



WELL DONE SON! Dutch football legend Johann Cruyff (R) consoles his son Jordi after the Alaves' UEFA Cup final loss to Liverpool at Dortmund's Westfalen stadium on May 16.

# Heroes no matter what

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Alaves were treated to a heroes' welcome when they returned to the Basque country on Thursday following their heart-breaking 5-4 defeat by Liverpool in an epic UEFA Cup final.

Fans greeted the team with chants of "campeones, campeones" (champions, champions) on their arrival at Vitoria airport after Wednesday's gutsy performance in Dortmund.

Over 5,000 Alaves fans who could not make the trip to Germany packed the sports centre alongside the team's Mendizorrosa stadium in Vitoria to watch the game on a big screen.

After emotions ranging from delirium to desolation they still managed to provide a 15-minute ovation for their team after a 117th-minute golden own goal by defender Delfi Geli had shattered their hopes of a great upset.

"The team were there in the final and that is what is most important," said one pensioner and life-long Alaves fan.

"The excitement they have generated in the city and the joy they have brought to everyone is what has been important."

The Spanish press were full of praise for the modest Basque side that came so close to fulfilling their dream on their first appearance in a major European competition.

El Pais described the defeat as "heroic," stressing that Alaves had "covered themselves in glory" after twice coming back from a two-goal deficit and then again from a goal behind to force extra time with an 89th-minute equaliser.

"A festival of goals in Dortmund," sports daily As said. "We didn't win but we will never forget this game. Nine goals and a surfeit of emotion which was football

at its best. Losing like this doesn't matter.

"For us you are the champions" and "They fell with honour" were the headlines in local papers Periodico de Alava and Correo de Vitoria.

There is little doubt the team can be assured of a welcome every bit as enthusiastic as if they had won the cup when they attend a reception in the town's main square this evening.

"The players have to be congratulated because we have reached where no one would have dreamed. It is extraordinary what we have done," club president Gonzalo Anton said.

"For 15 minutes the pressure got the better of us," Anton said, referring to the two goals his team conceded in the early stages of the match. "But later we touched the heavens."

Romanian international Cosmin Contra, who supplied the crosses for his side's first two goals from Ivan Alonso and Javi Moreno, said the players had given their all.

"The team did everything possible to win the cup, but it just wasn't to be. But I want to congratulate all my team mates for everything they gave in the match. I know the fans will still treat us like winners.

Geli, the unfortunate scorer of the own goal that handed Liverpool

victory, was one of a host of Alaves players who collapsed in tears at the end.

But the former Atletico Madrid player, who otherwise had an excellent match, managed to view the game more philosophically once the shock of defeat had worn off.

"We went into the game hoping to provide some joy for our fans, but it wasn't to be," Geli said. "I tried to head the ball clear and it ended up going in the net. It is something that happens only one time in a hundred.

"But at least with all we have done we have managed to put the team of Alaves and the city of Vitoria on the map."



Javi Moreno (L), Alaves' ace marksman, giving Liverpool's Markus Babbel a tough time at Dortmund.

## Primera Liga preview

# Home Valencia's first focus

Football

REUTERS, Valencia

Valencia's Argentine midfielder Pablo Aimar says the team cannot allow next week's Champions League final in Milan to distract them from their league game against Athletic Bilbao on Friday (kickoff 1930 GMT).

Valencia take on Bayern Munich in the climax of the European club season determined to go one better after losing 3-0 to compatriots Real Madrid in last year's final.

Aimar admitted he had been surprised by the reaction of the fans to the team reaching the final for the second year in succession, but added that they cannot allow that to distract them.

"The atmosphere in the city is incredible.

"The people are so happy, but we have to concentrate on Friday's game against Bilbao and then start thinking about the trip to Milan despite the fact that it is difficult to cut yourself off from what is happening in the city."

Valencia slumped to a surprise 3-0 defeat at Malaga last week. Their normally miserly defence appeared to be in an unusually generous mood, allowing Panamanian striker Dely Valdes to score a hat-trick.

With a Champions League place at stake and Real Mallorca breathing down their necks level on 59 points with Barcelona just three points behind, Hector Cuper's side can ill afford another slip-up.

