



Valencia's David Villa (L), Fernando Morientes (C) and Santiago Canizares laugh at a training session in Valencia on Monday prior to Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal second leg against Chelsea.

Enormous challenge for Chelsea

AFP, Madrid



In theory, Valencia's Mestalla stadium has a level playing field but history suggests that Jose Mourinho's Chelsea side may find there are a few mountains to climb there on Tuesday.

The two sides meet in a Champions League quarterfinal second leg and the Spanish side, back-to-back finalists in 2000 and 2001, have a distinct advantage after the 1-1 draw in the first leg at Stamford Bridge.

Valencia haven't lost at home to an English club since Leeds United won in 1967 and since then only Liverpool in the 1998 UEFA Cup have managed a result, a 2-2 draw, that would see Chelsea through to the semifinals for the third time in four years.Chelsea have also won only once in their last 10 visits to Spain when contesting a European competition.

Nevertheless, Mourinho's men are confident that they can not only beat Valencia but also go on to fulfil owner Ramon Abramovich's dream and finally lift the Champions League trophy in Athens next month.

"When you are down, when you are not playing as well as you can but you still win, that is what makes you a champion," said Chelsea defender Ashley Cole.

"That is why you are in football, to go to these sorts of places and get a result. We did it at Barcelona and I don't see why we cannot go there and get two goals.

"We have the type of players we will need in a testing time, like (Chelsea captain) John Terry. He would put his head through a wall for you. No one needs to motivate us," added the England international.

Chelsea's recent domestic form, two hard fought 1-0 wins, has hardly been convincing despite the London side lying second in the Premiership and only three points behind league leaders Manchester United.

However, Valencia's players are under no illusions that Chelsea will raise their game after just coming up short in their bid to lift the continent's top club prize in recent seasons.

"I expect a battle here because being knocked out will be an enormous blow to Chelsea. The intensity of the game will be much higher than the first leg," said Valencia defender Miguel.

The Portuguese international is widely reported in England and

Spain to be a target of Chelsea.

Next season he might be sharing a dressing room with The Blues' strikers Andriy Shevchenko and Didier Drogba but on Tuesday his main task will be to stop the dynamic duo from scoring.

"Chelsea are an outstanding team but they aren't invincible. We have one or two options open to us and I'm sure we'll make the last four.

"We showed at Stamford Bridge and in the previous round against Inter Milan that we can become the European champions," added Miguel.

Valencia know that if they can beat Chelsea then another English club Liverpool probably await the winner in the semi-finals after the five-times European champions' emphatic 3-0 win at PSV Eindhoven last week.

"Mourinho is an excellent coach and I believe he will be preparing a surprise so we must not underestimate them. However, I feel we have more power," added Valencia winger Joaquin Sanchez.

Valencia's confidence, sky-high after their Stamford Bridge result thanks to a spectacular goal from David Silva, took a knock when they went down 1-0 at struggling Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

Despite coach Quique Flores resting seven first-choice starters,

including goalkeeper Santiago Canizares, it was far from ideal preparation to face Chelsea.

Flores will also still be without two men who have contributed much to them getting into the last eight, midfielder playmaker Vicente Rodriguez and striker Fernando Morientes, owing to recent injuries

Valencia's central defenders Carlos Marchena and David Navarro are also suspended after their infamous punch up with Inter players.

In the wake of last week's clashes between English football fans and police, in Rome and Seville, the football's continental governing body UEFA have advised Valencia to take care in segregating the home and away supporters.

UEFA is also expected to keep a close eye on any racist abuse by Valencia supporters directed against Chelsea's black players like Cole and Drogba, after other shameful incidents in the Mestalla in recent years.

United under pressure

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson faces the prospect of watching his treble dream crumble under the strain of Manchester United's crippling injury crisis.

United have slumped to successive defeats for the first time this season and Roma will arrive at Old Trafford on Tuesday for the second leg of their Champions League quarterfinal confident they can add to Ferguson's misery by holding on to their 2-1 advantage.

With the prize of a semifinal meeting with AC Milan or Bayern Munich at stake, United have been hit by injuries to key defenders at the worst possible time.

The absence of Nemanja Vidic, Gary Neville and Mikael Silvestre has left the Premiership leaders exposed at the back and the cracks are beginning to show.

United have been coming under more pressure than usual as their under-strength defence struggles to control the opposition and Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar has looked increasingly fallible.

He was at fault for three of the four goals his side conceded in the losses against Roma and Portsmouth. And as if the injuries weren't enough cause for concern, United will also be without suspended midfielder Paul Scholes on Tuesday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer acknowledges United have left themselves a tricky task against Roma. But the Norwegian striker, who scored the goal that won the Champions League against Bayern Munich in 1999, refuses to accept his side are now underdogs.

"Losing is never a good result," Solskjaer said, "but we have to win 1-0 at Old Trafford to get into the Champions League semifinals.

We would have taken that six months ago.

"The best advantage is that we've scored an away goal. We have given ourselves a big chance.

"But they are a very good footballing side with fantastic individuals, so we know it's going to be hard."

The finely-poised nature of the tie was guaranteed to make Tuesday evening a tense occasion, but feelings in Manchester will be running higher than ever after the horrifying scenes of crowd disorder that scarred the first leg.

Several United fans needed hospital treatment after being stabbed before the match and the evening got even uglier when Italian police baton-charged the visiting supporters during the first half.

With so much at stake it is safe to say that Slovakian referee Lubos Michel will need to show the diplomatic skills of a UN peacekeeper if a potentially explosive clash is to pass off without incident on the field.

Roma will certainly draw optimism from United's poor record of finishing off European ties at Old Trafford.

Four times in the last 10 years, they have failed to advance in the Champions League when a second leg win at Old Trafford was required. Borussia Dortmund, Monaco, Real Madrid and Porto have all been able to get what they needed to eliminate United at the Theatre of Dreams.

Luciano Spalletti's side maintained the momentum from their win over United in the Eternal City with a 2-0 success against Catania on Sunday. One of the goal-scoring heroes of the first leg victory, Mirko Vucinic, was on the scoresheet again at the weekend, with Francesco Tavano notching the other.

Roma captain Francesco Totti was rested for the Catania match as he struggles to shake off a sciatica problem in his lower back, but the talismanic striker is certain to start on Tuesday.

Totti wasn't the only Roma star wrapped in cotton wool, with Cristian Chivu, Daniele De Rossi, Christian Panucci and Mancini all on the bench.

Spalletti's decision made sense since the Serie A title is already beyond them. He will hope it pays dividends against a United side showing signs of cracking physically and mentally under the pressure of Chelsea's relentless pursuit in the Premiership.



Manchester United will be depending on all the skills of their influential winger Cristiano Ronaldo to overturn a 2-1 deficit when they face AS Roma in their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal second leg at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

Kaka plots Bayern fall

INTERNET, undated

Kaka is confident that Milan will beat Bayern Munich to book a place in the semifinals of the Champions League.

The Rossoneri will play the second leg of the tie on Wednesday and are likely to need a win after a 2-2 draw at the San Siro last week, but the Brazilian star is not overly concerned.

"I don't think there is any need for desperation," he told UEFA.com. "As much as Bayern deserve respect, not only because of their history but also because of the quality players they have, Milan can win.

"I have a feeling this game will be one of those historic European nights."

Milan were unable to win the first leg despite taking the lead twice and they now find themselves requiring a positive result away from home.

"We had victory in our hands against Bayern and the fact we let it slip through our fingers with the last kick of the game meant we didn't leave the San Siro happy," explained Kaka.

"We are convinced we can outplay them in front of their supporters. It's important for us to keep our heads up."

The 24-year-old found the back of the net against the German outfit last week to secure his place at the top of the Champions League scorers' chart with seven goals from nine matches.

"Goals are scored for the team and I want to score more to take us further and further," concluded Kaka.

The winner of the tie will go through to face either Roma or Manchester United in the semifinals on April 24/25 and May 1/2.

Roma duo declared fit

INTERNET, undated

Francesco Totti and Rodrigo Taddei have both recovered from injury to be at Roma's disposal for the Champions League clash against Manchester United.

The Giallorossi travel to England on Tuesday for the return leg of their quarterfinal, having earned a narrow lead thanks to the 2-1 win at the Stadio Olimpico last Wednesday.

Totti and Taddei had missed Saturday's Serie A tie with Catania after picking up minor injuries, but both players have recovered and trained with the rest of the team on Easter morning.

Coach Luciano Spalletti will, however, be without Max Tonetto, who is still suffering with a muscular problem in his left thigh, and the suspended Simone Perrotta.

The tactician has yet to decide which formation to use, but is expected to field Christian Wilhelmsson next to Taddei and Amantino Mancini.

The Coach could also choose to give a chance to in-form striker Mirko Vucinic, who confirmed his excellent form after scoring the second goal in the 2-0 win against Catania.

