

## Barca show their class

AFP, Paris



Barcelona and AS Roma made their own entries into the history books of the Champions League on Tuesday, although it was the defending champions who penned the most interesting reading.

Frank Rijkaard's Spanish giants calmed the nerves of their anxious fans with a 2-0 victory over Werder Bremen at the Nou Camp which secured entry to the last 16 after a second place finish in Group A behind winners Chelsea.

Roma, missing talismanic skipper Francesco Totti, beat Group D winners Valencia 1-0 at home to finish second in their group and enter the knockout phase for the first time in its current format.

However Barcelona's win, for Champions League posterity, had a little more significance: it meant they avoided becoming the first defending champions to exit the competition at the group stages.

Galatasaray's 3-2 defeat of Liverpool in Istanbul was also remarkable, but so was Robbie Fowler's two goals in a match in which the Reds had little to lose having already secured top spot in Group C ahead of PSV Eindhoven.

Reds manager Rafael Benitez fielded a makeshift team, but said it had been difficult to motivate his troops.

"If you know you have already qualified and then concede two early goals, it is difficult to get back into the game because it is not like a final or playing for three points," he said.

"We simply paid for too many

mistakes."

Sporting Lisbon meanwhile had a night to forget.

Sitting third in Group B behind leaders Bayern Munich and Inter Milan, both already qualified, Paulo Bento's side suffered a 3-1 hammering at home to Spartak Moscow, who stole third place to enter the UEFA Cup's last 32.

PSV Eindhoven also suffered a morale-sapping setback on the night going down 3-1 at home to Bordeaux.

Despite qualifying in second behind Liverpool the Dutch side's coach Ronald Koeman was agitated at a performance which they will be keen to erase from their memories.

"We forgot to play, and let Bordeaux do what they want," said Koeman, who scored the winning

goal for Barcelona when they won the Champions League for the first time, in 1992.

He added: "You can afford to be slack in the Dutch league, but not in the Champions League. No-one forgives you here."

At Barcelona, where Rijkaard's side faced an embarrassing dilemma, it took only 13 minutes for the script to begin to take shape.

Ronaldinho, rested for Barca's 1-1 draw with Levante on Saturday, set the tone for the rest of the evening when he stepped up to take a free-kick after being fouled by Pierre Wome.

The Brazilian majestically fooled the defending wall with a strike from the edge of the area which rolled under their feet as they jumped in anticipation of a high, curling effort.

Five minutes later Icelandic striker Gudjohnsen slotted home a close range effort, and, despite both teams missing chances Barcelona held on to preserve an unbeaten home record in the competition going back to 2003, when they slid out to Juventus.

Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf admitted that his side, who will now play among the last 32 in the UEFA Cup, were outplayed in a vibrant first half.

"We just weren't at the races early on, we didn't find our game as well as we had hoped," said Schaaf, whose men had only needed to draw to go through to the last 16.

"Barca were into their stride faster and although we played much better in the second half we reacted too late."

Rijkaard saluted Barca's first half performance, but admitted

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INGENIOUS: Barcelona forward Ronaldinho (2nd from L) drills a free-kick under the jumping Werder Bremen wall to score the opening goal during their Champions League clash at the Nou Camp on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

### ESDAY'S RESULT

<b>GROUP A</b>	Barcelona (ESP) 2 (Ronaldinho 13, Gudjohnsen 18) Werder Bremen (GER) 0 Chelsea (ENG) 2 (Shevchenko 27, Wright-Phillips 87) Levski Sofia (BUL) 0
<b>GROUP B</b>	Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Makaay 62) Inter Milan (ITA) 1 (Vieira 90+1) Sporting Lisbon (POR) 1 (Carlos Bueno 31) Spartak Moscow (RUS) 3 (Pavlyuchenko 7, Kalynychenko 16, Boyarintsev 89)
<b>GROUP C</b>	Galatasaray (TUR) 3 (Necati 24, Okan 28, Ilic 79) Liverpool (ENG) 2 (Fowler 22, 90) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Alex 87) Bordeaux (FRA) 3 (Faubert 7, Dalmat 25, Darceville 37)
<b>GROUP D</b>	Olympiakos (GRE) 1 (Castillo 54) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 1 (Matuzalem) Roma (ITA) 1 (Panucci 13) Valencia (ESP) 0

## Fergie defends C'Ron

Football

INTERNET, undated

Sir Alex Ferguson has insisted there is no diving culture at Manchester United.

The Red Devils manager launched a passionate defence of winger Cristiano Ronaldo amid allegations he cheated to gain his side a crucial penalty against Middlesbrough on Saturday.

Having watched the incident countless times on video, Ferguson is adamant referee Chris Foy was correct to give the spot-kick and said there was no way he would ever support a player who deliberately dived.

"We do not condone diving at this club and Cristiano is well aware of that," said Ferguson.

"But I have looked at the incident a million times and Cristiano lost his balance completely.

