

Van Bommel out of Milan clash

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's hardman Dutch midfielder Mark van Bommel was handed a two-match ban on Tuesday by UEFA which will keep him out of both of his club's Champions League quarter-final games against AC Milan.

Having been sent-off for a second yellow card in Bayern's 2-1 last 16 win over Real Madrid last week, the Dutch midfielder misses his side's trip to Milan's San Siro stadium on April 3 and the return leg in Munich on April 11.

The 29-year-old former Barcelona player has already been fined 6,200 euros by UEFA this year for making an obscene gesture to Real Madrid fans after scoring a late goal in Bayern's 3-2 defeat at the Bernabeu last month.

Leipzig stadium vandalised

REUTERS, London

Hooligans have spray-painted a swastika and right-wing slogans at the stadium of lower division Lokomotive Leipzig, calling the club president a "traitor pig" and demanding his resignation.

A police spokesman said they were investigating whether club president Steffen Kubald was the target for turning over the names of several Lok Leipzig supporters the club suspects of participating in post-match riots on Feb. 10.

"I'm not going to throw in the towel just because a couple of Nazis want me to," Kubald said in a story on the Lok Leipzig Web site.

Last month's violence erupted when around 800 soccer supporters armed with cobblestones and concrete blocks attacked a police force of 300, leaving 39 police injured.

Chelsea-Spurs fans clash

AFP, London

British police arrested 34 people when rival football gangs clashed in one of the most affluent parts of London after Chelsea's FA Cup clash with Tottenham, officers said Monday.

Fans of the two teams armed with knives, hockey sticks and wooden clubs fought outside a pub in Parsons Green, west London, in what police said was a pre-arranged confrontation.

It came after the 3-3 quarterfinal draw at nearby Stamford Bridge, Chelsea's home ground.

Police restored order after about an hour of unrest Sunday, and arrested 34 men, who were later bailed to various dates in May. Seven of them received hospital treatment for stab wounds or head or chest injuries.

The disturbance is thought to be among the worst in recent years in London, where football hooliganism has been largely wiped out.

"Incidents of this nature following a football match are rare, but it would appear that a very small number of supporters were intent on meeting after the match for a confrontation," Superintendent Dave Page, of London's Metropolitan Police, said.

Essien extends Chelsea contract

AFP, London

Chelsea's Ghana international midfielder Michael Essien didn't suffer for scoring an own goal in the epic 3-3 FA Cup quarterfinal draw with Spurs as on Monday he was rewarded with a new five-year contract by the Premiership champions.

The 24-year-old has been a huge success since his then record 24million pound move from French giants Lyon in August 2005 when he also signed a five-year deal.

Essien is highly rated by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho and has been an ever-present for Chelsea this season, making 46 appearances in all competitions and scoring four times.

Messina 'keeper tests positive

AFP, Rome

Serie A side Messina's goalkeeper Nicholas Caglionì became the second player to test positive for cocaine, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) said Monday.

The 24-year-old failed the test after the 1-1 draw with fellow Sicilian side Catania on February 11.

Caglionì follows Sampdoria captain Francesco Flachi in testing positive for cocaine this term.



PHOTO: AFP

Benfica's Simao Sabrosa (L) celebrates his strike against Leiria with teammate Miccoli during their Portuguese Liga match at the Luz stadium in Lisbon on Monday.

Zizou rejects Matrix link-up

Football

AFP, Brussels

Astar-studded European XI including Ronaldo, Marco Materazzi and Steven Gerrard will join forces to face Manchester United on Tuesday to celebrate 50 years since the EU's founding Treaty of Rome.

The match, to be held at Old Trafford stadium, is a sell-out, ensuring a 72,000-strong crowd with all proceeds going to charity.

World Cup winner Ronaldo, along with fellow Brazilian star Ronaldinho of Barcelona, will also be joined by the likes of German goalkeeper great Oliver Kahn and French world cup winner Lilian Thuram.

However there will be no cosy coming-together for Materazzi and Zinedine Zidane, who famously head-butted the Inter Milan defender in last year's World Cup final in what was the French great's swansong.

The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) invited Zidane for the special match but "the answer arrived late and it was negative" former Italian coach Marcello Lippi announced Monday.

Lippi coached Italy to victory and is managing the European XI for Tuesday's match.

Several other players were approached but declined the invitation for "excellent reasons", Lippi told a press conference in Brussels, alongside UEFA chief Michel Platini, former Manchester United great Bobby Charlton and EU Commission chief Manuel Barroso.

