



THE PICTURES SAY IT ALL : A Combo of photos shows the different moods of the two camps after Valencia's second goal. (L) Scorer Manuel Sanchez being lifted by an ecstatic teammate Fabio Aurelelio and (R) Leeds' Mark Viduka scratches his head in disbelief.



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia prove a different class

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Valencia

Valencia tore apart Leeds United 3-0 in their European Champions League semi-final second leg match on Tuesday to make their second successive Champions League final.

The arguments will carry for a long time over the legality of Juan Sanchez's first goal after 16 minutes but there can be no complaints about his second, two minutes after the beak, nor Gaizka Mendieta's strike on 52 minutes.

Valencia coach Hector Cuper, playing his third consecutive final in Europe after losing to Real Madrid last year in the Champions League and to Lazio in the 1999 Cup Winners Cup, said: "They say things go in threes.

"Last year after the defeat by Real, I said at the time I would do anything to play the final again. This year, I would give my life to win on May 23.

"Today I'm really smiling. Everything went well in England and now here in our stadium as well. But remember our success is not thanks to me, it's down to

what the players do on the pitch.

"They apply a strategy, a philosophy that I try to give them but it's them who go out on to the pitch and win. If I win a trophy all well and good but it's not because of what I have done.

"There were dangerous moments in the first half when Leeds threatened but we managed to resist the pressure. But if you ask me what the key to our success I'd have to say it was our midfield.

"Mendieta and Albelda were outstanding and kept the pressure on. This was the way we won the game. Juan Sanchez played well and, of course, he got the goals but our success was not just down to the man who scored. The way we moved forward so quickly clearly caused Leeds problems, and you have to remember that they are a good team."

Cuper admitted he didn't care who they come up against in 15 days time in Milan's San Siro stadium.

"Well, it's great to be in the final, and it would be great to have an all-Spanish final again if Real Madrid can win, but it really doesn't matter whether we face them or Bayern Munich. At the moment, we're just enjoying getting to the final again."

Leeds players protested vehemently that Sanchez's first effort was handball but Swiss referee Urs Meier

viewed the ball as having bounced off the Spanish international's chest, close to his shoulder, after a long range pass from Mendieta found Sanchez free of his marker Rio Ferdinand.

However, after a good period at the end of the first half, the English Premiership side were stunned by two almost identical goals within seven minutes of the break.

The pair of goals put the game, and their bid to make their first Champions League final in 26 years, beyond the reach of the Yorkshire club but, to their credit, they continued to go forward and departed with dignity.

For his second goal, Sanchez threaded his way through a host of Leeds defenders and then unleashed a low, powerful shot from 25 metres out.

The blast evaded the outstretched arms of Leeds goalkeeper Nigel Martyn and found the bottom left corner of the net.

Five minutes later Mendieta, the game's outstanding player, repeated the punishment from almost exactly the same position and in almost exactly the same fashion.

Valencia could have gone four up just after the hour but an effort from their giant Norwegian striker John Carew rebounded off the post.

Leeds' best chance came in a 15-minute period at the end of the first half when a fusillade of shots from the

edge on the box, unleashed in turn by Harry Kewell, Oliver Dacourt, David Batty and Alan Smith all required good saves from Valencia goalkeeper Santiago Canizares, the Spanish club's first leg saviour.

Smith's frustration got the better of him in injury time and he was sent off for a reckless challenge from behind on Valencia substitute Vicente.

However in the end it was Valencia who were worthy winner and progress to the Champions League final in Milan on May 23 where they will face either Real Madrid or Bayern Munich.

Leeds manager David O'Leary admitted that Leeds had been outclassed.

"I felt we did well in the first half but we can't afford to give away two daft goals like we did at the start of the second half. The game was over then," he said.

"I'd like to see the first goal again. I thought it hit his (Sanchez's) arm but he disguised it well.

"We're so near and yet so far from getting into the Champions League final. I wish Valencia well in the final. They are a good side. They work hard for each other and don't give many goals away.

"I hate losing but we've done well. I never expected to get this far and I'm proud of how far we've come. We'll learn from this and get better."

Home clubs after Recoba, Magallanes

AFP, Montevideo

Uruguayan internationals Alvaro Recoba and Federico Magallanes, currently playing with Inter Milan and Racing Santander respectively, have been targeted by top flight clubs in their native countries, according to reports here Tuesday.

Striker Recoba, who has problems with Italian authorities for possession of a false passport, has received an offer from his former club and Uruguayan champions Nacional to play next season, while midfielder Magallanes, who has failed to feature at the Spanish outfit which he signed for last January, could be on his way to Penarol.

The 25-year-old Recoba, reputedly the highest paid footballer in Italy, played for Nacional in 1996 and 1998, and the club, who are currently struggling in fifth in the Uruguayan league, are keen to have him back.