Cuper will be missing Argentine fullback Fabian Ayala, who has been banned for two matches after being sent off for a dangerous challenge on Malaga forward Manuel Canabal in last week's game.

Midfielders Kily Gonzalez and Ruben Baraja are suspended after notching up their fifth bookings and Cuper may decide to give Didier Deschamps a run out alongside 21-year-old Vicente and Miguel Angel Angulo, neither of whom are likely to make the starting line-up against Bayern.

Cuper will probably select the bulk of those expected to play in Milan, but may opt to rest some of his key players such as midfielder Gaizka Mendieta and is sure to use

all his substitutes ahead of the Bayern clash.

Although Bilbao are clear of the relegation zone, the Basque team have been in poor shape in recent matches.

A 5-0 drubbing at Real Oviedo and a disappointing 1-1 draw at home to Valladolid has led to some soul-searching from members of the squad.

"In my opinion we have had a very poor season," said midfielder Javi Gonzalez. "I would be angry if I was a fan. At home we seem to play well, but when we play away we are unrecognisable and I have no idea why this happens."

The records suggest that Bilbao will have a hard time on Friday. They have only won two away matches all season and have not tasted victory at the Mestalla in the last 13 years.

Coach Txetxu Rojo will hope Valencia's second Champions League final in two years will be enough to distract them and give his side a rare victory.

## Real after Zidane

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid and Juventus are locked in a record-breaking tug of war over world player of the year Zinedine Zidane, it was reported here Thursday.

Spanish giants Real have offered their Italian rivals a staggering 50 million dollars plus three players as they seek to land the French midfield maestro.

But Juventus have countered by demanding 50 million dollars for the player - plus Real's Portuguese international Luis Figo, sports daily Marca reported.

Figo moved to Real last year for a then world record 56 million dollars.

If the Madrid side were to meet Juve's stratospheric demands it would put the total value of Zidane's transfer above the 100-million-dollar mark.

"Madrid and Juve begin arm-wrestling for Zidane," Marca's headline said Thursday, stating that the brother of Real president Florentino Perez had recently met Juventus officials to discuss a deal.

As well as the 50-million-dollar transfer fee, Real are offering Brazilian Flavio Conceicao, Frenchman Claude Makelele and Spaniard Michel Salgado into the deal, Marca reported.

## Dauids banned

AFP, Milan

Juventus and Holland midfielder Edgar Dauids was suspended from football Thursday following his positive test for the banned steroid nandrolone, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) disciplinary committee announced.

Dauids was suspended pending an outcome of a hearing into his case and the committee announced the 'immediate suspension of the athlete whose positive test has been confirmed' as provided for by their rules.

On Wednesday it had been announced that the player's second urine sample after the Udinese v Juventus match was positive, confirming the finding of the first.

Dauids has denied the doping allegations.

It is a big blow for Juve who will now be deprived during the title run-in of the 28-year-old midfielder who was born in Paramaribo, Surinam and has been nicknamed 'pitbull' for his fighting qualities.

Now they will have to do without the former Ajax Amsterdam and AC Milan man for all four remaining fixtures in the First Division. The Turin side is in third place a point behind Lazio and six behind leaders AS Roma.

Earlier this week football anti-doping inquisitors demanded a 16-month ban on Lazio's Portuguese defender Fernando Couto for a similar alleged offence.

That penalty has already been inflicted on Perugia players Salvatore Monaco and Cristian Bucchi who are appealing that decision. They too tested positive for nandrolone.

## Confederations Cup Lemerre calls up Dacourt

AFP, Paris

Leeds star Olivier Dacourt has earned his first call-up to France's national squad for this month's Confederations Cup tournament in Japan and South Korea.

The tough-tackling midfielder is one of six new faces in Roger Lemerre's squad for the tournament, which takes place from May 30 to June 10.

Others to feature for the first time in the World and European champions squad are keepers Gregory Coupet and Mickaël Landreau, defenders Zoumana Camara and Jeremie Brechet, and midfielder Eric Carriere.

The debutants have been drafted in to the squad in place of several Italy and Spain-based stars, who are unavailable because of domestic commitments.

Juventus' world player of the year Zinedine Zidane and teammate David Trezeguet, Parma duo Lilian Thuram and Johan Micoud along with AS Roma's Vincent Candela are the Serie A-based absentees.

