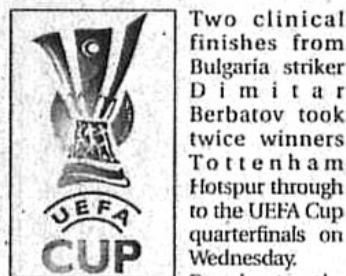




Tottenham forward Dimitar Berbatov (L) celebrates his first half strike with teammate Steed Malbranque during the UEFA Cup match against SC Braga at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

GERMANS MARCH ON Spurs ride on Berbatov

REUTERS, London



Two clinical finishes from Bulgaria striker Dimitar Berbatov took Tottenham through to the UEFA Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday. Berbatov's double took his UEFA Cup tally to seven for the season as Spurs overcame a spirited Braga side 3-2 at White Hart Lane for an aggregate second-round success.

There was double celebration for Germany with Werder Bremen and Bayer Leverkusen reaching the last eight along with Spain's Osasuna, who put out Rangers.

Tottenham can look forward to their first European quarterfinal since 1992 when they bowed out in the last eight to Feyenoord in the Cup Winners' Cup.

The Premier League side, who enjoyed a bye through to the last 16

after Feyenoord were kicked out of the competition, have won all eight UEFA Cup matches this season.

"We started with 160-170 teams, it's pleasing to be in the last eight," said Spurs manager Martin Jol.

Braga coach Jorge Costa hailed Berbatov as "one of the best strikers in Europe" after he proved too hot to handle for the Portuguese side.

Berbatov quickly cancelled out Tom Huddlestone's own goal with a fine finish from Robbie Keane's pass and volleyed in a superb second just before halftime.

A scorching free-kick from Brazilian Andrade gave Braga a glimmer of hope but Steed Malbranque, from a Berbatov flick, sealed the tie.

Leverkusen invoked memories of their run to the 2001-02 Champions League final with a clinical 3-0 win over Racing Lens at the BayArena, easily overturning a 2-1 first leg reverse.

The German side produced their most impressive performance of this season's competition to keep on course for a May 16 final at Hampden Park in Glasgow, the venue for their

defeat by Real Madrid five years ago.

"Compliments to my team," said Leverkusen coach Michael Skibbe. "That's football as it should be played. It was a perfect evening for us."

Ukraine striker Andriy Voronin set Leverkusen on their way when he controlled the ball on his chest and swept a shot just inside the post from the edge of the area in the 36th minute.

Voronin, set for a move to Liverpool at the end of the season, also had a hand in his side's two other goals.

Sergej Barbarez tapped in 11 minutes into the second half to make it 2-0 after Voronin's header had struck a post and Brazilian defender Juan headed home from Voronin's corner with 20 minutes to go.

Werder Bremen, who failed to advance in the Champions League, defeated Spain's Celta Vigo 2-0 at the Weststadion to complete a 3-0 aggregate victory.

The home side added to their 1-0 lead from the first leg with a Hugo Almeida header in the 48th minute and made the game safe with a fine Clemens Fritz shot inside the far post

in the 61st.

"We had to be patient," said Werder coach Thomas Schaaf. "We stayed calm in the first half and that was important. In the second half we had more space and that made things a lot easier for us."

Bremen's only notable European success came when they defeated Monaco to win the 1991-92 Cup Winners' Cup.

Osasuna moved into uncharted territory, reaching the last eight of a European competition for the first time with a 1-0 win at home to Rangers to take the tie 2-1.

Cameron striker Pierre Webó made sure of victory by firing home 19 minutes from time.

It is the second time the team from Navarra have got the better of Rangers in the competition. They also beat the Scots 2-1 in the first round of the UEFA Cup in 1985.

Holders Sevilla take on Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk in the four remaining last 16 ties on Thursday. The Spanish side face a tough challenge having been held to a 2-2 draw at home in the first leg.

Bielefeld turn to Middlesbrough

REUTERS, Berlin

Ernst Middendorp is returning as coach of Arminia Bielefeld on a contract running until 2008, the struggling Bundesliga club announced on Wednesday.

Middendorp, who was sacked as coach of South African club Kaizer Chiefs earlier this month, has already had two separate spells as Bielefeld coach, from 1988-90 and 1994-98.

