



PARTY POOPER! Porto's Costinha (L) is delighted after scoring the equaliser against Manchester United while Maniche joins in the celebrations at Old Trafford on March 9.

Costinha brings out Red blood



AFP, Manchester

A last-minute equaliser by Porto's Portuguese international midfielder Costinha sent Manchester United crashing out of the Champions League on Tuesday as they drew 1-1 but went out 3-2 on aggregate.

Just as United appeared to be on the brink of a record eighth successive appearance in the quarter-finals of the tournament, they paid a massive price for conceding a free-kick 30-yards out.

Tim Howard could only beat out South African international Benni McCarthy's strike and Costinha pounced to cancel out Paul Scholes's 32nd-minute header and send the Portuguese champions into Friday's draw for the last eight.

United manager Alex Ferguson said the end result was a poor reflection of the match.

"We did so well," said the 62-year-old Scot, whose chances of winning a trophy this season rests probably with just the FA Cup where they meet

two-time defending holders Arsenal in the semi-finals and who they trail by nine points in the Premiership.

"They never made a chance in the game really, one shot in the first half which Howard saved but you've got to accept it's football.

"They (United) did very well. You can't really blame the defenders for a goal like that. It was a great shot but the only thing no-one followed in (to clear)."

It was an agonisingly cruel blow for United, who had comfortably contained their opponents for 89 minutes and were denied a perfectly good second goal by Scholes on the stroke of half-time because of a monumental blunder by Russian referee Valentin Ivanov.

"It proved vital," said Ferguson. "The referee or the linesman didn't do his job. It's just one of these things in football."

For his Portuguese counterpart Jose Mourinho it was a moment to savour especially after the war of words he had had with Ferguson in the past fortnight - though he didn't dwell on that.

"Winning was important, it is history for us.

"What made me very happy was the way the team played with a lot of class and confidence in a very difficult atmosphere," he said.

Even without the cushion of an extra goal, United appeared to be coasting into the last eight.

McCarthy in particular found his efforts nullified by Wes Brown and Gary Neville, the same defenders he had embarrassed with his two first leg goals, and Porto never found anything like the pulsating tempo they had played at in front of their own supporters.

But that will count for little as they celebrate a victory that will only add to the burgeoning reputation of their young coach, Jose Mourinho, a man some believe could end up succeeding Alex Ferguson at the helm of United.

Geed up by Ferguson's pre-match charges of gamesmanship against their opponents, the Old Trafford crowd was in unusually good voice from the outset.

Ruud van Nistelrooy's attempt to squeeze between centrebacks Jorge Costa and Ricardo Carvalho after seven minutes cranked the noise up another level but 60,000 or so

screams for a penalty went unheeded.

Ivanov was more accommodating when the Dutchman found himself upended on the left hand side of the area three minutes later.

Ryan Giggs touched the free-kick to Scholes, whose shot flew sufficiently close to Vitor Baia's near post to send the Portuguese international sprawling to his right.

Given the acerbic exchanges which preceded the match, it was never going to be an encounter for the faint hearted.

Costinha's lunge at van Nistelrooy, a career-threatening tackle, deserved greater sanction than the yellow card it earned from a Russian official rapidly losing control of the match.

The pure simplicity of United's goal was a joy.

Gary Neville swept a pass crossfield to John O'Shea. A neat combination with Giggs sent O'Shea to the byline, where he turned back inside Portugal's right back before sending a cross into a six-yard box stuffed with red shirts.

Scholes was in pole position, rising at the near post to glance his

header beyond a hopelessly exposed Baia.

Porto looked even less sure of themselves, Carlos Alberto spurning the chance to equalise after Eric Djemba Djemba's miscued clearance.

With only Howard to beat, albeit from a tight angle, the young Brazilian struck his shot against the United goalkeeper's legs.

Another error of judgement from Ivanov cost United the chance to go two ahead in first half stoppage time. A goalmouth scramble concluded with O'Shea driving a low cross across the six-yard line that Scholes stopped and clipped past Baia.

Offside ruled Ivanov. Television replays revealed no fewer than three Porto defenders playing the England midfielder onside.

Van Nistelrooy's touch deserted him once more mid-way through the second half, when a flick for Scholes presented him with a chance to break Denis Law's European scoring record for the club.

