

## Rooney's WC not damaged

AFP, London

England and Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney has suffered "minor ligament damage" and a scan of his injured ankle showed no fracture, his club said on Thursday.

The results of the scan appear to suggest Rooney should be able to play in this year's World Cup finals in South Africa, which kick off in 10 weeks' time.

"We're pleased to report that Wayne has not suffered a fracture. The scan revealed only minor ligament damage," a club spokeswoman told ManUtd.com, without saying how many games Rooney will miss.

The 24-year-old appears almost certain to play no part in Saturday's crucial top-of-the-table Premier League clash against Chelsea.

Rooney was injured in United's 2-1 defeat to Bayern Munich in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinal on Tuesday.

He limped off the field and left Bayern's Allianz Arena with his right ankle encased in a plastic boot before having a scan on his return to Britain.

It was initially feared the injury could either rule him out of the World Cup, where he will be key to England's hopes, or leave him facing the same desperate race for fitness he endured before the 2006 finals.



Inter Milan striker Diego Milito (L) scores the all-important goal against CSKA Moscow during their Champions League quarterfinal at San Siro on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Arshavin out for three weeks

AFP, London

Andrey Arshavin will be sidelined for up to three weeks, Arsenal's Russian star has revealed after limping out of his side's 2-2 Champions League quarterfinal draw with Barcelona.

Skipper Cesc Fabregas, who fears he may have suffered a stress fracture in his leg, and centreback William Gallas, who broke down in his comeback match, could both be ruled out until the end of the season as a result of injuries suffered in Tuesday's dramatic first leg at the Emirates.

But Arshavin's calf injury does not appear to be as serious, he said on his website, www.arshavin.eu.

"Perhaps I won't be able to play for another two or three weeks," he said. "It is not a relapse of my old injury, this is a new one."

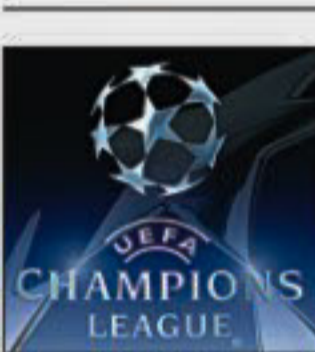
Arsenal battled back from 2-0 down to keep their hopes of a semifinal place alive and Arshavin believes a depleted Gunners squad could pull off a shock win in the Nou Camp next week.

"The rest of the players will play to win," he said. "They showed great character. Barcelona had a good start, but we found our way back."

"There is one more match ahead, and there is still hope."

# Inter just ahead

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan will take a slender lead to the Luzhniki Stadium next Tuesday after beating CSKA Moscow 1-0 at the San Siro here on Wednesday in the first leg of their Champions League

quarterfinal. 'Il Principe' Diego Milito scored the only goal of the game during an Inter siege in the second half after a thoroughly forgettable first 45 minutes.

Jose Mourinho's team, listless in the first period, were unrecognisable after the break and will be disappointed to have managed only the one goal.

That it stayed 1-0 was thanks largely to goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev, a reported target for Manchester United who will have bolstered his burgeoning reputation with this performance.

CSKA coach Leonid Slutsky admitted he was quite happy to have kept the score to 1-0.

"Of course 1-0 is a good result but we should have been able to do better," he said.

"We hoped to get a 0-0 but given how many chances they had it could have been a lot worse than this."

"It didn't go the way we hoped it would, especially in attack. We were under a lot of pressure in defence and it was a difficult game."

"I hope that in Moscow in the return leg we'll be able to better organise our play."

In the first quarter of an hour there was little to get excited about although Wesley Sneijder made sure Akinfeev was awake from a free-kick and then Sergei Ignashevich returned the compliment for Julio Cesar.

The first real opportunity came on 22 minutes as Goran Pandev hit a rising shot from

almost 25 yards that sailed just over the bar.

Moments later Japan star Keisuke Honda teed up Milos Krasic in a great shooting position inside the box but the Serbian midfielder shanked his effort miles off target.

Nine minutes before the break Samuel Eto'o jinked into the CSKA area but his shot hit Esteban Cambiasso, who was in an offside position.

Mourinho must have said something to his players at half-time because Inter finally got going an hour in after a dreadful clearance from CSKA fell straight to Cambiasso 25 yards out and he fed the marauding Dejan Stankovic - but the Serbian got the ball caught between his feet and his poked finish was straight at Akinfeev.

The hosts were playing with more urgency and intensity and Pandev brought a flying one-handed save out of Akinfeev with a curling shot while the goalkeeper then plunged low to his right to hold onto an Eto'o effort.

The sudden surge of pressure told on 65 minutes as Sneijder passed to Milito, who found the bottom right hand corner from the edge of the area.

Next up it was the turn of veteran centre-half Marco Materazzi

to head over from a free-kick. Inter were now rampant and Pandev played a one-two with Milito before rounding Akinfeev but Aleksei Bereuztski got back to hack his shot off the line on 71 minutes.

Sneijder had a golden opportunity to double the lead on 84 minutes as Eto'o found him free on the left hand side of the area but instead of shooting left footed he pulled the ball back onto his right and then fired it wide of the near post.

Two minutes later and Akinfeev was a double hero punching away a rifled effort from Cambiasso and then deflecting a rocket from Stankovic over the bar.

### IN BRIEF

#### SA draw with Paraguay

AFP, Asuncion

World Cup hosts South Africa continued their buildup to this summer's tournament with an encouraging 1-1 draw against Paraguay here late Wednesday.

The South Americans, who were missing several top European-based players, took the lead after 37 minutes through Marcelo Estigarribia, but Bafana Bafana (The Boys) hit back to equalize through Siphwe Tshabalala 19 minutes from time.

#### Loew facing selection headache

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew will unveil a pre-World Cup squad on May 6, the German football federation (DFB) said Thursday.

FIFA rules stipulate that Loew will have to submit his definitive 23-man squad for the World Cup finals on June 11-July 11 no later than June 5. However the German has been given a selection headache by the fact Bayern Munich and Werder Bremen, who both boast several German internationals, will contest the German Cup final on May 15.

It means Loew could have to do without around 10 players for the start of a scheduled training camp in Sicily on May 14-21, and for the first of three pre-tournament friendlies.

Manuel Almunia made some great saves.

"They did play well for 60 minutes but they died off in the last 30 minutes. Playing at that tempo for 90 minutes is hard and we are a fit team. We came right at them."

"Looking back it will be a very good result for us. If we can get an early goal and frustrate them it will be a great game in the second leg."

Walcott conceded that injuries to captain Cesc Fabregas, who could be sidelined for months with what could be a broken leg, William Gallas and Andrey Arshavin had cast a shadow over the result.

But he is confident the Gunners have enough strength in depth to cope.

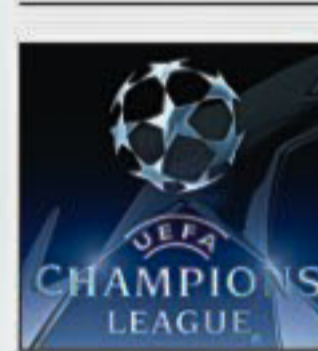
"It is a very mixed atmosphere at the moment. We've got a few injuries but hopefully they won't be as bad as first thought," Walcott said.

"Cesc is a fantastic player for us. We always want him to play and hopefully the injury won't be too bad."

"But we have players who can come in and do the job. Against Porto he didn't play and we still won. We have some great players who can come in for him."

# Our best half: Pep

SOCCERNET



Pep Guardiola described Barcelona's supremely dominant first-half performance against Arsenal as "the best 45 minutes" of the best 45 minutes he has produced during his reign.

A thrilling encounter ended 2-2 at Emirates Stadium in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinal, but Manuel Almunia had to be at his best in the first half to deny, amongst others, Xavi and Zlatan Ibrahimovic as Barcelona enjoyed 71 per cent possession and produced a succession of excellent chances.

Two goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic then put the visitors in firm control but Arsenal responded when Theo Walcott beat Victor Valdes following his introduction as a substitute and Cesc Fabregas scored a penalty to make it 2-2.

Despite seeing his side loosen their grip on the tie, Guardiola could only admire the flowing football that Barcelona, inspired by midfield playmaker Xavi, produced

against an Arsenal side renowned for their own aesthetic quality.

"Last season we won many prizes, but never played away in the Champions League like we did here," Guardiola said. "We took the ball and never allowed them to play."

"It was the best 45 minutes since I became a coach. Against Bayern Munich [in the Champions League quarterfinal] last season we had four chances and scored four goals, but this was the best 45 minutes my team have played."

"We've given a good image of how football should be played and I'm proud of my team. My team's performance was good and I will sleep okay. We created many chances and it's just a pity because we had a chance to take a bigger step towards the semifinal."

"We could have won, but could have lost as well. But everyone who came to the stadium and watched the game will have enjoyed it, which is the point. We play football because we want to give happiness to people."

"It's a big mistake to be defensive. It's more risky not to take risks. Always you have to attack. If you're winning 2-0, you

have to try for 3-0. That's what I've tried to put in the heads of the players from the first day I met them until the day I stop being their coach."

While Arsenal are rueing the loss of Cesc Fabregas and William Gallas, potentially for the remainder of the season, not to mention a calf injury sustained by Andrei Arshavin, Barcelona will also be depleted for the second leg as both Gerard Pique and Carles Puyol will be suspended, the latter due to a red card.

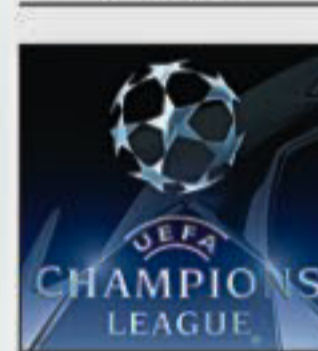
Guardiola is not content to rest on an advantage secured by virtue of the away goals rule though, and has instructed his team to attempt to overwhelm Arsenal at Camp Nou.

"The second leg will be much harder in terms of the chances we will have, but my orders will be 'attack, attack'," Guardiola said. "It will be more difficult because Pique and Puyol will not be there."

"We have a good chance to qualify for the next round. They scored two goals, but this is football. We're happy with the result as we were away from home, but we should have killed off the tie. Only teams who can win will get the glory."

# Fabregas fears the worst

AFP, London



Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas fears he may not play again this season after suffering a serious leg injury in Wednesday's 2-2 Champions League quarterfinal draw

against Barcelona. Fabregas, already struggling with a knee problem, believes he may have sustained the injury either when he was fouled by Carles Puyol to win the penalty that he converted to cap Arsenal's impressive fightback or when he retrieved the ball from the back of the net after the spot-kick.

The Spain midfielder left the Emirates Stadium on crutches and faces a scan on Thursday that will tell him whether he can recover in time to play any part in the rest of Arsenal's season or his country's World Cup campaign.

"I fear the worst which is that I broke something," Fabregas said. "I took the penalty quite strong and I went to get the ball. After that I couldn't walk anymore."

"We have to wait. But I hope I can wear the Arsenal shirt again this season."

"I fear the worst. If they tell me it is nothing that is better but at least I will know if it is bad."

"I don't think it is going to be good news but still I hope there will be. It is the same area. It is the fibula."

Fabregas insisted it was not a gamble to play even though he knew he wasn't fully fit.

The 22-year-old rarely played at his best as a result of the injury but still won and converted the late spot-kick which gives Arsene Wenger's side hope for the second leg in Spain next week.

"For 85 minutes it was not a gamble to play. I knew that there was something there but until the penalty I was feeling quite good," Fabregas said.

"It was an amazing experience, an amazing game. I will remember it all my life but the injury makes it bad."

Fabregas would have missed the second leg anyway after picking up a yellow card that triggered a one-match suspension.

French defender William Gallas could

also miss the Nou Camp clash after breaking down on his comeback from a calf injury, while Russian winger Andrey Arshavin limped off in the first half.

Despite those blows, Fabregas believes the way Arsenal fought back after Barca's Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice early in the second half shows they have the spirit and ability to pull off a shock in the return.

"We were dead at 2-0. You can never imagine we would come back," he added. "In the first half we never saw the ball at all. We thought we would get the ball and then all of a sudden they would change sides. It was very tough."

"Then in the second half it was even worse because they started really well and scored two great goals."

"But after that we made a great comeback. Not everyone can do that against a team like that and it says a lot for this team."

"We can definitely do it. They have lost two big players in defenders (Carles) Puyol and (Gerard) Pique."

"I don't think it is the same without them because they move the ball so well and are so confident. We will see."

# Walcott to make Barca pay

AFP, London



Arsenal winger Theo Walcott insists his side can make Barcelona pay for failing to turn their fantasy football into a Champions League

route against the Gunners. Arsene Wenger's side looked set for a heavy quarterfinal first leg defeat at the Emirates Stadium when Barca's Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice early in the second half.

But England star Walcott sparked Arsenal's fightback when he came on as a substitute midway through the second period and the Londoners earned a 2-2 draw that gives them hope going into next week's return clash at the Nou Camp.

While Arsenal crumbled this season when they fell behind against Chelsea and Manchester United, this time they were able to rise to the occasion. And Walcott is convinced his team showed enough character to prove they can cope with anything the European champions can throw at them.

have caused us to let our heads go down but the experience of the last few years against teams like Man Utd showed here," Walcott said.

"When I came on it seemed to give everyone a bit of a boost but it wasn't just me. We showed great character, had a bit of luck and got the two goals. I think it was a fair result in the end."

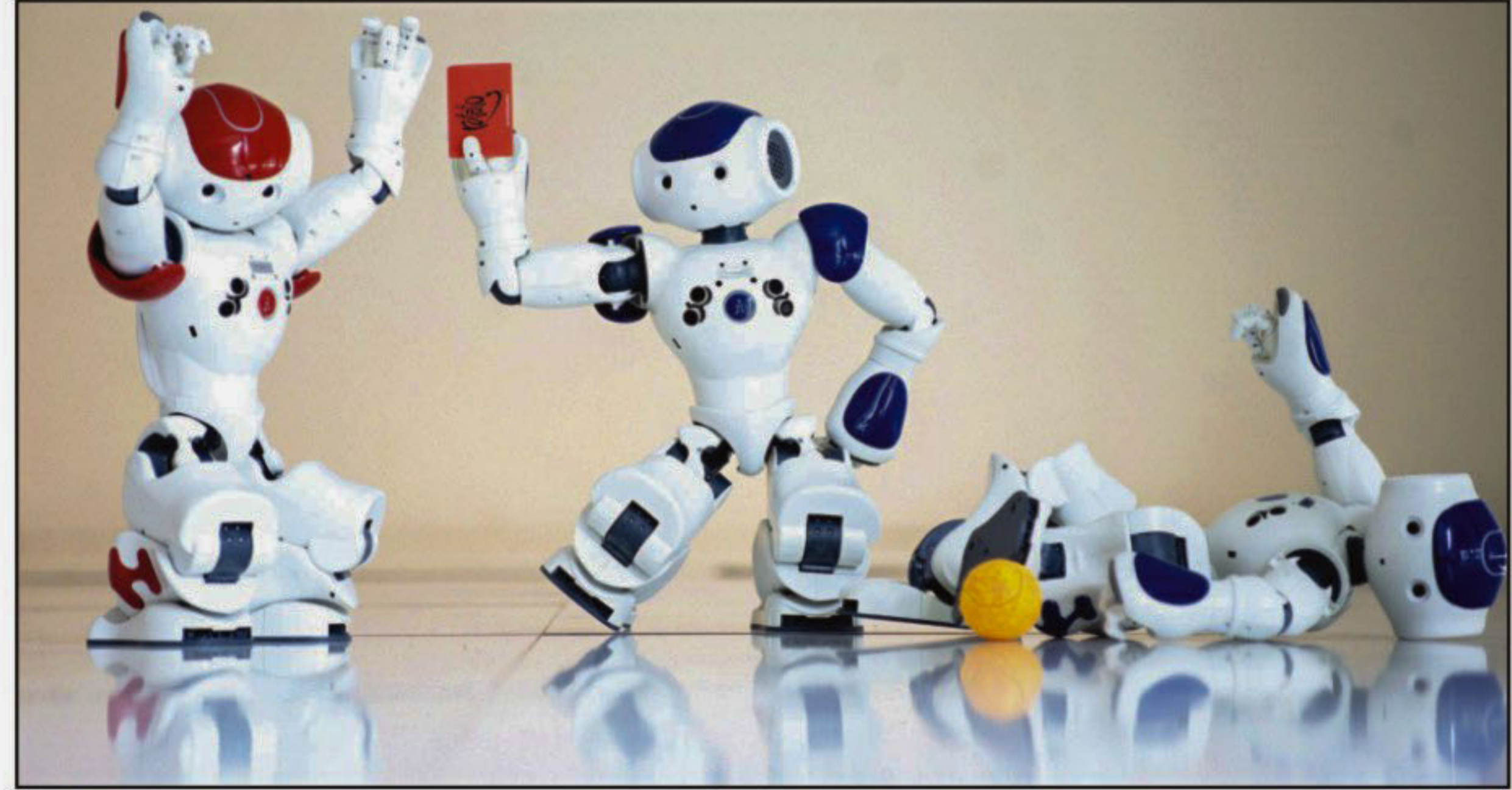
"We've had so much experience of disappointments in the last few years and we just want to go and win something. Hopefully we showed the character to try and go that one step further."

Walcott admitted watching Barca turn on the style in the first hour was like watching a football computer game, such was the breathtaking trickery from Lionel Messi, Xavi and company.

But he took heart from the way Josep Guardiola's team seemed to lose energy and focus in the final 30 minutes.

"In a way as a young player growing up it was a fantastic experience just watching world-class players. It was like someone was holding a Playstation controller and moving them around," Walcott said.

"It could have been three or four nil at half time so to go in at 0-0 was fantastic."



Football playing robots show off their skills at Edinburgh University's School of Informatics in Scotland on Thursday. The event marks the start of preparations for the 2011 RoboCup android football world contest in Istanbul.

PHOTO: AFP