

## English League Cup Rovers send Gunners packing

Football

AFP, London

Blackburn Rovers dumped under-strength Arsenal out of the League Cup Wednesday with exciting young striker Matt Jansen scoring a hat-trick in a comprehensive 4-0 win at Ewood Park.

In the other quarter-final tie, Arsenal's bitter north London rivals Tottenham trounced Bolton 6-0 at White Hart Lane with former England hitman Les Ferdinand matching Jansen's feat with his own treble.

Even though they are just 90 minutes from a place in the final, Rovers boss Graeme Souness insisted his priority is to ensure his side consolidate their position in the league.

"Our priority is the Premiership League," Souness told ITV. "We've got a hard game against Newcastle (on Saturday) but if we go there with this determination we'll have a wee chance."

"I've been around too long to think of anything other than the next game."

Souness was pleased his side took their chances after missing a handful of opportunities in recent home games against Leeds and Middlesbrough.

"We put our chances away - which is the difference between tonight and Sunday's game (against Leeds), and the game against Middlesbrough."

Showing nine changes from the side that beat Aston Villa in the Premiership on Sunday, Arsenal were dead and buried when Rovers took control with three goals in a stunning 10-minute first-half spell.

A dreadful mistake by Japan international Junichi Inamoto gifted Jansen the opening goal after 11 minutes and the former Crystal Palace marksman doubled his tally four minutes later with an easy tap-in.

Veteran striker Mark Hughes added a third goal for Rovers after 21 minutes to give the Gunners a

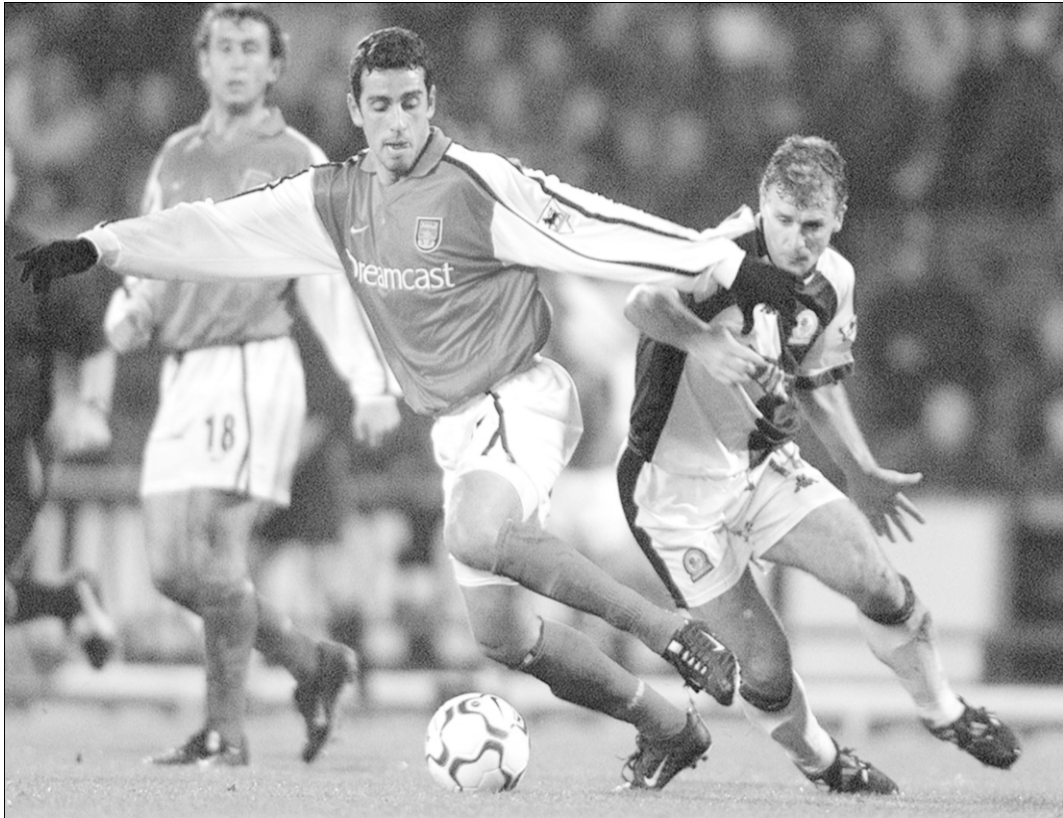


PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's Edu is in control against Mark Hughes of Blackburn during their League Cup clash at Ewood Park on December 11.

mountain to climb. Damien Duff almost increased Blackburn's lead before the interval but his low shot struck the inside of a post and bounced away to safety.

