

Banned for diving

AFP, Paris

Lithuanian international Saulius Mikoliunas has been suspended for two matches after being found guilty of diving in the Euro 2008 qualifying match against Scotland, UEFA said Thursday.

The Hearts player will miss the matches against France on October 17 and Ukraine on November 17 after being found guilty of "deceiving the referee (by diving)" during the 3-1 loss to Scotland in Glasgow on September 9.

Lithuania scored from the penalty which was awarded in the 61st minute by Slovenian referee Damir Skomina after Mikoliunas went to ground.

Beautiful Bern bans cranes

AFP, Geneva

The Swiss capital, Bern, wants to ban cranes that mar its landscape while it hosts matches for football's Euro 2008 finals next year.

Mayor Alexander Tschaepaet told the Swiss freesheet '.ch' on Wednesday that he had warned host-to Europe's top international football tournament.

Tschaepaet said the pretty medieval city should be on its Sunday best for visiting fans while it plays joint host to Europe's top international football tournament.

Bern's historical centre is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Construction sites and building upgrades are a regular feature of the prosperous Swiss economy in summer. The city council intends to allow building work to continue during Euro 2008 but without cranes for a month.

The Euro 2008 finals take place in Switzerland and Austria from June 7 to June 29.



PHOTO: AFP

Fenerbahce striker Deivei de Souza (front) is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal in their victory over Inter Milan in the Champions League in Istanbul on Wednesday.

Fenerbahce shock Inter

AFP, Istanbul



Turkish club Fenerbahce secured an impressive 1-0 victory over Italian giants Inter Milan in their opening Champions League Group G match here on Wednesday.

Striker Deivid found the net two minutes before the break to upset Inter, who lie second in the Italian league and who had been unbeaten this season so far.

Brazilian legend Zico led out his side against Milan who admittedly

have been hampered by injury problems.

It was also an interesting match-up between two former Real Madrid star players, Fenerbahce's veteran Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos and Portugal's Luis Figo, who came on with half an hour to go.

Roberto Carlos had a shot blocked himself before starting the move which saw Deivid put the Turks ahead in the 43rd minute.

Roberto Carlos darted down the left flank and then cut inside to feed Alex on his right hand side. The ball was then chipped to Deivid who fired an acrobatic volley on the turn into the roof of the net.

Fenerbahce almost had a goal in

the 56th minute when Mateja Kezman hit the post.

Inter goalkeeper Julio Cesar made a critical save shortly afterwards, winning congratulations even from the player who made the shot, Alex.

Figo came on for the final half hour to give Inter some hope and teammates Luis Antonio Jimenez and striker Hernan Crespo were also brought on.

Inter, missing a number of key players including injured pair Marco Materazzi and Patrick Vieira, struggled under constant pressure from the home side, managing 10 shots compared to 20 by Fenerbahce.

China reach quarters

AFP, Tianjin

A determined China battled past New Zealand Thursday to tee-up a women's World Cup quarterfinal with Norway, while Australia snatched a last-gasp equaliser to book a showdown with Brazil.

The host nation, watched by a raucous crowd, went through to their fourth successive quarterfinals after beating the Kiwis 2-0 as Group D rivals Denmark lost 1-0 to Brazil in Hangzhou.

Second-half strikes from Li Jie and Xie Caixia downed New Zealand after China laid siege to the visitors' goal in a one-sided game.

Li broke the deadlock on 57 minutes, heading in a floated free-kick from deep for her second goal of the tournament, while Xie put the win beyond doubt by coolly rounding a defender to slot home with 11 minutes left.

In the other quarterfinals, the United States take on England in Tianjin on Saturday while defending champions Germany are up against North Korea in Wuhan on the same day.

Brazil scored a late goal in Hangzhou to book their place in the knockout round with substitute Pretinha doing the damage in the 91st minute after both sides went close in regulation time.

It kept the fleet-footed South American powerhouse, who topped Group C, on course for their first title.

Former champions Norway, who needed only to draw to qualify, made no mistakes with a 7-2 demolition of Ghana, as star striker Ragnhild Gulbrandsen plundered a hat-trick, one of which was the 500th goal in World Cup history.

The 1995 winners began their bombardment in the fourth minute when Lene Storlokken chested down and rifled home after being picked out with a header and the result from then on was never in doubt.

"I think this game we were very effective," said coach Bjarne Bernsten, but added that there was room for improvement.

"It's very important that we improve, though, because I don't think we played our best football today, we were certainly too casual in defence."

Australia came from behind twice to scramble a 2-2 draw against Canada with captain Cheryl Salisbury firing home a 92nd minute equaliser to put the Matildas in the knockout rounds for the first time.

Fergie challenges C.Ron

AFP, Lisbon



Sir Alex Ferguson has challenged Cristiano Ronaldo to emulate the goal-scoring heroics that

established the Manchester United winger as one of the world's best players.

Ronaldo was the driving force behind United's Premier League success last season, scoring 23 goals and producing a series of electrifying performances en route to winning the Footballer of the Year award.

But the Portugal star had suffered a slow start to this campaign after a red card at Portsmouth cost him a three-match ban. So Ferguson was relieved to see Ronaldo score his first goal of the season as United snatched a 1-0 Champions League win at Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday.

Despite Wayne Rooney's return from injury, Ferguson's side had been struggling to find any rhythm until Ronaldo shattered his former team with a diving header that gave United their 100th win in European's elite club competition.

Now he is off the mark, Ferguson expects Ronaldo to reproduce the kind of goal return that can push United towards more success in the Champions League.

"I was pleased Cristiano scored because he got 23 goals last season," Ferguson said. "It was his first this term so hopefully it sets him off

on another run.

"It's absolutely realistic for him to do that again. I expect him to improve as a player and I expect to see him develop in the football club.

"He is a good finisher, has two great feet and is marvellous in the air, so there is no reason why he can't go on and hopefully do better."

Ronaldo was back at the Jose Alvalade Stadium for the first time since moving to United in 2003 and broke the deadlock in the 62nd minute.

A slick United move gathered pace when Paul Scholes picked out Wes Brown and the right-back's cross was met with a perfect diving header from Ronaldo.

Ronaldo went off to a standing ovation from his former supporters but in contrast, Rooney laboured for long periods. The England star was used as a lone striker in his first game back from a broken toe and understandably looked off the pace.

Rooney lasted 72 minutes before coming off but Ferguson believes he will benefit from the run out against Chelsea on Sunday.

"Wayne had a difficult task playing up front on his own but he put in a good work rate," Ferguson said. "Fitness-wise he's done well and it will help him for Sunday."

Not for the first time this season, United found it hard to establish any attacking momentum. But with Edwin van der Sar in imperious form they remain rock-solid at the back.

The Dutch goalkeeper produced brilliant saves to keep out Liedson and Tonel as he claimed a fourth successive clean sheet.

"I must say when we brought

Edwin here I thought he would be one of our best signings," Ferguson said. "I should have done it years ago when I had the chance but I let him slip through my fingers.

"He's a great example for the young goalkeepers at the club. He has 120-odd caps for Holland, has won everything you could ask, but he's still in early every morning."

Ferguson expects his team to improve considerably as key players like Rooney return and Chelsea's visit to Old Trafford this weekend will provide the perfect stage to underline that belief.

"Consistency is what we are looking for," Ferguson said. "I've had to wait really. The players coming back can only improve our chances.

"It won't do us any harm getting a run of victories. It's always good for the team's continuity and attacking play.

"Sunday is a massive game for us now. I'm looking forward to it."

While United returned home with the points, Sporting could consider themselves hard done by not to take a point from a game they dominated.

Coach Paulo Bento said: "All results have implications and because we lost we have to think about our strategy. But last season we started with a victory and still went out.

"This time we lost so we hope it will be different."



PHOTO: AFP

PRODIGAL SON RETURNS: Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo gives fans the thumbs-up sign after he scored to effect a win against his former club Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League on Wednesday.

8x3

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8x3