



Werder Bremen defender Per Mertesacker (R) rises above Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack (L) to head in the winning goal past goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini during their Champions League match at the Weser-Stadion in Bremen on Wednesday.

Bremen give Chelsea blues

AFP, Berlin



Chelsea progressed to the knockout stages of the Champions League despite losing 1-0 in their Group A clash with Werder Bremen here on Wednesday.

A 27th minute header from German international defender Per Mertesacker inflicted a first European defeat on Chelsea and punctured confidence ahead of Sunday's title showdown with Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Chelsea knew a point would be enough to see them finish top of the group and with winless Levski Sofia their final opponents they should at the very least get one.

German outfit Bremen are now level on ten points with Chelsea and have a great chance to eliminate reigning champions Barcelona.

Barcelona, two points behind Bremen after a 2-0 win over Sofia, face the Germans in a thrilling finale at the Nou Camp on December 5 needing a win to go through.

Chelsea manager Jose

Mourinho was not aware that his side had progressed but admitted he was not happy to have gone through having lost.

"For sure are we? I like to lose to my kids but not to my opponents, it was not a super game by Chelsea."

Chelsea captain John Terry admitted it was a disappointing result but warned people off from accusing them of not wanting to win the match so it would make life for Barcelona very difficult.

"I am a little bit disappointed to lose," said the England captain, who picked up a booking which sees him miss the clash with Sofia.

"I am disappointed but pleased we played so well and upset we got nothing from it."

"No one can accuse of us not trying to win the game, they can look at the teamsheet. Thankfully we are through."

Mourinho also insisted that Chelsea had taken it seriously.

"I think we showed that we treated it seriously."

"We tried everything. We missed Lampard and Didier (Drogba who went off with an ankle injury but should be fit for the United match) in the last period."

As promised Mourinho fielded a full-strength team with German international captain Michael Ballack making his first return to his homeland since a summer switch from Bayern Munich.

WEDNESDAY'S RESULTS

GROUP A
Levski Sofia (BUL) 0 Barcelona (ESP) 2 (Giuly 5, Iniesta 64)
Werder Bremen (GER) 1 (Mertesacker 27) Chelsea (ENG) 0

GROUP B
Inter Milan (ITA) 1 (Crespo 36) Sporting Lisbon (POR) 0
Spartak Moscow (RUS) 2 (Kalinichenko 16, Kovac 72) Bayern Munich (GER) 2 (Pizarro 22, 39)

GROUP C
Bordeaux (FRA) 3 (Alonso 22, Laslandes 47, Faubert 50) Galatasaray (TUR) 1 (Inamotto 73)
Liverpool (ENG) 2 (Gerrard 65, Crouch 89) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 0

GROUP D
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 1 (Marika 61) AS Roma (ITA) 0
Valencia (ESP) 2 (Angulo 45, Morientes 46) Olympiakos (GRE) 0

With Lampard suspended the omission of prolific Ukraine international forward Andriy Shevchenko came as a surprise.

Bremen manager Thomas Schaaf fielded his usual 4-2-2 with the only surprise seeing Portuguese striker Hugo Almeida come in for Aaron Hunt.

Both sides were keen to get forward whenever possible and Chelsea had a great chance in the eighth minute but Jon Obi Mikel headed over after a great lay-off from Terry.

Almeida, who played under Mourinho at FC Porto, had an equally good chance for Bremen on 16 minutes but screwed his shot wide under pressure from Geremi.

Bremen then forged ahead with Mertesacker, a cornerstone of Germany's World Cup side, ghosting in from a corner to head in on 27th minutes with Chelsea's marking all at sea — though Mourinho was furious as Torsten Frings had won a freekick which produced the corner having not been touched by Ashley Cole.

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FIFA suspends Iran

REUTERS, Zurich

FIFA said on Thursday it had suspended Iran from all international soccer activity because of government interference in running the game in the country.

The move comes just five months after Iran took part in the World Cup finals in Germany and a week after Iran sealed their place in the 2008 Asian Cup finals, winning their qualifying group by beating South Korea 2-0 in Tehran.

FIFA's Emergency Committee, composed of FIFA President Sepp Blatter and one representative of each of the six FIFA confederations took the decision at a meeting on Wednesday.

In a statement FIFA said they had decided to "suspend the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation (IRIFF) from all international activity due to government interference in football matters and violation of Article 17 of the FIFA Statutes."

Article 17 relates to the independence of FAs free of any government interference.

The FIFA statement continued: "The FIFA Emergency Committee took this decision after determining

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Drogba, Eto'o vie for top award

AFP, Lagos

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba and Barcelona forward Samuel Eto'o have been nominated for the 2006 African Footballer of the Year award.

The other nominees for the honour are Ghana international midfielder Michael Essien, who plays for English champions Chelsea, Nigeria's Nwankwo Kanu, who has twice grabbed the award, as well as Mohamed Aboutrika, whose dying-minute goal ensured Egyptian club Al Ahly retained their African Champions League trophy this year.

The winner will be announced at an awards ceremony in Abuja, Nigeria, on January 18.

All 53 member-nations of CAF along with the CAF media and technical committees are expected to vote for the continent's best player. Eto'o has won this individual award for the past three years.

Collina for tsunami charity

AFP, Male

A leading Maldivian newspaper is auctioning World Cup memorabilia of popular Italian football referee Pierluigi Collina to help tsunami victims in the Indian Ocean atoll nation.

Mohamed Shahyb, the acting-editor of Haveru Daily, said the autographed black T-shirt and the boots which Collina used during the 2002 FIFA World Cup will be put on an online auction site.

The bidding will be open till Christmas.

"Collina has so kindly sent these items for auction as goodwill of friendship and gesture towards Maldives and especially for our tsunami victims," Shahyb told reporters in Male on Thursday.

Shahyb said the money from the auction goes to a fund set up by the newspaper to help those who lost their homes in the December 2004 tsunami.

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Ponting punishes Eng Equals Waugh's century tally



AFP, Brisbane

Ricky Ponting joined Steve Waugh as Australia's greatest century-maker in Test cricket to put his team in command over England on the first day of the Ashes opener at the Gabba here Thursday.

Skipper Ponting plundered the English attack for the ninth century in his last 12 Tests to make an emphatic statement of Australia's intent to wrest the Ashes back off England with a thumping first-day total of 346 for three.

It mirrored Australia's savaging of the English attack on the first day of the last Ashes Test here four years ago when they scored 364 for two at stumps after being sent into bat.

At the close of a deflating day for England, Ponting, in the richest form of his career, was unconquered on 137 off 206 balls with Mike Hussey not out 63 in an unbroken partnership of 148.

"We've all been thinking about today for a long time and all have been preparing for it for a long time as well, so to go out today and do it when it mattered was a nice start for the series for us," Ponting said.

"In saying that, it's just one day down in the series for us and we've got to build on that tomorrow."

Ponting, leading from the front in his 106th Test, made it a day of personal milestones as he equalled Waugh's record of 32 Test hundreds and moved to fourth all-time in Tests.

The 31-year-old also leapfrogged Englishman Graham Gooch

and Pakistan's Javed Miandad to become the sixth all-time leading Test scorer.

Before a ground Test record of 39,288, Ponting also raised 5,000 Test runs in Australia and his fourth century at the Gabba ground.

It was a psychological mauling for Andrew Flintoff's tourists, who struggled to restrict the Australian scoring as the home team hummed along at more than four runs an over.

"The guys are going to keep their heads up, they're tired but I know this England team and tomorrow the boys will come out buzzing and we'll be looking to pick up some early wickets, that's all we can do," spinner Ashley Giles said.

"This side doesn't lie down so I'm sure we'll be back in the morning and coming out fighting."

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NUMBER 32: Australia captain Ricky Ponting raises his bat in celebration after reaching his century on the opening day of the first Ashes Test against England in Brisbane on Thursday.

Barca keep breathing

AFP, Sofia



Reigning European champions Barcelona kept their hopes of a title repeat on course on Wednesday with

a 2-0 win over Levski Sofia but now must beat Werder Bremen in their final group game to progress.

Ludovic Giuly and Andres Iniesta were on target for the Spanish giants.

However, Werder Bremen's 1-0 win over Group A leaders Chelsea means Frank Rijkaard's team have to beat the Germans at the Nou Camp on December 5 to make the knockout round.

Anything less will mean elimination.

"I'm optimistic about the match with Werder," said Rijkaard. "But it's going to be a very difficult match."

The Dutchman said that Giuly's early goal, which arrived after just five minutes, was crucial to the game.

"We had to battle to win espe-

cially in the first half. We scored early and Levski had to respond."

Levski coach Stanimir Stoilov admitted that his unheralded team will learn from having played against the likes of Barca and English champions Chelsea in this year's tournament.

"Tactically, we were equal with the European champions in the first half and the crowd were behind us," said Stoilov.

"Chelsea and Barcelona are two of the best teams on the continent and it will be good for our players' experience."

The Bulgarians welcomed back goalkeeper Georgi Petkov and striker Valeri Domovchijski after injury for the match while, for the visitors, Silvinho came in for Giovanni van Bronckhorst at left-back.

The champions, who crushed the Bulgarians 5-0 in the first meeting between the two sides in Spain, got off to a flying start when Giuly opened the scoring after just five minutes.

The French international midfielder fired in a low drive beneath Levski goalkeeper Petkov

after Gianluca Zambrotta's right-wing cross wasn't cleared.

It was Giuly's second goal in the tournament this season.

Levski went into the tie having just scored once in their previous four games in the tournament while conceding 13 and they were always struggling to match Barcelona's stylish build-up.

Their frustration was evident when defender Zhivko Milanov was booked for a foul on Giuly in the 25th minute.

With Werder Bremen beating Chelsea at half-time, Barca kept pushing knowing that three points were crucial.

Deco and Eidur Gudjohnsen tested Petkov early in the second period.

Domovchijski then missed a good chance to level for Sofia from Lucio Wagner just before the hour.

He was made to pay as Barca quickly opened up a two-goal lead.

Petkov failed to hold on to a long-range Deco shot in the 65th minute and Barcelona midfielder Iniesta was quickest to react by tucking away the rebound from close range.

Crespo sends Inter thru'

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan beat Sporting Lisbon 1-0 here Wednesday to book their place in the knockout stages of the

Champions League.

Hernan Crespo's clinical finish nine minutes before half time sealed a narrow but deserved victory over the Portuguese and saw Inter join Group B rivals Bayern Munich in the last 16.

Sporting were pretty on the ball and Nani's dribbling skills proved a handful for Inter's defence, but his trickery alone was not enough to prevent them being eliminated from the competition.

Inter's final first phase match is against Bayern on December 5 in Germany where a victory for the Italian champions will see them win the group.

Bayern, who drew 2-2 at Spartak Moscow, are on 11 points, two ahead of current Serie A leaders Inter.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini saluted his players for their third Champions League win in a row, which came after two defeats in their first two matches.

"They have been extraordinary - winning three games on the trot is a great achievement," he said.

"It was a difficult match, just as we expected, but we didn't give Sporting many chances. They rarely threatened our goal and that was pleasing."

"I felt we were always in control, although we should have got the second goal that would have allowed us to relax a little more."

Sporting coach Carlos Pereira admitted Inter were worthy winners.

"We had a good spell just before Inter's goal, but overall we didn't create very much," he said.

"We can't complain about the defeat. Inter are a strong side and deserved their victory."

Argentine striker Julio Cruz, Inter's match-winner in the back-to-back wins against Spartak Moscow which revived their European campaign, was ruled out with a knee injury so Zlatan Ibrahimovic partnered Crespo

in attack.

Sporting were without striker Liedson due to a one-match suspension.

Inter had the ball in the back of the net in the first minute, but Crespo's strike was ruled out as Dejan Stankovic was standing in an offside position.

Fabio Grosso sent two long-range shots wide in quick succession as the hosts continued to apply the pressure, before Inter's Brazilian defender Maicon was yellow-carded for a two-footed tackle on Nani.

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Inter Milan's French midfielder Patrick Vieira (R) hugs teammate Hernan Crespo after the Argentine forward scored in their Champions League clash against Sporting Lisbon at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Valencia roll over Olympiakos

REUTERS, Valencia



Goals either side of halftime from Miguel Angel Angulo and Fernando Morientes gave injury-ravaged Valencia a 2-0 win at home to Olympiakos Piraeus on Wednesday that ensured them of first place in Champions League Group D. Olympiakos, who had not won on the road in their previous 30 away matches in the Champions League, made a bright start at the Mestalla, but fell behind when Angulo curled a shot into the far corner on the stroke of halftime.

Valencia hit them again a minute after the break, Morientes scoring his fourth goal against the Greek side this season with a trademark header at the far post after midfielder David Silva had floated in a fine cross from the left.

With AS Roma slipping to a 1-0 defeat at Shakhtar Donetsk, Valencia top the group with 13 points, six clear of the Serie A side, and eight ahead of the Ukrainians. Olympiakos are

bottom with two points.

Olympiakos needed to notch up their first away win if they were to have any hope of progressing to the knockout round and with Rivaldo at the helm they made a promising enough start.

The Brazilian midfielder forced a sharp save from Santiago Canizares in the fourth minute when he unleashed a fierce half-volley from the edge of the area.

Substitute Milos Maric, who came on for the injured Michalis Konstantinou after a quarter of an hour, was denied by another fine save from Canizares midway through the half when the Valencia keeper tipped his goalbound freekick over the bar.

Valencia's chances of victory appeared to have suffered a major blow when striker David Villa joined the club's lengthening list of injury victims when he was forced off with what appeared to be a thigh strain in the 22nd minute.

But Quique Sanchez Flores's side rose to the challenge and Olympiakos keeper Antonis Nikopolidis had to produce a fine

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Champions League		November 21 - 22 matches	
GROUP A Wednesday November 22		GROUP E Tuesday November 21	
1 W. Bremen v Chelsea 0	0	2 Real Madrid v Lyon 2	2
0 Levski Sofia v FC Barcelona 2	2	1 S. Bucharest v Dynamo Kiev 1	1
RANKINGS	P W D L Pts	RANKINGS	P W D L Pts
Chelsea (ENG)	5 3 1 1 10	Lyon (FRA)	5 4 1 0 13
Werder Bremen (GER)	5 3 1 1 10	Real Madrid (ESP)	5 3 1 1 10
FC Barcelona (ESP)	5 2 2 1 8	Steaua Bucharest (ROM)	5 1 1 3 4
Levski Sofia (BUL)	5 0 0 5 0	Dynamo Kiev (UKR)	5 0 1 4 1
GROUP B Wednesday November 22		GROUP F Tuesday November 21	
2 S. Moscow v Bayern Munich 2	2	3 Benfica v FC Copenhagen 1	1
1 Inter Milan v S. Lisbon 2	2	1 Glasgow Celtic v Man. United 0	0
RANKINGS	P W D L Pts	RANKINGS	P W D L Pts
Bayern Munich (GER)	5 3 2 0 11	Glasgow Celtic (SCO)	5 3 0 2 9
Inter Milan (ITA)	5 3 0 2 9	Manchester United (ENG)	5 3 0 2 9
Sporting Lisbon (POR)	5 1 2 2 5	Benfica (POR)	5 2 1 2 7
Spartak Moscow (RUS)	5 0 2 3 2	FC Copenhagen (DEN)	5 1 1 3 4
GROUP C Wednesday November 22		GROUP G Tuesday November 21	
2 Liverpool v PSV Eindhoven 0	0	3 Arsenal v Hamburg 1	1
1 Bordeaux v Galatasaray 1	1	0 CSKA Moscow v FC Porto 2	2
RANKINGS	P W D L Pts	RANKINGS	P W D L Pts
Liverpool (ENG)	5 4 1 0 13	Arsenal (ENG)	5 3 1 1 10
PSV Eindhoven (NED)	5 3 1 1 10	FC Porto (POR)	5 3 1 1 10
Bordeaux (FRA)	5 1 1 3 4	CSKA Moscow (RUS)	5 2 2 1 8
Galatasaray (TUR)	5 0 1 4 1	Hamburg (GER)	5 0 0 5 0
GROUP D Wednesday November 22		GROUP H Tuesday November 21	
2 Valencia v Olympiakos 2	2	1 Lille v Anderlecht 2	2
1 S. Donetsk v AS Roma 0	0	1 AEK Athens v AC Milan 0	0
RANKINGS	P W D L Pts	RANKINGS	P W D L Pts
Valencia (ESP)	5 4 1 0 13	AC Milan (ITA)	5 3 1 1 10
AS Roma (ITA)	5 2 1 2 7	AEK Athens (GRE)	5 2 1 2 7
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)	5 1 2 2 5	Lille (FRA)	5 1 3 1 6
Olympiakos (GRE)	5 0 2 3 2	Anderlecht (BEL)	5 0 3 2 3

(Rankings: played, won, drawn, lost, points)

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