

Panathinaikos, Porto fire blanks

AFP, Athens

Panathinaikos coach Yiannis Kyrastas said his men had to count on getting a result at group favourites Real Madrid in their next match after they could only eke out a goalless home draw against Porto on Wednesday in their Champions League second phase opener.

"We will try to get back the points we lost tonight in Madrid," said an optimistic Kyrastas after the Group C encounter.

"We should have won this match by at least two or three goals, we missed so many chances.

"I am happy with the performance of the team but angry about the result," Kyrastas said.

"Of course Real Madrid is a very good team, but I feel we can fight for at least a draw in Spain," he insisted.

At least the Greeks maintained their unbeaten home record in the tournament.

They went into the game having won all three first phase matches at the Apostolos Nikolaidis Stadium without conceding a goal. And once again they dominated play against their Portuguese visitors.

Enrique out for five weeks

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona's Spanish international midfielder Luis Enrique faces a five-week injury layoff after straining a thigh in Tuesday's Champions League victory over Liverpool.

A Barcelona doctor said Enrique suffered a recurrence of an old injury in the 14th minute of the Anfield clash won 3-1 by the Catalan giants.

The 31-year-old had only returned to Barca duty last Saturday after two weeks out with a damaged thigh.

Salihamidzic blow for Bayern

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's Bosnian international Hasan Salihamidzic faces up to five months on the sidelines after suffering a serious knee injury, the club said Wednesday.

Salihamidzic suffered a partial rupture of his exterior right knee ligament after clashing with Manchester United's Mikael Silvestre in the 1-1 Champions League clash on Tuesday.

The midfielder now faces surgery with American specialist Richard Steadman in Vail, Colorado.

"It's a blow for us," commented Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

Gunners no match for Deportivo



AFP, Madrid

Two first half-goals from Spanish international striker Diego Tristan and Dutch counterpart Roy Makaay gave Deportivo La Coruna a comfortable 2-0 victory over Arsenal in their European Champions League second-phase Group D encounter on Wednesday.

The victory maintained Deportivo's unbeaten streak in the Champions League this season, and a hold onto their hoodoo over English clubs following their two victories over Premiership title holders Manchester United in the first group phase.

"I said at the start of the season that we don't need to fear anyone and that has proved to be the case," said Deportivo coach Javier Irureta.

"I'm not saying that we will win the Champions League but I think we have shown that Spanish football is not just about Real Madrid and Barcelona," he added.

By contrast, the defeat extended two sorry streaks for Arsenal, whose lack of ammunition up front is making their nickname of The Gunners look somewhat of a misnomer.

The north London outfit have now gone six games, both in domestic and European competition, without a win and they have not won on their last five visits to Spain.

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger made no attempt to look for excuses for another lacklustre performance.

"It is a disappointing result especially in the way we lost the game. I felt we started well in the first five or six minutes but their second goal killed the game and I don't think it was necessary to concede a goal like that.

"We made a good reaction to it in the second half to get back in which we didn't get and it was difficult to get flowing without a goal," said the Frenchman.

Arsenal's scouting videos of the Spanish league leaders were quickly rendered useless when



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's French international Robert Pires (L), being challenged by Deportivo la Coruna's Brazilian veteran Mauro Silva at La Coruna on November 21.

Irureta fulfilled his promise to change his tactics from the usual lone out-and-out target man and sent out Tristan and Makaay as a twin strike force.

The pairing quickly proved their worth.

Makaay, who scored a hat trick in Saturday's 3-1 win in the Spanish First Division over Real Sociedad, added to his tally when he found the net after just nine minutes.

With Arsenal's defence in disarray, Makaay blasted the ball home from just inside the area after Arsenal's Swedish international midfielder Fredrik Ljungberg had miscued a clearance of a Tristan pass and sent it straight to the Dutchman's feet.

seemed to go out of the Deportivo attack when Tristan limped off two minutes later, with what a Deportivo official later called a minor hamstring twinge, to be replaced by former Spanish international Jose Emilio Amavisca.

