

Real class but Liverpool labour



AFP, Paris

Eight-time winners Real Madrid beat Anderlecht 4-1 in the European Champions League on Wednesday for their third straight win - and still without the world's most expensive player.

The legendary Spaniards may feel the 66 million dollars they paid Juventus for mercurial Frenchman Zinedine Zidane will prove money well spent - but do they actually need him?

Zidane, suspended for five matches because the red mist descended last season in a miserable time for Juve in Europe, has sat out the Spaniards' Champions League campaign so far and the "meringues" have not batted an eyelid, so crammed with talent is their midfield.

Belgium's Anderlecht were the latest lambs to the slaughter in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium and will possibly have mulled how much greater the damage might have been had Zidane been around to help improve on their performance.

The Belgians had the temerity to take the lead but then fell away as they went down to a defeat of exactly the same magnitude as they suffered in Madrid in last year's competition.

A double strike from Spanish international striker Raul and further efforts from Albert Celades and Santiago Solari rubbed out Aruna Dindane's 33rd-minute opener.

"We had a few difficult moments in the first half," admitted Real coach Vicente Del Bosque.

"But in the second half we sought and found inspiration, although in Brussels it will be a different ball game."

Real, basking in their centenary year, now have a healthy five-point lead in Group A and another point will see them through.

Should they go all the way to lift the trophy in Glasgow next May - which would make it three successes in five seasons - they might even manage to pay off most of the Zidane bill.

AS Roma lie second after beating Lokomotiv Moscow 2-1 with Francesco Totti hitting the winner after the Russians had been ahead - but the Italians are surely playing for second place at best.

While Real celebrated another convincing win there was misery for



PHOTO: INTERNET

Ace striker Raul of Real Madrid is congratulated by teammates Roberto Carlos (L) and Solari (R) after he scored his second goal against Anderlecht during their Champion's League match.

Lazio, as they sank to the bottom of Group D with a 1-0 defeat at PSV Eindhoven of Holland to remain without a single point and give new coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who replaced the sacked Dino Zoff after last week's 3-1 defeat by Nantes, much unpleasant food for thought.

PSV defender Kevin Hofland gave the Dutchmen a first-half lead minutes after Argentinian midfielder Diego Simeone was carried off injured further limiting the options of the injury-hit Lazio boss and in the dying minutes Lazio had looked what looked a cast-iron penalty denied when substitute Simone Inzaghi was fouled by PSV goalkeeper Ivica Kralj.

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti slammed Scottish referee Michael McCurry afterwards.

"The refereeing was scandalous," he said. "Italy has no representation at international (administrative) level, there is no-one to make his voice heard over the referees who continue to penalise our teams," said Cragnotti, upset at



PHOTO: INTERNET

Liverpool's Jari Litmanen celebrates after scoring what proved to be the only goal against Dynamo Kiev during their Champions League match on Wednesday.

the penalty that wasn't.

French champions Nantes still head the table but lost 1-0 at home to Turkey's Galatasaray to an untidy effort from Seren Yalcin.

English sides enjoyed mixed fortunes.

Four-time European Cup winners Liverpool, who had not been impressive in drawing at home to Portugal's Boavista and at Borussia Dortmund, thanked stand-in striker and Finnish star Jari Litmanen for the only goal of the game at Anfield against Dynamo Kiev.

Boavista, in for the injured Michael Owen, justified coach Gerard Houllier's decision to leave Robbie Fowler on the bench as Liverpool went second in Group B with five points.

But Boavista lead the way with seven points after beating Dortmund, the 1997 champions, 2-1 in Portugal.

Houllier was relieved to see his men finally get the win bonus.

"I'm very pleased that we've managed to get our first Champions League win this season, but I just felt that we could have sealed the result," said Houllier, who was disappointed about a plethora of missed chances.

"We created good chances, but we missed two or three sitters," the Liverpool boss told ITV television.

There was huge disappointment for Arsenal, quarterfinalists last season, as they crashed to their second Group C defeat, 1-0 at Panathinaikos, which leaves them facing elimination.

A goal by midfielder Giorgios Karagounis in the 25th minute kept the unfancied Greeks on top and maintained their 100 per cent record after Martin Keown and Thierry Henry spurned late chances for Arsene Wenger's men.

Real Mallorca, coached by German Bernd Krauss, boosted their prospects with a 1-0 win at Schalke 04 and are tucked in in second place behind Panathinaikos with six points from three games.

STANDINGS

Champions League tables after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Group A						
Real Madrid	3	3	0	0	10	2
AS Roma	3	1	1	1	3	3
Anderlecht	3	0	2	1	2	5
Lokomotiv Moscow	3	0	1	2	2	1
Group B						
Boavista	3	2	1	0	6	3
Liverpool	3	1	2	0	2	1
Borussia Dortmund	3	0	2	1	3	4
Dynamo Kiev	3	0	1	2	3	1
Group C						
Panathinaikos	3	3	0	0	5	0
Real Mallorca	3	2	0	1	2	2
Arsenal	3	1	0	2	3	4
Schalke 04	3	0	0	3	2	0
Group D						
Nantes	3	2	0	1	7	3
PSV Eindhoven	3	2	0	1	5	6
Galatasaray	3	2	0	1	3	3
Lazio	3	0	0	3	1	5

Guardiola relieved

AFP, Brescia

Former Spanish international Josep Guardiola completed his signing for Italian Serie A side Brescia here Wednesday and said he was glad to be back in football action.

Guardiola, 30, has been inactive since he parted company with Barcelona in the summer and is raring to get back into action after signing a one-year contract with another season.

"A lot of clubs were interested in me," said the player nicknamed "Pep".

"But in the end I came here because Brescia was the team that showed the most interest in me and showed itself interested and convinced in me."

"In these two months I have been without a team but have trained a lot but I need to get match-fit again: we will see how I feel in the next few days and how the gaffer feels: I must work to earn my place."

In fact Brescia coach Carlo Mazzone, at 64 the oldest in Serie A, had seemed less than keen on a deal for Guardiola.

Speaking on Tuesday before the deal was struck, Mazzone said: "Guardiola is a great player, the best in the world in his position. But in his position we are already sorted out. I told the president so but if he buys him I have no problems training him and getting him in condition to play."

Korea might allow alcohol

INTERNET, Seoul

Unlike Japan, South Korea may permit fans to drink beer during World Cup finals.

Co-chairman of South Korea World Cup Organising Committee Chung Mong-joon thinks beer drinking is not hooliganism.

He said: "I am all for the sale of beer at the stadiums." His committee will co-operate with domestic and international agencies to strengthen security during the games.

However, irrespective of South Korea's intention, the world football governing body, FIFA, is expected to take a final decision about alcohol

Reds in trouble over Ziege deal

INTERNET, London

Premier League trial launched against Liverpool FC for making an illegal approach for Middlesbrough FC former player Christian Ziege, now with Tottenham Hotspur FC, still continues. Liverpool is to face a 2.5 million pounds compensation bill.

The charges follow a 10-month investigation into allegations made by Middlesbrough, insisting that transfer rules were broken by Merseysiders, who bought Ziege for 5.5 million pounds at the start of the last season.

Both Liverpool and Ziege have been given 14 days to respond to the charges and may face a Premier League disciplinary commission.

A Premier League spokesman told the Press Association: "I can confirm that Liverpool and Christian Ziege have been charged by the Premier League.

If the charges are proved, Middlesbrough will get a compensation for a player, valued at 8 million pounds.

In response to the accusations, Liverpool said: "We will fight to clear our name because the accusations are not true."

Premiership

Solano strikes for Newcastle

REUTERS, Newcastle

Nolberto Solano fired Newcastle United to a 1-0 victory over Premier League strugglers Leicester City on Wednesday.

The Peruvian struck in the 33rd minute, steering a first-time shot past City keeper Ian Walker after Craig Bellamy surged into the left-hand side of the area and supplied a superb square pass.

Skipper Alan Shearer and Frenchman Laurent Robert both missed chances to make it 2-0, but their side did enough to avenge the 3-0 drubbing by West Ham United last weekend which ended a 13-match unbeaten run.

"We bounced back, we have given a committed response," said Newcastle manager Bobby Robson. "I told the players they had to be angry with themselves and with each other. Our defense looked solid tonight."

The win moved Newcastle into fifth place in the table and level on 11 points with the two sides above them, Manchester United and Arsenal.

Leicester, with just one win from their first seven games of the season, are languishing second from bottom with five points, two more than Southampton.

Diego's shirt to retire

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Four days before at Boca Juniors' Bombonera stadium, Maradona will wear the Argentine number 10 shirt for the last time in a match in his honour against a world all-star team.

Maradona however explained that there would be a problem with FIFA regulations because World Championships require squads to be numbered from 1 to 22.

"When the moment comes we will ask that the number 10 shirt not be used," Maradona said. At the moment, River Plate's Ariel Ortega usually wears that number.

Maradona played for Argentina between 1977 and 1994, earning 91 caps and scoring 34 goals.

Arguably his most famous goals were scored against England in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals, the first being scored with 'The Hand of

God' and the second a superb solo effort widely described as one of the best World Cup goals of all time.

Argentina went on to win the trophy that year in Mexico for a second time. Four years later in Italy in 1990, Argentina led by a diminished Maradona lost in the final to Germany.

At junior level, Maradona won the world under-20 title in Japan in 1979.

Since the beginning of last year, 40-year-old Maradona has been having treatment for drug abuse at a Cuban clinic.

As far as a future career, Maradona is hoping to gain the Boca Juniors coaching job when Carlos Bianchi departs from the post on December 31 later this year.



A file photo shows Argentine football legend Diego Maradona wearing the shirt of Boca Juniors waving to the players during a league match.

Voeller still hopeful



REUTERS, Gelsenkirchen

Germany for nearly two years.

Germany, who suffered their worst home defeat in 70 years when they were crushed by England in their previous qualifier on September 1 in Munich, are in a very uncomfortable situation.

The triple world champions must beat Finland in their final European group nine match, and hope England do not beat Greece on the same day, if they are to win the group for an automatic spot in next year's finals in Japan and South Korea.

Otherwise, they will face a play-off, against probably Ukraine or Belarus.

Voeller ignored calls to bring back 35-year-old Bayer Leverkusen forward Ulf Kirsten, instead including strikers Carsten Jancker and Oliver Bierhoff in his 20-man group despite the fact both are injured.

There was only one slight surprise in the choice of Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Bernd Schneider, who has not played for

Werner Bremen striker Marco Bode and Bayer Leverkusen midfields Carsten Ramelow, Lars Ricken, Bernd Schneider, Christian Ziege.

Strikers: Oliver Bierhoff, Marco Bode, Carsten Jancker, Miroslav Klose, Oliver Neuville.

Owen renews contract

Football

REUTERS, Liverpool

Michael Owen has signed a new deal with Liverpool that will keep him at the English Premier League club until 2005.

"I am delighted to sign this new contract," the 21-year-old England international, one of Europe's most coveted strikers, said on Wednesday. "There's never been a thought in my mind about any club other than Liverpool."

Owen's current contract was due to expire in two years' time, but he has been in discussion with Liverpool over a new deal since the end of last

season.

A former Liverpool trainee, he has scored 92 goals in 172 games for the club.

Media reports have claimed his new deal is worth in excess of 50,000 pounds (73,670 dollars) a week, making him one of the highest-paid players in English