

Terry faces knee op

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry is to undergo surgery on his injured right knee and faces several weeks on the sidelines, manager Andre Villas-Boas confirmed on Tuesday.

In a major blow to Chelsea's Premier League and Champions League campaigns, the inspirational defender could be out of action for up to six weeks after his injury failed to heal as expected.

"Hopefully John Terry will be out for less than six weeks. They are cleaning the joint and hopefully it will be less," said Villas-Boas ahead of Tuesday's Champions League second round, first leg against Napoli.

Terry suffered the injury after colliding with a goalpost during last month's FA Cup victory over Portsmouth at Stamford Bridge.

The 31-year-old had travelled to Italy the Napoli match but was ruled out after suffering a reaction following a training session on Monday.

Terry's injury also has implications for England's Euro 2012 preparations, ruling him out of the February 29 friendly against Holland at Wembley and leaving him racing to recover his fitness for the finals in Poland and Ukraine.

However the defender's unavailability relieves caretaker England manager Stuart Pearce of a potential headache over the issue of whether to pick Rio Ferdinand and Terry in the same squad.

Terry is currently awaiting trial over allegations he racially abused Ferdinand's younger brother Anton, allegations he denies.



Napoli forward Ezequiel Lavezzi (R) scores the third goal past Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech during their Champions League second round encounter at the San Paolo Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

PLS hits roadblock

AFP, New Delhi

A new football league in the Indian state of West Bengal featuring semi-retired world stars has been postponed after encountering "many problems", organisers said Wednesday without elaborating.

The franchise-based Premier Soccer League (PLS), based along the lines of cricket's popular Indian Premier League, was due to be played across six venues in West Bengal from March 24-May 6.

"We will announce the new dates soon," said Utpal Ganguli, secretary of the Indian Football Association, the name of the body running the sport in West Bengal.

"There are many problems which need to be sorted out. We are confident the tournament will be held in West Bengal. But for now, it is not starting on March 24."

MU close in on last 16

AFP, Paris



Manchester United's march towards the latter stages of the Europa League looks set to continue on Thursday when they line up against Ajax at Old Trafford leading 2-0 from the first leg in the round of 32.

United's exit from the Champions League following a 2-1 defeat at FC Basel in December was a huge shock to the club's fans and came barely seven months after defeat by Barcelona in the final of Europe's premier club competition.

To their credit, Sir Alex Ferguson's

side have put their full weight behind the Champions League's poorer relation and, at this stage, must be considered among the favourites to reach the May 9 final.

United have yet to be beaten at home by a Dutch side and defender Chris Smalling, set to return to the starting 11 after sitting on the bench at the Amsterdam Arena, says the players are committed to winning the competition.

"Obviously we'd still like to be in the Champions League but we're looking at the Europa League as a second chance," Smalling told www.manutd.com.

"We're going to go out there and show Europe we can still perform and we can still win trophies.

"We want to reach the final, although

we know it won't be easy. All of the players will be going out on the pitch and giving our all to reach the final."

United, however, could find the going tougher in the latter stages of the competition.

Atletico Madrid, who beat Fulham to the trophy in 2010, have been one of the tournament's form sides and seem to have found fresh impetus since former Argentina international Diego Simeone took over as coach.

But despite sitting in the comfort zone following a 3-1 first-leg win in Rome last week, they are taking nothing for granted against a team that striker Falcao, who scored goals in either half last week, describes as "highly dangerous".

Napoli nightmare for Chelsea

AFP, Naples



Napoli piled the pressure on Andre Villas-Boas and put one foot in the Champions League quarterfinals with a 3-1 first leg victory over Chelsea at the San Paolo here on Tuesday.

Ezequiel Lavezzi scored a brace and Edinson Cavani added the third after Juan Mata had given the visitors the lead.

Villas-Boas will now face more questions over his future with his side struggling in the league and hanging on in the FA Cup after a fifth round home draw with Championship side Birmingham City.

A 2-0 win at Stamford Bridge in the last 16 second leg in three weeks time would be enough for the Londoners to progress but on this evidence Chelsea don't look capable of keeping a clean sheet against anyone.

The absence through injury of captain and star centre-back John Terry was marked as David Luiz and Gary Cahill were made to look vulnerable and incapable of plugging any defensive gaps.

And with Terry ruled out for the next six weeks as he needs a knee operation -- news that was announced before the game -- Chelsea's defence doesn't look likely to improve any time soon.

But that's not to take anything away from Napoli who were scintillating on the counter attack -- as they had been against Manchester City in the group stages -- although only mildly less inept than Chelsea at the back.

Villas-Boas laughed in the face of his supposedly precarious position by picking a surprisingly attacking line up with Daniel Sturridge, Mata and Florent Malouda behind Didier Drogba.

It made for an entertaining game but Chelsea's defence was too often exposed.

Gokhan Inler released Cavani after just nine minutes with Cahill's slip giving the Uruguay forward time to control and shoot but Petr Cech came to his side's rescue.

The Czech goalkeeper did so again when Lavezzi released the overlapping Maggio inside Luiz.

And yet it was largely against the run of play when Mata gave the visitors a 27th minute lead, helped in no small part by the pitch.

After a neat passing move Sturridge tried to slip the ball inside to the Spaniard.

Paolo Cannavaro was in the way but a bobble saw him slice his attempted clearance up in the air and Mata calmly let it drop and side-footed home from 10 yards.

Luiz then beat goalkeeper Morgan De Sanctis to a Mata corner but headed over.

The leveller came on 38 minutes as Lavezzi sold Raul Meireles a huge dummy, opening up an acre of space outside the box from where he curled a precise finish around Cech.

Brazilian Ramires immediately replicated Lavezzi's feint up the other end but couldn't do likewise with his finish.

And in first half stoppage time Inler stroked the ball to the back post where Cavani got ahead of Cahill to brilliantly improvise by shouldering the ball in from close range.

In the second half an awful mistake from Meireles - who is suspended for the second leg after being booked - allowed Cavani to slip in Lavezzi but the Argentine failed to hit the target.

Chelsea were piling on the pressure but chances for Drogba, Mata, Malouda and Cahill came and went without the home goalkeeper being troubled and they were to pay for their wastefulness.

The third Napoli goal came on 65 minutes as Luiz hesitated under a long punt forward and Cavani nipped in front of him, drew Cech and slid the ball left for Lavezzi to roll the ball past Cahill on the line.

It could even have been worse for Chelsea in the final 10 minutes after Marek Hamsik got in behind the defence and crossed for Maggio but Ashley Cole somehow cleared his shot off the line.



CSKA Moscow midfielder Pontus Wernbloom (2nd from R) celebrates his equalising goal against Real Madrid during their Champions League second round tie in Moscow on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Karim suffers groin injury

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema will undergo scans on a suspected groin injury suffered in the 1-1 Champions League draw away to CSKA Moscow, the Spanish league leaders said Wednesday.

"Karim Benzema is to undergo scans" to determine the seriousness of the injury, a spokesman told AFP.

Fourteen minutes into the match, played in sub-zero degree temperatures, Benzema left the pitch holding the top of his right thigh after trying to volley the ball.

He was replaced by Argentinian Gonzalo Higuain.

If serious, the injury could compromise Benzema's chances of playing for France in an away friendly with Germany on February 29.

CSKA grab a draw

AFP, Moscow



An injury-time goal on his debut by Swedish midfielder Pontus Wernbloom grabbed CSKA Moscow a 1-1 draw with Spanish giants Real Madrid here on Tuesday in their Champions League Last 16 first leg match.

A goal from Real's Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo in the 28th minute put the nine-time European champions ahead and they looked set for their seventh successive win in this season's competition until Wernbloom blasted the ball home.

Real coach Jose Mourinho meanwhile expressed his satisfaction with the result despite the fact that his men missed out on victory.

The hosts, supported by a 63,000 home crowd, started in lively fashion probing for weaknesses in the Real defence and created the first chance in the seventh minute.

However, Alan Dzagoev's shot from eight metres went wide and was the hosts' only opportunity in the first-half.

Real replied with a long-range shot by Karim Benzema, which also went wide forcing Jose Mourinho into an early substitution as the Frenchman pulled a muscle and was replaced by Gonzalo Higuain in the 16th minute.

CSKA 'keeper Sergei Chepchugov pulled off a great double save a minute later as first

he beat away a Higuain effort and was able to get back up and deflect for a corner Sami Khedira's follow-up.

However, he was unable to prevent Ronaldo from opening the scoring, as he drilled home from inside the area after Zoran Totic failed to clear Fabio Coentrao's cross from the left.

CSKA, who have never lost to a Spanish team before in European competition, poured forward seeking an equaliser but the visitors defence was solid and repelled the hosts attacks.

After the interval CSKA continued testing the visitors defence but failed again to create any serious threat to Iker Casillas lacking accuracy in the decisive moments.

Meanwhile Real, who were relying on rapid and dangerous counter-attacks missed a host of chances to increase their lead before the one-hour mark.

CSKA, who were lacking match practice as the Russian league is on the winter break, nevertheless showed strong character trying hard to pull the scores level but Real looked comfortable.

In the 82nd minute the hosts missed a chance to level as Casillas produced a diving save to prevent CSKA midfielder Keisuke Honda's freekick ending up in the net.

But in the third minute of injury time Wernbloom had the CSKA fans on their feet as he sent the ball into the net from six yards, converting an Alexei Berezutsky cross from the left.

Loew turns to youth



Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew has responded to his mounting injury list by giving youth a chance in next Wednesday's Euro 2012 warm-up friendly against France.

Germany host the French in Bremen and this is Loew's last chance to look at prospective players for Euro 2012, to be hosted by the Ukraine and Poland, before he names his final 23-man squad in May.

Loew is without four first-choice names in vice-captain Bastian Schweinsteiger (ankle), teenage midfield star Mario Goetze (groin), forward Lukas Podolski (foot) and defender Per Mertesacker (ankle).

To compensate, 22-year-old twins Lars and Sven Bender have been called up into the midfield from Bayer Leverkusen and Borussia Dortmund respectively.

Dortmund's Mats Hummels, Schalke Benedikt Hoewdes and Bayern Munich's Jerome Boateng, all 23, will be competing for the centre-back berths in defence.

Borussia Moenchengladbach attacking midfielder's Marco Reus, 22, is also included on the back of strong performances in the German league where he has scored 13 goals in 20 Bundesliga games this season.

The youngest player named is Leverkusen's 21-year-old attacking midfielder Andre Schuerle, who has already made 11 appearances for his country and scored five goals.

Real Madrid midfielders Sami Khedira and Mesut Ozil are also included, while upfront Loew has named three strikers in Bayern Munich's Mario Gomez, Stuttgart's Cacau and Miroslav Klose of Rome.

Klose has made 113 appearances for his country and with 63 goals to his credit, is just five short of the all-time German record number of goals.

SQUAD
Goalkeepers
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Muenchen), Tim Wiese (Werder Bremen)
Defenders
Dennis Aogo (Hamburg), Jerome Boateng (Bayern Munich), Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich), Benedikt Hoewdes (Schalke 04), Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich), Christian Traesche (VfL Wolfsburg), Marcel Schmelzer (Borussia Dortmund)
Midfielders
Lars Bender (Bayer Leverkusen), Sven Bender (Borussia Dortmund), Sami Khedira (Real Madrid/ESP), Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich), Thomas Mueller (Bayern Munich), Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid/ESP), Marco Reus (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Simon Rolfes (Bayer Leverkusen), Andre Schuerle (Bayer Leverkusen)
Forwards
Mario Gomez (Bayern Muenchen),

Rooney out of Ajax tie

AFP, Manchester

England striker Wayne Rooney will miss Manchester United's Europa League match against Ajax at Old Trafford on Thursday with a throat infection, Sir Alex Ferguson said Wednesday.

United manager Ferguson may well have rested even a fit Rooney, with Lokomotiv Moscow or Athletic Bilbao waiting for the English champions in the next round.

Teenage French midfielder Paul Pogba could feature against Ajax, although it seems the 18-year-old is more likely to be among the substitutes than handed a starting role.

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England v Pakistan
First T20
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TEN Action+
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Valencia v Stoke City
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Man United v Ajax
Live from 2:00am (Friday)
TEN Sports
UEFA Europa League
Bilbao v Lokomotiv Moscow
Live from 11:55pm
Atletico Madrid v Lazio
Live from 2:00am (Friday)
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