

Real really confident



AFP, Paris

Real Madrid, buoyed by their 5-1 win against Espanyol at the weekend, seek to consolidate their flying European Champions League start at home to Anderlecht on Wednesday.

After their first win in four Spanish League games, a third straight Champions League victory in this 2001/2002 campaign should ensure Real of a second round spot as they chase their ninth European crown.

France's Zinedine Zidane, the most expensive player in the world after being signed in the summer for 66 million dollars from Juventus, is suspended for their fixture against the Belgian club.

Strikers Fernando Morientes and Guti are also doubtful with injury problems but it's not clear they would regain their places anyway because of the outstanding form of Pedro Munitis.

In the other Group A game, Fabio Capello's AS Roma host Lokomotiv Moscow and the Italian side are still winless following their first two fixtures.

Now Capello hopes for a first European victory following the 2-1 defeat by Real Madrid and the 0-0 draw with Anderlecht.

But he will be aware that Roma still have a lot of work to do if they are to recover their scintillating form of last season.

Of primary concern is the form of Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta who has not scored since the Super Cup win, equalling the worst period

of the 10 years in Italy that have seen him score 172 Serie A goals.

Against Anderlecht the Argentinian at least got into positions but spurned several chances - against Fiorentina he never got a sniff. Capello may well start the Lokomotiv match with Vincenzo Montella alongside Marco Delvecchio.

England's Liverpool go into their Group B match at home to Ukrainian side Dynamo Kiev at Anfield on Wednesday without in-form England striker Michael Owen. The frontman injured his hamstring in last weekend's 1-0 English Premiership victory over Tottenham.

Owen's place in the line-up is likely to be taken by Finnish international Jari Litmanen, who scored a superb solo goal against Tottenham although could Gerard Houllier could take England forward Robbie Fowler off the bench instead.

Kiev are languishing at the bottom of the pool after taking just one point from two matches and are desperate for a victory to relaunch their European campaign.

Dynamo are likely to be without injured defender Yuri Dmitrulin and out-of-form Andrei Husin.

Borussia Dortmund are set to field the same team at Portuguese club Boavista as played in Saturday's 1-1 German League draw against Bayer Leverkusen.

Dortmund are still without long-term injury victims Jorg Heinrich, France's Guy Demel, Giuseppe Reina and Ghanaian international Otto Addo against the surprise group pacesetters from Porto.

Arsenal captain Tony Adams is ruled out of the Group C match against Panathinaikos in Athens on

Wednesday, adding to manager Arsene Wenger's defensive problems as England centre-back Sol Campbell is already out with a hamstring injury.

French midfielder Gilles Grimandi, an emergency defender against Bolton, is also out with a calf muscle problem.

But Arsenal do have England centre-back Martin Keown available after a one-match ban. He is likely to be partnered by 22-year-old Matthew Upson.

Schalke 04, with no points so far, have their backs to the wall in their

Wednesday's fixtures

European Champions League fixtures on Wednesday:

Group A

Real Madrid (Spa) v Anderlecht (Bel)

AS Roma (Ita) v Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)

Group B

Boavista (Por) v Borussia Dortmund (Ger)

Liverpool (Eng) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)

Group C

Panathinaikos (Gre) v Arsenal (Eng)

Schalke 04 (Ger) v Real Mallorca (Spa)

Group D

PSV Eindhoven (Ned) v Lazio (Ita)

Nantes (Fra) v Galatasaray (Tur)

Group C clash at home to Real Mallorca. "If we don't win, the situation will have become critical," said coach Huub Stevens.

Stevens still has to make do in the absence of last year's German league top scorer Ebbe Sand of Denmark and Belgian international Marc Wilmots, both out injured.

New Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni has a lot on his mind as he prepares for their Group D clash with Dutch side PSV Eindhoven.

Before Sunday night's 2-0 defeat at the San Siro by his former club AC Milan in Zaccheroni's first game in charge things were bad enough for the coach who replaced the sacked Dino Zoff on Thursday.

Still winless in the domestic league Lazio are bottom of their first-round group and victory on Wednesday at the Phillips Stadium is a must.

But Sunday's match left four players with injuries that are likely to rule them out of the match with PSV. Club captain Alessandro Nesta injured ligaments and Argentinian forward Hernan Crespo was replaced at the interval with a similar problem in his left knee.

