

What colour will Real show?



AFP, Paris

The Jekyll-and-Hyde superstars of Real Madrid face the latest test of their erratic early season form Wednesday when the Spanish giants take on Russia's Lokomotiv Moscow in the Champions League.

Winless in the *Primera Liga* after three matches, the European footballing aristocrats from the Spanish capital slipped unthinkably into the relegation zone on Saturday after crashing 3-1 to Real Betis.

But to the exasperation of their fans, that defeat came only days after a sumptuous display when the Spaniards defeated Italian champions AS Roma 2-1 away in their Champions League Group A opener.

The contrast between the two games could not have been sharper.

Fluid and confident in dispatching Roma, Vicente Del Bosque's men were a pale shadow of their normally sparkling selves as they surrendered to Betis.

Del Bosque said before the season that Madrid had a lot of work to do to live up to the mantle given them by many football commentators as the best club side in the world.

The quality at Del Bosque's disposal is staggering. Portugal's Luis Figo, the second most expensive player in the world to Zidane, put in a virtuoso display in scoring and creating another goal in the 2-1 win at Roma.

Zidane is considered peerless worldwide in a role just behind strikers, Raul, Fernando Morientes and Savio, whose skill and finishing have often been dazzling on the European stage.

Zidane however is suspended through five first teamers, rested for the Betis loss, are expected to feature at home to Lokomotiv Moscow, including Claude Makelele, Flavio Conceicao, Aitor Karanka, Michel Salgado and Iker Casillas.

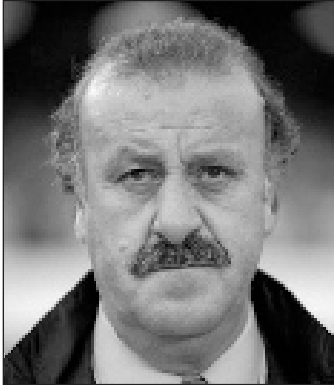
A Group A victory by the eight-time European champions would lift

the gloom after troubles back home which resume on Saturday with a home match against Espanyol.

Meanwhile Roma, whose 2-0 defeat at Piacenza at the weekend left them fourth from bottom in Italy, have a chance to redeem themselves with a trip to Belgian side Anderlecht.

Disgruntled Roma coach Fabio Capello, who worked wonders mainly at AC Milan but also at Real Madrid during the last decade, called a secret meeting with his players in an attempt to get them back on track.

"It's true, we are playing very badly," Capello said. "I don't recog-



VICENTE DEL BOSQUE

Fowler into his starting 11.

In the other Group B game, Portuguese League champions Boavista, who earned a creditable 1-1 draw at Liverpool in their opening game, host Dynamo Kiev, who may have to do without key defender Alexander Holovko who has an eye injury.

Arsenal, top in the English Premiership till Leeds beat Charlton on Sunday, host Germany's 1997 UEFA Cup champions Schalke 04 in Group C without England international left back Ashley Cole, who was sent off for dissent in their 1-0 defeat at Real Mallorca.

Arsenal manager Arsene



FABIO CAPELLO

nize my team any more."

With captain Francesco Totti as playmaker and an enviable strikeforce of Gabriel Batistuta, Vincenzo Montella and Marco Delvecchio, the Italian champions have enviable options.

In Group B, Liverpool travel to Borussia Dortmund after a lukewarm start to the Premiership.

They might have beaten city rivals Everton 3-1 at the weekend but two defeats in their first four matches is not a great return for a team which has one five trophies in the last year - UEFA Cup, English FA Cup and League Cup, European Super Cup and English Charity Shield.

Gerard Houllier may have his whole squad to choose from but he is expected to make changes for their trip to the heartland of industrial Germany, perhaps bringing in Gary McAllister, Nick Barmby and Robbie

Wenger has a problem with his defensive options as both Lee Dixon and Oleg Luzhny are injured and doubtful for the game.

Schalke are without key players too. German internationals Jorg Bohme and Sven Kmetzsch have a pulled hamstring and a hand injury respectively, Czech international Jiri Nemec has a groin problem and last year's top scorer in Germany, Danish striker Ebbe Sand, has a thigh injury.

Schalke's Polish defender and captain Tomasz Waldoch had an operation for a fractured nose on Friday and may need a protective mask to play.

In the other Group C game, Real Mallorca must do without Argentinian Ariel Ibagaza for their trip to Greeks Panathinaikos, though their clean sheet in their last three matches bodes well on the

defensive front.

In Group D, Lazio coach Dino Zoff knows his job hinges on the result of Wednesday's clash with French champions Nantes at the Olympic Stadium.

With the deposed Italian champions already struggling in the league, victory against the 'Canaries' from France is virtually essential for Lazio if they are to retain a realistic chance of progressing further in the competition.

Three draws in three Serie A matches against modest opposition and a 1-0 defeat in Istanbul by Galatasaray in their opening Champions League match provides ample reason for Lazio fans to be angry.

Nantes, winless and bottom of the French league after seven games, have their own problems. Romanian forward Viorel Moldovan has been ruled out for at least a month and possibly a season after injuring himself during the weekend match with Lyon.

Turkish club Galatasaray are looking to consolidate the Lazio victory with a second win at PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands in the other Group D match.

Wednesday's fixtures

European Champions League fixtures on Wednesday:

GROUP A
Anderlecht (Bel) v Roma (Ita)
Real Madrid (Spa) v Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
GROUP B
Boavista (Por) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) v Liverpool (Eng)
GROUP C
Arsenal (Eng) v Schalke 04 (Ger)
Panathinaikos (Gre) v Real Mallorca (Spa)
GROUP D
Lazio (Ita) v Nantes (Fra)
PSV Eindhoven (Ned) v Galatasaray (Tur)

Roma president charged in Rolex case

AFP, Rome

AS Roma president Franco Sensi and the club's managing director Fabrizio Lucchesi have been formally charged with offences relating to the 1999 scandal in which Rolex watches were allegedly given to Italian referees, judicial sources revealed Monday.

The watches were given ostensibly as Christmas presents but have inevitably raised speculation that Roma were seeking to influence the decisions of match officials in Serie A and B.

Rome magistrate Giancarlo Amato has acquired documents that show that 25 watches were handed over to referees.

Lucchesi has always maintained that Italian football chiefs were informed that the watches were to be presented as part of a celebratory dinner.

Vieri to miss UEFA Cup tie

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan striker Christian Vieri will miss Thursday's UEFA Cup tie with Romanian outfit Brasov, the Italian First Division club announced Tuesday.

The Achilles tendon injury that has kept him out of action since Italy's World Cup qualifier with Lithuania (0-0) has proved worse than originally thought and the player will not be available for Thursday's match which will be played at Trieste because of crowd misbehaviour by Inter fans last season.

The club said the injury was "particularly painful."

Premiership Brilliant Boro



AFP, London

Middlesbrough snatched a dramatic last-gasp victory with two goals in the final five minutes to defeat Leicester 2-1 in the English Premiership here Monday.

In a battle of the beleaguered managers, Steve McLaren's Boro struck twice through Paul Ince and former Manchester United player Jonathan Greening to deny Peter Taylor's Foxes a third win on the trot.

Leicester had been heading for a morale-boosting victory that would have seen them climb out of the bottom half of the table after

Napoli out of Naples?

AFP, Napoli

Flood damage could force Italian Second Division club Napoli out of their San Paolo Stadium home until 2002, Corriere dello Sport reported Tuesday.

Huge damage was wreaked during the weekend by torrential storms which caused the deaths of two people and the San Paolo has been judged unsafe as a result.

In all Napoli will probably have to play eight games away from the Stadium which hosted the 1990 World Cup semi-final between Argentina and Italy and regularly attracted 80,000 when Argentinian Diego Maradona played for the Naples club.

Four grounds in the Campania province have been earmarked as replacements - they are Benevento (68km) from Naples), Caserta (30km), Avellino (57km) and Torre Annunziata (22km).

Naples mayor Rosa Russo Iervolino has asked the Italian government to declare the city a disaster zone when the cabinet meets on Friday.

Arsenal won't fight

AFP, London

English Premiership side Arsenal have backed down in their stand-off with France over the release of players for an international friendly in Australia.

The London side were furious when the French asked for the release of Patrick Vieira, Thierry Henry, Robert Pires and Sylvain Wiltord for the game in Melbourne on November 11.

But the international ruling body FIFA said that French coach Roger Lemerre was in the right and that the players would face a ban if they did not go on the long trip.



AFP, Rome

The poor form of expensive close-season signing Gaizka Mendieta is just one of many headaches for Lazio coach Dino Zoff ahead of Wednesday's home Champions League match with Nantes of France.

Reports in Italy say Zoff's future hinges on the result of Wednesday's match with the French champions and the coach will feel it is about time the Spanish midfielder signed from Valencia produced the goods.

And Zoff, the goalkeeper and captain in Italy's 1982 World Cup winning side, made it clear that the onus is on the player.

"I think the fact that he has not yet found a house is significant," said Zoff.

But Mendieta is not the only misfiring player at Lazio with

Costa Rica in last 8 Spain stunned



AP, Port-of-Spain

Costa Rica clinched a berth in the quarterfinals of the under-17 FIFA World Championships on Monday with a 3-0 victory over Paraguay.

In other matches, Burkina Faso, an unheralded nation from West Africa, stunned Spain 1-0, Argentina defeated Oman 3-0 and Mali edged Iran 1-0.

Playing in Group D in Malabar, Costa Rica didn't open the scoring until well into the second half. Armando Alonso netted the Central American side's first goal in the 76th minute and added another in the 85th. Randall Azofeifa scored in the 83rd minute.

In another Group D match, Mali resurrected its chances to advance to the round of eight alongside Costa Rica thanks to a goal from Bakary Coulibaly in the 38th minute.

Costa Rica leads Group D with six points from two games. Paraguay and Mali are tied for second with three points.

In Group C in Marabella, Wilfried Sanou converted a penalty kick to give Burkina Faso its first victory in the tournament, two days after the Africans managed to hold Argentina to a 2-2 draw.

In a later match, Argentina's Maximiliano Lopez opened the scoring in the 10th minute, Carlos Tevez added the second in the 37th, and captain Hugo Colace sealed the match with a 52nd-minute penalty



PHOTO: INTERNET

Argentina's Maximiliano Lopez celebrates his goal against Oman during at the Manny Ramjohn Stadium in Marabella, Trinidad on September 17.

kick.

Argentina and Burkina Faso share the lead in Group C with four points from two games, followed by Spain with three.

The tournament continues Wednesday with France taking on Japan in Group B and Australia playing Croatia in Group A in fea-

tured matches.

Host nation Trinidad and Tobago will face two-time defending champions Brazil, and the United States will play Nigeria. Both the Trinidadian and U.S. teams are unable to advance, having lost their first two games.

Decisive match for Zoff



AFP, Rome

Lazio coach Dino Zoff knows his job hinges on the result of Wednesday's Champions League clash with French champions Nantes at the Olympic Stadium.

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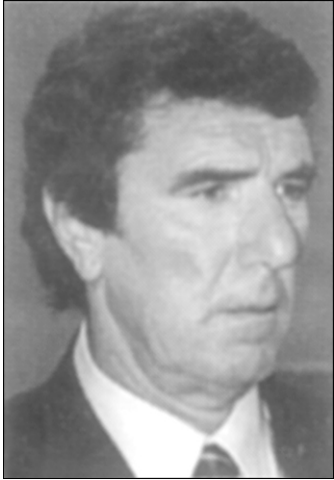
And defeat on Wednesday would test the patience of club president Sergio Cragnotti, who has already said he is taking counsel on how to respond to the crisis, to the limit.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that nothing is going right for Zoff who has only ever enjoyed a provisional backing from Cragnotti who initially said the 1982 World Cup winner would only replace Swede Sven Goran Eriksson until the end of the 2000-1 season when he took command in January.

And the signs are that Cragnotti is already ruling the decision not to change ship in the summer with even the tried and trusted Lazio

stars underachieving.

Argentinian forward Hernan Crespo, top scorer in Italy's Serie A with 26 goals last season, is yet to hit the target this season while his club's major signings in midfield have both underachieved so far.



DINO ZOFF

Spain's Gaizka Mendieta and Italian international Stefano Fiore have been widely criticised by supporters who during the 0-0 draw with Torino at the weekend chanted the names of Argentinian Juan Sebastian Veron and Czech Pavel Nedved, sold respectively to Manchester United and Juventus this summer.

Zoff has already questioned Mendieta's commitment to the club,

pointing out that the Spaniard has not yet found a house in Rome.

"He needs time like all newcomers need time," said Zoff. "But I think the fact that he has not yet found a house is significant."

One major doubt for Wednesday's match is Dutch defender Jaap Stam who injured a foot during the match with Torino.

Stam is perhaps the only recent signing who has immediately found his feet with Lazio but Zoff's preferred 3-5-2 formation does not seem to be working with many calling for him to revert to 4-4-2.

Zoff will be aware that the Italian media has said his time will be up unless Lazio win on Wednesday with former AC Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni already the favourite to succeed him.

It is not all bad news for Lazio with defenders Paolo Negro and Sinisa Mihajlovic, who is from Yugoslavia, likely to be available for the first time this season.

Nantes have their own problems with Romanian forward Viorel Moldovan ruled out for at least a month and possibly a season after injuring himself during the weekend match with Lyon.

The player's own personal physician has said that Moldovan could face an entire season on the sidelines.

But no-one is in any doubt that all the pressure is on Lazio on Wednesday evening.

Shearer still a Keane follower



AFP, London

Newcastle striker Alan Shearer on Monday said he is still a great admirer of Manchester United captain Roy Keane - despite their blazing row at St James' Park on Saturday.

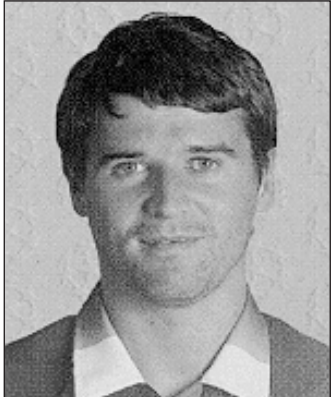
Republic of Ireland international Keane was sent off in injury-time after clashing with the Newcastle captain whose side beat the reigning champions 4-3.

Midfielder Keane had to be held back by team-mate David Beckham as he tried to confront Shearer on his way to the dressing room, but the former England international insists there is no bad blood between the two.

"I've got the utmost respect for Roy Keane. He epitomises everything about the game, he doesn't like losing - and rightly so - but that's what makes him such a great player," Shearer told SkySports.



ALAN SHEARER



ROY KEANE

But Shearer, who scored Newcastle's winning goal, said he did what any other professional would have done in the same situation.

"I was just trying to be professional and waste a bit of time, but that's football."

Keane's dismissal was the ninth of his Old Trafford career.



AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian football supremo Peter Velappan Tuesday bemoaned a lack of creativity in the sides competing at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games but expressed hope for a new breed of player coming through.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) boss said that except for Thailand and Vietnam, regional teams needed to develop their players to be not just mobile but "creative when under pressure".

Velappan was unveiling a technical analysis of the football event at the 10-day SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, which ended this week with defending champions Thailand beating Malaysia 1-0 Saturday to retain their title.

The Philippines was the only one of the 10 Southeast Asian countries

not to take part in the football, which the AFC decreed should be an under-23 rather than full-strength event.

That AFC decision had been vindicated by the youthful talent shown at the Games, Velappan said



PETER VELAPPAN



PHOTO: INTERNET

ACROBAT JONES! Leicester's Matthew Jones (R) is over the moon after scoring against Middlesbrough at Filbert Street, Leicester on September 17.

Riges wanted to forget September 11

AFP, Metz

United States international defender David Regis lined up for Metz at the weekend to try and forget the September 11 terror strikes on the USA, he told AFP on Monday.

"I needed to try and forget, if only for a couple of hours," said the 32-year-old who moved to France after featuring in the USA's 1998 World Cup campaign.

The defender was moved to tears during the one-minute silence in honour of victims and their loved ones that was observed throughout Europe and said he couldn't have played without the support of his teammates.

"If it had been the day after the strikes or the day after that I could never have played, all this is so meaningless after what has happened," he said.

Regis helped the northern French side to only their second win of the season, 2-0 at Guingamp, having lost five of their seven other games.

Rangers game switched

AFP, Geneva

The UEFA Cup clash between Glasgow Rangers and Russian side Makhshkala will now be a one-off match at a neutral venue away from Dagestan, football's European governing body UEFA said Tuesday.

The tie will now take place September 27 with the venue to be announced shortly.

Muslim Dagestan is a small republic on the edge of the Middle East and borders war-torn Chechnya, and when Rangers first appealed to UEFA, in early September, to switch the tie their request was denied.

Since then the rise in global security fears after the September 11 attacks on the United States has forced UEFA to reconsider.

"We have continued to closely monitor the security situation in the region which has clearly deteriorated over the last 24 hours. In addition we have now been informed that the insurance cover for Rangers FC has been withdrawn," said UEFA Chief Executive Gerhard Aigner.

The Scottish club were unable to find adequate insurance for their multi-million dollar squad after the British foreign ministry advised against travelling to the region.

"In light of these developments, and to be fair to both clubs concerned, we have decided that this match should be played as a single tie at a neutral venue on Thursday 27 September," he added.

Scottish Football Association chief executive Davis Taylor welcomed the move and praised Rangers' stance.

"Rangers took a brave stance, knowing that they could have faced serious consequences for failing to fulfil a UEFA Cup tie and I am delighted that the concerted campaign by the club, the SFA, the media and the government has finally been successful," he said.