



Manchester United players jog prior to a training session at Carrington yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Bayer Leverkusen.

Photo: AFP

Bayern begin title defence

AFP, Paris



Reigning European champions Bayern Munich begin their title defence at home to CSKA Moscow on Tuesday, while David Moyes leads Manchester United in the Champions League for the first time.

MANCHESTER UNITED V BAYER LEVERKUSEN

The spotlight will be on David Moyes in what will be his first game as a manager in the Champions League proper. His sole previous experience of the competition came in 2005, when Everton lost 4-2 on aggregate to Villarreal in the third qualifying round. He is still getting to grips with life in the United dugout and could do with getting off to a winning start in a testing Group A. Leverkusen qualified for this season's competition by finishing third in the Bundesliga and are coached by a familiar face to Moyes

and United fans - Finnish former Liverpool defender Sami Hyypia.

REAL SOCIEDAD V SHAKHTAR DONETSK

Appearing in the Champions League for the first time in a decade, Real Sociedad begin their Group A campaign at home to four-time defending Ukrainian champions Shakhtar. Shakhtar have reached the knockout stages in two of the last three seasons but lost a trio of leading players over the summer in full-back Razvan Rat, all-action Brazilian midfielder Fernandinho and the outstanding Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

FC COPENHAGEN V JUVENTUS

Danish champions FC Copenhagen are back in the group stage for the first time since their run to the last 16 in 2010-11 and begin with a daunting home clash against Serie A title-holders Juventus. Stale Solbakken's Copenhagen side had won just one of their opening seven domestic league

games before hosting Esbjerg on Saturday but at least in the likes of Olof Mellberg and Daniel Braaten they have players with experience of this level. Mellberg, indeed, played for Juve back in the 2008-09 campaign. Antonio Conte's Juve, faced a trip to Inter on Saturday in the coach's 100th game at the helm, have started the campaign well and are eager to make a major impression in this season's competition.

GALATASARAY V REAL MADRID

This clash in the heated atmosphere of Istanbul's Ali Sami Yen stadium is a rematch between the clubs, who clashed in last season's quarterfinals, with Madrid winning 5-3 on aggregate. It has been all change in the Spanish capital since then of course, with Carlo Ancelotti replacing Jose Mourinho in the dugout. The Italian has already confirmed that goalkeeper Iker Casillas will come in from the cold to start at the expense of Diego Lopez,

while recent big-money signing Gareth Bale will be hoping to feature for the visitors.

BENFICA V ANDERLECHT

Following the trauma of their Europa League final defeat to Chelsea in the spring, Benfica are back in continental competition as they entertain Belgian champions Anderlecht in Lisbon's Estadio da Luz, the stadium which will host this season's final. Jorge Jesus' Benfica side will be hopeful of making an impression in a group that could be one of the most open in this season's Champions League, but they must get off to a good start.

OLYMPIACOS V PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

French champions PSG are the favourites to win Group C as they bid to improve on last season's run to the quarterfinals. They warmed up for their trip to face the Greek title-holders with a 2-0 win at Bordeaux on Friday, achieved without the rested Ezequiel

Lavezzi and with record signing Edinson Cavani on the bench for all but the last nine minutes. They can expect to return to the side at the Georgios Karaiskakis Stadium in Piraeus against the three-time defending Greek champions. Coached by former Real Madrid and Spain star Michel, the Olympiacos squad contains numerous players who have previously played in Ligue 1, most notably Javier Saviola, who counts Monaco among his many clubs.

BOYERN MUNICH V CSKA MOSCOW

Bayern begin their defence of the title with Pep Guardiola - who coached Barcelona to glory in this competition in 2009 and 2011 - now in the dugout. The Bundesliga giants play host to CSKA Moscow, the Russian champions. Bayern come into the game with Mario Gotze, Thiago Alcantara and Javi Martinez all on the injury list and the

signs are that last season's all-conquering team are still adjusting to life under Guardiola. Leonid Slutski's CSKA warmed up for their trip to Bavaria with a 1-0 win against Rostov on Saturday, achieved thanks to a Konstantin Bazelyuk goal a minute into his league debut.

VIKTORIA PLZEN V MANCHESTER CITY

Having failed to progress beyond the group stage in either of the last two seasons, big-spending Manchester City will be expecting to do much better under new coach Manuel Pellegrini, who has taken both Villarreal and Malaga to the latter stages of the competition in recent seasons. Indeed, City failed to win a single match last season, but they have been given a kinder draw this time. This is a fixture that the English club should win, although Pavel Vrba's Plzen have a fine record at their compact Struncovy Sady Stadion.

Castro out of MU clash

AFP, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen's defensive midfielder Gonzalo Castro is out of Tuesday's Champions League clash against Manchester United at Old Trafford after tearing his hamstring.

The 26-year-old, who made the last of his five Germany appearances in 2007, sustained the injury in the closing stages of Saturday's 3-1 Bundesliga win over VfL Wolfsburg, which kept them third, before Monday's diagnosis.

Midfielder Lars Bender, who sat out the Wolfsburg match, is set to deputise, providing he has fully recovered from the hip injury which kept him out of Germany's World Cup qualifiers earlier this month.

"I feel fit again. There is nothing standing in the way of me playing," Bender told SID, an AFP subsidiary.

Leverkusen, back in the Champions League after a year's absence, are up against a United side who enjoyed their first win at home under David Moyes on Saturday after both Robin van Persie and Wayne Rooney scored in the 2-0 win over Crystal Palace.

Leverkusen have won four of their five Bundesliga matches so far this season and are third behind leaders Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich in the German league.

Alves's kind gesture to Abidal

AFP, Madrid



Monaco full-back Eric Abidal has said that his old Barcelona teammate Dani Alves offered to donate the Frenchman his liver when Abidal needed a transplant 18 months ago.

Abidal was first diagnosed with a tumour on his liver in March 2011 and after briefly returning to the first team, was ruled out of the game for over a year to undergo the transplant in March 2012.

As a tribute to Abidal, who was surprisingly not offered a new contract by Barca at the end of last season, Alves has changed his squad number from two to Abidal's old number 22 this season.

However, the 34-year-old has revealed their friendship went even much further than public displays of support.

"My relationship with Dani goes much further than him taking my old number 22 shirt," he told Catalunya radio.

"When I had to undergo surgery, he wanted to donate his liver. Logically, he couldn't because he is a professional footballer. Our relationship goes much deeper than friendship."

In another recent interview Abidal caused controversy by saying that Barca hadn't paid him whilst he had been ill.

Those allegations were denied by the club who said they had fulfilled all their contractual obligations to the player.

Abidal admitted there had been a misunderstanding and that he will most likely return to the club to work with their football development team once he has finished playing.

In the period when Abidal needed the transplant and then during his recovery period, his playing contract was suspended by mutual consent, although he did continue to receive monthly payments from the club.

His playing contract was then reactivated when he returned to training with the first team.

"I don't have any problems with Barcelona. It was all signed, what they said was true and what I said was true.

"Everything is good. I will return to Barcelona with the joy that I have always had there.

"I have an agreement with Barca for when I finish playing to be the director of their football schools worldwide and I will almost certainly accept that proposition."



DANI ALVES

Gomez faces 3 months out

AFP, Milan



Fiorentina's Mario Gomez is facing up to three months on the sidelines after suffering a right knee injury in a 1-1 draw with Cagliari on Sunday.

Former Bayern Munich striker Gomez was one of Vincenzo Montella's key signings in the summer but had to be stretchered off four minutes into the second half after clashing with Cagliari 'keeper Michael Agazzi.

The German gave club bosses hope when he asked to walk off the pitch despite initially being carried off on a stretcher.

Early reports suggested he had avoided serious injury, but domestic news agency ANSA reported Gomez had suffered a "sprained knee with a partial lesion of the medial collateral ligament".

If confirmed, it could sideline the German for two to three months.

Kaka adds to Milan woes

AFP, Milan



Brazilian forward Kaka has added to AC Milan's injury woes after being sidelined with an adductor muscle injury, the Serie A club confirmed Monday.

Kaka, expected to be out for at least two weeks, will now be unavailable for the Rossoneri when they host Celtic in their opening Champions League Group game at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Milan are already without forward Stephan El-Shaarawy, defenders Ignazio Abate and Mattia De Sciglio and midfielder Riccardo Montolivo, all of whom have picked up injuries in recent weeks.

Kaka joined Milan on a free transfer from Real Madrid two weeks ago, having enjoyed huge success with the Italian giants in a six-year spell from 2003-2009.

"Muscle damage on the left adductor," said a brief statement from Milan.