



PHOTO: AFP

ANOTHER NAIL IN THE LIVERPOOL COFFIN: Basel's Christian Gimenez (top) scores his team's second goal past a hapless Liverpool's goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek at Basel on November 12.



AFP, Basel

Liverpool were dumped out of the Champions League on Tuesday after a thrilling 3-3 draw against FC Basel saw the Swiss club secure a place in history as the first Swiss side to reach the second stage of the Champions League.

Basel's victory was gained largely in the first half with a dominant display of incisive attacking football by its Argentine attacking duo, Julio Hernan Rossi and Christian Gimenez, who ripped through Liverpool's defence.

The Swiss side also dominated midfield, with Hakan Yakin putting in a commanding performance feeding Basel's Argentine forwards.

With Liverpool needing a win to progress, they pulled even in the middle of the second half as the two coaches engaged in a tactical battle, with Gerard Houllier pulling off a lacklustre Steven Gerrard and Emile Heskey to turn to a more attacking side.

But while they restored some balance and a Michael Owen goal from a penalty pulled them level, a cliffhanger in the final minutes of the game rarely found Liverpool with enough bite to make a difference.

Houllier said all three of Basel's goals were avoidable, especially the crucial third when goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek could only parry the ball to a grateful Timothee Atouba.

"We were chasing the game, it was an ideal scenario for them," Houllier admitted.

"I have mixed feelings. I'm quite disappointed not to qualify, but I'm also proud of our response in the second half," added the Frenchman.

"The first goal changed the face of the game a lot. I think two goals could have been avoided, if not three. The third goal could have been avoided. When Jerzy (Dudek) made his save, we were not focused and concentrated enough."

Basel coach Christian Gross said his side's first-half burst had been crucial.

"We played 25 fantastic minutes," he said. "I'm very happy for the players. It was a very intensive and very good game, as I expected."

"However we are lucky, because we also could have been dead." The former Tottenham manager added: "We're getting a little closer to the bigger teams, it's a tremendous achievement for the players and club."

Liverpool, who will now have to reset their sights on the UEFA Cup, were stunned by a second minute goal by Rossi, who pounced into

space on the inside left of Liverpool's defence to pick up on a cross from Yakin.

Rossi and Gimenez repeatedly left Merseyside defenders John Arne Riise and Sami Hyypia stranded with their pace.

Shortly after Hakan Yakin put a free kick narrowly past the foot of Dudek's left post, the Swiss international midfielder chipped a ball through to Gimenez in the 13th minute, again on the Merseyside's inside left, which the Argentinian easily slotted past Jerzy Dudek.

They were joined by Atouba, brought in by Gross at left back, but the Cameroonian constantly threatened Liverpool with runs up the wing.

In the 24th minute Atouba latched on to a Yakin free kick which was pushed aside by Dudek at full stretch, but Atouba picked up the rebound to fire in Basel's third goal.

Owen was largely left to poach balls on his own up front, but he was let down by his own uninspired midfield which was lagging far back in defence.

Two Liverpool goals midway through the second half by Danny Murphy and Smicer helped pile the pressure on the Swiss side.

Yakin handled the ball in the penalty area in the 83rd minute, leaving Owen to put the ball in on the second attempt after a fine save from Pascal Zuberbuehler.

But Basel still looked dangerous on the break, despite the withdrawal of Rossi and Gimenez in the second half, and Liverpool failed to get the all-important winner.

STANDINGS

Final European Champions League tables after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

GROUP A							
Arsenal (Eng)	6	3	1	2	9	4	10
Dortmund (Ger)	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Auxerre (Fra)	6	2	1	3	4	7	7
PSV (Ned)	6	1	3	2	5	8	6
GROUP B							
Valencia (Spa)	6	5	1	0	17	4	16
FC Basel (Swi)	6	2	3	1	12	12	9
Liverpool (Eng)	6	2	2	2	12	8	8
Spartak (Rus)	6	0	0	6	11	8	0
GROUP C							
Real Madrid (Spa)	6	2	3	1	15	7	9
AS Roma (Ita)	6	2	3	1	3	4	9
AEK Athens (Gre)	6	0	6	0	7	7	6
Genk (Bel)	6	0	4	2	2	9	4
GROUP D							
Inter Milan (Ita)	6	3	2	1	12	8	11
Ajax (Ned)	6	2	2	2	6	5	8
Lyon (Fra)	6	2	2	2	12	9	8
Rosenborg (Nor)	6	0	4	2	4	12	4

Crespo ensures top spot



AFP, Milan

Inter Milan beat Ajax 2-1 in their final Champions League Group D first-phase match here on Tuesday as both clubs progressed into the last 16.