Two other players - Giuseppe Favalli and Dino Baggio - also picked up knocks and all four are unlikely to play against the Dutch side.

Nantes striker Marama Vahirua returns in their Group D match at home to Turkish club Galatasaray but that will not compensate for the absence of Romanian front man Viorel Moldovan.

Moldovan suffered a muscular tear in their French League match against Lyon on Saturday and will be out for at least two months.

Everthing fine with Carlos



REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid will be relieved to go into their Champions League game at home to Anderlecht on Wednesday with a potentially damaging row involving Roberto Carlos apparently resolved.

Real are riding high in Europe once again after two wins out of two in group A and they finally got their domestic campaign rolling on Saturday with a 5-1 victory at home to Espanyol.

However, the team's sparkling football has been overshadowed in recent days by a perceived problem with Roberto Carlos, with newspapers reporting the Brazilian fullback was ready to leave Real after being told his contract would not be renegotiated.

But the Brazilian went public for the first time on Tuesday to insist he has no problem with the attitude of the club - and no intention to leave.

"Everything is fine," Roberto Carlos told the club's official website.

"I've never asked for more money and I've never said I wanted to leave the club at the end of the season."

Club sporting director Jorge Valdano met the Brazilian on the eve of Saturday's game and told him the new contract he had signed the previous year was not up for renegotiation.

In an apparent response, Roberto Carlos celebrated his goal on Saturday by holding a finger up to his ear - a gesture that was interpreted by the Spanish media as a call for the club directors to listen to him.



ROBERTO CARLOS

The player gave a different explanation, though, saying he was dedicating the goal to his daughter, who had been sick, and on Tuesday he sought to clear up the matter entirely.

"I'm professional enough to score a goal and speak in the dress-

ing room with Valdano, where no one else sees," he said.

"I'm not going to make an issue. My image has always been clean and I've always tried to behave correctly."

"Scoring goals is the best thing possible and I'll always dedicate

them to someone."

He added: "I'm not disappointed and nothing out of the ordinary has happened. I didn't speak after the meeting because we had an important game. The club are treating me well."

Meanwhile, Emilio Butragueno, a former player at Real and now one of the officials of the club, said on Monday that Carlos has no intentions to leave Madrid.

"Roberto Carlos deserves the admiration of all of us. He is a great player and greatly beloved. As to the rumors on his leaving, I can prove they have no reliable basis," commented Butragueno.

Moreover, the Real official said he is agitated on the recent interest on the players' wages, saying there is no need to publicly expatiate the figures.

"I don't think it is necessary to talk publicly about the players' wages and bonuses, as those are the confidential issues of the club board. Recently, Roberto Carlos had a meeting with the club officials and conducted negotiated over all possible points. There are no disagreements between the club and Roberto, and he is going to please 'inchada' with his brilliant game," said Butragueno.

The attacking form of the Brazilian has been one of the highlights of the season so far and coach Vicente del Bosque will once again look for him to push forward down the left flank, linking with either Santiago Solari or Steve McManaman.

With Fernando Morientes fit again, but still short of match practice, Pedro Munitis is likely to continue up front alongside Raul as Real look to make it three wins out of three in Europe this season.

Spurs, MU for Sept. 11 victims?

AFP, Washington

Benefit football exhibitions involving such teams as Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur are being discussed as a fund-raiser for families of victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The Washington Post reported here Monday that talks of matches are in very early stages, but that the two English Premiership sides might try to host exhibitions against US foes in November.

D.C. United of Major League Soccer has been mentioned as a possible opponent and the MetroStars, New York's MLS squad, is another likely squad in the wake of terrorist attacks that collapsed New York's World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon.

European champion Bayern Munich has been discussed as a possible exhibition foe for D.C. United here next year.

The Washington club and its Women's United Soccer Association counterpart, the Washington Freedom, have agreed to play a pair of double-headers against New York rivals MetroStars and New York Power.

The matches are set for October 27 or 28 at East Rutherford, New Jersey and here on November 3. Two such man-woman double-headers drew more than 30,000 spectators to RFK Stadium here this year. The Freedom outdrew most MLS clubs.



