

Mourinho up against Di Matteo

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Jose Mourinho comes up against the only coach to have steered Chelsea to the Champions League title when the Blues travel to Roberto Di Matteo's Schalke 04 on Tuesday. Victory will confirm Chelsea's place in the Champions League's knock-out phase, but the focus will be on Mourinho's opposite number on the Schalke bench.

Chelsea coach Mourinho, the self-styled 'Special One', won the Champions League title as Inter Milan coach in 2010 and Porto boss in 2004, but the European crown has so far eluded him in his two stints at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea face Schalke in Gelsenkirchen as Group G leaders, three points clear of their second-placed German hosts, but the Premier League side have a much better goal difference. Di Matteo has won all four of his home matches since taking charge of Schalke last month and is in his first role since being sacked by Chelsea in November 2012, just six months after winning the Champions League title. Mourinho clearly did not like to be reminded that he will be up against the only coach to bring the Champions League to Stamford Bridge and insisted it is Chelsea against Schalke, not him against Di Matteo.



Manchester City defender Pablo Zabaleta (C) jogs with teammates prior to a training session at the City Football Academy yesterday ahead of their must win Champions League encounter against Bayern Munich. PHOTO: AFP

Do or die for Man City

AFP, London



Manchester City are teetering on the brink of a third Champions League group-phase elimination in four seasons ahead of Bayern Munich's visit to the Etihad Stadium on Tuesday. City's dismal 2-1 loss at home to CSKA Moscow in their previous outing left them bottom of Group E with only two points and they will be knocked out if they fail to beat Bayern and there is a winner in the Russian champions' home game with Roma. Manuel Pellegrini's side can draw some solace from the fact that Bayern, who shaded September's reverse fixture 1-0 thanks to a last-minute goal by former City player Jerome Boateng, are already guaranteed to qualify as group winners. City will also take inspiration from their

3-2 win away to Bayern in the group phase of last season's competition, although the circumstances then were quite different, with the visitors having already secured a place in the last 16. City's hand has been weakened by suspensions to Yaya Toure and Fernandinho, both of whom were sent off -- the former for a petulant shove -- during the defeat by CSKA Moscow on November 5. And although City came from behind to beat Swansea City 2-1 in the Premier League on Saturday, midfielder Samir Nasri knows that Pep Guardiola's ruthless Bayern side will be a very different proposition. "We are really lucky to still be in with a chance of qualifying because, with two points and two games left, normally you are out," said the former France international. "Now is our chance. We have to take it and play with nothing to lose. We can take

a lot (from beating Swansea), but a game against Bayern Munich will not be the same as a game against Swansea. "No disrespect to Swansea, who are a great team, but Bayern Munich have world-class players in every position." Bayern have gone 18 games without defeat since losing to Borussia Dortmund in the German Super Cup on August 13, winning all four of their games to date in the Champions League. The 2013 European champions extended their lead at the Bundesliga summit to seven points by crushing Hoffenheim 4-0 at the Allianz Arena on Saturday. Bastian Schweinsteiger made his first competitive appearance since starring for Germany in the World Cup final, coming on as a late substitute, and Guardiola has hinted that he could feature again at City. "It's good news for him and for us. I have seen how important Bastian is for the

FIXTURES

CSKA Moscow (RUS) v Roma (ITA), Man City (ENG) v Bayern Munich (GER), Apoel Nicosia (CYP) v Barcelona (ESP), Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) v Ajax (NED), Schalke (GER) v Chelsea (ENG), Sporting Lisbon (POR) v Maribor (SLO), BATE Borisov (BLR) v Porto (POR), Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) v Athletic Bilbao (ESP)

club and the fans," said Guardiola, who is bidding to win his third Champions League title as a coach after two previous successes with Barcelona. "With Philipp (Lahm), David (Alaba), (Javi) Martinez and Thiago (Alcantara) out, we now have a super midfielder back, but he has only trained for a week with us. "He's not ready for 90 minutes, but he has huge amounts of experience. But for this period now until Christmas with the Bundesliga and Champions League, he will of course be a big help to us."

Pressure rises on Rodgers

AFP, London

Brendan Rodgers admits he must restore Liverpool's shattered morale quickly after a dismal 3-1 defeat at Crystal Palace raised questions about his job security. Rodgers' team hit a new low in an already troubled campaign at rain-lashed Selhurst Park on Sunday as they crashed to a third successive loss in the Premier League.

With Liverpool's season teetering on the brink of a full-blown crisis, Reds manager Rodgers acknowledged he will start to hear more criticism and calls for his sacking unless he can reverse the downward spiral immediately.

"I'm not arrogant enough to think I will be in the job through anything. Any manager will tell you they have to win games," Rodgers said. "I have a great communication line with the owners. We've been honest with each other.

"But ultimately you have to get results. They have to see development on the field and, barring this period, I think our development has been good and very fast."

Falcao back in training

REUTERS, London

Manchester United forward Radamel Falcao is back in training after overcoming a niggling calf problem, the 28-year-old confirmed on Twitter on Sunday. Falcao has not featured since a 2-2 draw against West Bromwich Albion on Oct. 20. On Thursday, manager Louis van Gaal announced Falcao could be out for a further two weeks after suffering a "new injury" but the forward could now feature in next weekend's game against Hull City.

Messi eyes more history

AFP, Nicosia



Fresh from becoming the all-time leading goalscorer in La Liga, Lionel Messi will have his sights on more history as he looks to repeat that feat in the Champions League when Barcelona visit APOEL Nicosia on Tuesday. Messi's double in the Catalans' 2-0 win at Ajax three weeks ago took him level with Real Madrid legend Raul's record tally of 71 goals in the competition and ensured Barca's progress to the last 16 for an 11th consecutive season. However, Luis Enrique's men still need at least a point in Cyprus to ensure they can win Group F with victory over Paris Saint-Germain at home in their final group match early next month. Messi's latest record feat overshadowed arguably Barca's best performance of the season so far in crushing Europa League holders Sevilla 5-1 at the weekend, with the Argentine scoring his 27th hat-trick for the club along with goals from Neymar and Ivan Rakitic.

Luis Suarez's attempts to break his Barcelona duck were frustrated once more but Enrique has no concerns over the Uruguayan's ability to find the back of the net as he again proved his worth with a fourth assist in as many games. "It will come. To have a goalscorer of that quality and generosity is marvellous," said Enrique. "They are all playing for each other. No one doubts that Suarez will score many goals for Barcelona." Rakitic also hailed the importance of such a resounding win after a difficult couple of weeks which saw Barca lose to Real Madrid and Celta Vigo in consecutive games before struggling to overcome Almeria 2-1 ahead of the international break. "It was important to play well and recover good feelings, but above all to regain the confidence of the fans." The Croatian is likely to team up with Xavi Hernandez in midfield as Andres Iniesta has been left out of the 22-man squad that will travel to Nicosia on Monday, despite nearing a return to action after a month out.

Real to play Down Under

AFP, Melbourne

European champions Real Madrid will headline a pre-season international tournament at Australia's 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground next year, organisers said on Monday. The glamorous Spanish outfit, featuring Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale and James Rodriguez among others, will play in the International Champions Cup along with an English Premier League team and Italian Serie A side. Organisers said the other teams, reported to be Manchester City and Inter Milan, would be revealed in the next few weeks. The tournament will take place from July 18-24. With the securing of Real Madrid's huge box-office appeal, organisers are hoping to build on the local appetite for top European clubs after a 95,000 crowd watched English Premier League Liverpool's 2-0 win over Australia's Melbourne Victory at the MCG last year. "We are aware of the large number of Real Madrid fans in Australia and it will be a pleasure to be close to them and give them the best that the club has to offer," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti said in a statement. The round-robin tournament in Australia is an offshoot of the main International Champions Cup which is staged in North America and next year will feature eight teams. Ten-time European champions Real Madrid were named FIFA's Club of the 20th Century and are worth an estimated 500 million euros (\$618 million).



Inter Milan midfielder Joel Chukwuma Obi (R) is ecstatic after scoring the equaliser against AC Milan during their Serie A clash at the San Siro on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Di Natale hits magic mark

AFP, Milan



Udinese striker Antonio Di Natale expressed his delight after scoring his 200th Serie A goal on what was his 400th league appearance Sunday in a 1-1 draw with Chievo. "I'm delighted with the record. I want to thank my teammates, my family and my parents who are no longer here," Di Natale told Sky Sport Italia. Di Natale last season went back on his decision to retire and started this campaign determined to match the 205-goal tally of Italian great Roberto Baggio, who is sixth on Serie A's all-time list of top scorers. The current record is held by Silvio

Piola, who retired in 1954 with 274 league goals. With 237, Roma playmaker Francesco Totti is the top active goalscorer in the league. Asked about breaking Baggio's 205-goal mark, Di Natale added: "It's been a target since the start of the season, but we'll take it a game at a time." Despite playing for Udinese, a club that has neither won the Italian league nor Cup, Di Natale has won Serie A's 'Capocannoniere' top-scorer award two years in succession. In 2010 he scored 29 league goals to leave Inter's Diego Milito (22) a distant second and then hit the net 28 times to leave Uruguayan Edinson Cavani, then of Napoli, second by just two goals.

Milan derby ends all square

AFP, Milan



Inter midfielder Joel Obi struck a second-half equaliser in a hard-fought 1-1 draw away to AC Milan to save Roberto Mancini's blushes on the Italian's return to Serie A after a six-year absence on Sunday. Mancini, who led the Serie A giants to seven trophies including three consecutive league titles from 2004 to 2008, was handed a San Siro baptism of fire on his first game back at Inter after replacing Walter Mazzarri a fortnight ago. On his previous spell at Inter, Mancini had won four, lost five and drawn one in the 'Derby della Madonnina' between the city rivals. After Jeremy Menez struck in the 23rd minute for the hosts, Nigerian Obi's 61st minute goal secured a deserved share of the points for the Nerazzurri. Milan moved back up to seventh

place and are now 13 points adrift of champions and leaders Juventus, with Inter a point further adrift in ninth. As expected, former Manchester City and Galatasaray handler Mancini ditched the misfiring 3-5-2 used by Mazzarri for a 4-3-1-2 formation, with Nemanja Vidic starting on the bench alongside influential midfielder Hernanes. With the San Siro only several hundred supporters short of the 80,000 mark, Inzaghi's side looked the more nervous in the first city derby of the season. Ghanaian Sulley Muntari almost gifted Inter an eighth-minute opener when his mis-hit pass sent Mauro Icardi clear on goal only for Milan goalkeeper Diego Lopez to somehow block the Argentinian's attempted chip with his trailing leg. Three minutes later Lopez had to get down smartly to block a low 35-yard drive from Fredy Guarin.

Menez was off target with a free kick from 25 yards that floated over the crossbar, but the Frenchman made amends to send the Rossoneri support into raptures in the 23rd minute. Stephan El Shaarawy's one-two with Michael Essien left the Milan forward in space deep on the left and Menez, unmarked, met the forward's low cross with the inside of his right foot to beat the outstretched Handanovic inside the keeper's far post. It was Menez's fifth goal of the campaign, and second in succession following his strike in a 2-2 draw with Sampdoria a fortnight ago. The Nerazzurri emerged fired up for the second half but spurned several chances to level. From a corner, Zdravko Kuzmanovic saw his close-range shot blocked by Lopez and when Mateo Kovacic whipped the rebound across the edge of the box, it bobbed before being cleared to Icardi, who skied his effort into the Inter stand.