

Inter back on track

REUTERS, Rome

Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini said his side were shaking off their inconsistent early-season form after they beat Champions League rivals Spartak Moscow 1-0 to close in on the knockout phase of the competition.

Tuesday's result, following a 2-1 victory against Spartak in Milan two weeks ago, lifted the Italian champions to second in Group B with six points, four behind leaders Bayern Munich.

"It was important to win. Nothing else mattered. We needed the three points to make up for our poor start in the competition," Mancini was quoted as saying in La Gazzetta dello Sport.

Inter's win in freezing conditions in the Russian capital was their third in seven days, a sequence that included a 4-3 victory over city rivals AC Milan at the weekend.

"I think that the derby gave us a lift, boosted our confidence in our abilities," Mancini said.

"And by winning again today we showed that we've also made a big step forward psychologically."

Inter began their Champions League campaign badly, with back-to-back defeats against Sporting Lisbon and Bayern.

A win in their next match against Sporting on Nov. 22, however, will send them through to the knockout phase -- a huge relief to Mancini, whose much-fancied team looked in danger of an early exit.



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia's David Silva (C) skips between the challenges of Shakhtar Donetsk players Mariusz Lewandowski (L) and Darijo Srna during their Champions League clash in Donetsk on Tuesday.

Valencia held but still progress

AFP, Donetsk



Valencia came back twice to earn a 2-2 draw at Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday to seal their passage into the knockout stages of the Champions League.

After winning their opening three games Valencia turned up at Donetsk knowing a share of the points would virtually see them through depending on how their main Group D rivals AS Roma fared against Olympiakos.

And with the Italians being held to a 1-1 draw Argentina defender Roberto Ayala's 68th minute leveller left Valencia guaranteed of at least second place and into the last 16.

Bottom-side Shakhtar's hopes are all but dead and buried.

The Ukrainians, beaten by the 2004 UEFA champions 2-0 in Spain last month, raced into a two minute lead when Brazilian midfielder Jadson curled in a finely taken free-kick from the edge of the penalty area around the Valencia wall and past keeper Santiago Canizares.

On 18 minutes Valencia were back on level terms off another setpiece.

David Villa, the author of both goals which sank Shakhtar a fortnight ago, sent the ball low into the area with Fernando Morientes extending his boot to divert the ball past Bohdan Shust.

That was the former Real Madrid, Liverpool and Monaco striker's fourth goal in the competition this season.

The status quo lasted just ten minutes when another Brazilian, Fernandinho, restored Shakhtar's lead.

The versatile midfielder, who arrived at the Ukrainian champions on a 7.5 million euro transfer from Paranaense last year, stung Canizares with a 30m drive which clipped the Valencia stopper's hand on the way into the net.

In an open encounter Shakhtar managed to hold on to their supremacy up to the 68th minute when combative Argentina centre-back Ayala came up with Valencia's vital equaliser.

The former AC Milan defender, who has over 100 caps for his country, celebrated his 30th Champions League appearance when heading in Emiliano Moretti's pass from barely a metre off the ground.

Magath smiling

REUTERS, Munich

Felix Magath lost his selection gamble in Bayern Munich's Champions League game against Sporting but the coach still came away smiling as a goalless draw made certain of his side's place in the last 16.

With Mark van Bommel, Owen Hargreaves and Bastian Schweinsteiger all unavailable, Magath chose full back Willy Sagnol to play in midfield and promoted the rarely used Christian Lell to occupy his place at right back.

It is hard to remember Bayern looking less comfortable in a home match than they did in the first 45 minutes against the Portuguese side.

Magath made amends at halftime, taking off Lell, putting Sagnol back in his usual place and bringing on the Paraguayan Julio Dos Santos.

Bayern looked more secure as a result and with better finishing from Roy Makaay they would have made it four wins out of four.

As it is, they have two games left, away to Spartak Moscow and at home to Inter Milan, to secure first place and Magath, who was quick to own up to his mistake, had every reason to be satisfied.

"The starting side was clearly not the ideal formation," Magath told reporters. "I thought that Sagnol could make up for the absence of Van Bommel in midfield but it didn't workout.

Levski give in to Bremen

REUTERS, Sofia



Levski Sofia coach Stanimir Stoilov gave his backing to teenage goalkeeper Nikolay Mihaylov after the Bulgarian side slipped to a 3-0 home defeat to Werder Bremen in the Champions League.

Mihaylov, son of Bulgarian Football Union president Borislav Mihaylov, failed to gather the ball from a Lucio Vagner's back pass in the 33rd minute of Tuesday's match to concede an own goal.

"I thought he (Mihaylov) was

playing very well until that happened," Stoilov said. "We don't have to write off young players just because they are making errors."

"He will continue to be part of the team but now he'll have to be much more responsible, to work much harder and to wait for his revenge."

Werder added two more goals, all in the space of five minutes, through captain Frank Baumann and Torsten Frings.

"It was shocking," said Stoilov. "We conceded the goal and then we were knocked out in the quickest possible way."

"Unfortunately, the big teams waste no time in punishing such mistakes."

The 18-year-old Mihaylov, whose father was keeper for the Bulgarian team that reached the semi-finals at the 1994 World Cup, had only pulled on the gloves because of Georgi Petkov's finger injury.

Mihaylov suffered the wrath of Levski supporters, who started booing him every time he touched the ball, and it was no surprise when he was substituted at halftime.

His place between the posts was filled by 19-year-old Bozhidar Mitrev, making his senior debut.

Levski made a bright enough start at Vasil Levski stadium with Nigerian midfielder Richard Eromuigbe and Croatian-born defender Igor Tomasic coming close to scoring midway through the first half.

"It was a pity as Werder got their opener when we looked like the better side on the field," Stoilov said. "But we are lacking experience and self confidence."

Pizarro eyes spot duties

INTERNET, undated

David Pizarro and Bruno Conti have tried to reassure Francesco Totti on his penalty-taking position.

The Chilean is the man set to take over if Totti decides to take a break from the role after missing three of the four penalties he has taken this season between Serie A and the Champions League.

"I am always hanging around back there! I know Totti is the first choice and the pressure is inevitably on him, as only someone who has the courage to take a penalty can miss it," assured Pizarro.

Totti saw his effort saved by Antonios Nikopolidis in the 1-1 draw with Olympiakos, but made up for it with a goal.

"We struggled a lot more in the first half, as we had difficulty creating space, but after the break I saw an impressive Roma side that passed the ball around well. If it had been 1-1 at half-time, maybe the end result would've been different."

Summer signing Pizarro also admitted he wanted the club to sign reinforcements up front, as Totti's makeshift role as a lone striker is causing some problems.

"It'd certainly be different to play with a centre-forward, as the midfielders now have to run forward and find space. It's an interesting system, but we do feel the absence of a 'real' striker sometimes."

Mandarin makes Leicester bid

INTERNET, undated

Milan Mandarin today confirmed he has made a bid to buy Leicester.

Mandarin walked away from Portsmouth in September after eight years in charge of the south-coast club and admits he would have preferred a longer break before taking control elsewhere.

But the Serbian-born American tycoon has found himself overwhelmed by offers from clubs who wanted to get him involved and felt under pressure to move quickly.

He promised Leicester fans his main aim was to take the club back into the Premiership.

Mandarin, 68, said: 'I feel I have made a fair and generous offer to acquire Leicester City Football Club from the present shareholders.'

'Under the circumstances and following a very emotional departure from Portsmouth Football Club after nearly eight years of ownership, I have given serious thought to the offer, the timing and the implications of such a bid.'

'In an ideal world I would have preferred to have delayed my return to football. But under the circumstances and following other interest in the club I have had to accelerate takeover plans.'

'My aim is to re-awaken Leicester City and aspire to the dreams of their passionate supporters and bring Premiership football back to the club at the earliest opportunity.'

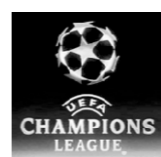
The bid for Leicester has been reported to be in the region of £25million.

Mandarin guided Portsmouth into the Premiership before selling the club to Alexandre Gaydamak earlier this year.

He continued in a role of non-executive chairman at Fratton Park before finally severing his links at the end of September.

Totti makes amends

AFP, Rome



Francesco Totti made up for missing a first-half penalty by scoring a 66th minute equaliser in a 1-1 draw with

Olympiakos here Tuesday which moved the Serie A club to the brink of the Champions League's knockout stages.

Julio Cesar's headed goal in the 19th minute had raised Olympiakos' hopes of recording their first ever away win in Europe's premier club competition at their 30th attempt and vastly improving their own chances of advancing.

But Totti's clinical finish denied the battling Greeks, the Italian World Cup winner redeeming himself after his 32nd minute spot-kick had been brilliantly saved by Antonios Nikopolidis.

A draw left Roma second in group D on seven points, five ahead of both Olympiakos and Shakhtar Donetsk, with two games left to play. Valencia booked their place in the knockout stages after drawing 2-2 against Shakhtar, a result which left them top on 10 points.

Tension had been raised prior to the match following attacks on visiting fans by Roma supporters the previous night, but there was no trouble inside the Olympic stadium.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti

criticised his team for making life hard for themselves.

"We need to start putting away our chances if we have ambitions of going far in this competition," he said.

"The opportunities are being created, but we have to put them away. If you fail to do so in this competition, with all the quality teams that you come up against, you will inevitably be punished sooner or later."

Olympiakos' Norwegian coach Trond Sollied admitted his team's chances of surviving the first round could be slim.

"The damage was not done here, but in Athens," he said. "We should have taken at least a point from that match and we ended up with nothing."

"Tonight we played well, but we have a habit of conceding silly goals and it cost us again."

Roma started with Totti employed as a lone striker supported by a five-man midfield.

Simone Perrotta, who scored Roma's winner in Greece a fortnight ago, only made the substitutes' bench as he was still feeling pain from a knee injury.

Olympiakos were without Alberto Castillo after the influential Uruguayan striker complained of breathing difficulties.

Olympiakos gave Roma a fright in the sixth minute when former Brazilian superstar Rivaldo, who used to play in Italy for AC Milan, fired an angled shot which Alexander Doni did well to parry.

Roma failed to heed the early warning and they soon fell behind.

Rivaldo delivered a right-wing corner to the edge of the six-yard box, and Julio Cesar outjumped his marker to plant a firm header past Doni.

Roma saw their appeals for a penalty turned down in the 23rd minute when Max Tonetto's left-footed drive appeared to be handled by Michal Zewlakow.

Totti's deflected free-kick was unconvincingly palmed away by Nikopolidis as Roma raised the tempo, before Julio Cesar scythed down Rodrigo Tadei in the box with a poorly-timed lunge.

Totti struck the spot-kick with plenty of venom, but Nikopolidis guessed correctly, diving to his right to pull off a stupendous save.

Perrotta came on for Matteo Ferrari for the start of the second half to add more thrust to Roma's midfield, but even his introduction failed to lift the 2001 Italian champions.

Roma needed a creative spark and Totti finally provided it midway through the second half.

A sublime touch from the Roma captain brought Tadei's lobbed pass under control, and his angled shot swept past a helpless Nikopolidis.

Roma substitute Mirko Vucinic might have nicked all three points for Roma, but his two late efforts were saved by the excellent Nikopolidis.



PHOTO: AFP

Olympiakos midfielder Rivaldo (C) sneaks the ball between AS Roma defender Christian Chivu (L) and Daniele de Rossi during their Champions League match in Rome on Tuesday.

Kone fires PSV into last 16

AFP, Eindhoven



Eindhoven shot into the Champions League knockout stages after earning a 2-0 victory over 10-man Galatasaray here on Tuesday

Faryd Mondragon, who had made several saves for the first hour of the match, finally let the ball into his net. Mondragon saved a Phillip Cocu header but the party went straight to Belgian midfielder Timmy Simons who scored with his head from close in.

Galatasaray's Belgian coach Eric Gerets changed their striking formation, bringing on the 'Bosphorus Bull' Hakan Sukur for Umit Karan but the veteran forward was unable to find the equaliser.

Then, with six minutes to go, Ivory Coast striker Arouna Kone doubled PSV's lead after showing fine poise under pressure to race into the box from the left, go past Mondragon before shooting into the net from the edge of the area.

Koeman singled out Tomas' red card as the key point in a match which left his Dutch side lying second to Liverpool in Group C on goal difference.

He said: "Super, it was a deserved

win and a little easier than anticipated. The Turkish side didn't leave us much space but then came the turning point with Tomas' sending off."

"We really capitalised on our numerical superiority."

Koeman added: "The important thing was to win to get us qualified. We're very happy as not many observers believed in us at the start of the season."

His opposite number, Eric Gerets, commented: "The players are very disappointed this evening."

"But I'm going to motivate them quickly around our next objective, third place in the group and a place in the UEFA Cup."

"We'll be fighting for that -- Galatasaray never lets up, the way the players' battle tonight makes me optimistic for the future," added the former Belgian national captain, who led them to the 1986 World Cup semifinals.

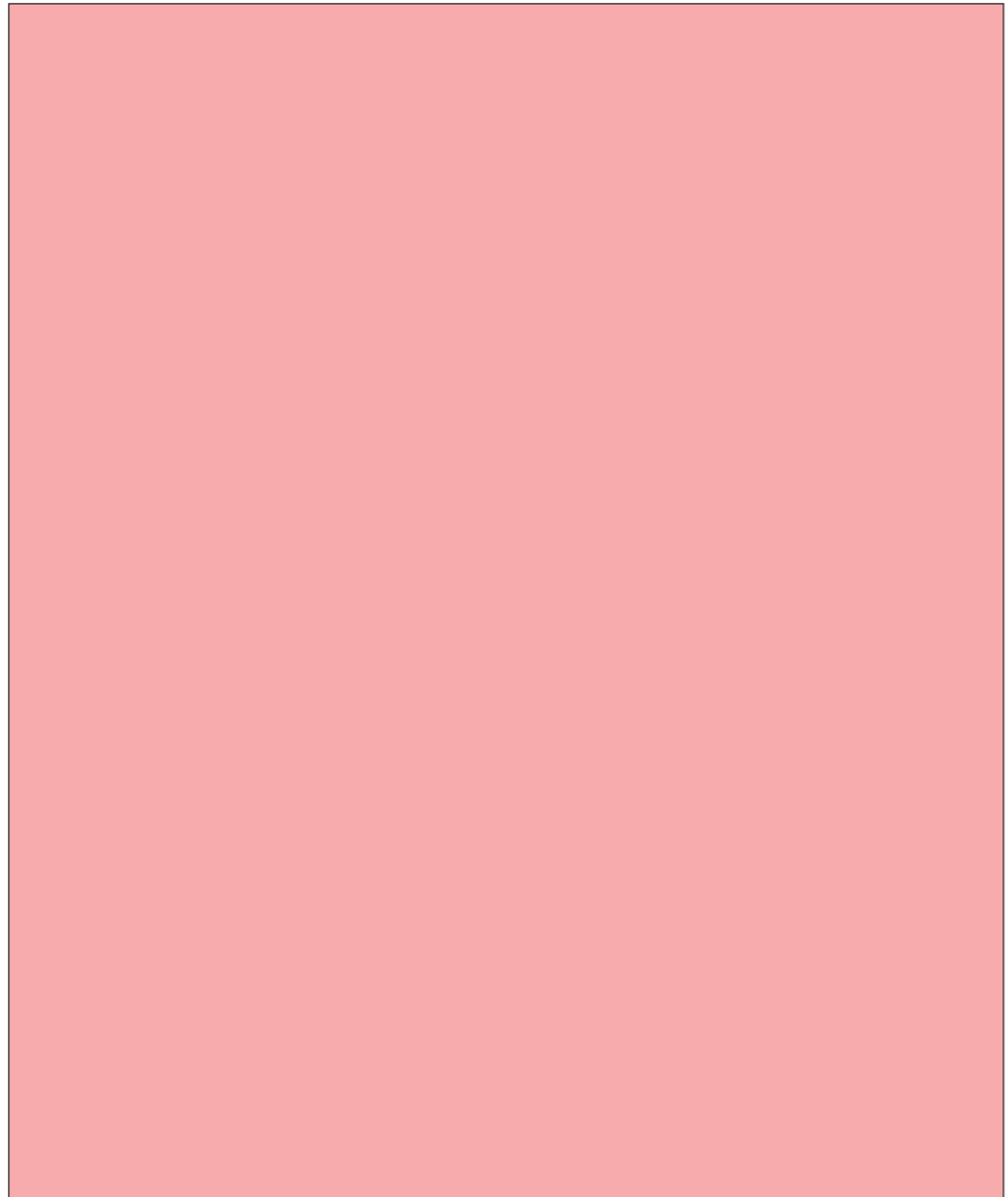


PHOTO: AFP

Werder Bremen players Frank Baumann (C) and Miroslav Klose (R) celebrate the formers headed goal in their Champions League match against Levski Sofia in Sofia on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 40 Uncivilized 1 Mia 41 Always quartet 5 Is able to 8 "— Gotta Have It" 12 Teatime, perhaps 13 Pay with plastic 14 Bamako's land 15 Fruit-filled pastry 17 Educ. org. 18 Bar 19 Evades 21 Listener 22 Palm starch 23 Muppet eagle 26 Schlep 28 Half a sawbuck 31 Roundup device 33 Crony 35 Pianist Peter 36 Ranch statistics 38 Short haircut. DOWN 1 P.M. 20 Lummox 23 Hot tub 24 Joan of — 25 Besides 27 Run up the phone bill 29 Historic time 30 Tier 32 Off the norm 34 Faithfulness 37 Moment (Var.) 39 Cry noisily 42 Non-payment results, for short 44 Intact 45 Hoofbeat sound 46 Own 48 Terrible guy? 49 Lascivious 50 Sea flock 53 E.T.'s vessel?

Grid for crossword puzzle with numbers and letters.

CRYPTOQUIP
D W N C E T K J B C W U - C R D C A D R
B W D B R Y D J D K E B W A U T R W Z
D W J N Q R T R B C Y J B Z E D N :
"CLR FEQ FR FLJY."
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU'RE IN A MOTEL ROOM AND THE DOOR IS SAFELY LOCKED, DOES THAT MAKE YOU INN-SECURE?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals T
The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.