

Pippo's rescue act

UEFA CUP

AFP, Paris

AC Milan's veteran Italian striker Filippo Inzaghi grabbed his 65th career European goal to dent Portsmouth's UEFA Cup ambitions in a 2-2 draw on Thursday as Manchester City and Tottenham eased to victory.

Portsmouth, in their first season of European football, were cruising at 2-0 in their Group E clash at Fratton Park after goals from Younes Kaboul and Kanu.

But substitute Ronaldinho pulled one back with a fabulous free-kick in the 84th minute before poacher Inzaghi struck in the second minute of injury time to put Milan, who now have seven points, into the knockout stages.

"We are struggling to put teams to bed but they have some excellent players and if you switch off, they punish you," admitted Portsmouth boss Tony Adams.

Manchester City made it two wins out of two in Group A with an assured 2-0 victory over Germany's Schalke 04 in Gelsenkirchen which followed their opening 3-2 victory against FC Twente.

Paris Saint Germain's 2-2 draw with Racing Santander in the same pool meant Mark Hughes's City are assured of a place in the next round.

City took the lead on the half-hour mark when Daniel Sturridge's cross was sidefooted home by Zimbabwean striker Benjani Mwaruiri to stun the majority of the 60,000-strong crowd.

In-form midfielder Stephen Ireland tucked

away the second in the 65th minute.

The result follows City's convincing 3-0 victory at home to Arsenal at the weekend, and Hughes feels his side are in fine fettle ahead of Sunday's derby meeting with Manchester United.

"It's been a great week," he said. "It started off very well, beating Arsenal, and we've carried on with a great performance here and that leads us very nicely into a certain game at the weekend."

Tottenham enjoyed a 1-0 win at Dutch side NEC Nijmegen with Jamie O'Hara's 14th-minute header proving the clincher after Fraizer Campbell had hit the bar.

Harry Redknapp's side now have six points from three Group D games, which should be enough to see through.

"The pitch wasn't particularly good," said Redknapp. "It was difficult to really pass the ball but we were strong and solid and I never felt in any danger. Six points is job done."

In Group H, CSKA Moscow beat Lech Poznan of Poland 2-1 to make sure of their place in the knockout stages.

Alan Dzagoev and Yuri Zhirkov's first-half goals secured CSKA's third successive win with Semir Stiliz hitting a late consolation for the Poles.

In Group G, French side St Etienne also reached the last 32 after a 1-1 draw with Bruges, but the match was overshadowed by fighting between the two sets of fans in the Belgian city.

The top three teams in each of the eight groups go through to the knockout stage where they will be joined by the eight third-place finishers from the opening round of the Champions League.



Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi is ecstatic after scoring the equalising goal to make it 2-2 during their UEFA Group encounter against Portsmouth at Fratton Park on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

BLUES TAKE ON GUNNERS

A high-stake derby

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney has raised the stakes for this weekend's Manchester derby by casting scorn on newly-rich City's hopes of knocking champions United off their pedestal any time soon.

Sunday's clash, which precedes an equally intriguing encounter between league leaders Chelsea and crisis-hit Arsenal, will be the first cross-Manchester skirmish since City were propelled into football's financial super league as a result of a takeover by Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

The new owners have already financed the 32.5-million-pound acquisition of Robinho and more stars look set to follow the Brazilian to the City of Manchester stadium in January.

But the investment has yet to produce a significant improvement in terms of results with City currently languishing in the bottom half of the Premier League table, well below where they were at this stage last season under Sven-Goran Eriksson.

The Swede left his successor Mark Hughes with plenty to live up to after masterminding victories in both derby

matches last season -- as well as ensuring United, who can ill afford to lose any further ground to Chelsea and Liverpool, will have added incentive to do well on Sunday.

As Rooney pithily put it: "It'll be nice to show City who are the kings of Manchester."

"It doesn't irritate us that City are getting all this publicity," said Rooney, before really putting the boot in.

"If they were winning trophies it would irritate us, but while they're still lingering in mid-table we're not too bothered about it."

Having suffered five defeats already this season, Arsenal will travel to Stamford Bridge looking to convince the doubters that their title challenge can somehow be resurrected in the wake of William Gallas being stripped of the

club captaincy over his public criticism of his teammates.

Gallas has been replaced by Cesc Fabregas and the 21-year-old, whose reign began with a 1-0 win over Dynamo Kiev in midweek, insists there is life left in the Gunners.

