



Newcastle striker Obafemi Martins shoots to score against AZ Alkmaar during their UEFA Cup match at St. James' Park in Newcastle on Thursday.

Ferguson respects Roma

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson insists Manchester United will not underestimate Roma when they meet in the Champions League quarterfinals.

United will face Roma for the first time in a competitive fixture after being paired with the Italian club in Friday's draw in Athens.

The first leg will be at Roma's Olympic Stadium on April 3 or 4 with the return at Old Trafford on April 10 or 11.

Roma may not be regarded as one of the favourites for the tournament, but they are currently second in Serie A and Ferguson believes their surprise win over French champions Lyon in the last 16 shows they must be treated with respect.

"We've never played Roma before so it'll be a new and exciting experience," Ferguson told ManUtd.com. "That's the great thing about Europe, you play teams you've never played before."

"We respect their last result (beating Lyon). They have some great players like De Rossi and Mancini."

"Obviously it's pointless looking beyond this game. We must concentrate on this game only. We're really looking forward to it."

If United, who beat Lille in the last 16, see off Roma they will play either AC Milan or Bayern Munich in the semifinals as the Premiership leaders try to repeat their 1999 treble triumph.

Inter need derby tonic

AFP, Rome

Runaway Serie A leaders Inter Milan can ease some of the pain felt after their Champions League exit by defeating city rivals AC Milan on Sunday and continuing their march towards the Scudetto.

Inter's misery at being dumped out of Europe by Valencia on Tuesday deepened when AC Milan reached the quarterfinals of the competition the next day with an extra-time victory over Celtic.

Docked eight points for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandal, AC Milan are unbeaten in their last 15 league games and sit just three points off the Champions League places for next season.

And Inter, 16 points clear at the top of the table, would love nothing more than to dent their neighbours' hopes of a top-four finish this weekend.

Adding more fuel to the fire will be Ronaldo's first appearance for AC Milan against Inter, his former

employers, who he walked out on in 2002 after the club had stood by him during a lengthy injury crisis.

Kaka, scorer of AC Milan's goal in Wednesday's 1-0 victory over the Scottish champions, said he expected the San Siro derby to be more intense than usual.

"Inter will be desperate to make up for the disappointment of going out of the Champions League and winning the derby would go some way to making up for that," said the creative Brazilian midfielder.

"But we're too charged up after reaching the last eight, so I expect it to be a superb match."

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini said beating Celtic was the ideal way to warm up for the derby.

"Qualifying for the quarterfinals of the Champions League has certainly given our morale a major boost," he said.

"Our target is to finish in the top four and a derby victory will help us do that."

Inter's Brazilian wingback Maicon, who has been a revelation for the club this season, is suspended while midfielders Esteban Cambiasso and Patrick Vieira are still injured.

Argentine defender Nicolas Burdisso, whose nose was broken in an ugly brawl after Inter's Champions League exit in Spain, is doubtful.

Alessandro Costacurta, Cafu, Kakha Kaladze, Alessandro Nesta and Serginho are all ruled out for AC Milan because of injury.

Second-placed Roma, who won 2-0 at French side Lyon on Tuesday to clinch their place in the last eight of the Champions League, play at home to Udinese.

Third-placed Palermo host Fiorentina while Lazio, in fourth spot, will be looking for their fifth consecutive win at struggling Reggina.

FIXTURES

(1400GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday

Siena v Ascoli (1700), Torino v Catania (1930)

Sunday

Atalanta v Parma, Chievo v Messina, Empoli v Livorno, Inter Milan, Palermo v Fiorentina, Reggina v Lazio, Roma v Udinese, Sampdoria v Cagliari

L'pool takeover close to completion

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's takeover by George Gillett and Tom Hicks is close to completion after they told the stock exchange that they have bought 80.7 per cent of all shares in the Premiership club.

Gillett and Hicks have reached the 75 per cent take-up needed to make today's announcement of securing unconditional control.

The American businessmen need another 9.3 per cent to force a compulsory purchase of every share and have extended their

deadline to small shareholders willing to sell until March 26.

It is thought Gillett and Hicks met shareholders ahead of Tuesday's Champions League match against Barcelona and were told there would not be any significant shareholder who would be holding out.

Shareholders had been offered 5000 pounds per share from Gillett and Hicks' Kop Football Ltd company and Steve Morgan, previously the third-biggest shareholder with six percent, Terry Neill, who owns 3 per cent, are expected to sell up.

The statement to the Stock Exchange this morning confirmed the American pair yesterday (Thursday)

day) "received valid acceptances in respect of 28,089 Liverpool shares, representing approximately 80.7 percent of Liverpool's issued share capital to which the offer relates."

Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry claimed Gillett and Hicks' announcement was a momentous moment for the Reds.

"It is an historic day for the club," Parry told Liverpool's website. "It's obviously very pleasing to hear that George and Tom have reached the threshold they required and I'm sure they're equally delighted with the news."

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