

PREVIEW

Chelsea, L'pool eye knockouts



English rivals Chelsea and Liverpool can become the first two teams to reach the Champions League knockout round with wins on Tuesday.

Chelsea, the Premiership champions, can reach the last 16 with a win at Real Betis in Spain while Liverpool, the defending European champions and second behind the Londoners in Group G, will also go through with a win against Anderlecht at Anfield. The Belgians have lost all of three matches in the tournament this season without scoring a goal and haven't won a European tie in their last 10 outings.

Liverpool are desperate for a European tonic. They are 13th in the Premiership, with just three wins and seven goals in nine games.

They are a huge 18 points behind Chelsea but coach Rafael Benitez has an admirable record in Europe with 17 wins in 25 matches. "We did a very good job in Brussels in the first leg to win 1-0," said Benitez. "Now we intend to finish the job with another victory. If we do that we will be virtually through into the knockout stages. We have been very positive in our Champions League matches and I hope that we can continue this now."

Real Betis were outclassed 4-0 at Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in the first meeting of the two teams and a 2-0 Spanish League defeat at home to Real Madrid on Saturday left them four places off the bottom.

"Chelsea are a good team but it has been demonstrated in the past that things don't always go as expected," said Betis coach Lorenzo Serra Ferrer.

"I don't think my players are psychologically frightened about facing English sides even though Chelsea are a very powerful team."

Chelsea go into the game having seen off Blackburn 4-2 which kept them nine points ahead at the top of the English Premiership at the weekend.

"I hope Betis think they can beat us and they play their normal way," said Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho.

Self-critical Adriano



Inter Milan superstar Adriano has been under fire recently for his poor form and lack of discipline, but on Sunday he apologised to his club and promised to do better.

"I analysed this difficult time with President Giacinto Facchetti and made him a promise: I want to find my form as soon as possible so that I can help Inter which, recently, I have been unable to do," he told the official club website.

"The pain I still feel in my shoulder could explain some of my performances, but I must shut out any excuses or alibis and concentrate on my work."

The man dubbed 'L'Imperatore' (The Emperor) has been disappointing of late and hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. He caused controversy and was publicly taken down a peg by Juan Sebastian Veron after he took an extra three days to return from international duty, then turned up an hour late for Friday's training session amid reports he had been out dancing the night before.

"I promised President Facchetti that I will do what the club, the Coach, my team-mates and the fans ask of me," continued Adriano. "When I renewed my contract with Inter, I made a precise choice, because I want to win and continue to grow both as a player and a man."

However, the Brazilian cannot rediscover his scoring touch through will-power alone and admits his poor form could last for some time.

"I think that everyone can go through a period where the ball just isn't hitting the back of the net. The club showed me affection and proved that it cares, because the things that were said were for my own good. I thank Inter for this. I have promised to prove on the field that I want to get over these problems with hard work."

Olympiakos in Greece. Coach Gerard Houllier, who groomed the vast majority of the Liverpool squad which went on to win last season's Champions League, believes the summer signing of Tiago from Chelsea could prove crucial as they plot a path to the quarter-finals for the first time.

"I'm very pleased with Tiago. He is tactically very important and with his skill on the ball, gives us a bit more fluency," said Houllier.

Real Madrid, who are in Lyon's slipstream in Group F, go to Rosenborg hoping that Ronaldo, Julio Baptista and Zinedine Zidane will recover from injury to make the trip to Norway. But defender Michel Salgado will probably miss out after suffering a suspected broken jaw in Saturday's win at Real Betis.

In Group E, last season's runners-up AC Milan go to PSV Eindhoven, who they beat in the semi-finals on the way to the final, buoyed by handing Juventus their first Serie A defeat of the season.

Milan are top of Group E with five points from three games, one ahead of Fenerbache and PSV. Inter Milan, European champions in 1964 and 1965, top Group H with six points from three matches and face 2004 champions Porto at home.

Like Liverpool, Inter are struggling on the home front and are eight points behind Juventus.

But Inter have an excellent home record against Portuguese clubs in European competition with six wins and a draw in seven meetings.

Glasgow Rangers, 10 points off the pace in the Scottish Premier League, are second in the group behind Inter with four points and go to Armedia Bratislava, the Slovakian team who put out Celtic in the qualifying round.

They too are looking for a continental boost against the team with whom they drew 0-0 at Ibrox.

Table with 3 columns: Date, Team 1, Team 2, Score. Includes fixtures for Tuesday, Group E (PSV vs Milan, Schalke vs Fenerbahce), Group F (Olympiakos vs Lyon, Rosenborg vs Real Madrid), Group G (Real Betis vs Chelsea, Liverpool vs Anderlecht), and Group H (Armedia vs Rangers, Inter Milan vs Porto).



JOSE MOURINHO

SERIE A Fiorentina stay close

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina moved to within five points of Serie A leaders Juventus after fighting back from a goal down to beat Cagliari 2-1 on Sunday.

Honduras international David Suazo capitalised on a weak backpass by Marco Di Loreto to give the Sardinians a first-half lead and increase their hopes of claiming their first win of the campaign.

But Luca Toni toe-poked his 12th goal of the season to level the score soon after the break before Martin Jorgensen's low drive sealed victory nine minutes from time.

The Florence club are now emerging as genuine title contenders but their coach Cesare Prandelli was keeping his feet firmly on the ground.

Table: Italian football league table after Sunday's matches. Columns: Team, Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals For, Goals Against, Points.

Hussey covers for Langer

AFP, Brisbane

Mike Hussey is in line to make his long-awaited Test debut after opener Justin Langer admitted Monday he was losing his fitness battle to play in Thursday's opening Test against the West Indies at the Gabba.

Langer, who fractured a rib while batting for Western Australia in a one-day match last weekend, has until early Tuesday to prove he is fit to play for his country.

Langer has bravely insisted he would play but on Monday the stoic left-hander admitted his chances were diminishing.

"If it's anything like this morning, I don't think I've got that much chance," said Langer, who has played 53 consecutive matches since winning a recall for The Oval Test of the 2001 Ashes tour of England.

"It's pretty sore and it's a lot worse than I thought it was when I spoke to everybody yesterday.

"I'm not so worried about getting another hit in the ribs. It's just the fact that it's hard to run and it's hard to breathe.

"You can be as optimistic as you like. But I saw the intensity and the way the guys trained this morning and if I'm not up to 100 per cent, I wouldn't be playing on Thursday."

Langer, who was on course to play his 100th Test against South Africa in Sydney next January, said he has been advised to rest for 10 days, which should have him ready to return for the second Test in Hobart starting on November 17.

But if he is forced to stand down, Langer said he could not be more delighted that the 30-year-old Hussey would get the chance to make his Test debut.

"He's your consummate professional and I've watched him since he was an 18-year-old kid," Langersaid.

"I've probably not met a guy who wants to wear a baggy green cap as much as Mike Hussey does.

"So if I'm going to be replaced by anyone, you couldn't have a better replacement."

Hussey was placed on standby by selectors and flew to Brisbane from Perth Monday.

"Justin's going to be given every chance to prove his fitness. I've just got to sit and wait," Hussey told reporters.

DCCA donation

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Dhaka Cricket Club Association (DCCA) donated Tk 50,000 to ailing umpire Mahbub Haque Shaheen on Monday.

Shaheen has been suffering from kidney complications.

Mourinho 'special' for Wenger



AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has launched a stinging attack on his Arsenal counterpart Arsene Wenger who he claims gets his kicks involved in trying to catch the runaway league leaders.

Mourinho responded by suggesting the Arsenal chief is clearly rattled by their success.

"I think he is one of those people who is a voyeur," said Mourinho after watching his side destroy Blackburn 4-2 at Stamford Bridge to make it 10 wins out of 11 in the league this season.

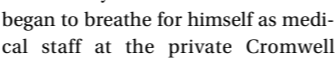
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Best breathing on his own



LONDON

After days under heavy sedation as his life hung by a thread, George Best started to wake up on Sunday as doctors declared they were "very pleased" with his progress.

The 59-year-old former footballer began to breathe for himself as medical staff at the private Cromwell Hospital in west London turned his ventilator down and he showed he was aware of his surroundings.

Professor Roger Williams, who oversaw Best's liver transplant in 2002, said he was still in a serious condition with internal bleeding and kidney problems but there was "an increasing degree of hope".

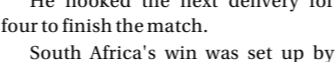
He said: "He's recognising people. He's better in that respect but please don't run away with thinking he's fantastic because there's still a long way to go. He has not spoken."

Professor Williams said medication for the internal bleeding seemed to be working but there was much to do to get all his organs functioning. The main worry was Best's kidneys which were "affected by the bleeding and the infections".

Best would remain in intensive care for the next few days, he said. "It's the long haul when somebody has been as ill as this."

Professor Williams added that he should suffer no "long-term harm from these acute episodes" and should get back a very reasonable quality of life.

SA keep on winning



AFP, Port Elizabeth

Justin Kemp hit New Zealand fast bowler Shane Bond for a massive six which sailed out of St George's Park as South Africa won the third one-day international with four balls to spare Sunday.

South Africa took an unbeatable 3-0 win in the five-match series with a four-wicket victory. It was their 12th successive one-day international win, the second-best winning streak in history.

New Zealand, who set the home side a target of 244 to win, seemed to have clawed their way back into the match with some disciplined bowling and tigerish fielding before Kemp and Shaun Pollock came together in an unbeaten stand of 43 off 24 balls.

Nine runs were still needed off the final over but Bond's first ball was slightly short and Kemp pulled it high over midwicket and into the street beyond.

He hooked the next delivery for four to finish the match.

South Africa's win was set up by Herschelle Gibbs, who stroked a fluent 81, but their winning streak was in danger when Gibbs was caught at point off Bond and Mark Boucher run out by a direct hit by Lou Vincent from cover.

"We put ourselves under a little bit of pressure but we stood up when it counted," said South African captain Graeme Smith.

All three matches in the series have had close finishes.

Chelsea's 1-1 draw at Everton last Sunday and their FA Cup loss to Charlton on penalties in midweek.

Wenger had said that some of Chelsea's self-belief disappeared after those two results and that hope had been restored to those clubs involved in trying to catch the runaway league leaders.

Mourinho responded by suggesting the Arsenal chief is clearly rattled by their success.

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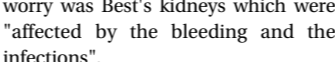
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Magpies fly on Owen - Shearer



AFP, London

A Michael Owen double and a late strike from Alan Shearer helped kick side from Newcastle's Premiership campaign with a 3-0 away win at West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

Newcastle manager Graeme Souness has been under pressure to turn around the Magpies disappointing start, which had left them eighth from bottom of the Premiership, and this fourth win from 11 games will be welcomed.

Two pieces of news concerned Newcastle in midweek, and both could be said to have led to Owen's opener moments after the restart.

French midfielder Charles N'Zogbia, whom the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruled could stay at the club after an appeal by his former side Le Havre, combined with Shola Ameobi in the 46th minute and the Frenchman sent in a probing cross for Owen from wide on the left flank.

Owen perfectly timed his run to the near post and prodded the ball home with the outside of his right foot to leave goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak clutching at thin air.

Shearer came on to replace Ameobi and barely 10 minutes later Newcastle had doubled their lead.

Shearer found Kieron Dyer on the right and the England midfielder raced to the byline before cutting the ball back to Owen at the near post where a first time prod sent the ball high past Kuszczak.

Shearer grabbed a goal of his own 10 minutes from time after Dyer had started a move which left Owen with the ball in midfield.

The England striker released Peter Ramage after the defender's great run down the right and when his cross was heading across goal Shearer pounced to divert it past Kuszczak from close range.

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King stands by his charges

AFP, Brisbane

Coach Bennett King Monday defended his West Indian cricketers against claims by fast bowling great Michael Holding of an attitude problem, just days before the opening Test here with Australia.

Holding has criticised the current touring party, accusing the squad of not focusing on cricket and on representing the West Indies.

Holding said the attitude problem would lead to the Caribbean tourists being demolished in all their three Tests against Australia.

The West Indies have not won a Test in Australia since February 1997.

"I'm concerned about their general focus. They aren't focused on their game enough, they aren't focused on representing the Windies enough," said Holding, who claimed 249 wickets in 60 Tests.

Holding, here as a television commentator on the series, pointed to the disciplining of paceman Tino Best last week over a training incident as an example of the lax attitude within the squad.

But King Monday stood up for his players and questioned Holding's knowledge of the contemporary Windies squad.

"He's not privy to the group now I don't think," King told a lunch. "The group actually works really hard and I think publicly they're getting more acceptance."

Trescothick

FROM PAGE 12 momentum going.

England have another three-day game starting in Lahore from November 6, before they take on Pakistan in the first Test at Multan from November 12.

Record-breaking

FROM PAGE 12 Yuvraj b Dilshan 18

Rao not out 19

Extras: (b-6, lb-2, nb-5, w-1) 14

Total: (For 4 wkts in 46.1 overs) 303

Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-99, 3-185, 4-250

Did not bat: Yadav, Pathan, Agarkar, Harbhajan, Kartik

Substitute: Raina for Kartik

Bowler