

Big boys all blaze



AFP, Paris

Manchester United and Bayern Munich cruised to qualification for the first group phase of the Champions League on Tuesday and were joined by Italian giants Inter Milan.

United averted a financial disaster by beating Zalaegerszegi 5-0 at Old Trafford, wiping out the Hungarians' 1-0 advantage from the first leg.

Defeat and elimination from the richest competition in club football was unthinkable for the English giants - their annual accounts revealed last year that the club earned 29.4 million dollars from their participation in the Champions League.

United were 3-0 up within 21 minutes thanks to a goal from Ruud van Nistelrooy, a trademark free-kick from David Beckham and a scrambled Paul Scholes effort.

Van Nistelrooy doubled his tally from the spot 14 minutes from time after being fouled by Zalaegerszegi goalkeeper Sasa Ilic.

The former Charlton player followed through on the Dutchman with his studs when jumping for a high ball and was harshly sent off.

Second-half substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjaer netted United's fifth after being picked out by Ryan Giggs' precision pass to complete the rout.

The last time United were forced to qualify for the Champions League, in the 1998-1999 season, they won the competition.

United boss Alex Ferguson said: "I think the desire in the first half gave us the foundation - in the first half the speed of the passing and the movement was excellent."

"This club's history is built on great European nights and now we can look forward to more."

But while the world's most expensive defender Rio Ferdinand started his first competitive match for the club, United were hit by an injury to Scholes.

Bayern had an easier job after beating Partizan Belgrade 3-0 in the first round. They eased to qualification with a 3-1 win over the Yugoslavs at Munich's Olympic Stadium.

A classy first-half shot from Michael Ballack and goals from Giovane Elber and Hasan Salihamidzic gave Bayern, who won the Champions League in 2001, a 6-1 aggregate victory.

"My team knew how important this match was," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"Partizan showed how dangerous they can be but we pushed ourselves because we want to be back in with the big boys."

"My team showed they can pull together and showed their spirit."

Ronaldo was absent because of his ongoing desire to move to Real Madrid but two first-half goals sent Inter Milan through against Sporting Lisbon at the San Siro.

After holding the Portuguese side to a draw in their first leg match two weeks ago in Lisbon the Italians left nothing to chance, winning 2-0.

Hector Cuper's men took the lead from a header by Luigi Di Biagio off a corner after 31 minutes and a header from Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba secured the match after he moved onto a cross from the right by Francesco Cocco.

Japanese World Cup star Shinji Ono opened the scoring in Dutch side Feyenoord's 2-0 win over Fenerbahce in Istanbul and Thomas Buffel completed the job for a 3-0 aggregate win to ensure Feyenoord get a chance to improve on their UEFA Cup win last season.

In the remaining match, Genk of Belgium scraped through on away goals despite blowing a 2-1 lead to go down 4-2 to Sparta Prague. The opening goals from Moumouni Dagnano and Wesley Sonck proved crucial for the Belgians in the Czech capital.

Karel Poborsky, two goals from Jiri Jarosik and Pavel Mares gave Sparta a meaningless victory.

The qualifying round is completed on Wednesday and the draw for the first group phase of the Champions League is made in Monaco on Thursday.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Results from European Champions League qualifying round, second leg matches on Tuesday. Winners qualify for first-round group phase:

At Manchester
Manchester United (Eng) 5 (Van Nistelrooy 6, 76-pen, Beckham 15, Scholes 21, Solskjaer 84) Zalaegerszegi (Hun) 0
Manchester United win 5-1 on aggregate

At Milan
Inter Milan 2 (Di Biagio 31, Recoba 44) Sporting Lisbon 0
Inter Milan win 2-0 on aggregate

At Istanbul
Fenerbahce (Tur) 0 Feyenoord (Ned) 2 (Ono 49, Buffel 89)
Feyenoord win 3-0 on aggregate

At Munich
Bayern Munich (Ger) 3 (Ballack 26, Elber 71, Salihamidzic 74-pen) Partizan Belgrade (Yug) 1 (Cakar 72)
Bayern Munich win 6-1 on aggregate

At Prague
Sparta Prague (Cze) 4 (Poborsky 56, Jarosik 59, 64, Mares 84) Genk (Bel) 2 (Dagnano 25, Sonck 57)
Aggregate score 4-4, Genk win on away goals



PHOTO: AFP

RELIEF: Manchester United superstar David Beckham (R) exults with Phil Neville after scoring the second goal against Zalaegerszegi TE in their Champions league qualifier at Old Trafford on August 27.

Fergie fears none



AFP, Manchester

The pressure of abject failure firmly set aside, Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson is relishing Thursday's European Champions League draw.

The 5-0 drubbing of Hungarian upstarts Zalaegerszegi at Old Trafford on Tuesday night erased fears that the 1999 European Champions could make an early exit from a tournament which constitutes their main aim of the season.

The outcome of the tie was not in doubt once Ruud van Nistelrooy, David Beckham and Paul Scholes had struck in the opening 21 minutes.

The victory puts United into the last 32, although as a qualifier, it is not yet known whether they will be one of the seeded teams in the draw.

"The last time we came out of the qualifiers, we ended up in a group with Barcelona and Bayern

Munich," said Ferguson. "We responded to it then and we will respond to it again. There is no great difference between the seeded and non-seeded teams in the Champions League, you can get some difficult opponents in either situation. We are just happy to be there."

Of more pressing concern though are some notable additions to Ferguson's chronic injury list. Scholes will be out for at least two weeks after picking up an ankle injury, while England team-mate Nicky Butt is awaiting a specialist's report into the toe problem which ruled him out of last night's clash.

And, there is a huge question mark hanging over Roy Keane, who it is reported requires surgery on a hip injury which will see him sidelined for three months.

Ferguson was reluctant to enter into discussion about his skipper, rejecting outright the suggestion he might enter hospital for surgery this week.

However, the Scot did admit there may be a problem to solve.

"Roy is not having any sort of operation this week," he said.

"Maybe there is a problem further down the line but I deal in facts. Paul Scholes went over on his ankle and it has swollen up immediately. It is difficult to assess these things but hopefully he will only miss two weeks."

With Fabien Barthez, Gary Neville and Wes Brown already out of the weekend trip to Sunderland, Ferguson can ill afford any more problems, even if record signing Rio Ferdinand did complete an hour of his belated debut.

Ferguson though also encouraged by a strong display from David Beckham who switched wings with bewildering regularity and produced his best all round performance in months.

"David has been really fresh since he came back to us," said Ferguson.

"Maybe the World Cup came a bit too quickly for him but it has never looked like there would be a rebound from our point of view."

"The first year at a new club is always a new and sometimes difficult experience. However, I've adapted well to the city and the people here and I think that in the coming year you'll see an even better Zidane," said the Frenchman.

Another man many expect to see in even better form, perhaps even matching his Spanish international team mate Raul in the affections of the football-watching public, is Real Betis' right-sided midfielder Joaquin Sanchez.

Joaquin shone at the World Cup - and he is now being talked of in the same breath as Raul as probably the best Spanish-born player to have emerged since the legendary Luis Suarez, who won the European Player of the Year award in 1960.

Sure to shine



AFP, Madrid

The biggest transfer headlines in the Spanish newspapers this summer were devoted to a player who had not set foot in the country and now looks unlikely to for a long time to come, Ronaldo.

However, while negotiations between Inter Milan and Real Madrid over the buck-toothed Brazilian superstar striker meandered on and eventually stalled, the 497 players who are registered with Spanish First Division clubs got on with their job of getting ready for the new season which starts Saturday.

None could be accused of being more attentive to his task than Juan Riquelme, who took over the number 10 shirt that had belonged to the departing Rivaldo at Barcelona, after arriving from Boca Juniors following more than a year's negotiations.

The charismatic Riquelme is the biggest name to have moved to a Spanish club even if he was far from the most expensive signing.

Already, many pundits are already suggesting that the six million euros that the Catalan club paid for the 24 year-old Argentine international midfielder looks like very good value against some of the astronomical figure that were flying around the market place last summer, including the world record fee of 65 million dollars that Real Madrid paid Juventus for Zinedine Zidane.

"He wants to learn, he's working hard but he's not accustomed to training like we do, so he's having to adapt to new methods," cautioned Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal on Sunday.

However, Riquelme has already shown that a lack of stamina for the long season ahead, possibly playing more than 50 games, is possibly the only real hurdle he has to negotiate in order to make a huge impression on Spanish football.

"I'm not worried about the pressure here. At Boca, the fans expected us to win every game as well. Javier Saviola has been a constant friend since I arrived here from Argentina, telling me what to expect and how to deal with things. That has helped a lot," said Riquelme last week.

Riquelme though will be fighting for space in the limelight with Spain's own home grown hero Raul Gonzalez.

The Real Madrid striker, third in last year's World Player of the Year voting and the Spanish First Division's top scorer for two of the last four seasons, finally showed his true skills on an international stage at the World Cup, but returned from Korea slightly injured which has impeded his progress this summer.

Nevertheless, Raul hopes that his questionable fitness will not impede Real adding more silverware to their trophy cabinet.

Show-stopper Inamoto



AFP, Paris

A hat-trick from Japanese World Cup star Junichi Inamoto gave Fulham a 3-1 Intertoto Cup final, second leg win over Bologna on Tuesday and took the Premiership side into the UEFA Cup for the first time in their history.

Fulham advanced 5-3 on aggregate, securing one of the three UEFA Cup berths along with German Bundesliga side VfB Stuttgart who cracked ten-man Lille 2-1 on aggregate with two late goals and Malaga, who advance 2-1 on aggregate after being held 1-1 at home by fellow Spaniards Villarreal.

Inamoto, on a one-year loan from Premiership rivals Arsenal, gave Fulham the lead with a well-taken goal in the 12th minute at Loftus Road.

But his sloppy defending allowed Bologna to equalise after 34 minutes.

However, the 22-year-old, making his first start for Fulham, struck twice more in the first five minutes of the second half to secure a piece of football history for the Cottagers.

Inamoto said he had wanted to show what he could do.

"I would like to stay here and am going to try my best to make my transfer a permanent one," he said.

"The environment here is really good and I hope to stay longer."

His heroics earned the praise of Fulham boss Jean Tigana who believes chairman Mohamed El Fayed will be keen to keep Inamoto in west London.

"I think the chairman will want to keep him, although I haven't spoken to him," said the Frenchman.

"I am very happy for Junichi. I wanted to sign him two years ago before he went to Arsenal because I knew him well."

"In a way he lost a year at Arsenal, but I am sure he progressed working under Arsene Wenger."

"It is difficult to play at Arsenal because they are a big team with a fantastic squad."

Stuttgart, meanwhile, had been trailing 1-0 going into the second leg, but netted two goals in the space of seven minutes in the dying minutes of the game as their opponents succumbed to the pressure.

Lille, reduced to ten practically throughout the second half after defender Stephane Pichot was sent off when his arm prevented the ball crossing the line, finally cracked after fending off a series of attacks by the Germans.

Stuttgart got off to a nervous start and were unfortunate in the first half having two goals disallowed by Danish referee Knud-Erik Fisker for offside.

The first on 16 minutes followed a disputed offside by Jochen Seitz, and the second by Greek striker Ioannis Amanatidis just before the break.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Results in the InterToto Cup Finals, second leg matches on Tuesday:

At Stuttgart, Germany
Stuttgart (Ger) 2 (Balakov 81, Kuranyi 88) Lille (Fra) 0
Stuttgart win 2-1 on aggregate and qualify for UEFA Cup

At London
Fulham (Eng) 3 (Inamoto 12, 47, 50) Bologna (Ita) 1 (Locatelli 34)
Fulham win 5-3 on aggregate and qualify for UEFA Cup

At Malaga, Spain
Malaga (Spa) 1 (Roteta 32) Villarreal (Spa) 1 (Aranda 61)
Malaga win 2-1 on aggregate and qualify for UEFA Cup

tage of their chances with Benoit Cheyrou missing two first-half chances and Christophe Landrin failing to hit a wide open goal five minutes later.

In the final 20 minutes Stuttgart's

attacks paid off with Bulgarian ace Krassimir Balakov, whose earlier shot had hit the bar, grabbing the equaliser with nine minutes remaining.

Seven minutes later from a Balakov corner substitute Kevin Kuranyi wrecked French hopes with a header.

"We always believed in ourselves," said Stuttgart coach Felix Magath.

"It was a question of time to see Lille bow under our pressure. Even after 1-0 we threw everything into the attack.

"We didn't want to have to rely on penalties and our efforts paid off."

Lille coach Claude Puel could not hide his disappointment.

"We paid for not consolidating our chances in the first half. It was then that we should have nailed it," he said.

Malaga had a cushion of a 1-0 first leg away win to Villarreal, and did not disappoint the home fans when defender Mikel Roteta opened the scoring after 32 minutes. The visitors levelled on 61 from striker Carlos Aranda but it was too little too late.



