



View of the Alvalade stadium in Lisbon where the UEFA Cup final will take place on Wednesday. Sporting Lisbon will play against CSKA Moscow.

AFP

CSKA's quest for Russia's first European trophy

LISBON: CSKA Moscow's presence in the UEFA Cup final against Sporting Lisbon here on Wednesday throws up the prospect of a first ever European trophy for a Russian club.

Coach Valery Gazzaev's side have knocked out impressive clubs such as Benfica, Partizan Belgrade, Auxerre and Parma on their way to this final at the Jose Alvalade stadium, ironically Sporting's home ground.

Dynamo Moscow's defeat in the now-defunct European Cup Winners Cup final in 1972 was the sole appearance by any Russian club in a final, though if you add clubs from the former Soviet Union, you find three Cup Winners Cup champions - Dynamo Kiev in 1975 and 1986, and Dynamo Tbilisi in 1981.

Gazzaev has reason to be optimistic with his side, which has a wealth of talent in the attacking department as long as the youthful average age of the team - just 22 - does not count against them.

Brazilians Wagner Love and Daniel Carvalho have an inspirational effect on the rest of the team together with Russian under-21 international

Yuri Zhirkov, who was superb in the 4-0 thrashing of Auxerre in the home leg of the quarter-final, scoring two goals and setting up another.

However, their first ever victory over an Italian club, in their 3-0 aggregate win over Parma in the semi-finals, really showed their pedigree.

CSKA were invincible on their own ground, scoring 11 goals without reply in their four home matches from the last 32 onwards.

Moscow's 19-year-old keeper Igor Akinfeev even told the Russian press he was looking beyond this year's UEFA Cup, saying: "If we continue playing the way we have been, we will soon be playing in the Champions League final."

But, CSKA know Sporting will prove tough opposition particularly as the final is on their own turf. Sporting have a fully-fit squad, including Brazilian Liedson who is the top scorer in Portugal with 24 goals.

Liedson was suspended for their 1-0 defeat at Benfica on Saturday following his fifth yellow card but is available for Wednesday.

Coach Jose Peseiro has Nigerian defender Joseph Enakarihire and

PREVIOUS 10 UEFA CUP WINNERS	
2004: Valencia (ESP)	1999: Parma (ITA)
2003: FC Porto (POR)	1998: Inter Milan (ITA)
2002: Feyenoord (NED)	1997: Schalke 04 (GER)
2001: Liverpool (ENG)	1996: Bayern Munich (GER)
2000: Galatasaray (TUR)	1995: Parma (ITA)

UEFA CUP ROUTES TO THE FINAL	
Sporting Lisbon (POR)	(H) 2-1 (A) 2-3
1st rd: Rapid Vienna (AUT) (H)	CSKA Moscow
2-0 (A) 0-0	Qualified for last 32 after finishing third behind Chelsea (ENG) and FC Porto (POR) in Group H of the Champions League
Group stage: Panionios (GRE)	Last 32: Benfica (POR) (H) 2-0 (A) 1-1
4-1, Dynamo Tbilisi (GEO) 4-0, Sochaux (FRA) 0-1, Newcastle 1-1	Last 16: Partizan Belgrade (SEM) (A) 1-1 (H) 2-0
Last 32: Feyenoord (NED) (H) 2-1 (A) 2-1	Quarter-finals: Auxerre (FRA) (H) 4-0 (A) 0-2
Last 16: Middlesbrough (ENG) (A) 3-2 (H) 1-0	Semi-finals: Parma (ITA) (A) 0-0 (H) 3-0
Quarter-finals: Newcastle (ENG) (A) 0-1 (H) 4-1	
Semi-finals: Alkmaar (NED)	

midfielders Rogerio and Carlos Martins back from injury which will boost his pool of players to choose from.

Neutrals have Sporting as the fa-

vourites. Only 2,000 to 3,000 CSKA supporters are likely to be present in the 50,000-capacity stadium which will be a huge plus to Sporting.

The stadium opened in August

2003 and was used for the Euro 2004 tournament won by Greece and is the second largest footballing venue in Lisbon behind Benfica's Stadium of Light.

Portugal's recent successes in European competition show the country has the players to excel at the highest level. Apart from Portugal reaching last year's Euro 2004 final, FC Porto won the Champions League last season and the UEFA Cup the year before.

Just days before Portugal's most important sporting occasion of the year, supporters are already getting in the mood by decorating their cars with flags and scarves in the green and white colours of Sporting.

And billboards advertising the match can be seen on the main roads of the capital as well as other strategic places such as airports. And Barcelona's Deco, who won last season's Champions League with Porto, is firmly behind his countrymen. "Sporting's performance this season proves the quality of Portuguese football. I fully back them," he said.

AFP

Team China to challenge 32nd America's Cup

By Chen Xiangfeng

Six hundreds years ago, Zheng He set sail from China heading west with a fleet, then unparalleled in maritime terms, and reached as far as the Cape of Good Hope. His magnificent early Ming Dynasty junk was being compared to a floating city, one capable of supporting voyages of epic proportions.

This year, China will make another nautical stride by producing a sail boat good enough to participate in the 32nd America's Cup. The result will exemplify the team work and advances of the country's technological development.

The China Aquatic Sports Administration Centre (CASAC) and China Yachting Association announced at weekend that Team China has been officially accepted as a challenger for the 32nd America's Cup, marking the first time for China to take part in the 154-year-old premier water sports event.

"We will become the only Asian team taking part in the 2007 race.

China's participation in the America's cup will help make the event more international," said Wei Di, director of CASAC. "It is also a platform for us to learn from the world's top sailing teams." With 12 challengers representing nine countries, this is not just one of the biggest, but it is by far the most diverse America's Cup in history.

There were 13 challengers from six countries in Australia in 1987, the first time the event was held outside the United States and 11 challengers from seven countries in 1999 in Auckland. Between 1851 and 1967, each edition of the America's Cup featured just two nations - one defender and one challenger. Since 1970 the number of challengers has steadily grown, further fuelled in 1983 by the introduction of the Louis Vuitton Cup - the qualifying round for the America's Cup final.

"Team China will compete in about ten stages from this year until 2007 (when the final will take place)," Wei said. "The event is a showcase of a country's development of Economy, Science and technology.

By competing with the world's top teams, China will benefit in terms of producing top level sailing boats and improving the skills of Chinese sailors and crew."

China will send 3-5 people for training and at least three Chinese will take part in the 2007 event. But there will be no Chinese yachtsmen or crew for the time being due to a current dearth of skill and experience.

"Team China will need a group of 70 people, including 17 crew and engineers, technicians and market-staff," said Pierre Mas, manager of the Team China Management Company, which was established by Equity Investment, a leading Chinese venture capital investment company and Le Defi, a French Sports management company.

"The Swiss holder Alinghi's crew were mainly from New Zealand and Germany," said Pierre. "But China will take advantage of Le Defi's experiences in competing in the past two events to cultivate future Chinese yachtsmen."

"For the time being we will recruit

the main crew from France and little by little, we are going to introduce Chinese sailors."

Big bucks event

As a big-money event with a budget of 30 million Euros, and relatively unknown in China, there are worries it will have trouble attracting sponsors and spectators. But Wang Chaoyong, chairman of China Equity Investment, said he was in touch with a number of booming Chinese firms who are looking to increase their profile on the international stage.

He revealed that Brilliance China Automotive, one of China's leading auto companies, and CITIC International have shown an interest in becoming sponsors of the team. "These companies have their sights set on the European market so it is a chance for Chinese firms to promote their image through the event, which attracts millions of viewers."

"Companies who are listed abroad like Ping An insurance, China Mobile and China Life Insurance Co are also possible sponsors.

"We are going to have one major sponsor from China and two or three from other countries," said Wang

"It is a chance for Chinese companies to promote their image through an event which attracts millions of spectators.

"More importantly, as long as our team achieves a good result, more people will pay attention to China's sailing sports."

The effort to spread sailing sports around China has started, including Qingdao's bidding as a stage venue for the 32nd America's Cup.

