



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



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 reserved 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 miscuing with the goal at his mercy. Tallinn were not without their 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 Vassiljev 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 Vitek'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

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Trezeguet forced to stay

REUTERS, Paris

France striker David Trezeguet said he was forced to stay at Juventus after they were relegated to Serie B for their part in a match-fixing scandal.

"(Juventus coach) Didier (Deschamps) told me: 'You're staying here'," Trezeguet told Friday's issue of French sports daily L'Equipe.

"Of course it took me time to accept that situation. When a player has played the Champions League seven times in a row, it's not easy, neither for me nor for the others."

Trezeguet, who has been at Juventus since 2000, said he had no other option than to stay at the club.

"The club officials told me from the start that I had to stay here," he said. "I had no choice."

The 28-year-old Frenchman had avoided addressing the media since missing a penalty in the World Cup final shootout that Italy went on to win on July 9 in Berlin.

"Why hide it? The World Cup was negative for me," said Trezeguet, who was used as a substitute by coach Raymond Domenech throughout the tournament.

"People keep asking me about that missed penalty but my biggest disappointment is to have hardly played in a competition that might have been my last."

Trezeguet, who missed France's first two Euro 2008 qualifiers because of a groin strain, said he had considered international retirement after the World Cup.

"Yes, I asked myself that question," said the forward, who is no longer an automatic choice for Domenech despite having scored 32 goals from 66 internationals.

Barca look to keep tempo

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona opened the defence of their Champions League title in fine fashion by thrashing Levski Sofia 5-0 in midweek and they will be looking to

continue their perfect start to the domestic season at struggling Racing Santander on Sunday.

The Catalan's coach Frank Rijkaard has advertised that there will be changes to the sides that beat Levski, and also Osasuna 3-0 on Saturday, as he continues to rotate his squad but he has an embarrassment of riches at his disposal.

"But whoever is playing and whoever we are playing, we are always going to play the same way, with the same calmness and the same enthusiasm," said World Player of the Year Ronaldinho on Wednesday.

"It's possible that overall we are even better than last year," added Barcelona playmaker Andres Iniesta, reflecting the upbeat mood in the dressing room despite the fact that no one has a guaranteed starting place.

In the same fixture last season, Racing held the Spanish giants to a 2-2 draw and that would be considered an excellent result for the hosts this time around as they have yet to score a goal this season.

However, the antidote to Racing's goal drought may have arrived, albeit it a little late, in the

shape of the giant Serbian striker Nicola Zigic.

Zigic has been unable to play so far this season because of international commitments but the imposing 2.02-metres tall player finally arrived at the club earlier this week and could play on Sunday.

"I am sure I'm going to adapt very quickly and my aim is to score as soon as possible," advertised Zigic on his arrival on Tuesday.

Sevilla lead La Liga after two matches, on goal difference from Barcelona.

Last season's UEFA Cup winners are one of four teams to have won both their matches but they have a tough local derby at home to Real Betis on Sunday.

"Sevilla have to be the favourites as they are at home but anything can happen in a derby like this," said Betis' Brazilian striker Robert, who is expected to make his season's debut after missing his club's first two matches with back problems.

Adding to the potential problems for Sevilla, their own Brazilian striker Luis Fabiano is doubtful for the match after straining his right hamstring in training on Tuesday.

Getafe travel to Valencia, third and fourth respectively, the latter in buoyant form after their 4-2 win in the Champions League over Olympiakos on Tuesday.

The match brings together the only two other teams with 100 percent records.

Valencia will be without their Italian midfielder Emiliano Moretti, who was sent off last week against Atletico Madrid, and Uruguayan international Mario Regueiro looks

set to take his place on the left wing.

Real Madrid lie fifth by virtue of their 4-1 win at Levante on Sunday but that victory over the Spanish first division's bottom club has already been forgotten after the Spanish giants went down 2-0 at Lyon on Wednesday.

"I hope our fans will be patient and accept that we are going to get much better," said Brazilian international Cicinho, who looks set to start at right back at home to Real Sociedad on Sunday.

"They have to have confidence in us because things are going to improve under (Real Madrid coach) Fabio Capello," added Cicinho.

Cicinho's compatriot and World Cup colleague Ronaldo trained with the rest of the Real Madrid first team squad on Thursday, for the first time in almost two months after injury problems with his left knee.

However, Capello might keep the three-time World Player of the Year for another week while he recovers a little more of his fitness.

FIXTURES

(1800 GMT unless otherwise stated)

Saturday
Deportivo La Coruna v Villarreal (2000)

Sunday
Sevilla v Real Betis (1700), Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid, Espanyol v Celta Vigo, Osasuna v Gimnastic Tarragona, Recreativo Huelva v Levante Valencia v Getafe, Racing Santander v Barcelona, Real Zaragoza v Real Mallorca, Real Madrid v Real Sociedad (1900)

Releasing Gallas an error: Drogba

INTERNET, undated

Didier Drogba believes Chelsea lost the world's best defender when they allowed William Gallas to join Arsenal.

Gallas made the switch across London as part of the deal that took Ashley Cole in the opposite direction on transfer deadline day.

The parting of the ways has been anything but smooth, with Chelsea launching an outspoken attack on the France defender days after the move.

But Drogba is in no doubt over the quality of his former team-mate, who is regarded as one of the most versatile defenders.

"William Gallas' departure is a massive loss," Drogba said in the Daily Express. "He is one of the greatest defenders in the world."

"When it comes to the ability to play anywhere, he is the best on the planet. It is very hard to part with a player of Gallas' quality."

"But if that is what the club have done, it must be because they see sense in the deal."

Striker crisis for Gunners

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal face an injury crisis with Robin van Persie joining fellow striker Thierry Henry as doubtful for Sunday's vital trip to Old Trafford.

Van Persie is struggling to be fit for Sunday after picking up a hip problem during Wednesday night's 2-1 victory over Hamburg in Germany.

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

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



PHOTO: AFP

SWISS MISS IN KOLKATA: Swiss star Martina Hingis leaves a practice session ahead of the Sunfeast Open in Kolkata on Friday.

Moratti demands higher return

AFP, Rome



Inter owner Massimo Moratti has ticked off his star-studded squad ahead of Saturday's Serie A clash at home

to Sampdoria.

The big-spending patron was livid after Tuesday's 1-0 defeat at Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League and is demanding a better return on his considerable summer investments.

"There can be no excuses," said Moratti, who splashed out to land inspirational France captain Patrick Vieira, dangerous Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, World Cup-winning Italy defender Fabio

Grosso and Argentine marksman Hernan Crespo for the new season. "We didn't play well and too many players were not in form. With the squad we have, I expect better."

The most disappointing Inter player in Portugal was Adriano, who managed just one shot on

target. The goals have dried up for the powerfully-built Brazilian striker.

The last time he found the net was on March 29 against Villarreal in last season's Champions League, and his last Serie A goal came 18 days before that against Saturday's opponents Sampdoria.

Adriano would seem the first in line for the axe, but Moratti had words of encouragement for the misfiring South American.

"He's improving gradually and we are only at the start of the season, so it's too early to start judging him," he said.

"He's lacking a little in confidence. That's normal when a striker doesn't score, but I'm sure it won't be long before he's back

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

AFP, Berlin



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 VfL

Bochum.

Schalke face Hertha Berlin on Sunday as both sides were in UEFA Cup action on Thursday.

In contrast to rivals Bremen and Hamburg reigning champions Bayern are in fine fettle after crushing Spartak Moscow 4-0 on Tuesday in their opening Champions League match.

Forwards Roque Santa Cruz and Claudio Pizarro were both on target and coach Felix Magath was relieved after a lean spell in front of goal.

"I am glad our strikers our scor-

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



PHOTO: AFP

Players of Boca Juniors celebrate after clinching the Recopa Sudamericana beating Sao Paulo on aggregate after the second leg of a double-legged affair at Morumbi Stadium in Sao Paulo on Thursday.