

Monaco turn Real world



AFP, Monaco

Monaco claimed a deserved place in the Champions League semi-finals here on Tuesday after knocking out Real Madrid in one of the most improbable upsets in the history of the competition.

On a night of drama at the Louis II stadium Monaco, all but written off after losing the first leg of the quarter-final 4-2 in Madrid, handed out a 3-1 beating to the nine-time European champions to leave the two sides level at 5-5 with the fighting French going through on away goals.

Monaco skipper Ludovic Giuly was the hero with a double sandwiched between a goal from Real's on-loan striker Fernando Morientes.

Raul scored Real's lone effort although Ronaldo, and later Raul, had goals disallowed for offside.

For Monaco coach Didier Deschamps it was a fully deserved result.

"My players are writing a memorable page in football history for Monaco, and for the whole of French football," he said.

"It's a deserved victory for us after our performance tonight, and just shows that anything can happen in football, and that you have to have faith all the way to the end."

Real coach Carlos Queiroz admitted his players had been taken by surprise.

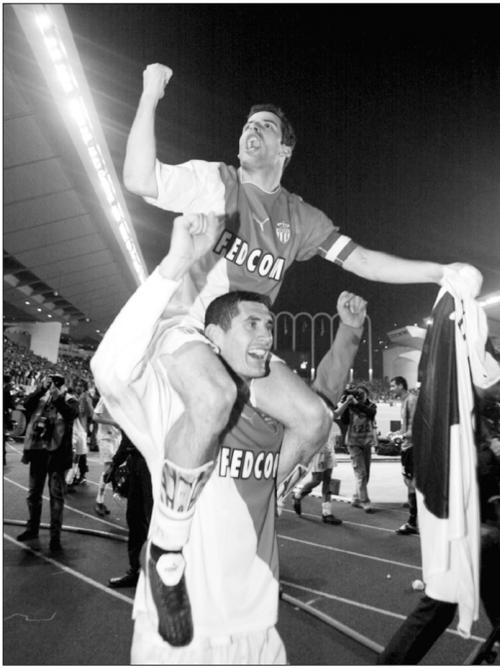


PHOTO: AFP

Monaco's two-goal hero and captain Ludovic Giuly rides on the shoulders of teammate after victory over Real Madrid at Louis II Stadium in Monaco on April 6.

"I want to congratulate Monaco. We were not expecting a rout like this," said Queiroz.

Monaco started out as if their lives depended on victory, with Patrice Evra teaming up well time and time again with Croat Dado Prso on the left. On one incursion into the Spanish defence Evra was sent crashing after a rash tackle by Ivan Helguera, who was booked by Italian referee Pierluigi Collina.

Jerome Rothen sent the resulting free kick in high with Real keeper Iker Casillas fumbling his save - but the Madrid defence cleared.

At the other end Zinedine Zidane had had Flavio Roma at full stretch with a menacing chip.

Real opened the scoring, largely against the run of play, in the 36th minute.

Ronaldo set up the prowling Raul from the left, and the Madrid skipper was given plenty of space to flick the ball past Roma in the Monaco goal.

That was the last thing Monaco needed if they were to keep their Champions League dream flickering but Giuly's leveller in first half stoppage time kept their European adventure alive and kicking.

Evra was at the heart of the move, his cross headed on by Morientes rose high above the Real defence from eight yards out to beat the static Casillas and leave the quarter-final on a knife edge. One more goal from the hosts without reply and they were through to their third semi-final in ten

years. Monaco manager Didier Deschamps brought on Shabani Nonda for Prso on the hour mark, hoping the Congolese striker could work the oracle again after returning from an eight-month injury absence to inspire a Monaco fightback from three goals down against Ajaccio in the league last week.

And sure enough within minutes of coming on he was instrumental in setting Giuly up for his double as the balance of power ebbed away from the Spaniards, the diminutive frontman - with his back turned to goal - deftly backheeling a cross whipped in by Nonda from the right.

Ronaldo then had his goal adjudged offside shortly after Real coach Carlos Queiroz had replaced Fernandez Borja, who was standing in for the suspended David Beckham, with Santiago Solar.

Nonda almost deepened Madrid's woes with a dangerous weighted shot which edged over the crossbar.

Monaco, who will now play Chelsea in the semi-finals, held on for a famous victory, almost adding another in injury time when substitute Emmanuel Adebayor hit the post.

The defeat means Real, who were beaten last year by Juventus in the semis, miss a shot at the title for the second year in a row. x



PHOTO: AFP

PICTURE TELLS THE STORY: Chelsea's manager Claudio Ranieri (R) is ecstatic at the final whistle as a grim Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger looks on at Highbury Stadium, London on April 6.

Deschamps' delight

AFP, Monaco

Monaco coach Dider Deschamps hailed his players after they knocked out Real Madrid to claim a place in the Champions League semi-finals in one of the most improbable upsets in the history of the competition.

All but written off after losing the first leg of the quarter-final 4-2 in Madrid, Monaco handed out a 3-1 beating to the nine-time European champions to leave the two sides level at 5-5 with the fighting French going through on away goals.

"My players are writing an extraordinary page in the history of French football," said Deschamps after Tuesday's tie at the Louis II stadium.

"They've got a remarkable spirit - anything is possible. But we haven't won anything yet -- this doesn't give us a title."

He added: "Despite what they were saying in public Real thought they had the tie wrapped up. We'd made errors in the first leg but dug deep and made up for them tonight."

With Prince Rainier in attendance Monaco skipper Ludovic Giuly was the hero with a double sandwiched between a goal from Real's on-loan striker Fernando Morientes.

Raul scored Real's lone effort although he had another goal disallowed for offside.

Monaco, leading the French first division, now face Chelsea, who overcame Arsenal in Tuesday's other quarter-final.

"Everyone was expecting Real to be playing Arsenal in the semis -- it's a surprise turn up," said Deschamps, who skipped France to World Cup success in 1998.

"The stakes are raised again but playing Chelsea we've got no reason to be scared or have doubts -- I'm happy to be finding players that I know like my old teammate Marcel Desailly. London's not too far away, I'm looking forward to going to Stamford Bridge."

Asked which he'd prefer to win -- the Champions League or French championship -- he answered with a smile: "Both!"

Real coach Carlos Queiroz admitted his players had been taken by surprise and suggested an overcharged fixture list had played a part in their downfall.

"I want to congratulate Monaco. We were not expecting a rout like this," said Queiroz.

"I take full responsibility for this defeat. Paradoxically, this very disappointing result could help us finish strongly in the Spanish championship."

"With so many matches the players are less capable of making decisions, not as fresh."

The defeat means Real, who were beaten last year by Juventus in the semis, miss a shot at the title for the second year in a row.

But for Real playmaker Zidane, Monaco deserved to go through.

"The best team won tonight," said the Frenchman.

"We're all gutted. What made the difference was conceding a goal right on the stroke of half time."

For Morientes meanwhile Monaco's success generated mixed emotions.

"This journey has made me confront old friends -- it hurts to beat them, but I shouldn't think about that. I'm a professional, I wear Monaco's colours."

For Giuly the result was simply "magical".

"We gave everything," he said.

Galaxy gone wrong?



AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid lost their shirts in Monte Carlo on Tuesday in what the Spanish press has claimed proved the failure of the club's superstar recruitment policy.

The first thing Manchester United deputy Carlos Queiroz asked for when he was brought in to replace old servant Vicente Del Bosque last June was a new defender.

But Madrid president Florentino Perez has pursued his policy of paying top dollar for the world's best forwards for the last four years and he told the Portuguese coach he would have to make do with what Del Bosque had.

Del Bosque, at the club for 30 years, had spent each summer for

the previous three years asking for a centre-back, only for Perez to buy midfielders Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane and Brazil striker Ronaldo.

Manchester United's David Beckham, who missed the 3-1 defeat at Monaco on Tuesday because he was suspended, was the last big signing.

To make matters worse, Real off-loaded Fernando Morientes to Monaco and he was the hero as the French side, which survives despite paltry attendances, dumped out the nine-times European Cup winners.

"I take full responsibility for this defeat," said Queiroz who might find himself looking for a new job in the summer. It was the second year in a row Real have failed to reach the final. Juventus beat them in the semi-finals last year.

Queiroz blamed a congested fixture list for taking its toll.

But the Spanish press said Real simply did not have the fight and

drive in them to beat inferior opponents.

Morientes said Monaco's success generated mixed emotions.

"It hurts to beat them, but I shouldn't think about that. I'm a professional, I wear Monaco's colours."

The Monaco defeat will turn up the pressure further on Real following their shock loss to Real Zaragoza in the Spanish Cup final and Valencia's dogged pursuit of them in the chase for the league title.

Another former Real player was enjoying European success on Tuesday. Tough-tackling midfielder Claude Makelele, sold to Chelsea to make way for Beckham, will now take on Monaco in the semi-finals after Chelsea knocked out Arsenal in a London derby.

Asian Champions League Caniggia off the mark

AFP, Hong Kong

Japanese club Jubilo Iwata scored an important 2-1 victory over Shanghai Shenhua on Tuesday to take a firm hold on Group E of the Asian Champions League.

Jubilo's third straight win in the Asian Football Confederation's flagship competition saw them move on to a maximum nine points.

Zob Ahan, of Iran, clawed back a two-goal deficit to salvage a draw from match against Qatar Sports Club in Estahfan City.

The Iranian side stay top of Group A, while the visitors hold onto second spot, a point ahead of Pakhtakor, of Uzbekistan, whose game against Riffa, of Bahrain, was postponed because of unrest in the central Asian country.

Argentine World Cup star Claudio Caniggia scored the Qatar club's third goal for his first in the competition.

Rebecca to go public



INTERNET SOURCES

A tearful Rebecca Loos has reportedly told friends she feels he betrayed her when she was sacked as his personal assistant.

"I still can't believe how he dropped me like a stone. David has betrayed me. He led the way and I'm no marriage wrecker," the 26-year-old reportedly told a friend on Wednesday.

The Madrid temptress who says she slept with Beckham also claims he swapped sex texts with a second girl and is set to lift the lid on her "rival" when she goes public with her story.

England skipper Beckham who was on Wednesday night holidaying in France with wife Victoria denies having a fling with the gorgeous diplomat's daughter.

But Rebecca told a pal on Wednesday: "I am going to go public. I was never in love with David, I was happy to be his mistress."

"I am a very confident woman and I just want to have a good time. I'd no intention of trying to become the next Mrs Beckham."

Real Madrid ace Beckham, 28, is reported to have texted red-hot phone messages to Rebecca hired by his former management firm to help him settle in Spain last year.

But the beauty's pal said: "Rebecca will reveal she was infuriated when she discovered David was also texting another girl."

"This other girl from the Madrid party scene was boasting that she was texting him and getting sexy texts back."

"Rebecca heard that the texts were identical to hers and she was upset. That was what made her decide to go public and reveal her affair with David."

"Rebecca said she felt no guilt about what her affair might do to Victoria. As far as she was concerned, David knew what he was doing and it was his decision."

Spanish-born Rebecca, revealed to be bisexual in an English tabloid, was fired when Beckham quit the SFX management company last year to sign up with Victoria's firm.

The pal said: "She says she felt let down by David when he

didn't fight for her to stay on as his fixer. She wants to set the record straight and tell the world everything about her relationship with David."

"Rebecca feels she has the right to speak out after the way she was treated by the Beckhams. And if she makes hundreds of thousands of pounds in the process, then who can blame her?"

"She's very open and honest about everything, which is why she was annoyed that David was texting another woman. That's why she has no loyalty to him now. She was not just his PA, but his closest confidante."

Andrea Weeden, a close friend of Rebecca, said the beauty kept in contact with David after she had been sacked by SFX.

She said: "Rebecca kept in touch over the phone and through texting. She barely ever spoke of David. Her friends only knew they were in touch because little things or mentions would occasionally come up."

"After rumours first began that something might be going on, Posh had her fired. It was embarrassing she didn't like being accused of having anything more than a professional relationship."

"She was close with the kids, and she and Posh would even go out shopping together. Everyone feels really badly for Rebecca right now. She's not the one who took the marriage vows, but she's being vilified."

Becks, whose Real Madrid



REBECCA LOOS



PHOTO: REUTERS

EVERYTHING OKAY? Real Madrid superstar David Beckham and his wife Victoria leave a ski chalet in Courchevel in the French Alps on April 6.

Gunners get the Blues



AFP, London

Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri has admitted he suffered "30 seconds of delirium" after watching Wayne Bridge's late winner fire his side into the Champions League semi-finals at Arsenal's expense.

"I'm a pragmatic man, so to describe my joy is very difficult," the Italian said after watching his side finally beat their London rivals at the 18th time of asking.

"I was mad, in delirium for 30 seconds. I just wanted to go with my players."

Ranieri, whose position as manager at Stamford Bridge has been under threat all season, would not be drawn on recent reports he could finally be asked to stay on next season.

But his description of how the club's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich joined in the celebrations after Bridge had secured a 2-1 victory was perhaps significant.

"He was mad like me," Ranieri said. "Everybody was crazy in the dressing room. It's history for Chelsea."

Ranieri was even able to joke about the headlines that had labelled him a "dead man walking" as Chelsea unsuccessfully attempted to persuade England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson to take his job.

"It is difficult to kill me. I continue to walk but I don't stand still." Ranieri had reason to feel satisfied.

His decision to leave 30 million pounds of forward talent on the bench (Hernan Crespo and Adrian Mutu) and start with Eidur Gudjohnsen up front paid off as the Icelandic striker had a hand in both Chelsea's goals.

The first, a Frank Lampard rebound after Jens Lehmann spilled Claude Makelele's drive, cancelled out Jose Antonio Reyes's opener for Arsenal and laid the foundations for Bridge's late strike after a neat one-two with Gudjohnsen.

Ranieri also got his tactics in the match correct, pulling off Scott Parker at half-time to introduce Jesper Gronkjaer and ensure Ashley Cole was pinned back in his own half rather than creating chaos in Chelsea's.

The win has put Chelsea into an eminently winnable semi-final against Monaco and Ranieri believes Arsenal could still be vulnerable in the league, particularly with tough matches against

Liverpool and Newcastle over the upcoming Easter weekend.

"I think now I must touch (wood) before I speak but I think this victory can change something for us. We must believe in ourselves more than before," Ranieri said.

The Italian insisted however that Chelsea would not take a place in the final for granted. "I know Real Madrid very, very well, and if Monaco won it is because they are a good team with good players and a good coach."

Ranieri's joy found its mirror image in a despondent Arsene Wenger, who admitted Saturday's FA Cup semi-final defeat at the hands of Manchester United had taken more out of his side than he had been prepared to admit in the aftermath of that match. "It is a big blow when you lose a long unbeaten run. Once you hit the wall it takes time to bounce back."

"Now though it is a good test for us, a chance to show how strong we are mentally."

Although Arsenal are four points clear in the Premiership with a game in hand over their nearest rivals, Chelsea, Wenger was prepared to admit that the possibility of that lead slipping away was real.

"There is a possibility there because we are far from winning the Premiership."

Much will depend inevitably on how Arsenal react to blowing what Wenger admitted was a golden opportunity for European glory.

"I think it is the most disappointing setback we have had in Europe because you play Monaco and have a very good chance to go to the final."

Just how disappointing was underlined by the Frenchman's assessment of his former club Monaco's semi-final chances: "If you ask me, it's 80-20, for Chelsea," he said.

Wenger had spent the days leading up to the match insisting that his was not a side on the verge of a nervous breakdown in the aftermath of their two bruising encounters with Manchester United last week.

An unusually raucous Highbury told a different story and the pangs of self doubt were only too apparent in the untidy opening exchanges.

Jens Lehmann did well to hold Lampard's low shot as it skidded off the turf only to fumble a head-high cross minutes later.

Sol Campbell's clearances were invariably sliced into the stand and Robert Pires must have mislaid more passes in the opening 20 minutes of the match than he had done all season.

A Russian victory!



AFP, London

Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich claims his players showed "Russian character" to knock Arsenal out of the Champions League at Highbury on Tuesday.

The Blues came from a goal down to win the quarter-final second leg 2-1 for a 3-2 aggregate score. It was their first victory over Arsenal in 18 attempts, and set up a semi-final with Monaco who upset nine-times winners Real Madrid.



ROMAN ABRAMOVICH "Chelsea played great and I think

Only Reyes appeared totally immune from the collective stage fright afflicting his side and his defence-splitting pass to Thierry Henry should have given Arsenal the lead after 19 minutes. Instead Henry pushed his shot wide of the post.

Damien Duff spurned an equally good chance after a surge into the Arsenal box two minutes later, scuffing his shot wide after having done the hard work of waltzing round Campbell.

Pires fluffed another chance when he headed Ashley Cole's cross to the near post into the side netting.

But the French midfielder made amends with the perceptive crossfield pass to rightback Lauren that opened up Chelsea's defence for Arsenal's opener.

The Cameroon international's deep cross was knocked back across goal by Henry and Reyes raced in between William Gallas and John Terry to prod the ball over the line.

Gudjohnsen laid the foundations for the equaliser with a dribble into the box.

Sol Campbell cleared the ball off the toes of the Icelandic but only as far as Duff who immediately pinged it back into the goalmouth.

Another half-clearance landed at the feet of Makelele, who unleashed a 30-yard drive that Lehmann could be excused for failing to hold, handing Lampard the chance to sweep the ball into the net.

Both sides had further chances. Lampard's well-struck shot rattled into the side netting while Marco Ambrosio was extended by both Reyes's attempt to curl the ball past him from the edge of the area and Kolo Toure's effort from nearly twice that distance.

Gudjohnsen should have sealed victory two minutes before Bridge when he sidefooted Joe Cole's neat cutback straight at Ashley Cole on the line.

With the tie headed for extra-time, that miss looked as if it could prove very costly but the Icelandic kept his cool to provide the critical pass that may have ensured Ranieri will still be at Stamford Bridge next season.