



Blackburn Rovers forward Benni McCarthy (2nd L) tries to get the better of Bayer Leverkusen midfield trio of (L-R) Rolfs, Schneider and Babic during their pulsating UEFA Cup tie at the BayArena on Wednesday.

## Matthaeus wants Bayern job

REUTERS, Berlin

Former Germany captain and World Cup winner Lothar Matthaeus has made clear his interest in coaching Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich, his former club.

Asked whether he could do the job, Matthaeus, who has been coach at Austria's Red Bull Salzburg since May, told Thursday's edition of German newspaper Bild: "Of course."

"I am a Bundesliga insider and especially of Bayern," he added. "And it must be clear to whoever looks at my life up to now: my goal has to be the Bundesliga."

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

## Cicinho on recovery road

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid defender Cicinho, who injured his right knee in September during a Spanish league match against Real Betis, resumed training on Thursday, his club said.

It was the first time that the Brazilian international had jogged at the club's training centre since he picked up the injury which required surgery to correct, the club said in a statement posted on its Internet site.

Cicinho was unmarked when he turned awkwardly on the wet turf at Betis' Manuel Ruiz de Lopera stadium (Sevilla) and immediately fell to the floor in pain before being stretchered off after 29 minutes of Madrid's 1-0 win.

Real Madrid has predicted that Cicinho will return to the pitch in March.

## Eto'o won't be punished

AP, Madrid



FC Barcelona's sports director Txiki Begiristain won't punish Samuel Eto'o for criticizing coach Frank Rijkaard and teammate Ronaldinho.

Begiristain said Wednesday that Rijkaard had requested that Eto'o escape a sanction because he believes the players "can manage themselves."

"He (Rijkaard) is very happy that everything has been resolved so quickly. The problem has been one of dialogue from the moment last weekend's game with Racing ended," Begiristain was quoted as saying by the Web site of sports daily Marca.

Rijkaard added that the striker's remarks would not "affect our relationship," adding the way the affair had been settled had "encouraged the squad, which today has trained better than ever."

Earlier Wednesday, Eto'o and Ronaldinho smiled broadly as they embraced at the start of training.

"A sign that the squad is united is that Ronaldinho is the best friend of Eto'o in the dressing room," Begiristain said.

The previous day, Eto'o called Rijkaard "a bad person" and attacked Ronaldinho for suggesting the Cameroon international had refused to play as a substitute in Sunday's 2-0 league win over Racing Santander.

Eto'o has only just returned from a four-month absence following a serious right knee injury he picked up in a Champions League match

Werder Bremen. The 26-year-old reappeared for five minutes at the end of Barcelona's 0-0 draw with Osasuna on Feb. 4.

Eto'o also said he was caught between two factions at Barcelona, headed by club president Joan Laporta and its former vice president Sandro Rosell.

In an interview with Cadena SER late Tuesday, Eto'o said he wouldn't retract his comments but added it was "a lie" he had insulted Rijkaard.

"Rijkaard and I aren't going to have problems," he said. "If I have something to tell him, we sit down and talk. There's no problem."

Spain's sports press on Wednesday devoted their front pages to the striker's barrage of criticism.

Two dailies Mundo Deportivo and AS ran the headline "Eto'o blows Barcelona up with dynamite,"

SEE PAGE 22 COL 3

## Gunners win a humdinger

AFP, Bolton



Arsene Wenger hailed the "exceptional spirit" of his players after Arsenal overcame Bolton in an FA Cup epic to keep alive their triple trophy assault.

Already in the final of the League Cup and with a last 16 Champions League date with PSV Eindhoven on the horizon, Wenger's troops booked a 5th round home clash with Blackburn following a 3-1 extra-time victory over their Premiership rivals.

In an absorbing 4th round replay at the Reebok Stadium on Wednesday, Arsenal appeared to

be cruising through courtesy of Emmanuel Adebayor's ninth goal of the campaign.

But Abdoulaye Meite unexpectedly sent the tie into extra-time when he stabbed home an equaliser at the end of normal time after Gilberto Silva had missed the chance of doubling Arsenal's lead from the penalty spot.

Substitute Freddie Ljungberg's second goal of the campaign made it 2-1 before Adebayor's late strike made it 3-1 after Julio Baptista had missed Arsenal's second spot-kick of the night.

Bolton finished the game with 10 men following the dismissal of Israeli defender Tal Ben Haim for two bookable offences deep in extra-time.

"It was an electric tie with some exceptional football played," said a

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

delighted Wenger, whose side are now unbeaten in 11 games.

"To miss two penalties with two Brazilians was astonishing. But that was certainly one of our better performances of the season. We are doing really well at the moment and the spirit in the side is exceptional."

Wenger will recall Thierry Henry for Saturday's game at the Emirates Stadium. The French striker was given the night off at Bolton but will start against Blackburn after Wenger admitted Wednesday's 120 minute tie had taken its toll.

"We've got games on Saturday and then Tuesday so I have to look at the fatigue factor," said Wenger. "We did not want to play extra-time. There will be changes on Saturday - that's for sure."

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal forward Emmanuel Adebayor winds up the home fans after scoring in their FA Cup fourth round replay against bogey team Bolton at The Reebok Stadium on Wednesday.

## Germans dominate

AFP, Paris



Bayer Leverkusen earned a thrilling 3-2 victory over English Premiership outfit Blackburn Rovers on a night when both German clubs won their UEFA Cup last 32 first leg matches while

the British duolot.

However while Werder Bremen can look forward to a likely place in the last 16 after thrashing Dutch giants Ajax 3-0 in Bremen there can be no such confidence espoused by Leverkusen after a late Shabani Nonda goal pegged them back to a 3-2 home win over Rovers.

Rangers' British counterparts Rangers there was frustration as the Scottish side saw their hopes of a club record 13th undefeated match in Europe dashed as they went down 2-1 away to Hapoel Tel Aviv.

Rangers' woes could be compounded if a case is proven against inspirational captain Barry Ferguson for elbowing - but their away goal could prove invaluable when they meet again in Glasgow next week.

The three French clubs in action like their German counterparts emerged unbeaten but Bordeaux could only draw 0-0 at home to Spanish side Osasuna while Nancy grabbed an impressive 1-1 away draw with Shakhtar Donetsk in Ukraine and PSG's resurgence under Rangers former handler Paul Le Guen continued with a 2-0 away win against AEK Athens.

Nonda may have been the

quieter of the all-African strike partnership for Rovers this term with South African Benni McCarthy being more prolific but his spectacular volley towards the end of the clash with former Champions League finalists Bayer could earn him a permanent move from AS Roma.

"We have an option to sign Shabani permanently, but a decision hasn't been made at the moment," said Rovers manager Mark Hughes.

"It is something that will be addressed at the end of the season. "But his goal against Leverkusen was very important for us."

His Leverkusen counterpart Michael Skibbe still believed that the Germans could prevail next week.

"I am looking forward to next week's second-leg and I still believe that we have an excellent chance of progressing into the next stage," said Skibbe.

Bremen were masterful in their dominance of the once mighty Ajax with German internationals Per Mertesacker and Torsten Frings two of their scorers.

However coach Thomas Schaaf was still left somewhat underwhelmed.

"I think if we had taken a couple of our other chances we would be way out of sight," said Schaaf, who has seen his side slip in the title race in recent weeks.

"I really want us to go as far as possible in this competition," added Schaaf, whose team narrowly missed out on reaching the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Rangers manager Walter Smith, who was in charge of Rangers in his first spell when they set the record of 12 unbeaten and came agonisingly close to reaching the Champions League final, sadly resorted to the old tactic of blaming the referee for the defeat.

"It was a terrific free-kick for the goal and you always end up complaining about the referees. But

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

## Bremen sound warning

REUTERS, Bremen



Werder Bremen struck three times in the second half to seal a 3-0 win over 10-man Ajax Amsterdam in the first leg of their UEFA Cup first knockout round tie on Wednesday.

The game between AC Milan and Celtic on March 7 will also have a crowd cap, but this has yet to be determined. The capacity will, however, include 4,500 seats reserved for Scottish fans.

Doubts had been cast on the staging of the games in the San Siro after the strict crowd-control measures brought in by the Italian government following the violence in Sicily that led to the death of a policeman.

The San Siro was one of the grounds that fell short of the basic standards set down by the government, but a crowd of 21,000 Milan season ticket holders watched AC Milan defeat Livorno on Sunday after 28 new turnstiles were installed.

UEFA said that they had been informed of the venues by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) after they had consulted with the Italian Home Affairs Ministry.

"The FIGC told UEFA that the stadium was already in conformity with some of the measures provided for by Italian law and that additional work was undertaken to fully comply with new measures that have come into force," UEFA said on its website.

"However, some work must still be done before full capacity will be allowed at the venue."

They managed to cling on until three minutes into the second half

Fritz and a kick from behind on Frings.

It was all about damage limitation from then on for Ajax and the visitors did a good job until the break.

The game was up immediately afterwards, though, when Mertesacker was left unmarked at a corner to sweep home.

Werder got their second when Naldo rose to head goalwards from around the penalty spot. Anita blocked the Brazilian's header but sadly for Ajax he was standing well behind the line when he did so and the referee awarded the goal.

Ajax created little but they should have got one back soon afterwards when Hedwiges Maduro got the ball under control in the area only to scuff his shot and give Tim Wiese an easy save.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1



Werder Bremen players converge around Per Mertesacker (C) after the tall defender had given them the lead in their victory over Ajax in the UEFA Cup match at the WeserStadion on Wednesday.

## Barca chaos buoys Benitez

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez believes his side can benefit from the row between three-time African Footballer of the Year Samuel Eto'o and Barcelona manager Frank Rijkaard when they face the Spanish giants in next week's Champions League tie at the Nou Camp.

"Her Majesty therefore decided to host a tea at Buckingham Palace to thank those involved in the project for all their hard work and to have a chance to meet some of those who have been seen on the day."

Highbury stadium had hosted Arsenal games for 93 years till they moved to their new stadium in the pre-season.

Racing Santander, and that incident has also caused Ronaldinho to question Eto'o's team loyalty, though, both parties moved to calm the storm on Wednesday with Eto'o protesting he had been misinterpreted.

"Yes, I think they have been trying to push these players back quickly for this game," said Benitez, who worked with Eto'o when in charge of Real Madrid's youth academy.

Looking ahead, the Spaniard also told LiverpoolFCtv: "Everyone is very excited about this game. They have been talking about it almost everyday for the last two months."

Their team is really good and when the draw was made people were saying Barcelona are the best team in the world."

After two months we are a lot better and they have had some

problems. They need Eto'o fit, and Messi, because they haven't been scoring a lot of goals.

Yes they are really strong, they are not playing at the same level but if they have Eto'o, Messi and Ronaldinho then I think they have very good players.

"I also know Eto'o as he was in the academy at Real Madrid when I was there, so I have good relations with them."

"It could be good for us to be underdogs. I think that it is important for us as we will not have big pressure there."

"He added: "It will be hard there, but it will be good for us to score. Always for us to play the second leg at Anfield is important and we need to score in Barcelona if it's possible."

"Liverpool have never lost at the

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5