Jansen, being tipped to become a full England international in the near future, completed his hat-trick on 68 minutes as Blackburn cruised into the semi-finals of the much-maligned cup competition.

The defeat was disappointing for the Gunners who have enjoyed a run of good fortune of late, with coach Arsene Wenger's signing of a contract extension last week followed by a comeback win over Villa.

That was capped on Monday by Arsenal's plans for a new 60,000-seater stadium in north London

being given the go-ahead at a local council meeting.

Ferdinand struck his hat-trick in a nine-minute first-half spell as Spurs overwhelmed Bolton to reach the last four.

The former Newcastle man, who had to shrug off an ankle injury to play in the game, netted in the 29th, 31st and 38th minutes following Simon Davies' opener.

Anthony Barnes' own goal made it 5-0 before Steffen Iversen completed the rout six minutes from time.

It is a competition which Tottenham boss Glenn Hoddle is taking very seriously as he believes it offers Tottenham a realistic route into next year's UEFA Cup.

Bolton boss Sam Allardyce, however, would rather concentrate on Premiership survival, and he made eight changes to the team which lost here 3-2 in the league last week, resting key players such as strikers Michael Ricketts and Paul Warhurst, and skipper Gudni Bergsson.

But Tottenham, who won the trophy two years ago, made the most of it and the match was over as a contest by half time.

The emphatic victory also avenged Tottenham's heaviest defeat in the League Cup, a 6-1 win hammering five years ago by Bolton at Burnden Park in the fourth round.

## Italian Cup Bertotto injury mars the match

AFP, Udine

A serious-looking injury to Italian international defender Valerio Bertotto marred Udinese's first match of the post-Roy Hodgson era as they fought back to draw 1-1 with Parma in an Italian Cup quarter-final first leg match at the Stadio Friuli Tuesday.

Just eight minutes after Udinese striker David Di Michele had replied to Marco Marchionni's first-half goal for Parma, Bertotto collapsed in a heap and had to be stretchered off - an event that has an added significance with the World Cup less than six months away.

"I am really sorry for Valerio," said Parma defender Fabio Cannavaro, an opponent on Tuesday night but a colleague of Bertotto's in the Italian national team defence.

It provides the first headache for new Udinese coach Giampiero Ventura, who was confirmed as successor to Englishman Roy Hodgson Tuesday but left team matters for this match in the hands of goalkeeping coach Alessandro Zampa.

Parma, whose Argentinian coach Daniel Passarella is also reportedly walking a tightrope even though he only took the job in November, took the lead seven minutes before the interval.

A corner from Frenchman Johan Micoud landed at the feet of Marchionni and the winger signed from Second Division Empoli in the summer drilled a diagonal shot inside the far post with his left foot.

Udinese rallied in the second half and created several opportunities and it was no surprise when the leveler finally came as Di Michele controlled the ball well and poked it past Parma's advancing Brazilian goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel, a 1994 World Cup winner who was getting a rare outing in place of rested Frenchman Sebastien Frey.

Shortly afterwards came the nightmare moment for Bertotto who jumped to head an innocuous looking ball but landed awkwardly on his left leg in agony.

The concern of players on both sides was evident as the Italian international defender was carried off on a stretcher.

Parma finished strongly and Micoud set up two good chances for Cameroon Patrick Mboma but on both occasions Udinese's stand-in goalkeeper Morgan De Sanctis made good saves.

