



BREAKING SPANISH HEARTS: Manchester United starlet Javier Hernandez (L) scores a late winner against Valencia during their Champions League encounter at the Mestalla on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Man Utd leave it late

AFP, Paris

Javier Hernandez earned Manchester United a smash-and-grab 1-0 win at Valencia in the Champions League on Wednesday, while Samuel Eto'o notched a hatrick as Inter Milan thrashed Werder Bremen.

United were drifting towards their second straight goalless draw in the competition, having been held 0-0 at home by Rangers two weeks ago, when Hernandez took a pass from Federico Macheda and rammed home in the 85th minute.

The Mexican had earlier struck a post from close-range, while Spanish league leaders Valencia's best chance saw Roberto Soldado head over an open goal in the first half.

"It's a great result for us," said United coach Sir Alex Ferguson, whose side had only beaten Spanish opposition once in 18 previous visits to Spain.

"It's a difficult place to come. Our record stretches over a long period. Nonetheless, we're pleased to win." In the evening's other Group C game, Rangers beat Bursaspor 1-0.

Defending champions Inter brushed aside Bremen 4-

0 at the San Siro to record their first victory in this season's competition.

Held 2-2 at FC Twente on the first match day, Inter wrapped up victory in a devastating 13-minute spell midway through the first half.

Eto'o put Inter ahead in the 21st minute after scampering onto a loose ball on the edge of the hosts' area and he made it 2-0 six minutes later with a cool finish from Lucio's lofted pass.

The Cameroon hitman turned provider in the 34th minute when he slid a pass through to Wesley Sneijder, who crisply lifted the ball over the advancing Tim Wiese, before completing his treble nine minutes from time.

Inter coach Rafael Benitez said Eto'o's hatrick had nothing to do with the fact he was playing in the centre in place of the injured Diego Milito. "Samuel is always close to the goal, even when he plays on the left," said Benitez. "The industry and application of the players count more than the system of play."

Inter have four points from two games and top Group A alongside Tottenham, who defeated Twente 4-1 at White Hart Lane.

Rafael van der Vaart made up for a missed first-half penalty by firing Spurs in front early in the second half and Roman Pavlyuchenko doubled the lead from the spot soon after.

Nacer Chadli replied for the visitors before van der Vaart was sent off for picking up two yellow cards, but Pavlyuchenko made the points safe with a coolly chipped second penalty in the 64th minute.

Gareth Bale completed the scoring with five minutes to play.

In Group D, Barcelona welcomed Lionel Messi back from injury, but the Argentine sensation was unable to inspire his team to anything more than a 1-1 draw at Rubin Kazan.

Both goals came from the penalty spot, with Rubin skipper Christian Noboa

putting the hosts in front in the first half and David Villa equalising on the hour.

Messi came on as a second-half substitute after 10 days out with an ankle injury and saw a close-range effort blocked by Rubin goalkeeper Sergei Ryzhikov, while Rubin substitute Obafemi Martins almost snatched victory in the 87th minute when he hit the post with a header.

"We got a very important point tonight," said Villa.

"The penalty in the first half made life hard for us because they were playing well in defence.

"We missed a lot of chances and the Rubin goalkeeper played very well, but finally we managed to level."

Barca, who lost 2-1 at home to Rubin in last season's group phase, have four points from two games, but FC Copenhagen top the group with six points after securing an unexpected 2-0 win at Panathinaikos.

Lyon put their domestic difficulties behind them to record a 3-1 victory at Hapoel Tel Aviv.

The French side are 18th in Ligue 1 with just one win from seven games but prevailed via a first-half brace from Michel Bastos and a late goal from Miralem Pjanic.

Goals from Jefferson Farfan and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar earned Schalke a 2-0 win over Benfica in the night's other Group B fixture.

RESULTS

- Inter Milan (ITA) 4** (Eto'o 21, 27, 81, Sneijder 34) **Werder Bremen (GER) 0**
- Tottenham Hotspur (ENG) 4** (van der Vaart 47, Pavlyuchenko 50-pen, 64-pen, Bale 85) **FC Twente (NED) 1** (Chadli 56)
- Hapoel Tel Aviv (ISR) 1** (Ernyeama 79-pen) **Lyon (FRA) 3** (Bastos 7, 36, Pjanic 90+4)
- Schalke 04 (GER) 2** (Farfan 73, Huntelaar 85) **Benfica (POR) 0**
- Valencia (ESP) 0 Manchester United (ENG) 1** (Hernandez 85)
- Rangers (SCO) 1** (Naismith 18) **Bursaspor (TUR) 0**
- Rubin Kazan (RUS) 1** (Noboa 30-pen) **Barcelona (ESP) 1** (Villa 60-pen)
- Panathinaikos (GRE) 0 FC Copenhagen (DEN) 2** (N'Doye 28,

World Champs sans Xavi

AFP, Madrid

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque on Thursday unveiled a 20-man squad which did not include Barcelona playmaker Xavi for the world champions' Euro 2012 qualifiers against Lithuania and Scotland on October 8 and 12.

Del Bosque left out Xavi, who has been struggling with tendonitis, as the reigning world and European champions seek to build on a 4-0 win in Liechtenstein.

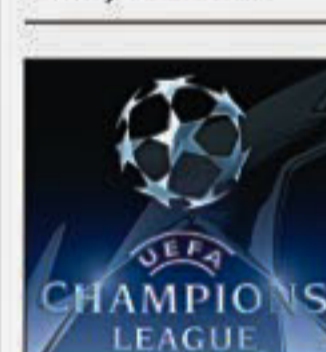
They will host Lithuania in Salamanca on October 8 before heading to Scotland four days later.

SQUAD

- Goalkeepers:** Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Victor Valdes (Barcelona), Jose Manuel Reina (Liverpool/ENG)
- Defenders:** Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid), Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), Carles Puyol (Barcelona), Gerard Pique (Barcelona), Carlos Marchena (Villarreal), Joan Capdevila (Villarreal), Ignacio Monreal (Osasuna)
- Midfielders:** Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid), Sergi Busquets (Barcelona), Santi Cazorla (Villarreal), Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)
- Strikers:** Pedro (Barcelona), Jesus Navas (Sevilla), David Villa (Barcelona), David Silva (Manchester City/ENG), Fernando

VDV on cloud nine

AFP, London



Rafael van der Vaart, the Tottenham midfielder, reckons his team-mates can topple Champions League holders Inter Milan without him.

The Dutchman was sent off in his side's 4-1 home win over FC Twente on Wednesday night and will therefore miss the trip to the San Siro on Wednesday October 20.

"We have a great team, we have quality and a good squad so we don't have to be nervous," he said.

"They are going to win for me against Inter Milan."

It was certainly a night to remember as White Hart Lane hosted a Champions League group game for the first time.

Norwegian referee Terje Hauge and his four assistants awarded Tottenham three penalties. Twente goalkeeper Nikolay Mihaylov saved the first, from van der Vaart, but was beaten by Roman Pavlyuchenko with the other two.

Van der Vaart opened the scoring early in the second half and was sent off with the score at 2-1 after Twente substitute Nacer Chadli had pulled one back.

Gareth Bale netted a late fourth for the 10 men.

"I scored a goal and was sent off - it was a full house," van der Vaart added.

"I've never had a game like this. We did well and deserved to win. Now we have to play against Inter and it will be a great game."

Twente manager Michel Preud'homme was annoyed so many decisions appeared to have

gone Tottenham's way, especially as the officials allowed play to continue early in the second half when the ball hit Peter Crouch on an arm with the game in the balance.

"At some moments it was a joke," the Belgian complained but Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp insisted two of the three penalty awards had been correct.

Redknapp argued that Crouch had been wrestled for the first and Bale tripped for the second while a defender's use of an arm to block a Pavlyuchenko long-ranger had probably been rash.

"I keep seeing too many soft penalties given lately when people kick the ball at someone from close in," he said of the third penalty.

"That wasn't so close. I thought the third was soft but the other two were nailed on."

Tottenham will take a four-point tally with them to Italy, with Rafa Benitez's side now topping Group A on goal difference after beating Werder Bremen 4-0 in Milan.

Tottenham had taken a point from their first group game, sharing a 2-2 draw in Bremen on a night when Twente and Inter played out the same score-line in the Netherlands.

"After a fantastic point in Bremen it was a great performance to win 4-1, you can't ask for more than that," Redknapp added. "If people can't enjoy that they can't enjoy anything."

Redknapp revealed he had been about to substitute van der Vaart before the midfielder picked up his second yellow card of the night for a reckless lunge on Roberto Rosales.

"It wasn't a malicious challenge," Redknapp said. "It was a bad forward's challenge. I've seen a lot worse. I had been contemplating taking him off when it happened."

Berbatov rules out return

AFP, Berlin

New Bulgaria coach Lothar Matthaeus admitted Thursday he has failed in his bid to persuade Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov to come out of retirement to help his country qualify for Euro 2012.

"I have had several conversations with him, but he is not ready to play for Bulgaria again," Matthaeus told German magazine Kicker.

"He gave me no reasons, but for me the issue is settled for Berbatov and other players can now take their chances."

"It's like the Germany team before the 2010 World Cup: Ballack got injured so Ozil and Khedira took their chances and are now at Real Madrid."

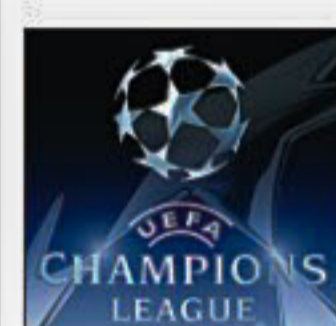
The 29-year-old United star Berbatov announced in May that he was ending his international career having scored 48 goals for his country.

Having been beaten 4-0 by England at Wembley last month and then 1-0 at home by minnows Montenegro, Bulgaria are currently bottom of Euro 2012 qualifying Group G and face Wales in Cardiff next Friday.

