



Barcelona captain Carles Puyol (C) scores the first goal against Stuttgart during their Champions League match in Stuttgart on Tuesday.

It was our toughest game: Messi

AFP, Stuttgart



Barcelona goal-scorer Lionel Messi admitted Tuesday night's 2-0 win at VfB Stuttgart was an important step towards Champions League qualification for the Spanish giants.

The German striker was denied two rapid-fire headers from point-blank range on 32 minutes and Stuttgart could have been at least 2-0 up at half-time, rather than the reality of 0-0, if they were not for Valdez.

"Zero points and a 2-0 defeat," said Gomez, whose side now face fellow Group E strugglers Lyon at the Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion on October 23.

"Everyone saw we played well in the first half, but we had no goals to show for it."

"As has happened to us so many times before this season, we conceded a goal early in the second half and we just couldn't get any momentum after that."

"That was our most difficult game so far," said the 20-year-old Messi.

"There were a lot of chances for both teams in the first-half, but it

was a tough game for us as we had to work hard, but luckily we were successful in the end."

"Things will get harder for us now," said Stuttgart coach Armin Veh.

"This Barcelona side are very good and we have a few problems."

"They are technically very good and terribly strong, always looking to counter-attack with confidence across the team."

"We coped well in the first-half and should have taken our chances, but Barcelona deserved the win and I am not unhappy to have lost to 2-0 to a side with so much talent."

But Barcelona's Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard was far from happy with his side's performance with his side facing a trip to Ibrox on October 23 to take on Group E rivals Rangers.

"We started well and had some chances," said the former Dutch

"But I was not at all happy with our first-half performance as we finished the half with no goals."

"Stuttgart reacted well to us and Valdez had to work hard in goal to keep them out."

"But we will have to be more disciplined and work harder to get a result in Scotland."

Superb night for British clubs

AFP, Paris



Scottish giants Rangers led the way with a 3-0 victory over six-time French champions Lyon on a superb night for British clubs in the latest Champions League action on Tuesday as all three won.

English powerhouses Arsenal and Manchester United both won 1-0 Arsenal away at Steaua Bucharest and United with Wayne Rooney's first goal of the season at home to Roma to add to Rangers' first away win in their last 10 Champions League matches. Rooney was not the only striker to end a goal drought as the flamboyant Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice in Inter Milan's 2-0 home win over PSV Eindhoven for his first goals in the Champions League in nearly two years.

Rangers, though, were magnificent as they tore apart a Lyon side and heaped the pressure on coach Alain Perrin, who boasts a record of just one win in eight Champions League matches.

The Scottish side's performance left manager Walter Smith rather surprised but delighted as well.

"It was a fantastic result, no one could have expected that," said Smith, who left the Scotland coaching post for a second spell with Rangers.

"We were hoping to sneak a result."

"But those two goals early in the second-half killed the match off. We've had some fantastic results in the past but this must be up there with them."

"It was a very good performance from us."

Perrin, who has done better at lesser clubs than when in charge of

lost to Arsenal in their opener in fine style beating Slavia Prague 4-2 with former Spurs striker Fredi Kanoute opening the scoring for them.

If Rangers thought they had a dreadful away record then they had nothing on Sporting Lisbon, but the Portuguese side ended their record of not winning any previous away matches in their Champions League history by winning 2-1 against Dynamo Kiev.

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Perrin, who has done better at lesser clubs than when in charge of

bigger ones, was honest about the feelings in the changing room.

"We are all dreadfully disappointed, we will have to assess this very quickly. Tonight was a nightmare."

Arsenal showed character to defeat the Romanian side, displaying a side not often shown by them in that their football was more workmanlike than pretty to play leaving manager Arsene Wenger purring with delight.

"But it's not just that we are winning the games, it also says a lot about the resolve of the team. The focus they had today shows there is something special in the team."

United also showed grit in a match they were perhaps fortunate to come away with the three points and manager Sir Alex Ferguson was confident that the goals would start flowing despite six of United's seven wins this season coming by a 1-0 margin.

"Sometimes you go through these spells. But it won't last forever. Some day we're going to hit a few goals and hopefully it will start soon," said the Scot.

