

# Sampdoria KO Inter

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's recent run of poor form continued on Wednesday as an admittedly under-strength side were soundly beaten 3-0 by Sampdoria in their Italian Cup semifinal, first leg clash making it a long shot that the Serie A leaders reach their fifth successive Cup final.

Inter, who were second best in a Champions League last 16 first leg match with Manchester United last week and then were held 3-3 by AS Roma last weekend, went down to goals from badboy Antonio Cassano and a double by strike partner Giampaolo Pazzini.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho, with a mind towards this weekend's tough Serie A match with fifth-placed Genoa and next week's

Champions League match at Old Trafford against United, had decided to rest players such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Julio Cesar and Christian Chivu.

Their replacements could not handle it and a disastrous error by Colombian defender Nelson Rivas, who had a catastrophic first-half against United before being withdrawn by Mourinho at half-time, let in Cassano, who made no mistake and shot past Francesco Toldo in the ninth minute.

Pazzini then added a double through a header and then a shot three minutes from the break to wrap up victory for Sampdoria.

Inter's night hardly got better after the break as talented young striker Mario Balotelli had to go off injured in the 52nd minute having collided with a post.

Inter could not even take advantage of Sampdoria being

reduced to 10 men on the hour as defender Daniele Gastaldello was sent off.

Mourinho, who is subject of disciplinary proceedings after making inflammatory remarks following the draw with Roma, took defeat in his stride.

"We conceded a ludicrous first goal and a second off a rebound," said the Portuguese. "When not everybody is there (as in first choice players), the team is obviously not of the same calibre."

"But I decided I had to make changes because it is not humanly possible for them to play every match."

Lazio came from behind on Tuesday to beat Juventus 2-1 in their Italian Cup semifinal, first leg after second-half goals from Macedonian forward Goran Pandev and Tommaso Rocchi cancelled out Marco Marchionni's opener on 34 minutes.



Sampdoria starlet Giampaolo Pazzini (C) scores to make it 3-0 against Inter Milan during their Italian Cup clash at Luigi Ferraris Stadium in Genoa on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Kuwait stun Socceroos

Football

AFP, Canberra

Kuwait rocked Australia's 2011 Asian Cup qualification hopes with a stunning 1-0 win here on Thursday.

The Kuwaitis, ranked 125th in the FIFA rankings, moved to second behind Oman in Group B with their first victory in Australia for 32 years and left the Socceroos at the bottom of the group after two games.

It was only Australia's third loss in 16 games under Dutch coach Pim Verbeek, who chose an all A-League squad and paid a high price with Kuwait outplaying the second-stringers.

Kuwait, showing the benefit of playing a couple of lead-up matches in New Zealand, rocked the disjointed Australians with a goal by

defender Mesaed Al Enezi in the 37th minute.

Socceroos skipper Craig Moore fouled Hamad Al Enezi and Mesaed's header from a splendid Bader Al Mutwa freekick beat goalkeeper Eugene Galekovic.

It was the first goal Australia had conceded in 534 minutes after five clean sheets since the Netherlands scored in a 2-1 loss to the Socceroos in Eindhoven last September.

Kuwait last beat the Socceroos in Australia 2-1 in a World Cup qualifier in Sydney on October 16, 1977 and they celebrated wildly after the full-time whistle on Thursday.

Australia squandered their best chance in the 23rd minute when striker Archie Thompson had a weak shot cleared off the line only for Tom Pondeljak to ricochet the rebound off an upright with the goal beckoning.

The Australians became increasingly fraught in the second half, trying to find a way through the packed Kuwait defence and only conjured a couple of half-chances. They lost skipper Craig Moore with a leg injury five minutes before the end.

The best of their chances fell to substitute Mitch Nichols in the first minute of stoppage time but his volley flew wildly over the bar and with it went Australia's last chance to snare an undeserved draw.

The shock loss will intensify pressure on Verbeek to throw more of his European stars into future Asian Cup qualifying games if Australia are to ensure they play in the 2011 finals in Qatar.

Australia next play group leaders Oman at home on November 14 in a must-win game, while Kuwait are away to Indonesia.

# Ronaldo returns to action

INTERNET, undated

After more than a one-year injury layoff, Ronaldo finally returned to action with his new club Corinthians.

Ronaldo may have only played 29 minutes, but he looked very lively, and even came close to getting on the score-sheet.

He replaced Jorge Henrique in the 21st minute of the second half and one minute later he had his first touch of the ball.

The excited crowd at the Jucelino Kubitschek stadium in Itumbiara roared each time Ronaldo came close to the ball, and the former FIFA World Footballer of the Year tried to impress them with some of his trademark trickery.

He showed no signs of an injury, although it was evident that he was lacking the necessary fitness to play a competitive football match.

But Ronaldo, 32, constantly asked for the ball, and instead of passing the ball as soon as he got it, he preferred to take on his opponents, and with good results.

Towards the end of the match Ronaldo looked to mark his debut with a goal.

He fired a long-range effort wide of the right post, and minutes later he forced his way into the area, but was penalized for pushing.

The former Barcelona, Real Madrid, Inter and AC Milan striker was without doubt the main focus of attention in a match that Corinthians won 2-0. The match corresponded to the first round of the Copa do Brasil.

At the final whistle several excited reporters mobbed Ronaldo, and he was hurt in the process. He quickly made his way into the tunnel while touching his sore head.

Ronaldo is likely to start for the first time in the top-of-the-table Paulista derby with Palmeiras on the weekend.

# Bayern lose their crown

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's desperate recent domestic form continued on Wednesday as the defending German Cup holders were eliminated from the competition as the equally out-of-form Bayer Leverkusen beat them 4-2 in their quarterfinal clash.

Bayern, who have lost two and drawn one of their last three league matches, found themselves 3-0 down after Bayer scored three goals in 16 second-half minutes and with just 20 minutes remaining.

Jurgen Klinsmann's side fought back to make it 3-2 with two goals in the next four minutes but Bayer ensured they progressed with a goal in the second minute of time added on.

Bayer's Swiss international Tranquillo Barnetta had opened the scoring in the 54th minute with a superb shot and they quickly doubled their advantage through a header by Arturo Vidal from a corner.

When Patrick Helmes added a third it looked game over for Bayern, who had won four of the last six editions of the Cup.

However at least in attack they showed some resilience as Brazilian defender Lucio pounced to take advantage of a poor punch by German international 'keeper Rene Adler to make it 3-1 and then Bayer's nerves were set truly on edge as two minutes later Miroslav Klose scored following a terrific pass by Franck Ribery.

Despite this it was too little too late as Bayer - with three

defeats, a draw and a win in their last five matches - added a deserved fourth.

Earlier on Wednesday both Hamburg and Werder Bremen had moved through to the semifinals - Hamburg beating struggling Second Division Wiesbaden 2-1 while Werder Bremen were impressive 5-2 winners over VfL Wolfsburg.

Brazilian star Diego Pizarro were the stars of the show for Werder as they grabbed a brace apiece.

Schalke 04's disappointing season continued on Tuesday

as they were knocked out of the German Cup 1-0 by Second Division Mainz in their quarterfinal clash.

An 88th minute goal by Burkina Faso's Aristide Bance was enough to end four-time Cup winners Schalke's interest in the competition and send Mainz - who are second in their division - into the semifinals for the first time in their history.

Schalke's exit heaps the pressure on their Dutch coach Fred Ruten as they are eighth in the league, nine points adrift of leaders Hertha Berlin.

