



Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas (R) is unable to stop Lyon midfielder Jean Makoun's (not in picture) goal bound shot during their Champions League encounter at the Gerland Stadium on Tuesday.

Makoun sinks Real

AFP, Lyon



Lyon ruined former striker Karim Benzema's return to his boyhood club by beating Real Madrid 1-0 in their last 16 Champions League first leg clash here on Tuesday.

The defeat will add to the woes of Real's Chilean coach Manuel Pellegrini, who is under pressure to return European football's most coveted trophy to the Santiago Bernabeu following the triumph of fierce rivals Barcelona in the competition last year.

Defeat continued Real's desperate record at Lyon's ground, having failed ever to win there or even score.

Lyon coach Claude Puel has been under pressure of late as the fans have taken the view that he is too negative in his strategy, but the former Monaco and Lille hander was sporting a beaming smile after this victory.

"It was a very good performance, but I wouldn't class it as a great achievement," said Puel.

"It's a shame we didn't score a second one as I thought we outplayed them in the second-half."

Pellegrini said that Real could easily overturn the deficit back in their territory.

"This evening Lyon outmuscled us," said 56-year-old Pellegrini, who gained the Real hotseat on the back of an impressive five year spell at Spanish rivals Villarreal.

"We just didn't know how to cope. It isn't obviously a great result for us.

"We conceded a goal and failed to score one ourselves. We have to be more disciplined in the second leg and do to them as they did to us this evening.

"I am certain that we can achieve that and

win the tie. I don't believe the same demons that have plagued the side in recent seasons in this competition and seen us go out in the last 16 on five successive occasions have returned."

The French side's breakthrough came immediately after half-time when Cameroonian midfielder, Jean II Makoun, picked up the ball from deep and powered through a retreating Madrid defence to hit a dipping shot over a stranded Iker Casillas.

Real were not without their chances but the multi-million-euro Spanish side could not penetrate a resilient Lyon defence, despite enjoying most of the possession.

Argentinian forward Gonzalo Higuain missed a glorious chance when he was clean through on the goal.

But the French-born star could only fire his shot directly at the oncoming Hugo Lloris.

Real threw everything at the seven-time French champions as they went in search of an equaliser and defender Sergio Ramos headed over the crossbar on 80 minutes from a Kaka corner.

Ronaldo had a penalty appeal turned down five minutes earlier when he fell under a challenge from the Lyon keeper.

Lyon old boy Benzema, on as a substitute, had one opportunity to snatch a vital away goal but he could only screw his shot wide.

The victory means Puel's men are unbeaten in four matches in all competitions in 2010, while Real face an uphill battle to reach the quarter-finals.

Lyon travel to the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium - where the final will be held later in the year - for the second leg on March 10, where Real Madrid will be without midfielder Xavi Alonso and left-back Marcelo through suspension.

Everton edge Lisbon

AFP, Liverpool



English Premier League outfit Everton will take a narrow advantage to Portugal for their Europa League last 32 second leg match after beating Sporting Lisbon 2-1 here on Tuesday.

David Moyes' side looked to be cruising towards the last 16 after goals from South Africa midfielder Steven Pienaar and French defender Sylvain Distin put the hosts two goals ahead just after half-time.

But Distin was sent off with four minutes left for a mistimed tackle in the penalty area and Miguel Veloso converted the spot-kick to leave the tie on a knife-edge ahead of the return on February 25.

Despite beating Chelsea in their last match, Moyes still made two changes to the Everton team, as Pienaar came in for Russia winger Diniyar Bilyaletdinov, while Nigerian defender Joseph Yobo replaced John Heitinga.

Everton nearly took the

lead in the 12th minute when Australia midfielder Tim Cahill sent Louis Saha racing through on goal. The French striker, who has 15 goals this season, had to react quickly to get his shot off and Sporting goalkeeper Rui Patrício was able to block.

Cahill was in the thick of the action again when he headed wide from Leighton Baines's corner.