From Spain, Claude Makelele of Real Madrid and Barcelona midfielder Emmanuel Petit are both missing.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Ulrich Ramé (Bordeaux/Fra), Mickaël Landreau (Nantes/Fra), Gregory Coupet (Lyon/Fra)

**Defenders:** Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/Eng), Mikail Silvestre (Manchester Utd/Eng), Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/Ger), Willy Sagnol (Bayern Munich/Ger), Martin Djedou (Monaco/Dra), Jeremie Brechet (Lyon/Fra), Frank Leboeuf (Chelsea/Eng), Christian Karembeu (Middlesbrough/Eng)

**Midfielders:** Patrick Vieira (Arsenal/Eng), Youri Djorkaeff (Kaiserslautern/Ger), Eric Carrière (Nantes/Fra), Olivier Dacourt (Leeds Utd/Eng), Zoumana Camara (Marseille/Fra)

**Forwards:** Thierry Henry (Arsenal/Eng), Sylvain Wiltord (Arsenal/Eng), Robert Pires (Arsenal/Eng), Nicolas Anelka (Paris SG/Fra), Steve Marlet (Lyon/Fra), Christophe Dugarry (Bordeaux/Fra), Laurent Robert (Paris SG/Fra)

Football

REUTERS, Dortmund

UEFA is to examine the format of the Champions League and decide, probably by the end of the year, if it is to remain a 32-team competition.

It is also looking at changes to the UEFA Cup which could change from being a purely knockout competition to incorporate a league section, top officials said on Wednesday.

UEFA chief executive Gerhard Aigner told reporters: "The Champions League is the best club competition in the world, but it will only remain the best if we are watchful of what the public wants.

"The indications from the fans are perhaps that they are having difficulty coping with two parallel leagues -- a domestic competition



HEROES BEHIND THE SCENE: Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier (Front Row C) with the the UEFA cup with backroom staff at the team hotel in Dortmund on May 17.

# Party put on hold

Football

AFP, Dortmund

The treble's in the bag but Liverpool's season will not be complete until they successfully clinch a coveted Champions League spot for next year's tournament.

Gerard Houllier's side must win at Charlton in the Premiership on Saturday to secure third place in the league and a spot in Europe's top club competition.

The Anfield giants sparked wild celebrations amongst their fans by winning a remarkable UEFA Cup final against Alaves 5-4 on Wednesday.

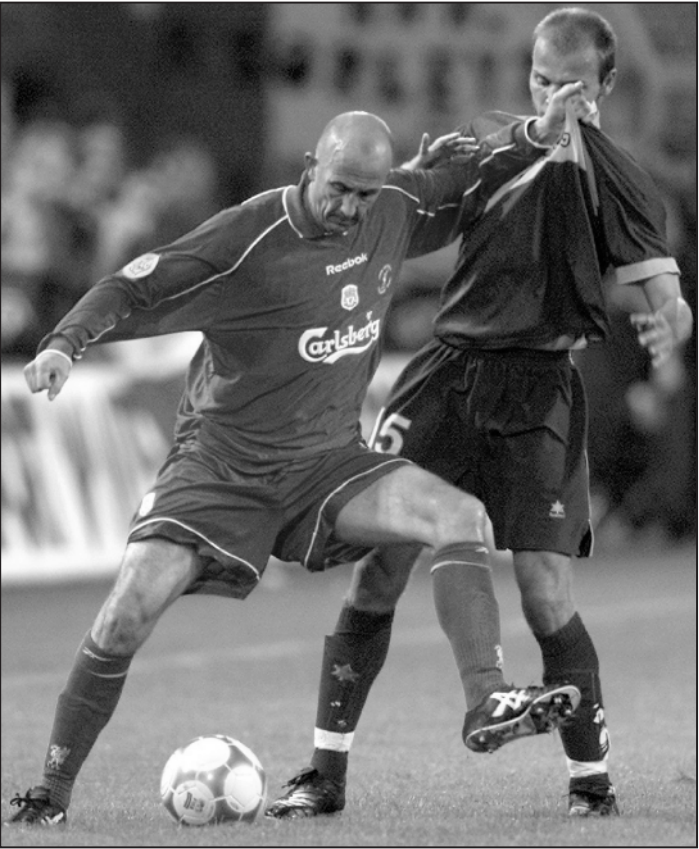
Football

REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool's UEFA Cup man-of-the-match Gary McAllister has pledged his prize money to those who helped his wife survive a cancer scare during his remarkable first season at Anfield.

The 36-year-old former Scottish international midfielder won the award after being the match winner in the Reds' amazing 5-4 defeat of Alaves in Dortmund on Wednesday which completed a unique treble of cup wins for the Premier League side.

McAllister has decided to donate his 2,000 pounds (2,864 dollars) prize money to two cancer charities --



OLD IS GOLD: Liverpool's veteran live-wire Gary McAllister fighting off Alaves' Ivan Tomic.

# UEFA thinking changes

and an international competition. "We are not in an over-kill situation, but we must make sure we are delivering the right product the public wants.

"The changes to the two competitions are inter-dependent on each other and must reflect the differences between them."

Last week, UEFA president Lennart Johansson said he thought the competition, expanded from 24 to 32 teams in 1999 was now too big and said he was in favour of restricting the entry only to domestic league champions.

Johansson said on Wednesday: "That is my personal view, and I realise that it is probably wishful thinking.

"I know the clubs do not want that and have expressed no desire for change, and I am not sure that members of the Executive Commit-

tee want change either. And perhaps nothing will change.

"But as it stands I think the competition is too big with too many 'dead' matches.

"And you can also end up with the teams that have finished second and third in their league the previous season, contesting the Champions League final to become champions of Europe when neither is champion of their own country, and that cannot be right."

The 1999 final in which Manchester United beat Bayern Munich 2-1 with two goals in injury time has been the only final so far between two teams who had not won their domestic league the previous season.

But UEFA is more concerned with football's image on television, sponsorship and fans' continued interest.

ics. "All our fans have enjoyed us winning two finals in five days, but I stress we need to win at Charlton because Leeds and Ipswich are right behind us still," Houllier said.

"We need to finish third and we know we have a tough game on our plate. We will need to recover and rest and we won't be having a drink. But don't worry, we will catch up on Sunday.

"If you can maintain your professionalism, and I know my team can, it will pay off in the end.

"I know I am working against an English tradition (of having a drink), I'm sorry about that," Houllier said.

health, his debut season at Anfield really began to take off as he showed the form that helped him win a league title with Leeds in 1992 and contributed to saving Coventry from the drop for the past four seasons.

He scored five goals in as many games as the season reached its climax, including the winners against Barcelona in the UEFA Cup semifinal and Merseyside rivals Everton in the league as the club tries to secure a Champions League place.

And just five days before his Dortmund heroics, McAllister turned the FA Cup final in Liverpool's favour by coming off the substitute's bench and playing a major role as the Reds fought back from 1-0 down to win the prestigious match 2-1.

His impact at the club has been more beneficial than probably even manager Gerard Houllier expected and has led the Reds to offer him another one-year deal for next season.

He was signed on a Bosman free transfer from Coventry last summer to bring an experienced head to a young midfield, but the arrival of Igor Biscan to complement the likes of Steven Gerrard, Dietmar Hamann and Patrik Berger seemed to limit his chances.

But, following his displays in the two cup finals, McAllister is now considered Liverpool's premier midfield asset despite his age.

He said: "What we have achieved is sensational. I don't think it will sink in until we are away in the summer and we look back at what we have achieved."

Liverpool's players have been banned from drinking alcohol to celebrate their cup triumphs until after their final league match of the season against Charlton on Saturday.

They have to win the match to be mathematically sure of securing third spot in the Premier League and a Champions League place for next season.

But the team will tour Liverpool in an open top bus on Thursday to parade the two latest additions to the Anfield trophy cabinet as well as the Worthington Cup they won in February by beating Birmingham.

Aigner added: "There are a number of options, possibly reducing the number to 24 teams again, but the big clubs would not necessarily like that. But we also have to consider kickoff times, the role of sponsors and the television companies.

"When we had our workshop of over 70 clubs in February none of them expressed a wish to change the current format, and perhaps no changes will be made. But we have to look at the competitions closely and see what changes are needed."

Aigner added that UEFA expected to have their studies completed by the end of the year and ratified by the executive committee in December. Any changes would come into effect at the start of the 2003-04 season.