On that basis Ferguson will be content to keep on winning 1-0 and Wenger that winning ugly is better than playing pretty and ending up with nothing.

"I was not impressed with the first-half," he said.

"We started well, but we were thoughts with our chances. Those are problems which we must address, because you can't afford to waste them in a competition like this."

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti bemoaned his side's bad luck although in reality it was dreadful finishing that cost them, Simone Perrotta and Mauro Esposito in

Four stitches for C.Ron

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo needed four stitches after being elbowed in the face several minutes before the end of Tuesday night's Champions League match here, United manager Alex Ferguson said.

Ronaldo left the pitch in the 85th minute with his face covered in blood and with an injury to his right eyebrow following an elbow from Miroslav Klose.

"He (Ronaldo) told us that it was a deliberate," Ferguson said after the match which United won 1-0 thanks to a Wayne Rooney goal.

Milan after Ronaldinho

AFP, Madrid

Six of the Premier League champions' seven wins this season have come by the same margin and Ferguson admitted he was bemused by the trend.

"It is a disease," the Scot observed with half a smile. "We're trying to get a vaccine for it."

"Sometimes you go through these spells. But it won't last forever. Some day we're going to hit a few goals and hopefully it will start soon."

The evening would have had a different outcome if Roma had been able to take any of the numerous chances they generated in a game they dominated for long periods.

Ferguson acknowledged United had ridden their luck, but insisted the quality of the goal from Rooney was worthy of winning any match.

The England forward had endured a frustrating evening operating behind an out-of-sorts Louis Saha, who was making his first start since February. But his luck turned when he was pushed to the head of the forward line following the introduction of Carlos Tevez.

A superb little ball from the outstanding Nani gave him a yard of space in the inside right channel and Rooney finished with a first-time shot that found the net off the bottom of the far post.

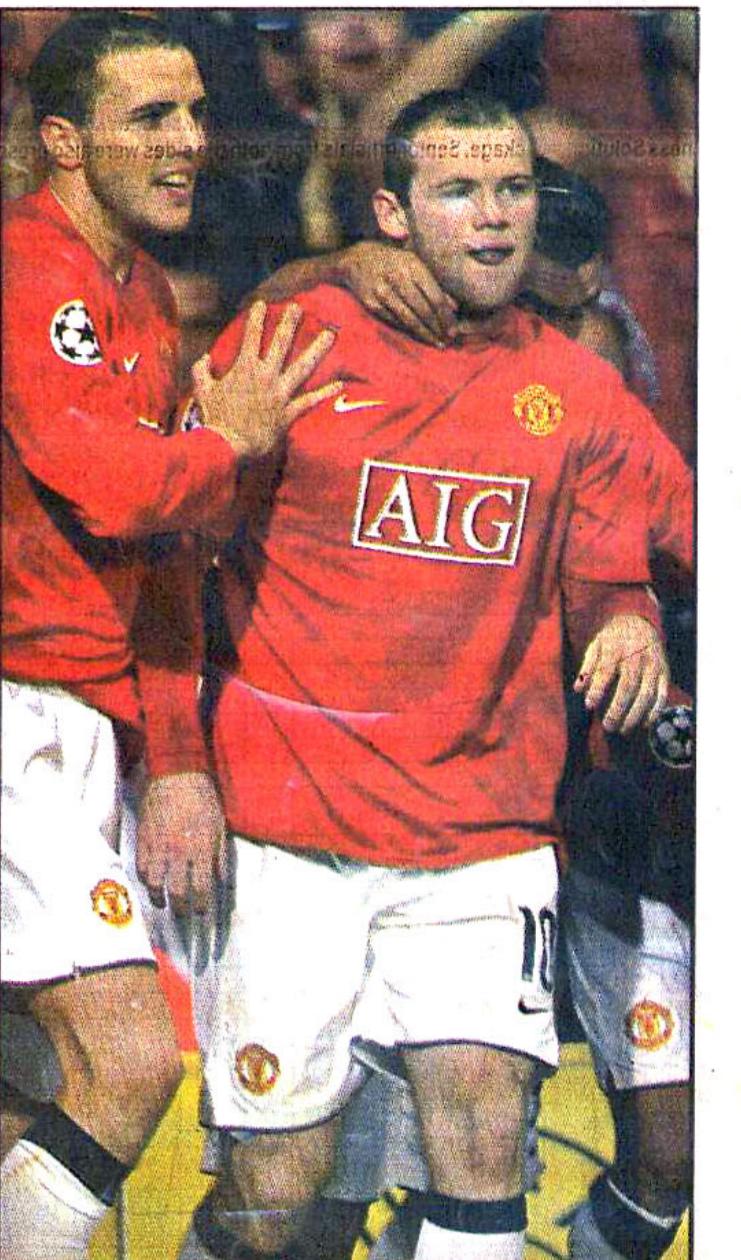
"It was a fabulous goal - great moving and great passing," Ferguson purred. "The penetration we were looking for in the second half created the opening for us."

Rooney is only four matches into his comeback from a broken metatarsal bone and Ferguson

self has said it was an elbow," the Scot said. "It is unfortunate because the match was played in a good spirit."

He added: "Roma had some really good chances at the end but that's football, it can be unfair. I think we probably deserved a bit of

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney (R) celebrates after scoring against Roma during their Champions League match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Tuesday.

Wenger wants to be invincible

AFP, Bucharest



did before.

"In 49 and nine, there is 40 games difference. Let's go step by step and try to win the next game, which is Sunderland at home."

After so many dazzling exhibitions of the beautiful game from Arsenal in the first weeks of the campaign, this was an example of winning ugly.

Steauea proved a tougher nut to crack than expected, but Wenger's team refused to give in and got their

rewards eventually.

Arsenal have often gone missing in action when they travel to Eastern Europe, with Wenger admitting his team sometimes finds it hard to get motivated for these less glamorous assignments.

That looked to be the case again in the early stages.

When Romeo Sureda whipped in a cross from the left, Valentin Badea should have done better than nodding over from bar. Then, in the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Marquez out for a month

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona defender Rafael Marquez will be out for a month after suffering a torn leg muscle during Tuesday's Champions League 2-0 victory over Stuttgart, the Spanish club said Wednesday.

However captain Carles Puyol, who was also injured during the match in Germany, will be available for Sunday's match against Atletico Madrid.

The Mexican international joins a long list of injured at Barcelona including Italian international Gianluca Zambrotta, Ivory Coast midfielder Yaya Toure, Brazilian centre-back Edmilson and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, all out for four weeks or longer, the club said.

metatarsal.

But Hyppia insists he will have no complaints if he has to take a back-seat when Agger returns to the side sometime next month. "I'm enjoying this moment because I'm playing a lot of games," said Hyppia. "But I'm not 20-years-old anymore."

The recovery time after games is a bit longer now than what it used to be."

Benitez's rotation policy has come under-fire from critics as Liverpool have stuttered in the Premiership despite reaching two Champions League finals in the last three seasons.

Hyppia insists his team-mates must rediscover their early season form if they are to end their long wait for the title.

"Lately we haven't performed as well as we can," he said. "We can beat anybody on our day, but lately we haven't performed as well as we can. At the start of the season we played well and created chances."

"But we need to get back to that and keep the consistency."

Hyppia after new deal

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Sami Hyppia is convinced he can earn himself a new contract at Liverpool because he claims he is tailor-made for Rafa Benitez's controversial rotation policy.

Hyppia, who has made over 400 appearances during eight years at Anfield, in the final year of his current deal.

The long-serving Finland defender, who turns 34 when Liverpool entertain Tottenham on Sunday, wants another contract to take him beyond his 35th birthday.

And Hyppia is hoping to use his extended run in Benitez's side to prove he is worth another deal.

Liverpool manager Benitez has been forced to use Hyppia more than he would like this season because of Daniel Agger's fractured

"There are some quality players on the bench and some quality players who can't even get on the bench."

"Everybody keeps talking about the rotation when the results aren't going well, but when they are going well nobody mentions it!"

Having topped the Premiership table after thrashing Derby 6-0 last month, Liverpool have fallen off the pace recently and go into the weekend trailing current leaders Arsenal by four points.

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