

Sport

Grobbelaar cleared to play

HARARE, Nov 12: Zimbabwean soccer officials and players were overjoyed Saturday that embattled goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar had been cleared to play against Zaire, reports AP.

"Fantastic," grinned an exuberant Grobbelaar as he arrived for training with the rest of the Zimbabwean team for the African Cup of Nations qualifying match Sunday.

FIFA, the governing body of world soccer, decided Friday that Grobbelaar could play despite allegations the goalie had taken bribes to fix matches in the English Premier League.

FIFA made its decision after examining a preliminary report by the English Football Association (FA) on the allegations published last week in the mass circulation London tabloid The Sun.

Zimbabwe's national coach, German Rudi Gutendorf, said he expected all along that Grobbelaar would be cleared to play.

"FIFA never suspends a player without evidence. If they (FA) say it's 100 per cent true, FIFA will take action. But even the FA couldn't do that," Gutendorf said.

Grobbelaar, in a front page report Saturday in The Herald, the country's main daily news-

paper, repeated that he "completely and utterly" refuted the corruption allegations against him.

He also rejected suggestions the stress of the controversy would unsettle his game.

The people of Zimbabwe have shown their faith in me. They do not doubt my integrity and I and the national team will not fall," he said.

Gutendorf said Grobbelaar was "completely relaxed. It is



GROBBELAAR
amazing for me. He is cool, composed."

An editorial in The Herald condemned the British press for "screaming guilty" over the allegations before they were

proved.

"At least Grobbelaar will find his many fans more open-minded," it said. "And what a roar there will be from the terraces if he keeps Zaire out and helps Zimbabwe through to the next round of the African Cup of Nations."

Grobbelaar has been accused by The Sun of taking bribes from a Far East gambling syndicate to fix Premier League games. The paper, which says the allegations are backed up by secret videotapes and recordings, has turned over its evidence to the FA and British police for investigation.

Grobbelaar, the former Liverpool goalkeeper who now plays for Southampton, denies the allegations and is suing The Sun for libel.

The Sun's main allegation against Grobbelaar is that he pocketed 40,000 pounds (dls 65,000) to help Liverpool lose 3-0 to Newcastle in a Premier League match last November.

The Sun also alleged that Grobbelaar was offered money to fix other matches, and in some cases, missed out collecting because he inadvertently made spectacular saves.

The Sun's investigation was based on a sting operation involving Chris Vincent, a former business partner of Grobbelaar, who posed as a middleman for a bogus betting ring.

Graf not sure about NY Slams

PHILADELPHIA, Nov 12: World number one Steffi Graf says she is not yet sure whether her recurring back problems will allow her to play in next week's year-ending Virginia Slims Championships in New York, reports Reuter.

Graf, top seed for the 3.5 million dollars event, practised on Friday against Martina Navratilova at the Pennsylvania Convention Centre, site of this week's Slams of Philadelphia.

Graf, whose back problems forced her to pull out of the tournament a week ago, had asked permission to use these practice courts, which are identical to the ones that will be used at Madison Square Garden for next week's championships.

Navratilova, the incoming WTA Tour president, was here for meeting involving the Women's Tennis Council.

When asked about her status for next week, Graf said she did not know and would wait to make her decision.

Graf has been plagued by back problems that began during the summer and was visibly affected during the US Open, where she lost in the championship match against Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

Since the Open final, the German has withdrawn from three scheduled tournaments.



World number one Pete Sampras of the United States makes a forehand return during his ATP indoors quarterfinal match against Zimbabwean Byron Black in Antwerp, Belgium on November 11. Sampras sailed into the semifinal with a 6-1, 6-3 victory.

— AFP photo

Wise man from Gothenburg

DUBLIN, Nov 12: Swedish international goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli knows the big game between IFK Gothenburg and Manchester United is a moment of truth in this season's European Champions' League, reports Reuter.

"Whichever team wins that game will go through to the quarter-finals," said Ravelli, looking ahead to the November 23 clash in Gothenburg.

"Barcelona have to be favourites to top the group now after beating Manchester United 4-0 last week. We hope that we do not have to go to the Nou Camp Stadium for our final game in the group needing to win," he added.

Group A remains delicately poised after four rounds of games.

Gothenburg head the standings with six points, Barcelona lie second on five while Manchester United are a point adrift in third.

"I was surprised at that result. I thought that United would do much better," said Ravelli.

The team showed its fighting spirit then," he added.

Gothenburg's only Champions' League defeat occurred at Old Trafford when they succumbed 4-2 to a United team at its best.

When the sides meet for the return leg United will be anxious to bury all memories of the crushing defeat they suffered at the hands of Barcelona last week.

"I was surprised at that result. I thought that United would do much better," said Ravelli.

Ravelli, who with 120 international caps is closing on Peter Shilton's world record 125, said: "It should be an open game just as it was when we met in Manchester. We both like to pass the ball around and attack at every opportunity."

But Gothenburg are anxious to show their true worth against United, who shrugged off their Barcelona defeat with a 5-0 thumping of Manchester City in the English Premier League on Thursday.

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