

Ronaldo to wait a little longer



AP/REUTERS, Madrid

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo will not make his debut for Real Madrid in Wednesday's Champions League clash against Belgian side Genk on medical advice, club coach Vicente del Bosque said yesterday.

"The doctor recommends that he doesn't play," said Del Bosque.

Ronaldo is now likely to play his first match against Real Valladolid in the Spanish First Division this weekend.

Ronaldo was eager to make his Real debut in the Champions League although Del Bosque seems happy to keep him waiting.

The 26-year-old, who moved to Real from Inter Milan for 45 million euros (dollars 44.03 million) at the end of last month, ended training on Monday complaining of pain in his left ankle and did not train with his team mates on Tuesday.

A medical examination confirmed that the player was suffering from a minor strain in the area around his left ankle and club doctors advised that his debut should be delayed as a result.

"The injury is not a worrying one," said Del Bosque. "We should not over-dramatise the situation just because he is not going to play tomorrow."

"We didn't sign him just for one match or one month, but for five years and I hope he will be able to make his debut very soon."

Ronaldo, who has spent much of the last four years on the treatment table because of a series of serious knee injuries, said he was not overly concerned by the new setback.

"I want to reassure everyone that it is only a small strain and I will be ready to play very soon, although unfortunately I won't be able to play against Genk."

Real have a 100 percent record in league action and started their Champions Cup defence with a 3-0 win at AS Roma last week. Del Bosque doesn't often change a winning team, meaning that even if he had made it to the squad, Ronaldo's best chance of playing against Genk was as a substitute.

"I'm ready," said Ronaldo earlier. His last appearance in a competitive game was in the World Cup final, where he scored Brazil's two goals against Germany.

"I've trained well but whether I play on Wednesday depends on the coach. I might need to wait because the others are playing very well. If I don't play against Genk, it's not a problem."

Del Bosque, whose star-studded

Monday. After that, as the rest of the squad got down to the exercises with the ball, both Frenchmen were under the supervision of physical trainer Javier Miñano and did some jogging exercises with progressive shifts of pace. They kept working by

League champion Valencia, Champions Cup runner up in 2000 and 2001, brushed aside four-time titlist Liverpool 2-0, Barcelona won 3-2 over FC Brugge, and Deportivo de La Coruna gained a 3-2 win at Bayern Munich, another four-time winner.

Valencia visits Moscow Spartak on Wednesday while Liverpool, with Michael Owen missing a penalty on Saturday and suffering miserable form in front of goal, hosts Swiss team FC Basel in the other Group B game.

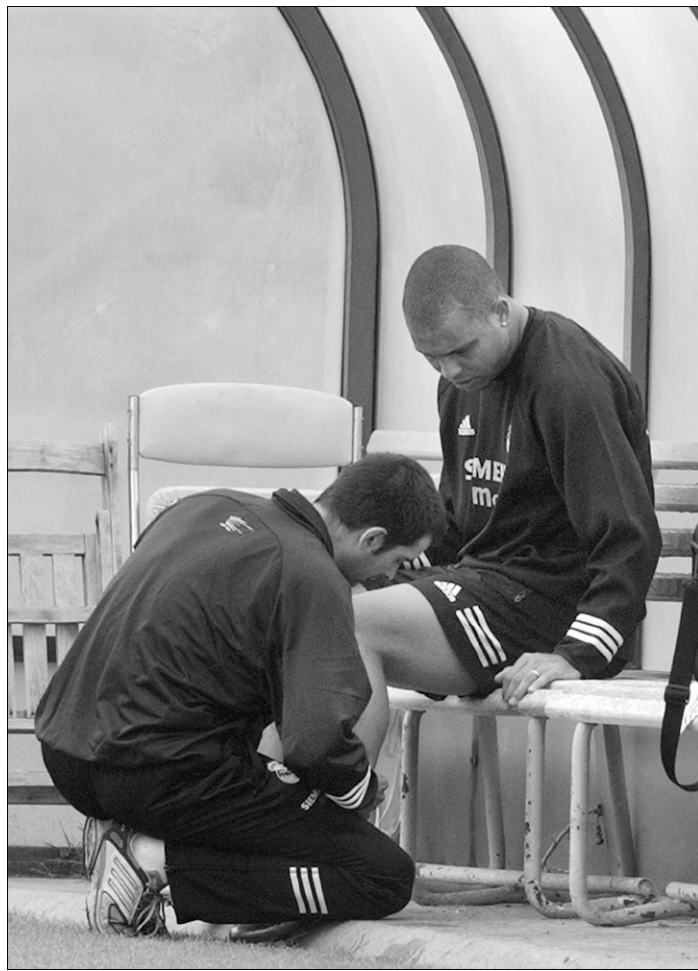
Dortmund, beaten 2-0 by Arsenal in Group A, hosts French club Auxerre. There's a chance that top scorer Marcio Amoroso may be back to face Auxerre but Czech midfielder Tomas Rosicky remains doubtful because of a back problem.