Former England star David Beckham was earlier named to face his former club but is currently out with a knee injury.

Nor do any Chelsea players appear on Lippi's list, which he stressed was still subject to last-minute changes.

Charlton could not say whether United would field their strongest side for the match, given their heavy domestic and European schedule.

But he assured the assembled reporters that whatever team United manager Sir Alex Ferguson sends on to the field "it's a team he sends out to win".

The match, the proceeds of which will go to the official Manchester United Foundation, funding community projects locally and further afield, also marks 50 years of the club's involvement in European football competitions.

"In a continent proud of its cultural diversity, football offers a common language," said Platini.

Below is a list of the full squad of European and Europe-based players, who will give their time and effort for free.

Goalkeepers: Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich/GER), Gregory Coupet (Lyon/FRA), Iker Casillas (Real Madrid/ESP)

Defenders: Paolo Maldini (AC Milan/ITA), Jamie Carragher (Liverpool/ENG), Eric Abidal (Lyon/FRA), Lilian Thuram (Barcelona/ESP), Carles Puyol (Barcelona/ESP), Marco Materazzi (Inter Milan/ITA), Fabio Grosso (Inter Milan/ITA), Gianluca Zambrotta (Barcelona/ESP).

Midfielders: Steven Gerrard (Liverpool/ENG), Juninho (Lyon/FRA), Florent Malouda (Lyon/FRA), Luis Miguel (Valencia/ESP), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan/ITA), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan/ITA)

Strikers: Ronaldinho (Barcelona/ESP), Ronaldo (AC Milan/ITA), Alessandro Mancini (AS Roma/ITA), Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter Milan/ITA), Henrik Larsson (Helsingborg/SWE).

Philosophical Henry

REUTERS, Paris

Arsenal captain Thierry Henry, out for the season, said his injuries were an inevitable result of last season's punishing schedule.

The France striker damaged stomach and groin muscles in his team's Champions League exit to PSV Eindhoven last week.

Henry has been dogged by a lack of fitness since returning from the World Cup in Germany, notably with a long-standing sciatic nerve problem, along with hamstring and foot injuries.

"I saw it coming and, in a way, I was ready for it. My body was in a permanent state of alert," Henry told France Football magazine on Tuesday.

"It's even comforting: we know we are not robots and these injuries remind us of that."

"I will now heal and get ready for next season. I have not had a proper break in the past seasons."

Henry, expected to resume training in July, will miss France's next three Euro 2008 qualifiers, as well as Arsenal's Premier League run-in as they chase a Champions League place.

"I'm not saying France will not have any problems because I respect our opponents but I am not worried," he added.

"As for the Gunners, they are among the best three teams of the league if you look at the last eight matches. We are on a nice streak, without me playing."

Barton in the dock again

AFP, London

Manchester City footballer Joey Barton has been arrested on suspicion of assault and criminal damage.

The midfielder, who has courted controversy for several off the field incidents recently, was questioned by police over an alleged argument with a taxi driver in Liverpool earlier this month.

A spokeswoman for Merseyside Police said: "I can confirm a 24-year-old man from Widnes was arrested on suspicion of causing criminal damage and assault."

"He has been bailed until May pending further inquiries."

In February, Portsmouth fans complained after Barton, 24, allegedly made an obscene gesture towards them during a match at Fratton Park.

He was fined 2,000 pounds by the FA after dropping his shorts and baring his bottom at Everton fans in October.

Barton was sent home from a pre-season tour of Thailand after becoming involved in a brawl with a schoolboy Everton fan.

He was also fined six weeks' wages by his own club after stubbing a cigar out in the eye of young City team-mate Jamie Tandy at a club Christmas party.

Raul confident of Spain call-up

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid captain Raul is aiming to fight his way back into the Spain squad for their next Euro 2008 qualifier against Denmark on March 24.

Spanish football icon Raul has recently been out of favour with national team coach Luis Aragones, who did not include him in his squad for their last qualifier in October, a 2-0 defeat to Sweden.

Raul was also left out for the 1-0 friendly win against England last February in Manchester.

However Spain's next match is in Real's Santiago Bernabeu stadium, and Raul is reported as saying: "I think I've got a chance (of playing). That's my opinion."

Spain, who exited last year's World Cup finals before the quarterfinals stage, are currently struggling in group F of the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

Aragones' side sit in fifth place on only three points after three games.

Oliveira's sister released

AFP, Rome

The sister of AC Milan striker Ricardo Oliveira has been released by her kidnappers in Brazil, the Italian Serie A club said on Tuesday.

Maria de Lourdes Silva de Oliveira was abducted from her Sao Paulo home by hooded men in October last year.

In a statement posted on their website, AC Milan said Oliveira's sister was "alive and well".

Oliveira, 26, joined AC Milan from Spanish club Real Betis last August.

He helped Brazil win the Copa America in 2004 and the Confederations Cup in 2005, but was not included in last year's World Cup squad.

Juninho hints at Lyon exit

Football

AFP, Lyon

Lyon's Brazilian playmaker Juninho has hinted he could leave the French champions if his contract is not extended for a further two years.

An extension on his current contract, which ends in 2008, could mean Juninho would end his career at Lyon.

"I am 32 years old. I know how football works. I have a history with the club," the Brazilian free kick specialist said Tuesday.

"Three years ago I said I wanted

to leave the club and at the end of this season I will say what I am going to do. I would like to go on until 2010."

Juninho -- who joined the French side in 2001 -- retired from the international scene following Brazil's exit from the World Cup quarterfinals in 2006 when they lost 1-0 to 1998 world champions France.

Having decided to concentrate purely on playing club football the free-kick maestro is now looking for a longer spell to help Lyon in their ultimate goal of winning the Champions League.

"I have not yet extended it (the contract) and I don't want to extend

it for just one year only," explained the Brazilian midfielder.

"I quit the national team to stay fresh, but it is not only me who decides my future at OL. If I don't get the extension, I could leave."

"The club is still deciding about 2010, I realise that time is ticking away, but I feel good. The president (Jean-Michel Aulas) is understanding about the situation. He wants to form a Champions League winning team between now and 2010."

"For the moment, I have to finish the season well and then I will see what happens to me personally."

Federer fizzles in California sun

Tennis

AFP, Indian Wells

Roger Federer's consecutive match win streak was halted in shocking fashion here Sunday as he failed to muster a challenge against the hard-charging Argentine dynamo Guillermo Canas.

"Many times in matches I win I fear I am not going to turn it around," said Federer, following his 7-5, 6-2 loss to Canas in his opening match of the Pacific Life Open Masters Series tournament.

"I just feel this guy is playing probably better than me and I need some kind of miracle to get out of it."

"And today was no different. Today wasn't the day I could come back for some reason."

The last man to defeat Federer was British number one and Scotsman Andy Murray at the Cincinnati Master Series event in August and this was Federer's first opening match loss since 2004 at the same Cincinnati tournament.

"I've had an incredible run not losing in the first round for, I think, over two years," Federer said. "So

I am really happy about that. Sooner or later it had to happen."

The 25-year-old Swiss superstar was a three-time defending champion in Indian Wells and was seeking his eighth straight ATP tournament title.

Federer had also won 41 straight matches and six more would have set an ATP record of 47 consecutive wins, breaking another Argentine Guillermo Vilas' record of 46, set 30 years ago.

Federer downplayed the shocking end to his winning streak on Sunday and when asked if this took some pressure off his game, he said, "No, I would rather face it. You think it is pressure. It is no pressure because I take it match by match."

"And you guys think it takes a (tournament victory) to break the record. I'm concerned about winning my first round match against a lucky loser."

"There you go. It just shows you how tough it is."

Besides the match winning streak, Federer had his sights on a number of other historic records at the Pacific Life Open.

He has 495 career match victories and needs five more to reach the 500 mark.

Federer's 41-match win streak



PHOTO: AFP

World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland is distraught at his defeat at the hands of Guillermo Canas of Argentina in the first round at the Pacific Life Open in Indian Wells California on Sunday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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36 CBer's nickname 37 Language suffix 38 Neighbor of Pak. 39 Satyr's kin 42 Pompous sort 44 Boone portrayer 48 B&B 49 Experts 50 Concept 51 Singer 52 Month in a Jewish calendar 53 Competed 54 Youngster 55 Nabors role

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20 Resting for a bit 22 Bumps into 24 Rice recipe 25 Roast beef au -- 26 Doctrine 27 Greek cross 29 Neither Rep. nor Dem. 30 Benicio -- Toro 31 Raw rock 35 Annual 36 Big deal 39 Authoritative decree 40 Domini predecessor 41 Troop group 43 Beelzebub's purchase 45 Tent texts 46 Wilt-nessed 47 Actress Thompson 49 Energy

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SUPPOSING I HAD A WIFE WHO WORKED AS A CARNIE, I RECKON SOME WOULD CALL HER MY FAIR LADY.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals V