

Fiorentina floor L'pool

AFP, Paris



Liverpool coach Rafa Benitez slammed his side for a shambolic showing after they compromised their hopes of advancing to the knockout stage of the Champions League with a 2-0 loss Tuesday at Group E rivals Fiorentina.

The five-time European champions had done the minimum in seeing off Hungary's Debrecen to open their campaign at Anfield but the English Premiership giants were undone by two first-half goals from teen Montenegrin striker Stevan Jovetic.

With French side Lyon crushing Debrecen 4-0 away they now lead the group and can travel to Anfield for their next game full of confidence.

Benitez said Liverpool had to pull their socks up if they wanted to advance.

"If you want to win you have to score. We were not the best in any part of the pitch. We were giving the ball away all the time," he told Sky Sports.

Arsenal gave the English contingent some cheer with a 2-0 home win over Olympiakos of Greece with Robin Van Persie and Andrei Arshavin on the mark after the break as coach Arsene Wenger vowed to wrap up passage to the last 16 "as quickly as possible."

Group H rivals AZ Alkmaar and

Standard Liege, whom the pool-topping Gunners have already seen off away, parted 1-1.

But Scottish fans suffered a horror show as Rangers, having started with a gutsy draw at Germany's Stuttgart, went down 4-1 at home to a rampant Sevilla of Spain in Group G.

Stuttgart again drew, this time at Romania's Unirea Urziceni, who held them 1-1.

In stark contrast to woeful Liverpool, Lyon were on fire in Budapest.

Kim Kallstrom scored after just three minutes, firing home a half volley home following a Miralem Pjanic corner from the left and the French doubled their lead when Pjanic netted a freekick after 13 minutes.

Lyon were running riot and Sidney Govou headed in a third on 24 minutes after another Pjanic corner kick routine caused havoc in the home backline.

Bafetimbi Gomis lobbed home the fourth after the break.

"I think we made the game look easy," concluded Lyon coach Claude Puel.

Liverpool preferred to make things hard for themselves as Fiorentina stepped through the gears to bounce back from their loss at Lyon.

And the Italians earned swift reward when Montenegrin striker Jovetic, only starting in the absence of the suspended Alberto Gilardino, stunned the visitors with two goals inside nine minutes on his

competition debut.

Cristiano Zanetti picked him out with a neat through ball and Jovetic, who netted Saturday's winner in Serie A at Livorno, slipped the ball expertly past keeper Pepe Reina after 28 minutes.

The 19-year-old then struck again on 37 minutes, nudging home instinctively as Juan Vargas fed him from out on the left flank.

Lucas Leiva headed millimetres over as Liverpool tried to rally after the interval but they never looked capable of a comeback of the kind they produced to come back from three goals down in the 2005 final in beating AC Milan on spotkicks.

Holders Barcelona, having held Group F rivals Inter Milan in Italy in their first game, swatted Dynamo Kiev with Lionel Messi bagging the opener and Pedro Rodriguez hitting the clincher.

In the same group Jose Mourinho's Inter could only manage a 1-1 draw at Russian newcomers Kazan, who had the temerity to take an early lead courtesy of Argentine striker Alejandro Dominguez's meaty drive.

Inter levelled after 25 minutes, with the unmarked Dejan Stankovic heading in but were grateful to survive the final half hour with 10 men for a point after striker Mario Balotelli was dismissed for a second bookable offence.

Mourinho's men are now third in the table two points behind Barca and one adrift of Kiev.



PHOTO: AFP

Fiorentina forward Stevan Jovetic (L) runs off after scoring one of his two goals against Liverpool during their Champions League encounter at the Artemio Franchi Stadium on Tuesday.

IN BRIEF

Depor grounded for Tenerife tie

AFP, Madrid

Spanish top flight team Deportivo La Coruna can't find seats to fly to Atlantic island club Tenerife for their Saturday encounter.

The club from Galicia in the north-west of the country claim to have been notified too late of the tie on the Canary Islands.

"Deportivo has a serious problem trying to reach Tenerife on Friday," the club admitted on its website, adding a complaint about only being given eight days' notice for the game.

Coruna is in "a corner of Spain ... and Tenerife is a classic European tourist destination", it said.

Deportivo, fifth in the league after five matches, and mid-table Tenerife are scheduled to kick off at 1600 GMT on Saturday.

Tevez will relish goals against MU

AFP, Manchester

The souring of Carlos Tevez's relationship with Manchester United has been underlined by the Argentinian's revelation that he will enthusiastically celebrate any goals he scores against them in the future.

Now at Manchester City, Tevez won widespread praise for his discreet acknowledgements of his two goals in Monday night's 3-1 win over West Ham, the club that brought him to England.

"I decided not to celebrate my goals out of respect to West Ham," Tevez said. "They were my first club in England and, in my heart, part of me will always be a Hammer."

"The professional part of me was really pleased with my first City goals at home but, personally, I would have preferred to beat another club."

"In the derby against United I had also decided not to celebrate our goals but, after the bad treatment I received from the supporters that day, I have changed my stance on that. If I score in the next derby then I am sure that I will celebrate."

Iraqi, Kuwaiti clubs to face off

AFP, Arbil

A Kuwaiti football club was to square off against an Iraqi side Wednesday in the first sports competition involving the two countries here since Saddam Hussein invaded his oil-rich neighbour in 1990.

The match, pitting Arbil Club and Kuwait SC, at the 21,000-seat Francois Hariri Stadium in the capital of the autonomous Iraqi region of Kurdistan is the second leg of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) cup quarterfinal, following a 1-1 draw earlier this month.

It is a sign both of warmer ties between the two neighbours, which have clashed diplomatically in recent months over war reparations stemming from the 1990 invasion, and of improving security in Iraq.

Rubin hold Inter

AFP, Moscow



Italian champions Inter Milan were held to a 1-1 draw in their second Champions League group stage match at Russian champions Rubin Kazan on Tuesday.

Argentine striker Alejandro Dominguez scored a superb opener for the hosts, who chalked up their first point in the Champions League, while Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic was on target for Inter.

"I wish we could get more points from two matches but everything goes as it goes," Inter manager Jose Mourinho said after his side were left on two points from two draws in Group F which also includes Barcelona and Dynamo Kiev.

"Kazan's good playing was not a surprise for me. They performed very spectacular football in front of their home crowd."

"Rubin could win but we also had chances to clinch three points. In general I'm satisfied with the result."

The hosts, playing their first ever Champions League game on home turf, made a lively start and Inter, who had three wins and one defeat in six previous matches against Russian opposition, were initially content to sit back.

Their cautiousness backfired in the 11th minute, when the mercurial Dominguez received a pass from Alexander Bukharov before dribbling past two Inter defenders and firing a rising shot into the roof of the net past Julio Cesar.

Jose Mourinho's side responded positively, creating several scoring opportunities, but Kazan's Spanish defender Cesar Navas spurned a clear-cut chance to extend his side's lead when he headed Dominguez's cross wide from close range.

Inter levelled after 25 minutes, with the unmarked Stankovic heading home Maicon's precise centre from

the right flank.

Roared on by a capacity 25,000 crowd, Kazan took the game to their illustrious opponents in the second period and their hopes of victory were boosted when Inter striker Mario Balotelli was sent off for a second bookable offence just after the hour-mark.

The Italian champions found themselves pinned back in the game's last 10 minutes and Kazan skipper Sergei Semak came inches away from securing all three points when his right-footed effort from the edge of the six-yard box struck Julio Cesar's left-hand post and rebounded to safety.

"We played with courage and discipline but unfortunately missed our chances in the second half," Rubin coach Kurban Berdyev said. "I'm happy with my players' creative performance tonight but a little bit upset with the result."

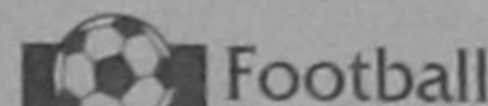
"We need to keep on working hard to keep alive our chances for a place in the play-offs."



PHOTO: AFP

Rubin Kazan forward Alejandro Dominguez (R) shoots past Inter Milan defender Walter Samuel during their Champions League tie in Kazan on Tuesday.

Valencia-Genoa tops bill



AFP, Paris

Genoa's trip to Valencia is the pick of the matches in the Europa League on Thursday evening, while a host of big-name clubs are looking to bounce back from surprise defeats in their opening games.

The revamped version of the UEFA Cup kicked off a fortnight ago, with Genoa stealing a march on Group B rivals Valencia by beating Slavia Prague 2-0 at home while the Spanish heavyweights were being held to a 1-1 draw at Lille.

