

MU, Real through

AFP, Paris



England and Spain had a good night in the Champions League on Tuesday as each country saw two sides progress to the knockout stages.

Titleholders Manchester United went through on the back of a 0-0 draw with Villarreal, who also qualified as Celtic's dreadful away record continued with defeat against Danish side Aalborg.

Arsenal put their recent woes on and off the pitch behind them by going through after a 1-0 win at home to Ukrainian league leaders Dynamo Kiev, Nicklas Bendtner scoring the only goal. 2004 Champions League winners FC Porto also progress courtesy of a 2-1 win against Fenerbahce in Istanbul.

Spanish giants Real Madrid ensured they reached the knockout stages by edging a 1-0 win against Belarus side BATE Borisov - Raul's goal putting him equal with Filippo Inzaghi as the competition's all-time top scorer with 64 goals.

Also through are seven-time French champions Lyon - who beat Fiorentina 2-1 - and Bayern Munich, after they eased past Steaua Bucharest 3-0.

United and Villarreal fought out a pretty sterile draw - the fourth time both sides have ended up 0-0 in the Champions League - but Sir Alex Ferguson was happy with the result even though his team had a one man advantage for the last eight minutes after Joan Capdevilla was sent-off.

"I thought we deserved better out of this match," said the Scot, who has guided the team to two Champions League trophies in his time in charge.

"I was satisfied with the second-half perfor-

mance and I felt that Villarreal were just happy to get the draw."

Ferguson's bitter rival Arsene Wenger looked a relieved man after his Arsenal team had ensured their place in the knockout stages after last week's shenanigans had seen William Gallas stripped of the captaincy for criticising his teammates and then a desperate 3-0 defeat to Manchester City.

Wenger praised both the new skipper Cesc Fabregas and Gallas, who even had the ball in the net at one point but it was ruled out for offside - Nicklas Bendtner ensured they took all three points with a late goal.

"Cesc was very good for me. He was focused for 90 minutes and worked hard defensively and offensively," Wenger said. "It wasn't easy in midfield. Overall he had a very good game."

"William's focus was great. He wanted to do well and you could see he was completely committed. I was very happy that the fans responded in a positive way to him."

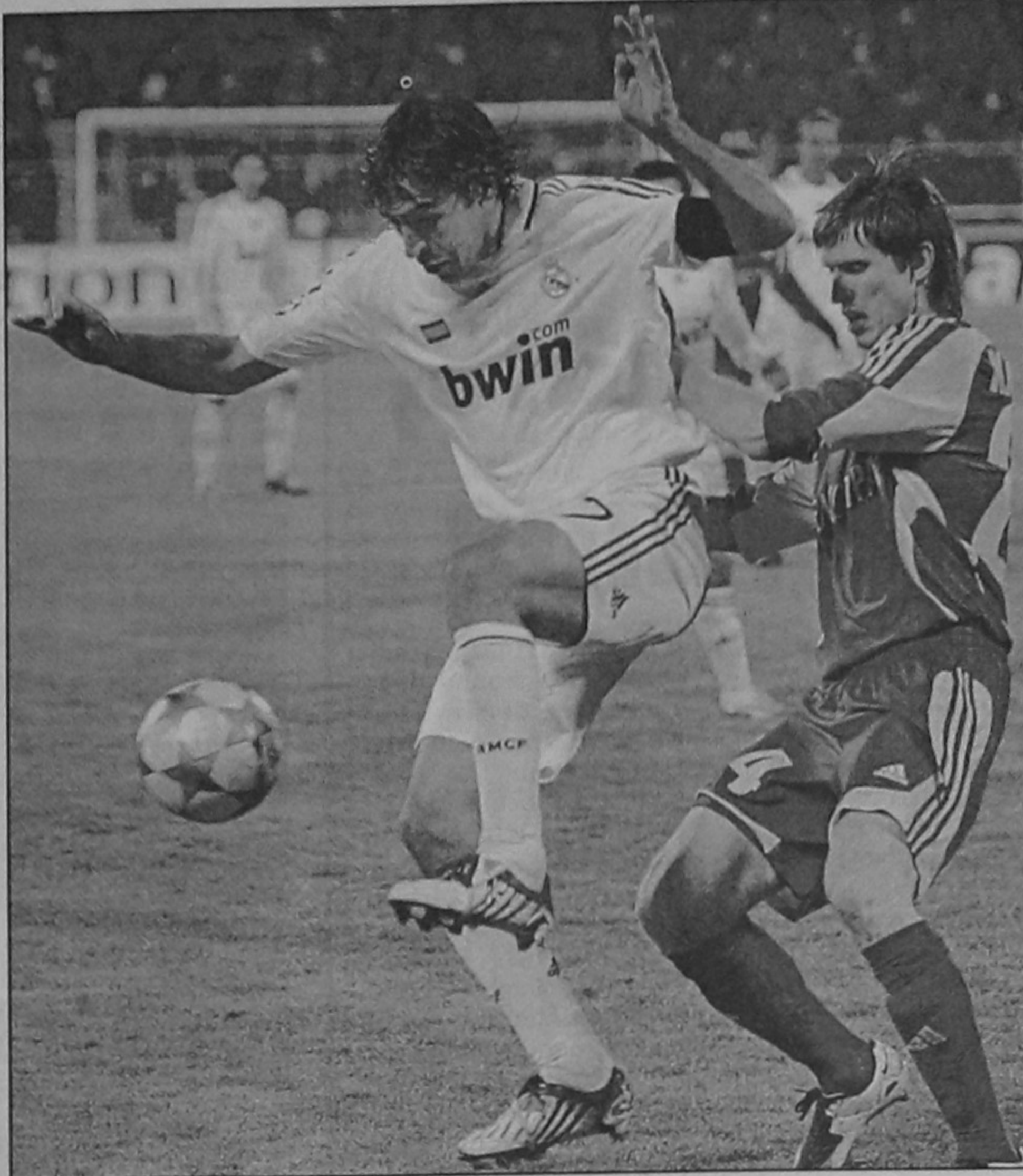
Wenger may have been having a hard time of it late but nothing compared to hardman German Bernd Schuster at Real Madrid, so he too was happy to be sure of seeing the meringues in the next phase.

