



Ajax striker Klaas Jan Huntelaar (C) trips over himself in an attempt to get the ball ahead of Werder Bremen players Naldo (L) and Daniel Jensen during their UEFA Cup tie in Amsterdam on Thursday.

Italian clubs bow out

AFP, Paris



Italy's flirtation with this season's UEFA Cup came to a premature end on Thursday when defeats for Parma and Livorno left the country without a representative in the last 16.

Parma, champions in 1995 and 1999 and the last Italian side to win the trophy, lost 1-0 at home to Portuguese side Sporting Braga to exit 2-0 over two legs.

Livorno, playing in their first UEFA Cup, lost 2-0 at Espanyol to go out 4-1.

The defeats came on the heels of decidedly mediocre week for Italian sides in the Champions League where AC Milan, Inter and Roma all drew their last 16 first-leg ties.

Spain will boast four sides in the last 16, including defending champions Sevilla who put out Steaua Bucarest, while Tottenham and Newcastle will fly English colours.

Tottenham had already made sure of their place in the next round after scheduled opponents Feyenoord were expelled.

Newcastle went through with a 1-0 win over Zulte-Waregem of Belgium for a 4-1 aggregate, but Premiership rivals Blackburn were knocked out after a 0-0 draw at home to Bayer Leverkusen sent them spinning 3-2 on aggregate.

Parma had the better chances in their tie but Braga substitute Diego scored the only goal with a sweeping volley a minute from time.

The defeat left Parma coach Claudio Ranieri with three 1-0 losses on the trot since he took over nine days ago.

"We gave it our best shot and I am proud of the players," said Ranieri whose side are second from bottom of Serie A.

"Psychologically we are in a difficult moment, but I feel there is enough spirit to overcome this and save ourselves from relegation."

Braga will face Tottenham for a place in the quarter-finals.

Blackburn goalkeeper Brad Friedel claimed his team were outdone by the European experience of Bayer Leverkusen after the German outfit progressed with a 0-0 draw at Ewood Park.

"Leverkusen did exactly what we expected of them because they have a lot of experience in their team and

COLLATED RESULTS

At Alkmaar

AZ Alkmaar (NED) 2 (Martens 64, Opdam 87) Fenerbahce (TUR) 2 (Metin 21, Alex 34)

Aggregate 5-5; AZ Alkmaar win on away goals

At Nancy, France

Nancy (FRA) 0 Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 1 (Fernandinho 70)

Shakhtar Donetsk win 2-1 on aggregate

At Blackburn, England

Blackburn (ENG) 0 Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 0

Bayer Leverkusen win 3-2 on aggregate

At Bucharest

Dinamo Bucarest (ROM) 1 (Munteanu 23) Benfica 2 (POR) (Beraldo Anderson 50, Katsouranis 64)

Benfica win 3-1 on aggregate

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time-wasting is part and parcel of European football," said Fridel.

"But they probably deserved to go through on the basis of their performance in the first-leg in Germany."

Newcastle will face AZ Alkmaar of the Netherlands after a second half goal from Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins gave them a narrow win at St James's Park.

Goalkeeper Steve Harper said Alkmaar, who put out Fenerbahce, will be a tougher proposition than Zulte-Waregem.

"It will be very tough. They have performed well in the last couple of years – but we are confident we can progress."

A Barry Ferguson double helped 10-man Rangers go through with a comfortable 4-0 victory at home to Israeli side Hapoel Tel-Aviv.

A Kris Boyd goal between the Rangers' captain's goals and a Charlie Adam strike in injury time completed the 5-2 aggregate win for the Scottish side.

However, qualification came at a cost, with the Ibrox side's goalkeeper Allan McGregor suspended for their next game after being sent off after clashing with Luciano De Bruno.

Rangers will take on Osasuna, who beat Bordeaux in the last minute of injury-time, in the next stage.

"It is a terrific result and a great performance by the team," said Rangers boss Walter Smith.

There was some success for Israel, however, when Maccabi Haifa put out the 2005 champions CSKA Moscow 1-0 with Roberto Colautti scoring his fourth goal of the tournament to make sure of victory.

Maccabi will face Espanyol in the next round.

United go for the jugular

AFP, London



With Chelsea otherwise engaged by the small matter of a League Cup final this weekend, Manchester United can edge another step closer to reclaiming the Premiership by beating Fulham on Saturday.

Victory for Sir Alex Ferguson's side in the lunchtime clash at Craven Cottage would extend their lead over their London rivals to nine points.

And with Chelsea set to be without captain John Terry for several weeks at least, three points would inevitably further cut the odds on the Scot picking up the ninth title of his reign at Old Trafford.

"It's knock-down time now – as every week goes by we get another

game knocked out the road and eventually your opponents run out of games," Ferguson said.

"With the confidence and ability the players are showing, there is no reason why we can't go on and win it."

Fulham, who conceded four goals in the first 20 minutes when they visited Old Trafford earlier in the season, will be without Italian striker Vincenzo Montella, who is suspended after being sent off last weekend in the FA Cup defeat by Spurs, a match in which the Cottagers also conceded four.

After the high of their victory over Barcelona in the Nou Camp in mid-week, the visit of Sheffield United to Anfield presents Liverpool with a more humdrum challenge as Rafael Benitez's side seek to consolidate their grip on third place.

With Momo Sissoko having been

stretchered off in Barcelona, Benitez is expected to hand a Liverpool debut to Argentina World Cup star Javier Mascherano.

Liverpool's Spanish manager will be wary of Neil Warnock's Sheffield United, who have already claimed Arsenal's scalp this season and are close to securing their Premiership status in their first season back in the top flight.

The same cannot be said of Charlton and West Ham, who are both one point above Watford, meet in a clash that will see current Hammers boss Alan Curbishley

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