PHOTO: AFP

Junichi Inamoto (R), Fulham's Japanese star, celebrates with teammate Sean Davis (L) after scoring his second goal against Bologna's during their Intertoto Cup Final second leg match at Loftus Road in London on August 27.

Moratti confident about Ronaldo



REUTERS, Milan

Brazil's World Cup winner Ronaldo will stay with Inter Milan despite his stated desire to leave the Italian club, Inter president Massimo Moratti has said.

Speaking after Inter's 2-0 win over Sporting Lisbon booked them into the Champions League group stage, Moratti told Italian television the protracted talks with Real Madrid over a possible move by the twice World Player of the Year were closed.

"The situation is very clear. He's part of Inter, everything will soon return to normal. We can already define the Ronaldo case as closed, without having to wait until Saturday [deadline for Champions League squad lists to be presented to UEFA]," said Moratti.

"Ronnie is staying with us. He is an intelligent lad, but he needs to get his feet back on the ground again. When we look into each other's eyes everything can be resolved," said Moratti.

"Public opinion in Milan is as important as that in Madrid," added Moratti, referring to the damage

done to Ronaldo's relationship with Inter fans by his comments that he wanted to leave.

"We want the best for him and what has happened is no longer of importance. We want him with us," said Moratti.

But the club's coach Hector Cuper admitted for the first time there was a problem between him and the Brazilian -- though he would be glad to see Ronaldo back as a full member of the squad.

"If Ronaldo stays I would have no problem. I have no problem with Ronaldo -- it is him who has a problem with me," said Cuper, who later said the two may have a meeting to clear the air.

Talks between Inter and Real over a possible transfer broke down last week after the Italians rejected an offer from the Spanish club.

For his part 25-year-old Ronaldo has been continuing his training alone in preparation for the first match of the Italian season, having said that he was prepared to sit out and wait for his chance to play in Spain.

The start of the Italian league season has been delayed until September 15 by a dispute over pay-per-view television rights.



PHOTO: INTERNET

SURE TO TOP THE CHART! The legendary Diego Maradona giving an example of his singing and dancing prowess in the lobby of the Pedro de Elizalde Children's Hospital in Buenos Aires after he and a local pop group presented a music CD to raise funds for the hospital.

Diego sets the tune



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona has presented a new album he recorded to benefit a troubled Argentine children's hospital, singing a couple of verses on national television and mocking his lack of musical talent.

"It doesn't matter how I sing, whether it's bad or good, I'm just doing it for the kids," the former

Argentine captain joked at a news conference surrounded by patients at the hospital. "I really hope the song can help cure a child."

Maradona, who has been undergoing drug rehabilitation in Cuba, sings on the album backed up by a local pop band.

Proceeds will benefit the Buenos Aires hospital, which like many others in Argentina is short on the most basic of supplies as the country suffers its worst economic crisis.

Premiership Gunners lesson for West Brom



AFP, London

English champions Arsenal powered their way to the top of the Premiership on Tuesday with a thumping 5-2 win over top-flight newcomers West Bromwich Albion at Highbury.

In the night's other match, an eighth minute goal from Welsh international Simon Davies gave Tottenham a 1-0 win at London rivals Charlton.

West Brom, who have lost their opening three league fixtures, fell behind after just three minutes.

Nwankwo Kanu, recalled because of Dennis Bergkamp's calf injury, spotted Cole's storming run down the left flank and lobbed the ball deftly into England the full-back's path.

Cole twisted outside and then inside Darren Moore before unleashing an unstoppable drive into the top corner.

In the 21st minute West Brom were hit by a second sucker-punch.

Kanu was again the provider, cutting the ball back for Lauren, who crashed his shot home from close range.

Worse was to follow for the visitors three minutes later.

This time Thierry Henry provided the inspiration, chipping a pass towards Wiltord, who escaped the offside trap and lofted the ball over West Brom goalkeeper Russell Hoult.

Arsenal sat back on their lead and gave West Brom a lifeline in the 51st minute.



PHOTO: AFP

INSTANT IMPACT: Arsenal's French recruit Jeremie Aliadiere (top) scores the ball past West Bromwich Albion custodian Russel Hoult during their English Premier League match at Highbury on August 27.

Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
Tottenham	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Leeds	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Liverpool	2	2	1	0	4	0	6
Fulham	2	1	1	0	6	3	4
Chelsea	2	1	1	0	5	4	4