Two rapid-fire goals shortly after the restart from Argentinian international Hernan Crespo sent Inter through as the group's winners as runner's up Ajax added a meaningless consolation goal in injury time.

Ajax, who came up against a solid defensive wall throughout much of the first half, also fell victim to the Italians' superiority in the counter-attack contest.

Nevertheless, Ronald Koeman's Amsterdam side let

known their intentions early on, with Raphael van der Vaart giving Inter keeper Francesco Toldo room to do with a shot in the seventh minute.

Van der Vaart even had the ball in the net two minutes later although his effort was ruled offside by Austrian referee Markus Meier.

In a match which pitted the enthusiasm of Dutch youth against Inter's experience, Hector Cuper's visiting side were on more than one occasion rapped for their sportsmanlike tactics.

However there was nothing illicit about Crespo's rise to meet a cross floated in by midfielder Luigi Di Biagio in the 50th minute.

Crespo was again on target two minutes later when he rose to meet a cross from Italian international Christian Vieri.

Inter then tightened the hatches

and controlled the remaining half hour before a seemingly determined van der Vaart stole a consolation four minutes into injury time.

However Ajax were forced into a nervous wait for the result of the Lyon v Rosenborg match which finished 1-1 and condemned the French champions to third place in the group and into the UEFA Cup.

"It was the worst five minutes of my young career as a coach," admitted Koeman after the match.

"When I heard that Lyon had equalised I really began to think the worst. Fortunately Lyon failed to qualify and it's us who are going through."

"I think we deserve it - even although we were beaten tonight by an Inter team who were intelligent and showed the extent to which they can successfully employ the counter-attack."

Win not enough for Auxerre

AFP, Auxerre

Zimbabwean striker Benjamin Mwaruwari fired Auxerre into the UEFA Cup after getting the only goal in the French side's 1-0 Champions League win over Borussia Dortmund here on Tuesday.

And with PSV Eindhoven drawing 0-0 with Arsenal in the other Group A fixture, Auxerre finished in third place with the German champions qualifying in second behind Arsenal.

With French international Djibril Cisse back in the team after a two-month spell injured Auxerre knew they had to come away with maximum points.

The 64-year-old Auxerre coach Guy Roux is a noted tactician and his decision to bring on 'Benjani' as Mwaruwari is nicknamed for the second half to team up with Cisse was to prove inspirational.

After some good work between the pair Benjani broke the deadlock. Picking up a throw in from the far left the 24-year-old fairly booted in the ball into the left hand corner of the Borussia net.

Genk hold Real

REUTERS, Genk

Spirited Belgian champions Genk scored only the second goal of their maiden season in the Champions League on Tuesday as they secured a deserved 1-1 draw against weakened defending champions Real Madrid.

Genk trailed to a first-half goal by young Spanish forward Tote, but fought back to clinch a draw when hard-working Belgium striker Wesley Sonck headed in from a corner after 86 minutes.

The result thrilled the sellout 22,500 crowd, but was not enough to stop them finishing bottom of Group C as they needed a win to secure third spot and a UEFA Cup place.

Madrid clinched their place in Friday's draw for the second group stage among the seeds as group winners.

It seemed that Tote's 21st minute goal on a rainswept night at the Fenix Stadium in eastern Belgium, where the home side worked hard to create chances but seemed to lack a finishing touch, would be decisive.

The 23-year-old struck his first goal in European competition when a corner on the left from Portugal's Luis Figo was headed back across goal by Francisco Pavon leaving Tote to net a simple chance from close range.

It was a rare moment of precision from the visiting aristocrats of the European game against a home-spun team completing their maiden appearance with a test against the nine-times winners of the continent's top competition.

Fernando Morientes, the man displaced by Madrid's signing of Brazilian World Cup hero Ronaldo, wasted a second-half opening with a soft shot against a post but, without the polished presence of Raul, Zinedine Zidane or Ronaldo, the visitors did not merit a more handsome scoreline.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque retained only three players -- Roberto Carlos, Luis Figo and captain Fernando Hierro -- from the team that won at Rayo Vallecano on Saturday in the Spanish league and a disjointed and patchy performance was the result.

Gunners' bruising draw



AFP, London

Ten-man Arsenal survived an ill-tempered battle with PSV Eindhoven to top their Champions League group and move into the second phase with the advantage of being seeded.

Arsenal played the last ten minutes of the first half and all of the second with a man down following the sending off of their Ivory Coast defender Kolo Toure for a second wild tackle on PSV's Danish winger Dennis Rommedahl.

But Arsenal were more sinned against than sinners on the night with Robert Pires on the receiving end of some brutal treatment from the Dutch defence and Thierry Henry involved in a clash with Mark Van Bommel in which the PSV captain appeared to spit on him.

Despite watching his side fail to score for the first time in nine months, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hailed the performance as further evidence that the Gunners have emerged from their recent slump in form.

"We wanted to top the group and overall we deserved to top the group," Wenger said, although he played down the significance of being seeded.

"I'm very pleased with the strength of the team, the movement and the passing, and the defending as well. It's now three games that we don't concede any goals and we know we can score goals. We didn't tonight but we did play a long time with only ten men."

Auxerre's win over Borussia Dortmund means that PSV do not

even have the consolation prize of a place in the UEFA Cup, and their coach Guus Hiddink said they had been undone by losing two of their home games.

"We didn't win here but I'm satisfied with the way we played. In general I think we failed to be smart enough in our home games," he said.

But he refused to condemn Van Bommel's conduct. "Players, they do some things in mutual ways, so I'd like you to see the whole video. Maybe there is something the other way round, from Arsenal to one of my players. Let us not be cissies in this. See it in two ways."

With only five first team regulars on the pitch, some of Arsenal's second-string players had the perfect opportunity to impress Wenger.

But for most of the opening period the supporting players showed more signs of stage fright than any desire to grab a leading role.

The first two minutes saw Ukrainian centreback Igor Shevchenko slip innocuously on his backside while attempting a straightforward pass out of defence, quickly followed by debutant goalkeeper Rami Shaaban fumbling a pass back from Toure.

The comedy of errors then switched to the other end with Francis Jeffers heading Henry's perfect cross wildly wide in the 3rd minute.

The England under-21 star compounded that error five minutes later when Pires' pass sprung PSV's outside trap. Jeffers timed his run well but his touch let him down and the advancing Ronald Waterreus was able to close him down suffi-

ciently to deflect the shot clear.

With neither side able to find any kind of form, the match began to take on a rougher edge and PSV defender Johann Vogel picked up a yellow card for clattering into Pires.

A clumsy rather than malicious tackle on Rommedahl earned Toure his first yellow card in the 29th minute. But Norwegian referee Tom Ovrebø had little option but to pull out a red six minutes later when Toure scythed into the Dane as he threatened to burst into the Arsenal box.

Andre Ooijer was then booked for yet another foul on Pires before Van Bommel's clash with Henry on the stroke of half-time.

PSV needed to win to be sure of a place in the third round of the UEFA Cup but even with an extra man there was little sign of any urgency from Hiddink's side.

Their first shot -- on or off target -- did not come until eight minutes into the second half, when Van Bommel's diagonal pass played Mateja Kezman in behind the Arsenal defence.

The forward will have been disappointed not to have scored but Shaaban did well to spread himself and save with his legs.

The chance seemed to galvanise PSV and left winger Arjen Robben immediately wriggled his way into a good shooting position, before firing over.

But after the introduction of Dennis Bergkamp, it was Arsenal who finished the match looking more likely to score.

Waterreus narrowly avoided deflecting a corner into his own net 20 minutes from the end and Sylvain Wilford twice flashed shots wide after being set up by Bergkamp.

Wenger doesn't want Gilberto to travel

AFP, London

Arsenal will ask Brazil to release their midfielder Gilberto Silva from the squad due to play a friendly in South Korea next week.

Gilberto has been named in the squad for the November 20 match in Seoul. But Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger made it clear the club do not want him to go, despite FIFA rules which mean players must be released for international duty.

"I will try to negotiate with Brazil to keep him here," Wenger said after Arsenal's Champions League match against PSV Eindhoven.

If Gilberto does make the trip he will miss Arsenal's Premiership clash with Southampton this weekend.

"It's not only because we are playing Southampton but also for the player," Wenger insisted. "What can be the motivation for a player to travel for at least 12, 13 hours and then come back just to play maybe 45 minutes in a friendly."

"It looks difficult to accept for us who pay the players."

Wenger also hinted that a number of other Brazilians playing in Europe, including Paris Saint-Germain's Ronaldinho, could pull out of the trip to South Korea

Bring on Real Madrid!

AFP, Basel

Fresh from the 3-3 draw against Liverpool which pushed the English side out of the Champions League, Swiss side FC Basel were on Wednesday itching for more giant-killing feats in the next round.

Coach Christian Gross did little to hide his ambitions just after the match on Tuesday, lining up Real Madrid in his sights.

"If we play against Ronaldo it wouldn't be too bad," Gross told journalists.

Gross admitted he did not expect his team's performance over the past few months, their first participation in the Champions League.

"I was really thinking we would be outsiders. This proves everything is possible," the Swiss coach said.

Basel's Argentinian attacking duo of Julio Hernan Rossi and Christian Gimenez ripped through Liverpool's weakened defence, served by an inspired midfield led by Swiss international Hakan Yakin which also picked up possession from the Merseysiders with ease for the first 45 minutes.

But pressure from Liverpool's revamped midfield and front line in the second half exposed Basel's defensive flaws to allow the English side to draw level, and some of the Swiss side's players fired swiftly.

Basel can count on the largest and most enthusiastic crowd following of any football team in Switzerland.

Several thousand supporters turned out in the city centre overnight, capping the side's historic performance as the first Swiss team to advance into the next stage of the Champions League with a celebration that ran deep into the night.

Liverpool's legendary following, reduced to about 1,400 fans in one corner of the St Jakob stadium, were easily drawn out by more than 28,000 vociferous Basel fans during the match.

It was also a sweet revenge for the Basel trainer on two counts.

Gross was pilloried by British newspapers during a season at London club Tottenham Hotspur four years ago.

Two years beforehand, he also failed to bring his then side Grasshopper Zurich through the next stage of the Champions League when they lost to the Ajax 0-1 at home, although like Basel the team only needed one point to go through.

"I guess it has been difficult to accept that we in Switzerland can play football at quite a good level and that we don't only have snow, cows, chocolates and maybe some beers," Gross said.

The draw for the next group stage of the Champions League will take place in Geneva on Friday.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated results from the Champions League first round on Tuesday:

Group A
At London
Arsenal (Eng) 0 PSV Eindhoven (Ned) 0
At Auxerre, France
Auxerre (Fra) 1 (Mwaruwari 76) Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 0

Group B
At Valencia, Spain
Valencia (Spa) 3 (Juan Sanchez 38, 46, Aurelio 78) Spartak Moscow (Rus) 0
At Basel, Switzerland
FC Basel (Swi) 3 (Rossi 2, Gimenez 22, Atouba 29) Liverpool (Eng) 3 (Murphy 61, Smicer 64, Owen 85)

Group C
At Genk, Belgium
Genk (Bel) 1 (Sonck 86) Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Tote 21)
At Rome
AS Roma (Ita) 1 (Delvecchio 40) AEK Athens (Gre) 1 (Centeno 90)

Group D
At Amsterdam
Ajax (Ned) 1 (Van der Vaart 90) Inter Milan (Ita) 2 (Crespo 50, 52)
At Rosenborg, Norway
Rosenborg (Nor) 1 (Brattbak 69) Lyon (Fra) 1 (Govou 84)

