

# Italian Cup Juve, Milan poised for face-off

Football

AFP, Milan

Perennial rivals AC Milan and Juventus will hope to set up a semi-final clash in the Italian Cup when they complete their quarter-final second leg matches this week.

AC Milan will defend a 2-1 first-leg lead when they travel to Rome on Wednesday for a return with Lazio while Juventus travel to Bergamo on Thursday but have a 4-2 advantage over opponents Atalanta.

Milan can consider themselves lucky to be leading Lazio who - 14 points behind AS Roma in the title race and eliminated from the Champions League - know this is their last realistic chance of silverware this season.

Lazio had most of the play in last week's first leg but were undone in injury time when Spanish striker Javi Moreno cracked a winner from a freekick.

But Juventus are far more confident of progressing and won last week despite fielding what was

essentially a second-string team - reserve striker Nicola Amoroso bagging a hat-trick.

The tie will see the Zenoni twins pit their wits against each other with Juve's Cristiano, who left Atalanta last summer, facing his brother Damiano who remains with the Bergamo club.

A two-goal cushion looks enough although the Turin side know to their cost that Bergamo is a notoriously difficult place for visiting teams.

But it all points to a semi-final between Milan and Juve, the two most successful teams in Italian football history.

The other semi-final will be between Parma and Brescia who have already booked their last four spots.

### FIXTURES

Quarter-final second legs (first leg scores in brackets)

**Wednesday (19:45 GMT)**  
Lazio (1) v AC Milan (2)

**Thursday (19:45 GMT)**  
Atalanta (2) v Juventus (4)

# Gulf Cup starts today

Football

AFP, Riyadh

Football teams from the six Gulf monarchies converge on Saudi Arabia Wednesday to contend the 15th Gulf Cup, with the host nation and its northern neighbour Kuwait starting as hot favourites.

But the four other teams - Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates - all enter the tournament capable of causing an upset.

Saudi Arabia, which has just qualified for the World Cup finals - for the third consecutive time - in Japan and South Korea, has remarkably only won the Gulf Cup once, in 1994.

In its warm-up matches, the national team defeated Iceland 1-0 and will remain highly-fancied despite a 2-0 loss to Zimbabwe.

Kuwait, coached by former German coach Berti Vogts, were disappointingly eliminated in the first round of the World Cup qualifiers, but their Gulf pedigree shows in nine winners' trophies over the last 14 years.

The reigning Gulf champions have enjoyed three draws, 1-1 with Romania, 2-2 and 0-0 with Syria, and a 3-0 drubbing of Zimbabwe in the run-up to the competition.

The opening match between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on January 16 could set the tone for the round-robin competition that ends on January 29.

The Gulf Cup is taking place more than a year after the event was originally scheduled because the original timing of the event would have coincided with the Asian Cup

finals taking place in Lebanon in October.

Bahrain hosted the last Gulf Cup in November 1999.

Aside from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, which just missed out on qualifying for the World Cup, look set to impress under Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere in a tournament the team has never won.

Qatar, who warmed up with a 2-2 draw with Egypt and a 3-1 loss to Iraq, are aiming to follow up on their exploits of 1992 when they claimed the title.

Bahrain and Oman go into the competition as underdogs after sketchy and unsuccessful performances in their World Cup qualifiers.

Iraq, who have won the Gulf Cup three times, have not taken part in the competition since the 1991 Gulf War.

### PROGRAMME:

- 16/1: Saudi Arabia-Kuwait
- 17/1: United Arab Emirates-Oman
- 18/1: Qatar-Bahrain
- 19/1: Kuwait-Oman
- 20/1: United Arab Emirates-Qatar
- 21/1: Saudi Arabia-Bahrain
- 22/1: Kuwait-Bahrain
- 23/1: Oman-Qatar
- 24/1: Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates
- 25/1: Kuwait-Qatar
- 26/1: Bahrain-United Arab Emirates
- 27/1: Saudi Arabia-Oman
- 28/1: Kuwait-United Arab Emirates
- 29/1: Saudi Arabia-Qatar



PHOTO: INTERNET

GLAMOUR BOYS! Serie A side Chievo's Brazilian recruit Eriberto (L), Eugenio Corini (C) and Bernardo Corradi appear as models for Victor Victoria's men's collection at the Milan fashion week.

# Chievo's collection!

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Italian Serie A team Chievo have shot to stardom in their soccer strip this season, but it was off with the yellow shirts and on with stylish suits as the team modelled at Milan's men's fashion week.

"It's quite amusing really," defender Nicola Legrottaglie laughed at a fashion show-cum-drinks party for designer Victor Victoria's autumn/winter 2002/3

collection.

"This time last year, I'd never have thought I'd be modelling in Milan," he said, smoothing down the lapels of the deep grey worsted wool suit.

Chievo, the club from a tiny suburb of Verona who were playing amateur football against village sides 16 years ago, have won the hearts of Italy's footballing public by topping Serie A in their first season of top flight football.

Sports writers and fashionists all seemed to be on first-name terms with the players, pumping them on their new-found fame as much as on

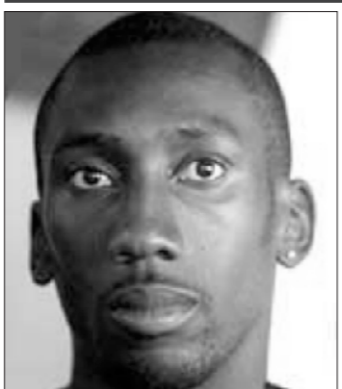
the clothes they were modelling.

"The suits are lovely," said striker Bernardo Corradi, looking quite the model as the team posed around a piano.

"We liked the designs. Otherwise we wouldn't have agreed to do it," he added, adjusting his Prince of Wales check jacket and insisting the show was not just a publicity stunt.

Meanwhile a bemused Eriberto, Chievo's Brazilian winger, grinned at the idea of taking to the pitch in his new brown corduroy suit and silk neckerchief.

"I don't think it would be quite threatening enough," he said.



JIMMY FLOYD HASSELBAINK

# Atletico's Jimmy hope

AFP, London

Spanish Second Division side Atletico Madrid are trying to put together a bid aimed at luring back in-form Chelsea striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink, it was reported Tuesday.

The Dutch international quit Atletico for Stamford Bridge after failing to prevent the club from relegation two seasons ago.

But Hasselbaink's old team are now leading their division and general manager Paulo Futre told the Daily Star he wants to try and tempt back the forward.

"Jimmy is a top-drawer player and the fans love him," Futre told the Daily Star.

"But there might be a problem financing the deal. However, we are doing the best we can."

Atletico chairman Jesus Gil added: "Jimmy has told me repeatedly that he wants to come back."

# Vieira, Shevchenko on Real's list

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid are interested in luring Arsenal's Patrick Vieira and AC Milan's Andriy Shevchenko to the Spanish club.

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez said the two players were on sporting director Jorge Valdano's target list for next season.

"Valdano has very good taste and Vieira and Shevchenko are certainly on his list," Perez was quoted in the sports daily Marca.

Perez, who was involved in bringing world record signings Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane to the club, made it clear that Real would only add one major signing to their squad before next season.

"It is possible that we will sign a major star next season, but in the

most optimistic of cases we will only be signing one such player," he said.

The Real president dismissed speculation that Real were interested in Lazio defender Alessandro Nesta, who recently underwent an knee operation.

"Nesta is a different case, because we have our own Nesta in the club already and that is (Francisco) Pavon," Perez said in reference to the young centre back who has emerged from the club's youth ranks this season.

Perez insisted he was not worried by suggestions that signing too many big players could lead to resentment within the squad.

"We want to sign players who will fit in with the culture at Real Madrid and, because of that, we not only consider the sporting side, but also other aspects ... and everyone has seen that with Zidane."



PATRICK VIEIRA



ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO

# Beckham not Bayern's type

Football

AFP, London

Bayern Munich have ruled out any chance of a bid for Manchester United midfielder David Beckham, saying they can live without the 'media circus' that follows the England skipper.

Beckham has been persistently linked with a move to the continent after stalling on signing a new contract at Old Trafford and falling from favour with manager Alex Ferguson.

However, Bayern general manager Uli Hoeness insists Bayern

would not be interested in signing the 26-year-old.

"From a sporting point of view Beckham would appeal to us very much, but not when I realise it would mean his wife - that Spice Girl - coming with him," Hoeness told the Sun.

"That would be great for the media but not for us. We can do without that kind of circus."

"Beckham is a good player but how could he be a good pro, being dragged from one catwalk to another?"

"If we do such transfers, we would be saying goodbye to football. It would be pure showbusiness," Hoeness said.

# Ruud record

Football

REUTERS, Southampton

Manchester United's Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy has equalled a premier league record when he scored for the seventh match in a row.

Van Nistelrooy notched his ninth goal in seven matches when he levelled the scores for the English champions in the ninth minute after James Beattie had given Southampton the lead six minutes earlier at St Mary's Stadium.

The scoring record is now jointly held by Van Nistelrooy, Mark Stein (Chelsea), Alan Shearer (Newcastle) and Thierry Henry (Arsenal).

# Unsure about Di Canio

Football

REUTERS, London

West Ham United's Paolo Di Canio and manager Glenn Roeder are both unsure as to whether the Italian striker is to leave for Manchester United.

Both clubs admit Di Canio is the subject of a transfer bid from the English premier league champions but West Ham rejected their first offer.

"I don't know what is happening, I don't know anything, and that is true," Di Canio told West Ham's website. "All I know is that there was an official request and West Ham didn't deny it, only turning

down the price.

"West Ham didn't say I am not for sale, they just said I am not for sale at that money."

Di Canio said while he was keen to stay at Upton Park he would not rule out a move to another club.

"It is clear that the club has put a price on me and I am for sale, even if Southampton, Watford, or Macclesfield pay 3.5 million pounds.

"But I have never said I am desperate to leave ... (and) the fans have given me everything since I have come here.

"Glenn spoke to me two weeks ago and said that he wants to keep me."

Di Canio was last to leave the pitch after scoring the matchwinner in Saturday's 1-0 defeat of

Leicester in what looked like an emotional farewell.

Roeder also said he was unsure as whether Di Canio would leave.

"He loves playing at Upton Park, and it was not the first time that he has been the last player to leave the field on Saturday - especially as he scored the goal which earned us the win," he told the club's website.

"I don't know if Paolo will be a West Ham player next week. I am still in the dark, but we have had no further contact from Manchester United since we turned down their first offer.

"I absolutely love him and I want him in my team, but Alex Ferguson wants him in Manchester United's team, because he has a God-given talent."

# Liverpool's lost spark

Football

REUTERS, London

Under any circumstances a draw away at Arsenal is a good result, but Liverpool's point at Highbury on Sunday could not mask the alarming slump in the team's performances in recent weeks.

From a side which, under manager Gerard Houllier, swept almost all before it last season and before Christmas, Liverpool have suddenly become a team who have forgotten how to win.

They started the campaign on the back of a glittering summer which brought the UEFA Cup, FA Cup, League Cup, European Super Cup and Charity Shield to Anfield.

After a slow beginning, Liverpool had won four games out of five in the premier and Champions leagues when Houllier collapsed at halftime in the 1-1 draw against Leeds on October 13, necessitating the heart surgery from which he is still recovering.

To resolve a difficult situation, rather than calling in an outsider, Liverpool handed the reins to Phil Thompson, the enthusiastic if managerially inexperienced assistant to Houllier.

With their ill manager as inspiration Liverpool embarked on their best run of the season, losing only one of the next 13 games.

They qualified for the second group phase of the champions League and, on November 17, went top of the premier league with a 1-1 draw at Blackburn Rovers.

For five weeks Thompson's team remained at the summit, riding a wave of form that seemingly took its momentum from the previous season's success, their manager's state of health and the exuberance of their England players who had secured World Cup qualification.

On December 8, when Liverpool beat Middlesbrough and Manchester United lost at home to West Ham, Liverpool stood 11 points ahead of the champions with a game in hand.

Eight games later, United hold a three-point advantage over Thompson's side who, if not directly heading for the rocks, have become suddenly becalmed.

With United resurgent, Liverpool

could not have chosen a worse time to embark on a run of one league win in eight matches.

The loss of rhythm can be traced to the 4-0 premier league defeat by Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on December 16.

As Thompson rightly pointed out that day, the fact that Chelsea goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini was man of the match showed what a freak, unjust result that was.

But unwarranted or not, it sapped the confidence of a team who had not tasted defeat in the premier league for over two months, and try as he undoubtedly has, Thompson has not been able to restore it.

There is an element of Kevin Keegan in the former Liverpool and England defender.

Like former England and Newcastle United manager Keegan, Thompson is never short of a word or six and his enthusiasm is unquestionable, there for all to see on the touchline during games.

Not one to shy away from confrontation, Thompson's style could not be more different from the more thoughtful, circumspect Houllier.

One of the Frenchman's greatest assets is his tactical nous, notably his ability to outthink his opposite number in terms of formation and team selection during a match.

The lack of such an ability was pinpointed by Keegan, whose Newcastle side once threw away a 12-point lead to United in the title race, as the main reason for his decision to quit as England boss in October 2000.

Thompson says Houllier, who is not expected back on the touchline for several weeks, is still having a major input even though he is away from Anfield.

"We discuss everything; team selection, everything," the acting manager insisted after Sunday's 1-1 draw at Highbury.

That may be the case, but with United suddenly looking unstoppable again and the return of the Champions League barely a month away, there is a growing feeling that Houllier's return to the frontline cannot come soon enough.



PHOTO: INTERNET

A file photo showing Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier (L) and his assistant Phil Thompson during a training session.