

# Mallorca's time to party

**PALMA DE MAL- LORCA, Spain, Apr 23:** Mallorca's fears of an invasion by British soccer hooligans for Thursday's European Cup Winners' Cup semifinal tie against Chelsea never materialised.

And in the end the only danger to Palma's many medieval monuments came from home supporters during their celebrations after beating the holders 1-0 for a memorable 2-1 aggregate victory.

Mallorca now face Lazio in the last ever final in the competition's history on May 19 at Villa Park, Birmingham.

So instead of thousands of holiday-makers going to Mallorca for sun, sea and sangria, thousands of football fans will be heading to the English midlands for a football fiesta of their own.

The celebrations began with the final whistle. Suddenly, after struggling to fill their antiquated 19,000 seater stadium all season, Mallorca came alive with football fever late on Thursday. The Friday morning papers were full of pictures of jubilant Mallorca fans dancing in the fountains and packing the local squares, celebrating long into the night. "It was a superb victory," the head of the Balearic government Jaume Matas said. "One that will be difficult to forget."

The local daily paper Diario de Mallorca devoted 15 pages to the triumph and it even relegated the Kosovo conflict from its front page. The hard-fought victory over the reigning Cup holders saw Mallorca progress to the final in their first ever European campaign thanks to a header after 14 minutes from Argentine-born striker Leo Biagini.

"They were heroes," Mallorca coach Hector Cuper said of his side after the victory. Mallorca's success in Europe this season is all the more remarkable because they only returned to the top flight of Spanish soccer two seasons ago after languishing for most of the last 40 years in the second division.

The club even had spells in the amateur regional leagues as relatively recently as the 1979-80 season. The architect of their success in the last two years has been Cuper, who joined the club in the summer of 1997. He has welded together a rare ensemble of cast-offs from other clubs and aging journeymen. Into the mix he added a couple of genuine global stars, goalkeeper Carlos Roa of Argentina and

Yugoslav international Jovan Stankovic.

Their reputations may have made other clubs shy away from putting them on their payroll, but they have helped turn Mallorca into a side that can hold its own with European soccer giants such as Real Madrid and Barcelona.

As a sign of the soccer club's recent rise in popularity, 5,000 supporters are expected to travel to England for the final in four weeks time. Earlier in the season, home attendance figures barely topped that figure.

Playing in a European final may be a new experience to most of the Mallorca squad but one man already knows what it is like to lift the Cup Winners' Cup, veteran left back Miquel Soler. Soler, 34, is the oldest man in the Mallorca squad but a decade ago he was part of the Barcelona team that beat Sampdoria 2-0 to win the 1989 trophy.

"I thought at the start of the season that Mallorca might be the last club I was going to play for," Soler, who has turned out for seven Spanish first division clubs, said. "So you can imagine how happy I am to get the chance to play in another European final."

On Thursday night Soler turned back the clock and found young legs, causing havoc down the flank and making it a miserable night for Chelsea's Romanian international defender Dan Petrescu.

It was a night of celebrations for Mallorca's players and supporters but many local residents were also breathing a sigh of relief. The much expected problems with travelling Chelsea supporters, some of whom have a fearsome reputation, did not materialise. The local police force staged the biggest operation in their history and had 800 men patrolling the streets and in the stadium.

Although more than 5,000 Chelsea fans were expected, estimates the morning after the match suggested only around half that number actually arrived on the island. Many bars in the Mallorcan resort of Magaluf, a popular destination for budget-minded British holidaymakers, were deserted and some closed early.

There were even a few empty seats at the away end of the Luis Sitjar stadium and touts were apparently left with tickets in their hands, trying to offload them at face value as the kickoff approached.

# Lacklustre Lazio creep through

**ROME, Apr 23 (Reuters/Inter- net):** Unconvincing Lazio were held 0-0 at home by a defiant Lokomotiv Moscow on Thursday but crept into their first and last European Cup Winners' Cup final on the away goals rule.

The Italian league leaders, who had come from behind to draw the first leg in Moscow 1-1, were often outplayed by a spirited Russian side inspired by stocky striker Zaza Dzanashia.

Sven Goran Eriksson's side showed all the inconsistencies which had caused them to lose

their last two league matches at the Olympic stadium and their only real chance came on the half hour when Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic hit the crossbar with a wickedly swerving freekick.

Lazio's appearance in what will be the last ever Cup Winners' Cup final at Birmingham's Villa Park next month, will be only their second in a major European final.

Their first, in last year's UEFA Cup final, ended in a 3-0 defeat to fellow Italians Inter Milan.

"We suffered tonight but I think we deserved the result because we created a few more

chances than they did," Eriksson said afterwards.

"Reaching a European final for the second year in a row is important to us. Let's hope we get a better result than we did against Inter last year."

Lazio started the match with Croat Alen Boksic, their goalscorer from the first leg, and Chilean striker Marcelo Salas on the substitutes' bench.

Both were on yellow cards and Eriksson chose not to risk second bookings which would have ruled them out of the final.

