

Fighting Bosnich

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea's Australian international goalkeeper Mark Bosnich will fight a Football Association misconduct charge...

Bosnich was suspended from all football-related activities after being found guilty of breaching doping regulations...

He was given 14 days in which to respond to the FA charge and his legal team replied on Friday afternoon...

His lawyers made it clear that the 30-year-old would be requesting a personal hearing and would be seeking to answer the charge against him.

FA spokesman Adrian Bevington said: "I can confirm that Mark Bosnich's legal team have responded and they are contesting the charge."

If Bosnich is found guilty of the FA charge at the as yet unscheduled hearing, he could receive a lengthy ban from the game.

However, he maintains his innocence even though the onus is now on him to prove why traces of the drug were apparently found in his system in a random test.

The former Aston Villa and Manchester United keeper was charged by the FA after confirmation that his 'B' sample had tested positive for cocaine...

Chelsea, who had suspended him without pay, notified him in writing earlier this week that his contract would be terminated 14 days later.

Bosnich, who is reported to have been earning around 40,000 pounds (64,000 dollars) a week at Stamford Bridge...

this action as they argue that he has breached his contract under Premier League rules.

Bosnich excused himself from a meeting with the club just before Christmas on medical grounds.

The goalkeeper has reportedly been receiving treatment for depression.



MARK BOSNICH

Lazio to pay up

AFP, Rome

Cash-strapped Italian first division club Lazio said Friday they could pay the salaries outstanding to their squad up to the end of September last year.

The Rome giants have been trying to right their ship with last week's resignation as club president by Sergio Cragnotti and the launch of a banking package designed to put the outfit on a solid financial footing.

Cragnotti's canned food company Cirio put the club up for sale after running into money problems of their own.

The players are currently owed four months' salary.

Several banks have agreed to loan the troubled Serie A club around 50 million euros to ease its debts.

Owen boost

AFP, Liverpool

England star Michael Owen returns to the Liverpool starting line-up for Saturday's English Premiership clash with Aston Villa.

Owen returned as a substitute in the midweek League Cup semifinal defeat at Sheffield United after two games out with a hamstring injury and should replace youngster Neil Mellor.

Emile Heskey was expected to recover from an ankle injury and goalkeeper Chris Kirkland has shown no ill effects from the late challenge on him by Michael Brown.

But manager Gerard Houllier is still without injury-victim Dietmar Hamann as his side seek to end a sequence of 10 Premiership games without a win.

League One Lyon regain top spot

Football

AFP, Paris

A first-half header from Peguy Luyindula saw reigning champions Lyon edge a battle royal to return to the top of the League One (French First Division) on Friday thanks to 1-0 home win over previous leaders Marseille.

A fully deserved win for the hosts propelled Lyon from fifth to top of the table with 36 points from 21 games, one clear of Marseille, who went down to their sixth defeat of a season in which they hope to land their first silverware in a decade.

Lyon coach Paul Le Guen saluted his side for bouncing back from a Cup humiliation a week ago at fourth division Libourne.

"I think we deserved it, especially coming off a bad defeat. We had to react - and we did very well."

Club president Jean-Michel Aulas was equally impressed, having suggested Le Guen needed to push the team harder and make more of the squad's talent.

"It's a boost for Paul and the team - I believe we were not professional in the Cup match."

"We have lost several matches in the final minutes this season and this time we showed great stamina and determination in closing it out."

Lyon started the brighter and carved out a handful of chances in the opening 35 minutes, Brazilian star Juninho cutting in from the left and drawing a flying save from Marseille keeper Vedran Runje.

Sidney Govou, back for Lyon after seven games out with a thigh strain, then smacked a left-footed shot just over the top before directing a flying header straight at Runje.

Jean-Marc Chanelet was next in line as Lyon players shrugging off sub-zero conditions queued up to

open the scoring but his low effort flashed just wide.

Just when it appeared Marseille would survive until the interval Luyindula struck with his fifth goal of the season in the 42nd minute, heading home from close range after Runje had palmed out a whipped Govou header.

Luyindula's poaching form was

Sonny Anderson with a thigh strain.

Frank Lebouef could have levelled for Marseille in the dying seconds of the first half from a Manuel Dos Santos cross but Lyon keeper Gregory Coupet got down smartly to the veteran defender's header.

After the interval Juninho came within a glove-tip of putting Lyon



PHOTO: AFP

Lyon's Peguy Luyindula goes past a Marseille player during their match on January 10.

all the more welcome for the title-holders in the continued injury absence of Brazilian sharpshooter

goals to the good when Runje pushed away a piledriver just after the hour mark.

Marseille boss Alain Perrin reacted by sending on burly Ivory Coast striker Ibrahima Bakayoko. The former Everton man almost immediately forced Coupet into a good stop from a low drive after a burst to the right edge of the box.

"It's only a point deficit - we can make it up," insisted Marseille midfielder Brahim Hemdani.

Italian referee Pierluigi Collina meanwhile refused to be wired up with a microphone for the match. Drafted in because France's men in black were all attending a training course, he cited the language barrier as one reason for opposing the idea, adding he was not "a showman."

On Saturday, Paris Saint Germain will attempt to start bridging the gap on the leading pack with a win in Corsica at promoted Ajaccio despite being without Ronaldinho, who is still not match fit after an extended winter break.

Nice, who have spent all the season to date in the top three following promotion, host mid-table Lille while another surprise package, Guingamp, have a Breton derby at neighbouring Rennes to look forward to.

Fifth-placed Monaco take on Bastia with criticism ringing in the ears of the squad following their French Cup exit last weekend at second division Wasquehal.

STANDINGS

Table with 5 columns: Team, Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals for, Goals against, Points. Lists teams like Lyon, Marseille, Nice, Guingamp, Monaco, Sochaux.

Liverpool keen on Kanoute

INTERNET, Liverpool

Liverpool are bidding to ease their Premiership plight with the acquisition of West Ham striker Freddie Kanoute, according to a report.

The Hammers forward is rated at 8 million pounds and is seen by Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier as the perfect answer to ease the club's 11-match winless streak in the Premiership.

Kanoute is currently out injured with an on-going groin complaint and is receiving treatment in Canada.

But, despite his fitness problems, Houllier, according to the Daily Express newspaper, is prepared to pay 6 million pounds up front for the Frenchman and a further 2 million pounds if he helps Liverpool clinch a place in the Champions League.

West Ham are bottom of the Premiership with just 16 points from 21 matches.

Despite their position, they are said to be willing to sell the player but value him at 10 million pounds.

Any deal would free up funds for Hammers manager Glenn Roeder who is keen to bring in a series of players before the close of the transfer window at the end of January.

Roeder has already brought in midfielder Lee Bowyer.

But Ipswich striker Marcus Bent and former England forward Les Ferdinand are among those at the top of his shopping list.

Wenger backs Dugarry

Football

REUTERS, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger believes their next opponents Birmingham City have made one of the best moves in the transfer window by signing Frenchman Christophe Dugarry from Bordeaux.

City, who host the premier league leaders on Sunday, took the 30-year-old former France forward in a loan deal on Thursday of last week, hoping he would make and score the goals to keep the newly-promoted club in the top flight.

Backing the move for his fellow countryman, Wenger told reporters at Arsenal's training ground on Friday: "He's a top-class international player."

"Dugarry can run at people, and create the spark -- he can give you the final ball and he can score as well. He's very quick and in my opinion still 100 percent physically."

Asked if Dugarry would prove one of the best buys during the January transfer window, Wenger said: "Certainly."

"Dugarry is a proud guy and I don't think he needs money. He has made quite a lot -- he's played in Milan and Barcelona and usually they are not the poorest when they come out of there."

"He will want to show that he is successful."

Wenger believes the combative forward, who can also play as an attacking midfielder, has the strength to handle the rigours of English premier league football.

"Dugarry is not afraid of the physical side of the game," Wenger said. "He's prepared for that because he likes a tough game, and he's strong in the air."

"He looks to be built for the premier league." Wenger needs to keep Dugarry and his team mates in check, though, on Sunday as the champions look to defend their lead at the top of the table and re-discover their best away form.

"Now he's able to attract players and he's not afraid to make decisions. It all looks very promising to me."

Wenger also defended his team against critics who point to a lack of fluidity and flourish in their recent performances, particularly compared to last season, even though they have taken 10 points from 12 over the last three weeks.

"There are always periods in the season when you are a little bit less fluent or less entertaining but the most important thing is to win the games," Wenger said.

"I feel there are different phases in the championship. There are phases where people fight for a place in Europe, or fight to not go down or to make sure they are safe."

"And then in March and April suddenly there are some teams who know they will not go down and the games are more open."

"But there's a period in December, January and February when the games are much more closed and compact, and people are fighting for everything. And that's where you have to win."



CHRISTOPHE DUGARRY

Though five points ahead of second-placed Manchester United, Arsenal have already lost three times on the road this season after being unbeaten away throughout 2001-2002.

Looking back to their 2-1 victory at West Bromwich Albion on December 26, Wenger said: "West Brom was an important step for us, to win away from home, and Birmingham is another one for getting that away consistency back."

"I think Birmingham are a good team. I watched the tape of them against Leeds and they played very well (in a 2-0 league defeat)...they can be very dangerous."

Paying tribute to their manager Steve Bruce, Wenger said: "I think he's done well because he's taken Birmingham over in a situation where they couldn't get up (from the first division to the premier league) and he's done the job."

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Morientes staying

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes has rejected joining Tottenham Hotspur on loan and will remain at the Spanish club until at least the end of the season, his agent says.

"I have been informed that there is an offer from Tottenham for Morientes to go on loan until the end of the season, but we are not interested in a loan deal," the player's agent Gines Carvajal told Spanish website Libredirecto.com on Friday.

Carvajal added that the out-of-

could move at the end of the season.

"We will see how things go and will take a look at the situation when the season is over," he said.

The player himself was diplomatic in his rejection of the interest from the English premier league side.

"I am very grateful for the interest that has been shown," he said. "It gives me a sense of pride when offers are made especially if they come from abroad."

"The premier league is a very attractive competition and any professional would be pleased to play for one of its leading teams."

The 26-year-old Spanish international was poised to move to arch-rivals Barcelona in order to raise funds for Real's 45 million euro (29.6 million pound) deal to sign Ronaldo at the end of August last year, but his move fell through at the last minute after Barca withdrew their bid.

Spurs were also interested in signing the player at the start of the season, but were reported to have balked at the 18 million euro (12 million pound) price tag put on him by Real.

Morientes, who was the leading scorer at Real last season, has fallen out of favour since Ronaldo's arrival and has now dropped behind both Guti and former youth team striker Javier Portillo in the pecking order at the club.

He has made the starting line-up in the league on just one occasion this season, and has yet to score a goal.

Jimmy going to Barca?

Football

INTERNET, London

Chelsea could finally sell striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink to Barcelona in a 7.5 million pounds deal.

Hasselbaink has long been a target of Nou Camp bosses and had looked set to join the club in the summer before talks petered out.

But Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri has now hinted he is ready to off-load the Dutch international to the Spanish giants.

Collina, 42 and designated the world's best referee for the fifth straight year, was brought in to officiate the game because France's men in black were attending a training course.

But he had reservations about the idea, which was tried out in Marseille's French Cup win over Bastia last weekend and refused to take part in the experiment, according to Karl Olive, director of sports broadcasting at Canal Plus television, which showed the match nationwide.

"Collina contacted FIFA in the afternoon to explain that given the pressure surrounding this encounter - but even more so given the language barrier, he preferred to abstain from the idea," Olive revealed.

Collina had earlier told Italian sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport: "I am a referee who has to officiate an important match. I am not a showman who, on live TV, is off on an adventure on a foreign field."

"Whether Jimmy goes or stays depends on how much money Barcelona put on the table," said Ranieri.

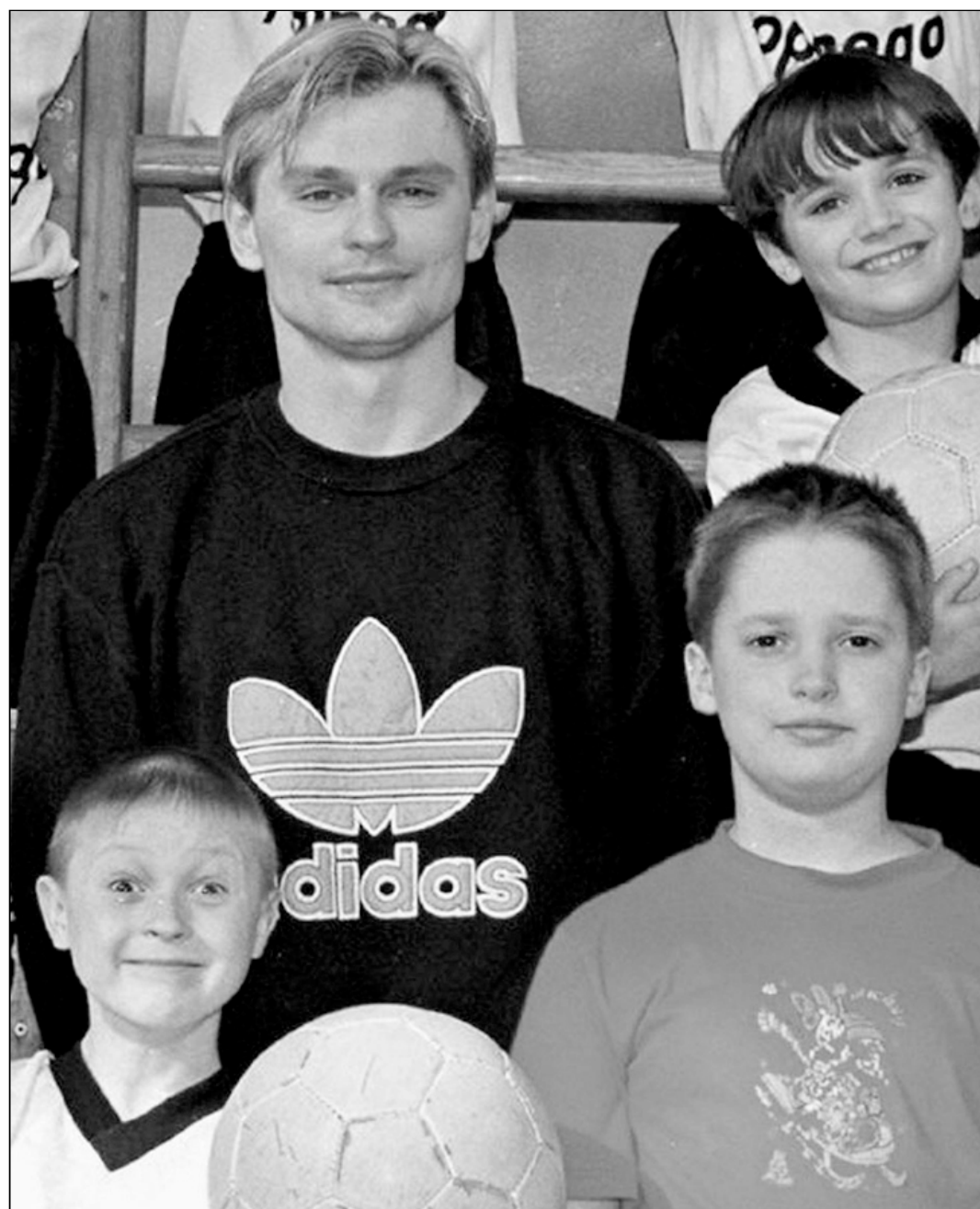
"I have talked to the (Chelsea) board about this eventuality on a technical basis, but I haven't spoken about economic matters."

Barcelona are reported to have offered five million pounds to sign Hasselbaink.

But Stamford Bridge's money men are believed to want 7.5 million pounds for the player, who scored 33 goals last season and has already found the target 11 times in the current campaign.



A file photo of Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink.



An AFP file photo shows former Russian soccer star Yuri Tishkov (L) posing with children at the Torpedo soccer school. Tishkov was found dead from gunshot wounds in Moscow yesterday.

Collina says no way

AFP, Paris

Italian referee Pierluigi Collina refused to be wired up with a microphone for Friday's French league encounter between reigning champions Lyon and leaders Marseille.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP

IFYYRIQOB G MGU AHDH TFSS RT DGEQRGMUQKH AGIUH ARFSE QUWGKH HQBWUHO WGST-SQKHI? Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SCAVENGER HUNTS TAKING PLACE IN SOUTH KOREA'S CAPITAL EVOKE REAL SEUL-SEARCHING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals L. The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



FERNANDO MORIENTES

favour striker was aiming to see out his contract, which does not expire until June 2006, with the European champions, although he admitted that if the player remained sidelined at Real he