

David, your shirt please

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
REUTERS/INTERNET, La Coruna

Deportivo Coruna midfielder Aldo Duscher, whose reckless challenge on David Beckham threatened the Manchester United player's participation in this year's World Cup, is hoping to swap shirts with him.

Duscher will get his chance when he comes face to face with Beckham again in the second stage of the Champions League.

The Argentine's wild tackle during his side's Champions League quarterfinal defeat at Old Trafford last April broke a bone in Beckham's foot, leaving the England captain's World Cup hopes in the balance.

Beckham, however, made a speedy recovery from the injury and was able to lead England in their campaign in South Korea and Japan.

"It was an unlucky tackle and I never wanted to injure him," said Duscher.

"When I saw him play in the World Cup after all that had happened I was really pleased."

Duscher was vilified in the British press in an incident that was portrayed by tabloids in both countries as the latest episode in the long-standing rivalry between Argentina and England.

Duscher had to go into hiding after the incident which threatened to stop Beckham from appearing in the World Cup.

But, after learning he would face Beckham again, Duscher revealed how the United ace forgave him and rejected calls he had deliberately been fouled.

Duscher said: "David proved to be as remarkable a person as he is talented as a footballer after that wretched match when I injured him last season.

"I'm delighted to be playing against him again because it should give me the chance to thank him personally for all he did for me after our Champions League quarterfinal."

"Everything was blown out of all proportion because it was an England player before the World Cup, but my telephone conversation with David put my mind at rest.

"He told me he knew I had no intention of 'doing him' and the injury was a fluke rather than deliberate.

"Since that call, we've never had problems between us because we both understood that, as profession-

als, we have to expect injuries under any circumstances."

Duscher was hounded by press from around the world after his challenge.

At first, he refused to apologise until he realised the severity of what he had done, which led to a rebuke from FIFA. It sent the player into a crisis of conscience, which he said was only relieved when Beckham phoned him.

Old Trafford.

Duscher, who is not a regular in the Deportivo first choice line-up but has been used as a substitute in Europe, said that his only concern was to concentrate on the game itself.

"I don't know how I will be received at Old Trafford because what happened there before had massive repercussions. In any case I am only going to focus on matters



Madrid tipped as champs

REUTERS, London

Real Madrid have been listed as 7-2 favourites to win the Champions League following Friday's second phase draw.

The reigning champions, who have won the trophy in three of the last five seasons, were placed with AC Milan, Borussia Dortmund and Lokomotiv Moscow and were also favoured to win the group with British bookmakers William Hill. Manchester United and Valencia are joint second favourites at 13-2. Then come Arsenal at 7-1, AC Milan 8-1, Inter Milan 10-1, Barcelona 11-1, Juventus 12-1, Deportivo Coruna 14-1, Borussia Dortmund 18-1, AS Roma 20-1, Bayer Leverkusen 25-1, Newcastle United 33-1, Ajax Amsterdam 50-1, Lokomotiv Moscow 80-1 and Basel 100-1.

UEFA Cup Liverpool face Vitesse

REUTERS, Geneva

Liverpool will play Dutch side Vitesse Arnhem in the third round of the UEFA Cup following Friday's draw.

The 2001 UEFA Cup winners are one of eight teams who entered the competition at this stage, featuring 32 teams, after finishing third in their Champions League first-phase groups.

Liverpool are top of the English premier league while Vitesse are seventh in the Dutch standings.

Vitesse fought back from 2-0 down to draw 3-3 with Werder Bremen in the second round on Thursday, going through 5-4 on aggregate.

Lazio, another of the top seeds and the only remaining Italian team in the competition, were drawn to face Austria's Sturm Graz, who reached the second phase of the Champions League last season.

Celtic's reward for their impressive 3-0 aggregate victory over Blackburn Rovers is a tongue-twisting tie against Celta Vigo of Spain.

Schalke 04, winners in 1997, face Poland's Wisla Krakow, who surprisingly knocked out Parma on Thursday.

Other interesting fixtures include Real Betis against Auxerre, Besiktas v Dynamo Kiev, Paris St Germain v Boavista, Malaga v Leeds United and Panathinaikos against Slovan Liberec.

Mouth-watering prospects

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
REUTERS, Geneva

Real Madrid will be seeking some long-overdue revenge when they meet Italian club AC Milan in the outstanding clash thrown up by Friday's draw for the second stage of the Champions League.

Madrid, the nine-times winners of the European Cup, were eliminated in 1989-90 and 1990-91 in their two most recent meetings with Milan, the second most successful team in the competition's history, with five wins.

