

EUROPEAN REVIEW AND OUTLOOK FOR PREMIERSHIP CLUBS

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Mark Viduka (white shirt) heads Leeds United's third goal against Lazio in the Champions League game that finished 3-3.

All four remaining English clubs progressed with varying degrees of conviction into the next round of their respective European competitions last week, and all now face daunting but fascinating ties in a fortnight's time.

Sir Alex Ferguson demanded an improvement from his team when they faced Austrian champions Sturm Graz at Old Trafford and he got it as a reshuffled and revitalised Manchester United set about their visitors with great urgency and commitment. Phil Neville, Wes Brown, David Beckham, Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole had all been dropped, but United quickly found their passing range and rhythm.

The impressive Nicky Butt gave them an early lead his first European goal for United with a superbly struck drive, and the result was never in doubt after that. Teddy Sheringham and skipper Roy Keane added further goals as the red Devils completed a 3-0 victory that carried them comfortably into the quarter-finals behind Group winners Valencia.

Leeds United had already qualified for the quarter-finals when they lined up to face Lazio at Elland Road, but both sides contributed to an entertaining

game that finished 3-3. Fabrizio Ravanelli gave Lazio the lead but Lee Bowyer, having spent the day being cross-examined in the witness box at Hull Crown Court, produced an exquisite chip to equalise.

Almost immediately the Italians were back in front, Sinisa Mihajlovic netting from the penalty spot after Dominic Matteo fouled Ravanelli. Shortly before half-time Leeds levelled again when Jason Wilcox prodded a corner from Gary Kelly over the line, and the Yorkshire club took a deserved lead just after the hour, Mark Viduka heading home Ian Harte's free-kick. Frustratingly for Leeds, however, Mihajlovic forced a draw with a direct free kick in the final minute.

Most of the drama, if relatively few goals, came in Group C, where a disappointing Arsenal slipped to a 1-0 defeat by Group leaders Bayern Munich at the Olympic Stadium. The Gunners, frequently exposed in defence and rarely posing much of an attacking threat, fell behind in the tenth minute. Giovane Elber, the Brazilian striker who had contemptuously dismissed Arsenal's threat before the game started, dived full length to head a cross from Bixente Lizarazu past David Seaman. The goalkeeper was one of the few plusses for Arsenal on the night, making crucial saves to keep the score at 1-0.

However, the other major plus for the Gunners came from Moscow, where Spartak held Lyons to a 1-1 draw. Both goals came from the penalty spot, and the result meant Arsenal, who finished the Group with the same number of points as Lyon, progressed because of their superior head-to-head record against the French club. Arsenal head beaten Lyon away and drawn with them at home.

It was a fortunate outcome for Arsenal, whose manager Arsene Wenger knows they must improve significantly to make any further impact in the competition.

The results meant that each of the English clubs finished second in their respective groups, thereby avoiding one another in the quarter-finals - the draw for which was made on Friday. It paired Manchester United with Bayern Munich, Leeds United with Deportivo La Coruna, and Arsenal with Valencia. Real Madrid, the European Cup holders, face Galatasaray, the Turkish champions and UEFA Cup holders, in the other tie.

In each case the English clubs face formidable obstacles - though all will be relieved to have avoided Real Madrid at this stage. For Manchester United, the draw has provided a re-run of the 1999 final which they won so dramatically against Bayern with virtually the last kick of the game, having

trailed for most of it. The Germans proved against Arsenal that they are a powerful force to be reckoned with, and United will be hoping to secure a lead from the first leg at Old Trafford.

As for Arsenal, their tie against last year's runners-up Valencia brings back memories of 1980, when the same two teams faced each other in the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup. The game finished 0-0 after extra-time, with Valencia triumphing 5-4 in a penalty shoot-out. The Gunners will be looking for a different outcome this time, but will have to make sure that home advantage really counts when they entertain the Spaniards in the first leg at Highbury.

Man of the match in that 1980 final was Arsenal's then 22-year-old centre-half David O'Leary. Now manager of Leeds United, O'Leary is preparing his young team to take on last season's Spanish champions in an intriguing first leg at Elland Road. In many ways, Leeds have been the most impressive of England's Champions League representatives during this campaign, and they will relish the prospect of upsetting the odds again in the quarter-finals. They will be encouraged by the fact that Arsenal thrashed Deportivo 5-1 at Highbury in last season's UEFA Cup competition, but cannot take anything for granted.

If Leeds do triumph, and if Arsenal overcome Valencia – both big ifs at this stage – there will be an all-English semi-final. That's a mouth-watering prospect – and could even pave the way for an all-English final. However, three Spanish, one German and a Turkish club will all be keen to prevent such an outcome.

Meanwhile Liverpool swept aside the challenge of FC Porto in the second leg of the UEFA Cup quarter-final at Anfield. Goals from Danny Murphy and Michael Owen gave them a comfortable 2-0 victory, the draw then pairing them with Barcelona in what promises to be an epic battle of styles over two eagerly awaited legs.

The winners, who will meet either Kaiserslautern of Germany or another Spanish side, Alaves, in the final, must be considered the favourites to lift the trophy.

If Liverpool can defeat Barcelona, they will therefore be on course for a unique cup treble. They have already won the League Cup, face Second Division Wycombe Wanderers in the semi-final of the FA Cup, and are well-placed in the UEFA Cup. If Gerard Houllier's team are ultimately successful on all three fronts, it will signal a convincing return to the glory days that became so frequent for Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s.



Manchester United's Paul Scholes brings the ball away from Gyorgy Korsos of Sturm Graz during United's 3-0 Champions League victory over the Austrians.

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