



Tunisian defender Karim Hagi puts the ball past Nigeria goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama to score the final penalty in their African Nations Cup semifinal on February 11. Tunisia meet Morocco in tomorrow's final.

French Cup
Morientes
mauls Lyon

AFP, Paris

A Fernando Morientes' hatrick shot Monaco into the quarterfinals of the French Cup in a 4-1 victory over league rivals Lyon in the Principality on Wednesday.

The Spanish international, on-loan from Real Madrid, scored three times in the space of 15 minutes before and after the break to deliver a psychological blow to Paul Le Guen's league champions.

Lyon had gone ahead early in the first half through Brazilian Giovane Elber, who was playing his first match since his recent return from injury.

Despite being involved in the last 16 of the Champions League and still in with a shout of defending their league title, the result will leave Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas fuming.

Although neither club would say the French Cup is their top priority, Aulas had targeted the trophy at the start of this season because it is the only domestic one the team have failed to win under his stewardship.

Monaco's convincing scoreline, albeit without their first-choice line-up, will further dent Lyon's confidence as they attempt to claw back a seven-point deficit to Didier Deschamps' pace-setters in the league.

Lyon looked lively early on and Florent Malouda on the left and Sidney Govou on the right looked a threatening pairing. It was France striker Govou who started the move for their goal.

Govou beat Monaco defender Gael Givet before sliding a pass to Peggy Luyindula, who wisely dummed the ball to leave Elber to fire past Monaco keeper Flavio Roma in the 15th minute.

Santini
ignores
Anelka

AFP, Paris

France coach Jacques Santini on Thursday snubbed Nicolas Anelka for the upcoming friendly on February 18 against Belgium by leaving him out of the squad.

Santini named a 20-man squad for the Euro 2004 warm-up match, including Manchester United forward Louis Saha alongside Arsenal's Thierry Henry, David Trezeguet of Juventus and Lyon pair Sidney Govou and Peggy Luyindula.

Santini's decision to leave out Anelka - a member of the Euro 2000 winning squad - makes it unlikely the 24-year-old will make it into the Euro 2004 squad.

Babbel still
loves Anfield

AFP, Berlin

Germany international defender Markus Babbel has admitted he would love to return to top level football - with Liverpool.

Babbel, 31, has spent this season on loan at fellow Premiership side Blackburn and although he is revelling in life at Ewood Park the defender clings to the hope of a return to Anfield where he is contracted until 2006.

"As it stands now I do not know what I will do," Babbel told German magazine Kicker.

"On one hand things are good here at Blackburn, but on the other I am still really attached to Liverpool and used to playing at the highest level."

A North African affair



AFP, Sousse

Morocco trounced Mali 4-0 at the Olympic Stadium here on Wednesday to set up the first-ever all-north African Nations Cup final clash against hosts Tunisia this weekend.

Youssef Mokhtari scored once in each half, first after 14 minutes through a free kick and then in the 57th minute when against the run of play he smashed a shot past the diving Mahamadou Sedibe in the Mali goal.

Youssef Hadji grabbed his third goal of the tournament after he stabbed home a fine through ball by Marouane Chamakh in the 80th minute before substitute Nabil Baha completed the rout in injury time.

Morocco will now face Tunisia in

Tunis on Saturday after the host nation defeated Nigeria 5-3 on penalties in the earlier semi-final. The match had ended 1-1 following extra time.

Mali have the scant consolation of taking on fellow west Africans Nigeria in the third-place playoff on Friday in Monastir.

The Atlas Lions of Morocco opened the game brightly and within minutes Mokhtari fired the first warning when his first free kick of the game was pushed away for a corner by Sidibe.

After Mokhtari's free kick goal Mali fought back gamely for an equaliser with Tottenham ace Frederic Kanoute and his striking partner Dramane Traore proving a constant danger to the Moroccan backline ably marshalled by captain Noureddine Naybet, who was winning his 103rd cap.

Daouda Coulibaly mishit his shot from inside the 18-yard box after 35 minutes and a little earlier Dramane

Traore had also come very close as the Eagles of Mali kept up the pressure.

Mali continued with the same attacking verve after the break while Morocco pulled more bodies back into defence, which now looked to be missing the injured Paris Saint-Germain defender Talal El Karkouri.