Both sides go into their meeting at the Mestalla with enviable records in European competition.

Valencia, UEFA Cup champions in 2004, are on a 13-match unbeaten streak in continental tournaments, while Genoa have not lost away from home in UEFA competition since a defeat to Real Oviedo in September 1991.

The Europa League has garnered headlines due to the trialling of extra officials behind the goal-line at each end of the pitch, but the tournament's opening day was also notable for a series of shock results.

Italian giants Roma went down 2-0 at Swiss underdogs Basel in Group E, while their city rivals Lazio were undone by an injury-time Marc Janko winner in a 2-1 defeat at home to FC Salzburg in Group G.

Both sides face opposition from the capital of Bulgaria on Thursday, with Roma hosting CSKA Sofia and Lazio visiting

Levski Sofia.

German league leaders Hamburg will attempt to bounce back from a 3-0 defeat at Rapid Vienna when they host Israeli side Hapoel Tel-Aviv, who came from behind to beat Celtic 2-1 in their Group C opener.

Rapid's trip to Celtic Park on Thursday has been mired in controversy after the Austrians announced plans to wear a special red strip to commemorate a fiery clash between the sides in the 1984 European Cup Winners' Cup.

Celtic won the tie on aggregate but a replay was ordered after Rapid's players claimed to have been struck by missiles thrown from the crowd, allowing current Rapid coach Peter Pacult to score the winning goal in the replay at Old Trafford.

Elsewhere, Premier League representatives Everton travel to Belarus to play BATE Borisov, while last season's UEFA Cup runners-up Werder Bremen visit Athletic Bilbao in Group L.

Toulouse's Group J meeting with Club Brugge, meanwhile, is likely to be a sombre affair, following the death of one of the French club's fans on Tuesday after an attack by rival supporters prior to their 3-2 victory at Partizan Belgrade.

The Europa League's group phase sees 12 groups of four teams face off in a round-robin format, with the top two from each group qualifying for a place in the knockout round alongside the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League group stage.

Diego seeks divine aid

AFP, Buenos Aires

Beleaguered Argentina coach Diego Maradona on Tuesday sought divine intervention as he pondered his side's chances of reaching the World Cup finals after some recent poor showings, notably a home loss to Brazil.

"The bearded one (God) saved me many times before - and I hope he will do so this time," Maradona told Cadena 3 radio.

The 1986 world champion famously dubbed his first quarterfinal goal in that year's competition the work of the "hand of God" after he slammed the ball past Peter Shilton in the England goal before a brilliant second individual effort settled the encounter.

But as coach he is struggling to keep Argentina afloat after recent losses to Brazil and Paraguay, and the albiceleste now lie fifth in the continental group, one place below the final qualifying berth.

Next week the team take on Peru at home before a final make-or-break match away to Uruguay in Montevideo.

"We have to get it into our heads that these two games are crucial to our hopes and we can't keep giving things away such as we did against Brazil," said Maradona.

Maradona, who recently went on a slimming course in Italy, where he formerly starred with Napoli, said that while he was over there fans had told him "a World Cup without Argentina just wouldn't be the same."

He responded: "Don't worry, Argentina will be there."

Moscow doubts for Ballack

AFP, Berlin

Captain Michael Ballack faces a race against time to be fit for Germany's key World Cup qualifier in Moscow against Russia in 10 days time after picking up a calf strain.

The 33-year-old is out of Chelsea's Champions League clash with Cyprus side APOEL FC on Wednesday and has stayed in London before the Germany squad gathers in Mainz on Sunday for the crucial Moscow match, Bild reported Wednesday.

Ballack who has already missed Chelsea's league cup win over Queens Park Rangers and the 3-1 Premier League defeat to Wigan Athletic last weekend, has sat out the trip to Nicosia as a precaution.

The midfielder has a history of calf trouble after being struck by lower leg complaints at the 2006 World Cup and again just before the Euro 2008 final, although he was fit enough to lead his side in the 1-0 defeat to Spain.

Germany coach Joachim Loew is to announce his squad on Friday for the tie in Moscow and the final World Cup qualifier against Finland in Hamburg on October 14.

