

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TABLES

Group A	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Roma	6	4	0	2	12	6	12
Chelsea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Bordeaux	6	2	1	3	5	11	7
CFR Cluj	6	1	1	4	5	9	4
Group B	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Panathinaikos	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Inter Milan	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Bremen	6	1	4	1	7	9	7
Anorthosis	6	1	3	2	8	8	6
Group C	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Barcelona	6	4	1	1	18	8	13
Sporting	6	4	0	2	8	8	12
Shakhtar	6	3	0	3	11	7	9
Basel	6	0	1	5	2	16	1
Group D	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Liverpool	6	4	2	0	11	5	14
Atletico	6	3	3	0	9	4	12
Marseille	6	1	1	4	5	7	4
PSV	6	1	0	5	5	14	3
Group E	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Man Utd	6	2	4	0	9	3	10
Villarreal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
AaB	6	1	3	2	9	14	6
Celtic	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
Group F	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Bayern	6	4	2	0	12	4	14
Lyon	6	3	2	1	14	10	11
Fiorentina	6	1	3	2	5	8	6
Steaua	6	0	1	5	3	12	1
Group G	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Porto	6	4	0	2	9	8	12
Arsenal	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
D Kiev	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
Fenerbahce	6	0	2	4	4	11	2
Group H	Pld	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Juventus	6	3	3	0	7	3	12
Real Madrid	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Zenit	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
BATE	6	0	3	3	3	8	3

KEY: Pld: Played W: Won D: Draw L: Lost GF: Goals For GA: Goals Against Pts: Points
N.B. Top two from each group qualify

Top Scorers
5 Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich), Karim Benzema (Lyon)
4 Dimitar Berbatov (Man. United), Jadson (Shakhtar), Alessandro del Piero (Juventus), Lisandro Lopez (Porto)

Assists
5 Franck Ribery (Bayern Munich)
4 Anders Due (AaB), Frank Lampard (Chelsea)
3 Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Savio (Anorthosis), Juninho (Lyon), Raul Meireles (Porto), Mesut Ozil (Werder Bremen)



Bayern Munich striker Miroslav Klose embarks on a sliding celebration after his second goal against Lyon during their Champions League encounter at the Stade Gerland in Lyon on Wednesday.

Bayern take top spot

AFP, Lyon
A Franck Ribery-inspired 3-2 victory at Lyon on Wednesday night shot Bayern Munich to the top of their Champions League group in rainy conditions in France.

Bayern's pole position in Group F meant they are assured of playing a second-placed team in the February/March first knockout round, whose draw is on December 19, and of having the advantage of having the second leg at home.

Ribery's swashbuckling attacking performance left Lyon bereft of ideas. The Frenchman was involved in all three of Bayern's goals, scoring the second, while Miroslav Klose's brace left him with five in the competition this season and 21 career strikes in Europe.

Sidney Govou and Karim Benzema earned consolation goals for Lyon and Claude Puel's men at least knew they had already qualified for the next stage.

Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann told Canal Plus television: "I think we missed out on our opportunities of making it 4-0 and then mentally relaxed a bit. We made two mistakes and I think it was

down to a lack of concentration. You can't do that against such a good side as Lyon." Klinsmann was without injured Brazilian defenders Ze Roberto and Lucio but his fielding of Ribery and Tim Borowski on the left, whose link play with Klose was impressive, had a big impact.

Puel fielded Anthony Mounier instead of Fred and star striker Karim Benzema started as a classic centre forward. Calf-victim John Mensah was fit enough to start at centre back, meaning Jeremy Toulalan stayed in his usual defensive midfield role.

Combative tackles and the game played at a fast pace early on was curious given that little was riding on the match, though it made for compelling action.

Klose easily put Bayern ahead on 11 minutes. Hesitancy in the Lyon back line meant Toulalan and Jean II Makoum failed to clear and battling Ribery, surrounded by yellow shirts, got the ball to Klose who found the net from six metres.

A minute later, Benzema fired a left foot shot just wide of keeper Michael Rensing's right hand post.

Ribery got on the score-sheet himself in the 34th minute with more fighting play down the left flank. A defence-splitting pass from Luca Toni found Ribery and, without breaking stride, he ran into the box and shot

fiercely across Hugo Lloris's goal with the ball going just inside his left hand post.

Three minutes later, Bayern were three goals ahead. Profiting from a neat Bastian Schweinsteiger backheel, Ribery floated the ball over from the left to Klose, whose mis-hit shot at the far post bounced over the head of Lloris and into the net.

Sidney Govou showed spirit to have his shot blocked, then made a tackle, before eventually firing home in the 52nd minute, and Benzema hit a second for Lyon on 68 minutes.

Brazilian Fred and Swede Kim Kallstrom came on in the second half as Puel shuffled the pack in an attempt to get back on terms but even a third goal would not have been enough to earn top spot in the pool.

Ribery said afterwards he was flattered by Lyon fans.

"Spectators at the Gerland stadium applauded me! I'm happy about that, it brings me a lot of pleasure, and it proves that even though I play for Bayern Munich, the people have not forgotten that I am a Frenchman, and when I play for France, they are all supporting the French team."

"I had success in my first match in France for Bayern and I was fortunate enough to score. I feel good about that."

NEW DAWN FOR REAL Gunners stifled

AFP, Paris



Arsenal slipped up in their bid to top their Champions League group on Wednesday as they went down to rivals FC Porto 2-0 in their final group match.

While they ended as runners-up they at least avoided the fate of having to play against Real Madrid, coached for the first time by former Spurs handler Juande Ramos, whose new team eased to a 3-0 victory over UEFA Cup holders Zenit St Petersburg.

A double from iconic Real striker Raul ensured that Ramos, who was sacked by Spurs earlier this season but who replaced Bernd Schuster on Tuesday, got off to an ideal start.

It took Raul's total to a record 66 goals in the Champions League - Filippo Inzaghi is next best on 64 and his club AC Milan are not in this season's competition.

Ramos, who enjoyed great success with Sevilla winning two successive UEFA Cup titles with them, was impressed by the spirit the players showed.

"It's a good result, which boosts team morale. I really liked the players' attitude," said Ramos.

Sporting director Pedja Mijatovic, the power behind

the Bernabeu throne, noted that there had been an evident change of atmosphere amongst the team.

"Now we are a little calmer. We saw something different with the change of coach."

Juventus still topped the group after drawing 0-0 at home to Belarus outfit BATE Borisov.

Wenger's youngsters, who replaced several of the first team players, were unable to ever get to grips with FC Porto and it left Gunners goalkeeper Manuel Almunia fuming.

"We were not in the game at any moment, we were not aggressive, we didn't pass the ball well and this is why we lost," said the Spaniard.

"I'm very disappointed. Everyone is wearing the Arsenal shirt and has to give 100 per cent. That was not the case."

Two players turned coaches who used to play for Wenger in his days as Monaco coach provided the match of the evening as Jurgen Klinsmann's Bayern Munich forged into a 3-0 lead - thanks mainly to a double by Miroslav Klose taking him to five for this campaign - over French champions Lyon, coached by Claude Puel only to just edge them 3-2.

Victory ensured Bayern finished top of the group with Lyon in second, though, Klinsmann was slightly alarmed at the manner in which his side had allowed

Lyon back into the game. "I think we missed out on our opportunities of making it 4-0 and then mentally relaxed a bit," said the former Germany coach.

"We made two mistakes and I think it was down to a lack of concentration. You can't do that against such a good side as Lyon."

Arsenal's bitter Premiership rivals Manchester United fared better, drawing 2-2 with Danish side Aalborg, though it was Scottish champions Celtic that ensured Sir Alex Ferguson's side topped the group by beating 10-man Villarreal 2-0 for their first win of the campaign.

While Ferguson thought his side would have won comfortably if they had been more accurate in front of goal, he was ebullient about entering the knockout stages and with a second leg at home as they set their sights on a third Champions League title under his reign.

"(We will) come to Old Trafford with a full house and a really good atmosphere," he said. "We are there, have got the track record and the players so let's go and have a go."

Celtic do not even have the UEFA Cup as a consolation but victory was still a welcome relief for manager Gordon Strachan. "That match was there to make us feel better about ourselves," he said.

Drogba fires Chelsea

AFP, Paris



Returning striker Didier Drogba hit the winner in Chelsea's 2-1 victory over Romanian team CFR Cluj on Tuesday to set last season's Champions League finalists safely through to the knock-

out stages.

Chelsea's victory together with Roma beating Bordeaux 2-0 in Rome was enough to ensure Luiz Felipe Scolari's side did not suffer the embarrassment of exiting at the group stage for the first time ever in seven Champions League campaigns.

However it meant they finished second in Group A, which in theory hands them a more difficult clash in the last 16.

It left the combative Scolari a little underwhelmed, as he compared the spirit shown by his opponents as an example of what he wanted from his team.

"We had more of the ball but there was not a big difference between the teams. We didn't play very well, we played ok, but they have the spirit I want in my team," said the 2002 World Cup winning coach, who had claimed that exiting the Champions League wouldn't be a disaster.

"They fight for the ball and even if they made mistakes, everyone understood this and fought to help them. They played as a team," added Scolari, who it was claimed by assistant Ray Wilkins had been looking tired and stressed last week amid reports of internal discord with several senior players.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti could rejoice in seeing his side's fortunes turn around over a matter of weeks when he was under immense pressure.

"This is a really prestigious result (to finish

top of the group)," he said. "I would give my boys 12 out of 10," added the coach.

Chelsea will however avoid former manager Jose Mourinho's side Inter Milan in the last 16 as his team finished only second in Group B after being surprisingly beaten 2-1 by German side Werder Bremen.

"I am disappointed, but you had one side playing life or death football and the other who were just playing for a result," said Inter coach Jose Mourinho.

"I left a few names out of the team which was an indication of what we were trying to do here and so you have to accept the result."

"We'd like someone like Bayern Munich, Barcelona or Manchester United in the next round, we won't be an easy game for them."

Panathinaikos finished top after beating Anorthosis Famagusta 1-0.

Chelsea's Premiership rivals Liverpool, though, did finish top of Group D after defeating PSV Eindhoven 3-1 with young French striker David N'Gog scoring their final goal.

Atletico Madrid finished second after eking out a 0-0 draw with Marseille, where the atmosphere had lightened considerably earlier in the day when it was announced that a Marseille fan handed a three-and-a-half year prison sentence for assaulting a Madrid police officer who was to be released on bail on Wednesday.

Atletico's Spanish rivals Barcelona still finished top of Group C despite losing with a largely second string side 3-2 at home to Ukrainian outfit Shakhtar Donetsk.

Sporting Lisbon too already knew they would finish runners-up and rounded off their group campaign with a 1-0 win away at Basel.

The qualification of Chelsea, Roma and Panathinaikos completed the 16-team line-up in next year's first knockout round, with the draw on December 19.

Ronaldo set for Corinthians

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian star Ronaldo was set to put pen to paper on a deal to join Brazilian giants Corinthians, the club announced here Tuesday.

The 32-year-old striker has been out of action since picking up another career-threatening knee injury in February while playing for former club AC Milan.

Ronaldo has reportedly been working hard for the past few months in a bid to regain fitness after putting on the kilos in the wake of his left knee injury.

Corinthians said the former two-time European footballer of the year and three-time FIFA player of the year was "only hours from signing a deal."

"The management of Corinthians is currently in negotiations to sign the striker Ronaldo Nazario," said a media spokesman for the club, adding that the finer details of the contract were being finalised.

"Both parties are only hours away from reaching agreement."

Ronaldo, who won the World Cup Brazil in 1994 and 2002, suffered the serious knee injury in February only months before his contract with AC Milan came to an end.

He has played since -- in a match organised by the United Nations in Morocco in mid-November -- but was only on the pitch 22 minutes.

Corinthians are one of Brazil's biggest clubs and have in the past included top players such as Deco, now of Chelsea, Manchester United's Carlos Tevez and current Brazil keeper Dida of AC Milan.

Gattuso out for season

INTERNET, Rome

AG Milan and Italy midfielder Gennaro Gattuso was to undergo surgery next week on a damaged cruciate ligament which will sideline him for the rest of the season. Milan said in a statement on Wednesday that Gattuso will undergo surgery in Antwerp, on December 19.

Gattuso, 30, was examined in Antwerp on by the famed orthopaedic surgeon Marc Martens who confirmed that an operation on the injured ligament in the right knee was necessary.

The world champion sustained the injury during the weekend match against Catania, but managed to remain on the pitch until the final whistle.

Andrea D'Amico, the footballer's agent, was quoted as saying that "recovery time is as expected, that is six months."

Before departing from Milan for Antwerp Wednesday morning, Gattuso said he considered the injury "a new challenge, a new battle to win. I'm sorry, but you have to look ahead. I have won many challenges, I'll win this one too."

Schuster out, Ramos in

Football

AFP, Madrid

Struggling Spanish champions Real Madrid fired coach Bernd Schuster on Tuesday and immediately replaced him with former Tottenham and Sevilla coach Juande Ramos.

Real sports director Pedja Mijatovic said he had held a meeting earlier in the day with Schuster, who had "accepted" the decision but "was sad to do so."

"We analyzed everything that has happened in recent months. We saw the difficulties and reached this decision by mutual agreement," Mijatovic told a news conference.

German Schuster, one of a rare breed of footballers who have played for both Real Madrid and Barcelona, was under contract with Real till 2010.

Ramos, 54, has been given an initial six-month deal which will keep him at the Spanish giants until the end of the season.

"This is the dream of every

coach, I hope I don't disappoint anybody. I don't think there is any higher level than arriving at Real Madrid," he told a news conference.

Schuster's head was placed firmly on the block on Sunday when Real slipped to a humiliating 4-3 home defeat to Sevilla, a result that left them languishing in fifth place in the league, nine points behind leaders Barcelona.

The 49-year-old led Real to their record 31st league title last season, his first in charge, but has been under pressure as early as November following the club's elimination from the King's Cup by third-division Real Union.

But it appears the final nail in the coffin was Schuster's remarks to the Spanish press over the weekend, when he said his injury-riddled side had no chance during Saturday's game in the Nou Camp against arch rivals Barcelona.

"At the Camp Nou now, it's not possible to win. They are playing really well there and it's their year," he said after the match against Sevilla.

Mijatovic denied that Schuster's comments had been a deciding factor in his departure as reported by the Spanish media while Ramos stressed the need to always seek victory during their joint news conference.

"Madrid is a team that whichever game it has to play it will go in with maximum motivation to play it. Barcelona is playing really well but Madrid is playing well enough to not renounce a victory in any stadium in the world," Ramos said.

Ramos guided Tottenham to the League Cup last season but was sacked by the English side in October following the London club's worst start to the season which left the team at the bottom of the Premier League.

But he enjoys a healthy reputation in Spain based on his successes with Sevilla which included two UEFA Cup wins in 2006 and 2007.

Schuster joined Madrid from Getafe last July, replacing current England coach Fabio Capello who was also sacked by the Spanish giants.

Alex wants to quit Chelsea

SOCCERNET

Alex is reported eager to quit Chelsea in order to secure regular first team football.

The centre-back has spent four years of Chelsea, three of those out on loan at PSV Eindhoven due to work permit problems. But after being granted permission to launch his Premier League career he has struggled to make an impact.

With John Terry and Ricardo Carvalho firmly in place as first choice chances have been limited. Carvalho's injury problems seemed to clear the way for the Brazilian to stake his claim but Serbian defender Branislav Ivanovic has also been used alongside the England skipper.

The former Santos player has started 10 games this season with five of those coming in the Premier League. But the 26-year-old wants to play week-in week-out and has revealed he wants to leave Stamford Bridge to realise that dream.

"I told Chelsea a few days ago that I wanted to leave," he was quoted as saying in The Sun.

"There are many options. But I have to think them through and see if Chelsea will let me leave in January."



HE'S BACK: Chelsea striker Didier Drogba celebrates after scoring the winning goal against CFR Cluj during their Champions League clash at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday.