



Andrea Caracciolo (R) of Palermo celebrates with teammate Marco Pisano after scoring against West Ham during their first leg tie of the UEFA Cup at Upton Park on Thursday.

Mixed fortune for big boys

UEFA CUP

AFP, Paris

English Premiership sides Newcastle and Tottenham came through tricky away ties with narrow victories in Thursday's UEFA Cup first round first leg ties.

But there was disappointment for West Ham, who lost 1-0 at home to Palermo, and Blackburn who gave away a late goal to draw at Salzburg.

Holders Sevilla struggled to a 2-1 victory at Greeks Atromitos and French league leaders Marseille edged out Slovaks Mlada Boleslav 1-0 but it was a dismal night for their bitter rivals Paris St Germain who were held to a goalless draw at minnows Derry City.

Four-time European Cup winners Ajax quickly overcame the disappointment of losing in the Champions League final qualifying round to Denmark's FC Copenhagen with a 5-2 demolition of IK Start.

There were seven goals as well

in Greece where Dinamo Bucharest won a 4-3 thriller against FC Xanthi.

Despite fielding Argentine World Cup stars Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano from the start for the first time, West Ham could not find a way through against their Sicilian opponents.

Andrea Caracciolo scored the only goal of the game on the stroke of half-time as West Ham made an inglorious return to Europe after seven years away.

But Hammers manager Alan Pardew refused to blame his players for defeat.

"I thought we didn't get the breaks," he said. "I was particularly disappointed with the refereeing in that first 20 minutes. I thought the referee would be stronger."

And he deserved a little praise for his new South American duo.

"In terms of performance I thought Mascherano's passing raised us a level. After half-time when he had the bit between his teeth he raised the tempo for us and gave an accomplished display.

"Tevez you can see is a special

talent; we just need to harness it. Certainly I don't think either of them have any problems adapting on a physical front."

Newcastle kept their steady European progress, which began in the Inter Toto Cup, going as they edged out Estonians Levadia Tallinn 1-0 thanks to a goal from debutant Antoine Sibierski.

The Frenchman was only signed on transfer deadline day but has already started to repay manager Glenn Roeder as he headed in Damien Duff's free-kick on 10 minutes.

Newcastle should have taken a larger winning margin back to St James Park but were wasteful in front of goal with Nigeria international forward Obafemi Martins missing the goal at his mercy.

Tallinn were not without there chances, though, and had taken a 30-match unbeaten run into the game.

Vladimir Voskoboinikov was denied by Shay Given in the second half before Konstantin Vassiliev skied the rebound over the bar.

Tottenham came away from

Slavia Prague with an impressive 1-0 victory thanks to Jermaine Jenas's fierce right-foot strike after great work from Ivory Coast international Didier Zokora.

The north Londoners were largely in control in their first European match for seven years and now look in prime position to reach the group stages.

The 1972 and 1984 UEFA Cup winners caused Slavia problems through their little'n'large strikeforce of Jermain Defoe and Mido while at the other end England goalkeeper Paul Robinson had little to do until midway through the second period when he made a smart double save.

He pushed away a Dusan Svento free-kick and was then up quickly to block Stanislav Vlcek's effort from the rebound.

Blackburn went behind at Salzburg to a goal from former Germany international Andreas Zickler on 30 minutes.

But within nine minutes they were in front after Robbie Savage scored an equaliser and South

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Bochum.

SV Hamburg and Werder Bremen both look to bounce back at the weekend after stomaching painful defeats first in the German Cup and then in the Champions League.

Hamburg travel to Borussia Dortmund on Saturday in the eye-catching fixture of the weekend and their manager Thomas Doll wants a first league win of the season after three draws.

"The results are not great at the moment but we are not having a crisis," said Doll. "If we play to our strengths we are a class team but we have to prove that."

Hamburg were humiliated by Stuttgart Kickers in the first round of the German Cup last weekend, losing on penalties, and lost 2-1 to Arsenal in their first Champions League match on Wednesday.

Bremen, runners-up last season, also had a week to forget losing on penalties to third division Pirmasens in the first round of the domestic cup and falling 2-0 to Chelsea in the Champions League.

The 2004 champions host VfB Stuttgart on Saturday aiming to flush those defeats out of the system and keep the heat on champions Bayern Munich.

"I thought we were unlucky against Chelsea as we held our own but now we have to focus on the league again," said midfielder Torsten Frings.

Bremen lie fourth in the table with six points one point behind the trio of FC Nuremberg, Bayern and Schalke 04.

Nuremberg, who have not conceded a goal this season, are top on goal difference and have the chance to defend that position with a home game against pointless VfB.

ing because that is what they are paid to do," Magath declared. "It was good to see that our team has

FIXTURES

Saturday

Werder Bremen v VfB Stuttgart, Borussia Dortmund v SV Hamburg, FC Nuremberg v VfL Bochum, Arminia Bielefeld v Bayern Munich, Alemannia Aachen v Borussia Monchengladbach, Energie Cottbus v Mainz 05

Sunday

Hertha Berlin v Schalke 04, Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen

potential going forward."

Arminia Bielefeld entertain Bayern on Saturday with their coach Thomas von Heesen urging his players to have a go.

"We can be terrified before the game or roll our sleeves up and make life difficult for Bayern," said von Heesen.

Dutch international Marc van Bommel, a six million euro signing from Barcelona, is set to make his league debut for Bayern but his compatriot Roy Makaay faces another game on the substitutes bench due to poor form.

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With captain Thierry Henry

missing because of a foot injury, Van

Persie took on most of the attacking

duties on Wednesday, but Arsenal

now face the stern test of

Manchester United with both of their

first choice attacking options doubtful.

Arsene Wenger revealed:

"Robin's [foot] got stuck in the pitch

when he wanted to keep the ball in.

"We have to wait a little bit, but there

is a doubt about both him and Thierry.

However defender Kolo Toure is

expected to start Sunday's match

despite hobbling off inside 30 minutes

on Wednesday with his own hip

injury.

Despite such injury worries Van

Persie has every faith the Arsenal

team can put in a performance at

Old Trafford.

He said: "It will be a big game

against Manchester United. I am

very confident we will get a result

because I trust our players."

This is a good team with good

players and they can cope with any

situation.

If it is Old Trafford, then fine; if it

is Croatia, then fine. We just play

football. That is why I have great

belief for Sunday."

Wenger is unlikely to hand Theo

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