

# Trio out to up a gear

AFP, Paris



After performances ranging from inconclusive to dismal in their opening games, Manchester United, Manchester City and Inter Milan must step up a gear in their second Champions League outings on Tuesday.

Although the trio will be fully aware that no club has retained the trophy since the league format was introduced 20 seasons ago, most observers agree it will take a Herculean effort to wrest the cup from Barcelona.

Dethroning the Catalan club will certainly demand an improvement on United's opening draw at Benfica, City's stalemate at home to Napoli on their Champions League debut and Inter's shock home defeat by Turkey's Trabzonspor.

City, joint-top of the Premier League with United, suffered from nerves in their opener against Napoli, who held them 1-1 at the Etihad Stadium to leave manager Roberto Mancini admitting his expensively assembled side had been "nervous because it was the first game".

But he predicts that the pressure has now subsided as City -- for whom Carlos Tevez could feature with weekend goal hero Mario Balotelli suspended -- head off to their first away encounter in Group A.

The sides have never met before but Bayern have the edge in experience, even if City can boast four former winners in their squad in Tevez, Balotelli, Owen Hargreaves and Yaya Toure.

Bayern have already laid down a marker by winning 2-0 away to Villarreal and a win on Tuesday would almost give them a foot in the next stage.

Bavarian confidence is sky-high

after a weekend drubbing of Bayer Leverkusen moved them two points clear in the Bundesliga.

"We've a massive game ahead of us and we'll have to be at the top of our game for the whole 90 minutes," says Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes, whose club have racked up eight straight wins and can point to just one home loss ever to English opposition -- a 1993 UEFA Cup reverse to Norwich.

Midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger said the whole side was looking forward to the clash but warned "this is probably our toughest match of the season so far, a real challenge".

Napoli will bid to stay in the mix by

## FIXTURES

Tuesday

(all 1845GMT unless otherwise stated):  
Bayern Munich (GER) v Manchester City (ENG),  
Napoli (ITA) v Villarreal (ESP), At Moscow  
(1600GMT), CSKA Moscow (RUS) v Inter Milan  
(ITA), Trabzonspor (TUR) v Lille (FRA), Otelul  
Galati (ROM) v Benfica (POR), Manchester  
United (ENG) v Basel (SUI), Lyon (FRA) v  
Dinamo Zagreb (CRO), Real Madrid (ESP) v  
Ajax (NED)

inflicting more woe on Villarreal, who knocked the Italians out of last season's Europa League.

Manchester United, meanwhile, have to tackle Swiss side Basel without the services of hamstring victim Wayne Rooney.

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson is pondering his most effective line-up in Rooney's absence, while awaiting news of the extent of the injury Javier Hernandez suffered in Saturday's 1-1 draw at Stoke, which ended United's perfect start to the league season.

"I do need to get all the squad moving. I think there will be changes on Tuesday," Sir Alex told manutd.com.

"If we win our next three games, we can utilise the squad... Although I want to make changes, I don't want an embarrassment. So changes have got to be made with a mind of still winning the game."

Basel's coach Thorsten Fink has a special reason to want to put one over United, as he was in the Bayern Munich side that lost the dramatic 1999 final to the Red Devils in Barcelona.

Inter will hope their nightmare start to the campaign is over after sacking Gian Piero Gasperini and bringing in former Chelsea and Juventus boss Claudio Ranieri.

Ranieri got off to a winning start with a 3-1 victory at Bologna on Saturday, but playmaker Wesley Sneijder, Brazil full-back Maicon and Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic will miss the Group B meeting with CSKA in Moscow.

In the same group, French champions Lille visit Trabzonspor, having thrown away a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 at home to CSKA in their first fixture.

In Group D Lille's compatriots Lyon tackle Dinamo Zagreb, while Real Madrid host Ajax, who they helped eliminate at the same stage of last season's competition.

PHOTO: AFP

**Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (L) leads teammates during a training session in Madrid on Sunday on the eve of their Champions League match against Ajax.**



# Massive miss for Malaga

AFP, Madrid



Big-spending Malaga squandered a golden opportunity to top La Liga for the first time on Sunday when they were held to a 0-0 draw at Real Zaragoza.

Malaga, who were taken over by billionaire Qatari Sheikh Abdullah al-Thani last year, saw a string of chances come and go with their best opening falling to Ruud Van Nistleroy on eight minutes.

After being put through with a majestic pass by Joaquin Sanchez the Dutch veteran's shot was blocked by Zaragoza goalkeeper Roberto Jimenez.

The goalkeeper came to Zaragoza's rescue again in the last minute with a superb reflex save to keep out a header from substitute Seba Fernandez.

The draw left the Costa del Sol club in sixth place, level with Valencia and Real Madrid on 10 points, but two behind leaders Real Betis who play at Getafe on Monday.

Levante defeated nine-man Espanyol 3-1 to go third, a third win in three matches to illustrate their victory over Real Madrid last weekend was no fluke.

The modest Valencia-based club have 11 points, the same as second-placed Barcelona, and trail the champions only

on goal difference after a week which also saw them beat Real 1-0 last Sunday and Rayo Vallecano 2-1 in midweek.

Levante went ahead in the 12th minute with the first of Ruben Suarez's two penalties, after Rui Fonte had tripped Juanlo Gomez.

Suarez scored again from the spot on 58 minutes after Jordi Amat had tripped him when he had a clear chance on goal. Amat was sent off and Espanyol were down to 10 men.

Hector Moreno pulled one back for Espanyol on 72 minutes but any hopes of a comeback were quickly dashed when Jose Barkero restored the two-goal advantage four minutes later.

Espanyol's misery was further compounded on 81 minutes when substitute Walter Pandiani was given a straight red card for an elbow in the face of Victoriano Rivas 'Nano'.

Mallorca got their first points since the opening weekend, beating Real Sociedad 2-1 at home to take some pressure off coach Michael Laudrup.

Victor Casadesus and Chori Castro came to Laudrup's rescue with goals in the 20th and 49th minutes after Imanol Agirretxe had put Sociedad ahead with a clever chip on 15 minutes.

The winner came when Castro drilled a powerful shot into the top right hand corner of the net after the Sociedad defence failed to clear a corner.

## RESULTS

**Real Mallorca 2** (Victor 20, Castro 50)  
Real Sociedad 1 (Agirretxe 15)  
**Levante 3** (Ruben Suarez 14-pen, 58-pen, Barkero 76)  
Espanyol 1 (Moreno 72)  
Grenada 1 (Rico 64) Osasuna 1 (Raul Garcia 29)  
Sporting Gijon 0 Racing Santander 0  
Real Zaragoza 0 Malaga 0

# Van Persie coy over contract

AFP, London

Arsenal fans were given fresh cause for concern on Monday when it emerged that captain Robin van Persie is stalling over signing a new contract.

The 28-year-old Dutch striker netted his 100th Arsenal goal in Saturday's 3-0 victory at home to Bolton as the Gunners recorded just their second victory of what is proving to be a difficult campaign.

However, van Persie is believed to be concerned about the club's future following the sales of Cesc Fabregas and Samir Nasri, and has sought assurances from coach Arsene Wenger that Arsenal's ambition remains intact.

Nasri joined Manchester City last month after electing not to extend his contract.

Wenger could face a similar problem with van Persie, whose contract expires in 2013 and who revealed on Monday that talks over a possible extension were at the back of his mind.



Malaga midfielder Joaquin Sanchez (L) fights for the ball with Real Zaragoza forward Luis Garcia during their Primera Liga tie at the La Romareda Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# QPR snatch a draw

AFP, London



QPR snatched a dramatic 1-1 draw against Aston Villa as Richard Dunne scored an own goal in stoppage time at Loftus Road on Sunday.

Neil Warnock's side looked set to suffer a controversial defeat when Villa took the lead through Barry Bannan's spot-kick after referee Michael Oliver harshly penalised Armand Traore for a tug on Gabriel Agbonlahor.

QPR felt they should have had a penalty of their own when Shaun Derry's goal-bound header hit Alan Hutton on the arm, but Oliver and his assistants failed to spot the offence.

Oliver then sent off Traore in the closing moments for a second booking, but QPR rescued a point when Dunne turned Heidar Helguson's cross into his own net.

Villa's failure to hold onto their lead means Alex McLeish's side have now drawn five of their six Premier League games this season, while QPR remain level with their opponents on eight points.

Warnock was furious with Oliver's per-

formance and he said: "I've had a look at our penalty appeals again and I think the statisticians have put the first Alan Hutton one down as a save. How can he not give it?"

"He can't say he's in a bad position. My boys deserve better than that."

"As for the penalty he gave? It's embarrassing. Armand has blown on him."

"Referees should be seen and not heard and the official made it all about him, which is a shame because he took away from what was a good performance from us."

McLeish added: "I had to tell my players a few home truths at half-time because in the first half we were poor, very poor."

"I let them know that in no uncertain terms and sure enough we came out a lot better in the second half."

Although Villa were able to count British Prime Minister David Cameron among their supporters at Loftus Road, even the presence of such a famous fan couldn't inspire McLeish's team in the early stages.

QPR made a fast start and went close to taking the lead in the fifth minute as Adel Taarabt cleverly worked space for a well-struck effort from long-range that beat Shay Given but cannoned back off a post.

# Rovers set India date

AFP, New Delhi

Blackburn Rovers will become the first English Premier League side to play in India when they take part in an exhibition match in Pune next month, organisers said on Monday.

Rovers, owned by Indian poultry firm Venky's, were scheduled to play Pune Football Club in July, but the game was postponed following a bomb attack in Mumbai. The match will now be held on October 7.

The English club had earlier announced they were also planning to establish a youth academy near Pune.

## SPORTS POLL

### WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Mushfiqur Rahim is a good choice as skipper?

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# Messi eyeing goal record

AFP, Barcelona



LFP

Lionel Messi is determined to keep breaking goal-scoring records at Barcelona after his 12th career hattrick for the European and Spanish champions took him to 192 at the club.

The 24-year-old Argentine magician hit his latest hattrick in the 5-0 demolition of Atletico Madrid and is now just two behind Hungary's Laszlo Kubala who scored 194 in his career at the Camp Nou in the 1950s.

Once he gets past that, the all-time club record of 235, set by Cesar Rodriguez between 1939 and 1955, will be easily within his sights.

"I'm pretty calm about it. I just take it a game at a time, but obviously I'm very excited about becoming top scorer," Messi told fcbarcelona.com.

"Many years have gone by and it's still the same player (Kubala). Hopefully I can beat his stats. I want to continue breaking records here."

Atletico are his favourite victims with 14 goals scored against the Madrid side, including three hattricks.

Barcelona have racked up 22 goals in five La Liga games this season, but Messi insists there is still room for improvement, especially getting used to playing a 3-4-3 system that coach Pep Guardiola has chosen.

"We feel pretty comfortable with it. There are some things we still aren't doing well, just like with the previous system, but that's OK," he said.

"It takes time and practice. We still aren't totally used to it. Personally I'm pretty happy, because up front we have more space and we can link up better with the midfield players, and receive more passes."



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Champions League T20  
KKR v SA Redbacks  
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Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 11:30pm

**TEN Sports**  
UEFA Champions League  
Man United v Basel  
Live from 12:00am (Wednesday)

**TEN Action+**  
UEFA Champions League  
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Live from 10:00pm  
Real Madrid v Ajax  
Live from 12:00am (Wednesday)



**BCB Red v BCB Green**  
Four-Day Practice Match, Day 2  
Time: 9:30am  
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur