

AEK deny Real



AFP, Madrid

Defending champions Real Madrid squandered a two-goal lead and allowed Greek side AEK Athens to battle back to snatch a 2-2 draw in their European Champions League Group C clash here on Tuesday.

After England's Steve McManaman had twice been on target for Madrid, AEK stormed back to grab a point with two goals in the last fifteen minutes.

First, Konstantinos Katsouranis was allowed to score with a free header from a corner after 74 minutes before substitute Walter Centeno slotted home a right-wing cross from Ilija Ivic with just four minutes left.

Victory would have put Real into the second stage of the competition and they had been cruising at one stage thanks to McManaman's goals and a glittering contribution from Brazilian superstar Ronaldo who caught the eye as he made an impressive European debut for the Spanish giants.

Genk hold Roma

AFP, Rome

AS Roma's Champions League hopes suffered a setback here Tuesday when they were held to a disappointing 0-0 draw by Belgians Genk.

With their next match away to reigning European champions Real Madrid, qualification for the Italians could hinge on their final Group C clash at home to AEK Athens of Greece.

Roma enjoyed the lion's share of the possession at the Stadio Olimpico but the best chances fell to the visitors who are yet to win a first-round match.

After absorbing a brief spell of early pressure, Genk, beaten 1-0 by Roma in the home leg three weeks ago, went close to taking the lead in the 10th minute.

Moumouni Dagano found space 25 yards from goal and his fierce right-foot drive was destined for the roof of the net until Francesco Antonioli palmed the ball away for a corner.

Two minutes later Roma's goalkeeper saved their blushes once again, tipping Koen Daerden's thunderbolt onto the angle of post and crossbar.

As Roma stuttered without their injured captain Francesco Totti, Genk grew in confidence and the Belgians almost broke the deadlock eight minutes from the interval.

Josip Skoko's angled pass sliced open the home defence for Mirsad Beslija to run onto, but his right-foot screamer was bravely blocked by Roma's imperious Argentinean defender Walter Samuel.

Roma looked far more threatening at the start of the second-half, replacing the disappointing Antonio Cassano for Italy international Vincenzo Montella up front.

And the resurgent Italians came close to ending the stalemate in the 51st minute when Gabriel Batistuta's powerful downward header from Vincent Candela's right-wing corner was beaten away by Genk goalkeeper Davy Schollen.

Argentinian striker Batistuta was foiled again 12 minutes later when his close-range shot was blocked by the shins of Didier Zokora before Brazilian Cafu fired hopelessly wide after ignoring the cries of an unmarked Montella.

Montella could have ended the night a hero but his scissor-kick in the final minute sailed inches past Schollen's left-hand post.

Trap to know in November

AFP, Rome

The Italian Football Association (FIGC) will meet to discuss the future of national team boss Giovanni Trapattoni in the first week of November, FIGC president Franco Carraro said Tuesday.

Trapattoni's job is on the line after Italy's 2-1 defeat to Wales in their Euro 2004 championship qualifier in Cardiff last week.

"We will make a decision regarding the manager in the first week of November," Carraro told Italian sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

"It is a delicate situation for the national team and we are obliged to look at it closely."

Italy have only won two of their last 10 matches and were knocked out of the World Cup in the second round by South Korea this summer.

Trapattoni, 63, has enjoyed successful coaching spells at Inter Milan, AC Milan, Juventus and Bayern Munich.

In September 2000 he replaced former Italy international goalkeeper Dino Zoff as national coach.

In 25 matches in charge of the national team, "Il Trap", as he is known in Italy, has won 13 games, drawn six and lost six.

He played a major role in the second goal just before half-time and also had the ball in the net after the interval only to see his effort ruled-out.

After dominating the early stages, it was McManaman, making a rare start, who gave the Spanish giants a deserved lead in the 24th minute when he latched on to a cross from the left from Argentinian midfielder Esteban Cambiasso.

Two minutes before half-time, it was 2-0 with McManaman finishing off a move which was dominated by Ronaldo's classy approach work.

The Brazilian World Cup winner, playing his first European tie for the Spanish side, first of all released Guti before taking the return pass.

Head bent in concentration, the superstar twice passed his foot over the ball, feinting one way, then the other, before slipping a pass through for the English midfielder to control in the penalty area and beat AEK keeper Dionysis Hiotis.