"It was really important to gain a place in the knockout phase today," the German said.

"It could be difficult for us to play two important matches against Barcelona (in the Spanish league) and Zenit so closely in December."

"And of course Juventus helped us a lot with their draw with Zenit."

Bayern Munich coach Jurgen Klinsmann also has his problems as German international striker Lukas Podolski wants a move as he believes he is not getting the chances he deserves, but his international teammate Miroslav Klose was on form scoring twice and creating another.



Real Madrid striker Raul Gonzales (L) fights for the ball with Bate Borisov's Anri Kragush during their Champions League encounter at Minsk on Tuesday. Raul scored the all-important goal to become all-time top scorer in Champions League with 62 goals.

PHOTO: AFP

Raul equals Inzaghi



AFP, Paris

Real Madrid captain Raul on Tuesday joined AC Milan's Filippo Inzaghi as a leading scorer of goals in European club competition.

Raul opened the scoring for Real in the seventh minute against Belarus side BATE Borisov in the penultimate group game of the Champions League to claim his 64th goal in European competition and 62nd in the Europe's premier club competition.

All-time top scorers in European competition:

1. Filippo INZAGHI (ITA/AC Milan)	64 goals
= Raul (ESP/Real Madrid)	64
3. Gerd Muller (GER)	62
4. Andrei Shevchenko (UKR/AC Milan)	61
5. Ruud van Nistelrooy (NED/Real Madrid)	60
6. Eusebio (POR)	56
= Henrik Larsson (SWE/Helsingborgs)	56
8. Thierry Henry (FRA/Barcelona)	54
9. Alfredo Di Stefano (ARG-ESP)	50

All-time top scorers in Champions League/ European Cup (since 1956, including preliminary rounds):

1. Raul (ESP/Real Madrid)	62 goals
2. Ruud van Nistelrooy (NED/Real Madrid)	60
3. Andrei Shevchenko (UKR/AC Milan)	56
4. Alfredo Di Stefano (ARG-ESP)	49
5. Eusebio (POR)	47
6. Thierry Henry (FRA/Barcelona)	46
= Filippo Inzaghi (ITA/AC Milan)	46

Hammam lashes back

AFP, Shanghai

Asian Football Confederation President Mohammed bin Hammam Wednesday slammed former top official Peter Velappan, accusing the influential Malaysian of conspiring against him.

The two have fallen out over Bin Hammam's proposal to move AFC House out of Malaysia, which has hosted the governing body since 1965.

In a letter to the AFC Executive Committee meeting here on Wednesday, Velappan, who served as AFC secretary-general for 30 years, claimed the governing body was becoming increasingly "authoritarian".

He urged member nations to block an "insulting" plan to shift its headquarters and ridiculed demands laid out by bin Hammam, saying that his request for diplomatic status for AFC staff was "ridiculous".

He added that the proposal to relocate was "a travesty to everyone who has given so much to put Asian football on the map".

In response, bin Hammam showed AFP a letter Velappan wrote to the Malaysian authorities in 2003, when he was secretary-general, demanding concessions that virtually mirror the ones he is now ridiculing.

Velappan had a habit of firing from the hip during his 30-year reign, to the delight of journalists but not always the powers that be.

But in 2006 bin Hammam, a Qatari who says he lives by the maxim that actions speak louder than words, silenced him by deciding he would be the only person authorised to talk officially on Asian football matters.

Velappan subsequently retired.