Schweinsteiger and Demichelis doubtful

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich midfielders Bastian Schweinsteiger and Martin Demichelis are doubtful for their Champions League quarterfinal, second leg against AC Milan on Wednesday, the German club said.

Schweinsteiger hurt a knee in Saturday's German league action and Demichelis has a hamstring pull. Both scored in the 2-1 victory at Hanover.

"His (Schweinsteiger's) absence will be a big blow but we are still hoping he will be able to play," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld. Hitzfeld was less optimistic about Demichelis however saying: "He is very doubtful."

Bayern had hoped Argentinian Demichelis would step up to the plate in place of Frenchman Willy Sagnol, who is out for the rest of the season after right knee surgery.

In Demichelis's absence, Bosnia's Hasan Salihamidzic could pull back into defence allowing a midfield spot for Andreas Ottl.

Hitzfeld also confirmed veteran Mehmet Scholl, who has a calf injury, will not be in the squad for Wednesday's match though he is retiring in the summer and only makes rare, substitute appearances.

Bayern and AC Milan are level at 2-2 after the first leg in Italy.

McLaren secure one-two Alonso rules in Sepang



AFP, Sepang

Defending world champion Fernando Alonso proved Sunday he has no intention of letting his rivals steal his title with a perfectly-judged drive to win the Malaysian Grand Prix.

The Spaniard led his young McLaren Mercedes-Benz teammate Lewis Hamilton home in a spectacular one-two triumph, as the pair handed out a lesson in race strategy to their rivals at the sweltering Sepang International Circuit.

It was the 16th victory of Alonso's career, his first for his new McLaren team in only his second race with them, and his second in Malaysia.

He won in 2005 and finished second last year, both results achieved while driving for Renault and en route to two successive world titles.

"It is a perfect result, a dream," said Alonso. "This is such a tough race and you never know about tyres, but we were relaxed in the end. I lost radio communications from lap ten, like Kimi (Raikkonen) in Australia, so it is a lucky thing!

"But they fixed it and to win is absolutely fantastic and it is a wonderful surprise to achieve this after such a short time with the team. Everyone has worked so hard. So much has been done by the whole team."

Hamilton, 22, of Britain, confirmed the dazzling potential he demonstrated on his debut in Australia last month, when he finished third, by driving a perfect race in support and defence of his team-mate on his own way to a well-deserved second place, 17 seconds behind Alonso.

Alonso's victory also ended a long 20-races McLaren drought.

It was their first win since they won in Japan in October 2005 and the first one-two since the Brazilian race that same year.

The result hoisted 25-year-old Alonso to the top of the embryonic world drivers' championship ahead of Raikkonen, who finished third for Ferrari ahead of German Nick Heidfeld in a BMW Sauber.

Raikkonen fought hard in the closing stages to close the gap on Hamilton, but the young tyro held him off to finish seven-tenths of a second ahead as they crossed the line.

"That was the toughest race of my life," said Hamilton afterwards. "It was so difficult, so hard to defend. I ran out of water -- and now I feel overwhelmed!"

"To see two Ferraris in your mirrors behind you and to know they are slightly lighter and probably quicker than you -- it is so difficult to hold them back."

Brazilian Felipe Massa, in the other Ferrari, who started from pole, made mistakes and finished fifth ahead of Italians Giancarlo Fisichella, who claimed sixth place for Renault, and Jarno Trulli, who finished seventh for Toyota.

On another sweltering day, with air temperatures hovering around 34 degrees Celsius (93 degrees Fahrenheit) and the track tempera-

ture climbing to 57 degrees, together with humidity of 58 per cent, everyone felt the strain.

At the start, Alonso, in second place, made a smooth and powerful attack on pole-sitting Massa and swept ahead of him into the first right-hand bend.

Massa fought to recover but was swiftly out-witted again by the pace and intuition of Hamilton who shot through to claim second as the cars fought for road space and positions through turns two and three on the run towards the back straight.

Massa, frustrated, had to settle for third with Raikkonen fourth and neither Ferrari driver was able to do much about it.

Alonso settled into his rhythm and reeled off a series of fastest laps as he burnt off his fuel load.

Hamilton, in only his second Grand Prix, rode 'shotgun' behind him, allowing the Spaniard to open up a 14-second gap before the opening round of pit stops.

Once the leading group had all changed tyres and refuelled for the first time, the order was settled again with Alonso ten seconds clear of Hamilton as McLaren dominated ahead of Raikkonen, in his Ferrari, Heidfeld and Massa.

