

Van the Man



AFP, Manchester

Ruud van Nistelrooy's double strike gave Manchester United a 2-0 Champions League Group D win over Spanish side Deportivo La Coruna here at Old Trafford on Wednesday, the Dutchman extending his remarkable European record.

Van Nistelrooy has now scored 29 goals in 30 Champions League matches for both former club PSV Eindhoven and United.

His latest European efforts helped the English giants make it two second phase wins out of two after last month's 3-1 win over Basel.

This victory confirmed United's resurgence, which has seen Alex Ferguson's side become Premiership contenders again following victories over domestic title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal.

"We played very well tonight and we attacked well in the first half," said a delighted Ferguson.

"We had a lot of chances, and tremendous penetration."

He also insisted that luck was now running in his team's favour, citing United's second goal, which came barely a minute after Fabien Barthez had pulled off a fine save from Victor Sanchez.

"It was a great save by Barthez and we went up the other end and scored the second goal."

"We're getting the breaks that we weren't earlier on (in the season) and that was a major one."

"To get in this position, with six points, ahead of the two games against Juventus is just fantastic," said Ferguson looking ahead to next year's clashes with the Italian giants when the group resumes in February.

Meanwhile, Deportivo coach Javier Irureta said early hesitancy had cost his team dearly.

"The real key to the game was

the first 15 minutes. We weren't on our game and we paid for it."

"Manchester United got 1-0 up and then they could wait for us. It suited their counter-attack game."

However, he added that Diego Tristán should have been awarded a penalty at the start of the second half.

"It was a clear foul," complained the Spanish coach.

Deportivo lost captain and influential midfielder Fran before



Paul Scholes (L) and Ole Gunnar Solskaer are delighted with Manchester United's opening goal scored by Ruud van Nistelrooy against Deportivo La Coruna at Old Trafford on December 11.

kick-off with a high temperature but Irureta was not downhearted.

He still insisted it was possible for his team to make the last eight. "United and Juventus must play each other back to back and I'm hopeful we can take six points off the Swiss (Basel)."

United took the lead in the seventh minute when, following Gary Neville's quick throw on the right, Paul Scholes sent over a cross and the unchallenged Van Nistelrooy headed home past helpless Deportivo keeper Juanmi.

Van Nistelrooy had earlier come close to opening the scoring in the fourth minute only to see Juanmi

athletically turn away his shot from the edge of the box.

But United should have gone 2-0 up in the 21st minute when Ryan Giggs, captain in the absence of Roy Keane and David Beckham, powered down the left hand side and into the box.

He squared the ball to Scholes but the England midfielder steered his shot wide with the goal at his mercy.

But it was not all one way traffic

the second half he claimed a penalty after going down under John O'Shea's challenge.

But Skjerven was not interested. At the other end, Van Nistelrooy went clean through on goal in the 50th minute only to shoot straight at Juanmi.

His error was almost punished instantly, the industrious Sanchez's 25 yard shot well tipped over by Barthez.

Then, in the 53rd minute Giggs' brilliant solo run almost ended with a goal, the ball coming back off the post.

Van Nistelrooy followed up but his effort was ruled out for offside.

In the end-to-end battle unfolding Deportivo striker Roy Makaay then saw his shot well-blocked by Barthez.

But Van Nistelrooy was not to be denied a second goal. Superb work down the right from Scholes ended with Juanmi doing well to save the shot.

However, the ball broke to Van Nistelrooy, who rifled the ball in from point blank range in the 55th minute and this time the flag stayed down.

United then had several penalty claims turned down but in the end it did not matter.

The teams met four times in the Champions League last season, Deportivo winning twice in the opening group stage before United won both legs of the quarter-final.

During the last eight clash England captain Beckham had his foot broken by Deportivo's Argentine midfielder Aldo Duscher, an injury that sidelined him ahead of the World Cup, although he did return for this summer's finals.

Irureta, fearful of the United fans' reaction, dropped Duscher for this match. Meanwhile Beckham, who sustained a rib injury last month, came off the bench for the last 20 minutes having not been missed at all early on.

and Deportivo's Joan Capdevila should have done better than head wide from a 22nd minute corner.

However, it was United who were doing most of the pressing and in the 27th minute it was Van Nistelrooy's turn to head a corner wide.

But barely a minute later he did have the ball in the back of the net when he headed home Giggs' deflected cross - only to see Norwegian referee Tommy Skjerven disallow the goal for the striker's challenge on Juanmi.

