

Real roar after breather



AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid turned on the style in the second half to earn a deserved 4-2 win over Monaco in their Champions League quarter-final first leg here on Wednesday.

"We dominated the first half but didn't make the most of our opportunities. The second half we took our chances and got the goals. We can now go forward to the second leg in a relaxed fashion," said Real coach Carlos Queiroz whose team are chasing a 10th European crown.

"We will not be changing our tactics for the second leg, you can still expect to see a creative Real Madrid."

Second-half goals from Sebastien Squillaci - the Monaco defender putting through his own net after opening the scoring at the other end just before half time - Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo and Ronaldo sealed victory.

Nevertheless, Monaco's two away goals have given their coach Didier Deschamps slight hope that they can cause an upset and overhaul the two-goal deficit to reach their third semi-final in a decade.



Real Madrid's superstar Ronaldo (C) being tackled by Monaco's Argentinian midfielder Lucas Bernardi (L) and Spanish forward Fernando Morientes at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on March 24.

'Phenomenal' difference



REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid have a Champions League/Primera Liga double in their sights thanks to a "phenomenal" display by Ronaldo in the 4-2 defeat of Monaco.

After a shock defeat in the King's Cup final and a 4-2 loss at Athletic Bilbao in the league at the weekend, Real appeared to be flagging.

However, the return of leading scorer Ronaldo from injury gave the Spanish champions a new lease of life in Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg.

Out of action for more than two

"I thought we had a good game and there are still plenty of possibilities for us to come back in the second leg," said Deschamps.

"Obviously I would have been happier if we had only lost by one goal but two goals are not impossible to overcome. Every game can have its surprises."

Real nearly opened the scoring after 30 minutes when Zidane hit the post but Squillaci put Monaco ahead against the run of play two minutes before the break, tapping the ball home during a goalmouth scramble.

As a result, Real left the field at the break with more than the referee's whistle ringing in their ears.

However, Squillaci went from hero to villain five minutes after half time when he put through his own net following a David Beckham corner.

The goal seemed to give Real the green light to attack at will but they still took 20 minutes to break through a haphazard Monaco defence that rode its luck and had an inspired goalkeeper in Flavio Roma.

Zidane put Real ahead after 70 minutes, picking up a long pass from Jose Maria Gutierrez and breaking away down the left flank.

Roma parried Zidane's first

effort from close range but then failed to save the French midfielder's second attempt.

Shortly afterwards, Ronaldo was tripped by Squillaci and Luis Figo scored the penalty on the second attempt, the Portuguese midfielder heading home the rebound after Roma had initially saved his shot from the spot.

After 80 minutes it was the turn of Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo to add his name to the scoresheet, getting a goal that was cheered to the rafters of the Santiago Bernabeu after missing Real's last four games.

The party was slightly spoiled just a minute later when former Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes got partial revenge on the club that discarded him last summer.

Despite the margin of victory, and putting an end to a two game losing streak, it was a far from perfect performance and Real's critics were provided with plenty of ammunition with which to arm their guns.

Beckham had another lacklustre night with the ball at his feet, although his energy could not be faulted, and Real's central defence was a shaky as their French counterparts.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

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

At Madrid
Real Madrid 4 (Squillaci 51-og, Zidane 70, Luis Figo 77, Ronaldo 81) Monaco 2 (Squillaci 43, Morientes 82)
2nd leg: Monaco, April 6

At London
Chelsea 1 (Gudjohnsen 53) Arsenal 1 (Pires 59)
2nd leg: Highbury, April 6

TUESDAY
At Milan
AC Milan (ITA) 4 (Kaka 45, 49, Shevchenko 46, Piro 53) Deportivo La Coruna (SPA) 1 (Pandiani 11)
2nd leg: La Coruna, April 7
At Oporto
FC Porto (POR) 2 (Deco 44, Ricardo Carvalho 72) Lyon (FRA) 0
2nd leg: Lyon, April 7

Atletico tracking Nakata

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid are reported to be set to make a bid for Japan star Hidetoshi Nakata who is currently on-loan to Italian side Bologna.

Nakata's contract is with financially crippled Parma and Atletico, who tried to sign the player a few years ago, believe they will be successful in getting their man this time, the AS sports daily reports.

The deal would also make money from the Asian markets.

The 27-year-old Nakata, twice Asian player of the year, moved to Perugia after the 1998 World Cup finals for his first overseas contract. He also played for AS Roma with whom he won the league title in 2001 before being sold to Parma.

He would be the third Japanese player in Spain.

Akinori Nishizawa plays for Espanyol Barcelona and Shoji Jo is with Valladolid.

Robson signs fresh contract

AFP, Newcastle

Bobby Robson has signed a new contract with Newcastle United that will see him stay as manager until the end of the 2004/05 season, the English Premiership side said Thursday.

Former England manager Robson, 71, had been on a rolling 12-month agreement since replacing Ruud Gullit at St James' Park in September 1999.

Newcastle chairman Freddy Shepherd said Thursday: "Bobby has signed a new one-year contract."

"He's got one more season to go after this season which I think he's happy with and we're happy with, so he's here until the end of 2005."

Responding to questions that Robson might stay on beyond then, Shepherd replied: "Knowing Bobby, I wouldn't be surprised by anything that happens. He's a one-off."



HAPPINESS! Arsenal's Robert Pires (R) celebrates with teammates (L-R) Sol Campbell, Kolo Toure and Thierry Henry after scoring against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, London on March 24.

Advantage Gunners?



AFP, London

Claudio Ranieri has warned Arsenal they will need all of their killer instinct to end Chelsea's Champions League dream in a fortnight's time.

A 1-1 draw in Wednesday's first leg of the all-London quarter-final left Arsenal as narrow favourites to advance to the last four of the tournament for the first time in the club's history and a potential meeting with Real Madrid.

But Ranieri, who now appears resigned this week to being replaced at the end of this season, was upbeat after watching his side finally avoid defeat against Arsenal at the fourth attempt this season.

"I know Arsenal is Arsenal. This season they have been in another world. We are behind them."

"In the Champions League, in every competition they score a lot of goals. Maybe they could score at Highbury but Chelsea away is strong and I believe it is not finished yet."

"They are hypothetical champions in the league, maybe also in the Champions League. But before they must kill us off."

Chelsea have now failed to beat their north London rivals in their last 17 matches, but they came very close to ending that run after Eidur Gudjohnsen's opportunism earned them a well-deserved 53rd-minute lead.

A rare header from Robert Pires

levelled the scores six minutes later and ensured Arsenal will kick off at Highbury as favourites, although Pires himself insisted there would be no complacency in the Gunners' camp.

"We will take nothing for granted. We have not done so all season and we are not going to start now."

"We can't forget that Chelsea are always capable of scoring, even though, psychologically the away goal gives us a little advantage."

Ranieri paid tribute to the way Iceland striker Gudjohnsen, started in preference to Hernan Crespo, had spotted a moment's hesitation from Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann before charging down a clearance and hooking the loose ball into the net from a tight angle.

"The Gudjohnsen goal was for his determination," Ranieri said. "He believed he would get the ball, he did get the ball and he scored."

"After the goal we had ten fantastic minutes. We took our confidence and played good football without anxiety, with a free mind and maybe we deserved to score the second goal."

Ranieri was clearly touched by the warmth of the reception he received from the Chelsea fans after a few days in which the Chelsea board's refusal to respond to his appeal to end the uncertainty over his future has effectively confirmed his fate.

"I would like to say thank you to everyone for their support but I would like to see support only for Chelsea and my players."

"The manager and the chairman may change but Chelsea remains

and that is what's important."

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger paid tribute to Chelsea's performance and admitted his side had had to dig deep after Gudjohnsen's goal.

"Certainly it gives you a psychological edge when you are 1-0 up and the opponent comes back to 1-1. It was a big blow for Chelsea and I thought in the last 20 minutes I felt we could win it."

Arsenal now know a 0-0 will be enough to put them into the last four but Wenger insisted he would not play that "dangerous game," and said Arsenal would not adopt Chelsea's approach to their home leg.

"They played not to concede a goal, tried to suck us in and then get a break and score. It was a very European style of match."

"We had a lot of possession but did not create many opportunities and we made it difficult for ourselves by conceding the goal."

"We needed to show a lot of character to survive for the next ten minutes but to come back and score after going a goal down is a good result for us."

Chelsea will travel without the reassuring presence of Marcel Desailly, who was sent off seven minutes from time after a late tackle on his former France teammate Patrick Vieira, having already been booked for knocking the ball out of Lehmann's hands.

Chelsea always looked the more determined of the two sides but that could not prevent Arsenal from creating the better early chances.

Dennis Bergkamp's curling shot brought a good save from Marco

Ambrosio and the Dutchman's inswinging free-kick saw Sol Campbell's back-post header fly narrowly wide.

Gradually however the home side began to dominate. Scott Parker was denied from close range by Lehmann, Gudjohnsen had a volley blocked by Lauren and, shortly after the restart, a Frank Lampard shot spun off Campbell and into the side netting.

Arsenal's luck did not last however and a lack of communication between Lehmann and Campbell allowed Chelsea to take the lead.

There appeared little danger as Lampard swept a loose ball forward through the inside-left channel. But Campbell's decision to allow Gudjohnsen to chase the ball unhindered and Lehmann's failure to come out of his box decisively transformed the situation.

The Icelandic striker was able to block Lehmann's attempted clearance before hooking the loose ball into the empty net from a tight angle.

Fired up by the goal, Chelsea might easily have snatched a second when Lehmann failed to hold another attempt from Lampard, the rebound just defeating Duff.

Instead, it was Arsenal who grabbed both an equaliser and a precious away goal with a swift counter-attack that generated the space for Cole to pick out Pires, who got in front of John Terry to head past Ambrosio from eight yards.