He was voted Arminia Bielefeld's coach of the century during their centenary year.

His task this time will be to stave off relegation after Saturday's 1-0 defeat at Mainz left the club second from bottom with nine games left to play.

"The goal is simply to finish in 15th place," Middendorp said at a news conference. "I think it's realistic."

Middendorp will be the third man to lead Bielefeld this season. Thomas von Heesen quit on February 11 with the club in 11th place. Frank Geisde, who then took over the running of the first team, will now step back down to the number two position.

Financial boost for Juventus

AFP, Rome

The board of fallen Turin giants Juventus on Wednesday approved a capital increase of 100 million euros which they hope will ensure their best players stay at the club.

Constant speculation has surrounded the futures of goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and French striker David Trezeguet since the club was relegated from Serie A last year for their involvement in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

But Juve, currently top of the second division and on course for a quick return to the top flight, hope the cash injection will persuade their star players that the club are building towards a bright future.

"It's an important day for Juventus and its future," said John Elkann, vice-president of the Italian car company FIAT which owns Juventus.

"The atmosphere here is far different to that of 10 months ago and we have confirmed our commitment to making the club competitive."

Happy milestone for Arsene

AFP, Birmingham

Arsene Wenger celebrated his 400th Premiership game in charge of Arsenal with a 1-0 victory at Villa Park on Wednesday night as his team maintained their unbeaten league start to 2007.

About Diaby's first half goal -- after only nine minutes -- ensured that Arsenal made up for the treble disappointments in cup competitions of late by moving into third place in the Premiership table for the first time this year.

Despite having to field a 'side weakened by suspensions and injuries,' Wenger's recent claims that he will not have to add too many new faces to his squad this summer because he already has the foundations in place for another generation of title winners seemed well founded judging by the way they disposed of Martin O'Neill's strugglers.

Diaby is another of the member of the exciting crop of young players Wenger believes can emerge stronger next season and provide a Premiership title threat to Chelsea and Manchester United.

The French coach had been without the services of the 20-year-old graduate of the Auxerre youth academy in France with a badly broken and dislocated ankle suffered against Sunderland last May.

Diaby only returned to the first team for the 6-3 League Cup victory over Liverpool in January, but could not have wished for a better opening to his first Premiership start of the season, even if it involved a large slice of good fortune.

Arsenal needed something to lift their spirits after exiting the FA Cup and Champions League, as well as losing the League Cup final to Chelsea in the last 11 days.

He started the move with a powerful surge beyond Phil Bardsley, which set up a shooting opportunity for Julio Baptista.

Villa's Danish goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen appeared to have Baptista's shot covered until Diaby, who had continued his run, deflected the on-loan Real Madrid striker's effort beyond the wrong-footed Sorensen.

Villa's record against Arsenal is desperately poor and their last victory came back in 1998 when the game was marred by an injury to a parachutist -- who had to have a badly broken leg amputated after crashing into the roof of the Trinity Road Stand before the game.

Their chances of breaking that depressing sequence should have been more remote when Freddie Ljungberg's excellent cross picked out Jeremie Aladiere -- but the French striker squandered the simplest of opportunities, forcing his free header into the ground and over the crossbar from six yards out.

Arsenal's only real moment of discomfort in a first half which they controlled with embarrassing ease, despite suspensions for Gael Clichy, Kolo Toure, Emmanuel Eboue and Emmanuel Adebayor, was when Justin Hoyte brought down John Carew, when the Norwegian international broke free.

Hoyte's challenge was adjudged to have been just outside the area by referee Martin Atkinson, despite Villa manager Martin O'Neill's demands for a penalty and Carew blasted the resulting free-kick into the wall.

Villa certainly had a more spirited attempt at rescuing matters in the second half and Carew would have equalised when clean through -- but his first touch saw him over run the ball with only Jens Lehmann to beat.

Ljungberg had to rescue Diaby with a goal line clearance when the youngster accidentally headed Gareth Barry's corner beyond Lehmann.

Villa's poor record of just two wins in their last 17 Premiership games is an ever increasing source of embarrassment to their manager O'Neill, especially given the funding he has been provided with by American owner Randy Lerner.

O'Neill should be grateful that he accumulated enough points in his impressive start at Villa Park to provide him with a comfortable cushion from getting sucked into relegation.

FORMULA 1

Alonso against night racing



AFP, Melbourne

World champion Fernando Alonso has come out against plans to stage Formula One grand prix races at night.

Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone has spoken of wanting to include a number of night races on the F1 schedule as early as next season.

Some leading drivers have backed the move to increase the sport's spectacle, but Alonso is concerned about drivers' safety.

Speaking ahead of Sunday's season-opening Australian GP here,

the Spaniard said he had some experience of racing at night at the McLaren team's 2007 season launch.

"We launched the car in Valencia at night and it was extremely difficult to see the road," Alonso told a press conference Thursday.

"For me, it's very hard to believe that they will have strong enough lights to see okay to have a grand prix."

"But sometimes no one surprises you, so from a driver's point of view it's very difficult to say anything about this until we are not driving any more."

Ferrari's Felipe Massa said night racing could be tried as long as driver safety is ensured.

"The most important thing for a driver is to have great visibility as we

have during the day," Massa said.

"If it is possible, then why not? But we have to make sure everything is perfect and safe for us to race in the night."

Australian driver Mark Webber has welcomed the concept of night racing, as long as proper testing of running cars in the dark was done.

"That is a brilliant idea," Webber said this month. "I think we should race at night. I think Bernie is talking brilliant sense. It would be great for the sport."

"There will have to be a balance between not having enough lighting and having too much lighting, because you don't want it like daytime."

Hitzfeld to stay at Bayern

REUTERS, Berlin

Ottmar Hitzfeld will stay on as coach of Bayern Munich for at least another season, the Bundesliga club announced on Thursday.

Bayern said in a statement that Hitzfeld had reached agreement with the club on a new one-year deal at a meeting on Wednesday.

"We are delighted we could reach such a quick and easy agreement," Bayern manager Uli Hoeness said.

"It was a mutual decision to make the new contract just for one year. In due course we'll review the situation and agree on whether to extend it into the middle or long term."

Hitzfeld, who led Bayern to victory in the Champions League in 2001, returned for a second spell in place of Felix Magath at the start of February.

Early results were not good, with Bayern losing their first match 3-0 away to Nuremberg and managing just one win in the first four games.

They have since won two and drawn one of the last three Bundesliga games to revive hopes of a third successive league title, with the gap behind leaders Schalke 04 now down to six points with nine games to play.

The team also made up a 3-2 deficit in the Champions League to beat Real Madrid and clinch a place in the quarterfinals, where they will face AC Milan.

Marca predict C'Ron arrival

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo, who is in talks to extend his contract at Manchester United, will quit Old Trafford for Real Madrid at the end of the season, Spanish sports daily Marca predicted on Thursday.

"Cristiano Ronaldo will sign for Real Madrid once the season is over," the paper claimed on its front page, a report that will hardly be welcomed by Sir Alex Ferguson.

"That's the bombshell that the president (of Real Madrid, Ramon Calderon) is going to announce this summer. A galactic transfer, if he's one," the paper continued.

This latest bout of speculation over the Portuguese international comes on the back of last week's assertion from Ferguson that his prize winger was going nowhere.

"Cristiano is at the right club. He wants to stay. Why would he want to go anywhere else?" the Scot said, adding that negotiations were up and running for Ronaldo to sign an extension to his existing contract which finishes in 2010.

The player himself spoke about his future intentions to Portuguese radio also last week, saying: "Everyone knows I really like Spain, that I would like to play in Spain one day but I am happy here at Manchester."

"If I don't leave now, if I leave in two, three, four, five years, I would be happy, I am at a great club."

He joined Manchester United from Lisbon-based Sporting for 12 million pounds (17.6 million euros or 23.2 million US dollars) in August 2003 on a five-year contract which he extended for another two years in November 2005.

Platini hits out at Wenger

AFP, London

UEFA president Michel Platini hit out at Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger on Wednesday for remarks the Gunners coach made blaming Thierry Henry's injury-plagued season on poor management by the France national team.