The injury to Bertotto provides the first major headache for Ventura who will be on the touchline Sunday when Udinese visit Venezia.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Strike duo made in heaven: Ronaldo (L) and Vieri before the start of the match against Brescia on December 9.

## Moratti can afford to dream

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Ronaldo's goal-scoring return to action could prove to be the final piece in the jigsaw for Inter Milan's long-suffering president Massimo Moratti.

The twice World Player of the Year offered a glimpse of his frustrated talent when he scored 19 minutes into Sunday's game against Brescia, as he continues his comeback after effectively two years out through injury.

Inter lead Serie A by two points, having been transformed this season under the guidance of Argentine coach Hector Cuper.

The mouth-watering prospect of Brazilian Ronaldo and Italy international Christian Vieri lining up together in attack finally became a reality at the weekend, with the 'dream pair' sharing three goals.

"I must say the reality was better than what I had imagined," Moratti told the daily Gazzetta dello Sport on Tuesday. "Ronaldo has scored his goal and with Vieri scoring the other two, it was perfect."

The two strikers had not started together since the Milan derby in

October 1999.

The injury-plagued pair, who cost combined transfer fees of 77 million dollars, had managed just 121 minutes on the field together in the past two and a half seasons.

But what pleased Moratti as much as the goals from the duo was the reaction from players left out of Cuper's starting line-up.

"I looked at the bench on Sunday and there was joy and emotion for Ronaldo's goal from (Nicola) Ventola, (Mohammed) Kallon and (Clarence) Seedorf. That shows that Cuper is motivating the entire squad and they all feel involved," Moratti added.

Pragmatic in his coaching style and tactics, Argentine coach Cuper must take much of the credit for guiding Inter to the top of Serie A after two seasons of setbacks at the San Siro club who have at times descended into farce.

Cuper came to Inter in the summer after suffering the heartache of losing two consecutive Champions League finals with Valencia.

His reputation as a stern taskmaster seemed well suited to the job of finally getting Inter on track for their first title since 1989.

Moratti joined in the chorus of praise for the understated Cuper. "He is a fantastic person, really

passionate about football, studious and a hard worker," Moratti said.

Moratti has spent close to 400 million dollars on players since he took over as president in February 1995, but so far his only trophy has been the 1998 UEFA Cup.

Coaches such as Marcello Lippi, now back at Juventus where he was so successful in his first spell, former Italy under-21 coach Marco Tardelli, Romanian Mircea Lucescu, Gigi Simoni and Englishman Roy Hodgson have all failed to end Inter's search for a league title.

Interestingly, it was an Argentine who created the last great Inter side of the 1960's when Moratti's father Angelo was at the helm as coach Heleno Herrera guided his team to three Italian titles and two European Cups.

Moratti says he has no regrets about ploughing cash into the club without yet seeing the treasured prize of a Serie A title.

"I believe that a club must offer great players to its fans," Moratti said. "I hope that now everyone can understand how much of an impact not being able to count on Ronaldo and Vieri had on the team's strategy and results."

## Fergie still hoping

Football

AFP, London

Alex Ferguson has backtracked on his gloomy assessment of Manchester United's championship prospects, saying the Red Devils still have a chance of winning the league.

After plunging to six defeats so far this season - with the latest at home to West Ham on Saturday - United boss Ferguson appeared to concede the title, saying his team needed a miracle to retain the Premiership.

But Ferguson admitted on Tuesday he has not completely written off the rest of the season, and hopes that contenders Arsenal, Leeds and Liverpool will start dropping points.

"If we get a spark into life then we've got a chance, a slim chance. We need Arsenal, Leeds and Liverpool to start cutting each other's throats," he told Manchester United's website, www.ManUtd.com

"They'll know that this is the best chance they've had for years to win the League, so I think those three

might have a lot of draws.

"Chelsea, Aston Villa and Spurs are all doing very well. I think it will be a season with a lot of draws."

Ferguson said he believed

"I feel that if we can get the fighting spirit back in the club for the remaining games of the season, then we can work from that," he said.

"If we can get the team spirit right and keep it solid then the supporters will acknowledge that the players are trying their best.