Deportivo brought on striker Tristán in place of Amavisca at half-time and in the opening minute of



Raul celebrating one of his goals against Lokomotiv Moscow at Madrid on December 11.

Real owe Raul



AFP, Madrid

Spanish international Raul struck twice on Wednesday to rescue Real Madrid from what could have been an embarrassing Champions League defeat at the hands of Lokomotiv Moscow.

The 25-year-old Spanish international's two goals in the 2-2 draw took his tally in the competition to 32 from 72 matches.

But the Spanish giants can count themselves lucky to have escaped this tricky Bernabeu encounter against a plucky Lokomotiv side who had vowed revenge after last season's 4-0 mauling at the Bernabeu, and nearly succeeded.

"We knew that Lokomotiv were going to be disciplined and come at us on the counter-attack. I thought we were the superior team but I don't know whether that was reflected in the scoreline," said Real coach Vicente Del Bosque.

Real have now not won in front of their home fans since October 6, and have four draws and a loss in the Bernabeu since then.

Further misery came in the form of injuries to Fernando Hierro, Claude Makelele and Ronaldo, all of whom are doubtful for Sunday's Spanish league match against Recreativo Huelva.

Raul opened the scoring when he latched on to a through ball from Esteban Cambiasso in the 21st

minute. The goal was his 200th in his 405 competitive games for Real and he became the fifth player at the club to reach the mark, although he still has some way to go to beat the record of 307 goals set by the legendary Alfredo Di Stefano.

After being 1-0 down at the break, the Russian side's African imports Joseph Obiorah and Thabo Mnguni gave them a brief 2-1 lead before Raul struck his second and saving goal.

For his third goal in six Champions League games so far this season Raul had to cut-back from the goal-line and take a step inside a defender before threading the ball with his left foot, at an acute angle, beneath the body of Lokomotiv keeper Sergei Ovchinnikov.

The Russian champions then stunned Real just two minutes after the interval when Nigerian striker Obiorah made the most of a poor challenge by Francisco Pavon to slot the ball past Iker Casillas in the Spanish goal.

Sixteen minutes from time, Lokomotiv were in front when South African midfielder Mnguni cut inside two weak tackles by Zinedine Zidane and Roberto Carlos to fire a powerful left foot shot past Casillas.

The Spaniards were clearly missing the calming influence of defender Ivan Helguera, who was suspended, but Lokomotiv's joy lasted just two minutes before Raul struck again.

There was a hint of good fortune about the goal as he managed to chest the ball over the line from Luis Figo's cross although his deft footwork outwitted Ovchinnikov, who had made a mess of the cross.

Obiorah's contribution was stunning as he had come on as a half-time replacement for Julio Cesar while, for Real, an out-of-sorts Ronaldo was taken off to be replaced by Guti.

However, Ronaldo did not have to shoulder the blame alone. "There is no escaping it. I played badly," admitted the world's most expensive player Zinedine Zidane.

The result leaves both sides with a point each with AC Milan the pacesetters after their 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund.

Del Bosque refused to write off Real's chances of progressing but the Russians would have been the happier of the two sides as Real had looked to build on their win over Paraguay's Olimpia in the Intercontinental Cup last week and their 5-1 Spanish league drubbing of Mallorca at the weekend.

"It is too premature to talk about anything," said Del Bosque. "I remember in other years that teams with six points have crashed. OK, so we are more accustomed to going into February with six points rather than one, but I think with our experience in Europe it would be unwise to discount us," he warned.

Magpies wings clipped



AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona put their domestic woes behind them as they beat Newcastle United 3-1 in their Champions League Group A match on Wednesday to equal the competition's record of 10 consecutive wins.

Dani Garcia, Patrick Kluivert and Thiago Motta all found the net for the Catalans who looked a different side to that which has only won once in their last six Spanish League outings.

The victory also dampened the dreams of Newcastle coach Bobby Robson, who coached at Barca in the 1996-97 season and had hoped for a win on his first occasion back at the Nou Camp as a visiting team boss.

Barcelona got the perfect start when they opened the scoring after just seven minutes.

Dani Garcia, starting in place of off-form Javier Saviola, produced a fine left-foot volley from a Xavi Hernandez cross that Newcastle keeper Shay Given had little chance of stopping.

The Catalans suffered a double blow shortly afterwards when, within the space of 90 seconds, both Michael Reiziger and Phillip Cocu had to leave the field injured.

Barca never stopped attacking despite the departure of their Dutch international duo but Newcastle got back into the game against the run of play when Shola Ameobi got the equalizer after 25 minutes.

Ameobi, who got his chance due to Alan Shearer and Craig Bellamy's suspensions, got clear of his markers to sidefoot home a Kieron Dyer pass.

However, Newcastle's goal seemed to be the signal for Barca to knuckle down and concentrate on imposing themselves. The ball stayed at Barca's feet almost exclusively for the final 20 minutes of the first half.

Barca got their reward for having the majority of possession after 35 minutes when Marc Overmars darted down the left wing to find fellow Dutchman Patrick Kluivert in front of goal and he had no difficulty finding the net for his third goal in this season's Champions League campaign.

Barcelona also had legitimate claims for a penalty turned down two minutes before the break after a crude challenge in the box by Aaron Hughes on Gaizka Mendieta went unpunished.

Newcastle started the second half much more brightly, with Ameobi and Lomana LuaLua both going close in the first five minutes after the restart.

However, the game drifted behind the visitors' reach when Thiago Motta got Barcelona's third by heading heading home a Xavi corner on 58 minutes.

Robson admitted later that was

the point when the game, and perhaps their Champions League ambitions after two convincing defeats, got away from them.

"We lost to a freak goal in the second half when we were 2-1 down. I don't know whether Shay (Given) missed the cross and Keiron (Dyer) got caught half asleep," lamented Robson.

"That cost us dearly. At 2-1 you always have a chance, 3-1 just takes a bit of enterprise away from you. We never stopped, I'm just a bit sorry with the result. It's a painful defeat," added the former England manager.

While the Newcastle coach was critical of his defenders, he had nothing but praise for his men at the front, even though they only got one goal.

"I thought young Shola was outstanding. He had a hat-trick of chances and a good shot. He could've gone off a hero. He looked a real handful."

Nevertheless, the night belonged to Barcelona, although they may live to regret the myriad of chances that went begging late in the game when they could have added to their advantage.

Barca can content themselves that they equalled the Champions League record for consecutive wins, which had until Wednesday been in the possession of Milan from the 1992-93 season.

Now in Barca's sights is the all-time European record of 11 wins on the trot which Ajax achieved over two seasons of the now-discontinued Cup Winners Cup between March 1987 and April 1988, and their next match will be at home to Inter Milan on February 18.

MU, Nantes partnership planned

AFP, Nantes

French top flight outfit Nantes and Manchester United are discussing a partnership scheme to develop and exchange young players which could start as early as next week, Nantes sources said Wednesday.

The clubs will have exchange trips for officials and matches organised for youth sides.

"We are in discussions but up until now nothing has been finalised," Nantes' sporting director Robert Budzynski said.

Manchester United brought in Frenchman of Brazilian origin Francisco Filho to coach their 17-year-old last July and he has close links to Nantes staff.

Nantes believe United could aid them in terms of advice on merchandising.

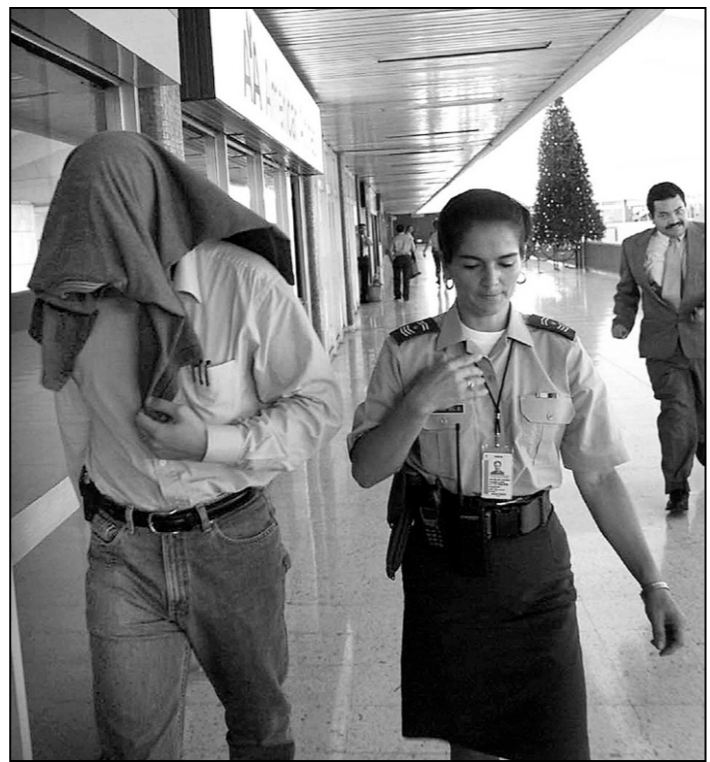
STANDINGS

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

GROUP A							
Inter Milan	2	2	0	0	7	3	6
Barcelona	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Bayer Leverkusen	2	0	0	2	3	5	0
Newcastle	2	0	0	2	2	7	0

