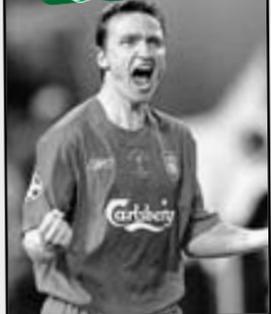




KOP KINGS OF EUROPE

Day after the



SMICER: Leaving as a hero

SMICER IS SO SAD TO BE GOING

By DAVID MADDOCK

VLADIMIR SMICER said goodbye to Liverpool with a fear of regret, but with pride in his heart.

The Czech winger will not be given a new Anfield contract after becoming a free agent, despite his heroics in scoring a great goal to drag his team back into the final.

Smicer also stayed calm during the penalty shoot-out to convert his spot-kick.

The 32-year-old could not contain his joy afterwards, and took to the streets with Liverpool fans.

"I celebrated with the largest cigar you have ever seen, and I went with the fans to dance in the streets," he said.

"It was incredible to be with the fans. I just wanted to share with them what I felt. It was the greatest night of our lives.

"I didn't go to bed at all, there is no need for sleep after a night like this. I just wanted to go out on a high, and I am proud that I showed I can play."

He added: "I was told two months ago that I wouldn't be getting a new contract, and I said to the manager would he need me, or could I go on holiday.

"He said that I was still needed, and that's all I wanted to hear. I love Liverpool, both my children were born here, and it is very difficult for me to leave."

DJIMI: AC RILED ME

From DAVID MADDOCK

DJIMI TRAORE revealed last night that AC Milan's half-time celebration helped inspire his side's incredible Champions League comeback.

Liverpool produced the greatest fight back in European final history when they scored three second-half goals to take the tie into extra time, and then snatch victory on penalties.

And the French full-back revealed that even though he and his team-mates thought they were finished by the interval, their pride was pricked by the noise coming from the opposition dressing-room.

"When we were going into the dressing-room at half time, the Milan players were already celebrating," he said.

"One or two of them were already lifting the cup, and that probably helped us to play at least for some pride. We didn't like it."



DESTINED TO MISS: Shevchenko believed Dudek would deny him and Milan in the shoot-out

By NEIL McLEMAN

ANDREI SHEVCHENKO yesterday claimed Liverpool had been destined to win the Champions League after their incredible Istanbul fightback.

The reigning European Footballer of the Year was brilliant in the first half as AC Milan raced into a 3-0 lead by the interval.

But he was denied an extra-time winner by Jerzy Dudek's stunning double save following Liverpool's near-miraculous second-half recovery.

Shevchenko, who scored the winning penalty in the final at Old Trafford in 2003, completed his night of misery by again being denied by the Polish keeper in the shoot-out to give Liverpool the trophy.

"It's very hard to explain but I think it was destiny that decided to change sides and give the cup to Liverpool," said the Ukrainian striker.

"With a 3-0 advantage it's difficult to think any team can come back against Milan, but Liverpool found the courage to continue.

Painful

"They never lost hope, they believed right until the end it was possible and I guess that's the winning mentality."

Milan have form for such collapses. Last season they beat Deportivo La Coruna 4-1 in the first leg of a Champions League quarter-final, only to lose the return 4-0.

And they needed a late goal from Massimo Ambrosini in the semi-final after squandering a 2-0 lead at PSV Eindhoven. But this defeat was the worse. "It's very painful but we must accept it," Shevchenko added. "I don't think we underestimated Liverpool and I'm not surprised at how they played.

"This team knocked Juventus and Chelsea out of the competition and did what they had to do to win." But Shevchenko admitted he will never forget Dudek's heroics.

"With that late chance, I hit it so well I didn't think anybody could save it," he admitted.

"I still can't believe it didn't go in. I've relived in my head again and again since. It was an incredible save. And then the penalties are cruel. There can be only one winner and this time we were on the receiving end."

Striker Hernan Crespo, on loan

at Milan from Chelsea, said: "I'm destroyed in all senses."

Crespo, who scored twice on Wednesday night, added: "A final can be lost or be won, but what happened has been incredible.

"This has never happened to me before and it will take time to take it all in."

When push came to Shev, Liverpool had the winning mentality..

'MILAN SUFFER SHOCK OF THE CENTURY'

WHAT THE (ITALIAN) PAPERS SAID..

GAZZETTA DELLO SPORT

"Milan in a Nightmare - from 3-0 to 3-3, then Dudek and penalties write the shock of the century."

LA REPUBBLICA

"Crazy Milan gift the Cup to Liverpool. They lost the title. Now the Champions League also goes up in smoke. The 50th

final of the European Cup was resolved in a psycho-drama."

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

"What heartbreak! Milan pay for six minutes of madness. Not even Agatha Christie would have been able to imagine an even stranger ending."

IL GIORNALE

"Milan give the Champions League to Liverpool."

EL MUNDO DEPORTIVO (Spain)

"As the Beatles would have said: 'It's been a hard day's night!'"

L'EQUIPE (France)

"Liverpool are Eternal - A final which has already entered into history."

BILD (Germany)

"Gigantic, sensational. The best Champions League Final of all time."



night before.. and Liverpool party is just starting

CALM DOWN CRAZY CARRA

Dudek: Ranting Jamie told me to leave Milan Grob-smacked



JERZY DUDEK and Jamie Carragher last night relived the bizarre exchange that ended with the Polish keeper becoming an Anfield legend.

Carragher rushed up to Dudek after extra-time at the Ataturk Stadium to remind him of what happened the last time Liverpool faced a penalty shoot-out to win the biggest prize in club football.

But as Carragher screamed at Dudek to emulate the 'spaghetti legs' antics of Bruce Grobbelaar which undermined Roma's nerves in the Olympic Stadium 21 years ago, the Pole revealed he was more concerned about getting the England defender to calm down.

Carragher said: "I obviously know about the history of Liverpool and just reminded Jerzy of what Grobbelaar did in 1984 against Roma.

"I said to him: 'Jerzy, you've got to do everything you can to put the penalty takers off'. I mentioned Grobbelaar to him. I'm not sure if he knew what I was talking about. He said he was a Liverpool fan when he signed - but they all say that, don't they?"

"But that's what he did. He kept walking up to them, trying to squeeze the ball when they were getting ready to take them. Maybe that did put them off a little."

Dudek's own version of the famous Grobbelaar antics was to bounce up and down on his line like a rubber ball to make himself look bigger.

It worked as Serginho



Martin LIPTON

Chief Football Writer

blasted over the bar before Dudek got away with advancing at least two yards off his line to save from Andrea Pirlo and then produced the Cup-winning stop from Milan superstar Andrei Shevchenko.

Carragher suggested that he had been the calmer of the pair. But Dudek countered: "He came over to me as if he was crazy - as always!"

Unbelievable

"He said: 'Jerzy, Jerzy, remember Grobbelaar, remember him. He did lots of crazy things and you have to do the same now. You will be the hero'. I just said: 'OK Carra, calm down, easy'."

"I've seen Grobbelaar and what he did with his spaghetti legs many, many times. I was thinking about the same thing but it didn't work for me. I did something else and I'm happy with that."

And Grobbelaar was full of praise for the Pole. "Jerzy did Liverpool proud," he said. "He saved two penalties, you can't ask for more than that. I didn't



THROWING A WOBBLY: Dudek puts off Milan's Pirlo

expect the wobbly legs routine but he did it very well."

Carragher added: "Jerzy will be remembered as a legend now for what he did against Milan. It wasn't just the penalties but the Shevchenko save as well. That was unbelievable."

"It was a goal, wasn't it? It was a certain goal but he saved it. And he's got a story to bore people with for years now."

Dudek recalled: "As the ball came over, I could see he was between a couple of our players and they couldn't get to the ball."

"I just prepared myself to save the header. I saved it. After that I saw him running to get to the rebound and put it in. I just stood up as quickly as I could to make myself bigger and just got my arm in the way again."

"It was the best save I've ever made and the most important, of course. I looked at the clock and saw it was just one minute before the end."

Dudek, one of up to half a dozen Liverpool players who may not be around next season, added: "For all of us it is the greatest moment of our lives. Even now it feels unbelievable."

"I did well in the shoot-out against Tottenham in the Carling Cup but I guess this was a bit bigger."

"I have to admit I was a bit worried about the beginning of the game."

"We were 3-0 down and I thought to myself 'what's this? We're supposed to be 3-0 up'. We knew it would be difficult but for the second half we changed a couple of things on the pitch."

"But now I can happily retire! I just want to say thank you to Rafa. He was my biggest supporter at the club. He was fantastic for me."



PARTING: Benitez and Kewell

Raf ready to axe his Cup kings

FROM BACK PAGE

many as eight players to leave Anfield in the summer, despite many being first-team regulars, and he will replace them with an equal number.

There will be no room for sentiment, even towards the heroes of Istanbul, as he explained: "I've said all season that we are maybe only at 60 per cent of what I want us to be. That could be 70 per cent now."

"But we still have a long way to go, and I am not happy. I am always trying to analyse things, to find the reason behind things, and I want to know why we haven't been at the right level in the Premiership."

"We know we need to improve and change things. We need to realise that while we are very happy at winning this trophy, we cannot think this is the most important trophy and it is enough."

"I am thinking that we have to do everything possible to get stronger and to win more trophies. It is my burning ambition to win the Premiership now, and we will not rest until we have a team to do that."

Renew

Already, the Spanish coach has made it clear he will not renew the contracts of Igor Biscan and Vladimir Smicer, and he is also likely to let Didi Hamann go to Bolton.

Add to that the departure of Saif Diao, El-Hadji Diouf, Gregory Vignal, Bruno Cheyrou and Carl Medjani and there will be a procession of players leaving, although Alou Diarra may be recalled from a loan spell at Lens.

But it will not stop there. Players such as Harry Kewell and Jerzy Dudek could find their futures clouded, along with £5million-rated Milan Baros, and youngster Anthony Le Tallec may be advised to look elsewhere.

Benitez has already agreed to sign Villarreal keeper Jose Reina, and is close to landing Real Zaragoza centre-half Gabriel Milito. Owen Hargreaves is also a target along with Chelsea's Scott Parker and Dutch striker Dirk Kuyt. Benitez would love to sign several men from his former club Valencia.



BOLTON BOUND? Hamann, with his wife