

Quarterfinal 2nd leg Barca, Bayer hope for a reversal



AFP, Paris

German league leaders Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday stand in Liverpool's path to the semi-finals of the European Champions League...

LEVERKUSEN v LIVERPOOL

Liverpool will again be boosted by their coach Gerard Houllier as the Frenchman travels abroad for the first time since undergoing emergency heart surgery in October.

And Leverkusen are full of confidence after staying on track for their first ever Bundesliga title...

Toppmoller believes his hard-working side can spoil English dreams. Houllier said England striker Michael Owen, who was disappointing in the first leg, should be fit as Liverpool had no league fixture at the weekend.

Argentinian Javier Saviola could start the match after bagging both goals on Saturday...

Panathinaikos coach Sergio Marcarian has appealed to FIFA to allow him to sit on the bench as he has been banned for pushing the referee in a league match against Olympiakos last month.

BARCELONA V PANATHINAIKOS

Barcelona substituted inspirational Brazilian midfielder Rivaldo in their 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Saturday as he was suffering leg pains but he is expected to play against Panathinaikos on Tuesday.

CUP CORNER



AFP, Lagos

Nigerian fans have been slow in snapping up tickets for the country's first round matches at the May 31 to June 30 World Cup, football officials said here on Monday.

VOLLER UNSURE ABOUT LINEUP!

Berlin The World Cup is to start in Japan and South Korea in less than two months but German national team manager Rudi Voller has serious hardships with defining his line-up as many of his players suffer from injuries.

KIRCH, FIFA MOVE TO PROTECT WC TV

Zurich The ailing German media group Kirch moved on Monday to protect live television broadcasts from the 2002 football World Cup by transferring all its holdings in the World Cup television rights to a Swiss-based company, FIFA said.

Pakistan, India friends in South Africa!

AFP, Karachi

A long-awaited revival in sporting links between Pakistan and India will kick off in South Africa next month with a two-match football series, an official said Monday.

Pakistan Football Federation secretary Agha Liaquat Ali told AFP the matches would be held at Durban on May 12 and 17.

The fixtures are the first major sporting encounter between the South Asian nuclear rivals since they clashed in the President Gold Cup hockey final in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in March last year.

"We had hopes that football will break the ice since the sponsors were keen to arrange a football series and, since there are many Pakistani and Indian expats in Durban, the matches will attract large crowds," Ali said.

India cut off sporting relations with Pakistan after the Kashmir conflict in 1999 but took a step towards restoring ties when it sent its Olympic Association President Suresh Kalmadi to Islamabad for discussions last month.

Cricket, the national game in both India and Pakistan, has been badly hit with the two countries not meeting on a cricket field since an Asian Cup league game in Dhaka almost two years ago.

However, Pakistan's Under-19 team beat India in the ICC Junior World Cup in New Zealand in February this year.

India stunned the United Arab Emirates 1-0 in a football World Cup qualifying match. The Indians finished third in Group Eight and failed to qualify for this summer's tournament.

Serie A Atalanta hurt Inter



AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's dreams of lifting a first Italian championship crown since 1989 suffered a major setback on Sunday when they went down to a 2-1 defeat at the hands of Atalanta.

The result completed a miserable week for Hector Cuper's team after they had lost 1-0 to Feyenoord in the first leg of the UEFA Cup semi-finals on Thursday.

However, Inter remain two points clear at the top with four games to play after closest rivals and defending champions Roma could only draw 2-2 with bottom side Venezia.

Luigi Sala headed Atalanta into the lead on the stroke of half-time after getting on the end of a cross from Damiano Zenoni before Italian international Christian Vieri, who was rested for the UEFA Cup tie, equalised two minutes into the second period.

It was Vieri's 21st goal of the campaign but it proved to be in vain as Daniele Berretta stepped up to fire in the 62nd minute winner.

It was his first goal for the club and came after a mistake by Inter keeper Francesco Toldo.

The goal stunned the 40,000 crowd at the San Siro and they were left even more perplexed by the decision of Cuper to keep Brazilian ace Ronaldo on the bench throughout the afternoon.

Meanwhile, Roma were indebted



Gabriel Batistuta (L), AS Roma's Argentinian ace trying to outwit Venezia's Antonio Marasco at Venice on April 7.

Serie A's top six

Standings in the Italian league after Sunday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)

Table with 7 columns: Team, Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals For, Goals Against, Points. Rows include Inter Milan, AS Roma, Juventus, Bologna, AC Milan, and Chievo.

to Vincenzo Montella for saving their blushes at Venezia who have already been relegated.

Montella scored two penalties in the last three minutes to give Roma a point and keep them two points behind Inter.

Roma had gone into the game full of confidence having defeated Bologna 3-1 last week but they were stunned when they fell 2-0 down through goals by Filippo Maniero and Ivone De Franceschi after 62 and 80 minutes.

Inter have 62 points from 30 matches and Roma have 60 from the same number of games.

Juventus were the big winners of the day beating Perugia 4-0 to move on to 59 points, three behind the leaders.

Alessandro del Piero scored twice from the penalty spot in the 45th minute and in the 62nd minute.

French star David Trezeguet had opened the scoring after nine minutes with Cristian Zenoni adding to the total in the 57th minute.

In the late match on Sunday, Lazio kept alive their slim hopes of playing in the UEFA Cup next season with a 1-0 win over Lecce at the Olympic Stadium.

Stefano Fiore scored the only of the game in the 68th minute.

On Saturday, Bologna consolidated their fourth place, although ten points behind third placed Juventus, with a 1-1 draw at Torino.

Alessio Scarchilli gave the Turin side a 20th minute lead before Julio Ricardo Cruz equalised six minutes into the second half.

Weah boost for Blatter



AFP, Dubai

George Weah, the first African to win the World player of the year award in 1995, on Monday threw his weight behind incumbent president Sepp Blatter's bid to land another four-year term at FIFA's helm.

Weah, who plays for Abu Dhabi-based Al-Jazirah, said Blatter had been a "true friend to football and Africa during his four years at FIFA's helm."

"I wholeheartedly support him for a second term," the 36-year-old Liberian told a press conference organised by one of Blatter's aides, Emmanuel Maradas.

"I think FIFA should give him the mandate he needs to finish the excellent work he has begun in his first term."

Blatter, a Swiss national who has occupied world football's top post since 1998, faces a challenge for the FIFA presidency from African Football Confederation (CAF) president Issa Hayatou of Cameroon.

The election by 204 FIFA members is due to take place in Seoul on May 29, just two days before the opening match of the World Cup finals.

Weah was damning of Hayatou's credentials: "We have all seen what he's not done for African soccer. He has failed in the development of football. It would be a big mistake" were he elected.

"He is not capable and is acting only for personal interests, not in the interests of Africa or the sporting world."

"I know that people may find it strange that I am backing a European candidate against an African, but I sincerely believe that Blatter is the best man for the job," Weah said.

Premiership Leeds do the required



AFP, London

Leeds improved their chances of a top-four finish and a place in next season's Champions League with a 2-0 win over struggling Sunderland at Elland Road on Sunday.

A bizarre own goal from Jody Craddock gave Leeds an early lead and after Cameroon striker Patrick Mboma missed a golden opportunity to level the scores, substitute Robbie Keane killed off the visitors with a late strike.

The goal ended the Republic of Ireland international's four-month goal drought.

Leeds remain sixth in the table but are now just three points behind fourth-placed Newcastle who play Fulham on Monday.

Sunderland, with just nine goals from 16 league matches away from home, stay sixth from bottom, five points clear of the relegation zone.

Man-of-the-match Lee Bowyer feels he is recovering his form after an indifferent last few months for Leeds.

"The manager said I went

Leeds' young forward Alan Smith roasted Sunderland defender Darren Williams wide on the right wing and spotted strike partner Mark Viduka lurking in Sunderland's penalty box.

Smith crossed but before his delivery found the Australian international, Sunderland central defender Jody Craddock stuck out a foot and diverted the ball over Thomas Sorensen's head and into the back of the net.

Robbie Fowler almost doubled Leeds' advantage in the 25th minute but the former Liverpool striker's outstretched leg failed to connect with Bowyer's angled pass with the goal gaping and Sorensen stranded.

Kevin Phillips went close on the half hour mark in one of the visitors' rare attacks, his crisp volley squirming wide of Nigel Martyn's right-hand post.

Reid was forced into a substitution at half-time with Mboma replacing the injured Phillips.

Keane replaced Fowler just after the hour, before Bowyer let fly with a screamer from 22 yards which whistled narrowly over Sorensen's crossbar.



Robbie Keane (C) of Leeds being marked by Sunderland's David Bellion (L) and George McCartney at Leeds' Elland Road stadium on April 7.

through a bad patch, but I've had a long break (because of suspension) and there's four games now until the end of the season and hopefully I can keep improving," he told Sky Sports.

Goalscorer Keane was delighted to get on the scoresheet after a miserable spell in front of goal.

"Obviously it was nice to get the second goal. It was a good team performance and that's all credit to the lads," he said.

"We just have to keep doing what we're doing and hopefully we can keep up with the teams above us."

Sunderland, still not assured of their Premiership status next season, gifted David O'Leary's men an eighth minute lead.

Despite enjoying the majority of possession, Sunderland should have equalised nine minutes from time.

Niall Quinn flicked on a Kevin Kilbane cross into the path of Mboma and after a neat first touch took take him away from his marker, he drove a rising 12-yard shot over the crossbar.

It proved costly as Leeds grabbed their second two minutes later.

Viduka's clever play provided Keane with the chance to steer the ball past Sorensen for his first Premiership goal since September 30.

Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Sunday's match between Leeds and Sunderland (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Table with 7 columns: Team, Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals For, Goals Against, Points. Rows include Arsenal, Man Utd, Liverpool, Chelsea, Newcastle, and Leeds.

Primera Liga Valencia keep pace with Real



AFP, Madrid

Valencia ensured the Spanish title race stays close as they thrashed Real Sociedad 4-0 on Sunday to put themselves back on the same number of points as Real Madrid.

Ruben Baraja, Kily Gonzalez, Miguel Angel Angulo and Mista each scored past former Liverpool goalkeeper Sander Westerveld at the Mestalla stadium.

Real Madrid are still top with a superior goal difference after defeating city rivals Rayo Vallecano 3-1 on Saturday as Portuguese international Luis Figo made a goal-scoring return from injury.



Valencia's Ruben Baraja (R) and Inigo Idiakez of Real Sociedad in scuffle at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on April 7.

Bundesliga's top six

German league standings after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Table with 7 columns: Team, Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals For, Goals Against, Points. Rows include Bayer Leverkusen, Borussia Dortmund, Schalke 04, Bayern Munich, Hertha Berlin, and Kaiserslautern.