

Real rout Spurs

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid put a giant foot in the last four of the Champions League with a thumping 4-0 home win over 10-man Tottenham Hotspur in the quarterfinal, first leg at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday.

A headed brace from Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor and late goals from Angel di Maria and Cristiano Ronaldo put Tottenham to the sword in Madrid's fifth straight home win in Europe and a four-goal lead gives Tottenham a mountain to climb in the second leg at White Hart Lane on April 13.

Tottenham, who last reached a European Cup semifinal back in 1962, were left to rue the early sending off of striker Peter Crouch on 15 minutes for a late lunge as Real made the ten men pay.

Real coach Jose Mourinho had seen his 150-match nine-year unbeaten home league record come to an end on Saturday with a 1-0 loss against Sporting Gijon, however, his team responded with a victory that puts the nine-time champions in the driving seat to reach the last four.

The Bernabeu home crowd were nervous after the shock loss to Gijon, but the hosts got off to the perfect start scoring after just four minutes.

A corner from the right found Adebayor in the penalty area and the striker planted a header goal wards and the unfortunate Luka Modric could not keep the effort out as it went between his legs.

It was a setback for the visitors, who were then reduced to ten men on 15 minutes with Crouch's rash lunge on Marcelo earning him a second caution.

Real dominated possession but a half chance from Ronaldo was all they had to show for their extra man.

Bale had been quiet but sparked into life in the 28th minute with his gigantic throw catching Real off guard but van der Vaart could not get a shot off.

Bale then powered down the left and homed in on goal but his shot went into the side netting.

Adebayor, well known to the Spurs fans from his Arsenal days, was inches away from heading in his second goal on 32 minutes but was centimetres away from converting Sergio Ramos' unorthodox headed cross.

Portuguese centre-back Pepe was booked for hacking down Bale close to half-time and will now the miss return leg.

Van der Vaart made way for striker Jermain Defoe in the second half in a brave move from Redknapp.

Ronaldo, shooting from everywhere, drilled a left-footed shot wide of the post early in the second half to sound out a warning.

On 57 minutes Real got the second goal they craved with a corner finding Marcelo who crossed and Adebayor was again unmarked to direct a header into the corner.

Adebayor almost got a hat-trick with another header before Argentine di Maria netted on 72 minutes cutting inside before bending a terrific shot into the corner with his left foot.

Ronaldo made it four in the closing minutes with a volley although goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes should have done better.

Moratti defends Leonardo

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti has insisted he still has faith in coach Leonardo despite Tuesday's Champions League debacle against Schalke 04.

The last four days have been nothing short of a disaster for Inter as a 3-0 defeat to AC Milan in the top-of-the-table derby clash saw them give up a five-point Serie A advantage to their bitter neighbours with just seven games to play.

And that was followed by a spectacular capitulation in

their Champions League quarterfinal, first leg at home to Schalke in which they were humiliated 5-2, despite leading 2-1, leaving next week's second leg virtually superfluous.

To have had two such high-profile failures in quick succession one might have expected Leonardo to be in the firing line, but Moratti came out defending his coach.

Having seen his side concede eight goals in their two most important games of the season, and having Cristian Chivu sent off in both, one might have expected a reprimand from Moratti over defensive frailty or discipline, instead there were excuses.

"It was a defeat due to tiredness. I was surprised by the size of the defeat but you could already see the tiredness on Saturday (against Milan) and it's impossible to rediscover freshness in so few days," he said.

"Now we're feeling down but this can help to push us on even more, however my opinion of Leonardo hasn't changed.

"I know that something has maybe changed for him because he feels bad about what has happened twice in quick succession."



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) is ecstatic after scoring the fourth goal against Tottenham Hotspur during their Champions League quarterfinal at Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Schalke destroy Inter

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan's defence of the Champions League is

hanging by a thread after the Italians suffered a 5-2 thrashing at home to Schalke 04 in their quarterfinal, first leg here on Tuesday.

In a thrilling game Inter twice took the lead but saw their defensive frailties ruthlessly exposed and even finished with 10 men as Cristian Chivu was sent off for the second game in a row.

Dejan Stankovic, with possibly the goal of the season, and Diego Milito had both put the hosts in front.

But Joel Matip, Brazilian Edu with two, Spain legend Raul with his 70th Champions League strike and an Andrea Ranocchia own goal gave the Germans a near unassailable lead to take back to Gelsenkirchen next week.

The result continued Inter boss Leonardo's miserable run of having never won at home in the Champions League as a coach in six attempts.

A pulsating first half began as it meant to continue with a stunning goal after just 27 seconds.

Neuer came charging out of his area to meet the ball with a crowd-pleasing flying header to clear but Stankovic, just a couple of yards inside the Germans' half, adjusted his body quickly and on the volley sent the ball straight back over the Schalke captain's

head and into the gaping open goal.

Schalke were level on 17 minutes as Kyriakos Papadopoulos had a free header from a corner but although his effort was weak and Julio Cesar stopped it with his feet, the ball broke kindly to Matip to blast home from close range.

Cesar then came to Inter's rescue as he saved again with his feet when Jose Jurado met a deflected Jefferson Farfan cross full on the volley.

The hosts went back in front on 34 minutes from a lovely move as Wesley Sneijder stood the ball up to the back stick and Esteban Cambiasso put a cushioned headed back into the danger zone where Milito, for once onside, volleyed home.