GROUP C							
AC Milan	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Borussia Dortmund	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Lokomotiv Moscow	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Real Madrid	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

GROUP D							
Manchester United	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Juventus	2	1	1	0	6	2	4
Deportivo La Coruna	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Basel	2	0	0	2	1	7	0



IN SHAME! Colombian Doctor Mauricio Vergara (L) covers his face while being escorted by a police officer at the Cali international airport on December 11.

Maradona's doctor held with cocaine



AFP, Bogota

Colombian doctor Mauricio Vergara, who helped Argentine football legend Diego Maradona lose weight last year, has been arrested in the southeastern city of Cali with two kilos of cocaine in his possession, police sources said Wednesday.

Vergara was arrested by drugs squad officers at the airport in Cali, 515km southeast of the capital Bogota, just before he attempted to board a flight destined for Buenos Aires with a stop-off in Panama.

"The cocaine was found in the case of a camera that he was carrying in his luggage and in a

false bottom to a briefcase in which he had his personal computer," said Cali police chief Colonel Alvaro Caro.

The police chief did not give the value of the cocaine.

Vergara worked for five months last year with Maradona helping the 41-year-old drop six kilos for a Boca Juniors match in November.

Maradona, the hero of Argentina's 1986 World Cup triumph, has fought back from drug abuse and received lengthy treatment in a Cuban clinic.

Vergara was in the news recently after the Colombian press reported that he had been contracted by Real Madrid to help Brazilian star Ronaldo lose weight, but this was denied by the Spanish side as a publicity stunt by the doctor.

Milan fly with Inzaghi



AFP, Dortmund

De Filippo Inzaghi bagged his ninth goal of the tournament and one potentially worth its weight in gold Wednesday, securing a 1-0 Champions League win at Borussia Dortmund.

Inzaghi struck five minutes after the interval after latching on to a through pass from former Real Madrid and Inter Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf, the goal all but silencing the disbelieving 52,000 crowd at the Westfalenstadion, who included German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

But the goal which ended an unbeaten home run of 11 Champions League matches warmed the heart of watching Italian Prime Minister and Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, who braved the sub-zero temperatures to attend.

Inzaghi drew level with Inter Milan's Hernan Crespo as the

tournament's top scorer this season.

Dortmund coach Matthias Sammer said his side had missed an opportunity.

"Milan did not play that well - but we didn't turn it on either and you can't beat an opponent of that class unless you do."

"I felt we lacked a little self-belief and a bit of bite."

Milan's win gives them the whip hand in Group C after they won a battle of two sides who had both won their respective opening second phase matches.

The Italians showed their earlier success over holders Real Madrid was no fluke and now it is Dortmund's turn to sweat as the German champions still have to face the Spaniards home and away.

Dortmund took this fixture last season in the UEFA Cup semi-final 4-0 but since then the Milanese have been on the march and they gave as good as they got in a tight and goalless opening 45 minutes before suffocating the life out of

their hosts in true Italian fashion in the second half.

Tomas Rosicky had a snapshot from some 30 metres after 20 minutes as Dortmund started the brighter but neither side created many clearcut early chances.

Brazilian defender Dede was working hard on the left flank for Dortmund and Czech striker Jan Koller should have done better than head off target two minutes before the interval from his colleague's deep cross.

Koller's strike partner Marcio Amoroso hit a hat-trick in last year's encounter but this time was getting little change out of Alessandro Nesta.

Andriy Shevchenko and Inzaghi were also running into cul-de-sacs in the opening period for the Italians although Seedorf was highly industrious just behind them.

The Dutch midfielder star almost caused panic in the Dortmund defence after Shevchenko crossed from the left, but Dede just came across to concede a corner in the 35th minute.

