



Ronaldinho (C) Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian superstar, scores with a header during their UEFA Cup match against FC Ujpest of Hungary at Paris Parc des Princes in Paris on September 19.

Celtic run riot



AFP, Paris

Scottish champions Celtic took the UEFA Cup goalscoring honours on Thursday as some of the leading lights of European football began their campaigns to make up for missing out on the lucrative Champions League.

Celtic bounced back from the bitter disappointment of failing to make the group phase of the continent's most lucrative tournament by handing out an 8-1 thrashing to Lithuanian side FK Suduva.

Swedish striker Henrik Larsson stole the show hitting a hat-trick inside the first half hour at Parkhead.

Stilian Petrov, with a stunning right foot volley, and Chris Sutton were also on target to put Celtic on cruise control by the break.

Paul Lambert made it six with a header soon after the interval, Welsh striker John Hartson came off the bench to notch the seventh and Joos Valgaeren made it eight before the Lithuanians grabbed a consolation goal right on the stroke of full time.

However, Leeds United, Champions League semi-finalists two years ago, and who started the

night as one of the UEFA Cup favourites, found the going tough against the Ukrainians Metalurg Zaporizhzhya at Elland Road.

It took a strike by England forward Alan Smith ten minutes from the end to give them a slender lead to carry to the Ukraine in a fortnight's time.

"I think we were a bit unfortunate not to get two or three goals," Leeds boss Terry Venables said.

"But that is what we have got and now we have got a bit of work to do."

Fulham enjoyed one of the best performances of the day.

Having come through the Intertoto Cup to reach the first round, Jean Tigana's side defeated Croatia's experienced Euro campaigners Hajduk Split 1-0.

French midfielder Steed Malbranque scored the only goal of the game early in the second half to give his team a vital edge to take into the second leg in London in two weeks' time.

Japanese international Junichi Inamoto played a vital role in the goal when his pass set free Steve Marlet who eventually set up Malbranque.

Ipswich, who had never lost at Portman Road in 40 years of playing in Europe, were in danger of losing that proud record when they went a goal down to Yugoslavian outfit FK Sartin.

Nenad Miroslavjevic put the visitors ahead with a chip over Andy Marshall in the 32nd minute.

Alun Armstrong equalised 11 minutes after the break to extend Ipswich's unbeaten home record to 30 European ties.

Chelsea were frustrated by the dogged resistance of Viking

Stavanger at Stamford Bridge until Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink finally found a way through three minutes before the break and Quique de Lucas gave them a further edge in the 68th minute.

However, former Bristol City striker Ben Wright grabbed a precious away goal for the Norwegians in the dying moments.

Blackburn suffered a double setback early on in their home clash with CSKA Sofia. Dwight Yorke was forced off injured after only ten minutes and the Bulgarians then grabbed a shock lead through Velizar Dimitrov in the 22nd minute.

Corrado Grabbi equalised within five minutes but Blackburn were unable to turn their pressure into further goals.

Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho inspired Paris Saint Germain to a 3-0 win at home to Ujpest of Hungary.

Ronaldinho scored the opening goal in the 12th minute of the first leg, a rare header, and with compatriot Paulo Cesar ran the game in the first 45 minutes as the visitors were left to chase shadows.

Shortly after a Paulo Cesar free kick was punched away by Ujpest goalkeeper Geza Vlaszak, the Brazilian's corner was headed home by PSG captain Mauricio Pochettino in the 24th minute.

The Ujpest defence panicked every time Ronaldinho and Paulo Cesar ran at them. Argentine forward Martin Cardetti was credited with the third goal when he appeared to get a touch to a header from Fabrice Florese just before half-time.

Meanwhile, in Rome, Lazio crushed Xanthi of Greece 4-0.

Owen under Houllier's wings

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier has vowed to protect star striker Michael Owen as the England forward struggles to find his goalscoring touch.

Owen has scored just one goal - a penalty - so far this season and has been on the bench in Liverpool's last two matches.

He came on against Spanish side Valencia on Tuesday but was powerless to prevent a 2-0 Champions League defeat in Liverpool's first match of this season's tournament.

