

Final Whistle



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WENGER LAMENTS DISPLAY

Arsene Wenger admitted Arsenal were just not convincing enough as they ended their Champions League Group F campaign with a 3-1 defeat in Olympiacos - but the Greeks missed out on the knockout stages.

Despite qualification and top spot already secure before Tuesday night's clash in Athens, Wenger - taking charge of his 200th European tie - expected better as defensive lapses from what was an experienced back four again proved costly as the visitors trailed 2-0 at the break.

In-form Algeria striker Rafik Djebbour slotted home on 16 minutes after a loose ball was not cut out at the edge of the area, before substitute keeper Vito Mannone - on for the injured Lukasz Fabianski - made a hash of his clearance as David Fuster put the hosts in the driving seat to reach the last 16.

Yossi Benayoun slotting home a consolation on 57 minutes before Francois Modesto secured victory with a minute left.

However, that was not enough as rivals Marseille produced a late rally to win at Borussia Dortmund and deny the Athens club qualification as they had to make do with the Europa League instead.

Wenger, who revealed full-back Andre Santos was set for a spell on the sidelines after going off with an ankle injury, felt the fact Arsenal had nothing to play for proved a telling factor.

"We had the early chances, but Olympiacos played a very committed game and made a good battle," said Wenger. "We lost too many balls in the first half and overall became a bit insecure."

FA looking at Suarez 'gesture'

The Football Association are looking at allegations Liverpool striker Luis Suarez made an offensive gesture after Monday night's 1-0 defeat at Fulham.

Photographs published on Tuesday appear to show the Uruguay international making a gesture in the direction of the crowd as he left the pitch at Craven Cottage.

The FA are aware of the alleged incident and it is understood they are now looking at the matter.

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish was cautious when quizzed after the game about the allegations.

"I've not seen the picture and I am not taking anybody's word for it," he said. "But until you have proved it is true to me, I won't comment."

Blues win to avoid exit

Andre Villas-Boas believes Chelsea's success on Tuesday evening gives a "slap in the face" to their critics.

The Blues manager avoided an early Champions League exit thanks to a Didier Droghba-inspired win over Valencia.

The 33-year-old broke the deadlock with a third-minute drive and, after Ramires prodded home at second, secured victory by neatly flicking in a Juan Mata through-ball in the second half.

Victory confirms progression to the knockout stage as Group E winners, which Villas-Boas hopes will quieten the naysayers.

"It helps to score straight away in the game," Villas-Boas said.

"It gave the team the right emotional stance for the rest of the game and gave a full boost in confidence.

"To get the second not long afterwards made the team even more confident on what was happening.

"In terms of the result and what happens in us finishing top, it's fantastic. It's against all odds.

"Nobody, or anybody here, would have bet on us finishing top, but it's happened and it is very, very gratifying for the team.

"The team were excellent. It is a win of human values, of team spirit, solidarity,

responsibility, strength of character, ability to take criticism, resilience, and this is a great win for Chelsea players.

"They deserve a respect that they don't get. We've been continually chased by different kinds of people, but today we've given everybody (those critics) a slap in the face."

Villas-Boas has seen his squad selection, philosophy and position come under increasing scrutiny recently.

The Portuguese manager believes the column inches dedicated to Chelsea is part of a wider "persecution" and called it "out of this world".

Asked whether he detected anger among players, Villas-Boas retorted: "No, I just think the reaction has been over the top. There's only one team in the country at the moment, and that's Man City."

"I hope they qualify sincerely, but the approach to them is if they qualify they qualify, and if they don't they don't."

"We don't get that margin from you guys. That's not the same as with us. I will never criticise your editorial choices, but it is the reality."

"People take perspectives that are out of this world, from criticising our players to criticising choices."

Mancini: Tevez sale important

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini has said it is "important" to sell Carlos Tevez and would be happy to see him move to Italy.

The striker does not appear to have a future at City and has been absent from the club for the past month.

AC Milan revealed on Monday they had been given permission by City to speak to representatives of the player.

Mancini, speaking at a press conference to preview Wednesday's Champions League clash against Bayern Munich, said: "I don't know what the situation with Carlos is in this moment. I think for us it is important to sell him."

"We can do this, to sell Carlos, for him and the club. If he has a chance to go to Italy I am happy for him."

Tevez's advisor, Kia Joorabchian, has stated that his client's priority is to secure a move to another European club.

O'Neill eyes drop zone

New Sunderland manager Martin O'Neill has called on his players to start winning matches soon so they can drag themselves away from the relegation zone.

O'Neill took over the manager's position at the Stadium of Light on Saturday before watching the Black Cats squander a 1-0 lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves.

The defeat stretched the Weariders' winless run to five matches and also saw them slip to 17th in the Barclays Premier League table, just one point from safety.

O'Neill took charge of his first training session at the club on Tuesday and chose the media conference that followed to remind his players that they must start winning games fast if they are to move away from the drop zone.

He said: "Obviously we are in a little bit of trouble at the moment. We have been losing games and we could have had a few more points on the board."