Wenger blasted the France management for not giving Henry the adequate rest after their team went all the way to the World Cup finals last summer.

However, Wenger's main grievance stems from the international friendly between France and Bosnia, in which Henry played 90 minutes, on August 16 -- three days before the start of the Premiership season.

"I don't understand how Thierry Henry was injured in March due to a match he played in Bosnia in August," explained Platini.

"I am not a physiotherapist, but I can't understand how he can be injured because of a match six months ago."

Henry has sustained a number of injuries throughout the domestic season, and has now been ruled out for the rest of Arsenal's campaign with groin and stomach trouble suffered against PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League.

The French tactician risked fielding the 29-year-old striker against the Dutch giants last week and later said: "I don't take responsibility for that (his injury) because I feel Thierry has been badly managed by the French national team."

The London club have had a disappointing season, crashing out of the Champions league last week and losing to Chelsea in the final of the League Cup.

They also exited the FA Cup in the fifth round at the hands of Blackburn and presently occupy fourth place in the English Premiership, 20 points off leaders Manchester United.

Schalke seek a fix

REUTERS, Berlin



Bundesliga leaders Schalke 04 need a win to steady their nerves when they host third-placed VfB Stuttgart on Saturday.

Schalke have managed just two draws and two defeats from their last four matches, a run that has seen their lead cut from six points to three over second-placed Werder Bremen.

It has been almost 50 years since Schalke last won the championship and the team's recent poor form has had German media cruelly speculating about them blowing another chance.

Schalke coach Mirko Slomka must once again do without Brazilian forward Lincolf, who has another three matches of suspension to serve after he punched Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Bernd Schneider last month.

The good news is that Christian Pander, Gerald Asamoah and Gustavo

Varela could all return to the squad after taking part in training this week.

Fullback Pander, who has not played this year because of an ankle injury, hopes to get at least an hour on Saturday.

Striker Asamoah is also nearing full fitness after breaking his leg more than five months ago, while midfielder Varela could make his first appearance since February 10 if his recovery from a knee injury continues.

Stuttgart hopes of climbing to within a point of the leaders will be hit by the absence of striker Mario Gomez, who tore knee ligaments in last weekend's goalless draw against VfL Wolfsburg.

Gomez is the Bundesliga's leading scorer with 13 goals and could be out for six weeks.

Bayern Munich blew a chance to get back to within four points of Schalke when they were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Werder last Sunday.

As it is, they remain six points behind Schalke in fourth and could be forced to play away at Eintracht

Frankfurt on Saturday without goal-keeper and captain Oliver Kahn, who has a back injury.

"If he isn't back in training by Friday he won't play," said Ottmar Hitzfeld, who returned as coach in February and is considering an offer to stay on next season after leading the side through to the Champions League quarterfinals.

England midfielder Owen Hargreaves also missed out on training this week because of flu but Hitzfeld expects to have him fit for Saturday against relegation threatened Frankfurt.

Werder are not in action until Sunday after playing in the UEFA Cup in midweek, securing a place in the quarterfinals thanks to a 2-0 win over Celta Vigo.

Werder face a tricky game at home to Mainz, who are the form team of the second half of the season with 19 points from eight games.

Miroslav Klose missed the UEFA Cup win because of a back injury but the World Cup top scorer should be fit for Sunday.

Chelsea narrow gap

AFP, Manchester



Frank Lampard turned up the heat on Manchester City boss Stuart Pearce with a first-half penalty that sealed a 1-0 victory for Chelsea and lifted the champions to within six points of Premiership leaders Manchester United.

Lampard's first-half strike made it five successive league wins for Chelsea, but the result leaves Pearce needing a positive result at Middlesbrough on Saturday to banish the storm clouds surrounding his future as City manager.

While the focus lay firmly on City and newly-appointed England Under-21 manager Pearce following his team's abject FA Cup quarter-final defeat at Blackburn at the weekend, a loss which left his position under threat, this game also carried huge significance for Chelsea.

With Premiership leaders Manchester United nine points clear at the top of the table, anything other than three points for Mourinho's team would have handed Sir Alex

Ferguson's men a major psychological lift ahead of the title run-in.

