



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba is about to score from a penalty during their Champions League encounter against Spartak Moscow at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Eduardo stabs Gunners

AFP, Donetsk

Eduardo da Silva ended Arsenal's 100 per cent start in the Champions League as the Croatian's clinical strike gave Shakhtar Donetsk a 2-1 win over his former club on Wednesday.

Eduardo spent three injury-ravaged years at Arsenal before moving to Shakhtar in July and the 27-year-old forward showed his old team-mates he is still a force to be reckoned with by driving in the goal which dented their charge towards the knockout stages.

Arsene Wenger's side had taken the lead through Theo Walcott's superb finish early in the first half at the Donbass Arena, but Craig Eastmond's own goal drew Shakhtar level before Eduardo won it for the Ukrainian champions.

It was a bittersweet moment for Eduardo, who retains fond memories of Arsenal for the way he was cared for in the aftermath of the horrendous injury he suffered in a challenge with Birmingham's Martin Taylor in 2008.

But, while he refused to celebrate his winner, Eduardo was the toast of Donetsk for a goal that lifted his side level on points with group leaders Arsenal with two games to play.

Wenger conceded his team had only

themselves to blame for the defeat and told Sky Sports: "We had a good start but after that we became too easy. We were punished against a good team. It's a good lesson for us."

"We were shown you can not get through without a 100 per cent defensive concentration."

"We came back in the second half, but if you're not focused for 90 minutes then you will suffer. I believe it's a lack of maturity."

After romping through their first three group matches, Wenger knew a victory here would have secured Arsenal's place in the last 16.

But that always looked a tricky task as the Gunners had never won in four previous visits to the Ukraine and Shakhtar have a formidable home record, with no defeats in their last 48 games in front of their own fans.

Injuries to midfield trio Cesc Fabregas, Alex Song and Andrey Arshavin were also a significant blow, yet Wenger's much-changed side initially seemed set to silence the vociferous home support.

The Gunners were quickly into their stride and Samir Nasri hit a post before Walcott embarked on a scintillating counter-attack to open the scoring in the 10th minute.

Jack Wilshere laid the ball into the path of Walcott as Arsenal broke from a Shakhtar corner and the England winger sprinted clear of the home defence before sliding a low finish past Andriy Pyatov

from just outside the penalty area.

At that point Arsenal looked in control, but Shakhtar were able to wrestle back the momentum in impressive fashion.

They nearly equalised when Jadson's headed against a post from close range and from the resulting corner, Lukasz Fabianski made a brilliant reaction save to deny Dimitro Chygrynskiy.

Shakhtar's equaliser arrived in the 28th minute after Emmanuel Eboue tripped Jadson.

Jadson took the set-piece himself and whipped over a teasing delivery that Chygrynskiy met with a powerful header which Eastmond could only glance into his own net.

Arsenal were struggling to keep the hosts at bay now and a woeful piece of defending by French left-back Gael Clichy gifted Shakhtar the lead on the stroke of half-time.

Clichy had time to clear from deep inside his own half, but instead opted to take an extra touch, allowing Darijo Srna to steal possession and drill over a low cross that Eduardo swept past Fabianski.

There was more frustration for Arsenal after the interval as England midfielder Wilshere missed a glorious chance to equalise when he robbed William on the edge of the area, only to bend the ball wide.

Arsenal wasted their last chance to level when Sebastian Squillaci headed Nasri's cross straight at Pyatov from close-range.

Heskey out for 4 weeks

REUTERS, London

Aston Villa striker Emile Heskey has been ruled out for up to a month after picking up a knee injury in training, the Premier League club said on Thursday.

The former England forward, who retired from international soccer after the World Cup, had been in good form, scoring three goals in six games since the arrival of new manager Gerard Houllier.

"Heskey tore the medial meniscus in his right knee yesterday (Wednesday) in training with no other player involved in the incident," read a statement on the club website.

"The injury will require an operation and the powerful forward faces between three to four weeks out of action."

FC Toronto appoint Klinsmann

AFP, Berlin

Former Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann will join Major League Soccer (MLS) side FC Toronto as an advisor, the Canadian club announced on Wednesday.

"It's an honour for us to work with an icon like Jurgen Klinsmann," said Toronto vice-president Tom Anselmi, whose club finished in 11th place overall in the 2010 MLS season.

Klinsmann, 46, lives in the United States with his family and has been out of work since he was sacked by Bayern Munich in April 2009, after only nine months in charge.

He led hosts Germany to a third-place finish at the 2006 World Cup, but refused to prolong his contract.

Liverpool hire talent-spotter

AFP, London

Liverpool announced the appointment of former Tottenham sporting director Damien Comolli on Wednesday, as part of their bid to overhaul their recruitment process.

Liverpool are currently battling their way out of the lower reaches of the Premier League and recently manager Roy Hodgson has hit out at the lack of quality in a squad he inherited from predecessor Rafael Benitez.

Frenchman Comolli quit his post at Saint-Etienne on Tuesday, having joined the French first division side after leaving Spurs in October 2008.

His appointment--one of several positive measures that new club owner John Henry has promised--is intended to help the Reds boss boost his squad with the right type of player.

"I am looking forward to working with Damien, whom I have known for many years," said Hodgson.

Chelsea cruise

REUTERS, London



While Tottenham Hotspur have attacked the Champions League like an average sprinter in his one Olympic shot, London rivals Chelsea are like Usain Bolt, using the group stage to ease smoothly into their stride.

North London is still buzzing from Spurs' effervescent 3-1 win over Inter Milan on Tuesday but over in the west Chelsea fans have already forgotten Wednesday's 4-1 win over Spartak Moscow and are instead looking forward to Sunday's Premier League game with Liverpool.

The victory secured progress to the knockout stage with two games to spare and, as so often has been the case in recent years, was achieved with the minimum of exertion.

Chelsea lead group F with 12 points, six ahead of Spartak and Olympique Marseille, and look certain to top the group for the sixth time in eight campaigns.

Having reached the semifinals five times in that period, going all the way to the final in 2008, it seems that the Londoners, under various managers, have mastered the art of doing just enough then kicking on when it matters.

After a turgid first half, when Chelsea seemed intent just to cover their defence, they swept Spartak aside with two goals for Branislav Ivanovic, a key opener by Nicolas Anelka and a Didier Drogba penalty. "There will be a long race getting to the final," said the latest man at the helm, Carlo Ancelotti.

"When you reach the first aim, which is to win the group, the next is to reach the final, and then to win that."

"I don't know if we can do this, but we have a possibility. We have the motivation but sometimes you have to be lucky also. We are working to play the last game at Wembley. In the final..."

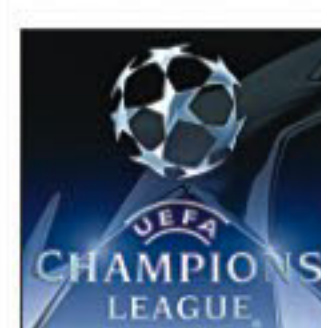
Ancelotti felt confident enough to rest captain John Terry on Wednesday and did not risk Michael Essien, who has a minor toe injury. With Frank Lampard missing most of the season so far after hernia surgery and new signing Yossi Benayoun also a long-term absentee, the manager has plenty of resources to call upon in the New Year.

He is adding to his options too by giving more and more game time to youngsters like Gael Kakuta, Daniel Sturridge and 17-year-old Josh McEachran, who all came on once the game was safe on Wednesday.

"They haven't got the experience yet but I have trust in these young players," Ancelotti said.

Marseille's record win

AFP, Zilina



France striker Andre-Pierre Gignac hit a hat-trick as Marseille recorded the biggest ever Champions League away win on Wednesday in a 7-0 demolition of Group F whipping boys Zilina.

His hat-trick, courtesy of his knee, left foot and head, plus a brace from Lucho Gonzalez and one apiece from Loic Remy and Argentinian veteran Gabriel Heinze saw the French champions to an emphatic win in Slovakia.

It was the ideal boost ahead of Sunday's high-octane league clash with fierce rivals Paris Saint-Germain and also sets up a potentially decisive match with Spartak Moscow on November 23 in the battle for second place.

Marseille are equal with Spartak on six points after the Russians were beaten 4-1 by Chelsea on Wednesday.

Gignac had entered the match under a bit of pressure after a return of just one goal since his

big-money move from Toulouse in the summer.

However, he started setting the record straight in the 11th minute when he got his knee to Benoit Cheyrou's free-kick to send the ball flying through a crowd of players and past Martin Dubravka in the Zilina goal.

Gignac grabbed his second in the 21st minute as he ran onto Charles Kabore's beautifully weighted pass, nicked the ball away from a defender and slotted it left-footed past Dubravka.

The game was all but over three minutes later as Heinze rose unmarked to meet Cheyrou's corner and direct a powerful header over the unfortunate Dubravka into the far corner.

Remy was next to get on the scoresheet in the 36th minute, as two Zilina defenders failed to clear Cheyrou's superb ball into the box and the French international was on hand to tuck it past Dubravka.

Marseille did not let up in the second half as Lucho got a double, either side of Gignac completing his hat-trick with a header from Cesar Azpilicueta's cross.

Lahm extends Bayern stay

AFP, Berlin

Germany's World Cup captain Philipp Lahm has agreed a new deal with Bayern Munich that will keep him at the Bundesliga champions until 2016, the club said Thursday.

