

Guus looking ahead

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

Guus Hiddink admits Chelsea cannot afford a repeat of their epic Champions League quarterfinal second leg against Liverpool when they face Barcelona in the semi-finals.

Hiddink's side reached the last four after surviving one of the most dramatic matches in the history of Europe's elite club competition at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday.

After winning 3-1 at Anfield in the first leg, Chelsea were expected to cruise through but twice they were within one goal of surrendering that lead as Liverpool made a heroic bid for victory. It wasn't until Frank Lampard scored his second goal in the last minute that the Blues could finally relax.

The amazing 4-4 draw sealed a 7-5 aggregate success

for Chelsea, but Hiddink knows Barcelona are capable of making Chelsea pay a heavier price if they produce another performance laced with so many errors.

"Barcelona have skilful players and they know how to handle the pace of the game. They always like to play an advanced, attacking game," Hiddink said.

"If you give teams who are very skilful too much space, they know how to handle it and go into that space. Then you are in for a very difficult match."

"It is difficult to play them because they are a top team, but it is one of those beautiful games at the end of the season."

Chelsea's cause won't be helped by the absence of Ashley Cole after he picked up a booking that triggers a one-match ban. With Paulo Ferreira injured, Hiddink has no experienced cover for the England left-back.

Hiddink will also have to

spend time working out a way to restore Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech's shattered confidence.

After conceding three goals against Bolton on Saturday, Cech looked a nervous wreck and was caught completely out of position by Fabio Aurelio's clever first half freekick.

Hiddink admitted Cech's morale is low but refused to consider dropping him for Saturday's FA Cup semifinal against Arsenal.

"Petr is very intelligent and self-critical. He wasn't happy with his performance against Bolton. He knows he had a difficult time and also against Liverpool you could see there were times when he didn't have full confidence," Hiddink said.

"But I think a goalie once in a while has a right not to have a big performance. We will think about the situation but if a player is playing badly it is not always the reason to make a change."

Diego faces fitness race

AFP, Bremen

Bremen playmaker Diego faces a race against time to shake off a thigh injury before Thursday's UEFA Cup quarterfinal second-leg tie against Udinese, it was revealed Wednesday.

Diego scored twice in Bremen's 3-1 win over Udinese at the Weserstadion last week and coach Thomas Schaaf is hoping the 24-year-old will be fit in time for the second-leg.

"His leg is better, but it is not perfect yet," said Bremen's Schaaf.

"We are simply hoping he can play, but it will be close."

"Diego is a proven goal-scorer and decision maker."

The Brazilian, who has scored three goals in five UEFA Cup games this season, says he will do all he can to be fit.

'Adriano's career not over'

AFP, Rome

Troubled Brazil forward Adriano's agent insisted on Tuesday that his client's career is not over.

The 27-year-old went to Brazil for international duty last month and has not returned to his club Inter Milan, claiming he would be unhappy if he came back to Italy.

His agent Gilmar Rinaldi is rumoured to be negotiating a termination to his club contract with Inter but he says that Adriano will be back.

"I think he will return to playing, he needs time to reflect and to make a decision," said Rinaldi upon his arrival at Milan's Malpensa airport.

"He's calm in Rio (de Janeiro) with his family and now we're waiting to talk with Inter."

"We have to do these things slowly, without haste, evaluating everything a little and then with Inter we'll make a decision."

"But now we have to be cool, in Brazil and in Italy many things have been said, even that Adriano was dead."

Rinaldi added that he had received no contact from other clubs regarding Adriano's availability.

"Even if I do get an offer we wouldn't reply. Right now there's other things to sort out," he said.

"There is a team, Inter, that has a contract and brought Adriano to Italy six years ago, we have to respect that."

"First we have to talk to them," explain everything and then we'll see."

Gerrard against MU quintet

AFP, London

Premier League champions Manchester United provided five of the six nominees for the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) player of the season award when they were announced on Tuesday.

The only non United player to be nominated is Liverpool's inspirational captain Steven Gerrard.

The United quintet are headed by favourite for the award Serbian central defender Nemanja Vidic, veteran Welsh star Ryan Giggs - who has never won it - Vidic's centrecback partner Rio Ferdinand, Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo and veteran Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar.

For Giggs it probably represents his last crack at getting the ultimate nod from his peers while Gerrard can hope that he benefits as David Ginola did in 1999 by winning because the vote for the United players is split - something that infuriated Sir Alex Ferguson.

Ronaldo is bidding to become the first player to win it on three successive occasions.

United's recent slump in form didn't matter as the voting for the nominations took place prior to it.

The decision will be announced in London on April 26.

