

2003 Champions' League final in Moscow

MOSCOW, Nov 24: Moscow's five-star Luzhniki stadium is to host the 2003 Champions' League final. Russian Football Union president Vyacheslav Koloskov told the press here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Koloskov said that UEFA President Lennart Johansson had reached a verbal agreement on the issue with Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov during Wednesday's second group phase match between Spartak and English Premiership side Arsenal at the stadium.

Spartak won 4-1 before a capacity 84,000 crowd at the recently-renovated ground.

Premiership preview Euro tumblers shift focus

LONDON, Nov 24: Arsenal and Leeds will both be looking to bounce back from Champions League defeats when they meet at Elland Road on Sunday, reports AFP.

Arsenal were comfortably beaten 4-1 away to Spartak Moscow and Leeds went down 2-0 at home to Real Madrid in the first round of the second phase earlier this week.

On Saturday by contrast the only English side to record a Champions League success this week, Manchester United will look to follow their 3-1 success over Panathinaikos with a win away to struggling Derby County.

Struggling FA Cup holders Chelsea will see what life has to offer after the departure of Tore Andre Flo to Rangers when they travel to Everton, who will have been boosted by a much-needed three points last weekend against Arsenal.

In the relegation zone Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson will be under greater pressure if his team lose to bottom of the table Bradford in a classic 'six-pointer'.

The one-time 'Captain Marvel' who has spent millions constantly rebuilding the side, has seen his Middlesbrough team lose their last seven games and they have yet to win at home this season.

Arsene Wenger has told his shell-shocked Arsenal stars to get their act together quickly before their black November develops into a full-blown crisis.

The Spartak reverse was the London club's fourth defeat in six matches this month.

Their only win in that spell, which started with a home League Cup defeat by Ipswich, was via a Thierry Henry penalty at Middlesbrough.

Second-placed Arsenal have slipped five points behind Manchester United in the Premiership race since being held to a goalless home draw by then-bottom club Derby two weeks ago and Wenger was appalled at the team's lack of fire in a 2-0 defeat at Everton last Saturday - only the second league loss since the opening day of the season.

Arsenal played far better in Moscow only for their once famously-mean defence to ship goals that Wenger described as 'stupid - not at all like the Arsenal we used to know'.

And, at the moment Gunners' 35million pounds (52.5million dollars) strike quartet cannot seem to even buy goals. Hapless Nigerian ace Kanu, desperately out of touch in Moscow, is a prime example with just one all season.

Wenger admits: 'We are going through a very difficult period and have got to find the mental strength to come back again.'

'It is clear there are flaws in our game which have to be rectified quickly but I still believe we will show our true form against Leeds in the next match.'

Centre back Martin Keown insists: 'We've had setbacks like this before at the club and we've bounced back.'

Leeds, who hope to have completed the signing of West Ham centre-back Rio Ferdinand for 18million pounds (27million dollars) - a world record price for a defender - have premiership problems of their own.

They are currently in 11th place, having won five out of 13 matches and like Chelsea last season their domestic form appears to be suffering at the expense of their Champions League campaign.

United will be without England international goalkeeper Nigel Martyn until at least Christmas after he aggravated a groin strain in training. Stand-in Paul Robinson has been performing so well, however, that Martyn's absence will not be the problem it could have been.

Leeds' Norwegian international midfielder Eirik Bakke should be available after missing the Real game with a calf injury. Talented Australia striker Harry Kewell is set to stay on the sidelines after sustaining a thigh strain following an Achilles operation.

FIXTURES (kick-off 1500GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Charlton v Sunderland, Coventry v Aston Villa, Derby v Manchester United, Everton v Chelsea, Manchester City v Ipswich, Middlesbrough v Bradford, Southampton v West Ham, Tottenham v Leicester

Sunday: Leeds v Arsenal (1600GMT), Newcastle v Liverpool

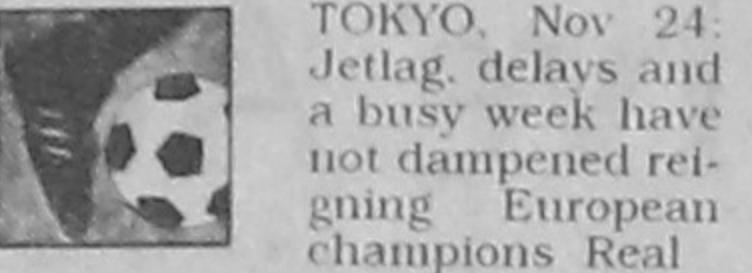


Real Madrid President Florentino Perez (C) is flanked by team captain Fernando Hierro (R) and coach Vincente del Bosque after a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Real are in the Japanese capital to play in the Intercontinental Cup against Boca Juniors of Argentina.

