

Spanish King's Cup

Owen scores treble!

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Michael Owen scored his third goal in three games when he helped his side to a 2-1 win over third division neighbours Leganes in the first round of the King's Cup.

Fellow striker Fernando Morientes, getting his first start of the season, put Real ahead in the 19th minute when he poked the ball home on the rebound after an Owen volley.

The England striker, who got the winners in Real's 1-0 victories against Dynamo Kiev in the Champions League and Valencia in the Primera Liga, made it 2-0 early in the second half as he steered the ball in after a neat pass from Morientes.

But Real had to endure a nervous finale on Tuesday after Leganes pulled one back with a superb Dani Ruiz free kick in the 56th minute.

Deportivo Coruna striker Diego Tristan continued his impressive return to form by scoring both goals in the 2-0 victory against fourth division Cerceda, a game which saw both sides reduced to 10 men after 30 minutes.

In Tuesday's other match, Primera Liga side Osasuna managed to squeeze through with a 4-2 victory on penalties against third division Castellon after the game ended 0-0.

Holders Real Zaragoza, who



MICHAEL OWEN

claimed a dramatic extra-time victory over Real Madrid in last year's final, face a tricky game at second division Gimnastic on Wednesday when league leaders Barcelona visit third division Girona.

Leganes's 8,000-capacity stadium was only half full for the arrival of a shadow Real Madrid side missing leading Galacticos Ronaldo, Raul, Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo and David Beckham.

But with Owen and Morientes leading the way, Real took little time to get the measure of their modest opponents.

Owen forced a sharp save from goalkeeper Sergio Vera with a close-range snap volley following a miscued clearance by the Leganes defence and Morientes was on hand to stab home the rebound in the 19th minute.

Morientes returned the favour at the start of the second half when he powered his way into the area and cut back a neat pass to Owen who tucked a first-time left foot shot past the keeper and inside the far post.

But Leganes, who had barely managed to mount an attack in the first half, narrowed the lead when Ruiz looped a perfectly struck free kick over the wall and beyond the reach of keeper Cesar in the 56th minute.

Real went through a nervous patch for the next 15 minutes and were fortunate not to concede a penalty when defender Javier Paredes handled in the area but they eventually regained their composure to book themselves a place in the next round.

Capello dismisses Roma rivalry

REUTERS, Milan

Juventus coach Fabio Capello is playing down any personal rivalries with his old players before Thursday's Serie A match at home to former club AS Roma.

Capello left Roma at the end of last season after five years in charge to take over at the Delle Alpi, leading Juventus to the top of the league.

"I haven't got any problems with anyone," Capello said.

"If you spend years together there are always going to be discussions but you have to look at the rapport that existed above all that, above the moments of anger."

The coach transformed Roma during his tenure, winning the title for only the third time in the club's history in 2001 with a team inspired by Francesco Totti.

Totti will be the main threat to Capello's Juve on Thursday along with strikers Vincenzo Montella and Antonio Cassano -- players Capello frequently clashed with during his time in the capital.

Indeed since moving to Turin, Capello has also said that his relationship with Roma captain Totti was a troubled one at times.

Capello even had kind words for Roma president Franco Sensi, who the coach was reported to have a strained relationship with and who has often pointed an accusing finger at Juventus.

"I want to thank him again, and I will always do so, for giving me the chance to have five splendid, intense years in which I was able to win something in an atmosphere where it is difficult to do so," the Juve coach said.

In recent years clashes between the two clubs have been preceded by accusations and rancour, the majority of which has emanated from club officials rather than players.

Sensi has frequently engaged in bitter public rows with Juventus managing director Luciano Moggi.

Even Moggi decided this week was the time to make peace with septuagenarian Sensi and call an end to the verbal jousting.

"That is over because I am tired of entertaining people by involving an elderly man who deserves the maximum amount of respect," said Moggi.

While Capello has produced instant results at Juve, with six wins and a draw from the opening seven games, Roma have had a terrible start to the campaign.

After Capello's replacement Cesare Prandelli stood down on the eve of the new season due to family reasons, German coach Rudi Voeller struggled to impose his authority on the team and poor results led him to resign.

Former Chievo coach Luigi Del Neri has restored some order to the club but they are already 10 points behind Juventus and Sunday's home draw with Palermo showed they have yet to refind their form.

Capello's side will feature two players he brought with him from Rome in French full back Jonathan Ebina and Brazilian playmaker Emerson.

Crazy hairdos out in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iranian footballers have been banned from sporting "unconventional" hairstyles and beards on the pitch and offenders will be fined and banned from playing, football officials said.

"Football clubs have been ordered to stop players with long, messy hair, ponytails, hair bands and certain kinds of beard, or they will be fined and banned from playing," an Iranian football federation official said.

"We live in a traditional society and certain values must be respected. The champions who act as role models to society set a bad example to the youth by appearing like that," he added.

Football is the most popular sport in Iran and scores of top players have long hair and wear ponytails.

So far two players in the Iranian professional league have received warnings about their hairstyles and trendy beards.

Testimonial for Scholl, Elber

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich are lining up a testimonial match for Mehmet Scholl at the end of the season with former club favourite Giovane Elber also pencilled in for a double send off.

Scholl, 34, is Bayern's longest-serving player after spending 13 years at the Olympic Stadium but his contract runs out at the end of the season and will not be renewed.

"Mehmet wanted to quit as early as Christmas," explained general manager Uli Hoeness to newspaper AZ on Tuesday.

"We are thinking about having a communal testimonial match for Scholl and Elber."

Scholl arrived at Bayern from Karlsruhe in 1992 and has gone on to make over 300 appearances for the club despite persistent back and muscular problems which limited the gifted midfielder to just 36 caps for Germany.

Socrates dons yellow shirt!

Football

REUTERS/AFP, London

Brazilian Socrates is to pull on the famous yellow jersey once more, but this time it will not be for the five-time World Cup winners but for a non-league English team.

The former Brazil captain, who played alongside fellow Latin luminaries Zico and Junior, has agreed to join Garforth Town in the Northern Counties East League.

Teesside businessman and owner of Garforth Simon Clifford persuaded Socrates to join the club -- based in a former pit village near Leeds in Yorkshire -- initially on a month-long deal until December.

"It is a fantastic coup. Our fans will be pinching themselves when they see Socrates running out," he told Britain's Sun newspaper on Wednesday.

Clifford, who names a number of Brazilian soccer players among his friends, owns a string of soccer schools in the South American country.

"I wanted to put the focus on the club (Garforth) so a few weeks ago I started putting out feelers in Brazil," Clifford told The Times.

"This is the result."

Socrates reportedly still has the same slim physique as he did in his prime but Clifford may have to relax his smoking ban as the Brazilian was a heavy smoker even at his peak.

Joining Socrates in the team will be former Manchester United man Lee Sharpe, who has also recently signed for the club.

According to the club website garforthtown.com, "the lure of a spell in the Northern Counties East League has proved too much for the 50-year-old (Socrates)."

However Socrates, a doctor by profession, will have to get back to



SOCRATES

football basics.

Having played in front of 200,000 people at the legendary Maracana stadium in Rio, he will have to get used to playing with electricians and plumbers -- and in front of a capacity 3000 crowd.

The West Yorkshire club, which is based in a mining village, have

signed Socrates initially on a one-month deal.

Socrates, who retired from the game 14 years ago having skippered Brazil to two World Cups, will line up for his first game for the club against Tadcaster Albion on November 20.

League Cup

Villa shown exit

Football

REUTERS, London

Aston Villa lost 3-1 away to second division Burnley in the League Cup third round as the top Premier League clubs made their first appearance in this season's competition.

A much-changed Manchester United side won 3-0 at Crewe Alexandra, Liverpool beat Millwall by the same scoreline and there were also victories for Portsmouth and Nottingham Forest.

Villa, five-time League Cup winners, fell behind to Burnley after 10 minutes when Graham Branch scored for the hosts.

David O'Leary's team rarely threatened to equalise and, after Villa goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen saved a penalty, Mohammad Camara scored following a short corner routine to double Burnley's advantage.

Colombia striker Juan Pablo Angel got a goal back for Villa with a header nine minutes from time but Jean-Louis Valois made the game safe for Burnley in the dying minutes.

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Manchester United, showing 11 changes from the side that started Sunday's league victory over champions Arsenal, eased past Crewe in the first competitive match between the near neighbours, which pitted English soccer's two longest-serving managers in Alex Ferguson and Dario Gradi.

United took the lead after only 10 minutes on Tuesday through Alan Smith who was set up by his fellow striker Louis Saha.

Crewe held their own until 12 minutes into the second half when Ireland midfielder Liam Miller grabbed his first goal for United, and the Premier League side added a third through a Steve Foster own goal just before the hour mark.

Liverpool, record seven-time League Cup winners, took the lead at second division Millwall on 17 minutes when midfielder Salif Diao rammed the ball home from 10 metres after a corner.

Last season's FA Cup runners-up fell further behind midway through the second half following a mistake by goalkeeper Graham Stack, Liverpool striker Milan Baros turning the ball into an empty net,

and the Czech striker added a third in stoppage time.

Portsmouth striker Diomansy Kamara put the Premier League side ahead against Leeds United after 14 minutes and Israeli midfielder Eyal Berkovic doubled the lead with a 32nd minute penalty.

Veteran Leeds striker Brian Deane reduced the deficit with a trademark header before halftime but Portsmouth held on to secure their place in the last 16.

Nottingham Forest beat Doncaster Rovers 2-0 thanks to goals by striker Marlon King and midfielder James Perch.

The all-Championship match between Sheffield United and Watford and the game between Bournemouth and Cardiff City went to extra time.

Among the highlights of Wednesday's nine third-round matches holders Middlesbrough host Coventry City, Arsenal travel to Manchester City, last season's runners-up Bolton Wanderers welcome Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea take on West Ham United in a London derby at Stamford Bridge.

West Brom part with Megson

AFP, London

West Brom manager Gary Megson was relieved of his duties with immediate effect after saying earlier in the day he would leave the struggling Premiership club at the end of the season when his contract expires.

West Brom have won just once in the Premiership this season, obscuring the good work done by Megson who in four-and-a-half years at the Midlands club has helped them from 21st in the old First Division to twice gain promotion to the Premiership.

Megson's comments, made to newspapers and in a letter to the club, were treated by Baggies officials as a resignation statement.

West Brom are currently two points above the relegation zone, in 16th place.

Frank Burrows, formerly Megson's assistant, has been installed as caretaker manager for Saturday's game at home to second-placed Chelsea.

An Albion statement said: "Gary Megson today (Tuesday) informed the board of West Bromwich Albion by letter that he wishes to leave the club at the end of his current contract in approximately eight months' time on 30th June 2005.

"The club accepts this letter as a resignation and the board believes it is now in the best interests of West Bromwich Albion that Gary Megson no longer remains in charge of team affairs.

"As such, he has been relieved of his duties while contractual matters are resolved.

"This is a crucial period for the club and the board regards the timing and manner of Gary Megson's announcement as extremely unhelpful, particularly following the team's disappointing performance at Crystal Palace on Saturday."

Aldridge eyes Wales job

AFP, Cardiff

Former Liverpool striker John Aldridge has applied to take over the vacant post of Wales manager, according to reports.

Aldridge, a former Republic of Ireland international, has been out of the game since resigning in 2001 as the manager of Tranmere where he last played as a professional.

Aldridge took the old First Division side to the 2000 League Cup final and walked away from the game a year later claiming the pressures of the job almost led to a mental and physical breakdown.

However the 46-year-old says he is now hoping to use his playing and coaching experience to resurrect his career in a job which has attracted interest from the likes of former Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier.

"These jobs don't come around every five minutes and I would love to manage an international team," Aldridge told the South Wales Echo newspaper on Tuesday.

"This is too good an opportunity to let pass me by, it's just so tempting. I posted my application last night."

Wales have been manager-less since Mark Hughes left to take over at English Premiership side Blackburn.

Aldridge added: "Mark Hughes did a fine job, but I had five successful years at Tranmere Rovers and was involved in international football for nearly 14 years taking in two World Cups and a European Championship so I know what's it all about.

"I am a very passionate man, football has always been my life. I was with Newport County for five years and I know how passionate the Welsh people are about their sport and in particular their football.

"To be honest, as soon as Mark Hughes announced officially that he was leaving it was always in my mind to have a go for the job and to contact the Football Association of Wales.

"In the last week or so I have had so many friends in the game -- both footballers and managers -- say to me that I should apply."

Only days ago the Football Association of Wales (FAW) said that Houllier topped their short-list of four candidates to take over.

"Gerard Houllier has offered his services and is on a short-list with John Toshack, Ian Rush and Bryan Flynn", said Welsh FA spokesman Ceri Stennett.

The four men are to be interviewed after next week's Welsh FA board meeting.

Injury ends Mendieta's season

REUTERS, London

Middlesbrough's Spanish midfielder Gaizka Mendieta has been ruled out for the rest of the season with knee ligament damage.

Mendieta requires surgery on an anterior cruciate ligament injury sustained on Sunday against Portsmouth, Middlesbrough said on its official website on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old was injured after a challenge with Portsmouth's Patrik Berger in the 38th-minute of the 1-1 draw at the Riverside.

Bundesliga

Pizarro boosts Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro left his injury woes behind him with a brace of goals for Bayern Munich in a telling 2-0 win over Bundesliga leaders VfL Wolfsburg.

Pizarro's first goals of the season following a back injury gave Bayern's title aspirations a boost and brought Wolfsburg back down to earth although they retained their one-point lead over Bayern and VfB Stuttgart.

Stuttgart, who are in third on the same points as Bayern, host German champions Werder Bremen on Wednesday.

Elsewhere Borussia Dortmund gave their irate fans something to cheer about with a 1-0 win at Hertha Berlin.

Hundreds of Borussia fans prevented the team bus from leaving the home stadium on Saturday after a 2-0 defeat to SV Hamburg, but on Tuesday smiles were back on some faces after Borussia climbed from 15th to a more respectable 11th.

Bayern playmaker Michael Ballack was forced to watch from the stands along with his fellow German international Sebastian Deisler, who is recovering from his relapse into depression.

Their absence handed a chance to teenager Bastian Schweinsteiger, 19, and he grabbed it with both hands.

In the ninth minute Schweinsteiger produced a powerful drive from 25 yards and it took a fine save from Simon Jentzsch to push the effort onto the crossbar.

It was a warning that Wolfsburg failed to heed, and a rampaging run from the effervescent Schweinsteiger created the opening goal on 24 minutes.

He ghosted past two defenders

before a clever reverse pass played in Pizarro to slot home.

It was the Peruvian international's first goal of the season, and his second - when he slotted home an Owen Hargreaves cross on the chime of half-time - helped ease the pain of his recent injury woes.

The South American star could even have netted a hat-trick but a chance on the hour mark rebounded off the post to safety.

Hertha meanwhile were left feeling dejected after hitting the woodwork three times in the first 30 minutes against Dortmund.

Borussia rode their luck and Czech striker Jan Koller netted the winner on 44 minutes to move the club away from the relegation zone.

The noose is tightening, however, around the neck of Kaiserslautern coach Kurt Jara following a 3-1 defeat by Hannover.

Kaiserslautern are bottom of the table after conceding 20 goals in 10 matches.



ARSENE WENGER

Wenger a Gunner till 2008

Football

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger has extended his contract at English champions Arsenal for another three years to the end of the 2007-2008 season.

That includes the first two years at the 350-million-pound (636-million-dollar), 60,000-seat Emirates Stadium which is due to open in August 2006.

"My intention has always been clear. I love this club and am very happy here -- signing a new contract just rubber-stamps my desire to take this club forward and fulfil my ambitions," Wenger said.

"I still have so much to achieve and my target is to drive this Club on, not only by sustaining our recent success but building upon it. These are exciting times for Arsenal and I'm proud to be the manager."

Arsenal have been at Highbury since 1913 but the club's ability to compete financially with rivals like Manchester United has been hampered by its relatively small capacity of 38,500.

Wenger, who resisted an approach by Real Madrid in the summer, has been at Arsenal for eight years during which time Arsenal have won two domestic doubles and gone an entire league season unbeaten.

Manchester United ended their 49-match unbeaten run in a controversial 2-0 win at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Wenger's current contract ran out in 2005.

In seven full seasons, he has guided the club to six major trophies -- three FA Premier League titles and three FA Cups -- and has never finished outside the top two positions in the Premier League.

Wenger has also been named manager-of-the-year three times including in 2004 when the

Gunners were crowned Premier League champions without losing a single game during the 38-match campaign.

Chairman Peter Hill-Wood said: "We are absolutely delighted that Arsene has signed an extension to his contract. Since his arrival in 1996, he has revolutionised the club both on and off the pitch.

"As well as the six major honours he won during his time here, Arsene has been a leading influence behind all the major initiatives at the club including the construction of our new training centre and also our new stadium.

"The club has continued to reap the benefits of Arsene's natural eye for unearthing footballing talent and we currently have a fantastic crop of young players coming through the ranks together with a number of world class players who are playing a wonderful brand of football."