea owner) Roman Abramovich can offer fortunes. What he needs is to convince the player it's the right move for him."

"This is not a financial issue, it's about a chance in life."

Buffon's official agent for 12 years, Silvano Martina, admits he is "honoured" with the link and that Juve would be tempted by any offer.

But he appeared to pour cold water on the story.

"Officially there has been no contact so far," said Martina.

"We are very saddened with what has happened to goalkeeper Cech."



BUFFON