

# Sparta's Ruud awakening



AFP, London

The way Ruud van Nistelrooy got Manchester United's Champions League campaign back on track was a suggestion from his manager that the Dutchman now deserved to be bracketed alongside Europe's all-time greats.

Three poacher's strikes and a coolly executed penalty fired United to a 4-1 win over Sparta Prague and extended van Nistelrooy's tally of European goals for United to a phenomenal 35 in 36 matches.

It was the perfect response from the Dutchman to Ferguson's pre-match jibe about picking himself if his misfiring strikers did not start hitting the target more regularly than they have done in United's stop-start beginning to this season.

"Ruud -- he's just unbelievable," was how the Scot summed up van Nistelrooy's performance. "He's definitely the best, most clinical finisher we've seen here. You hope all the chances will fall to him."

Ferguson believes it is no accident that van Nistelrooy seems to save his most deadly form for big European nights.

"All the great strikers loved Europe," he observed. "If you go back to the Cruyffs, the Di Stefanos or a Gerd Muller -- European football was the big platform for them and I think Ruud loves the European stage."

The victory on Wednesday night means United can book their place in the knockout stage by beating Lyon, who have already qualified, on November 23 in what will be Ferguson's 1,000th game in charge of the club.

"We don't want to be going to Fehnerbase for our last game needing a draw -- forget about that. We'll

go for the win against Lyon," Ferguson promised.

Reassuring as Van Nistelrooy's display of his predatory instincts must have been for the Old Trafford faithful, it was not a performance to completely silence the sceptics.

Sparta have claimed just one point from four games in group D but their modest means did not prevent them from generating sufficient chances to have given the evening a totally different complexion.

"They showed an attacking enterprise that surprised us," Ferguson admitted. "That led to a game that was so open it could have been four each after 20 minutes. But we got the goals that mattered, especially the third -- they had pulled one back and had a bit of momentum behind them."

Sparta manager Prantisek Straka disputed the penalty which allowed United to lead by two goals at the break but admitted that defensive blunders on van Nistelrooy's first and third goals had cost his side dear.

"I had warned my players about how good and aggressive a player van Nistelrooy is and you cannot afford to make the kind of mistakes we did against him," Straka said.

Karel Poborsky was the instigator of much of Sparta's best work but his return to Old Trafford was marred by the red card he received three minutes from the end for a late tackle on Gabriel Heinze, having been booked for dissent over United's first half penalty.

Ferguson's description of the early pattern of the match was only a slight exaggeration.

By the time van Nistelrooy put United ahead in the 14th minute, Sparta goalkeeper Jaromir Blazek had produced good blocks to deny first Wayne Rooney then Cristiano Ronaldo (with his feet) and it was

only the inside of his post that kept out Heinze's purely struck shot from the left of the area.

At the other end, Tomas Sivok provided an early scare when he fired the first chance of the match fractionally over and Sparta's lone striker, Tomas Jun, spurned an even better chance when he volleyed Sivok's intelligent knockdown wide of the target from 10 yards.

The good start was undone for Sparta by centreback Jiri Homola's careless passback which left van Nistelrooy with a clear run at goal. The Dutchman duly sidestepped Blazek and clipped a left-foot shot into the empty net.

His second came from the penalty spot, courtesy of Martin Petras's trip on Paul Scholes, who had fastened on to an underhit clearance from the Sparta defence.

To their credit, Sparta did not crumple and it required two good stops in quick succession from Roy Carroll to prevent Poborsky and then Lukas Zelenka's follow-up effort.

Sparta efforts finally bore fruit in the 53rd minute. Zelenka's intelligent dummy caught the United back line on their heels and the midfielder was able to dart into the box to meet Jun's first time pass with a shot over the hopelessly exposed Carroll.

But van Nistelrooy killed off any fightback shortly afterwards when Radoslav Kovac misjudged Heinze's long ball towards the Sparta box and was left stretching to try and head the ball back to his goalkeeper.

The contact proved too weak and van Nistelrooy was able to squeeze past the defender with just enough space to lift the ball over Blazek.

Goal number four came in stoppage time and was the easiest of the lot for the Dutchman -- a close-range tap in from Liam Miller's low cross.



MAKE WAY! Manchester United's Ruud Van Nistelrooy scoring one of his four goals against Sparta Prague at Old Trafford on November 3.

PHOTO: AFP

# Blame it on Kahn!



AFP, Munich

German international goalkeeper Oliver Kahn bore the brunt of the criticism following Bayern Munich's 1-0 Champions League Group C defeat by Juventus on Wednesday.

Captain Kahn, 35, spilled a shot from Swede Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the final minute of the match and Alessandro Del Piero was on hand to tap in and break Bayern's hearts.

"What a dreadful error from Kahn," headlined the Bild daily.

"Bayern are starting to wobble and still have work to do to reach the next stage."

"Ibrahimovic made (Owen) Hargreaves and (Torsten) Frings look like fools and then Kahn spilled his shot -- what an error."

Ibrahimovic produced a fantastic turn to leave the duo for dead on the edge of the penalty area before forcing Kahn to parry his shot into the path of Del Piero.

"Kahn had virtually nothing to do all game and then he made a mistake for the goal," said manager Felix Magath. "The shot was well struck but even Jens Lehmann makes mistakes like that."

"But I cannot accept two of our

players failing to contain one opponent -- that is not good enough."

Kahn and Arsenal goalkeeper Lehmann have been in a fierce battle for the German number one jersey since Jurgen Klinsmann was named national coach.

Vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge refused to single out Kahn but admitted the goalkeeper was partly at fault for the late winner.

"That was a bad mistake," Rummenigge said. "A few people did not look good including Oliver Kahn."

WBut the Munchner Merkur newspaper offered a vote of sympathy for Bayern.

"Bayern played courageously for 89 minutes but then came undone by the trickery of Ibrahimovic," the daily said.

Bayern missed a string of chances with Dutch international Roy Makaay and Claudio Pizarro the main culprits.

"We had so many chances but did not take them," confessed Magath. "Juve showed how clinical they are with the late goal."

Juventus progressed as group winners with the three points in Munich while Bayern know their fate is in their own hands with a victory over Maccabi Tel Aviv on November 23 enough to see them secure second spot.

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Wednesday's collated results in the European Champions League matches:

Group A	Group C
At La Coruna, Spain	At Munich, Germany
Deportivo La Coruna (SPA) 0 Liverpool (ENG) 1 (Jorge Andrade 14-og)	Bayern Munich (GER) 0 Juventus (ITA) 1 (Del Piero 90)
At Athens	At Tel Aviv
Olympiakos (GRE) 1 (Schurrer 84) Monaco (FRA) 0	Maccabi Tel Aviv (ISR) 2 (Dego 48, 57) Ajax (NED) 1 (De Ridder 86)
Group B	Group D
At Kiev	At Lyon, France
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 2 (Yussuf 13, Verpakovskis 23) Real Madrid (SPA) 2 (Raul 38, Figo 44-pen)	Lyon (FRA) 4 (Essien 22, Malouda 53, Nilmar 90, 90) Fenerbahce (TUR) 2 (Selcuk 14, Tuncay Sanli 73)
At Rome	At Manchester, England
AS Roma (ITA) 1 (Montella 90) Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Berbatov 82)	Manchester United (ENG) 4 (Van Nistelrooy 14, 25-pen, 60, 90) Sparta Prague (CZE) 1 (Zelenka 53)

## STANDINGS

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

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Liverpool 4 2 1 1 3 1 7	Kiev 4 2 1 1 9 5 7	Juventus 4 4 0 0 4 0 12	Lyon 4 3 1 0 11 6 10
Olympiakos 4 2 1 1 3 2 7	Leverkusen 4 2 1 1 9 6 7	Bayern 4 2 0 2 5 2 6	United 4 2 2 0 12 5 8
Monaco 4 2 0 2 4 4 6	Real 4 2 1 1 7 7 7	Ajax 4 1 0 3 4 7 3	Fenerbahce 4 1 0 3 6 13 3
Deportivo 4 0 2 2 0 3 2	Roma 4 0 1 3 4 11 1	Tel Aviv 4 1 0 3 2 6 3	Sparta 4 0 1 3 2 7 1

## Pires hears the music

AFP, Paris

Arsenal star Robert Pires, who made a scathing attack on new France coach Raymond Domenech last week, has been summoned to a French Football Federation hearing next Monday.

However, the official motive is to explain why he was wearing Nike gear on a French television interview instead of clothing supplied by the official France sponsors adidas.

However, Domenech, whom Pires accused of getting on his play-



ROBERT PIRES

ers' nerves, will not be present at the hearing as he is on an official trip.

"I was surprised," French federation president Claude Simonet told the L'Equipe sports daily of what Pires claimed was a tense atmosphere in the international camp.

Monday's hearing comes two days before Domenech names his squad for the November 17 friendly against Poland.

## Real fight back in Kiev



AFP, Kiev

Spanish giants Real Madrid came back from a two-goal deficit for the second time this season in the Champions League to draw 2-2 with Ukrainian outfit Dynamo Kiev in their Group B clash here on Wednesday.

Nigerian under-21 international midfielder Ayala Yussuf and Latvian international striker Maris Verpakovskis had the nine-times European champions on the ropes in a shock opening period which threatened their qualification aims.

However Raul and Luis Figo brought the scores level before the end of the first half and maintain their bid for one of the top two qualifying places from Group B.

With two matches remaining, Real sit third in a tight group B on seven

points, the same as group leaders Dynamo and second placed Bayer Leverkusen. Italian side Roma are last on one point.

In what was a balanced start to the match Real looked to have the edge and seemed more focused, however it was Dynamo who lit up the home stadium after only 12 minutes.

Yussuf played a one-two with Brazilian winger Diogo Rincon before unleashing a shot which deflected off Real defender Francisco Pavon and sent Iker Casillas the wrong way.

Real poured forward in attack however the Spanish giants were humbled again as Verpakovskis grabbed their second only 10 minutes later.

Again, Rincon was at the heart of the action supplying the ball to 25-year-old Verpakovskis before he drove forward and fired the ball through a crowd of traffic to beat Casillas from 12 yards out.

It all looked pessimistic for Real,

however in what seemed like no time at all Raul, the Champions League's current record holder for goals, had raised their hopes with a 38th minute strike.

The Spanish international collected from Figo and, seeing Alexander Shovkovsky out of position, Raul slotted home from 12 yards to beat the Dynamo keeper at his left hand corner.

Six minutes later Real's hopes of a result that would keep them in the qualification race for the final knockout phase was given a boost when Ronaldo was fouled in the penalty area by Moroccan midfielder Badr El Kaddouri.

The Brazilian striker left it to Figo to do the honours, and the Portuguese forward duly converted, beating Shovkovsky to bring the scores level.

Both sides battled through the second half, sharing the chances -- and the misfortune not to score any more goals on the night.

## Parreira supports Adriano



AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira defended Adriano on Wednesday, saying the striker reacted the right way when he was sent off for retaliation in Inter Milan's 0-0 Champions League draw with Valencia.

Adriano marred an outstanding start to the season when he lashed out at Valencia's Marco Caneira after

being slapped in the face on Tuesday, earning the first red card of his career.

Parreira refused to condemn the striker, who was top scorer with seven goals when Brazil won the Copa America in July.

"I think his reaction was normal," Parreira told reporters.

"Nobody takes a slap in the face and just looks back at the opponent. I think he reacted the right way."

"I don't condemn him, I think I would have reacted the same way. It shows that he's fierce and doesn't

like to get beaten around.

"On the contrary. He's a player who likes to impose himself, he's hot-blooded and this is good at certain moments," said Parreira. Adriano apologised for the incident earlier on Wednesday and said he acted in legitimate self-defence.

Parreira also heaped praise on Brazil forward Ronaldinho after his brilliant late winner for Barcelona in their 2-1 Champions League victory over AC Milan on Tuesday.

"It was a marvellous goal, with the Ronaldinho hallmark," he said.

## Juve, Lyon sail



REUTERS, London

Juventus and Olympique Lyon joined Chelsea and Inter Milan in the last 16 of the Champions League after both scored late goals to seal their places on Wednesday.

Juventus qualified from Group C by beating Bayern Munich 1-0 with a last minute Alessandro Del Piero winner which gave them their fourth successive 1-0 victory and lifted them onto 12 points.

Although Bayern lost and remain on six points they should still qualify as their last two games are at home to Maccabi Tel Aviv on November 23 before a visit to Ajax Amsterdam on December 8. Bayern have already beaten both those sides.

Maccabi beat Ajax 2-1 in the other group match for their first ever goals and victory in the competition proper leaving them both on three points. Midfielder Barukh Dago was Maccabi's hero, scoring twice in eight minutes early in the second half.

Olympique Lyon joined Juve in the opening knockout round when they beat Fenerbahce 4-2 in a roller-coaster Group D match at home with two stoppage-time goals to take their tally to 10 points.

They cannot now finish lower than second and are likely to be joined by Manchester United who beat Sparta Prague 4-1 to move to eight points.

Fenerbahce (three points) have a slim mathematical chance of overhauling United and finishing second, but Prague (one point) are out.

Lyon looked like they had blown their chance with 17 minutes to play when Tuncay Sanli equalised for the Turkish champions to make it 2-2.

But Fenerbahce were reduced to 10 men after Servet Cetin was red carded two minutes later and paid the price when substitute Nilmar scored twice in stoppage time to seal the victory in a thriller. Fenerbahce led first before Lyon established a 2-1 lead early in the second half.

Lyon dominated and should have wrapped up the match after goals from midfielder Mickael Essien and Florent Malouda had helped give them the lead after Sahin Selcuk's fortunate opener.

Selcuk picked up a clearance from Lyon defender Eric Abidal and tried his luck with an innocuous 25-yard shot which hit Brazilian defender Cris on its way towards beating Coupet in the Lyon goal.

But Lyon's equaliser came almost immediately.

After some wobbly defending in the 22nd minute Ghanaian

midfielder Mickael Essien pounced on a loose bouncing ball in the visitors' area to beat Reber Rustu from 20 metres.

The second half started off in quieter fashion, but after only eight minutes Malouda finally converted one of his numerous chances.

The Frenchman certainly didn't do his chances of an international call-up any harm when he beat Fenerbahce's deep off-side trap to convert Frau's inch perfect right wing cross from three yards out.

Lyon keeper Coupet was left on the field in agony following a clash with a Fenerbahce boot which left him requiring treatment.

Obviously in agony as he jumped for a high ball minutes later, Coupet was finally replaced by Nicolas Puydebois.

The club's second keeper however had a rude introduction, conceding their second goal of the night straight away.

Big defender Luciano rose high to nod down a corner from the right and just as Puydebois prepared to collect, Tuncay stuck out his right foot to direct the ball high into the net for the equaliser.

Moments later the visitors were reduced to ten men when Servet picked up his second caution for a foul on Nilmar.

The Brazilian would get up to

show that for him the match was far from over, first heading home a freekick from Juninho in injury time to give them the lead before heading home his second of the night to seal a dramatic victory.

Real Madrid overturned a two-goal deficit for the second time in the competition, coming back to draw 2-2 with Dynamo Kiev in Ukraine in their Group B match.

Roma and Leverkusen drew 1-1 behind closed doors in Rome in the other match in the group leaving Leverkusen, Kiev and Real on seven points with Roma on one.

UEFA banned spectators from the match as punishment for the coin-throwing attack on referee Anders Frisk when Roma played Kiev at home in September.

Despite just taking one point from a possible 12, Roma are still, mathematically at least, not yet eliminated.

In Group A Olympiakos beat AS Monaco 1-0 and Liverpool's Spanish manager Rafael Benitez enjoyed his trip back home with Liverpool winning 1-0 at Deportivo Coruna with an own goal from Jorge Andrade after only 14 minutes.

Olympiakos and Liverpool are on seven points, Monaco on six and Coruna, last season's beaten semi-finalists, facing elimination with just two points.



PHOTO: AFP

IT CAME FROM UP ABOVE: Lyon's Brazilian prodigy Nilmar points to the heavens after scoring during the match against Fenerbahce, at the Gerland's stadium in Lyon on November 3.