

SPORT

The Daily Star

No Real problems



REUTERS, Monaco

European champions Real Madrid were handed a fairly easy start to the defence of their title when they were drawn on Thursday to play AS Roma, AEK Athens and Genk of Belgium in the Champions League's opening group phase. Bayern Munich and AC Milan,

who have won the European Cup nine times between them, were drawn in the same group, while the 1999 winners Manchester United will face Bayer Leverkusen, who lost 2-1 to Real Madrid in last season's final

Real, who became European champions for a record ninth time in May, were drawn in the same first stage group as Roma last season. winning 2-1 away and drawing 1-1 at home.

"I have to admit it could have been much worse and we could have drawn stronger teams so we can't complain," said Real Madrid general manager Emilio Butragueno.

Oddly the only one of the four in the group who won their league championship last season was the most inexperienced club of all in European terms -- Genk. Rea finished third in Spain, Roma were second in Italy and AEK runners-up in Greece

Manchester United, who qualified for the competition proper after beating Hungarian champions Zalaegerszeg 5-1 on aggregate, will face Olympiakos and Maccabi Haifa, the first team from Israel to reach the Champions League, as well as Leverkusen.

United chief executive Peter Kenyon said they were happy not to have any long journeys in the opening phase, but warned that he expected very difficult matches against Leverkusen.

"I think overall it's a good draw for us and with a trip to Nicosia thrown in to play Haifa, geographically it's not too bad, nothing too strenuous," said

Kenyon. "When you look at the competition in general, the quality is as high as it's ever been so there could have been some really difficult draws. Generally we have to be pleased.

"I'm sure the tie against Leverkusen will be billed as a chance for us to gain revenge but we will give them great respect and hope we get a better result than last time.'

Veteran Brazilian striker Romario is

being given special treatment by his

new club Fluminense, officials said

The 36-year-old, who admits he

does not like training, is allowed to

travel separately to away games

and miss the occasional training

session if he tells the club

REUTERS, *Rio de Janeiro*

Thursday.

United were knocked out of last season's competition by the German side on the away goals rule in the semifinals after the teams

drew 2-2 at Old Trafford and 1-1 in German Leverkusen coach Klaus

Toppmoeller said he did not expect to defeat United again because his team had been seriously weakened since last season by the departure of key midfielders Michael Ballack and 7e Roberto da Silva to German

rivals Bavern Munich. "We are not so strong, but we will do our best even if I know I cannot expect another great result," he said. "But we have some very good youngsters. Olympiakos and United also met

good." Bayern Munich, whose European Cup success in 2001 was sandwiched between Real's victo-

ries in 2000 and 2002, head a tough group that includes last season's Spanish League runners-up Deportivo La Coruna, perennial Italian powerhouse AC Milan and Lens, runners-up in the French League last season.

Bayern's chairman was rubbing his hands in anticipation of sell-out crowds at the Olympic stadium in Munich.

"I'm personally really looking forward to the game against Milan, with Rivaldo and Co in the Olympic Stadium. It'll be a sell-out," Karl-

THE DRAW

Draw for the first group stage of the European Champions League made here on Thursday:

Group A Arsenal (Eng) Borussia Dortmund (Ger) PSV Eindhoven (Ned) Auxerre (Fra) Group B Valencia (Spa)

Liverpool (Eng) Spartak Moscow (Rus) Basel (Swi)

Group C Real Madrid (Spa) AS Roma (Ita) AEKAthens (Gre) Genk (Bel)

Group D Inter Milan (Ita) Lyon (Fra) Ajax (Ned) Rosenborg (Nor)

First matches take place on September 17 and 18 and the final games on November 12 and 13.

in the first stage last season -- with United beating the Greek champions 2-0 away and 3-0 at home.

Haifa were delighted to be drawn against United, even though due to the political unrest in Israel, their home matches will all take place in Nicosia in Cyprus.

"It is so exciting for us, so fantastic, nobody can believe it," said general manager Itamar Chizik. 'The whole of Israel wanted this, I think, and they all wanted us to bring Manchester United to them. So, now it has happened.

"The stadium, in Nicosia, is a good one. It is a new one and it holds

VVIP Romario! Premiership preview

Group E Juventus (Ita) Feyenoord (Ned) Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) Newcastle (Eng) Group F Basel in group B. Manchester United (Eng) Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)

Olympiakos (Gre) Maccabi Haifa (Isr) Group G

Bayern Munich (Ger) Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) AC Milan (Ita) Lens (Fra)

Group H Barcelona (Spa) Galatasaray (Tur) Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) Bruges (Bel)

Heinz Rummenigge, chairman of Bayern Munich. Barcelona, desperate to win the

European Cup for the second time after their only success in 1992, face familiar opposition in their opening group when they meet Galatasaray.

They were also paired in the second group stage last season when they drew 2-2 in Spain before Barcelona won 1-0 in Turkey. Lokomotiv Moscow and Bruges complete their group.

Gunners in high spirits

"He is a real team player, he's not

only a goalscorer but I'm happy that

Chelsea midfielder Emmanuel

FIXTURES

Saturday: Birmingham v

Leeds (1100 GMT), Manchester

City v Everton, Middlesbrough v

Blackburn, Sunderland v Man-

chester United, Tottenham v

Southampton, West Brom v

Sunday: Bolton v Aston Villa

(1300 GMT), Chelsea v Arsenal

Monday: Liverpool v Newcas-tle (1900 GMT)

land star Paul Scholes who is

United are already without

French goalkeeper Fabien Barthez,

Gary Neville and Wes Brown but

Ferguson is confident he has the

resources to cope with the current

sidelined with an ankle injury.

Old Trafford injury crisis.

Fulham West Hamy Charlton

(1400GMT unless stated)

he scores all these goals now."

"At first sight it appears an easier draw than last year so we are quite happy," said Anton Parera, Barcelona's director-general.

Southampton

1505 GMT)

25,000 people and the pitch is Borussia Dortmund and PSV Eindhoven, who have both won the top club trophy in Europe once, will play AJ Auxerre of France and English double winners Arsenal, who start their bid to win the European Cup for the first time in group A.

"It's a strong and attractive group, which promises much. The clubs are also ones that our fans can realistically reach. Our goal is passage to the second round, we simply have to do that " said Dortmund's commercial manager Michael Zorc.

Frank Arnesen, PSV's technical director, said: "We know all about Arsenal and it will be even more interesting because they have Dutchmen Dennis Bergkamp and Giovanni van Bronkhorst. It should be a fascinating series of games in the group."

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger told his club's website: "I'm conscious that it's a difficult group, but no matter who we play we want to go through and we are good enough to go through".

Valencia, losing finalists in 2000 and 2001, play four-time s winners Liverpool, Spartak Moscow and

"I am very happy about the draw. It is the competition we want to win having lost two finals and we are still hoping that we can win the final this year in Old Trafford," said Jaime Orti, president of Valencia.

"It's certainly an interesting draw," said Liverpool coach Gerard Houllier.

"Valencia's quality is undoubted as their Spanish title win and two recent appearances in the Champions League Final demonstrated. It's four years since we faced them in the UEFA Cup but they, like us, have improved considerably in the meantime and they will be a tough challenge.

"It's never easy travelling to eastern Europe and Spartak Moscow will be formidable opponents on their own ground. But as we showed in Kiev last season, the lads have the mental strength and experience to cope with that type of

situation." Italian champions Juventus also head a tough group, which includes UEFA Cup holders Feyenoord, Dynamo Kiev and Newcastle United, while compatriots Inter Milan and Ajax were happy with their group which also includes Lyon and Rosenberg.

The competition starts with the opening matches on September 17 and 18. The final is at Old Trafford, Manchester, next May.

Leeds travel to Birmingham for

Saturday's early match loking to

bounce back from their shock 1-0

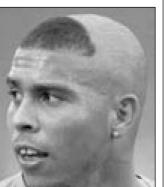
defeat at home to Sunderland on

Inter offered new deal for Ronaldo

AFP, Monaco

European champions Real Madrid have launched a fresh bid for Ronaldo by offering Inter Milan 40 million euros (39.3 million dollars) plus Argentine midfielder Santiago Solari, officials from both clubs said here on Friday.

A decision must be made before Saturday's European transfer deadline. Solari, a 26-year-old midfielder



RONALDO

with a good goalscoring record, is known to interest Inter's Argentine coach Hector Cuper but it remains to be seen whether the new offer is enough to persuade the Italians to release Ronaldo, the top scorer at this year's World Cup finals. Since returning from the World

Cup where he scored both goals in the final against Germany, 25year-old Ronaldo has set his sights on joining Real, a decision which has infuriated Inter's fans and saddened the club's president Massimo Moratti.

Inter have rejected previous bids for Ronaldo but in a meeting with Moratti in Milan on Wednesday, Ronaldo repeated his intention to join Real

Real's bid could be conditional on the transfer of Spanish international Fernando Morientes to English Premiership club Tottenham for a fee of 25 million euros, but that deal is currently deadlocked

MVP Zidane REUTERS, Monaco

France's Zinedine Zidane, whose spectacular goal clinched Real Madrid's ninth European Cup as they beat Bayer Leverkusen in May, was named the most valuable playe (MVP) in the Champions League for last season's performances.

The award was announced at UEFA's annual gala dinner at which the European governing body's president Lennart Johansson also gave a special award to Sir Bobby Robson, the 69-year-old Newcastle United manager, for his lifetime contribution to the game.



Primera Liga preview Champions' tough act to repeat

Football

AFP. Madrid

Valencia kick off the defence of their Spanish championship at Real Mallorca on Sunday knowing that goals, in short supply last season, are a must if they are to stand any chance of retaining their title.

They won their first league title in 31 years last season having scored a measly 51 goals, the lowest number since Real Madrid won in 1972 when the Spanish First Division contained two fewer clubs and the lowest average in the 71 editions of the league.

"I've told my players what I expect from them this year," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez last week, knowing that they lifted the trophy on the basis of a rock-solid defence rather than any fireworks at the other end.

FIXTURES (Kick off times in GMT) Saturday: Racing Santander v /alladolid (1830)

Sunday: Rayo Vallecano v Alaves (1700), Real Sociedad v Athletic Bilbao (1700), Villarreal v Osasuna (1700), Real Mallorca v Valencia (1800), Recreativo Huelva v Malaga (1830), Barcelona v Atletico Madrid (1900), Deportivo La Coruna v Real Betis (1900), Sevilla v Celta Vigo (1930)

Monday: Real Madrid v Espanyol (1930)

Paraguayan midfielder Toro Acuna and Portuguese defender Jorge Andrade, paying 13 million (12.8m dollars) and 12 million euros (11.8m dollars) to sign them from Real Zaragoza and Porto respectively. Irureta's only concern prior to hosting the side from Seville is the fitness of his star striker Diego Tristan

Cup and is still not fully fit despite being named on Thursday in Spain's squad to face Greece in the European Championship gualifiers on September 7

Real Madrid resisted the overtures of Inter Milan to pay out a world record transfer fee for Ronaldo and instead have promoted several youngsters from their reserve team into the squad, including left-sided defender Raul Bravo, a natural replacement for Roberto Carlos.

However, despite making his international debut during the summer Raul Bravo has been unable to displace the Brazilian World Cup winner and Real coach Vicente Del Bosque is likely to keep faith with the starting 11 from last season who won a record ninth European crown. Del Bosque's only point of con-

tention in the squad is his indecision over who will keep goal for Real, Iker Casillas or Cesar Sanchez. Casillas was Real's number one

PRIMERA LIGA'S TOP SIGNINGS

Top ten most expensive signings made the Spanish First Division clubs this summer. The Spanish championship starts on Saturday

(Player, nationality if not Spanish in parenthases, club before, current club, transfer fee in euros.)

Toro Acuna (Par)	Real Zaragoza	Deportivo la Coruna	13 million
Javi Moreno (Milan (Ita)	Atletico Madrid	12 million
Jorge Andrade (Por)	Porto (Por)	Deportivo La Coruna	12 million
Emerson (Bra)	Deportivo La Coruna	Atlético Madrid	10 million
Assuncao (Bra)	Roma (Ita)	Real	Betis
10 million			
Peter Luccin (Fra)	PSG (Fra)	Celta Vigo	7 million
Maxi Rodriguez (Arg)	Newell's Old Boys (Arg)	Espanyol	6.2 million
Juan Riquelme (Arg)	Boca Junior (Arg)	Barcelona	6 million
Belletti (Bra)	Sao Paulo (Bra)	Villarreal	4 million
Luis Garcia	Atletico Madrid	Barcelona	3.5 million

Argentine striker Pablo Aimar, one of the men entrusted with finding the net more regularly, was more explicit than his boss.

"Any ambitions we have of winning the title again depend entirely on us scoring more goals," commented Aimar on Thursday.

However. Benitez has resisted delving into the transfer market to find any new goal getters, preferring instead to keep faith with his existing corps augmented by Diego Alonso, who returns after a year on loan at Atletico Madrid where he scored 22 goals to lead the Second Division strikers.

Deportivo La Coruna, after two years of settling for second place, are determined to emulate their solitary title-winning success of three seasons ago and are looking for a good start at home to Real Betis on Sunday.

"They were last season's surprise package but there is no doubt that this year Real Betis could be championship contenders," observed Deportivo coach Javier Irureta, about the team that finally finished sixth.

1996-97 In sharp contrast to the teams 1997-98 that finished above and below 1998-99 ortivo last 999-00

for much of the season but then fell Last season's leading goalscorer in the First Division has suffered out of favour in March after some from a series of minor injuries before, during and since the World the-field arguments over his salary.

CHAMPIONS **SINCE 1980**

Spanish championship winners since 1980.

1979-80 Real Madrid 1980-81 R e a Sociedad 1981-82 R e a Sociedad 982-83 Athletic Bilbao 1983-84 Athletic Bilbao 984-85 Barcelona 1985-86 Real Madrid 1986-87 Real Madrid 1987-88 Real Madrid 1988-89 Real Madrid 989-00 Real Madrid 1990-91 Barcelona Barcelona 991-92 1992-93 Barcelona 1993-94 Barcelona 1994-95 Real Madrid 1995-96 Atletico Madrid

before Real face Espanyol on Monday, who they beat 5-1 in the corresponding fixture last season. In many people's eyes the most attractive fixture of the weekend is Barcelona against Atletico Madrid with both teams having much to prove this season.

lacklustre performances and off-

Cesar then took over success-

fully until he was injured during the

Champions League final against

Bayer Leverkusen. Casillas then

stepped back into the breach and

carried on his heroics for Spain

this issue, I'll decide fairly when the

time comes," said Del Bosque in his

usual matter-of-fact fashion, which

will probably mean just a few hours

"I'm not having headaches about

during the World Cup.

Newly-promoted Atletico climbed out of the Second Division after two years outside of the top flight and have made nine new signings in a bid to regain their former glory.

Barcelona have been less active in the transfer market, with just three new men including midfielders Gaizka Mendieta and Juan Riquelme, but after not winning a single trophy in the last two seasons they are equally determined to consign that sorry streak to history.

advance, president David Fischel told reporters

"We knew what we were buying when we hired him," Fischel said. "We talked about this and that's

why we made an agreement. He has his private commitments and we respect that. We are interested in his performances on the pitch.

"To have this treatment, a player needs to have a curriculum like he does. I've been very impressed with his professionalism. The squad knows that he is a different player." Romario, who scored five goals as he helped Brazil win the 1994 World Cup. was the top scorer in last year's Brazilian championship and has scored four times in his five games for Fluminense.

He missed the 1998 World Cup through injury and was left out of the squad for 2002 by coach Luiz Felipe Scolari despite enormous popular pressure for him to be included

Having joined the club earlier this month. Romario has already missed one training session to go to a friend's wedding and Brazilian media say he has traveled alone to all three of Fluminense's away games so far

Asprilla is no darling

REUTERS, London

Colombian Faustino Asprilla failed to turn up for a medical at Darlington and has headed for a job in the Middle East, leaving the chairman of the English Third Division club "absolutely devastated"

Asprilla, the former Newcastle United player, had been paraded by Darlington in front of their fans and the club said they expected to sign the striker this week after persuading the British government to grant him a work permit.

But early this morning chairman George Reynolds, who had offered Asprilla up to 17,000 pounds a week, found the 32-year-old "had done a runner" and flown to the Middle East.

"We made him a fantastic offer and I thought it was all in place. I am absolutely devastated," Reynolds told Sky Sports.

"We're friends, I wined and dined him but he knew about this (alterna tive offer) two to three days ago. He did not have the decency to say goodbye

"We offered him 20 percent of the gate receipts, plus salary, plus a car, plus a flat rent free.

"I'll never ever talk to him again, he's completely sunk me.

AFP, London

Football

Premiership leaders and reigning champions Arsenal visit London rivals Chelsea on Sunday, brimming with confidence after rattling home nine goals in their first three Premiership matches. The biggest contributor to the

Gunners' tally is French striker Sylvain Wiltord who has already found the net four times, twice in Tuesday's 5-2 win at home to West Brom

Wiltord, 28, has lived in the shadows of Thierry Henry since arriving at Highbury two years ago, but the former Bordeaux star is the one hogging the limelight this season despite playing out of position.

With Robert Pires and Freddie Ljungberg both injured, Wiltord has been asked to play as a penetrating right-sided midfielder and the switch appears to have done him the power of good.

"He is a tremendous asset to us and I feel he will get better and better," Wenger said on the club's official website, www.arsenal.com. the eye like other players but you how many goals - important goals he scores for us. "It was Wiltord who scored the

season. People forget that.

Sunderland on Saturday. Butt missed this week's Champions League qualifier win over Hungarian side Zalaegerszegi but is

"Sometimes he does not catch look at the way he works and see

winner (to secure the Premiership title) at Manchester United last

"There is also the number of goals and openings he creates for others. He may be underrated by some people but not by anyone at Arsenal.

Petit, a former Highbury favourite, is Wednesday.

expected to recover from a hip injury Coach Terry Venables believes in time to face the Gunners after the team may be suffering from the missing Wednesday's 1-1 draw at weight of expectations at Elland Road this season. Manchester United boss Alex

"It's not what people expect, it's Ferguson is confident midfielder what we do that counts." said the Nicky Butt will recover from a former England coach. bruised toe in time to face

"Expectancy and things like that are all on the outside. We are the ones who have to do it. We have to learn and know how to win games." A few frustrated fans booed Leeds off the field after their loss in

midweek, but Venables was not unduly worried by the crowd's reaction.

"If you lose at home you some times get that," he said.

"If they do it at the end it's ok. As long as they are with you during the game and help keep you going. It's up to them how they feel they should react."

Leeds striker Mark Viduka, meanwhile, has vowed to play through the pain barrier this season rather than risk surgery which could rule him out for months expected to return to replace Eng-

"I think I have tendinitis or something on my two Achilles, which is a difficult injury to treat." Viduka said.

"If you rest it, you can come back for the next game and still find it hurting, so the best way is to go through the pain and try to keep training and playing.

"I could have surgery, but if that "This sort of thing happens but happened it would put me out for a you just have to handle it and we long time, so I am trying to avoid it."

Football ZINEDINE ZIDANE Real Madrid swept four of the six

awards with Roberto Carlos being AFP, Paris named the best defender, Raul the best forward for the third successive Lvon may be missing the manager year, Zidane the best player and Vicente del Bosque as the best who led them to their first ever league title but the French champicoach. ons could regain control of the The other awards went to Bayern League One (First Division) this

Munich keeper Oliver Kahn, who won that category for the fourth successive season, and Michael Ballack, now Kahn's team mate but named best midfielder of the season for his performances with Bayer Leverkusen. Sporting's Jardel won UEFA's

Golden Shoe after his 42 goals national coach. helped the Portuguese side win their domestic title last season and draws so far, Lyon sit third one point landed him the Golden Boot award off the pace of surprise leaders Nice as Europe's top scorer. and second-placed Auxerre.

AWARDS

Best Goalkeeper: Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich) Also nominated: Gianluigi Buffon

(Juventus); Jerzy Dudek (Liverpool) Best Defender: Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid)

Also nominated: Cafu (AS Roma) Sami Hyypia (Liverpool) Best Midfielder: Michael Ballack (Bayer Leverkusen)

Also nominated: Roy Keane (Manchester United), Patrick Vieira (Arsenal)

Best Forward: Raul (Real Madrid) Also nominated: David Trezeguet (Juventus), Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United)

Most Valuable Player: Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid) Also nominated: Raul (Real Madrid), Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United)

Best Coach: Vicente Del Bosque (Real Madrid) Also nominated: Alex Ferguson (Manchester United); Klaus Toppmoeller (Bayer Leverkusen)

President's Award: Bobby Robson (manager, Newcastle United).

and Real Madrid did not pay for a single player during the summer -2000-01 the Galician club splashed out on 2001-02

Saturday to show Jacques Santini

they can operate without his techni-

at the club, however Lyon have the

on-field talent to fill the void left

when he took over as the French

Thanks to two wins and two

However it is in the goals column

Fourteen goals from four

matches, compared to 10 for Nice,

has left Santini's successor Paul Le

Guen with little to say in his pre-

match pep talk for his forwards, the

main reason being Brazilian Sonny

Anderson not only scores goals ·

he is honest, too, and admitted to

sinning last week when Lyon

but the rebound came out so fast.

fared not too badly in past encoun-

ters with Lyon and have a number of

players returning - including Nige-

rian Wilson Oruma - for the fifth

league match of the season.

threat from Auxerre on Sunday.

Auxerre are laced with huge

"Okay, the ball did touch my arm

inflicted a 4-1 defeat on Bastia.

of the league standings where

Lyon's true potential can be seen.

cal savvv.

Anderson.

stadium.

Deportivo La Coruna Real Madrid Valencia

Real Madrid

Barcelona

Barcelona

League One preview Lyon eye top spot

talent including defender Philippe Mexes and flashy forward Diibril Cisse, but they failed to score against Boavista in midweek on route to claiming their ticket for the group stage of the Champions League.

Marseille may be reputed more for their off-the-pitch crises than their sporting endeavours, however playing at the Velodrome will be a challenge for Roux's side.

Alain Perrin's Marseille team sit eighth in the league standings with two wins, a draw and one defeat and Santini's departure left a big hole

FIXTURES

Saturday: Bastia v Rennes, Sochaux v Lyon, Guingamp v Bordeaux, Lens v Monaco, Troyes Ajaccio, Strasbourg v Lille, Montpellier v Le Havre, Sedan v Nantes. Paris St Germain v Nice Sunday: Marseille v Auxerre

will be looking for home advantage to help them overhaul Auxerre on Sunday

Marseille defender Johnny Ecker is doubtful due to hamstring trouble. as is Brazilian 'utility' man Fernandao who should however take the field at some point.

"I'm still feeling a little twitch but it shouldn't be a problem. From now until Sunday we have the time to work on it," Fernandao told the club's website.

But at no time did I intentionally Flexible Fernandao, however, touch the ball." admitted Anderson after scoring three of his six goals so may not yet know which position from forward or midfield he will be Sochaux nevertheless, have asked to take

"It's not a problem," continued Fernandao, who has been used in various positions by Perrin so far. "In Brazil I often played number 10. although my natural position is as a striker.

While Lvon aim to take things into their own hands on Saturday, all "For the past two matches I've their good work could come under been playing well and we have fast forwards that I can pick out because However Auxerre will have to be they always make space for themresolute when they take on Marselves. So playing in midfield is not a seille in the volatile Velodrome problem.

The other matches to look out for on Saturday are Nice v Paris St

Germain - where Ronaldinho could finally make an appearance if he is fully fit - and Guingamp v Bordeaux. Bordeaux, who sit sixth on seven points, have just signed Savio from Real Madrid on a loan deal however the Brazilian star is likely to either sit out the fixture or be on the bench.

Chilavert threatens to leave

REUTERS, Strasbourg

Paraguay's goalkeeper Jose-Luis Chilavert, at odds with Racing Strasbourg for financial reasons says he is ready to leave the French club.

The flamboyant Chilavert, 37, was expected to play his first match for Strasbourg this season on Saturday in a First Division game against Lille, but said he would not

play. "I have not been respected. And nothing matters like respect in life," he told Strasbourg newspaper L'Alsace on Friday.

"A large sum of money should have been paid to me a year ago and it has not yet been paid," he added.

Chilavert, who captained Paraguay in their World Cup campaign in South Korea and Japan, said he had been told by Strasbourg staff a month ago he was no longer needed

"They did not need me then, I wonder why they should need me now," he said

First choice goalkeeper Vincent Fernandez is unavailable with a thigh injury and coach Ivan Hasek was relying on Chilavert.

"I'm not ready and even if I had been I would not have played," the Paraguayan said.

"He accepted competition. That's it," said Hasek. "If he doesn't want to play, he should go," he added.

Litmanen going back to ajax

Football

Liverpool striker Jari Litmanen is returning to his former club Ajax Amsterdam next month after being sidelined in the English Premier

League The deal with Ajax is initially for four months with a year-and-a-half extension to be considered in January. Ajax did not disclose the financial details of the move.

being the Jari of old in Amsterdam,"

club director Arie van Eijden said on Friday.

moved to Spain.

The 31-year-old Finnish interna-

Lvon at home on September 17 Litmanen made only 12 league

starts for Liverpool since joining them from Barcelona on a free transfer in January 2001.

Liverpool gave Litmanen per mission to speak to Turkish side Galatasaray earlier this week.

"This was agreed late last night," Litmanen scored 126 goals in Litmanen's agent Harri Kampman 224 games for Ajax before he said on Finnish television.

"The most important thing is that He will rejoin the Dutch champi-Jari gets back to a familiar and safe environment, and hopefully will get ons on September 9 as coach Ronald Koeman prepares his playing time. The club and the squad for their opening Champions player know each other perfectly," League game against Olympique he said.

have got a great group of players so I am sure they can do it," he said.

tional spent seven years at the

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Dutch club before moving to Barcelona in 1999.

"Jari leaves a difficult time at Liverpool behind him. I hope for him and for Aiax that Jari will return to