



Liverpool forward Peter Crouch (R) is followed by an eager TV Cameraman after he scored the winner in their Champions League quarterfinal second-leg encounter against PSV Eindhoven at Anfield on Wednesday.

World record C'Ron bid?

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid will reportedly offer 54 million pounds for Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo this summer.

The Portuguese winger has been in dazzling form this season and is widely regarded as the best player in the world at the moment. However, his spellbinding performances, both in the Premiership and Champions League, have also made him the hottest property in world football and United face an arduous fight to retain his services beyond the current campaign.

Having stalled on extending his Old Trafford contract, Ronaldo has been repeatedly linked with a move to the Bernabéu and it is understood that the Spanish giants have made him their number one target this summer.

According to The Guardian, Real Madrid have stepped up their attempt to sign by meeting his agent and agreeing a course of action that directors at the Bernabéu believe will end with the Portuguese winger becoming their latest galáctico.

Any such deal would represent a new world-record transfer fee, usurping the 46 million pounds spent by Madrid in 2002 on Zinedine Zidane.

Kaiser braced for Hargreaves exit

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer revealed on Wednesday that the German champions would be ready to let Owen Hargreaves join Manchester United this summer if the price was right.

"If it is right that there is an offer of 25-30 million euros for Hargreaves, then I would seriously consider it," Beckenbauer told Premiere television before Bayern's Champions League quarterfinal against AC Milan.

"I think the board also think this is the way to satisfy the needs of the player."

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has been keen to sign the England international midfielder, even offering a reported 20 million pounds (39m dollars), but that has so far not been enough to tempt Bayern.

They believe the 26-year-old should honour the new four-year contract he signed last summer which takes him up until 2010.

Meanwhile, Beckenbauer said that it would be a "dream" for Bayern to recruit an international striker of the calibre of Italian Luca Toni (Fiorentina), Brazilians Kaka (AC Milan) or Ronaldinho (Barcelona), Portugal's Deco or Argentine Lionel Messi. "The stars won't come. To sign them is a dream," he said.

Beckenbauer added that the club had been given the green light by their board to go up to 30 million euros (40m dollars) for a big-name transfer.

'Best is yet to come'

AFP, Munich



AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti says there is more to come from his side after their 2-0 win at Bayern Munich on Wednesday night booked them a Champions League semifinal against Manchester United. Two goals in less than five minutes by Clarence Seedorf and Filippo Inzaghi midway through the first-half were enough to cancel out Bayern's slim first-leg advantage, after last week's 2-2 draw, to seal the 4-2 aggregate win.

"It was important we struck an early blow," said Ancelotti, "it was clear from the first-leg that we desperately wanted to stay in the

competition.

"Everyone played their part, both central defenders were rock solid and we have more than just Seedorf and Inzaghi to thank."

"Our team has plenty of players with big-game experience, who relish this type of challenge and know how to win tight games."

"To get to this stage of the tournament was difficult, harder than in previous years, but we can go on and do well now, I am sure."

Ancelotti revealed goal-scorer Inzaghi was struggling with an injury prior to kick-off, but the 33-year-old repaid the faith in his selection.

"He persuaded me with his desire and motivation, I wasn't sure he should play and he showed the sort of heart you need to win crucial matches."

Despite his bitter disappoint-

ment, Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld admitted Milan deserved the win and said the Italian side will test Manchester United in the last four.

"We didn't show the necessary quality to beat a team of the class of AC Milan," said Hitzfeld.

"The first 15 minutes were good and we had two good chances, but after we fell behind, Milan showed their class by hitting us with another quick goal, we tried to break them down in the second-half, but we just couldn't find a way through."

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More worries for Maradona

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona faces treatment for alcoholism after being released from hospital, but the Argentine football idol still hopes to attend a major game of his beloved Boca Juniors team.

Maradona, 46, will be treated at

home for at least two weeks with a medical team, a therapist and nurses on watch for 24 hours to care for the former Argentina captain.

Doctors will consider after his two-week house treatment whether to fly him to Switzerland for further care.

The former Boca Juniors, Barcelona and Napoli star, who was hospitalized in 2000 and 2004

after heart attacks following cocaine overdoses, said Wednesday he would follow the treatment.

"If I mess up, the only one who gets hurt is me," he told local media. "I'm calm."

Guemes Sanatorium director Hector Pezzella said Maradona "must follow the prescribed treatment and diet."

After Maradona was released from Guemes in Buenos Aires Wednesday, his personal doctor, Alfredo Cahe, said Maradona had made a "surprising" recovery from toxic hepatitis induced by drinking.

"His physical and psychological condition is so good, even I am astonished," Cahe told reporters.

The star, who was rushed to the clinic on March 28, lost between six and seven kilos (13 and 15 pounds) during the hospital stay, Cahe said.

Maradona may even be healthy enough to go to Boca Juniors' stadium to watch his team take on arch-rivals River Plate in the 10th round of Argentina's Clausura tournament, Cahe said.

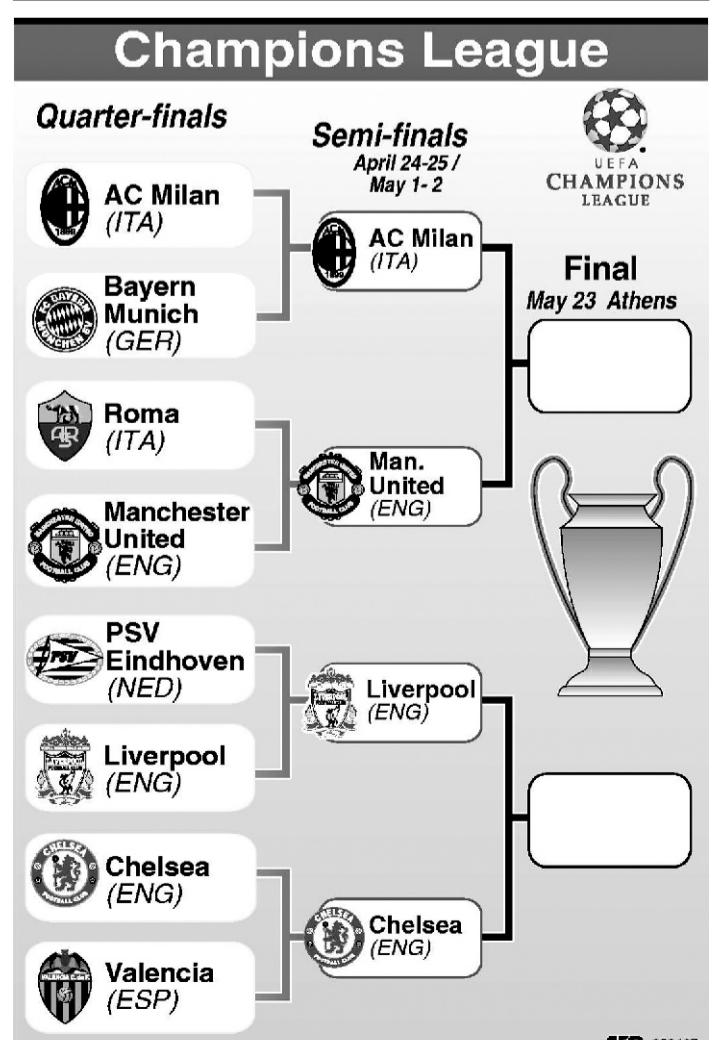
"On Sunday I will go (to the stadium), with IV, with my doctor, in ambulance, however," Maradona said in a telephone interview with TyC Sports channel, predicting that Boca would win.

Maradona, who has a special bath at the "Candy Box," as the fans call the stadium, vowed to go see Boca "until I use the last drop of my blood."

"Diego is very intelligent, extremely intuitive," Cahe said. "It is difficult to maintain with him a dialogue with questions and answers, but he knows how to listen."

Maradona "is lucid, coherent, calm," said Daniel Tejada, one of the two psychiatrists who looked after him at the hospital.

According to a source close to his family, Maradona is staying in a country house in Ezeiza, a town south of the capital, where his girlfriend Veronica Ojeda lives.



AFP 020407

Crouch completes formalities

AFP, Liverpool



Peter Crouch put Liverpool on course for a Champions League grudge match against Chelsea as his second half strike sealed a 1-0 quarterfinal second leg win over 10-man PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Crouch's tap-in came moments after PSV's Dirk Marcellis was sent off and completed a 4-0 aggregate victory that capped a memorable week for English teams.

Crouch admitted the match had been a bit of a damp squib.

"It wasn't much of a spectacle but we did what we had to do. It was a strange game but nevertheless all the lads were up for it."

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez said it had been hard to get the players motivated.

"We had more control in the second-half especially after the sending-off," said the canny Spaniard.

His PSV counterpart Ronald Koeman agreed that the sending-off had been pivotal in giving PSV any chance of getting back into the tie.

"We did better than last week," said the former Dutch international defender.

"We gave nothing away to Liverpool. The sending-off was an incredible decision."

"I told him (Marcellis) don't be disappointed because you did fantastic. I don't understand the referee, it was a yellow card but not a red one. However, Liverpool were too strong for us over the two games."

Liverpool followed Manchester United and Chelsea's victories - the latter beating Benitez' former club Valencia - on Tuesday to become the third Premiership club to reach the last four.

An early goal was vital if the visitors were to have any chance and they were quickly on the offensive, with Jefferson Farfan's header bringing a good stop from Jose Reina.

Liverpool suffered a blow when Welsh striker Craig Bellamy was stretchered off after he suffered a knee ligament strain while trying to charge down a corner in the 16th minute.

PSV had nowhere near enough firepower to trouble Liverpool, who were content to maintain a grip on possession without over-committing to rash attacks. PSV keeper Gomes was finally tested in the 27th minute when Crouch met Jermaine Pennant's cross with a volley that the Brazilian pushed over the bar.

That miss was as close as the Anfield crowd got to real excitement in the first half, although Boudewijn Zenden was narrowly off-target with a curling free-kick from 25 yards just before the break.

If PSV had the slightest belief they could get back into the tie, it was extinguished by Italian referee Roberto Rosetti after 64 minutes.

Marcellis' lunge at Zenden was rash but hardly a serious danger to the Dutch winger, but it still brought the 18-year-old debutant right-back an immediate red card from Rosetti.

Liverpool went for the kill straight away and got their reward in the 68th minute.

Crouch looked to have wasted the chance when he failed to connect cleanly with John Arne Riise's left-wing cross. But Robbie Fowler turned the ball back into the six yard box for Crouch to shoot past Gomes for his fifth goal in four games.

Fowler is likely to leave Liverpool at the end of the season and it was fitting that the striker, a hero to the Anfield faithful, played a part in the winner on what will be one of his last European nights for the club.

But this victory ensured he still has a chance to write one more chapter in the Liverpool history books against Chelsea later this month.

England-Brazil in Wembley curtain-raiser

AFP, London

England will take on Brazil in their first match at the new Wembley Stadium on June 1, the Football Association (FA) confirmed Wednesday.

England's first match at Wembley for seven years will provide a test for Steve McClaren's side ahead of their Euro 2008 qualifier in Estonia five days later.

The 90,000-seater national stadium has been rebuilt at a cost of 800-million pounds (1.45 billion dollars).

FA chief executive Brian Barwick said: "We're delighted to be able to announce that Brazil will be the first team to take on England at the new Wembley."

"It's a fantastic match to mark the team's return to the stadium after nearly seven years on the road around the country."

"Brazil featured in some memorable matches at the old Wembley. The new stadium is a fantastic football arena and I'm confident there will be many new memories created there for England fans over the coming years."

England were beaten by Germany in a World Cup qualifier in their last match at Wembley in October 2000.

Football returned to Wembley last month as England Under-21s played out a 3-2 draw with their Italian counterparts in front of a crowd of 55,700.

The success of that match allowed the FA to confirm that the ground would be able to stage this year's FA Cup final as anticipated on May 19.

The FA have also confirmed that from next year the semifinals of the FA Cup will also be played at Wembley.

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No love lost between old foes

AFP, Liverpool



Rafael Benitez has started the psychological war ahead of Liverpool's Champions League grudge match against Chelsea at the new Wembley.

Benitez's side set up a semifinal meeting of the increasingly bitter

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