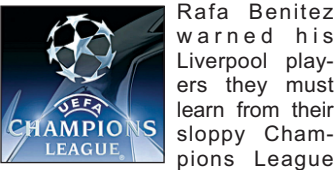


Benitez warns Liverpool

AFP, Porto



Rafa Benitez warned his Liverpool players they must learn from their sloppy Champions League draw at Porto.

Benitez's side were fortunate to escape from the Dragao Stadium with a 1-1 draw on Tuesday after being punished for a lacklustre start.

They fell behind to Lucho Gonzalez's early penalty and, although Dirk Kuyt equalised later in the first half, Jermaine Pennant's needless sending off on the hour summed up an underwhelming display by last season's Champions League runners-up.

Benitez knows Liverpool will have to improve vastly if they are to reach a third European final in four years and he will emphasise that message on the flight home.

The only crumb of comfort for the Spanish coach was the way his resilient team held on for a point in arguably their toughest Group A assignment.

"I haven't seen the other teams yet so it is difficult to say who is the best team in the group," Benitez said. "But we were playing against a good team so we have to be happy."

"The point is good because playing with 10 men against good players with pace and ability is not easy."

"I don't know why we were so bad in the first half because the warm-up was ok, but we made too many mistakes."

"We needed to show character and we did. We have to learn from the positives in the second half."

Pennant must have breathed a sign of relief that Liverpool's defenders, led by the imperious Jamie Carragher, managed to bail him out.

Benitez didn't even look at Pennant as the winger trudged off after earning a second booking for a rash lunge on Fucile as he shepherded the ball out for a goal-kick.

The Spanish coach made it clear he had told Pennant not to commit himself to a challenge unless he was certain he could win the ball, so it was especially galling to see him do the exact opposite.

"The sending off was right," Benitez said. "Jermaine made a mistake and he will learn from the experience. Maybe it will be positive for him in the future."

"It is clear he did not need to make the tackle. We were talking to him about staying on his feet. It was difficult to understand but he will learn."

While Pennant's woes were self-inflicted it was hard to recall a less effective club display from Steven

Gerrard.

The Liverpool captain, who is obviously still struggling with his broken toe, admitted his side were fortunate.

"I'm disappointed with the way we played," Gerrard said. "We didn't start well and never got going in the first half."

"But I'm glad to take a point. A point away in the Champions League is never a bad result."

Sektioui was clear on goal and Liverpool were caught cold and fell behind in the eighth minute when Tarik Sektioui easily beat Sami Hyypia to Ricardo Quaresma's clever pass.

Sektioui was clear on goal and he clipped the ball round Reina before being sent sprawling by the Liverpool keeper.

It was a clear penalty and Porto captain Lucho stepped up to send Reina the wrong way from the spot.

But Liverpool equalised in the 17th minute.

Hyypia looped Finnan's free-kick across goal to Kuyt and the Dutch striker got in front of Joao Paulo to plant a close-range header past

Nuno.

Liverpool could have few complaints when Pennant was dismissed in the 58th minute. He had already been booked, so his lunge on Fucile was foolhardy in the extreme.

Inevitably the visitors were forced back but Porto came no closer than a Quaresma chip that Hyypia hacked away.

Jesualdo Ferreira believes the Portuguese champions will grow in confidence after a promising performance.

Although the Porto coach conceded his team had missed an opportunity for an invaluable victory, he was encouraged by the way they dominated one of Europe's top sides.

"A draw against Liverpool is ok, but if you look at the game we could have won it," Ferreira said.

"It was our first game and it is always difficult against Liverpool but we were superior at all times."

"We didn't have many chances after the sending off but we tried to win the match."



PHOTO: AFP

FC Porto's Argentine midfielder Lucho Gonzalez (L) celebrates with teammate Lisandro Lopez after scoring against Liverpool during their Champions League match at the Dragao Stadium in Porto on Tuesday.

WC stadium workers stone police

AFP, Cape Town

Hundreds of South African construction workers downed tools Wednesday at Cape Town's 2010 football World Cup stadium and pelted police with stones as they demanded better working conditions.

Armed with sticks, wearing hard hats and singing revolutionary songs, the group broke office windows and threw stones at police, hitting one in the head.

"He was taken to hospital and required stitches," said police spokesman Superintendent Billy Jones.

He denied radio reports that police had fired rubber bullets at the crowd.

By noon, all entrances to the stadium remained closed off as dozens of police were deployed to keep the protesters under control.

The group demanded employer-sponsored transport between their workplace in the Cape Town suburb of Green Point and the train station in the city centre several kilometres away. This was their second labour action on the issue.

"This matter has been in dispute since June," said Eugenia Peter, spokeswoman for the Building, Construction and Allied Workers labour union.

"The company promised that transport would be available from Monday, but it was not."

The employer, a joint venture between construction companies Murray and Roberts and WBHO, was not available for comment.

Cape Town's new 68,000-seater Green Point Stadium is to host one of the semifinals when the world's most popular sporting event is staged on African soil for the first time ever.

Atouba gets four-match ban

AFP, Frankfurt

Hamburg's Cameroon defender Thimothee Atouba was banned for four matches by the German Football Federation (DFB) on Tuesday for elbowing Eintracht Frankfurt's Albert Streit in the face.

The incident was not seen by the referee during the Bundesliga game which Hamburg lost 2-1 at the weekend.

Hamburg, currently tenth in the table with seven points, are already without Ivorian defender Guy Demel, sitting out a four-match ban.

Bayern prefer Champions League



AFP, Paris

Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoeness admits he would prefer to be lining out in Europe's elite competition this week than enduring the punishment of heading into the group stages of the UEFA Cup.

