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PHOTO: AFP

Liverpool midfielder Yossi Benayoun (C) and defender Jamie Carragher (L) fight for the ball during a training session in Melwood on Monday on the eve of their Champions League match against Lyon.

L'pool eye Euro boost

AFP, *Paris*

Liverpool, their English Premier League hopes punctured by their bizarre 'beachball' loss at Sunderland, must establish their European credentials Tuesday with a Champions League win over Lyon.

After opening their Group E campaign with an uninspiring win over Hungary's Debrecen prior to a demoralising loss at Fiorentina, Liverpool are aware dropped points against the French could see their Champions League hopes beached as well as their domestic dreams.

Seven points behind Manchester United on the domestic front after shipping four defeats in nine games, the Merseysiders are inconsistency personified, although veteran Jamie Carragher insists the team can iron out their flaws.

"We have the quality and the belief we will get back to winning ways soon, hopefully starting on Tuesday against Lyon".

Key to Liverpool's powers of recovery will likely be the fitness of Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres, who both missed the debacle at the Stadium of Light with groin injuries.

Without either star, Rafael Benitez's men are less effective but without both of their talismen much of the heart is stripped out of the team.

Benitez as good as admits as much.

"I can only pray that Gerrard and Torres will be fit, they are very important to us. I hope they will be available for Tuesday.

"Steven is the captain, a leader and a player with quality who can always score goals. Clearly we will have to change something if he is still not fit, but that is the situation and we will have to adapt."

Lyon head into their Anfield cauldron with problems of their own.

The French fans know what it is like to wait for a league title even more than Liverpool fans lamenting two decades without one.

Lyon had never won the domestic crown at all until 2002, when they embarked upon a run of seven in a row.

Usurped by Bordeaux last season, Claude Puel's side had streaked clear of the field until Saturday brought their first loss, at home to modest Sochaux.

Lyon still lead the table - but only because Bordeaux also slipped up at Auxerre.

They head for Anfield with central defenders Mathieu Bodmer, Jean-Alain Boumsong and Cleber Anderson all carrying injuries.

An Anfield stalemate, coupled with a Fiorentina win at Debrecen, would severely compromise Liverpool's hopes - though they have extricated themselves from tighter situations under Benitez, and not just the "miracle of Istanbul" in 2005.

Arsenal are ready to keep the English flag flying high with a win at Dutch outfit Alkmaar having overcome early nerves to win at Standard Liege and then see off Olympiakos, who face off in Greece.

Despite their good start the Gunners will be mindful of a 2007 elimination in the Netherlands at PSV Eindhoven, while Alkmaar have lost only one of 34 home encounters in Europe - to Everton in the UEFA Cup in 2007.

Group F heavyweights Barcelona, the holders, and Inter Milan, are both at home having already ended all-square against each other in Italy - to Russian debutants Kazan and Dynamo Kyiv respectively.

Kiev reached the Champions League semi-finals in 1999 when Andrei Shevchenko was leading their front-line. Shevchenko is now back at Dynamo this season following two spells with Inter's arch rivals AC Milan.

In Group G, Rangers have ground to make up as they host Romanian makeweights Unirea Urziceni having already lost at home to Spain's Sevilla, who will have a foot in the next phase if they make it three wins out of three at Stuttgart.

The Germans are currently second in the group albeit after only two draws.

FIXTURES

Tuesday (1845 GMT)
Group E
Debrecen (HUN) v Fiorentina (ITA), Liverpool (ENG) v Lyon (FRA)
Group F
Barcelona (ESP) v Kazan (RUS), Inter Milan (ITA) v Dynamo Kyiv (UKR)
Group G
Rangers (SCO) v Unirea Urziceni (ROM), VfB Stuttgart (GER) v Sevilla (ESP)
Group H
AZ Alkmaar (NED) v Arsenal (ENG), Olympiakos (GRE) v Standard Liege (BEL)

France get Ireland

AFP, *Zurich*

Former champions France have been handed a potentially tough test in their bid to qualify for the World Cup finals after drawing the Republic of Ireland in the play-offs Monday.

Giovanni Trapattoni's Irish side were one of the most impressive sides in their qualifying group eight, which was dominated by Italy.

And they were one of two teams, the other being Ukraine, the French wanted to avoid for the two-leg playoff in which Ireland play at home on November 14 before travelling to France four days later.

On the plus side for France is the fact they will travel to Dublin's Croke Park, where the capacity is around 82,000, first. A second leg there could have been a handicap.

"It's good to have the return match at home in France," said former World Cup winner and the team's captain in 1998, Didier Deschamps.