"We have started preparations to bid for the qualification. I hope there will be one stage held in Qingdao in 2006," said Zang Aimin, deputy mayor of the city, the venue of the sailing events for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Team China's training and the building of the boat are also expected to take place in Qingdao.

"To be involved in preparations for the America's Cup is a great chance to test our capability and help improve the level of Qingdao's sailing base," said the mayor.

IN BRIEF

TENNIS

Federer aiming high after Hamburg win

LISBON: World No 1 Roger Federer has set his sights on sweeping the remaining three tennis Grand Slams this year as well as the season-ending Masters finals in Shanghai.

Coming off his straight sets win over Richard Gasquet in the Hamburg Masters final on Sunday, the Swiss star was in Portugal to accept a distinction at the annual Laureus sports awards.

"I failed at the Australian Open, but the season is going well, I already have six titles," Federer said. "Wimbledon and Roland Garros (French Open) are important goals, but it would be great to win the final three Slams of the season and the Masters," he added.

"If I win in Paris it means I have won every Slam, which is something only a few players can claim."

The French open, where Federer has struggled in recent years, gets underway in Paris next Monday and he is the top seed.

The win in Hamburg was a record 19th straight win in ATP finals since losing to the Czech Republic's Jiri Novak at Gstaad in 2003, the week after winning his first Wimbledon title.

Blues at the US Open for tennis greats

NEW YORK: US Open tennis courts will be blue this year in the hope of making the sport's yellow balls easier for stadium spectators and television viewers to see, the US Tennis Association announced on Monday. Chris Widmaier, a USTA spokesman, said the year's final Grand Slam event will convert from green courts and the change will be made in 10 hardcourt events leading to the Flushing Meadows fortnight that begins August 29.

The new blue debut for the courts will be at Indianapolis starting July 18 in the first hardcourt event leading to the US Open.

Patience pays off as Frenchman gets Open invitation

PARIS: Frenchman Olivier Patience was handed a place in next week's French Open on Monday.

His compatriot Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, ranked 135 in the world, was given the final wildcard spot in the men's draw. Patience, ranked 141 in the world, benefited from the withdrawal of Argentina's Mariano Zabaleta, whose foot injury allowed another Frenchman Julien Benneteau into the main draw automatically and opened up another wild card spot.

Spain's David Sanchez also got a place in the main draw because of the withdrawal of Argentina's Agustin Calleri, who suffered a back injury. The French Open runs from May 23 to June 5.

CYCLING

Charmed Petacchi takes Tour of Italy first stage

RAVENNA, Italy: A gift of a panther keyring as a lucky charm from his wife paid off here on Monday as Italian sprint ace Alessandro Petacchi won the ninth stage of the Tour of Italy after a mass sprint for his first win in this year's race.

But countryman Danilo Di Luca, riding for Liquigas, retained the overall lead.

It was 31-year-old Petacchi's 16th victory in the Giro, including nine wins last season, and he finished ahead of compatriot and Olympic road race champion Paolo Bettini and Aurelien Clerc of Switzerland.

Petacchi, helped by his team in the final kilometres, made his dash for the line with about 200m to go. Australian's Robbie McEwen followed Petacchi, but was not able to overhaul him and finished fourth ahead of German veteran Erik Zabel, who was fifth.

"It was too far to launch it that is for sure," admitted a relieved Petacchi. "It is the third spirit of the Giro but the first I have really been involved in," added Petacchi, referring to the first where he got caught out and in the second he crashed.

FOOTBALL

Liverpool striker Cisse still not fully fit

LONDON: Liverpool striker Djibril Cisse has said he is still well short of match fitness as his side prepare for the Champions League final, the BBC reported on Monday.

Cisse scored both goals in the 2-1 defeat of Aston Villa on Sunday, his first goals since returning from a severe fracture of his leg. "I'm not thinking about starting against AC Milan, that's a decision for the manager to make," said Cisse. "I feel good but I'm still only about 70 or 80 per cent fit."

Liverpool play AC Milan in Istanbul's Ataturk stadium on May 25 in Europe's showcase final.

Cisse surprised medical staff at Anfield with his rapid recovery from the double fracture he suffered against Blackburn back in October 2004. He joined the Anfield club last summer for 14 million pounds, but only played 15 games before sustaining the major injury.

Ronaldo targets goal of peace on Mideast visit

RAMALLAH, West Bank:

Brazilian and Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo was mobbed by dozens of young Palestinian football fans on Monday as he paid a morale-boosting visit to the poverty-stricken West Bank.

The World Cup winning forward, visiting anti-poverty projects in his capacity as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations, was handed a traditional Palestinian keffiyeh headscarf by one wheelchair-bound fan as he watched youngsters stage a kickabout at a playground in the town of Ramallah. "My goal during this visit is to contribute as much as I can towards peace in the world," he told reporters. "In my name and in the name of the Real Madrid players, I thank you for this reception and I promise you to talk about the Palestinian people when I go back to Brazil," the former world player of the year added.

Prime minister Ahmed Qorei, who was on hand to greet Ronaldo, thanked him for helping boost the morale of the Palestinian people.

Achilles costs Henry FA Cup final place

LONDON: Arsenal suffered a huge blow ahead of Saturday's FA Cup final with Manchester United as it was revealed leading scorer Thierry Henry would miss it because of an Achilles tendon injury.

The 27-year-old had only just returned to the first team after recovering from a groin injury, playing in last week's 7-0 humbling of Everton, but aggravating an old Achilles injury in the process. He missed their 2-1 defeat by Birmingham on Sunday and the injury will not heal in time for him to face Manchester United.

Both sides are going for their first trophy of the season having missed out on the Premiership to Chelsea and failing to make a mark on either the Champions League or League Cup.

Mourinho has no time for excuses

LONDON: Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho said on Monday that he was not satisfied with fellow managers who used the excuse of needing time to settle into a new team and using that as a reason for their lack of success on the pitch.

Mourinho said it was a very easy excuse to hide behind, and he should know as in his first season he has just guided Chelsea to their first domestic title in 50 years with a runaway 12-point advantage over Arsenal. "Yes," replied the Portuguese when asked if he had expected to be able to mould a team together so quickly.

"I always think when we managers say, 'We need time, we need years', I think it is the best excuse and protection we can have in football. "I need three years, so during these three years I can lose matches and nobody touches me," I think is a good excuse.

"I thought we could build a team ready to compete and ready to start the season just with the pre-season. Of course, you have to improve, you have to work, and I have to say, in English football, it is not easy to do that because we have no time."

SCOREBOARD

BASEBALL				
NEW YORK: Results from the MLB matches on Monday (home team in CAPS):				
Los Angeles 3 CLEVELAND 1				
WASHINGTON 5 MILWAUKEE 2				
NEW YORK METS 9 CINCINNATI 2				
Texas 7 CHICAGO WHITE SOX 6				
ATHLETICS 6 Boston 4				
New York Yankees 6 SEATTLE 3				
SAN DIEGO 5 Atlanta 3				
Florida 6 LOS ANGELES 2				
Standings				
American League				
Eastern Division				
Baltimore	W	L	PCT	GB
Boston	22	16	.579	2 1/2
Toronto	20	18	.526	4 1/2
New York	20	19	.513	5
Tampa Bay	14	25	.359	11
Central Division				
Chicago	27	12	.692	-
Minnesota	21	15	.583	4 1/2
Detroit	17	19	.472	8 1/2

Cleveland	16	21	.432	10
Kansas City	11	27	.289	15 1/2
Western Division				
Los Angeles	22	16	.579	-
Texas	21	18	.538	1 1/2
Seattle	15	23	.395	7
Oakland	15	23	.395	7
National League				
Eastern Division				
Atlanta	23	15	.605	-
Florida	20	15	.571	1 1/2
Washington	21	17	.553	2
New York	20	19	.513	3 1/2
Philadelphia	17	22	.436	6 1/2
Central Division				
St Louis	24	13	.649	-
Milwaukee	18	19	.486	6
Pittsburgh	17	19	.472	6 1/2
Chicago	16	20	.444	7 1/2
Houston	14	23	.378	10
Cincinnati	14	24	.368	10 1/2
Western Division				
Arizona	24	16	.590	-
San Diego	23	16	.590	-
Los Angeles	21	17	.553	1 1/2
San Francisco	18	19	.486	4
Colorado	10	25	.286	11

TENNIS

day after the Rome Masters: 1. Lindsay Davenport (USA) 5169 pts 2. Maria Sharapova (USA) 5014 3. Amelie Mauresmo (FRA) 4477 4. Serena Williams (USA) 3991 5. Elena Dementieva (RUS) 3807 6. Anastasia Myskina (RUS) 3371 7. Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS) 3212 8. Alicia Molik (AUS) 2585 9. Nadia Petrova (RUS) 2258 10. Patty Schnyder (SUI) 2160 11. Vera Zvonareva (RUS) 2091 12. Justine Henin-Hardenne (BEL) 2017 13. Venus Williams (USA) 1772 14. Elena Bovina (RUS) 1662 15. Jennifer Capriati (USA) 1587 16. Nathalie Dechy (FRA) 1526 17. Kim Clijsters (BEL) 1516 18. Jelena Jankovic (SRB) 1320 19. Elena Likhovtseva (RUS) 1316 20. Tatiana Golovin (FRA) 1301

ST POLTEN ATP

ST POLTEN, Austria: Results from the second day of the 325,250-euro ATP tournament here on Monday (x denotes seeding): 1st rd: Juergen Melzer (AUT) x4

bt Marco Mirnegg (AUT) 6-3, 6-1; Gilles Muller (LUX) bt Albert Montanes (ESP) 6-2, retired; Guillermo Garcia-Lopez (ESP) bt Jean-Rene Lisnard (FRA) 6-3, 7-5; Nikolay Davydenko (RUS) x1 bt Michal Mertinak (SVK) 6-3, 6-2; Mariano Puerta (ARG) x5 bt Alex Calatrava (ESP) 7-5, 6-2; Felix Mantilla (ESP) bt Francisco Fogues (ESP) 7-6 (2/10), 7-5; Nicolas Almagro (ESP) bt Ivo Karlovic (CRO) 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3); David Sanchez (ESP) bt Robby Ginepro (USA) 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Jose Acasuso (ARG) bt Igor Andreev (RUS) 3-6, 6-3, 6-2; Potito Starace (ITA) x7 bt Philipp Kohlschreiber (GER) 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

ATP World Team Cup, Germany: Results from the second day of the 1,850,000 euro (US\$2,367,500) ATP world team tournament on Monday. Red Group Argentina 2 France 1 Singles Gaston Gaudio (ARG) bt Arnaud Clement (FRA) 6-4, 6-4; Guillermo Coria (ARG) bt Mickael Llodra (FRA) 6-1, 6-4 Doubles Arnaud Clement/Mickael Llodra (FRA) bt Guillermo Canas/Juan Ignacio Chela (ARG) 6-1, 6-4 Blue Group Spain 2 Sweden 1 Singles Thomas Johansson (SWE) bt Tommy Robredo (ESP) 7-6 (7/4), 6-1; David Ferrer (ESP) bt Jonas Bjorkman (SWE) 6-4, 6-0. Doubles Tommy Robredo/Santiago Ventura (ESP) bt Thomas Johansson/Jonas Bjorkman (SWE) 6-7 (6-8), 6-3, 6-3.

WTA Istanbul Cup

ISTANBUL: Results from the first day of the US\$200,000 WTA Istanbul Cup on Monday: 1st rd: Jennifer Hopkins (USA) bt Maja Matevzic (SLO) 4-6, 6-0, 6-1; Marta Marrero (ESP) bt Shihoko Hisatsuna (JPN) 6-0, 6-2; Tatiana Panova (RUS) bt Jill Craybas (USA) 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; Yuliana Fedak (UKR) bt Marissa Irvin (USA) 4-6, 6-2, 7-5; Anna Chakvetadze (RUS) x7 bt Antonella Serra Zanetti (ITA) 7-5, 6-2; Mashona Washington (USA) x8 bt Alyona Bondarenko (UKR) 6-4, 2-6, 7-5; Akiko Morigami (JPN) bt Lisa Raymond (USA) x9 6-1, 6-2.