- AFP photo

Intercontinental Cup

Real up for the challenge



TOKYO, Nov 24: Jetlag, delays and a busy week have not dampened reigning European champions Real Madrid of Spain's hopes of beating Argentina's Boca Juniors to lift the Intercontinental Cup in Tokyo next Tuesday, reports AFP.

We have a lot of information about Boca Juniors and their players. European clubs have won this Cup for five years running and we will do our best to make it a sixth in a row," said a tired-looking coach Vicente Del Bosque.

Real Madrid overpowered English Premiership club Leeds 2-0 in a Champions League Group D match at Elland Road on Wednesday and flew to Tokyo only to spend an hour snarled in Tokyo's notorious traffic congestion en route to their hotel.

Boca Juniors, determined to bring back the Cup to South

America, arrived on Wednesday and went through a rigorous practice session Friday in preparation for the game at the National Stadium.

European clubs have won the previous five straight Intercontinental Cups, held between Libertadores Cup champions and UEFA Champions League winners -- effectively a world club championship final.

"All our players came here having determined to win the Cup. I really want to win the match," said captain Fernando Ruiz Hierro.

Real Madrid have won the title twice -- in 1960 and 1998 -- out of eight appearances.

"It is very important for us to take part in this match, because we have some 80 million fans all over the world. We have won the title twice and now we are seeking the third one," said Real Madrid president Florentino Perez.

The star-studded 24-member Real Madrid squad

consists of 13 Spanish internationals, three Brazilian internationals, and one each from Germany, England, Portugal, France, Argentina and Cameroon.

Boca Juniors have only six internationals from Argentina, one from Peru, and three from Colombia, including one of the best goalkeepers on the continent, Oscar Eduardo Cordoba.

"All our players came here having determined to win the Cup. I really want to win the match," said captain Fernando Ruiz Hierro.

Boca Juniors have a lot of good players. We will have to play at a very high level to fight against them, and I'm very glad to play against such a good team.

"We will just play our 100 percent in 90 minutes to win our third title. Martin Palermo is the most dangerous striker and he always scores. We shall check him very strictly," added Hierro.

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EUROPEAN FOOTBALL PREVIEW

PRIMERA LIGA

After a positive assault on the Champions League midweek, it's back to the domestic front for three of Spain's top sides - Deportivo La Coruna, Valencia and Real Madrid - who, it seems, are just as keen to hold the fort at home as they are on their European forays.

Deportivo's Dutch forward Ron Makaay scored Deportivo's third goal in the PSG encounter and, after hearing this week

conceding goals with alacrity - they have netted 14 times but conceded 13. Only Napoli have conceded more goals.

WEEKEND FIXTURES

PARIS, Nov 24: Major European league fixtures this weekend:

FRÉNCH FIRST DIVISION (1900 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday: Bastia v Marseille (1615 GMT), Lille v Paris Saint Germain, Lens v Monaco, Metz v Toulouse, Rennes v Auxerre, Troyes v Guingamp, Strasbourg v Lyon

Sunday: Saint Etienne v Nantes (1600 GMT), Sedan v Bordeaux (1945 GMT)

BUNDESLIGA

Friday: Schalke 04 v VfL Bochum

Saturday: SC Freiburg v Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund v VfL Wolfsburg, Energie Cottbus v Cologne, Eintracht Frankfurt v Hertha Berlin, Hansa Rostock v SV Hamburg

Sunday: 1860 Munich v Unterhaching, Werder Bremen v VfB Stuttgart, Bayer Leverkusen v Kaiserslautern

SERIE A

Saturday (14:00 GMT unless stated): Atalanta v Lecce, AC Milan v Napoli (19:30)

Sunday: Bari v Udinese, Juventus v Verona, Parma v Lazio, Perugia v Bologna, Reggina v Brescia, Vicenza v Inter Milan, AS Roma v Fiorentina (19:30)

PRIMERA LIGA

Sunday: Valladolid v Real Sociedad, Valencia v Oviedo, Malaga v Alaves, Athletic Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano, Racing Santander v Espanyol, Deportivo La Coruna v Celta Vigo, Barcelona v Osasuna, Real Madrid v Real Zaragoza, Real Mallorca v Villarreal, Numancia v Las Palmas

FRENCH FIRST DIVISION

Paris Saint Germain will attempt to put their season back on track at Lille this weekend after a miserable month without a win and a 3-1 home

drubbing by Deportivo La Coruna on Tuesday in the Champions League.

Meanwhile, the two clubs at the top of the table, modest Sedan and a resurgent Borussia, clash on Sunday and Marseille travel to Corsica to face Bastia after an unsettling week in which they failed to find a new, high-profile coach.

that a Spanish court ordered its former club Tenerife to pay him an outstanding 1.4 million dollars, will be taking to the field with particular vigour.

