

Napoli's noble gesture

AFP, Rome

Serie A club Napoli will donate the proceeds from their next home match against Atalanta on Saturday to the victims of the L'Aquila earthquake.

Catania and Siena followed up that announcement by saying they would do likewise following their next home matches on April 19 against Sampdoria and Chievo respectively.

The latest death toll stands at 179 people while thousands have been left homeless after their houses collapsed during the earthquake in the Abruzzo region which struck in the early hours of Monday morning and measured 6.2 on the Richters scale.

"President Aurelio De Laurentiis, who has been profoundly touched by the human tragedy, has decided, as an act of solidarity, to give the takings from the Napoli-Atalanta match to the families of victims of the earthquake in Abruzzo," said a brief statement from Napoli.

The Italian Football Federation (Fige) announced that all players in the top two divisions would wear black armbands and observe a minute's silence during this weekend's matches.

They also called off all amateur football in the Abruzzo region this week and suspended the tour of the World Cup trophy, which was due to arrive soon in Abruzzo.

"This is a tragedy that has hit the whole country. The football world is a popular one which must bow its head as a mark of respect," said Fige president Giancarlo Abete.

"We share the pain of the families of the victims, Italian football won't fail to show its solidarity with the population affected by this tragedy."

A minute's silence will be observed and black armbands worn for Udinese's UEFA Cup clash against Werder Bremen on Thursday as well.

Serie A team Fiorentina, who have an official supporters' club in L'Aquila, have also vowed to help those affected by the earthquake.

Their defender Luciano Zauri said he would organise some kind of benefit for the victims but said he needed more time to iron out the details before giving away any more than that.

Long lay-off beckons for Gallas

AFP, Paris

Veteran French international defender William Gallas faces a long lay-off after suffering a medial ligament injury during Arsenal's 1-1 away draw with Villarreal on Tuesday according to Gunners manager Arsene Wenger.

Gallas had to come off during the first-half and is definitely out of next week's second leg match in London as Arsenal's Spanish goalkeeper Manuel Almunia, who also came off in the first-half with a twisted ankle.

"Gallas has a medial ligament injury," Wenger told Canal Plus.

"The initial diagnosis doesn't appear to be very positive, but it will be clearer on Wednesday."

"As for Almunia it is the second time he has twisted his right ankle, and generally that means a three week lay-off," added Wenger.

Berlin lose Freidrich

AFP, Berlin

Germany defender Arne Friedrich will miss most of his club's remaining Bundesliga matches in the title race after the Hertha Berlin captain had a knee operation on Wednesday and now faces six weeks.

The centre back had a successful operation on his left knee in Potsdam, near Berlin, on Wednesday morning and the 29-year-old is now expected to be out for four to six weeks.

Friedrich, who has won 64 caps for his country, is expected back for Hertha's games against Schalke on May 16 and Karlsruhe on May 23.

Berlin were knocked from top spot to third in the league when they lost to Borussia Dortmund last Saturday.

His replacement is Germany's Far East tour in between May 26 and June 3 is in question when the national team will play China in Shanghai on May 29 and Saudi Arabia in Dubai on June 2.



Arsenal striker Emanuel Adebayor (R) executes a perfect scissor-kick from the edge of the box to score the equaliser in their Champions League quarterfinal against Villarreal at the El Madrigal on Tuesday. Adebayor's fabulous strike meant that Arsenal got a crucial away goal in Spain.

PHOTO: AFP

Fergie calls for a rally



AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson has challenged Manchester United to keep their Champions League title defence alive by becoming the first English team to win in Porto.

Ferguson's holders face an uphill struggle to reach the semifinals after being held to a 2-2 draw by the Portuguese champions in Tuesday's last eight first leg clash at Old Trafford.

Porto's two away goals mean United need to win or earn an unlikely high-scoring draw at the Dragao Stadium next Wednesday to stay in the competition.

Ferguson admits it is a daunting prospect, especially given the woeful record of Premier League teams in Porto.

Arsenal lost 2-0 at the Dragao this season, while United have failed to return from Porto with a win twice under Ferguson and Liverpool

and Chelsea have also been frustrated there.

"It's a difficult job now because no British team has won in Porto," Ferguson said. "We have to win the game. We've been good at firsts at this club so this is an occasion when we can be first again. We have a job to do."

United looked to have earned a barely deserved victory when Carlos Tevez stabbed United into the lead with five minutes to play at Old Trafford.

But Porto substitute Mariano equalised four minutes later to give the visitors just reward for an impressive display and leave United almost certainly needing to become the first English side to win at Porto's stadium next week.

Jesualdo Ferreira's side had gone ahead early in the first half through Cristian Rodriguez and could have been further in front before a calamitous mistake from Bruno Alves set up Wayne Rooney's equaliser.

Not for the first time in recent weeks, United looked

nervous in defence and short of urgency in attack. Now they face a testing trip to the Dragao Stadium next Wednesday knowing only a victory or an extremely high-scoring draw will keep alive their hopes of retaining the Champions League trophy.

"The result was about right. First half they were the better side but second half we improved and got more possession," Ferguson said.

"But getting the (second) goal the way they did - we should really have defended that. It was a bad goal to lose."

"It's been a hard two days for them but they were lacking in concentration."

"You get a 2-1 lead with four or five minutes left, you really should see it out. It's a difficult game now in Porto, no question of that."

Ferreira added: "In the first half we were the team that attacked more and had more corners. In the second half we were able to keep out United's attacks."

"We had a good reaction to United's second goal. It is a joy to see my team play like this."

Moscow still haunts Terry

AFP, Liverpool

Chelsea captain John Terry, has revealed he is still haunted by his penalty miss in last season's Champions League final and is unsure whether he will ever truly get over the experience.

The England defender has been in excellent form as Guus Hiddink's team chase domestic and European success this term.

But Terry said he was still hurting inside after his miss from the spot helped Manchester United be crowned champions of Europe last May in Moscow.

Ahead of the first leg of Chelsea's all-England Champions League quarterfinal with Liverpool at Anfield on Wednesday, Terry said: "I'm very determined to go the extra step this year and win the trophy."

"That burning (disappointment) I suffered last year will live with me forever. The one way I can make that pain ease a little bit is to win this trophy," Terry also told reporters at Anfield here on Tuesday.

"I can do that with the manager we have in charge this year. It's not just about me. It's a team game. Everybody has felt the pain I've felt."

"My personal memories will never go away, but it's about the team. We, as a squad, can go on and do great things in the competition."

This is the fifth successive season that Liverpool and Chelsea, who are second and third in the Premier League table respectively, have met in Europe.

England gain ground

AFP, Paris

England's World Cup qualifier win over Ukraine has pushed Fabio Capello's side up two places into seventh in FIFA's latest world rankings released on Wednesday.

World champions Italy slipped one spot down to fifth while 1998 World Cup winners France broke into the top ten after their back-to-back wins over Lithuania. FIFA rankings

1. Spain
2. Germany
3. Netherlands
4. Brazil (+1)
5. Italy (-1)
6. Argentina
7. England (+2)
8. Croatia (-1)
9. Russia (-1)
10. France (+2)

Ade's acrobatics



AFP, Villarreal

A brilliant acrobatic equaliser by Emmanuel Adebayor earned Arsenal a 1-1 draw and a crucial away goal in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal against Villarreal here on Tuesday.

Spain's Euro 2008 victor Marcos Senna had put Villarreal into a 10th minute lead with an unstoppable levelling shot but Adebayor swerved on 65 minutes with his fourth Champions League goal and it was one to remember.

The Togo striker controlled a superb pass from Cesc Fabregas on his chest before volleying home with an acrobatic scissors kick.

The away goal makes Arsenal slight favourites for the tie going into the return leg at their Emirates Stadium on April 15.

However, the joy at getting the away goal will have been tempered by the news that first choice goalkeeper Manuel Almunia faces perhaps three weeks out with an

ankle injury and France international defender William Gallas faces a lengthy absence after suffering a medial ligament injury.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger was impressed by the quality of both sides and acknowledged that his side were not over the line yet as he bids to land the trophy for the first time.

"I am pleased with the quality we have shown and added to the mental strength and desire we have shown."

"But we know Villarreal are a good team as well, so we will have to be on our toes in the second leg."

"The team has shown the whole season they are mentally very strong and when they have their backs to the wall, these young players always find the answer."

"I believe we have created momentum."

Adebayor was delighted to have made an impact after returning from injury.

"I wanted to do something good," he said.

"I am very pleased and very happy."

"I don't really know how I scored. We are delighted."

"Of course the injuries in the first half (to Almunia and Gallas) didn't help our rhythm but Villarreal played really well, especially Senna and we came back well in the second-half."

Senna said that despite conceding the away goal Villarreal had far from given up hope.

"They are the favourites now because they have the away goal and home advantage for the next game," said Senna.

"However, we won't be throwing in the towel and believe we can win at Arsenal."

Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini said his side deserved to win and that Arsenal were only slight favourites to progress.

"I think overall we did more than Arsenal. They had a good period of 20 minutes in the second half but we were superior in the first half and in the closing stages of the match," said Pellegrini.

"In theory they have a slight advantage but I still think the tie is 50-50."

City face stern test



AFP, Paris

Manchester City defender Nedum Onuoha says medals and not money will tempt new recruits to the big-spending club, ahead of their UEFA Cup quarterfinal first leg at Hamburg.

City's take-over by the hugely wealthy Abu Dhabi United Group in September thrust the club into the spotlight and after an indifferent start they are now beginning to climb the Premier League table.

Such is the club's financial strength that rumours are already beginning to circulate about who they will sign in the summer, but England Under-21 captain Onuoha feels the UEFA Cup trophy is more likely to lure big names than the promise of a juicy contract.

"That would definitely mean more than the money," Onuoha said.

"There is so much potential here now and the chance to be able to afford better players. But they will come because they see the club is moving in the right direction."

City's form has been patchy all season - they have managed consecutive league victories on just two occasions - and much has been made of the performances of 32.5million-pound record signing Robinho, who hasn't scored since the end of December.

The Brazilian has been playing with a sexual assault charge hanging over his head, but after that was dropped on Monday and City skipper Richard Dunne backed the fleet-footed winger to rediscover his best form.

"It was an awful thing to be accused of and it would affect any man in that situation," Dunne said.

"He's got a young family and they are his main concern so hopefully that has lifted a bit of weight off his shoulders and he can start playing with a smile on his face again and showing what he can do."

City coach Mark Hughes has injury concerns over left-back Wayne Bridge, former Hamburg utility man Gelson Fernandes and star midfielder Steven Ireland, and he will be mindful that Hamburg are in top form after a 1-0 victory over Hoffenheim on Saturday sent them up to second place in the Bundesliga.

The winners of the tie will face either Hamburg's German counterparts Werder Bremen - who knocked out favourites AC Milan in the round of 32 - or Udinese, the only Italian side left in European competition.

On-loan Chelsea striker Claudio Pizarro netted a hat-trick as Bremen trounced Hannover 4-1 in the league on Sunday, while Udinese will be without talismanic captain Antonio di Natale after he suffered a serious knee injury while on international duty with Italy.

The other two last-eight ties feature four of the biggest names from France and Ukraine.

Ukrainian champions Shakhtar Donetsk face Marseille, whose fierce rivals Paris St-Germain take on runaway Ukrainian league leaders Dynamo Kiev.

With a 15-point advantage over Shakhtar, Dynamo are well-placed to secure the national championship, but Marseille and PSG are both firmly still in the French title race, one point and four points off leaders Lyon respectively.

Both sides won at the weekend to stay in the domestic title hunt and their fans are now dreaming of a semifinal showdown in the UEFA Cup.

"I'd really like to play Paris in the next round," said Marseille winger Hatem Ben Arfa.

"It would be a great match and a great season if we managed to beat them again. That would prove that we are better than them."

FIXTURES

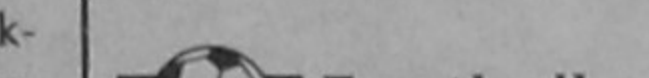
(1845GMT unless otherwise stated)
 Thursday
 Hamburg (GER) v Manchester City (ENG)
 Paris St-Germain (FRA) v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)
 Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) v Marseille (FRA) (1630GMT)
 Werder Bremen (GER) v Udinese (ITA)



Olympique Marseille striker Mamadou Samassa signs an autograph for a fan as the team arrives at Donetsk airport late on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Adriano goes AWOL



AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Inter Milan striker Adriano has taken refuge in his home favela in a state of depression after a painful break-up with his girlfriend, his former companion claimed here Tuesday.

Adriano's whereabouts and wellbeing have been the subject of intense speculation since he went off the radar after appearing for Brazil in a World Cup qualifier last week.

Inter had had no contact with the troubled 27-year-old whose absence has led to rumours of kidnapping or problems with drugs. His Brazilian agent, Gilmar

Rinaldi, has denied those theories but he did acknowledge in the local press that Adriano had a "serious" problem which he wanted to resolve before returning to Milan.

His ex-girlfriend, Joana Machado, lifted some of the mystery surrounding the star in an interview with Tuesday's O Dia newspaper.

She said the player had spent the last few days with his friends in the favela Vila Cruzeiro - one of the most violent districts in Rio, where he was born and grew up.

"It's in Vila Cruzeiro that Adriano feels comfortable. He likes to fly kites, walk in barefeet. There he doesn't play the role of The Emperor (Adriano's nickname)," the 28-

year-old told the paper. Machado added: "Adriano is totally lost, but I no longer have the strength to deal with him."

She added that Adriano did meet drug traffickers whom he had known since he was a child but categorically denied that he was a user.

"His only drug is beer," she stated.

"But who doesn't like a beer from time to time?"

Machado said she had split up with Adriano because of his excessive jealousy.

Such is the concern over the player that the Brazil Football Confederation were moved to issue a statement saying that Adriano was at home with relatives.