There was also an astute dummy that set up Guti for a shot and one promising run on the left of the area but otherwise the first half was quiet.

Twelve minutes after the break Ronaldo had the ball in the back of the net, beating Hiotis with a first-time swipe after he was put through by McManaman only to see a raised flag dash his hopes of a goal on his European debut.

"That Ronaldo chance would have put us 3-0 up," said Real coach Vicente del Bosque. "It was a key moment in the game."

Real had gone into the match on the back of a shock loss to Racing Santander in the league at the weekend and were without injured stars Luis Figo and Raul.

They were also keen to give their fans an easier time of it compared to two weeks ago when they had to claw back a two goal deficit to draw 3-3 in Athens.

AEK were completely out-classed in the opening half with Mihalis Kasapis and Vassilios Tsartas resorting to long range efforts which were comfortably dealt with by Iker Casillas in the Madrid goal.

With Roma and Genk also drawing 0-0 in the other match, the race for the two qualifying places is still up for grabs.

Owen freezes Spartak



AFP, Moscow

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier believed the manner of his side's crucial 3-1 Champions League victory over Spartak Moscow here on Tuesday showed the new steeliness he has instilled in his players.

Despite going behind to Alexander Danishevsky's 23rd-minute goal, Liverpool kept their cool in the freezing conditions in the Luzhniki Stadium.

Michael Owen equalised six minutes later with a neat header and the England striker scored twice in the second half to notch up a hat-trick, leaving Liverpool on the cusp

was getting stick for not scoring. I rested Michael at Leeds because he had played on a very heavy pitch in Bratislava for England and had played seven games on the bounce.

"Michael scores important goals for Liverpool."

Owen said Liverpool had experienced problems with the pitch.

"It was not easy," he said. "When we trained yesterday the pitch was a bit like the one in Slovakia when we played for England."

"It was a bit hard to find a rhythm but it was good to grind out a result."

Spartak failed to create any serious threat in the opening quarter hour, while Liverpool's Czech striker Milan Baros missed a couple of clear scoring chances.

Eighteen-year-old striker



VINTAGE OWEN: Liverpool superstar Michael Owen is ecstatic after scoring his second of the night against Spartak Moscow at Moscow's Dynamo stadium on October 22.

of qualification for the second phase.

It capped a brilliant four days for the club, who went top of the English Premiership for the first time this season with a 1-0 victory over Leeds on Saturday.

They remain second in Group B, three points behind Spanish champions Valencia and two ahead of Swiss side Basel.

"I thought this match was a demonstration of the character that is about us at the moment," said Houllier.

"Spartak started very strong, they had nothing to lose. Even though we had chances in the first half I felt they deserved their first goal."

"We never let our heads go down and the second half was much better. We took the chances and showed a great professional attitude."

Houllier paid tribute to Owen and said his gamble of resting him in the win over Leeds had paid off as he scored his first goals in European competition this season.

"Michael deserves special credit for his hat-trick, to do that away from home in Europe is a special achievement," said the Frenchman. "Remember only a month ago he

Danishevsky put his side 1-0 up 23 minutes into the game, firing the ball past Liverpool goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek from 12 yards after 17-year-old right winger Alexander Pavlenko fed him in the box.

But six minutes later Owen pulled the visitors level, beating Ukrainian international 'keeper Maxim Levitsky with a downward header following Jamie Carragher's precise cross from the right.

All Spartak's attacking efforts after the break proved fruitless as the Liverpool defence played faultlessly, while their teammates up front threatened on the counter-attack.

In the 70th minute Owen netted his second of the match, sweeping in a rebound following a series of ricochets in Spartak's six-yard box after Danny Murphy's left-hand cross from a free-kick.

Spartak poured into attack, searching for an equaliser, but Liverpool defended stoutly, while Owen scored his third goal one minute into injury time, when he stroked home a cross from Murphy.

Liverpool now need a result against Valencia at Anfield next Wednesday before travelling to Basel on November 12.



Steve McManaman of Real Madrid jumps over AEK Athens' goalkeeper Dionisis Hiotis (No. 22) and defender Nikolaos Kostenoglou to score his second goal at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on October 22.