QUALIFIERS

Qualifiers for the second phase of the European Champions League following Tuesday's matches:

Group A: Borussia Dortmund (Ger), Arsenal (Eng)
Group B: Valencia (Spa), FC Basel (Swi)
Group C: Real Madrid (Spa), AS Roma (Ita)
Group D: Inter Milan (Ita), Ajax (Ned)

Already qualified ahead of Wednesday's matches in Groups E-H

Group E: Juventus (Ita)
Group F: Manchester United (Eng), Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Group G: AC Milan (Ita)
Group H: Barcelona (Spa)

Qualified for UEFA Cup

Group A: Auxerre (Fra)
Group B: Liverpool (Eng)
Group C: AEK Athens (Gre)
Group D: Lyon (Fra)

Keane affair Irish FA boss resigns

AFP, Dublin

The general secretary of the Football Association of Ireland, Brendan Menton, on Tuesday became the second high-profile victim of the row which led to Roy Keane walking out on the country's World Cup squad.

Menton submitted his resignation after a report criticised the FAI's handling of the bust-up between manager Mick McCarthy and Keane and effectively vindicated the Manchester United midfielder's stance, if not his behaviour.

McCarthy stepped down as Ireland's manager last week, dismayed at the sniping criticism that has dogged him in the wake of the Keane affair.

The report by a Scottish management consultancy recommended sweeping changes to the way the game is run in the Republic, echoing the sentiments of Keane who complained bitterly about the team's poor preparation and inferior facilities leading up to the World Cup.

It was Keane's frustration which led to the verbal assault on McCarthy which triggered his departure from the Irish training camp in Saipan before the tournament had even begun.

Menton said: "My decision was made on the future needs of the association."

"I felt for personal and professional reasons this was a job for someone else and not for me."

The consultancy compared the Irish preparation with that of Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and England, and deduced that the fact Ireland progressed to the second round and made a profit of one million euros was "more a matter of luck than effective management practice."

The consultancy interviewed 14 of the 23 members of the Irish World Cup playing squad, and six Premiership managers to compile the report.

FAI president Milo Corcoran said: "We need a fresh start. I can assure you that we have the commitment to put that report into operation."

"We have a meeting scheduled for November 29 when we have to set up means of delivering that report."

"It is a shock to us but we have a lot to learn. We will commit that report into action."

"Costs don't come into it. We will put the football first."
The FAI Association said it would appoint a chief executive, as recommended by the report, by early next year and that a successor to McCarthy would definitely be recruited by February 1 next year.

Roma make it



AFP, Rome

AS Roma clinched a place in the second phase of the Champions League Tuesday despite being held to a frustrating 1-1 draw by Greek side AEK Athens here at the Stadio Olimpico.

Needing a point to guarantee their place in the last 16 of Europe's premier club competition, Roma went ahead five minutes before the break thanks to Marco Delvecchio's close-range header.

But after dominating the match, the hosts were pegged back in the final minute when AEK's Walter Centeno poked in the equaliser from six yards out.

Had Roma conceded another goal in the five minutes of stoppage time then AEK would have progressed at the expense of the Italians, but the Serie A club held off a few late scares to finish second and join group C winners Real Madrid in round two.

AEK meanwhile face life in the UEFA Cup.

Roma coach Fabio Capello was unhappy with the referee who failed to spot visiting goalkeeper Dionisios Hiotis handle the ball outside his 18-yard box in the second-half to prevent Vincenzo Montella's lob from making it 2-0.

"It was a clear penalty and the only person not to spot it was the referee," he said.

"Montella's shot was heading for the goal and that would have given us a comfortable two-goal cushion. "Instead, the score stays the same and they still have their goalkeeper on the pitch."

AEK coach Dusan Bajevic said had his side scored 15 minutes earlier the outcome could have been very different for a side who were unbeaten in the group having drawn all six first round matches.

"We looked sharper in the second-half but couldn't break through," he said.

"When we scored, it gave everyone a lift, but we didn't have enough time to make it difficult for Roma."

"The players gave everything they had so I can't complain."