

## German soccer clubs against FIFA plans

FRANKFURT, Mar 16: German club bosses have blasted FIFA plans to reduce domestic soccer leagues to create space for more competitions, including a World Championship for clubs, reports AP.

Sepp Blatter, president of FIFA, the world governing body of soccer, revealed the plans Friday, as part of a drive to reform soccer's calendar.

"If FIFA produces new decisions every four weeks, the questions arises, 'Do we need FIFA any more,'" said Gerd Niebaum, president of Borussia Dortmund, the Champions' Cup winner in 1997.

"They are making too many regulations," Niebaum was quoted as saying in the magazine Kicker on Monday.

"FIFA officials can decide what they want, but not for Europe. For us, UEFA is more important than FIFA," Niebaum said, referring to the European governing body of soccer.

Rudi Assauer, the manager of Schalke, said over the weekend the Europeans should even consider pulling out of FIFA if the world body keeps making decisions about their interests.

Assauer said it wasn't FIFA's business to meddle in national leagues.

Blatter said that beginning in 2005, competition would generally follow that of the calendar year, with events starting in February and finishing by the end of November.

That would cause a radical change for Europe, which begins its league and cup competitions in July-August and conclude in May.

Domestic leagues, which include as many as 20 clubs in England and Spain, would be reduced to 16 teams each. Germany and most other major European soccer nations have 18 teams in the First Division.

The new harmonized calendar would open up the way for Blatter's stated intention to hold the World Cup every two years instead of every four at present.

Reiner Calmund, manager of Bayer Leverkusen, said the plans were "not only unacceptable but also not serious."

"They have to be criticised sharply," he said.

"Decisions that concern national federations and especially clubs cannot be simply accepted. The last word has not been spoken on this topic," Calmund said.

Franz Beckenbauer, the influential chairman of Bayern Munich, was more conciliatory, saying the Bundesliga itself once had been planning to reduce the competition to 16 teams. The plan was shelved after German unification.

Kicker, in a commentary, said the World Championship for clubs would only serve the purpose of increasing FIFA's income.

"If it really happens, soccer will be finally reduced to nothing more than show business," Kicker said.

A trial World Championship for clubs that in principle should bring together continental champions will be held next January, probably in Brazil.

"We will make a trial but I doubt that there will be further tournaments," Lennart Johansson, president of UEFA, said last week.

## Euro 2000 qualifiers

### Swedish roster for Poland, Luxembourg

STOCKHOLM, Mar 16: Sweden coach Tommy Soderberg on Monday named an experienced squad for the Euro 2000 qualifying matches against Luxembourg on March 27 and Poland on March 31, reports Reuters.

Soderberg has ruled out any experiments, choosing 18 overseas-based players in the 20-man squad. However, there is no room for Newcastle's Andreas Andersson, who scored against England in September, or Anderlecht's Par Zetterberg.

Prolific Celtic striker Henrik Larsson and veteran Kennet Andersson of Bologna are the likely strike duo.

### SQUAD

**GOALKEEPERS:** Magnus Hedman (Coventry City), Magnus Kihlstedt (Brann).

**DEFENDERS:** Patrik Andersson (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Joachim Bjorklund (Valencia), Pontus Karkmark (Leicester City), Teddy Ladic (Bologna), Roland Nilsson (Coventry City), Gary Sundgren (Real Zaragoza).

**MIDFIELDERS:** Niclas Alexandersson (Sheffield Wednesday), Daniel Andersson (Bar), Jesper Blomqvist (Manchester United), Fredrik Ljungberg (Arsenal), Hakan Mild (Gothenburg), Johan Majalby (Celtic), Stefan Schwarz (Valencia), Magnus Svensson (Viking).

**STRIKERS:** Henrik Larsson (Celtic), Kennet Andersson (Bologna), Mattias Jonsson (Helsingborg), Jorgen Pettersson (Borussia Moenchengladbach).

### Nat'l athletics from tomorrow

The three-day long Hosaf Metre 25th national athletics championship will begin on Thursday at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, reports UNB.

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader will inaugurate the meet at 9 am.

Some 300 athletes representing 20 teams from across the country, will take part in 35 events — 22 for men and 13 for women.

Hosaf Metre, the sponsors of the competition, gave Tk 3 lakh to Bangladesh Amateur Athletics Federation (BAAF) for the meet.



SMILING SKIPPERS: Aminul Islam and Wasim Akram shake hands after the coin toss.

—Star photo

## All eyes on Inter's Ronaldo

ROME, Mar 16 (Reuters/ Internet): Seldom can so much have been expected of one footballer than on Wednesday, when Ronaldo's faltering Inter Milan side take on Manchester United in the quarter-finals of the European Cup.

Inter enter the clash labouring under a 2-0 first leg deficit, mediocre league form and dissent in their ranks.

They were outplayed by the English league leaders at Old Trafford two weeks ago and have done nothing in the Italian championship to suggest they can turn the tie around.

But on Wednesday night at the San Siro, for only the second time in 13 matches, Inter will have Ronaldo -- and possibly God -- on their side.

The Brazilian travelled to Rome for a ceremony at the Vatican nine days ago, sparking rumours he had sought a private audience with the Pope to cure his long-term knee injuries.

The rumours proved unfounded but nevertheless, a week later, the committed Roman Catholic and former World Footballer of the Year was back in action in the Milan derby.

He played adequately but not spectacularly and came off at halftime as a precaution.

He then suffered head pains during Sunday night, prompting Inter to whisk a doctor to his bedside. By Monday the Brazilian said he was better and he is expected to play most if not all of his side's biggest match of the season.

"I'm not at 100 percent and everyone knows it but I'm getting better and I'm feeling good," Ronaldo told reporters at the weekend. "I don't know how many minutes I'll play on Wednesday but I'll give my all. This is the match of the year."

Ronaldo will almost certainly start in a three-pronged

attack alongside Roberto Baggio and Chile's Ivan Zamorano.

Baggio is back in the starting line-up in place of Youri Djorkaeff, who was whistled and jeered by Inter fans in Saturday's 2-2 draw with AC Milan.

Inter's only absentees are Brazilian midfielder Ze Elias, who has a twisted knee, and, more importantly, Portugal's Paulo Sousa, who has been dropped for dissent.

"We're lacking a game plan," the midfielder said after being substituted in Saturday's derby.

RONALDO

"It's not enough to send players on to the pitch and say to them: 'play'. No one knows what the others are doing."

Romanian coach Mircea Lucescu responded by axing Paulo Sousa from his initial 20-man squad.

United, installed as 9-4 favourites after their first leg victory, say they can cope with Ronaldo's explosive talent.

"I've faced him twice before -- once when I marked him during the Tournoi de France -- and he's a very good player," defender Gary Neville said.

"He's quick and very skilful. But apart from myself we also

have three other defenders who have seen what he can do and are in form themselves at the moment.

United will exploit any lapses of discipline in Inter's ranks and their wily coach Alex Ferguson has done his best to good Inter on the eve of the match.

There will be a lot of scheming, diving and referee-baiting from Inter. I think the Italians will go through their whole repertoire," Ferguson said after his side's 2-1 away win over Newcastle at the weekend.

The message we'll put across is that our players can't let themselves down. It's a test of temperament but ability will have a lot to do with it too and they have the ability."

United will inevitably concentrate on defence first and attack second but are quite capable of handing Inter their first home defeat in 36 years of European Cup football while claiming their first Italian scalp of their long European history.

United's biggest injury worry is goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, who went off with flu at half-time at Newcastle.

But the big Dane is expected to last the distance to form United last line of defence against Inter's would-be Brazilian saviour.

## BWDB athletics

The two-day 22nd international annual athletics meet of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) will begin at the Mohammadpur Physical Training College ground at 9 am on Friday, says a press release.

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzaq will inaugurate the event as the chief guest.

A total of 800 athletes from 44 offices of BWDB will take part.

by reaching the European Cup final for the fourth successive season following their win in 1996 and defeats in 1997 and 1998.

Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, who scored in Juve's 2-1 first leg win, said he expected an epic battle in Athens.

"It's going to be tough, we all know that, because the Greek teams really get pumped up in front of their own fans," said Inzaghi, who hit a hat-trick in last season's second leg quarter-final at Dynamo Kiev.

"But as far as I know, the fans have never scored a goal," he added.

Bayevic has assigned the attacking job to talented midfielders Predrag Djordjevic, Stelios Yannakopoulos, Grigoris Georgatos and striker Simica Gogic.

Yannakopoulos scored twice in a friendly with Croatia last Wednesday.

One problem for the Greeks is the sprained right hand of goalkeeper Dimitris Eleftheropoulos, with a series of fine saves in Turin. He was expected to play with the help of pain killers. They will also definitely be without striker Ilija Ilic who has a leg injury.

Ancelotti, without injured Alessandro Del Piero for the rest of the season, said he was still unsure whether to pair Inzaghi with Argentine Juan Esneider, Uruguayan Daniel Fonseca or Nicola Amoruso.

But he added that world footballer of the year Zinedine Zidane of France had recovered from an ankle injury and would start.

Italy goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi and Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero will have to pass fitness tests on Wednesday with Michelangelo Rampulla and Alessandro Brindelli ready to step in for them.

Ancelotti, who has led Juve to five wins and a draw since taking over for Marcello Lippi, said he expected a different Olympiakos from the first leg.

"They'll have to attack this time since they must score -- they can't just focus on breaking our game down in midfield like last time," he said.

"But we must not think about protecting our lead, that would be a fatal error. We are the better team and must take control of the match without making any silly calculations," he added.



WATCH DOG: Anyone who decided to create trouble would do so at their own risk.

—Star photo

## Sport

### Spurs plan to pair with Nantes

LONDON, Mar 16 (Reuters/ Internet): Tottenham Hotspur are set to borrow an idea which has recently proved so successful for their arch-rivals Arsenal, by linking up with a French club to nurture young talent.

Tottenham, who have been revitalised in the last six months since appointing George Graham as manager, do not intend replacing him with a French manager.

But they are investigating a link-up with French first division club Nantes in an attempt to increase their pool of young talent, the London Evening Standard reported on Tuesday.

If it happened the potential partnership would be similar to the agreement reached between Arsenal and St Etienne last year in which Arsenal can obtain talented French youngsters and also give their players experience in the French league.

Manchester United have a similar agreement with Antwerp in Belgium.

Existing rules prevent Spurs linking with another club in Britain but they are permitted to have a loan agreement and financial links with European clubs.

Tottenham's Director of Football David Pleat said: "We are continuing to monitor that situation where we can arrange an involvement with a club from abroad.

Manchester United have close links with Royal Antwerp in Belgium and have three players on loan at that club. Arsenal have a similar agreement with St Etienne, and in the past week, we have been in France to look at a situation there."

Nantes, who are currently sixth in the French first division, have won the French title six times, and have old ties with Spurs who beat them 1-0 on aggregate on their way to winning the UEFA Cup in 1972.

Tottenham face Barnsley in an FA Cup quarter-final on Tuesday night with a semifinal place against Newcastle at stake. They also play Leicester City in the League Cup Final at Wembley on Sunday.

The league's joint top scorer

will be out of action for the remainder of the season.

"Elber is a super player but we have others," said Bayern mid-fielder Mario Basler.

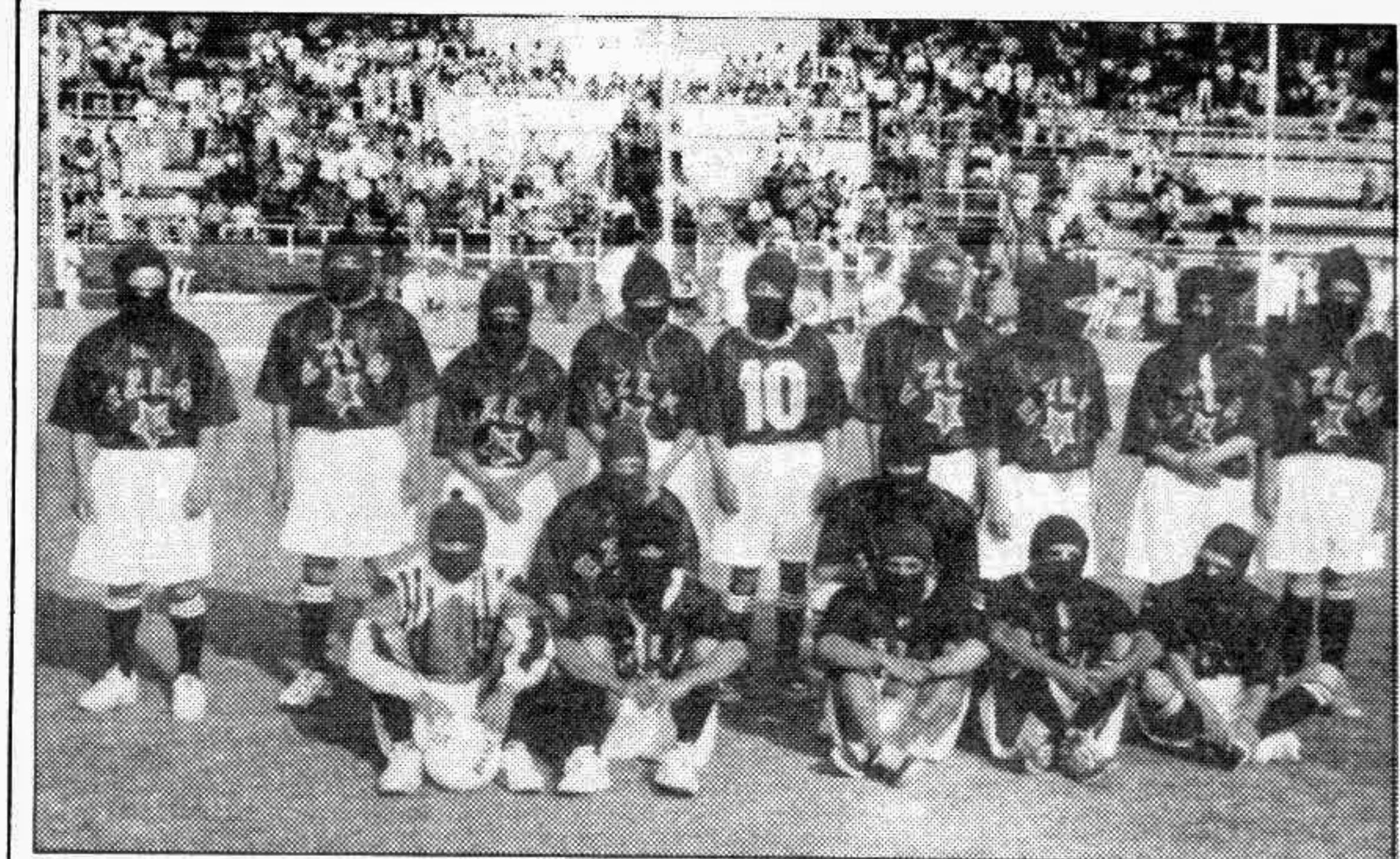
"This is FC Bayern, not FC Elber. I believe we can be just as strong without him."

Coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who

is expected to pair Bosnian Hasan Salihamic with Carsten Jancker up front, could also be without mid-fielder Thomas Strunz, hampered by a sore stomach muscle.

Rehhagel, too, has his worries. Danish defender Michael Schjønberg is still nursing a nasty leg fracture and Egyptian defender Hany Ramzy is suspended after being sent off in the first leg.

The favourites will naturally



Human rights delegates from Zapatista National Liberation Army pose for a team photograph before playing a friendly soccer match against former Mexican First Division players in Mexico City on March 15.

—AFP photo

## Turning to history for inspiration



KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany, Mar 16 (Reuters/ Internet): Kaiserslautern have a 2-0 deficit from the first leg and their chances of reaching the European Cup semifinals look slim but they know that when Bayern Munich come to their Betzenberg stadium miracles can happen.

The Bayern players are tired of hearing the story of a Bundesliga match back in 1973 when the mighty Bavarians, then led by Franz Beckenbauer, were leading 4-1 after just 30 minutes of their game in the Red Devils' den.

Kaiserslautern bounced back to win 7-4 and that memorable match will certainly inspire the German champions as they entertain Bayern on Wednesday in the second leg of their all-German quarter-final.

"If we open the scoring, it will be hell for Bayern," predicted Kaiserslautern chairman Juergen Friedrich, aware that his side's 40,000 passionate fans will play a key role.

They will wave their red banners, beat their drums and shout 'Fight, Lautern, Fight' as they always do, and the Betzenberg will once again live up to its reputation as the most intimidating arena in Germany.

The soccer team are the only pride of this greyish southwestern town and nothing is sweeter than victory over prestigious

Red Devils' den.

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