AFP, Rome

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni has a lot on his mind as he prepares for Wednesday's Champions League clash with Dutch side PSV Eindhoven.

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Still winless in the domestic league Lazio are bottom of their first-round group and victory on Wednesday at the Phillips Stadium is a must.

But Sunday's match left four players with injuries that are likely to rule them out of the match with PSV. Club captain Alessandro Nesta injured ligaments in his right knee against Milan and Argentinian forward Hernan Crespo was replaced at the interval with a similar problem in his left knee.

Two other players - Giuseppe Favalli and Dino Baggio - also picked up knocks and all four are unlikely to play against the Dutch side.

They join five other probable absentees on the treatment table. They are Dutch defender Jaap

Stam, who is struggling to be fit to face his former club, Yugoslav international defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, Paolo Negro and midfielders Giuliano Giannicheda and Karel Poborsky, a Czech.

The defence is particularly badly hit with Nesta, Mihajlovic, Negr



ALBERTO ZACCHERONI

and Stam all likely absentees.

Zaccheroni admitted it brought back memories of last season when his AC Milan side narrowly failed to qualify for the Champions League quarter-finals with an injury list at the time the coach called "the worst he had known in 20 years in football".

Zac was sacked by Milan president Silvio Berlusconi when Milan only drew their final second phase match with Spain's Deportivo La

Putting up a brave face

AFP, Seoul

South Korean World Cup organisers sought Tuesday to play down fears that the international terrorism crisis would hit attendances at next year's finals.

Although a security review has been ordered, Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KOWOC) co-chairman Chung Mong-Joon would not be drawn on whether the US terror attacks had slowed ticket sales.

But he indicated organisers were not worried.

"In general, demand is 10 times higher than supply for tickets," Chung told a briefing for foreign reporters when asked about the threat. "Terrorist attacks should have no impact on our lives."

KOWOC and South Korean security authorities have already ordered an anti-terrorism review which will include extra security forces, heightened surveillance of people entering the country and a no-fly zone over stadiums.

President Kim Dae-Jung reaffirmed again Tuesday that the country had to be ready to confront any terrorist threat to the World Cup and the Asian Games, which will also be held in South Korea next year.

There are just over three million tickets for the World Cup matches which will be played in South Korea and Japan from May 31 next year.

South Korea is selling its final 300,000 tickets for matches in the country now.

Chung reaffirmed KOWOC estimates that 400,000 people would visit South Korea for the finals. "This is the largest event in the history of Korea in terms of impact. We want to show the new image of Korea that it is politically and economically different."

Despite his confidence, Chung will go to Europe next week to help with a World Cup promotion campaign. The KOWOC co-chairman will give a speech and give interviews in Paris on October 5.

The Korean authorities are sending three groups of musicians to Rome, Madrid, the German city of Cologne and Paris to promote the tournament for which South Korea has spent two billion dollars on 10 new stadiums.

According to latest figures, the World Cup will also be the most popular television sports event ever.

Chung said there were 19.6 billion television viewers for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. "For the 1998 World Cup in France there were 37 billion viewers and we expect 42 billion next year and if China qualifies 60 billion."

Overmars out for three weeks

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona's Dutch international winger Marc Overmars will be out of action for up to three weeks after suffering a viral infection, the club revealed Monday.

The 28-year-old had been called up for Tuesday's Champions League match with Bayer Leverkusen after missing the past four matches with a knee injury.

Overmars has been replaced by Gerard Lopez in a match involving the two Group F table toppers, who both won their opening matches last week.

Lazio suffer double blow

REUTERS, Milan

Lazio's attempts to get their season back on course suffered a setback when Italy international Alessandro Nesta and Argentine striker Hernan Crespo were ruled out for six weeks with thigh injuries.

Lazio skipper Nesta will now miss Italy's World Cup qualifier against Hungary in Parma on October 6, in which Giovanni Trapattoni's side need a point to secure a place in next year's finals.

Striker Crespo was top scorer for Lazio in the last two seasons and his absence will severely dent their hopes of progressing in the Champions League.

The Rome club lost their opening games to Galatasaray and Nantes and have since replaced coach Dino Zoff with Alberto Zaccheroni.

But there was some good news for Zaccheroni with the injuries to midfielders Giuseppe Favalli and Dino Baggio said by Campi to be less serious than expected.

The pair have been included in the squad to face PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Dutch defender Jaap Stam is, however, ruled out of the game against his old club because of a foot injury.



PHOTO: AFP

Aston Villa's Moroccan international Mustapha Hadji (R), battles for possession with Southampton's Rory Delap at Southampton on September 24.

Premiership Villa climb to fifth



AFP, London

Aston Villa moved into fifth place in the English Premiership and ensured Southampton stayed bottom of the table with a 3-1 away win on Monday.

Two goals in six minutes from George Boateng and Juan Pablo Angel put Villa 2-0 up before Latvian forward Marian Pahars pulled one back for Southampton in the final seconds of the first-half.

Both sides had a player sent off in the second half before Mustapha Hadji ensured Villa maintained their unbeaten start to the season with a goal 11 minutes from time.

Southampton in their first floodlit match at the new St Mary's Stadium and their first without central defender Dean Richards, taken by former boss Glenn Hoddle to Tottenham for 8.1 million pounds (12 million dollars), started brightly.

Villa captain and former Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel made a good save from a Kevin Davies' header following a Rory Delap cross.

Then in the ninth minute Villa took the lead. Dion Dublin played in Boateng who blasted the ball past

Veron better than Cantona: Scholes



AFP, London

Juan Sebastian Veron has upstaged Manchester United legend Eric Cantona and is a better player than the controversial Frenchman, according to Old Trafford favourite Paul Scholes.

Scholes believes Veron will lead United to more glory than Cantona, who retired in 1997 after playing a key role in United's emergence as the all-conquering force of English football.

"I think Juan is a better player than Eric to be honest. In terms of his all-round game I think he will go on and do more than Eric has done," Scholes told Tuesday's Daily Mail.

"Don't get me wrong, Eric was amazing, but I just think Juan's got a bit more. He's involved in the game all the time - he can create goals and score goals. He can do just anything."

"He treats every game the same

Southampton keeper Paul Jones. Villa went 2-0 up six minutes later when a neat passing move initiated by Angel ended with the Colombian slipping the ball under the advancing Jones.

Schmeichel was called on again when another fine left-handed save saw Davies' 18-yard strike turned away.

But just before the end of the first half, diminutive Latvian Pahars headed home from Davies' fine cross to pull one back for Southampton.

Tempers frayed early in the second half with two red cards issued by referee Steve Dunn. First to go in the 52nd minute was Delap deemed to have denied Kachoul a clear goalscoring chance when he clipped his heels.

Then four minutes later, Dublin

departed in controversial circumstances. From a free-kick Southampton defender Tahar El Khalej, stood next to Dublin, went down in the Villa box.

Referee Dunn consulted with both linesmen before sending off Dublin for what was presumably a headbutt although television replays suggested minimal, if any contact, at best.

Villa had to do their fair share of defending but just after Southampton boss Stuart Gray had gambled on a double substitution the visitors wrapped up the points.

Lee Hendrie's 79th minute cross from a throw-in caught the Southampton defence napping and unmarked Moroccan Hadji made no mistake with the free header for his first Aston Villa goal.

Premiership's top six												
English Premiership table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):												
Leeds	6	4	2	0	9	1	14					
Bolton	7	3	3	1	10	4	12					
Arsenal	6	3	2	1	14	5	11					
Man United	6	3	2	1	17	10	11					
Aston Villa	5	2	3	0	7	3	9					
Chelsea	5	2	3	0	9	6	9					

Adams misses trip to Greece

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Tony Adams will miss his side's Champions League match in Athens on Wednesday, the English Premiership side confirmed Monday.

Adams' absence adds to Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger's defensive problems for their match against Panathinaikos. Adams' fellow England centre-back Sol Campbell is already out with a hamstring injury.

Adams, 34, was recalled for Saturday's 1-1 Premiership draw with Bolton after three matches out with a foot injury. But he struggled in that match and further foot and groin problems have ruled him out of Wednesday's Group C match.

French midfielder Gilles Grimandi, an emergency defender against Bolton, is also out with a calf muscle problem.

But Arsenal do have England centre-back Martin Keown available after a one-match ban. He is likely to be partnered by 22-year-old Matthew Upson.