

Gunners second

AFP, Paris



English Premier League leaders Arsenal avoided what would have been a shock exit at the group stage on Wednesday with a 3-1 home victory over Partizan Belgrade in their Champions League Group H match.

Partizan had drawn level in the second-half but goals by substitute Theo Walcott and Samir Nasri ensured Arsene Wenger's side progressed second in the group behind Ukraine's 2009 UEFA Cup winners Shakhtar Donetsk - they beat Sporting Braga 2-0.

Elsewhere two of France's fallen stars Karim Benzema and Franck Ribery ensured they would get positive headlines for once.

Benzema - who was left out of the France World Cup finals squad after struggling to make an impact at Real Madrid - scored a hat-trick for Real Madrid in a 4-0 romp over Auxerre.

Ribery - who has had a wretched year on and off the pitch - scored his first goals for his club since April in Bayern Munich's 3-0 victory over Swiss side Basel, ruining the losers hopes of taking the second spot in the group from AS Roma.

Roma rounded off their campaign with a 1-1 draw away at Romanian side Cluj.

Bayern Munich showed there was no room for sentiment as they welcomed back former player Thorsten Fink and his Basel side, who entertained hopes of causing a shock and going through to the Last 16 at the expense of Roma.

However, Bayern struck twice in the first-

half first through France playmaker Franck Ribery, with his first goal for the club since April.

Ukrainian Anatoly Tymoshchuk rattled home a second shortly afterwards leaving Fink - a Champions League winner with Bayern in 2001 and a loser in the dramatic final against Manchester United in 1999 - looking forlorn on the bench.

Fink was beside himself as early in the second-half Ribery hit his second of the match to wrap up the win and end the Swiss side's creditable campaign which at least sees them get the consolation of a place in the knockout stages of the Europa League.

There was also no victorious return for Ivory Coast football icon Didier Drogba to his former club Marseille, as the French champions beat the out of form English champions Chelsea 1-0 through a Brandao goal.

Chelsea were already assured of top spot in the table, with Marseille assured their place in the last 16 as group runners-up. Real Madrid became the first side to score 300 goals (own goals included) in the Champions League main competition proper when Benzema netted early on.

The hosts doubled their advantage in the second-half with a peach of a goal by Cristiano Ronaldo and Benzema, who has been fighting to convince Jose Mourinho he is worth keeping did his case no end of good with a second and then added a third near the end.

The defeat ended Auxerre's hopes of grabbing third spot, but just for good measure Ajax pulled off a great result given they lost coach Martin Jol on Monday as they beat AC Milan 2-0 at the San Siro.

RESULTS

Bayern Munich (GER) 3 (Ribery 35, 50, Tymoshchuk 37) **Basel (SUI) 0**
CFR Cluj (ROM) 1 (Traore 88)
Roma (ITA) 1 (Borriello 21)
MSK Zilina (SVK) 1 (Majtan 48) **Spartak Moscow (RUS) 2** (Alex 54, Ibrson 61)
Marseille (FRA) 1 (Brandao 81)
Chelsea (ENG) 0
AC Milan (ITA) 0 **Ajax (NED) 2** (de Zeeuw 57, Alderweireld 66)
Real Madrid (ESP) 4 (Benzema 12, 72, 88, Cristiano Ronaldo 49)
Auxerre (FRA) 0
Arsenal (ENG) 3 (van Persie 30-pen, Walcott 73, Nasri 77) **Partizan Belgrade (SRB) 1** (Cleu 52)
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 2 (Rat 78)

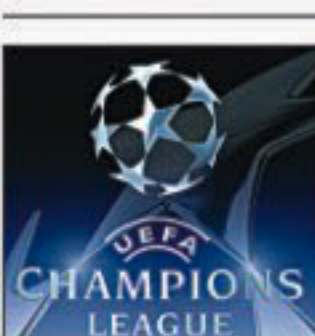


Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema (L) celebrates his second goal with teammate Cristiano Ronaldo during their Champions League encounter at Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ribery finds his feet

AFP, Munich



Last season's finalists Bayern Munich went through to the last 16 of the Champions League as Group E winners on Wednesday with a 3-0 win over Basel as midfielder Franck Ribery netted twice.

This was Bayern's fifth win of their European campaign and Louis van Gaal's side progress to the knock-out stages alongside AS Roma while Basel finish third but have the consolation of a place in the Europa League.

A pair of goals from Ribery - his first for the club since April - and a simple tap in by Ukraine star Anatoly Tymoshchuk, who is enjoying a purple patch, sealed the win in Munich.

But all is not rosy with the German champions and tougher tests await in February's round of 16 which will be drawn on December 17 in Nyon.

There are already real concerns around the Allianz Arena about qualifying for next season's competition and Bayern need to finish in the German league's top two to be sure of a place in European football's most lucrative tournament.

Their 2-0 defeat at German league strugglers Schalke on Saturday leaves them seventh in the Bundesliga and 17 points behind surprise leaders Dortmund with van Gaal already admitting the gap may be too big to bridge.

The Germans have now won their last seven European home games, but there is no denying they are erratic on occasion and have lost four times in the Bundesliga this season.

The last time the two sides met in September, Bayern won 2-1 thanks to a late Bastian Schweinsteiger goal and the hosts took a 2-0 lead in as many minutes here.

Bayern scored when defender Diego Contento won the ball on the edge of the penalty area and squared to Ribery who slammed home his shot on 35 minutes.

The Germans struck again moments later when Mario Gomez rose highest at a corner and headed down for defensive midfielder Tymoshchuk to stab the ball home.

The hosts made sure of the victory just five minutes into the second-half when Thomas Mueller found acres of space down the right flank and squared for Ribery to net his second of the night.

But Basel should have at least scored a consolation goal when Bayern defender Breno was robbed of possession by Swiss striker Alexandra Frei who squared the ball back inside but forward partner Federico Almerares fired over.

Bayern are set to welcome back long-term injury victims Dutch playmaker Arjen Robben, Croatia striker Ivica Olic and Germany veteran Miroslav Klose in January.

The Germans will need all the firepower they can muster if they are to repeat last season's feat of reaching the final.

Putin turf grass on sale

AFP, Moscow

Turf grass with the image of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the slogan "Get Ready for the 2018 WC" is available for purchase on the Russian Internet.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the Moskovsky Komsomlets tabloid that he was looking into the report, but the Russian prime minister never authorised for his use of the image.

The paper said the bags of seeds were probably put on sale immediately after Russia last week was awarded the rights to stage the 2018 World Cup -- a campaign spearheaded by the sports-loving Putin.

Tevez doesn't like MU taunting

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez has urged the club's fans to focus their energies on supporting City rather than taunting arch-rivals Manchester United.

Tevez joined City from United before the start of last season and soon afterwards his new supporters started the chant of "Fergie, Fergie, sign him up", a dig directed at long-serving United manager Sir Alex Ferguson for letting the Argentine striker cross the Manchester divide to the dismay of many of the Old Trafford club's fans.

But while United under Ferguson have won numerous trophies, the fact remains City's last major piece of silverware was the 1976 English League Cup.

However, bankrolled by their wealthy Abu Dhabi owners, big-spenders City are now fourth in the Premier League table -- two points behind second-placed United and three adrift of leaders Arsenal.

"The thing that would wind up Sir Alex more than anything is for us to win something and really start achieving things," Tevez told ManC, the official Manchester City magazine.

"It is not the song that needs to change; it's the attitude or mindset of our fans."

"Let's not be thinking about Sir Alex Ferguson and Manchester United, we need to think of City and what we can do."

SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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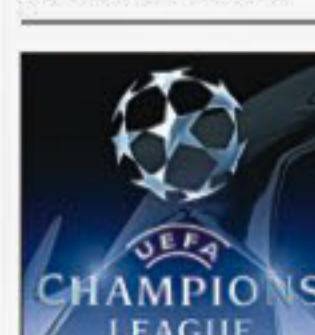
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Marseille stun Chelsea

AFP, Marseille



Chelsea travelled to Marseille here Wednesday seeking an upturn in their fortunes but it wasn't to be as their French hosts came away with a deserved 1-0 win in this concluding 'dead' Champions League Group F encounter.

Aside from seeing two decent penalty appeals turned down Chelsea will find it hard to quibble with a result that saw the Londoner's hitherto perfect first round record blemished by defeat.

Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti made three changes from the side held 1-1 by Everton at the weekend, with Paulo Ferreira, Josh McEachran and Ramires starting in place of John Mikel Obi on the bench and Ashley Cole and Nicolas Anelka rested.

Gabriel Heinze, Taye Taiwo and Fabrice Abriel returned for Marseille, undone 1-0 by south coast neighbours Nice on Sunday.