Instead, Roberto Mancini partnered Christian Vieri up front with Portuguese defender Fernando Couto moving up into

midfield alongside Yugoslav Dejan Stankovic.

Lazio started slowly and it was Lokomotiv who had most of the early possession.

In the seventh minute striker Dmitry Bulynkin confused Lazio's Yugoslav centre-back Sinisa Mihajlovic in the box and fired in a dangerous low shot across Luca Marchegiani's goal.

Lazio right back Paolo Negro managed a thundering long range shot over the crossbar shortly afterwards but the visitors continued to control the ball with Dzanashia looking capable of adding to his first leg goal.

# Unique final in the offing

**LAGOS, Apr 23 (Reuters/Inter- net):** A new name will go on the World Youth Cup on Saturday when Japan and Spain, who have surprised even themselves by getting so far, meet in the final.

Spain reached the final 12 years ago when they lost out to Brazil by a single goal scored in extra time.

**World Cup 2006 Blatter dashes**

**Nigeria's hopes**

LAGOS, Apr 23: Nigeria's hopes of hosting the 2006 World Cup were seriously undermined by FIFA president Sepp Blatter here on Friday, reports AFP.

Blatter, here to watch the World Youth championship final on Saturday, said the African state still had a long way to go before it would be ready to host the world's biggest sporting event.

FIFA officials said Blatter, who has regularly expressed support for an African country hosting the 2006 event, accepted that Nigeria had still a long way to go in building the hotels and setting up transport facilities needed for the senior event.

"The World Youth Championship has worked, but there is a quantum leap between that and the World Cup," said a senior FIFA official Friday.

The official cited the shortage of hotel beds, poor communications facilities and transport problems in Nigeria.

With the final decision over who hosts the 2006 World Cup being made early next year, Nigeria has little time to get things sorted out.

England, Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Morocco and Egypt are all bidding for the 2006 World Cup.

But Blatter was full of praise for Nigeria's handling of the Youth championship.

"We did it. I can say that we have had a successful championship," said the FIFA president.

The three week youth tournament, staged for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, wraps up Saturday with Japan playing Spain in the final, while Mali takes on Uruguay for the third place.

Many critics had worried that Nigeria would not be up to hosting teams from 24 countries and staging 52 matches.

But Japan's appearance is the biggest surprise the tournament has seen since Qatar reached the 1983 final before going down 4-0 to Germany.

"I am proud of my players, proud of my team," said Japan coach Philippe Troussier. "Of course I didn't expect to get this far."

Spain coach Inaki Saez Ruiz, who described the idea of reaching the final as unthinkable just a month ago, said the supposed underdogs will be tough opponents.

"We met them two years ago but now they are more balanced, they are technically good. Before, they simply ran around



PHILIPPE TROUSSIER

a lot," he said.

The Asians will have to do without captain Shinji Ono, who is suspended. He picked up his second yellow card for time-wasting in the 2-1 semifinal win over Uruguay.

Japan have knocked out Portugal, Mexico and Uruguay as well as claiming victories over the United States and England in the first round.

They have only three first division professionals in their team and are missing five top players who were prevented from travelling by the Japanese federation because they did not get hepatitis B vaccinations in time.

Spain began the tournament with a well-deserved 2-0 win over three-times champions Brazil and have continued in the same vein ever since.

Most of their players are reserves at top clubs such as Portugal, Mexico and Uruguay and Real Madrid.

"There's never been so much interest in Spain in a match at this age level," said Saez Ruiz.

# Munich derby Sunday

**COLOGNE, Apr 23:** Bayern Munich are celebrating reaching their first European Cup final since 1987 - but they have no time for resting as Sunday sees them face a city derby with city cousins 1860 Munich, reports AFP.

Traditionally it is an occasion which splits Bavaria's capital down the middle as 1860's underdogs try to get one up on their richer and more famous neighbours.

When the two last met last autumn, 1860 were second in the table and promising Bayern a strong title challenge.

But they lost 3-1 that day and suspended Lions' coach Werner Lorant had to watch the defeat high in the stands as a commentator for German television.

Lorant has good cause for agitation prior to Sunday's game as well because 1860 have claimed just two points from their previous eight games - including losses in the last five. That run has dented their UEFA Cup hopes and they now stand in seventh place.

Bayern, ten points clear and going for a treble of title, European Cup and German Cup, must guard against weariness following Wednesday's 1-0 Champions League win over Dynamo Kiev.

Elsewhere, playmaker Stefan Beinlich is out of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen's side for Friday's game at VfB Stuttgart after a minor knee operation. He will also miss Germany's friendly on April 28th against Scotland.

Stuttgart will have their two front men Fredi Bobic and Krassimir Balakow back in action after injury but Austrian keeper Franz Wohlfahrt will miss the game through suspension.

"Everyone is talking about Leverkusen at the moment, and quite rightly too," Stuttgart coach Rainer Adrion said. "We won't be going into this game as favourites."

Leverkusen have strung together four wins in a row and have looked rejuvenated since Christoph Daum altered his strategy a month ago to make the side more attack-orientated.