"We are delighted that we were able to agree a long-term extension to the contract of such an important player in our team," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

The 26-year-old first played for Bayern in 1995 and apart from a two-year stint at Stuttgart from 2003 to 2005 has been at the German giants ever since, playing in 148 Bundesliga games and being substituted just once.

Lahm, who has been nominated for FIFA's Ballon d'Or award, is currently also wearing the captain's armband at Bayern while Dutch midfielder Mark van Bommel recovers from injury. His contract had been due to expire in 2012.

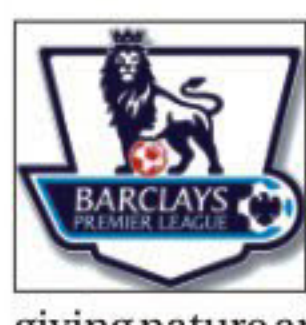
The story is the same for the national side, where he has filled in for injured regular captain Michael Ballack, 34, since before the World Cup, in which Germany finished third.

Bayern are not having the best of seasons domestically, however, languishing seventh in the table and 10 points off surprise leaders Borussia Dortmund. This Saturday they travel to bottom-placed Moenchengladbach.

Their form in Europe, however, has been exemplary, taking four wins from four in the Champions League Group E and cruising to the knockout stages with a 4-0 drubbing of Romanian side Cluj on Wednesday.

Balotelli undeterred

AFP, London



Former Inter Milan striker Mario Balotelli admits his full Premier League debut for Manchester City against Wolves last weekend gave him a fresh insight into the unforgiving nature and pace of the English game.

But the Italian, who was on the wrong end of a 2-1 defeat and finished a frustrating match with a yellow card to his name, said that won't deter him from aiming to become "the best player in the world."

"It was difficult for me on Saturday because it was my first full game after all the injuries," Balotelli told the club's website www.mcfc.co.uk before heading to Poland for the Europa League game with Poznan.

"The tackles are harder and the referees don't seem to blow very often for fouls--in Italy, when someone makes contact with you, it's a foul, but that's not the case in England."

"It was my first game and it wasn't easy for me because I need to get to know my team-

mates on the pitch and understand their movement and that comes with time."

Despite the challenges, the 20-year-old Italy international has no doubt where he wants his career path to take him whilst at City.

"I want to be the best player in the world. It is good to have ambition. I've said in the past that I don't care what other people want or expect of me because I know what I want," he added.

"I will always give everything because I want to become the best. That is my aim and I am determined to make it happen."

"I am here at City to play Champions League football, that's the competition I want to be in and that's what all the players here want to play in."

City will be hoping to bounce back from their shock 2-1 defeat at Wolves and consolidate their status as top dogs in Europa League's Group A.

"It is important we progress to the next stage," added Balotelli.

"We are going to Poznan to win--but that is normal. We want to win every game we play. The quicker we guarantee a place in the round of 32 the better."



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez (L) celebrates one of his three goals with teammates during their Champions League clash against CFR Cluj in Cluj-Napoca on Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Argentine legend Diego Maradona controls the ball during a ceremony organised by the Chinese Red Cross Foundation in Beijing yesterday.

China welcomes Diego

Football

AFP, Beijing

Argentine football icon Diego Maradona received a royal welcome in Beijing Thursday, offering his services to the nation and expressing bemusement as to why Team China has failed to shine.

Maradona, who arrived in China late Wednesday for a series of charity events with the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, was mobbed by journalists and has been hailed in the national press as the "King of Football."

He immediately quieted speculation that he had come to coach China's national side, a team which has suffered a string of poor performances and failed to qualify for last summer's World Cup in South Africa.

"I have no intention (of coming here for China's coaching job), but if the question is raised, then we can sit down and discuss it... I would like to do something for Chinese football," Maradona told reporters.

"There is a big gap between the level of Chinese football and world football, so a lot of effort is needed to rise up."

During his stay in China, the former World Cup-winning captain was scheduled to play in

a series of charity matches around the nation.

Gambling, match-fixing, crooked referees and poor performances by China's national team have made the sport the laughing stock among an increasingly indifferent fan base and a matter of mounting state concern.

Two successive heads of the Chinese Football Association and numerous other association officials have been jailed this year and are awaiting trial on charges of match fixing and bribery.

When asked why Chinese football was so bad, the 50-year-old Argentinian said he was mystified.

"I have no idea why China with 1.3 billion people cannot organise a (strong) national team," Maradona said.

"China is certainly a strong nation in the world and is on the top of the world in a lot of areas except for in football."

"What I want to tell Chinese fans, is that you can play football just like us, Chinese football has a lot of potential, (but) right now it is like a sleeping child."

Since unceremoniously leaving Argentina after reaching the quarterfinals of the World Cup, Maradona has said he is seeking a return to management and admitted he was attracted by the possibility of coaching in the English Premiership.