



Gunners' Porto test

AFP, Porto



Arsene Wenger says Arsenal will marry caution with adventure when they visit Porto for the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie here on Wednesday.

The Gunners returned to league form with a much-needed 1-0 win at home to Liverpool in their last outing following damaging back-to-back defeats against title rivals Manchester United and Chelsea.

Victory over Rafael Benitez's side took Arsenal to within six points of league leaders Chelsea and they have had a full week to prepare for the trip to Portugal due to their early

elimination from the FA Cup. Arsenal, though, have not won on their previous two visits to the Estadio do Dragao and Wenger believes his side must approach

the game carefully. "The minimum requirement is not to lose the game and be out of the tie," said the Arsenal coach.

"A clean sheet will do, but we are a team who will not hide - we want to play. However, we want to make sure defensively we are OK."

The Londoners' cause has not been helped by injuries to influential players.

Dutch international striker Robin van Persie has already been ruled out for much of the season with an ankle injury and Russian playmaker Andrey Arshavin is unlikely to feature against Porto due to a hamstring problem.

Defensive midfielder Alex Song is also a doubt with a knee ligament injury, but Croatian striker Eduardo (hamstring) and France midfielder Samir Nasri (head injury) are expected to be fit.

Eduardo has not been prolific in front of

goal this season but Wenger is backing him to come good as he continues to adapt to toplevel football after a year out with a badly broken left leg.

"Eduardo has shown signs in training that and I always think we can win."

he is getting sharper again," Wenger said.

"It takes a long time to recover when you have been injured as he was, but he is getting stronger and stronger.

"It is not a worry that he does not score - I told him that, once you start to make assists, it is the same as scoring and that, for me, there is no difference."

Porto have made it through to the Champions League knockout phase six times in the last seven years, winning the competition

in 2004, and Wenger anticipates a tight tie. "From the outside, sometimes you are seen as favourites, but that does not matter," said the Frenchman, whose side reached the semifinals

last season. "Porto have been consistently in the Champions League and you know you will get a tough game, so I will not be surprised."

The reigning Portuguese champions have demonstrated a rich pedigree in European competition in recent years but they are much changed from the side that frightened eventual

quarterfinals. A summer of upheaval saw Argentine pair Lucho Gonzalez and Lisandro Lopez as well as left-back Aly Cissokho leave for France, with playmaker Lucho joining Marseille and striker

runners-up Manchester United in last season's

Lisandro linking up with Cissokho at Lyon. Jesualdo Ferreira's team are currently nine points behind Portuguese league leaders Benfica with a game in hand, having been held to an underwhelming goalless draw at secondbottom club Leixoes on Saturday that sparked

clashes between angry Porto fans and police. "To be realistic, we have to fight against the bigger powers in Europe, with different budgets, with a different type of players of a different level, said Porto defender and captain Bruno Alves.

"But I think in football that's not everything. It's a matter of showing who's stronger on the pitch, plays better, scores goals. We've always had good campaigns in the Champions League

a 3-1 home win against Borussia Dortmund

that left them level on points with Bayer

They trail by the slenderest of margins on

Fiorentina, meanwhile, have gone five

However, the Italians have found an extra

dimension in European competition and

topped their Champions League group with

five straight wins, including a 2-1 victory

Defender Alessandro Gamberini was set to

against Liverpool at Anfield to complete a

miss the match through a shoulder injury.

Midfielder Cristiano Zanetti is training again

after undergoing knee surgery but was also not

games without a win in Serie A, were beaten in

the first leg of the Italian Cup semifinals by Inter

Milan earlier this month and slumping to 11th

Leverkusen at the top of the league.

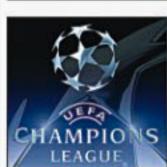
goal difference -- 30 to 29.

in the league.

double over the Reds.

Robben eyeing goals

AFP, Berlin



might be different.

Bayern Munich's on-form Dutch striker Arjen Robben is dreaming of sending Italy's Fiorentina packing in Wednesday's Champions League clash at home but admits that the reality

"The ideal result would be 6-0 but maybe that's not going to happen," Robben, who has scored in his last five appearances for the

German giants, told the Bild daily. "We must score a goal and make sure that

Fiorentina don't score. On paper, Bayern look clear favourites for the round of 16 first leg Champions League clash against the struggling, under-strength

Italian club, with 12 straight wins in all competitions behind them. Coach Louis van Gaal said Tuesday that Germany striker Miroslav Klose was fit for

League in 2001, are now back at full strength.

ing Bayern, who last won the Champions French star Franck Ribery made his first

selection again after a lay-off for injury, mean-

due to make the trip to Germany. Romanian striker Adrian Mutu is serving a provisional suspension for failing drugs tests.

Van Gaal warned against over-confidence,

"One single player isn't that important. We've won games without Ribery and Robben,

Bundesliga start in four months on Saturday in he told a news conference on Tuesday.

City to buy

IN BRIEF

IPL team?

INTERNET, undated

Manchester City are considering buying an Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket team, according to a report from The Sun.

The club's owners are believed to feel that their Abu Dhabi base could be a successful place from which to launch their venture into cricket.

The IPL is set to grow from eight franchises to ten in 2011, and league commissioner Lalit Modi confirmed that there has been interest from an English Premier League football club in purchasing one of the new teams.

"I can confirm an English Premier League club has approached us about buying a team," he said.

That team is definitely not Chelsea, according to the report, leaving City as the only club with the financial clout to invest in a franchise.

UruguayWC great dies

AFP, Montevideo

Juan Carlos Gonzalez a mem ber of the Uruguayan squad that won the 1950 World Cup, died on Monday aged 85, local media reported.

Gonzalez, who also won the Uruguayan title with Penarol, played in two of the Uruguayan side's matches but did not play in the final

where they beat Brazil 2-1. His remains will be transferred to the Olympic Pantheon here and he will be buried alongside other Uruguayan sporting heroes.

Canada to play Argentina for first time

INTERNET, undated

Canadian soccer history will be made this spring when the national men's side travel to Buenos Aires to face Diego Maradona and his tremendously gifted, notoriously flawed Argentina team just weeks before the World Cup opens in South Africa.

The friendly match will mark the first time Canada and Argentina have met in international men's competition. It will also be the marquee game of Stephen Hart's first year as head coach of the Canadian team.

"When you're talking world football, you can't talk about it without mentioning Argentina," Hart said Monday. "They are one of the greatest nations in the game. This is a huge game for Canada and its players."

The game will be held at Estadio Monumental on May 24. Argentina opens their World Cup schedule against Nigeria on June 12, following an often bumpy qualification process and a two-month suspension levelled on Maradona after a profanity-filled tirade against reporters.

Bayern target lucky 13

AFP, Berlin



German giants Bayern Munich head into their Champions League round of 16 first leg clash at home to Italian side Fiorentina on Wednesday brimming with confidence after 12 straight wins in all competitions.

Porto players train at the Dragao Stadium on Tuesday on the eve of their Champions League last sixteen encounter against Arsenal.

Inspired by prolific Dutch striker Arjen Robben, who has scored in his last five appearances, and fit-again French midfield star Franck Ribery, Bayern are second in the Bundesliga on goal difference and are in the semifinals of the German Cup.

In contrast, Fiorentina have struggled, going five games without a win in Serie A, being beaten in the first leg of the Italian Cup semifinals by Inter Milan earlier this month and slumping to a disappointing 11th place in the league.

However, the Italians have found an extra dimension in European competition and topped their Champions League group with five straight wins, including a 2-1 victory against Liverpool at Anfield to complete a double over the Reds.

Bayern Munich president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge warned against taking the Italians too lightly.

'If we do not underestimate Fiorentina and do not allow ourselves to be blinded by their league position, then we can advance into the quarterfinals," Rummenigge said.

"If we believe that we can just breeze through this round, then we'll get a rude awakening," added Rummenigge.

Nonetheless, history is on the side of the Germans. Fiorentina have never won a Champions League game in Germany and Bayern beat them 3-0 last season at home before a 1-1 draw in the Stadio Artemio Franchi.

Bayern's recent form against Italian opposition is also impressive, hammering Juventus 4-1 in December in a winner-takes-all game to advance to the knock-out stages.

However, according to Fiorentina captain, Riccardo Montolivo, the Italians are viewing the match at the Allianz Stadium as a way to turn around their season.

"This game comes at exactly the right moment. Now we can show what we can do. I'm sure that the challenge of a match away at Bayern could be a turning point for us," he said.

And coach Cesare Prandelli said he was prepared to shake up his tactics, complaining after a 2-0 loss away to Sampdoria that the Viola had become "predictable."

make us difficult for Bayern to read," he said. Ribery is top, second and third of Prandelli's

list of concerns. Asked which three Bayern players he feared

Ribery." The French international made his first Bundesliga start in four months on Saturday

Borussia Dortmund. After a lacklustre first half, Ribery reminded the Bayern faithful what they had been missing, supplying the slide-rule pass that allowed Mario Gomez to score the third and kill off the

But Ribery's return has been overshadowed by a mystery virus that has laid low a host of players in the squad, forcing coach Louis van Gaal to order separate training

Fiorentina have their own worries with injuries and suspensions ahead of

cated his shoulder during the Sampdoria game

Bayern are bidding for their second quarterfinal place in two seasons, while the Italians have not reached the last eight in Europe's elite club tournament since the 1969/70 season.

Vermaelen eager to

Arsenal defender Thomas Vermaelen is ready to carry on playing despite a leg injury as the Gunners continue their quest for Champions League

The 24-year-old centreback feared he had fractured his leg against Aston Villa last month but played against Manchester United four days later despite feeling the effects

comfort due to the injury but is determined to carry on, starting with Arsenal's Champions League trip to Porto on Wednesday

"It turned out that I could play against Manchester United, but after that game had some more problems, so l went for another scan, Vermaelen said.

"We could see then that there was a big bruise on the bone, and that's all - so it is painful but that can be controlled with medicine and when it is not broken, you can't do too much wrong," he added Monday.

play - yes it is still there and will take some time to go away, but it is not dangerous.

Defeats by title rivals Manchester United and Chelsea stalled Arsenal's bid to top the table but, following a win over Liverpool, they are

the end as a team, that is all we can do," Vermaelen said. "The important thing is to

stay together. When you lose, it is easy to say it is his fault or his fault, but I think it is important to remain as a team and a unit.

Andrey Arshavin is expected to miss the Porto trip but Eduardo and Alex Song

Tenerife boost survival hopes

AFP, Barcelona

against Real Mallorca in their bid to avoid relegation in their First Division clash on Monday.

The Canary Island side are now just one point from safety while the result means that high-flying Mallorca have failed to return to a top-four place.

best season's in their history, Mallorca's away record has not been so impressive and they went behind to a Juan Nino goal after 13 minutes. Tenerife had a further

chance to add to their lead through Nino before Mallorca presented their first real danger from a Mario Suarez shot, and then an effort from distance by Borja Valero was saved well by keeper Sergio Aragoneses.

In the second-half, Mallorca pushed forward but they left space at the back and Tenerife went closest to scoring again through Julian Omar but he was denied by a fine block from keeper Dudu Aouate.



during a press conference at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium on Monday.

Cech relishes Inter tie

AFP, London



Chelsea's Czech international goalkeeper Petr Cech cannot wait for next week's "perfect" Champions League tie against Inter Milan.

The last 16 clash pits Premier League leaders Chelsea, who've yet to win the European Cup, against an Italian side managed by the

Londoners' former boss Jose Mourinho. "Always the Champions League is our aim and you can see that we've been playing for it every season and we've gone far, but the aim is

the same," Cech told Chelsea Magazine. "The Champions League is the only trophy this club is missing so I think that is what everyone would like to win," added the Czech international, a member of the Blues side that lost the 2008 Champions League final to English rivals Manchester United in a penalty shoot-out in

Moscow. "For the fans, for the players and for everyone linked with the club, I think it is going to be

Chelsea versus Inter or Man United against AC Milan and, in the end, it did happen, which is

perfect." Cech was criticised early in the season as Chelsea repeatedly conceded goals from set pieces but last week made important saves in

The 27-year-old has a contract until 2013 and, when asked about spending the next 10 years at Stamford Bridge, said: "If I stay fit, at least as I am now, then I'll play as long as I can because this career is normally pretty short and

"It all depends on how fit you stay and how well you play because suddenly you're not as fast and your reaction is not the same.

"You can compensate it with a bit of experience, but there always comes a point when you know it's not going to be the same, so it

lenges about playing behind a Chelsea defence that tends not to give opposition teams too many chances.

if the penalties weren't given. The referee was good and let the play flow, I liked

Napoli were incensed last Udinese and Mourinho referees). making the next week,

"Now, for example, that Gasperini and his president will go crying (to the authorities) I'm sure it will be us who out. pay for it.

we're paying for others' problems, the problem Napoli have with referees. crying so we can change these

"At the end of the day it's us who pay. For the last month and a half there have been too many episodes going against

paid for mistakes made in other matches with those evened out when teams play

against his team.

(Aurelio De Laurentiis) went week, as he always does."

"We are going to change the old system to

most, Prandelli said: "Ribery, Ribery and

after an injury lay-off in a 3-1 home win against

visitor's resistance.

sessions.

Wednesday's match. Romanian star Adrian Mutu is serving a provisional suspension for failing drugs tests, while defender Alessandro Gamberini dislo-

and will not be available.

Mourinho cries foul



Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho complained his team is being hard

seven points clear at the top of Serie A. In a pulsating game at the San Paolo stadium in Naples there were chances aplenty for both sides and the woodwork was struck three times as the result could have gone

done by in crucial refereeing

decisions following their 0-0

draw at Napoli that took them

either way. But Mourinho, while admitting Napoli did not deserve to lose, said his team had been deprived after referee Roberto Rosetti failed to give a first half penalty to Inter when a cross from Maicon clearly hit Salvatore Aronica's arm in the area.

surprise but their football is predictable, even if they play with great intensity and speed," said Mourinho. "We should have had two penalties. But in the end the

result is fair because they

didn't deserve to lose.

"Napoli are a good team

and for us that wasn't a

"It was a great game even

his attitude. "Unfortunately, however,

Mourinho felt that Inter

against Inter. weekend about the refereeing in their 3-1 defeat at suggested their recompense was favourable decision-

alty awarded to Juventus late normal circumstances on in their 3-2 win over should have resulted in pen-Genoa for a foul on Alessandro Del Piero. Genoa coach Gian Piero Gasperini complained the incident had not been in the area, was not a foul and that Del Piero had been offside anyway -- claims largely supported by TV replays.

"That's the same way this midget Napoli president

"It makes me think that I too should talk to my president and he too should start

things. "What happened in Turin was shameful but I'll say it again, it's not my problem.

"De Laurentiis cries, the coach (Walter Mazzarri) shouts like a madman and then there is us... Obviously I'm not talking about a conspiracy against us but I am saying that there is too much pressure (put on

"I believe we didn't get the penalties because we didn't cry. But I repeat, the referee was excellent but then there He also hit out at the pen- were episodes that under alties."

For his part, Mazzarri

"Mourinho was watching

accused Mourinho of hypoc-

his own match as has always

happened ever since he arrived in Italy," he said. "He always puts pressure on the referees and behaves in a way that if others did the same they would be kicked

"As for the penalties l didn't see either of them. It was him who was crying all

AFP, London

and Premier League glory.

of heavy bruising. The Belgian still feels dis-

"It is not a big problem to

now just six points off top spot. "We will keep fighting to

"We will battle until the last moment of the season."

could be fit.

Tenerife secured a vital 1-0 win

Despite enjoying one of the

a special occasion (against Inter). "I said before the draw, right before Christmas, that if the English and Italian media wanted a gift from Santa Claus it would be

his team's win over domestic title rivals

everyone wants to make the most of it.

depends how long this is going to take." Cech added there were particular chal-

"Sometimes it is hard because when you have 10 or 15 minutes without touching the ball, and then suddenly something happens, you have to be there," he said.

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