Italian and English clubs had mixed results in the opening round of games.

Inter Milan has a tough home game in Group D against four-time champion Ajax.

English champion Arsenal goes to PSV Eindhoven, and there's a strong chance that Dennis Bergkamp, who rarely plays away games in Europe because of his fear of flying, will face his countrymen after making the trip by car.

After losing in Valencia, Liverpool must hit back with a victory over Basel. Bobby Robson's Newcastle, beaten by Dynamo Kiev in Ukraine, can't afford to lose at home to UEFA Cup holder Feyenoord.



Superstar Ronaldo (R) is examined by a medical staff member of Real Madrid during a training session in Madrid on September 23.

side also includes Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo, Roberto Carlos and Raul Gonzalez, has no reason to tinker with a successful lineup just for the sake of Ronaldo.

"He's almost ready to start playing," the coach said. "He seems keen to get going and, in the next few days, he will begin to familiarise himself with our style of play."

Del Bosque meanwhile, has worries regarding the fitness of Zidane and compatriot Makelele. Both did the physical work with their teammates during training on

themselves for 40 minutes and then carried on with the medical treatment and the physiotherapy.

Zidane is recovering from traumatic arthritis on his right knee while Makelele had a strain on his left knee at the Rome game, plus a contusion on the tibia in the same leg.

In Group C's other game, Roma hopes to bounce back from last week's loss by winning at AEK Athens.

Real's victory in Rome was one of a sweep of Spanish triumphs.

FIXTURES

European Champions League first round fixtures on Wednesday:

Group A
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) v Auxerre (Fra)
PSV Eindhoven (Ned) v Arsenal (Eng)

Group B
Spartak Moscow (Rus) v Valencia (Spa)
Liverpool (Eng) v FC Basel (Swi)

Group C
Real Madrid (Spa) v Genk (Bel)
AEK Athens (Gre) v AS Roma (Ita)

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

Spain honour Brazil

REUTERS, Oviedo

World Cup winners Brazil have been awarded Spain's top international sporting honour, the Principe de Asturias award, organisers said.

The Brazilian team, who won a record fifth title with a 2-0 win over Germany in June's World Cup final in Japan, were chosen as this year's winners by a jury headed by former International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch.

According to organisers the Brazilian team was given the award because of "its achievement in winning five World Cups, with exceptional players who have played in some of the best teams on the planet."

"Their players have always played in an innovative, sporting and offensive manner, providing a permanent example to millions of players and fans who are involved in the sport," read the jury's citation.

Previous winners of the Spanish award include cycling's Lance Armstrong, tennis players Steffi Graf and Martina Navratilova and Carl Lewis and Sebastian Coe from athletics.

Leverkusen eying Emerson

AFP, Cologne

Bayer Leverkusen are interested in buying back one of their old boys, Brazil captain Emerson, the German club's coach Klaus Toppmoller revealed on Monday.

"We're always keeping a watch on him," Toppmoller told the Cologne Express newspaper.

"If AS Roma don't get through the first round of the Champions League he could become a subject of interest. We know that Roma have financial problems."

The midfielder, who was forced to sit out the World Cup with a dislocated shoulder, played for the Bundesliga runners-up from 1997 to 2000.

Emerson was in the Roma side rolled over 3-0 by Real Madrid last week - they will be hoping for a more positive outcome in their next Champions' League date away to AEK Athens on Wednesday.

Totti pleads with fans



REUTERS, Milan

Roma captain Francesco Totti has urged the team's fans to get behind the players and put an end to the protests which have followed the team's poor start to the season.

Roma face Greek side AEK Athens in the Champions League on Wednesday but their preparations for that game have been overshadowed by the angry aftermath to their shock 2-1 home defeat to Modena on Sunday.

A group of around 100 hardcore 'ultras' protested outside the team's Trigoria training ground on Monday, singling out defender Jonathan Zebina for abuse and the Frenchman was jostled as he entered his car during ugly scenes.

"I want to ask our fans to stick together and to be more calm," said Totti in comments reported by the daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Above all I want to see that

these protests are not useful. Who does it help blaming (coach Fabio) Capello or Zebina? This is a crisis that neither us nor the fans expected.

"The best things we have achieved we have done with the help of the fans and if they stand by us we can more easily get out of this moment of difficulty."

