

The one and only Maldini

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini set a new record for appearances held by European club competitions when he played in his 130th match in Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final, first leg game against Deportivo Coruna.

Maldini broke the previous record of 129 appearances held by Dutchman Frank de Boer, who currently plays for Scottish club Rangers and was previously with Ajax, Barcelona and Galatasaray.

Maldini made his European debut in September 1985 in a UEFA Cup first-round match away at AJ Auxerre, which Milan lost 3-1.

The 35-year-old defender is also Italy's most capped player, making 126 appearances for his country before quitting internationals after the 2002 World Cup.

RECORD APPEARANCES

REUTERS, London

List of players who have made 100 or more appearances in European club matches after Paolo Maldini made his 130th on Tuesday (tabulate under appearances, player, first-last appearance, clubs played for):

- 130 Paolo Maldini 1985- AC Milan (130)
- 129 Frank de Boer 1989- Ajax Amsterdam (71), Barcelona (50), Galatasaray (8)
- 117 Giuseppe Bergomi 1980-1999 Inter Milan (117)
- 111 Stefan Reuter 1988- Bayern Munich (26), Borussia Dortmund (85)
- 107 Ray Clemence 1969-1985 Liverpool (80), Tottenham Hotspur (27)
- 106 Luis Figo 1991- Sporting (11), Barcelona (45), Real Madrid (50)
- 106 Filip de Wilde 1983- Beveren (14), Anderlecht (80), Sporting (12)
- 106 Oliver Kahn 1993- Karlsruhe SC (10), Bayern Munich (96)
- 105 Michel Preud'homme 1977-1999 Standard Liege (40), Mechelen (39), Benfica (26)
- 103 Fernando Hierro 1989- Real Madrid (103)
- 103 Alessandro Costacurta 1988- AC Milan (103)
- 101 Bulent Korkmaz 1988- Galatasaray (101)
- 100 Manuel Sanchis 1984-2001 Real Madrid (100)
- 100 Lothar Matthaeus 1979-2000 Borussia Moenchengladbach (15), Bayern Munich (64), Inter Milan (21)

Note: Table does not include matches in the Intercontinental Cup, played between the European Cup winners and the winners of the Libertadores Cup, or matches played in Intertoto Cup.

It's very un-Real



FERNANDO MORIENTES AFP, Madrid

Monaco's Fernando Morientes hardly got a hero's welcome on his return to the Spanish capital on Tuesday.

The former Real Madrid player was greeted at Madrid's Barajas airport by one TV crew, two girls who had invested in a Monaco number nine shirt hoping that he would sign it, and a few gawping onlookers coming off other planes.

It was a stark contrast to the reception he usually got during his six years at the club.

Even coming back from domestic league fixtures there were usually dozens of fans waiting to greet him.

"I have a strange feeling coming back here," the Spanish international striker said later on Tuesday ahead of Monaco's Champions League quarter-final first leg with the nine-time European champions on Wednesday. "But I always knew that there was a chance that at some time in the season I would have to."

"After six years being in the Real Madrid dressing room, the emotions I have at the moment are totally different to those that I have had before any other game," added Morientes, who lifted three Champions League titles while wearing a white shirt and is a close friend of Real striker Raul.



PHOTO: AFP

RIGHT UP THERE! AC Milan's Brazilian sensation Kaka is ecstatic after scoring one of his two goals against Deportivo la Coruna at the San Siro Stadium in Milan on March 23

Milan a class apart



REUTERS, London

Holders AC Milan virtually booked their place in the Champions League semi-finals with a 4-1 thrashing of Deportivo Coruna at the San Siro on Tuesday.

In the night's other quarter-final, first-leg match Porto also put themselves in the driving seat with a comfortable 2-0 home win over French champions Olympique Lyon.

Milan, aiming to repeat their feat of 14 years ago by winning Europe's premier club competition two seasons in a row, banged

in four goals in nine minutes to recover from a nervy start.

Brazilian midfielder Kaka wrote himself into San Siro folklore with two goals, while Serie A's leading scorer Andriy Shevchenko and midfielder Andrea Pirlo were also on target.

Yet Deportivo, bolstered by their victory in the San Siro last season and their elimination of Juventus in the previous round, had looked on course for a shock.

Milan's experienced defence, including skipper Paolo Maldini who set a new record of playing in 130 European club matches, stood motionless as Depor striker Walter Pandiani rose unmarked to head powerfully past goalkeeper Dida after 11 minutes.

The silky Spanish side continued to trouble the hosts but the game turned on the stroke of halftime when the 21-year-old Kaka controlled a Cafu cross on his thigh before slamming a volley past Jose Molina.

Ukrainian Shevchenko made it 2-1 with a low drive 21 seconds into the second half before Kaka buried his second from 20 metres four minutes later. Pirlo then put Milan in cruise control with a curling 25-metre free kick.

UEFA Cup holders Porto, conquerors of Manchester United in the last round, needed a stroke of luck to break the deadlock in the Antas stadium.

Striker Benni McCarthy's 44th-minute volley flashed across goal

and struck the in-rushing Deco Souza, who claimed his first Champions League goal this season.

Porto, European Cup winners in 1987, gained valuable breathing space after 71 minutes when Deco's pinpoint cross was headed in by defender Ricardo Carvalho.

The result maintained Porto's record of not having lost at home to a French side for more than 30 years and put them firmly on track for a likely meeting with Milan in the last four.

Wednesday's quarter-finals feature the all-London derby between Chelsea and Arsenal at Stamford Bridge and Monaco's visit to Real Madrid.

Bayern flops face cuts



AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's highly-paid stars will face salary cuts after the German giants' failure to qualify for the knockout stages of this season's Champions League.

The Bavarian side's squad could see their income slashed by "15 to 20-percent", club vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge told Sport-Bild magazine.

"We are going to reduce the wage bill by 15 to 20-percent each year. Contracts which expire will

not be renegotiated under the old conditions. There will be no more madness," said Rummenigge.

Bayern, who are defending German champions, splashed out a national record 18.75 million euros last year for Dutch international striker Roy Maakay.

Rummenigge said that the next round of transfer dealings will have to have a great deal of common sense.

"A number of players from England, Italy and Spain will be on the market. Our transfer dealings will be very late. Price and wages drop quickly."

Bomber is a Beckham fan!



AFP, London

England football captain David Beckham signed a birthday card for one of the suspected Madrid train bombers when he met him just weeks before the attack, several British newspapers said Wednesday.

Mohamed Bekkali met Beckham and asked for an autograph at the Real Madrid training ground two weeks before 190 people were killed in the bombings, the Sun and the Daily Express tabloids said.

Police allegedly found the card when they raided the home of the 31-year-old Moroccan, who is said to be a Real Madrid fan.



PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT'S REAL-LY GOING ON! Real Madrid's David Beckham (C) stands between teammates Roberto Carlos (L) and Javier Portillo as he defuses a heated confrontation during a training session in Madrid on March 23.

Going gaga over Kaka



AFP, Milan

The Italian press hailed AC Milan as the saviours of Italian football following Tuesday's breathtaking quarter-final, first leg victory over Deportivo La Coruna in the Champions League.

The defending champions helped erase the memory of the ugly scenes which marred Sunday's Rome derby with an awesome display, crushing the Spaniards 4-1 to move closer to a place in the last four.

A goal down after 11 minutes, Milan rallied to score four times in nine scintillating minutes with Brazilian midfielder Kaka capping a mesmerising performance by scoring twice.

The match lifted some of the gloom in Italy following Sunday's Serie A clash between Roma and Lazio at the Olympic stadium where more than 170 people were injured as fans fought running battles with riot police and forced the game to be abandoned.

"A work of art," headlined the Gazzetta dello Sport. "Milan produced another spectacular performance at the San Siro to put Italian football back among the stars.

"Nobody can forget the night at the Olympic stadium, but the nausea of that evening feels a little more distant. This is a Milan to love for those people who look for joy in football."

The Corriere dello Sport were equally lavish in their praise, but singled out two-goal hero Kaka whose performances have drawn

comparisons with legendary Frenchman Michel Platini.

"Super Milan, Magic Kaka. In these dark days in which we are at risk of being overcome by tear gas, we need 100 Kakas so that we can breathe again."

Milan skipper Paolo Maldini said his team will take some stopping as they look to retain the trophy they lifted last May in Manchester after defeating Juventus in a penalty shoot-out.

"I am proud to be captain of a team that wins by playing great football," he said.

"I think we are a great advertisement for the sport and even neutral fans appreciate what we are doing.

"With performances like this our confidence is sky-high and we feel we can go all the way. If anything we are stronger than last season."

Porto pack a punch



AFP, Oporto

FC Porto lived up to their billing as potential Champions League winners with a convincing 2-0 win over French champions Lyon in the first leg of their quarter final here Tuesday.

Jose Mourinho's men, who are the reigning UEFA Cup champions, had diminutive striker Deco and defender Ricardo Carvalho to thank for goals either side of the interval.

Lyon will have to score at least three goals in the second leg on April 7 to go through.

"It will be very hard, we can't hide that fact. It hasn't been a good night," said Lyon coach Paul Le Guen.

Le Guen was disappointed at the marking on the second goal and regretted that his side had failed to capitalise on a brief period of domination in the second half.

"That second goal leaves a lot of regrets. We should have scored in the second half because we had chances. But the tie isn't over," Le Guen said.

"We'll be calling on the fans to give us some extra support at the Gerland Stadium and with the team motivated and with revenge on our minds, I say why not?"

"I would have liked to see a bit more from certain players, and I hoped for more in the first half from the team as a whole."

Mourinho, who took great pleasure in ousting Manchester United in the last round, struck a cautious note.

forced to replace the injured Juninho with Vikash Dhorasoo.

Juninho's absence did not prove crucial, but from the outset Lyon had trouble containing their hosts.

Coupet was given an early wake-up call when he misjudged a Porto freekick from the right wing, the keeper coming out too far and missing the ball entirely before it bounced out of play.

From the resulting corner, Deco worked the ball past the Lyon defence and along the touchline before delivering superbly for McCarthy who headed the ball over.

Alberto then tested Coupet with a fierce rising shot which he unleashed from the edge of the area, the ball inching past the corner of Coupet's goal.

Lyon enjoyed a rare piece of promising play in the 65th minute when Dhorasoo did well to set up Elber and Luyindula on the right flank but their move broke down.

Porto defender Carvalho all but sealed the win when he rose above the badly organised Lyon defence to head home a freekick from the right wing past a static Coupet.

The Portuguese side were even unlucky not to score more in a busy final period when McCarthy kept Coupet on his toes with a swerving shot from the edge of the area.

In the second half, Le Guen was



PHOTO: AFP

FC Porto's playmaker Deco (L) loses balance during a tussle with Olympique Lyonnais' Ghanaian Mickael Essien at Do Dragao stadium in Porto on March 23.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

European Champions League quarter-final, first leg results on Tuesday:

- At Milan
AC Milan (ITA) 4 (Kaka 45, 49, Shevchenko 46, Pirlo 53) Deportivo La Coruna (SPA) 1 (Pandiani 11)
- At Oporto
FC Porto (POR) 2 (Deco 44, Ricardo Carvalho 72) Lyon (FRA) 0