Arsenal's supine performance in a 3-0 defeat at Manchester City last weekend enabled Aston Villa to replace them in the top four and Martin O'Neill's side could rise to third, for 24 hours at least, by beating Fulham at Villa Park on Saturday.

The match will see Villa's goalkeeper, Brad Friedel, pass David James's record of 166 consecutive top-flight appearances, although the American is reluctant to make too much of the landmark.

In the pick of Saturday's other ties, Newcastle will be hoping Mark Viduka's return to the squad will provide the inspiration required to secure a derby win at the Australian's former club Middlesbrough, which would be enough to lift the beleaguered Magpies out of the relegation zone.

Joint leaders Liverpool are not in action until Monday and will be without Fernando Torres for West Ham's visit to Anfield after the Spanish striker suffered a hamstring strain in the midweek win over Marseille.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated)
Saturday
Aston Villa v Fulham, Middlesbrough v Newcastle, Stoke City v Hull City, Sunderland v Bolton, Wigan v West Brom
Sunday
Chelsea v Arsenal (1600 GMT), Manchester City v Manchester Utd (1330 GMT), Portsmouth v Blackburn, Tottenham v Everton
Monday
Liverpool v West Ham (2000 GMT)

UEFA CUP RESULTS

AFP, Paris

Collated UEFA Cup results on Thursday:

Group A
Schalke 04 (GER) 0 Manchester City (ENG) 2 (Benjani 32, Ireland 66)
Paris Saint Germain (FRA) 2 (Kezman 5, Luyindula 32) Racing Santander (ESP) 2 (Traore 40-og, Colisa 55)
Group B
Galatasaray (TUR) 0 Metalist Kharkov (UKR) 1 (Edmar 81)
Olympiacos (GRE) 5 (Galletti 1, Patsatzoglou 17, Diogo 24, 53, Belluschi 44) Benfica (POR) 1 (Luiz 33)

Group C
Sampdoria (ITA) 1 (Sammarco 39) VfB Stuttgart (GER) 1 (Marica 8)
Partizan Belgrade (SRB) 0 Standard Liege (BEL) 1 (De Camargo 36)
Group D
NEC Nijmegen (NED) 0 Tottenham (ENG) 1 (O'Hara 14)
Dinamo Zagreb (CRO) 0 Spartak Moscow (RUS) 1 (Saenko 75)

Group E
Portsmouth (ENG) 2 (Kaboul 62, Kanu 73) AC Milan (ITA) 2 (Ronaldinho 84, Inzaghi 90+2)
Sporting Braga (POR) 2 (Barzagli 6-og, Meyong 49) Wolfsburg (GER) 3 (Dzeko 24, Misimovic 83-pen, 90+4)
Group F
MSK Zilina (SVK) 0 Slavia Prague (CZE) 0
Hamburg (GER) 0 Ajax (NED) 1 (Leonardo 77)

Group G
Bruges (BEL) 1 (Vargas 50) Saint Etienne (FRA) 1 (Alcaraz 44-og)
Rosenborg (NOR) 0 Valencia (ESP) 4 (Mata 21, Pablo 76, Baraja 88, Joaquin 90)
Group H
CSKA Moscow (RUS) 2 (Dzagoev 31, Zhirkov 45) Lech Poznan (POL) 1 (Stiliz 66)
Deportivo La Coruna (ESP) 3 (Lopo 30, Hofland 50-og, Guardado 51)
Feyenoord (NED) 0

Napoli plot Inter fall

AFP, Rome



Serie A surprise outfit Napoli travel to Inter Milan this weekend confident they can emulate Panathinaikos and come away from the San Siro with three points.

Napoli currently sit in a Champions League qualifying position despite a recent blip in their early season form.

Captain Francesco Montevino believes they have the firepower, particularly on the counter-attack, to hurt Jose Mourinho's leaders and reigning champions.

"It will be an open match. We need to be humble but also intelligent," said Montevino.

"We mustn't close up shop and we have to look to players such as (Ezequiel) Lavezzi and (Marek) Hamsik who are great, quick players on the counter-attack."

That may not have been the approach Panathinaikos took to derail the Italian giants but for Napoli to upset the applearc they must look to

their strengths, which are far more in going forward than trying to hold out at the back.

Recent results have gone against them as they lost at both AC Milan -- to a late own-goal after playing the entire second half with 10 men -- and Atalanta while managing only a draw at home to lowly Cagliari after letting in an equaliser in the fifth minute of stoppage time at the end of the game.

A victory would propel Napoli back into the title race and would be welcomed by second placed AC Milan and third placed Juventus, respectively three and six points behind Inter.

Milan have a tricky trip to Palermo on Sunday while

Juventus have what looks on paper like a simple three-pointer at home to Reggina.

Both teams dropped points last week, Milan after conceding a late equaliser against Torino, and need a victory to keep hold of Inter's coat-tails.

Meanwhile, down the other end, AS Roma, who have won their last three matches, welcome Fiorentina, who currently sit sixth and need a win to try to keep themselves in the title picture.

But Roma coach Luciano Spalletti believes his team, who have finished runners up in the last three seasons, are back on track.

"I think we can say that we're back on the right path in respect to the quality we have in our squad," he said following the 3-1 Champions League victory at Romanians CFR Cluj.

"But it would be a mistake to get carried away, we must keep our feet on the ground. We've seen some improvements, particularly in midfield, which gives me confidence for the future."

FIXTURES

Saturday
Catania v Lecce, Juventus v Reggina
Sunday
Atalanta v Lazio, Cagliari v Sampdoria, Genoa v Bologna, Inter Milan v Napoli, Palermo v AC Milan, AS Roma v Fiorentina, Siena v Torino, Udinese v Chievo

Table-toppers clash

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich striker Miroslav Klose insists the defending Bundesliga champions must seize their chance to leapfrog Bayer Leverkusen to go second in the table when the two sides meet Saturday.

The Bavaria derby gives third-placed Bayern the chance to overtake their rivals in the table and put themselves in pole position to take on league leaders Hoffenheim in Munich the following week-

end. But Klose insists despite his side facing four tough games in the next fortnight, including their Champions League clash with Lyon, Jurgen Klinsmann's Bayern must focus fully on Leverkusen.

"We have a hard programme ahead of us now with some very, very difficult games," said Klose, who scored twice in his side's 3-0 Champions League win over Steaua Bucharest last Tuesday.

"But we can't afford to make the mistake of talking about Lyon or deliberating over Hoffenheim, everything has to go into the Leverkusen game." Klinsmann will have both

Italian World Cup striker Luca Toni (shoulder) and midfielder Franck Ribery (ankle) available after they shook off injuries from the win over Bucharest.

"We have to carry the momentum forward from the Steaua game," said Klose ahead of the clash at Leverkusen's BayArena.

The only injury worries for Bayern are defender Martin Demichelis and striker Lukas Podolski. Argentina's Demichelis has a calf strain and Podolski has a back injury.

Leverkusen have Germany strikers Stefan Kiessling and Patrick Helmes up front, while defender Gonzalo Castro has the task of containing Bayern's Ribery who is in superb form with six goals in the last six league games.

League leaders Hoffenheim host strugglers Arminia Bielefeld on Saturday with Bosnia striker Vedad Ibisevic in classy form with 16 goals in 14 league games including three in the last two.

Fourth-placed Hertha Berlin host Cologne in the German capital's Olympic Stadium on Friday with the Lucien Favre-coached side on a roll with wins in their last three league games.

There is a bottom of the table clash on Saturday when Borussia Moenchengladbach, fourth from bottom, are home to Energie Cottbus who anchor the league table.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt, Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich, Hanover 96 v Karlsruhe, Borussia M'gladbach v Energie Cottbus, Hoffenheim v Arminia Bielefeld
Sunday
VfB Stuttgart v Schalke 04, VfL Bochum v Hamburg, Borussia Dortmund v VfL Wolfsburg

Feyenoord striker Roy Makaay, who was a hugely successful player at Deportivo Coruna reacts at the end of their UEFA Cup match against his former team at the Riazor Stadium in Coruna on Thursday. Deportivo won the match 3-0.

PHOTO: AFP

Messi to bolster Barca

AFP, Madrid



impressive Champions League demolition of Sporting Lisbon when they travel to Sevilla on Saturday.

A Lionel Messi-inspired 5-2 victory in Portugal, which secured his team's place in the Champions League knockout stages, once again illustrated their dependency on the Argentinian.

He was given a break last weekend against Getafe and, without him, Barca lacked impetus and only managed to draw.

Messi started the game against Sporting in the centre of the three attacking players, but then went to the flanks after the team went ahead.

"Messi played in the number nine role because Sporting played with a diamond formation and I thought that if he was in the middle then he could take on their centre-backs directly," said Barca coach Pep Guardiola.

