



Barcelona's Argentine ace Javier Pedro Saviola (behind), rounding off Fenerbahce's goalkeeper Rustu Recber prior to scoring at the Sukru Saracoglu Stadium in Istanbul on September 18.

Lucky Juve, last gasp MU

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

A dreadful penalty decision handed Juventus a 3-2 victory over Celtic in Turin on a drama-filled night of Champions League action across Europe.

Nicola Amoruso's last-gasp 89th minute spot-kick for the Italian giants was the main talking point from Tuesday's matches, which also saw English champions Manchester United scrape a last-minute victory over Lille.

Elsewhere holders Bayern Munich laboured to a dismal 0-0 draw against Czech side Sparta Prague in Group H.

A scrappy David Beckham goal was enough to give United a 1-0 win over their unfashionable French opponents at Old Trafford which fired Alex Ferguson's team to the top of Group G.

But while the English side's victory was just about deserved on the balance of play, heartbroken Celtic were left screaming robbery as they went down at Juventus in Group E.

Free-scoring Swede Henrik Larsson appeared to have earned Martin O'Neill's side a share of the points when he equalised with a penalty on 85 minutes.

But when Amoruso tumbled over after barely making contact with Celtic's Belgian defender Jos Valgaeren, German referee Helmut Krug pointed to the spot sparking uproar.

Amoruso picked himself up and slotted home to leave Celtic - making their debut in the Champions League - distraught.

"I have never seen anything like it," Celtic boss O'Neill fumed after the defeat. "I don't know what the referee saw and I don't think the Juventus players did either." O'Neill said.

"I'm sure when the referee sees it on TV he'll realise I'm right. It was shocking - I couldn't believe it when he pointed to the spot."

"I maybe totally wrong because I have not seen the incident again but the player was a foot away from the ball."

"That was a devastating blow for us but in the end the players did well."



OFF YOU GO: Juventus' Dutch star Edgar Davids (C) being shown the red card by German referee Krug during the match against Celtic at Turin on September 18.

Larsson's penalty was reward enough but then came Amoruso's extravagant tumble and Juventus pinched a lucky win. In the other

"People assumed it was going to be a walkover except us - we knew they'd make it hard for us. We didn't expect it to be an easy game."



Ryan Giggs (L) of Manchester United makes a sliding tackle on Lille's Sylvain N'Diaye at Old Trafford in Manchester on September 18.

Return of the phenomenon

Football

AFP, Milan

The man once projected as the face of football in the first decade of the third millennium returns to competitive action on Thursday hoping to put more than three years of injury misery behind him.

Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo - full name Ronaldo Luis Nazario de Lima - was Wednesday named by the club's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper in his squad for the UEFA Cup first round tie with Romanian side Brasov and the odds are the 24-year-old from Rio de Janeiro will feature at some stage.

But many will keep their fingers crossed if and when Ronaldo enters the fray at Trieste, remembering his last-fated comeback.

In April, 2000 Ronaldo was selected for Inter's match with Lazio at the Olympic Stadium but just seven minutes into his substitute appearance he collapsed in agony as the ligaments in his troublesome right knee gave way.

He has never kicked a football in anger since - but on Thursday that should change and assuming he does get through unscathed it will be the end of a long purgatory.

A little walk at the centre of Milan by foot. That's how Ronaldo has spent his last day before an official match.

"I return playing an European match, a real one. And I'm really looking forward it. Tomorrow it's going to be a special day, to be concentrated with the team before a match is very special, unique."

"Anyway. Other than this special sensation, there is something more: I've been training with the team as it was natural, not special."

"Today I scored one goal (in practice) against Toldo (Inter custodian), and after we've played, and we had fun. Being able to play is great. We'll continue little by little, getting used to this environment."

Less than four years ago it looked as though Ronaldo had the world at his feet and his face seemed almost omnipresent in advertising ahead of the 1998 World Cup in France.

One advert even game him quasi-messianic status with Ronaldo photographed with his arms outstretched, imitating the famous statue of Christ the Redeemer that overlooks Rio de Janeiro, his home city.

But the night of the World Cup

Final on July 12, 1998 which many expected to be his coronation as the king of world football was to prove that the former Cruzeiro, PSV Eindhoven and Barcelona forward was all too human.

Journalists around the world gasped in disbelief when the team sheets were handed out without Ronaldo's name. As the news beamed its way into living rooms all over the planet a second team sheet was issued, this time with Ronaldo's name on it.

But the player was in no shape to play and looked disorientated as France trounced the Brazilians 3-0 to lift the Cup on home soil. It later emerged Ronaldo had collapsed in the team hotel on the day of the tournament, been taken to hospital and eventually turned up at the stadium alone, insisting he was fit to play.

