

Betis in turmoil

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Betis president Jose Leon tendered his resignation to the majority shareholder Manuel Ruiz de Lopera on Tuesday to set in motion a presidential election at the struggling Primera Liga club.

"I have placed my position in the majority shareholder's hands but will continue in my post so that there is no power vacuum," Leon told a news conference.

"I hope everything will be resolved harmoniously between the candidates who want to come and be president here."

Leon had been in the post since the beginning of July only when De Lopera stepped aside after 14 years at the helm, though the latter remained a controlling influence behind the scenes.

Leon's decision added to the air of uncertainty round the club who are in the relegation places in the league after nine games.

On Monday the board gave coach Javier Irureta their qualified backing following Sunday's 3-2 defeat to Villarreal which dropped them to 18th place in the table.

Betis, who sold two of their best players, winger Joaquin and striker Ricardo Oliveira in August, are without a win in eight league and Cup games.

They host Recreativo Huelva in a King's Cup fourth round, second leg on Wednesday and follow that with a home match against Levante in the league on Sunday.

Xavier signs Boro contract

REUTERS, London

Former Portugal defender Abel Xavier has signed a contract with Premier League side Middlesbrough until the end of the season after completing a ban for doping.

Middlesbrough cancelled his contract in January after an appeal against a positive test for the performance-enhancing steroid dianabol was rejected by UEFA.

"In no way do we condone the taking of drugs but the ban was reduced by the game's governing authorities, which suggests there was a significant reason for that," Boro manager Gareth Southgate said on the club's Web site on Wednesday.

"I'm a believer that people in life who serve a sentence should get the opportunity to rebuild their life or their career afterwards. He's served his ban and wants to force his way back into the side."

Mozambique-born Xavier, who joined Middlesbrough from AS Roma in August last year, became the first Premier League player to be banned for doping when he failed a test after a UEFA Cup tie against Xanthi the following month.

Originally banned for 18 months, his suspension was cut to 12 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in July.

Xavier has played 20 times for Portugal and had spells with Benfica, Bari, PSV Eindhoven, Everton and Liverpool.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Werder Bremen midfielder Torsten Frings (C) is congratulated by defender Clementz Fritz (R) and playmaker Diego after scoring against Nuremberg in their Bundesliga clash on Tuesday.

Bremen keep up pressure

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen temporarily opened up a six-point gap over reigning champions Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga after an impressive 2-1 win at FC Nuremberg on Tuesday.

Goals from German international midfielder Torsten Frings and Brazilian Diego made it 16 points from a possible 18 for league leaders Bremen who pile the pressure on Bayern.

"You cannot always turn on the style and sometimes tight games like this are decided by individuals," said Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf. "Two great goals were

enough for us to secure the points."

Bayern have a game in hand but must defeat bottom side Hannover at home on Wednesday to move back to within three points of Werder.

VfB Stuttgart stay second, two points behind Bremen, after a 2-0 home victory over SV Hamburg on Tuesday.

"We have been convincing over the past few matches but Hamburg were a strong opponent and we are just glad to take the points to be honest," said Stuttgart goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand.

Bremen, champions in 2004, were touted as title challengers this season and continue to look the part after a 2-1 triumph over Nuremberg.

Frings, a key member of

Germany's World Cup squad, broke the deadlock on 32 minutes, faking to shoot with his left foot before shifting the ball to his right and driving the ball in off the post.

Brazilian Diego then curled an exquisite 79th minute free-kick in for his sixth goal of a fantastic debut season.

Stuttgart, a disappointing ninth last season, continued their revival under manager Armin Veh with a 2-0 win over Hamburg.

German Under-21 international Mario Gomez scored his seventh goal of the season in the 80th minute and Thomas Hitzlsperger added a second five minutes later.

It was another setback for Hamburg, third last season, who are fourth from bottom in the table with one win to their name and the pressure continues to mount on manager Thomas Doll.