Sporting have been in poor form of late and, with the second leg at home still to come, they were largely content to sit back in the early stages.

Abel tried his luck with a long-range effort midway through the half but he couldn't hit the target.

Pienaar was sent off at Liverpool in his last appearance but the South African made amends for that in the 35th minute.

Phil Neville released Cahill and he back-heeled cleverly into the path of Pienaar and he showed tremendous desire to get to the ball ahead of his marker to shoot into the roof of the net for his sixth goal of the season.

That setback sparked Sporting into life and Marat Izmilov picked out former

Rangers midfielder Pedro Mendes, who tested Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard for the first time.

Izmilov went even closer in the 40th minute with a ferocious effort from a tight angle that cannoned into the woodwork.

While Sporting had more bite going forward now, they still looked shaky at the back and it was no surprise when Moyes' side increased their lead four minutes into the second half.

Baines swung in a corner and Patrício made a hash of his attempted catch, giving Distin the opportunity to poke home from close-range, although the defender didn't know much about it as the ball hit him and went in almost before he had time to take aim.

Cahill limped off in the closing stages with an injury, but Patrício still needed to make two fine stops to deny substitute Ayegbeni Yakubu and then Saha in the closing stages.

Just as Everton looked home and dry, Distin was sent off after a clumsy challenge on Liedson and Veloso stepped up to slot home the spot-kick to give Sporting a lifeline.

IN BRIEF

Turkey appoint Hiddink

AFP, Istanbul

Much-travelled Guus Hiddink is on the move again, taking over as head coach of Turkey as they gear up for the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign.

The Turkish Football Federation on its website Wednesday announced that the 63-year-old Dutchman had agreed on a two-year contract, with an option for a further two years.

He will take over in August, a month after the end of his current contract as head coach of Russia.

Fellaini out for season

AFP, Liverpool

Everton midfielder Marouane Fellaini will miss the rest of the season after discovering he needs surgery on an ankle injury that is likely to keep him sidelined for six months, the Premier League club confirmed on Tuesday.

The 22-year-old Belgian international suffered the injury after being caught by an ugly two-footed lunge from Liverpool's Sotirios Kyrgiakos during his side's 1-0 defeat at Anfield earlier this month.

Kyrgiakos was sent off for the challenge but Fellaini had to come off after trying to resume playing.

Everton manager David Moyes, speaking to his club's website on Tuesday, admitted Fellaini needs an operation that is certain to end his season.

"He's not good," Moyes said. "He's going to have an operation. He's got a similar injury to (Arsenal striker) Robin van Persie and it's probably going to keep him out for six months."

Carragher set for return

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher is set to return against Unirea Urziceni in a Europa League tie at Anfield here on Thursday as injury problems start to ease for Reds manager Rafael Benitez.

Veteran defender Carragher was forced off with a groin problem during last Wednesday's 1-0 loss away to Arsenal but has now been passed fit to play against Romanian side Unirea.

Meanwhile Israeli playmaker Yossi Benayoun could feature on Thursday after being out for more than a month after breaking a rib in Liverpool's FA Cup defeat by second tier Reading on January 13.

"Carra is training again and he will be available, which is very good news for us as he is an important player for us," Benitez said Wednesday.

"Yossi is training with the team. He still has a problem with his rib but at least he is training," the Spaniard added.

Juve-Ajax pick of the ties

AFP, Paris



Italian giants Juventus will take a stab at European glory for the second time this season when they meet Dutch heavyweights Ajax in the first-leg of their Europa League tie on Thursday.

The last 32 clash is a rematch of the 1996 Champions League final, which saw the Italian club triumph over then holders Ajax in a penalty shootout 4-2 after it finished 1-1 at the end of normal time.

With the Amsterdam side nine points off league leaders PSV Eindhoven and Juventus trailing first-placed Inter Milan by 16 points, the Europa League represents their last chance at winning a major title in 2010.

Juve's French midfielder Jonathan Zebina conceded that another Serie A title is out of the club's reach but that his team would give their all to win the trophy.

"We have to continue now as the season is still long and there are objectives. It might not be the Scudetto, but it won't be bad if we win the Europa League," Zebina told the official Juventus website.

But Ajax's Danish starlet Christian Eriksen believes his side can pile on the woes for The Old Lady, who sacked coach Ciro Ferrara just over two weeks ago.

"Juventus are in bit of a crisis," the 18-

year-old playmaker said.

"I hope we can win at home. We must now seize our opportunity. I think we can pull off an upset."

Juventus feature in this rebranded successor to the UEFA Cup after crashing out of the Champions League earlier this season, while Ajax failed to even qualify for Europe's elite competition after finishing third in the championship.

A place in the Europa League is the consolation prize awarded to clubs that finish third in their Champions League qualifying groups.

Rafael Benitez's Liverpool was one of those sides and his team will bid to turn around their ailing season when Romanian champions Unirea Urziceni - coached by former Romania and Chelsea star defender Dan Petrescu - visit Anfield on Thursday.

The Reds have been knocked out of both of England's domestic cups and are behind Premier League leaders Chelsea by 14 points.

"Clearly I would prefer to be fighting for the title or for the Champions League but you must accept the situation," said the Liverpool manager.

"But you have to be positive and turn things in your favour...we have got to keep progressing in the Europa League and aim to finish as high as we can in the Premier League."

Although striker Fernando Torres is still out injured, Benitez is expected to

field his strongest possible side on Thursday in the club's last-ditch bid to win some silverware this season.

The tournament include eight Champions League drop-outs including German titleholders Wolfsburg and Ajax's bitter domestic rivals PSV Eindhoven.

Hamburg's new signing, Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, will be looking to open his European account on Thursday when the German side play PSV, where he played his trade before his big money move to Manchester United in 2001.

But the 33-year-old, who arrived from Real Madrid during the January transfer window, has no intention of granting any favours to the team that launched his career.

"It's the sort of coincidence only football can bring about, but those who know me know I don't live in the past," said van Nistelrooy.

In the pick of Thursday's other games, Roy Hodgson's Fulham meet Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk - who can claim to be the defending champions as they won the last ever UEFA Cup last year - at home while former England coach Steve McClaren sees his high-flying FC Twente side welcome Germany's Werder Bremen, who were beaten by Shakhtar in the 2009 final.

Spain's Atletico Madrid will play Turkish giants Galatasaray at home, while Hertha Berlin play Portugal's Benfica.

Results are key: Ribery

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery, courted by some of Europe's

top sides including Real Madrid, said Wednesday his future at the German giants will depend on how well they do in the Champions League.

"Our result in the Champions League will of course play a part in my decision. For me, footballing potential is the most important thing," the French international midfielder told the

Sport Bild magazine.

"Seeing how the team is playing, we've got every chance in the Champions League," Ribery said as Bayern prepared to host Serie A team Fiorentina in the first leg of the first 16.

Bayern go into the match as clear favourites, on the back of an impressive run of 12 straight wins in all competitions that has seen them advance to the semifinals of the German Cup and joint top of the Bundesliga.

"Our squad isn't quite as good as Barcelona or Real but when everyone is on form, the 11 on the pitch are top class," he said.

Ribery, 26, arrived at the club in 2007 and his contract runs until June 2011 but he has been linked to some of the top names in Europe. Bayern have said they will make the player an offer at the beginning of March.

Sport Bild said that Bayern had lined up 25-year-old Serbian winger Milos Krasic from CSKA Moscow, to replace Ribery if he decides to leave the Allianz Stadium.

Ribery has won 41 caps and scored seven goals for France and looks set to be one of the stars of the 2010 World Cup which takes place in South Africa from June 11 to July 11.

Wenger scorns play-off

AFP, Porto



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger says he is firmly against a proposal to introduce a play-off for the fourth Champions League qualifying berth in the Premier League.

Under the current system, the teams that finish in the top four positions in England's top flight automatically qualify for a place in Europe's premier cup competition the following season.

But under a plan discussed by all 20 Premier League clubs in February, the teams finishing in fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh would enter a play-off, with the winner securing the final qualifying spot.

Qualification for the Champions League has been dominated by England's 'big four' of Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United in recent years, but Wenger says there is no need for an alternative format.

"I don't see any reason why we should reconsider that," he said on Tuesday, on the eve of his side's Champions League last-16 first leg clash with Porto here.

"Why shouldn't the bottom seven teams play each other not to go down? It means you have to start the championship again.

"It's down to where you finish. You have to accept that the best four are in the Champions League. This year there's a massive fight, nobody's guaranteed to be in the top four. You can drop points anywhere and the gaps between teams are getting shorter and shorter."

Everton coach David Moyes, whose side have finished in the top seven in five of the last seven campaigns, has already expressed cautious enthusiasm for the idea.

"I always think your league position is judged over all the games and where you finish is where you finish, so to give it to a team that finishes three or four places down the table could be a little bit unfair," he said.

"Nevertheless, the Championship play-offs for promotion into the Premier League have worked very well so it might be something worth looking at."

Any change to the current qualifying format would require the agreement of at least 14 of the 20 clubs in the Premier League, who will reconvene to examine the proposal in April.

AFP, Stoke



Manchester City moved into fourth place in the Premier League after Gareth Barry's late equaliser rescued a controversial 1-1 draw at Stoke on Tuesday.

Roberto Mancini's side looked set to suffer another disappointment against Stoke, who had Abdoulaye Faye sent off early in the second half, as the hosts took the lead through Glenn Whelan in the closing stages.

But England midfielder Barry levelled with just five minutes left at the Britannia Stadium to lift City above Liverpool into the final Champions League place with a game in hand still to play.

Stoke felt hard done by at the end as Ryan Shawcross's stoppage time goal was harshly ruled out for a foul on City goalkeeper Shay Given.

Mancini made five changes to the side that squandered the lead in their 1-1 draw against Stoke in the FA Cup on Saturday, with Wayne Bridge, Pablo Zabaleta, Stephen Ireland, Shaun Wright-Phillips and Martin Petrov all dropped.

Martin Delap's trademark long throw had caused City all manner of problems at the weekend and led to Ricardo Fuller's equaliser, so it was no surprise to see the midfielder take every chance to do the same in the early stages here.

Four times inside the opening 10 minutes, Delap unleashed his rocket throws and Shawcross almost took advantage twice as he headed over and then had an effort cleared by Micah Richards.

It wasn't just throw-ins that troubled the City defence.

From Liam Lawrence's free-kick, Mamady Sidibe had a golden chance to score but the Mali striker shot tamely at Given.

Faye was next to threaten when he met Lawrence's corner with a powerful header that Joleon Lescott had to scramble clear.

City finally fashioned a sight of goal when Barry shot wide, then Paraguay striker Santa Cruz tried his luck with a volley from Adam Johnson's cross.

After being battered in the first half, City got a break when

Emmanuel Adebayor raced

onto a long punt from Given and Faye responded by hauling down the Togo striker outside the penalty area.

Referee Alan Wiley consulted with his assistant before showing Faye a straight red card.

City found it hard to make their one-man advantage count however and Stoke were back on the attack when Fuller appealed for a penalty after Barry blocked his route to goal.

Tony Pulis's side made City pay for their nervous display as Whelan opened the scoring in the 72 minute.

Johnson sliced his

attempted clearance of Delap's cross into the path of Whelan and the Irish midfielder's powerful shot from the edge of the area deceived Given.

To City's credit they took control after that and equalised with five minutes to play when Adebayor flicked onto Barry, who scored at the second attempt after his first effort hit a post.

There was still time for more drama as Given missed a Delap throw and Shawcross headed home, only to see his effort disallowed for a foul on the keeper.



Manchester City midfielder Gareth Barry (L) vies with Stoke City forward Tuncay Sanli during their Premiership clash at the Britannia Stadium on Tuesday.