

C'Ron calls for fans support

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo believes Real Madrid can overcome its 1-0 first leg defeat to Lyon and reach the Champions League quarterfinal on Wednesday for the first time since 2004, with some help from the fans.

Lyon "are a strong team physically, but it's our turn to play at home," the Portuguese winger told a news conference.

"I was amazed by the fans on Saturday and I must thank them for their support. I hope we see the same kind of atmosphere on Wednesday because they will play a crucial role in our success. The stadium will be great to see so full and the players are ready."

Real lost 1-0 at Lyon in their last-16 first-leg match on February 16, and now have it all to do on Wednesday at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium - where this year's Champions League final will be played.

"Wednesday's match is do-or-die. We are playing very good football and we have proven that we are the strongest team in La Liga," said Ronaldo.

"Everyone knows how bad this club wants to win the Champions League," said Ronaldo.

"It has nine titles and wants ten, and this year the final is being played here. I am sure we can turn this tie around... We have to prove to Lyon that we own the Bernabeu."

Real's French midfielder Lassana Diarra said an early goal is essential.

"We must start the match strongly, and above all watch out for their counter-attacks so as not to concede a goal," he said.



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo is about to kick the ball during a training session in Madrid on Tuesday on the eve of their Champions League match against Olympique Lyon.

MU aim to end Milan jinx

AFP, Manchester



Dimitar Berbatov will never have a better opportunity to convince the Manchester United faithful that he was worth the 30.75 million pounds it cost to prise him away from Tottenham.

With Wayne Rooney likely to be sidelined by a knee injury incurred on England duty last week, United boss Sir Alex Ferguson is set to place his trust in Berbatov as the English champions attempt to defend a 3-2 first-leg advantage in their Champions League last 16 clash with AC Milan.

Ferguson is acutely aware that he has never got the better of a Milan squad in the competition and, having watched an irrepressible Rooney score twice in the San Siro last month, would have dearly loved to be able to unleash his top scorer once more on Wednesday.

Rooney however is unlikely to play any role in the match after succumbing to a knee injury that Ferguson has blamed on the heavy surface at Wembley, where the striker played 86 minutes for England on Wednesday three days after featuring for United in their League Cup final win over Aston Villa.

With Michael Owen out for the rest of the season, Berbatov is destined for centre stage and the Bulgarian knows Old Trafford will be an unforgiving place if he fluffs his lines.

Ferguson has verged on the strident in his regular defences of Berbatov's contribution to the cause but United fans, many of whom are still pining for Carlos Tevez's heart-on-the-sleeve contributions, remain unconvinced of his value.

Rio Ferdinand, however, believes that the Bulgarian's popularity with his teammates will eventually be mirrored by recognition from the Old Trafford masses.

"If we win the league this year, I think 'Berba' will be appreciated for what he has done," Ferdinand said. "When you look at the statistics you can see he is one of the hardest runners in our team and that he covers the most ground."

"He is a bit languid but he really puts the effort in. At the training ground, he is always in the gym. It's just his style of play, which means people see a different side to him."

"But I don't think that it actually reflects his importance to the team. He is appreciated by us and that is the most important thing."

It is not only in attack that United's options are restricted with, most significantly, Ryan Giggs still sidelined after

breaking his arm, Michael Carrick suspended and England defender Wes Brown having joined an injury list already featuring Brazilian midfielder Anderson, backup centreback Jonny Evans and Irish utility man John O'Shea.

History, in general terms, is on United's side. They have never been knocked out of the competition when they have returned to Old Trafford with a lead at the half way stage of a tie.

When it comes to the particular however, recent memory is more chastening. Milan having triumphed in the 2007 semi-final thanks to a 3-0 win in the San Siro following a 3-2 first-leg defeat at Old Trafford.

United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar recalled: "They played particularly well in the home leg here when we won 3-2 and Kaka scored two goals."

"Then at the San Siro, Clarence Seedorf was fantastic - he was excellent in both games actually. But we got a good result in Milan and now we need to finish it off with a magic night at Old Trafford."

Milan coach Leonardo will arrive in Manchester still unsure whether Alexandre Pato will be able to start, following the hamstring injury which kept the Brazilian prodigy out of Saturday's goalless draw at Roma in Serie A.

Messi chosen goodwill ambassador

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona's Argentine winger Lionel Messi has been appointed a goodwill ambassador for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Spanish club said on Tuesday.

"Messi will work to highlight challenges faced by especially vulnerable children. The player will be involved, together with UNICEF, in a series of activities to support the rights of children," Barcelona said in a statement.

The 22-year-old reigning FIFA World Player of the Year is the first Barcelona player to become a UNICEF goodwill ambassador.

He follows in the footsteps of England football star David Beckham, Colombian singer Shakira, US actress Mia Farrow and Latin pop star Ricky Martin.

Barcelona, the current Spanish and European champions, already wear the UNICEF logo on their shirts, having agreed a unique five-year partnership with the charity in July 2006.

