

Real cruise past Milan

AFP, Paris



Real Madrid cruised to a 2-0 win over AC Milan in the clash of the Champions League heavyweights on Tuesday, while English powerhouses Chelsea and Arsenal both recorded impressive victories.

The match at the Santiago Bernabeu pitted together two teams with 16 European Cups between them, but Milan were no match for nine-time champions Real, who went three points clear in Group G.

After a start full of intent from Jose Mourinho's men, the damage was done in the space of one first-half minute.

Cristiano Ronaldo broke the deadlock in the 13th minute with a free-kick that went straight through Milan's defensive wall.

With the visitors reeling, seconds later Ronaldo burst into the Milan box before squaring to Mesut Ozil, whose shot took a huge deflection that left goalkeeper Marco Amelia helplessly flatfooted.

Andrea Pirlo came close to pulling one back for Milan but his vicious free-kick was brilliantly tipped onto the crossbar by Iker Casillas, while Real spurned a host of chances to

press home their advantage.

"It was a fantastic performance and I can only say congratulations to my players and hope the Real fans are happy with what they saw," said Mourinho.

In the other group game, Ajax survived the 55th-minute dismissal of centre-back Andre Ooijer to record a 2-1 win at home to Auxerre that took them level on points with Milan.

Chelsea took a firm grip on Group F by ending Spartak Moscow's unbeaten start to the group phase with an impressive 2-0 win on a freezing night in the Russian capital.

Russian international Yuri Zhirkov, formerly of Spartak's city rivals CSKA Moscow, broke the deadlock in the 23rd minute with a stunning half-volley from outside the box that looped into the top-right corner.

Nicolas Anelka notched the second two minutes from the break, to give the Blues victory on their first visit to the Luzhniki Stadium since their agonising defeat on penalties to Manchester United in the competition's 2007-08 final.

"We have to stay focused for the next game," warned Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti, whose side now have a three-point lead in the group.

"We want to arrive in first place. This is our aim and we

have the possibility to do this, but we don't need to rest players. The Champions League is important for all the games."

Marseille recorded their first victory in the group after a Souleymane Diawara header early in the second half brought them a 1-0 win at home to Slovakiens MSK Zilina.

Arsenal, like Chelsea, were up against previously unbeaten opposition and they slipped through the gears to register a crushing 5-1 win over Ukrainians Shakhtar Donetsk at the Emirates.

Alex Song set the Gunners

on their way in the 19th minute after goalkeeper Andriy Pyatov spilled a corner, with France international Samir Nasri smashing home his sixth goal in six games just before the break to make it 2-0.

Cesc Fabregas celebrated his return to the side after injury with a 60th-minute penalty, before goals from Jack Wilshere -- his first in the competition -- and Marouane Chamakh added gloss to an imperious performance.

Even Shakhtar's late consolation was cheered by the home fans, scored as it was by returning Arsenal old boy Eduardo.

"We're a team with great potential and we showed that tonight," said Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger. "Let's take it game by game."

Arsenal top Group H by three points from Shakhtar, with Sporting Braga a further three points back after a 2-0 win at home to Partizan Belgrade.

Skipper Cadu was hero and villain for CFR Cluj in the Romanians' 3-2 defeat at Bayern Munich, cancelling out his 28th-minute opener with a 32nd-minute own goal as last season's beaten finalists maintained their 100 per cent record.

Basel produced the shock of the night with a 3-1 win at struggling Roma in the other Group E match.

RESULTS

Roma (ITA) 1 (Borriello 21) **Basel (SUI) 3** (Frei 12, Inkoomb 44, Cabral 90+3)
Bayern Munich (GER) 3 (Cadu 32-og, Panin 37-og, Gomez 77) CFR Cluj (ROM) 2 (Cadu 28, Cullio 86)
Spartak Moscow (RUS) 0 **Chelsea (ENG) 2** (Zhirkov 24, Anelka 43)
Marseille (FRA) 1 (Diawara 48) MSK Zilina (SVK) 0
Ajax (NED) 2 (de Zeeuw 7, Suarez 41) Auxerre (FRA) 1 (Birsas 56)
Real Madrid (ESP) 2 (Ronaldo 13, Ozil 14) AC Milan (ITA) 0
Sporting Braga (POR) 2 (Lima 35, Matheus 90) Partizan Belgrade (SRB) 0
Arsenal (ENG) 5 (Song 19, Nasri 42, Fabregas 60-pen, Wilshere 66, Chamakh 69) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo shoots to score the opening goal against AC Milan during their Champions League encounter at Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

Mourinho delighted

AFP, Madrid



Jose Mourinho could not hide his delight at Real Madrid's 2-0 Champions League Group G home win over AC Milan at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday and now wants his

side to win the group and, in theory, ensure a kind draw for the knockout phase.

Spanish league leaders Real made it a perfect three wins as two goals in as many minutes from Cristiano Ronaldo (13 min) and Mesut Ozil (14) clinched victory over Milan and the nine-time European champions are five points ahead of Milan and Ajax in Group G with three games to play.

"We have nine points but we want to be first in the group so we have to try and win the next games," said Mourinho. "We have the next two games away from home before finishing off at home to Auxerre."

"If we can guarantee top spot before that final game against Auxerre it would be ideal, however, we can qualify with ten points if we don't lose at Milan."

Real's next two fixtures are away from home at Milan on November 11 and then against Dutch side Ajax before finishing off with a home match against Auxerre.

Mourinho had faced Milan many times during his time with city rivals Inter Milan and said his team had been well equipped for the challenge.

"We knew how Milan were going to play," explained Mourinho. "I know them well and we were prepared to take them on. However, I

don't care about what they did, what concerns me is the work and concentration levels my team showed."

Ronaldo had an immense game capped by his first Champions League goal - his fifth goal in his last three matches - and said Milan were lucky to escape with a 2-0 defeat.

"We knew they couldn't handle us if we kept up a fierce tempo and that is what happened," said Ronaldo. "We have made it nine points which is what we wanted to do and now we are 75 per cent qualified."

"When we play against strong teams we are more concentrated. We had a great first half with a lot of one-two passes and only bad luck prevented us from scoring more."

Real had scored ten games in their last two league matches coming into the game and as well as being potent going forward Mourinho's side are solid defensively and have yet to concede in this season's Champions League.

Ronaldo was hacked down by former Barcelona player Ronaldinho in the second half which saw him writhe on the ground in agony, however, the world's most expensive player said there was no harm done, declaring: "My foot is a bit inflamed but it is fine."

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri, who had a few run-ins with Mourinho when he was Inter Milan boss, admitted his side were second best.

"It was a really poor game from us and I expect the next one (in Milan) to be better," said Allegri. "We put out a team to attack but you have to do more than we did to hurt Real Madrid."

"We had goalscoring chances but the first quarter hour was crucial. They scored two goals and we didn't know what to do."

Mancini cools Rooney talk

AFP, London

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini has moved to end speculation linking want-away Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney to the club.

The English Premier League is abuzz with the news that Rooney, considered England's most talented footballer, wants to leave Old Trafford.

With Rooney having only 18 months left on his existing contract, United will now likely be forced to sell their prized asset -- worth around 50 million pounds (57 million euros) -- as quickly as possible before his value depreciates.

If he is not sold in the January transfer window, he could, under FIFA regulations, technically buy out the remaining year of his contract next summer for around five million pounds, leaving United without him.

City have emerged as the favoured destination for Rooney, but Mancini insists the move is not on.

"No. Never," said Mancini when asked if contact has been made with Rooney.

Mancini echoed the thoughts of Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho, who said Tuesday he believes Rooney will ultimately stay at the club he joined from Everton as an 18-year-old.

"Rooney is a great player but I think he'll stay at United," said Mancini. "He's a good player, he's an important player for United."

Pressed on whether he would be keen to sign the striker, Mancini added: "He is a United player. It's not correct to speak about that situation."

OFC chief protests innocence

AFP, Wellington

A FIFA official from Oceania who is accused of offering to help his vote in the 2018 World Cup bidding insists he was innocent and is vowing to clear his name, it was reported Wednesday.

Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) president Reynald Temarii said he was quoted out of context in a British newspaper expose which alleged he solicited money in return for his vote, the website insideworldfootball.biz reported.

"I am 100 per cent convinced of my integrity... I will prove I am an honest man," he told the British-based website. The Sunday Times alleged it filmed Temarii, who is also a FIFA vice president, demanding 2.3 million US dollars to set up a sports academy in Auckland from undercover journalists posing as bid lobbyists.

He and Nigeria's Amos Adamu have been summoned to appear before FIFA's ethics committee in Zurich later Wednesday as part of a probe into the newspaper sting.

Temarii said the footage released by the Sunday Times did not give a true picture of what occurred.

"You have only heard 15 seconds of the interview," he said. "Maybe you should hear the full 45 minutes, then you will understand everything."

Gunners thrash Shakhtar

AFP, London



Arsenal took a giant stride towards the knockout phase of the Champions League here Tuesday, beating Shakhtar Donetsk 5-1 to take firm control of their qualifying group.

First-half goals from Alex Song and Samir Nasri followed by second-half efforts from Cesc Fabregas, Jack Wilshere and Marouane Chamakh sealed the win for Arsenal, who maintained their 100 per cent record at the top of Group H.

The home fans could even derive pleasure from Shakhtar's lone consolation goal -- scored by Arsenal old boy Eduardo in the dying minutes, returning to the Emirates after his summer transfer to the Ukrainian champions.

Arsene Wenger's men now have nine points from three matches, three clear of second-placed Shakhtar, who have six points.

A dreadful blunder from Shakhtar goalkeeper Andriy Pyatov had put Arsenal on the road to victory after 19 minutes, the visitors shotstopper fumbling a corner on the edge of the six-yard area.

Johan Djourou, following up, managed to stab the ball past Pyatov and Song

fortuitously scrambled it over the line after Olexander Kuchur's despairing block had ricocheted back off the Arsenal midfielder.

Moments later Nasri had a glorious opportunity to double Arsenal's lead, but saw his volley from a Chamakh knock-down well saved by Pyatov from eight yards.

Their tails up, Arsenal began to attack with more purpose and appealed for a penalty on 27 minutes when Tomas Rosicky went over in the area after a rugged challenge by Razvan Rat.

Norwegian referee Svein Oddvar Moen waved away Arsenal appeals for the spot-kick however despite howls of protest from the crowd.

With Arsenal dominating possession it seemed only a matter of time before the Gunners extended their lead and three minutes before half-time their pressure was duly rewarded.

Emmanuel Eboué and Song combined down the right, with Song whipping in a cross which fell invitingly to Nasri.

The French international's sublime first touch took him clear of Darijo Srna before he rifled in an unstoppable effort past Kuchur.

Twelve minutes after half-time Arsenal made certain of victory when Shakhtar's Brazilian striker Luiz Adriano clumsily

hauled down Djourou in the area after a Nasri free-kick caused confusion.

Fabregas, playing his first game since returning from an injury sustained against Sunderland last month, duly blasted home the spot-kick.

With victory assured, Wenger substituted Fabregas on 61 minutes to a rousing ovation from the Emirates faithful matched only by the generous applause as Shakhtar brought on Eduardo for Adriano.

As they have done on so many European nights in the past against limited opposition, Arsenal then went for the jugular and were to score twice more as Shakhtar were torn asunder.

Teenager Wilshere, who produced another assured performance in central midfield, made it 4-0 on 65 minutes, playing a delightful one-two with Rosicky before dinking a delicate finish over the on-rushing Pyatov.

Four minutes later Chamakh got his name on the scoresheet after being picked out by Nasri. With Shakhtar's players appealing vainly for off-side, the Moroccan international waltzed into the area to finish past Pyatov.

With the clock winding down, Eduardo then got one of the biggest cheers of the night when he hammered a well-taken volley for Shakhtar on 82 minutes.

Basel baffled Roma

AFP, Rome



Swiss underdogs FC Basel stunned AS Roma 3-1 in the Stadium Olimpico here on Tuesday to grab a Champions League lifeline.

Alexander Frei had given the visitors the lead before Marco Borriello equalised but Samuel Inkoom restored the visitors' advantage a minute before the break while substitute Cabral put the cherry on the cake in stoppage time.

The Swiss team are now level on points with Roma and Romanians CFR Cluj with runaway leaders Bayern Munich seemingly home and dry on a maximum nine points.

It was a further blow in a difficult season for Roma who were in the Serie A relegation zone before last weekend and they were roundly jeered at the final whistle.

Borriello had an early half chance but lashed it high and wide for the hosts and they were made to pay on 12 minutes.

Xherdan Shaqiri chipped the ball into the box where giant striker Marco Streller cushioned a header back to Frei, in acres of space on the edge of the area, to dispatch an unstoppable half-volley that kept rising all the way to the net.

Roma equalised with a goal of stunning simplicity that showed the supposed difference in class between the two teams.

In his own half and with his back to goal Francesco Totti took a pass and shifted it on first time between Basel's

centre-backs. Borriello was the only one to read it and his angled run kept him inside before he chipped over onrushing goalkeeper Franco Costanzo.

Totti came close on 37 minutes as he cut in from the right and had a dig but he didn't get any bend on the ball and it went wide.

Frei had the ball in the net a couple of minutes later but was rightly judged offside.