Club boss Alejandro Balbi said that they had been in contact with the player were ready to buy out Recoba's contract with Inter Milan and pay him 200,000 dollars until the end of the year.

While Penarol boss Jorge Pasculli said that the league leaders were interested in gaining the services of Magallanes, out-of-favour with Santander coach Gustavo Benitez.

Pasculli said that the player has always indicated that he hasn't forgotten his former club Penarol and was interested in returning to defend the yellow and black jersey.

Maturana first choice

AFP, Bogota

Francisco 'Pacho' Maturana, Colombia coach at both the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, was given the first option to return to the post on Tuesday following Monday's sacking of Luis 'Chiqui' Garcia.

Alvaro Fina, president of the Colombian football federation (FCF) told Colombian press: "We have sufficient high quality coaches in Colombia who have proved themselves at national and international level.

"Considering the coach of the national team should be to all intents and purposes a Colombian, I would be inclined to go for Francisco 'Pacho' Machurana."

Fina added he had had a telephone conversation with Maturana on Monday night and told him the FCF wanted to give him the post. "Maturana is interested," Fina continued.

Veron's International career threatened

AFP, Buenos Aires

Lazio's Argentine international

midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron, sent forward for trial in Italy for alleged offences relating to the bogus passport affair, could be suspended from the national football squad, according to press reports here Tuesday.

Veron and Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti were Monday committed by Rome magistrate Claudio Tortora for a hearing which is scheduled to start on October 11.

The Lazio player was given an Italian passport by Rome authorities on September 9 1999 enabling him to play as a European Union player.

However irregularities in documents submitted when applying for

the passport have emerged, notably the claim that he had an ancestor from Calabria in southern Italy.

According to the Clarin newspaper here Veron risks a suspension of several months if sanctions are taken by world soccer's governing body FIFA against the player which would prevent him playing in Marcelo Bielsa's national squad, on course to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

If banned Veron would be excluded from the team for key times including the forthcoming World Cup 2002 qualifier against Argentina and the Copa America in Colombia this summer.

Argentina are currently leading the South American World Cup 2002 qualifiers on 29 points, six points ahead of Paraguay, followed by Ecuador and Brazil, who are seven and eight points behind respectively.

Copa America's security blow

AFP, Asuncion

South American soccer chiefs are to meet later this month to review security during the Copa America soccer tournament in Colombia next July after a bomb blast injured 36 people before a Colombian First Division match at the weekend, a spokesman said Tuesday.

Paraguay's Brazilian Football Confederation (CSF) spokesman Nestor Benitez told AFP Tuesday that the issue was to be discussed during an executive committee meeting of the CSF in Rio de Janeiro on May 17.

Six football officials of the visitors' delegation were among the 36 injured in the car bomb blast in the south eastern town of Cali prior to the America Cali versus Once

Caldas tie, which was postponed.

Benitez said that the CSF would go through the question of security in minute details with Colombian authorities, whom he said were making huge efforts for the Copa America to take place normally.

He said that observations made by the visiting technical delegation to the stadia which host the tournament will have a determining factor in relation to the May 17 meeting.

"It's still a little early to talk about decisions (which will be taken on May 17) but we have to be very careful so that this tournament doesn't become a sort of star wars," remarked the CSF spokesman.

The Copa America, the championship of South American nations, will be hosted by seven Colombian towns from July 11-29.

Group B tie, which include Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru, will be played in Cali, 470km south east of the capital Bogota.

Redknapp leaving West Ham?

AFP, London

West Ham United manager Harry Redknapp has parted company with the English Premiership club, television news reports said here Wednesday.

Redknapp leaves the club after a disappointing season where the Hammers narrowly avoided relegation, BBC and Sky News reported. Neither West Ham nor Redknapp could immediately be contacted for comment.

Dutch want answers

AFP, Zeist, the Netherlands

The Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) on Tuesday demanded an independent inquiry be carried out into the failed doped tests of their international footballers Frank de Boer and Edgar Davids, the ANP agency reported Tuesday.

Barcelona's Dutch international captain De Boer admitted on Tuesday he had tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone last month. The admission by the 30-year-old De Boer comes after international teammate and Juventus midfielder Edgar Davids also tested positive for nandrolone recently after a league match.

Davids, who has been suspended pending a hearing with the Italian Olympic committee (CONI) anti-doping commission on May 8-9, denied he had ever taken the substance which builds up muscles and is also a performance-enhancer.

De Boer's recorded level was four times over the normal limit, 8.6 nanogrammes per millilitre of urine compared to 2.0 nanogrammes.

By contrast De Boer's Barcelona and Dutch teammate Patrick Kluijver passed his dope test taken after the same match against Celta Vigo.

However the KNVB want independent experts to lead an inquiry to establish if the excess of nandrolone could be related to dietary supplements given to Dutch team members, ANP added.