The Frenchman served his team equally well at the other end, getting his body in the way of another goalbound volley from Gudjohnsen and preserve Arsenal's narrow advantage.

Wind beneath the wings



AFP, Madrid

Ronaldo's return grabbed most of the headlines on Thursday but the man who took the plaudits for Real Madrid's 4-2 win over Monaco was Luis Figo.

"Figo sorted everything out ... from the left," commented Spanish sports daily Marca, the country's biggest paper.

The Portuguese captain switched from the right flank to the left at half time, with David Beckham moving out from the centre to the right, and the moves helped make the jigsaw pieces fit together after being 1-0 down at the break.

Figo was the only Real player deemed deserving of three stars by Marca, their highest rating, the paper acknowledging Real's spluttering performance despite the comfortable win.

The player himself refused to take credit for the victory but admitted Madrid were still not firing on all cylinders.

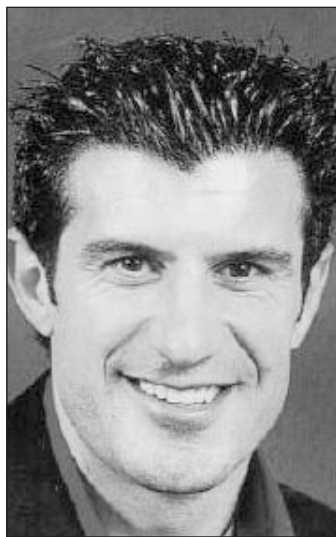
"We were not 100 per cent. Monaco came at us but we are used to this. The important thing is that we got an important victory while still not being at our best," Figo said.

"At least this victory puts us

back on the right track after losing two games in the last week."

Other papers also heralded Figo's performance.

"Figo gets Madrid off the canvas," commented Spain's biggest mainstream daily El Pais.



LUIS FIGO

Figo's outstanding performance will also add spice to the debate about whether he will be leaving Real at the end of the season, despite having two years left on his contract.

It has been rumoured that Figo,

31, will be the latest victim of the ruthlessness of Real president Florentino Perez, who is widely believed to be wanting to be able to cash in his asset before his value starts to decline.

The themes of Real redemption were not just restricted to Figo's thoughts.

"Medicine for the crisis," begrudgingly acknowledged El Mundo Deportivo, the Barcelona-based sports daily.

The other man to get the top ratings was Monaco's former Real Madrid player Fernando Morientes.

Morientes was widely cheered by the Santiago Bernabeu faithful on his return to the Real Madrid citadel, appreciative of his efforts during six years in a white jersey, after being deemed surplus to requirements last summer.

"The reaction of the Bernabeu to my goal was wonderful. I am glad they understood the dedication of my goal to the victims of the March 11 (the Madrid bombings)," said Morientes.

"Moro is better than ever," said sports daily AS.

As the equal top-scorer in the Champions League this season, after his 82nd minute header for Monaco's second goal which gives the French team hope of fighting back in the return leg, few would disagree.



AFP, Sydney

Australia on Thursday named Massimiliano Vieri, the younger brother of Italian superstar Christian Vieri, in their squad to play a friendly match against South Africa in London next week.

The call-up came just two weeks after Massimiliano Vieri, 25-year-old striker for Napoli in Italy's Serie B league who was born in Australia but moved to Italy as a child, obtained his Australian passport.

Socceroos coach Frank Farina also named England-based Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell and Swiss-based Scott Chipperfield to

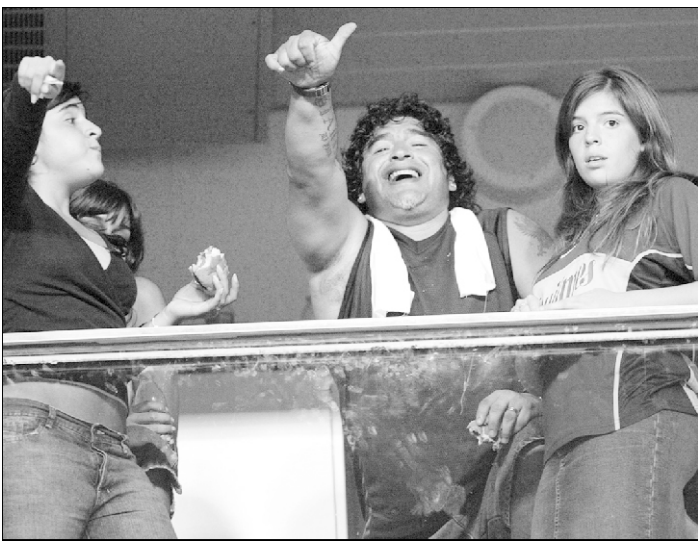


PHOTO: AFP

A FAMILY OCCASION: Argentine legend Diego Maradona, flanked by his daughters Dalma (L) and Giannina, gives the thumbs up while watching the Libertadores Cup qualifying game between Boca Juniors of Argentina and Deportivo Cali of Colombia at La Bombonera stadium in Buenos Aires on March 24.