Portugal, the runners-up in Group 1 behind winners Denmark, will meet Bosnia-Herzegovina over two legs with home advantage first.

Greece, runners-up in Group 2 behind Switzerland, will host Ukraine first before their second leg four days later while Russia host Slovenia first.

France had a mediocre qualifying campaign in Group 7, won by Serbia, but eventually finished seven points ahead of third-placed Austria.

While France were winners in 1998, the Republic of Ireland are bidding for only their fourth appearance at the finals, their last coming at the 2002 edition in Korea/Japan.

Portugal also flattered to deceive at times in Group 1 and they will be wary of a Bosnia-Herzegovina side which comfortably held off Turkey and Belgium to finish runners-up behind European champions Spain.

The Bosnians' potent forward line could be boosted by the fact they are bidding for a first ever appearance at any major championships.

The group winners from the European zone who have already qualified are Denmark, Switzerland, Slovakia, Germany, Spain, England, Serbia, Italy and the Netherlands.

DRAW

Republic of Ireland v France
Portugal v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Ukraine
Russia v Slovenia
Note: playoffs to be contested November 14 and 18. Four play-off winners qualify for 2010 World Cup.

BUNDESLIGA

Wolves see off 'Gladbach

AFP, *Berlin*

Defending champions Wolfsburg moved up to fifth in the Bundesliga table on Sunday after a last-minute goal frenzy ended in a 2-1 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach.

The game was heading to a 1-0 win after defender Alexander Madlung's first-half header, but Gentner scored for the Wolves deep in injury-time and almost immediately Michael Bradley scored a consolation goal for Borussia.

Both sides had had first-half efforts ruled offside, but the Wolves finally got the break just before half-time when playmaker Zvjezdan Misimovic swung in a cross which Madlung powered home before the frantic finish.

The result leaves Moenchengladbach in the bottom three, but there was concern for Wolves goalkeeper Diego Benaglio who took a heavy knock to the throat in the last few minutes, but he recovered to finish the game.

Milan edge Roma

AFP, *Rome*

Ronaldinho inspired AC Milan to only their third win of the season with a come-from-behind 2-1 success against AS Roma at the San Siro on Sunday.

While the first half in Milan belonged to Roma's French winger Jeremy Menez, it was Ronaldinho who starred after the break, scoring one and creating the other - and quite possibly saving countryman Leonardo's job as coach.

The result moved Milan up to eighth in the Serie A table with Roma dropping to 11th.

And yet Roma, and Menez in particular, tore Milan apart in the first half.

But it was with a helping hand from Milan centre-back Thiago Silva that the visitors went in front as Menez pounced on his fluffed back pass on three minutes and shrugged off the Brazilian's shirt pulling before sending goalkeeper Dida the wrong way.

A minute later Menez surged into the box again but this time his angle was more difficult and he shot straight at Dida.

But on 20 minutes he was in behind the defence a third time, however under pressure from Silva he shot wide as he fell.

Moments later Daniele De Rossi drove forward unchallenged from midfield and brought a fine one-handed stop out of Dida.

Menez burst into life again on 38 minutes as he teed up Mirko Vucinic, whose first touch was sublime to take him past Alessandro Nesta but he then hesitated and Dida blocked his weak shot.

Finally Milan created something on the counter-attack a minute later and Roma goalkeeper Doni had to tip a shot from Clarence Seedorf onto the post after the Dutchman benefitted from a fortunate ricochet in the box.

Leonardo had to react and he did by bringing on evergreen striker Filippo Inzaghi for midfielder Ignazio Abate and within two minutes Inzaghi's header from an Andrea Pirlo corner had been cleared off the line by David Pizarro.

Milan needed a helping hand to get back into the match and they got it from the referee with a highly contentious penalty award after Nesta crumbled under Nicolas Burdisso's challenge in the box.

Burdisso got the ball, even if his challenge was rambunctious, but Ronaldinho despatched the penalty on 56 minutes to add insult to injury.

And the winner came from a moment of quality on 67 minutes as Ronaldinho's long diagonal ball found Pato, whose control on his chest was sublime and took John Arne Riise out of play before he rounded Doni and slotted home.

Roma should still have got a draw but De Rossi blazed over the bar from 10 yards late on.

Meanwhile, Sampdoria lost ground on Inter Milan at the top when they were held to a 1-1 draw at Lazio, in a game where both teams finished with 10 men.

Champions Inter lead Sampdoria by two points having humbled Genoa 5-0 on Saturday while Juventus and Fiorentina, who drew 1-1 in Turin, are a further two points behind.

Sampdoria needed a win to join Inter on 19 points at the top but despite taking the lead through Giampaolo Pazzini, they were pegged back by a goal from Francesco Matuzalem.

Promoted Parma moved up to fifth after Bulgarian forward Valeri Bojinov scored the only goal of the game at home to Siena.

Walter Mazzarri's first game in charge of Napoli ended in victory after Cristian Maggio struck in injury time to sink Bologna 2-1.

Catania and Atalanta recorded their first victories of the season, respectively 2-1 at home to Cagliari and 3-1 at Udinese.

PHOTO: AFP

Milan striker Alexandre Pato (R) is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Roma during their Serie A clash at San Siro on Sunday.

Wigan hold City

AFP, *Wigan*

Manchester City's 10 men held on for a 1-1 draw at Wigan on Sunday even though referee Alan Wiley was back in the spotlight with the second half dismissal of Pablo Zabaleta.

Mark Hughes' team fell behind to Charles N'Zogbia's first half strike at the DW Stadium, but Martin Petrov equalised soon after the interval and City looked the stronger side until Argentine full-back Zabaleta was shown a second yellow card.

Wiley's fitness was criticised by Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson after a recent game against Sunderland but although Zabaleta's first booking was marginal, there were no doubts about the second.

That forced City into a rearguard action and they battled well enough to emerge with a point that keeps them in fifth place in the Premier League, five points behind leaders Manchester United with a game in hand.

Kolo Toure and Craig Bellamy were both sidelined with injuries so Petrov and Micah Richards came in as City searched for their first away win over Wigan in the top-flight.

City were pushed back early on, with French midfielder N'Zogbia bursting clear of Nigel de Jong and driving his shot narrowly wide.

City finally responded when Carlos Tevez picked out Emmanuel Adebayor and the Togo striker slipped past Titus Bramble before forcing a smart stop from Chris Kirkland.

Hughes's side were struggling to find their rhythm and Wigan threatened again when Hugo Rodallega's ferocious effort was palmed away by Shay Given.

N'Zogbia had a goal disallowed when Wiley ruled he fouled Gareth Barry but the Latics didn't have to wait long to go ahead.

In first half stoppage time, Rodallega's cross-shot was pushed out by Given to N'Zogbia and he slid in ahead of Wayne Bridge to open the scoring.

That could have been a major dent to City's morale but they regrouped at half-time and were level within 65 seconds of the re-start.

Tevez picked out Petrov on the edge of the Wigan penalty area and the Bulgarian let the

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LEAGUE ONE

PSG suffer setback

AFP, *Paris*

Paris St Germain suffered another setback to their French first division title hopes on Sunday when they slumped to a dispiriting 1-0 defeat at Toulouse.

The loss left PSG in ninth place in the table, seven points behind leaders Lyon. It also meant that they have not won a league game since August 29.

Albin Ebondo scored the game's only goal in the 74th minute as Toulouse moved three points clear of the drop zone.

A double from Spanish-Brazilian midfielder Nene handed Monaco a 2-0 win over Lens and allowed the Principality side to reclaim fourth spot from Marseille.

Nene put himself top of the French league goalscorers list following a performance which underlines both his and his club's ambitions this term.

He fired in his sixth goal of the season after ten minutes and Monaco could have gone two-up before the break following a corner from Nene but Vedran Runje saved a fine header from Adriano.

After the break Monaco were happy to sit back on their advantage with the odd foray forward.

South Korean striker Park Chu-young picked up a cross from Ivorian striker Jean-Jacques Gosso after 58 minutes but Runje once again proved solid.

The hosts were awarded a penalty after 66 minutes after Park was fouled in the box by Romain Sartre and Nene stepped up to slot home his seventh league goal.

Lorient gave warning that they are not be ruled out of the championship chase as they easily saw off Nice 4-1.

A goal from midfielder Arnold Mvuemba six minutes before the break and a second from Marama Vahirua after their return to the pitch set Lorient on their way against their outclassed rivals.

Osasuna trump Atletico

AFP, *Madrid*

Atletico Madrid had their brittle confidence shattered ahead of Wednesday's testing Champions League trip to Chelsea losing 3-0 at Osasuna on Sunday.

Osasuna scored three times inside the opening half hour as Atletico's suspect defence collapsed with Walter Pandiani (4min, 25min) scoring twice to take his season's tally to five before Carlos Aranda notched a third on 29 minutes.

Atletico languish 15th in the Spanish league with the worst defensive record after leaking 17 goals in seven games which does not bode well for the Stamford Bridge trip.

Madrid coach Abel Resino has been under pressure all season and the manner of the Osasuna loss will see the knives sharpened further.

In the league, Atletico are just a point above the drop zone and in Europe the club have yet to register a win with a point from the first two group games.

Promoted Xerez ended a 62-year wait as they finally won their first game in the Spanish top-flight defeating Villarreal 2-1 to move off the bottom of the table at their opponents' expense.

Antonito scored a controversial 79th-minute winner for Xerez's historic win as Villarreal and their under-pressure coach Ernesto Valverde experienced a new low.

"It's a first small step but very important mentally," said Xerez coach Jose Ziganda.

"It was a tough game and we were made to suffer as they had some clear chances. However, we had some luck today that we didn't have in previous matches."

Veteran French midfielder Robert Pires had put Villarreal ahead in the 17th minute but Mario Bermejo equalised in the 42nd minute and Antonito struck the decisive blow 11 minutes from time despite protests of a handball.

"I thought we were going to score a second with all the chances we had," bemoaned Valverde.

"However, they scored a questionable second goal since we should have had a penalty for the foul on Cani and then the clear handball of (Carlos) Calvo."

Goal-scorer Pires took his frustrations out after the match by insulting referee Antonio Rubinos Perez who reported the Frenchman in his post-match report.

In other matches, Espanyol overcame Tenerife 2-1 on Sunday thanks to a brace from Ivan Alonso.

Tenerife have yet to collect a point on their travels and are a single point above the relegation zone.

After starting with three wins Athletic Bilbao are on the slide and fell to a 2-1 home loss against Sporting Gijon to make it a solitary point from the last 12.

Meanwhile, Sporting climb to seventh as they look to beat the drop for a second successive season.

FA charges Fergie

AFP, *London*

Sir Alex Ferguson was charged Monday with improper conduct by the Football Association (FA) for publicly labelling referee Alan Wiley "unfit".

The Manchester United manager made his comments after the Premier League champions were held to a 2-2 draw by Sunderland at Old Trafford on October 3.

Ferguson apologised for the remarks but that didn't stop the FA from pressing charges against the Scot which could lead to a possible touchline ban and fine.

Ferguson accused Wiley of not being "fit enough for a game of that standard" and of "walking up the pitch for the second goal needing a rest".

The FA said Monday in a statement: "Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has been charged with improper conduct.

"The charge relates to media comments made by Ferguson about referee Alan Wiley following United's match against Sunderland at Old Trafford on October 3. He has until November 3 to respond to the charge."

Ferguson, in his apology, said: "I apologise to Mr Wiley for any personal embarrassment my comments may have caused and to the FA for going public with my views.

"In retrospect I accept that they could be deemed as expressing those views in an inappropriate form. It was never my intention to bring the focus of intense media interest on Mr Wiley and I will apologise to him personally when I return from an overseas trip during the international break," he said.

Ferguson's outburst outraged leading English referees and now retired former top official Jeff Winter, blasted it as "a cowardly attack."

"Every game Alan Wiley takes charge of now where he makes a decision which upsets some fans is going to result in chants of 'You're not fit to referee', he's going to be known as the 'unfit ref'," Winter told the Guardian newspaper.

"Sir Alex won't care though. He's a knight of the realm and he thinks he's untouchable, bullet proof," added Winter, who dubbed Sir Alex "a bully".

At 49, Wiley is one of the oldest referees officiating at the top level in England. His supporters say his fitness, like that of other officials, is subjected to weekly monitoring and an annual assessment.

IN BRIEF

Van Gaal may risk Robben

AFP, *Munich*

Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal will decide on Monday whether to risk Dutch winger Arjen Robben for Wednesday's Champions League clash at Bordeaux, it was revealed Sunday.

The 25-year-old Robben injured his knee in the 0-0 draw at home to Juventus on October 1 and had an operation, but he has made a remarkable recovery and van Gaal is toying with the idea of playing him against Bordeaux.

Giggs in doubt for CSKA trip

AFP, *London*

Veteran midfielder Ryan Giggs is doubtful for Manchester United's Champions League clash against CSKA Moscow in the Russian capital on Wednesday.

The Welshman suffered a knock towards the end of Saturday's 2-1 win over Bolton and is unlikely to travel to the Luzhniki Stadium.

Manager Alex Ferguson also has doubts over several other key players and told the club website: "Ryan Giggs has got a knock and is a doubt for Wednesday.

"Patrice Evra we'll have to look at tomorrow, he may be a doubt.

"(Dimitar) Berbatov, I think, will be all right. Wayne Rooney, we've got to try to get him ready for Wednesday.

"I'm hopeful (Nemanja) Vidic will be all right, but he'll certainly be ready for the Liverpool game."

United top Group B with full points from two games, while CSKA have won one and lost one.