Leonardo not worried



AFP, Milan

Under-fire AC Milan coach Leonardo claimed he is not worried about his position ahead of Wednesday's Champions League Group C clash against FC Zurich.

Rookie coach Leonardo has already come in for much criticism after an unspectacular start to the Serie A season with just two wins in his first six league matches.

But the Brazilian World Cup winner and former Milan midfielder insists he has nothing to fear.

"A coach's job is always on the line but for me that's the least important thing so I'm not worried about it," he said during Tuesday's pre-match press conference.

In European competition, however, Milan are a different proposition, as they often have been, having won 2-1 away to Marseille in their first group match.

Milan have a proud tradition in Europe, winning more European Cup or Champions League crowns than all other Italian teams put together.

And yet they are not the most successful club domestically.

"We need the Champions League Milan. Will this be the turnaround? Right now any match could seem like a turnaround," said the Brazilian.

"What we're really looking for is the com-

passness that would bring consistency."

Leonardo has put his faith recently in the Milan old guard as he's tried to spark some life into his team.

Thirty-somethings such as captain Massimo Ambrosini, Gennaro Gattuso, Clarence Seedorf, Alessandro Nesta and Filippo Inzaghi -- the ageing players Milan were supposed to be gradually phasing out -- have found themselves on the front line leading the team. And Ambrosini says they need to do more to drag themselves out of the rut.

"Leonardo is asking us to interpret differently the same model (of play) but more than anything else we're all aware that our attitude on the pitch is fundamental," he said.

"We've got no excuses, we're all aware that we need to do more and from the off to motivate our fans."

Zurich coach Bernard Challandes believes his team could make the most of Milan's problems but he claims they are still one of the giants of European football, notwithstanding their current snooze.

"We can try to profit from their problems but Milan are still Milan. However, we know we're capable of playing well and we're ready to face up to a great team, as we did against Real Madrid."

The omens are not good for Zurich who were beaten home and away by Milan in last season's UEFA Cup, now the Europa League, and began their Group C campaign with a comprehensive 5-2 home defeat to Real.

Barca up and running

AFP, Barcelona



Holders Barcelona recorded their first Champions League win of the new campaign with goals from Lionel Messi and substitute Pedro securing a 2-0 win over Dinamo Kiev at Camp Nou on Tuesday.

After a perfect five wins in the league Barca kick-started their European defence and replace Kiev at the top of Group F on four points after Inter Milan drew 1-1 with Rubin Kazan.

Argentine Messi, top-scorer in last season's Champions League with nine goals, scored Barca's first goal after 25 minutes before substi-

tute Pedro, the latest hope from the Barca youth team, added a second to bring up a scoreline that still didn't reflect their dominance.

With French international striker Thierry Henry out injured, Spanish international Andres Iniesta, Barcelona's Champions League semifinal hero against Chelsea last season, made his first start since the 2-0 final win over Manchester United in May.

After several months out with a thigh injury Iniesta has been bedded in slowly with substitute appearances but he looked razor-sharp and had a penalty shout turned down on the quarter-hour mark after he went down after having his shirt tugged.

Dinamo, semifinalists in 1999, went close themselves though when Barca's

Brazilian defender Dani Alves had to shuffle his feet quickly to clear a ball zipped across the penalty area.

Then with 25 minutes gone Barca registered their first Champions League goal in this season's competition and, predictably, it was Messi who scored it.

The Argentine, who has been scoring freely in the league, drifted inside with a burst of pace and before the Kiev defence had time to react he had curled a trademark finish into the corner.

A minute later Zlatan Ibrahimovic produced a vintage pass for Messi but the chance went begging and when the pair reversed roles shortly afterwards Ibrahimovic saw his chip blocked.

The two stars have struck up a real rapport despite having just started playing together and were carving a hapless Kiev open at will.

In contrast, former AC Milan striking icon Andriy Shevchenko, celebrating his 33rd birthday, was starved of service up front for the away side.

A youthful Shevchenko scored a first-half hat-trick for Kiev in a 4-0 group stage win over Barcelona at Camp Nou back in November 1997 but he didn't have a look-in this time around as Barca controlled proceedings.

In the second half Ibrahimovic and Messi resumed their torture of the Kiev defence and both had chances to score in the first five minutes after the interval.

After 67 minutes Ibrahimovic was denied again as his drilled shot was well saved after a great run and pass from Seydou Keita.

The second goal finally came in the 76th minute with the ubiquitous Ibrahimovic setting up substitute Pedro to slot home after neatly shifting the ball onto his left foot.

Barcelona sit a point above Kiev at the top, with Inter Milan two points back in third, and the champions' next match is against Rubin Kazan on October 20.

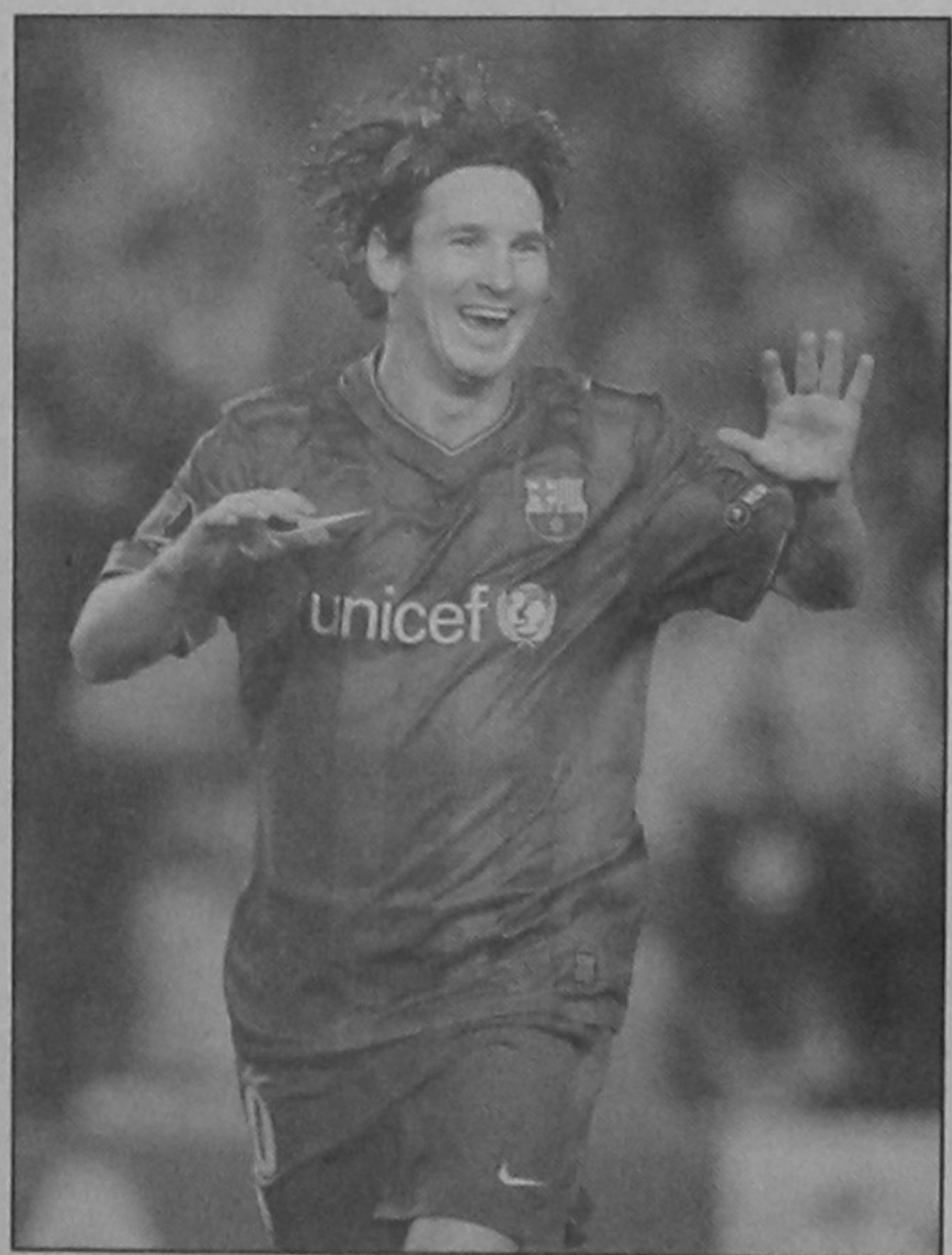


PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona star Lionel Messi is over the moon after scoring against Dynamo Kiev during their Champions League clash at Nou Camp on Tuesday.