But on 40 minutes Edu

ran onto an inch-perfect through ball and although his initial shot was deflected, it almost deceived Cesar, who could only weakly parry allowing the Brazilian to slide in the follow-up from a tight angle.

Attacks had been on top in the first 45 minutes and they were again after the restart as Milito got in behind the Schalke backline but surprisingly failed to hit the target.

Samuel Eto'o then danced through the visiting defence but Neuer pulled off a one-handed save to deny the Cameroon captain.

And yet it was Schalke who took control as Farfan slipped in Raul, who held off Andrea Ranocchia and shot past Cesar on 53 minutes.

Four minutes after that Ranocchia inadvertently

directed a Jurado cross past his own keeper as Inter started to implode.

Their task became even more complicated as Chivu received his marching orders on 62 minutes for a second booking in quick succession -- he had also been dismissed against AC Milan on Saturday.

Moments later Jurado pinged a skimming low shot off the base of the post with Cesar beaten.

With a quarter of an hour left Farfan danced through Inter's demoralised backline and although Cesar saved, the Peru flyer shot his follow-up against Ranocchia and onto the post.

Inter didn't survive for long, though, as a few seconds later Edu curled home a killer fifth that surely renders the second leg a formality.



PHOTO: AFP

Schalke's legendary striker Raul (C) scores the fourth goal against Inter Milan during their Champions League quarterfinal at San Siro Stadium on Tuesday.

Messi Argentine at heart



Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Barcelona star Lionel Messi said Tuesday he could never imagine playing for world champions Spain, despite living in the country since his formative years.

Messi came to Barca in 2000 and hence has spent half his life outside Argentina - yet 'la pulga' (flea) told TyCSports.com that he would always be Argentinian.

"I would never have chosen to play for Spain because I am Argentinian. It is true that Spain has

treated me very well.

"Let's not forget that I have spent almost as many years living in Barcelona as in Argentina and that leaves you with divided loyalties - but it doesn't change your true colours," said the man who has already won 13 major honours in the game, including the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

He added he could not understand the criticism of his absence from last week's goalless friendly with the Costa Ricans in San Jose.

The 23-year-old missed the match with a leg injury and that went down badly with Costa Rican fans who had expected him to be the star attrac-

tion.

"I want to be clear that there was no pressure of any kind from Barcelona (not to play). I couldn't play as I had pulled a leg muscle and I don't understand the reason for such a storm," said Messi.

Asked if he had divided loyalties between club and country he said: "I love the national side but I also love my club."

After a season finale in which he hopes to lead Barca to another Spanish Liga and Champions League title Messi will turn his focus to the Copa America, where he hopes to lead his country to glory on home soil.

IN brief

Rooney appeals 2-game ban

AP, London

Wayne Rooney acknowledged using offensive language during a Premier League game but will appeal his automatic two-match ban.

England's Football Association said Tuesday the Manchester United striker deemed the punishment "clearly excessive."

The governing body will hear Rooney's appeal Wednesday. If Rooney's appeal fails he risks further discipline in addition to his suspension for Saturday's league match against Fulham and the following week's FA Cup semifinal against Manchester City.

During Man United's victory over West Ham on Saturday, Rooney cursed into a television camera after scoring his third goal. United is chasing the league, FA Cup and Champions League trophies.

Jose threatens to leave

INTERNET

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has made it clear he will leave the club should Cristiano Ronaldo be sold to AC Milan.

Silvio Berlusconi, president of AC Milan, is reportedly keen in making an ambitious bid to bring the Portuguese star to the San Siro in the summer.

And the 75-year-old has already given the green light to vice-president Adriano Galliani to negotiate a deal with the Spanish giants.

Ater learning of the news, Mourinho has made a stance in regards to his star player, insisting he will leave the Santiago Bernabeu with Ronaldo - but not to Milan.

"In football, everything is possible," the former Chelsea coach was quoted as saying to Sportal. "Should Ronaldo go, I will also go, but not to Milan.

Liverpool lack depth

AFP, Liverpool

The lack of depth in Liverpool's squad came as a shock to John Henry when the American's Fenway Sports Group (FSG) bought the Anfield club last year.

FSG paid £300 million to buy Liverpool from Tom Hicks and George Gillett in October and Henry admitted tackling problems with the squad was "a bigger issue than we feared".

"The worst surprise was the lack of depth," the American told FourFourTwo magazine.

"There was a huge multi-year pay-roll for a squad that had very little depth."

Henry said the financial outlay on the group of players in terms of salaries was huge in comparison to the resources available.

Japanese pair makes history

AFP, Milan

Japanese full-backs Yuto Nagatomo and Atsuto Uchida made history on Tuesday as they became the first players from their country to face each other in a Champions League quarter-final.

Uchida played from the start as his side Schalke 04 earned a stunning 5-2 victory over the reigning champions at an exasperated San Siro.

But history was made in front of a thronging contingent of Japanese media late in the second half as Nagatomo came on for Inter to replace Thiago Motta, lining up the two Japanese full-backs opposite each



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ESPN

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DAY'S
EVENT

BCB XI v Australia

Warm-up Match

Venue: Fatullah Stadium

Bangladesh A v South Africa A

(First Four-Day Match, Day-1)

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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