

Real offer bonus for UCL win

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have promised their players a bumper bonus of 600,000 euros (826,000 dollars) each if they can secure a tenth European Cup crown this season, Marca sports daily said Sunday.

In the event of victory in the Champions League, the bonus would cost the nine-times European champions a total of 15 million euros (20.6 million dollars).

But with Real picking up a hefty 21 million euros (28.9 million dollars) in Champions League revenues by making to the last 16 last season, Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon is happy to splash out.

Calderon said he is determined to win Europe's premier club competition this season and has introduced the bonus scheme from which team coach Bernd Schuster will also benefit.

The Champions League final will be held on May 21 in Moscow.

Real, who last won the Champions League in 2002, currently sit top of the Spanish first division after just two match days.

Jose warns star duo

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho has told Andrei Shevchenko and Michael Ballack to make sure they put the team's interests first.

The future of both players is still uncertain with neither particularly shining in the Premier League so far.

And Mourinho has warned the pair to start performing or risk being left out of the squad.

"Shevchenko and Ballack have to give more because their status is not superior to that of the others," Mourinho told The Sun.

"Each is a champion," he added. "They have quality, status and fame. They're rich and have already won a lot of trophies. All that is an undeniable fact.

"But it's one thing their being the centre surrounded by 20 nobodies, and it's something else these two players arriving at a club where the others are already champions, famous and rich."

Mourinho insists everyone at the club is equal in their abilities and their quality and that no player should receive star treatment.

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City, MU fight over Huntelaar

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United and Manchester City are in a head-to-head battle for Ajax striker Klaas Jan Huntelaar, according to the News of the World.

The 24-year-old Holland international smashed 36 goals in 51 games for the Amsterdam giants last term and Ajax's failure to reach the Champions League group stages this season could force them to offload their prized asset.

After selling Ryan Babel to Liverpool and Wesley Sneijder to Real Madrid in the summer it was expected that Ajax boss Henk ten Cate would be able to keep hold of Huntelaar until at least the end of the season.

However the 3-1 aggregate defeat to Slavia Prague in the Champions League qualifying tie has placed a huge financial burden

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France midfielder Franck Ribery (R) sneaks the ball in between the legs of Italian wing-back Gianluca Zambrotta during their fiery Euro 2008 qualifying clash at the San Siro in Milan on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Owen fires England

AFP, London



Michael Owen scored one of the finest goals of his international career as England got their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign back on track with a 3-0 win over Israel here on Saturday.

Owen's 38th England goal, a sublime half-volley from 20 yards, was sandwiched between Shaun Wright-Phillips's first-half opener and a Micah Richards header midway through the second period as Steve McClaren's side strolled to their first win at the rebuilt Wembley.

Israel looked desperately out of their depth. But England still displayed sufficient quality to ensure they will go into Wednesday's meeting with Russia here confident of taking another big step towards next year's finals.

McClaren said: "Good performance, good result, now we have to follow that on Wednesday.

"The crowd really got behind the

team, they kept us going for 90 minutes - we need that again on Wednesday."

He added: "Shaun Wright-Phillips was under a lot of pressure today. We were disappointed with him last season but he's really come to the boil.

"And what a tremendous goal by Michael."

McClaren's starting line-up, shorn of the injured Wayne Rooney, Frank Lampard and David Beckham, had a retrospective air about it.

Owen Hargreaves's failure to recover from a thigh strain allowed Aston Villa's Gareth Barry to make his first start for his country in almost seven years while, Owen resumed his strike partnership with Emile Heskey, recalled after three years in the international wilderness.

Heskey's early contribution offered promise, the Wigan's striker willingness to make himself available to hold up the ball offering England's attacking moves a cohesion that was notably missing in a goalless draw with Israel in Tel Aviv

in March.

But there was also an early reminder of why Heskey's previous 43 England appearances had yielded only five goals. Teed-up after Owen had pulled down Barry's ball into the box, he blasted his shot over the bar from 12 yards.

The 10th-minute chance highlighted Israel's defensive deficiencies and it took a crude body-check from Shimon Gershon to prevent Gerrard from charging on to a Heskey flick, the Israeli defender picking up a yellow card in the process.

With Heskey going close with a back-post header from Gerrard's corner, an England opener was looking inevitable.

It duly arrived in the 20th minute courtesy of a fine move launched by Gerrard, whose long ball sent Ashley Cole beyond the Israeli back four.

The left-back deftly clipped the ball back into the path of Joe Cole who floated in an angled cross that Wright-Phillips, timing his run around the back of the defence to

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EURO 2008 Dutch win as Portugal, Spain draw

AGENCIES, undated

Wesley Sneijder and Ruud van Nistelrooy scored either side of the break to earn the Netherlands a 2-0 home win over Bulgaria.

The Real Madrid pair made the difference in a one-sided Group G match against the Bulgarians, who relied almost completely on playing on the counter attack.

The Dutch are now second in the group with 17 points from seven matches, three points behind leaders Romania, who have played eight matches.

"I am satisfied with the result and for phases we played good football and it was attractive to watch," Dutch coach Marco van Basten told reporters.

Elsewhere, Scotland's emphatic win over Lithuania firmly kept alive their dreams of making next year's finals.

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'We must beat Ukraine'

AFP, Milan

Italy must beat Ukraine on Wednesday to maintain their Euro 2008 qualifying hopes following an unwelcome draw against group B leaders France on Saturday, Italy coach Roberto Donadoni said.

"Against France, it was important not to lose but to go to Ukraine and think of taking just a point would be a mistake. We have to go there and win," said Donadoni.

According to Donadoni, Saturday's scoreless draw at the San Siro "leaves the path open to qualification" but he would not be drawn on how many more points Italy would need to qualify for next year's European Championships.

"The calculations bore me. We can win in Kiev while France beat

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FRANCE HOLD ITALY Everything but goals

AFP, Milan



France held on to top spot in Euro 2008 qualifying Group B following a hard-fought 0-0 draw against Italy here on Saturday in their second meeting since last year's World Cup final.

Italy's Filippo Inzaghi lobbed on to the bar on the half hour and Nicolas Anelka of France only had keeper Gianluigi Buffon to beat following the break in the best chances of this tough-tackling match.

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni was far from unhappy with the result.

"This was not a wasted opportunity," he said.

"France are top of the group but they didn't really create any problems for us. We were never really put in any danger to my mind."

France however will host Scotland at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday without star striker Thierry Henry following his 56th minute yellow card after a foul on

defender Fabio Cannavaro.

Cannavaro had provoked the Barcelona centre forward in the press this week by telling French daily L'Equipe: "Everyone knows that Henry is afraid."

France lead Group B with 19 points from their eight matches, one point ahead of Scotland who beat Lithuania 3-1 in Glasgow, and two points ahead of Italy.

Italy will be without tough Italian midfielder Gennaro Gattuso in Ukraine on Wednesday following his yellow card in the first half.

This was the second time the teams have played since that fateful final won by Italy on penalties in Berlin on July 9 last year and the match showed neither team have lost their competitive edge by limiting chances to opposing strikers.

Marco Materazzi, famous for receiving a headbutt into the chest from Zinedine Zidane in the World Cup final, was watching from the stands because of a thigh injury.

France coach Raymond Domenech was also in the stands following his one-match ban by European football's ruling body UEFA for bringing the game into disrepute.

Domenech caused a surprise by naming Lassana Diarra at right back in place of the injured Willy Sagnol, rather than the expected Lyon defender Francois Clerc.

Striker Anelka, playing alongside Henry, looked impressive early on as France dominated possession but it was Alessandro Del Piero of Italy who had the first chance of the match.

Mauro Camoranesi got the better of Diarra to set up Del Piero but his effort was well caught by France keeper Mickael Landreau.

Moments later, Inzaghi found himself on the left side of the penalty area and his lob-cum-shot beat Landreau and landed on the cross-bar.

France's Florent Malouda and Franck Ribery had chances for France before the break but it was not till after the interval that the home side had their best opportunity to go ahead.

In the 52nd minute Henry set up Anelka who darted into the penalty area, but the Blues striker, who had a further effort 10 minutes from time, was not able to get the better of Buffon in their one-on-one duel.



PHOTO: AFP

Popular Hollywood actress Catherine Zeta-Jones (C) samples the US Open action alongside husband Michael Douglas (R) and father-in-law Kirk Douglas at Flushing Meadows in New York on Saturday.

Alonso claims Monza

AFP, Monza



Defending world champion Fernando Alonso reduced his McLaren teammate Lewis Hamilton's lead at the top of the world championship to just three points Sunday when he led him home at the Italian Grand Prix.

Alonso, who started from the 17th pole position of his career, dominated the race from start to finish and was only out of the leading position for five laps following his first of two pit-stops.

The 2005 and 2206 champion came home seconds ahead of the 22-year-old British rookie to claim the 19th win in his 101st Grand

Prix. With four races remaining, Hamilton leads by just three points with 92 to Spaniard Alonso's 89.

The only races remaining are next Sunday's Belgian Grand Prix and then the events in Japan, China and Brazil.

Finland's Kimi Raikkonen finished third for Ferrari, who suffered a dismal afternoon on home turf and against the background of the acrimonious and controversial 'spy story' scandal in which they claim McLaren have gained an advantage from a secret dossier that was leaked from Ferrari.

Brazilian Felipe Massa, who started third for Ferrari, was unable to finish after retiring early in the race after only 11 laps.

German Nick Heidfeld finished

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PHOTO: AFP

Swiss top seed Roger Federer celebrates after winning a point against Russian Nikolay Davydenko during their US Open semifinal at Flushing Meadows on Saturday.

Master vs Minnow

AP, New York



- Roger Federer watched his opponent's last shot of their U.S. Open semifinal sail wide, then calmly walked to the net for a handshake.

He didn't drop to his knees, didn't thrust an index finger to the sky to declare, "I'm No. 1," didn't take off his shirt -- the sort of celebratory gestures Novak Djokovic came up with earlier Saturday upon reaching his first Grand Slam final.

You see, Federer does not get overly excited about semifinal victories, even at major tournaments. He's all about titles, and now he's one victory away from yet another: No. 4 at the U.S. Open, No. 12 overall at Slams.

Tested at the start and again late, the No. 1-seeded Federer worked his way past No. 4 Nikolay Davydenko 7-5, 6-1, 7-5 Saturday, stretching his winning streak at Flushing Meadows to 26 matches.

"I'm always very well-prepared for the majors. I know what it takes," Federer said. "When the second week comes around, I play my best."

In Sunday's championship match, Federer will face the only man to beat him over the past three months: Djokovic. The No. 3-seeded Serb had a harder time with the heat and humidity than with his foe but over-

came all three to defeat No. 15 David Ferrer 6-4, 6-4, 6-3.

"I guess the best players of the summer are in the final," said Federer, all too aware that he lost to Djokovic at a hard-court event in Montreal in early August.

That was Djokovic's big breakthrough: He also beat Rafael Nadal and Andy Roddick there, becoming the first man in 13 years to beat Nos. 1-3 in the rankings at a single tournament.

Later Saturday, No. 1 Justine Henin overwhelmed No. 4 Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-1, 6-3 for her second U.S. Open title and seventh Slam overall. Henin, who eliminated Serena Williams in the quarterfinals and Venus Williams in the semifinals, became the first player to knock off both sisters en route to a major championship.

The resumes of the men's finalists are vastly different, of course.

While Djokovic will be aiming for his first major title, Federer will be trying to tie Roy Emerson for second in tennis history behind Pete Sampras' 14.

There's more. Sunday's match will be Federer's 10th consecutive Grand Slam final.

No one else in the history of tennis managed to make more than seven in a row.

And Federer will be trying to become the first man since Bill Tilden in the 1920s to win the American Slam four

consecutive years.

Federer should consider himself warned, however: Djokovic wants to go home with the U.S. Open trophy, not just make another good impression.

"I need to believe in myself, because otherwise I wouldn't get the positive outcome," Djokovic said. "I don't want to go out tomorrow and try to do my best or try to perform well. No, I'll go tomorrow to try to win."

With the temperature approaching 90 degrees during his semifinal, Djokovic was too spent afterward to reprise the sort of act he performed after winning in the quarterfinals, when he drew guffaws by doing spot-on imitations of Maria Sharapova and Nadal.

"Last two days, the people were more congratulating me for the impressions than for my tennis," Djokovic said. "I was wondering, 'Guys, am I here for the impersonation, entertaining -- or to play tennis?'"

Well, possibly both, but certainly the latter. The 20-year-old Djokovic is the youngest men's finalist at Flushing Meadows since Pete Sampras was 19 when he won the 1990 title. Djokovic is also the first man from Serbia to get to a major final.

There were moments early on when it looked as if Djokovic might actually face Davydenko, who was



PHOTO: AFP

Serbian firebrand Novak Djokovic roars in delight after winning a point against Spaniard David Ferrer during their US Open semifinal at Flushing Meadows on Saturday.