



Werde Bremen playmaker Diego (R) shimmies past Celta Vigo defensive hardman Pablo Garcia during their UEFA Cup clash at the Balaidos Stadium in Vigo on Thursday.

Sheva ambushed?

AFP, Berlin

Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko on Friday denied he spoke to a German internet site expressing his deep dissatisfaction with manager Jose Mourinho and saying he has had "better coaches."

The website of German TV channel ARD also reported this week Shevchenko as saying he became Mourinho's "dardboard" because of a rift with owner Roman Abramovich.

However Shevchenko reacted to say: "This is complete rubbish. I have never spoken to this German website or to the journalist who claims to have interviewed me."

The club statement continued:

"The only official comments from Andriy appear on the Chelsea website, his own website or in interviews organised by the club, his sponsors or official pre- or post-match press conferences."

"Andriy and Chelsea will now be considering what future action to take."

Shevchenko was quoted by ARD this week as saying: "He (Mourinho) is professional, no more and no less. He is a tactical fox and has strict ideas, but I've had better coaches."

"It is the first time in my career that a coach has said publicly that I don't fit with his concept. That is not exactly great for motivation. If that is what he really thinks, then why am I here?"

"We had a meeting and he said his opinion had been twisted. But deep inside it still bothers me. If the owner asks me what I think of the manager, then I will speak my mind."

The Ukrainian who has been written off as a 30-million-pound flop by the British media after his move from AC Milan last year claimed he had become a pawn in

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Dark night for Spain

AFP, Paris



Spain's love-hate relationship with European competition this season endured another roller-coaster journey in the UEFA Cup on Thursday with neither of the country's four sides managing to scrape a win.

The night of mediocrity followed on from Barcelona and Real Madrid's exits from the Champions League.

It also meant that not one of the seven Spanish sides plying in Europe this week managed to win although Valencia at least avoided the Champions League cull with a 0-0 draw with Inter Milan to move into the last eight.

On Thursday, UEFA Cup holders Sevilla, the current Spanish league leaders, were held to a 2-2 draw at home by Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine and needed a goal in the dying minutes to rescue a draw in their fourth round tie which featured three penalties.

Celta Vigo lost 1-0 at home to Germany's Werder Bremen. Espanyol drew 0-0 at Maccabi Haifa while Osasuna came back from Glasgow Rangers with a 1-1 draw.

Luis Marti gave Sevilla an eighth-minute lead from the spot against Shakhtar who were level 11 minutes later through their Czech international defender Tomas Hubeschman.

Brazilian midfielder Matuzalem then put Shakhtar ahead on the hour from the spot before the Spaniards guaranteed a share of the spoils through an 88th-minute penalty from Italian Enzo Maresca.

The draw was particularly pleasing for Shakhtar who were missing key players Olexandr Kucher, Mariusz Lewandowski and Ciprian Marica through suspension.

Hugo Almeida scored the only goal of the game six minutes from time to give Werder a 1-0 win at Celta while, in Glasgow, Raul Garcia's 17th-minute opener for Osasuna was cancelled out by an injury-time equaliser from French defender Brahim Hemdani.

Rangers boss Walter Smith, whose side had been outplayed at a packed Ibrox, was relieved just to get a draw.

"It's a strange emotion for me talking about that game as a 1-1

draw," said Smith.

"That was easily the poorest performance we've had since I returned as manager of Rangers."

Top scorer on the night were Newcastle United who saw Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins grab two in a 4-2 win over Dutch side AZ Alkmaar at St James's Park.

The pace of the 10-million-pound signing from Inter Milan was a persistent threat and, on a night of brisk attacking football and pitiful defending, it was his two finishes that stood out.

AZ, who have never lost a home European tie, will still be hopeful of reaching the quarterfinals by claiming what could be a crucial second away goal.

All of Newcastle's goals came in the first half.

Great Steinsson put through his own goal after eight minutes, Kieron Dyer added the second after 22 minutes before Martins grabbed a brace in the 23rd and 37th minutes.

AZ, coached by former Barcelona boss Louis van Gaal, pulled one back through Shota Arveladze with Danny Koevermans

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Clash of the titans

AFP, Athens



AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti gave high praise to Manchester United with whom they were drawn in the European Champions League quarterfinals here on Friday.

Manchester must travel to the Italian capital on April 3/4 and Spalletti said that, while they were not afraid of their opponents, they understood their quality.

The other quarterfinalists were AC Milan at home to Bayern Munich, PSV Eindhoven entertaining Liverpool, and Chelsea playing their first leg of the tie at home to Valencia.

Spalletti told Italian television station Sky: "Of course Manchester's past record proves they might have the plus that you need in this competition."

"They are strong, complete team with young players of quality and wearing the jersey gives them even more strength. But we will give it our all without thinking of any of that."

Spalletti also said he was expecting his side to show a high standard in their match, saying: "We are very good tactically and technically with a very good defense."

As for the AC Milan versus Bayern Munich game, coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said: "They (AC Milan) are opponents of great class and it will be a big challenge against one of the best teams in Europe. Milan have great players like Kaka, Clarence Seedorf and Filippo Inzaghi."

Bayern have the first match away, and Hitzfeld added: "We need to be in a good position for the second leg when we have the

chance to impose ourselves in front of our own fans."

Bayern president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said their defeat to the Italians the previous year had been a poor memory.

"Everyone knows the result of

the season before against Milan (a 4-1 loss in the second leg of the last 16)," Rummenigge said. "That's not a glorious moment for us. This time maybe we can do something good."

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Ancelotti happy with draw

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti was delighted to avoid Manchester United in the draw for the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

Ancelotti had feared a last-eight meeting with United or Roma after eliminating Celtic in the last 16, but his players were answered with the six-time European champions being drawn against Bayern Munich.

"Bayern Munich have a great tradition and a lot of value," admitted Ancelotti. "We know them well, having faced them in the past."

"I would have been more disappointed to have met Roma or Manchester United at this point of the tournament. Manchester United is the team that plays the best football in Europe right now."

Milan will host Bayern, who ousted Real Madrid on away goals in the previous round, on April 3/4 before travelling to Munich a week later.

Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge admits his players will be looking for revenge when they face Milan.

The German giants were knocked out of the tournament after losing 5-2 on aggregate to Milan in the second round last season.

Dunga leaves out Ronaldo

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Ronaldo was left out by Brazil again on Thursday when coach Dunga named his squad for this month's friendlies against Chile and Ghana in Sweden.

Ronaldinho, who has started only one match since the World Cup, was included but Dunga said he wanted to the former World Player of the Year to revert pre-Barcelona style of play.

Ronaldo, 30, has made a promising start at AC Milan after his 7.5 million euros move from Real Madrid, but his performances failed to persuade Dunga to call him up for the first time since the World Cup.

Dunga told reporters: "We are watching and observing him and as soon as his performances interest us and he is near to his best, he will be selected."

Dunga, who retired in 1999 with Internacional, said he wanted Ronaldinho to play as he did in the early days of his career.

Internacional and Gremio are bitter rivals in the southern city of Porto Alegre and Dunga was given a torrid time by Ronaldinho, then a teenager, when they were on opposite sides in a "Gre-Nal" derby.

"I would like to see Ronaldinho

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SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Helton (Porto), Julio Cesar (Inter Milan)

Defenders: Daniel Alves (Sevilla), Isinho (Sao Paulo), Gilberto (Hertha Berlin), Kleber (Santos), Lucio (Bayern Munich), Alex Rodrigo (PSV Eindhoven), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen), Luisao (Benfica)

Midfielders: Gilberto Silva (Arsenal), Mineiro (Hertha Berlin), Dudu Cearense (CSKA Moscow), Elano (Shakhtar Donetsk), Josue (Sao Paulo), Diego (Werder Bremen), Kaka (AC Milan)

Forwards: Ronaldinho (Barcelona), Robinho (Real Madrid), Fred (Olympique Lyon), Rafael Sobis (Real Betis), Wagner Love (CSKA Moscow)

Hitzfeld urged to stay

AFP, Berlin

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld insists he will leave at the end of the season, but club captain Oliver Kahn and president Franz Beckenbauer on Thursday pleaded with the veteran coach to stay.

Having only returned to the German giants in February, after Felix Magath was sacked following some dreadful results, 58-year-old Hitzfeld helped Bayern win four of their last six games, although he still insists he will go.

But after Bayern dumped Real out of the Champions League on Wednesday night to reach the quarterfinals with a 2-1 win at the Allianz Arena, their captain could not praise his coach highly enough.

"Hitzfeld is the ultimate Bayern coach," said German international veteran goalkeeper Kahn.

"He understands everything about football. He has the most modern methods and is very clever psychologically. He can handle the stars. He has everything a Bayern coach needs."

And German football legend Beckenbauer was in no doubt who he would like to see at the club's helm.

"My wish would be Ottmar Hitzfeld," said Beckenbauer. Ottmar

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Ronaldinho sweating on Real clash

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard will likely have to do without Brazilian star Ronaldinho for Saturday's La Liga show down at the Nou Camp against Real Madrid, the Catalan club reported on Thursday.

The Brazilian star has a left thigh muscle strain and is fighting to be fit for 'el clasico', the club announced.

"Following tests, no rupture has shown up regarding the muscle pain the player is feeling," the club added.

Barca knocked off top spot by Seville, who beat them last weekend in Andalusia, are desperate to put that disappointment behind them as well as their Champions League exit at the hands of Liverpool.

