



Inter Milan striker Hernan Crespo (C) celebrates his strike with teammate Okan Buruk while dejected Newcastle defender O'Brian and goalkeeper Shay Given sit on the ground at St. James Park on November 27.

Magpies caged

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Newcastle

Inter Milan have swept to a 4-1 victory over 10-man Newcastle United in the Champions League after the hosts went one goal and one man down after just five minutes.

Domenico Morfeo put Inter ahead after less than two minutes and Newcastle's fate in their opening second phase clash in Group A was sealed four minutes later when Wales striker Craig Bellamy was shown the red card for an off-the-ball clash.

Matias Almeyda scored a superb second in the 35th minute, Hernan Crespo tapped home in the first-half stoppage time and substitute Alvaro Recoba curled in the fourth in the 81st minute after Nolberto Solano had pulled one back for the hosts.

Driven on by the Tyneside crowd, Newcastle played with real passion and no shortage of skill -- but were simply outgunned in a game they had as good as lost after just five minutes' play.

Having only scraped into the second phase with a 3-2 win at Feyenoord, sealed by a Bellamy winner in stoppage time, Newcastle now have another mountain to climb -- having lost their opening three games in the first phase.

Inter, who had finished top of their group, were clinical in their finishing and well-disciplined at the back -- doing well to weather Newcastle's second-half onslaught.

Despite all the good intentions to make up for their 5-3 defeat by Manchester United at the weekend, Newcastle got off to a nightmare start.

Inter skipper Javier Zanetti broke into space down the right, Crespo got a flick to his cross and the ball fell to Morfeo, who easily beat Shay Given from close range.

Minutes later, Newcastle were rocked again when Bellamy was shown the red card for his petulant punch to the body of Inter defender Marco Materazzi, who collapsed to the turf in apparent agony.

Bellamy left the field in tears but sympathy will be in short supply for a player who has already missed three European games this season after being banned for a headbutt in a first phase game against Dynamo Kiev.

The St James' Park crowd moved swiftly behind their team, however, and boomed Materazzi every time he touched the ball, prompting coach Hector Cuper to replace him with Ivan Cordoba after 15 minutes.

Newcastle shrugged off the setbacks and Nikos Dabizas, at fault for the first goal, squandered their first scoring chance, mis-directing his header from a Hugo Viana freekick.

As late as it gets

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Valencia

Spanish champions Valencia kept the tension high at the Mestalla stadium on Wednesday, coming back from a late goal against Group B opponents Ajax to level the scores two minutes into extra time.

The 1-1 result in the sides' opening second phase match left Valencia third in the table and kept intact their unbeaten record at home in the Champions League.

Valencia, who prior to last season had lost two successive Champions League finals, were the dominant team on the night against an Ajax team which was continually forced on the back foot.

However it was Ronald Koeman's visitors from Amsterdam who struck first through Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic who latched on to a ball from midfielder Rafael van der Vaart.

Ibrahimovic ran into the area and nutmegged the sprawling goalkeeper Santiago Canizares.

Before then the hosts, dominant



A tearful Newcastle United star Craig Bellamy walks off the pitch after he was sent off against Inter Milan at St. James Park on November 27

Henry conquers Rome

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Rome

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry scored a stunning hat-trick as English champions Arsenal beat AS Roma 3-1 in their opening Group B Champions League second round match here on Wednesday.

Arsenal rallied after going behind to an early strike from Antonio Cassano to score three times and secure their first win in Italy since beating Juventus in the 1980 European Cup Winners' Cup semi-final.

Henry saved his best goal till last, curling a delightful free-kick over the Roma wall from 20 metres out to kill off the Italians with 15 minutes remaining.

After the match Roma coach Fabio Capello paid the ultimate compliment to Arsenal for a classy display.

"They are the strongest team in Europe right now," he said.

"You cannot afford to make mistakes against them because they punish you."

"They are a very compact squad, always running, always dangerous on the counter-attack."

"Roma played well up until the second goal but we are not taking advantage of our opportunities."

"Arsenal had three shots and scored every time."

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger said Roma paid the price for not being adventurous in attack.

"I always felt on the bench that Roma were too cautious and didn't want to be caught on the break. They were scared of our counter-attacking," said the Frenchman.

"We needed to be patient, to keep the ball well and wait for the openings - that we did well and we got the goals at the right moment of the game."

Asked whether Henry was the difference between the two sides, Wenger replied: "Thierry Henry had an exceptional night. He scored three different goals but three great goals."

"He was outstanding but the whole team played well. He can't do it alone."

Roma welcomed back their inspirational captain and Serie A's joint leading goalscorer Francesco

Totti who had not played since injuring his right knee at Piacenza on November 10.

Marco Delvecchio recovered from a thigh strain to partner Cassano in attack, so Vincenzo Montella joined Argentine marksman Gabriel Batistuta on the substitutes' bench.

For the visitors, England veteran David Seaman failed to overcome a groin injury and was replaced in the Arsenal goal by 27-year-old Swede Ramil Shaaban.

The Gunners were also without Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp because of his fear of flying, while a knee injury ruled out Nigerian international Nwankwo Kanu.

Roma started positively despite their patchy league form and took the lead in the fourth minute.

Cassano played a neat one-two with Totti to open up Arsenal's

rearguard and escaped the attentions of Sol Campbell to fire towards goal.

Cassano looked on as his feeble shot hit the base of the right-hand post, but thankfully for the 20-year-old forward the ball rolled along the goalline and into the opposite corner of the net.

But Roma's lead lasted just two minutes as a swift Arsenal counter-attack drew the Londoners level.

Brazilian Gilberto Silva fed Henry who had drifted wide out on the left, and fortunately for the Frenchman his closest marker, Christian Panucci, lost his footing and fell over.

Henry had time to stroke the ball with his trusty right foot wide of Roma goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli and into the bottom corner.

Only a superb goalline clearance from Pascal Cygan prevented

Roma from regaining the lead in the 28th minute.

Cafu's right-wing cross found Totti who controlled the ball with his chest before volleying towards goal.

With Shaaban beaten, Cygan somehow managed to block the ball with his thigh to ensure his side remained on level terms.

After Roma had appeals for a penalty waved away when second-half substitute Gianni Guigou clashed in the penalty box with Shaaban, Arsenal took the lead 20 minutes from time.

Panucci failed to deal with Oleg Luzhny's cross and the ball fell kindly for Henry who made no mistake with a low drive from eight yards.

As Roma tired Henry iced the cake with his brilliant third goal to complete a stunning win for Wenger's men.



DESPERATE MEASURES: AS Roma's Brazilian international Emerson (L) catches Arsenal's hattrick hero Thierry Henry with a clip-tackle at Rome's Olympic Stadium on November 27.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Champions League second group phase collated results on Wednesday:

Group A	
In Leverkusen, Germany	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Berkatov 39) Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Saviola 48, Overmars 88)
In Newcastle, England	Newcastle United (Eng) 1 (Solano 72) Inter Milan (Ita) 4 (Morfeo 2, Almeyda 35, Crespo 45, Recoba 80)

Group B	
In Rome	AS Roma (Ita) 1 (Cassano 4) Arsenal (Eng) 3 (Henry 6, 70, 75)
In Valencia, Spain	Valencia (Spa) 1 (Angulo 90) Ajax (Ned) 1 (Ibrahimovic 88)

TABLES

European Champions league tables after Wednesday's second group phase matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

GROUP A	
Inter	1 1 0 0 4 1 3
Barcelona	1 1 0 0 2 1 3
Leverkusen	1 0 0 1 1 2 0
Newcastle	1 0 0 1 1 4 0

Group B	
Arsenal	1 1 0 0 3 1 3
Ajax	1 0 1 0 1 1 1
Valencia	1 0 1 0 1 1 1
AS Roma	1 0 0 1 1 3 0

Blatter boost

AFP, San Salvador

FIFA President Sepp Blatter promised increased backing for the development of football in North America, Central America and the Caribbean on a visit to El Salvador on Wednesday.

Blatter said that the performances of the United States, Mexico and Costa Rica at the World Cup finals had underlined the progress made by CONCACAF nations.

He said the FIFA Executive Committee in Madrid next December would consider raising the number of World Cup places for CONCACAF nations from three to four.

And he said the world governing body was prepared to back schemes to develop players.

"We can support development projects on demand at any time," said Blatter.

"CONCACAF is one of the confederations with which we have worked the most," he added.

Blatter is due to complete his tour of CONCACAF nations with a visit to Mexico.

Barca brave Leverkusen

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Leverkusen

Former Arsenal man Marc Overmars handed fellow Dutchman Louis van Gaal a massive boost Wednesday, netting two minutes from time as Barcelona came from behind to win 2-1 at Bayer Leverkusen.

The last-gasp win was the Catalan giants' seventh in as many Champions League outings this season and if their Spanish league form is dire coach van Gaal will not be unduly worried as long as their European performances remain at this level.

Overmars had only joined the fray after 75 minutes but made the most telling contribution of the night with a fine low shot on the run after Xavi Hernandez had slid a pass to him.

Dimitar Berbatov had headed the Germans into a 39th-minute lead from a Marko Babic corner. Barcelona were happy to soak up pressure in the opening period, given the absence of Dutch international defender Frank de Boer with a calf problem.

Michael Reiziger came in to deputise for De Boer while Fabio Rocchombac replaced Achilles

tendon victim Luis Enrique.

But the wily Van Gaal made a swift double substitution at the break and the move paid an almost immediate dividend.

Diego Placente lost the ball in midfield for Leverkusen and Javier Saviola, who replaced

a lethargic Gaizka Mendietia, played a neat one-two with Juan Riquelme, who likewise had just entered the action for Gabi Garcia, before firing past home keeper Hans-Jorg Butt.

Mendietia, a former finalist with Valencia, was touted as Barcelona's main creative influence in midfield but earned little change out of the hard-tackling Placente.

The Catalan giants, champions in 1992, steamed through the opening phase with maximum points while Leverkusen, surprise runners-up last season, made the second phase after coming in second in their pool to Manchester United having lost three matches.

Barca could have been behind after only three minutes and rode their luck as Thomas Brdaric netted only for Boris Zivkovic to be ruled offside.

Leverkusen were without veteran defender Jens Nowotny with a knee ligament injury as well as Brazilian defender Juan owing to a stomach muscle strain.

But playmaker Yildray Basturk

returned from a knee injury and proved a thorn in the side of Barca Fernando defender Navarro, who was booked for a rough challenge which will force him out of the home meeting with group lightweights Newcastle in two weeks.

Leverkusen coach Klaus Toppmoller kept some of his powder dry with German World Cup striker Oliver Neuville and veteran forward Ulf Kirsten starting on the bench, finally sending Neuville on ten minutes into the second half.

But Barca had the bit between their teeth and should have gone ahead on the hour after Placente brought down Kluivert inside the box. Butt saved Riquelme's poor penalty kick - but the miss proved to be a mere stay of execution.

Van Gaal had another attacking option of his own in the shape of Overmars, who took over from the already booked Thiago Motta and promptly earned his side the points.

Leverkusen were left scratching their heads as the match ran away from them while Barca's decision to look for the win in the closing stages paid off handsomely.

Toppmoller said his side had shot themselves in the foot.

"Once again we have punished ourselves. We had things under control and deservedly led 1-0. But Placente's mistake was a gift."

Scolari taking over Portugal

AFP, Lisbon

Brazil's World Cup-winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has agreed to guide Portugal through to the 2004 European championships which the country is hosting, his agent said Wednesday.

"Luiz Felipe Scolari is the coach of the Portuguese squad until July 2004, that is, until the end of the European championships," Acas Fellerger told private radio TSF.

He said Scolari had informed Portuguese football association president Gilberto Madail of his decision by phone on Wednesday but a contract will only be signed in January.

Portugal automatically qualified for the tournament as hosts.

The association was authorised at the beginning of the month to hire a foreign coach to revive Portugal's fortunes and Madail had said 54-year-old Scolari was his first choice.

Scolari, nicknamed Big Phil, stepped down as Brazil's coach after landing Brazil's fifth World Cup this year. He had reportedly also received offers to coach the Mexican, Italian and Uruguayan national teams.

Portugal have been without a coach since August when Antonio Oliveira was sacked following the country's disappointing first-round exit in the World Cup.

The country last had a foreigner as head of its national squad in 1966 when a Eusebio-inspired team led by Brazilian Otto Glória made it to the World Cup semi-finals.

Portugal lost that year to host nation and eventual winners England.

Ronaldo for a repeat

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazilian striker Ronaldo is hoping to repeat his match-winning performance when he returns to the scene of his World Cup triumph with European champions Real Madrid in next week's World Club Cup.

The former Inter Milan player, who scored both goals in Brazil's 2-0 victory over Germany in the final at Yokohama and finished as the tournament's top scorer, will return to the stadium to face South American champions Olimpia de Paraguay in next Tuesday's match.

"Obviously I have some great memories of the final against Germany," Ronaldo told Spanish sports daily Marca on Thursday. "For me the World Cup gave me the chance to show that I had left all my injury problems behind and was still a real footballer."

"Now it is my chance to return to the scene with Real Madrid and I hope I can repeat what I did with Brazil. I am really looking forward to winning my first title with Real."

Ronaldo appears to have recovered from the bout of influenza that kept him out of last Saturday's goalless draw against Barcelona and this week's Champions League defeat against AC Milan and will join the rest of his team mates as they depart for Japan on Thursday.

Real have won the World Cup on two occasions, beating Uruguayan side Penarol in the inaugural match in 1960 and Vasco de Gama of Brazil in 1998.

Nou Camp face closure

AFP, Madrid

A anti-violence body in Spain Wednesday called for the closure of Barcelona's Nou Camp stadium for up to a month following incidents during the league match against Real Madrid last weekend.

The government-backed organisation, which is consulted on serious matters such as violence during sports events, also called for the Catalan club to be fined 60,000 euros (dollars).

It feels so strongly about last Saturday's events, which led to the match being suspended after hundreds of missiles rained down on former Barcelona midfielder Luis Figo, that it has called for Barcelona club president Joan Gaspart to face legal proceedings.

Gaspart caused outrage by initially blaming Figo for provoking the crowd, but on Wednesday he described the incidents as "disgraceful" and blamed them on a minority of fans.

"We don't want any repetition of them," added Gaspart.

The anti-violence body's recommendations are passed on to the government which can open an inquiry and then hear Barcelona's version of the story before deciding whether to act on the recommendation.

It means that Barcelona are now being targeted from several fronts.

On Tuesday Spanish football federation disciplinary watchdogs gave the club until Friday to fully explain the incidents and are likely to sanction the club to some extent.

Last Saturday's match at Barcelona's stadium descended into anarchy when Figo attempted to take a corner halfway during the second half.

Hundreds of missiles, including a pig's head and a whisky bottle, were thrown by supporters who are still smarting over his transfer to Real, their arch rivals, in July 2000.

The match had to be suspended for 10 minutes before resuming and ending in 0-0.



GIVE UP, YOU'RE SURROUNDED! Bayer Leverkusen's Turkish international Yildray Basturk (C) finds himself cordoned off by Barcelona's Fernando (L), Thiago Motta (2-R) and Fabio Rocchombac (R) at Leverkusen on November 27.