Valencia kept waiting



AFP, Basel

A last minute goal from Australian international Ivan Ergic gave Basel a 2-2 draw with Valencia and denied the Spanish side their chance to book their place in the second stage of the Champions League.

Ergic, who had earlier given the Swiss side the lead, converted a free-kick from Hakan Yakin to clinch a vital point.

The free-kick had been conceded by Argentinian defender Roberto Ayala who was also sent off for his foul on Yakin.

The result means that Valencia still top Group B with 10 points with Liverpool, who beat Spartak Moscow 3-1, in second spot with seven points.

Basel are third with five points and still with a chance of making it through to the next round with two matches still to play.

Valencia defender Curro Torres thought his 72nd minute goal would

have been enough to put the Spaniards through when he shrugged off the attentions of two Swiss markers to poke the ball home to make it 2-1.

Valencia had won their first match between the two sides 6-2 a fortnight ago and went into the game on Wednesday with a one hundred percent record in the competition.

Ergic opened the scoring for Basel when he shot home from the edge of the box after being put through by Hakan Yakin.

Not only was it a deserved goal for the Swiss side, it was also the 2,500th goal scored in Champions League history.

But the lead lasted just four minutes before Ruben Baraja equalised with a magical goal hit from 25 yards which left Pascal Zuberbuehler in the home goal with no chance of stopping it.

It was Baraja's third goal in the Champions League this season although his night was ruined later in the game when he was booked.

STANDINGS

Standings in the European Champions League after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)

Table with 2 columns: Group A and Group C. Group A: Arsenal (Eng) 4 3 0 1 8 29, Dortmund (Ger) 4 2 1 1 6 57, Auxerre (Fra) 4 1 1 2 3 44, PSV (Ned) 4 0 2 2 2 82. Group C: Real (Spa) 4 2 2 0 14 5 8, AS Roma (Ita) 4 1 2 1 1 3 5, AEK (Gre) 4 0 4 0 5 5 4, Genk (Bel) 4 0 2 2 0 7 2

Table with 2 columns: Group B and Group D. Group B: Valencia (Spa) 4 3 1 0 13 4, Liverpool (Eng) 4 2 1 1 9 4 7, Basel (Swi) 4 1 2 1 7 9 5, Spartak (Rus) 4 0 0 4 11 3 0. Group D: Lyon (Fra) 4 2 1 1 11 6 7, Inter (Ita) 4 1 2 1 7 7 5, Ajax (Ned) 4 1 2 1 3 3 5, Rosenborg (Nor) 4 0 3 1 3 8 3

Lineker's mission



AFP, Leicester

Former England international striker Gary Lineker announced Wednesday his beloved Leicester City would not be allowed to disappear because of its huge financial problems.

Lineker made his name at Leicester before going on to spells with Everton, Spurs and Barcelona and is heading up a consortium of local businessmen - including current Leicester City plc chairman Greg Clarke and club chairman Martin George - to try and raise the funds to save the embattled First Division club.

Lineker, who in contrast to their parlous cash problems are a very healthy third in the First Division as they bid for an immediate return to the Premiership, were on Tuesday placed in the hands of administrators to allow time for Lineker to complete his rescue package.

"This club cannot go to the wall," said Lineker, who scored 48 goals in his international career which included the 1986 and 1990 World Cup finals where his goals inspired England to a quarter-final and semi-final respectively.

Lineker is part of a consortium which is bidding to get the cash-strapped team out of the hands of the administrators and back into the Premiership.

At a press conference at the club's new Walkers Stadium on Wednesday, Lineker explained why he got involved with a potential buy-out of the club.

"Leicester have been in a financial mess with administration and everything else - we can't see a club like Leicester, with its history, go to the wall," said Lineker, who played for Leicester from 1978-85.

"That's why a number of us have got together to try and do something about it."

"This is not about one person or anyone's ego trip, especially not mine. It will take lots of money to take over the club and run it."

"There are a number of us who have pledged some money to try and get this thing off the floor and we're still looking for people."

"We want to unite the people of Leicester behind the club. If anyone wants to make a decent donation they'll be more than welcome."

The consortium are understood to have received a favourable response from administrators, whose duty is to ensure any rescue bid is a financially sound proposition.

The consortium's objective is to buy Leicester City as a going concern from the administrators.

City are the latest in a long line of clubs, including Bradford and Barnsley, to suffer adversely from relegation as they try to sustain the salary levels of higher divisions.

Anderson saves Lyon



AFP, Lyon

Lyon and Inter Milan shared the spoils after a pulsating 3-3 draw in their Champions League Group D tie here Tuesday.

Lyon had veteran captain Sonny Anderson to thank for getting them out of jail, the 32-year-old Brazilian getting the equaliser and his second goal of the night, in the 75th minute to leave Inter still fighting to reach the second round.

The result left the French champions top of the group on seven points with two matches remaining and Inter on five points, level pegging with Ajax.

Both managers went away happy.

Lyon coach Paul Le Guen reflected: "I'm satisfied with the point we took but also the way the player's performed and their competitiveness."

"We were proud to beat them in the first leg away and then to get a draw here at home."

"We now have to build on our advantage, we have to qualify."

His Inter counterpart Hector Cuper believed there was still everything to play for.

"I think I have to be happy with this. We let in three goals, it's true, but we also scored three," said the Argentinian manager.

"With tonight's other game between Ajax and Rosenborg ending in a draw it's still very open," he added.

The Italians had come here seeking revenge for Lyon's 2-1 win at the San Siro at the start of the month, but they were put on the back foot for much of the first half by a Lyon side with the bit between their teeth.

Anderson had a fine game, bursting through the middle in the opening minutes, his searing shot producing a great diving save from Inter keeper Francesco Toldo.

With the game played at a whirlwind pace Juninho Pernambucano unleashed a thunderbolt direct free kick from 30 yards. Although Toldo

saved, the rebound fell to Eric Carriere whose close range attempt went sailing over the crossbar.

Carriere made up for that miss with interest though in the 21st minute when his fine pass fed Anderson, whose shot whistled past Toldo to make it four goals in as many games for the buoyant Brazilian.

Inter had a chance in the 29th minute in a rare incursion into keeper Gregory Coupet's territory when a Sergio Conceicao cross from the right found Christian Vieri who headed over.

Two minutes later, against the overall run of play, Inter levelled, Cristiano Zanetti's shot from the box deflected off hapless Lyon defender Claudio Caccapa.

Inter almost went ahead with less than 10 minutes of the first half to go when Danish referee Kim Nielsen awarded a free kick just outside the box. Emre Belozoglu's shot flew over the Lyon wall, hitting the inside of the right post, and bouncing along Coupet's line and out of danger.

Carriere ensured Lyon went into the interval on a high when, in the fourth minute of time added on, he slotted in a pass from Juninho on the right.

All Toldo could do was to thump the French soil with his fist in despair.

Lyon came out after the break intent on keeping up their fine attacking play, yet Inter it was who grabbed a 56th minute equaliser, when Herman Crespo, pouncing on a rebound off Coupet's chest, ran past the Lyon keeper to shoot into an unmanned goal.

With Inter finally gaining the upper hand in midfield they began to take control, and in the 66th minute Crespo got a double to put them in front when heading in Emre's corner.

The Italians looked to be heading for the three points when, nine minutes later, up popped Anderson again to save Lyon's pride, the former Barcelona star slotting in from close range after being left unmarked by an Inter defence that was all at sea.

Party poopos Auxerre



AFP, London

Auxerre revived their Champions League campaign and ruined Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger's 53rd birthday here on Tuesday.

First-half goals from Olivier Kapo and Khalilou Fadiga earn the impressively composed French side a deserved 2-1 victory and a precious three points on another miserable night for David Seaman.

The disintegration of the England goalkeeper's confidence was cruelly exposed by another hesitant display, his error contributing to Fadiga's goal.

Nigerian forward Nwankwo Kanu pulled a goal back for Arsenal six minutes after the break and ensured Auxerre could not relax right until the end.

But after losing their 30-match unbeaten run in the Premiership to Everton on Saturday, the supreme confidence that characterised the English champions early season form appears to have gone, temporarily at least.

"You have to give credit to Auxerre, they played very well," Wenger said. "They started very well and I think we still had not got over the shock of Saturday."

"But we gave everything we had in the second half and there is no basic reason to be alarmed."

