



PHOTO: INTERNET

EMOTIONAL CONTRAST: (left) Euphoric Panathinaikos players celebrate their qualification for quarter-finals after their draw against Real Madrid in Athens while (Right), crest-fallen Arsenal booters Thierry Henry (L), Nwankwo Kanu (2nd R), Frederik Ljungberg (R) come to terms with their exit at Stadio delle Alpi in Turin on March 20.

Gunners gone with the Bayer wind



AFP, Paris

Germany's Bayer Leverkusen, bidding to break their *Bundesliga* title duck this season, remained firmly in the hunt for Champions League glory as well Wednesday, winning 3-1 at Spain's Deportivo La Coruna to book a surprise quarter-final place at the expense of Arsenal.

The Gunners failed to join Manchester United and Liverpool in the last eight after a 1-0 defeat at Juventus, and only had their ongoing poor form in Europe to blame.

A looping header from Uruguayan striker Marcelo Zalayeta 15 minutes from the end at the Stadio Delle Alpi saw Juve claim three virtually meaningless points.

But another culprit was the manifestly absurd format of the double group phase formula which incredibly left Leverkusen, one point clear of the chasing pack in the German league, as Group D winners - despite a 4-1 defeat at Highbury and a 4-0 mauling in Turin.

LEVERKUSEN 3; DEPORTIVO

A first-half header by midfielder Michael Ballack, a shot by international team-mate Bernd Schneider after the interval and a late leader by substitute Oliver Neuville gave the German side 10 points in the group.

Deportivo, whose goal came in the second half through substitute international striker Diego Tristan, also have 10 points but finishes in second place head-to-head.

Arsenal, who lost 1-0 at Juventus, end third with seven points and are eliminated. The Italian powerhouse, whose challenge for a place in the quarterfinals ended last week, also finishes with seven.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta's decision to make seven changes from his first-choice side appeared to take its toll as Leverkusen dominated the game.

On the quarter-hour mark, Klaus Toppmoller's side wasted two chances in succession with Croatian striker Thomas Brdaric and then Schneider putting the ball into the side-netting.

Deportivo looked vulnerable to the German league leader's swift counter attacks, and in the 26th minute Turkish midfielder Yildiray Basturk spurned an excellent opportunity from close range after Ballack's low cross.

It came as no surprise when Ballack gave his side the lead in the 34th minute, the international leaping above Deportivo's Brazilian midfielder Mauro Silva to power a header off the crossbar.

Leverkusen's superiority contin-

ued and they came close to extending their lead five minutes later when Brdaric sent a fierce long-range drive onto the crossbar.

The second half began with Deportivo continuing to struggle.

Nine minutes after the break, the more fluid German side added a deserved second.

From Ze Roberto's corner, Schneider hit a tame shot from close range but, with the help of a deflection off Deportivo's Argentine midfielder Aldo Duschler, the ball rolled into the net.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated results from the Champions League second stage matches on Wednesday:

Group C
At Athens
Panathinaikos (Gre) 2 (Liberopoulos 9, Goumas 64) Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Morientes 11, Portillo 80)
At Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 2 (Sionko 63, Jarosik 71) FC Porto (Por) 0

Group D
At Turin
Juventus (Ita) 1 (Zalayeta 76) Arsenal (Eng) 0
At La Coruna
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 1 (Tristan 75) Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 3 (Ballack 34, Schneider 54, Neuville 86)

On the hour, Irureta swapped Duschler and the ineffectual Uruguayan forward Walter Pandiani with Spanish international midfielders Juan Valeron and Sergio Gonzalez.

The changes failed to stem the tide and substitute Neuville, who

STANDINGS

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

GROUP C						
Real Madrid	6	5	1	0	14	5 16
Panathinaikos	6	2	2	2	7	8 8
Sparta Prague	6	2	0	4	6	10 6
FC Porto	6	1	1	4	3	7 4

*Real Madrid and Panathinaikos qualify for quarter-finals

GROUP D						
Bayer Leverkusen	6	3	1	2	11	11 10
Deportivo La Coruna	6	3	1	2	7	6 10
Arsenal	6	2	1	3	8	8 7
Juventus	6	2	1	3	7	8 7

*Bayer Leverkusen and Deportivo qualify for the quarter-finals

treble bit the dust.

Arsenal goalkeeper David Seaman said the earlier 2-0 home defeat to Deportivo had wrecked his side's chances.

"It was out of our hands at the end of the day and they (Leverkusen) got a great result out in Spain," he told ITV television.

"We had a lot of chances but we

Blatter in enemy territory!



REUTERS, Johannesburg

FIFA president Sepp Blatter will visit the Ivory Coast and Senegal from Sunday in his first trip to Africa since the Confederation of African Football president Issa Hayatou announced he will stand against the Swiss for the leadership of world football later this year.

Blatter will attend a meeting of French-speaking African sports ministers in Abidjan on and then travel to Senegal on Tuesday in the last of his visits to all 32 World Cup qualifying countries, a spokesman said on Thursday.

Blatter's trip to Abidjan had been scheduled before the announcement of Hayatou's candidacy for the FIFA presidency, to be decided at the organisation's congress in Seoul, South Korea on May 28-29.

The meeting will deal with government interference in the running of soccer in the region but also

couldn't complete them. We lost out against Deportivo," said the England shot-stopper.

Wenger was perplexed.

"We are surprised and disappointed with this result. It's not only surprising but strange," he mused.

Leverkusen were left to bask in the glory of topping a group which had only weeks ago seemed totally beyond them.

And club general manager Reiner Calmund was quick to dub their achievement "the greatest success in the club's history - even more so than our 1988 UEFA Cup win."

Coach Klaus Toppmoller maintained the win would "prove a big boost to us in the *Bundesliga* title race" as well as the Champions League itself.

PANATHINAIKOS 2; REAL

In Group C, Panathinaikos ended Real Madrid's winning streak to join the eight-times European champions in the quarters at the expense of Porto, beaten 2-0 at Sparta Prague.

The Greek side, third going into the final match, took advantage as Real rested several top names.

Nikos Liberopoulos gave the Greeks a ninth-minute lead but Spanish international forward Fernando Morientes levelled, aided by a cross from England international Steve McManaman, making a rare start.

Yannis Goumas put Panathinaikos back in front in the second half but Champions League debutant Javier Portillo levelled with a stunning drive.

Real advanced with 16 points to eight for the Greeks with Sparta third on six and Porto bottom on four.

Prague thanked goals from Libor Sionko and Jiri Jarosik for their win

SPARTA 2; PORTO 0

day's final matches in Groups A and B are Group A winners Manchester United and runners-up Bayern Munich, the holders, Group B winners Barcelona and four-times European champions Liverpool.

Friday's draw at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, for the quarter-final first legs on April 2 and 3 could now see an all-Spanish encounter as Real and Barcelona cannot meet, having won their groups.

But either could meet Deportivo - or indeed Bayern.

Manchester United, Barcelona, Real and Leverkusen cannot meet each other while United cannot play Bayern as they came out of the same second phase group.

The same goes for Barca and Liverpool, while Real will not meet Panathinaikos and Leverkusen cannot face Deportivo.

CUP CORNER



AFP, Lagos

Nigeria have yet to chose a captain for this year's World Cup finals but the player selected must prove he can deliver the goods on the pitch, national coach Adegboye Onigbinde told local radio on Wednesday.

"Competence on the field of play will determine who will be chosen as the captain of the team. Every player should be motivated and be ambitious to do the nation proud," he said.

Age and long service to the team will not be factors in the choice of a captain to replace out-of-favour Sunday Oliseh of German giants Borussia Dortmund, Onigbinde said.

Striker Nwankwo Kanu, who plays for English Premiership side Arsenal, has reportedly been offered the captaincy of the 'Super Eagles' even though Onigbinde insisted a captain would only be named after the team's World Cup build-up.

Nigeria are drawn in arguably the toughest first round World Cup group with Argentina, England and Sweden.

The coach also defended his 54-man list of World Cup probabilities, which included established stars like Taribo West, Ike Shorunmu and Austin 'Jay Jay' Okocha.

"I do not want to regret after I might have made my selection. The more people I invite, the higher the chances of picking the best of them," he stated.

"When I invited Mudasiru Lawal into the camp in 1984 many Nigerians criticised me for that action. But later when they saw his high performance, they commended me for that action," said the 64-year-old coach, who went on to explain his selection policy.

"You do not throw away the water you have in your tank at home simply because you heard a rumbling in the sky. The sky may rumble or thunder and not rain," he added.

RIVALDO A REAL CONCERN

Barcelona

Barcelona forward Rivaldo says injury will prevent him playing in Brazil's World Cup warm-up match against Yugoslavia next Wednesday.

The Brazilian international, who missed his club's 1-0 Champions League win at Galatasaray on Tuesday, has an ankle strain sustained in last week's 1-1 draw against Real Madrid.

The 29-year-old told reporters on Wednesday he would miss the friendly as well as the Catalan side's league match against Valladolid on Sunday.

He also hinted that he may miss the following week's league game against Las Palmas.

Brazil coach Luis Felipe Scolari told Barcelona-based daily Sport on Wednesday he was concerned that doubts about Rivaldo's fitness could jeopardise his participation in this year's World Cup.

I am very worried about the injury problems Rivaldo has had this season," he said. "If he hasn't fully recovered by the beginning of May I will have to look for someone else to cover his place as the World Cup is going to be very tough."

Brazil have been drawn with Turkey, China and Costa Rica in group C of the tournament.

KAREMBEU, MARLET BACK FOR FRANCE

Paris

Steve Marlet and Christian Karembeu have been recalled to the France squad for the international football friendly against Scotland at the Stade de France next Wednesday.

Fulham striker Marlet and Olympiakos defender Christian Karembeu were the main surprises for the match which serves as one of the warm-up fixtures for the May 31 to June 30 football showcase in Korea and Japan.

However coach Roger Lemerre did not name Liverpool striker Nicolas Anelka or Bolton attacking midfielder Youri Djorkaeff in his 19-man list.

Several established players, such as keeper Fabien Barthez and defenders Frank Leboeuf and Bixente Lizarazu, who were out injured for the Romania game last month, earned expected recalls.

On the other hand, players out injured include Lilian Thuram, Willy Sagnol, Christophe Dugary and Alain Boghossian.

These absences mean Philippe Christanval and Eric Carriere remain in the squad with just two friendly matches before the list for the World Cup is finalised.

SQUAD

Keepers: Fabien Barthez (Manchester United/Eng), Ulrich Rame (Bordeaux)

Defenders: Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/Ger), Vincent Candela (AS Roma/Ita), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/Eng), Philippe Christanval (Barcelona/Spa), Frank Leboeuf (Marseille), Mikael Silvestre (Manchester United/Eng), Christian Karembeu (Olympiakos/Gre)

Midfielders: Eric Carriere (Lyon), Claude Makelele (Real Madrid/Spa), Emmanuel Petit (Chelsea/Eng), Robert Pires (Arsenal/Eng), Patrick Vieira (Arsenal/Eng), Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid/Spa)

Strikers: Thierry Henry (Arsenal/Eng), David Trezeguet (Juventus Turin/Ita), Sylvain Wiltord (Arsenal/Eng), Steve Marlet (Fulham/Eng)

JAPAN PIP UKRAINE

Osaka

Japan beat Ukraine 1-0 here Thursday in an opener to their eight-match build-up for the World Cup finals that saw both sides play without their overseas-based stars.

Shimizu S-Pulse midfielder Kazuyuki Toda flicked in a goal after a flurry of passes from a short corner kick in the 24th minute of the friendly match at Nagai Stadium.

Japan, due to co-host the premier football event with South Korea in June, will leave here Friday for an international against Poland in Lodz next Wednesday.

Ukraine, who lost to Germany 5-2 on aggregate in a World Cup qualifying play-off, face Romania next Wednesday.

Mrs Ronaldo debuts



AFP, Monza, Italy

Milene Domingues, the wife of Inter Milan's Brazilian superstar Ronaldo, made her debut for Italian women's team Fiamma Monza on Tuesday in a 1-1 draw with an American team called Region Four.

Domingues, watched by her husband and baby son Ronald with her mother-in-law Sonia also present, came on in the second half of the match as a substitute

and played for half an hour.

She showed some skilful footwork in front of about 1,000 supporters but did not appear to be fully match fit - she has acknowledged she needs to get back to full fitness after motherhood and a long lay-off from football.

Her best moment was a piece of skill that saw her outfox two American players.

Domingues formerly played for the women's team of Sao Paolo-based Corinthians.

Her husband returned to Italy last week to resume training with Inter after being laid off since before Christmas with injury.



PHOTO: INTERNET

WITH DAD TO SUPPORT MAMA: Superstar Ronaldo and his son Ronald watch Ronaldo's wife Milene Domingues play in a friendly football match for women's club Fiamma Monza against Region 4 USA at the Brianteo stadium in Monza on March 19.

Vieira's reassurance



AFP, London

Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira has said he will stay at Arsenal to give the London club something to cheer although they have been knocked out of the Champions League.

Juventus beat Arsenal 1-0 in Turin on Wednesday night to end the Gunners' hopes of a first ever Champions League title and some football experts believed failure in Europe would see an exodus of star players.

However, Vieira has his sights on a Premiership and FA Cup double, and insists he will be seeing out the remaining two years on his Highbury contract.

Quizzed about his future by ITV Sport, Vieira said: "I will be here. Where do you want me to go? I have two years left on my contract and the only way I will leave is if the club tell me they don't want me to stay any more."

A host of Europe's top clubs, including Champions League quarter-finalists Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United, have been linked with Vieira during his time at Arsenal.

Real Madrid were the frontrunners to gain his signature, with reports Vieira has already

signed a pre-contract agreement with the Spanish giants.

However, Arsenal have reportedly opened negotiations with Vieira on a new deal which could double the player's wages to 60,000 pounds (86,000 dollars) per week.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has insisted throughout the speculation that Vieira is not for sale - even for 50 million pounds (72 million dollars) and that the player wants to stay at Highbury.

Vieira added: "I am with the club until my contract is over, so I'm just going to do my time until the end of the season. I will try to do my best and try to win the Premier League and the FA Cup, and I will come back next season.

"You want me to leave, or what? People will talk. People say what they want to say. My relationship with the club and the boss is fantastic, so that is not in my mind, and I told you before what is going to happen.

"I have two years left on my contract and that's it. In my mind, everything is clear."

Meanwhile Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger warned Manchester United and Liverpool that his side's painful Champions League exit is set to give them a vital advantage over their two rivals in the title race.

Wenger was trying to apply a positive gloss to an immensely frustrating night as Arsenal failed to follow United and Liverpool into the quarter-finals of the competition.