Dope failures of 2000/01

List of professional footballers who failed drugs tests this season following Tuesday's revelation that Barcelona's Dutch international captain Frank De Boer tested positive for banned anabolic steroid nandrolone (date relates to when they underwent tests):

2001
January 21 - Belgian Jean-Francois Gillet, playing for Italian First Division strugglers Bari, failed test after league match with Reggina. Suspended pending sentence.
January 28 - Lazio's Portu-



PHOTO: AFP

Frank de Boer talks to the media on May 8 in Barcelona.

2000

September 22 - Italians Christian Bucchi and Salvatore Monaco, both playing for Italian First Division outfit Perugia, tested positive after league match with Lazio and suspended for 16 months on February 22, 2001.

September 24 - Italian Andrea Da Rold, who plays for Second Division Pescara, suspended for 16 months on February 22, 2001.

December 23 - Italians Nicola Caccia and Stefano Sacchetti, both playing for Second Division Piacenza. Awaiting punishment.

guese international captain Fernando Couto failed test following league match with Fiorentina. Suspended pending sentence.

March 4 - Juventus' Dutch international midfielder Edgar Davids failed test following league match with Udinese. Awaiting result of second test of specimen.

March 15 - Barcelona's Dutch international captain Frank De Boer following UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg match with Celta Vigo. Has asked for a second analysis whose results should be known in a fortnight.

Tehran tragedy

Eleven in coma

AFP, Tehran

Eleven people are in a coma following the tragic collapse of a football stadium in Iran that left two dead, the student ISNA news agency reported Wednesday.

Abdollah Madani, a medical official in the northern city of Sari where the tragedy happened Sunday, killing two and injuring 287, said they had been in a coma since the accident.

"They could stay in this clinically dead state a long time," he said. A number of people have been arrested in connection with the accident, which unfolded during a do-or-die cup-tie between Tehran's Pirouzi, which has a popular nationwide following, and local first-division rivals Shamushak.

An estimated 30,000 were packed into Sari's Mottaqi stadium, built to hold no more than half that number, when the northwest stand collapsed during the match.

President Mohammad Khatami has asked officials to launch an investigation into the incident.

Nice hijack!

AFP, Dusseldorf

Two pieces of turf were removed from Fortuna Dusseldorf's pitch and held hostage in a cheeky ploy to secure money for the club, the culprits said on Tuesday.

An obscure "Fortuna salvation commando" cut the pieces out of the pitch on the night of April 17.

They then sent photographs of the captive turf, in chains, to the Dusseldorf town hall, threatening not to water them unless money was found for the club.

The stunt, mounted by local publication Die Sport, was happily resolved without further drama Monday night when the Dusseldorf municipality undertook to ask firms to find money for Fortuna.

The captive turf was subsequently released in a brief ceremony in front of the town hall.

Ronald looking ahead

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers experienced Dutch international midfielder Ronald de Boer claimed on Tuesday he would give the fallen Scottish giants more value for money next season after he spent the past three months out injured.

The 30-year-old, along with fellow Dutch international Giovanni van Bronckhorst, emerged unscathed from an under-21 game and could be set to return to the side against Kilmarnock on Saturday.

De Boer, who picked Rangers ahead of Manchester United when he left Barcelona last summer, has not played since the Scottish Cup tie against Brechin in January but maintains he is desperate to help provide a lift for next season.

"I'm ready to cope with next season and then we will see what I can bring to the team," said the two-time Dutch footballer of the year.

"I started quite well at Rangers and, even when I was I wasn't quite fit before the winter break, I played reasonably.

"I scored important goals against Hibs and Celtic but I didn't have the feeling I could lift the team.

"I feel I have the capacity to do that but unfortunately injury prevented me."

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool could only draw 2-2 with Chelsea in their 60th match of the season on Tuesday night meaning they failed to get the victory which would have clinched a Champions League football place next season.

Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink twice struck exceptional goals to cancel another double from Michael Owen, his sixth in a week and 21st for the club this season.

But it just wasn't enough. Liverpool struggled and strained, but they couldn't get that final winner that would have eased all the fears in this Premiership match.

Now they must go to Charlton on the last day of the season - after the FA Cup and UEFA Cup finals - and try to clinch third spot, knowing both Ipswich and Leeds still have a genuine chance of their own to pip Liverpool at the post.

The Kop rose to a team who have reached three cup finals, never before achieved by an English side in the same season, but it all had a hollow ring about it as Chelsea marched off, party poppers and with

Premiership's top six

After Tuesday's match between Liverpool and Chelsea (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Manchester United	36	24	8	4	77	26	80
Arsenal	36	20	9	7	61	35	69
Liverpool	37	19	9	9	67	39	66
Ipswich	37	20	5	12	56	41	65
Leeds	36	18	8	10	55	41	62
Chelsea	37	16	10	11	66	44	58