Wenger replaced the demoralised Wright - who has made several dreadful errors since taking over from the injured first-choice David Seaman - with Stuart Taylor during the break.

However, Wenger insisted that the substitution was because Wright himself had been carrying an injury and was struggling with his fitness.

"He (Wright) felt his knee on the second goal so we decided to change. I don't know if Stuart Taylor will now play at the weekend (against Manchester United). Let's first try to see how bad the injuries are," commented Wenger.

Taylor didn't concede any more goals, although Arsenal seemed to have little answer to the speed of Spanish international Victor Sanchez down the right wing, but rarely did Arsenal look like reducing the deficit in the second half.

The visitors' best chance came four minutes from the whistle when a swerving free kick from Frenchman Thierry Henry curled just wide of the post.

However, the Deportivo defence did an otherwise excellent job of containing Henry and snuffing out any chances of his getting adequate service.

"Of course you need a good start and I feel everything went against us and if you look at possession in the game and shots on goal they looked a little bit more mature and we looked nervous at the start of the game and that belief we have at home in the Champions League was missed," said Wenger.

Tristan, the Spanish First Division's leading scorer, put the hosts two ahead after 25 minutes - an advantage they comfortably maintained until the break.

His fourth Champions League goal in five games came from a right foot shot struck low and hard from 20 metres, which evaded the out-stretched arms of Arsenal's diving goalkeeper Richard Wright.

However, some of the bite

UEFA Cup preview

Rejects get their shout



AFP, Paris

The not so magnificent seven, who tumbled out of the Champions League at the first stage, get a second chance of European glory on Thursday night in the third round of the UEFA Cup.

Celtic, Borussia Dortmund, Mallorca, PSV Eindhoven, Lyon, Lille and Feyenoord all earned consolation prizes of playing in the UEFA Cup after failing to make the grade in the premier competition.

So did Lokomotiv Moscow, but they got their campaign off to a bad start when they lost 2-1 at Hapelloel Tel Aviv on Tuesday.

Martin O'Neill's Celtic have the hardest task of the Champions League also-rans - they travel to

Valencia for their first leg clash. "Our form wasn't great away from home in the Champions League group stages," said striker Chris Sutton.

"However, we did very well in Amsterdam against Ajax and the UEFA Cup is obviously a different set-up but hopefully we can get a result," Sutton told the Celtic website.

City rivals Glasgow Rangers entertain Paris St Germain at Ibrox with Gers' boss Dick Advocaat warning of the dangers posed by Nicolas Anelka.

"They have some good players up front and there is no doubt the main threat will be Anelka because of his pace," said the coach.

Leeds United, Champions League semi-finalists last season, take a depleted squad to face Grasshoppers Zurich.

David O'Leary is still without

Harry Kewell and Mark Viduka who are on Australian World Cup duty in Uruguay, while Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate are both unavailable.

Ipswich Town, winners of the UEFA Cup in 1981, entertain Inter Milan with the Italian's missing strikers Ronaldo and Christian Vieri who are being held back for the Serie A clash with Fiorentina on Sunday.

The cash-strapped Florence side could do with the money that UEFA Cup success brings and they will be looking to advance against French side Lille.

But they are without international striker Enrico Chiesa who has a knee injury and Pedrag Mijatovic who is suspended leaving coach Roberto Mancini with a dilemma over who will partner Nuno Gomez in attack.

UEFA CUP THIRD ROUND, FIRST LEG FIXTURES

- Servette (Swi) v Hertha Berlin (Ger)
- FC Copenhagen (Den) v Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
- PAOK Salonica (Gre) v PSV Eindhoven (Ned)
- Slovan Liberec (Cze) v Majorca (Spa)
- Brondby (Den) v Parma (Ita)
- AEK Athens (Gre) v Lovech (Bul)
- Grasshoppers Zurich (Swi) v Leeds United (Eng)
- Feyenoord (Ned) v Freiburg (Ger)
- FC Bruges (Bel) v Lyon (Fra)
- Fiorentina (Ita) v Lille (Fra)
- Ipswich (Eng) v Inter Milan (Ita)
- Glasgow Rangers (Sco) v Paris SG (Fra)
- AC Milan (Ita) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
- Valencia (Spa) v Celtic (Sco)

TUESDAY
Bordeaux (Fra) 1 Roda JC (Ned) 0
Hapoel Tel-Aviv (Isr) 2 Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 1

* Second legs - December 4 and 6

No Giggs until the new year

AFP, London

Manchester United winger Ryan Giggs will be out of action until the new year after suffering a recurrence of his long-standing hamstring injury, the club confirmed Wednesday.

Giggs missed United's 1-1 Champions League draw with Bayern Munich on Tuesday night after pulling up in training during Monday's training session in Germany.

"Ryan's pulled his hamstring and these things take around six weeks to heal," said United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, speaking on the club's official website.

Welsh international Giggs will miss United's crunch Premiership clash at Arsenal on Sunday as well as home games against Chelsea and Portuguese outfit Boavista in the Champions League.



PHOTO: AFP

A REEF'S WORKOUT IN THE FOG! Swiss referee Meier runs in the foggy Stadio del Alpi (Stadium of the Alps) in Turin to check visibility on November 21.

Fog-forced no-show at Turin



AFP, Turin

The Champions League match between Juventus and Bayer Leverkusen was postponed here Wednesday after thick fog enveloped the Delle Alpi stadium.

Swiss referee Urs Meier ruled the game could not go ahead after a pitch inspection with visibility down to barely 20 metres.

The UEFA match delegate suggested the Group D second phase match would be played next Wednesday.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Champions League second phase results on Wednesday:

- GROUP C**
- At Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 2 (Michalik 30, Sionko 72) Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Zidane 20, Morientes 36, 74)
- At Athens
Panathinaikos (Gre) 0 FC Porto (Por) 0
- GROUP D**
- At La Coruna
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 2 (Makaay 8, Tristan 25) Arsenal (Eng) 0
- At Turin
Juventus (Ita) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) postponed.

Lazio after Owen?

AFP, London

Italian club Lazio are attempting to lure star England striker Michael Owen from Liverpool, the Sun newspaper reported on Thursday.

The 1999/2000 Italian champions have been linked with Owen before, with speculation at one stage suggesting they had paid 1.6 million dollars just for the right to have first refusal on the striker should he ever wish to leave Anfield.

Now Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti has told The Sun: "I want Owen. He is a player I would have liked to have had at Lazio for some time now."

"Owen has the talent of an absolute champion. I think he deserves the European Player of the Year award."

Liverpool later on Thursday dismissed the suggestions. Linked in successive days with Real Madrid and Lazio, Liverpool point out that Owen has only recently signed a new contract that ties him to Anfield until the summer of 2005.

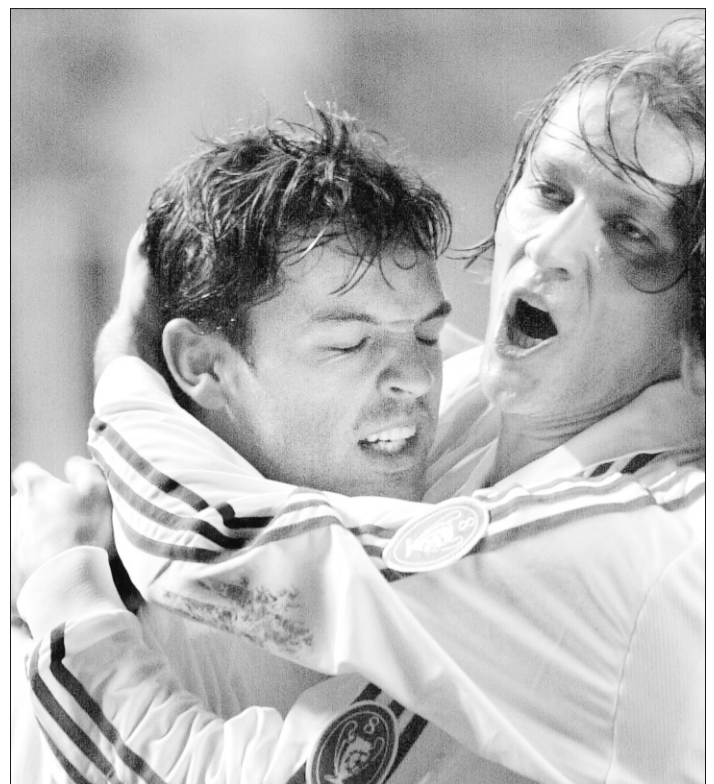


PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes (L), being congratulated by an ecstatic team-mate Michael Salgado on scoring against Sparta Prague at Prague on November 21.

Real rise to the occasion



AFP, Prague

A goal from Zinedine Zidane and two opportunistic efforts from Fernando Morientes gave Real Madrid a winning start to the Champions League second phase on Wednesday in the shape of a 3-2 triumph at Sparta Prague.

Eight-times champions Real, bidding for another triumph in their centenary season, look good for at least a place in the quarters after an away success which gave an early fillip to their hopes of progressing from Group C.

"We had expected a really tough match," said Zidane afterwards.

"But we were very strong tonight. It's a great start for us."

The mercurial Frenchman gave Real a 20th-minute lead with a left foot shot which took a slight deflection to arc high into the net past Czech keeper Petr Cech.

Five minutes later the busy Fernando Morientes was unlucky to see a first-time effort crash against the woodwork.

Sparta, who had impressed throughout their opening phase campaign in qualifying from Group H along with reigning champions Bayern Munich, were causing precious few early problems for the Spanish defence with Lukas Hartig's looping header over Iker Casillas' crossbar a rare half chance on 26 minutes.

Spanish international forwards Raul and Morientes then almost combined for a second on 29 minutes - but the latter skewed his shot off target.

But Sparta, roared on by the 19,000 crowd, equalised out of the blue on the half hour after a comedy of errors in the Real back line.

Francisco Pavon and Fernando Hierro were the chief culprits as Libor Sionko left both of them sliding around in his wake before whipping in a cross from the right for Radoslaw Michalik to smack an instant left foot drive spinning beyond Casillas and into the far corner of the net.

However, Real swiftly recovered from that lapse to regain the lead just six minutes later.

Raul's astute through ball found overlapping full back Michel Salgado and the marauding Morientes gleefully tucked his inch perfect cross from the right into the net from inside the six yard box.

There were some anxious glances from the Real bench five minutes before the break when Zidane's midfield partner Luis Figo went down clutching his lower left leg under a heavy challenge from Michalik.

But the Portuguese international star got up and limped gingerly back into action.

The Czechs tried to turn up the heat after the break but Real looked as if they would hold firm as a Marek Kincl effort flew high and wide on the hour over an untroubled Casillas, a star of Real's 2000 title win.

Jan Flachbart's meaty diagonal drive from 25 metres brought the young Spanish international shot-stopper into belated action, however, as Casillas dived athletically away to his right to palm the effort away.

Zelenka then clubbed a volley from outside the box straight at Casillas, who blocked with his fists as Real breathed again.

But the Czechs scented blood after forcing a succession of corners and their pressure finally paid off with Libor Sionko driving home his second goal of the tournament on 72 minutes with the unfortunate Casillas partially unsighted behind a forest of defenders.

Just as the hosts appeared to be in the ascendancy Real produced the killer blow, a mere two minutes after being pegged back.

Brazilian wingback Roberto Carlos hared down the left and cut inside the area.

Keeper Cech blocked a low shot with his legs but Morientes was onto the loose ball in a flash for a true poacher's goal, his fifth in his last four games.

A Jiri Jarosik header caused a few palpitations in the Real rear-guard ten minutes from time but the visitors, who five minutes from the end introduced England winger Steve McManaman for Morientes, held on.

Socceroos feel Uruguayan heat



AFP, Sydney

The Australian government is to send a top-ranking police officer to oversee increased security for the Australian Socceroos in Uruguay after players received a hostile reception in Montevideo Wednesday.

Several players were spat on by a volatile crowd waiting at the airport when the Australian team arrived for the final leg of their World Cup football playoff with Uruguay.

Australia are taking a 1-0 lead to Montevideo after the home leg in Melbourne on Tuesday.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he called Uruguay ambassador Pablo Sader Thursday and received assurances from him that local police would double their presence at the ground in Sunday's return match.

But an Australian Federal Police officer based in neighbouring Argentina would also travel to Uruguay, Downer said.

"The AFP will be meeting with the director-general of the national police of Uruguay tomorrow morning and he will have the opportunity to discuss further security requirements," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

"The ambassador will be there

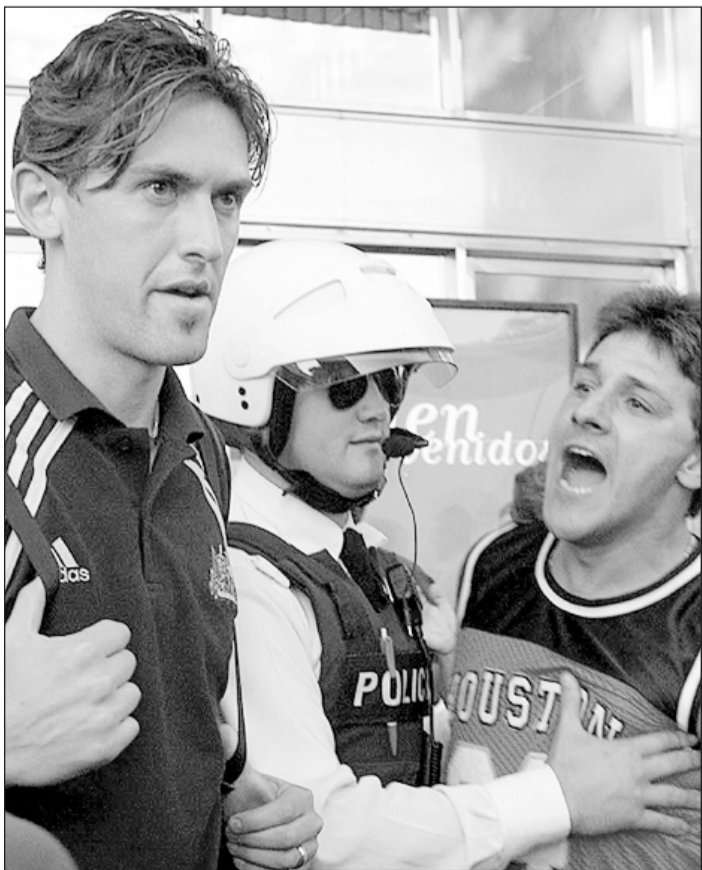


PHOTO: AFP

WELCOME TO URUGUAY! An Uruguayan fan hurls verbal abuse towards an Australian booter on arrival of the Socceroos at the Montevideo International Airport on November 21.

soon as well, she's going from Buenos Aires as well, and so I think with both the ambassador and an AFP police officer intervening that should assist the situation substantially."

Sader said police had not been prepared for the crowd at the airport because there was no tradition of soccer hooliganism in Uruguay.

"In Uruguay we've been playing international games for over a century and an episode like this one never happened before," he told the ABC.

"Ours is a very peaceful and peace-loving country, we don't have a history or a tradition of hooliganism."

Sader said he had spoken to the Uruguay chief of police and been assured the Socceroos would not have any more trouble.

"I was assured by the police that they will guarantee that the Socceroos are not molested again, that they will be able to rest in the hotel, go to the training ground, go to the soccer stadium, go in and out without being disturbed," he said.

But he said he did not think the incident would upset the Australians.

"I don't think this would intimidate the Socceroos, I think they have a moral fibre that goes beyond this sort of thuggish behaviour," Sader said.

Uruguay's defeat to Australia got an angry reception back home with 20 people injured and 74 people arrested before and during the match.