But just when Mali looked like they would be rewarded for all their hard work, Mokhtari again popped up from nowhere to double Morocco's advantage early in the second half.

In one of the few attacks Morocco launched, Mokhtari ran at goal and from the edge of the box again fired beyond the Mali goalkeeper.

Goals from Hadji, the brother of former Aston Villa and Coventry midfielder Moustapha, and Baha in the space of 12 minutes finally took the match beyond the west Africans, who have now crumbled in three semi-finals, in 1994, 2002 and 2004.

Glazer ups
his stake

AFP, London

Rumours of an eventual Manchester United takeover war increased on Thursday after billionaire American Malcolm Glazer upped his stake in the English Premiership club by just over two percent.

Glazer increased his share ownership from 14.25 to 16.31 per cent less than 24 hours after John Magnier and JP McManus did the same thing, fuelling rumours of a takeover war between the two camps.

A decision by the Irish pair -- who are still feuding with club coach Sir Alex Ferguson -- not to take up the full stake of Dutch media tycoon John de Mol has been seen as a sign they are not interested in buying the club outright.

Magnier and McManus own 28.8 per cent of United through their Cubic Expression company and while Glazer's recent acquisition of an extra 5.4 million shares still leaves him way behind the Irish pair, it raises the possibility of the American attempting to gain complete control of the club.

Many United fans, and indeed the club's board and some shareholders, are hostile to the idea of a Magnier and McManus takeover because it would hand control to a single body.

The Irish pair's scrutiny of Ferguson's management of the club and the part played by Ferguson's son Jason -- a football agent for United -- has only intensified that hostility, which has also been fuelled by Ferguson's row with Magnier over the stud rights to champion race horse Rock of Gibraltar.

Colombian
tragedy

AFP, Bogota

Former Colombia international Albeiro 'Palomo' Usuriaga was shot dead at his home in Cali on Wednesday, police said.

Usuriaga, 37, was playing cards with friends when he was shot several times with a handgun.

Police colonel Mario Gutierrez said there were no leads at present.

Usuriaga played most of his career with Nacional Medellin, winning the South American club championship, the Copa Libertadores in 1989.

He helped Colombia qualify for the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy but was surprisingly overlooked for the tournament.

Italian Cup
Lazio storm
into final

AFP, Rome

Stefano Fiore scored twice as Lazio thumped holders AC Milan 4-0 at the Olympic stadium here on Wednesday to secure a place in the final of the Italian Cup.

An uncharacteristic drubbing for the current Serie A leaders and Champions League holders gave Lazio a handsome 6-1 aggregate semi-final victory following their 2-1 first leg win at the San Siro last week.

Lazio will meet the winners of the other semi-final between Inter Milan and Juventus.

Lazio coach Roberto Mancini refused to get carried away with the emphatic scoreline and said the result would mean little unless they went on to win the trophy for a sixth time.

"I'm really happy because we beat a great team to reach the final," said the former Lazio star, who has been linked with a possible move to English Premiership side Tottenham in the summer.

"But the result will soon be forgotten if we don't lift the trophy. We've won nothing yet."

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said he hoped not to see similar performances from his side as they chase their first league title since 1999 and try and retain the Champions League trophy.

"We wanted to keep the cup but it wasn't to be," he said.

"We played poorly and got punished and we must ensure we defend better for the rest of the season or we will end up with nothing."

Milan rarely looked a threat and they paid the price for their negative approach when Cesar gave the home side the lead in 1th minute.

Fabio Liverani ran at the heart of the Milan defence and slipped a perfectly timed pass through to the speedy Brazilian midfielder, who tucked home past a helpless Christian Abbiati.

The same pair combined to double Lazio's lead five minutes later with Cesar cutting the ball bar Liverani to sweep home from close range.

On Thursday, Inter Milan host Italian league champions Juventus, who with nine successes to their name have won the trophy more than any other team in Serie A.

The teams drew 2-2 in a pulsating first leg at the Delle Alpi stadium last week where Adriano twice put Inter ahead, only for Marco Di Vaio to match the Brazilian's double strike.

Premiership

MU suffer Boro blow



AFP, London

Middlesbrough rocked Manchester United's Premiership title challenge to its roots as Joseph Desire-Job snatched a 3-2 victory at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Boro's victory meant United stayed five points behind leaders Arsenal as third-placed Chelsea closed to within a point of Sir Alex Ferguson's side following their 2-0 win at Portsmouth.

Michael Owen scored for the first time since October to send Liverpool on their way to a 2-1 home victory over Manchester City which moved Gerard Houllier's team into fourth place - and Champions League territory.

Charlton and Newcastle, the sides above Liverpool at the start of play, lost ground as Charlton were thrashed 4-2 by a resurgent Tottenham and Craig Bellamy's goal was cancelled out by Jon Stead as Blackburn held the Toon to a 1-1 draw at Ewood Park.

"It's not a good position to be in but there's plenty of time to do something about it and we can do that," Ferguson told Sky Sports at Old Trafford.

"They (Middlesbrough) seem to have a bit of a bogey on us here. The disappointing feature was the soft goals we did. Some of our play was brilliant at times, some of our attacking play was very good."

Meanwhile Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri hailed a crucial win at Fratton Park. "It was a big victory. Portsmouth at home are very strong," he said.

"It was very important for us to maintain the pressure and now I'm getting all my injured players back," the Italian added.

Houllier too had reason to be cheerful, saying: "It was a great result against a great side. It was very hard for us."

Diminutive Brazilian playmaker Juninho put Boro ahead with two headers in the space of five first-half minutes before Ruud van Nistelrooy pulled one back just before the break.

And it seemed as if United's record of never losing a match in which their Dutch marksman had scored would be preserved when Ryan Giggs levelled in the second half.

But then then came Job's 80th minute winner. Boro needed a lucky break to take the lead.

There seemed little danger when Franck Queudrue unleashed a speculative shot but United States goalkeeper Tim Howard saw the ball bounce off his body and against the crossbar before falling to Juninho who headed into the empty net in the 34th minute.

At the other end Mark Schwarzer saved Louis Saha's shot and soon Boro were 2-0 up after the United defence, criticised during their 4-3 win over Everton, again appeared to be at fault.

Stewart Downing collected a pass from Gaizka Mendieta and his centre found the unmarked Juninho who headed in his second with 38 minutes gone.

United hit back when Giggs's cross to the far post found Saha who chested the ball down for van Nistelrooy to blast a volley past Schwarzer just before half time.

Showing fresh composure, United drew level in the 63rd minute. Phil Neville's cross was headed down by van Nistelrooy and Giggs struck the ball home with his left foot.

United thought they had a winner but John O'Shea's effort was brilliantly cleared by Gareth

Southgate.

When the ball came to Job 18 yards from goal, there seemed little danger but his snap shot gave Howard no chance.

Diego Forlan nearly levelled for United in the dying seconds but from just six yards out he headed Saha's cross against the bar to the disgust of the United fans.

At Portsmouth, goals from recent signing Scott Parker and Hernan Crespo left Chelsea breathing down United's necks.

Liverpool took the lead at Anfield through Owen after just three minutes, but Shaun Wright-Phillips hit back before Steven Gerrard gave the home side a winning lead.

The result stretched City's Premiership winless streak to 14 games - and they face United in the FA Cup at the weekend.

"It was a great goal from Michael Owen," said City boss Kevin Keegan, himself a former Liverpool and England striker.

"It's the sort of thing he does all the time when he's fit and he looks like he's getting sharper by the minute."

"It was disappointing but we played some good football second-half and a possibly a bit unfortunate to go away with nothing."

Newcastle and Liverpool both have 38 points, 17 behind third-placed Chelsea while Charlton remained on 37 points after their drubbing from Spurs at the Valley.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	25	18	7	0	49	16	61
Man Utd	25	18	2	5	49	23	56
Chelsea	25	17	4	4	46	19	55
Liverpool	25	10	8	7	36	27	38
Newcastle	25	9	11	5	35	26	38
Charlton	25	10	7	8	34	30	37



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United's Ruud van Nistelrooy (top) shoots past Middlesbrough's Franck Queudrue during their Premiership clash at Old Trafford on February 11.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's French playmaker Zinedine Zidane (L) vies with Sevilla's Antonio Lopez during their Spanish Cup semifinal on February 11.