

A galactic grinding



AFP, Leverkusen

Nine-time European champions Real Madrid started the 2004/05 season as favourites to win the Champions League but a 3-0 drubbing by Bayer Leverkusen here on Wednesday night could see their odds lengthened.

Real splashed out 47 million euros on England international Jonathan Woodgate and Argentine international Walter Samuel to shore up their defence but Leverkusen showed there was more to football than the colour of money.

Goals from Polish international Jacek Krzynowek, Brazilian Franca and Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov condemned Madrid.

It was Real's biggest Champions League defeat for four years when another German side, Bayern Munich, triumphed 4-1 over the Spaniards in March 2000.

"Bayer play the mighty Madrid off the park," lauded magazine Kicker.

German daily Bild described Bayer's display as "galactic" in a jibe at Madrid's expensive collection of stars who have been dubbed 'Los Galaticos'.

"Horror" was the press reaction in Madrid.

"Real trampled underfoot," said sports daily Marca.

"Real lost more than a match, they lost their credibility," said the AS sports daily.

"Bad in defence, disorganised in midfield, toothless in attack."

Madrid coach Jose Antonio Camacho dragged off French playmaker Zinedine Zidane, Portuguese winger Luis Figo and Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo at the interval.

The trio were all below par and Camacho must have wished he had more than three substitutions to replace his other outfield players with David Beckham, Roberto Carlos and Raul all cutting forlorn figures.

"Bayer Leverkusen steamrolled us from the first minute," admitted Camacho. "We only pulled ourselves together in the last 30 minutes."

"I take full responsibility for the defeat. I clearly did not manage to send my players out with the right attitude."

Leverkusen midfielder Carsten Ramelow claimed before the match that "sometimes passion is more important than ability" and his verdict proved spot-on as Madrid's multi-millionaires were humbled by a club almost relegated from the Bundesliga 15 months ago.

"Madrid humiliated in Leverkusen," bemoaned Marca. "Madrid did nothing to improve their image and now have a deep wound that will take some time to heal."

Real face Italian side Roma at the Santiago Bernabue in their next Champions League match on September 28 knowing victory is essential.

"We have to make up for this awful start in our next match against Roma," added Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos.

While gloom was the order of the day for Madrid credit is due to Leverkusen for an attacking brand of football reminiscent of that which helped them to the 2002 Champions League final.

Madrid defeated Klaus Toppmoller's side 2-1 in the Glasgow final but that reverse was avenged in some style at the BayArena.



SCORE TO PRESERVE IN MEMORY: Bayer Leverkusen fans celebrate in front of the scoreboard at the Bay Arena after their team's 3-0 victory against Real Madrid in Leverkusen on September 15.

Too bad to be Real



AFP, Leverkusen

Real Madrid's hopes of winning the Champions League crown for a fourth time suffered a major blow here on Wednesday as Bayer Leverkusen brutally exposed a weak rearguard in a 3-0 win.

Madrid's suspect backline caused their quarter-final exit in this competition last season and on this evidence they have not solved the problem as German side Leverkusen avenged their 2002 final defeat by Madrid in fine fashion.

Jacek Krzynowek, Franca and Dimitar Berbatov grabbed the goals to enact sweet revenge for that 2-1 defeat in Glasgow and pull off Leverkusen's first ever win against the Spanish giants.

Real Madrid sporting director Emilio Butragueno described the defeat as a "crushing blow".

"It's not the moment to say whose fault it is. Today all we can feel is sadness by the result," he said.

"Leverkusen were superior and deserved to win. They were better in almost all areas and have to be congratulated."

Real's problems were compounded when the club later revealed that they could be without Zinedine Zidane for at least three weeks after the French star injured his shoulder in a collision with Roque Junior.

After just five minutes Bulgarian international Berbatov looked on in anguish as his shot rebounded off the post.

Real fielded new signing Argentine international Walter Samuel, nicknamed 'The Wall', but there are a number of building bricks still required in Madrid's defence.

The first period was full of goalscoring chances - with most of them falling to Bayer - and Brazilian

Zidane out of action

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid said their French play-maker Zinedine Zidane will be out for at least three weeks after dislocating his right shoulder in their 3-0 Champions League defeat to Bayer Leverkusen in Germany.

World Player of the Year Zidane injured his shoulder in a collision with Leverkusen's Brazilian defender Roque Junior.

Madrid's suspect backline allowed Leverkusen to avenge their 2002 final defeat with goals from Polish international Jacek Krzynowek, Brazilian Franca and Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov.

ers, were ineffective.

England skipper David Beckham tried to gee his team up with some tough tackling and had a number of run-ins with Argentine hardman Diego Placente.

Placente dumped Beckham to the ground with a thunderous challenge early on and was then upended by a worked-up Beckham moments later.

Leverkusen's central defensive pairing of Juan and Roque Junior know all about Ronaldo from the Brazilian national team and had him under lock and key until the 25th minute when he flicked a shot onto the post.

It was Real's only opening of a disappointing first 45 minutes prompting Real manager Jose Antonio Camacho to jump out of the dug-out and bark some instructions to his lacklustre team.

Camacho's half-time teamtalk did little to stop Leverkusen's dominance and just five minutes after the interval Franca doubled their lead with a curling right-footed shot leaving Casillas with no chance.

"We converted our chances in the end and that was vital," explained Bayer midfielder Bernd Schneider.

Madrid's defence was all at sea and in the 55th minute Bayer struck again with Franca firing a low cross into Berbatov's path and the striker rolled the ball home.

Manager Camacho will now hope England international Jonathan Woodgate can help shore up the backline before the next Champions League match at home to Roma on September 28.

Meanwhile, Bayer can take heart from a sparkling display against nine-time European champions Madrid, particularly when you consider the club were almost relegated from the Bundesliga 15 months ago.

Rome is bleeding



AFP, Rome

The Group B Champions League match between Roma and Dynamo Kiev was abandoned here Wednesday after Swedish referee Anders Frisk was injured by a missile thrown from the crowd.

The object hit Frisk on the forehead as he was walking towards the tunnel at half-time and blood poured down his face as he was helped to the dressing room. Dynamo were leading 1-0 at half-time at the Olympic stadium.

The first-half had ended controversially with Roma captain Francesco Totti booked and French defender Philippe Mexes sent off for lashing out at Maris Verpakovskis, which provoked an angry reaction from the home supporters.

Frisk received medical attention in a corridor and was later driven to hospital after being struck by what is believed to have been a cigarette lighter or a coin.

The second-half was delayed for nearly an hour before it was decided to suspend the match. The decision to call off the tie was taken by Frisk himself.

UEFA delegate Andre Francioli explained: "Frisk suspended the match because of the seriousness of his injury. He was not well enough and he was worried about his safety."

Asked what punishment might be handed out to Roma, Francioli replied: "UEFA's disciplinary commission will decide what happens."

The ugly incident is likely to land Roma in hot water.

The Serie A club will inevitably be fined and Kiev could be awarded the three points.

Roma, a club that has a poor disciplinary record, may also be forced to play their remaining first phase matches at a neutral stadium.

Fans of the club have a history of violence. Last season they forced the Rome derby against Lazio to be abandoned after a rumour spread around the stadium that a young Roma fan had been run over by a police van.

The rumour, which turned out to be false, sparked serious crowd disorder which left 150 police officers injured.

In addition to a hefty fine, Roma received a three-match stadium ban and had to play their home matches in the Sicilian city of Palermo.

Mayor of Rome Walter Veltroni was appalled by Wednesday's violence.

"What happened at the Olympic stadium was a disgrace," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

SHOT DOWN! Swedish referee Anders Frisk (L) is down on his knees after been struck on the head by an object thrown by a fan during the AS Roma vs Dinamo Kiev match at Rome's Olympic stadium on September 15.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

AFP, Paris

Champions League results on Wednesday:

Group A
At La Coruna, Spain
Deportivo La Coruna (SPA) 0 Olympiakos (GRE) 0
At Liverpool, England
Liverpool (ENG) 2 (Cisse 22, Baros 84) Monaco 0

Group B
At Leverkusen, Germany
Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 3 (Krzynowek 39, Franca 50, Berbatov 55) Real Madrid (SPA) 0
At Roma
AS Roma (ITA) 0 Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 1 (Gavranic 29)
Match abandoned at half-time when referee injured by missile from crowd.

Group C
At Amsterdam
Ajax (NED) 0 Juventus (ITA) 1 (Nedved 42)
At Munich
Bayern Munich (GER) 1 (Makaay 64-66) Maccabi Tel-Aviv (ISR) 0

Group D
At Istanbul
Fenerbahce (TUR) 1 (van Hooijdonk 16) Sparta Prague (CZE) 0
At Lyon, France
Lyon 2 (Cris 35, Frau 45) Manchester United 2 (Van Nistelrooy 57, 61)

Rivaldo's barren debut

AFP, La Coruna

Olympiakos newcomer Rivaldo failed to achieve a dream win at the expense of his former club Deportivo La Coruna on his first outing with the Greek side with both sides having to settle for a goalless draw in their Champions League Group A match here on Wednesday.

The Greeks, who have a woeful away record in this competition with 19 defeats from 23 games, achieved the same result as the last time they visited Galicia in 2001.

But they failed to produce the game to see off a Deportivo depleted by injuries and who struggled to get past Irish champions Shelbourne in the qualifying round.

Rivaldo had his first outing for the Greek side and the former Deportivo striker got off to a lively start.

The 32-year-old Brazilian had an effort knocked back after just five minutes, and another ambitious overhead kick just going over the bar ten minutes later.

Spanish Defender Cesar Martin had Deportivo's best chance of a goal after 21 minutes when the right-back hooked on to a free kick from Sergio Gonzalez but his diving header went just wide.

Six minutes later it was the Greeks who missed a golden opportunity to open the scoring when former Deportivo player Gabriel Schurr nudged just wide after Deportivo goalie Jose Molina failed to hang on to a Rivaldo free-kick.



AFP, Anfield

Djibril Cisse and Milan Baros handed Liverpool a winning return to the Champions League with a goal apiece as the four-time European Cup winners overcame inspired goalkeeping by Flavio Roma to beat Monaco 2-0 at Anfield on Wednesday.

Cisse's first-half goal and a late strike from Euro 2004 top scorer Baros ensured that Rafael Benitez's team opened up in Group A with a comfortable victory against last season's beaten finalists.

"You can't ask for more than a win and a clean sheet on your first game back in the Champions League, but we could have scored more," said Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard.

"We played some nice football and everything worked well. Djibril's goal was something we have worked on during training, so it was pleasing to see that go in."

Monaco coach Didier Deschamps admitted his side were overshadowed by Liverpool.

"It is never good to lose, but Liverpool is not an easy place to play, so it is no shock to lose at Anfield," said Deschamps.

"But we just couldn't get into the game and we lost out in all areas to Liverpool."

With only five survivors in their line-up from last season's final defeat against Porto in Gelsenkirchen, Monaco had been expected to find life much tougher among Europe's elite this term.

But Deschamps's team made the brighter start against a Liverpool team making their 100th appearance in Europe's premier club competition.

Sierra Leone forward Mohamed Kallon almost gave the French club the lead inside the opening three minutes when he narrowly failed to score with an audacious shot from 45 yards.

Kallon had spotted Liverpool

goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek on the edge of his penalty area and the striker's long-range effort was only inches away from embarrassing the Polish international.

Swedish midfielder Pontus Farnrud then went close on 11 minutes when he fired a right-foot strike over the crossbar from 20 yards.

Liverpool gradually found their feet as the first-half wore on, however, and the Spanish forward Luis Garcia had the first effort on goal for the home side when he flashed a 20-yard strike wide on 17 minutes.

Garcia, who scored against West Bromwich Albion on his home debut at the weekend, was then at heart of Cisse's goal which opened the scoring four minutes later.

The 6million pounds signing from Barcelona linked up with Xabi Alonso before working a one-two with Steven Gerrard on the edge of the Monaco penalty area.

Gerrard then threaded the ball through to Cisse, who sprung the Monaco offside trap before firing an

unstoppable right-foot strike past goalkeeper Roma from 12 yards.

Monaco's early dominance had by now subsided and Liverpool looked the team most likely to score again and Australian winger Harry Kewell was unfortunate not to make it 2-0 when his volley from Garcia's throughball was blocked by Roma's legs.

Kewell raised his game another notch after the interval and he sent a sidefoot volley over the bar from Jon-Arne Riise's corner early in the second half.

Moments later, former Leeds United man Kewell released Cisse with a defence-splitting pass that handed the French forward a golden opportunity to score his second goal.

However, with only Roma to beat, Cisse aimed his shot straight at the goalkeeper's legs to let Monaco off the hook.

Liverpool's failure to score the elusive second goal kept Monaco's hopes alive and Deschamps's team upped their efforts to score an

equaliser in the closing stages.

Striker Emmanuel Adebayor went closest to levelling when he outjumped the Liverpool defence to head Kallon's corner goalwards on 72 minutes, but Dudek reacted well to save.

Garcia should have made the game safe for Rafael Benitez's team eight minutes from time when he was teed up by Steve Finnan's downward header.

Despite receiving the ball six yards from goal, though, Garcia inexplicably aimed his volley wide of the post.

Substitute Baros finally rewarded Liverpool's dominance three minutes later, however, when he converted Josemi's long pass to make it 2-0.

The Czech Republic forward was forced to round goalkeeper Roma twice before firing into the net from a tight angle three yards out.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Liverpool's Czech International forward Milan Baros (C) scores past Monaco's goalie Douglas Maicon (L) at Anfield, Liverpool on September 15.

Penalty rescues Bayern



AFP, Tel Aviv

Dutch international striker Roy Makaay scored the only goal as Bayern Munich beat Maccabi Tel Aviv 1-0 in their opening Champions League Group C clash here on Wednesday as the German giants won their first away match in the competition for three years.

Makaay scored from the penalty spot in the 63rd minute to hand the four-time champions their first victory away from Munich since the 2001/02 campaign.

The match was making history as it was the first Champions League game to be staged in Israel after UEFA had finally conceded the security situation was stable enough to play.

Ze Roberto looked the most

dangerous player and it was the Brazilian who was at the heart of the only goal when he was chopped down by Ghanaian defender John Pantasil in the area in the 63rd minute.

Pantasil was yellow-carded and while he protested, Makaay stepped up to bury the penalty past Strauber in the Maccabi goal.

The match was played against a background of controversy with Bayern's Iranian international striker Vahid Hashemian missing the trip allegedly because of a back injury.

No Iranian has played sport on Israeli soil nor competed against Israel anywhere in the world since the Iranian revolution in 1979 when Islamic leaders took power.

Had Hashemian made the trip, he would have faced sanctions in his home country as, just last week, the official Iranian news agency Irna said any sporting links with Israel would be punished.

Nedved makes the difference

AFP, Amsterdam

A superb goal by the Czech Republic's European footballer of the year Pavel Nedved gave Juventus a 1-0 victory over Dutch side Ajax in their Champions League Group C match here on Wednesday.

Juve's victory was only their second in nine trips to the Netherlands - their last a 2-1 victory over the same opposition in the 1997 Champions League semi-final - and gave coach Fabio Capello some measure of revenge as his then AC Milan side had lost to the Dutch in the 1995 Champions League final.

Nedved re-energised a match that had gone dead after a lively opening 10 minutes when he fired in a fierce shot in the 42nd minute that whistled into the top corner of the Ajax net after great work by Alessandro del Piero and Mauro Camoranesi.



AFP, Lyon

Ruud van Nistelrooy rode to Manchester United's rescue and into the club's record books in a Champions League thriller here on Wednesday.

Trailing French champions Lyon by two goals at the interval, Sir Alex Ferguson's side rallied to secure a 2-2 draw courtesy of a second half double from van Nistelrooy.

The goals took the Dutch striker's tally of European goals for United to 30, two more than the previous record set by Denis Law in the 1960's and 70's.

Van Nistelrooy, playing only his second game after a hernia operation and clearly lacking match sharpness,

contributed little else to the match. But his goals vindicated Ferguson's decision to gamble on his fitness.

The same could not however be said for the United manager's decision to keep faith with the out-of-form Tim Howard.

The American goalkeeper gifted Lyon's Brazilian defender Cris their opening goal mid-way through the second half and United appeared dead and buried when Pierre-Alain Frau added a second on the stroke of half-time.

Despite the fightback, Ferguson made it clear he was ready to swing the axe in response to the chaotic first half display.

"We can't ignore what happened in the first half. If we did I would not be doing my job," the Scot said. "There were some terrible elements to our play and we had to change."

Eric Djemba-Djemba and Ryan Giggs both spurred good early

chances before the defensive hesitancy that has haunted Ferguson's side this season became apparent.

United's back four were repeatedly outmanoeuvred by Lyon's nimble forwards.

The sight of Scholes, ostensibly playing up front alongside van Nistelrooy, heading the ball off his own line from Frau underlined the extent to which the momentum had swung behind the home side.

Kneeling to gather an innocuous long-range free-kick from Juninho, Howard allowed the ball to cannon off his chest, presenting Cris with an easy close-range finish. The visitors were then caught by a sucker punch just before the break when Ronaldo lost possession with all but two of his teammates ahead of him.

Wiltord capitalised by carrying the ball fully 60 yards to the edge of the area before slipping a pass to Frau, who beat Howard from 12 yards.

But within 12 minutes of the restart United were back in the contest.

Having switched to the left flank, Ronaldo was allowed to turn back on to his favoured right foot and get in a cross that van Nistelrooy got his head to ahead of France goalkeeper Gregory Coupet.

Five minutes later United were level. Drifting in from the right, Roy Keane set up Ronaldo for a shot that spun kindly off a Lyon boot and into van Nistelrooy's path and his left boot duly swept the ball past Coupet.

United lived dangerously right to the end. It took another goal-saving block from Scholes to deny Wiltord a goal and substitute Nilmar was guilty of an astonishing miss 12 minutes from time when he pushed Malouda's cross wide of the target from barely eight yards out.

Juninho's stoppage time effort then flew inches wide with Howard struggling to cover his post.