Second-placed Valencia kept their unbeaten home record intact on Tuesday night when they scored two unanswered

Ferdinand the richest back

LONDON, Nov 24: England international Rio Ferdinand on Friday became the world's most expensive defender after finalising personal terms on an 18million pound (25.1million dollar) transfer from West Ham to Leeds, reports AFP.

Ferdinand, 22, will undergo a medical in Leeds on Saturday before being presented to the Leeds United fans before Sunday's Premiership match at Elland Road with Arsenal.

Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale has confirmed Ferdinand still has a few contractual loose ends to tie up with West Ham, one of which is believed to be a goodbye payment from the London club.

"The deal is done with the one remaining aspect being tomorrow's medical," said Ridsdale.

"Personal terms have been agreed and pleasingly, from our perspective, we have landed a player of Rio's calibre without going outside our existing wage structure."

Ferdinand, who had been at the London club for a decade, is expected to be paid around 30,000 pounds (42,000 dollars)

per week for the five-year deal with Leeds, making him one of the highest-paid players at Elland Road.

Ferdinand's Israeli agent Pinhas Zahavi confirmed: "Talks have been completed with Leeds and everything is okay. There were no problems on either side."

The fee shatters the previous world best for a defender of 13million pounds (18.1million dollars) paid by Roma for Argentinian Walter Samuel, and represents a British record after the 15million pound (22.5million dollar) deals for Alan Shearer and Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink.

It had initially been hoped the deal would have been concluded in time to allow Ferdinand to make his debut against Arsenal, but his will take his bow for the Yorkshire club at Leicester on December 2.

Ferdinand will be eligible for United's current Champions League campaign from February, starting with the home game against Anderlecht on February 13.

Leeds were beaten 2-0 by Real Madrid in their first second-phase Champions League match on Wednesday.

The capture of Ferdinand takes David O'Leary's spending as manager of Leeds in just over two years to 64.3million pounds (90million dollars).

Barcelona, perhaps this week, have a chance to apply some sort of dressing to their sores as they host basement side Osasuna.

Sitting in ninth position, the Catalan outfit have the chance to get back on track in the league after scoring a 2-0 victory over Belgian outfit Club Brugge on Thursday night.

BUNDESLIGA

Reigning German champions Bayern Munich, their confidence shored up by Wednesday's 1-0 win over Lyon in the Champions League, hope to reignite their faltering domestic challenge this weekend with three points at Freiburg.

Bayer have lost their past two league outings and last weekend went down at home to Eintracht Frankfurt for the first time in 24 years.

Bayer coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who described the match against Lyon as "an awful affair" because of the pressure involved and the nerves generated as a result, said he hoped the fact the team had collected a vital three points against the French would have a positive effect.

"We have to keep on improving and above all make better use of our chances," he told reporters.

"We did play better in the second half and we must build on that."

The Millennium Cup is a millennium flop, it will not take place," a senior Indian football official, who requested anonymity, told AFP.

The AIFF can't organise domestic tournaments, how does anyone expect it to put on an international event of this magnitude?"

Except for embattled AIFF president Parijanan Das Munshi, no one in the country's football fraternity is convinced the tournament will take place.

"Asia, leave alone India, would not have seen anything like this," said Munshi, a member of parliament from the Congress party.

But he conceded the event-management company, Studio 2100, hired to promote the tournament, had been unable to finalise sponsors or a television deal.

With less than seven weeks left until the scheduled kick-off, there is no media campaign. No match schedule has been announced.

There is also confusion over which 16 nations are supposed to be taking part. A total of 18 countries have been mentioned as participants: Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Yugoslavia, Jamaica, South Africa, Cameroon, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Japan, Qatar, Trinidad, Bahrain, Jordan, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia and hosts India.

Meanwhile, the two clubs at the top of the table, modest Sedan and a resurgent Borussia, clash on Sunday and Marseille travel to Corsica to face Bastia after an unsettling week in which they failed to find a new, high-profile coach.

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Patrick Kluivert (L), Barcelona's Dutch international striker, leaps above a Club Brugge defender to score during his side's UEFA Cup third round first leg game at Brugge on November 23.

- AFP photo

PARIS, Nov 24: All-time Spanish giants Barcelona - a bit of sun-light their weary fans way on

Thursday as they beat previously unfeeling Belgian league leaders Club Brugge 2-0 away in their UEFA Cup third round first leg match, reports AFP.

While Barca, who had lost their last two league matches and been knocked out of the Champions League, could look forward optimistically to pursuing further the only European trophy to have eluded them, the same could not be said for the Italian sides, who used to make this trophy their own.

Parma, winners of the 1999 UEFA Cup trophy, looked well