"I believe this team is strong mentally and will recover from tonight."

Auxerre's veteran coach, Guy Roux, delighted to see one of his side's win in England for the first time, admitted he had been surprised by the way Arsenal had resorted to punting long balls towards his back four, in which Philippe Mexes further enhanced his burgeoning reputation.

"The image we had of Arsenal with a more continental style, with the ball played in to feet, disappeared and we had a lot of long balls."

Auxerre went into the match with only one point from their first three games. "This gives us hope. Now we know we can go to (PSV) Eindhoven with the ambition of qualifying," said Roux.

Before the match, Wenger had been vigorous in his public defence of Seaman, who has been pilloried by the media since conceding a goal straight from a corner in England's Euro 2004 qualifier against Macedonia last week. But he must have been having

second thoughts five minutes into the game, when the 39-year-old keeper's failure to gather a straight-forward shot presented Auxerre with a gilt-edged chance to go ahead.

The ball broke to Yann Lachuer but the midfielder could only volley over the bar.

Three minutes later, the visitors were in front thanks to a breathtakingly pure strike from Kapo.

Picking up a throw-in on the right edge of the area, he nutmegged Patrick Vieira on the turn and unleashed an unstoppable left foot drive into the far corner.

Nwankwo Kanu twice went close as Arsenal pushed forward in search of the equaliser.

But Auxerre showed no signs of panic and it was no surprise when they went two-up.

Jean-Alain Boumsong was the architect with a marauding run from the left of midfield saw him combine with Benjani and burst into the box. Ashley Cole's last ditch tackle stopped him but the ball spun into no man's land between Seaman and Fadiga. Fatally, Seaman hesitated and the Auxerre winger was able to clip the ball over him from eight yards.

Kanu saw another effort fly just wide of the upright and Lauren tried his luck with a long-range effort before the break but Arsenal were giving Auxerre goalkeeper Fabien Cool little to get worked up about.

The Highbury crowd finally had something to cheer about just after the interval, when French international Robert Pires, back in the first team squad for the first time since a serious knee injury in April, started warming up.

If Wenger was attempting to give his side a boost, it worked. Two minutes later Lauren sent Thierry Henry sprinting through the inside-right channel and in behind the Auxerre back four.

With the visitor's defence unsettled for the first and only time of the night, Henry was able to look up and square the ball to Kanu for the easiest of finishes from close range.

Arsenal began to dominate but Auxerre might have killed the game off in the 59th minute when Seaman saved twice at point blank range from Benjani.

Pires finally came on with 18 minutes remaining and he tested Cool from the edge of the area in the final minute of regulation time. But even his unique talent could not inject any spark into a strangely subdued Arsenal side.

FIFA world rankings

Italy go out of elite ten

AFP, Paris

Three-time world champions Italy have dropped out of the top ten FIFA rankings as Brazil remain top and England climb to number six despite being held to a 2-2 home draw by Macedonia in the latest rankings released on Wednesday.

The 1998 world champions France hold down second-place outright after impressive wins over Slovenia and Malta in Euro 2004 qualifying while Spain slipped to number three.

Germany and Argentina are classed fourth and fifth respectively while Mexico who appointed Ricardo Antonio Lavolpe as their new coach on Wednesday are joint sixth with England.

Italy saw their prestigious reputation take another battering as their home draw with Yugoslavia and a 2-1 defeat at Wales saw Giovanni Trapattoni's men slump to number 11.

Wales meanwhile continue their resurrection under Mark Hughes by climbing 15 places to 61.

FIFA WORLD RANKINGS ON SEPT 18

- 1. Brazil 855 points, 2. = France 790, 3. Spain 779 (-1), 4. Germany 763, 5. Argentina 753, 6. = England 731 (+3), Mexico 731, 8. Turkey 727 (-1), 9. Holland 726 (+3), 10. United States 719 (-2), 11. = Italy 713 (-1), Portugal 713, 13. Denmark 703, 14. Republic of Ireland 695 (-1), 15. = Czech Republic 690 (+2), Yugoslavia 690 (+4), 17. Belgium 688 (+2), 18. Paraguay 683 (-2), 19. Cameroon 682 (-4), 20. South Korea 667 (+1)