

UEFA Cup Parma, Lyon, Leeds ousted

 Football

INTERNET, London

In a night of UEFA Cup shocks, Parma, Lyon and Leeds all found themselves dumped out of the competition in dramatic fashion.

Many expected an easy passage through for Parma after a hard earned 0-0 first-leg draw with Hapoel Tel Aviv in Israel. The reality was anything but. Goals from Milan Osterc and Istvan Pisont put Hapoel 2-0 ahead and the Italians' only reply was an 84th minute consolation goal from Emiliano Bonazzoli.

Hapoel's staggering achievement simply cannot be understated. They've already achieved the feat of being the most successful Israeli team ever to enter the UEFA Cup but to beat Chelsea and Parma on the way to doing it is quite amazing. We are talking about side's with budgets hundreds of times bigger than Hapoel's and yet the team from Tel Aviv have continued to upset the form book. It just goes to show that even in this modern age, money isn't everything.

Lyon were another major casualty of the night as they went out in embarrassing fashion, 4-1, at

Liberec, it would be no surprise to see a number of their highly talented players popping up in the European leagues in the next year or so.

Leeds United's last chance of a trophy also went last night as they were beaten 1-0 by PSV Eindhoven in dramatic fashion at Elland Road. It was yet another poor performance from the Yorkshire side and PSV got the goal they'll feel they deserved when Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink headed a last minute winner. This was a huge result for the Dutch side and served, once again, to demonstrate that a 0-0 away draw is

UEFA CUP QUARTERFINAL FIXTURES

Hapoel Tel Aviv (Israel) v AC Milan (Italy)
Inter Milan (Italy) v Valencia (Spain)
PSV Eindhoven (Netherlands) v Feyenoord (Netherlands)
Slovan Liberec (Czech Republic) v Borussia Dortmund (Germany)

First leg: March 14
Second leg: March 21



PHOTO: INTERNET

BYE, BYE LEEDS: PSV Eindhoven's Jan Vennegoor of Hasselink (L) heads in the last minute winner against Leeds United's on February 28.

Slovan Liberec. Goals from Nezmar(2), Stajner and Neumann ensured it was a night to remember for the Czech side, and Lyon could only muster a reply through Patrick Mulder.

Lyon are now left to reflect on the possibility of yet another trophy-less season. Following the weekend's defeat at Sochaux their title hopes have almost faded and they are now left with the prospect of a real fight for a Champions League spot. As for

always a risky result.

With Leeds nine points off the Champions League places in the Premiership, it looks increasingly likely that David O'Leary's side will be playing UEFA Cup football at best next season. There will also be the inevitable talk of a mass exodus at the club although these suggestions are surely premature.

Milan survived a huge scare before booking their passage through to the quarter finals after

they were beaten 1-0 by Roda JC at the San Siro. A 71st minute goal from Mark Luipers stunned the home crowd and sent the match into extra time after that 1-0 first-leg Milan win. Despite missing two penalties, the *Rossoneri* made it through after Cosmin Contra netted the decisive spot-kick.

Lets not be fooled by Milan's appearance in the quarter finals though. This is a desperately poor Rossoneri team who've so miserably underachieved once again this season. Defensively they look shaky, in midfield they lack invention without Manuel Rui Costa, while up-front, if Andriy Shevchenko doesn't get the goals, who will?

Their neighbours Inter enjoyed a rather less dramatic passage through to the last eight after drawing 2-2 with AEK Athens in Greece. With the 3-1 first-leg advantage, the *Nerazzuri* soon made it 4-1 on aggregate when Vratislav Gresko found the net early on. Despite going 2-1 down, Nicola Ventola netted his third goal in three games to make it 2-2 and end any lingering hopes that the Greeks had of causing an upset. Hector Cuper's side now look favourites for the competition but ironically they may well come up against their toughest opposition in the next round as they

leagues and one senses that it could be a moment of brilliance from say, Christian Vieri or Pablo Aimar, that separates the teams after 180 minutes.

Elsewhere, Feyenoord booked their place in the next round with a 3-2 win over Rangers and in the night's remaining encounter Borussia Dortmund squeaked through after a 1-1 aggregate draw with Lille. The match ended 0-0 on the night and Matthias Sammer's side will now face Slovan Liberec in the next round.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated results of UEFA Cup fourth round, second leg matches:

Slovan (Czech Republic) 4 - Jan Nezmar 1, 82; Jiri Stajner 74; Robert Neumann 85
Lyon (France) 1 - Patrick Muller 17
Result: Slovan win 5-2 on aggregate

Parma (Italy) 1 - Emiliano Bonazzoli 85
Hapoel Tel Aviv (Israel) 2 - Milan Osterc 31; Istvan Pisont 53
Result: Hapoel Tel Aviv win 2-1 on aggregate

Feyenoord (Holland) 3 - Pierre van Hooijdonk 37, 45; Bonaventure Kalou 46
Rangers (Scotland) 2 - Neil McCann 26; Barry Ferguson 55 pen
Result: Feyenoord win 4-3 on aggregate

Servette (Switzerland) 2 - Robert 37; Alexander Frei 67
Valencia (Spain) 2 - Juan Gines Sanchez 12; Miguel Angulo 45
Result: Valencia win 5-2 on aggregate

AEK Athens (Greece) 2 - Sotirios Konstantinidis 23; Themistokis Nikolaidis 56
Inter Milan (Italy) 2 - Vratislav Gresko 21; Nicola Ventola 57
Result: Inter Milan win 5-3 on aggregate

Borussia Dortmund (Germany) 0
Lille (France) 0
Result: Aggregate - 1-1; Borussia Dortmund win on away goals

Milan (Italy) 0
Roda JC (Holland) 1 - Mark Luipers 70
Result: Aggregate -1-1; AC Milan win 3-2 on penalties

Leeds United (England) 0
PSV Eindhoven (Holland) 1 - Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink 90
Result: PSV Eindhoven win 1-0 on aggregate

Ramzy the naughty Egyptian!

AFP, Kaiserslautern, Germany

Kaiserslautern have sacked Hany Ramzy after the veteran Egyptian international was found guilty of sexual harrassment, the German First Division side announced here Friday.

Ramzy was sentenced to eight months in prison after the incident involving a woman in her twenties in a restaurant.

The victim has since left Germany to live in Australia.

"After being told about Ramzy's sentence...by the pressPUlgá fier the player was intervern any more, with immediate effect," a club statement announced.

The 32-year-old defender, married with one child, was signed by Kaiserslautern from *Bundesliga* rivals Werder Bremen in 1998.

Beckham waxed

AFP, London

England soccer captain David Beckham is to become a waxwork dummy to celebrate England's qualification for the 2002 World Cup, the London museum Madame Tussaud's announced Thursday.

Beckham and England coach Sven Goran Eriksson, who has also been measured up for a waxwork, will form the centre-piece of a new attraction celebrating the achievement.

England's qualification for the summer finals in South Korea and Japan came when Beckham scored the winning goal against Greece in the dying moments of the game last October.

To help visitors feel the tension of the moment, Beckham's figure has been given a unique addition -- a beating heart.

Bruce McKendrick, managing director of Madame Tussaud's, said: "We wanted to create an attraction that captured the drama and emotion of football and to celebrate the achievements of the England team."

Berlusconi forced to step down

INTERNET, Milan

The Italian Parliament has passed a conflict of interest bill today. Thus Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is to step down as president of AC Milan football club after 16 years at the head of the Italian side.

A bill on the alleged conflict of interests of Berlusconi, who as well as heading the government has a myriad of business interests, will effectively require him to step aside from the job title of president although he will remain owner of his Mediaset company, but he will not be able to retain his Milan president post even as an honorary president. His son Piersilvio will step in as the new president of Milan. Meanwhile his son will equally inherit Milan's debts (100 milliard lire).

Berlusconi took over AC Milan in 1986 and has won 18 trophies including six Italian league titles, three European Cups and two Intercontinental Cups.

West pleads innocence!

AFP, Lagos

Nigerian international defender Taribo West has dismissed claims by his wife that he refused to have sex with her and often assaulted her as "lies from the pit of hell".

"These are lies from the pit of hell. I can never assault my wife. I live in a country where it is absolutely impossible to beat one's wife," the Kaiserslautern ace told reporters Thursday.

"Nowhere in the world would a man marry a wife and refuse to sleep with her, even a pastor," he added.

The estranged wife of the player told a court here Monday she wishes their marriage be dissolved because he refused to have sex with her and often assaulted her.

But West said the marriage broke down after only three weeks when his wife told him she was no longer interested in being married to him.

Lawyers for West said they filed for divorce last April and were therefore surprised to learn that another suit had been filed in a Lagos court by the player's wife this week.

The 27-year-old defender insisted that his estranged wife was out to ruin him.

"This is a ploy to tarnish my image and dampen the spirit of God in me, I am a man of God," said West, who claims to be a devout Christian.

"But it will not disturb my preparations for the World Cup because I know what I am preparing for."

The player is expected to play a key role for Nigeria at the World Cup in June where they are drawn against Argentina, England and Sweden in the first round.

The divorce proceedings have been adjourned to April 8.

Serie A preview

San Siro centre of all attention

 Football

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan hope to slay the ghost of recent derby humiliations on Sunday when they meet local rivals AC Milan in a cross-city showdown at the San Siro which could have big implications on their title challenge.

Inter, joint leaders with AS Roma, are still haunted and taunted about the 6-0 collapse last May in the most one-sided meeting between the Milan clubs in the 98-year history of the fixture.

They vowed revenge and in the meeting earlier this season between the clubs everything seemed to be going to plan when they led 1-0 at the hour mark. But four AC Milan goals in 20 minutes saw Inter cave in and even a late consolation could not save them from a 4-2 defeat.

This time the stakes are even higher for Inter on derby day.

With just 10 games left in the season for each team any setback will be crucial in such a closely-contested race in which AS Roma and Inter Milan lead Juventus by a single point.

It could be a crucial fortnight for Inter who after facing their co-

tenants on Sunday must steel themselves for another white knuckle ride at the San Siro a week later against Juventus.

AC Milan are out of contention for the title but this fixture promises an opportunity for partial redemption and the 'Rossoneri' are finally back in form after last weekend's 4-1 win

FIXTURES

(14:00 GMT unless stated)
Sunday: Brescia v Piacenza, Juventus v Bologna, Lazio v Venezia, Lecce v AS Roma, Parma v Chievo, Perugia v Torino, Udinese v Atalanta, Verona v Fiorentina, AC Milan v Inter Milan **(19:30 GMT)**

at Venezia.

But AC Milan are also at something of a crossroads. Although their president Silvio Berlusconi this week denied he would step down the Italian press is continuing to speculate that the Italian prime minister might just be waiting until after the derby to announce his decision.

Inter's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper, aware that he is heavily dependent on striker Christian Vieri for goals, this week rested him from the UEFA Cup tie with AEK Athens.

Primera Liga preview

A Real point to prove

 Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's away form has been erratic this season but, after Wednesday's European Champions' League win at Porto, they are now feeling confident that they can reverse the trend at Celta Vigo on Saturday.

The defending Spanish champions had not won on the road this year until the win over the border in neighbouring Portugal, and the victory has sent confidence levels sky-high.

"We have broken our bad streak. Things are going to be different from this point. The players now believe again that they can win anywhere," said Real coach Vicente Del Bosque.

Real Madrid lie in second place in the Spanish First Division, with 46 points from 27 games, but are one point adrift of Valencia.

If they do move back into pole position on Saturday night though, they may be on top for less than 24 hours as Valencia play at Real Zaragoza on Sunday.

Del Bosque rested his four super-stars - Roberto Carlos, Luis Figo, Raul Gonzalez and Zinedine Zidane - on Wednesday. The quartet have been suffering from minor injuries in recent weeks, and Del Bosque did not want to aggravate the problems any further.

However, all except Figo, who will have a late fitness test on a sprained ankle but is unlikely to play until next Wednesday's Spanish Cup final against Deportivo La Coruna, are expected to be drafted back into action for the vital trip north to the Atlantic coast.

The return of Raul means that

Santiago Solari should return to the bench, a tough decision considering the Argentine international's outstanding form in recent games, which have elicited calls for his inclusion in Marcelo Bielsa's World Cup squad.

"People keep asking me whether I'm happy being the continual number 12, but Real Madrid is a fantastic club and I have progressed since arriving here. I am ready to play five or 70 minutes," said Solari, who has become one of the favourites of the Real faithful for his unstinting commitment whenever, or where ever, he plays.

One Real player who will be missing is their suspended club captain Fernando Hierro. Aitor Karanka will fill the same role he had during Hierro's month-long absence

FIXTURES

(Kick off 1600GMT, unless stated):
Saturday: Celta Vigo v Real Madrid **(2000)**, Sevilla v Deportivo La Coruna **(2000)**, Villarreal v Real Betis

Sunday: Alaves v Valladolid, Barcelona v Malaga, Rayo Vallecano v Real Mallorca, Osasuna v Real Sociedad, Real Zaragoza v Valencia, Tenerife v Espanyol **(1700)**, Athletic Bilbao v Las Palmas

due to injury in January and early February.

Celta have also had a testing encounter this week - in front of the Spanish Football Federation's Competitions Committee, after they ended last Sunday's controversial 4-1 defeat at Real Betis with nine men.

The Galicians succeeded in getting Alexander Mostovoi's red

card reduced to the yellow variety, and the Russian international midfielder will play against Real, as will defender Fernando Caceres, who had his booking annulled.

However, Celta will still be missing midfielders Valeri Karpin and Doriva through suspensions.

Valencia travel to Zaragoza still struggling to find the net.

They have only scored 32 goals so far, and know that they have to increase their strike rate if they are to stand a realistic chance of lifting their first title since 1971.

Three teams in the bottom half of the table have even scored more goals than Valencia, although Zaragoza are not one of them.

Strangely though, the Zaragoza squad seem less worried about the problem than the league leaders.

"I'm playing well and the goals will come eventually. Every day, I am more optimistic," said Zaragoza's Yugoslav international striker Goran Drulic calmly on Thursday, despite the fact that he has yet to score.

Valencia will probably name an unchanged side from the one that beat Barcelona 2-0 last Saturday, unless there are any reactions to Thursday's UEFA Cup tie at Servette, while Zaragoza have doubts over their Yugoslav international defender Slobodan Komljenovic, who has Achilles' problems.

Barcelona, who have dropped back to fifth, are looking to bounce back at home to Malaga on Sunday after two consecutive defeats.

However, the Catalans will be without their injury-prone club captain Sergi Barjuan, who will be out for three weeks with a seriously sprained left ankle that he suffered in Tuesday's 3-0 Champions' League defeat at Roma.

Sergi is also almost certain to miss the derby clash against Real Madrid on March 16.

Spouse influenced Fergie

 Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson paid tribute Thursday to his wife Cathy for his decision to go back on his announced retirement and sign a new deal.

United confirmed Wednesday that 60-year-old Ferguson had agreed a new three-year contract with the club, even though the Scot had said he was retiring at the end of the current campaign.

On Thursday, the usually iron-willed Ferguson said his wife had changed his mind.

"There was a big U-turn and it only came about because of the intervention of my wife (Cathy) and sons but I couldn't see myself riding into the sunset - not just yet," said Ferguson.

"As Cathy says, 'retire when you're tired' and I feel strong, young and fit. Hopefully my health will be maintained and I can go on and do the next few years because I do think we can get better.

"There is a great future for Manchester United. We still have a vibrant youth system and we have fantastic medical and coaching staff in place.

"It's exciting for me and I think those are the areas where we can make up more ground," Ferguson told Sky Sports News.

United chief executive Peter Kenyon said: "Eighteen months ago, when I became chief executive, my first job was to meet Alex, who had already announced he intended to retire.

"I felt he was too young to retire because he was fit and healthy. On that occasion I couldn't persuade him not to retire.

"That set in motion the process of trying to find someone to replace Sir Alex and we went a long way down that road.

Blatter feels the heat

 Football

AFP, London

The heat was still on Sepp Blatter Friday with the embattled FIFA president accused of dishonesty over his handling of the world football body's rocky finances.

Blatter, who on Thursday strongly denied reports that he had bought his way to the presidency, was accused by UEFA treasurer Mathieu Sprengers of denying in public that he had dipped into the 2006 budget to keep FIFA's ship afloat - while not rejecting the accusation in private.

FIFA was badly hit after the collapse of its marketing partner ISL with debts of 1.2 billion dollars.

Sprengers, president of the Dutch Football Association, claimed in The Daily Mail newspaper that Blatter, up for re-election in Seoul on May 29, had purposely played down the whole murky affair just as he was seeking support to gain a second mandate.

"When I asked him privately he would not deny that he had used the 2006 money but when he is challenged in public he denies ever saying that. We need to know if the financial position of FIFA is in danger," said the Dutchman.

Blatter has admitted in public that ISL's collapse cost FIFA 22 million pounds, but the real figure has been put at nearer 230 million by some observers.

FIFA's finance committee is to examine the external audit of FIFA's accounts at a meeting in Zurich on March 5.

It will be followed by a FIFA executive committee meeting two days later, setting up another con-

Premiership preview

Magpies' chance to take off

 Football

AFP, London

Newcastle United, still dismissed by some as also-rans rather than genuine title contenders, can confound their critics by going top of the English Premiership with victory at home to third-placed Arsenal at St James' Park on Saturday.

With Manchester United not playing until Sunday, the Magpies, in second, can leapfrog the reigning champions should they claim the three points in front of a sell-out crowd in the day's early evening match.

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson continues to play down his side's chances of winning the championship race, but with 11 games left to play - six of which are at home - the Geordies are within sight of causing a major upset.

Their next two games are likely to determine whether or not Newcastle have what it takes to pip Manchester United and Arsenal to the post with the visit of the Gunners followed by a trip to fellow title-chasers Liverpool.

A daunting task was made even tougher this week by the injury to in-form Wales striker Craig Bellamy, signed by Robson from relegated Coventry in the summer.

Bellamy has undergone a second scan on his knee to identify the injury which left him hobbling following Sunday's 1-0 derby win at Sunderland.

Although the problem may yet prove to be minor, Robson insisted he will rest Bellamy for Sunday's match and the equally-important trip to Liverpool next Wednesday.

warhorse Alan Shearer whose vast experience has complemented Bellamy's quick turn of foot.

The pair have racked up 31 goals between them in all competitions and so the Welshman's absence will be sorely missed.

England under-21 international Shola Ameobi and the fit-again Carl Cort will contest a starting place alongside Shearer.

Arsenal have injury problems of their own with Giovanni van Bronckhorst, Ashley Cole, Fredrik Ljungberg, Tony Adams and Lauren

FIXTURES

(All 1500 GMT unless stated)
Saturday: Aston Villa v West Ham, Bolton v Blackburn, Charlton v Chelsea, Fulham v Liverpool, Ipswich v Southampton, Middlesbrough v Leicester, Newcastle v Arsenal **(1730 GMT)**, Tottenham v Sunderland
Sunday: Derby v Manchester United **(1600 GMT)**, Everton v Leeds

all on the treatment table.

Manchester United travel to Derby on Sunday boosted by Alex Ferguson's signing of a new three-year contract with the club - even though the Scot had earlier stated he was retiring at the end of the current campaign.

Ferguson, whose wife Cathy persuaded him to reverse his decision to call time on his Old Trafford career, insisted the current leaders were now in position for a successful defence of their Premiership title.

"At this time of year we start to get ready for the battle, so I'm confident that the form is back," said Ferguson whose side suffered a serious loss of form at the start of the season.

On his reasons for staying with the 1999 European champions Ferguson said: "It is a very difficult club to leave, as I have found out in the last few months."

He added that the continued success of the club's youth policy was another factor in his decision to continue.

"We've done very well with new players - we've proved that with Luke Chadwick, John O'Shea, Michael Stewart as they're now first-team squad players."

Derby will be hoping Manchester United's 5-1 win at home to French side Nantes on Tuesday took its toll as John Gregory's men look for more points to ensure their Premiership survival.

Elsewhere fourth-placed Liverpool, who have a seemingly tougher task than United in making it through to the Champions League quarter-finals following their 1-1 midweek draw with Galatasaray, take on Fulham at Craven Cottage.