

A big big night

UEFA
CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

The last three winners of the European Champions League face off in an awesome strong night of quarter-final first leg action on Tuesday.

Reigning champions Bayern Munich play host to Real Madrid, the winners in 2000, while Manchester United, who lifted the trophy in 1999, tackle Deportivo La Coruna in Spain.

MAN UNITED V DEPORTIVO

United are hoping it will be third time lucky against.

The 1999 European champions have already lost to their Galician hosts twice in the competition's group stages this season, going down 2-1 in Deportivo's Riazor stadium, where they play this week, and then 3-2 at Old Trafford in the first round group stage.

"We didn't take them then but hopefully it will be a different story this time," said United midfielder Paul Scholes.

"We faced them before when it was earlier in the season, when we were having a few problems and making some mistakes."

The England international might give Deportivo more to worry about than David Beckham after his outstanding display in United's 4-3 Premiership win against Leeds on Saturday, helped by an early goal from Scholes.

However, Deportivo are confident they can contain the threat from Scholes, Beckham and the rest of the star-studded United squad, who are also determined not to exit at this stage in the competition for the third year in a row.

"We've done it before and we can do it again," said Deportivo's Spanish international midfielder Sergio Gonzalez.

"Obviously it is not going to be easy but we are certainly capable of getting a good result," Sergio said on Sunday.

United coach Alex Ferguson is the joint leading scorer in the Champions League this season, along with Juventus' David Trezeguet, having found the net eight times.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta will bring back striker Diego Tristan and right back Lionel Scaloni, who were both suspended for the disappointing 1-1 draw at Real Sociedad on Saturday.

Despite missing Tristan's scoring touch in San Sebastian, having the World Cup-bound striker fully rested could prove a blessing.

Tristan has been almost as prolific as Van Nistelrooy, having scored 15 goals in the Spanish First Division and another six in the Champions League this season.

Irureta acknowledges that despite the two previous victories over United, this could be more difficult.

"We are going to have to concentrate and work hard. It would be so easy to make a silly mistake against United, and we would be highly likely to be punished," said Irureta.

However, regardless of the result on Tuesday, this tie will not be over until after the second leg. We gave a good account of ourselves the last time we visited Old Trafford. No-one and nowhere scares us any more.

"Like I have been saying since we won the Spanish championship two years ago, Spanish football is no longer about Real Madrid and Barcelona," commented Irureta.

One man uniquely poised to



Stefan Effenberg (R), the Bayern Munich captain, shares a light moment with teammate Salihamidzic during a training session in Munich on March 31.

PHOTO: AFP

judge the tie is Alaves' Jordi Cruyff, the only current Spanish First Division player to have played for the Premiership champions.

Cruyff, who moved back to Spain two years ago, tips Deportivo without hesitation.

"The Spanish are further ahead. It's not even a close thing, I think it is clearcut," commented Cruyff last week.

BAYERN V REAL MADRID

expect when they face eight-time European kings Real in a mouthwatering tie in Munich.

"It's effectively like bringing the final forward," said Bayern President Franz Beckenbauer.

As Europe's top club competition reverts to a knockout format after two group stages, only one of these giants can progress from a draw which punished Bayern for finishing

the night.

But Real's chances of progressing to challenge for a third European title in five seasons are being ham-

back when he is not 100 percent and risk making things worse."

As for Zidane, his sprain is less serious and the signs are he will probably start the match. "His ankle is still sore and we will just have to see what happens though we are hopeful he'll make it for Tuesday," added Hernandez.

Bayern will be without German international midfielder Mehmet Scholl, who injured his ankle in the 0-0 league draw against SV Hamburg on Saturday. The club said the 31-year-old, who had only just returned from a back injury, would probably also miss the return leg at the Bernabeu next Wednesday.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said: "It will hit us hard because I was counting on him against Real. He's a creative player who can make the difference in this kind of match.

"But we'll do everything possible to beat Real and give ourselves a good basis for the return leg."

Bayern are struggling to retain their Bundesliga title, but captain Stefan Effenberg has all the motivation he needs for a run to the Champions League final at Hampden Park as he is leaving the club at the end of the season.

"We're looking forward to the game. Real Madrid are the club above all other clubs," he told Bayern's website.

"One great team has to go out at this stage and I just hope it isn't us," he said.

And Effenberg hopes World Cup and Euro 2000 winner Zidane will be playing.

"I've never played against Zidane," he said. "I've come up against a number of interesting opponents, and now the best is on his way. I'm looking forward to taking him on one-to-one."

The winner of this tie will play the winner of the quarter-final between surprise Greek qualifiers Panathinaikos and Spanish giants Barcelona.

FIXTURES

(Both matches 1845 GMT)

Tuesday

Bayern Munich (Ger) v Real Madrid (Spa)

Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) v Manchester United (Eng)



Real Madrid coach Vincente del Bosque speaking at a press conference in Munich yesterday.

second in their group to Manchester United.

The current Real and Bayern lineups know each other inside out after meeting in the Champions League semi-finals for the past two seasons.

Real won in 2000 before going on to beat Valencia in the final but the Bavarians triumphed in both legs last season before overcoming the hapless Valencia on penalties in the

ankle.

Club doctor Juan Carlos Hernandez said: "Figo has been training on his own for the last week. 'But we don't want to force him

Portuguese international Figo is still out after originally injuring an ankle in mid-February and is unlikely to play while French playmaker Zidane had to be substituted late in Saturday's 1-0 league victory at Sevilla after spraining the ankle.

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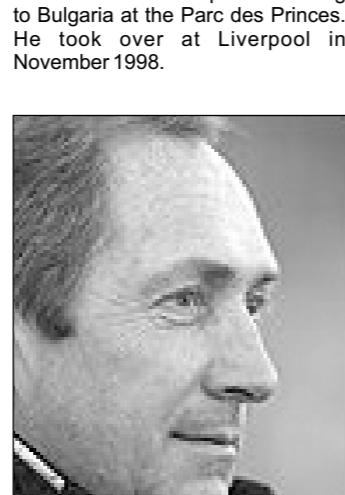
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win the national title, the Catalan club will use all their efforts to succeed in the Champions League.

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier was on Monday awarded the Legion d'Honneur, one of France's top civil awards.

The 54-year-old, who guided the English side to the UEFA Cup in 2001, has recently recovered from heart surgery and will help oversee the team's Champions League quarter-final, first leg clash against Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday.

Houllier, a former English teacher, is a former coach of Lens, Paris Saint-Germain, and was seconds from taking the French national team to the 1994 World Cup before losing to Bulgaria at the Parc des Princes. He took over at Liverpool in November 1998.



Michael Reiziger, Barcelona defender Michael Reiziger is expected to join English giants Manchester United for a fee of 6.1 million pounds (8.7 million dollars) in the next few weeks, it was reported Sunday.

The Holland international, who is unhappy with his lack of first-team football in Spain, insisted the deal will be tied up soon.

"I have played for Ajax, AC Milan and Barcelona, three of the greatest clubs in Europe. But now I'm going to the greatest club in the world, Manchester United. It's only a matter of time," he told the News of the World.

"I know Manchester United have made a bid for me although I'm leaving all the negotiations to my representatives who are arranging everything. It will all be okay in a few weeks."

Legion d'Honneur for Houllier

AFP, Paris



Rivaldo fit again

INTERNET, Barcelona

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A 77th minute strike from Malik Diop secured Lorient's home win against Nimes, who themselves are last in their division, and set up a final against Corsican side Bastia.

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