But the visitors did get their

second goal on 44 minutes as Ghanaian Inkoom overlapped from right-back, catching out Simone Perrotta, and collected Shaqiri's smart pass before smashing it past Bogdan Lobont.

Roma had to attack after the break and after Totti had lashed a shot narrowly wide, they were a whisker away from equalising when Rodrigo Taddei crashed a shot from the right against the post on 58 minutes.



FC Basel striker Alex Frei celebrates his goal against AS Roma during their Champions League clash at the Olimpico Stadium on Tuesday.

City eye big step forward

AFP, Paris



Manchester City may have grander ambitions than the Europa League, but the big step towards the Premier League club can take a big step towards the competition's knockout phase with a win over Lech Poznan on Thursday.

The Polish side are the surprise leaders of Group A after two matches, heading City on goal difference, while Italian aristocrats Juventus are third, two points adrift.

City supporters of a certain vintage will be heartened by the opposition being Polish as their last European trophy came following a Cup Winners' Cup final victory over another Polish outfit, Gornik Zabrze, in 1970.

Current manager Roberto Mancini, however, is focused on the future and the need to accrue silverware; not only to reward the massive investment of the club's owners, but also to give himself some breathing space in the job.

The Italian takes his side into the match on a great run of form after their 3-2 win last weekend over Blackpool saw City record four successive wins under his stewardship for the first time and move to second in the Premier League, two points off leaders Chelsea.

City's England midfielder James

Milner says future opponents should beware as they are not yet playing to their full potential.

"The best is to come," said Milner, who signed earlier this season from Aston Villa for a reported 26 million pounds (29.7 million euros).

"Obviously it takes time for a side with so many new faces to come together. We have a lot of very good players here, players who are determined to succeed. Hopefully we can improve as a team, keep moving forward and hopefully you will see the best of us soon."

Mancini has so much strength in depth that he has said he intends to rest his talismanic Argentine striker Carlos Tevez as he does not want to tire him out with so much of the season to go.

"I would like to rest Carlos," Mancini told British newspaper the Daily Star. "He has played a lot of games and when he goes away with Argentina it is difficult. He returned last week and he was tired."

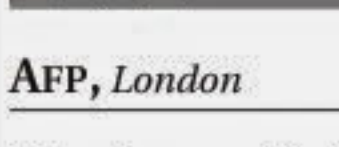
Lech, though, will be no pushovers for City, having won their first domestic league title last season.

They will be looking to Artjoms Rudnys to outwit the City defence in the same manner as he did against Juventus in the opening group match, when he scored a hat-trick in a 3-3 draw in Turin.

City's English rivals Liverpool have a richer record in European competition but, plagued by boardroom strife and on-field woes this season, they have looked to the Europa League for solace.

Rooney painted a mercenary

AFP, London



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney has been left looking like the villain of the piece and will be hated by the club's fans after the revelation that he wants to quit, Britain's press said Wednesday.

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson on Tuesday confirmed the 24-year-old striker wanted to leave Old Trafford, laying bare the full details of the saga in an extraordinary press conference that stunned commentators.

Ferguson's clear distress and feelings of betrayal dealt a heavy blow to Rooney's reputation as a superstar who put loyalty to his club above money, they said.

"Roo's let Utd down," said the Sun newspaper's headline, while the Mirror's

simply read: "Betrayal."

"The Manchester United boss threw Wayne Rooney to the lions," said the Sun.

"By leaving the impression Rooney is a mercenary who will go wherever the big bucks are, he's buried a myth the striker has cultivated -- he'd play for United for nothing."

The Guardian added that Ferguson's speech "nailed several myths and cast Rooney as a mercenary with no regard for United's health."

Fans would already be incensed by Rooney's desire to leave Old Trafford -- and this would be made considerably worse by speculation that he could be snapped up by the club's cross-town rivals, said the press.

Rooney will be vilified by Reds fans, not just because he wants to quit Old Trafford but as he is prepared to consider

a move to Manchester City," said the Sun. Ferguson's performance itself -- at a press conference ahead of United's Champions League match with Turkish side Bursaspor Wednesday -- left many commentators open-mouthed.

His speech was "one of the most compelling pieces of football theatre that we have ever seen," said the Mirror, while the Daily Mail thought it "mesmerising."

There was much sympathy for Ferguson himself, who had said he was unable to provide an explanation for the player's desire to move after six successful years at the club.

"He spoke like a father who had been betrayed by his favourite son," said the Mirror. "It was as if Roo had desecrated all that United stood for," it added.