Hamilton, as expected, raced superbly to hold his position, notably in the early laps when he was attacked by the Ferraris and not only defended and resisted, but repassed them brilliantly when either managed to overtake.

Marseille reignite Euro push

AFP, Paris



A late double from Paulo Cesar and Albin Ebondo lifted Toulouse to joint second in the French league on Sunday with a 2-0 victory at lowly Sedan as Marseille reignited their push for Europe with a crushing 4-1 win at home to ten-man Lille.

Toulouse, who looked in danger of being relegated at the beginning of the season, are now in the fray to seal a spot in Europe's elite Champions League next season.

The south western outfit moved ahead of Sochaux, who were held 1-1

by fourth-from-bottom Nice Saturday, to sit equal on points but behind second-placed Lens, who fell 1-0 at Rennes, on goal difference.

Both Lens and Toulouse have 49 points from 31 games, 17 points behind champions Lyon, who have a game in hand and are just two wins away for a record sixth title, but were held to a goalless draw at promoted Valenciennes Saturday.

As the push for Europe heats up with just seven points separating Lens and Toulouse in second and Le Mans in 12th position, Marseille boosted their hopes as they moved up to fifth.

Franck Ribery made his return after being sidelined for over a month with a foot injury but the heroes of the night were Mamadou Niang and Renato Civelli who netted a double apiece.

Lille were reduced to ten men after just eight minutes when Emerson was given his marching orders.

Niang stepped up to convert the penalty awarded before Lille got the equaliser minutes later through a Michel Bastos penalty. Civelli doubled up after 38 and 63 minutes with Niang claiming his second in injury time.

Despite a spirited performance against Toulouse, hosts Sedan are facing relegation as they stay stuck second from bottom with an upcoming trip to five-time champions Lyon.

The match was effectively played in the final 15 minutes with Brazilian striker Cesar breaking the deadlock after 78 minutes and Ebondo consolidating the win six minutes later.

Paris Saint Germain, meanwhile, moved further away from the drop zone Saturday as they fought out a 2-1 win against Le Mans at the Parcs Princes.

Paul Le Guen's side are now three points above the relegation zone moving one place up to 16th position following their second straight win after last weekend's 2-1 win against Lens.

Brazilian striker Grafite had given Le Mans the lead after 31 minutes but the Parisians earned maximum points and just their eighth victory of the campaign with goals from Peguy Luyindula (55) and substitute Amara Diane (80).

Diane had come on for underperforming captain Pauleta after 68 minutes and 12 minutes later found the net through the feet of Le Mans goalie Rodolphe Roche, much to the delight of the jubilant home crowd.

Elsewhere Auxerre and Monaco were held to goalless draws at home by Bordeaux and Troyes respectively while Lorient won 1-0 at Nancy.

Nantes, meanwhile, remain stuck to the bottom of the table after losing 2-1 at Saint Etienne.

Marseille players are ecstatic after defender Renato Civelli scored against Ligue 1 rivals at the Velodrome stadium in Marseille on Sunday.

CROSSWORD
By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Prepared
4 Rotating part
7 "Beetle Bailey"
8 Cock and bull?
10 Love (French)
11 Portuguese city (Var.)
13 Being very concerned about
16 Before
17 Action locale
18 Pith
19 Tend
20 Obligation
21 Unalterable disc
23 Compulent
25 Entreaty
26 Rage
27 Weir

DOWN
2 Flavor enhancer
3 Big wind-storm
4 Poultry purchase
5 Island greeting
6 Unembellished
7 Actor Sharif
8 Sacred composition
9 Rank-ing
10 Noshed
12 Give a speech
14 Somber
15 Take a whack at

Solution time: 21 mins.
PAPA HIS THAI
ALAS URI AILS
COURT MORTUARY
EMERSON UPBET
AIR WEE
MARYS MADISON
ALEX TEX ADO
STIMPSON BLEDIE
RPM MAG
SMEAR JOHNSON
TENNIVSON AGRE
OTTIE KIE TABS
WADE NET ERIST

30 "Over the Rainbow" composer
31 Dazzle
32 Foe
34 Big name in dare
35 German car

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CRYPTOQUIP
C V X V H G H Y V G I T
W I F L T U Z L V X C V R ' G G B T D D
Y I F P H B I Q V L L D I B U R M L
Q I L M I B T D L I G I P D T W V Z ?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER THE POWER OF A HEX, I WOULD GUESS THAT YOU'RE EX-SPELLED.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals Y