



Marseille top French fan-poll

AFP, Paris

Former European champions Marseille may be struggling on the pitch but they can still count on the largest fan base in France, according to a report published Monday.

The poll, taken among 1,000 people and published in France Football magazine, shows that Marseille can call on 17.2 per cent of French football supporters as their own, ahead of dominant champions Lyon, with 12.5 per cent and capital giants Paris St Germain on 4.6.

France's most successful team of all-time St Etienne came in only sixth with 2.6 percent while Lyon were voted the most attractive team to watch.

Despite their recent lull, Real Madrid came out as the most popular foreign team with 11 per cent of that vote.

Cannavaro looking to hit form

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Italian defender Fabio Cannavaro insists that he can put his current slump behind him in Wednesday's Champions League last 16 second-leg clash at Bayern Munich.

The 2006 World Player of the Year has not played his best since helping Italy win the World Cup last year.

"I'm not at my top level. I've never had so many yellow cards. It's a strange experience for me. But since the World Cup it has been difficult," Cannavaro told sports daily Marca.

"I've been thinking a lot about this. I've looked at players who reached the World Cup final like (Thierry) Henry and others, and I'm realizing they're not at their best either so I hope that this is the explanation," said Cannavaro.

"When you're not playing your best all you can do is work more."

Cannavaro said that Real will be looking for a goal-fest after Bayern netted important away goals in the 3-2 first-leg defeat to the Spaniards at the Bernabeu a fortnight ago.

"We know that we have to score. Otherwise we're dead," he added.

But Real Madrid captain Raul admitted that he fears the pressure cooker atmosphere of the Allianz Arena in Munich.

"It will be the first time that we've played on this new pitch. The fans are very near the players, it will be a different atmosphere," said Raul.

"In Porto we prepared to play a certain way but lost everything when Terry was injured," he said.

"Then we changed the system and Robben was playing well. It looked like we would win the game but then Robben was injured."

"But we still managed to get a result. I am not saying it is a miracle or a job for Superman, but my players deserve credit and respect."

West Ham confirmed Tuesday that they have opened an investigation into allegations that some of their fans engaged in racist and anti-semitic chanting before the 4-3 home defeat to Tottenham at the weekend.

"We are a leading campaigner in the Kick Racism out of Football campaign. We will not tolerate racist behaviour. We will investigate this matter fully," the club said in a statement.

According to reports, among the chants heard was: "I'd rather be a Paki than a Jew".

Tottenham is a club historically supported by the Jewish community in London.

The Football Association (FA) has passed footage of the alleged incidents to police and asked the club to provide CCTV images.

An FA spokesman added: "Racist behaviour has no place in football. We would hope that, if these individuals are identified, they will be issued with banning orders."

Lyon fan jailed

AFP, St Etienne

A fan of French league leaders Lyon has been sentenced to two months in prison for throwing a smoke bomb at rival St Etienne fans, the court here said Monday.

The local derby at St Etienne's Geoffroy Guichard stadium was held up for 20 minutes after smoke bombs were thrown onto the field of play and police responded by firing tear gas into the crowd.

The Lyon fan, a 25-year-old plumber, is a member of a group of supporters known as the "Bad Gones" and has also been banned from sports stadia for six months.

He had already been convicted of offences five times previously, although none relating to football matches.

The French football federation (FFF) is investigating the incidents and either club could face sanctions over the behaviour of their fans.

Rival club presidents Jean-Michel Aulas of Lyon and his St Etienne counterpart Bernard Caiazzo have been hauled before a disciplinary committee to explain their actions after they exchanged insults in the days preceding the game.

Milan favourites against Celtic

REUTERS, Milan



AC Milan have hit form at the right time and start strong favourites to eliminate Celtic from the Champions League at the San Siro on Wednesday.

The first knockout round tie awaits a first goal after Milan failed to capitalise on their dominance in the first leg in Glasgow.

Injuries and the eight-point penalty from last season's match-fixing scandal made it hard work for Milan at the start of the season.

Celtic have a clutch of injury worries with Japanese midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura vowing to play through the pain of a broken bone in his hand.

Polish striker Maciej Zurawski is out with a thigh injury while fellow forward Craig Beattie is battling with a recurring hamstring injury and was taken off in Saturday's 2-1 league win over Dunfermline.

Defender Stephen McManus also limped out of the game with a

"We have always given our best performances in European matches. They take personality and courage. Milan has both."

Brazil striker Ronaldo is unavailable for selection, having already played Champions League football for Real Madrid this season.

In his absence, Ancelotti could recall Filippo Inzaghi to partner Alberto Gilardino up front.

The 33-year-old Italy international, who has recently recovered from a thigh strain, is Italy's most prolific scorer in Europe, with 55 goals in all competitions.

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Polish striker Maciej Zurawski is out with a thigh injury while fellow forward Craig Beattie is battling with a recurring hamstring injury and was taken off in Saturday's 2-1 league win over Dunfermline.

Defender Stephen McManus also limped out of the game with a

groin strain, but is expected to be in Celtic's squad.

"We just need to score one, but they are a top team and they have handled this before whereas it is something new for us," said manager Gordon Strachan.

"I told them if you cannot win then zero-zero is a good score."

PROBABLE TEAMS

AC Milan: 1-Dida; 44-Massimo Oddo, 25-Daniele Bonera, 3-Paolo Maldini, 18-Marek Jankulovski; 8-Gennaro Gattuso, 21-Andrea Pirlo, 23-Massimo Ambrosini; 22-Kaka; 11-Alberto Gilardino, 9-Filippo Inzaghi

Celtic: 1-Artur Boruc, 44-Stephen McManus, 48-Darren O'Dea, 3-Lee Naylor, 25-Shunsuke Nakamura, 15-Evander Sno, 18-Neil Lennon, 46-Aiden McGeady; 9-Kenny Miller, 10-Jan Venegoor of Hesselink

Referee: Konrad Plautz (Austria)

Trophies rather than records

Football

AFP, London

Didier Drogba is in the form of his life but the Chelsea striker would be happy not to score another goal if it means his side can win the Champions League.

Drogba is on the verge of becoming the first player to score 30 goals for Chelsea in a single season since Kenny Dixon in 1985.

The Ivory Coast forward has already bagged 29 goals so far this term and could emulate Dixon's achievement against Porto in the Champions League second round, second leg on Tuesday.

But he would gladly swap a place in the record books for the chance to get his hands on a Champions League winners' medal in Athens in May.

Drogba said: "I know how big Dixon was for Chelsea. It would be something great for me to reach his record, but there is no interest for me to score if we don't win.

"It would mean nothing special if we don't win this competition."

"I want my team to win and everybody to be happy. Even if I don't score until the end of the

season it is not a problem if we win the Champions League and the FA Cup."

Drogba believes Chelsea can cope with the pressure of chasing Premiership leaders Manchester United, as well as trying to win Chelsea's first Champions League crown.

"Everyone is speaking about Ronaldo and me but there are players like Essien and Paul Scholes who are having good seasons, so it is difficult to choose one."

"Essien is doing a lot. If I am voting for a player he deserves something big because he has made a great contribution."

After being condemned for some lacklustre displays and his occasional theatrics in the last two seasons, former Marseille star Drogba has won over the critics.

Chelsea boss Mourinho insists Drogba deserves all the credit for his transformation.

"It is different for a striker playing in this country and they need time to adapt," he said. "When we brought Didier we knew he had qualities to play the English game. That was our vision."

"He has improved year after year and at this moment he is at the top of his game. He has all the responsibility for his improvement. For sure he is one of the players whose performance all over the season makes him a candidate for player of the year."



DIDIER DROGBA

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	38	Vast	2	Telegram	23	In	8	7	8	9	10	11
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12	Black Sea	44	Leftovers	6	Resorts	international?						
13	Outcast	46	Lotion	7	Destru-	tion						
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26	character	64 Provide	64 Provide	54	45 Hum-	45 Hum-						
27	20 New	65 Provide	65 Provide	55	46 Curved	46 Curved						
28	England	66 Provide	66 Provide	56	47 Tackie's	47 Tackie's						
29	campus	67 Provide	67 Provide	57	48 Kazan	48 Kazan						
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