



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

PHOTO: AFP

## 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.

While both Arsenal and United lead their groups after two matches, Rangers are second, behind Barcelona on goal difference, the Catalan mammoths having beaten VfB Stuttgart 2-0 in Germany.

Barca's fellow Spaniards Sevilla got on the winning track, the two-time UEFA Cup titleholders having

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.

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

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 watch 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.

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

particular missing absolute sitters in the closing stages.

"When a team puts on that kind of display, really at the end of the match they should not be on the beaten side, even against opponents of the stature of Manchester United," Spalletti complained.

"If anyone deserved to score more goals today it was us rather than Manchester."

The sometimes highly strung Ibrahimovic was on his best behaviour not that that could be said of two of his team-mates who were sent-off and earned plaudits from both coaches, though, Inter handler Roberto Mancini contented himself by saying everyone was very happy for him.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard was certainly not in the same frame of mind as Mancini far from satisfied with the performance.

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

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

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.

## Wenger wants to be invincible

AFP, Bucharest

Arsene Wenger has challenged in-form Arsenal to emulate the club's historic 'invincibles' by going on an epic unbeaten run.

Wenger knows what it takes to achieve perfection in football after building the famous team that went 49 league matches without losing.

The French coach believes his side's hard-fought 1-0 win at Steaua Bucharest in the Champions League on Tuesday is proof that the Gunners' current crop have what it takes to follow in the footsteps of the 2003-04 vintage.

Arsenal are unbeaten in 12 matches in all competitions and Robin van Persie's late goal in Romania clinched a ninth consecutive victory.

Wenger has been adamant that the Premier League leaders can roll their sleeves up and grind out a win just as easily as they produce the eye-catching moves that makes them the most attractive side in Europe.

And the way they emerged unscathed from an exacting Group H examination against Steaua underlined that point.

Now Wenger is convinced something special is taking shape at the Emirates Stadium.

"It says something about the focus of the team," he said. "Even though it was not the most glamorous of games, we had good focus and good team display. Overall the team is hungry."

"That is now our challenge, how long can we extend this run?"

How can we try to be inspired by that kind of consistency, but it is too early to compare a run like we

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.

Steaua 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 find it hard to get motivated for these less glamorous assignments.

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

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

seventh minute, Surdu had the ball in Manuel Almunia's net, only to see his header ruled out for offside.

Steaua, who had never lost at home to English opposition, nearly fell behind when goalkeeper Robinson Zapata almost carried Gael Clichy's deflected cross over his own goal-line.

It took an alert clearance from Arsenal's Kolo Toure to deny Nicolae Dica after his lob looped

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Arsenal striker Adebayor (R) skips a sliding tackle from Steaua Bucharest's Petre Marin during their Champions League match at the Ghencea stadium in Bucharest on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 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.

La Liga leaders Barcelona took a step closer to the first knock-out round as Argentinian Messi score their second goal to seal their second consecutive win in Group E at the Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion.

Despite the home side having four clear first-half chances to take the lead, Stuttgart's defence finally cracked as substitute Carles Puyol beat Stuttgart keeper Raphael Schaefer on 53 minutes before Messi struck on 67 minutes.

The win leaves the Spaniards unbeaten after last month's 3-0 win at home to Lyon as they join Rangers on six points, while Stuttgart stay pointless.

"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."

While Messi was putting in the work for Barcelona's attack, at the other end Spanish goalkeeper Victor Valdez pulled off four top-class saves to deny Germany's player of the year Mario Gomez.

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 it 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."

Stuttgart now have a mountain to climb if they are to reach the first knock-out round of the Champions League with a six-point gap between them and joint group leaders Barcelona and Glasgow

Rangers.

"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 midfielder.

"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."

## Ferguson hails Rooney

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson is hoping Wayne Rooney's Champions League winner against Roma will open the floodgates for the England forward and a Manchester United squad that has found goals painfully hard to come by this season.

Rooney's superbly-taken 70th-minute strike, his first of the season, was enough to give United a somewhat fortunate 1-0 win over a side they had beaten 7-1 on their last encounter at Old Trafford, only six months ago.

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 a half 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."

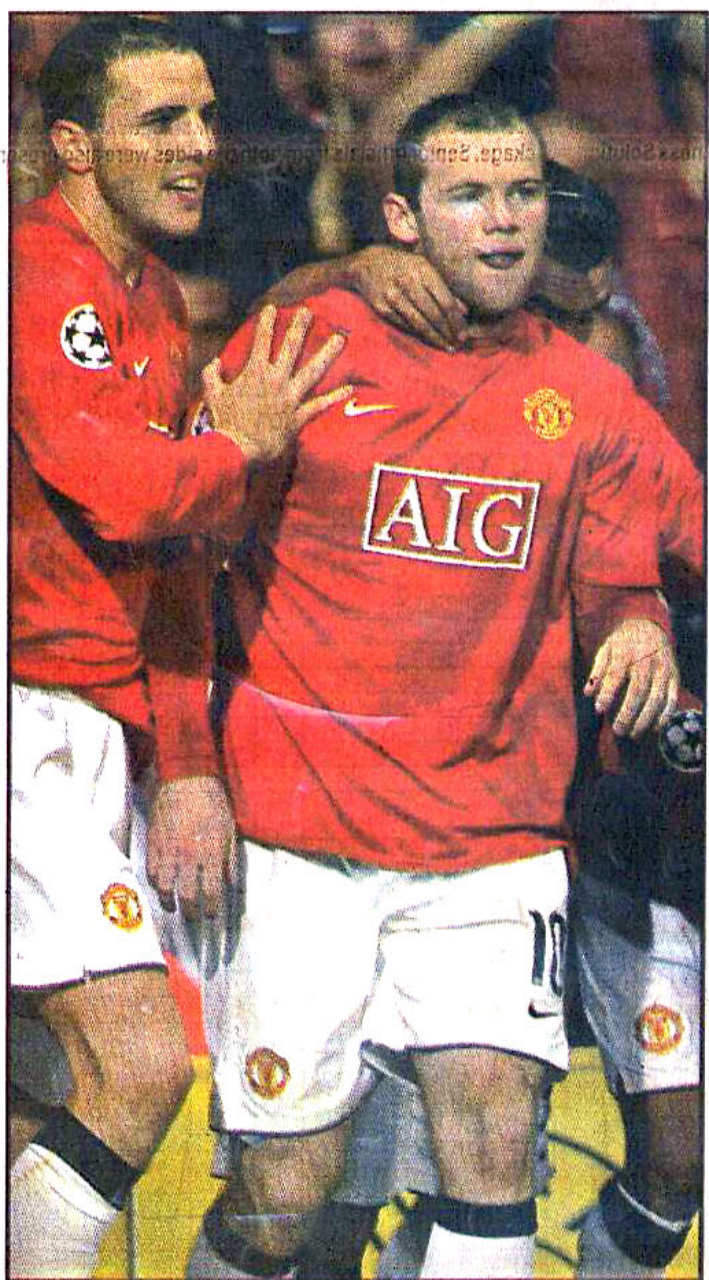
Rooney is only four matches into his comeback from a broken metatarsal bone and Ferguson

admitted: "He is still trying to get his rhythm and real match fitness. But this will do him good. Goals always do players good, especially when they are expected of them."

Ferguson revealed that Cristiano Ronaldo had needed four stitches in his eyebrow after the match. "I didn't see it but he himself 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

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

PHOTO: AFP

## Hyypia after new deal

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Sami Hyypia 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.

Hyypia, who has made over 400 appearances during eight years at Anfield, is 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 Hyypia 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 Hyypia more than he would like this season because of Daniel Agger's fractured

metatarsal.

But Hyypia 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 Hyypia. "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.

Yet Hyypia says he is a fan of the system and believes it will reap rewards in the future.

"It suits me that I don't play every game," added Hyypia. "I understand that there are only 11 places in the starting line-up and that we have a big squad."

"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 then nobody mentions it."

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

Hyypia 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."