The home side, subjected to chants of 'You're not fit to wear the shirt' by their own supporters as they slid to defeat at Blackburn, were hugely motivated, however, and they made life tough for Chelsea in the early stages.

And although Pearce's team failed to worry goalkeeper Petr Cech with any serious efforts on goal, the commitment of midfielders Joey Barton and Sun Jihai kept Chelsea subdued prior to Lampard's penalty opener.

City defender Micah Richards mounted a half-hearted protest to referee Alan Wiley after conceding the spot-kick on 27 minutes following a foul on Salomon Kalou.

The England full-back caught the Chelsea man and Wiley had no option but to point to the spot and Lampard beat keeper Andreas Isaksson to claim his eleventh league goal of the season.

City rallied, however, and Barton sent a 20-yard half-volley narrowly wide shortly after his cross into the penalty area had created a headed opportunity for Richards.

Chelsea held out until half-time,

though, and the champions ought to have extended their lead early in the second-half when Lampard beat the offside trap to latch onto Arjen Robben's throughball.

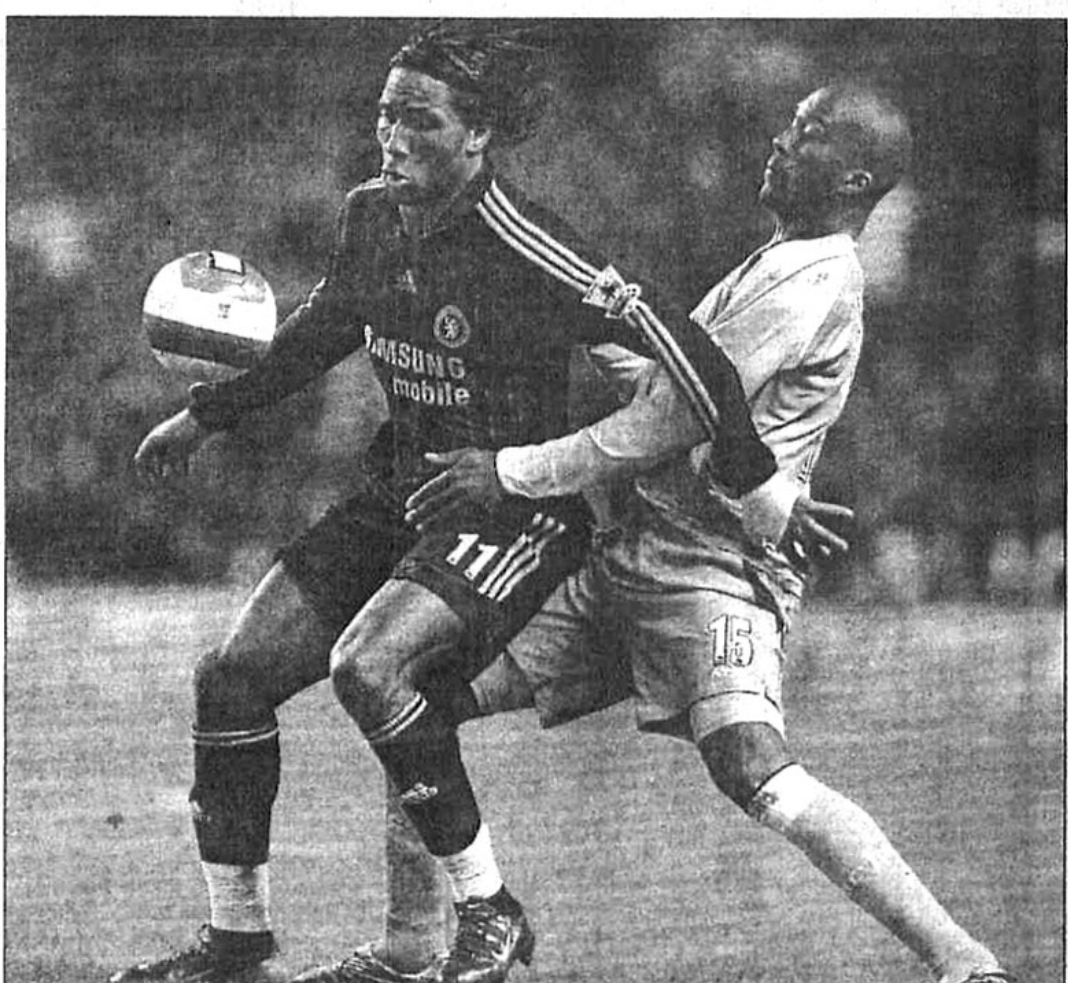
The England midfielder lofted the ball over Isaksson's head, but Richards was in the right place at the right time to head the ball back into his goalkeeper's hands.