Last week the University of Navarra ranked Messi the football player with the highest profile in the world for the second year running, beating Real Madrid's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo, who was second, and Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney, who came in third.

In September Messi, who joined Barcelona at the age of 13 from Argentine club Newell's Old Boys, signed a two-year contract extension with the Catalan giants that will keep him at the club until at least 2016.

Gerrard faces FA rap

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard could face an FA investigation after he appeared to flash a V-sign at referee Andre Marriner during his side's 1-0 defeat at Wigan.

The England midfielder was booked in the 81st minute of the Barclays Premier League clash at the DW Stadium following a robust challenge from behind on James McCarthy, and replays of the incident suggested that Gerrard had gestured towards Marriner as well as mouthing an obscenity at the official.

Marriner did not notice the gesture but the FA may decide that Gerrard, who captained England in their 3-1 friendly victory over Egypt last week, has a case to answer.

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez, speaking after the game, insisted he had not seen the incident.

"I don't know, I was too far away," he said.

Pressure on Real

AFP, Madrid



A staggering summer outlay of over 250 million euros and home advantage for the final has seen Real Madrid put themselves under immense pressure to win the Champions League this season.

However, the record nine-time European champions first have to come from behind to eliminate French side Lyon who arrive for Wednesday's last 16 decider at the Santiago Bernabeu holding a 1-0 first leg lead.

Real have been unstoppable in the league at home winning all 13 games but in Europe their dominance has not been as overwhelming losing 3-2 to AC Milan at home in this season's group stage while Liverpool and Juventus both won in Madrid last season.

Lyon's clean sheet in the first leg means a vital away goal would force Real to score three goals to progress as they go all out to reach the final at their Bernabeu stadium on May 22.

"We are up for coming from behind against Lyon," said Guti, a three-time Champions League winner with Real.

"If they score it will complicate things but with the signings we have made we

have to give everything to get through.

"It would be a failure not to get past the knockout stage against a rival like Lyon who are good but not one of the big European sides."

Lyon, third in their domestic league, may not have the grandeur of Real but they are seasoned campaigners in the Champions League and have outperformed Real in the last five campaigns reaching the quarterfinal stage in 2005 and 2006.

"We really believe in our chances, even if Real (Madrid) remain the favourites," said Lyon's Brazilian captain Cris. "It's just a match with 11 against 11 and we are not worried about their stars."

Real have been a disappointment in Europe in recent seasons failing to reach the quarter-finals since 2004 and coach Manuel Pellegrini is under pressure to put them back among Europe's elite particularly after the massive summer spending.

Pellegrini, who guided Villarreal to the semifinals in 2006, must do without midfielder Xabi Alonso through suspension leaving the door open for the likes of former Lyon old boy Mahamadou Diarra, Esteban Granero and Rafael van der Vaart to stake a claim for a first team place.

French striker Karim Benzema, a summer signing from Lyon, could miss the

game against his old club due to a groin strain but Real have the firepower in Brazilian Kaka, in-form Argentine Gonzalo Higuain and Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo who is the Champions League top-scorer with six goals.

Real will also be on a high after their dramatic 3-2 win over Sevilla, coming from two goals down to move level on points with Barcelona at the top of the table and Ronaldo called on his team-mates to stamp their authority over Lyon.

"We need to show that, at the Bernabeu, we are the ones in charge," said Ronaldo. "We already know Lyon are a strong team, but now we are playing at home and I am confident that we will progress."

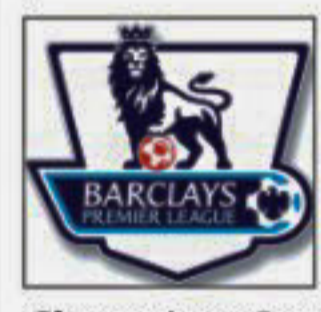
"It would be a huge disappointment if we did not progress. We are going to go out with the mentality of winning and scoring goals."

Real are top-scorers in the Spanish league and start as favourites but Lyon's Argentine striker Cesar Delgado insists the French giants won't come to sit back and defend.

"We are not coming with the idea of defending because we are not a team that likes to defend," said Delgado. "There is no doubt that they have players that can change the game. We have a lot of respect but in football you can't have fear."

Rodallega sinks L'pool

AFP, Wigan



Hugo Rodallega scored the only goal of the game as Wigan dented Liverpool's

Champions League hope with a 1-0 victory at the DW Stadium here on Monday.

Fernando Torres had already hit the post when Rodallega made the most of poor defending from the Reds to fire the hosts in front just after the half hour.

And there was little response from Rafael Benitez's side as they slipped to a ninth Premier League defeat of the season.

They are still just one point off fourth place but with nine games remaining, they are sixth in the table and Tottenham and Manchester City have them now have games in hand.

It was Wigan's second win of 2010 and their first in eight matches which sees Roberto Martinez's side move four points clear of the relegation zone.

Having beaten Chelsea earlier this season, it was also only the second time Wigan have ever beaten a "big four" team.

Javier Mascherano was once again asked to fill in at right back but Glen Johnson was back on the bench after two months out.

But Argentina captain Mascherano did not seem to mind the unfamiliar role and

quickly got forward to good effect.

His cross was only half cleared by Gary Caldwell and Steven Gerrard thumped a shot over from just outside the area.

Liverpool began strongly and produced a threat again when Fernando Torres' volley flew wide off the post from Yossi Benayoun's deep cross.

Titus Bramble was forced into a fine block after Gerrard broke through midfield again and tried his luck from long range.

But struggling Wigan recovered from their early

Wigan 1 (Rodallega 35) Liverpool 0

hesitancy and caused Liverpool plenty of problems.

A strong run from James McCarthy, who was a Liverpool target as a youngster, was only halted by a fine tackle by Jamie Carragher on the edge of the area.

And Wigan winger Charles N'Zogbia also sent over a couple of dangerous crosses after beating defender Emiliano Insua with ease.

The Reds produced a fine passing move with Maxi Rodriguez and Benayoun before Gerrard scuffed his shot wide from close range.

But Wigan made no mistake when Dirk Kuyt gave the ball away on the edge of his own area.

Emmerson Boyce curled a cross over and Rodallega fired in from close range to give the

strugglers a shock lead.

And Torres failed to level when he headed over from six yards after he was picked out by a Rodriguez cross.

Wigan continued to pressure after the restart and Pepe Reina had to desperately grab an N'Zogbia cross at the near post.

And as Torres tried to get Liverpool on level terms, he fired over from a low Rodriguez cross.

Benitez had finally seen enough of Lucas and dragged the Brazilian off to replace him with Johnson.

Wigan almost doubled their lead when Carragher's clearance flew off Marcelo Moreno and was headed wide by Sotirios Kyrgiakos.

And Bolivian forward Moreno forced a fine save from Reina with a powerful drive after he cut in from the right.

N'Zogbia nearly created a second when his low shot beat Reina and Paul Scharner failed to touch in at the far post.

Liverpool pressed and pressed but failed to trouble Latics goalkeeper Chris Kirkland.

Substitute Victor Moses could have made the game safe for Wigan but shot narrowly wide as the hosts pressed hard on the break in added time.

They also survived a late goal-mouth scramble to grind out a first-ever victory over Liverpool and leave major doubts about whether the Reds can reach the Champions League.

Adriano needs to lose weight

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Troubled Brazil striker Adriano will not go to this year's World Cup finals if he doesn't lose weight, said his club president Patricia Amorim.

The 28-year-old former Inter Milan striker - who failed to impress in last week's 2-0 friendly win over the Republic of Ireland - has struggled with his weight over the years as well as battling depression but his present club Flamengo and national coach Dunga are losing patience with him.

"Each person reaps what they sew," said Flamengo president Patricia Amorim.

"If Adriano wants to go to the World Cup finals in South Africa (they run from June 11-July 11) he has to change."

"We have already told him this."

Flamengo, who along with Dunga have expressed their displeasure at Adriano's repeated failure to turn up for training, have taken measures themselves in dropping the barrel-chested forward - scorer of 27 goals in 48 international appearances - from the squad for Wednesday's Copa Libertadores match with Venezuelan outfit Caracas FC.

Adriano, nicknamed the "Emperor", weighed 106 kilograms (almost 17 stone) on his last medical check-up - eight kilos (16 pounds) over weight - and despite scoring six goals since

Racing hold Valencia

AFP, Madrid



Valencia dropped important points in the fight for a Champions League place after they were held 0-0 at home by lowly Racing Santander on Monday in their Spanish First Division match.

With fourth-placed Sevilla losing, Valencia could have

opened up a six-point cushion but they were never at their best with a number of players missing through injury and suspension.

A make-shift defence struggled especially against the skills of youngster Sergio Canales but they still had the chances to see off the threat from Racing going forward.

The normally clinical David Villa shot straight at the Racing keeper Fabio Coltorti from six-yards out and then saw another strike come back off the post.

Racing also had their moments with Canales denied by the Valencia keeper Miguel Moya before the break and in the second half Santander had the better opportunities to win the match.

Moya proved to be the hero for Valencia making several point-blank saves notably from Manuel Arana and Mohamed Tchite.

The pressure on the Valencia defence took its toll with the expulsion of David Navarro for a second yellow card late on.

"Although the balance of play was in our favour in the first-half in terms of openings, in general we were never comfortable and in the second-half Racing were on top," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

"We were missing a lot of players though and Racing played well so the best thing is to turn over a new page."

Racing coach Miguel Angel Portugal realised that the game was there for the taking but was philosophical about the result.

"Sometimes when you can't win it is best not to lose," he said.

"We were unable to finish off chances and that has cost the team points. Maybe we had a different mentality against a team of the quality of Valencia than we do against sides of our level where we try and play more football," he added.



Valencia star David Villa reacts during their Primera Liga clash against Racing Santander at the Mestalla on Monday.



Wigan Athletic forward Hugo Rodallega celebrates his all-important goal against Liverpool during their Premier League encounter at the DW Stadium on Monday.