Seedorf, having reported fit from an ankle sprain, was shouldering extra responsibilities alongside Portuguese Rui Costa in the absence of Brazilian World Cup star Rivaldo, out with a thigh strain.

With Inzaghi having made the breakthrough, taking Seedorf's pass before firing unerringly past home keeper Jens Lehmann, Sammer, a European champion with Dortmund six seasons ago, withdrew one of his Brazilians in Ewerthon and sent on German international Lars Ricken.

Ricken was on the scoresheet in the 1997 final against Juventus but here he was unable to spark a belated German recovery.

Christoph Metzelder eluded Milan's veteran skipper Paolo Maldini with 20 minutes remaining but fired just over from the edge of the box.

With four minutes remaining Rivaldo made a cameo entrance for Inzaghi, who departed the scene having made the evening's most telling contribution.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated Champions League results on Wednesday:

- GROUP A**
In Barcelona, Spain
Barcelona (Spa) 3 (Dani 7, Kluivert 35, Motta 58) Newcastle (Eng) 1 (Ameobi 25)
*(rearranged from Tuesday due to waterlogged pitch)
- GROUP C**
In Dortmund, Germany
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 0 AC Milan (Ita) 1 (Inzaghi 49)
In Madrid
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Raul 21, 76) Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 2 (Obiorah 47, Mnguni 74)
- GROUP D**
In Turin, Italy
Juventus (Ita) 4 (Trezeguet 3, Montero 34, Tacchinardi 43, Del Piero 51-pen) Basel (Swi) 0
In Manchester, England
Manchester United (Eng) 2 (van Nistelrooy 7, 55) Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 0

Juve lesson for Basel

AFP, Turin

Juventus made tight work of Basel here on Wednesday, thumping the Swiss champions 4-0 in their Champions League Group D second phase meeting at an icy Stadio DelleAlpi.

Juve cruised into a three-goal lead before half-time thanks to goals from injury-plagued French striker David Trezeguet, Uruguayan man-marker Paolo Montero and Italian international Alessio Tacchinardi.

Alessandro Del Piero converted a penalty six minutes after the break to pile more misery on the Swiss, who are rooted to the bottom of Group D without a single point.

A win for the reigning Italian champions took them second in the table behind Manchester United who they meet at Old Trafford on February 19.

Trezeguet, whose season has been blighted by a knee injury, was delighted to get on the scoresheet so early.

"After such a long lay-off it was nice to get a goal. It's just what I needed," he said.

"This (knee) problem has been with me for almost six months and it was a great personal satisfaction to score."

Trezeguet refused to take all the credit for Juve's win and praised his team-mates for a slick performance. "It was a wonderful overall team performance. This was an important step towards the quarter-finals."

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi hit back at the critics who had talked of a crisis at the club following their 2-0 defeat at Brescia on Sunday which ended a 12 match unbeaten league run.

"Juventus are a club that always hit the headlines, both for good and bad things," he said.

"We are used to this move from praise to insults. It inspires us to do well."

Basel, who advanced to the last 16 at the expense of English giants Liverpool, found themselves a goal down after just three minutes.

Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved delivered a corner into the 18-yard box which defender Mark Juliano flicked on for Trezeguet, who headed past Pascal Zuberbuhler at the back post.

Juve doubled their lead in the 34th minute when South American hard man Montero grabbed a rare goal.

Del Piero's free-kick was parried by Zuberbuhler onto the crossbar and Montero was the first to react, poking the ball home from close range.

Juve increased their advantage with a stunning goal two minutes before the interval.

After Dutchman Edgar Davids' cross was blocked on the edge of the Basel penalty area, Tacchinardi forced his way in front of Marco Zwyssig and volleyed home spectacularly from 25 yards.

Things got worse for Basel early in the second-half when Antonio Esposito brought down Nedved in the penalty area with a clumsy tackle and Del Piero sent Zuberbuhler the wrong way from 12 yards.

Rosicky on Barca's list

AFP, Prague

Spanish First Division outfit Barcelona are targeting Borussia Dortmund's Czech international playmaker Tomas Rosicky, the daily Sport reported here Wednesday.

A meeting is reported to be in the offing between representatives of the German champions and Barcelona next week with the sum of 53 million dollars on the table for the 22-year-old.

Rosicky, capped 24 times for the Czech Republic, has a contract with Dortmund until 2006 after signing for a Bundesliga record of 12 million dollars in January 2001.

He is the only Czech footballer to appear in