

Barca destroy Sporting

AFP, Paris



Barcelona coasted to a 5-2 victory over 10-man hosts Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday to win Champions League Group C after running riot at the Jose Alvalade stadium in Lisbon on Wednesday.

Both sides had already ensured their passage to the last 16 inside their first four games, leaving makeweights Shakhtar Donetsk and Basel trailing in their wake.

But Barca wanted group bragging rights and roared into a three-goal lead before a spell of complacency saw the Portuguese pull two goals back inside a minute.

The Catalan club, champions in 1992 and 2006, quickly produced a fourth goal when Marco Caneira put through his own net and teen striker Bojan Krkic scored the fifth from the penalty spot having replaced Henry at the break.

Henry, starting out as a lone spearhead with fellow former Arsenal man Alex Hleb and Messi foraging wide, put them ahead on the quarter-hour.

Most of the spadework was done by Argentine star Messi, back on song after a thigh injury forced him out of Sunday's disappoint-

ing draw with Getafe.

Messi, a candidate for the prestigious Ballon d'Or awarded by French magazine France Football in December, tore down the right flank and set Henry up on a plate barely three metres out.

Three minutes later Gerard Pique bundled in the second after Eidur Gudjohnsen unwittingly deflected a loose ball to him in a muddle.

Four minutes after the restart Messi poached the third, gliding in to score unmarked following a Daniel Alves freekick to all but end the contest.

Barca then endured a sloppy few moments as Miguel Veloso smacked home a ferocious freekick in the 65th minute and Liedson then netted almost straight after the restart.

But within a minute Caneira screwed the ball into his own net under pressure and the roof then fell in on Sporting as Rui Patrício was red-carded for fouling Krkic, who coolly dispatched the resulting penalty in the 73rd minute.

For Guardiola, the impressive win was all the more rewarding after he elected to rest defender and skipper Carles Puyol as well as Ivory Coast midfielder Yaya Touré and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, who looked on from the bench.

Cesc targets EPL title

Football

AFP, London

Cesc Fabregas, Arsenal's newly-appointed captain, has insisted the Gunners still haven't given up hope of winning the English Premier League title this season.

Arsenal travel to leaders and London rivals Chelsea on Sunday knowing they are 10 points off top spot following five league defeats already this season.

But they will be buoyed by a 1-0 Champions League win over Dynamo Kiev at the Emirates Stadium here Tuesday - Fabregas's first match as Arsenal captain.

Victory over the Ukrainians, secured by Nicklas Bendtner's late goal, saw Arsenal into the last 16 of European football's leading club competition with a

match to spare.

It was a welcome result for Arsenal following the negative headlines generated by William Gallas's public criticisms of his teammates, remarks which saw the France defender stripped of the club captaincy by compatriot and Gunners manager Arsene Wenger.

Arsenal's title aspirations may have been written off by many pundits but not by 21-year-old Spain midfielder Fabregas.

"The aim is to lift a trophy. We are in the last 16 of the Champions League and are in contention in every competition."

"Arsenal never go for a draw, we always go for a win and I am sure a club like Chelsea will do the same as well because every time I have played against them they have always gone forwards, to go for the victory."

"We have played only 14 league games this season and it is not over yet. Nothing is done and we will fight until the end."

"Our target is to go there and win, because we could get some points back. The

Liverpool in last 16

AFP, Paris

Atletico Madrid, Liverpool and Inter Milan reached into the Champions League second round on Wednesday night while 10-man Chelsea and minnows Anorthosis Famagusta must wait and see.

Steven Gerrard's goal shot Liverpool through in a 1-0 home victory over Marseille, Atletico beat PSV Eindhoven 2-1, while Inter Milan still went through after losing at home to complete 13-pieces of the 16-team knockout stage jigsaw.

Anorthosis must be kicking themselves after throwing away a 2-0 lead at home to Werder Bremen, drawing 2-2, and Panathinaikos shocked Inter Milan 1-0 in Italy in Group B.

Group A is wide open after Chelsea drew 1-1 at Bordeaux with Nicolas Anelka on the scoresheet and Frank Lampard suspended for their final match at home to Romanians Cluj after a second yellow card. Roma won 3-1 at Cluj and host Bordeaux in their final match.

Barcelona topped Group C with a 5-2 victory at Sporting Lisbon as Spain got a Grand Slam of all four clubs -- Real Madrid and Villarreal are the others -- through to the next phase.

Atletico fans had to celebrate goals from Simao and Maxi Rodriguez outside their Vicente Calderon stadium after UEFA punished the club for disturbances and reported racist remarks by its fans during the group match against Marseille on October 1.

As for Anorthosis Famagusta, they threw away vital points as they let slip a two-goal lead at home to eliminated Werder Bremen to leave their hopes of further progress hanging by a thread.

A Diego penalty and Hugo Almeida's last-gasp volley cancelled out goals from Nikos Nikolaou and Savio and Temuri Ketsbaia's surprise package now need a result in Athens against Panathinaikos to reach the knockout phase.

Rank outsiders Anorthosis

slid down to third place on six points - one behind the Greeks, who bagged their win at the San Siro courtesy of Josu Zarraga's second-half strike.

"We are disappointed because we led 2-0 but couldn't hold on, we made mistakes and at this level you get punished for mistakes," Anorthosis manager Temuri Ketsbaia said.

Anorthosis can only dream of enjoying the multimillion budget of English big-spenders Chelsea - but Luis Felipe Scolari's men are in the same boat with one match to go after they also let slip a lead to push qualification down to the wire and the lastmatch.

Ronaldo is the most targeted player in Europe right now, as opposing teams wake up to the fact that an aggressive approach is the best way to unsettle one of the world's finest players.

If you listen to United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, his man is the victim of an epidemic of "systematic fouling" designed to curtail his productivity or, worse, cause him injury.

Yet what Ferguson has failed to grasp himself is that the most compelling reason to take a heavy-handed approach with Ronaldo is the mental effect it has on the 23-year-old and his boss.

Ronaldo looks fragile at mind at present, seemingly ready to explode with an outburst of fury at the sight of an outstretched leg or a tug on his shirt. Lately, he has shown himself susceptible to the taunts of rival fans, gesturing towards the stands twice in English Premier League games over the last few weeks.

In the UEFA Champions League on Tuesday, he was left bruised again following United's 0-0 draw away to Villarreal. The defending European champions moved safely through to the last 16, but Ronaldo's night didn't go so smoothly as the Spanish side's defenders welcomed him to El Madrigal with tough tackling and close marking.

Ferguson ranted at length about the alleged mistreatment of Ronaldo and Liverpool star Steven Gerrard (R) celebrates with teammate Alvaro Arbeloa after scoring the all-important goal against Olympique Marseille during their Champions League encounter at Anfield on Wednesday.

Liverpool star Steven Gerrard (R) celebrates with teammate Alvaro Arbeloa after scoring the all-important goal against Olympique Marseille during their Champions League encounter at Anfield on Wednesday.



Barcelona wizard Lionel Messi (2nd from L) scores the third goal against Sporting Lisbon during their Champions League clash at the Alvalade Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

C LEAGUE RESULTS

AFP, Paris

Champions League group stage results on Wednesday:

Group A

Bordeaux (FRA) 1 (Diarra 83) Chelsea (ENG) 1 (Anelka 60) Cluj (ROM) 1 (Y Kone 30) AS Roma (ITA) 3 (Brighi 11, 64, Totti 23)

Group B

Inter Milan (ITA) 0 Panathinaikos (GRE) 1 (Sarriaghi 69)

Anorthosis Famagusta (CYP) 2 (Nikolaou 62, Savio 68) Werder Bremen (GER) 2 (Diego 72-pen, Almeida 87)

Group C

Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 5 (Jadson 32, 65, 73, Willian 50, Seleznov 75) Basel (SUI) 0 Sporting Lisbon (POR) 2 (Veloso 65, Liedson 66) Barcelona (ESP) 5 (Henry 14, Pique 17, Messi 49, Caneira 67-pen, Krkic 73-pen)

Group D

Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Simao 14, Maxi Rodriguez 28) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Koevemans 47) Liverpool (ENG) 1 (Gerrard 23) Marseille (FRA) 0

Fergie fed up with C'Ron fouling

INTERNET, undated

Cristiano Ronaldo may as well peel off the No. 7 fixed to the back of his Manchester United jersey and replace it with a giant "X."

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Greek tragedy for Inter

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan scraped through to the Champions League knock-out stages despite a shock 1-0 home defeat to Panathinaikos at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Josu Zarraga scored the winner for the Greeks on 69 minutes to give them a Champions League lifeline.

Panathinaikos only need a point at home to Anorthosis Famagusta in two weeks time to join Inter in the second round, although the Italians now need a result, possibly even a victory, away to Werder Bremen or they risk failing to top Group B.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho made no excuses for the defeat but suggested that there would be no difference between finishing first or second in the group.

"We deserve to go to the last game with Werder under pressure to finish first," he said.

"We're lucky to have qualified for the last 16 after a deserved defeat, well done to our opponents."

The biggest success is that we made Greek players believe they can win away from home. Normally their self-belief away is not so big but they proved they can learn quickly. If you are well organised like we were today, you can surprise a lot of people."

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"The coach is always responsible for a defeat and I have to listen to and accept all criticism aimed at me. It seems to me that there is no difference between finishing first or second."

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"There is no difference between finishing first or second but my thinking is to go to Werder to win."

Panathinaikos' Dutch coach Henk Ten Cate admitted he didn't expect to be in this position after his team lost their first two group games.

"Surprised, yes of course. If you start the qualification group with two defeats, normally it's game over," he said.

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