

Semi-final 1st leg

MANCHESTER UNITED v BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Red Devils favourites but...



REUTERS, London

Manchester United have a glorious opportunity to return to the Champions League final for the first time since they won the title three years ago when they take on Bayer Leverkusen in the first leg of their semifinal at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

However, just as the 'Red Devils' did on that famous night in Barcelona in 1999 without Roy Keane and Paul Scholes, they will have to do it without at least one of their most influential players.

Keane, the driving force of the club with monumental powers of motivation, is struggling with a hamstring strain but may just make it while David Beckham, the team's most creative player, is certainly out with a broken bone in his foot.

While Keane is almost sure to be back for the second leg, Beckham's club season is over and that means that the likes of Juan Sebastian Veron, Ryan Giggs and Scholes will have to step up to the plate and provide the ammunition of Ruud van Nistelrooy to shoot down the German league leaders.

Manager Alex Ferguson has refused to complain about the injuries and instead points to the way Nicky Butt has slotted in seamlessly to the team -- as he did in the 1999 final.

Defender Wes Brown has also earned his manager's praise after his return from a lengthy injury lay-off -- timed perfectly in the light of yet another injury that has ruled out the fragile Ronny Johnsen.

"It's better the team tells me we

not to blow it again this time -- especially with a mouth-watering final looming at Hampden Park in his home city of Glasgow.

However, any relief the fans might feel at avoiding Spanish duo Real Madrid and Barcelona, who

finals.

In their 4-1 defeat at Highbury they looked way off the pace, prompting coach Klaus Toppmoeller to say that they had been handed a footballing lesson.

The coach and his players appeared good learners as a few weeks later they produced a far more controlled performance to lose only 1-0 at Anfield in the first leg and followed up with one of the most incredible games of the season in the second which they won 4-2.

Toppmoeller would probably be happy with a repeat of the 1-0 scoreline on Wednesday.

"A solid performance in defence will be the key," he said.

"At Liverpool we were playing more for the result than going all out for the win."

The Germans stuttered at the weekend, losing 2-1 at Werder Bremen to cut their lead as they chase their first *Bundesliga* title.

Toppmoeller claimed this week that winning the domestic league is more important than the Champions League but, with the side also in the German Cup final, he is nevertheless delighted to find himself in such a position.

We haven't achieved anything yet," he said. "It's a huge surprise for us to be at this stage (in Europe).

"But we are on the right track, we've got some good players and I am quite excited to see how far we can go."



ALEX FERGUSON



KLAUS TOPPMOELLER

can handle it without Roy and David," Ferguson said after Saturday's 3-0 away victory at Chelsea that maintained United's premier league title hopes.

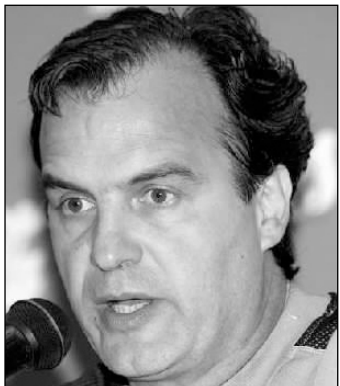
Leverkusen are unlikely to offer such limp resistance on Wednesday, though the Old Trafford fans may have to show some patience as their team bids to find the right tempo for the occasion.

After going out at the quarter-final stage in the last two seasons, Ferguson is obviously desperate

were playing in the other semifinal on Tuesday, should be tempered by the realisation that Leverkusen are much more than the makeweights of the last four.

Victories over Juventus, Barcelona, Deportivo Coruna (twice) and Liverpool this season underline their pedigree, as does a two-point lead in the *Bundesliga* with two games to go.

The Germans have had a close look at the premier league this year, having faced Arsenal in the quarter stages and Liverpool in the quarter-



MARCELO BIELSA

Bielsa may not take Argentina to finals

AFP, Buenos Aires

The treasurer of the Argentinian football federation (AFA) admitted on Monday he could give no guarantees that Marcelo Bielsa would still be national coach at the World Cup finals.

Bielsa has called on the federation to find a solution to his contractual dispute as soon as possible and insisted that the four-year deal he signed in 1998, which pays him 70,000 dollars a month, be respected.

When the contract was signed, the peso was equivalent to a dollar but since the collapse of the Argentinian economy, the federation want the salary to be paid in pesos which have sharply declined in value, meaning Bielsa would effectively receive roughly a third of the sum he agreed.

AFA Treasurer Hector Dominguez said he hoped a solution could be found to ensure Bielsa remained in charge for the finals in South Korea and Japan, where Argentina are one of the favourites.

"At the moment I cannot give you any guarantees because I can't speak for Marcelo," Dominguez told Del Plat radio.

"But we are going to fix this problem because we are good people and there are no personal problems between us," he added.

Sources at the AFA also said Bielsa was owed 490,000 dollars in unpaid bonuses.

England, Nigeria and Sweden are Argentina's first-phase World Cup opponents in a tough-looking Group F.

Argentina is mired in an economic crisis that after 46 months of recession has left the country broke and some 22 percent of the workforce jobless.

Heskey set for contract extension

AFP, London

Liverpool's England international striker Emile Heskey is set to seal a new 10-million-pound (14.5-million-dollar) contract after claims he will be offered a deal extending his original one by three years till 2007.

"We are very happy with Emile and we will be looking to do something over the summer," Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry told Tuesday's Daily Express.

Heskey is in line for a 40,000-pound (58,000-dollar) a week contract and the player is keen to sort out his future by extending his stay at Anfield, a club he joined for 10 million pounds from Leicester City two years ago.



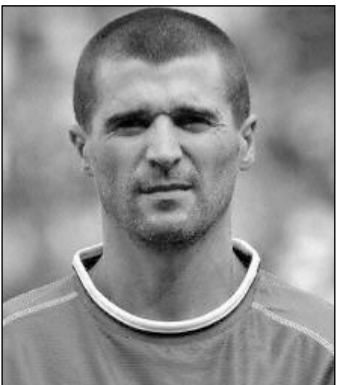
AFP, London

Manchester United captain Roy Keane is making an unexpectedly good recovery from a hamstring injury and may be fit to face Bayer Leverkusen, the Sun newspaper reported on Tuesday.

The tough-tackling Irishman was stretched out for Deportivo La Coruna pitch earlier this month with a torn hamstring and was thought to be doubtful to be back even by the Champions League final in Glasgow on May 15.

Keane's central midfield partner Juan Veron of Argentina also looks set to be available for Wednesday's Champions League semi-final, first leg against their German opponents at Old Trafford, after being rested for the 3-0 Premiership win at Chelsea on Saturday because of having

treatment on his Achilles tendon. United go into the Champions League crunch tie without England



ROY KEANE

captain David Beckham, who is out for the domestic season with a broken foot.

It had been expected Keane would also be similarly out of action

for the rest of United's campaign but the Sun revealed he may be on the bench on Wednesday, and will definitely be back for the return in Germany on April 30.

Coming through unscathed during two demanding training sessions convinced United manager Alex Ferguson Keane was fit and the player himself is said to be enthusiastic to get back on to the pitch.

Keane will probably not start the match but Ferguson will not be underestimating the motivational effect of having the inspirational skipper on the team sheet for the game.

If 30-year-old Keane is available for selection, as Manchester United go for broke against Germany's revelation of the season Leverkusen who are going for a Champions League, domestic league and cup triple, the battling midfielder will only have been out of action for three weeks.

Blatter not hated?

AFP, Paris

FIFA president Joseph Blatter, standing for a further four-year term at the top of football's world governing body next month, on Tuesday hit out at what he described as a hate campaign against him.

Blatter made a written reply, of which AFP has knowledge, to an attack by UEFA boss and old adversary Lennart Johansson on him in a letter to European federations.

Johansson, the long-serving head of European football's governing body, said Blatter was seeking to slash the number of World Cup places given to the continent as a tactic in his bid to be re-elected FIFA president.

Blatter faces African candidate Issa Hayatou in an election for the top job in world football on May 29 in Seoul, shortly before the World Cup kicks off.

Johansson, a key backer of Hayatou who was instrumental in persuading the Cameroonian official to stand against Blatter, said Blatter's tactics were intolerable.

Blatter, who believes there has always been a hate campaign aimed at rubbishing his career, replied he has consistently tried to do his job in a reconciling and non-revengeful way designed to bring about unity.

He spoke of the Goal programme, the 10 million dollars of aid over four years to European football's governing body UEFA, who, Blatter added, has never revealed what they have done with the money.

Blatter continued saying FIFA had put into place an improved worldwide fixture calendar for club and international matches and also successfully lobbied the European Union into making transfer deals specific to sport, ratified in December 2000.



AFP, London

When Alf Ramsey took England to their one and only World Cup triumph in 1966, he brooked no criticism from the media.

How Sven Goran Eriksson, who will try this summer to emulate Ramsey's triumph, must wish for such a relationship as he undergoes his current trial by tabloid.

But the Swede, who faced a barrage of questions from the press on Monday about his relationship with TV presenter Ulrika Jonsson, can at least take comfort from the fact that he is the latest in a long line of England managers who has suffered exposure on the nation's front as well as back pages.

Ramsey treated the press with a disdain bordering on the hostile.

When his team arrived in Mexico in 1970 to defend their world crown, a radio reporter announced that he was going to carry out an interview with the great man.

"No you bloody won't," barked Ramsey.

Things eventually changed in Britain as newspapers gorged themselves on a diet of football and deference disappeared with the swinging sixties.

As coach after coach tried and

Arena counts on new blood

USA's 23 announced



AFP, Washington

The United States, trying to erase the sting of a last-place finish in the World Cup finals four years ago, named 11 World Cup debutantes here Monday to a 23-man roster for this year's 32-team tournament.

"If you compare this team to the 1990 team, it's no comparison," US coach Bruce Arena said.

"If you compare it to 1994 and 1998, it's a better team from top to bottom in experience. Hopefully it will position itself to move forward."

Of course, anything would be an improvement over the side that finished last at France in 1998.

"We're going to make believe it never happened," Arena said. "It's a clean slate in 2002. They're going to be a better team than we saw in 1998."

There were no surprises. Team captain and playmaking midfielder Claudio Reyna, forward Clint Mathis, the team's biggest offensive threat, and veteran midfielder Earnie Stewart were among those named as the US became the first of the 32 finalists to name its World Cup team.

Eleven European-based players were selected and 12 from the Major League Soccer, the US's seven-year-old First Division league.

Arena announced his team now because it begins training camp in Cary, North Carolina in 10 days.

Besides Reyna (Sunderland, England), goalkeepers Brad Friedel

(Blackburn Rovers, England) and Kasey Keller (Tottenham Hotspur, England) and Stewart (NAC Breda, Netherlands) were named.

Selected from MLS were San Jose Earthquakes and league defender of the year Jeff Agoos, defensive midfielder Chris Armas (Chicago Fire), Mathis, Columbus Crew forward Brian McBride and San Jose's 20-year-old midfielder Landon Donovan. McBride scored

the lone American goal in France.

Goaltending looms as the most intriguing matchup during three World Cup warm-ups next month.

Friedel has starred for Blackburn for most of the Premiership season while Keller became a regular for Tottenham recently.

Arena said he will pick "what goalkeeper gives us the best chance to win. It's like splitting hairs between Friedel and Keller".

Of the four US teams that have reached the World Cup since 1990, this is the oldest, with a 28.7 average age (higher than the 28.1 at France '98). Agoos, 34, is the oldest of 10 players over 30.

"We need to understand that we are still a developing country in terms of soccer," Arena said. "Our players start at an older age. I think at the next World Cup, we'll have a younger team."

"Hopefully, the previous experience will be a factor. That's a reason they are a part of this. We think they'll help us get through a difficult stretch."

The Americans have qualified for an unprecedented fourth consecutive World Cup. They meet Portugal in Suwon on June 5, Poland in Daegu on June 10 and South Korea in Daejeon on June 14.

Before leaving for South Korea, the US will play its final three warm-up matches at home. They face Uruguay in Washington on May 12, Jamaica in East Rutherford, New Jersey on May 16 and the Netherlands in Foxboro, Massachusetts on May 19.

SQUAD
<b>Goalkeepers:</b> Brad Friedel (Blackburn Rovers, England), Kasey Keller (Tottenham Hotspur, England), Tony Meola (Kansas City Wizards).
<b>Defenders:</b> Jeff Agoos (San Jose Earthquakes), Greg Berhalter (Crystal Palace, England), Frankie Hejduk (Bayer Leverkusen, Germany), Carlos Llamosa (New England Revolution), Pablo Mastroeni (Colorado Rapids), Eddie Pope (D.C. United), David Regis (F.C. Metz, France), Tony Sanneh (Nuremberg, Germany).
<b>Midfielders:</b> Chris Armas (Chicago Fire), DaMarcus Beasley (Chicago Fire), Landon Donovan (San Jose Earthquakes), Cobi Jones (Los Angeles Galaxy), Eddie Lewis (Fulham, England), John O'Brien (Ajax, Netherlands), Claudio Reyna (Sunderland, England), Earnie Stewart (NAC Breda, Netherlands).
<b>Forwards:</b> Clint Mathis (New York/New Jersey MetroStars), Brian McBride (Columbus Crew), Joe-Max Moore (Everton, England), Josh Wolff (Chicago Fire).

That's English media



AFP, London

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As coach after coach tried and

already been sharpened.

One tabloid wrote 'England Mustafa new man' after a dire 0-0 draw in a friendly in Saudi Arabia before Robson found himself defending his private life.

He allegedly discovered that he was to be replaced as manager by Graham Taylor from a journalist.

It was Taylor who probably suffered most from the pens of the nation's more bloodthirsty sports reporters after England failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup.

He was criticised for his long-ball tactics and was even portrayed as a 'Turnip' in one newspaper after a defeat to Sweden.

Things got steadily worse for Taylor when he allowed his 1994 World Cup qualifying campaign to be the subject of a TV documentary - The Impossible Job - where he was recorded uttering a stream of expletives as the national team failed again.

After Terry Venables came and went on the back of revelations over his business practices, the poisoned chalice passed to Glenn Hoddle who took the reins for the 1998 World Cup where England were knocked out in the second round by Argentina.

However, he was shown in the door in 1999 after controversial remarks about disabled people and beliefs in re-incarnation and faith-healing made him a figure of national fun.



ULRIKA JONSSON

qualify for the 1978 World Cup and after three years in the job, he left to take a lucrative job in the United Arab Emirates.

It was a decision that was greeted with headlines that screamed 'Don Readies' and 'Goldfinger'.

In 1982, Bobby Robson took over from Ron Greenwood, but despite reaching the quarter-finals of the 1986 World Cup and the semi-finals in 1990, the knives had

Eriksson still undecided



AFP, London

Sven-Goran Eriksson revealed he is still undecided about a third of England's World Cup squad while dealing with a volley of questions over his private life.

Tuesday's British newspapers continued to be dominated by news of the England manager's alleged romantic liaison with TV presenter and compatriot Ulrika Jonsson yet die-hard fans will perhaps be more concerned about Eriksson's selection dilemmas.

The England coach's revelation that he has as few as 15 definite names in his 23-man party may have more ramifications among real fans than any news on his private life.

Claims that the 54-year-old, whose girlfriend of three years is Italian lawyer Nancy Dell'Olio, has had a two-month fling with former weather girl Jonsson have sent the media into overdrive.

But Eriksson turned his thoughts to football and gave fresh hope to players bidding to nail down their place in his squad, to be announced on May 7.

Asked if he has decided on every player, he said: "Many times - but I've changed my mind many times as well."

"It's easy to pick out 15, 16 or 17 players, but then it gets very difficult. There will be many disappointed football players in this country."