Pearce attempted to spark his team into renewed action by throwing forwards Ishaq Miller and Georgios Samaras into the fray as Chelsea tightened their grip on the game.

But Cech's goal remained untested and the impression was that the home side could play all night without worrying the Chelsea goalkeeper.

Chelsea substitute Shaun Wright-Phillips, a former City player, almost put the game beyond Pearce's team on 78 minutes when his dipping 25-yard strike hit the crossbar.

Mourinho's team did not need the second goal to seal the game, though, and Lampard's penalty was enough to claim the points and move them to within six points of United at the top of the table.



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (L) vies with Manchester City's Sylvain Distin during their Premiership match at the City of Manchester Stadium on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Hurried

5 Stroller, in

9 Gridiron

12 Tower city

13 Wee bit

14 Swiss canton

15 Outcome of the Lizzie Borden trial

17 Actor Holm

18 Little lice

19 Guitars' ancestors

21 Filzy fiddle

24 Compliment

25 Canary row?

26 Honored artist

30 Hallow-
een abbr.

31 Scottish land-owner

32 Win -
nose

33 Like young women

35 Pinches

DOWN

36 Campus board cylinder

37 Ship-board pal

38 Put (down) firmly

40 Ror-schach picture

42 Main-lander's memento

43 Eleanor's part of France

48 Feedbag morsel

49 Follows

50 It may be a common object

51 Attempt

52 Bridge position

53 Card-board cylinder

54 Hot tub

55 Snapshot

56 Attorney's abbr.

57 Intim-dates

58 Actor Brad at the keyboard

59 Green-headed duck

60 Oodles

61 Highland hillside

62 Trans-gressions

63 Mid-afternoon notation

64 Work with

65 Fermi's concern

66 Isinglass

67 Time Immemorial

68 Inter

69 Crow's-nest call

70 Have a bug

71 Work at the keyboard

72 Result of fraus

73 Insulation

74 Press for payment

75 Swimming

76 Witicism

77 Whodunit basis

78 Mad king of literature

79 Pur-chases

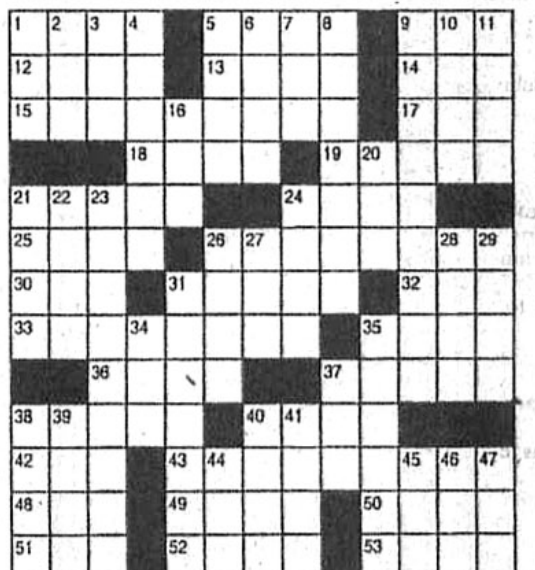
80 Santa's write-up

81 Sine-non link

82 Debtor's letters

83 Gist

84 Compass pt.



CRYPTOQUIP

YB HPC QEWTFIT OP NJTV
HPCJ SPBBTT OVYST, VPCZI
OQEO MTO HPC E OYSGTO
B P J I P C N Z T W T J G Y F M ?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IN THE FLICK "THE WIZARD OF OZ" COULD YOU SAY ONE OF DOROTHY'S FRIENDS WAS TIN-SKINNED?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals Y