

Semi-final 1st leg

MANCHESTER UNITED v BAYER LEVERKUSEN

Red Devils favourites but...

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

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

to play 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 group stages and Liverpool in the quarter-

treatment on his Achilles tendon.

United go into the Champions League crunch tie without England reported on Tuesday.

The tough-tackling Irishman was stretched off the 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

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 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.

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

failed to duplicate the 1966 success, they became objects of derision.

Don Revie didn't help those who were to follow in the hotseat when he replaced Ramsey in 1974.

Revie's England team failed to

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 poisioned 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.

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.

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.

Banking on Pele!

Football

APP, Valparaiso, Chile

A soccer shirt taken from Brazilian legend Pele 40 years ago has turned into a potential gold mine for an amateur Chilean club which hopes to sell it for up to 70,000 US dollars in an Internet auction.

The down-and-out Deportivo Monjas neighbourhood club has preserved the shirt since one of its fans coaxed Pele to hand it over after a game that clinched the 1962 Brazilian championship for Pele's Santos club.

The Chileans kept the treasure, unwashed and in a glass frame, at their clubhouse -- a rundown wooden hut on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean in the gritty port city of Valparaiso.

Now desperate for cash to spruce up their dilapidated offices, the team launched an online auction last Friday for the shirt, its most valuable asset.

"We're in bad shape as far as infrastructure goes. We need to rebuild this place. We want to buy a computer and modernise," club chairman Ismael Valenzuela said during a break from painting the clubhouse. His face was splattered by blobs of green paint.

Deportivo Monjas were inspired by Christie's auction house in London which fetched a record 224,600 dollars in March for the Brazil shirt worn by Pele in the World Cup final in Mexico in 1970.

Sports memorabilia collectors have until May 4 to bid in the Chilean auction. Bidding started on Latin American Internet auction site www.derelecta.com at 30,000 dollars and was at 30,200 dollars on Monday morning.

"If we get 60,000 dollars or even 70,000 dollars we will be happy," club spokesman Marcelo Hernandez said.

A Deportivo Monjas fan who was a student in Brazil at the time

snatched the shirt from Pele after Santos beat Sao Paulo away from home to win the league in 1962 for the third year running.

The fan, Andres Urrejola, who is now 61 and lives in Brazil, donated the shirt to the Chilean team.

He raced onto the pitch at the Pacaembu stadium and pestered Pele for the white shirt, at one point trying to pull it off the Brazilian star's back, club officials said.

They proudly showed an old Brazilian magazine with the headline, "Santos Wins The Third, Pele Loses His Shirt," beside a story about the Chilean fan.

The shirt has not been washed since the escapade, and is now coloured off-white. The number 10, made famous by Pele both for his club and country, is sewn on

the back in black.

Deportivo Monjas plays in a local amateur league to tiny crowds and shares a stadium with other clubs.

Pele, born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, rocketed to international fame after becoming the youngest ever World Cup winner in 1958 when at age 17 he scored two goals to help Brazil beat Sweden 5-2 in the World Cup final.

He played for Santos during most of his career. He later joined the New York Cosmos.

Local press reports say as many as 20,000 could watch China take on South Korea in a pre-tournament friendly on April 27.

China begin their inaugural campaign with a match against Costa Rica on June 4.

"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.

A Deportivo Monjas fan who was a student in Brazil at the time

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 15, 16 or 17 players, 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

will be able to do well in the tournament.

"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."

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

two-year tenure.

The life-time's achievement award was presented to veteran

Brescia coach Carlo Mazzone.

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.

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Manchester United have a glorious

opportunity to return to the

Champions League final for the first

time