

Champions owe it to Benny

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Oporto

A late goal by South African international Benni McCarthy saw reigning champions FC Porto squeeze through to the second round of the Champions League here on Tuesday as they beat Chelsea 2-1 in their Group H clash.

McCarthy's goal ensured that they did not suffer the indignity of becoming the first holders to crash out before the knockout stage and inflicted the English Premiership leaders' first defeat of the competition.

Victory for Porto was made all the sweeter by the fact that Jose Mourinho, the man who guided them to Champions League glory last season, was now in charge of Chelsea.

Porto coach Victor Fernandez was understandably delighted as it ended a tense past 10 days which had seen club president Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa accused of two counts of sports corruption, two

counts of influencing trafficking involving referees and one count of falsifying documents.

"Relieved? Yes of course. We deserved this victory. Little by little gaps opened up and we showed in this match we have the willingness to win, even if it wasn't easy."

Mourinho for his part said his old team deserved their place in the last 16.

"My players were less motivated and played for the draw while the Porto players realising what was at stake were highly motivated."

"This was not a match to prepare for the Arsenal game on Sunday as if it had been I would have played my best side," he added rather patronisingly.

Mourinho said it was logical that Porto had progressed.

"They were the second best side in the group and I would have been surprised if they hadn't gone through. Yes I congratulate them, though personally I am not happy as I never like to lose matches," he said.

Porto had to come from behind to pull it off as Damien Duff had opened the scoring in the first-half

before Brazilian Diego levelled with a superb goal in the second-half and McCarthy's 86th minute header wrapped up the great escape.

Chelsea had the first chance of the match in the 11th minute as Ivory Coast international Didier Drogba had a free header from Frank Lampard's superb cross but the hosts keeper Nuno pulled off a brilliant save tipping it onto the bar.

The deadlock was broken in the 34th minute when Nunes made a complete mess of Duff's shot from the edge of the penalty area as the 30-year-old goalkeeper's effort to punch it away saw it deflect off his fist into the net.

Porto's first worthwhile effort in the half came from a long range freekick by South African international striker Benni McCarthy but it drifted wide three minutes from the break.

They went closer right on the stroke of half-time as their impressive Brazilian midfielder Diego struck a fierce freekick which Petr Cech did well to punch away.

Diego was the first player to test either keeper in the second-half as after 12 minutes of nervy football

with the hosts especially tense the 19-year-old unleashed a shot which lacked any real power and Cech gathered it safely.

However, the Brazilian teenager made no mistake four minutes later as he slotted home past Cech to give the hosts real hope of making the last 16 with a wonderful right-footed volley from the edge of the area after John Terry had headed out Greek international Giourkas Seitaridis' shot.

Porto poured forward searching for the winner and McCarthy went close in the 64th minute when his low shot was beaten away by Cech.

Chelsea regained some composure and Lampard reminded the hosts that they should not be too loose at the back as he drifted in unnoticed but did not match his movement with the quality of the shot as he sidefooted softly straight at Nunes.

McCarthy though got the goal that he deserved for his performance as four minutes from time he netted with a wonderful header from the previously anonymous Ricardo Quaresma's cross.

Bremen prove tougher

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AT VALENCIA

German champions Werder Bremen booked their place in the last sixteen of the Champions League with a 2-0 triumph over Valencia here on Tuesday but the match was overshadowed by a series of ugly scenes in the final minutes.

Paraguayan international Nelson Haedo Valdez was the Werder hero scoring two goals in the final seven minutes after coming on as a substitute to guide Bremen into the knockout phase.

"My team deserved to progress and I am very proud of them," declared Bremen handler Thomas Schaaf. "Nelson Valdez is a great player who showed his quality once again."

Valdez scored in the 83rd minute

- just two minutes after coming on - and then in the final seconds but the match was tarnished by a late brawl.

Angulo brutally chopped down Valdez in the final minute and was red-carded for his wretched tackle and things then spiralled out of control with the Spaniard spitting in the direction of the Paraguayan.

"Scenes such as that can not be tolerated and the game had to come to an end," explained Schaaf.

A number of players from both sides tussled and all kinds of objects were launched onto the pitch as Swedish referee Anders Frisk - who himself had been the subject of violence earlier in the competition when struck on the head by an object thrown during the AS Roma v Dynamo Kiev clash - his hands full.

Valencia will in all likelihood face a UEFA probe for the conduct of their players and supporters.

On the pitch a place in the UEFA Cup - a competition they won last

season - awaits Valencia.

Despite needing just a point to progress Bremen vowed not to sit back and defend and they were good to their word pushing forward in numbers.

Indeed it was Bremen who had the best chances to score in the first period with three good openings in five minutes.

German international Miroslav Klose, Frenchman Johan Micoud, a real thorn in Valencia's side all evening, and Daniel Jensen all went close.

At half-time the match stood at 0-0 with Bremen in the knockout phase and Valencia demoted to the UEFA Cup.

In the second half Valencia turned the screw and should have scored three minutes after the break with Mista missing an open goal.

Pablo Aimar fired a fierce shot that Werder goalkeeper Andreas Reinke failed to hold but Mista

somehow headed wide when it appeared easier to put the ball in.

Italian coach Claudio Ranieri was gesticulating frantically on the touchline showing the signs of a man under pressure.

Ranieri sent on three substitutes at once - Marco di Viao, Bernardo Corradi and Vicente - on the hour mark in a last throw of the dice and it almost had the desired effect.

Italian striker di Viao thundered a 20 yard volley that crashed against the crossbar to safety.

Bremen then hit Valencia with the sucker punch with Valdez rounding Santiago Canizares to slot home.

Angulo's horrendous tackle then sparked a mass brawl that Frisk struggled to contain but Valdez kept his cool to net in the closing seconds and further anger the irate Valencia fans.



PHOTO: AFP

Werder Bremen's Paraguayan Nelson Valdez (R) rounding off Valencia's goalkeeper Santiago Canizares at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on December 7.

Gunners' young smile

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

Arsenal swept into the knockout stages of the Champions League at the top of group E after matching their biggest win in the tournament with a 5-1 demolition of Norwegian champions Rosenborg.

All the pre-match talk of an impending crisis at Highbury was left looking slightly ridiculous as Arsene Wenger's precociously talented youngsters totally outclassed the Norwegian champions in north London on Tuesday.

Cesc Fabregas in particular was outstanding, capping a mature performance with a goal that, at 17 years and 217 days, made him Arsenal's youngest goalscorer in European competition, as well as making light of the absence of the suspended Patrick Vieira.

Jose Antonio Reyes, Thierry Henry, Robert Pires - from the penalty spot - and second-half substitute Robin van Persie provided Arsenal's other goals on a night that was spoiled only by an error from goalkeeper Manuel Almunia that allowed Erik Hoftun to score for Rosenborg.

Perhaps because of that blot,

Wenger declined an invitation to declare his side as back to their best after their recent stumble, but smiled: "Maybe we were never as bad as people said we were."

Arsenal can now turn their attentions to Sunday's Premiership summit meeting with Chelsea.

"We said before the game against Birmingham (on Saturday) that we had three big targets -- to beat Birmingham, to qualify tonight and then Sunday."

"We can't say the job is done yet but in Europe the job is done. It would have been very bad preparation (for Chelsea) to have gone out tonight and we knew it would be difficult if took a while for us to score," the Frenchman added.

Arsenal's already depleted resources had been further reduced prior to kick-off when forced Freddie Ljungberg out of the starting line-up and also left him doubtful for Sunday.

That meant Dennis Bergkamp had to be drafted into the starting line-up, Jose Antonio Reyes pushed out to the left-wing and Pires switched to the right.

It did not take long however for the enforced reshuffle to look like an exemplary piece of planning.

Cutting in from the left, Reyes looked sharper than he has done for some time and when Bergkamp's

third-minute pass found him just inside the area, the Spaniard turned centreback Torjus Hansen inside out before giving Arsenal the lead.

The ease with which Henry and Reyes were able to find space behind the Norwegians back four indicated how the evening would develop.

But Arsenal had reason to be grateful to Almunia for denying Rosenborg an equaliser with a fine save, diving low to his right to keep out Harald Martin Brattbakk's crisp volley.

Henry promptly doubled Arsenal's lead, outstripping the unfortunate Hansen to reach a through ball from Pires before clipping the ball over Espen Johnsen.

The Rosenborg goalkeeper prevented Bergkamp from making it three after Fabregas had played him in but there was nothing he could do to prevent the teenager from claiming Arsenal's third and his own first goal in the competition.

A deflected shot from Bergkamp landed at the feet of Pires, whose first time pass gave Fabregas the chance to turn inside Hoftun and place a left foot shot beyond Johnsen.

Rosenborg though declined to crumble and three minutes after Roar Strand had powered a header against the woodwork, they pulled a goal back with the help of a double

blunder from Almunia, selected ahead of recently dropped Jens Lehmann.

Having come for but dropped Brattbakk's free-kick, the Spaniard then contrived to push Hoftun's hooked shot into his own net.

Fabregas did his best to restore the party atmosphere with a breathtaking slalom through the Rosenborg defence, his weary shot at the end not quite matching the excellence of what had preceded it.

But four minutes before the interval Arsenal did go further ahead. Bergkamp's pass put Henry into a one-on-one with Johnsen, whose attempt to claim the ball succeeded only in up-ending the French striker for a penalty that Pires converted.

The introduction of van Persie and Gael Clichy as second half substitutes meant Arsenal finished the match with six players under-21 and van Persie might easily have had his first Highbury hat-trick.

As it was, the young Dutchman had to be content with just one goal. Six minutes from time he collected Reyes's neat pass and deftly flipped the ball over Johnsen to ensure Arsenal registered their biggest Champions League win at Highbury

and matched last year's 5-1 win over Internazionale in Milan.



PHOTO: AFP

LOUDER! Porto's South African forward Benny McCarthy gestures after his goal against Chelsea at Dragao Stadium in Porto on December 7

STANDINGS

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

Group E									
Arsenal	6	2	4	0	11	6	10		
PSV	6	3	1	2	6	7	10		
Panathinaikos	6	2	3	1	11	8	9		
Rosenborg	6	0	2	4	6	13	2		
Group F									
Milan	6	4	1	1	10	3	13		
Barcelona	6	3	1	2	9	6	10		
Shakhtar	6	2	0	4	5	9	8		
Celtic	6	1	2	3	4	10	5		
Group G									
Inter	6	4	2	0	14	3	14		
Bremen	6	4	1	1	12	6	13		
Valencia	6	2	1	3	6	10	7		
Anderlecht	6	0	0	6	4	17	0		
Group H									
Chelsea	6	4	1	1	10	3	13		
Porto	6	2	2	2	4	6	8		
CSKA	6	2	1	3	5	5	7		
PSG	6	1	2	3	3	8	5		

Note: Top two from each group qualify for the Champions League knockout phase (last 16). Third placed teams go into UEFA Cup, fourth placed teams eliminated from Europe.

UEFA Cup spots decided

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, London

Defending champion Porto produced a thrilling fightback to beat Chelsea 2-1 and grab a Champions League lifeline as Arsenal and Werder Bremen booked their places in the next round Tuesday.

On a tension-filled night in Europe's premier club competition, UEFA Cup places were also up for grabs as the bottom finishers in each Group targeted at least the third spot.

Nine teams had already qualified for the last 16, including Manchester United, Olympique Lyon, Juventus and Bayern Munich who play their final fixtures Wednesday.

Sergei Semak scored a hat trick to take CSKA Moscow into the UEFA Cup past Paris Saint Germain in Group H. Chelsea had finished first with 13 points and Porto eight, while

CSKA enters the UEFA Cup after coming third.

PSV Eindhoven, which had already qualified, finished second after being hammered 4-1 at Panathinaikos, the Greek side earning the consolation of a UEFA Cup place.

Inter Milan, already qualified in Group G, coach Roberto Mancini fielded a largely second-string side against Anderlecht but two goals from striker Obafemi Martins sealed top spot as the Belgians ended a miserable campaign without a point.

In Group F Shakhtar Donetsk claimed a UEFA Cup place with a 2-0 victory over a depleted Barcelona side, Nigerian forward Julius Aghahowa scoring four goals in the first half to see off the Spanish league leader.

Barcelona finished second in the group, behind AC Milan which drew 0-0 at Celtic, a result that ended the Scottish club's participation in European competition this season.

Paying the price for the dead

Football

APP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian club Sao Caetano have been docked 24 points for having played full-back Serginho in a first division league match during which he died of a heart attack.

Paulo Sergio de Oliveira Silva, 30, collapsed in the 14th minute of the second half of a match between Sao Caetano and Sao Paulo on October 27 and was taken to hospital where he died.

The autopsy on Serginho showed

his heart weighed 600 grammes, three times the weight of a normal heart.

Sao Caetano, fourth in the championship with 77 points, now drop back to 14th place on 53 points and will lose the chance to qualify for the Copa Libertadores, the most prestigious club tournament in South America.

Brazil's Sports Disciplinary Tribunal also suspended Sao Caetano president Nairo Ferreira for 720 days and the club doctor, Paulo Forte, for four years.

The club, which was also slapped with a 50,000-real (13,730-euro) fine, has three days to appeal the tribunal's ruling.

Karimi Asia's best

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Persian football's golden boy Ali Karimi was crowned Asian player of the year here Thursday, becoming the fourth Iranian player to lift the award since 1996.

The Dubai-based striker was handed the award after a string of superb displays in this year's Asian Cup in China, where he finished joint top-scorer with five goals as Iran reached the semi-finals.

The 26-year-old, who also scored 27 goals in all United Arab Emirates competitions this season for his club Al-Ahli, pipped Japan's Shunsuke Nakamura and Bahrain's A'ala Hubail for the award.

Karimi's honour was the highlight of the Asian Football Confederation awards for 2004.

Japan, who overcame the loss of several European-based stars to successfully retain their Asian Cup crown, were named national team of the year.

Adnan Hamd, who guided Iraq to the finals of the Asian Cup and the Olympics after a fairytale run that saw them overcome the ravages of war in their homeland, was named coach of the year.

Newly crowned Asian Champions League winners Al-Ittihad of Saudi Arabia were named as the continent's top club side.

Al-Ittihad defied the odds last month by coming back from a 3-1 first leg defeat at home in the Champions League final against Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma to win 5-0 away and run out 6-3 winners on aggregate.

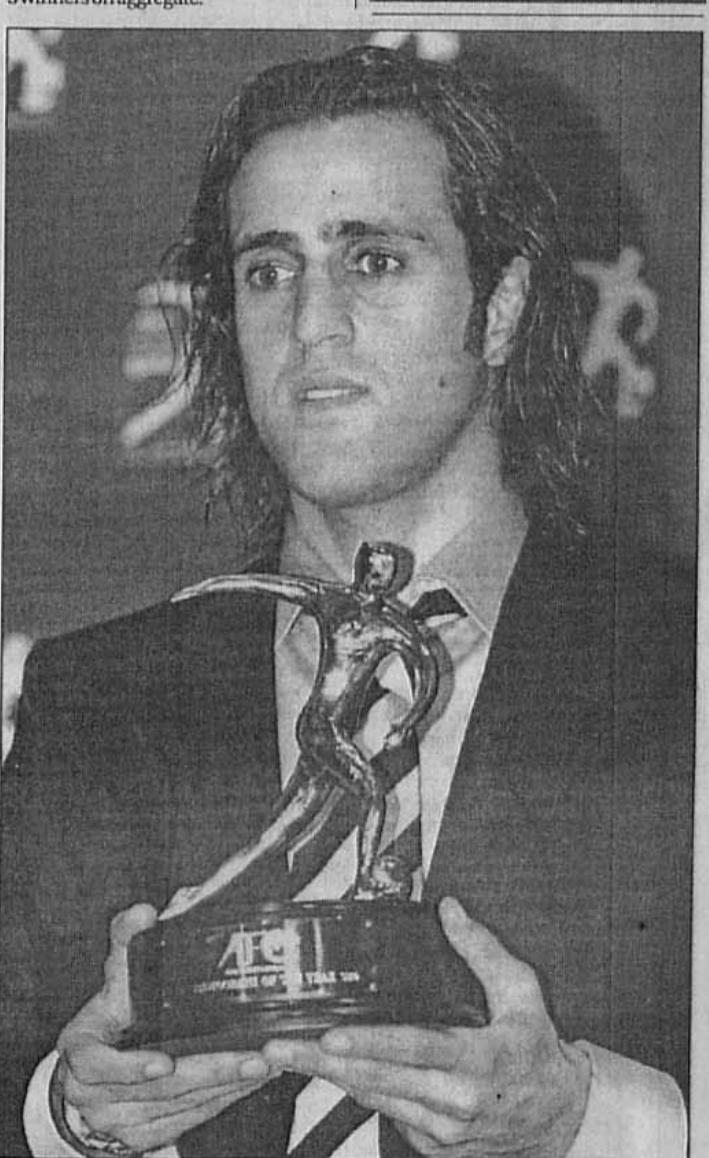


PHOTO: AFP

Iranian international Ali Karimi poses with his trophy after he was announced Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Player of the Year 2004 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.