Real, fourth in the table six points off the pace and five behind Barca, also have to lick their European wounds having also gone out on away goals – in their case to Bayern Munich.

If Ronaldinho cannot make it he will miss his first meeting with Real since the 2003-2004 season, his first with Barca.

Ever since, he has played a starring role with the club having won the title in the past two seasons – although Real did win the encounter between Spain's two biggest clubs at the Bernabeu earlier this term.

Down The World Cup Lane

2003: Ponting on fire

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The combination of hosts South Africa's early exit, Australia's incredible dominance, the surprise results of Kenya and Zimbabwe and the ridiculous length of the tournament meant that some gloss were off the Super Six stage even before it started.

Australia were guaranteed their place in the semifinal as they carried maximum points from the group stage. Captain Ricky Ponting struck a superb hundred against Sri Lanka to give his side a 96-run victory while India catted Kenya (by six wickets) and Sri Lanka (by 183 runs). The second

Australians that afternoon.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's 74-run triumph against the Black Caps in the next match made sure of their semifinal against Australia, which they lost by 48 runs after rain interrupted the game in Port Elizabeth. Andrew Symonds again starred for the defending champions but it was Brett Lee's early burst that clinched them a final spot for the third time in succession. The match shall forever be remembered for Adam Gilchrist's unusual gesture of walking when the umpire almost gave not out. This sparked off some debate but it showed what Gilchrist was made of.

India however had a much easier task of facing Kenya. Skipper Ganguly feasted on the weak attack as he notched up a classy 111* in Durban as his side climbed to 270. Steve Tikolo scored a superb 56 but that was just an afterthought to the entire match as India cruised to a 91-run win.

India had reached the final of this tournament after 20 years. Australia awaited them at the Wanderers in Johannesburg with

news that one of their batsmen Damien Martyn had a broken finger.

With a day to go, Martyn had a talk with the legendary Greg Chappell who, somehow, convinced the premier batsman to play through the pain barrier. So with Martyn playing, Australia had a line-up for the ages but as the commentators pointed out, had a fight in hand against India, a team peaking at the right time in the competition.

Ponting and Martyn were brought together when openers Gilchrist (57) and Matthew Hayden (37) fell after giving a brilliant start. Indian bowlers thought their hellacious times were over but they were shifted from the frying pan to the fire as Ponting and Martyn started peeling off two magnificent knocks. From 2-125 in the 20th

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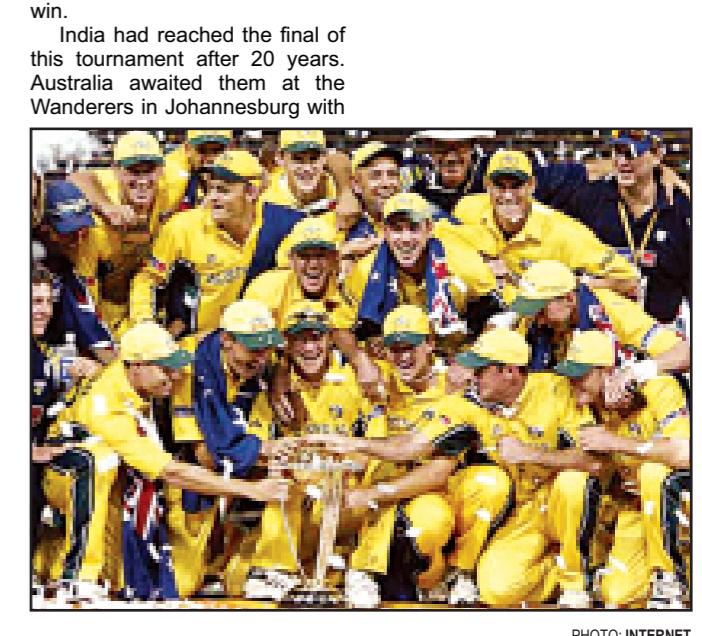


PHOTO: INTERNET
Australian players celebrate with the trophy after their 125-run win over India in the World final at the Wanderers in Johannesburg on 23rd March, 2003.

Anti-climactic El Clasico

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona and Real Madrid have even more to prove than usual in their derby match in the Catalan capital on Saturday between both Spanish giants.

"A farce called Capello," blasted one headline in the Spanish sports daily As on Thursday.

"The results are not good, there's no hiding that," admitted Capello

"But I have the desire and the team can make it to the end of the season with serious chances of winning the league. We need to think of winning and of playing a good game on Saturday."

Capello is in a stronger position, having won the Spanish title for the last two years and the 2006 Champions League, but he is still conscious that he cannot afford to lose one of the most high profile matches in the world.

"It is not the end of the season for us, but it is very disappointing," said Rijkaard, after their 1-0 win over Liverpool which was not enough for them to avoid overall defeat on the away goals rule.