

# Crisis giants clash

AFP, Paris



Seven previous winners kick off the first Champions League action in 2007 on Tuesday where off-pitch hassle, goal droughts, stadium problems and injury crises have given spice to the build-up.

David Beckham is back in favour at Real Madrid, Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson is up-arms over TV schedules, neither Bayern Munich nor Real Madrid have been scoring much but AC Milan at least know the San Siro stadium has passed security regulations.

Lille, who host Manchester United in Lens, are the only non-former European champions in action on Tuesday.

Ferguson has voiced his displeasure that television companies are making it difficult for him against Lille who had an extra day's rest to prepare for this last 16, first round leg.

United's 1-1 FA Cup fifth-round draw against Reading at Old Trafford was the Saturday late match because of the TV schedules though Lille's match against French leaders Lyon was brought forward to Friday night.

Ferguson believed that extra 24 hours or so of rest could play a crucial role in the performance of

both teams at Lens's Felix Bollaert stadium where Lille have moved to for their European games.

"People want us to do well in Europe, but we are not given a proper chance. If you look at Lille, they played Lyon on Friday night, but we have to play on a Saturday night," said the Scot.

However, it could not be a better time to face Lille who are in the midst of an alarming slump in their domestic league.

The French side have won only once in their last nine league games and have been knocked back by late goals in several recent games.

Their set-piece defending has also been poor with three of their last four goals conceded coming from set-plays.

United will welcome back English forward Wayne Rooney, who was suspended against Reading, and will almost certainly recall Gary Neville, Ryan Giggs and Rio Ferdinand - who all sat out the Reading match - and restore Paul Scholes, Patrice Evra and maybe Henrik Larsson to the

## FIXTURES

Tuesday

Celtic (SCO) v AC Milan (ITA)  
PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Arsenal (ENG)  
Lille (FRA) v Manchester United (ENG)  
Real Madrid (ESP) v Bayern Munich (GER)

## Drunken row shames L'pool

INTERNET, undated

Craig Bellamy will cop an 80,000 pound fine for the drunken row which has shamed Liverpool.

Furious boss Rafa Benitez is going to war after Bellamy lashed out at teammate John Arne Riise with a golf club.

Benitez read the riot act to his players yesterday as a storm raged over Friday's boozy night out in Portugal.

Riise and keeper Jerzy Dudek are set to be disciplined along with Bellamy.

Striker Bellamy and Riise first clashed as the Kop stars let their hair down at Monty's karaoke bar in Vale Do Lobo. Norwegian defender Riise then returned to his hotel room, where it is alleged Bellamy burst in on him wielding the club.

The Wales striker's Anfield future is now in the melting pot, though both men put on a show of affection at Liverpool's Melwood training ground yesterday as they prepared for Wednesday's Champions League clash in Barcelona.

Disgraced Bellamy will travel to Spain with the squad and is still likely to feature in the Nou Camp showdown.

His behaviour will earn him a fine of two weeks' wages.

Riise will be fined as well, while Dudek is also in the dock having clashed with a Portuguese policeman on the night from hell.

Benitez said last night: "I met with the entire first-team squad this morning.

"I made it clear to all of them the responsibilities that come with

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## Valencia snare Barca scalp

AFP, Madrid



Spanish internationals Miguel Angel Angulo and David Silva scored twice in three minutes to give Valencia a 2-1 win over Spanish league leaders and reigning European champions Barcelona on Sunday.

Sevilla then beat Atletico Madrid 3-1 to draw level on points with Barca at the top of La Liga, with both sides having 46 points from 23 games, although the Andalusian side remain second on goal difference.

Angulo was left unmarked to sidefoot the ball into the net after 52 minutes following a bewitching run down the left wing by David Villa.

Silva then hammered a loose ball home from 10 metres out.

Ronaldinho got Barcelona's consolation goal two minutes into injury time, the two-time World Player of the Year getting his 16th goal of the season from a free kick just outside the box.

"In the first half we could have scored but we were playing a game against a team that gave you little space and were operating at a higher level," said Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard.

"A lot of possession doesn't always lead to scoring goals but our problem wasn't one of failing to react (to the goals)."

The win was Valencia's eighth in 10 games and took the 2002 and 2004 champions up to third, four points behind the leading pair.

starting line-up after they began the FA Cup match on the bench.

AC Milan's build-up has been eventful and it was only last week that their San Siro stadium was deemed to have passed new security regulations after a police officer was killed in Sicily bringing about strict new guidelines though their first leg against Celtic is in Glasgow.

On-pitch problems have also bothered the team who received a boost with the arrival of Ronaldo from Real Madrid in the winter transfer window.

The Brazilian three-time FIFA World Footballer of the Year is, however, cup-tied.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti has a selection crisis in the striking department. Filippo Inzaghi was expected to replace Ronaldo but he has not recovered from a muscular problem in an Italian Cup tie against AS Roma late last month.

Alberto Gilardino is also a doubt as he is suffering from knee pain, leaving Brazilian Ricardo Oliveira as the only 100 percent fit striker at the club.

Ancelotti has therefore called up 18-year-old forward Davide Di Gennaro as a precaution.

Real Madrid and Bayern Munich know each other well having met in five of the past eight seasons but fans studying the form book will not be expecting a high-scoring match at the Bernabeu stadium.

Real have only scored 30 goals so far this season, once of their worst records in recent history, and the problems continued with a 0-0 draw against Real Betis on Saturday.

Bayern lost to Alemannia Aachen 1-0 at the weekend and have only one victory in five matches since the winter break and, with only 33 goals from 22 Bundesliga matches, it's their worst goalscoring record at this stage of the season for two decades. Beckham, ironically sent off against Real Betis, is back in favour at Real Madrid however after falling out of favour with coach Fabio Capello following his agreement to move to Los Angeles Galaxy on a 250-million-dollar, five-year contract.

Arsene Wenger is determined to ensure the nagging sense of unfinished business that surrounds Arsenal is erased this season as they take on PSV Eindhoven in the Netherlands.

Success against the Dutch league leaders would take Arsenal a step closer to the final in Athens, and a chance to purge the bitter memories of last year's final defeat against Barcelona.

"We were 10 minutes away against Barcelona," said Wenger.

"The frustration is there, of course, but we have to use that in a positive way when we go back. We want to go back into the final and win it this time."



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham (R) juggles the ball as left-back Roberto Carlos stretches during a training session on Monday on the eve of their Champions League clash against old rivals Bayern Munich in Madrid on Tuesday.

## Zidane in charity appearance

AFP, Bangkok

French football legend Zinedine Zidane, whose career ended with an infamous head-butt in last year's World Cup final, will play a charity match this weekend in Thailand, organisers said Monday.

Zidane will play alongside south-east Asian stars in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai on Saturday, corporate sponsor Adidas Thailand said in a statement.

The French striker will play for 20 minutes in the first half with one side, and then switch sides to play for 20 minutes in the second half for the opposing team, the statement said.

Among the Asian players joining the match are Thai star Piyaopong Pue-On, as well as his compatriot Kiatasak "Zico" Senamuang, it said.

Other players will come from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, it added.

"Donations will be collected at the match to raise money for an AIDS charity in Chiang Mai," the statement said, adding that there would be no charge for admission.

## Chelsea cut losses

AFP, London

English Premiership champions lost 60million pounds (89million euros) pounds in the year ending June 30, 2006, but this figure was much improved from the previous year.

The London side had lost 140 million pounds (208million euros) in the previous season during which they also won the Premiership title under Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho.

Turnover increased last year by 2.3 percent from 146.6million pounds (217million euros) in 2004-05 to 150million pounds (223million euros) in 2005-06.

Merchandising increased by 44 percent to 11.1million pounds (16.4million euros), and football activities increased by 6.3 percent to 130.4million pounds (193.5million euros).

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## Ruud laments goal drought

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy admitted on Sunday that the Spanish giants are struggling to find the net.

They have only scored 30 goals so far this season, once of their worst records in recent history, and the problems continued with a 0-0 draw against Real Betis on Saturday.

Other statistics are equally damning.

Real have only scored one goal in front of their own fans in their last four games.

The goals have dried up for a club that can look back and count free-scoring forward legends like Alfredo Di Stefano, Ferenc Puskas and Hugo Sanchez among their past players.

"It's one of our problems. We lack goals," conceded the Dutch striker who has scored 11 times this season.

"We want to create chances through wingers and forwards, but we lack a bit of confidence in the attacking front. We have players on the team capable of scoring goals. It's only a matter of time until they do."

Despite the optimism that he and his Real teammates would soon be scoring regularly again, Van Nistelrooy confessed that he was actually stumped about how to resolve the situation.

"If I knew the answer to that question I would have the solution to the problem, but we are still standing strong and I ask people to give us more time, although that is a very difficult thing to ask for at Real Madrid," added the striker.

"Football sees teams going through bad stages but they always eventually pull through. Barcelona and Milan went through similar situations (in recent years) and eventually won the Champions League."

He admitted that the dull draw against Betis had been a blow to their morale ahead of their crucial Champions League last 16 match against Bayern Munich on Tuesday.

"The result (against Betis) was rather bad. We obviously wanted to win, but our efforts didn't pay off. We had some chances, but so did Betis, so I think a draw was a fair result."

"The fans want us to win by playing good football but so do we. This isn't happening as of now and we have to make a change. We have to play with good spirits and with character, and we have to work very hard."

"We haven't scored many goals in the past few games but we'll see what happens on Tuesday. We all want this to change."

"The game against Bayern Munich is the most important one so far this season and we must win it in order to recover our confidence," added van Nistelrooy.

"Tuesday will see two good teams playing against each other. Bayern Munich will be looking to forget about their situation in the League and so will we."

"It will be a good chance for both teams to win back their confidence. I watched their game and saw they have several problems but they will be a different team on Tuesday."

## Milan Italy's flag-bearers

REUTERS, Rome



AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti believes his side's Champions League first knockout round match against Celtic in Glasgow on Tuesday could be a chance to restore the tarnished image of Italian football.

The Italian game, still smarting from last year's Serie A match-fixing scandal, suffered another massive blow to its public image earlier this month when a policeman was killed in rioting at a match between Catania and Palermo.

A tough anti-hooliganism plan approved by the government has forced many top-flight clubs to play behind closed doors while their stadiums are brought into line with security regulations.

"I believe that the Champions

League can be the trampoline to relaunch the image of Italian football abroad by showing the strength of our teams," Ancelotti was quoted as saying on La Gazzetta dello Sport's Web site on Monday.

"From the World Cup onwards the image of Italian football abroad has continued to decline. We touched a new low point with what happened in Catania."

"Today, we play in stadiums that are empty or half-empty and when we turn on our televisions to watch matches in foreign leagues we see full stadiums, enthusiasm, and a different kind of sporting culture," he said.

Milan's Serie A rivals Inter Milan and AS Roma are also involved in Champions League last 16 first-leg fixtures this week.

On Wednesday, Inter host Valencia at the San Siro, while Roma take on Olympique Lyon at Rome's Olympic Stadium (kickoffs 1945 GMT).

"I'll be supporting Inter and Roma as well because at the moment Italian football needs good results," Ancelotti said.

Milan travel to Celtic Park having won five of their last six Serie A games despite a series of injuries to key players.

Striker Filippo Inzaghi was left out of the squad after failing to recover from a muscle strain, while the team's leading scorer this season, Alberto Gilardino, and midfielder Clarence Seedorf are struggling to shake off minor injuries.

"Their presence is important to us. We have a day and a half to know whether we can recover them," said Ancelotti, who anticipated a tough game in Scotland.

"On paper, Celtic look an easier opponent than some of the others, but they remain a dangerous team, especially at home, where they try to impose their rhythm on the match. We will have to pay a lot of attention to defence."



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia winger Miguel Angel Angulo (R) puts the ball beyond the despairing reach of Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes to put his side ahead during their Primera Liga clash at the Mestalla on Sunday.