

Jose jibes at Roman

AFP, London



Inter Milan manager Jose Mourinho has warned Roman Abramovich that Chelsea may never win the Champions League after the former Blues boss returned to dump his old club out of the competition.

Mourinho masterminded Inter's 1-0 victory in the last 16 second leg at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday which clinched a 3-1 aggregate success and left Chelsea owner Abramovich still waiting to fulfil his dream of winning Europe's elite club event.

Ever since he was sacked by Abramovich in September 2007 following a lengthy power struggle with the Russian billionaire, Mourinho must have dreamed of the moment he would exact his revenge.

Thanks to his inspired game-plan, Inter's resolute defending and a superb goal from Samuel Eto'o, Mourinho was able to prove his point and deny his former employer the trophy he prizes most.

Mourinho resisted the temptation to gloat too much but he made it clear there is no guarantee Chelsea will ever win such a demanding competition.

"I know that Roman is a very intelligent person. And because of this he is not the same person he was one year, three years or five years ago," Mourinho said.

"Probably when he arrived in football he thought it would be easier to do it. It is not easy. The team that wins will have small details that make the difference.

"Roman knows very well how to read, understand and analyse the game. For sure he knows his team lost to a team that deserved to win. Because he is a man of fair play I am sure he accepts that."

Although Mourinho could have been forgiven for taking a very public satisfaction from eliminating his old club, the Portuguese coach insisted it was only Inter's progress to the last eight that pleased him.

"I'm happy because I won. I am not happy my ex-players lost, because Roman lost or because the fans go home unhappy,"

Mourinho said.

"It is a very important victory for me as a coach but it is not the victory of my life. It was hard to prepare myself to come here as an enemy.

"I exchanged some text messages with John Terry before the game and I told him someone will go home happy and someone sad.

"My people will always be my people. But I was the enemy. And the enemy won. That's life.

"Somebody asked if I would still be special if I didn't win. Now I can say I am not so special to the Chelsea supporters who will probably never forgive me."

For Mourinho there was more satisfaction in a job well done. His decision to play Eto'o and Goran Pandev as wide attackers to take advantage of Chelsea's full-backs worked perfectly and Inter were rarely in danger of surrendering their first leg advantage.

The decisive moment came in the 79th minute when Eto'o sprinted onto Wesley Sneijder's superb pass, held off right-back Branislav Ivanovic and drove his shot past Ross Turnbull.

Mourinho's fist-pumping celebration told its own story and Chelsea's frustration at their earliest exit from the competition since 2006 - and their first home European defeat for 22 matches - boiled over when Didier Drogha was sent off for a nasty stamp on Thiago Motta.

While Mourinho returned to Italy well and truly vindicated, Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti admits he has to deliver success in the Premier League to make amends for his European failure.

Brought to the Bridge for his impressive achievements in the Champions League, Ancelotti could have done without such an early exit and now he must focus on ending Manchester United's three-year reign as English champions.

"We are near the top of the league but I'm sure there will be more pressure on the next games. This is normal," he said.

"We were in three competitions, now we are only in two and we are disappointed by that. But our objective now is to go on and win the FA Cup and Premier League."



Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho is pictured in the tunnel before kick off against Chelsea during their Champions League encounter at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

IN BRIEF

Hull appoint Dowie

AFP, Hull

Iain Dowie has been appointed as the new manager of Premier League strugglers Hull, replacing Phil Brown who was sacked on Monday.

Brown was dismissed in the wake of a 2-1 home defeat by Arsenal which left Hull second from bottom of the table and Dowie was due to be unveiled as the new Tigers boss at an 1100GMT press conference Wednesday, BBC radio reported.

The former Crystal Palace and Charlton manager will have nine matches to save Hull, who are currently three points from safety, from relegation, a fate which would leave the club facing serious financial difficulties.

Van Bommel extends Bayern deal

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich captain Mark van Bommel has extended his current deal with the Bundesliga giants by a year, to 2011, the club said Wednesday.

"I wanted to give it another year," said the 32-year-old Dutchman. "I want to win trophies with Bayern this year, and next year too."

Van Bommel, a defensive midfielder, has played 103 league matches, scoring 11 league goals, since joining Bayern from Barcelona in 2006.

CSKA stun Sevilla

AFP, Madrid



A costly goalkeeping blunder from Sevilla captain Andres Palop helped CSKA Moscow qualify for the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time with a 2-1 win here on Tuesday.

The Russians march on to uncharted waters at the expense of Sevilla having secured a 3-2 aggregate victory.

With the last 16 tie level at 2-2 Palop allowed Japan international midfielder Keisuke Honda's long-range free-kick to creep in on 55 minutes and Sevilla could not find the two goals they needed as they joined Spanish counterparts Real Madrid in exiting the competition.

Tomas Necid shot CSKA into a 39th minute lead only for Argentine Diego Perotti to equalise two minutes later and level the tie 2-2 on aggregate.

Palop then underestimated the ferocity of 23-year-old Honda's free-kick which forced its way in and proved the decisive moment in the tie.

Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez sprung a surprise by fielding Brazilian Luis Fabiano as a lone striker with three speedy wingers behind in Perotti, Diego Capel and Jesus Navas.

The club's 15 million euro club record signing Alvaro Negredo, who scored in the first leg, was left pressing the substitutes bench along with Mali international striker Frederic Kanoute.

CSKA also played with one target-man in Necid with Honda in the hole and the dangerous Milos Krasic coming in off the wing.

With just under three minutes gone Sevilla had a golden chance to go in front when Navas, hoping to gatecrash the Spain squad for this summer's World Cup, broke down the right and fed Fabiano but the Brazilian's shot was straight at goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev who parried the effort.

A tame shot from Krasic was all CSKA mus-

tered until the 25th minute when Palop fumbled a Honda shot and the midfielder tried again despite being on the ground but his shot went wide.

The Russians drew first blood on 39 minutes when Necid let the ball run cleverly before curling his precise shot into the corner to put his side 2-1 up on aggregate.

However, the lead lasted barely two minutes as a long goal-kick from Palop was poorly defended and Navas fed Perotti to prod home to level the match and the tie.

Sevilla were relieved but knew they couldn't concede another away goal as it would mean they would have to score twice to progress.

Kanoute came on for Capel at the start of the second half to give Sevilla more punch up front and almost had an immediate impact flicking on a Navas cross but Perotti couldn't apply the final touch as the ball flew past him at pace.

The hosts were on the front foot but an unexpected goalkeeping mistake from the usually reliable Palop gave CSKA another away goal and meant Sevilla had to score twice in the remaining 35 minutes.

Honda's 55th minute free-kick shot was powerful but should have been saved by Palop who got his positioning all wrong and his reaction showed he felt it was his fault.

CSKA collected a host of yellow cards as they tried to break the game up and prevent Sevilla from having a lifeline.

Fabiano went close on 77 minutes but the Russians held on to become the first side to beat Sevilla at home in this season's Champions League and reach the quarter-finals for the first time in their history.

Sevilla's exit follows that of Real Madrid meaning holders Barcelona, who are in action against VfB Stuttgart on Wednesday, are Spain's last hope in the competition.

Benzema set for return

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are set to welcome back French striker Karim Benzema to their squad for Saturday's league match away to Sporting Gijon following a month-long injury absence.

Benzema last played for the Spanish league giants in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Lyon on February 16 and was subsequently sidelined with adductor and groin problems.

After that 1-0 defeat in Lyon, Real were sent crashing out of the Champions League after a second leg 1-1 draw at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium last week.

Real said on their website they were happy that Benzema completed a full training session early Wednesday morning.

Press reports now suggest the 22-year-old French international, who is currently battling Argentine star Gonzalo Higuain for the number one striker's spot, will come off the bench to play on Saturday.

Hernia op sidelines Bridge

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City full-back Wayne Bridge will be sidelined for a month after undergoing a hernia operation, his club announced Wednesday.

Bridge, who only returned to action in February following a knee injury suffered in December, was forced off after aggravating the long-standing injury in the first half of City's 1-1 draw at Sunderland on Sunday.

His absence comes just as City gear up for the challenge of securing one of the top four spots in the English Premier League, and with it the chance to play in the Champions League next season.

Thankfully for City, manager Roberto Mancini has several experienced left-backs that can step in to replace Bridge in Spaniard Javier Garrido, Brazilian Sylvinho and the emerging Greg Cunningham.

However the news will prove a bigger blow to England fringe player Bridge.

His comeback game in February, after missing 13 games with a knee injury, was played in the glare of intense media spotlight following allegations of an affair between his former partner Vanessa Perroncel and ex-Chelsea teammate John Terry.

Bridge subsequently ended any chance he had of playing at the World Cup by announcing he would not accept an invitation from England manager Fabio Capello to play alongside Terry in the England set-up.

Juve face injury woe

AFP, Paris



An injury crisis at Juventus has boosted Fulham's hopes of overturning a 3-1 deficit in their Europa League last-16 second leg match against the Italians on Thursday.

Juve bossed the first leg in Turin last week and looked to be on the brink of the last eight but injuries to a raft of players have given the Londoners a glimmer of hope.

First-choice goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and his under-study Alex Manninger have both been ruled out with thigh injuries, meaning third-choice keeper Antonio Chimenti is in line to make his UEFA club debut.

Giorgio Chiellini, Martin Caceres, Amauri, Sebastian Giovinco and Michele Paolucci are also injured, while central defender Nicola Legrottaglie is suspended.

Juventus are one of three sides taking a 3-1 advantage into the second leg, with Standard Liege and Hamburg similarly well placed against Panathinaikos and Anderlecht respectively.

The other five ties are more finely poised, with Lille on the verge of a famous upset after defeating five-time European champions Liverpool 1-0 in the home leg of their tie last week.

Beckham doing well



AFP, Helsinki

Footballer David Beckham is doing well after an operation at a Finnish hospital to fix his ruptured Achilles tendon and will leave with his wife Victoria Wednesday afternoon, his surgeon said.

"He is leaving today, but as is probably wise, he is not saying what time or where he is going," orthopaedic surgeon Sakari Orava told AFP. "I saw him this morning and we said our good-byes."

The former England captain twisted his left ankle during the final minutes of AC Milan's 1-0 Serie A win against Chievo on Sunday and limped off the field before being stretchered away in pain and in tears.

He flew to Finland for surgery on Monday, and while Beckham himself called the operation a

"success", the injury rules the 34-year-old out of the World Cup, which kicks off in South Africa on June 11.

Beckham's wife Victoria, a former member of the Spice Girls group, arrived at the south-western Finnish city of Turku Tuesday to be with her husband, and the pair would leave on a private plane some time in the afternoon, Orava said.

Beckham's leg is expected to be in a cast for three to four weeks and in a support for around the same length of time, but the on-loan LA Galaxy midfielder already began practicing to walk with crutches Tuesday, Orava said.

"It went well. The practice continues today, and every day there will be more," Orava said, adding he had worked with a physiotherapist until late Tuesday to put together a "good programme" of practice for the days to come.

"(This morning) the bandages were changed, the wound is clean and everything is as it should be," Orava said.

Villa bounce back

AFP, Wigan



James Milner put Aston Villa back at the heart of the battle for the Barclays Premier League football next season with the decisive strike in a 2-1 win over Wigan here on Tuesday.

The England World Cup hopeful struck the winner just after the hour mark after Gary Caldwell had cancelled out the James McCarthy own goal which had gifted Villa the lead.

The victory left Villa in seventh place in the Premier League table but they are just three points off fourth-placed Tottenham with a game in hand over their rivals.

Villa had top scorer Gabriel Agbonlahor back in action following his recovery from a virus, with Emile Heskey making way.

Wigan, just four points above the relegation zone, were hoping

to boost their survival hopes by winning at home for only the second time since November.

Manager Roberto Martinez kept faith with Caldwell after a horror show in the 4-0 loss at Bolton at the weekend and Wigan were first to show, Hugo Rodallega breaking into the box but firing wide before Maynor Figueroa shot inches over.

Villa's first hint of menace

Wigan 1 (Caldwell 27) Aston Villa 2 (McCarthy 25-og, Milner 63)

came when Ashley Young turned in an Agbonlahor cross from an offside position.

Figueroa then tested Brad Friedel from distance and John Carew, who sent a shot skidding narrowly wide, and Stewart Downing, whose free-kick was touched over by Chris Kirkland, both went close before Villa took the lead in the 25th minute.

Carew headed down a Downing cross and McCarthy,

under no apparent pressure, sliced an attempted clearance into his own net.

Wigan, though, were level inside two minutes with Caldwell rising to glance Charles N'Zogbia's free-kick past Friedel.

Kirkland produced a brilliant stop to prevent Carew from restoring Villa's lead before the interval but the home side were far from out of it and Marcelo Moreno went close just after the restart, his curling shot sliding narrowly wide with Friedel beaten. Villa began to assert themselves however and, after Caldwell had cleared a Carew flick off the line, they reclaimed the lead just after the hour mark.

Kirkland failed to clear a cross convincingly and, when the ball fell to Milner on the edge of the area, the England midfielder unleashed a shot that found its way through a crowd of bodies and into the net.

There was to be no way back for Wigan.



PHOTO: AFP

Sevilla midfielder Didier Zokora (L) sits dejected as CSKA Moscow players rejoice their win in the Champions League at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium on Tuesday.