Even a Brazilian parliamentary inquiry has failed to unearth the full truth.

But that was only the start of his problems. The 1998-9 campaign saw the player known in Italy as 'il fenomeno' (the phenomenon) frequently injured.

The following campaign was even worse with Ronaldo injuring his knee against Lecce in November and his only subsequent appearance was that ill-fated seven-minute outing in Rome.

Last season was a complete wipeout with the Brazilian not getting a look-in and concentrating on his recovery.

It has not all been a disaster. In the meantime Ronaldo has got married and is the father of a son called Ronald.

Last March he made his first tentative steps towards recovery when he appeared at Rio's legendary Maracana Stadium, albeit in a very tame charity match.

He has since cranked up his rehabilitation and scored in both his friendly appearances for Inter in August against Enyimba of Nigeria and French outfit Bastia.

But Thursday will be the acid test. A goal would only be a bonus - but the important thing is that he gets through unscathed.

An incident-free return would enable Ronaldo to start thinking ahead to next year's World Cup in Japan and South Korea although the once-mighty Brazilians are by no means sure of qualification.

But at present the man who may still fulfil the hype that surrounded him four years ago will be keen just to get a few games under his belt.



PHOTO: INTERNET
Inter Milan superstar Ronaldo talking to the press during a media conference at the team's training base in Appiano Gentile on September 19.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

AFP, Milan

Injury nightmare of Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo who was Wednesday selected for his club's first-team squad for Thursday's UEFA Cup first round tie with Brasov in Trieste.

1998

July 12: World Cup Final, Stade de France, Paris: Journalists are stunned when the team sheets handed out 45 minutes before kick-off show that Brazil coach Maro Zagallo had omitted Ronaldo, who had been hyped as the star of the tournament.

Minutes later a second sheet is handed out with Ronaldo's name restored to the starting line-up but the forward is clearly out of sorts as France thrash the tournament favourites 3-0 in the final.

It later emerges that Ronaldo had collapsed in the team hotel on the day of the final in an incident still not entirely explained. He had turned up at the stadium on his own and told Zagallo he was fit to play.

September 25: Tendon problems put Ronaldo on the sidelines at Inter with the suggestion that surgery may be required. The injury reoccurs at various times during the season.

2000

April 12: Restored to Inter's first team for the away match in Rome with Lazio. But only seven minutes after appearing as a substitute he completely ruptures the operated tendon and is carried off in agony.

Day later he undergoes another operation in Paris.

November 30: Operated on by Professor Gerard Saillant at the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital in Paris.

2001

March 6: Returns from Brazil to Milan before heading off to consult Saillant in Paris.

March 8: Saillant declares his patient 'clinically cured'. He returns to Rio de Janeiro for a month.

March 28: Plays a friendly at Rio's famous Maracana Stadium, scoring five goals in a charity match.

June 2001: Plays a friendly for Inter against Sant'Angelo Lodigiano and then heads off on holiday.

July 2001: Reports to Piretina training ground at Appiano Gentile with the rest of Inter's first-team squad to prepare for new season. Pro-gresses well.

On the 23rd he featured against Bormiese in a friendly.

August 19: Plays at the San Siro for the first time in nearly two years playing for more than half an hour and scoring in the 7-0 win over Enyimba of Nigeria, his first genuine test.

August 31: Scores twice as a substitute in friendly 4-2 win over Bari.

September 19: Inter coach Hector Cuper names Ronaldo in his squad for the UEFA Cup first round tie with Brasov of Romania.

Romario back for Boca tie

Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Romario should be fit for Vasco da Gama's Copa Mercosur tie against Argentine side Boca Juniors on September 25 despite pains in his recently operated knee, Vasco said on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old goal king, who helped Brazil to lift the 1994 United States World Cup, had surgery on

his left knee a month ago and says the wound is still painful.

"It's nothing serious, we have already checked there is no bleeding at the point where we operated," said club doctor Fernando Mattar. "We have decided to hold him back for another game just to make sure," he added.

Vasco lie 19th in the Brazilian championship largely due to a string of injuries to key players including Brazil international Juninho Paulista.

Milan fined for firecracker incident

Football

AFP, Milan

Milan fan threw a firecracker during Sunday's 2-1 win over Udinese at Udine, injuring a security guard who caught it to prevent injury to other supporters.

"The gravity of the consequences of this irresponsible behaviour of the supporters means that the incident undoubtedly deserved punishment," the disciplinary committee said.

The fine was imposed after a