"We had our chances but once again failed to win. That seems to be the story of our season," said Hamburg captain Rafael van der Vaart.

Elsewhere Borussia Dortmund coach Bert van Marwijk is also under pressure after a 0-0 home draw with Alemannia Aachen. Dortmund, champions in 2002, languish in mid-table anonymity after 11 games.

"We had about 20 corners and attacked them for the full 90 minutes," said van Marwijk. "But we need to score a goal and that is what is missing at the moment."

England axe a blow for Beckham: Capello

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham suffered 'psychological difficulties' after being dropped by Steve McClaren, claims Real Madrid manager Fabio Capello.

The 31-year-old resigned as England captain after the World Cup in Germany before being axed from the squad after McClaren succeeded Sven-Goran Eriksson as England manager.

Now Beckham's future at the Bernabeu is under question after he stalled on signing a new contract following his lack of involvement in the Real team since Capello was appointed manager.

However, the Italian believes Beckham's omission from the England set-up has had serious repercussions for the former Manchester United star.

He told Sky Sports: 'I think Beckham is an outstanding professional. He always gives his best both in training and when he is playing.'

'But a coach needs the overall picture. In Beckham's case, he has had bad times after being left out of England's national team.'

"Those are moments which produce psychological difficulties. Now he's regaining all his composure."

"The other day in the Champions League he played very well and now he seems to have become the Beckham we once knew. But I think the hardest test for him was to stop being captain of the England team.'

Gazza arrested

AFP, London

Troubled former England midfielder Paul Gascoigne was arrested in the early hours of Wednesday on suspicion of assault at a London nightclub, police sources said.

The recovering alcoholic was taken into custody after the alleged incident in South Kensington, west London, in which a 43-year-old man claimed he had been assaulted.

A spokeswoman for London's Metropolitan Police said officers were called at about 3:40am (0340 GMT) by the man who said he had been attacked in a local nightclub.

"Following inquiries, a 39-year-old man was arrested at a separate club nearby at 4:15am on suspicion of actual bodily harm and is currently in custody at a southwest London police station," she said.

Sources said that the victim is not thought to have required hospital treatment after the alleged attack.

The 57-times capped Gascoigne, who numbered Newcastle, Tottenham, Lazio, Rangers and Everton among his clubs, has struggled to gain a foothold as a football manager in recent years.

He was sacked from one job amid drinking claims, though he denies that was the case and has since had offers of help from the Professional Footballers' Association to get back into management.

MLS add up Becks benefit

Football

INTERNET, undated

Major League Soccer chiefs are working out the financial implications of what they see as a 'terrific' chance to bring former England captain David Beckham to the United States.

Beckham's contract at Real Madrid expires at the end of the season, and he will be allowed to speak to other clubs from January 1 if he does not pen a new deal by then.

The Los Angeles Galaxy have confirmed their interest in signing the 31-year-old, whose protracted contract negotiations with Real remain

ongoing. MLS commissioner Don Garber has now claimed officials are currently doing their sums to see if the league would get a return - in sponsorship and ticket sales - on any potential investment in Beckham.

"We're doing analysis and we should complete that in the next 30 days," said Garber.

"We'd certainly like to see him here. 'Beckham is a cultural world icon - and if we can get him in this league, people will care and they'll come out and see our games.'

"If we could have him here we think it would be terrific."

Garber acknowledges Beckham would serve as a great marketing tool for MLS but notes the former

Manchester United star still has a role to play on the pitch.

"It's a marketing opportunity, and this is a guy who was one of the better players on the English national team during the World Cup - so he is a player we think is very strong," he told Bloomberg Radio.

In order to sign Beckham, MLS would need to alter their salary cap rules. At present, teams can spend no more than 1.9 million US dollars per season on salary.

Beckham, who has struggled to secure a first-team spot at Real this season under new coach Fabio Capello, has a football academy in Los Angeles.

Hamburg keep Doll faith

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Hamburg SV coach Thomas Doll retains the support of the club even as the season goes from bad to worse.

"I don't believe there is a better trainer for us," Hamburg's sporting director, Dietmar Beiersdorfer told reporters after Tuesday's 2-0 defeat away to VfB Stuttgart.

The latest chapter in a horror story of a season left Hamburg in 15th place in the Bundesliga with just nine points from 11 matches. They have won only one league match and were just two points ahead of bottom-

placed Hanover 96 before Wednesday night's matches.

The 1983 European champions are the only club to have played every season in the Bundesliga since its formation in 1963. That proud record looks under threat.

Beset by injuries, Hamburg have also been eliminated from the German Cup and have suffered defeats in all four of their Champions League matches so far.

Beiersdorfer talked to Doll after the defeat but did not discuss the coach's position.

"All we talked about was the need to keep going and that we would eventually be rewarded," he explained.

There were signs of recovery on Tuesday. Hamburg were clearly the better team for all but the last 10 minutes, when two goals from Stuttgart settled the match.

Doll said he was determined to carry on.

"Let me be clear about this - I am not going to resign," he told reporters. "I believe the players are 100 percent behind me."

Hamburg's next league match on Saturday is at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach, who were just one place and three points above Hamburg in the table before their home match against Schalke 04 on Wednesday night.

Referees' chief to meet Mourinho

AFP, London



Keith Hackett, the referees' chief for the Premiership, is set to meet with Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho "to run through a number of issues," following the English champions ill-tempered 2-1 defeat away to London rivals Tottenham last weekend.

Hackett, himself a former top-flight official, has also criticised Chelsea players for questioning referee Graham Poll's integrity at White Hart Lane, with England duo Ashley Cole and Frank Lampard set to be questioned by the Football Association (FA) over Sunday's events.

Poll will also be spoken to by the FA, as will the two linesmen and the fourth official, who were able to hear what was said on the pitch as the referee was wearing a microphone to which

they were all linked. "We are communicating with the four match officials as well as Chelsea and Ashley Cole and Frank Lampard individually regarding the claims made," an FA spokesman said Wednesday.

"The priority at this stage is to gather information."

Hackett, meanwhile, will meet Mourinho. The head of the Professional Game Match Officials Board also believes testimony from the other match-day officials who had access to the radio link will prove Poll did not deliberately target Chelsea as has been suggested by the Blues' Portuguese manager.

"Mr Mourinho is a world-class, top manager and I will be privileged to speak to him and I am pleased he wants to do that with me," Hackett said.

"It shows he cares and wants to understand. We have already been in touch since Sunday and I will meet him again at the club's training ground if necessary to run through a number of

issues regarding referees. "What we are talking about is the integrity of one of my referees and I want to assure the public that I have some doubt - without trying to prejudice the case - about what is claimed to have been said," Hackett also told Sky Sports.

"We now wire our referees up so we have Graham operating with an open mic and the two assistant referees and the fourth official can actually listen in to what is said during the game."

"That level of conversation was listened to by three other people and it will be interesting to see how that proceeds."

Meanwhile Mourinho said: "I am happy to hear Mr Hackett is prepared to meet and I will meet with him when he wants."

"I have confidence that he is a football man and he respects the views of other football people," the Portuguese added.

"Cole was angered by Poll's performance at White Hart Lane, and the full-back was one of six Chelsea players shown a yellow card during the match, with Blues and England captain John Terry collecting two of them."

Terry claimed Poll offered two different explanations for his second booking but Hackett said: "All the referee has to do in terms of the player is ask what the player's name is and then issue a card, he doesn't have to explain why that player has been sent off."

Defeat, their second in the league this season, left second-placed Chelsea three points behind Premiership leaders Manchester United.

Mourinho's men are at home to Premiership rivals Aston Villa in the fourth round of the League Cup on Wednesday before welcoming top-flight newcomers Watford to Stamford Bridge for a league match this Saturday.



JOSE MOURINHO

Kaiser favours 6-5 rule

Football

AFP, Berlin

Franz Beckenbauer, president of German champions Bayern Munich, has backed proposals for a restriction on foreigners in club football and believes forcing teams to field six homegrown players would get rid of foreign mercenaries.

"FIFA and UEFA have certainly recognised the problem and I support the plan to introduce the 6+5 rule where six homegrown players are in from the start," Beckenbauer said in his column with Bild newspaper.

"I hope EU legislation does not stop football from implementing this necessary step."

The Bosman ruling in 1995 removed any restrictions of movement between football players within the European Union and most top club sides are now packed with foreigners.

"A lot of players have the mercenary mentality. If it does not work with one club then they go to the next one," explained Beckenbauer. "I do not know how long clubs will allow that sort of attitude."

Beckenbauer, a World Cup winner with West Germany in 1974, put forward Bundesliga club SV Hamburg, fourth from bottom of the table, as an example of too many foreigners pulling the club down.

"Too many players of different nationalities, who can hardly understand one another, can lead to a team falling apart if there is not a strong core of homegrown players," Beckenbauer said.

"That is what is happening at Hamburg. The fans long for personalities such as Uwe Seeler, who gave blood for Hamburg and was always loyal."

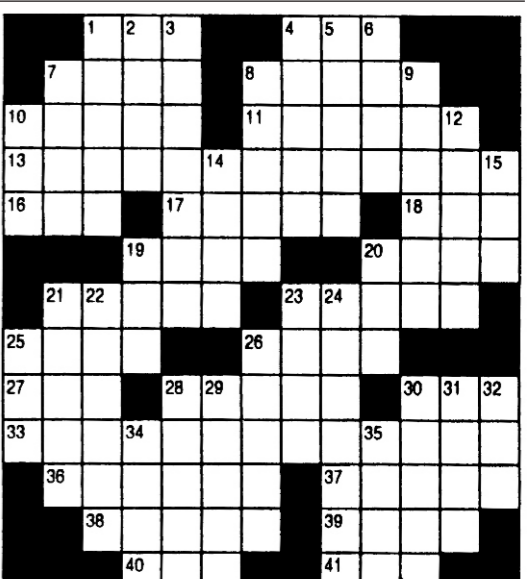
Hamburg have over ten different nationalities in their squad ranging from Namibia to Peru.

While Beckenbauer believes the 6+5 rule would benefit football other leading figures have spoken out against it with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger saying the quality would suffer with teams forced to field below-par homegrown players.

Under Frenchman Wenger Arsenal have become a team largely made up of foreigners with often just one Englishman on show.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS 1 "Absolutely" 4 Apply lightly 7 Head light? 8 Hard-drive contents 10 U.S. Grant's first name at birth 11 Smoothed over 13 Times of significance 16 Draft agcy. 17 Use a block and tackle 18 Born 19 Loving 20 4,840 square yards 21 Ostentatious 23 Sends quickly 25 Pinnacle 26 Guy Madam's mate 28 Weak way 30 Big you bother 33 Hester's "A" 36 "Seinfeld" role 37 Gaggle member 38 Obscene name status 40 Army officers (Abbr.) 41 "— to Joy" 27 Madam's airline 3 Any way you can 4 Seedy saloons 5 On the news-paper 23 Need remedial courses 7 Wastes no time 8 Malodorous 9 Rap session? 10 Day divs. 12 Color workers 14 Broadway 30 Expiate 31 Secretary, for one 32 Raw rock 34 Race-track border 35 Frog's cousin



CRYPTOQUIP

O M T Y Y Z M U C F Z T D J I T M O D U M M Y U Q M Z D ' M UDUQJUBOX VOBBVU AZJ XZTVA I U C Y U Y Y F F T Y Y O U Y T Y Y F Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF YOUR UTFIT IS USUALLY A BIT TOO REVEALING, I SUPPOSE YOU'RE AN OVER-BARING PERSON. Today's Cryptquip Clue: Y equals P The Cryptquip 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.