

## REAL EDGE BAYERN Tie evenly poised

AFP, Madrid



Two typically opportunist strikes by Spanish international Raul boosted Real Madrid's sagging confidence Tuesday as they edged out Bayern Munich 3-2 at the Bernabeu to put one foot in the Champions League quarter-finals.

All time tournament top scorer Raul scored twice in the opening half hour, sandwiching a consolation by Lucio for Bayern, and Ruud van Nistelrooy completed the scoring in an explosive first period.

But a late, late goal by Mark van Bommel gave the Germans a potentially priceless second away goal as they look to turn things around on home soil in a fortnight.

The match pitted two of the most successful sides in the history of European football against each other, Real's nine titles a record and Bayern's four battered only by the Spaniards, AC Milan's six and Liverpool's five.

But the form of Real and Bayern this season has been mediocre and both currently place fourth in their domestic leagues.

Real have stumbled from one bad showing to another while a dreadful Bayern run cost Felix Magath his job and saw the Bavarians send out an SOS call to former coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

Hitzfeld coached Bayern to glory in 2001 having also led Borussia Dortmund to the 1997 crown - but the defeats have kept on coming.

Raul, struggling to recapture the form that brought winners medals in 1998, 2000 and 2002, gave Real

the lead in the tenth minute with his 55th Champions League goal, sliding home past Bayern keeper Oliver Kahn at the second attempt.

Bayern regrouped and Brazilian star Lucio nodded the equaliser midway through the first period to stun the packed home crowd.

Facing the prospect of their Italian coach Fabio Capello resigning with the club likely headed for a fourth year without a trophy, Real dug in and promptly went back in front on 28 minutes.

From David Beckham's corner on the right Ivan Helguera headed goalwards and Raul bundled the ball home.

Six minutes later it was 3-1, Beckham involved again with a freekick that Helguera touched on for van Nistelrooy to pounce on and beat Kahn from close range for his fifth goal of the competition and 52nd in his career.

Spain's vociferous media have been predicting Capello's demise for weeks and when a radio station reported Monday he had offered to

step down the pre-match tension reached fever pitch.

Capello insists the team needs overhauling and has already sold Ronaldo.

But Beckham, having made just two starts in the group phase, is back in favour after being dropped for a month for opting to join Los Angeles Galaxy in the summer.

After a goal on his return helped Real win at Real Sociedad, Beckham and his teammates were dire in Saturday's home goalless draw with Betis.

But there was no doubting the hosts' appetite as they snapped into every tackle in a first half showing by a side knowing it needed to win against a side which appears to have forgotten how to.

As Real began to look comfortable on the ball for the first time in weeks, their rivals resorted to strong-arm tactics and Martin Demichelis was booked for a late foul on Guti.

After the first-half flurry came out with renewed steel and Roy Makaay came close with a low effort.

Capello threw on Robinho for Franco-Argentine Gonzalo Higuain and the Brazilian produced some incisive runs as Real sought to maintain their impetus.

Hitzfeld then withdrew ineffective German forward Lukas Podolski for Peruvian Claudio Pizarro.

But it was Real who almost made it four with Kahn stretching to touch over a Beckham deadball special.

Pizarro should have pulled it back to 3-2 with 12 minutes remaining, Iker Casillas making a superb reaction stop diving to his left, before Van Bommel's powerful strike left him helpless.



Real Madrid forward Raul (L) watches the ball drop for an easy tap in after beating the sprawling effort of Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn during their Champions League clash at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

## UNITED STEAL VICTORY Controversy reigns supreme

AFP, Lens



Manchester United snatched a vital 1-0 Champions League last 16 first leg victory in controversial circumstances against French side Lille on Tuesday.

Ryan Giggs scored directly from a quickly-taken free-kick with seven minutes left but that incensed the Lille players who were still trying to construct their defensive wall.

The game was briefly held up by protesting Lille players at Lens' Stade Felix-Bollaert as the home side seemed set to walk off the pitch.

Their behaviour incensed the United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

"I have never seen that before in all my years in football," steamed the United handler.

"That is a disgrace and UEFA have to do something as that was pure intimidation of the referee.

"It's a disgrace. However whether we should be awarded the tie is an area I wouldn't go into. It will take an hour or two for me to digest what went on out there. They the Lille players tried to get my players to go

off the pitch and that is disgraceful," added Ferguson, whose players have been known for intimidating referees over penalty decisions down the years.

It was an unfortunate way to end a thrilling second half that swayed back and forth.

Lille had the first chance of the game as Nigerian forward Peter Odemwingie created space on the left and crossed for Nicolas Fauvergue who beat Rio Ferdinand to the ball but headed well over.

There was a brief spurt of activity at the United fans' end of the stadium as four away supporters scaled the pre-Hillsborough style fences and tried to unbolt the gates.

They were quickly apprehended by the French police and despite some sustained goading from certain fans, the match proceeded without another incident.

Wayne Rooney could have scored twice in two minutes. Ryan Giggs ran at the back-peddling defence and when his shot was blocked, Paul Scholes quickly fed Rooney whose first touch was sublime before his second let him down and sent the ball flying over the bar.

A minute later Rooney took down a deep cross from Patrice Evra but

his volleyed shot screwed across the face of goal and no-one could turn it home.

Lille were let off three minutes before half time as Swedish striker Henrik Larsson, whose substitute appearance in last year's final inspired Barcelona to victory over Arsenal, escaped in the box.

His low cross produced a scramble before Cristiano Ronaldo had a shot blocked by a posse of sprawled defenders.

Lille finally managed a shot on goal on the stroke of half-time by Matthieu Bodmer fired wide from 25 yards.

United came out flying in the second half and should have buried the game within 10 minutes of the restart.

On 51 minutes Rooney brilliantly weaved his way through three players but with only goalkeeper Tony Sylva to beat he opted to cross to the back post instead of shoot and the ball was just too far ahead of Giggs arriving at pace.

Three minutes after that Rooney released Ronaldo whose pace got him through to another one-on-one with Sylva. The Senegalese keeper blocked the Portuguese winger's

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Lille players surround referee Franck De Bleckere after he awarded a controversial goal to Manchester United during their Champions League match at the Felix Bollaert stadium on Tuesday.

## Barca rule out C'Ron approach

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona vice-president Ferran Soriano would like the club to sign Cristiano Ronaldo but has denied they are set to move for the Manchester United winger.

The Spanish giants have frequently been linked with the 22-year-old Portugal international in recent times, along with Primera Liga rivals Real Madrid.

United have insisted they would not be willing to do business over one of their most prized assets, despite rumours of the former Sporting Lisbon player's discontent at Old Trafford.

And Soriano has moved to appease the United hierarchy by claiming there is currently no place for Ronaldo at the Nou Camp.

Asked if the Catalans would be bidding for the winger, he told BBC Radio Five Live: "Of course not.

"We are very happy with the players we have - there is plenty of speculation every year about players.

"This is a very good player but we are very happy with the players we have.

After a turbulent week for Barca, in which key players have been linked with moves away from the European Champions, Soriano was also keen to play down a spat between striker Samuel Eto'o and

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## Crespo blasts Milan

INTERNET, undated

Inter striker Hernan Crespo has blasted AC Milan for turning their back on him in the summer.

The Argentine was available for transfer and was tipped to rejoin the Rossoneri after spending the 2004-05 season on loan there.

But Milan snubbed the opportunity and Crespo rejoined Inter, the club he left for Chelsea in a £16.8m deal in 2003.

"I was very disappointed by the fact that Milan didn't do much to net me and that they preferred other strikers," said Crespo.

"Now they have even signed Ronaldo, while they had told me that they wanted to save money. It is logical that I was disappointed - you can only imagine how much they spent.

"But now I am happy to be at Inter and this is where I want to end my career.

"I will always be grateful to Inter President Massimo Moratti for giving me the opportunity to return to Italy."

## Both camps confident

AFP, Madrid



After stirring themselves for one of their best performances of a season which has been deeply disappointing for both Real Madrid and Bayern Munich have it all to play for in Bavaria on March 7 in their Champions Leg return after the Spaniards' 3-2 first leg win.

And top stars from both sides who have seen it all before many times over say everything is still left to play for after Tuesday's fireworks left nine-times champions Real with their noses just in front.

"I think we can win in Munich. It will be tough but we have a good chance," said striker Raul, whose two goals Tuesday at the Bernabeu took his career tally in the competition to a record-busting 56, just four more than strike colleague Ruud van Nistelrooy, who also got on the scoresheet.

Raul has three winners medals to his name from victorious campaigns in 1998, 2000 and 2002 but since the last win, which came against German opposition in the shape of Bayer Leverkusen, the round of last 16 has signalled the end of the European road for Real.

Bayern keeper Oliver Kahn, who was a champion in 2001 against Spanish side Valencia, says Real will again find the quarterfinals a step beyond them.

"Our stadium will be red-hot for the return; we'll make it really tough for Real. Tuesday was a decent result. A 3-1 is not the same thing as a 3-2 at all," warned the veteran shot stopper.

For opposite number Iker Casillas the second Bayern goal, coming from Dutchman Mark van Bommel just two minutes from the end as Real made the mistake of stepping off the gas, has to be seen as a wake-up call.

"I am happy with this result. It's better to go to Munich like that as we know we have to go out there mentally prepared to win, we can't relax," Casillas said.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who plotted Bayern's 2001 win and was also a champion with Borussia Dortmund in 1997, opined that "Van Bommel's goal was key to lifting the morale of the team," morale which has been badly shot in recent weeks which has seen the Germans lurch from one poor result to another.

The sides have now met six times in the past nine seasons but Real have recently had the upper hand after Bayern won the first meetings in 1976 and 1987.

Real, with David Beckham pulling

strings in midfield after coach Fabio Capello made his peace with the player he dropped for a month for electing to join LA Galaxy this summer, were able to afford to lose two group meetings seven years ago and still go on to win the semi-finals at Bayern's expense.

Beckham's name was greeted with huge applause when he ran out and again whenever Real had a freekick awarded near to goal. One 'special' forced a brilliant save from Kahn.

The March 7 return will have added spice, or rather, needle, after Van Bommel made an obscene gesture to the crowd after scoring the goal which meant that, in the words of Spanish daily El Pais, "means that Real will have to suffer to make the quarters."

Media reports said Real will protest to European football's governing body UEFA about the gesture former Barcelona player Van Bommel made with his arm, club officials dubbing his behaviour "an intolerable provocation."

The midfielder apologised to the supporters afterwards, explaining that "I have nothing against them but against some of the Real players, yes."

He did not elaborate, but admitted: "I shouldn't have done it. But it was an important goal."

## Becks restates England ambition

AFP, London

Former England captain David Beckham restated his case that he is still available to play for his country, British media reported on Wednesday.

Beckham was dropped by new manager Steve McLaren following last year's World Cup and has played the Euro 2008 qualifying campaign without the Real Madrid dead ball specialist.

"My ambition has never changed since the age of 13, even younger. I always wanted to play for my country and I will always be available whether I'm in Spain for the next four months, or whether I'm in LA," Beckham, who has 94 caps, told Sky Sports News.

McLaren has always said the door is closed to no player and Beckham excelled in Tuesday night's 3-2 Champions League victory over Bayern Munich at the Bernabeu stadium.

Beckham, who will move to Los Angeles Galaxy next season in a 250-million-dollar, five-year deal, has only recently been back in favour by coach Fabio Capello.

However high-profile figures in

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## Sheva frustrated at Chelsea

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea's under-fire striker Andriy Shevchenko has admitted his first few months in English football have left him frustrated.

The Ukraine captain joined the English champions for 30 million pounds from AC Milan in the summer and has failed to live-up to his massive fee.

Shevchenko, on the brink of becoming the Champions League all-time top scorer, has recently found the kind of form that made him one of the world's most feared strikers.

But Shevchenko still faces a battle to convince Mourinho he is worth a place in his starting line-up and admits he has found life hard in the opening few months of his career in England.

Shevchenko said: "The first three or four months have been frustrating.

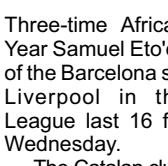
"I know we have a lot of forwards but the manager chooses the ones he wants to play.

"But for me it is important that Chelsea win. I work hard for the team but if I score goals I am a striker. But firstly, I work for the team.

"It has been difficult year for me with the World Cup and then coming to Chelsea but I have improved and feel better now."

## Barcelona explain Eto'o absence

AFP, Madrid



Three-time African Player of the Year Samuel Eto'o has been left out of the Barcelona squad that will play Liverpool in their Champions League last 16 first leg match on Wednesday.

The Catalan club said on Tuesday that last season's Spanish first division top scorer would miss the clash between the last two Champions League winners because he was still not 100 per cent fit.

"Eto'o and Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard talked this evening and decided together that it would be better not force his recovery," a Barcelona spokesperson told Spanish media.

Rijkaard had earlier on Tuesday suggested that Eto'o would be ready to play his part in the Catalan club's 18-man squad that will face the men from Merseyside.

"Psychologically he's fine and physically he's getting better all the time," commented Rijkaard at a

press conference before Barcelona's final training session in preparation for game.

Despite the apparently calm atmosphere concerning Eto'o and his delayed return to playing for Barca, many Spanish pundits on Tuesday suggested that it was further evidence that a rift has emerged between Eto'o and Rijkaard.

The Cameroon striker's refusal to take the field for the Spanish league leaders against Racing Santander 10 days ago lead to Rijkaard, and also

Barca's World Player of the Year Ronaldinho, to question his commitment to the club.

The trio subsequently smoothed over the public dispute but Eto'o himself then requested not be part of the Barca squad that lost 2-1 at Valencia on Sunday.

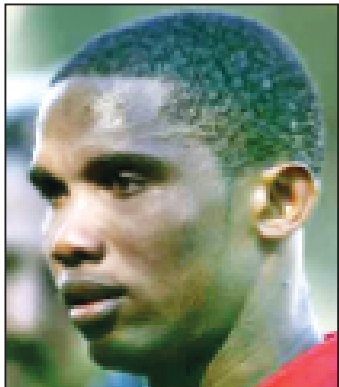
The player has only played 10 minutes of competitive football, just over two weeks ago after coming on as a late substitute at Osasuna, since suffering a right knee injury in the Champions League group stages against Werder Bremen last September.

Eto'o was subsequently out of action for more than four months until he returned to full training on February 1.

Two other players left out of the Barca squad on Tuesday were the Brazilian internationals Sylvinho and Edmilson.

Veteran French defender Lilian Thuram is recalled to the Barcelona squad for the first since suffering a left calf strain against Gimnastic Tarragona on January 21.

Thuram completed his first full training session since sustaining the injury on Monday.



SAMUEL ETO'O