But Houllier said he would have to look after Owen, 22, as much as possible.

"I will rest him whenever I get a chance," Houllier said. "The temptation with Michael is to play him in every game."

"But we have learned that if you do that you run the risk of losing him for three or four months."

"I will be delighted if he plays 70 percent of our games and just as pleased if he does not finish top scorer and we are successful."

Owen has only scored one goal in open play during the past 10 matches and Houllier admitted his lack of success was taking its toll.

"I'm hoping the rest will have taken a bit of the pressure off him," he said. "He was coming off after every game stressed about not having scored."

"He was becoming more or less obsessed with scoring a goal - you could see the relief on his face when the penalty went in - and it wasn't doing him any good."

"I don't think he's a lad who particularly lacks confidence, though when you miss chances it does affect you."

"He knows I will play him but at the same time we have to be careful. There's a split second of sharpness that's been lacking."

Ronaldo's wanted Barca deal?

Football

INTERNET, Madrid

Ronaldo may have been at Real Madrid for a few weeks now, but the fur is still flying over his transfer from Internazionale. One of the most controversial revelations came today - that he wanted to join Barcelona, not Real.

Josep Oriola, Ronaldo's lawyer claimed that: "As far as I know the Barcelona board were ready to complete the deal and Ronaldo had spoken face to face with president Joan Gaspart. But [Louis] van Gaal was totally opposed to the transfer and therefore it didn't happen."

The Brazilian striker left the Nou Camp in 1997, having scored 34 goals in 37 games for Barca. The lure of the lira in Italy was enough to take him to Inter. However, after five years of injuries, he decided that enough was enough and plotted his return to Spain.

The return of Louis van Gaal appears to have scuppered his move back to Barca, so he was left with the not-unattractive option of joining European champions Real Madrid. Now, much like his national colleague Rivaldo, he has hit out at the Dutch coach.

Ronaldo revealed that the sweetest goal he will score this season will be against Barcelona: "First of all I have to score, but I have a little surprise ready for van Gaal and I want to give it to him. I don't know van Gaal and I have never spoken to

him, but he has shown me a lack of respect. It will be a very nice surprise and very close to him. It will be a vendetta with class, but I'm not going to say any more."

Van Gaal criticised Real for spending so much money on Ronaldo, claiming that it would make no difference to the quality of their team: "Of course they can be beaten. You know that, and you expected me to say it. With Ronaldo, it does not make it any more difficult than it was before."

There has been an awful lot of talk surrounding this transfer, but Ronaldo is yet to kick a ball for Real Madrid, and that is when he can really prove his worth. Especially when he plays against van Gaal's Barcelona, and has the chance to deliver his "surprise".

But Real teammate Ivan Helguera warned on Thursday that Ronaldo cannot expect just to walk straight into the first XI.

"Real Madrid are playing very well at the moment and it's going to be difficult for him to find a way in," Helguera told reporters at Real's training ground.

"It's not easy for anyone to play here. Tell me, who are you're going to drop to create an opening?"

The competition for places at Real is particularly fierce in attack, especially after Guti scored twice in Real's 3-0 win over AS Roma in the Champions League this week.

Raul, who scored the other goal against the Italians, is untouchable, meaning Ronaldo will be up against Guti, Fernando Morientes and Javier Portillo for one place when he is given the all-clear to play. Ronaldo is recovering from a leg injury.

"Ronaldo is Ronaldo and when he's fit I'm sure he'll contribute a lot," Helguera said. "He's one of the best players in the world."

Ronaldo has been training alongside his team mates for the past week and could make his debut in next Wednesday's Champions League game against Genk.



RONALDO

Meanwhile, the Brazilian striker also had harsh words for Inter and especially the club's president: "I am not a traitor. Moratti and all of his directors knew I had a problem and they did nothing to solve it. I commented on it before the World Cup and they did nothing. I won't say what the problem was, because I promised Moratti."

Scolari linked with Mexico

AFP, Sao Paulo

Luiz Felipe Scolari, the man who coached Brazil to a fifth World Cup triumph in the summer, revealed that he was considering an offer to coach the Mexican national side.

Speaking during the launch of his book "Felipao, soul of the fifth" here on Thursday the burly 53-year-old said that the offer was one of three which he was seriously examining.

Scolari, who has hinted he would like to coach a major European club, stepped down citing the weight of public expectation in Brazil and family reasons for his decision.

The coach had endured severe criticism of his coaching methods before the 2-0 win over Germany in the World Cup final in Yokohama on June 30 which came courtesy of two goals from Ronaldo.

Most of the flak came during the team's troubled South American qualifying campaign where they finished behind Argentina and Ecuador.

Scolari said that he would give his answer to Mexico bosses on September 25.

Premiership preview

Spurs against charged up MU

Football

AFP, London

Premiership high-fliers Tottenham face their toughest test yet on Saturday with a visit to Old Trafford to face a Manchester United side revitalised by their five-goal Champions League display in midweek.

Spurs are lying second after six starts while United, in tenth position, have made their worst ever start to a Premiership campaign after slumping to successive defeats to Bolton and Leeds.

But there is little doubt that a degree of confidence has been restored to the United camp following the 5-2 win over Israel's Maccabi Haifa and Spurs will have to be at their best if they are to inflict a third straight defeat on Alex Ferguson's side.

England captain David Beckham believes the midweek tonic could be just the thing to kickstart United's league campaign before the gap between them and leaders Arsenal

becomes too great.

"It is up to us to get going," Beckham said after the win over Haifa. "We know we have got the ability. Football is all about confidence and now we have scored five goals, hopefully we can take that form into the Premiership."

England fullback Gary Neville, who was on the bench on Wednesday for the first time since breaking his foot in last year's Champions League semi-final against Bayer Leverkusen, is expected to be back

in the first team for Saturday's clash.

With Teddy Sheringham returning to his former club, Tottenham will be looking to the veteran's new striking partner Robbie Keane to repeat the kind of form he showed on his debut for the club against West Ham last weekend.

United will again be without Nicky Butt, as well as long-term absentees Keane and Paul Scholes. Phil Neville will again stand-in alongside Juan Sebastian Veron in the centre of midfield.

Arsenal entertain Bolton at Highbury looking to extend their lead at the top.

The visitors, unlucky to lose to Liverpool last weekend, have been hit by the loss of influential Jamaican midfielder Ricardo Gardner, who had knee surgery earlier this week and is out for up to six weeks.

"Unfortunately, he is going to be missing for four to six weeks and it is a huge loss for us," Bolton manager Sam Allardyce admitted.

"His level of performance in the last two matches has been fantastic. The ground he covers and in denying the opposition space to play, he

has been crucially important to us."

"At least between now and when he returns there is a break for international duty where we don't play, so he will be able to catch up on a game or two."

Allardyce is also without Paul Warhurst, Bruno N'Gotty and Bernard Mendy, while Anthony Barnes, Simon Charlton and Kevin Nolan are all doubtful.

The only plus point for Allardyce is that striker Michael Ricketts is fit again after missing the Liverpool match with a knee problem.

Liverpool and Newcastle will both be looking to pick themselves up after Champions League defeats in midweek.

Liverpool boss Gerrard Houllier must decide whether to play the out-of-sorts Michael Owen, who was left on the bench for the 2-0 loss to Valencia, as his side entertain West Bromwich Albion.

Newcastle face arch-rivals Sunderland in a north-east derby that has been given added spice by the fact that both clubs are in dire straits, respectively second and third from the bottom of the table.

Primera Liga preview

Back to business at home

Football

AFP, Madrid

After an unprecedented week when Spain's four representatives in the European Champions League were all victorious, the sights of Spanish football's big guns are turned this weekend onto domestic victims.

The match with the most immediate likely impact on the top of the league is Valencia's visit to Costa Del Sol side Malaga on Sunday.

After two games both sides have perfect records, and league leaders and reigning champions Valencia have yet to concede a goal.

However, both sides will be missing key players for the clash.

