



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack scores a late winner against Porto in their Champions League match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday.

Ballack sends Chelsea thru'

AFP, London



Michael Ballack kept Chelsea's Champions League dreams alive as his late goal earned a 2-1 last 16 second leg win over Porto that booked a place in the quarterfinals.

Jose Mourinho's side were on their way out after falling behind to Ricardo Quaresma's first half strike, but Ballack capped an impressive fightback as Chelsea scraped through their second round tie 3-2 on aggregate.

Arjen Robben cancelled out Quaresma's goal early in the second half and German international Ballack won it with a fine effort 11 minutes from full-time.

Mourinho said that words had been said at half-time and that his players had reacted brilliantly.

"It was quite strong (the half-time discussion)," admitted Mourinho. "We had tactical problems to

solve.

"I asked the players to enjoy it. We were out with 45 minutes remaining and I said to them do you want to be scared or do you want to enjoy it."

Ballack has been well below his best since his pre-season move from Bayern Munich, but he was signed by Mourinho for important European nights like this and finally showed why he is regarded as one of the world's leading midfielders.

With the Premiership title in Manchester United's grasp, Mourinho could not afford a second successive early exit from Europe's elite club competition and, as a tense encounter headed towards extra-time, Ballack stepped up with a goal worthy of his illustrious reputation.

Andriy Shevchenko had scored Chelsea's goal in the 1-1 first leg draw and he was quick to try his luck with a curling effort that went narrowly over from the edge of the area in the second minute.

But Jesualdo Ferreira's team had

demonstrated their attacking prowess in Portugal two weeks and they stunned Chelsea with a superbly-crafted goal in the 15th minute.

Chelsea were caught out at the back as Lucho Gonzalez clipped a sublime pass into the space left by Michael Essien and Quaresma took full advantage as he kept his composure to beat Petr Cech with a precise, low shot.

Mourinho's men spent long periods in the first half trying in vain to win the ball as Porto weaved neat passing patterns across midfield.

When the Blues did get possession they often squandered it too easily and one misplaced pass from Frank Lampard brought groans of frustration from the home fans.

Chelsea finally managed to work an opening midway through the first half, but Shevchenko missed his kick as he tried to convert Ashley Cole's cross and Didier Drogha scooped the rebound over from close range.

Lampard fared no better when Shevchenko cut through the Porto

defence and pulled a pass back to the Chelsea captain, Lampard had the goal at his mercy but his first touch let the ball run safely to Porto keeper Helton.

Chelsea's desperation to get back into the match by any means was apparent when Robben surged into the area and past Fucile, who made no contact, before launching into a blatant dive that earned a booking from referee Roberto Rosetti.

The Dutch winger tried a more legitimate attempt to lift his side when he flashed a shot just wide from the right side of the area on the stroke of half-time.

Mourinho, who left his seat before the interval to compose a crucial team-talk, sent on John Obi Mikel in place of Claude Makelele at half-time as he tried to shake up his lethargic side. Chelsea raised the tempo of their game straight from the re-start and were level within three minutes.

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Ferguson rules out Larsson extension

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson on Tuesday ruled out extending Henrik Larsson's stay at Old Trafford despite injury concerns surrounding Louis Saha.

Swedish striker Larsson is set to leave after the FA Cup quarterfinal at Middlesbrough on Saturday.

And his departure could leave a massive hole in United's striking department with Saha set to go for a scan after picking up an injury in training and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer ruled out for another three weeks after knee surgery.

"Henrik Larsson definitely goes back to Sweden next week," said Ferguson.

"He will play in the European charity game on Tuesday, then he will go home.

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Maul at the Mestalla

AFP, Valencia



Valencia progressed to the quarterfinals of the Champions League after a 0-0 draw here Tuesday with Inter Milan saw them home 2-2 on aggregate.

The Spanish outfit, which stretched its unbeaten European home record to nine matches, had its two away goals from the first leg draw at the San Siro to thank for ensuring progression into the last eight of European football's premier competition.

But the tie was marred when an ugly brawl broke out after the final whistle with rival players and members of each of the benches joining the melee which appeared to be triggered by blows exchanged by Valencia's Carlos Marchena and

Nicolas Burdisso of Inter.

Marchena's teammate David Navarro, who had been substituted, rushed onto the pitch and hit Burdisso who suffered a broken nose according to Inter coach Roberto Mancini.

Inter veteran Luis Figo also entered the fray, joining his teammates to round on Navarro.

Security officers were forced to intervene to restore order but there were renewed clashes in the tunnel and Inter's Argentina international Esteban Cambiasso made an attempt at getting into the Valencia dressing room.

Valencia coach Quisque Sanchez Flores, asked to give his reaction to the fight, said: "I'm not going to discuss things I didn't see as I was heading towards the changing rooms.

"They tell me Burdisso started it by hitting Marchena and then David Navarro intervened."

Quizzed about the Cambiasso

incident he added: "There was a lot of confusion. That's the consequence of a high tension game."

The match itself, despite the absence of goals, at the Stadio Mestalla was by no means a dull affair despite Inter missing hamstringed Brazilian striker Adriano and dynamic French midfielder Patrick Vieira.

The opening 10 minutes were end-to-end, with both sides keen to attack, and indicative of a pulsating match throughout.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic tested Santiago Canizares in the eighth minute, but the goalkeeper made a comfortable save from the striker's 25-yard strike.

A minute later, Valencia striker David Villa fumbled a shot from a delicate David Silva through ball, and Fernando Morientes' follow-up was parried away by the covering Marco Materazzi.

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Bedi predicts 'white' WC triumph

AFP, New Delhi

Former India captain Bishen Bedi on Wednesday ruled out an Asian team winning the World Cup, saying the sport's biggest prize will go to a "white" country.

Bedi backed Ricky Ponting's Australia to win a third successive World Cup campaign against Pakistan on May 31, also the final day of the group stage matches in the 1999 showpiece.

Led by Aminul Islam, Bangladesh faced a full-strength, in form and over confident Pakistan team who had at their own chest-beating self.

A day earlier, South Africa were humbled by their neighbours Zimbabwe by 48 runs so the onus was on Bangladesh to slip an upset win.

And so they did. All-rounder Khaled Mahmud was spearheading the most inexperienced attack in the history of Bangladesh with Shafiqul Islam and Niamur Rashid behind him. Mahmud took up the challenge as he took three important wickets while left-arm Mohammad Rafique bowled a brilliant spell to keep Pakistan at check.

When the last wicket fell (Saqlain Mushtaq run out by Khaled Mahmud), the feeling among expatriates was magnificent. None could forget that day in Northampton. Mahmud was adjudged the man-of-the-match for his heroic effort and a nation hailed this amazing victory.

But the World Cup was not over. The serious business of the Super Six hadn't started but the competition had heightened. Nine matches would decide the semifinal line-up and every team were up for the battle.

Australia, at the bottom of the Super Six table with no carried points, crushed Indian hopes with a 77-run victory. By this time, most of their batsmen were back to form and their bowlers, especially Shane Warne, had hit the straps.

No other sport caters for absolute no-hopers to get anywhere near a world-class contest," he wrote.

"By all means encourage cricket globally by financing. The ICC has loads of moolah to burn. But for goodness' sake, let's not throw lambs to slaughter in a world competition."

Tikolo wants top-class opposition

AFP, Daniel Town

Kenya captain Steve Tikolo is the latest personality to come out swinging for the minnows attending Cricket World Cup 2007.

The places of non-Test playing teams like Kenya, Canada, The Netherlands, Bermuda, Ireland, and Scotland in the World Cup have been subject of a raging debate among some of the game's leading personalities.

West Indies fast bowling legend Michael Holding has been the most prominent critic in the last few weeks about the value of the minnows taking part in the World Cup, and Australia captain Ricky Ponting has also raised an eyebrow.

"The International Cricket Council is looking to spread the game globally," Tikolo said following his side's 21-run defeat to West Indies in an official warm-up match on Tuesday.

"I don't see how they are going to do it unless they get us involved in cricket activities."

Tikolo also seemed to place the blame for the lack of competitiveness from the minnows at the feet of the Test-playing nations.

"To be playing at this level, you have to be playing against these guys regularly," he said.

"Playing them in World Cup warm-up matches and big tournaments alone is not good enough. We need quality opposition to improve and we are not getting that."

Tikolo is, however, satisfied with his side's performance in the warm-up match against the CWC 2007 hosts.

"It was a fruitful exercise, since the main aim was to try and get some good combinations going in the team, and I think we did this," he said.

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ICC okays Sami, Arafat for WC

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan have received International Cricket Council (ICC) approval to include fast bowler Mohammad Sami and all-rounder Yasir Arafat in their World Cup squad, a Pakistan Cricket Board said on Wednesday.

"We have clearance from the ICC technical committee to replace Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif," PCB director of cricket operations Saleem Altaf told Reuters, adding the replacements had left for the Caribbean and would join the team by Thursday.

The PCB withdrew Shoaib and Asif from their World Cup squad last Thursday on fitness grounds and submitted their medical reports to the ICC this week.

Shoaib (knee and hamstring) and Asif (elbow) have been initially advised to rest for three weeks.

Pakistan open their World Cup campaign against hosts West Indies on March 13.

Down The World Cup Lane

1999: Two winners

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Bangladesh travelled to Northamptonshire to play the last match of their already successful World Cup campaign against Pakistan on May 31, also the final day of the group stage matches in the 1999 showpiece.

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A day earlier, South Africa were humbled by their neighbours Zimbabwe by 48 runs so the onus was on Bangladesh to slip an upset win.

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Australia, at the bottom of the Super Six table with no carried points, crushed Indian hopes with a 77-run victory. By this time, most of their batsmen were back to form and their bowlers, especially Shane Warne, had hit the straps.

Australia were peaking at the right time.

South African Lance Klusener kept his heroics at a rapid pace with a cool 41-ball 46 against fellow-favourites Pakistan as the Proteas won by two wickets.

India duly beat Pakistan, for the third time running at the World Cup, but then lost to New Zealand to give up their place in the last four. Zimbabwe also bowed out but only after giving a good fight. Andy Flower's boys were well-appreciated in England. With a match left, Australia had to beat

South Africa to book a place in the semifinals. If they did win, they would face this opponent as Pakistan were slated to take on New Zealand.

Steve Waugh struck his best one-day knock of 120* to steer his side home with just two balls to spare. All 1999 World Cup stories must have the Herschelle Gibbs incident but Shane Warne's insight into Gibbs' body language was crucial to Waugh not walking after Gibbs had spilled it.

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Australia captain Steve Waugh (L) celebrates with his teammates after the dramatic win in the World Cup semifinal over South Africa at Edgbaston on June 17, 1999.

Zim keep Aussies waiting

AFP, St Vincent



Reigning champions Australia made heavy going of seeing off Zimbabwe in their opening World Cup warm-up match at Arncliffe on Tuesday.

All-rounders Michael Clarke (82), who scored at better than a run-a-ball, and Shane Watson (81) led the way in a total of 290 for seven that the keen Africans never looked like surpassing in a match Australia ultimately won by 106 runs.

But Zimbabwe, without several first choice players through a combination of political boycotts and pay disputes, kept Australia in the field for the full 50 overs before finishing on 184 for seven.

Nevertheless, Australia captain Ricky Ponting was happy to have spent time in the field ahead of Friday's second and final warm-up match against old rivals England, who dismissed Bermuda inside 23

overs during their 241 run walkover

on Monday.

"Ours was a better workout than they (England) got. At this stage of the tournament most teams are looking to get some quality time in the middle and we got through 100 overs today," said Ponting.

And he insisted he hadn't been taken aback by Zimbabwe's spirited effort with the bat.

"In one-day cricket on wickets like that, which are really slow and low, it can be quite difficult to bowl teams out. I wasn't surprised today and it was probably more beneficial to us that we didn't."

Zimbabwe captain Prosper Utseya was pleased by his side's batting display but left rueing a fielding performance that saw three catches dropped.

"We could have kept them to 240 if we had taken all our chances. We let them off the hook a little bit."

Stand-in openers Watson (81) and Brad Haddin (47) saw Australia off to a solid start although all three of Australia's top scorers were dropped once.

Clarke, also bowled off a no-ball, was missed on 58 when he hit left-arm spinner Sean Williams straight

to Terry Duffin at cover.

In all he faced 81 balls with one six and six fours before being caught by Gary Brent on the long-off boundary off paceman Christopher Mpofu.

Zimbabwe had only made 11 inside six overs when Duffin was caught by wicketkeeper Haddin off left-arm quick Nathan Bracken for five.

A fourth wicket stand of 67 between Sean Williams (44) and Stuart Matsikenyeri (35) held Australia up, both batsmen lofting spinners Brad Hodge and Brad Hogg for boundaries.

Earlier, Watson opened with Matthew Hayden still nursing a toe injury.

Haddin's chance came following the late arrival here on Monday of first choice gloveman and opener Adam Gilchrist after the birth of his third child.

Australia had been looking at a score of 300 plus but several batsmen got themselves out, with only Ponting, who won the toss, undone by a good ball when he edged an

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Spanish dominance in last 16

AFP, Paris



A four-strong Spanish contingent led by title holders Sevilla pose the most menacing of threats in the UEFA Cup last 16 round which kicks-off on Thursday.

The Spanish league leaders have one of the toughest tasks to progress to the quarterfinals as they face Ukrainians Shakhtar Donetsk.

Sevilla's domestic rivals Celta Vigo also face a tough challenge in the shape of Germans Werder Bremen, who squeezed past Ajax 4-3 on aggregate in the previous round having only narrowly missed out on making the Champions League knock-out phase before that.

Espanyol and Osasuna complete the Spanish challenge as they travel to Israeli Maccabi Haifa and Scotland's Rangers respectively.

With a 19-point deficit to leaders Celtic in their domestic league, Rangers are desperate to make the most of their UEFA Cup run.

And defender Ian Murray rubbished claims the competition is devalued by the expensive

Champions League.

"It has been berated a little bit, the competition, due to the Champions League successes," said Murray.

"Obviously there are some great teams still in it -- you've still got Espanyol, Sevilla, Werder Bremen -- so it's a good competition still. It's not taken lightly."

The English assault on Europe's second competition comes from Tottenham and Newcastle.

Spurs received a bye in the previous round after Dutch team Feyenoord were kicked out of the competition due to the behaviour of a section of their fans during a trip to Nancy in France in the group stage.

The Premiership outfit face a trip to Sporting Braga of Portugal in their first leg game, fresh from a four-

match winning run that has yielded 14 goals.

In-form Spurs have banged in four goals in three of those matches, including a thrilling come-from-behind 4-3 win at West Ham on Sunday.

Both they and Newcastle are largely relying on the UEFA Cup to have any hope of tasting success this season.

Tottenham are still in their domestic cup competition but face an away trip to Chelsea and will be looking at Europe as their best hope of silverware.

For Newcastle it is the only route to salvaging a miserable season that has seen them languishing in the bottom half of the Premiership table for most of it.

They entertain Dutch high-flyers AZ Alkmaar who came back from 2-0 down at home to Fenerbahce in the previous round before squeezing through on the away-goals rule.

The first leg is at Newcastle's St James' Park where the Magpies will be hoping to hit the goal trail again have been blanked in their last two outings.

Other games see France's Lens hosting Bayer Leverkusen of Germany and Portugal's Benfica travelling to the French capital to face Paris St Germain.



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia's Carlos Marchena (L) and Joaquin fight with Inter Milan's Nicolas Burdisso at the end of their Champions League match at the Mestalla in Valencia on Tuesday.