"I played in those games and I remember them well," said Real Madrid spokesman Emilio Butragueno. "So, of course, we want to win this time. But the most important thing for us is not revenge, but to qualify from a tough group."

AS Roma coach Fabio Capello believes his team have been given the toughest draw possible for the Champions League's second group phase.

Roma, who will face Valencia, Arsenal and Ajax Amsterdam, are the only team in Group B who not champions of their domestic league.

"It is the hardest draw we could have got," Capello, who won the trophy in 1994 as coach of AC Milan, said.

"It is certainly a difficult group but exactly because of that it gives you a chance to make up for any eventual slip-ups."

"In this group there will be no team with the cushion of being clearly ahead of the others," added the Roma coach.

"Real are a team that I am delighted to face for a special reason - Zinedine Zidane," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti who coached the French playmaker during his time at Juventus.

"We will be up against not only a great champion but above all a great man," said Ancelotti.

AC Milan representative Umberto Gandini said he was aware of the feelings in Madrid.

"It is a long time since we played them in a European game, but we played them in a pre-season match in their Centenary tournament in Madrid and we lost 2-1, of course, it will be a different matter next time."

"We are proud to be playing against Madrid because it means it is a meeting of the two clubs that have won the European Cup the most times. I hope both can go through to the quarterfinals and we play them again later on."

Gandini warned, too, that both Madrid and Milan should be wary of the threat from Borussia Dortmund and Lokomotiv Moscow.

"Dortmund eliminated us in the UEFA Cup last season and Moscow will be difficult to predict because their season will close down for the winter."

Arsenal's chief executive David Dein was also relishing a chance for revenge after the English champions were drawn with in-form Spanish champions Valencia, Roma and Ajax, in Group B.

"We played Valencia in the club's supporters.

"We know everything about English football and I am sure they will know everything about us," he said.

"Everyone knows that Bergkamp is a great player and he started his career as a junior at Ajax so I am sure he will be looking forward to the game."

After Newcastle United crept through the back door into the

"We are all learning and the team is very young. The average age is only 24, so it is really looking good for the future. And, obviously, the financial windfall of reaching the second group stage is also really good news."

Barcelona director general Javier Perez Farguella said Robson would be given a very special welcome back.

"We all have a lot of respect and a lot of affection for him in Barcelona," he said. "We will look forward to seeing him and his team very much. He was with us for only one season, but he did well and we won two cups and he brought Ronaldo to us."

Farguella pointed out also that Barcelona under Louis Van Gaal had this season won not only all six of their group matches in the opening phase, but also two preliminary games.

"It is a record for us to have won eight in a row," he said. "And we have an average home attendance of 75,000, more than ever before, so we are feeling strong and confident."

FC Basel, the first Swiss club to reach the second group stage of the Champions League, are just pleased to be involved and were rewarded for knocking out Liverpool with ties against Manchester United, Juventus and Deportivo Coruna in Group D.

Vice-president and majority shareholder Gig Oeri was understandably delighted with the draw.

"We are absolutely delighted, really happy," she said. "It is just fantastic to have these games and everyone in the city is feeling the same."

She said she could barely watch the last five minutes of the 3-3 draw against Liverpool on Tuesday which clinched Basel's qualifying place.

"It was horrible, like a torture, and I was digging into my thumbnails! But we are through and anything can happen now," she said.

"Can we beat Manchester United? We think anything is possible and I think we have shown already in the first stage what we are capable of doing."

"Of course, we have a chance. We know we are only a Swiss club and we have our limits, but we will do our best."

Inter coach Hector Cuper, who twice reached the Champions League final as coach of Valencia, will return to Spain to face Barcelona and must also tackle Newcastle and last season's runners-up Leverkusen.

"It is a very balanced group and like all groups at this stage it will be tough for everyone," said Cuper.



President of the UEFA commission senior management, Friedrich Stickler, draws the paper with the name of Spanish giants Real Madrid at the draw for the UEFA Champions League second group stage in Geneva, Switzerland on November 15.

quarterfinals two years ago and we were beaten on away goals and, of course, we were beaten by Valencia in the 1980 European Cup Winners' Cup final. Yes, you could say we have a score to settle."

While the Valencia matches could prove crucial to the group, Dein says the meeting with Dutch club Ajax will provide plenty of incentive for two of his players in particular.

"We haven't played Ajax in more than 30 years so that is one that everyone is going to look forward to, especially Dennis Bergkamp, who will be going home, and Kanu, also. They both started their careers there."

Ajax managing director Arie Van Eyden said meeting Arsenal would be a dream fixture for the Dutch

second phase chief executive Russell Cushing welcomed a draw that pitches them against Barcelona, Inter Milan and Bayer Leverkusen in Group A. It means 69-year-old coach Bobby Robson will face a sentimental return to the Nou Camp.

Robson was coach of Barcelona for only one season in 1996-97, but had a major impact with the Catalans by guiding them to two cup triumphs and a runners-up place in the league with a team that included Ronaldo.

"He's always so enthusiastic about everything that you can only imagine how he is going to feel about going back to Barcelona," said Cushing. "He is, like us all, really excited about this Champions League campaign."

Greedy!

AP, Pescara

Three people stole 90,000 dollars in cash and tickets from a stadium box office, taking money intended for earthquake victims.

Police said masked bandits pointed pistols at three employees late Thursday, stealing 60,000 dollars in cash and 3,000 tickets worth 30,000 dollars. The stadium is hosting a friendly between Italy and Turkey on Wednesday.

A strong earthquake hit the nearby southern Italian region of Molise on Oct. 31, killing 29 people, including 26 children in one small town. The Italian soccer federation called the hold-up "a shameful act against solidarity in sport."

The Italian team is scheduled to visit a tent city of earthquake survivors Tuesday.



THE DRAW

The draw for the UEFA Cup third round:

- Wisla Krakow (Pol) v Schalke 04 (Ger)
- Lazio (Ita) v Sturm Graz (Aut)
- Real Betis (Spa) v Auxerre (Fra)
- Besiktas (Tur) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
- Paris Saint Germain (Fra) v Boavista (Por)
- FC Brugge (Bel) v VfB Stuttgart (Ger)
- Liverpool (Eng) v Vitesse Arnhem (Ned)
- Panathinaikos (Gre) v Slovan Liberec (Cze)
- Denizlispor (Tur) v Lyon (Fra)
- Bordeaux (Fra) v Anderlecht (Bel)
- Malaga (Spa) v Leeds (Eng)
- PAOK Salonika (Gre) v Slavia Prague (Cze)
- AEK Athens (Gre) v Maccabi Haifa (Isr)
- FC Porto (Por) v Lens (Fra)
- Celtic (Sco) v Celta Vigo (Spa)
- Hertha Berlin (Ger) v Fulham (Eng)

First leg to be played on November 26 or 28, second leg on December 10 or 12

Houllier has no fears

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier has scoffed at suggestions his side are suffering a confidence crisis after their Champions League exit.

The English premier league leaders failed to qualify for the second stages of Europe's top tournament this week by drawing in Basel in the wake of losing their unbeaten domestic league record in the 1-0 defeat at Middlesbrough last weekend.

But Houllier has drummed home the message that the Reds are still the team to beat in the race for honours at home.

"I have had to remind my players they are still top of the Premiership," the Frenchman told reporters on Friday.

"The way people are talking you would imagine there is a crisis, but if we are having the same crisis at the end of the season when we are still top of the table I will be happy."

"It's just a shame that we lost the game at Middlesbrough when we should not have done, because since then everyone is selling doubts about us."

"All I can say is we know where we are and we want to keep hold of that position."

Houllier went as far as admitting a "dip" in form, saying: "No team goes through a whole season without dips, but a setback is always, to me, an opportunity and a gift."

"The dip was going out of the Champions League, but right now we have played 21 games and



GERARD HOULLIER

scored 39 goals -- not bad for a boring team!

"We have had more shots on goal than any other premier league team except Manchester United and I have been pleased with the attitude again this week because

everyone seems to have put the defeat at Basel to the back of their mind."

Houllier has no fresh injury worries ahead of Sunday's Anfield clash with Sunderland, but hinted that influential playmaker Steven Gerrard may be taken out of the crossfire until he regains his flagging form.

The struggling England midfielder was criticised by his manager after being substituted at half-time during Tuesday's 3-3 draw in Switzerland.

Houllier said: "Steven is not going through a good period -- he knows that. We will help him to come through this bad patch and maybe in a month we will laugh at all of this because he will be back to his best, but in the meantime we miss him."

"When we think it is the right time to play him in the team again, we will play him."

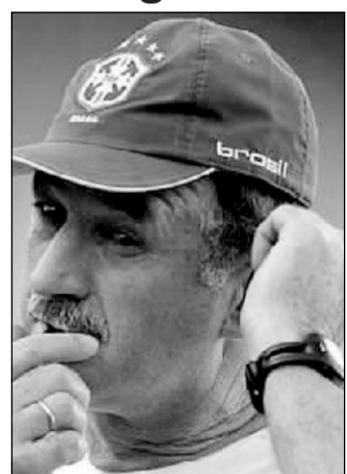
"We have given him many chances to get back into the team and show what he can do but it hasn't worked out."

"You give a chance, another chance and another chance (for him) to go one way, but unfortunately it went the other way."

"We rely on him, we like him and we want him in the team as soon as possible, but he knows he is not doing well."

"He is an honest player, but we are all here to help him."

Scolari in Portugal



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

REUTERS, Lisbon

Brazil's world Cup-winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari met Portuguese soccer officials this week to discuss the national team coaching job, the Portuguese Football Federation said on Friday.

Scolari and federation chairman Gilberto Madalini met in Madrid on Thursday, the federation said in a statement.

Madalini and Scolari "were in full agreement on their points of view as to the different issues inherent in hiring a coach for the national teams," the statement said.

Contacts were continuing in order to arrive at a deal as soon as possible, it added.

Fergie rues Rio injury

REUTERS, Manchester

Alex Ferguson says that losing Rio Ferdinand for a month through injury is "a body blow" for Manchester United.

The England defender limped out of United's Champions League defeat of Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday with a thigh injury, just weeks after returning from a knee operation.

Rio is out for three weeks to a month.

"It's a torn thigh muscle," Ferguson told reporters on Friday. "It is a killer because he is only just back from his knee operation. It is a bit of a body blow."

It's going to be a crucial game

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid defender Roberto Carlos believes that his side's opening match against AC Milan at the San Siro could prove to be the key match in the second group phase of the Champions League.

"The first game in Milan is going to be very important," he told reporters on hearing of Friday's draw, which also saw Real pitted against Borussia Dortmund and Lokomotiv Moscow in Group C.

"From now on in the competition all games are like finals. We know that Milan are in great form, but if we pressure them and work hard we can get a good result at the San Siro."

The nine-time European champions were eliminated by Milan,

the second most successful team in the competition's history, in their two most recent meetings in the European Cup in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

But Spanish international defender Michel Salgado believes that Milan's present style will be more suited to Real than that of other Italian sides.

"I am happy that we got Milan because they were one of the teams I wanted to face," he said.

"Compared to other Italian sides they play a style that will help us because they want the ball and also let you play -- much better than Juventus or Inter."

The match will also mark the return of Real's 45 million euro (45.10 million dollars) signing Ronaldo to his former stamping ground at the San Siro, although not to face his former club Inter but instead their city rivals.

Hadji does Morocco U-turn

REUTERS, Rabat

Aston Villa midfielder Mustapha Hadji is set to return to the Morocco squad after a lengthy absence, according to national coach Badou Zaki.

Zaki, quoted by the MAP news agency, praised Hadji's talent and contribution to the team.

"Hadji has decided, willingly, to stop sulking," he said in a press conference before a November 20 friendly against Mali.

He did not say, however, if Hadji would play against Mali or Switzerland, in another friendly set for February 12.

Hadji has not played for Morocco since a disappointing showing at the 2002 African Nations Cup in Mali. Local press reports said the French-born Moroccan's decision to snub the squad was because of disappointment at his own performances, especially after the team's failure to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

Van Gaal starts singing

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal is relishing his side's trips to Newcastle United and Inter Milan following the Champions League draw.

"It will be an honour for us to play at Newcastle, just as it will be at the San Siro against Inter, because the fans there are sensational," he said.

Barcelona, who reached the semifinals last season, have also been drawn against losing finalists Bayer Leverkusen in Group A.

Van Gaal said he would be glad to meet up with Newcastle coach Bobby Robson who was in charge at Barca in 1996-97, the season before the Dutchman began his first spell at the Catalan club.

good to meet up with him again," he said. "But on the pitch the rivalry will be intense as both sides will have to fight for victory."

The Dutchman said he was disappointed that his side's opening



LOUIS VAN GAAL

and closing group matches were away from home, raising criticisms of the highly-conditioned draw.

at Bayer Leverkusen and finish at Newcastle.

"In an ideal world I would have liked to have started and finished the group matches at home, but it wasn't to be," said Van Gaal.

"I think the draw is far too conditioned - sporting and not commercial interests should come first. It should be a completely free draw and sides from the same country should be able to meet each other as that would make things more exciting."

Barcelona defender Carles Puyol believes Inter Milan will prove to be his side's toughest opponents.

"In theory Inter are our most difficult rivals in the group," he told reporters. "They are tactically very strong, have a very good defence and have some quality forwards."

Inter coach Hector Cuper was in charge at Valencia when they knocked Barcelona out at the semifinal stage in 2000.