Fourth-placed Malaga have their Uruguayan international duo of Dario Silva and Clever Romero both banned while Valencia will be without Argentine winger Kily Gonzalez, who injured his left ankle in training on Wednesday.

Real Madrid play host to Osasuna on Saturday and the Spanish media was getting excited on Thursday about the possibility that the European champions' summer signing Ronaldo could make his debut.

However, it's understood that the Brazilian World Cup winner is more likely to see some action for the first time in next Wednesday's Champions League against the Belgian club Genk.

In a full-scale practice match on Thursday, Ronaldo was clearly not 100 per cent but club officials said that he will be at ready to play, "very soon."

One Real player definitely not appearing on Saturday will be their inspirational French international midfielder Claude Makelele, who suffered a knee ligament injury

during Real's 3-0 thrashing of Roma in midweek.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque is expected to move Ivan Helguera out of the back four and into the midfield, and bring in Francisco Pavon to accompany Fernando Hierro in the centre of the defence.

There are also doubts over World Player of the Year Zinedine Zidane, who slightly injured his right knee in the Italian capital.

Barcelona face Espanyol in the Catalan derby after putting behind

them the rampant internal discord and proved that they are still a team to be contended with after two impressive victories during the last six days.

Nevertheless, Dutch striker Patrick Kluivert has yet to score this season and there is speculation that his compatriot and coach Louis van Gaal will exile him to the bench on Saturday.

Kluivert has his fans though, among them his team mate Luis Enrique Martinez.

"I've yet to see a better goal getter in the world than Patrick," said the former Spanish international.

Valladolid, one of five teams with six points, could struggle for even

one more at Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday.

The visitors' first job will be to work out how to contain the Galicians' Dutch striker Roy Makaay, whose hat-trick in Munich against Bayern on Wednesday brings his tally to six goals in the last three games.

"It's pretty easy to find the net when you have a player of the calibre of Juan Carlos Valeron providing the service," said Makaay.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta will be looking up his notes for the corresponding game of last season when they romped to a 4-0 victory, with Makaay getting the first of his 12 goals of the last campaign.

Second-placed Real Sociedad have two victories to their name and their impressive form in the opening fixtures means that no one is betting against them making it three despite the fact that they have to face fellow championship challengers Real Betis on Sunday.

Celta Vigo, in third, have so far defied the pundits who were predicting the downfall of the club after the summer departures of the coach Victor Fernandez, who went to Betis, and Russian midfielder Valery Karpin, who moved to Real Sociedad.

Sunday's match at Recreativo Huelva will give Celta another chance to silence the critics and three points at Spain's oldest club, who returned this summer to the Spanish First Division after 23-year hiatus but who have yet to get a single point since their promotion.

Celta though will be without their banned striker Jesuli Mora, who scored two goals in last Sunday's 3-1 win over Real Mallorca and then got sent off after his second strike for his wild celebrations with the fans.

Serie A preview

Empoli plot a shock

Football

AFP, Rome

Empoli, the little team with high hopes, aim to bring defending Italian champions Juventus and their mighty reputation crashing down on Saturday.

Twelve months ago, Juve underwent a similar trip to the home of another hopeful in the shape of Chievo and narrowly escaped with the three points in a 3-2 win although the newcomers complained that the winning goal was due to a dubious refereeing decision.

This time Empoli, playing in the top flight for only the fifth time in their history, aim to go one better than Chievo and put a huge dent in the armour of a Juve side who got their campaign off to a flying start with a 3-0 win over Atalanta last weekend and then followed it up with a 1-1 Champions League draw at Feyenoord in midweek.

Empoli also got their league campaign off to a solid start last week beating Como 2-0 and can boast two wins - in 1987 and 1999 - against the Turin side.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi has warned his team against complacency at Empoli saying that the early season match-ups are hard to predict.

"Our victory against Atalanta on Sunday was not an answer to the teams which played on Saturday," said Lippi referring to the opening day wins of AC Milan and Inter.

"When the team plays well and all the players are available, that is satisfying. But when you have seven important players missing and your team plays like that, then your satisfaction is double because the coach knows he can trust every single player."

One of the top Juve players currently out of action is French striker David Trezeguet, but his

WEEKEND'S BUNDESLIG & LEAGUE ONE FIXTURE

Bundesliga
Saturday: Bayern Munich v Energie Cottbus, Hansa Rostock v Borussia Dortmund, VfL Wolfsburg v 1. FC Nuremberg, Hertha Berlin v SV Hamburg, Kaiserslautern v 1860 Munich, Hannover 96 v VfL Bochum, Werder Bremen v Bayer Leverkusen

Sunday: Schalke 04 v Borussia Monchengladbach, VfB Stuttgart v Arminia Bielefeld

League One
Saturday: Nice v Troyes, Le Havre v Marseille, Lille v Guingamp, Strasbourg v Montpellier, Lyon v Monaco, Bordeaux v Lens, Rennes v Nantes, Ajaccio v Sochaux, Auxerre v Sedan

Sunday: Paris-SG v Bastia

Eriberito banned

AFP, Paris

Eriberito, the Brazilian footballer at the centre of a false identity row, was banned Friday by FIFA from playing for his Italian club Chievo.

FIFA's action was sparked by the player's own disclosure that Eriberito was the name of another player he had assumed to help him try and break into professional football back in Brazil.

Last month 'Eriberito' announced that his real name was in fact Luciano Siqueira de Oliveira, and that he was 23-years-old and not 26, as stated by his falsified papers.

He said he had changed identities when he was 19 before he turned professional on the advice of his agent to help him get a job in club football.

He was taken on by Brazilian outfit Palmeiras in the 1997-98 season, and continued to use his borrowed identity when he arrived in Italy to play for Bologna in 1998, before moving to Chievo.

Chilavert going to court

AFP, Strasbourg

Strasbourg's sacked Paraguayan goalie Jose-Luis Chilavert is taking legal action against club president Patrick Proisy for alleged racism, his lawyer said Friday.

The action relates to comments by Proisy reported in the press last month which poked fun at Chilavert's weight and origins.

The player, who has ballooned to 106kg, 18kg over his ideal weight, was formally sacked by the French First Division side on Thursday, after a stormy two seasons with the Alsatian outfit.

"He (Proisy) called him Michelin Man and spoke of Banana Republic practices referring to his (Chilavert) South American origins. All that to unbalance him," claimed the player's lawyer Rene Pernot.

"An employee who is not paid his salary, whom you insult and show the door, it's not normal," added Pernot.

Chilavert, who joined Strasbourg two seasons ago, was banned from the stadium just over two weeks ago for his "unprofessional attitude."

Marcos wants to be dropped!

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian club Palmeiras's troubles have intensified with the request by World Cup-winning goalkeeper Marcos to be dropped from the team.

Marcos, whose excellent World Cup helped dispel the stereotype image of the fumbling, floundering Brazilian goalkeeper, made the request after his side lost 2-0 to Ponte Preta.

Coach Levir Culpi however, rejected his goalkeeper's request and insisted he would play against fellow strugglers Figueirense on Saturday.

"Marcos will travel with us and will be not dropped from the team at this moment," said Culpi who is the third coach the four-time Brazilian champions have had this season.

"He's one of the most important players in the squad and will go to the game."

Palmeiras, South American Libertadores champions Cup only three years ago, have won only once in 11 games, are bottom of the Brazilian championship and have the competition's worst defensive record with 25 goals against.

The request by Marcos is the latest in a series of bizarre mishaps the club has faced already this season.

Former Brazil coach Vanderley Luxemburgo walked out after two games when he received a better offer from Cruzeiro and was replaced by Flavio Murtosa, Brazil's assistant coach at the World Cup, who lasted only four matches.

Palmeiras supporters have also shown their disgust at the club's

record this season.

Late in the game on Wednesday, a group of supporters opened up a number of banners protesting at the team, including one which said: "Get out, Marcao (Big Marcos)."

Earlier this month, supporters protested outside the team dressing-room after their team again failed to win and had to be dispersed by police before the players could leave.

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