Bulgaria have not participated in the finals of a major tournament since Euro 2004. Matthaeus, 49, will be in charge for the first time against the Welsh having taken over as head coach earlier this month.

Eto'o happy with Rafa

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan boss Rafael Benitez is better for strikers than his predecessor Jose Mourinho, according to nerazzurri forward Samuel Eto'o.

The Cameroon captain scored a hatrick in Wednesday's 4-0 Champions League victory over Werder Bremen to take his tally to a remarkable 11 goals in nine games this season.

It was also the first game in this campaign that he was played through the middle in Benitez's attacking triumvirate and Eto'o reaped the benefits.

He played there due to an injury to Diego Milito and Eto'o is hoping to get more run-outs

through the middle.

"With Mourinho we played on the counter-attack, with Benitez we press more and that's better for us forwards because we win back the ball higher up the pitch and create more chances," he told Sky Sport.

"I feel good as a central striker. For a forward it's important to play close to the goal and not far from it. It's more complicated for me when playing on the wings."

Eto'o has had a stunning start to the season, scoring five goals in five league games, four in two Champions League matches as well as bagging a brace in the Italian Supercup, although he failed to hit the net in the European Supercup.

Inter sit joint top of Serie A with Lazio and now top their Champions League group A ahead of Tottenham, whom they play next, on goal difference.



Inter Milan striker Samuel Eto'o taps home against Werder Bremen during their Champions League tie at San Siro on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

No room for Toulalan

AFP, Paris

France coach Laurent Blanc called Arsenal midfielder Samir Nasri, Dimitri Payet and Yoann Gourcuff into his squad to face Romania in a Euro 2012 qualifier on October 9 and Luxembourg three days later.

But there is no room for Jeremy Toulalan, who served a one-match ban for his role in the World Cup mutiny which followed the sending home of foul-mouthed Nicolas Anelka after his clash with Blanc predecessor Raymond Domenech.

Blanc banned the entire 23-man World Cup squad from his first game in charge, a 2-1 defeat by Norway in a friendly on August 11.

Toulalan's ban has now expired while Franck Ribery, banned for three games, and skipper Patrice Evra, banned for five, are not yet back in the fold.

Anelka himself is unlikely to feature for France again after he was banned for 18 matches by the French Federation's disciplinary panel.

Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema, who did not make the cut for the World Cup, is in the squad despite Blanc telling Thursday's France Soir newspaper that the player is "not used to working," echoing similar criticism from Real coach Jose Mourinho.

Benzema netted the opening goal in France's recent 2-0 win at Bosnia-Herzegovina in a Euro 2012 qualifier.

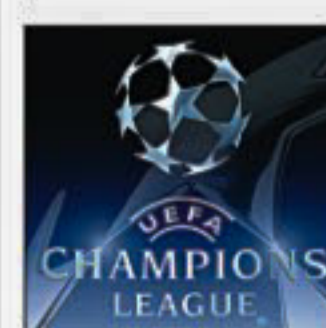


Tottenham Hotspur playmaker Rafael van der Vaart (L) volleys home the opening goal against FC Twente during their Champions League clash at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rubin frustrate Barca

AFP, Moscow



Spanish giants Barcelona were held to a 1-1 draw by Russian champions Rubin Kazan in their Champions League Group D encounter at Kazan on Wednesday.

Both goals came from the penalty spot, with Ecuadorian midfielder Christian Noboa giving Rubin the lead in the first half and David Villa equalising on the hour mark.

The result leaves Barcelona on top of the group with four points from two matches, while Kazan have just one point, having lost 1-0 at FC Copenhagen in their opening match.

Panathinaikos, thrashed 5-1 by Barcelona in their first game, host Copenhagen later on Wednesday.

Spanish champions Barcelona started cautiously in Kazan, no doubt mindful of the shock 2-1 defeat Rubin inflicted on them at Camp Nou in the group phase last season.

Barcelona had quickly settled into their home style, keeping the ball under control and probing the hosts' defence for frailties, with Rubin content to sit back and defend.

Villa threatened in the 26th minute, shooting across goal and wide on the half-volley after the ball fell to him following a corner.

The hosts replied with a series of counter-attacks, which ended with a foul by Daniel Alves on Vitaly Kaleshin in Barca's box.

Rubin skipper Noboa smashed home a powerful spot-kick to give the hosts a 30th-minute lead.

The visitors immediately pressed forward in search of an equaliser, with Pedro firing wide from 10 yards after receiving another pass from Villa shortly before the break.

After the interval Barcelona seized the initiative completely, pinning the hosts back but to no immediate avail, as Rubin defended stoutly.

But Pep Guardiola's side were handed an opportunity to level when Lasha Salukvadze bundled over Andres Iniesta in the area and Villa squeezed a precise penalty into the bottom-right corner.

Barca welcomed back Lionel Messi from injury and the second-half substitute saw a chance blocked by Rubin goalkeeper Sergei Ryzhikov in the 71st minute.