

A big big night



AFP, Paris

The last three winners of the European Champions League face off in an awesomely 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 rested Ruud van Nistelrooy against Leeds but the on-song Dutch international striker will be back against Deportivo, probably at the expense of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

Van Nistelrooy 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



PHOTO: AFP

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

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

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

final. But Real's chances of progressing to challenge for a third European title in five seasons are being hampered by injury problems for their creative hub, Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane.



JAVIER IURETA

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PHOTO: AFP

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

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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 an 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

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.

Table with 2 columns: Match, Date, Time, Location. Rows include Bayern Munich (Ger) v Real Madrid (Spa) and Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) v Manchester United (Eng).

CUP CORNER 2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN AFP, Seoul

South Korean religious groups on Monday launched a campaign to make the national team's fanatic supporters stop calling themselves "the Red Devils" before the World Cup finals begin.

Church leaders said the name will bring dishonour on the country during the tournament to be held in South Korea and Japan from May 31. "Devils are the enemies of Christians," said Shin Hyon-Kyun, head of the National Gospel Movement, at a special service before several hundred followers marched through the centre of Seoul.

Thousands of supporters of the national team calling themselves the Red Devils gather together to sing team songs and bang drums at each South Korea match.

But church campaigners want them to change their name to the Red Tigers or something without religious connotations. "Red Devils Bring Shame to Korea" said one placard carried on the rally.

One church has set up a rival cheer squad called "The White Angels" which sits at the opposite end of the stadium at each match chanting rival songs. Others have launched Internet petitions and staged public meetings.

"The whole world will be watching Korea during the World Cup and this is the image we will be showing them. Everyone knows that the devils are evil," said Park Ki-Ho a spokesman for the religious World Cup Mission 2002.

The Red Devils have totally rejected the demands however. "The name belongs to our members and only they can change it. We will never respond to these calls. We would rather focus on getting ready for the World Cup," said Red Devils spokesman Shim Dong-Hin.

REVENGE ON RONALDO'S MIND

Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Ronaldo admitted Sunday that every day he dreams of avenging his country's 1998 World Cup defeat to France.

"Every day I dream of a new final against France. That 1998 defeat still sticks in my throat. And only a win against France, in a championship final, can end this trauma," Ronaldo told the daily O Globo.

The Inter Milan player suffered convulsions in his hotel hours before the final four years ago in Paris and was only a shadow of himself when he played in the game which France won 3-0.

Since then, Ronaldo's career has been hampered by a career-threatening right knee injury, and the former star striker is fighting to recover on time to compete in his third World Cup. He was world champion in 1994, aged 17 years.

"You can't erase everything that happened four years ago. But I know that people will only forget that defeat against France when I help Brazil to conquer the world title. And I believe that that will be possible in the next World Cup," said Ronaldo.

Ronaldo pointed out that in the 1994 World Cup he was a youngster whose teammates were also his idols, and that it was a major change in the 1998 championship where he was a star in his own right.

"In 1998 my responsibility was much greater. But that did not affect me. It was painful to lose the title. Now it will be a new experience. I have a lot of confidence in Brazil whom I believe are stronger than in 1998. The pressure on me will not be as great," he said.

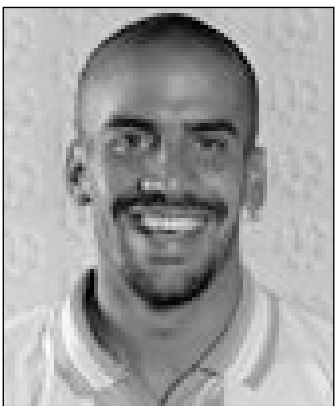
As to which player who will be the star of this summer's showcase of world football in Japan and South Korea, Ronaldo is keeping an open mind.

"It's hard to point someone out before a ball is kicked. The World Cup is a tournament which brings together the best."

But he predicted: "They will be (Luis) Figo, (Zinedine) Zidane, Rivaldo, (Christian) Vieri and (Michael) Owen, among others."



RONALDO



JUAN SEBASTIAN VERON

Veron concerned

AFP, London

Argentine international Juan Sebastian Veron is to see a specialist about the nagging heel injury which is keeping him out of the Manchester United line-up.

Veron was absent when the English champions flew to Spain for Tuesday's Champions' League quarter-final first leg against Deportivo La Coruna.

He had a scan two weeks ago on his heel, which revealed no broken bones, and now United fear he may have damaged his Achilles tendon.

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson said: "We're sending him to see a specialist. There is no break and it may be more to do with his Achilles."

The midfielder has only managed to start just one of United's last four games because of the problem.

Veron is United's only real injury absentee going into the game and his heel problem, at least, eases Ferguson's problem of who to pick in midfield.

Ferguson also confirmed that striker Ruud van Nistelrooy would return to the side after being rested for Saturday's win over Leeds.

French Cup Lorient in final

AFP, Paris

Lorient are bottom of the French First Division but on Sunday reached the Cup final after snuffing out the hopes of Second Division Nimes with a 1-0 victory.

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.

Primera Liga

Bilbao battered again



AFP, Madrid

A week after Athletic Bilbao suffered their worst ever home league defeat when they lost 6-1 to Celta Vigo, Jupp Heynckes' team crashed 5-2 at Villarreal on Sunday, while the German's former club Real Madrid continued to hang on to top spot.

Victor Fernandez opened the scoring for Villarreal after eight minutes and they were 5-0 up at the break.

Villarreal looked capable of bettering their best win in their brief time in the top flight, a 5-0 victory over Salamanca four seasons ago, until they relaxed during the second half and allowed the Basques two consolation goals.

"We had a lot of people missing but that's no excuse. We committed the same errors that we made a week ago and some players didn't seem to have learnt anything from that defeat," said an angry Heynckes.

The emphatic victory eased Villarreal's relegation worries and moved them up to 13th place although just five points cover the bottom eight teams.

Athletic stay in seventh but their European ambitions for next season are ebbing away.

Real Betis slipped a place to fifth on Sunday after they were held to a 0-0 draw at struggling Rayo Vallecano.

In a thrilling game which saw both sides fail to capitalise on their chances, Rayo had an injury-time effort by Michel Sanchez annulled for apparently being offside.

However, television replays clearly showed that Michel's goal was legal.

Malaga maintained their slim

Primera Liga's top six

Spanish league table after Sunday's late match between Rayo Vallecano and Real Betis (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Table with 11 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, Pts. Rows include Real Madrid, Valencia, Deportivo La Coruna, Celta Vigo, Real Betis, Barcelona.

Top booters taking EPO?



AFP, London

A FIFA official has claimed it would not be surprising if some professional footballers are benefiting from the blood-boosting drug EPO to gain an edge on their opponents, The Observer newspaper reported on Sunday.

Michel D'Hooghe, the chairman of the medical commission of football's world governing body, said it was not unthinkable that some top footballers were using the high-profile drug.

"EPO is now quite commonly used in other sports and I cannot imagine there is a barrier for EPO around the football field," he told The Observer.

The demands on leading pro-

fessionals are greater than ever and D'Hooghe believes some players may be turning to artificial methods to help them cope with such a gruelling schedule.

"Some specialists in doping, people who have done some doping in cycling and endurance skiing, suddenly appear around football clubs," he added.

"If a player playing all these games feels exhausted, this could be the answer: to take an artificial product to improve his condition to make him feel he can run for 90 minutes.

"That could be EPO, anabolic steroids or amphetamines. Their normal training, nutrition and rest are not enough."

The International Olympic Committee introduced a combined blood and urine test for EPO, a drug which boosts the

oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

And two players from both sides during this year's World Cup in South Korea and Japan will be asked to provide a blood as well as a urine sample after each match in order to deter the use of EPO.

Gordon Taylor, chief executive of England's Professional Footballers' Association, agrees with D'Hooghe that some players may be taking drugs.

"Players at the top are playing more games than ever before, too many, and you wonder how they cope and survive and keep a competitive edge," he said.

"Given the prevalence of drug abuse in other sports and society, it would be naive to think it wasn't going to be present in football. Football isn't an oasis."

Reiziger MU bound?



AFP, London

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."



MICHAEL REIZIGER

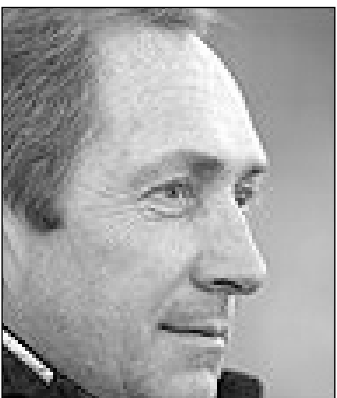
Legion d'Honneur for Houllier

AFP, Paris

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.



GERARD HOULLIER



RIVALDO

Rivaldo fit again

INTERNET, Barcelona

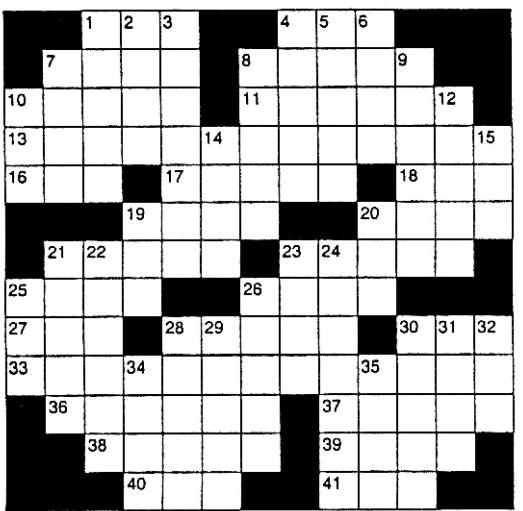
Barcelona FC midfielder Rivaldo has recovered from an injury and after a two-week break he is again with the team, Dianospport reported.

Tomorrow the Brazilian international will travel to Athens with Barca to get ready for the Champions League quarterfinal against Panathinaikos in midweek.

Rivaldo could have started against Las Palmas last Saturday, but the medicals advised to rest the player to be sure he can enter the pitch on Wednesday.

Thus, the break helped Rivaldo to restore his physical fitness ahead of the climax of the season.

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



CRYPTOQUIP

T T D Z F T Q L Z E S H Z K K N L

B J V H Q Z D L Q B S J V N A K L

B C J V F C B J O Z E Z M Z H

J O M J H A E

Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A FENCER GOT A LARGE AQUARIUM, I'M QUITE CONFIDENT HE'D FILL IT WITH SWORDFISH.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: H equals R

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words with an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.