"Playing out wide is more demanding and we wanted to protect him."

Sevilla will be looking to improve their strike rate as, despite their attacking style, they have been struggling for goals this season. Striker Luis Fabiano has been passed fit along with defenders Sebastian Squillaci and Julien Escude.

Real Madrid, who are also in the next round of the Champions League, reduced the gap at the top of the table to three points with an unimpressive win over Recreativo Huelva last week and they now face Getafe with a long list of injuries headed by Ruud van Nistelrooy.

At least they were buoyed on Thursday by seeing Arjen Robben and Fabio Cannavaro return to training.

Villarreal had been the only remaining unbeaten team in the league until they fell apart against giant-killers Valladolid last weekend.

Now with qualification to the next round of the Champions League secured they can concentrate on the league with their next opponents Recreativo who are bottom of the table without a win in eleven weeks.

The visit of Real Betis to Valencia will be a special game for their former player Joaquin Sanchez.

In-form Betis though will have their eyes on victory with Valencia having lost their last two games at home, and while they are without the injured Xisco Munoz they welcome

back Fernando Vega.

Atletico Madrid fans will return to the Calderon this weekend to watch their side against Racing Santander, in a key battle for Champions League places, having been banned by UEFA for their Champions League game against PSV Eindhoven which was played behind closed doors.

Almeria's European ambitions took a knock with defeat last weekend to lowly Osasuna but they will hope to respond against Deportivo La Coruna who are looking stronger than they have for several seasons.

Since being crushed by Barcelona 6-0, Valladolid have bounced back with impressive wins over Real Madrid and Villarreal, and they will be hoping to continue their surge up the table against Mallorca who have not had a victory in the league for over a month.

Osasuna will hope to build on their first victory of the season against Almeria when they travel to mid-table Malaga.

Espanyol know that they cannot afford to lose at Montjuic against Sporting Gijon with the drop zone looming ever closer after three straight defeats.

Athletic Bilbao keeper Gorka Iraizoz has called for his teammates to be calm in the face of their relegation clash with Numancia claiming that it is not an 'all or nothing' contest.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Getafe v Real Madrid, Sevilla v Barcelona
Sunday
Recreativo v Villarreal, Valladolid v Mallorca, Malaga v Osasuna, Almeria v Deportivo La Coruna, Athletic Bilbao v Numancia, Espanyol v Sporting Gijon, Valencia v Real Betis, Atletico v Racing Santander

Kinnear in charge till season end

AFP, Newcastle

Joe Kinnear has had his short-term contract as Newcastle boss extended until the end of the season, the club announced on Friday.

The former Wimbledon manager had been in charge on a month-by-month basis since September as owner Mike Ashley attempted to find a buyer for the club in the wake of former manager Kevin Keegan's acrimonious departure.

But with a sale looking unlikely in the short-term given the uncertain economic climate, the club have offered Kinnear greater stability, which he welcomed.

"Ever since I came to Newcastle United, I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience," he said.

"The players have been great to work with and the fans have made me feel at home since day one. We have a big challenge ahead of us for the rest of the season, but together, I'm confident we will make good progress."

"We have some very good players already at this club and hopefully we can further strengthen the squad in January, and I will be working very closely with the directors to try to achieve that."

Since Kinnear took over, Newcastle have lost only two of their eight matches and a battling goalless draw at Chelsea last weekend boosted his case for a longer-term deal.

Despite that result, Newcastle remain in the relegation zone but with players like Michael Owen and Mark Viduka finally fit the mood at the club has improved immeasurably in recent weeks.

Managing director Derek Llabias said: "Joe has done an excellent job since coming to the club, and everyone is delighted he has agreed to remain in charge for the rest of the season."

Newcastle play Middlesbrough in a northeast derby clash at Boro's Riverside ground on Saturday.

L'pool suffer Torres blow

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Premier League title push suffered a setback on Thursday when their Spanish international striker Fernando Torres was ruled out for up to three weeks with a hamstring strain.

Torres, who had only just returned to the side after five weeks out with a similar problem, picked up the injury in the 1-0 Champions League win over Marseille at Anfield on Wednesday.

Defender Fabio Aurelio will be out for a fortnight after picking up a calf problem in the same game. A club spokesman told www.liverpoolfc.tv: "Fernando has a strain in his right hamstring and will be out of action for between two and three weeks. Fabio has a calf strain in his left leg and will be out for two weeks."