

Aguero not for sale

AFP, Liverpool

Atletico Madrid coach Javier Aguirre has warned Manchester City that all the money in the world will not buy them Sergio Aguero.

The 20-year-old Argentinian striker has emerged as a top target for Mark Hughes as the City boss prepares to spend big in the January transfer window.

Aguero has been a revelation in La Liga, netting 31 times in 84 appearances since joining Atletico Madrid in 2006 and has represented Argentina at senior level 14 times.

But Aguirre, who will field Aguero against City's Premier League rivals Liverpool in Tuesday's Champions League group game at Anfield, insisted the player was staying put.

Asked on Monday whether he had a message for City regarding Aguero, the former Mexico coach said "Yes, I can give you a message."

"I know he is very happy at Atletico and he is still a very young player. For those reasons he will be staying with us for many years irrespective of how much money is on offer."

Aguero is expected to start for Atletico against Liverpool after scoring twice in a 2-0 win over Mallorca at the weekend which lifted his side to sixth spot in the table.

Meanwhile Luis Garcia believes Liverpool are stronger than the side which won the Champions League in 2005.

Garcia played a pivotal role in helping Rafa Benitez's side win the European Cup for a fifth time after scoring decisive goals against Juventus and Chelsea on the road to Istanbul.

He moved to Atletico in 2007 after scoring 18 goals in 77 appearances during three years at Anfield and is guaranteed a warm reception when he steps out in front of The Kop.

"Liverpool have a lot of different players from when I was here," Garcia said. "The squad is a bit bigger and the team is very consistent. That is something that Liverpool perhaps lacked a little bit when I was here."

He added: "Fernando Torres has been a very good signing for them. When I was here, Liverpool didn't have a player who could score 20 goals in a season. That is what Torres gives the team."

Barcelona admonish Messi

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola on Monday reprimanded Argentine striker Lionel Messi, who appeared in television images to have spat at Portuguese midfielder Duda during his side's 4-1 win at Malaga over the weekend.

"It is not right that these sorts of things happen," he told a news conference ahead of Barcelona's Champions League Group C match at home against Swiss side Basel on Tuesday.

Messi, a candidate for the Ballon d'Or awarded by French magazine France Football in December, seems to have spat in the direction of Duda after the two exchanged words during Saturday's rain-soaked Spanish league match.

The 21-year-old scored one of Barcelona's four goals, helping Barcelona achieve their seventh successive win and reach the top of the Spanish league standings. Duda, 28, scored his side's only goal.

The match was also marred by the monkey chants which Barcelona's Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o was subjected to by the home fans at La Rosaleda stadium.

Ronaldinho left out

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

AC Milan's Ronaldinho was once again left out of the Brazil squad as coach Dunga on Monday named his 22-man squad for a friendly with Portugal on November 19.

Despite some excellent performances in Serie A from Ronaldinho the coach opted for a strikeforce which includes Manchester City sensation Robinho, saying: "Ronaldinho needs more training and more rhythm."

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Julio Cesar (Inter Milan/ITA), Doni (AS Roma/ITA)

Defenders: Maicon (Inter Milan/ITA), Daniel Alves (FC Barcelona/ESP), Lucio (Bayern Munich/GER), Miranda (Sao Paulo), Thiago Silva (Fluminense), Luizao (Benfica/POR), Kleber (Santos), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP)

Midfielders: Gilberto Silva (Panathinaikos/GRE), Josue (VfL Wolfsburg/GER), Anderson (Manchester United/ENG), Elano (Manchester City/ENG), Kaka (AC Milan/ITA), Mancini (Inter Milan/ITA), Diego (Werder Bremen/GER), Alex (Internacional)

Attackers: Luis Fabiano (Sevilla/ESP), Alexandre Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Adriano (Inter Milan/ITA), Robinho (Manchester City/ENG)