"It is difficult for players who run as quickly as he does. For instance, if you were driving at 70mph in a car and another car comes out in front

of you, do you brake or carry on?"

"Don't forget, last year at Manchester City he got sent off for intent, even though there had just been two disgraceful tackles on him, while Steven Gerrard got a penalty at Sheffield United at the start of the season, again for intent.

"The interpretation is down to the referee but, to me, it was a clear penalty."

Ronaldo's reaction to the bombardment of questions over his conduct at the Riverside suggested he felt he was being treated unfairly.

And his condemnation of Boro boss Gareth Southgate, who branded Ronaldo a cheat, was fairly forthright.

"He (Southgate) stopped playing football last year. He needs to understand football much better," said the Portugal winger.

"I realise people criticise me for anything I do. They love to do that ever since the World Cup. But it doesn't bother me.

"When I go on the pitch, I do what I love, which is play football and do my best for the team. That is my aim."

Ferguson needs Ronaldo fully focussed and on top form this evening as United look to avoid a calamitous Champions League group stage exit at the hands of Benfica for the second straight season.

The United boss has acknowledged he is somewhat surprised his side should find themselves in their current plight, given they collected a maximum haul of nine points from their opening three games.

However, unexpected defeats to FC Copenhagen and Celtic have brought a sense of nervousness to proceedings, although, as Ferguson reflected, it is entirely in keeping with United's history that they should find themselves in such a precarious position.

"I know we will do it," he said. "But why do my players take us all right to the edge so often?"

"It is as if the make-up of the club has a built in requirement to take the difficult route.

"When you look at the history of our club, we tend to keep our supporters on a knife-edge. It seems like there is a certain enjoyment in it."

## Hail Spartak

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian media have hailed Spartak Moscow after they finally snapped a record 22-match winless streak in the Champions League group stage exit at the hands of Benfica for the second straight season.

The win in Lisbon allowed the Russians to leapfrog the Portuguese side thanks to their better head-to-head record and finish third in their group behind Bayern Munich and Inter Milan, securing a spot in the UEFA Cup.

"The curse has been lifted!" said a front-page headline in the newspaper Sport-Express on Wednesday.

"Spartak brilliantly made use of their last chance to reach the UEFA Cup!" echoed the rival sports daily Sovitsky Sport.

The Muscovites struck twice in the opening quarter of an hour through Russia striker Roman Pavlyuchenko and Ukraine international Maxim Kalinichenko to take a 2-0 lead.

Sporting striker Carlos Bueno pulled one back for the home side in the 31st minute but Spartak winger Denis Boyarintsev made sure of the points by scoring the third a minute from time.

The victory ended a six-year dry spell in Europe's premier club competition by Spartak. Their previous success was a 4-1 win over Arsenal on a snow-covered pitch at Moscow's Luzhniko stadium on November 22, 2000.

Spartak, however, still hold another unwanted Champions League mark for having the worst record in a group stage when they lost all six of their matches in the 2002-03 competition to Valencia, Liverpool and Basel and were outscored 1-18.

Bulgarian champions Levski Sofia, who made their Champions League debut this year, just avoided that ignominious record when they finished bottom of Group A, which also included Chelsea, Barcelona and Werder Bremen, with no points and a 1-17 goal ratio.

## Chelsea clinch pole

AFP, London



Andriy Shevchenko ensured Chelsea finished top of Champions League Group A as his clinical strike set up a 2-0 win against Levski Sofia on Tuesday.

Shevchenko has endured a miserable time since his club record 30-million-pound move from Italian giants AC Milan in the pre-season, but he was back to something approaching his best against the Bulgarian champions at Stamford Bridge.

The Ukraine forward opened the scoring in the first half before Shaun Wright-Phillips came off the bench to notch his first competitive goal for the Blues in the closing stages.

The London team's victory means they end their qualifying group ahead of holders Barcelona, Werder Bremen and Levski and have a chance of a slightly easier draw in the second round.

Now Chelsea fancy their chances of winning a first Champions League crown to go with their English Premiership trophies.

"I think we're equipped to win it, but it's no good talking about it, we have to put it into action," said the Blues' stand-in captain Frank Lampard.

"We feel we've got the squad, we think we've got the players, we've qualified through the toughest

group. "We've got to take that into the next stage and believe that we can win it this year."

Meanwhile Wright-Phillips rubbished suggestions that he might want to quit Stamford Bridge during the January transfer window to boost his chances of getting first-team football and a regular England place.

"I don't want to leave, why should I want to go anywhere?" he scoffed.

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho had been taken to hospital on Sunday after suffering from nausea and dizziness, but he was on the bench at Stamford Bridge and, if he was feeling any after-effects of his illness, his side's dominant display would have been the perfect tonic.

Shevchenko must have sensed a chance to shine against modest opposition and his astute pass gave Arjen Robben a chance to burst into the penalty area and round Levski keeper Bozhidar Mitrev in the eighth minute.

Robben played an astute cut-back to Shevchenko, unmarked 10 yards out, but he was denied as his shot was brilliantly pushed away by Mitrev.

Levski arrived in west London already eliminated after losing all five of their previous group matches but Stanimir Stoilov's side threatened to take a shock lead in the 10th minute.

Ricardo Carvalho gave Daniel Borimirov a sight of goal as he backed off on the edge of the pen-

alty area and the midfielder flashed his shot just over.

Mourinho's team could have been forgiven for taking it easy as they were already safely qualified for the second round.

But, with a win guaranteeing first place, the English Premiership champions were in business-like mood and came close to taking the lead twice in quick succession.

Robben cut inside and forced a fine save from Mitrev with a long range effort, then Didier Drogba volleyed just wide from Shevchenko's cross.

Chelsea didn't have to wait long for the breakthrough as Shevchenko produced a superb strike in the 27th minute.

Dutch winger Robben started the move as he accelerated away from his marker and rolled a pass to Lampard.

The England midfielder picked out Shevchenko's clever run into space and the Ukrainian produced a lethal finish with the outside of his right foot to claim his first European goal for Chelsea.

Levski responded well to that setback and were unlucky not to equalise just moments later when Hristo Yovov whipped in a cross and Cedric Bardon volleyed narrowly over the bar.

Yovov tested Portuguese keeper Hilario, in for the injured Carlo Cudicini, with a fierce free-kick in the 38th minute as the Bulgarians

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## Nedved issues ultimatum

AFP, Rome

Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved has threatened to quit football in protest at a five match ban he picked up in a Serie B match for Juventus this week.

The former European Footballer of the Year was hit with the punishment after an injury-time tantrum in Juve's 1-1 draw at Genoa on Tuesday.

The Professional Football League's disciplinary commission blamed the excessive nature of the suspension on Nedved's behaviour.

It claimed he'd purposely kicked out at the ankle of a Genoa player and after being sent off for that offence approached the referee in a provocative manner, saying something disrespectful and giving the official a kick.

Juventus have launched an appeal against a punishment they labelled "excessive" and on Wednesday Nedved, via his agent, also made plain his displeasure.

"They gave Zidane a three match ban for a head-butt (in the World Cup final), but what did I do to warrant a five match ban?"

"If that's the policy (of the disciplinary commission) I'm going to stop playing football," his agent told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

Juventus, unbeaten in Serie B with 10 wins and four draws are lying second, one point behind leaders Napoli.

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Bayern Munich marksman Roy Makaay embarks on his trademark celebration after scoring against Inter Milan during their Champions League tie at the Allianz Arena on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Spoils shared at Allianz

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich will go into the last 16 of the Champions League as Group B winners after securing top spot with a 1-1 draw with Inter Milan here on Tuesday.

Both Bayern and Inter, who have won a combined six European cups, had already qualified for the knockout phase and faced off at the Allianz Arena for first place.

Bayern only required a point to top the standings and took the lead through Dutch forward Roy Makaay just after the hour only for French international Patrick Vieira to equalise late on for the visitors.

"The last goal is irritating but the

important thing is we finished first and that is all that counts," said Peruvian international Claudio Pizarro.

However the German champions, who are unbeaten in this season's competition, still progress as group winners and Bayern coach Felix Magath got his wish to play the second leg of the last 16 knockout tie at home.

Last season AC Milan used home advantage to crush Bayern 4-1 in the second leg of their last 16 Champions League duel after the first leg finished 1-1 in Germany.

"I thought it would be a draw in the end but our strong performances in the group stage should not be underestimated," said Magath. "We have got through comfortably and are the only German team in the knockout stage."

Magath resisted the temptation to rest stars, fielding a full-strength team captained by goalkeeper Oliver Kahn who was making his 100th Champions League appearance.

The 37-year-old Kahn, who made his first Champions League outing against Paris Saint Germain way back in September 1994, becomes only the sixth player, and the first goalkeeper, to reach the century landmark.

Real Madrid's Spanish international striker Raul and AC Milan's Italian defender Paolo Maldini, now 38, lead the list with 106 appearances.

Before kick-off Magath cranked up the pressure on Inter by saying the Italians were one of the favourites to win this season's Champions League.

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## Montella speculation mounts

INTERNET, undated

Speculation is mounting in Italy that Roma forward Vincenzo Montella is on his way to Fulham in January.

The Italian striker is keen to obtain regular football and is attracted by a possible switch to West London.

Milan have also shown an interest in 'The Airplane' but his ineligibility in Europe counts against a move to the San Siro.

After being left out of the side that defeated Valencia 1-0 in the UEFA Champions League on Tuesday night, the writing looks on the wall for Montella's future at Roma.

The former Sampdoria star has been unable to convince coach Luciano Spalletti and Chris Coleman is reported to be leading the chase for his signature.



Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko points to a teammate after scoring a goal during their Champions League match against Levski Sofia at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP