



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 a 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 Bucharest, 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

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.

### 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 Bucharest (ROM) 1 (Munteanu 23) Benfica 2 (POR) (Beraldo Anderson 50, Katsouranis 64)  
Benfica win 3-1 on aggregate

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

## 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 title 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

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Charlton v West Ham, Fulham v Man Utd (1245 GMT), Liverpool v Sheffield Utd, Middlesbrough v Reading, Watford v Everton (1715 GMT),  
**Sunday**  
Blackburn v Portsmouth, Tottenham v Bolton, Wigan v Newcastle (1300 GMT)

Watford but the Premiership's bottom side are unbeaten in their last three matches and remain hopeful they can make up the seven points that separates them from Wigan, the team currently occupying 17th place, the last survival spot.

With Everton the visitors to Vicarage Road on Saturday, manager Adrian Boothroyd has told his players they have to stop feeling sorry for themselves.

"We should have beaten Wigan in midweek after they went down to ten (men) but I'm still positive and I believe the table will look different at the end of the season, I've told the players to stop sulking."

Charlton and West Ham, who are both one point above Watford, meet in a clash that will see current Hammers boss Alan Curbishley

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## Cassano earns Madrid recall

REUTERS, Madrid

Italy striker Antonio Cassano has been included in the Real Madrid squad to visit city rivals Atletico Madrid in the Primera Liga on Saturday.

Real coach Fabio Capello said earlier in the week the out-of-favour player would return because he had lost weight and been training well.

Cassano, who made four starts early on in the season, has not played in the league since the 1-0 defeat at Getafe in October.

He was fined and banned from training with the Real squad at the end of October after criticising Capello for his failure to play him in the first team.

Although he resumed training with the rest of the squad the following month, he has not returned in the league and not made a squad since early January.

Cassano has a fiery reputation and had run-ins with Capello when they were both at AS Roma.

Defenders Sergio Ramos, Roberto Carlos and Raul Bravo were all left out with injuries.

## Vieira sidelined

REUTERS, Rome

Inter Milan's bid to win the Champions League suffered a setback on Thursday with the club saying that midfielder Patrick Vieira had injured ligaments in his thigh.

They did say how long he would be out for but Italian media reports suggested it could be up to a month.

The French international, who picked up the injury in training earlier this week, missed Inter's 2-2 draw with Valencia in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday.

He is likely to miss the return leg at the Mestalla stadium on March 6, as well as Serie A matches against Catania, Udinese, Livorno, and AC Milan.

Inter have won their last 16 Serie A matches and lead the division by 14 points from AS Roma.

## Inter to dump Adriano

INTERNET, undated

Inter will reportedly sell Adriano at the end of the season after growing tired of his late night partying.

Numerous stories in Italy on Friday claim that Inter and Adriano have reached the point of no return after the latest bust-up between the club and player.

The Brazilian had looked to be at his best once again after he ended a nine-month goal drought before the Christmas break, just weeks after the Nerazzurri gave him a week off to recuperate in his homeland.

However, problems seem to have re-emerged between both parties after he was excluded from the Champions League clash with Valencia on Wednesday.

"Adriano didn't feature because he wasn't 100 per cent fit," explained boss Roberto Mancini. "He was in no condition to play an entire game."

Whispers in Italy allege that the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## 'Scudetto no joke'

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti has hit back at claims the Serie A championship has been greatly

devalued by the 'Caciopoli' match-fixing scandal.

The scandal saw Juventus demoted and AC Milan given an eight-point penalty, leaving Inter in a far stronger position to retain the Scudetto.

Inter, who face Catania on Sunday, have won their last 16 league matches, a Serie A record, and are 14 points clear at the top with 15 games to go.

But their domestic domination counted for nothing on Wednesday when they were held to a 2-2 draw at home to Valencia in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

The step up in class exposed some of the weaknesses Inter keep hidden in Serie A, but Moratti said it was wrong to suggest the title is a joke.

"I don't think it is right to compare Serie A to the Champions League to try and show the Italian championship as something to laugh about," he said.

Inter will be without the support of their travelling fans for the second successive away fixture when they take on Catania behind closed doors.

Catania have been banned from playing at their Massimino stadium following the crowd violence earlier this month, which resulted in the death of a police officer and led to the championship being temporarily suspended.

### FIXTURES

(all 1400GMT kick-off unless stated)  
**Saturday**  
Chievo v Torino (1700GMT), Atalanta v Palermo (1930GMT)  
**Sunday**  
AC Milan v Sampdoria (1930GMT), Cagliari v Lazio, Catania v Inter Milan (at Cesena), Fiorentina v Empoli, Livorno v Ascoli, Messina v Siena, Roma v Reggina, Udinese v Parma



Indian cricket commentator Mandira Bedi poses with exclusive World Cup 2007-themed saris in New Delhi on Friday.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Cover of leading Spanish sports portal AS depicts Barcelona superstar Ronaldinho's weight gain over the past four years under the caption "Ronaldinho pierde la silueta", which translates to: Ronaldinho losing his silhouette. The picture on the left shows Ronaldinho after a league match in November 2003 while the picture on right shows him after their recent Champions League defeat to Liverpool.

## Chubby Ronaldinho



AFP, Madrid

The Spanish press on Friday raised the alarm over the expanding waistline of Barcelona's Brazilian star Ronaldinho who has been under form this season.

Sports daily AS published two contrasting photos of the bare-chested midfielder taken four years apart on its front page under the headline: "Ronaldinho loses his figure".

The photo on the left depicted a muscular Ronaldinho and was taken after Barcelona's 3-3 draw against Real Sociedad in November 2003 while the one on the right, taken after the club's 2-1 Champions League loss to

Liverpool on Wednesday, shows his more plump recent state.

The Catalan daily El Periodico published similar contrasting photos on its front page and blamed the 2004 and 2005 World Player of the Year's recent slump in form on his weight gain.

"He has lost his explosiveness and velocity," it said in an article on the player's physical state, before adding the 26-year-old was "worn out".

The papers compared Ronaldinho's situation to that of his fellow Brazilian international Ronaldo who Real Madrid sold to AC Milan at the end of January after weight issues faded his star power.

Barcelona's medical department refused to talk about Ronaldinho's weight but AS reported the player has admitted he has a problem, having reportedly told close friends: "I am not

well."

An active social life, personal commitments, too many advertising commitments and unhappiness over his contract still not being renewed beyond 2010 when it expires were all cited by the press as possible reasons for Ronaldinho's weight gain.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard defended the player last month after AS reported that the Catalan club were thinking of selling the Brazilian striker.

"Ronaldinho is a key player. Ronaldinho is also part of the team and we have to look at that (issue) together," he said, referring to the player's recent underperformance.

"Leave us in peace to carry on working, I have confidence in everything he's done and I'm sure he will return to what he was," he added.