At a balmy Stade Velodrome the home fans gave a warm welcome to old boy Didier Drogba, who has been relishing this return to his former club.

While Chelsea, kitted out here in lime green, were already assured of top spot in Group F Ancelotti had nevertheless called for a spirited end to their Champions League group games after watching his side win only one of their last six Premier League outings.

Yet it was Marseille who started the livelier, with France international Mathieu Valbuena only denied by Petr Cech's crossbar in the tenth minute. Seconds later his diving header off Benoit Cheyrou's cross from the left went narrowly wide.

Down at the other end Florent Malouda after neatly beating the offside trap, was knocked to the floor by Souleymane Diawara.

Russian referee Vladislav Bezborodov pointed to the spot but then strangely changed his mind after discussion with his linesman, awarding Chelsea a corner instead which Marseille quickly cleared.

On the half hour Drogba saw his shot from the edge of

logical appeals for a second penalty as half-time beckoned when Diawara floored Salomon Kalou on the left of the area.

With Chelsea's first half performance falling short of their coach's pre-match demand for an improved showing the Londoners were under pressure to up their game as they emerged for the second half.

And they did just that, with McEachran setting up



Marseille forward Brandao celebrates his all-important goal against Chelsea during their Champions League clash at the Velodrome Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

the box fly over Steve Mandanda's overhead.

Marseille then had the ball on the back of the net, only for Heinze's header to be adjudged offside in a decision that was, in its turn, arguably harsh on the hosts.

In a third potentially game-changing decision, Bezborodov ignored Chelsea's

Malouda with a lovely long ball but the Frenchman's shot went straight to Mandanda.

On 62 minutes, Drogba was accorded a standing ovation when he came off for Daniel Sturridge with Ancelotti perhaps mindful of Sunday's date back home with fellow Champions League group winners and London rivals, Tottenham.



Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery (R) vies with FC Basel midfielder Adilson Tavares Varela Cabral during their Champions League tie at the Allianz Arena on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Moratti warns Benitez

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti has warned coach Rafael Benitez that failure is not an option at the Club World Cup next week.

Inter leave for Abu Dhabi on Friday and play their first match next Wednesday against either hosts Al-Wahda or Seongnam Ilhwa of South Korea.

But with last season's treble winners sitting a lowly fifth in Serie A, 10 points behind bitter city rivals AC Milan, and having finished second to Tottenham in their Champions League group following Tuesday's 3-0 defeat at Werder Bremen, Moratti has told Benitez to show his mettle.

"I don't want to create problems either before or during the Club World Cup but after we'll see," he said.

"Benitez has to have character because otherwise we won't win a competition like the Club World Cup."

"Psychologically I felt bad about the defeat (to Bremen) but I didn't say anything to the

players.

"When you lose you feel betrayed but that doesn't mean I think the players did it on purpose."

"I think we don't have enough character to overcome obstacles."

Last season character was one of Inter's main strengths under now departed boss Jose Mourinho and Moratti clearly expects something similar from Benitez's team.

"We'll pick ourselves up because we have an important appointment," he said.

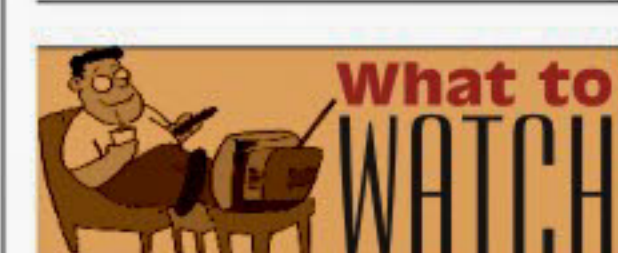
"We need great psychological support so that the players start doing what they were doing before."

"Benitez needs to take hold of the team and make everything function like clockwork."

That last point sounded like a direct reference to Mourinho who was well-known for his meticulous preparation, even planning training sessions to run for exactly 90 minutes.

Benitez has pointed often to a lengthy injury list as his team has struggled this season but Brazilian full-back Maicon, who has been injured for more than a month, claims that should not be an excuse.

"The problem is not injuries, we have a huge squad with great players," he said.



BTV

Bangladesh v Zimbabwe
Fourth ODI
Live from 9:00am

NEO Cricket

India v New Zealand
Fifth ODI
Live from 3:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentr India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



Bangladesh v Zimbabwe
Fourth ODI
Time: 9:00am

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong