

Inter, Chelsea march on

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, London

Inter Milan and Chelsea secured their places in the knockout stage of the Champions League on Tuesday but AC Milan will have to wait after an 89th-minute goal by Ronaldinho gave Barcelona a 2-1 win in the Nou Camp.

Chelsea became the first team to progress to the last 16 with a 1-0 Group H win at CSKA Moscow and Inter followed them later on Tuesday as their goalless home draw with Valencia was enough to guarantee a top-two finish in Group G with two games remaining.

AC Milan were set to join them but are now level with Barcelona on nine points in Group F, though both should still progress.

PSV Eindhoven took charge of Group E as a 1-0 home win over Rosenborg Trondheim put them three points clear of Arsenal, who were held to a 1-1 home draw by Panathinaikos.

Werder Bremen were the night's top scorers, Croat Ivan Klasnic hitting a hat-trick in their 5-1 win over Anderlecht, defending champions Porto are hanging on by a thread after a goalless home draw with Paris St Germain while Celtic claimed their

first points with a 1-0 home win over Shakhtar Donetsk.

Both teams should go through but both Celtic and Donetsk, each on three points, still have a mathematical chance.

Chelsea became the first club to make it four wins out of four thanks to a well-made goal and one of the worst penalty misses of the season.

The London club went ahead in the 24th minute when a Damien Duff backheel return pass to Arjen Robben set up the Dutchman to score with a firm, low finish.

CSKA should have equalised two minutes into the second half when Yuri Zhirkov was felled in the box by Glen Johnson but Brazilian Vagner Love blasted the penalty so high over the bar it could have bounced off a passing Sputnik.

Inter could not manage a goal but went through on the back of their 5-1 victory at Valencia two weeks ago - head to head records counting before goal difference in the qualification criteria.

Arsenal's recent struggles continued as they drew their third game of the European campaign after managing just one point from their last two Premier League games. The mighty Gunners are faltering with just one win in five in all matches.

A 16th-minute Thierry Henry penalty had them ahead at Highbury and when Angelos Basinas blazed a 62nd

minute penalty wide the English champions looked set for all three points.

But the Greek champions secured their second successive draw against the Londoners in the 75th minute when Arsenal defender Pascal Cygan diverted a Loukas Vintza drive into his own net.

That left Arsenal on six points, one ahead of Panathinaikos but three adrift of PSV, who eased past Rosenborg with a 10th-minute goal by American DaMarcus Beasley.

CSKA Moscow and Paris St Germain both have four points in the battle for second place behind Chelsea in Group H but Porto, on two, could also still sneak through.

Werder Bremen (nine points) and Valencia (four), who meet in the final round on December 7, are still in the hunt behind Inter while Anderlecht, who have lost all four games, are the only team from Groups E-H who cannot progress.

Groups A-D play their fourth-round matches on Wednesday.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Results in the European Champions League on Tuesday:

Group E
At Eindhoven, The Netherlands
PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Beasley 10)
Rosenborg (NOR) 0
At London
Arsenal (ENG) 1 (Henry 16-pen)
Panathinaikos (GRE) 1 (Cygan 74-go)

Group F
At Barcelona, Spain
Barcelona (SPA) 2 (Eto'o 37, Ronaldinho 88)
AC Milan (ITA) 1 (Shevchenko 17)
At Glasgow
Celtic (SCO) 1 (Thompson 25)
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 0

Group G
At Milan, Italy
Inter Milan (ITA) 0
Valencia (SPA) 0
At Bremen, Germany
Werder Bremen (GER) 5 (Klasnic 2, 16, 79, Klose 33, Jensen 90)
Anderlecht (BEL) 1 (Iachtchouck 30)

Group H
At Moscow
CSKA Moscow (RUS) 0
Chelsea (ENG) 1 (Robben 24)
At Oporto, Portugal
FC Porto (POR) 0
Paris Saint Germain (FRA) 0



Inter Milan ace Adriano (C) shots over the bar from a scramble in front of the Valencia goal at the Meazza stadium in Milan on November 2.

PHOTO: AFP

STANDINGS

Champions League tables after Tuesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Group E						
PSV	4	3	0	1	4	2 9
Arsenal	4	1	3	0	5	4 6
Panathinaikos	4	1	2	1	5	5 5
Rosenborg	4	0	1	3	3	6 1

Group F						
Barcelona	4	3	0	1	8	3 9
Milan	4	3	0	1	6	3 9
Shakhtar	4	1	0	3	3	5 3
Celtic	4	1	0	3	3	9 3

Group G						
Inter	4	3	1	0	10	2 10
Bremen	4	3	0	1	9	5 9
Valencia	4	1	1	2	4	7 4
Anderlecht	4	0	0	4	3	12 0

Group H						
Chelsea	4	4	0	0	9	1 12
CSKA	4	1	1	2	2	3 4
Paris SG	4	1	1	2	2	5 4
Porto	4	0	2	2	1	5 2

Ranieri will miss Adriano!

AFP, Milan

Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri insisted the late dismissal of Inter Milan striker Adriano was a bigger blow for his side than for their Italian opponents after Tuesday's goalless Champions League draw.

A point was enough for Inter to qualify for the knockout stages and so the Brazilian's sending-off was of little relevance to them, but Valencia need a favour from the Serie A side if they are to reach the last 16.

The Spanish champions - who have not won in eight matches - need Inter to win away at Werder Bremen in a fortnight, while they must first beat Anderlecht and then Bremen in their final Group G match to go through.

Ranieri believes Inter pose less of an attacking threat without Adriano, who was sent off in the final minute at the San Siro and will miss the trip to Germany.

"I think that between me and (Inter coach) Roberto Mancini, I am the one most unhappy with the red card for Adriano," said the man who was sacked by English Premiership side Chelsea in the summer.

"Now he will have a rest, but I didn't want him to have a rest, I wanted him on the pitch."

Ranieri is hoping Inter can still win in Germany even without the Brazil international, who has scored seven goals in nine league matches.

"We will do our utmost to win our remaining games and if Inter can do us this massive, massive favour I will be super happy," he said.

"There is still light at the end of the tunnel. We still have a chance and we hope we can make it."

An otherwise clean contest ended in controversy as Adriano reacted angrily to a shove by Marco Caneira, lashing out at the Portuguese defender and earning a red card for his troubles.

Inter, who thrashed Valencia 5-1 in Spain two weeks ago, came closest to breaking the deadlock in the second half with Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins hitting the bar from close range and Adriano's lob headed off the goal line by David Albelda.

Ronaldinho ends wait

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona fans have been waiting since 1959 to see Milan defeated in their own Nou Camp stadium but Ronaldinho made their dreams come true by getting a stunning winner close to the final whistle to give Barca a 2-1 victory over the Italian champions here Tuesday.

"This goal came just at the right time, for the game, for the team, for him, for everyone," said a delighted Barca coach Frank Rijkaard.

Ronaldinho had been struggling to find his best form in recent weeks due to recurring ankle niggles but he warned Milan before the game that he was slowly starting to feel better, and so it proved.

Football fans will rarely see a more entertaining match in the Champions League this season with both sides living up to their stellar billing, and the perpetually smiling Brazilian World Cup winner was a constant threat to Milan during the second half.

"Things haven't been quite right with Ronaldinho for the past few matches but he's still been playing well. I think that shows what type of player he really is. This goal will not only help him but help us as well, as I'm sure it'll boost his confidence," added Rijkaard.

Ronaldinho got the plaudits from

his team mates as well as his boss.

"What can you say about Ronaldinho? He's phenomenal. There isn't another player like him in the world," said Samuel Eto'o, the scorer of Barca's first goal.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti was sporting in defeat and also paid tribute to the man that handed them their first loss in this season's Champions League.

"Ronaldinho won this game for them with that fantastic goal but Barca deserved the victory, they played very well, especially when they took possession of the ball," said the man who guided Milan to the 2003 Champions League title.

"We started well but as the game went on we became a little less incisive and a little more imprecise in the way we played," analysed Ancelotti.

The result means that both teams have nine points but Milan stay on top of Champions League group F on the basis of their head-to-head results.

Milan's Andriy Shevchenko broke the deadlock after just 17 minutes.

The Ukrainian, who became a father for the first time on Friday and came to the Nou Camp with the express intention of celebrating the birth of his son, opened the scoring when he broke clear of his marker and latched onto Andrea Perlo's neat through-ball.

Shevchenko had the time to pick his spot and put low shot to the left

of Barca's oncoming goalkeeper Victor Valdes.

However, Barca were not to be denied in front of their home fans.

Eto'o equalised for Barca 20 minutes later when the African Player of the Year sent a first time right-foot shot straight past Milan keeper Dida, following a precision pass from Xavi Hernandez wide on the right wing.

The second half was another display of end-to-end football with Barca's Xavi and Belletti both having good efforts before Ronaldinho turned on the style to get the late winner.

The Brazilian World Cup winner enhanced his claims to be the FIFA World Player of the Year by going past two Milan defenders and then unleashing a left-foot shot from the edge of the area, which his compatriot Dida had little chance of stopping.

"What I was really happy about, regardless of the result, is the way the team responded when we were 1-0 down to Milan. They never gave up, and remained fully focussed," added Rijkaard.

"This game was a victory for attacking football but our defence played its part as well and was up to the task," added the Dutch coach, whose concerns now turn towards domestic matters as the Spanish first division leaders try to retain their unbeaten record at home to Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday.

Best on board!

AFP, London

Irish footballing legend George Best looks set to join the board of English Premiership side Portsmouth.

Portsmouth chairman Milan Mandaric has confirmed the club's interest saying that the Manchester United giant could play a positive role in raising the profile of the side.

Best is a regular at Portsmouth home games and has known Mandaric since his days with American club San Jose Earthquake.

"I have never made any secret of the fact that I would like George on the board in some capacity," Mandaric said.

"Who wouldn't? Friendship aside he has a tremendous amount to offer and has contacts worldwide in football."

"He is getting his life together and he has a hell of a lot to give so we are likely to sit down in the future and discuss the exact role we can both foresee him filling," Mandaric told Pompey's official website, www.pompeyfc.co.uk.

Best, who has fought a long battle against alcoholism and had a life-saving liver transplant operation, has indicated he would relish the role.

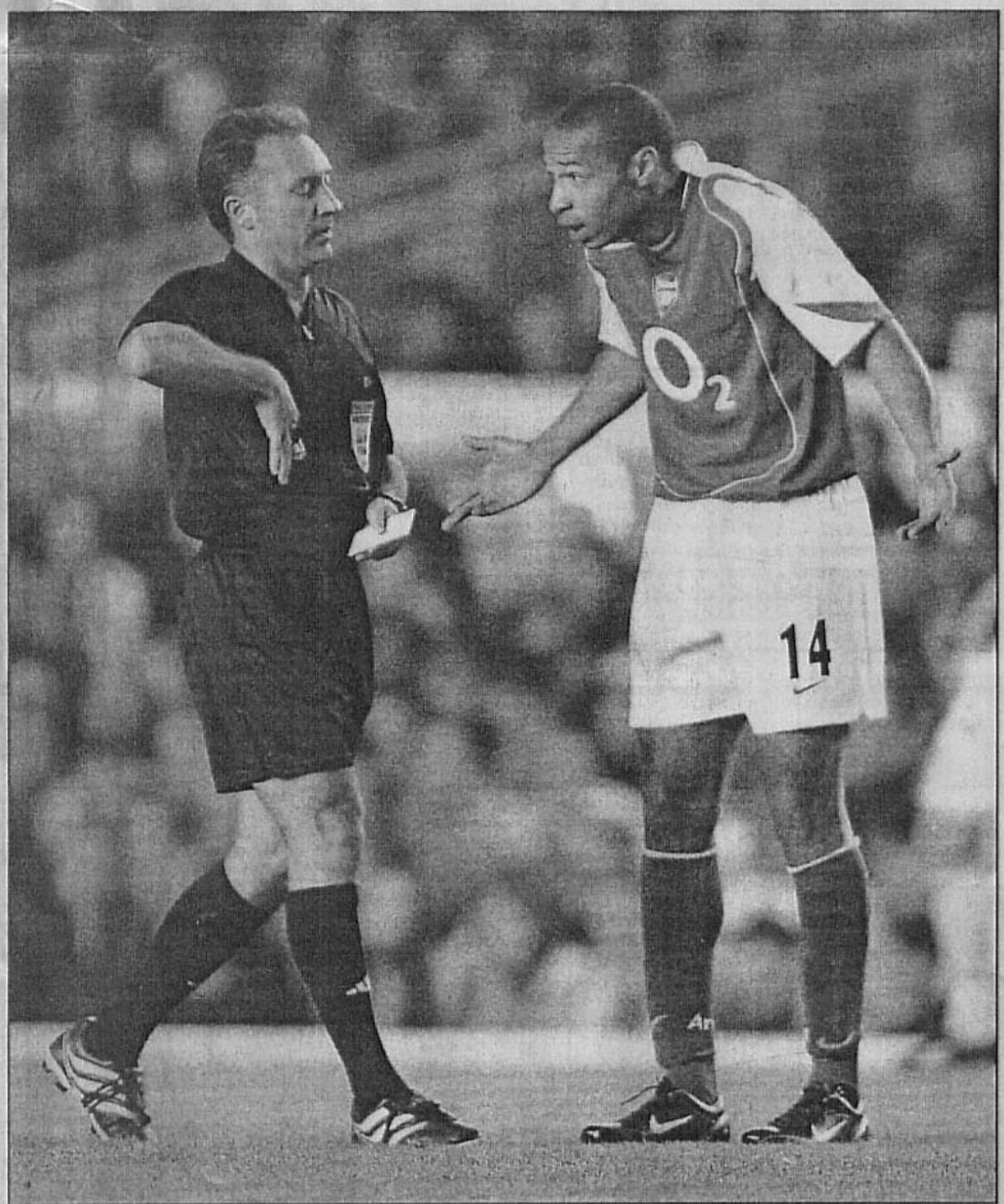


PHOTO: AFP

WHAT DID I DO WRONG? Arsenal's Thierry Henry (R) protests with referee Luis Median Cantalejo as he receives a yellow card at Highbury in London during the match against Panathinaikos on November 2.

Misfiring Gunners

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is refusing to panic but admits his side are going through a dip after witnessing their English Premiership and Champions League campaigns stutter.

The Gunners have misfired since the 'Battle of Old Trafford' when Manchester United ended the champions' unbeaten English Premiership run at 49 matches.

Though Wenger has his sights on winning the Champions League as well as retaining their domestic

crown, his side threw away a winning lead for a third successive European match when Panathinaikos earned a 1-1 draw and also missed a penalty.

"I feel we have a little dip physically and we need to recover a little bit," said Wenger after the draw with the Greek champions.

"We are going through a little period where physically we suffer a bit but I'm confident that we'll come back and the mental strength and the quality of the players is strong enough to come back. It is in our hands."

"We have lost one game in the whole season and we know we can play better going forward and we will again. If we panic the whole of Europe should panic."

Arsenal have four matches to shrug

off their lethargy before travelling to Champions League Group E leaders PSV Eindhoven, with sorties to Crystal Palace and north London rivals Tottenham, a home match against strugglers West Bromwich plus the visit of Everton in the League Cup.

English Premiership rivals Chelsea can boast of two international players in every outfield position and Blues manager Jose Mourinho is beginning the first rotation of his squad, fielding those who have thus far sat on the sidelines.

While Chelsea have oil tycoon Roman Abramovich's vast fortune to spend, Wenger has had to be thrifty in his purchases and plough his investment into the youth team as the new Emirates Stadium project eats up the

budget.

Wenger's second string consists of highly talented but very inexperienced youngsters and though 17-year-old midfielder Cesc Fabregas is tipped to star for Arsenal and Spain for years to come, there is no guarantee his peers will blend into the first team as successfully.

Arsenal have the chance to get their season back on track in Saturday's trip over the Thames to newly-promoted Palace and Wenger may risk throwing in a few starlets to re-energise their season.

England centre-half Sol Campbell is certain to miss out, still struggling with an achilles injury that has ruled him out of all but six games this season.

Preview

Time to show character

UEFA CUP

AFP, Paris

Alan Shearer has urged his Newcastle United team-mates to put their weekend Premiership defeat to Bolton Wanderers behind them and kick-off another lengthy unbeaten run starting with UEFA Cup action on Thursday.

The loss was Newcastle's first under Graeme Souness and Shearer feels their UEFA Cup Group D clash at home against Georgian side Dinamo Tbilisi will be a test of the players' character.

"The unbeaten run is gone now and there is nothing we can do about it," said the former England captain whose penalty three minutes from time gave Newcastle a 1-0 win over Greek side Panionios in the opening match.

"It's disappointing, but we must start again now. This is when you see a team's true test of character - when they have lost."

Newcastle midfielder Jermaine Jenas should be fit after sitting out his side's first defeat in 11 games through injury, along with French full-back Olivier Bernard, who has been assured that his absence at the weekend had nothing to do with his ongoing contract wrangle.

"I should be OK for Thursday night after missing out on Sunday. It was a bit of a freak accident really when I turned my back in training on Saturday morning," said 21-year-old England international Jenas.

Panionios, who fired coach Carol Pecze following their defeat against Newcastle, travel to Sporting Lisbon.

Spanish outfit Sevilla will also be bidding to put their 3-0 rout by Real Zaragoza behind them when they kick off their Group H campaign at home against German second division side Alemannia Aachen.

The Germans have gained something of a reputation as giant-slayers after shocking high-flying French side Lille in the first round of group matches.

And Sevilla captain Pablo Alfaro warned that his side, currently second in the Primera Liga, will be more motivated than ever.

"We're not going to repeat the mistakes of Sunday. There's professional and personal pride at stake. We're 100 percent focused on this match against the Germans which is going to be a very physical and dangerous game," said Alfaro.

teams are better prepared."

Boosted by their weekend win Real Zaragoza, top of Group C, travel to Austria Vienna, who are playing their opening match.

Zaragoza are boosted by the news that Alberto Zapater, Luis Garcia and Javi Moreno should be fit for Thursday's tie.

Last season's Russian Premier League runners-up Zenit Saint Petersburg enter their Group H match with Lille on the back of domestic success with a 3-1 win at Ramenskoye on Sunday.

But they will be without a set of key players with defender Martin Horak, striker Lukas Hartig and midfielder Radek Sirl all sidelined with injuries, and coach Vlastimil Petrela opting to leave out Bosnian half-back Darko Maletic and full back Alexei Katulsky.

Lille midfielder Matt Moussilou is uncertain with a back injury, while defender Mathieu Chalme, is still out after surgery on his cheekbone.

In Group A, in-form Schalke travel to Edinburgh to take on Hearts after winning their fifth straight league match following the appointment of Ralf Rangnick.

The new coach ensured Schalke recovered from their slow start to the season and his side are now second in the Bundesliga after defeating VfB Stuttgart 3-2 on

Saturday.

Hearts followed their 3-0 defeat by Feyenoord with the loss of manager Craig Levein to English first division side Leicester City last week, and will hope to have their new manager in place in time for the tie.

Also in Group A Hungarian league leaders Ferencvaros TC get their first taste of the group stage at home against 2002 winners Feyenoord.

Middlesbrough host crisis hit Italian giants Lazio but the English side have problems of their own as Spanish international Gaizka Mendietza has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury while Stuart Parnaby is out for up to 12 weeks after he fractured his fibia during a freak training ground accident.

Elsewhere, Partizan and Egaleo FC go into their Group B game with unbeaten domestic records.

Dinamo Zagreb kick off their UEFA Cup campaign at home against Beveren, while Group G heavyweights VfB Stuttgart and Benfica, the big winners on the first matchday, meet at the Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion.

Stuttgart face visiting Benfica looking to reverse a run of three league defeats that has seen Matthias Sammer's side drop from first to third in the Bundesliga.