The ball ran away from him and Law's record will now have to wait for next season.

Shown the door by Depor



AFP, Turin

Deportivo La Coruna sent Juventus tumbling out of the Champions League after defeating last season's beaten finalists 1-0 in the first knock-out second leg tie here on Tuesday.

Uruguayan striker Walter Pandiani's 13th minute goal gave the Spaniards a 2-0 aggregate win and a place in the quarter-finals and brought to an end a winless run of 20 matches for Spanish sides at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Pandiani's early strike not only silenced the surprisingly sparse crowd, but also gave the reigning Italian champions the tall order of scoring three times which never looked likely following the early exit of their injured striker Alessandro Del Piero.

The home side pushed hard but lacked a cutting edge up front after their captain's seventh minute departure and after taking the lead the visitors sat back on their comfortable advantage while always threatening on the counter-attack.

Deportivo can now look forward to Friday's quarter-final draw, while Juve must pick themselves up for Sunday's crunch Serie A clash against league leaders AC Milan, who beat them in last year's Champions League final on penalties.

Juve coach Marcello Lippi said the first 13 minutes proved unlucky for the 'Old Lady' of Turin.

"Before the game we were confident having prepared for the match in the minutest detail, but when you lose one of your most influential players and concede a goal in the first 13 minutes, you're fighting an uphill battle," he said.

"We had hoped to keep a clean sheet and put the pressure on them,

but when they doubled their lead on aggregate our confidence went."

Juve midfielder Alessio Tacchinardi agreed with Lippi that Pandiani's goal left them with too much to do.

"Unfortunately they scored early and we were unable to find any kind of rhythm," said the Italy international.

"It's a shame as we really believed we could turn the tie around after the first leg."

His Spanish counterpart Javier Irureta said it was just reward for Coruna's consistency in the Champions League over the past few seasons.

"Del Piero's early departure and Pandiani's goal so soon afterwards kiled it off really," he said.

"It's never easy to win in Italy but it is a just result for our overall performance, not only in the past fortnight but in the Champions League in the

last four years."

Lippi made three changes from the team that beat Brescia 3-2 on Saturday with Tacchinardi, Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero and Del Piero being recalled to the starting line-up.

Deportivo's Enrique Romero was ruled out with flu and replaced on the left-hand side of the defence by Joan Capdevila.

Juve suffered a major blow early on when Del Piero hobbled off with a right calf strain, giving Fabrizio Miccoli an earlier run-out than he might have expected.

Worse was to follow for the hosts when Deportivo's grip on the tie tightened with a vital away goal.

Rather than attack Jose Molina's long goal-kick, Montero allowed it to bounce in his own penalty box and Pandiani outpaced the static Uruguayan, moved the ball from his right foot to left and lobbed home from eight yards.



BOTH SIDES OF THE STORY: Juventus players Czech Pavel Nedved (L) and Marco Di Vaio (R) look dejected as Deportivo's Joan Capdevila (2nd L) and Moroccan Nourredine Naybet celebrate at the Delle Alpi Stadium in Turin on March 9.

All eyes on Park Head



AFP, Paris

Celtic's UEFA Cup ambitions to go one better than last season are put to the ultimate test against Barcelona at Parkhead on Thursday in what coach Martin O'Neill describes as a huge bonus for the club.

At 16 points ahead in the Scottish Premier League and favourites for the Scottish Cup, O'Neill was aware of the glamour but also the pitfalls of drawing such a huge club as they attempt a treble following last season's UEFA Cup runners-up spot after losing the final to FC Porto.

"Barcelona are in a rich vein of form - but it doesn't matter. It's exciting, and we knew we were going to draw someone big because we weren't seeded in the last 16," said O'Neill.

"It's a tough draw for us and one where we would probably start second favourites. It's great for us and we will just go out and play."

Celtic striker Chris Sutton is a serious doubt after injuring his ankle last Wednesday in the second leg of the third round tie against Czech side FK Teplice.

Long-term injuries to strikers John Hartson and Shaun Maloney make Celtic's need for Sutton to recover from his injury more acute.

For the Catalan side, defender Giovanni van Bronckhorst will be

one of the principle absentees, the Dutchman - who knows Celtic inside out having played a few seasons at Rangers - being sidelined for up to a month with a knee ligament sprain.

Van Bronckhorst was looking forward to returning to Parkhead, but admitted: "I'm gutted I'll have to watch it on TV."

"I'm told I will be out for two weeks which means there is a chance I'll play in the second leg. That's my target now."

Fellow Dutch international Edgar Davids will also miss the trip because he is cup-tied, while Luis Enrique is currently suspended.

The only good news for Barca is that Rafael Marquez is fit to return to the team and Javier Saviola is back in the squad after missing their 3-2 win over Real Mallorca at the weekend through suspension.

Bobby Robson's Newcastle have a good chance of reaching the semi-final stages should they overcome Real Mallorca at St James's Park.

They would then meet the winner of France's Auxerre against PSV Eindhoven for a place in the last four.

Auxerre striker Olivier Kapo will miss the first leg of their first leg in Burgundy after picking up a two-match ban from UEFA.

The French international was sent off for violent conduct in the first leg of Auxerre's third-round tie with Greek side Panathinaikos, and will now sit out the first game against PSV after UEFA decided the offence was

worthy of an extended suspension.

Auxerre also have problems in defence, with manager Guy Roux expected to introduce a makeshift back four with Philippe Mexes and Johan Radet, both out for several weeks through injury, adding to the absence of Alain Boumsong.

PSV coach Guus Hiddink has his own injury problems, with Swiss defensive midfielder Johan Vogel now out with a muscle problem.

In defence, Dane Kasper Bogelund and Dutchman Ernest Faber are still doubtful.

Meanwhile Marseille coach Jose Anigo said he was looking forward to their trip to 2001 champions Liverpool. "It's a real pleasure for me to discover English football at a stadium like Anfield. Being home for the second leg is certainly an advantage.

"It will be a festival for the fans but be careful. Just because I say 'festival' I don't mean 'we play, we lose and we go home'."

FIXTURES	
UEFA Cup 4th rd, 1st leg fixtures	
Genclerbirligi (TUR) v Valencia (SPA)	
Bordeaux (FRA) v FC Bruges (BEL)	
Auxerre (FRA) v PSV Eindhoven (NED)	
Newcastle (ENG) v Real Mallorca (SPA)	
Benfica (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA)	
Liverpool (ENG) v Marseille (FRA)	
Celtic (SCO) v Barcelona (SPA)	
Villarreal (SPA) v AS Roma (ITA)	
2nd leg: Thursday March 25	

Relief for Ranieri

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri was a relieved man Tuesday after Chelsea booked their place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League after a tense 0-0 draw against VfB Stuttgart at Stamford Bridge here on Tuesday.

Despite a barrage of second-half pressure from the Germans, the under-fire Ranieri breathed a sigh of relief at the final whistle as the Londoners kept alive their sole chance of silverware this season.

A spate of glorious late chances for both teams failed to produce a goal, meaning Chelsea return to the quarter-finals for the first time since 2000 when another Italian, Gianluca Vialli, led them to the last eight only to be beaten by Barcelona.

For Ranieri, it was all about getting the job done.

"We might not have produced great football, but at the same time we also did not give many chances to our rivals," he said after the match.

"At the end when we had three golden chances to score we should have settled the game."

Stuttgart manager Felix Magath admitted his side perhaps lacked the finishing touch.

"It's a pity because we gave a good account of ourselves against a big club like Chelsea. Maybe we were just tried to be a bit too perfectionist in front of goal," said Magath, a former German international.

After a frantic opening period which Stuttgart dominated in possession Chelsea began to find their feet through Damien Duff - making his first start in 2004 following injury - down the left flank.

Fernando Meira, the unfortunate victim of the Stuttgart own-goal in the first-leg, tried to make amends in the ninth minute but his fierce shot from outside the area was collected by Chelsea keeper Carlo Cudicini.

Duff then came closest to opening the scoring midway through the half, breaking free after Scott Parker penetrated the German defence. But after Duff had rounded Timo Hildebrand the Irishman found the angle too acute, giving the 24-year-old Stuttgart keeper time to recover.

Chelsea suffered a blow as right-back Glen Johnson caught his ankle badly in the turf and was stretched off, being replaced by France skipper Marcel Desailly for his first appearance in nine matches.

Larsson's on a different mission



AFP, Glasgow

Sabotaging the business of a prospective employer is not usually an advisable strategy for the eager job-hunter.

But in Henrik Larsson's case that is exactly what he will try to do when Celtic entertain Barcelona in the first leg of their UEFA Cup fourth round tie here on Thursday.

The prolific Swedish striker is resolved to take his leave of Celtic and has never made any secret of his desire to play out his last few seasons at the top in balmy climates.

Lightning blot kills Chinese booter



AFP, Singapore

An 18-year-old professional footballer from Chinese side SinChi TV was killed Wednesday after he was struck by a lightning bolt during a training session, local radio reported.

Jiang Tao was pronounced dead on the spot by an ambulance crew. His teammates saw him sprawled on the ground and had tried to revive him, NewsRadio 93.8 said.

SinChi TV is one of two foreign football clubs playing in the city-state Singapore's professional S-League, the other being Japanese side Albirex Niigata.

The club's vice chairman Wang Jin Hvi said he was "devastated" by Jiang's death because he had recruited the player two-and-a-

"I want to live somewhere I can go out in short sleeves," he said recently, apparently ruling out a much-remoulded move to Newcastle United.

Barcelona in contrast represents a much more attractive destination and the Catalan club have done nothing to dispel the belief that a couple of goals on Thursday night could cement a marriage apparently made in football heaven.

"He is a player we like a lot," Barca's vice-president Sandro Rossell admitted this week. "We probably will make a move for him in the summer."

half years ago in China.

"He was a talented footballer... Myself, I cried for a long time," he said.

"It is with extreme sadness that the S-League learnt today of the sudden passing of SinChi TV FC's Prime League player Jiang Tao, 18, during a training session this afternoon," Football Association of Singapore said in a statement that did not state the cause of death.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the player's family, teammates and officials of SinChi TV FC at this difficult time."

The statement said Sinchi's match on Thursday against local side Woodlands Wellington has been postponed to Saturday.

All S-League matches this week will be preceded by a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

Lyon breaks ground



AFP, Lyon

French champions Lyon assured their place in the last eight of the Champions League for the first time with a 1-0 win over Real Sociedad of Spain in their first knockout round second leg tie here on Tuesday.

In a match which was often scrappy Lyon pulled ahead through Brazilian midfielder Juninho who beat Alberto Lopez from close range with less than 20 minutes to play.

The aggregate score is 2-0 after the French side won 1-0 in San Sebastian a fortnight ago.

Lyon, who make the quarter-finals of the competition for the first time in their history, could be without their number one keeper Gregory Coupet for the rest of the competition.

Coupet, the France number two, came off his line in the opening

minutes to block an attack by Sociedad midfielder GabiLondo, whose studs appeared to catch Coupet's hand. The match was delayed for several minutes while he received treatment, but the keeper was soon replaced by Remy Vercoutre.

Lyon had numerous chances to kill off the match in the first half however Paul Le Guen's side were either stifled by an alert Sociedad defence, or they simply failed to finish.

Lyon's first real shot on goal came a minute later when Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien tested Alberto with a quick shot, the keeper being forced to jump into action.

After the break Sociedad enjoyed few chances at goal, with Lyon seemingly content to build up slowly as the visitors - and Karpin in particular - increased the fouls, the Russian eventually collecting a yellow card.

Lyon won a quick freekick after Xabi Alonso was adjudged to have

kneed Essien's face, however Juninho's 30-yard effort inched wide of Alberto's post.

Lyon began to enjoy possession and Peguy Luyindula was on route to goal after being set up by Essien, however the Frenchman had only a split second on the ball before a black wave of Sociedad defenders closed him down.

Alberto then kept his side in the match with a reflex save with his foot after a nice one-two between Edmilson and Luyindula left the latter cursing his failure to beat the keeper from close range.

At the other end Lyon defender Eric Deflandre did some saving of his own, heading Alonso's sure goal off the goalline.

Moments later Lyon pulled ahead to assure their entry to the last eight after Juninho beat Alberto at his far post with a close range shot after a nice cutback from Luyindula.



The body of SinChi TV player Jiang Tao (inset) is unloaded at a morgue in Singapore yesterday. The 18-year-old professional player from the Chinese club was killed hours earlier after he was struck by a lightning bolt during a training session.