



AC Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi is visibly frustrated at being substituted during their Italian Cup quarterfinal match against Arezzo at Arezzo on Thursday.

COPPA ITALIA

Defeat no loss for Milan

**Football**

INTERNET, undated

Milan will meet Roma in the semi-finals of the Coppa Italia despite a shock 1-0 reverse at little Arezzo.

The Second Division outfit put up a brave fight after losing the first leg 2-0 at San Siro last week, but their single goal in the return wasn't enough to dump a disappointing Rossoneri side out of the competition.

Boss Carlo Ancelotti decided to begin with the in-form Alberto Gilardino and Clarence Seedorf on the bench, opting to field Pippo Inzaghi and Massimo Ambrosini in his starting XI.

He did welcome back Nelson Dida in goal though after his two-month injury lay-off.

The Brazilian could be forgiven for thinking that he would be in for a quiet night, but he was kept on his toes from the off.

Cavagna and Goretli worried him early on with off target efforts, before Floro Flores tested his reactions on 16 minutes.

Arezzo were undoubtedly the livelier side and they went within inches of taking the lead on 22 minutes. A Floro Flores free-kick from the edge of the box surpassed the wall but also the post with Dida seemingly beaten.

Milan, who lost Giuseppe Favalli and Ambrosini to injury in the first 37 minutes, only showed signs of life in the closing stages.

Jankulovski curled a free-kick wide of target, before Bremec saved well after Ricardo Oliveira headed a Seedorf cross towards goal on 43.

Ancelotti wouldn't have been happy with what he saw in the first period and his mood would have worsened soon after the break.

Arezzo threatened within the first 60 seconds with a Floro Flores scissor-kick, before they took a deserved lead thanks to the former Under-21 international.

The striker skipped past Billy Costacurta and as he converged towards Dida, he blasted the ball from the edge of the box that wickedly beat the Brazilian. That goal opened up the tie as it made it 2-1 on aggregate.

Surely that would wake up the Milanese millionaires? Not exactly as the visitors almost conceded a second in minute 57. Goretli's outrageous chip from 18 yards deceived Dida, but the ball struck the bar.

Milan's response -- after Goretli and Floro Flores had been replaced -- came via an ambitious Gourcuff drive and a Seedorf shot, but both were fired straight at Bremec who kept his net ripple free.

As the clock ticked down, the top-flight side started to command ball possession and their patient build up play was almost rewarded in the 80th minute.

Oliveira fired in a low cross and Terra's attempted clearance almost finished up in his own net.

Oliveira had the last significant effort of the night, but Arezzo held on for their first historic -- even if worthless -- victory over the former European champions.

Mourinho sets Chelsea terms

**Football**

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho has laid down his conditions for staying at Chelsea, saying he will be happy to stay at the Premiership champions if he is offered "real support and complete respect" from the club's board.

Mourinho's future has been thrown into question against a background of tensions with Chelsea's owner Roman Abramovich over the handling of the misfiring 30-million-pound striker Andriy Shevchenko.

There have also been reports that the Portuguese manager has been angered by Abramovich's apparent refusal to provide the funds for transfers during the January window for buying and selling players.

Reacting to a public expression of support from Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon, Mourinho implicitly acknowledged on Thursday that there were problems behind the scenes, but insisted the issues were not related to money.

"Being supportive is not just about giving you money to spend on players," he said. "Being supportive is much more than that. I would say that money is the last part of the support you need."

"So if the club is supportive of me it means that it is supportive of my team because my team is completely with me. We are together since the first day and that hasn't changed so if the club is supportive it's very important."

Mourinho added: "Everything is good for me and the support Peter Kenyon was saying to you that the club has for me, if that support is real support -- again not about money -- but is about real support and complete respect for your job in the club then I will be very happy to see out my contract until the end."

Kenyon had earlier expressed confidence that Mourinho, widely tipped to quit at the end of this season, would stay with Chelsea for the duration of his contract, which expires in 2010.

"The board are fully supportive of Jose," Kenyon claimed. "He is fully committed to seeing the job out."

Mourinho responded: "I like to hear that. It's important for a manager to know and to feel that the club wants him, likes him and supports him."

According to reports, Mourinho has been angered by what he regards as the undue influence the Dane Frank Arnesen has on transfer policy at Chelsea and by plans to bring in former Israel coach Abraham Grant from Portsmouth to work with Shevchenko.

But he insisted that he was happy working and living in London, suggesting total control of team affairs is not the only issue for him as he mulls over his next move.

"My family is happy here," Mourinho said. "My kids are in a moment of their lives where a change year after year is not good for them."

FRENCH CUP

Lyon against tiny Laon

**Football**

AFP, Paris

The millionaires of Lyon embark on a potential banana skin of a French Cup tie when they take on fifth division amateurs Laon on Saturday.

And Gerard Houllier's men will be desperate not to avoid the fate that befell Paris Saint Germain, embarrassed by second division Gueugnon in the 2000 Cup final.

Gueugnon and PSG cross swords again in this round of last 32 matches which aside from Laon features four other fifth division outfits -- Chateaubriant, Rodez, Lyon Duchere and Jarville.

When the draw was made Laon could barely believe their luck at being pitted against the record-breaking men from Lyon -- en route for a sixth successive league title -- who will be in unfamiliar territory in the Reims' minnows' 9,200 capacity stadium. "This is the dream tie," enthused Laon's general secretary Raymond Larmigny.

"For the players it's a miracle, Lyon at Laon, it's magnificent."

The herculean task lying in store for Laon was lessened marginally by the news that Lyon's France international midfielder Alou Diarra would miss the game after picking up a serious right thigh injury in Wednesday's semifinal League Cup win over Le Mans.

The player is facing two months on the sidelines.

Laon can also take some heart from Lyon's rare slip-up last weekend against Toulouse in the league.

Larmigny though was keeping his feet firmly on the ground in terms of what Laon were aiming to get out of their time in the spotlight.

"We shouldn't be up to beating Lyon," he said.

"Our concern will be to play well and not to let in a string of goals."

That will also be the aim of underperforming PSG for whom this competition represents a source of rare solace in a torrid season both on and off the pitch.

Languishing fourth from bottom in the table, three points off the relegation zone, the former European champions are pinning their hopes of a resurgence under new coach Paul Le Guen, the former PSG favourite who returned to his former club after quitting Rangers to replace Guy Lacombe last week.

PSG will be without the services of midfielder Jerome Rothen, who suffered cramp towards the end of the midweek goalless draw against Toulouse in this grudge match.

Real looking for boost

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will try to put a week of turmoil and strife behind them with a win at Real Mallorca on Sunday.

Things seemed to be improving for the team in the wake of the upheaval over the departing David Beckham with a 1-0 victory over Real Zaragoza last Sunday, but Real president Ramon Calderon turned against his own team on Tuesday.

"There is vanity, egoism and they all think they are superstars," Calderon told students at a Madrid university, believing that he was not being recorded.

"Real Madrid players never pay for anything. You (students) have education and culture and that's something that they, in general, don't possess."

His comments provoked a behind-closed-doors crisis meeting on Wednesday with the squad apparently confronting the club boss and Calderon reportedly apologizing to the angry players.

Things got worse on Thursday when Real Betis sent them crashing out of the Spanish Cup.

Coach Fabio Capello now faces another tough assignment but Mallorca are unlikely to provide any relief.

They got a boost of their own by ending the 100 per cent home record of league leaders Sevilla with a 2-1 win last Sunday.

Sevilla are still on top of La Liga by two points despite having lost their last two games, although second-placed Barcelona have a game in hand over the league leaders who travel to Villarreal on Sunday.

"The only plan now is to get as many points as possible," said Sevilla coach Juande Ramos.

Villarreal are also motivated to do well after having been eliminated from the Spanish Cup by second division Valladolid but they also have injury worries.

Neither Guille France nor Josemi Gonzalez trained on Thursday after picking up injuries in the Cup clash and both are doubtful to face Sevilla.

Barcelona have been let off the hook thanks to Sevilla's two successive losses and are still well in contention for their third league title on the trot.

The Catalan giants suffered their biggest defeat of the season in any competition when they lost 3-1 at local rivals Espanyol last Saturday but it would be at least double the shock if they were to go down at home to bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona on Sunday.

"We haven't got the same winning mentality as before," admitted Barca's Gianluca Zambrotta on Thursday.

"We are not tired. It's not a question of physical preparation nor concentration," added the Italian defender, hinting that confidence had slipped in the Nou Camp dressing room after going three league games without a win.

Nevertheless, Gimnastic have little that should stop Zambrotta and his teammates from getting their first three points of the year

AFP, Manchester

**Football**

Sir Alex Ferguson has challenged Wayne Rooney to break his seven-game goal-drought against Arsenal on Sunday and embark on the scoring streak that could deliver Manchester United the Premiership title.

The England striker's failure in front of goal has been the only blemish on United's recent run of form that has seen them establish a six-point lead ahead of Chelsea at the head of the table.

But while Ferguson insists he is unconcerned at the forward's barren spell, he admits that a free-scoring Rooney could be crucial to his side's efforts to land a first title since 2003.

"Last week Wayne had nine attempts on goal (against Aston Villa) and he almost scored with that curling right foot shot that hit the crossbar," Ferguson said on Friday.

"He just needs a break at the moment and it will come. What he needs to do is to start scoring the odd goals. He has scored in spells of two, three and four but he needs to get into that one goal a game thing that strikers can do for you and if he does that it will make a big, big difference to the run-in."

United's first visit to the Emirates Stadium to face Arsene Wenger's resurgent side would provide the perfect platform for Rooney to rediscover his goal-touch.

But with Henrik Larsson making an immediate impression at the Old Trafford club following his 10-week loan move from Sweden's Helsingborgs and Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer challenging for a starting spot, Ferguson is convinced he has enough options to secure a vital win.

"Wayne is a big game player," Ferguson added. "But it's an excellent situation to have four good strikers fit and in form. The only problem is who to play."

"Larsson has been fantastic and done just what is expected from him. Saha is back fit and you could see when he came on last week he is really relishing the challenge in front of him. And of course Solskjaer with nine goals has been fantastic."

The intense rivalry that marked clashes between these two clubs has been diluted significantly since the emergence of Chelsea as the Premiership's dominant team.

With Arsenal in a state of transition, United go into the game with a 15-point advantage over the London club but Ferguson believes the match will still carry the physical edge that has marked this fixture over the last 15 years.

"This is a big game and should be a good game because both teams are playing excellent football at the moment," the manager said. "We are both winning games and are the in-form teams."

"It will be a competitive game because they have aggressive players and we have aggressive players. But it will be positive aggression. No team can be successful without having their share of players with that kind of aggression and they are no different, no matter what Arsene Wenger says."

"We have to keep our consistency between now and the end of the season. We are going to drop points but so are Chelsea. We slipped up at Newcastle and West Ham and those games have got to be taken as danger signs for us."

"Every game is important for us now but obviously this will be a lot harder than many of the others."

United this week offered Chinese striker Dong Fangzhou a new contract that will keep him at the club until 2010 and Ferguson paid tribute to the player who secured a UK work permit in December after spending time at Belgium's Royal Antwerp.

The Scot said: "Dong has done two-and-a-half years in Antwerp and made a great sacrifice in biding his time over there. He has been very patient while his work permit came through. He's big, strong, aggressive and very quick."

A Real mess

**Football**

INTERNET, undated

When Real Madrid hired Fabio Capello last summer, it was looking for a "sure thing" -- a big-name coach who would cut through the B.S., tame the Galacticos (or what was left of them) and deliver some kind of silverware. Any kind.

After all, Real Madrid has gone three full seasons without a trophy. And that has not happened for more than 50 years. Whatever else one might think of Capello, he is a winner: Seven league titles in 14 years at four different clubs is a difficult record to match.

Florentino Perez and all he brought with him -- the "Zidaney Pavones" policy, the succession of yes-men (Mariano Garcia Remon) and maladjusted maladroits (Vanderlei Luxemburgo) at the helm, global bombast followed by regular Champions League humiliation -- was laid to rest. What mattered was winning and doing so straight away.

President Ramon Calderon had it all worked out. All it took was a drill-sergeant coach with a proven record, a few veteran signings (Fabio Cannavaro, Emerson, Ruud van Nistelrooy), a few guys on the cusp of superstardom (Jose Antonio Reyes, Mahamadou Diarra) and everything would fall into place.

If only it were so easy. Halfway through the season, Real is stuck in its umpteenth rebuilding project, while seemingly hell-bent on self-destruction, in no small part thanks to Calderon himself.

The latest instalment of folly came when he was invited to speak at a local university. Rather than providing the usual "canned speech," Calderon shot from the hip. He said that David Beckham (who, lest we forget, is supposed to be a Real player until the end of the season), was going to Los Angeles to become an actor and that nobody else wanted him. He said that, at 31, Guti was still considered a "prospect." He revealed Iker Casillas' salary. And he generally accused his players of being a bunch of overpaid, vain egomaniacs.

Alas, a local radio journalist was in attendance and, predictably, all hell broke loose. A desperate Calderon phoned Real captain Raul and said he wanted to meet the team to apologise. The players made him wait 24 hours (which, given the circumstances, is more than understandable) before grudgingly accepting his *mea culpa*.

Capello hasn't helped himself either. On Sunday he made an obscene gesture at a portion of the Madrid fans who were booing him. He, too, had to apologise. While Capello can be a prickly customer who doesn't shy away from confrontation, he usually manages to keep his emotions under control. His outburst shows that the malaise is clearly getting to him.

After going for a short-term fix with its summer signings, the club made a sudden about turn over the last few months, bringing in three Under-21 players from South America (Fernando Gago, Gonzalo Higuain and Marcelo) while axing three senior players: Beckham, Ronaldo and Antonio Cassano (all of whom are certain leave, either now or in the summer).

What this showed -- again -- was a distinct lack of foresight. It's not that shedding the big contracts of Beckham, Ronaldo and Cassano is necessarily a bad idea, it's the way Real did it. Ronaldo and Cassano were left out to dry without first finding a buyer, which means, when they go they'll fetch peanuts. Beckham, of course, is on a free transfer at the end of the season, but given that the club is paying him until June wouldn't it have made sense to try and get what you can out of him until then?

The three newcomers are all promising players, but to expect a 20-year-old to settle in at a club like Real and contribute in a meaningful way straight away is a tall order. This is particularly true for Gago and Higuain: It's no coincidence that, in recent years, many Argentines (Juan Roman Riquelme, Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano, to name a

few) who came to Europe at a young age have struggled in their first season.

Capello will have to find a way to make it work, while also fending off criticism that his brand of soccer is too defensive and conservative. The latter criticism is, frankly, unfair. It's tantamount to booking a vacation in the Maldives and then complaining because it's sunny. Or taking Angelina Jolie out on a date and then bitching about her large lips. Capello is a coach who puts results ahead of style. Everybody knew that when he signed (and, of all people, Real should have known, since he was there some 10 years ago). If Real didn't want that kind of coach, it should have looked elsewhere.

Given the kind of asylum that Real has turned into this year, perhaps it's a minor miracle the club is still in the running both in La Liga (five points off the pace) and the Champions League. All this with a squad where nobody -- with the possible exception of van Nistelrooy, Sergio Ramos and Casillas -- is playing particularly well.

If Capello can pull it off under these circumstances and bring a trophy back to the Bernabeu, he will have more than earned his keep. If he fails, he will have proved -- once again -- that it takes more than big-name players and coaches to win silverware. You need a well-run club, too. And a president who doesn't put his foot in his mouth every other day.



Real Madrid's out-of-favour midfielder David Beckham cuts a desolate figure as he watches his side take on Real Betis in the King's Cup at Madrid on Thursday.