Defensive veteran Dieter Eilts will be wearing the captain's armband Friday when Werder Bremen go to Borussia Dortmund. Bremen coach Felix Magath withdrew it from Andreas Herzog this week after a dressing-room bust up with the Austrian star last week.

"I appreciate the decision and know just how important being captain is in our current situation," Eilts said.

Bremen have tumbled to 12th and are just three points away from the relegation zone with no goals scored in five of their last six clashes.

Jorg Berger is back in the Bundesliga with struggling Eintracht Frankfurt, whom he will hope to steer to a home win over Hansa Rostock.

Both teams - placed 16th and 17th respectively - are clawing to stay in Germany's top flight.

There was chaos at Frankfurt this week as Reinhold Fanz was sacked and Berger brought in to replace him. There followed the resignation of controversial club manager Gernot Rohr.

Berger has already saved Frankfurt from relegation once before in 1990 and is banking on his tested regime of hard discipline to pull the club through.

Schalke captain Olaf Thon extended his contract by two years prior to Saturday's game against Hamburg. The 32-year-old libero plans to end his career where it began as a teenager.

"Now that we have one leg out of the relegation battle I thought it was the right time to extend. I hope we do better in future than finishing between 10th and 15th on the table," Thon said.

Schalke are unbeaten in their last six games while Hamburg have won once in 11 years to their hosts' Gelsenkirchen stadium.

Borussia Monchengladbach, who host Wolfsburg, had their licence approved Thursday by the German Football Federation for next season despite debts reportedly totalling nine million dollars.

The bottom side is destined for the Second Division - and without star striker Toni Polster who, until now, had insisted he wanted to stay.

Polster is at loggerheads with coach Rainer Bonhof, who makes no bones about favouring younger players.

"Things between us have gone too far and finally snapped. After all that's been said and done it makes no sense to keep playing under Bonhof," Polster grumbled.

In other matches, Hertha Berlin play Bochum, outgoing champions Kaiserslautern play Freiburg and Nuremberg play MSV Duisburg.

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# Ghanaian sensation's Premiership dreams

**KADUNA, Nigeria, Apr 23:** Ghanaian sensation Peter Ofori-Quaye was not able to take his country

into the World Youth Cup semifinals but he may have done enough to earn a dream move to England, reports Reuters.

His swerving shots, darting runs, superb passes and four goals - including a last gasp equaliser against Spain in the quarter-finals - have marked the 19-year-old as one of the stars of the tournament.

Despite his personal success, however, he was disappointed by Ghana's eventual quarter-final exit - 8-7 on penalties to Spain. "Luck was against us... we were good enough to win the trophy," he said.

The defeat, meant he cannot now achieve his dream of winning the tournament's golden boot award.

But he said he has put it behind him and looks forward to making his debut for Ghana's national team, the Black Stars, "Playing for the senior side of Ghana is in my mind. Every serious player wants to play for his country," he said.

Currently at Greek club Olympiakos Piraeus, Ofori-Quaye has already shown his skills to the likes of Juventus, Ajax Amsterdam and Porto in the Champions League.

But he says he would love a move to the English Premier League.

"The rate of club soccer development is high in England, that's why I want to continue my club career there," he said.

But he is not content to join any English club and is aiming high. "I'd like to play for either Manchester United or Arsenal," he says with a confidence and maturity that belies his years.

And they are not the words of some star-struck teenager. Ofori-Quaye has been tipped for stardom for at least the last four years - and his performances on the world stage in Nigeria have confirmed to a wider audience what has been obvious to close observers of the game for some time now.

Two years ago aged just 17, Ofori-Quaye joined Olympiakos for the staggering sum of 4.0 million dollars from First Division Kalamata.

It was the second largest amount ever spent on a teenager's transfer after the 7.0 million dollars Barcelona paid

for then 18-year-old Ronaldo's signature when they priced him away from PSV Eindhoven in 1996.

Olympiakos signed him on a five-year contract and although they clearly took a gamble on a player so young his development since he joined them in 1997 suggests they made a very shrewd purchase.

Ofori-Quaye, who turned 19 in March, has been in Greece, originally with Kalamata since he was 15, and while the cost of his transfer in 1997 was astonishing, it was not the only unusual aspect of the move.

Kalamata reportedly refused even bigger offers from Ajax, Bayern Munich and Anderlecht for his signature and dealt with Olympiakos in much the same way that parent allows a son to leave home in the country to live with a more worldly-wise relative in the big city.

Kalamata president Stavros Papadopoulos always believed Ofori-Quaye was destined for greatness beyond Greece.

Born on March 21, 1980, he played briefly for goldfields in Ghana before being snapped up by Kalamata, who also has other Ghanaians on their books.

Bayern foiled in Santacruz bid

ASUNCION, Apr 23: Paraguayan club Olimpia de Asuncion has rejected a 15 million dollar bid from German league leaders Bayern Munich for 17-year-old attacking midfielder Roque Santacruz. It was reported Thursday, says AFP.

The Latin American club is demanding 20 million dollars but negotiations are continuing.

The player impressed Bayern during the world under-20 championship currently taking place in Nigeria.