

Palmeiras at fault again

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 29 (Reuters/Internet): Copa Mercosur finalists Palmeiras were once again accused of being violent and unsportsmanlike on Tuesday, this time by opponents Cruzeiro.

"Palmeiras do not play hard, they play violently, they have been kicking players off the ball for a long time," said Cruzeiro coach Levir Culpi, whose team were beaten 3-1 away by Palmeiras in Saturday's second leg of the Copa Mercosur final.

The result forced a decisive third match in the all-Brazilian final to be held later on Tuesday.

"They celebrate goals with obscene gestures, provoke our players and, when their team is winning, the ball boys vanish," he added.

Earlier this year, Vasco da Gama said they were taking out special accident insurance for their players before a Palmeiras game because, they claimed, the Sao Paulo team was violent.

Palmeiras coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, known popularly as "Big Phil," is one of Brazil's most successful in terms of titles but has long been criticised for the way his teams play.

He has publicly urged his team to commit more fouls but denies his players try to injure their opponents.

The abrasive Scolari was indicted at the latest criticism.

"Four players have been put out of the Brazilian championship by tackles from Cruzeiro players," he said.

The all-Brazilian Mercosur final went to the third clash after Cruzeiro won the first game 2-1 and Palmeiras the second 3-1. The match is decided on results rather than goal aggregate, so a third game has to be played.

Palmeiras have home advantage for the game by virtue of a better overall record in the tournament, which features the biggest clubs from Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile.

Booster on loan

PARIS, Dec 29 (Reuters/Internet): Former French international Mickael Madar is joining Paris St Germain on a six-month loan from Everton, the French first division side said on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old striker, who was called up by Aime Jacquet for Euro96 but did not play, joined English premier league side Everton a year ago from Spanish side Deportivo Coruna. Since leaving Monaco after Euro96, he had struggled to convince abroad.

His arrival further strengthens PSG's strike force after Xavier Gravelaine joined from Montpellier in a swap with off-form Nicolas Ouedraogo.

New club president Laurent Perpere, who replaced Charles Bilety last week in a bid to restore some pride after a lacklustre start to the season, said he was still looking to recruit striker Bruno Rodriguez from Metz.

Viera Wenger's concern



LONDON, Dec 29: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger revealed his fears for the future of his young Frenchman Patrick Viera on Monday after the midfielder was sent off for a moment of madness in the 1-0 English Premiership win at Charlton, reports AFP.

Viera, 22, received his marching orders for appearing to elbow Charlton's Neil Redfearn after 51 minutes.

It was the fourth red card of his Arsenal career and came just weeks after he was fined 20,000 pounds (\$32,000) for a V-sign made to Sheffield Wednesday fans at Hillsborough.

Wenger admitted he was concerned about the effect the dismissal would have on the emo-

Footballer fined for fatal accident

KAMPALA, Dec 29 (Reuters/Internet): Ugandan international Majid Musisi has been fined 1.2 million shillings (\$880) for killing a cyclist and injuring two others in two separate incidents, prosecutors said on Tuesday.

Musisi, who plays for Turkish side Dardanelspor and is the first Ugandan to play professional soccer in Europe, pleaded guilty to 10 separate charges, including drunken and reckless driving, before a magistrate's court in Kampala on Monday.

The 30-year-old killed a cyclist and injured another man in an accident in August.

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He succeeded Anatoly Byshovets, sacked this month after just five months in charge.

Romantsev, 45 next week, was named Russia's sixth coach as many years at an executive board meeting of the Russian football union. He previously led Russia to Euro 96 but was dismissed after the team performed poorly in the finals.

Romantsev, who remains Spartak boss, was picked ahead of two other candidates — Alania Vladikavkaz coach Valery Gazayev and Lokomotiv Moscow chief Yuri Syomin.

"I have not had the time to make any plans or outlines for the national team," Romantsev said after his appointment. "I will do that first thing next week after the new year."

But the coach made it clear he wants to work with a new generation of players and make his club a base for the national team.

The current core of players

on the Russian national team is a lost generation for our soccer," he said. "I believe that they lost their chance a long time ago."

Romantsev said he has not given up hope yet of reaching the 2000 European Championship finals. Successive defeats by Ukraine, world champions France and outsiders Iceland have let Russia with almost no chance of qualifying and led to the dismissal of Byshovets.

"There are seven more games (euro qualifiers) remaining," Romantsev said. "I think right

Kiko out of action

MADRID, Dec 29 (Reuters/Internet): Atletico Madrid's Spanish international striker Kiko Narvaez will be out of action for one more month, the club announced on Tuesday.

Kiko injured his right ankle against Barcelona on November 28. Close to recovery, he severely sprained the same ankle in training on Monday.

But the authoritarian coach has a solid record with Spartak, winners of six of the seven post-Soviet Russian championships and UEFA Cup semifinals last season.

The 30-year-old striker, who was called up by Aime Jacquet for Euro96 but did not play, joined English premier league side Everton a year ago from Spanish side Deportivo Coruna. Since leaving Monaco after Euro96, he had struggled to convince abroad.

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Miura joins Croatian camp

ZAGREB, Dec 29 (Reuters/Internet): Japanese striker Kazuyoshi Miura signed a 1-1/2 year contract with Croatian Zagreb on Tuesday, a club spokesman said.

"I am concerned that it will take away his confidence. I hope he does not overreact and behaves better but as well that he doesn't lose his aggression and confidence because that's part of his game."

"You cannot be proud of that but he is a young player. I am not sure today if he deserved to be sent-off. I have to see what he has done."

"I think it will have an effect of course because he will be out for three or four games and when you know how much he loves to play it will have an effect on him."

"He has improved his behaviour a lot and I don't think today he had an aggressive game."

Viera's dismissal wasn't the only problem for Wenger who saw Dennis Bergkamp and Nigel Winterburn join Nicolas Anelka on the injury list.

Winterburn hobbled off with a hamstring injury after just 28 minutes and was followed shortly after by Bergkamp with an ankle injury after a foul on Michael Matic.

Miura is likely to team up in attack with veteran Ardian Koznica and 18-year-old Michael Matic.

Midfielder Viera is still

Romantsev takes over

MOSCOW, Dec 29: Oleg Romantsev, head coach of Russian champions Spartak Moscow, took charge of the national team for the second time on Monday, reports Reuter.

He succeeded Anatoly Byshovets, sacked this month after just five months in charge.

Romantsev, 45 next week, was named Russia's sixth coach as many years at an executive board meeting of the Russian football union. He previously led Russia to Euro 96 but was dismissed after the team performed poorly in the finals.

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