



Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery (C) drives in between two Belenenses defenders during their first round second leg UEFA Cup match in Lisbon on Thursday.

Nistelrooy to extend deal

AFP, Madrid

Dutch international forward Ruud van Nistelrooy is to prolong his Real Madrid contract until 2010, Spanish sports daily AS said on Friday.

The 31-year-old, in his second season at the nine-time European champions, has a contract until the end of the season with an option for an extra year.

But it is believed the club's sporting director Predrag Mijatovic should offer the extension to a player who impressed in his first season since transferring from Manchester United, scoring 25 league goals as Real won the title last season.

Meanwhile, fellow Dutch international, midfielder Wesley Sneijder is said to be finding the stress of life at the Madrid giants difficult to cope with, also according to AS.

"I feel stressed by the pressure of my responsibilities," he is said to have told coaches in the Netherlands.

AS also claims that Sneijder is going to undergo therapy to try to rediscover his confidence, and with it the early season form he has since lost.

The 23-year-old joined Real in the summer from Ajax and put in some sparkling performances early in the season but he has been disappointing recently.

Oleguer out of line

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona defender Oleguer Presas is in hot water with the Spanish side after taking part in the shakedown for the Rally of Catalonia as co-pilot to Xevi Pons despite it being against club rules to participate in dangerous activities, sports daily Marca reported on Friday.

Pons and Presas clocked the second fastest time behind triple world champion Sebastian Loeb of France.

"It was an interesting experience, I'm very happy to have done it," said Presas who arrived late at training in the Nou Camp afterwards.

Presas's decision to compete is even more surprising as Barcelona are currently in the midst of an injury crisis in defence with Gianluca Zambrotta, Rafael Marquez, Yaya Toure, Carlos Puyol and Gabriel Milito all sidelined.

Blatter calls for labour laws change

AFP, Paris

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has called on the European Union (EU) to recognise the autonomy of sport when it comes to matters regarding labour laws.

Blatter wants football to be exempt from freedom of movement laws, which would allow sports authorities to limit the number of foreign players allowed to play at clubs.

"Workers in Europe can circulate freely but footballers are not workers," he said. "You cannot consider a footballer like any normal worker because you need 11 to play a match - and they are more artists than workers."

The EU recently stated it wanted to impose more regulations on football, something that has angered Blatter.

"Football has never had the courage to go against this practice," he said. "When you have 11 foreigners in a team, this is not good for the development of football, for the education of young players, and there is a financial aspect, too."

AJAX, ROVERS CRASH

Bayern safely through

AFP, Paris



Belenenses on Thursday.

On a charged programme across the continent other clubs celebrating their pass to the group stages where English Premiership outfits Tottenham, Everton and Bolton, and Scottish topflight side Aberdeen.

But two clubs that didn't make it past Thursday's first round second leg ties were the fourth Premiership side Blackburn and Ajax, the former European Champions who were knocked out by Dinamo Zagreb.

The Croatian outfit came good on the away goals rule after a 3-2 extra time win in a heated encounter over the Dutch masters which featured eight yellow cards.

Bayern Munich are appearing in Europe's second club competition after missing out on the coveted Champions League by only finishing fourth in the Bundesliga last season.

And Ottmar Hitzfeld's Bavarian giants avoided the ignominy of slipping up at their first hurdle when building on their first leg lead to go through 3-0 on aggregate - watched by a sparse crowd of around 4,000 fans - in Portugal.

McClaren won't risk Owen

AFP, London

Steve McClaren insists he will not jeopardise Michael Owen's fitness after including the Newcastle striker in his squad for the crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers against Estonia and Russia.

Owen's Newcastle manager Sam Allardyce has warned McClaren that he is ready to demand the forward be left out of the matches on October 13 and 17 if he is not fully recovered from surgery last week on a groin injury.

Owen hopes to be involved when Newcastle face Everton on Sunday and, with so much at stake as England enter crunch time in Group E, McClaren will give the forward every opportunity to prove he is ready to start.

McClaren, who named Everton defender Joleon Lescott and West Ham forward Dean Ashton in his squad, will keep Allardyce up to date with his player's fitness when he arrives for training next week, but the England coach knows he must decide whether to gamble on Owen's fitness.

"I'm delighted to have Michael available," he told Sky Sports. "Two or three weeks ago that looked an impossibility. He has had the operation and come through it well."

"He says he's flying and feeling very good. Hopefully he will play on Sunday, then he will be assessed in training and if he is fit he will play for England."

"I spoke to Sam this morning. This club versus country thing is never a problem. I've got a great relationship with Sam."

"We did our job here, but it was an unusual task in front of so few spectators," said Hitzfeld after the game at the Estadio do Restelo.

He added: "The tension was missing a little. I was pleased when we went 1-0 up, more because our game improved and we really took control."

Toni, who scored Bayern's first goal after 59 minutes, said: "Belenenses played very well and were well organised. The team did well to come here and get a result."

Aberdeen completed a week to remember for Scottish football when following up Rangers and Celtic's heroics in the Champions League by booking their place in the group stages with a 1-1 draw away to Dnipro for a 2-1 aggregate win.

Darren Mackie could not have come up with a better time to produce his first header of the season when grabbing Aberdeen's all important goal in the 27th minute.

The win came after Rangers had stunned French champions Lyon and city rivals Celtic meted out the same treatment to European champions AC Milan.

Aberdeen manager Jimmy Calderwood told BBC Scotland: "It's great for Scottish football. Gordon (Strachan) and Walter (Smith) have done great and now we have two. Maybe we're not as bad as people think!"

Tottenham were held to a 1-1 draw by Anorthosis in Larnaca but that was sufficient after their 6-1 thrashing of the Cypriots in London in the first leg to see them through 7-2 on aggregate.

Robbie Keane saved under fire

coach Martin Jol from an embarrassing defeat when the Irish international came off the bench to cancel out Fabio De Matos Pereira's 54th minute goal.

Jol said: "It would have been better if we could have kept a clean sheet because it was one of our targets - the only thing we could gain at 6-1 up."

"I have to think positively and for me it's great that Tottenham are in Europe again. We had a couple of thousand supporters here and it is always good to see them happy."

Everton produced a battling second-half display to beat Metalist Kharkiv 3-2 on the night and 4-3 on aggregate.

David Moyes's men looked to be struggling at the interval at 1-0 down but goals from Joleon Lescott, James McFadden and substitute Victor Anichebe sealed the win.

In form Nicolas Anelka came off the bench to produce the 68th minute winner to send Bolton through 2-1 on aggregate against Macedonian leaders Rabotnicki Kometal.

Blackburn were up against it trailing Greek side Larissa 2-0 after the first leg in Greece, and Silva Clayton's 17 minute strike left Mark Hughes's team needing four goals at Ewood Park.

Matt Derbyshire scored a retaken penalty in first-half injury-time after David Dunn was felled and Stephen Warnock fired a fine second on the volley from David Bentley's cross six minutes after the break - but it proved insufficient.

by game and deserves his call up."

Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard is in the squad despite missing several matches with a thigh injury and his club colleague John Terry is also included after playing in a protective mask when the Blues beat Valencia on Wednesday.

David Beckham, Owen Hargreaves and Michael Carrick are all sidelined through injury.

McClaren admitted Lampard's return has given him a selection headache in central midfield after Gareth Barry's impressive displays in the wins over Israel and Russia.

"I was disappointed to be without Frank for the last two games because he was man of the match against Germany," McClaren said.

"Garth Barry came in and did a fantastic job and that's given me competition for places."

"People who were outside of the squad in the last two games have to look and see what's needed to get back in."

"I spoke with JT (Terry) straight after the game on Saturday when he was injured and everyone was saying he would be out for a long time."

"He said to me he would be fit and that's why he is captain of England. He's remarkable."

McClaren admitted Lescott deserved a call-up after his superb form this season. The versatile defender is Everton's top scorer with three league goals and was on target again in their UEFA Cup win over Metalist on Thursday.

"Lescott is one of those players who is improving week by week," McClaren said. "He can play at left-back and in the centre of defence and is proving to be a goalscorer as well."

AFP, London



Rafael Benítez has challenged his misfiring Liverpool stars to prove they are genuine title contenders with a display of character against Tottenham on Sunday.

Liverpool's abject performance in a 1-0 Champions League defeat by Marseille in midweek has further raised the stakes for the pick of this weekend's Premier League clashes, one in which Spurs boss Martin Jol's job will once again be on the line.

Benítez's position is not in any way comparable to that of Jol, who may well have been out of a job if his side had not fought back from 4-1 down to draw with Aston Villa on Monday.

But the Spaniard knows that a second home defeat in a week would deal a massive blow to confidence in his ability to turn the huge financial investment Liverpool's owners made over the summer into trophies.

Liverpool's woes in Europe have been exacerbated by the fact Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal, all demonstrated real grit

in securing midweek wins and Benítez now wants his squad to match the commitment of their rivals.

"We must improve, we must show our character now," Benítez warned.

"We know we have to do better. We showed character to get a draw against Porto when we did not play well, and we showed character to win at Wigan last weekend in a hard match."

"Now we must show character against Tottenham. That is our first priority after the Marseille result."

The Champions League reverse has again focused attention on Benítez's penchant for constantly altering his line-ups, but he has been unrepentant on that score and it is almost certain there will be another string of changes to his line-up for Sunday's clash.

Spurs, who will be hoping Monday's fightback was a sign they have turned the corner in what has been a desperately disappointing start to the season, are hoping to have Jermaine Jenas and Aaron Lennon back from injury.

Manchester United can go top of the table, for 24 hours at least, if they beat struggling Wigan at Old Trafford in one of only two matches

scheduled for Saturday, the other being Aston Villa's meeting with West Ham.

United will have an unusual look about them in central midfield as Michael Carrick, Owen Hargreaves and Darren Fletcher are all injured.

Defender John O'Shea is the favourite to be pressed into the holding role as United seek to sharpen their cutting edge after a string of hard-won 1-0 victories.

Arsenal entertain Sunderland on Sunday looking for a tenth consecutive win in all competitions, Chelsea travel to another struggling side, Bolton, and third-placed Manchester City host Middlesbrough.

Given that Bolton are already fighting for their top flight lives, the Reebok Stadium might not be the ideal place for Chelsea to experiment with the more expansive style that new boss Avram Grant has admitted he is trying to introduce.

The Israeli acknowledged after the midweek win in Valencia that serving up more entertaining football was part of the brief he had been handed by Roman Abramovich following Jose Mourinho's departure last

month.

"I want the Chelsea fans to respect what Jose Mourinho did for them and what (Claudio) Ranieri did before. I think it's good," Grant said.

"For me, I understand that I'm new to them but I was chosen to lead the team in another way and I think this is the right thing to do. Finish the way of football Chelsea have been playing and try to do another way of football, which I think will be very good for the club."

Elsewhere, even with barely a quarter of the season gone, Reading's meeting with Derby has the look of a relegation battle about it.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)

Saturday
Aston Villa v West Ham, Man Utd v Wigan Athletic (1145 GMT),
Sunday
Arsenal v Sunderland (1100 GMT), Blackburn v Birmingham, Bolton v Chelsea, Fulham v Portsmouth (1510), Liverpool v Tottenham, Man City v Middlesbrough, Newcastle v Everton, Reading v Derby (1300 GMT)

Injury relief for Loew

AFP, Frankfurt

Germany's head coach Joachim Loew on Friday recalled midfielders Torsten Frings and Tim Borowski for key Euro 2008 qualifiers against the Republic of Ireland and the Czech Republic.

Germany top qualifying group D by two points from the second-placed Czech Republic, but with a game in hand.

Wins in Dublin against the Irish on October 13 and the Czechs in Munich four days later will virtually guarantee Germany a place at next summer's European Championships.

While Loew has welcomed back his midfield general Frings and Borowski after knee injuries, he is still without captain Michael Ballack, still suffering from an ankle injury, and key goal-scorer Miroslav Klose is out with a sore knee.

Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann is in the 22-man squad having shaken off the elbow and achilles tendon injuries which troubled him in the 2-0 Euro 2008 qualifier win over Wales in Cardiff last month.

"I am 100 per cent fit and ready to face the Irish," said 37-year-old Lehmann.

Bayern Munich pair defender Philipp Lahm and striker Jan Schlaudraff are still recovering from injury, while there is no place for Schalke 04 defender Christian Pander or Stuttgart midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Timo Hildebrand (Valencia/ESP), Jens Lehmann (Arsenal/ENG)

Defence: Gonzalo Castro (Bayer Leverkusen), Arne Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Manuel Friedrich (Bayer Leverkusen), Clemens Fritz (Werder Bremen), Marcell Jansen (Bayern Munich), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Christoph Metzelder (Real Madrid/ESP)

Midfield: Tim Borowski, Torsten Frings (both Werder Bremen), Roberto Hilbert (VfB Stuttgart), David Odonkor (Sevilla), Simon Rolfes, Bernd Schneider (both Bayer Leverkusen), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Piotr Trochowski (Hamburg)

Attack: Mario Gomez (VfB Stuttgart), Patrick Helmes (Cologne), Stefan Kießling (Bayer Leverkusen), Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke 04), Lukas Podolski (Bayern Munich)

Spain name squad

AFP, Madrid

Spanish coach Luis Aragones on Friday named the following 20-man squad for their Euro 2008 Group F qualifiers against Denmark on October 13 at Aarhus and Finland four days later in Helsinki.

Spain lead Group F three points ahead of Northern Ireland and Sweden. Denmark are fourth with five points but two games in hand on the Spaniards.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Jose Manuel Reina (Liverpool/ENG)

Defenders: Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), Raul Albiol, Carlos Marchena (Valencia), Pablo, Mariano Pernia (Atletico Madrid), Joan Capdevila (Villarreal), Carles Puyol (Barcelona)

Midfielders: Francesc Fabregas (Arsenal/ENG), Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta (Barcelona), David Silva, David Albelda, Joaquin Sanchez (Valencia), Albert Riera (Espanyol)

Strikers: David Villa, Miguel Angel Angulo (Valencia), Fernando Torres (Liverpool/ENG), Luis Garcia (Espanyol)

Battle of the Argentines

AFP, Madrid



Argentinian wunderkinds Lionel Messi and Kun Aguero, the leading scorers in the Spanish championship, go head-to-head on Sunday when Barcelona host a resurgent Atletico Madrid in the game of the weekend.

Barcelona's 20-year-old prodigy Messi has been the undisputed star of the season so far scoring five goals in the last three games and the media claim he is currently the best player on the planet.

Compatriot Aguero, just 19, is not as well known as Messi but his return of five goals, including a goal of the season contender last weekend, has helped Atletico get back on track after a poor start.

But this Argentine national team is very fortunate to have these two," said Atletico coach Javier Aguirre.

"They are two down-to-earth youngsters with incredible talent and they have great careers ahead of them."

Barcelona's French striker Thierry Henry, who scored a hat-trick last weekend, has also been impressed by Messi and claims the two are starting to gel.

"What Messi is doing at the

moment is incredible," said Henry. "We are on the same wavelength and understand each other's game."

Fourth-placed Barcelona, who defeated VfB Stuttgart 2-0 in the Champions League on Tuesday, have won their last three league matches but so have Atletico, three points behind in fifth, so something has to give at Camp Nou.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard must decide whether to include Ronaldinho, who returned for the Champions League win in Germany, in the starting line-up or stick by the team that has been so impressive in their last three league outings.

After six games the Spanish championship is starting to take shape and the top of the table is tight with the leading four teams separated by just two points.

Predictably Real and Barcelona, the two powerhouses of Spanish football, are the only unbeaten teams in the league.

Real lead the standings and can retain top spot providing they can defeat Recreativo Huelva on Sunday.

An unconvincing 1-0 derby win over Getafe saw Bernd Schuster come in for some criticism with some suggesting his rotation policy was disrupting the team's rhythm.

Schuster has changed the team in all of the six league fixtures this season but Real have collected 16 points out of a possible 18 representing the club's best start since 1991.

"You have to rotate. Schuster knows what he is doing because you can not just rely on eleven players," said Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas.

Villarreal were hammered 5-0 by Real at the beginning of September but now they lie just one point behind the leaders after winning 13 out of their last 14 league matches.

A trip to Osasuna is next for Villarreal who have benefited from the form of Giuseppe Rossi, a summer signing from Manchester United, with the striker bagging four goals in his first six matches.

Valencia are level on points with Villarreal and are looking to bounce back from the midweek 2-1 defeat to Chelsea in the Champions League by making it six league wins in a row.

In stark contrast Sevilla, ten points behind the leaders, are aiming to end a run of three successive defeats when they host Deportivo La Coruna.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Valencia v Espanyol
Sunday
Real Zaragoza v Levante, Barcelona v Atletico Madrid, Osasuna v Villarreal, Athletic Bilbao v Almeria, Racing Santander v Valladolid, Murcia v Real Betis, Mallorca v Getafe, Real Madrid v Recreativo Huelva, Sevilla v Deportivo La Coruna

Desperate times for Milan

AFP, Rome



Carlo Ancelotti's job may be safe having won the Champions League last May but that situation could quickly change if he doesn't soon turn around AC Milan's poor start to the season.

One win from the first six matches and a Champions League defeat at Celtic in midweek is far from the start expected of European champions.

And Milan face a tough test away to equally struggling Lazio on Sunday, knowing a defeat could render their title aspirations almost hopeless.

With seven points from six games, the same as their hosts, Milan already trail champions and bitter city rivals Inter by seven points.

And with Juventus, Fiorentina and Roma all also making strong

starts, Milan have a lot of catching up to do already.

Ancelotti is acutely aware that his team has under-performed this season and that needs to change, in particular improving on their Celtic display.

"We must slowly improve. We played in an organised and fairly focused way for most of this match (against Celtic) and that is what we have to stick with. That is the path to improvement," said the coach.

To make matters worse, Ancelotti is still short of Brazilian forward Ronaldo, who is recovering from a thigh problem.

In defence Ancelotti is also without Paolo Maldini, Kakha Kaladze and Serginho, while Brazilian goalkeeper Nelson Dida is in poor form and made two errors against Celtic to cost his side a 2-1 defeat on Wednesday.

In Fiorentina, Claudio "Tinkerman" Ranieri returns to his former club with new team Juventus, who sit second in the

table, one point and one place above their hosts.

Juve fans have been barred from the Artemio Franchi stadium following violence at the Turin derby last weekend, where a last minute David Trezeguet goal gave Juve a priceless 1-0 victory over Torino.

Recent clashes between the two teams have largely gone Juve's way, with the Viola's last success coming in 1998. However, those last matches were all before Juventus had the heart of its team ripped out following their demotion to the second division for match-fixing.

Plus Fiorentina, alongside Inter, are one of only two remaining unbeaten teams this season and in former Juve forward Adrian Mutu they have one of the form players this season.

Inter, meanwhile, host high-flying Napoli on Saturday with confidence sky-high in the camp following last weekend's fine 4-1 victory at previous table-toppers Roma.



Dinamo Zagreb winger Josip Tadic (top) jumps over the tackle of Ajax defender Jaap Stam during their UEFA Cup first round second leg clash in Amsterdam on Thursday.