"They've built up great reputations, but the club has a history of producing players who are not just great players, but who are also great fighters. We need to rediscover that.

"But the last two League titles have been won very easily, almost handed to us on a plate. Maybe that's been a problem.

"Maybe we'd be in a better position if we'd been involved in dog-fights all the time, like we were when we won the League against Newcastle."

While praising his players' fighting spirit, Ferguson issued a stern warning that under-achievement would not be tolerated indefinitely.

"We've had a horrendous season in the League, it's been very disappointing," he said.

"It must have something to do with hunger because these players are better than that. The blip has been going on too long."



ALEX FERGUSON

United's easy victories in the last two championship campaigns may be at the heart of his team's present problems, the competitive edge blunted.

Rediscovering the fighting spirit is vital if United are to have any chance of relaunching their domestic season, he added.

## UEFA meet for changes

Football

AFP, Nyon

UEFA's executive committee will meet here on Wednesday to mull changes to the Champions League format and also select venues for the finals of next season's European club competitions.

Kicking off a two-day meeting of European football's governing body will be the draw for fourth round of the UEFA Cup with the likes of Valencia, Leeds, the two Milan clubs and Parma the top names left in the draw.

The draw will be made at 1100 GMT with first leg matches on February 21 and the returns on February 28.

On Wednesday afternoon, and early Thursday, UEFA will then designate the venues for the Champions League and UEFA Cup finals in 2003.

The Stade de France just outside Paris, which hosted Real Madrid's Champions League win in 2000, has put itself forward for both events.

Other possibilities are Old Trafford, the Amsterdam ArenA and Real's own Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

UEFA is also working on sponsorship packages as it has to elect a marketing agency to deal with its commercial rights for the Champions League from the 2003-2004 season with Team and IMG McCormack bidding for selection.

But how far the 14 members of the executive committee will move along the road towards reforming the overblown Champions League format from 2003-2004 is open to question.

The current dual group phase comprising 32 teams at the outset has brought complaints of overkill with the finalists having to play 17 matches in all - almost half a domestic league season.

But a UEFA spokesman would not be drawn on whether wide-ranging alterations are in the pipeline.

"It's not certain that UEFA will announce any decisions," was the spokesman's non-committal forecast.

UEFA also has to respond to the European Commission's letter of July 20 questioning the distribution of television rights for the Champions League.

The Commission fears that plans to hand exclusive rights to one broadcaster per country might infringe European broadcasting rules.

UEFA has to date said only it will study the Commission's position.

## Schroeder to get World Cup relic

AFP, Berlin

Switzerland is to present Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder with a piece of turf from Bern's Wankdorf stadium where Germany won its first World Cup in 1954, Swiss ambassador Thomas Borer said Wednesday.

Borer told public television broadcaster ARD that the sod, preserved in a round box, would be given to Schroeder along with the hook the German team captain, Fritz Walter, hung his uniform during the final.

The Wankdorf stadium was demolished in August and is to be replaced by a new sports complex by 2004. But Swiss authorities saved certain relics before it was destroyed.

The stadium sod was still "in excellent condition," Borer said, holding the piece of turf up before the camera.

The 3-2 German victory during the 1954 final against Hungary was seen at the time as contributing to a rebirth of the nation that had been destroyed in World War II and bore the burden of its Nazi past.

## UEFA Cup Serie A-friendly draw

Football

REUTERS, Nyon

Italian clubs could have few complaints after Wednesday's UEFA Cup fourth round draw paired AC Milan with Roda JC Kerkrade and Parma with Israeli outsiders Hapoel Tel-Aviv.

Serie A leaders Inter Milan -- three times UEFA Cup winners in the 1990s -- should meet with stiffer resistance, however, against Greek league leaders AEK Athens.

British clubs will face Dutch opposition with Leeds United, semifinalists in last season's Champions League, playing PSV Eindhoven and Rangers taking on Feyenoord.

The winners of those two clashes during February will meet each other in the quarter-finals in March, just as AC Milan will play Parma, UEFA Cup winners in 1999, if they both win.

Valencia, losing finalists over the past two seasons in the Champions League, face an easy passage into the last eight against Swiss minnows Servette. However, they would then be expected to face Inter for a place in the semis.

There was mixed news for French fans after Olympique Lyon drew outsiders Slovan Liberec of the Czech Republic, but Lille were paired with Borussia Dortmund, European champions in 1997.

But the competition which Italian sides won eight times between 1989 and 1999, including an all-Italian final in 1995 when Parma beat Juventus, looks likely to return to the Serie A fold next May.

Parma will be taking on a side who dumped Chelsea out of the competition, after five Blues players refused to travel to the away leg in Tel-Aviv, citing safety fears in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Tension in the Middle East was also a concern on Wednesday for Parma's sporting director Salvatore Scaglia, who said: "Speaking about sport, the draw is okay. I think our team is good enough to beat Hapoel."

"But we are very worried about the political situation. We hope things will change in the region."

"If we win, we are disappointed that we would have to play another Italian team."

Inter's head of international relations Giacinto Facchetti, a double European Cup winner with the club in the 1960s, was wary of AEK, saying: "It is a good team. Greek football is doing well at the moment, we must keep up the level (of our play)."

"We have to respect Athens if we don't want to be taken by surprise."

Milan director Umberto Gandini felt the same way about Roda, saying: "We respect the team -- but we are not familiar with the players."

There will be some familiar faces though when Rangers take on Feyenoord.

Dutchman Dick Advocaat is stepping down as Rangers manager to become the club's technical director after signing five Dutchmen during his spell in charge -- Fernando Ricksen, Ronald De Boer, Bert Konterman, Arthur Numan and Michael Mols.

Feyenoord team manager Hans Hagelspein said: "The players told me yesterday it would be a great

challenge to draw Rangers because a lot of the players know each other. It will be a very tough game between two tough teams."

Rangers' club secretary Campbell Ogilvie was on the same wavelength, saying: "It will be a very exciting tie.

"The Dutch connection at our club will create a great deal of interest and for both of us there is a great prize following this match."

Looking ahead to their opening tie with PSV, Leeds director Ian Sylvester said: "We are away for the first leg, which I'm sure the manager would prefer. But the Dutch teams are good and we know it is going to be a test against PSV."

### THE DRAW

The draw for the last 16 of the UEFA Cup made here on Wednesday:

AC Milan (Ita) - Roda (Ned)  
Lille (Fra) - Borussia Dortmund (Ger)  
Valencia (Spa) - Servette (Swi)  
PSV Eindhoven (Ned) - Leeds United (Eng)  
Lyon (Fra) - Slovan Liberec (Cze)  
Hapoel Tel-Aviv (Isr) - Parma (Ita)  
Inter Milan (Ita) - AEK Athens (Grc)  
Glasgow Rangers (Sco) - Feyenoord (Ned)  
\*(1st legs on February 21 and return legs on February 28)

### DRAW FOR QUARTER-FINALS

Winner of Tel-Aviv (Isr) - Parma (Ita) against winner of AC Milan (Ita) - Roda (Ned)  
Winner of Inter Milan (Ita) - AEK Athens (Grc) against winner of Valencia (Spa) - Servette (Swi)  
Winner of PSV Eindhoven (Ned) - Leeds (Eng) against winner of Glasgow Rangers (Sco) - Feyenoord (Ned)  
Winner of Lyon (Fra) - Liberec (Cze) against winner of Lille (Fra) - Borussia Dortmund (Ger)  
\*(1st legs on March 14, return legs on March 21)

## Maldini linked with Paraguay

Football

AFP, Milan

Former Italy coach Cesare Maldini is the latest man to be linked with the job of coach to the national team of Paraguay, the Italian sports press reported Wednesday.

Maldini, who coached Italy in the 1998 World Cup where they were eliminated by eventual winners France in the quarter-finals on a penalty shoot-out, has been offered the job by Paraguay, according to Gazzetta dello Sport newspaper.

Originally the job was to be offered to Carlos Bianchi, coach of Boca Juniors but that has fallen through and now Maldini tops the list.