NOMINEES

PFA player of the year award: Rio Ferdinand (Man Utd), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Ryan Giggs (Man Utd), Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd), Edwin van der Sar (Man Utd), Nemanja Vidic (Man Utd)

PFA young player of the year award: Gabriel Agbonlahor (Aston Villa), Rafael Da Silva (Man Utd), Jonny Evans (Man Utd), Stephen Ireland (Man City), Aaron Lennon (Tottenham), Ashley Young (Aston Villa)



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Barcelona during their Champions League quarterfinal second-leg clash at the Allianz Arena on Tuesday.

Bayern restore pride

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Munich

French playmaker Franck Ribery ensured Bayern Munich exited the Champions League with at least some dignity as the German giants held Barcelona 1-1 in Tuesday's quarterfinal second-leg.

Having come to Munich with a virtually unbeatable 4-0 advantage from the first-leg at the Nou Camp, Barcelona go through 5-1 on aggregate to book their semifinal showdown against Chelsea.

"We are pleased to be in the semifinals, we still have a lot of games to get through before we can think of Chelsea," said Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola.

"They are a good side, but we need to go and look at the Bayern game first and look at how we played, there are areas to improve."

No side in the competition's history had ever over-turned a four goal deficit and Bayern were always going to need a miracle to reach the last four against Barcelona.

Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann was booed by his own fans before kick-off, but this result, on the back of the

weekend's 4-0 win over Frankfurt in the German league, will have taken some of the pressure off the ex-Germany coach.

"We wanted an early goal, then anything could have been possible, but we have lacked the little bit of luck," said Klinsmann.

"The team gave a good account of themselves against one of the teams who are favourite to take the Champions League title."

And Bayern players could at least hold their heads high having matched the Spanish.

"We were much better in the personal duels, things were a bit more normal, and we played the way you need to against such a good team," said Germany defender Philipp Lahm.

"But unfortunately we have still lost the tie."

After going close in the first-half, Ribery finally unpicked the Barcelona defence on 47 minutes before Seydou Keita equalised for the Spanish with less than 20 minutes left.

No Spanish side has ever won the treble of league, Kings Cup and Champions League, but Barcelona are on course to take all three titles as Guardiola hopes to lead the Spaniards to a third European title after 1992 and 2006.

A fever removed one of Bayern's chief tormentors from the second leg here as France striker Thierry Henry succumbed to a high temperature, but Guardiola retained a three-prong attack with Andres Iniesta pushed further upfield.

Germany strikers Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose were both ruled out with calf and ankle injuries respectively leaving Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni as the lone forward with Ribery playing just behind him.

Both Ribery and Toni went close in the first-half, but both blasted their shots over the bar as it stayed 0-0 at the interval.

Immediately after the break Bayern finally unlocked the Barcelona defence.

A great pass from Ze Roberto split the visitor's defence and Ribery skipped inside the penalty area before rifling his shot past goalkeeper Victor Valdes on 47 minutes.

It looked as though Bayern were heading for a win before Barcelona awoke from their slumber and showed their true class.

Iniesta and Eto'o combined in the Bayern penalty area and Xavi Hernandez pulled a pass back to Keita whose shot gave Butt no chance as it ended honours even.

Laursen out for season

AFP, Birmingham

Aston Villa will have to do without injured captain Martin Laursen for the rest of the season, manager Martin O'Neill predicted on Wednesday.

Laursen has not played since injuring his knee in January and hopes of a return were dashed when he suffered a setback at the club's training break in Dubai last month.

O'Neill said: "Martin is struggling. There's not much more to say. He'll be struggling to play again before the end of the season."

Villa have sorely missed the presence of Laursen at the back, conceding 24 goals in their last 10 matches.

Striker Gabriel Agbonlahor is improving after suffering a hamstring injury against Everton last weekend although he remains doubtful for Saturday's home meeting with West Ham.

Villa are still awaiting the results of a scan on the England player.

O'Neill said: "Gabby came off the pitch on Sunday with a hamstring niggle. It seems to be getting better. But we are awaiting the results of a scan."

"At the back of the doctor's mind is a concern that he may have strained it. That would make him doubtful for this weekend's game."

"He certainly seems to be responding - no doubt about that - but he still remains a doubt for the West Ham match."

Agbonlahor's absence could be offset by the return of Emile Heskey who suffered a hamstring injury during England's recent friendly international with Slovakia at Wembley.

O'Neill said: "Emile has trained for the last couple of days and that is encouraging for us. It would be good if he could make it for the weekend."

"We will see how he is later in the week because we have a few days yet. But at least he has been out training and he is certainly making progress."

Serie A fighters banned

AFP, Rome

Four Serie A players were on Tuesday hit with lengthy bans after being involved in fights at the weekend.

Fiorentina's Felipe Melo and Diego Lopez of Cagliari were each handed a five-match suspension for their part in a brawl in the tunnel following the match between the two teams in Florence on Saturday, won 2-1 by the home side.

France defender Philippe Mexes and Lazio's Brazilian midfielder Francesco Matuzalem were each banned for three matches following a scrap they had during Lazio's 4-2 win in the Rome derby.

Anfield recalls Hillsborough

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Anfield football ground stood in silence Wednesday to mark the 20th anniversary of the Hillsborough stadium disaster, in which 96 people were crushed to death.

A bell tolled as the names of the victims were read out, ahead of a minute's silence at 3:06 pm - the time when the FA Cup semifinal between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest was abandoned, as the full scale of the tragedy became clear.

The bells of Liverpool's two cathedrals also rang out to honour the victims of the disaster, caused by massive overcrowding in the Leppings Lane end of the Hillsborough ground in the northern city of Sheffield.

After the silence -- which was also observed outside Hillsborough and in Nottingham, where people bowed their heads in a mark of respect to those who died -- the crowd spontaneously broke out into dignified applause.

Real announce election date

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid announced Wednesday it will hold elections for a new club president on June 14.

Current president Vicente Boluda, who replaced the embattled Ramon Calderon in January, has announced he will not stand.

The favourite to take over is Florentino Perez, who led Real in its 'Galactico' years, from 2000 to 2006, during which time it won the Primera Liga twice and European Champions League with such stars as Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, and Luis Figo.

Jol dismisses City switch

AFP, Paris



Martin Jol insists he is concentrating on turning Hamburg into a top side despite growing talk of a switch to

Manchester City, the Germans' opponents in Thursday's UEFA Cup quarterfinals return.

With a 3-1 lead from the first encounter Bundesliga title contenders Hamburg look favourites to reach the last four and former Spurs boss Jol is keen to extend his adventure in the stylish northern German city, even if media reports say he could replace Mark Hughes should the Welshman leave City in the summer.

Jol has a contract until the end of next season and while he has not yet talked about an extension he admits that "I can imagine working here for a lot longer yet."

The board are hoping to take Kevin Keegan's former club - they won the Bundesliga with Keegan on board, then lifted the European Cup in 1983 after he had left - to the next level.

"They want to take the next step, so I've read - and I'm curious to see what that entails," said Jol.

While Hamburg seek to re-establish themselves as a major force in a European

game which has seen England and Spain come to pre-eminence ahead of Italy while Germany has relatively faded into the background, City are likewise chasing the elite.

For all the talk of being the world's richest club following last year's takeover by the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment, City have endured a mediocre English Premiership campaign and are set to finish in mid-table.

European success for the first time since a Cup Winners Cup win in 1970 might save Hughes', though the injury loss of livewire forward Craig Bellamy is a blow.

Bellamy suffered a recurrence of a knee injury in the match in Germany while strike partner Benjani Mwaruwani is battling a thigh muscle strain and winger Shaun Wright-Phillips has ankle trouble. But Brazilian Robinho, rested for a week-end loss against Fulham, will play.

"We're hopeful that Shaun

FIXTURES

Marseille (FRA) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) (Donetsk lead 2-0)
Manchester City (ENG) v Hamburg (GER) (Hamburg lead 3-1)
Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v Paris St-Germain (FRA) (1st leg: 0-0)
Udinese (ITA) v Werder Bremen (GER) (Werder lead 3-1)

Carlo eyes 2nd place

AFP, Milan



AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti has set his team a new target: second place in Serie A.

A couple of weeks ago the 49-year-old said the nerazzurri had had to reassess their goals for the season and would be aiming for third place and a direct spot in the Champions League group stages in the next campaign.

Back then they sat 14 points behind leaders Inter Milan and seven away from second-placed Juventus with fourth-placed Genoa breathing down their necks.

However, Juve have picked up only one point from their last two games and now Milan sit only two points behind their old rivals.

"We can believe in it because right now Juventus are back in our sights," Ancelotti told Milan's official TV channel.

"The bianconeri will have to be careful, just as we will. They have to play against Inter on Saturday and that for us is an extra stimulus to catch them."

Ancelotti has not forgotten about Genoa, though, who trail the seven-times European champions by just four points.

And Milan maintained that



CARLO ANCELOTTI

gap with a fortunate and hard-fought 1-0 victory at Chievo on Saturday.

"That was important for the standings. Even if we didn't dazzle it was important to win to keep our advantage over Genoa and Fiorentina," he said.

"We have to be careful because one slip could compromise the advantage we have."

Ancelotti also defended

playmaker Kaka, who has not shone since returning recently from injury.

"His performance in Verona (at Chievo) was in line with his period of inactivity," added the coach.

"He was out for a long time and needs to find his top form again because Ricky (Kaka) is a player who exploits the speed in his play a lot and if he's not in good condition he's hampered."