

Heskey faces finals ban



AFP, London

England striker Emile Heskey could be banned from next year's European Championship finals in Portugal after video evidence revealed he threw a punch at an opponent during Saturday's tunnel brawl in Istanbul.

European football's governing body UEFA will look at TV footage of England's match against Turkey before deciding whether disciplinary action is necessary following the tunnel scuffle.

The confrontation was sparked when Turkey defender Alpay poked England skipper David Beckham in the face as the players walked off the pitch at half-time.

Reports claimed up to 50 people got involved in the tunnel and Italian referee Pierluigi Collina ordered Alpay and Beckham to his room to tell them to calm down.

UEFA has decided to start disciplinary proceedings against the Turkish FA for incidents when flares were lit in the stadium and a couple of missiles thrown on the pitch.

UEFA said it was "extremely happy" with the overall safety and security in Istanbul but the match delegate had reported infringe-

ments. "We have started proceedings against the Turkish FA for a lack of order and discipline in the stadium," UEFA spokesman Mike Lee said.

"This will lead to a disciplinary charge to be heard at the control and disciplinary body meeting on 30 October.

"On the question relating to the players, as a result of Mr Collina's report we have decided to request video evidence before deciding whether or not a formal disciplinary process is needed.

"Mr Collina was able to see most of what happened in the tunnel himself and in fact dealt with what happened extremely well, he spoke to David Beckham and Alpay and calmed things down.

"We have to make sure that he did not miss anything before deciding whether or not to take disciplinary action."

But Heskey faces a three-match ban for violent conduct after reacting to racist taunts in the tunnel and attacking Turkish player Hasan Sas, the Daily Mail reports. The ban would be for competitive matches, not friendlies, which would rule him out of Euro 2004.

England qualified for the finals by drawing 0-0 in Istanbul where Alpay sparked trouble by confronting Beckham after the England captain missed a penalty.



German captain Bettina Weigmann holds up the FIFA Women's World Cup trophy with golden goal heroine Nia Kuenzer at Frankfurt's City hall Roemer yesterday. Germany defeated Sweden 2-1 in Carson, California, in the final of the World Cup on October 12.

The wait has started



AFP, London

England and Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand pleaded his case in front of Football Association bosses on Monday but must wait for a decision on whether he faces a misconduct charge for failing to take a drugs test.

Ferdinand was accompanied by Gordon Taylor, who heads the players' union, the Professional Footballer's Association, in the two-hour meeting in Manchester with FA head of compliance Steve Barrow.

In a statement released by Manchester United, Ferdinand said: "I provided the association with a full and detailed explanation of my failure to take a random test on September 23.

"My explanation dealt with a number of issues, including the reasons why I failed to attend the test and my attempts to rectify the situation with a test that same day.

"I also reiterated my condemnation of drugs in sport."

The 30 million pound defender was dropped from England's crucial Euro 2004 qualifier against Turkey on Saturday because of the error, sparking a revolt among the rest of the England squad who threatened to boycott the match in protest.

Ferdinand has insisted his mind was distracted because he was moving house on the day of the test.

It is thought the FA will hand down their verdict later this week.

Ferdinand faces two charges of wilfully missing the test and of failure to attend an anti-doping test.

Wilfully missing a control is a far more serious offence, and would carry a definite ban. To be proved it needs evidence of a deliberate attempt to avoid the drug testers.

Taylor said Ferdinand was aware of the seriousness of what he had done.

"He understands the problems that have been caused by him not taking the test at that time and he reiterated his intention to take the test later that same day."

The union boss has attacked the FA's handling of the affair, especially over the way the player's confidentiality was bro-

ken when he was left out of the England squad - but he appeared to take a softer line after the hearing.

"We attempt to maintain confidentiality until the due process has been followed. The due process has begun today.

"The nature of the game is so high profile, it's very difficult to maintain confidentiality.

"Once the decision is taken to leave him out of the squad, it was inevitable he would be named so I would hope that would be taken into consideration with what Rio's got to say."

He added that he was satisfied with the way Ferdinand was treating at the hearing.

"Rio was given the opportunity to give a full and detailed explanation."

FA marketing and communications director Paul Barber said before the hearing that the FA would be conducting a thorough review of all the issues including an analysis of what was said by whom and when.

He added: "Clearly, the FA would expect any unsubstantiated or inaccurate statements made about its handling of a very difficult issue to be corrected by those concerned at the earliest possible opportunity."

Manchester United lawyers are battling to save their player from a possible ban.

"Look, Rio made a mistake in not having his test when he should have done. But it was just an innocent error - he forgot," said United manager Alex Ferguson.

United insist they will continue to pick Ferdinand while the Football Association considers his failure to take a drugs test. That means Ferdinand will still be available to face his old-club Leeds at Elland Road on Saturday.

United's chief executive David Gill said: "Rio will continue to be selected until such time as whatever punishment is decided upon. As a club we'd be comfortable with him being chosen. We know the facts behind the case and there is no moral dilemma.

"The club have reacted in the past when it felt it was necessary to do so. United suspended Eric Cantona in 1995 following his unfortunate incident with a fan against Crystal Palace. There is no requirement not to play Rio if the manager chooses him."

Liverpool lose Owen

Barca sweat over Ronaldinho



AFP, Paris

Former European champions Barcelona and Liverpool hope to avoid slipping on UEFA Cup banana skins on Wednesday with November 9th for the match at home to Udinese."

Del Piero, who has won 13 trophies in his 11 seasons with the Turin club and scored 147 goals, will turn 29 on that day. He is the fifth highest goalscorer in Juventus' 106-year history.

am very satisfied," Del Piero told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I need another examination and if that is reassuring I could fulfill my promise and come back on November 9th for the match at home to Udinese."

Del Piero, who has won 13 trophies in his 11 seasons with the Turin club and scored 147 goals, will turn 29 on that day.

He is the fifth highest goalscorer in Juventus' 106-year history.

after eight matches.

Barca take on Slovakia's Puchov at the Nou Camp after being held to a 1-1 draw in the first leg of their first round clash.

That result, coupled with Barcelona's failure to win at home this season, has put pressure on coach Frank Rijkaard, who has called for patience from the club's discontented fans after his side's slow start.

The Catalans were jeered by sections of their home crowd following a 1-0 defeat by Primera Liga leaders Valencia on October 5, and any slip-up against Puchov is sure to undermine Rijkaard's position.

Southampton on October 25.

AS Roma will be without strike duo Marco Delvecchio and Vincenzo Montella as they take a seemingly unassailable 4-0 lead to Macedonian side Vardar Skopje on Wednesday.

Both forwards are nursing hamstring injuries and were not named in Fabio Capello's squad for the tie.

Lothar Matthaus' Red Star Belgrade host Danish side Odense BK on Wednesday hoping their fans behave better than in the first leg.

European football's governing body UEFA levelled a 77,600-euro (91,000-dollar) fine on Red Star

Pick me please!

AFP, London

Ruud van Nistelrooy has urged Dutch coach Dick Advocaat to play him in their Euro 2004 play-off against Scotland next month.

The Manchester United striker



RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

was dropped from the Dutch squad for the final qualifier against Moldova last Saturday after reacting angrily to his substitution in the previous match against the Czech Republic.

"I was so disappointed to be left out of the last squad," he said. "I'm desperate to be back in for the play-off matches.

"The manager gave me his reasons for leaving me out and I had to accept them.

"What happened has made me even more determined to come back and help the Netherlands get to the finals."

Van Nistelrooy predicted Scotland midfielder and Old Trafford team-mate Darren Fletcher had the makings of a class player.

"Darren is a fantastic young player with a great future ahead of him," he said.

Fletcher came off the subs bench to score the winner for Scotland against Lithuania to secure a play-off berth for Bertie Vogts' team.

"He's broken into the first team at United this season and has proved he can handle himself there," van Nistelrooy added.



MICHAEL OWEN



RONALDINHO

Brazilian forward Ronaldinho is a doubt for the game after suffering a leg strain in a King's Cup match earlier this month.

England's Blackburn Rovers already have an uphill task as they try to overturn a 3-1 first-leg deficit against Turkish club Genclerbirligi and their job was complicated with the news that Australian Lucas Neill will be absent from the game.

Rovers doctor Phil Batty confirmed Neill had pneumonia. "Lucas has been ill with a debilitating condition that has left him feeling weak.

"We will be working on rebuilding his strength. He is definitely out of Wednesday's game," Batty told the club's website.

Though Neill is serving a three-match suspension from the Premiership, he would have been available for the tie at Ewood Park. The club are now hoping he will be fit for their Premiership match at

after their supporters chanted racist slogans, threw smoke bombs and invaded the pitch on September 24.

Danish police arrested six Red Star fans after the game. Hertha Berlin general manager Dieter Hoeness has hit out at the club's UEFA Cup opponents Groclin Grodzisk after they jacked up ticket prices for the travelling Berlin fans.

"Our fans are paying five times the actual price," raged Hoeness. "It is a disgrace."

The Polish side are charging the Germans 45 euros to sit and 25 euros to stand at the game, prompting Hertha to offer ten euros in compensation to every fan who travels to the first round tie.

Hoeness was particularly disappointed by the pricing policy after Grodzisk fans were charged just 11 euros to sit at the Olympic Stadium in the first leg which ended 0-0.

Del Piero eyes birthday return

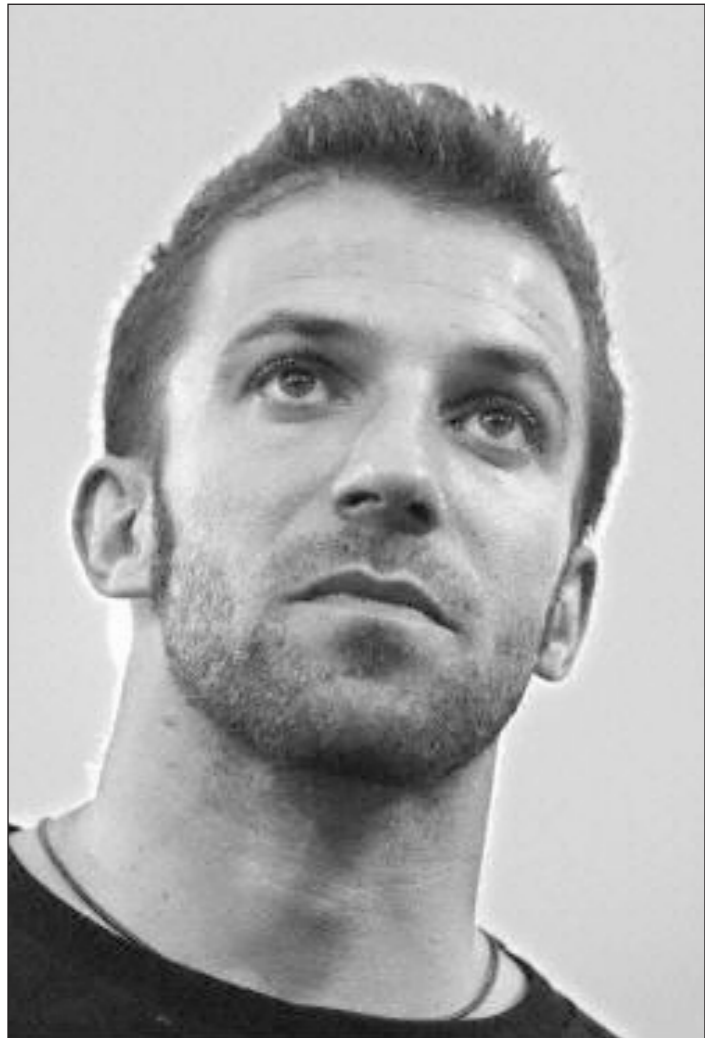


AFP, Rome

Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero is confident of returning to action on his birthday early next month.

The Italy international has been sidelined since September 21 when he suffered a calf strain in a 2-2 home draw against Roma.

"My recovery is going well and I



DEL PIERO

Trap wants Maldini U-turn



AFP, Rome

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni said Tuesday he was still hoping to persuade AC Milan's veteran defender Paolo Maldini to come out of retirement for next year's Euro 2004 finals in Portugal.

"It's a hope that I have never abandoned. A few months ago we spoke about it and agreed to discuss it later, so he may or he may not be at the Euros," Trapattoni said.

Maldini, 35, retired from the international scene after last year's World Cup to concentrate on club football. He is Italy's most capped player with 126 appearances for the

Azzurri. Italy clinched a place at the European championships after defeating Azerbaijan 4-0 on Saturday.



MALDINI



JUST LIKE OLD TIMES! Former Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelar makes a save during a friendly match in Bangkok on October 13 against former Flamengo players. The game was organised as part of the Asian tour of golden oldies.