



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.

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 Xavi 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 Sebastien 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 Gabriele Milioti 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 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



Second half goals from Luca Toni and Hamit Altintop lifted U E F A C u p f a v o u r i t e s Bayern Munich through to the group stages with a 2-0 win over P o r t u g u e s e s i d e Belenenses on Thursday.

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

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 eightyyellow 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 the 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.

"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 Dinipro 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 too. Maybe we're not as bad as people think!"

Tottenham were held to a 1-1 re-taken 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.

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 0-1 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 Kosevo.

Backburn were up against it trailing Greek side Larissa 2-0 after the first leg in Greece, and Silva Cleiton'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.

With Owen's status uncertain and Emile Heskey out with a foot injury, McClaren was relieved to be able to welcome back Ashton.

The West Ham striker suffered an ankle injury while training with England in August 2006 and is only just beginning to find his form again.

McClaren, who also has Wayne Rooney back from injury, said: "It's great to have Dean back. I was really sick for him when he got that injury, especially because it was with England."

"He has worked so hard, come through so much and got his rewards. He is improving game

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.

"Gareth 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."

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Paul Robinson (Tottenham), David James (Portsmouth), Scott Carson (Liverpool, on-loan at Aston Villa)

Defenders: Wes Brown (Manchester United), Sol Campbell (Portsmouth), Ashley Cole (Chelsea), Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United), John Terry (Chelsea), Joleon Lescott (Everton), Phil Neville (Everton), Michael Richards (Manchester City), Nicky Shorey (Reading)

Midfielders: Shaun Wright-Phillips (Chelsea), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Gareth Barry (Aston Villa), Joe Cole (Chelsea), Stewart Downing (Middlesbrough), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Ashley Young (Aston Villa), David Bentley (Blackburn)

Strikers: Michael Owen (Newcastle), Wayne Rooney (Manchester United), Alan Smith (Newcastle), Dean Ashton (West Ham), Jermain Defoe (Tottenham), Andrew Johnson (Everton), Peter Crouch (Liverpool)

SQUAD

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

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

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

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

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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), Cafes Puyol (Barcelona)

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

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

L'pool look to bounce back

AFP, London

Rafael Benitez 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.

Benitez'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 Benitez now wants his squad to match the commitment of their title rivals.

"We must improve, we must show our character now," Benitez 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 Benitez'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 he did 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