



(L) AC Milan forwards Ronaldo and Filippo Inzaghi arrive at a hotel in a southern Athens suburb with the rest of the team on Monday. Milan face Liverpool tonight in the Champions League final at the Olympic Stadium in Athens. Inzaghi is expected to start up-front with Kaka, while Ronaldo is ineligible for Champions League action this season. (R) Liverpool fans hold a banner at the Athens international airport on Monday. They will be hoping for a repeat of 2005 final when Liverpool beat Milan to win the trophy for the fifth time.

ISTANBUL PART II

Classy Milan vs dogged L'pool

APP, Athens



On Merseyside they like to remember it as the 'Miracle of Istanbul'. In Milan they would just like to forget it.

If the 2005 Champions League final is ever recalled in the red and black heartlands of Lombardy, it is with the kind of shivery discomfort usually associated with the aftermath of a particularly unpleasant dream.

But it is inevitable that the legacy of two years ago, when Liverpool overturned a 3-0 half-time deficit to AC Milan before clinching their fifth European Cup on penalties, will loom large here on Wednesday when the two sides

cross swords once more with club football's biggest prize at stake.

Having graciously swatted Manchester United to one side with majestic performances in both legs of their semifinal, Milan should, in theory, walk out into the Olympic Stadium gleefully contemplating the near inevitability of revenge against opponents who -- they will hardly need reminding -- finished the Premiership campaign 21 points adrift of the new English champions.

Football is rarely that simple however and the doubts planted in Milan's psyche by that Steven Gerrard-fuelled fightback two years ago will ensure form counts for little on Wednesday evening.

"The two teams are balanced," acknowledged Carlo Ancelotti, the Milan coach, before stressing how different the backdrop to this

year's final has been for his club compared with two years ago.

In a game like this, experience counts," he said. "The way in which players handle the pressure, especially on the eve of the match is very important. But we have plenty of players who are used to this kind of pressure, players who have won in Europe and who have won the World Cup."

While Ancelotti has been seeking to minimise the significance of the past, his counterpart Rafael Benitez has sought to harness the folk memory of that night in Istanbul to inspire his side to another night of glory.

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'Well done Stuttgart'

APP, Berlin

Deposed German champions Bayern Munich congratulated newly crowned Bundesliga kings VfB Stuttgart in newspaper adverts on Tuesday -- but promised to fight to regain their title next season.

"Congratulations. But we promise you a real battle to get the shield back," said the advert placed by Bayern in the Stuttgart Zeitung and Stuttgart Nachrichten newspapers.

Stuttgart were crowned champions for the first time in 15 years after beating Energie Cottbus 2-1 on Saturday, while Bayern had their worst season for years as they finished fourth and missed out on Champions League qualification.

Stuttgart could complete a league and cup double if they beat Nuremberg in the cup final in Berlin's Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Bayern meanwhile have promised to overhaul their squad after allowing England midfielder Owen Hargreaves to join English Premier League champions Manchester United in a deal worth 25 million euros.

Bayern international captain Patrick Vieira has been ruled out of next month's European qualifiers against the Ukraine and Georgia with a knee injury.

The 30-year-old Inter Milan midfielder was hurt when he collided with Roma's Rodrigo Taddei in the Italian Cup final.

"He's totally and definitely out, we can't take him," France coach Raymond Domenech told AFP.

"We're not going to rush him, what's important is that he can play again for his club," added

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"Operationally, we're at the same level as when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Athens (last year)," public order ministry spokesman Panagiotis Stathis told AFP.

"But as sports events go, this is definitely the largest since the Games."

Around 7,500 officers have been

Ancelotti keeping options open

APP, Athens

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti has decided who will partner Kaka for tonight's Champions League final against Liverpool, but refused to say whether the experience of Filippo Inzaghi has been preferred to the youth of Alberto Gilardino.

"I've decided who's going to play, but I haven't told the players yet," Ancelotti said ahead of the two sides' first meeting since the 2005 final, which Liverpool won on penalties.

"Everyone deserves to play, not only the eleven who start the match."

"I can say that the squad is in good shape. We have worked well, and we are ready for Wednesday."

Kaka has been Milan's driving force in Europe this season with 10 goals in the competition so far, and Liverpool will try to shackle the creative Brazilian whose three strikes in the semi-finals helped put Manchester United out.

Therefore the choice of Milan's second striker is an important one, with Italian media reports suggesting Inzaghi has been given the nod.

Inzaghi is 33, nine years older than Gilardino, but his predatory goal instincts have proved invaluable to Milan in the past, especially in European competition.

But while Inzaghi is an out-and-out goalscorer who just concerns himself with being in the right

place at the right time, Gilardino is quick and links up well with Milan's midfield.

Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister who is never afraid to voice his views about team selection, believes Gilardino, scorer of 16 goals this season, should start.

"I would play Gilardino from the start and put Inzaghi when the opposition are tiring," said Berlusconi.

Milan captain Paolo Maldini said last week that he expected to be fit to face Liverpool, but doubts linger as to whether his troublesome left knee will stand up to such a challenge.

Assuming he has proved his

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A Liverpool fan stands at the Syntagma square in central Athens ahead of the Champions League final against Milan tonight.

Robson takes over at Blades

APP, London

Former England skipper Bryan Robson was confirmed as manager of relegated Sheffield United on Tuesday taking over from Neil Warnock.

Previously in charge of Middlesbrough, West Brom and Bradford, Robson will have as assistant manager Brian Kidd who

moves up from a coaching role at the Yorkshire club.

Warnock resigned last week immediately after the 1-2 home defeat to Wigan which send the Blades crashing out of the Premiership. He had been seven and a half years at Bramall Lane.

Robson, who has been out of work since leaving West Brom in September 2006, has experience of winning promotion having guided Middlesbrough's Samuel Eto'o and Chelsea's Didier Drogba in earlier rounds.

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