



Chelsea defender John Terry (C) heads in the second goal during their Champions League second round encounter against Napoli at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Abidal to miss Euro 2012

AFP, Madrid

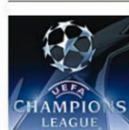
Barcelona's French international defender Eric Abidal will undergo a liver transplant in "the coming weeks", the Spanish club said Thursday, which will likely rule him out from the Euro 2012.

The 32-year-old, who signed from Lyon in 2007, underwent surgery in March 2011 to remove a liver tumour. "During the next few weeks, the player will undergo a liver transplant as a result of the progress of his liver disease," the club said in a statement.

"A transplant was considered an option from the start of his treatment a year ago. At the express wishes of the player, the Club asks that the maximum respect for the player's privacy be observed."

Chelsea stay alive

AFP, London



Branislav Ivanovic scored a dramatic extra-time winner as Chelsea completed a remarkable comeback to beat Napoli 4-1 and advance to the quarterfinals of the Champions League here Wednesday.

Serbian international Ivanovic swept home emphatically in the 105th minute to give Chelsea -- beaten 3-1 by the Italians in last month's first leg in Naples -- a 5-4 aggregate victory at Stamford Bridge.

It was only the fourth time in the modern history of the Champions League that a team has successfully overturned a two-goal first leg deficit.

The match had gone to extra-time after a pulsating period of 90 minutes which saw Chelsea battle to a 3-1 win that left the tie locked at 4-4 overall.

Chelsea had taken a 2-0 lead on the night through headers from Didier

Drogba and John Terry to put the Blues ahead on away goals.

But Gokhan Inler restored Napoli's crucial advantage with a 55th minute strike before a Frank Lampard penalty 15 minutes from time hauled Chelsea back into the tie to electrify a crowd of 37,784.

Chelsea had carved out the first chance of a frenetic opening period when Drogba held off his marker to chest a long throw into the path of Daniel Sturridge, whose first-time volley was well saved by Morgan De Sanctis.

But thereafter Chelsea were rocked onto the back foot as Napoli's fleet-footed attack, with Ezequiel Lavezzi, Marek Hamsik and Edinson Cavani to the fore, repeatedly pierced the home defence almost at will.

Hamsik was the first to test Petr Cech on 10 minutes, the Chelsea keeper just managing to block the Slovak international's low shot with his legs.

Napoli were soon on the attack once again, Christian Maggio bursting down

the right flank to shoot for Cavani, who just diverted into the side netting.

With Napoli causing havoc down Ashley Cole's flank, the chances continued to come for the visitors.

A superb ball forward from Inler sent Lavezzi racing clear and the striker's low shot forced Cech to save smartly once again after only 15 minutes.

Moments later and Cech was pressed into action once more, saving Hamsik's low shot as the visitors swarmed forward once more.

But having weathered the early storm Chelsea then grabbed the goal their fans had been craving.

Ramires swung in a perfectly flighted cross from the left and Drogba timed his run to perfection before heading powerfully past De Sanctis to trigger bedlam at the Bridge.

The goal signalled the start of Chelsea's best period of the half, with Sturridge flashing a shot across the face of goal which Hugo Campagnaro turned behind nervily.

Jose's dream final

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho was hoping for a dream Champions League final against his former club Chelsea on Thursday after the Spanish giants cruised into the quarterfinals.

Nine-time winners Real beat CSKA Moscow 4-1 in the second leg of their last 16 tie for a 5-2 aggregate win with Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo grabbing two of the goals.

No sooner had the night's business been settled, however, than Mourinho was already eyeing Chelsea, who won an extra-time thriller to defeat Napoli, as potential final opponents in May.

"People can't understand how much I love Chelsea and I know if I get them in the quarterfinals or the semifinals, they would be great opponents," said Mourinho, who has been widely-tipped to retake the reins at Stamford Bridge in the summer.

"I'm happy Chelsea have got through, but

I'd love to play them in the final."

The Real coach was also happy to heap more praise on Ronaldo whose brace took his Real Madrid career total to 19 goals in 24 appearances in the Champions League.

Compared to 16 goals during his 55 outings as a Manchester United player, the Portuguese star is flourishing at Real.

"Ronaldo is unbelievable," said Mourinho.

"You would have thought with the number of goals he scored last season you couldn't improve, but he is at another level."

Gonzalo Higuain and Karim Benzema were also on target on Wednesday as Real joined bitter rivals Barcelona in the last eight, the draw for which will be held on Friday.

The only negative on the night for Madrid was a yellow card for Xabi Alonso that means he will miss the first leg of their quarter-final tie.

"It's not a problem that Xabi can't play, we are not going to cry about it, there is no problem for (Lass) Diarra or (Esteban) Granero to play with (Sami) Khedira," added Mourinho.

Ronaldo steers Real into last 8

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as nine-time champions Real Madrid eased into the Champions League quarterfinals on Wednesday, a 4-1 win over CSKA Moscow giving Jose Mourinho's men a 5-2 aggregate victory.

Gonzalo Higuain and Karim Benzema were also on target as Real joined bitter rivals Barcelona in the last eight, the draw for which will be held on Friday.

"It was a good game, we've all played well and we have qualified. We knew what we had to do. We had to win," said Benzema.

Mourinho decided against bringing in fit again Frenchman Benzema from the start, preferring instead to pair Higuain with Ronaldo.

CSKA arrived in Madrid having not lost away in the Champions League all season and they started the game looking well-organised and determined.

Ivory Coast striker Seydou Doumbia shot high on eight minutes when put clear by Alan Dzagoev.

That produced an instant reaction from the home side when a Ronaldo shot was well-saved by Sergei Chepchugov in the Russians' goal.

On 12 minutes, Doumbia came close again to converting a right-wing cross from the quick Nigerian Ahmed Musa.

Mesut Ozil looked to French referee Stephane Lannoy when felled in the area on 14 minutes but the contact by Russian centre-half Sergei Ignashevich was judged to have been minimal.

Madrid's quick passing increased in intensity and it was no surprise when Sami Khedira and Kaka combined on 26 minutes to provide an easy finish for Higuain for his third goal in this season's Champions League.

Zoran Tomic, for CSKA, and Xabi Alonso, for the Spaniards, wasted good chances from dead ball situations before Musa produced a stinging shot that Iker Casillas had to turn over the bar.

CSKA survived further damage before the interval before making a tactical change, bringing on Pavel Mamaev for Evgeni Aldonin for the second period.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his goal against CSKA Moscow during their Champions League second round clash at Bernabeu on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sir Dave slates FIFA, UEFA

Football

AFP, Doha

Outspoken Premier League chief Sir Dave Richards launched a blistering attack on governing bodies FIFA and UEFA on Wednesday, accusing them of "stealing" football from the English.

But hours later he apologised for his remarks, which he said had intended to be "light-hearted".

England are still angry over the doomed multi-million-dollar bid to stage the 2018 World Cup, which was awarded to Russia, and Richards suggested that his own country's contribution to the game has been neglected.

"England gave the world football," Richards, speaking at the International Sport Security Conference in the Qatari capital, was quoted by the BBC as saying.

"We wrote the rules, designed the pitches and everything else. Then 50 years later, some guy came along and said you're liars and they stole it. It was called FIFA.

"Fifty years later, another gang came along called UEFA and stole a bit more."

However, later on Wednesday, Richards tried to limit the damage.

"Further to the comments I made earlier today at a conference in Doha, I would like to apologise for any offence caused," he said in a statement.

"It is important to clarify that I was expressing my personal views and not those of any organisation I represent.

"My comments on the heritage of the game were intended to be light-hearted. They clearly have not come across in that way and I sincerely regret making them and any resulting negativity that may have been interpreted towards FIFA and UEFA.

"I will be writing to both organisations in these terms." The Football Association distanced themselves from Richards' remarks.

"Sir Dave Richards is not representing the FA at this conference and his personal views are in no way shared or endorsed by the FA," said a statement.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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BTV & NEO Cricket

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Bangladesh v India

Live from 2:00pm

TEN Cricket

West Indies v Australia

First ODI

Live from 7:30pm

NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa

Second Test, Day 3



Asia Cup Cricket

Bangladesh v India

Time: 2:00pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium

Premier League

Sk Jamal v Abahani

Time: 3:45pm