TUESDAY'S RESULTS

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

GROUP E

Chelsea 3-0 Valencia
Genk 1-1 Bayer Leverkusen

Table

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Chelsea	6	3	2	1	13	4	11
Bayer Leverkusen	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Valencia	6	2	2	2	12	7	8
Genk	6	0	3	3	2	16	3

GROUP F

Olympique Lyonnais 3-1 Arsenal
Borussia Dortmund 2-1 Marseille

Table

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Arsenal	6	3	2	1	7	6	11
Marseille	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Olympique Lyonnais	6	3	0	3	8	6	9
Borussia Dortmund	6	1	1	4	6	12	4

GROUP G

Apoel Nicosia 0-2 Shakhtar Donetsk
FC Porto 0-0 Zenit St. Petersburg

GROUP H

Barcelona 4-0 BATE
Zenit 2-2 AC Milan

"Sunday's game (against Blackburn) is very important for us. The players are aware of that and we just need to start winning some matches. The sooner we can do that the better."

Despite their recent poor form, O'Neill has been impressed with what he has seen from the players in the short time he has had with them.

"Among the players there is very good spirit," the 59-year-old said. "We had a training session today. I would have expected them to be positive and they were just that."

Cahill appeal successful

Bolton defender Gary Cahill has had his claim for wrongful dismissal at the weekend upheld.

The England international was sent off after just 17 minutes of the 3-0 defeat at Tottenham for a foul on Scott Parker just inside his own half.

Referee Stuart Atwell had shown the red card for denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity.

However, Bolton lodged an appeal against that and an independent panel have upheld their claim for wrongful dismissal, the Football Association have confirmed.

As a result Cahill's subsequent one-match suspension has been withdrawn.

Berbatov ruled out

Dimitar Berbatov has been ruled out of Manchester United's make-or-break Champions League trip to Basle leaving Sir Alex Ferguson to contend with a striker shortage.

After Javier Hernandez suffered an ankle injury at Aston Villa on Saturday that is set to rule him out for a month, Ferguson expressed the hope Berbatov would have recovered from his own ankle problem to make the flight to Switzerland.

MERSON ON DRINK-DRIVE CHARGE

Former England midfielder Paul Merson has been summonsed to appear in court to face a charge of driving with excess alcohol following a motorway crash.

The 43-year-old Sky Sports pundit was arrested after his Mercedes collided with a lorry registered to the Ministry of Defence in the early hours of October 12.

Merson later claimed he had fallen asleep behind the wheel before colliding with the central reservation at 3.12am.

The former Arsenal player was breathalysed at the side of the M40, near Warwick, before being taken to hospital for treatment to a cut to the head.

A Warwickshire Police spokesman said: "A 43-year-old man who was arrested following a collision on the M40 in Warwickshire on October 12 will appear in court to face a charge of driving with excess alcohol."

But the Bulgarian was again absent on Tuesday morning, meaning Ferguson can only count on Wayne Rooney and Danny Welbeck, who has made just one substitute appearance since suffering a muscular problem on England duty last month, in addition to Federico Macheda and Mame Biram Diouf, who have made minimal contributions so far this season.

Rooney is due to face a UEFA appeal hearing in Nyon on Thursday in an attempt to reduce the three-match ban that threatens to rule him out of the entire Euro 2012 group phase.

By then, the 26-year-old will know whether he has any further Champions League action ahead of him this term.

After requiring a last-gasp Ashley Young goal to salvage a point at Old Trafford, United have already encountered difficulties overcoming Basle this term. And they require at least a point at St Jakob Park on Wednesday evening to claim a place in the last 16.

Private funeral for Speed

The funeral of Gary Speed will take place later this week, the League Managers Association (LMA) has confirmed.

The private funeral and service will take place in Wales and will be for family and close friends. It is by invitation only. But a public memorial service for the Wales national football team manager is being planned for the new year.

A spokesman for the LMA said: "At this time, Louise Speed and her family wish to express their deep appreciation for the very generous and clearly heartfelt tributes paid to Gary and his memory by the public and all forms of the media."

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Tel: +44 151 236 4124 (UK)
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E-mail: news@headlandmedia.com
Website: www.headlandmedia.com

TERRY REVEALS DELIGHT

Chelsea captain John Terry said he hoped his team's dip in form was over after the Blues avoided an early Champions League exit.

"We're obviously delighted (with the result)," Terry said.

"We left it too late in the group but it was a good solid performance and we knew it was going to be very difficult, which it was.

"It was important we didn't concede and we did that. We set out with a game plan and we still had to get a second goal. The manager said at half-time that the third one would kill them off completely, which it did. They were deflated after that."

"Genk was a tough place to go but we're delighted to be top and we're delighted to be in the next round.

"We had our dip in form in the season and hopefully that's the end of it. Newcastle (3-0 away win on Saturday) was the building block."

"Mrs Speed is especially grateful for the sympathetic way that the media has respected the family's privacy in these extremely distressing circumstances."

"She is also acutely aware how Gary touched the lives of so many people and that each of them would wish to thank him for the joy he brought to them."

"Accordingly, a memorial service to celebrate Gary's life will take place soon and hopefully this will allow as many people to attend as wish to be there to pay their final respects and tributes to Gary."

Speed, who played for clubs including Newcastle, Leeds and Bolton, was found hanged at his Cheshire home last month.

Any donations in his memory should be sent either to the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation or the John Hartson Foundation.

Mancini unhappy with Bayern boss

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini intends to speak to Bayern Munich chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge about his persistent sniping at the English club.