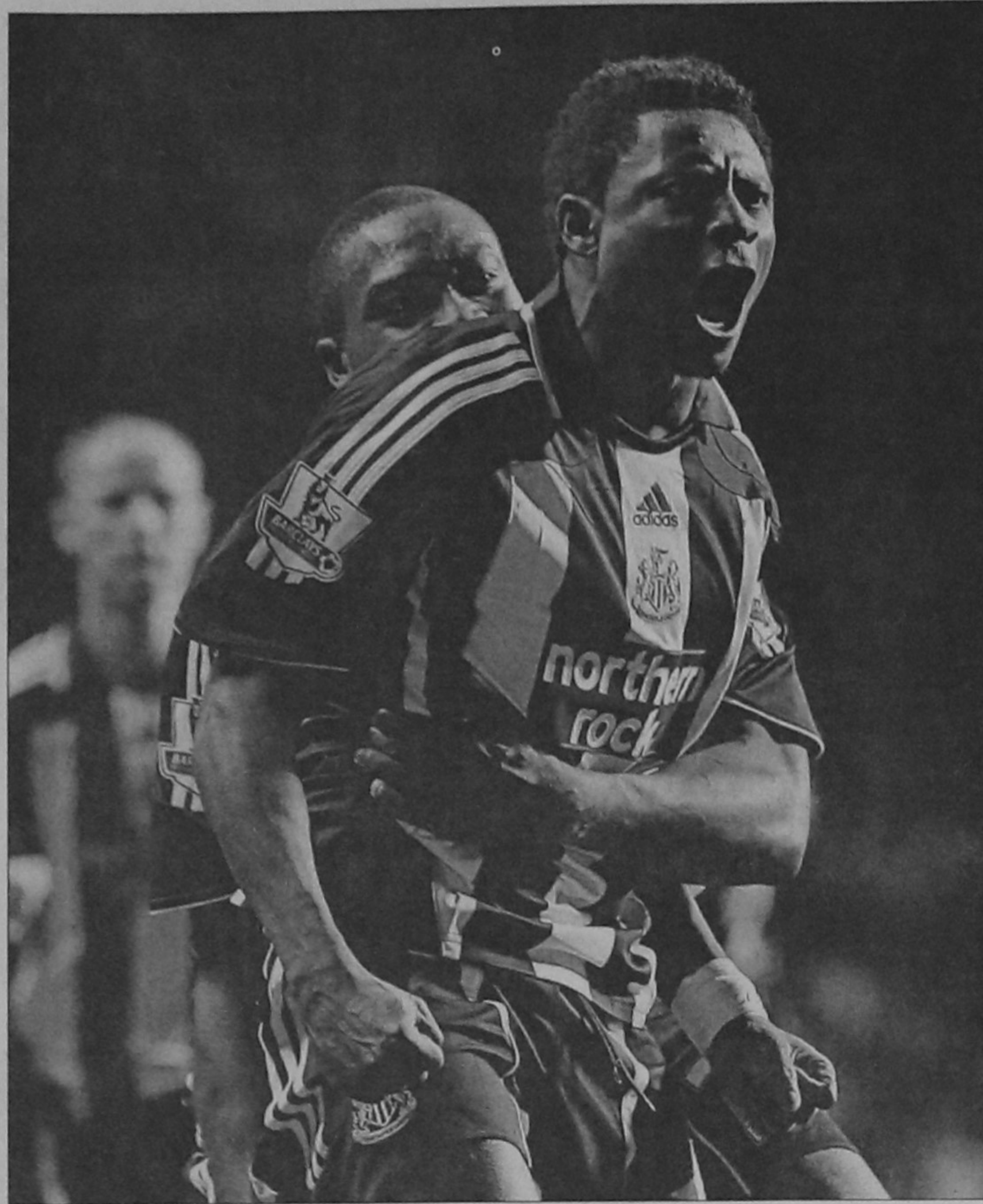


PHOTO: AFP
Newcastle United striker Obafemi Martins (R) exults after scoring the opening goal against Aston Villa during their Premiership encounter at St. James' Park on Monday.

Martins lifts Magpies

AFP, Newcastle

Obafemi Martins scored both goals as Newcastle United climbed off the bottom of the Premier League table with a 2-0 win against Aston Villa at St James' Park here on Monday.

Their second successive victory saw the Magpies rise out of the bottom three and into 14th place to go above local rivals Sunderland on goal difference.

Nigeria international Martins paid tribute to interim manager Joe Kinnear, brought in on a temporary contract while unpopular owner Mike Ashley looks to sell the club after becoming something of a hate figure with supporters following the departure of fans' favourite Kevin Keegan.

"The gaffer is doing his best, for us just to try and push the pace in training," Martins told Setanta Sports. "It helped us a lot today. We are happy he is here and I hope he stays."

Martins was in no doubt about the significance of Newcastle's first back-to-back successes since April. "We really needed this match, to put in 100 per cent to win. I hope we continue like this."

"It is very important for strikers to be scoring goals and I'm very happy to score two goals. I have to thank my teammates because we really tried."

But even after this win, and a 2-1 victory over West Brom last time out, Newcastle were left just a point

above the relegation zone.

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TOP SIX

English Premier League table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Chelsea	11	8	2	1	27	4	26
Liverpool	11	8	2	1	16	8	26
Man Utd	10	6	3	1	19	8	21
Arsenal	11	6	2	3	23	12	20
Aston Villa	11	6	2	3	19	14	20
Hull	11	6	2	3	17	18	20

What's eating Podolski?

INTERNET, Hamburg



Podolski, 23, is a successful German striker with 31 goals in 59 caps but is yet to show similar form in Munich where he is normally third choice on the bench behind starters Toni and Miroslav Klose.

But the issue reached a new dimension last Saturday when not even Toni's ongoing injury problems gave Podolski a place in the first 11 because coach Juergen Klinsmann changed the team tactics for the Bundesliga match against Arminia Bielefeld.

Instead of the usual 4-4-2 scheme, Klinsmann - looking ahead at Fiorentina and also intending to prompt a reaction from Podolski - tried out a 4-3-2-1 format with Klose the lone striker.

The tactics didn't work against defensive-minded Bielefeld and Munich reverted to 4-4-2 after the break. Podolski came on, fed Franck Ribery for the second goal and then clinched Munich's 3-1 win with a penalty.

However, Fiorentina are not Bielefeld and as the Italians are in a must-win situation Klinsmann is expected to have a 4-3-2-1 formation on the pitch again in Florence.

Podolski has never really felt at home in Munich since being hired from Cologne for 10 million euros (12.8 million dollars) in 2006 on a contract until 2010.



LUKAS PODOLSKI

He is homesick for Cologne (where he even played second division football in 2005-06), wanted to leave in summer but Bayern rejected a move. Now speculation is growing again about a winter break move.

"Podolski and Bayern. That was it," said Kicker sports magazine on Monday.

Munich general manager Uli

Hoeness said sarcastically: "For him there is only Cologne, Cologne and Cologne. He dreams of Cologne day and night."

Hoeness has been Podolski's most outspoken critic and even suggested that Podolski shines only for Germany against minnows such as Liechtenstein.

An angry Podolski countered that he will ask coach Joachim Loew to field him only against top teams in the future, and that he will carefully monitor the situation in Munich.

"You can understand that I will be considering by the winter break how things are going to continue," he said.

"We'll have to wait and see what happens in the next weeks and months. We have some important games coming up and that is more important than beginning any speculation."

Ribery hopes that the recent success against Bielefeld have boosted Podolski's morale and that he can become an important player for Munich after all.

"Lukas must play and score goals. That gives him confidence," said the Frenchman.

"I have the impression that he is getting better. I hope he is still around after the winter break because he is an important player for the club and the team. I like him a lot."

Loew, who guided Germany to the Euro 2008 final and now to the top of their World Cup qualifying group, did pay a handsome tribute to Lehmann, whose last appearance for Germany was in the 1-0 defeat by Spain in the Euro final.

"Jens brought a lot to German football and was for me an important go between during our four years together at international level," said Loew.

Euro breather for Gunners

AFP, Paris



Arsenal host Fenerbahce in the Champions League on Wednesday knowing a win is vital to boost team spirits, while north of the border Celtic will attempt to halt the Manchester United juggernaut.

Arsene Wenger's players top Champions League Group G but have dropped five points in the last two Premier League matches, including a 4-4 draw at home against Tottenham and a shock away defeat at Stoke City on Saturday.

And, with a crunch game against third-placed Manchester United next weekend, a good result against the Turks is vital for the players' confidence.

"We have a Champions League game on Wednesday and then Manchester United on Saturday lunchtime," said Wenger. "There are no better games in which to come back, give confidence and show our quality."

The French coach is concerned about Arsenal's loss of the killer touch they exhibited earlier in the season, which saw them rattle home 10 goals in Europe, five of which were against Fenerbahce.

"My biggest worry is that we did

not create a lot," Wenger said of the 2-1 defeat at Stoke. "We are not used to playing without creating chances and that is very frustrating."

Wenger told the club's website that he might have to reshuffle his squad for Wednesday's match.

"We have to rotate. Unlike Stoke we play in between (Premier League matches) and the games in the Champions League are very demanding. You cannot play with the same side."

European champions Manchester United prepared for Wednesday's north-south battle against Celtic with a tricky 4-3 home win over Premier League surprise package Hull City on Saturday.

Unlike the London club, United avoided a morale-sapping defeat, but Hull bagged three goals at Old Trafford - the first team to do so since Chelsea in May 2005.

And it is a feat defender Nemanja Vidic does not want repeated at Celtic Park.

"The most important thing is that we took the three points, but we made a few mistakes and lost a few goals," Vidic said.

"We can learn from the game. We made small mistakes that cost us three goals, so I hope we can improve on that so it doesn't happen again."

The Serbian added: "We need to forget this game but not how we conceded the goals. That way we

can make sure it doesn't happen again. We have a few days to work on that (before Celtic) and to improve."

Celtic boss Gordon Strachan was upbeat ahead of United's visit, thanks to a 2-0 win away to Hearts on Sunday, but the ex-Manchester player gave due respect to the Premier League champions.

"Man United are probably the best team in the world," Strachan said Monday. "Everyone who goes there, who has spent more money than us, has got a right tonking there," said the coach.

Celtic took a 3-0 'tonking' at Old Trafford last month, a victory that put United in the driving seat in Group E, but the Scottish champi-

FIXTURES	
Champions League fixtures on Wednesday:	
Group E: Aalborg (DEN) v Villarreal (ESP)	
Celtic (SCO) v Manchester United (ENG)	
Group F: Fiorentina (ITA) v Bayern Munich (GER)	
Lyon (FRA) v Steaua Bucharest (ROM)	
Group G: Arsenal (ENG) v Fenerbahce (TUR)	
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v FC Porto (POR)	
Group H: BATE Borisov (BLR) v Zenit Saint-Petersburg (RUS)	
Real Madrid (ESP) v Juventus (ITA)	

Dunga v Diego!

INTERNET, undated

Brazil coach Carlos Dunga on Monday played down his rivalry with Diego Maradona, after the new Argentina coach had criticized Dunga last week. "I hope things go well for him," Dunga said.

After his controversial appointment last week as coach, Maradona recalled his playing days, when he had led Argentina on the pitch to the 1986 World Cup and Dunga had captained Brazil to the 1994 World Cup.

"I do not play like Dunga, absolutely not," Maradona said. "Dunga kicked (opponents), I didn't. I dribbled them."

Pressed Monday during a press conference, Dunga took a veiled shot at Maradona, whose playing days and retirement have been marked by high-profile partying, drug problems and struggles with his weight.

"As a national team player, I won as much as him, although I had less talent. I knew my limitations, and that is why I worked very hard," Dunga said.

"I always looked after my body, because that is what I built my career with. I also looked after my behaviour, which transmits confidence to those who work with me. God gives each person a talent."

Bologna appoint Mihajlovic

AFP, Rome

Serbian Sinisa Mihajlovic was on Monday named the new boss of Serie A strugglers Bologna after they fired Daniele Arrigoni.

Bologna sit 19th in the 20-team division after 10 matches, having lost eight times, including Sunday's 5-1 humiliation at Cagliari.

Lehmann won't get friendly farewell

AFP, Berlin

Former German international goalkeeper Jens Lehmann will not have his wish granted of making a nostalgic final appearance in the friendly with England here on November 19. German coach Joachim Low announced on Monday.

The 38-year-old Stuttgart guardian had said he wished to have one final appearance at the ground where he produced one of his finer performances in his 61 caps when he saved two Argentinian penalties in the 2006 World Cup quarterfinal penalty shootout.

However, while Loew said he could see why Lehmann had wanted one final appearance and against a country where he played for five years with Arsenal there were bigger issues at stake.

"We have to use our friendly matches as a way of giving our young goalkeepers more experience at international level," explained Loew.

"It would of course have been great for Jens to once more don the national team shirt."

"Especially against England, where he played for five years with Arsenal. However, the wider briefs the forthcoming sporting challenges and they must have priority."

Loew, who guided Germany to the Euro 2008 final and now to the top of their World Cup qualifying group, did pay a handsome tribute to Lehmann, whose last appearance for Germany was in the 1-0 defeat by Spain in the Euro final.

"Jens brought a lot to German football and was for me an important go between during our four years together at international level," said Loew.

Real try to end jinx

INTERNET, Madrid



Wednesday will be a very important night for Real Madrid. That is when the Spanish giants will be trying to turn the tables

on their Euro jinx team of recent years, Juventus of Turin, in the week's most high-profile Champions League game.

At the same time, Real will be trying to go back on top of Group H. "The Old Lady", as Juventus are known in Italy, are currently top of the group, with seven points to Real's six - thanks to their 2-1 home

win over the Spaniards two weeks ago.

This was the fourth time that the nine-time winners Real had lost in Turin within 12 years.

Juventus, who have lifted the Champions' trophy twice, beat Real in the 1996 quarterfinals, with Alessandro Del Piero playing a starring role.

Real did beat Juventus in the 1998 final, with a controversial goal from Pedja Mijatovic, but since then nothing has gone right for the whites against the "Old Lady".

In May 2003, Juventus scored a memorable 3-1 win over Real to reach the final against compatriots AC Milan, with goals from Del Piero, David Trezeguet and Pavel Nedved.



PHOTO: AFP
Real Madrid defender Marcelo (L) and midfielder Guti have fun during a training session on the eve of their Champions League match against Juventus in Madrid on Tuesday.

Long road to the top

INTERNET, Milan



AC Milan have reacted with a mix of surprise and pride to their rise to the top of the Italian Serie A, a place they last occupied more than four years ago.

Their start to the season was a nightmare with two defeats, at home to promoted Bologna and at Genoa, but the following seven wins and one draw have now pushed them to the top on a 22-point tally from 10 games.

A lucky 1-0 win over Napoli, who were down to 10 men and hurt themselves with an own goal, allowed the Diavoli to leap ahead of Udinese, Napoli, and, probably most important, champions Inter Milan.

Massimo Moratti, the president of the title-holding cross-town rivals, did not miss the chance to underscore the scudetti Inter won in the past three seasons.

Beside praising Milan, who in late September beat Inter 1-0 in the city derby, Moratti said he "didn't know it was so long since they were last placed first in the home league. It was years that they didn't feel the thrill of the first place."

Milan vice president Adriano Galliani promptly replied in a radio interview that "as regards the thrills

felt and not felt, in Italy and abroad, there's nothing to debate."

It was a clear reference to Milan's triumphs in the international arena, which made them one of the most successful clubs worldwide.

After their last Scudetto in 2004, a year after winning the Champions League, the red-blacks finished second, third, fourth and fifth, respectively, in the Serie A - 26 and 21 points behind Inter in the past two seasons.

Their international successes, however, remained intact, with a seventh Champions League and the Club World Cup won in 2007, plus two European Supercups.

As for Inter, they won their last international trophy, the UEFA Cup, in 1998, and need to go back to the 1960s for their two Champions Cups, the predecessor of the Champions League.

Looking at the remainder of a season that sees Milan also engaged in the UEFA Cup, a trophy they strangely never won, Galliani said that "the idea is to remain at the top."

"We are geared for this. But I'm no clairvoyant and I cannot tell if it will happen."

After the first two rounds of games everything was a disaster and (new arrival) Ronaldinho was but a football sticker. Now he made us win the derby and the game against Napoli."

Ronaldinho is Milan's best

scorer on four goals and said he feels that the team "have the mentality to remain at the top in the league."

Galliani added that "our problem is the absence of (Alessandro) Nesta, who is injured. To me he is the greatest central defender in the world."

Nesta, 32, has suffered from backache since the summer and this week was on his way to surgery in Florida, with a possible return on the pitch set for January.

Milan's defence package, however, is already the best in the league, with seven goals conceded, as many as Inter and Juventus.

The Devils' also miss star playmaker Andrea Pirlo and look for improvement from Andriy Shevchenko who returned after two dismal seasons at Chelsea.

There is also David Beckham, who will play for Milan for a few weeks early next year. The English star's arrival is at least fantastic for Milan's marketing and merchandising.

Milan are likely to stay at or near the top in the next weeks as the Serie A calendar pits them against mid-level sides as Lecce, Chievo, Torino, Palermo and Catania.

But things will get tougher before the half-season point, with clashes against Juventus, Udinese, Roma and Fiorentina - a gruelling schedule to be repeated when the season ends in May.