Four-time European champions Bayern, who won the UEFA Cup in 1995/96, will join four English Premier League clubs in their UEFA Cup first round matches on Thursday.

Bayern start their campaign at home to Portuguese outfit Belenenses, while Dutch giants Ajax, who like Bayern won three consecutive European Cup titles in the 70's, travel to Dynamo Zagreb.

The German club, which last won the Champions League in 2001, missed out on a spot in European football's showcase tournament after finishing fourth in the Bundesliga last season.

"I think it's a real shame we're not competing this season. But we made our own

beds last season and we've received the appropriate punishment," said Hoeness.

"So there's no point wringing our hands, it's a sporting setback and we have to live with it. I do believe it'll be a one-season intermission, and we'll be back in the competition next term."

Hoeness will be looking to get back to winning ways against the Portuguese in Munich after being held to their second consecutive draw at home in the Bundesliga at the weekend.

Bayern remain top, and Hoeness takes heart from their Bundesliga rivals having tougher European ties. "Their somewhat smaller squads have plenty of travelling ahead," he said.

But despite being favourites against Belenenses who are eighth in their domestic league, Hoeness remains wary of their Lisbon-based opponents, who are packed with creative Brazilians.

Hoeness added: "We should all stop believing we're capable of wiping the floor with all our opponents. We must

avoid arrogance."

In addition to Bayern and Ajax, four other teams who have won the UEFA Cup will play, with inaugural champions Tottenham Hotspur opening their bid for a third triumph at White Hart Lane against Cypriot side Anorthosis.

In-form Turkish side Galatasaray, the 2000/01 winners, travel to FC Sion in Switzerland, as Anderlecht host Rapid Vienna in Belgium and Bayer Leverkusen host Portuguese side Union Leiria.

"For us the UEFA Cup is a big thing and we will try to do better than last year," said Tottenham's sporting director Damien Comolli whose side were semifinalists last year.

"We were all frustrated that we didn't go through against Seville because everyone knew whoever would win that tie would probably win the competition and that's what happened."

English clubs are well represented with David Moyes' Everton opening at Goodison Park against Ukrainian outfit Metalist Kharkiv as league rivals Bolton play away to

Macedonian side FK Rabotnicki, and Blackburn head to Larissa.

Rovers manager Mark Hughes said: "The trip to Greece will be difficult because they usually have a vociferous crowd and the away tie will be key."

Aberdeen are Scotland's only representatives after Dunfermline's elimination in qualifying and open at home against Ukrainian side Dniepropetrovsk.

Serie A side Empoli play their first tie in Europe against Zurich, as do Spanish club Getafe, at home to Danish outfit Twente.

Second leg matches take place on October 4 with the 40 teams that progress from the first round going into a group phase comprising eight groups of five clubs.

The top three teams progress through to the round of 32, at which point they will be joined by eight sides finishing third in their Champions League group. The final takes place at the City of Manchester Stadium on May 14.

Turkish delight for Marseille

AFP, Marseille



Marseille cast aside their dismal home form for a 2-0 win over Besiktas in their opening game of their Champions League group stage campaign here on Tuesday.

Marseille, currently languishing in 15th position in the French league with just seven points from eight games and winless at home, deserved the victory against a limited Turkish side that mustered only three shots, none of which were on target.

It was the unlikely figure of Julien Rodriguez who was first on target for the inaugural Champions League winners in 1993.

In the 76th minute, Samir Nasri swung in a powerful corner from the left that beat Besiktas goalkeeper Hakan

Arikan and dipped to rebound off the far post into Rodriguez's path, and the defender made no mistake from close range.

Ex-Liverpool striker Djibril Cisse doubled the score in injury time, neatly flicking a long ball over the covering Lamine Diatta and beating Arikan with a powerful, low shot.

It had been all the home side in the opening minutes in cold, blustery conditions at the Stade Velodrome, veteran Dutch midfielder Boudewijn Zenden and Senegal winger Mamadou Niang leading the Turkish defence a merry dance.

Marseille had the first real chance of the game in the 11th minute, Cisse getting a sight on goal after a clever lay-off by Zenden, but his effort was driven straight at Arikan.

Just two minutes later, a dangerous Niang cross was

headed away by Diatta from the fast-approaching Cisse.

Niang then sent a header wide from a pinpoint cross from speedy Algerian winger Karim Ziani, the man-of-the-match, down the right wing after a delicate one-two with Cisse.

But more often than not, the home side's final touch was missing, and although returning captain Lorik Cana did a good job of bossing midfield, far too much possession was gifted to the Turks.

The goal-shy visitors' first real effort on goal was in 38th minute, a left-footed strike from the edge of the area by Brazilian international midfielder Ricardinho drifting just high and wide of Steve Mendanda's goal.

Towards the end of the half, Ziani and Cana both had speculative long-range shots easily parried away by the defence, to the baying dismay of the vociferous home fans at

both ends of the stadium.

Arikan did well to glove over an effort from Ziani seven minutes into the second-half after the Algerian had made the most of a slip by Ibrahim Uzulmez and rounded Ibrahim Toraman in the box.

Niang then went wide with a blistering effort after skinning Koray Avci, on for the injured Ricardinho, down the left flank.

But the half turned quickly into a battle for possession with a series of petty and clinical fouls, which saw seven yellow cards handed out.

No side had shown any dangerous intent on goal until Nasri's cross fell fortuitously for Rodriguez's right foot.

Besiktas tried to rally and striker Serdar Ozkan saw a late effort go wide before Cisse made sure of Marseille's win.