

**Ajax's pop dilemma!**

AMSTERDAM, Sept 10: Thousands of Tina Turner fans danced through the first live pop concert at Ajax Amsterdam's Arena ground, giving Ajax a Monday morning hangover — big bald patches on the pitch, reports Reuter.

Ajax moved to the new 51,000-seater Arena with its retractable roof during August but has struggled to find the form that saw them crowned league champions for the third year in succession last season.

The ANP news agency on Monday reported crowds of joyous Turner fans sang and danced their way through her two-hour concert on Saturday, leaving the pitch without grass by the corner flags and with big areas patched up with sand.

Barely a month into the season and with only four soccer games played at the Arena, the pitch has only a couple of weeks to recover before the pop fans return with Michael Jackson scheduled for two concerts at the end of September.

Quite apart from Ajax's alarming loss of form, the Amsterdam club has been bedevilled by problems with the playing surface which, despite its computer-controlled heating and air-flow management, has been criticised for looking patchy and for altering the natural bounce of the ball.

Ajax are currently a modest ninth in the First Division.

**Bebeto bails Flamengo out**

RIO DE JANEIRO, Sept 10: Striker Beбето scored to earn Flamengo a draw at home against Corinthians at the weekend in a match overshadowed by violence on the field, reports Reuter.

The game was marred by a seemingly unending sequence of crunching tackles, most of which went unpunished by referee Antonio Pereira da Silva.

Flamengo were livid when Corinthians defender Alexandre Lopes was got away with a yellow card for a horrendous challenge from behind on lightweight striker Savio, already suffering from an ankle injury before the game.

They also claimed that Lopes's colleague Gino should have been sent off for bringing down Beбето, when he had a clear run on goal.

Flamengo were no angels, however, and Corinthians playmaker Souza was carried off after being flattened by Argentine midfielder Alejandro Mancuso.

Former Brazil international Gerson said: "The violence in Brazilian football today is a disgrace. The referees just overlook everything."

Television viewers were able to hear Flamengo coach Joel Santana swearing at match officials during the game, thanks to a microphone near the Flamengo bench.

Flamengo's Carioça put Corinthians in front with a first half penalty but Beбето headed an equaliser in the second half.

There was more brutality elsewhere with match statistics showing 70 fouls during Atletico Paranaense's 2-1 win at home to Vasco da Gama in another game.

Palmeiras lead the first stage of the championship, from which the top eight qualify for the quarter-finals, by four points after beating Santos 2-1 with goals by Colombian international Freddy Rincón and substitute Fernando Dinis.

Former national team goalkeeper Taffarel had a miserable afternoon as his Atletico Mineiro team were on the wrong end of a 5-0 defeat by Gremio.

**Derby dent Blackburn's pride**

BLACKBURN, Sept 10: Derby substitute Sean Flynn ended Blackburn hopes of a first win of the season when he scored a late winner in Monday night's English Premiership clash here, reports AFP.

The latest loss raises more doubts over the survival of Blackburn manager Ray Harford whose side has now lost four games and drawn once since the start of the campaign which has also seen the departure of both Kenny Dalglish and Alan Shearer.

Flynn came on for the newly-promoted visitors after 69 minutes and he was on target five minutes from time to clinch a 2-1 win.

Blackburn got off to the worst possible start, with Derby scoring after just 46 seconds.

Jeff Kenna, Tim Flowers, Kenna was able to scramble back but could only partially clear the ball and Dutchman Ron Willems was on hand to sweep home.

To their credit Blackburn fought back hard and 10 minutes later they drew level thanks to a goal from Chris Sutton who was making his first senior appearance of the season.

Sutton's goal should have filled Blackburn full of confidence but they still looked edgy.

Aljosa Ananovic rattled the bar with a thundering 25-yard free-kick to give the 1994 champions another scare but Fenton should have put Blackburn ahead early in the second half but his header from the marvellous George Dimis cross went wide.

As the game wore on it became clear that Derby had settled for a share of the points — all except for Marco Gabbiadini who made space in the area to set up Flynn who fired in a ben-

**The Euro soccer scene**

PARIS, Sept 10: France's former European champions Marseille made an emotional losing return to Bastia on Sunday, reports AFP.

They went down 2-0 to the Corsicans at the Furiani Stadium where 17 people died when a stand collapsed during a cup tie between the two clubs four years ago.

Bastia, who had had to fight for permission to play Sunday's game at their small ground, part of which is still being renovated, clinched their win with first-half efforts from Moravcik and Anton Drobjank.

Although no tickets were sold to Marseille fans, members of the Marseille Supporters' Club and relatives of the dead laid a wreath at the ground before the kick-off.

The victory moved Bastia up the table and they joined six clubs on 11 points from six matches — three points behind unbeaten pacesetters Paris St. Germain.

Paris St Germain shared a 0-0 draw in their eagerly-awaited but disappointing top-of-the-table clash with Monaco on Friday. Both sides squandered chances.

Paris should have wrapped up their fifth victory of the season in the second-half. But first Patrice Loko and then Panamanian striker Dely Valdes missed sitters.

Monaco nearly pocketed maximum points five minutes from time but international French goalkeeper Bernard Lama, who has yet to concede a goal so far this season, made a spectacular save from Thierry Henry's clever chip.

Bordeaux, the only other side in the division with PSG who have yet to lose, continued their superb run by beating Nice 1-0 away-Johann Micoud scored the all-important goal after half an hour.

Lens, thrashed 5-1 by Monaco a week ago, managed to hold on to second place one point adrift of PSG, when they shared a drab goalless affair with Cannes while reigning champions Auxerre recovered after their 2-1 defeat at Metz by beat visiting Caen 2-0.

Auxerre's goals, both early in the first-half, came from Moussa Saib and Lillian Laslandes.

Nantes, champions just two years ago, continued to struggle. They went down to their fourth defeat when they were beaten 3-1 at Le Havre.

The matches between Lyon and Montpellier, and Lille and Guingamp, ended in 1-1 draws, while Nancy crashed to Metz by the only goal in the northeastern Derby.

In Spain, a rampant Real Madrid breezed past Hercules Alicante 3-0 in their first appearance of the season in front of home fans at the Bernabeu Stadium. Fabio Capello's men sealed their victory with a Predrag Mijatovic goal and two more from teenager Raul Gonzalez.

Real's old rivals Barcelona snatched a last gasp 2-1 home win in their Derby clash with Espanyol. Watched by former manager Johan Cruyff, Barcelona came from behind to clinch their win at the Nou Camp stadium.

The visitors had gone clear through Lardin midway through the second-half but two goals in the last six minutes from Brazilian Giovanni and Argentine Pizzi gave Barcelona, now under former England manager Bobby Robson, maximum points.

Cruyff, sacked last season, has vowed to watch all of

Barcelona's home matches, he was among the sellout crowd, but left just before Barca's late winner.

Tenerife stayed top of the Spanish league on goal difference thanks to a 1-0 away win at Logrones — their goal coming from Juanel in the 13th minute.

Bayern Munich stayed on top of the Bundesliga after Saturday's narrow squeak against newly-promoted Arminia Bielefeld while rivals Dortmund and Stuttgart both kept up the pressure with victories.

Bayern needed a 58th-minute goal from Christian Ziege to overcome Bielefeld at the Olympic stadium and preserve a one-point lead over defending champions Dortmund.

Dortmund also edged through 1-0 at Hansa Rostock Brazilian defender Julio Cesar scoring their late winner.

Stuttgart made it four wins out of four after scoring a 4-0 win over Cologne.

In the Netherlands Dutch champions Ajax continued their poor start to the season by slumping to a 2-0 defeat at unfashionable Nijmegen. They are now entrenched in mid-table after five matches.

Loius van Gall's injury-hit side, who face French title holders Auxerre on Wednesday in their opening Champions League match of the season, were missing six regulars.

They crashed to goals from Maurice Graf and Anton Janssen.

Ajax, who have scored just two goals so far in the new campaign, are already eight points adrift of bitter rivals and league leaders PSV Eindhoven. PSV crushed Breda 5-0 to maintain their 100 per cent start. Feyenoord are in second place after beating Willem II Tilburg 4-1.

**Japan turns back on ROK**

TOKYO, Sept 10 (AFP): South Korea's pleas for a regional football tournament have been snubbed by Japan as rivalry between the co-hosts of the 2002 World Cup comes back to the surface. But Dr Chung Mong-Joon, head of the South Korean Football Association, said here Monday he hoped there would be a change of heart from the Japanese and the tournament would start next year.

Seven nations have been invited to compete in a northeast Asian Club tournament, run along the lines of the European Champions Cup. Only Japan rejected the idea, Chung said.

"I have discussed this idea with relevant football officials from the respective countries and virtually all of them have expressed their strong support," Chung said.

"I hope Japan will also embrace this idea and the tournament will start next year."

Chung, a vice president of the international football federation (FIFA), invited Japan, South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, Taiwan and Hong Kong to take part in the club championship.

In a meeting with Chung, his Japanese counterpart Ken Naganuma was reluctant to back the tournament, citing doubts about its economic feasibility and the "busy schedule" off of Japan's professional J-League.

Kawabuchi was a "very determined candidate."

Japan and South Korea have a long history of antagonism towards each other and fought a bitter campaign to host the 2002 World Cup until FIFA forced them to jointly stage the event.

Japan has also criticised South Korea's suggestion that North Korea be allowed to share some of the World Cup matches.

North Korea, which failed in its bid to have a slice of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, has so far distanced itself from the idea.

"I believe we must be patient. Eventually, North Korea will respond positively sooner or later," Chung said.

There are six years until kick-off and many things can happen during the period. I believe this would be a real economic incentive for the gradual opening of North Korea."

Chung was in Tokyo for the 75th anniversary of the Japanese Football Association.



CHUNG MONG-JOON

**Tiger kid on the block**

NEW YORK, Sept 10 (Reuter): Twenty-year-old Tiger Woods unquestionably the hottest new golfer to come along in years, is on track to become the next superstar of sports marketing as well, experts say.

His professional career less than one month old, Woods is seen taking away as much as 150 million dollars over the next five years, and eventually rivaling the biggest money maker of all, basketball super-

star Michael Jordan.

Woods, who won an unprecedented third consecutive US amateur championship this summer, already has contracts worth 60 million dollars, which includes a five-year deal with Nike Corp. for 8 million dollars a year.

But that is clearly just the beginning.

"Although golf is a much smaller game than basketball," says Roberto Muller, president of the Muller Sports Group, a New York sports marketing company that represents Magic

Johnson. Tiger can be as big as Michael Jordan as a sports celebrity figure.

He has that great amateur record. He's cool. He's got a great smile. And he plays golf like he enjoys it and like Andre Agassi used to play tennis, that makes him a marketing star. The big national brands like to play with the big stars."

Woods already has proven his "star" power — attracting record crowds to the amateur championship in Oregon in July and helping it draw a far bigger television audience than the one watching the PGA tour event television at the same time.

The former star of the Stanford University golf team also attracted enormous crowds at the Milwaukee Open last month when he played his first tournament as a professional.

While he did not seriously challenge for the title in that event, Woods still garnered the biggest galleries of the week, with crowds six-deep lining every hole he played.

And he did not disappoint his growing legions of fans. He consistently hit the ball farther than anyone else — even the famous long-hitting John Daly — and he capped his pro-debut with a hole in one on Sunday.

In addition, the novelty of a man of colour — his father is African-American and his mother is Thai — participating in the almost totally white world of professional golf adds to his marketing appeal.

The daughter of a golf pro, Ross believes that the young golfer has the quiet, confident charisma that will allow him to cross over to other fields unrelated to golf as a celebrity endorser.

However, some see Tiger's great monetary potential as a possible trap that could hurt his credibility.

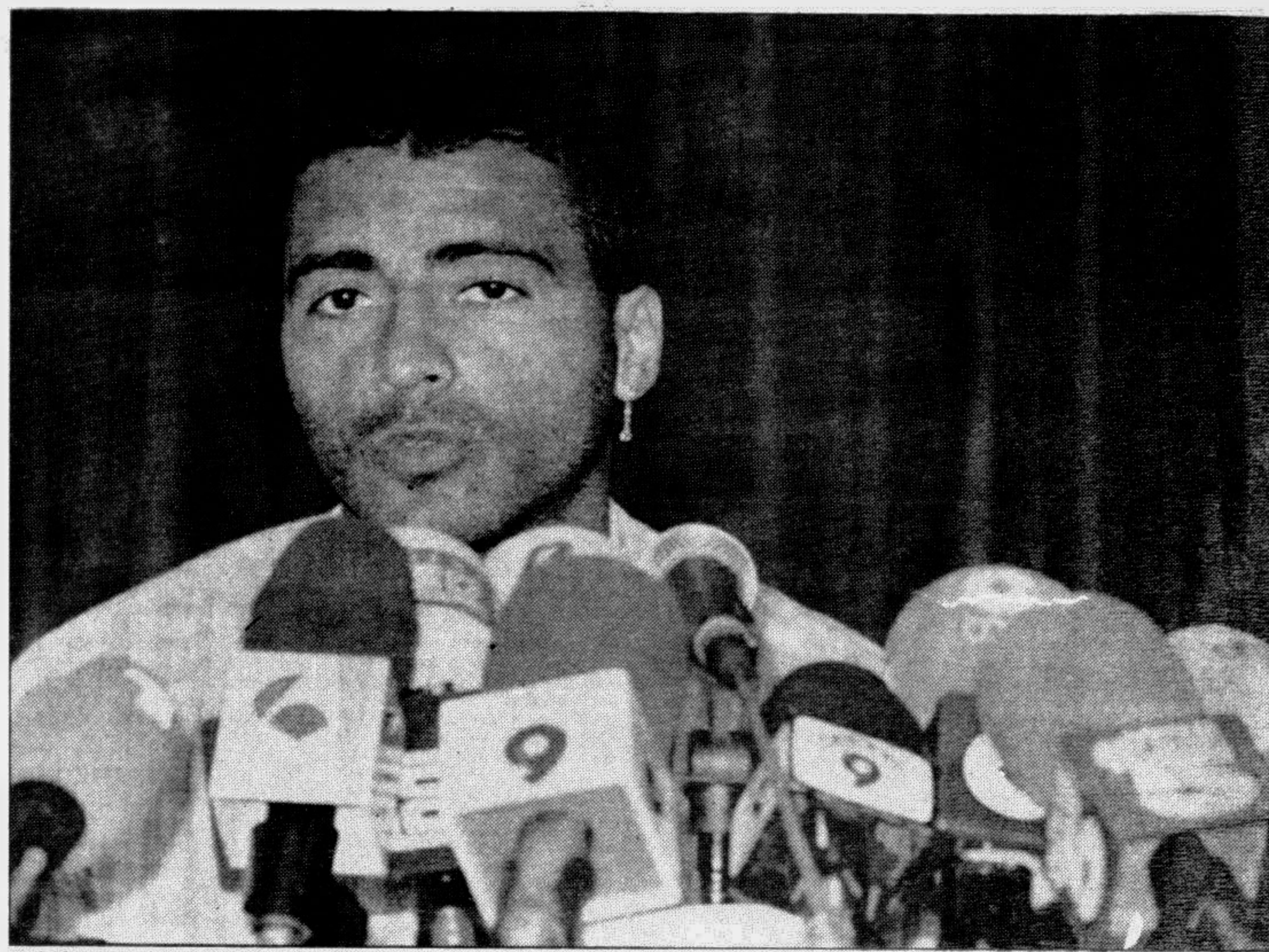
"He has to be concerned that he doesn't overcommit and overexpose himself," noted Jeff Klein, a partner in the New York law firm of Weil, Gotshal and Manges.

The agent for former baseball star Dave Winfield, Klein said. "At this stage, with the Nike contract in hand, I can't imagine that money is a big factor."

In Tiger Woods' case, Klein continued. "The special elements are his spirit, his drive, his earnestness, which are partly due to the limited access he has given of himself to endor-



A child carries a soccer ball shaped kite during an international festival in the northern French port city of Dieppe on Sept 8. —AFP/UNB photo



A dejected Valencia's Brazilian star striker Romario speaks to the press, on Sept 9, after coach Luis Aragones decided to leave him on the bench during a UEFA match against Bayern Munich. — AFP/UNB photo

**Romario goes thru' the roof**

VALENCIA, Sept 10: Brazilian World Cup striker Romario threatened to leave Valencia on Monday after being left out of the squad for Tuesday's vital UEFA Cup clash with holders Bayern Munich, reports Reuter.

"I'm annoyed. I've come here to play," said Romario, suggesting that he could not stay at the club with coach Luis Aragones. "The manager said the same, it's either him or me."

Romario said Aragones had complained of his attitude towards training and that he had been informed of the decision after Monday morning's practice session.

"I've never trained like I am now, at 30 so it's clear I can't do with the same intensity as 20-year-old," said Romario, who signed from Flamengo in the close season.

The Spanish press has recently printed photographs of training runs in which Romario was left somewhat behind the rest of the Valencia players.

Last year's runners-up, Valencia, lost the opening game of the season 3-2 after squandering a two goal lead, and slumped to the bottom of the First Division after also losing their second game.

The club's pre-season was marred by highly visible clashes between Aragones and club president Francisco Roig.

**Leeds sack Wilkinson**

LEEDS, England, Sept 10: Leeds manager Howard Wilkinson was fired Monday, two days after the Premier League club's 4-0 loss to Manchester United, reports AP.

Wilkinson took over at Leeds in 1988, guiding the club to the Second Division title in 1990 and the First Division championship in 1992 in a thrilling title race against Manchester United.

But Leeds has struggled since then, and Wilkinson has come under fire — especially after the team's poor showing in a 3-0 loss to Aston Villa in the League Cup final last season.

Leeds currently lie mid-table with seven points from five games.

"I decided after Saturday's game with Manchester United that a change of direction had to be made at management level," Leeds chairman Bill Fotherby said.

Wilkinson said the firing came as a surprise.

"I am very disappointed and obviously very shocked," he said. "My immediate reaction is that I have left a club which has made excellent progress over recent years... I don't see how Saturday's result had anything to do with what happened today."

Wilkinson blamed some of the team's fans for precipitating

his firing.

"Of late, a small section of our supporters have focused their disapproval, disappointment and dismay on me and I think that started to have an effect on the players," he said.

Youth coach Paul Hart was appointed caretaker manager at the club.

Former Arsenal managers George Graham and Bruce Rioch and former Liverpool boss Kenny Dalglish were considered among the candidates to replace Wilkinson.

Wilkinson is the second high-profile manager to lose his job in the past week. Ray Wilkins was forced out last week at Queens Park Rangers.

The pressure on Wilkinson, the current chairman of the League Managers' Association, increased this summer when media group Caspian took over the Elland Road club.

Wilkinson, who had already signed Liverpool's Ian Rush on a free transfer, was then given cash to spend on his squad.

He signed England Under-21 midfielder Lee Bowyer from First Division Charlton for 3.5 million pounds (5.25 million dollars), Crystal Palace goalkeeper Nigel Martyn for 2.25 million (3.5 million dollars) and Manchester United winger Lee Sharpe for 4.5 million (6.75 million dollars).

But Scotland captain Gary McAllister rocked the club when he decided to move to Coventry for 3 million (4.5 million dollars) just months after Welsh international Gary Speed see sold to Everton for 3.5 million (5.25 million dollars).

Wilkinson's cause was not helped by a persistent injury that derailed the club of Ghanaian international Tony Yeboah for the start of the season.

Wilkinson also angered the fans with his handling of record signing Tomas Brodin signed from Parma for 4.5 million (6.75 million dollars) in 1995. The Swedish international moved to Swiss club FC Zurich on loan at the start of this season.

**Indonesia in Tiger Cup semis**

SINGAPORE, Sept. 10: Five first-half goals, including two from striker Peri Sandria, saw Indonesia become the first nation to qualify for the semi-finals of the inaugural Tiger Cup, reports AFP.

Sandria's goals, in the 21st and 27th minutes, pushed the Indonesians to a 6-1 win over Burma and gave the young forward the man-of-the-match award.

**Ferguson the last flagship**

PARIS, Sept 10: Manchester United, bolstered by a battery of overseas stars, are aiming to end a 12-year English title drought when they begin their European Champions' League campaign away to Juventus on Wednesday night, reports AFP.

Liverpool were the last English club to triumph in what was then the European Cup — back in 1984.

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, his squad strengthened by the arrival of Dutchman Dord Cruyff, Czech ace Karel Poborsky and Norwegian duo Ole-Gunnar Solskjaer and Ronny Johnsen, is confident he can bring an end to the years on failure by English sides — who were once the dominant force in the competition, triumphing eight times in 16 years.

United have not won Europe's premier club competition since 1968 and the heyday of Bobby Charlton and George Best but they recorded an impressive 4-0 win over Leeds United at the weekend and their attack will be led by the brilliant Frenchman Eric Cantona.

"You can't be better in England than to win the double, but we are looking forward to the extra challenge of Europe," said Ferguson, whose squad failed to last the pace in the Champions' League last year.

United's initial assignment, though, could not hardly be tougher away to the defending champions.

Juventus, though, warmed up for the visit of the Red Devils with a disappointing 1-1 Italian League draw at Reggiana.

The Turin side were left to rue the departure of strikers Gianluca Vialli and Fabrizio Ravenelli to England's Premiership as their replacements Christian Vieri and Alen Boksic squandered a series of second half chances.

United are concerned about central defender Gary Pallister, who is struggling to recover from a twisted knee in time to play in Turin.

Ferguson sees Pallister as the man to counter the aerial threat posed by Boksic and Vieri.

Pallister is worth waiting for," Ferguson said. "He's an important player, particularly with the height they've got up front Manchester United and Juventus are in Group C of the 16 team Champions' League, alongside Fenerbache of Turkey

and Rapid Vienna.

European Cup Winners' Cup runner-up last year, Rapid Vienna are unfortunate to find themselves in such a tough group, but to have the consolation of opening up at home to Fenerbache, whose best European performance was a quarter-final appearance in the Cup Winners Cup 32 years ago.

The Turks will be without suspended Bulgarian international Emil Kostadinov.

Group A comprises depleted four-time champions Ajax Amsterdam, Auxerre of France,

he was suspended for the Cup final.

Sabj says Auxerre take a new attitude into their campaign.

"We've stopped thinking of ourselves as a little club. We can hold our own against the big teams," said the Algerian who has already scored three goals this season half his total from last year.

Roux says Ajax will be able to put aside their indifferent start to the Dutch league — which has included losses to minnows Heerenveen and Nijmegen.

"Playing in your own league and Europe is not the same kettle of fish."

Ajax are a great side and their Coach Louis van Gaal knows how to get the best out of his side," Roux said.

Roux said a lot would depend on Marc Overmars, the Ajax left winger who has just returned from injury.

"But they have a lot of attacking potential and we will have to concentrate the whole 90 minutes," he said.

Grasshoppers Zurich manager Erich Vogel, whose squad host Glasgow Rangers in their opener, is less convinced of Ajax's ability to overcome the loss of Flinidi George, Nwankano Kanu, Sonny Silooy, Edgar Davids and Michael Reiziger.

"Rangers are the group favourites from what I have seen," Vogel said.

"We know they will have typical Scottish fighting spirit and have World-class players in Paul Gascoigne and Brian Laudrup that's why I rate them favourites in Ajax are not so strong as they used to be."

Rangers are certainly a team in top form after winning their last eight matches, while Grasshoppers have failed to score in their last two outings despite the presence in their team of talented Kubilay Turkilmaz.

Rangers failed to win a match in the champions league last season, although manager Walter Smith says his team is "stronger overall than we were last year and better prepared."

Logic, nonetheless, says Ajax are the team to beat in the group, even though they will be without suspended stars Danny Blind, Richard Witschge and Nordin Wooter and injured duo Patrick Kluyvert and Peter Hoekstra at Auxerre.

The Dutch masters won the European Cup in 1995, were beaten in last season's final by



ALEX FERGUSON

Grasshoppers Zurich and Glasgow Rangers. Group B consists of Borussia Dortmund, Atletico Madrid, Widzew Lodz and Steau Bucharest and group D features A.C Milan, FC Porto, Rosenborg Trondheim and IFK Gothenburg.

Auxerre coach Guy Roux, whose team won the French title for the first time last year, almost regrets beating Ajax in the UEFA Cup three years ago.

"Now we can be sure they take us seriously," he said of Wednesday's match.

Roux, who prides himself on Auxerre's passing game, has promoted Algerian international Moussa Saib to playmaker in place of Corentin Martins who left for Spain's Deportivo Coruna in July.

Australian Ned Zelic, a summer signing from Eintracht Frankfurt replaces sweeper Laurent Blanc, who left for Barcelona.

Roux has yet to decide who will replace captain Frank Silvestre whose shoulder operation will keep him out until November. Silvestre missed only one game last season when

Juventus and are known for their prodigious strength in depth.

Italian champions AC Milan came from behind to defeat Verona 4-1 at the weekend, a victory that featured a memorable goal from Liberian striker George Weah. They are expected to be the dominant force in Group D and their form is bad news for Porto, who visit Milan on Wednesday with a squad that includes players from eight different countries.

The Italians will, however, be without suspended stars Alessandro Costacurta and Frenchman Christophe Dugary.

Gothenburg, two-time winners of the UEFA Cup, loom as definite dangers, should five time winners AC Milan or 1987 titlists Porto falter, while Rosenberg have never made it to the last eight in 15 previous European campaigns.

Spanish champions Atletico Madrid suffered a shock 3-1 loss to Compostela at the weekend and will face Steaua Bucharest with some trepidation in Group B, although the team from the Romanian capital are without suspended striker Sabin Ilie.

Borussia Dortmund, German champion for the past two years and at home to the Poles of Lodz on Wednesday, will be looking to improve on their performance of last year, when they lost to Ajax in the quarter-finals.

With a squad that includes experienced internationals in Matthias Sammer (who will miss Wednesday's match through injury), Jergen Kholer and Stefan Reuter, along with Portuguese ace Paulo Sousa, they and Atletico are the favourites to advance from the group.

**FIFA hailed**

WASHINGTON, Sept 10: US Labour Secretary Robert Reich praised world soccer's governing body on Monday for acting to outlaw soccer balls made by child labour, and endorsed spreading a ban to the whole sporting goods industry, reports AP.

"In fact, some 80 per cent of soccer balls sold in America are produced by child labour in Pakistan," he told a conference on child labour. "This has to stop."