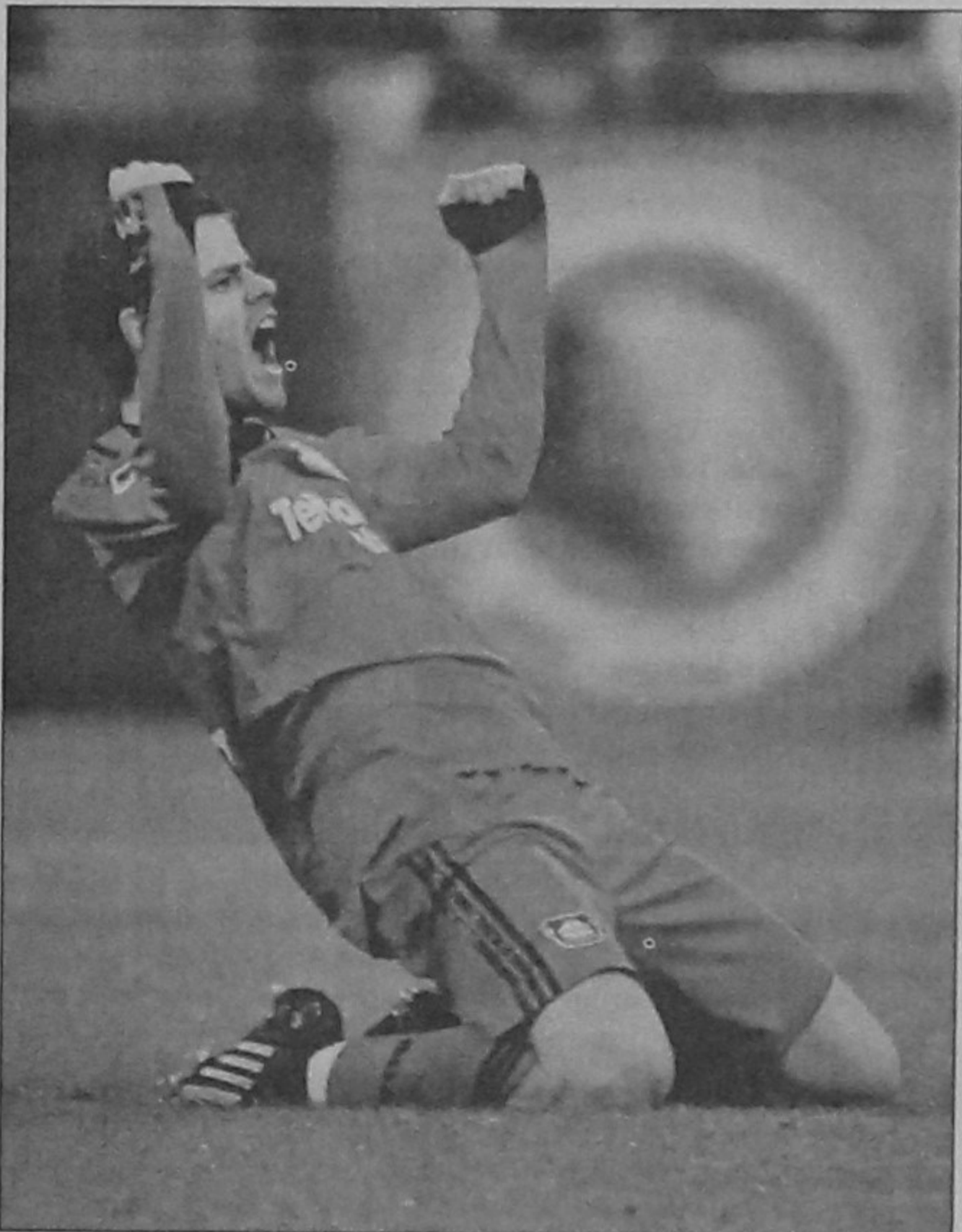


PHOTO: AFP

Leverkusen star Tranquillo Barnetta is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Bayer Leverkusen during their German Cup quarterfinal in Leverkusen on Wednesday.

# Lyon, PSG eliminated

Football

AFP, Paris

Last year's French Cup finalists Lyon and Paris Saint Germain went tumbling out of the competition on Wednesday night, ending Lyon's hopes of a repeat League and Cup double.

French league leaders Lyon fell 3-2 at Lille to a Nicolas Fauvergue winner in the third minute of injury time, while two goals for third-division Rodez in the last five minutes of extra time earned a 3-1 home win over PSG in round of 16 matches.

Two goals from Jeremy Choplin and another from Miguel Pacios meant Paul Le Guen's in-form PSG outfit, who are challenging strongly for the French league title and are in the last 16 of the UEFA Cup, were humbled by lowly opposition.

A run of five victories and a draw in all competitions for PSG came to an end against little Rodez, who are more in danger of going down from their division rather than moving up into the second flight.

After congratulating the winners, PSG boss Le Guen said tiredness could have been an issue. "They were fresher than us," Le Guen said. "I know

that might sound like excuses but that is not my intention. (...)

"We have been playing match after match for quite some time now and sometimes a good attitude, desire and effort are not enough. We lost in the semifinal of the League Cup and now we are out of the French Cup against Rodez, it's

a bit worrying.

"You have to congratulate the winners but there is also the disturbing aspect because we used up a lot of energy and we have to play again on Saturday night. I'm a bit worried about future games but we will just have to get on with it."

PSG went ahead through Sammy Traore in the eighth minute though the conceding of the goal seemed to spur on Rodez who gained the initiative and had numerous chances.

Choplin equalised in the 72nd minute from 25 metres, thanks to a fortunate deflection, then put his side ahead five minutes before the end of extra time. Portuguese striker Pacios netted Rodez's third with two minutes to go.

Meanwhile Lyon twice equalised in the first half through Jean II Makoun and then Anthony Mounier, after Lille's opener through Michel Bastos and Eden Hazard's superb solo goal.

Lille's Fauvergue had the final say in the dying seconds of the match however, his shot in open play from the penalty spot rifling under the crossbar of Lyon keeper Remy Vercoutre for the winner.

Lyon have an immediate shot at revenge when they play Lille in the league at the Stade de France on Saturday.

# C'Ron fisticuffs after 'ugly' jibe

THE GUARDIAN

Cristiano Ronaldo was involved in a confrontation with Newcastle's Steven Taylor in the players' tunnel at half-time of Manchester United's 2-1 victory at St James' Park on Wednesday night, calling the Newcastle defender 'a rubbish footballer' and having to be calmed down by his captain, Rio Ferdinand, and the referee, Steve Bennett.

Taylor had been booked for a rash challenge on Ronaldo before half-time and the pair exchanged angry words as they made their way to their dressing rooms. Ronaldo reportedly started the exchange by calling Taylor a rubbish footballer, to which the Newcastle defender responded by allegedly saying that, at least, "he wasn't ugly".

Ronaldo repeated the claim about Taylor being a poor footballer and the exchange ended with the defender apparently saying, "I know, but you are still ugly" before Ferdinand and Bennett intervened.

Newcastle's stand-in manager, Chris Hughton, defended his player after the game. "I've had the opportunity to see it again and Steven was a bit headstrong in his endeavour to pull Ronaldo back, but he caught him on the shoulder and neck, that's all it was," he said.

The FA are to wait on Bennett's report before it decides if it will take any action regarding the incident in the tunnel. However it cannot take any further action against Taylor for the tackle if it wished to, as he has already been booked for the offence.

# Barca meet Bilbao in final

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao the two most successful clubs in Spanish Cup history will meet in the final of this season's renewal after both came through their semifinals successfully on Wednesday.

Barcelona, who have 24 Cup wins to their name, were held to a 1-1 draw in Majorca by Mallorca but progressed 3-1 on aggregate, though they are now winless in four successive matches in all competitions and have seen their league lead whittled right down by bitter rivals Real Madrid.

Indeed Barcelona, who last won the Cup in 1998, could have been in real trouble had not their reserve goalkeeper Jose Manuel Pinto saved a penalty in the 52nd minute which saw Barca defender Martin Caceres sent off.

However, they settled once Mallorca's Josemi was also red carded in the 70th minute and 11 minutes later they wrapped up their place in the final when Lionel Messi netted.

Athletic Bilbao, who have won the Cup 23 times on the last occasion in 1984 beating Barcelona, wrapped up their place in the first-half of their second leg match with Sevilla as they scored three times to run out 3-0 winners on the night and 4-2 on aggregate.

The final is in Valencia on May 13.

AFP, London



Manchester United took another big step towards a third straight English title after coming from behind to beat Newcastle 2-1 and reclaim a seven-point lead at the top of the table.

Wins for Liverpool and Chelsea 24 hours earlier had encouraged thoughts of the title battle being opened up once more, which were further encouraged by Peter Lovenkrands 9th-minute opener for Newcastle.

But the stumble United's rivals had hoped for failed to materialise as United hit back through Wayne Rooney and Dimitar Berbatov.

Elsewhere, Manchester City dented Aston Villa's hopes of securing Champions League football next season with a 2-0 win at Eastlands while Stoke escaped from the relegation zone by beating Bolton by the same margin.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson admitted his side had not been at their best but paid tribute to his players' determination.

"It wasn't a great performance," admitted the Scot. "We got off to a terrible start, and Newcastle were pumped up for it."

"But coming from 1-0 down was a good result for us.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov (top) scores the winning goal past Newcastle United defender Fabricio Coloccini (lying on the ground) during their Premier League encounter at St. James' Park on Wednesday.