



PHOTO:AFP

Teammates congratulate Manchester United ace David Beckham (No 7) after his superb long-range goal against Deportivo la Coruna at La Coruna on April 2.

MU dazzle Deportivo



AFP, La Coruna

English Premiership champions Manchester United beat Deportivo La Coruna 2-0 in their European Champions League quarter-final first leg here on Tuesday in rainy conditions.

After 12 previously fruitless attempts, 13 was the 1999 European champions' lucky number as they notched up their first win over Spanish opposition in Spain.

First half goals from David Beckham, a spectacular lob from 35 metres, and Ruud van Nistelrooy ensured United return to Old Trafford for next Wednesday's second leg as the overwhelming favourites to progress to the semi-finals.

However, they will be without club captain Roy Keane for those matches as the Irishman was stretchered off in the first half in a clash with Sergio Gonzalez and will miss up to six weeks with a hamstring injury.

United coach Sir Alex Ferguson clearly decided that attack was the best form of defence, despite opting to start with English international Nicky Butt in the midfield rather than having Norwegian striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer accompany van Nistelrooy up front.

"Butt was there to contain Juan Carlos Valeron, but in Europe you have to attack in order to reach a level at which you can be successful. We reached that level tonight," commented Ferguson.

"I just hope that next week we don't regret the chances we missed, but the spirit we showed gives us a big chance," added the taciturn

Scotsman, taking nothing for granted.

The Reds took the initiative from the kick-off with an early chance falling to Paul Scholes after just four minutes.

Eleven minutes later Beckham produced another piece of magic that will remain in his scrapbook - and the memories of the 1,500 United fans who made the difficult trip to Galicia - long after he has retired.

Like his spectacular injury-time free-kick that secured World Cup qualification for England against Greece last year, Beckham showed equal that few in the game can equal when the ball ran loose in the midfield.

Seeing that the Deportivo back four had pressed too far forward, Beckham lobbed the ball over them and the Deportivo goalkeeper Francisco Molina.

The despairing former Spanish international realised too late that it was flying under his cross bar rather than over it.

Deportivo settled themselves and started to make opportunists of their own, with chances falling to Diego Tristan, Cesar Martin and Victor Sanchez, but after soaking up 15 minutes of pressure Manchester United got back into the game.

Van Nistelrooy got United's second goal after 39 minutes, connecting with a Mikael Silvestre cross.

The visitors nearly added a third 12 minutes from the whistle when Solskjaer, who had come on for van Nistelrooy only two minutes before, hit the post.

Despite the miserable night for Deportivo, their coach Javier Irureta still believes they can come back from the brink.

"In football nothing is definite. If

we can get one early goal then everything can be overcome. However, the first goal we conceded was a present to them," said Irureta, criticising his out of position defenders.

A negative note for United, in addition to the injury to Keane, on a night when they got revenge for their two defeats by Deportivo in the first round group stage was the three yellow cards they were shown.

The two goalscorers were booked needlessly in the first half, actions they might regret if, as expected, United reach the semi-finals to face either Liverpool or Bayer Leverkusen.

Beckham handled the ball deliberately in a seemingly safe position while van Nistelrooy came back onto the field without permission, having left briefly to get treatment following a foul.

Paul Scholes will miss next week's return match after being booked for hacking Spanish international Valeron early in the second half and picking up a second yellow card in the Champions League.

Ferguson, in familiar fashion, unhesitatingly defended his player despite the evidence, and remains optimistic that it will not seriously affect his team.

"Paul was unlucky but we have the resources to cope and will have to cope," said Ferguson.

Characteristically, he turned his anger on the opposition after Tristan had scythed down Beckham in injury time, and the England captain also left the field on a stretcher, although Ferguson only described the injury as a blow to the left ankle without revealing its severity.

"It was a terrible tackle on David. I'm amazed it only got a yellow card, it deserved a red," fumed Ferguson.

Fergie optimistic about Beckham



AFP, London

David Beckham could recover from his ankle injury in time for Manchester United's Champions League return against Deportivo La Coruna next week, manager Alex Ferguson confirmed Wednesday.

Beckham was stretchered off in stoppage time during United's 2-0 win at the Riazor Stadium Tuesday night following a late tackle by Diego Tristan.

The England captain was walking with a slight limp as he travelled back to Manchester on Wednesday with the rest of the United squad.

He was wearing flip-flops and had his left ankle bandaged.

Beckham was due to have a scan later Wednesday to determine the seriousness of his injury, but Ferguson insisted it was not that bad.

The United manager feels he could even return for the second leg of United's quarter-final at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

"We will know more later, but he could be back for next week," he told the Press Association.

That will be a huge relief for Ferguson as he is already without the suspended Paul Scholes and the injured Roy Keane, who will be out for four to six weeks with a hamstring injury, for the return leg against the Spaniards.

Argentine midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron could also miss out with an Achilles injury.

CUP CORNER



AFP, Zurich

World governing body FIFA will publish on May 24 the 23-strong squads for the 32 teams that will compete in this summer's World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan.

The country federations will have until May 21 at 1100 GMT to inform FIFA of their selections which must include three goalkeepers. In contrast to the last finals in France four years ago, there will be no need for countries to send a pre-selection squad of 35 players one month ahead of the start of the finals.

URUGUAY TO PLAY THAILAND

Montevideo

Uruguay will face Thailand in a World Cup warm-up match on May 18 in Bangkok, a Uruguay football federation official Osvaldo Gimenez said here.

The match comes after their May 8 date with Ghana in Montevideo, and two runs out against the United States from May 12 though the exact dates are yet to be fixed. Uruguay have still not decided whether to take up Brazil's offer of a friendly on April 21.

NO BOTTLES, UMBRELLAS, CONFETTI

Tokyo

Spectators at football's World Cup finals will not be allowed to bring plastic drink bottles, umbrellas and confetti into stadiums, organisers said Tuesday.

The Japanese and South Korean World Cup organising committees said "stones, bottles, cans, PET bottles with caps attached, sealed paper packets, frozen substances or other objects which may be considered as intended to be thrown" were banned.

The rules for spectators at stadiums and other World Cup facilities also prohibit bringing in umbrellas, "with the exception of folding umbrellas judged harmless by the security personnel".

Not surprisingly firearms and knives were also listed as banned objects. Takahisa Ishida, security director for the Japanese organising committee JAWOC, told reporters that confetti would be prohibited "because they hamper competition when scattered in enormous volume".

It is the first time that the World Cup finals are being held in Asia and in a co-hosting scheme. Both Japan and South Korea are braced for their first encounter with European football hooligans during the month-long finals which kick off on May 31.

The organisers have banned people from taking alcoholic beverages into the stadiums, but beer will be sold in the venues in limited amounts as a US brewer is one of the worldwide sponsors of the 2002 finals.

Finally Batistuta!



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina have recalled Gabriel Batistuta for the first time in six months but, as on the previous occasion he was picked, fellow striker Hernan Crespo was unavailable through injury.

Manchester United midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron was also named in the squad for the friendly away to Germany in two weeks' time despite worries about a possible Achilles tendon damage as Argentina's injury worries piled up.

Midfield hard man Diego Simeone, still recovering from a knee operation last year, and central defender Roberto Ayala were both omitted due to injury.

Batistuta and Crespo, two of the world's top strikers, have not been in the same starting line-up since coach Marcelo Bielsa took over three years ago and Tuesday's selection went no nearer to solving the mystery as to whether he will field the pair together at the World Cup.

Crespo has generally taken precedence over Batistuta but the AS Roma player, who has also been hampered by injuries, scored the equaliser away to Paraguay in November when he made his international comeback after nearly a year.

Veteran striker Claudio Caniggia, who made his international comeback in February at the age of 35 after five years in the wilderness, was picked for the third game in a row while Real Madrid's Santiago Solari, who did not play in Argentina's qualifiers, was also named.

Argentina, who in their two matches this year have drawn 1-1 with Wales and 2-2 with Cameroon, have been beset by injury worries.

The injuries are threatening to wreck a team which marched through the South American World Cup qualifying competition with 13 wins in 18 games.

Defenders Nelson Vivas and Eduardo Berizzo have both been ruled out of the World Cup and the latest worry concerns Veron's heel.

Veron did not travel with



GABRIEL BATISTUTA

Manchester United for Tuesday's Champions League match away to Deportivo Coruna and, although a scan last week revealed no broken bones, the English champions said the heel was still troubling him and that he would see a specialist.

Crespo injured his ankle in training with his Italian club Lazio two weeks ago and tests on showed that he had damaged his ligaments.

He missed the match with Cameroon and is expected to be out of action for a total of four weeks.

Bielsa, who was not available to comment on his selections, picked 19 foreign-based players in the squad announced Tuesday, leaving three of four places for home-based players to be named later.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: German Burgos (Atletico Madrid, Spain), Pablo Cavallero (Celta Vigo, Spain)

Defenders: Facundo Quiroga (Sporting Lisbon, Portugal), Mauricio Pochettino (Paris St Germain, France), Walter Samuel (AS Roma, Italy), Diego Placente (Bayer Leverkusen, Germany), Jose Chamot (AC Milan, Italy)

Midfielders: Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan, Italy), Juan Sebastian Veron (Manchester United, England), Juan Pablo Sorin (Cruzeiro, Brazil), Pablo Aimar (Valencia, Spain), Matias Almeyda (Parma, Italy), Marcelo Gallardo (AS Monaco, France)

Forwards: Claudio Caniggia (Glasgow Rangers, Scotland), Gabriel Batistuta (AS Roma, Italy), Kily Gonzalez (Valencia, Spain), Gustavo Lopez (Celta Vigo, Spain), Claudio Lopez (Lazio, Italy), Santiago Solari

Bayern leave it late



AFP, Munich

Defending champions Bayern Munich staged a thrilling comeback to beat Real Madrid 2-1 in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final clash here on Tuesday.

Two goals in the space of six minutes towards the end of the game gave Bayern a vital edge to take to the Spanish capital in the return next week.

After Geremi had given Real an 11th minute lead, it looked as if Bayern were heading for defeat until a dramatic finale.

Skipper Stefan Effenberg, who had missed a 71st minute penalty, made amends by scoring from close range in the 82nd minute after being set up by Giovane Elber.

Then, with just two minutes left, the impressive Elber played a one-two with Claudio Pizarro who blasted the ball home to send most of the fans inside the Olympic Stadium into ecstasy.

The two sides had met in the semi-finals of the event in the last two years - Real won through on their way to the title in 2000 but it was the German champions who clinched both legs in 2001 as they made their way to the trophy.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said afterwards: "German teams never give up and especially not Bayern Munich. Elber had hit the crossbar, Effenberg missed a penalty but our heads did not drop and we went on to earn a deserved success."

Hitzfeld's opposite number at Madrid, Vicente Del Bosque, said he had suspected Bayern might bounce back strongly just as they did during the final moments of the match.

"It was a painful result but I suspected Bayern might hit back like that. We tried to play the same way in the second half as we did in the first but it never really materialized that way.

"It was a typical victory by a battling side like Bayern."

Real shocked the defending champions by taking the lead after just 11 minutes when Cameroon defender Geremi hit a left foot shot from the edge of the box which bobbed over the despairing dive of Bayern keeper Oliver Kahn.

The goal came just moments after Geremi had put a header from a Zinedine Zidane cross wide of the mark.

The Spanish side, chasing a ninth European Cup, surged forward after that goal looking for more reward with Raul coming close on a couple of occasions.

Santiago Solari also caused a few nervous moments for the home side when he shot wide from outside the area.

It wasn't until the 38th minute that Real goalkeeper Caesar Sanchez was called to make his first serious save when he dived to his right to push away a smart turn and volley



PHOTO:AFP

CAPTAINS COLLIDE! Real Madrid captain Fernando Hierro (L) involved in a heated exchange with his Bayern Munich counterpart Stefan Effenberg at Munich on April 2.

from Elber.

But Elber had already given warning of his speed, twice getting the better of his markers only to be flagged offside when he was bearing down on goal.

Then Santa Cruz headed wide of the Madrid goal as Bayern began to string some confident moves together.

Bayern dominated the second half and were well worth their win although it seemed that they would suffer a fruitless night.

Elber found himself at the forefront of Bayern pressure again when Sanchez had to hurry to gather a strike from the edge of the box from the Brazilian after 52 minutes.

The Germans continued to push and Sami Koufour had a header that sailed wide from an Effenberg free-kick in the 68th minute.

A minute later, Bayern thought they had levelled the score when Bixente Lizarazu crossed from the left and Elber met it with a fine header which came off the crossbar with Sanchez well beaten.

In the 70th minute, Bayern squandered their best opportunity. Substitute Hasan Salihamidzic was brought down in the area by Pavon Barahona and referee Hugh Dallas of Scotland gave the penalty.

But Effenberg's spot-kick was

saved by Sanchez diving to his left.

Sanchez was called on again four minutes later when he saved a point-blank header from Elber.

Zidane had been a doubt for the match having picked up an ankle injury in the league game with Sevilla at the weekend while the Spanish champions were also missing Portuguese ace Luis Figo.

Bayern were without German international midfielder Mehmet Scholl, who injured his ankle in the 0-0 league draw against SV Hamburg on Saturday.

The winner of this tie will play the winner of the quarter-final between surprise Greek qualifiers Panathinaikos and Spanish giants Barcelona who are playing their first leg on Wednesday in Athens.

Zidane told French television station Canal Plus afterwards: "Unfortunately after conceding the first goal we were just not able to deal with the situation.

"Bayern never give up and hardly ever have a bad match and that's what brought about this result. But it's not the end of the world for us. This tie is certainly not over and it's not mission impossible in the second leg."

Romario remains a mystery

Scolari names foreign legion



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil denied on Tuesday the players had formed a pact with coach Luiz Felipe Scolari to keep Romario out of the squad and said speculation that the veteran had been the victim of a soft drinks war was also untrue.

The comments came as the controversy over Romario, who has not been picked by his country since last July despite excellent perfor-

mances for his club Vasco da Gama, refused to go away.

Technical director Antonio Lopes dismissed a report published by the sports daily Lance, which claimed the players were resentful of Romario's demands for special treatment and held a meeting with Scolari asking for him to be excluded.

"There has never been a meeting in this respect, the players have never made a pact with Felipe (Scolari) for Romario not to be picked," said Lopes. "It's not true."

Scolari then stepped in to describe as "lies" speculation that Romario had been the victim of a marketing battle between rival soft drinks companies.

"I pick the team on a technical and tactical basis. Anyone who says that the sponsors decide whether a player is picked is lying. It's one of the biggest untruths I have ever heard."

days before the competition was due to start and has made it clear that he desperately wants a final stab at the world title.

On Monday, Scolari gave a radio interview in which he hinted that Romario's record for indiscipline was instrumental in keeping him out of the team.

"He's a player of great quality. I don't just observe what happens on the pitch," said Scolari. "Off-field behaviour is also very important."

On Tuesday, Scolari refused to elaborate on the interview but said Romario had been left out for "tactical and technical reasons."

The man known as Big Phil praised Vanderlei Luxemburgo, one of his predecessors, for also refusing to bow to popular pressure over Romario.

Luxemburgo refused to take Romario to the Sydney Olympics as an over-age player and was sacked

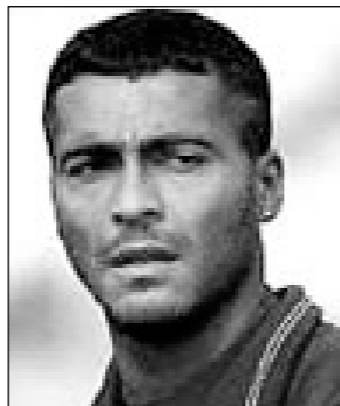
after Brazil were knocked out in the quarter-finals by eventual winners Cameroon.

Later, Luxemburgo admitted that he had been victim of a media campaign which began when he left Romario at home.

"I applaud Vanderlei Luxemburgo for having the personality to stand by his convictions," said Scolari.

"He should be congratulated for this, not crucified. In any case, I don't think it's possible for me to get any more criticism that I'm receiving at the moment."

Scolari on Tuesday named the foreign-based players for Brazil's



ROMARIO

next warm-up match away to Portugal on April 17.

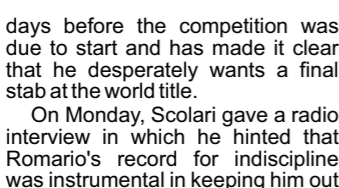
Sporting Lisbon striker Jardel, who has scored 33 goals in the Portuguese championship this season, was again left out as Scolari picked the same "foreigners" who were in the squad for last week's 1-0 win over Yugoslavia.

He will name the home-based players next Tuesday but Romario is given little chance of being included.

Meanwhile, Barcelona's Rivaldo, out injured for Brazil's 1-0 win over Yugoslavia last Wednesday, returns to the squad for the Portugal game.

Rivaldo, who missed the Yugoslav match with severely twisted left ankle, is back in action, according to team doctor Jose Luiz Runco.

RIVALDO



Technical director Antonio Lopes dismissed a report published by the sports daily Lance, which claimed the players were resentful of Romario's demands for special treatment and held a meeting with Scolari asking for him to be excluded.

Premiership Villa hold Magpies

AFP, London

Aston Villa's recent signing Peter Crouch was hailed by his new club after scoring the equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Newcastle in the English Premiership.

The 2.02m (6ft 7in) striker, a seven-million-dollar signing from Portsmouth, showed the kind of finishing which earned him 19 goals at the south coast First Division club.

Crouch received a standing ovation when he was substituted with 15 minutes to go.

Newcastle were the better side in the opening 20 minutes and Alan Shearer's 22nd goal of the campaign - and 199th in the Premiership - gave them the perfect start as they looked full of purpose and confidence.

But after that Villa dominated proceedings and it was Bobby Robson's side who were relieved to escape with a point.

Shearer got Newcastle off to that flying start by putting them ahead after only three minutes.

Kieron Dyer's right-wing cross was headed out by Villa centre-back Steve Staunton but only found Laurent Robert some 20 yards out.

His low cross-shot beat the dive of Peter Schmeichel and struck a post but ace poacher Shearer was on hand to turn home his 22nd goal of the campaign.

Crouch showed some neat early touches and he sent a header just wide from a cross by Thomas Hitzlsperger.

But after 25 minutes he produced a superb finish to put Villa back on level terms.

Barry supplied one of several dangerous crosses from the left flank and Crouch got in front of Nikos Dabizas to send a powerful header across Given into the corner of the net.

Puskas' birthday gift



AFP, Budapest

Hungary's government renamed the country's biggest football stadium after Ferenc Puskas as a birthday present for the football legend who turned 75 Tuesday, a government spokesman said.

The Budapest "Nepstadion (People's Stadium) will bear the name of Puskas in the future," spokesman Gabor Borokai said.

Puskas, hospitalised since October 2000 for arteriosclerosis, briefly turned up in the stadium Tuesday and even kicked a ball, cheered by 75 children.

"He is very glad. He could get no more beautiful birthday present," his wife Erzs Puskas told journalists.

Hungary's government was to host a reception for Puskas in a Budapest hotel Tuesday evening.



FERENC PUSKAS

Puskas, who played for years for Spain's Real Madrid, will be greeted by other former Real Madrid stars Alfredo Di Stefano and Emilio Bartrugeno, said Minister for Sports Tamas Deutsch.

In the 1950s Puskas was a leading light in Hungary's legendary "golden team," which set new standards for world football.

Jordanian prince wants Israel freed



AFP, Amman

Jordan's Prince Ali bin Hussein, a half-brother to King Abdullah II, on Tuesday urged FIFA to "freeze" Israeli participation in football to protest Israel's offensive in the Palestinian territories.

Prince Ali, who is president of the Jordan Football Association, made the appeal in a letter addressed to FIFA president Sepp Blatter, a copy of which was obtained by AFP in Amman.

"Football ... represents dignity, humanity and respect and in order to uphold its banner of 'Fair Play' the entire football community should freeze Israel's participation in this noble sport," the prince wrote.

FIFA should boycott Israel "in the

same way it did with the former apartheid South Africa, until such time as Israel abides by International Law, United Nations resolutions and the will of the world," he said.

Prince Ali insisted that Israel must also "restore dignity and freedom to the occupied people of Palestine".

"The reason I write to you today is that all of us are responsible for pressuring such a solution, so that the people of Israel, Palestine and the region may once and for all live in peace," he told Blatter.

A Jordan Football Association official told AFP a similar letter was sent to the European football federation asking it to "boycott meetings between European and Israeli clubs and to freeze Israeli sporting activities."