Podolski going nowhere

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's German international striker Lukas Podolski may have demanded a winter transfer, but head coach Jurgen Klinsmann insisted on Tuesday the striker is going nowhere.

On Monday, Podolski told German tabloid Bild he has informed Bayern's bosses he wants a transfer during January's winter break, but Klinsmann has put the brakes on such transfer talk.

Before Bayern played Tuesday night's Champions League clash in Munich against Steaua Bucharest - where Podolski was again left on the bench - Klinsmann said he wants the 23-year-old to stay.

"What he has said changes nothing at all," Klinsmann told German television channel DSF.

"We want to have four strikers in our squad next year - one of which is Lukas Podolski."

Milan visit Fratton Park

AFP, Paris



Park in the pick of Thursday's UEFA Cup action.

While Portsmouth entertain at home their Premier League rivals Manchester City and Tottenham are on the road at Schalke 04 and NEC Nijmegen respectively.

Portsmouth's first Group E game, and last under manager Harry Redknapp before his move to Spurs, resulted in a 3-0 loss at Sporting Braga.

For last season's FA Cup winners' second run-out in Europe it's now down to Redknapp's successor, Tony Adams, to plot the Italian superstars' downfall.

That promises to be no easy task given striker Jermain Defoe is nursing a calf injury to leave the attack spearheaded by Peter Crouch who has unfinished business with Milan.

The lanky attacker was part

of the Liverpool side beaten by Milan in the 2007 Champions League final.

Man City will be praying their record Brazilian signing Robinho is fit for Schalke after coming off with an ankle injury in the second-half in the 3-0 win over Arsenal on Saturday.

Schalke lead Group A on four points with City a point behind in second with a game in hand after their 3-2 home success over Steve McClaren's FC Twente.

Redknapp, takes his rejuvenated new charges Tottenham to Holland for their Group D date with Nijmegen.

Juande Ramos' replacement has conjured up a remarkable change in the fortunes of Spurs as evidenced by their 4-0 thrashing of Dynamo Zagreb last time out.

The Premier League side are placed second in the standings behind Udinese, who have the night off.

One of the players who has benefited from Redknapp's arrival is Croatia midfielder Luka Modric but he looks set to miss the match with an injury that kept him out of Sunday's 1-0 win over Blackburn.

Spurs' last trip to the Netherlands proved an unhappy occasion with PSV

Eindhoven, then featuring Tottenham's goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes, knocking them out of last season's round of 16 on penalties.

In the other Group D tie Dynamo Zagreb take on Spartak Moscow under new management, with assistant Marijan Vlak stepping in to replace Branko Ivankovic who resigned as coach on Monday.

Another team going into battle with a new manager are VfB Stuttgart who sacked Armin Veh at the weekend and appointed former Germany international Markus Babel as his successor.

Former Liverpool and Bayern Munich defender Babel takes charge for the first time in Stuttgart's Group C game at Sampdoria.

In Group G Saint Etienne will be grateful for some respite from the battering their receiving in the French league against Club Brugge.

Alain Perrin's bottom-of-the-table side are looking good for the next round after heading the standings with maximum points from their first two games.

The other French club on show Thursday are Paris Saint Germain who host Spaniards' Racing Santander on the back of Saturday's 1-0 upset of domestic champions Lyon.

C LEAGUE RESULTS

AFP, Paris

Results from the penultimate round of group games in the European Champions League on Tuesday:

Group E

At Villarreal, Spain Villarreal (ESP) 0

Manchester United (ENG) 0

At Aalborg, Denmark Aalborg (DEN) 2

(Caca 73, Caldwell 87-og) Celtic (SCO) 1

(Robson 53)

Group F

At Munich, Germany Bayern Munich (GER) 3

(Klose 57, 71, Toni 61)

Steaua Bucharest (ROM) 0

At Florence, Italy Fiorentina (ITA) 1

(Gilardino) Lyon (FRA) 2

(Makou 15, Benzema 27)

Group G

At Istanbul, Turkey Fenerbahce (TUR) 1

(Kazim Kazim 63) FC Porto (POR) 2

(Lisandro 19, 28)

At London, England Arsenal (ENG) 1

(Bendtner 87) Dynamo Kiev (UKR) 0

Group H

At Saint Petersburg, Russia Zenit St Petersburg (RUS) 0

Juventus (ITA) 0

At Minsk, Belarus BATE Borisov (BLR) 0

Real Madrid (ESP) 1 (Raul 7)

Lyon KO Fiorentina

AFP, Florence



French champions Lyon knocked Fiorentina out of the Champions League with a 2-1 victory here on Tuesday as they ensured their own place in the knock-out stages.

Jean Il Makou and Karim Benzema gave the visitors a two-goal lead before Alberto Gilardino pulled one back for the hosts while the woodwork was hit five times throughout the match.

Lyon now need a result against Bayern Munich in two weeks time to top the group while Fiorentina need to avoid defeat at Steaua Bucharest in their final Group F match to ensure the consolation of a place in the UEFA Cup.

La Viola's French goalkeeper Sebastian Frey admitted his team lacked a bit of experience.

"For 20 minutes we were afraid to play further up the pitch and that cost us but after that we played a great match," he said.

"This is a great competition but this year it was just too great for us, now we have to try to finish third and get into the UEFA Cup."

Fiorentina probed willingly in the early stages and Zdravko Kuzmanovic forced visiting goalkeeper Hugo Lloris into a sprawling save down by his post.

But while Fiorentina were more perspiration than inspiration, Lyon had the cutting edge that their hosts lacked and took the lead on 14 minutes.

Abdul Kader Keita's initial shot from distance was blocked but he ran onto the rebound and scuffed another shot well wide of the far post.

Benzema prevented the ball from running off for a goal-kick and pulled it back for Makou for a simple finish.

Lyon remained dangerous

on the break and Benzema was just a little too precise with his finish from Keita's pull-back, side-footing just wide on 19 minutes.

Sidney Govou then hit the post with a shot from the edge of the area as Lyon threatened to run riot.

Benzema got his name on the scoresheet on 27 minutes as Juninho robbed Riccardo Montolivo in midfield before feeding the France striker who strode forward and shot home low to Sebastian Frey's right.

Fiorentina didn't let their heads drop and deservedly pulled a goal back in the last minute of the first period.

Just before that Gilardino had seen his shot deflected wide off Brazilian defender Cris and from the resulting corner Adrian Mutu had headed against the corner of crossbar and post.

But Gilardino then peeled off to the back post to outjump John Mensah and head Mario Santana's cross into the top corner from eight yards.

Argentina will host 2011 Copa America

AFP, Asuncion

Argentina were chosen as hosts of the 2011 Copa America on Tuesday, a spokesman for the South American Football Confederation told AFP.

However Julio Grondona, president of the Argentinian Football Federation (AFA), said there were other priorities ahead of the hosting of South America's most prestigious football tournament.

"Our priority is to qualify for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa," said Grondona, who recently appointed Argentinian legend Diego Maradona as coach of the national side after a faltering start to their qualifying campaign.

"After that we can work on the 2011 Copa America." Grondona also revealed that Argentina would be inviting Japan to the Copa - the Japanese were guest in the 1999 edition.

"We will discuss this invite for Japan - I'll see what the other South American countries think. If it comes off we will have 12 teams, including Mexico," Grondona told Del Platario.

But for now qualifying for the next World Cup is the priority.

Argentina are third in the 10-team qualifying group and are on course to qualify yet they only have one victory from their last seven matches - when they beat Uruguay 2-1 on October 11.

Several days after the Uruguay victory, Argentina lost to Chile for the first time in 35 years and that prompted then coach Alfio Basile to be removed from his post.



Lyon star Karim Benzema (C) battles his way through Fiorentina players during their Champions League match at the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Loew warns Ballack



AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew on Wednesday warned captain Michael Ballack to choose his words carefully or face the consequences, while Franz Beckenbauer is speechless over the Chelsea star's latest comments.

On Tuesday, Ballack said he feels he was right to criticise Loew in an interview here last month which led to their public spat and says it is sometimes good to make things public.

His comments are the latest in a long saga which erupted when Ballack criticised Loew last month in a thinly-veiled attack by telling the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) senior players deserve more respect and loyalty.

Ballack later apologised in person to Loew, but the national coach has warned his captain to tread carefully on the subject which threatens to flare up again and embarrass Die Mannschaft further.

"Michael is entitled to his opinion and to express criticism," Loew told German tabloid Bild.

"But he will not make then known publicly, there you can be quite sure, because he knows what the consequences would be."

But German legend Franz Beckenbauer, who captained and coached Germany to World Cup triumph, was shocked at Ballack's latest comments.

"I am speechless," Beckenbauer told Bild.

"I don't know what else to say."

"I actually thought this matter was settled."

"It would be terrible if this

topic becomes an on-running saga."

Just four weeks after his public spat with Loew, die Mannschaft captain Ballack told German television channel Premiere on Tuesday he was right to criticise Loew for dropping veteran Torsten Frings last month.

"Sometimes you want to go public with things, in an even manner, to wake and shake things up a little," Ballack told Premiere on Tuesday.

"Sometimes you have to make a few critical tones in public."

Ballack is adamant he did not intend criticising Loew, either now or last month, but when asked if he regretted last month's FAZ interview said on Tuesday: "No, I gave my opinion in a reasonable tone."

"I was attacking nobody, that was not what I wanted to do at all."



Bayern Munich striker Miroslav Klose is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Steaua Bucharest during their Champions League clash in Munich on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP