



Sporting Lisbon's Liedson (C) vies with Viktor Elm (L) and Michel Breuer of SC Heerenveen during their Europa League match in Heerenveen on Thursday.

## Europa League takes off

Football

AFP, Paris

The group stage of the inaugural Europa League got under way on Thursday, with pre-tournament favourites Roma, Lazio and Hamburg all succumbing to surprise defeats in their opening matches.

Roma, with Claudio Ranieri at the helm for his first European assignment at the club, went down 2-0 at Swiss side Basel in Group E, while German league leaders Hamburg were stunned 3-0 by Rapid Vienna in Group C.

An injury-time goal from Marc Janko earned Red Bull Salzburg a shock 2-1 comeback win at Roma's city rivals Lazio, enabling Villarreal to steal a march in Group G with a 1-0 home win over Levski Sofia.

European football's governing body UEFA is using the tournament to trial the deployment of extra referee assistants behind each goal-line and the officials were an eye-catching if uncontroversial presence on the night.

The extra officials are the brain-child of UEFA president Michel Platini, and the Frenchman was doubly assured of a place in the headlines after his namesake - a Brazilian striker called Michel whose nickname is Platini - scored the opening goal in CSKA Sofia's 1-1 draw against Fulham.

Shakhtar Donetsk, who beat Werder Bremen in the last ever UEFA Cup final in May, began their defence with a 4-1 win at Club Brugge in Group C, while Everton trounced AEK Athens 4-0 in Group I but had Louis Saha sent off following an injury-time altercation with visiting defender Juanfran.

Genoa's Spanish midfielder Alberto Zapater had the honour of scoring the first

ever goal in the tournament's group stage, and his fourth-minute strike set the current Serie A leaders on the way to a 2-0 victory at home to Slavia Prague in Group B.

Elsewhere, Scottish giants Celtic let a 1-0 lead slip in a 2-1 defeat at Hapoel Tel Aviv, while a late equaliser from Ivorian forward Gervinho earned French side Lille a 1-1 draw at home to 2004 champions Valencia.

"I think it was a fair result," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

"We came up against a good team in Lille. Of course there's a bit of regret because we were leading and we were pegged back. It means we lose points but the overall performance was satisfying."

Brazil-born Portuguese international Liedson netted a hat-trick as Sporting Lisbon won 3-2 at Dutch side Heerenveen and there were also wins for Benfica, Athletic Bilbao, Turkish giants Galatasaray and Werder Bremen.

The Europa League is a re-named, streamlined version of the UEFA Cup, with 12 groups of four teams facing off in a round-robin format and the top two from each group qualifying for a place in the knockout phase alongside the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League group stage.

UEFA hope the competition's new look will endear it to clubs, fans and sponsors alike, but Fulham coach Roy Hodgson made his feelings about the tournament plain by making nine changes to his side for their trip to Sofia.

"The priority is undoubtedly the Premier League," Hodgson said.

"The Europa League is a bonus - and a very nice bonus - but the Premier League is our bread and butter. No-one would thank us for reaching the Europa League quarterfinals but getting relegated."

## Samp eye record start

AFP, Rome



If Sampdoria beat lowly Siena at home on Sunday the Genoa-based club will set a new club record of four straight wins at the start of a Serie A campaign.

Sampdoria sit alongside neighbours Genoa and giants Juventus as the only teams with 100-per cent records after three matches and while that will come as little surprise for the other two, for Sampdoria it constitutes a considerable improvement.

A fourth straight win would give them the belief that they are capable of challenging for a Champions League place and top four finish.

With the big three of Inter Milan, Juve and AC Milan expected to battle for the title, there is always the possibility of fighting for fourth place in Italy.

AS Roma would usually be expected to take that fourth spot but they started badly with two straight defeats before a fortuitous late win at Siena a week ago.

It means that the likes of Fiorentina, fourth last season, Genoa, Lazio and even Sampdoria can realistically dream about qualifying for Champions League football.

Driven by former Real Madrid forward Antonio Cassano, Sampdoria are a team moving in the right direction according to defender Marco Rossi.

"We're working well and game after game we're improving our understand-

ing and we're managing to put into practice what the manager (Luigi Del Neri) is teaching us," he said.

It's a good time for the city of Genoa whose other team are sitting top on goals scored above Juve and goal difference over their neighbours.

Genoa are also going great guns in the Europa League, having beaten Slavia Prague 2-0 at home on Thursday.

And all this despite selling two crucial players -- Diego Milito and Thiago Motta -- to champions Inter in the summer.

However, coach Gianpiero Gasperini believes his team is equipped to even improve on last season's fifth place finish.

"For us this is a new season, we've tried to substitute the two departures in the best way possible and we're happy with what we're doing," he said.

"It's a team that is doing a great job in terms of reaching our objectives and taking little steps forward."

Genoa travel to lowly Chievo in what on paper looks a tricky contest but certainly one they will be favourites to win and possibly maintain top spot.

Juve look to have a much

easier tie at home to promoted Livorno but the minnows held Milan to a 0-0 draw a week ago and the Old Lady of Turin are missing several key players.

Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro, club captain Alessandro Del Piero and midfielders Felipe Melo, Momo Sissoko and Tiago are definitely out with Brazilian playmaker Diego a major doubt.

It means the heart of Juve's midfield, their most experienced defender and their best creative spark will all be missing and that after a tough midweek Champions League clash against Bordeaux.

Inter face a difficult trip to Sardinia to play Cagliari following their draw with Barcelona on Wednesday while Milan will be looking to continue the improvements they showed in their 2-1 Champions League victory at Marseille.

Veteran striker Filippo Inzaghi, the two goal hero against the French, should retain his place ahead of Ronaldinho in the starting line-up.

And he believes the club are bouncing back from the 4-0 derby defeat to Inter three weeks ago and subsequent draw at Livorno.

"Milan shouldn't set goals this year but instead live day by day and improve," said Inzaghi.

"We started well (a 2-1 win at Siena) and then there was the big blow in the derby and an unspectacular game at Livorno. Now we've regrouped and we need to find some consistency."

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Juventus v Livorno, Napoli v Udinese  
**Sunday**  
AC Milan v Bologna, Bari v Atalanta, Cagliari v Inter Milan, Catania v Lazio, Chievo v Genoa, Parma v Palermo, AS Roma v Fiorentina, Sampdoria v Siena

## MU face City challenge

AFP, London



Manchester United have made a habit of putting would-be challengers

in their place over the years but it will be with particular relish that they seek to cut their neighbours down to size this weekend.

Manchester City's flaunting of their newly-acquired wealth appears to have got under the skin of everyone at Old Trafford from Sir Alex Ferguson down, providing an intriguing backdrop to the most eagerly awaited derby clash in years.

In their public statements, Ferguson's players have savoured the prospect of pricking City's bubble of self-confidence.

"They want to show people they are the kings of the city but they are not there yet," said Patrice Evra, United's French defender. "We have to make sure that doesn't happen."

It would be surprising however if there was not a bit of trepidation in there as well,

particularly in the wake of City's impressive 4-2 win over Arsenal last weekend, which extended their perfect start to the season to four matches.

The derby may have been billed as an important benchmark for the potential of Mark Hughes's side to break into English football's Champions League elite, but it will also serve as a reference point for assessing the impact of Cristiano Ronaldo's departure on United's ability to win the kind of matches that define seasons.

City's prospects have not been helped by the fact they could be without over 100 million pounds of striking talent at Old Trafford with Emmanuel Adebayor suspended following his stamp on Robin van Persie last weekend, Robinho and Roque Santa Cruz injured and Carlos Tevez struggling to recover from a knee injury in time to face his former team-mates.

United's main concern is over the availability of the increasingly injury-prone Rio Ferdinand.

The lunchtime encounter at Old Trafford is one of two pivotal derby encounters on

Sunday with league leaders Chelsea entertaining Tottenham later in the day.

Tottenham's own aspirations of breaking into the top four were put into perspective by the ease with which United overturned an early deficit to win 3-1 at White Hart Lane last weekend.

Chelsea will have Didier Drogba firing on all cylinders after the Ivory Coast striker sat out the midweek win over FC Porto because of a European ban.

After defeats by both Manchester clubs, Arsenal will seek to put their domestic campaign back on track by

building on a stirring Champions League fightback in Lieke in midweek.

Andrey Arshavin and Robin van Persie, who both missed the 3-2 win in Belgium, are in line for comebacks when Wigan visit the Emirates on Saturday.

Liverpool travel to West Ham on Saturday evening with star striker Fernando Torres having recognised that the Reds have very little room for error after losing two of their opening three league matches.

"We are recovering the confidence now after winning three games in a row," the Spain forward said.

"We have to keep on like this, but also improve. If we lose points in the coming weeks it will be very difficult to stay at the top come January and February."

Elsewhere on Saturday, Portsmouth travel to Aston Villa still looking for their first point of the season, Bolton entertain Stoke, Sunderland are at Burnley and Hull host Birmingham in what, even at this early stage of the campaign, looks like an important relegation battle.

### FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated)  
**Saturday**  
Arsenal v Wigan, Aston Villa v Portsmouth, Bolton v Stoke, Burnley v Sunderland (1145 GMT), Hull City v Birmingham, West Ham v Liverpool (1630 GMT)  
**Sunday**  
Chelsea v Tottenham (1500 GMT), Everton v Blackburn, Manchester Utd v Manchester City (1230 GMT), Wolves v Fulham (1300 GMT)

### IN BRIEF

#### Di Stefano is the greatest: Pele

AFP, Madrid

Brazil legend Pele took a swipe at Diego Maradona on Thursday, saying he feels another Argentine-born player, Real Madrid's iconic former striker Alfredo Di Stefano, is the best player ever.

"People talk about the best being Pele or Diego Maradona, but for me the best player ever was Alfredo Di Stefano," he told reporters in Madrid.

"Maradona was a great player, but he could not kick with his right foot and did not score goals with his head. The only time he scored an important goal with his head, it turned out he had used his hand," he added.

Pele was referring to Maradona's infamous "hand of God" goal in Argentina's 2-1 win over England during 1986 World Cup quarterfinals, when he fooled the referee by punching the ball into the net.

Di Stefano, who played for Real from 1953-63 and has been its honorary president since 2000, scored 418 goals in 510 games for the Spanish giants.

A two-time European Player of the Year, he became a Spanish citizen in 1956.

#### Alonso out for a week

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso will be sidelined for at least one week, while their German defender Christoph Metzelder will be out for at least two weeks, the club said Thursday.

Alonso, who joined Real from Liverpool this summer, suffered an achilles tendon injury during the Spanish club's 5-2 Champions League win over Zurich on Tuesday and will be out for "seven to 10 days," they said in a statement.

The Spanish international was replaced by Fernando Gago in the 59th minute of the away match.

Metzelder, who is suffering from muscle injury in his right leg, will be absent for two to three weeks, the club added.

#### Steaua owner sacks coach

AFP, Bucharest

Steaua Bucharest coach Cristiano Bergodi has been sacked after clashing with the owner of the Romanian giants' during their scoreless draw with Europa League opponents FC Sheriff of Moldova.

According to reports team owner Gigi Becali tried to force his way into the team dressing room at the half-time interval but was prevented from doing so by Italian coach Bergodi.

The reputedly mercurial Becali, who is currently implicated in a corruption scandal, was said to be humiliated and declared at the end of the match that Bergodi would soon be on his way out of the club.

On Friday it appeared Becali kept his word. He was quoted as saying by the Newsin press agency: "Mihai Stoichita is the new coach of the team and will take his first training session today (Friday)."

AFP, London



Emmanuel Adebayor insists he has no regrets over his controversial behaviour in Manchester City's win over his former club Arsenal.

Adebayor has been hit with a three-match ban after being found guilty of violent conduct following a stamp on Arsenal striker Robin van Persie's head during last weekend's match at Eastlands.

The Togo forward has also been charged with improper conduct for racing the length of the pitch to celebration in goal in City's 4-2 victory in front of Arsenal supporters.

But Adebayor is adamant he has nothing to feel guilty about because he had been disrespected by his old team-mates, who he claims refused to shake his hand before the match, and the Arsenal fans who chanted vile abuse at him throughout the highly-charged encounter.

"People talk about us as

being football players and the money we earn, but just because we are fortunate it does not mean we need to take abuse," Adebayor told The Sun.

"If you were to abuse a man in the street for over an hour he would react and it would be a worse reaction than a goal celebration!"

"There is only so much abuse a man can take until he reaches breaking point."

"I was being abused by people who six months ago were singing my name and the abuse was for no reason."

"I scored and I wanted to show people it is not a good

idea to abuse me."

Adebayor's challenge on van Persie drew an angry written response from his former strike partner, who posted a statement on Arsenal's website condemning the City star.

Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas also hit out at Adebayor, claiming a tackle from him left the Spanish midfielder with a three-inch gash.

But Adebayor said: "I am sorry Robin got hurt but I can't regret something I did not mean to do. Anybody who knows me knows I would not

set out to hurt anybody and I would especially not mean to hurt an old team-mate."

"I really am glad Robin was OK because I know my stud was close to his eye but there was really nothing I could have done - there was no way I could have got out of the way in time."

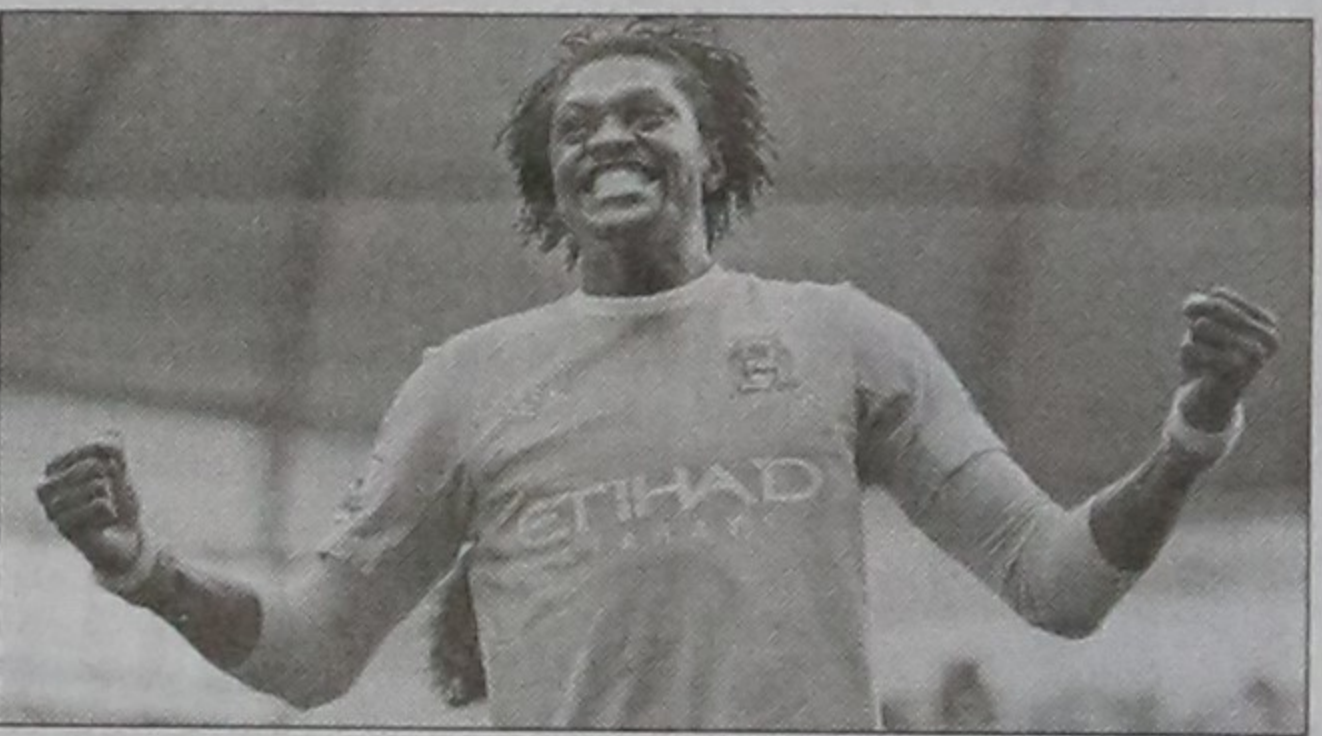
Adebayor, who left Arsenal under a cloud following his flirtation with several big clubs in the previous 18 months, was especially hurt that players he spent years with at Arsenal wouldn't have anything to do with him when he approached them before kick-off.

"There were players from Arsenal who refused to shake my hand before the match," he told The Sun.

"I don't want to give you their names - that is not my style - but there's more than one of them."

"These are people I have spent a lot of time with and people I thought were my friends. The way some of the players behaved is just crazy."

"When a man offers you his hand, you shake it. For them to act like that was a disgrace."



EMMANUEL ADEBAYOR

## Atletico test for Barcelona

AFP, Madrid



Despite Atletico Madrid's dismal start to the campaign, winger M a x i

Rodriguez believes that the under-performing side can rise to the challenge and beat champions Barcelona at the Nou Camp on Sunday.

While Barca are showing the form which allowed them to sweep all before them last season, Atletico Madrid have failed to pick up a win from their opening matches and know they will have to improve if they are to avoid a similar outcome to the 6-1 demolition they received at the hands of Pep Guardiola's men last time round.

"Our results so far have not been what we expected and the team is very disappointed but if we get three points against Barcelona then we are all going to feel a lot better. It is always

good to beat a big side as it changes the mood in the dressing room," said Maxi.

"We cannot make the same mistakes as last season, we have to be concentrated in the first few minutes so that they cannot surprise you and then maybe slowly but surely we can assert ourselves on the game."

Barca have won their two games played so far as have Real Madrid, who after a summer of expensive reinforcements are looking to bring an end to the Catalan club's dominance.

While it had been said that Cristiano Ronaldo was feeling the pressure of expectancy after his high-profile move from Manchester United his two goals for Real in their midweek Champions League victory over FC Zurich will have worked well to take the pressure off his shoulders.

As the team prepare to face Xerez the bad news is that they will be without Xabi Alonso for up to 10 days with a calf injury.

Valencia, who surprisingly

managed to keep hold of their attacking stars David Villa, Juan Mata and David Silva, have also made a strong start to the campaign and coach Unai Emery demonstrated the ambition of the club saying they will be fighting for success in the Champions League as well as domestically.

His side face a Sporting Gijon whose objective will be to stay in the top flight.

Athletic Bilbao are in fine form but will face their first real test when they take on

Villarreal this Sunday who have plenty of quality even without their injured talisman Marcos Senna.

Mallorca surprised Villarreal last weekend earning a point at El Madrigal and now they take on new comers to the top division Tenerife who have shown that they will be no pushovers.

After a poor opening day performance against Valencia, Sevilla answered their critics with a resounding win over Zaragoza and now travel to Osasuna hoping that they can overcome their ten year run without a win in Pamplona.

Espanyol will be looking to get their first points away at Deportivo la Coruna and are hoping that midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura is able to shrug off an ankle strain he picked up on international duty with Japan. The Catalan side are still struggling to come to terms with the loss of their centre-half and club captain Dani Jarque who died of heart failure over the summer.

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Deportivo la Coruna v Espanyol, Mallorca v Tenerife, Osasuna v Sevilla, Malaga v Racing Santander, Barcelona v Atletico Madrid  
**Sunday**  
Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal, Zaragoza v Valladolid, Almeria v Getafe, Real Madrid v Xerez, Valencia v Sporting Gijon

## Bayern's redemption chance

AFP, Berlin



Coach Louis van Gaal says his Bayern Munich side have a chance to redeem their poor

start to the season providing they win Saturday's Bundesliga showdown with Bavaria rivals Nuremberg.

Having started the season without a win from their first three games, Bayern have finally hit some form with Bundesliga wins over defending champions Wolfsburg and Borussia Dortmund as well as a European win at Maccabi Haifa.

Wednesday's 3-0 win at Haifa got their Champions League campaign off to a flying start and Bayern's poor start in

the German league - which included a 2-1 defeat at minnows Mainz - could be forgiven if they beat Nuremberg.

"We had a very difficult preparation before the season with limited time and injured players," said the Dutchman who took over on July 1.

"But if we win on Saturday against Nuremberg, we can speak of a good start - but first of all we must win."

Van Gaal is still without a full strength squad as Germany striker Miroslav Klose and French playmaker Franck Ribery are short of match fitness.

Fresh from their victory in Israel on Tuesday, Bayern Munich are looking to close the five-point gap behind leaders Hamburg.

Last week's 5-1 hammering of Dortmund put Bayern up to fifth in the table and the German giants are chasing

their third straight win against Nuremberg at Munich's Allianz Arena.

In a side packed with stars like Germany's Mario Gomez, Holland's Arjen Robben and France's Franck Ribery, home-grown striker Thomas Mueller from the southern Bavaria has impressed with four goals in his last two games.

Having scored twice when he came off the bench in

Dortmund, the 20-year-old who celebrated his birthday last Sunday, hit two more goals against Maccabi Haifa in Group A of the Champions League.

Leaders Hamburg, who have won their last four games, are at Eintracht Frankfurt who have climbed up to eighth in the table after being undefeated in their last five league games.

For Hamburg, Croatia striker Mladen Petric is in fine form after he produced a wonder goal in the 3-1 win over Stuttgart, while second-placed Bayer Leverkusen are home to Werder Bremen and are level on points with the league leaders.

Stuttgart have a good chance to break their poor run of form having gone four games without a win when they host Cologne on Saturday.

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Bayern Munich v Nuremberg, VfB Stuttgart v Cologne, Hannover 96 v Borussia Dortmund, VfL Bochum v Mainz 05, Borussia M'gladbach v 1899 Hoffenheim  
**Sunday**  
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hamburg, Hertha Berlin v Freiburg, Bayer Leverkusen v Werder Bremen