"As a manager, it's the worst thing you could have to do, telling someone they can't go. It's worse than telling them they're not even on the bench for a match."

"It's hard work to pick out the best 23, but I've seen them a lot of times in games and also with the national team, so hopefully I'll be prepared."

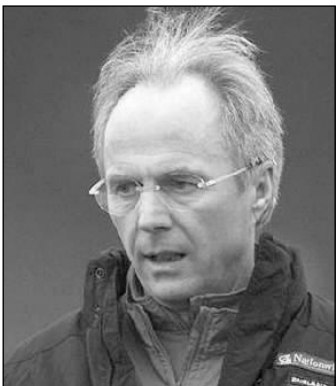
"My fingers are crossed that we

won't have any more bad injuries in the last few games of football in the season here."

Eriksson - speaking at a press conference to launch England's official World Cup suit - appeared his usual ice-cool self as he stonewalled a 20-minute barrage of questions over his private life.

But he did reveal how the Football Association have supported him over a turbulent weekend, and told how he was expecting to chat with England captain David Beckham.

"I talked to (chief executive) Adam Crozier on Friday, and also (execu-



SVEN-GORAN ERIKSSON

tive director) David Davies and (head of communications) Paul Newman - and we're going on working on World Cup preparations," he said.

"I've spoken to a couple of managers for football reasons, but I haven't spoken to the players, although David left a message for me on Friday and I'll phone him back."

Eriksson also allayed supporters' concerns he would not be 100 percent focused on his team due to the media frenzy over his reported relationship with Jonsson.

Asked if the outcry will affect England's World Cup bid, he said: "Of course not - absolutely not. That's football and we're going to be prepared to do as well as possible."

No way back for ITV Digital

AFP, London

Ailing British pay-TV broadcaster ITV Digital will be sold as a going concern after attempts to renegotiate its deal to show English football failed, its administrators said on Monday.

Deloitte et Touche said in a statement that "it has not been possible to restructure the cost base of ITV Digital", leading the administrator to believe that there is no other recourse but to sell the loss-making company.

"We are now in discussions with the Independent Television Commission about an accelerated process leading to a sale as a going concern," he said.

ITV Digital's service to subscribers, however, will not be hampered by the decision, a Deloitte et Touche spokesman added.

The administrators said they expected to make an announcement on Thursday about whether a buyer is likely to be found for the whole organisation.

ITV Digital went bust last month after parent companies Granada and Carlton pulled the plug on the loss-making business after it wildly over-estimated demand for football from the Nationwide League - covering all the divisions below the elite Premiership, whose live matches are televised by Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB.

A British court last week gave ITV Digital another week to settle a dispute with English football clubs that has brought joint venture between Carlton Communications and Granada to its knees.

But the football clubs refused to accept lower payments than originally promised and no deal could be struck.

ITV Digital owes the Football League 178 million pounds (290 million euros, 255 million dollars) under a contract signed 18 months ago.

But the British broadcaster, which has been losing money ever since signing the deal, said it wanted to pay just 50 million pounds for the last two years of the deal.

Football League chief executive David Burns said the move to put ITV Digital up for sale had been expected but insisted the clubs would continue to push for the all the money owed to them.

Burns said: "This is a course of action that we had anticipated."



AFP, Florence

AS Roma coach Fabio Capello on Monday was named winner of the 'golden bench' award by his coaching peers, the Italian media reported.

The award, decided by a vote of all of Italy's professional coaches, was handed out for the 2000/01 season when Capello led AS Roma to their first Italian First Division title for 18 years and it is the third time the Roma coach has won the prize after twice winning during his tro-

phy-garlanded spell in charge of AC Milan.

He succeeds Alberto Cavasin who won the award the previous season for his stewardship of Lecce although this season he was sacked by the southern club which on Sunday was relegated to Serie B.

Modena coach Gianni De Biasi was also honoured for leading his club to promotion to Serie B - he has continued his success story this season with Modena now leading Serie B and looking certain to win promotion to the top flight.

The life-time's achievement award was presented to veteran Brescia coach Carlo Mazzone.

Capello wins coaching award