



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



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 Hellmut 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.

"The second-half performance was fantastic and I have nothing but the highest praise for the players.

"But I'm absolutely devastated and it's hard to take after the way we played," he told ITV television.

Celtic had launched a superb fightback after going 2-0 down to a brace of David Trezeguet goals either side of halftime.

Stilian Petrov had pulled one back and the cosmopolitan Scots were given hope when Juventus midfielder Edgar Davids - returning to action after a four-month suspension for a failed drugs test - was sent off for a second bookable offence going into the final quarter.

group E game, Porto won 2-1 at Norway's Rosenborg with goals from Brazilians Pena and Deco.

Meanwhile at Old Trafford, England captain Beckham was a relieved man after his late winner for the Red Devils against Lille.

"It's important to get the win as it's our first game - especially as we were at home. We're pleased to get the result," Beckham said.

"We could have played better but some games go like that. We kept going to the end and got our reward.

"We kept battling and working hard and if you do that you're going to get a break - and luckily for us it was right at the end.



OFF YOU GO: Juventus' Dutch star Edgar Davids (C) being 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.

Results at a glance

Collated Champions League results on Tuesday:

Group E
At Turin, Italy
Juventus (Ita) 3 (Trezeguet 43, 55, Amoruso 89-pen) Celtic (Sco) 2 (Petrov 66, Larsson 85-pen)

At Trondheim, Norway
Rosenborg (Nor) 1 (Rushfeldt 90) Porto (Por) 2 (Pena 10, Deco 60)

Group F
At Lyon, France
Lyon (Fra) 0 Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Kirsten 75)

At Istanbul
Fenerbahce (Tur) 0 Barcelona (Spa) 3 (Kluivert 25, Andersson 28, Saviola 66)

Group G
At Manchester, England
Manchester United (Eng) 1 (Beckham 90) Lille (Fra) 0

At La Coruna, Spain
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 2 (Fran 22, Valeron 90) Olympiakos (Gre) 2 (Giannakopoulos 80, Ofori Quay 84)

Group H
At Moscow
Spartak Moscow (Rus) 2 (Robson 62, Bechastnykh 69) Feyenoord (Ned) 2 (Bosvelt 12, Tomasson 59)

At Munich, Germany
Bayern Munich (Ger) 0 Sparta Prague (Cze) 0

Return of the phenomenon



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 ill-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 gave 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

UEFA Cup preview

Ronaldo comeback hogs headlines



AFP, Paris

Injury-plagued Inter Milan star Ronaldo is poised to make his long-awaited return to competitive football as the bulk of UEFA Cup first round matches get underway on Thursday.

The Brazilian former world footballer of the year was named in Inter's squad for their first leg match against Romanian minnows Brasov, the Serie A side hinted on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, out since April 2000 when he injured his knee just seven minutes into a comeback from another long-term injury, appears confident he will be called up.

"I am returning in Europe, I am returning in a real match," said Ronaldo on Inter's website.

"I can't wait for that feeling you get the night before a real match. Tomorrow will be a special day, when you travel away with the team it is something special."

Inter coach Hector Cuper will name his travelling party later Wednesday.

Meanwhile Inter striker Christian Vieri will not be playing however. The Italian international centre forward still has an inflamed Achilles tendon which kept him out of their World Cup qualifier against Lithuania earlier this month.

Inter Milan, three-times UEFA Cup champions during the 90s, could not give a date for Vieri's return.

Inter's cross town rivals AC Milan, five-time former European Cup winners, start their UEFA Cup campaign in Belarus without Portuguese playmaker Rui Costa.

Milan, coached by Turkey's Fatih Terim, had hoped for the return of Rui Costa against Borisov after injuring his hand and right arm on their opening Italian league match against Brescia three weeks ago.

The terrorism atrocities in the United States had brought about the postponing of the fixtures by one week from last Thursday but it was not long enough to see the attacking midfielder back in the frame.

Rui Costa still has restricted movement in the arm and preferred to delay his comeback by a few days but should be back for Sunday's Italian League match against Lazio.

England's Leeds, who reached the European Champions League semi-finals last season, have a selection crisis in midfield for their

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 Ronaldo.

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.



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 of Romania 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 recurs at various times during the season.

1999

November 21: During Inter's match with Lecce at the San Siro he partially ruptures a tendon in the right knee.

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

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.

A day later he undergoes another operation in Paris.

November-December: Undergoes a rehabilitation course in Cap-Breton, France.

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 Pinetina training ground at Appiano Gentile with the rest of Inter's first-team squad to prepare for new season. Progresses well.

On the 23rd he featured against Borussia Dortmund 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 Bastia.

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



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



AFP, Milan

Italian First Division side AC Milan were Tuesday fined 50,000 dollars by football disciplinary chiefs under tough new anti-hooliganism laws, ANSA news agency reported.

The fine was imposed after a

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.