

Man United, Real's pricey passage



AFP, Manchester/Madrid

Euro giants Manchester United and Real Madrid completed the European Champions League semi-final jigsaw on Wednesday night - but at a cost.

Manchester beat nine-man Deportivo La Coruna 3-2, and 5-2 on aggregate, with the help of an Ole Solskjaer double, but paid the price of David Beckham perhaps being out for up to eight weeks with a broken bone in his foot following a dreadful tackle by Argentinian defender Pedro Duscher early in the first half.

Real Madrid beat holders Bayern Munich 2-0 with second-half goals from Ivan Helguera and Guti to win 3-2 on aggregate.

It was a result which purged Real of their Bayern jinx, having lost six of their seven previous meetings.

Real's win came at a cost however as 2001 World Player of the Year Luis Figo misses the first leg of their semi-final against arch-rivals and his former club Barcelona in two weeks time because of a suspension.

Spain have confirmed their European supremacy with two teams in the semis and, with the champions of two of the past three years plus 1992 winners Barcelona through only Bayer Leverkusen, who are yet to win the German title, upset the established order in Europe by downing Liverpool on Tuesday.

MAN UNITED 3; DEPORTIVO 2

United coach Alex Ferguson admitted Beckham is unlikely to be fit in time for England's 2002 campaign after breaking a bone in his left foot.

Asked if Beckham would make it to Japan and South Korea, Ferguson replied: "I think that's doubtful."

"He has a broken metatarsal bone in his foot. It's six to eight weeks and that's a blow for Manchester United."

Beckham's injury means he joins another United star Republic of Ireland captain Roy Keane on the sidelines but while it puts more pressure on the fit players, it left manager Ferguson purring with pride for the rest of the team.

"They showed they had the appetite for the game," he said. "We're having a torrid time at the moment with injuries but those who are fit showed that they are well able to set that aside and win vital games."

"They also played some tremendous football," he added.

On the pitch Manchester United succeeded where Liverpool failed by clinching a place in the last four.

Already 2-0 up from the first-leg in Spain last week, United sealed an impressive 5-2 aggregate victory thanks to a double strike from substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and one from stand-in captain Ryan Giggs.

Deportivo's goals came courtesy of a Laurent Blanc own goal a minute before half-time and a stoppage-time effort from Djalminha.

Deportivo's frustration got the better of them in the second period and they ended the match with nine men after Duscher and Lionel Scaloni were sent off.

United's Premiership rivals Liverpool crashed out of Europe on Tuesday after a 4-3 aggregate defeat in their quarter-final tie against Bundesliga leaders Bayer



PHOTO: AFP

REAL DELIGHT: Ivan Helguera, the Real Madrid midfielder, is submerged by ecstatic team-mates after giving his team the lead against Bayern Munich at the Bernabeu on April 10.

Irureta was sorry to see Beckham limp off and wished the United midfielder a speedy recovery.

"I'm sorry for what's happened but it was not deliberate and I hope he is back playing soon."

Deportivo, who beat United home and away in the first phase group stages earlier in the competition, almost fell further behind in the tie in the seventh minute.

Ruud van Nistelrooy cut in from the right and ran at the heart of the Deportivo defence and unleashed a vicious right-foot shot which Francisco Molina spilled in the six-yard box.

Luckily for the Deportivo goalkeeper a defender was alert to the danger and booted the ball to safety.

Quinton Fortune took advantage of some hesitation in the Spanish defence three minutes later but after bundling a way through the visitors' defence his low shot was tipped around the post by Molina.

United did not have it all their own way and Diego Tristan almost netted for Deportivo moments later, but after breaking the offside trap

Deportivo soaked up more United pressure and gave themselves a lifeline a minute from the break.

Enrique Romero played a neat one-two before cutting in from the left to drill a low cross into United's penalty box.

Barthez came to collect but Blanc stuck out a foot before his goalkeeper could reach it and diverted the ball into the net.

After early Deportivo pressure at the start of the second-half, United regained control of the match in the 56th minute when Solskjaer grabbed his second goal.

Veron played a delightful through-ball with the outside of his boot to the Norwegian who found space on the edge of the area before lashing the ball off Molina and into the net.

Deportivo's hopes of staging a recovery were shattered on the hour mark when Scaloni saw red for dissent and Giggs added insult to injury when he fired United's third with a brilliant solo effort 21 minutes from time.

Duscher soon followed Scaloni for an early bath as the Spaniards sent their heads before Djalminha's

REAL MADRID 2; BAYERN 0

late consolation for the Spaniards.

Real's 3-2 aggregate win, after a week baiting from a number of Bayern players and officials, meant they now progressed to an all-Spanish clash in two weeks time against bitter domestic rivals Barcelona.

Last week, Real went down 2-1 at Bayern, a win which was followed by some of the Bavarian club's players pouring scorn on the eight-time kings of Europe.

However Real had the last laugh as World Cup-bound midfielder Ivan Helguera proved himself a master at both ends of the pitch, scoring the opener in the 69th minute despite initially being drafted into the back four as an emergency replacement for the injured Francisco Pavon.

Substitute Guti scored the vital second goal in the 85th minute to send Real through.

The Spaniards had pressed Bayern all night, but without success until Helguera - who as part of the back four had helped keep Bayern quiet for the first hour - latched on to a Roberto Carlos cross.

The Brazilian produced one of his familiar marauding runs down the left wing and his shot across the face of the goal was initially missed by Raul Gonzalez.

Helguera slid in and, although his foot missed the ball, it bounced off his thigh and went into the net.

Guti put the tie beyond Bayern's reach with a second goal five minutes before the whistle, after coming on to the field only two minutes before for an ineffectual Fernando Morientes.

"We had no problems defensively and that proved to be decisive," commented Real coach Vicente Del Bosque.

Real had almost broken the deadlock eight minutes after the break when a swerving shot from Zinedine Zidane swung in from the right-hand edge of the box and hit the post.

had missed two golden chances to score when both Raul and Morientes failed to connect with passes provided across the face of the goal by Santiago Solari and Luis Figo respectively.

But the defending European champions Bayern created few chances themselves.

Bayern's Bosnian international striker Hasan Salihamidzic - the man who led the chorus of abuse against Real after their defeat to the Germans a week ago - had the best of them but his several long-range efforts from the edge of the box were easily collected by Real keeper Cesar Sanchez.

"Naturally, I'm disappointed but I'm not going to blame anyone. Real played much better than us in the second half but we fought until the end and we can leave with our heads held high. We didn't embarrass ourselves," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

One Bayern player who perhaps will leave happier than others was the England international Owen Hargreaves, who had an outstanding game in the midfield, which should confirm his place in Sven-Goran Eriksson's 23-strong World Cup squad.

Less likely to make the trip to the Far East is former Liverpool player Steve McManaman, who can be considered to be Hargreaves' rival for a place down the right wing.

McManaman was once again left cooling his heels on the Real bench and didn't get on the field. Wednesday night did not end on an entirely happy note for other Real

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Result of Champions League quarter-final second legs on Wednesday:

At Madrid Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Helguera 69, Guti 85) Bayern Munich (Ger) 0 * Real Madrid win 3-2 on aggregate

At Manchester Manchester United (Eng) 3 (Solskjaer 23, 56, Giggs 69) Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Spa) (Blanc 44-og, Djalminha 90) * Manchester United win 5-2 on aggregate

players either.

The 2001 World Player of the Year Luis Figo was booked for arguing with the referee and will miss the first leg encounter with his former club in Barcelona's Nou Camp stadium on April 23.

Ironically, Figo missed Real's previous visit this season to the Nou Camp through injury.

Real Madrid officials may also have some explaining to do to football's European governing body UEFA after various missiles rained down on the Bayern players, especially Bayern's combative club captain Stefan Effenberg, during the match.

No one was seriously hurt but UEFA have previously warned Real over their crowd control and could well impose a hefty fine.

CUP CORNER



AFP, Lagos

Nigeria's World Cup team will be ready soon, the country's coach Adegboye Onigbinde told a radio station here Thursday.

"At the latest by the first week of May, I am sure we will have a starting team. Actually, my target is for the team list to be ready at the end of this month," Onigbinde said during a phone-in programme on OGBC FM Radio.

The coach, hired in February, has been heavily criticised for changing and chopping the 'Super Eagles' with less than seven weeks to go to the World Cup, where they are drawn in a tough group along with Argentina, England and Sweden.

Last month, in his first match in charge against Paraguay, he capped three players and played several others who have been on the fringes of the national team.

He has also named as many as eight uncapped players for another World Cup warm-up against Scotland on Wednesday in Aberdeen.

In addition, Onigbinde has overlooked such experienced stars as former captain Sunday Oliseh and Fintidi George of English club Ipswich in his build-up.

"Every player is important but not indispensable. I am not going to beg any player to play for the team," he stated.

The 64-year-old coach also told the radio station he has been discussing with the Nigeria Football Association (NFA) over his contract for the World Cup and hopes to sign in "the next few days".

ANELKA GETS HIS CHANCE

Paris Coach Roger Lemerre opened a World Cup door Thursday for much-travelled striker Nicolas Anelka by including him in his 19-strong squad for the World Cup warm-up match against Russia at the Stade de France next Wednesday.

Anelka had been out of favour since the match against Australia last November and it had looked like he would once again miss out on the World Cup finals.

But despite having a potent strike force, Lemerre has given one last chance to the Liverpool striker whose talent ebbs and flows with his moods.

There was a recall too for Parma midfielders Johan Micoud who was last in the French squad for the match against Denmark on August 15 and for Alain Boghossian out since the game against Romania in February.

The Russia friendly is the penultimate test for the World and European champions before they leave for South Korea. The French play Belgium in Paris on May 18.

Lemerre left out four players who were in the squad for the 5-0 win over Scotland last month - Christian Karembeu, Eric Carriere, Claude Makelele and Steve Marlet.

The new faces in midfield appear to be the result of the injury to Arsenal's Robert Pires who had been expected to play a key role in the finals, but who will now not make the trip.

Elsewhere Lemerre stayed true to his core group of players with Thierry Henry, David Trezeguet and Sylvain Wiltord up front and Youri Djorkaef confirmed in midfield alongside Zinedine Zidane, Emmanuel Petit and Patrick Vieira.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Manchester United), Ulrich Ramé (Bordeaux)

Defenders: Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich), Vincent Candela (Roma), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea), Philippe Christanval (Barcelona), Frank Leboeuf (Marseille), Mikajil Silvestre (Manchester United), Lilian Thuram (Juventus)

Midfielders: Johan Micoud (Parma), Emmanuel Petit (Chelsea), Youri Djorkaef (Bolton), Patrick Vieira (Arsenal), Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid), Alain Boghossian (Parma)

Forwards: Thierry Henry (Arsenal), David Trezeguet (Juventus), Sylvain Wiltord (Arsenal), Nicolas Anelka (Liverpool)

CUP TO ROCK

Seoul Football's world governing body, FIFA, on Thursday sent the World Cup trophy on a tour of South Korea to promote the global sports event this summer, organizers said.

South Korea, along with Japan, will co-host the world's biggest soccer tournament from May 31 to June 30.

The FIFA trophy, which is displayed to the public in Seoul to mark the 50-day countdown to the start of the World Cup finals, will tour 10 South Korean cities that will host tournament matches from April 16 to May 29.

South Korean World Cup organizers and FIFA officials, including German great Juergen Klinsmann, said they hoped the tour would spark football fever in the host country.

Citizens will be allowed access to the trophy for photographs during a two-day public display in each venue city.

US MILITARY PLEDGES SECURITY SUPPORT

Seoul US military authorities on Thursday pledged support for South Korea's security operations for the World Cup finals, the joint chiefs of staff (JCS) said.

The US pledge, made in accords signed at a US-South Korean military meeting, includes campaigns against biological and chemical attacks, it said.

Thomas Schwartz, commander of the US Forces in Korea, and Lee Nam-Shin, South Korean JCS chairman, signed the accords.

South Korea, which currently houses some 37,000 American soldiers, is to co-host with Japan the world's biggest soccer tournament from May 31 to June 30. American soccer players are scheduled to play in South Korea.

Seoul has vowed to enforce tight security for the tournament. The JCS earlier said it would deploy anti-aircraft missiles at South Korea's 10 stadiums during the matches.

Flights over the stadiums will be banned. Thousands of special forces are to be deployed in and around the venue cities for the World Cup matches.

OWEN OK

London Liverpool and England striker Michael Owen was given the all-clear on Wednesday following an injury scare that had prompted fears over his participation in this summer's World Cup.

The 22-year-old received a kick on his foot during the 4-2 quarter-final Champions League defeat away to German side Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday and manager Gerard Houllier had feared Owen could have broken his foot.

But after Owen underwent an X-ray Wednesday, Liverpool spokesman Ian Cotton said the player had suffered only bruising and would be fit to face Sunderland on Saturday in the English Premiership.

"Michael was sent for an X-ray this afternoon as a precaution and it confirmed our initial thoughts that he had suffered bruising of his right foot," said Cotton.

"Michael will be available for this Saturday's game at Sunderland." England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson is likely to be as relieved as anyone that his talismanic forward is ready to return to action

Nail-biting last 50 days



AFP, Paris

Fifty days to go and already there is World Cup drama.

A season-ending knee-injury to French midfielder Robert Pires ruled out one of the players touted to be among the star performers at the May 31-July 1 finals in South Korea and Japan.

Then, Sebastian Deisler, the 22-year-old Hertha Berlin playmaker on whom German coach Rudi Voller relies for much-needed creativity in a struggling side tore a thigh muscle in training provoking Franz Beckenbauer to say that he can forget about the World Cup.

Manchester United's success in Europe has come at a heavy price for two of the national captains, England's David Beckham and the Republic of Ireland's Roy Keane.

United may have beaten Deportivo La Coruna in their quarter-final Champions League clash but it resulted in Beckham being ruled out for up to eight weeks with a broken bone in his left foot after a brutal foul by Argentinian defender Pedro Duscher in the second leg.

Argentina by dark irony meet England in a potential World Cup group topping decider in Japan on June 7.

Manchester United's manager Sir Alex Ferguson's somewhat offhand remarks that Beckham was young and would play in another World Cup probably didn't play very well with England boss Sven Goran Eriksson.

Keane, as vital to Ireland's hopes of progress as Beckham's is to

joint World Cup favourites alongside Argentina and brought unaccustomed praise from the normally downbeat Lemerre.

"Four shots and four goals in the first half - that's exceptional, that's talent," he enthused.

Scottish counterpart Berti Vogts was not prone to disagree.

"In the first half maybe I was watching the new world champions," the man who led Germany to the 1996 European crown said.

"The pressure was too much for my young team."

The French are back in action at the same Stade de France where they defeated Brazil 3-0 in the final four years ago with a match against Russia. They then take on Belgium in Paris on May 18 before heading for South Korea.

Things are not looking so bright for the Brazilians and ultra-conservative coach Luis Felipe Scolari has much work to do in the 50 days that remain if he is to get the formula right.

Firstly he needs assurances that off-injured star Ronaldo can have a role to play in a tournament that for the finalists will involve seven strength-sapping matches in a little over four weeks.

Then he will have to end the ongoing debate over whether there will be a place in the squad for the ageing Romario, a hero of the last Brazilian World Cup triumph in 1994, but out of favour for his love of the high life.

Next Wednesday's enticing encounter with Portugal in Lisbon may provide some of the answers.

Others to look out for on what will be the biggest night for World Cup fanatics are Germany against Argentina in Stuttgart and Ireland against the United States in Dublin.

Over in South Korea, the joint hosts are marking the 50-day countdown by sending off the World Cup trophy on a warm-up tour of the 10 venue cities.

World Cup organisers have fixed up the former captain of Germany, Jurgen Klinsmann, as well as South Korea's Dutch-born coach Guus Hiddink and a host of other celebrities for the ceremony.

The cup will be on display for two days in each of the 10 venue cities with concerts, appearances by World Cup mascots and local celebrities on each occasion.

The South Koreans are also hopeful that they can reach a truce with labour unions by which they will agree not pursue any industrial action during the finals.

Already a 38-day old strike by power workers who had threatened disruption during the tournament has been ended.

In Japan, Tokyo's Narita airport formally opens its long overdue second runway on April 18 to cope with the hundreds of thousands of fans and tourists expected to visit the country during the football fiesta.

The final touches are also being made to security arrangements, concerning both crowd control deployments and the threat of any terrorist action.

In the latest trial run in Yokohama where the final will be held, Japanese police demonstrated an array of weapons they have assembled to deal with trouble-makers.

These included a new backpack-mounted water cannon, which when fired at close range can knock a rioter off his feet.

Truck-mounted water cannons, hooks to trip up opponents, attack dogs and ear-stunning sound bombs were also all used in the drills.

In one exercise, a team of 180 officers faced off against 150 bottle-throwing, firecracker-setting, bike-riding hooligans and blasted out -- in German, French, English, Portuguese, Japanese and Spanish -- "Quiet down!", and later "Arrests begin now."

Fifty days to go and the drama is building.



PHOTO: AFP

Ryan Giggs (L), Manchester United's star playmaker, is being challenged off the ball by Deportivo la Coruna's Lionel Scaloni at Old Trafford on April 10.

Leverkusen.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta hid his disappointment well despite seeing his side ousted by the reigning English champions.

"We can take something from the match, we passed the ball well, scored twice, and gave a good account of ourselves," he said.

"We can be reasonably proud of how we performed, especially at a place like Old Trafford.

and taking the ball around Fabien Barthez, he lost control of the ball, allowing the United goalkeeper time to recover.

The home side were forced into making a change in the 21st minute when Beckham was clattered by Duscher and had to be replaced by Solskjaer.

Two minutes later the Norway international had the home crowd on their feet with his first touch.

Veron drilled in a free-kick from out on the left flank, and Solskjaer reacted quickest to volley past Molina and into the bottom corner.