The defeat to promoted Modena, Roma's first Serie A home loss for over two seasons, followed a 3-0 humbling by Real Madrid in the Champions League and a 2-1 defeat at Bologna in the opening day of the Italian league campaign.

As well as labelling the players 'mercenaries' the fans had called for the resignation of Capello and club president Franco Sensi. Sensi rejected both calls and said he backed Capello to turn the situation around.

"Capello is the coach of Roma and he will resolve the problems - he has the means to do so. He has a first-class squad of players, almost all internationals," said Sensi.

Not for the first time, the Roma president suggested his club were being punished by referees, on this occasion hinting strongly that his own role as an opponent of Adriano Galliani in the recent elections for president of the Italian Football League may be behind the refereeing performances.

Roma had a harsh penalty awarded against them on Sunday and also saw defender Christian Panucci sent off for dissent.

Sensi said he wanted a meeting with Football Federation president Franco Carraro to 'clear-up' the issues.

"I want to ask him for an explanation of all that has happened regarding the refereeing since we started the championship. We will not accept a vendetta for the battle fought in the League and the Federation," said Sensi.

Totti is suspended for the Real match but Capello can call again on Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta who has completed his suspension.



PAYING THE PRICE: AS Roma's French defender Jonathan Zebina (C) is assaulted by angry fans outside the team's headquarters in Trigoria, near Rome on September 23 after their loss against Modena in the Italian First Division - Roma's third defeat in three competitive games this season.

Lemerre new Tunisia coach



REUTERS, Tunis

Former France coach Roger Lemerre will take charge of the Tunisia team, officials have said.

"The new coach is Roger Lemerre. He will come to Tunis this week and he will be with the team for its friendly match with Portugal on October 12," a Tunisian Football Federation official said.

Lemerre was sacked after the World Cup defending champions failed to win a match or score a goal in the first round of the World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan. Under Lemerre, France on the 2000 European title.

Tunisia, hosts of the 2004 African Nations Cup finals, have been without a coach since July when Ammar Souayah quit after taking his country's side to the World Cup finals. Souayah cited ill health for his resignation.

The Tunisian Football Federation, which had set up a six-man commission to hire a coach, had been under pressure to find the right man quickly to prepare the team for the African finals.

Premiership

Chelsea's missed chance



REUTERS, London

Chelsea, gunning for second place in the English premier league, fell short when they were held 0-0 away to London rivals Fulham at Loftus Road.

A victory by two goals would have lifted Chelsea into second place on 15 points, two behind leaders Arsenal and equal on points with Liverpool.

Instead, they are four behind Arsenal in third place on 13 points, above another London side, Tottenham Hotspur on goal difference. Leeds United are fifth on 12 points.

There were numerous half chances at both ends but nothing clear cut as Fulham, who kept a clean sheet for the third straight game, climbed above Middlesbrough and Manchester

The authorities had appointed Yousef Zouaoui as caretaker coach. Zouaoui, who had lost his job as a coach minutes after the Tunisian side was defeated by Mali in the opening match of the 1994 African Nations finals at home, did not want to stay.

Some local newspapers urged the authorities to appoint him as the permanent coach after he led Tunisia to a 1-1 draw with France in a friendly in Tunis in August.

Tunisian newspapers said the federation had shortlisted Lemerre and Marco Tardelli, a 1982 World Cup winner with Italy who had won wide respect as a successful coach of Italy's under-21 squad.

The government-controlled Essahafa reported that Tardelli was eager to take the job but had asked for a salary of dollars 50,000 per month while the authorities could afford to pay no more than a maximum of dollars 25,000.

Le Temps daily said on Tuesday Lemerre had agreed to get about 30,000 dinars (dollars 21,700) for his monthly salary and his contract would last until the African Nations Cup finals, with an option to extend his contract if Tunisia makes it the semi-finals.



England's Swedish manager Sven-Goran Eriksson with Peter Bonde from Denmark during the opening session of 5th UEFA Conference for European National Coaches in Warsaw on September 23.

It's the rotation age



REUTERS, Warsaw

World soccer trends show teams moving towards playing with a single rotating striker and away from a two-pronged attack. UEFA technical director Andy Roxburgh has said.

Former Scotland manager Roxburgh also said that teams where forwards and midfielders switched positions during play were often more successful at loosening up defences than those using less fluid tactics.

Speaking at European body UEFA's post-World Cup national coaches conference, he said: "One of the key trends coming out of the World Cup is more teams playing with one striker."

"No team gives up space for free nowadays, so you need players to rotate in the front," Roxburgh said.

"Take Brazil: When they played with two strikers, one was slightly behind the other," he said of the world champions.

"When they played three front-

liners, they were always rotating,

always moving. That is the most difficult thing to mark and the greatest advantage of this system."

Turkey's Hakan Sukur or Argentine Gabriel Batistuta were also often left up front to cherry-pick defences at the finals, played three months ago in South Korea and Japan.

Roxburgh said that flexible, speedy teams, able to quickly mobilise multi-player counter-attacks, often fared better than those playing with a traditional libero and set playmaker.

"This means a return to total football, where players easily move from back to front, like the Netherlands. Gus Hiddink had Korea playing like a Dutch club in the World Cup," he said.

Dutchman Hiddink steered South Korea to an unprecedented semi-finals appearance.

Roxburgh said decisive players in attack were usually middle-to-front slot men like Spain's Raul, Italy's Francesco Totti or Denmark's Jon Dahl Tomasson, or wide players like England's David Beckham or Sweden's Freddie Ljungberg.

He said that even though a majority of teams at the World Cup played with four defenders, all four



REUTERS, Rome

Six goals in Juventus's first four matches of the season make striker Alessandro Del Piero the most feared man on the pitch in Tuesday's Champions League group E match against Dynamo Kiev.

The striker struck twice against Empoli on Saturday to add to the two he scored in Juventus's Serie A opener against Atalanta and the double that sunk Parma in the Italian Supercup final in August.

Recent performances suggest a return to form for the troubled striker, who many commentators insist has not been the same since returning from a serious knee injury sustained in November 1998.

"It takes two years for a great player to recover," commented Juventus coach Marcello Lippi after

Saturday's match. "Del Piero is now certain that he's better. The difference is in his head."

Friends say they had noticed a change in the striker after he arrived back from the World Cup finals in June, since when he has also cut short his once shoulder-length hair.

"Alessandro has never been so

calm and secure before," Del Piero's agent, Mario Miyakawa, told La Gazzetta dello Sport on Monday.

Though Italy's World Cup adventure ended abruptly against South Korea, Del Piero was one of the few Italians to enhance their reputations, scoring a goal against Mexico that guaranteed Italy's passage to the knock-out stage.

Since then, he has continued to shine for the national side.

His goal from a free kick was the one bright moment in Italy's hapless 2-0 win over Azerbaijan in their opening European championship qualifier in Baku earlier this month.

Del Piero himself has little to say about his personal renaissance.

"These games have gone well," he told reporters after the match against Empoli. "Compared to last year I've scored more goals. We're happy."

At least after two years of facing down persistent questions about his commitment, he can finally let his feet do the talking.



ALESSANDRO DEL PIERO

Deportivo lose playmaker Valeron

INTERNET, La Coruna

Deportivo Coruna will be without influential midfielder Juan Carlos Valeron for around two months because of a fractured fibula, the Spanish club announced Sunday.

Valeron suffered the injury to his



AFP, Cologne

Ruud van Nistelrooy insisted Monday that he is not worried about his failure to continue scoring at the spectacular rate he did last season.

The Dutch striker has followed up his 36-goal debut season with five so far in the current campaign.

But three of those strikes were penalties and United's stuttering start to the season has put van Nistelrooy's form in the spotlight.

He insisted however that he was relaxed about the way he was playing.

"I can't expect to score the number of goals I did last season," he said.

"You always have times when you don't perform as well as you have done before. It's the way you deal with it that matters."

"I am still doing the same things and working hard on the training ground and, whether you play well in a game of not, that's where you show your true level."

"I don't feel nervous when I go onto the pitch. I feel good and I enjoy it. As soon as you join the club you know there is a bond, especially among the players who have been together for so many years."

"It is a major advantage to us and

I want to be with them for a long time."

While United have struggled to hit the net in the Premiership, they have fired in 10 in their last two Champions League matches and van Nistelrooy's effort against Maccabi Haifa last week was a bit special.

And he is confident there is more of the same to come.

"As a striker the next moment is always important, even if it is in the next game. You are talking about a split-second."

"You can't make things happen by standing still, you have to keep moving and making the right decisions."

Leverkusen dumped United out of the Champions League at the semi-final stage last year, but van Nistelrooy dismissed talk of revenge.

"To say losing in the semi-final last year was a major disappointment is a big understatement but I am not a player who believes in using revenge as a motivation," he said.

"This is the start of a new season and even though they have not made the best start, Leverkusen can still cause us trouble."

"If anything, the result last week will make them harder to play against because they will really want to make amends."



JUAN CARLOS VALERON

left leg during Deportivo's 2-0 win over Valladolid in the Spanish league on Saturday after setting up both goals.

The news will come as a major blow to Deportivo's Champions League hopes.

Valeron, who was outstanding in Depor's 3-2 victory over Bayern Munich last week, is almost certain to miss his side's five remaining Group G games in the first phase.