

## Juve dash Lazio hopes

AFP, Rome

Lazio's hopes of gaining some breathing space in the race for a Champions League place were dashed here on Monday as they lost 1-0 at home to Juventus.

Simone Pepe's 87th minute goal dealt an unwelcome blow to the hosts - who were reduced to 10 men for the final 10 minutes when Cristian Ledesma was sent-off for a second bookable offence - hopes of Champions League football next season.

Lazio only lead Udinese and bitter city rivals AS Roma by a point with three matches remaining while victory kept Juventus hopes of grabbing the last Champions League spot alive, as they are four points adrift of Lazio.

The decisive matches could well come next weekend as Lazio travel to Udinese while Roma are at home to AC Milan, who only require a point to seal the title.

Milan's city rivals and defending champions Inter Milan are also guaranteed a Champions League spot while Napoli are all but over the line as they lead Lazio by eight points.

Juventus forward Alessandro Matri hurdles the Lazio goalkeeper during their Serie A clash at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP



## Pep salutes Abidal return

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola on Monday saluted French defender Eric Abidal as he returned to full training ahead of his side's Champions League semifinal second leg against Real Madrid at the Nou Camp barely six weeks on from surgery on a liver tumour.

"This is the news of the day," exclaimed a delighted Guardiola.

"Abi' can't play 90 minutes, he has lost weight. But he is in perfect health and he'll be able to help us," Guardiola told reporters.

"His teammates are happy as 'Abi' is back and the people who come to the stadium will see him on the bench - or maybe even in the warm-up."

Abidal had the operation on March 17 but looked in fine shape as he trained with his teammates.

His return is a boon, particularly when Liga champions-elect Barca, who lead 2-0 from the first leg, also have fellow defenders Maxwell and Adriano on the sidelines.

## Formality for Man Utd

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United will attempt to shrug off domestic disappointment by reaching their third Champions League final in four years against Schalke 04 here Wednesday.

A 2-0 victory in the semifinal first leg in Germany has left United within touching distance of a place in the May 28 final and, crucially, has given Sir Alex Ferguson freedom to shuffle his pack for Wednesday's return fixture.

The second leg at Old Trafford comes after United's progress towards a record 19th Premier League crown suffered an unexpected setback with a 1-0 defeat to Arsenal on Sunday, a result that has blown the title race more open.

With United facing Chelsea in a crunch Premier League meeting next weekend that could well decide the outcome of the title, Ferguson has said he will rest some of his key players against Schalke.

"I will make some changes on Wednesday without question," Ferguson revealed. "I will bring Paul Scholes back in, Dimitar Berbatov, Michael Owen."

Scottish midfielder Darren Fletcher

may also make a return to first team after completing 45 minutes in a reserve match, Ferguson confirmed.

"We'll need to do that but I will probably keep my experienced players at the back. We have a big week ahead. Wednesday is a European semifinal second leg and then the game on Sunday.

"Two massive games, so we will regroup and freshen it up."

Ferguson is also confident that his side remain in a strong position in both domestic and European competitions.

"We're in as good a position as we could ever have wished for from the start of the season," Ferguson said.

"We're in the semifinal of the European Cup in the second leg, with a two-goal lead, and we go into Chelsea with equal goal difference and a home game."

Failure to seal the deal against a Schalke side who were so comprehensively outplayed in the first leg would represent an upset of unthinkable proportions, even allowing for the fact that Schalke produced the away result of this year's Champions League when they downed Inter Milan 5-2 in the quarterfinals.

As if being given a masterclass by

United last week wasn't bad enough -- when only the goalkeeping heroics of Manuel Neuer prevented a rout -- the Germans' confidence also received another mauling at the weekend when they were beaten 4-1 by Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga.

However United defender Patrice Evra has warned his teammates against the perils of complacency, citing his experiences with Monaco seven years ago.

"In football you never know," said the France defender.

"I remember playing for Monaco in the 2004 quarterfinal and we played in the Bernabeu against Real Madrid and lost 4-2.

"Real thought they were going into the semifinal. They thought they were there already. But in the second leg we won 3-1 and went through."

Evra however is confident that United will progress provided they play to their potential.

"We just have to do our job," said Evra. "We are very near to the final now but we have to complete the task we have started."

"We have to win at Old Trafford. If we don't go through to the final now then it would be a disaster for Man United."

## Hyypia set to retire

AFP, Leverkusen

Bayer Leverkusen's Finnish defender Sami Hyypia confirmed on Monday he will hang up his boots at the end of the season and will join the coaching staff at the Bundesliga club.

Hyypia, 37, joined Bayer in 2009 after 10 years with Premier League club Liverpool and his contract was due to expire in 2012.

However he has decided to return to Finland to prepare his coaching diploma and will then join the coaching setup at the Finnish national side before returning to Leverkusen in 2012 after the German club offered him a two-year contract as deputy coach.

"My time at Leverkusen has been fascinating and will finish with a direct qualification for the Champions League," said Hyypia, who played 52 times for the club.

"I've spent two years with a superb team and a wonderful club which is giving me the opportunity to start my coaching career."

## Real blast UEFA inaction

AFP, Barcelona



Real Madrid's assistant coach Aitor Karanka said on Monday UEFA's decision to not take action against Barcelona over their behaviour in the Champions League semifinal first leg clash will overshadow the decider at the Nou Camp on Tuesday.

Barcelona came away from the Bernabeu with a 2-0 advantage from a bad tempered game which will be remembered for fouls and playacting.

There was a war of words before the match between Real coach Jose Mourinho and his opposite number Pep Guardiola, and in the game the situation only deteriorated.

Barca's substitute keeper Jose Pinto was red carded in a clash at half time and in the second half Pepe was dismissed for a kick at Dani Alves who made the most of the challenge by writhing on the ground.

Mourinho was sent to the stands for criticising the decision and will not now be allowed on the bench at the Nou Camp hence why Karanka fielded the press on the traditional eve of match press conference.

UEFA are considering taking action over Mourinho's post match comments but they have thrown out a complaint from Real over the way Barca players acted.

"UEFA's decision means that the game now comes second," said Karanka.

"UEFA talks about fair play and tomorrow (Tuesday) there will be players on the pitch that lack this and have made racist comments."

"Meanwhile we will be without Pepe and (Sergio) Ramos."

"Everyone saw what happened at the Bernabeu and yet no decision has been taken, so this means that the game now comes second."

Real wanted up to six Barca players to be punished including Sergio Busquets who was shown on Spanish television to make racist comments towards full back Marcelo.

"We now have to concentrate on the game as we are Real Madrid and we will keep fighting to the end. We have 109 years of history and won nine European Cups," added Karanka.

Real are set to play a more attacking style which includes Mesut Ozil, Ronaldo and Di Maria while Karim Benzema is also fighting for a place along with Emmanuel Adebayor.

## 'We are no cheats'

### Football

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola hit back at accusations of cheating from Real Madrid ahead of the Champions League semifinal second leg match at the Nou Camp by describing his players as exemplary.

In the press conference ahead of the game, Real assistant coach Aitor Karanka claimed that UEFA's decision not to sanction Barcelona over their action in the first leg - which Barca won 2-0 - will overshadow the game.

With so much at stake on top of the fierce rivalry, the tension led to a poor match at the Bernabeu which will be remembered by the unsporting behaviour of both sides.

However, Real are angry at the way that only their club has been punished with Pepe and Sergio Ramos suspended and Jose Mourinho banned from the touchline.

They sent an official complaint to UEFA asking for action against six Barca players and coach Pep Guardiola for instigating their foul play. The petition though was thrown out.

"Madrid cannot decide who plays or doesn't, that is down to UEFA. My players go out to play football, I know them very well and they are professionals," said Guardiola.

"They love sport and I have no doubt that some can make errors but they are an example for Barca and for the national team."

"Here young players are taught the



Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola answers questions during a press conference at the Camp Nou on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

right values and in the game on Tuesday 14 of these youth products will be in the squad to play. They can think that we are wrong but we think differently."

A brace from Lionel Messi gave them the win in the first leg but at the weekend they lost 2-1 away at struggling Real Sociedad.

Although they remain eight points

clear at the top of the table with Real also losing, Guardiola feels it is a warning that they cannot afford to make mistakes.

"After what happened I know that we have to be worried about Madrid. We will attack but we need to be careful as Madrid have fantastic players," said Guardiola.

"It is amazing to be where we are in the

league and the Champions League. Madrid may not be happy with the sanctions and there is a judiciary where they can appeal. That is not our job we don't give suspensions we only enjoy playing football.

"We are prepared for everything and we know that there are going to be difficult moments in the game."

Midfielder Xavi Hernandez labeled as ridiculous Mourinho's claim that the team should be punished for a lack of fair play.

"It is not my job to criticise Mourinho. We try and talk about football and I have the feeling that he doesn't do it very often."

"I find it sad that he talks about things which have nothing to do with this sport. Mourinho is a controversial coach and uses his tactics to get ahead."

"The complaints to UEFA are pathetic because Barcelona have behaved well in all their matches. UEFA have turned down the petition obviously."

Xavi believes his side deserve their lead.

"Football came out on top in the end. Madrid have another type of football," he said.

"I think we like to play in an attacking and attractive way, not enclosing ourselves in defence but creating goal scoring chances."

"Hopefully we will now face a side which will try and play football and we will try and beat them doing this."

"They will probably come forward more because in the past they have attempted to play us on the counter-attack."

Xavi has his sights set on the final at Wembley where Barcelona won their first European Cup in 1992 against Sampdoria.

"I watched that game on the television at home because my parents wouldn't let me go. I would have liked to have been there and see our first victory but to go there again after beating our eternal rival would be something special," he added.

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
Who do you think will be cricket's next chief selector?  
Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote  
Follow The Daily Star Sport on **twitter**  
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**What to WATCH**

**SET Max**  
Indian Premier League  
Chennai v Rajasthan  
Live from 4:30pm  
Pune v Mumbai  
Live from 8:30pm

**ESPN**  
Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 8:30pm

**TEN Action+**  
UEFA Champions League  
SEMIFINAL, 2ND LEG  
Man United v Schalke

**DAY'S EVENT**

Bangladesh League  
Soccer Club, Feni v Rahmatganj  
Time: 4:00pm