

**Euro qualifier**  
**Owen, Beckham doubtful**

LONDON, Mar 22 (AP): England's two biggest stars could miss the most critical game for the national side this year. Michael Owen and David Beckham head the injury list as England manager Kevin Keegan prepares his team for Saturday's crucial 2000 European Championship qualifier against Poland at Wembley.

Liverpool's 19-year-old striker Owen has a persistent hamstring injury which has not responded to treatment and Beckham was forced to leave the field Saturday with a calf-muscle injury during Manchester United's 3-1 win over Everton.

Owen and Beckham were expected to have further medical exams on Monday as the practices for Saturday's key match.

Other players under an injury cloud were recalled Blackburn striker Chris Sutton, Sheffield Wednesday defender Andy Hinchliffe, Leeds midfielder David Batty and reserve keeper Nigel Martyn.

**Sjoberg says goodbye**

STOCKHOLM, Mar 22: Former world high jump record-holder Patrik Sjoberg announced his retirement from athletics on Sunday, reports AP.

"The Swede injured his back in 1997 during a made-for-TV superstars competition in Sweden and has competed sparsely since.

"It (the back) hurts more if I train a lot, which I have done," Sjoberg told Swedish channel TV4. "Sometimes, I can't sleep." Sjoberg set a world record of 2.42 metres (7.94 feet) at Stockholm's Olympic Stadium in 1987. Only current world-record holder Javier Sotomayor of Cuba has jumped higher than Sjoberg.

Sjoberg won the gold medal at the 1987 World Championships in Rome and medaled in three straight Olympics. He won a silver in 1984, a bronze in 1988 and a silver again in 1992. He was injured shortly before the 1996 Atlanta Games and did not compete.

"Missing the gold medal is my biggest regret," Sjoberg said. "I've never been in better shape than I was before Atlanta. I felt that I finally could have won the gold there."

After Atlanta, Sjoberg came back to win the Grand Prix finals before injuring his back in 1997.

**NATO alert at Balkan soccer**

GENEVA, Mar 22 (Reuters/Internet): UEFA said on Monday it was considering postponing or moving two European championship qualifying matches involving Yugoslavia and Macedonia because of the possibility of NATO air strikes.

Yugoslavia are scheduled to play Croatia in Belgrade and Macedonia are due to face Ireland in Skopje on Saturday, both games in group eight.

UEFA said it would announce its decision on Tuesday and was considering either holding the matches at a neutral venue or postponing them until late April.

The uncertainty is a result of NATO considering military action against Belgrade over Kosovo following the collapse of peace talks and the pull-out from Kosovo of OSCE monitors.

The Irish squad are due to fly to Macedonia on Thursday and a Football Association of Ireland spokesman said: "We have got to be assured that everything will be safe."

Ireland Manager Mick McCarthy said he was preparing his team in the expectation that the game would go ahead.

"What's happening in Kosovo is very sad but until somebody in authority tells us to the contrary, we must assume that the match is on," the Irish Times quoted him as saying.

Ireland's match against Yugoslavia scheduled for last October was postponed at the time because NATO countries were considering military action.

UEFA said on Monday it will also discuss Wales' request to play Denmark in a group one clash in Cardiff, not the English city of Liverpool.

Russia's soccer chief said on Monday they would comply with a UEFA demand to move their next home European qualifier from Vladikavkaz to Moscow.

"It's now official -- we will host Andorra at the Lokomotiv Stadium in Moscow," president of the Russian Football Union Vyacheslav Kolosov told the news agency.

A bomb explosion at Vladikavkaz's main market killed more than 50 people on Friday, raising doubts over match safety.

We have received the UEFA demand to move the game from Vladikavkaz and we complied with it."

Russia's original plan was to play Andorra on March 31 in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, just 50 km from war-torn Chechnya.

"I already informed North Ossetian President Kazbek Dzakoshov that we are moving the game to Moscow," Kolosov said.

"Vladikavkaz will have to wait for another time, perhaps when the situation there is more stable."

Vladikavkaz has the advantage of warmer weather than Moscow but is a short drive from Chechnya, which has been ravaged by criminal gangs since rebels forced out Russian troops in 1996.

Several people, including a French Red Cross official who was held hostage for almost a year, have been kidnapped in Vladikavkaz by groups operating out of Chechnya.

# Lazio remain five points clear



ROME, Mar 22 (Reuters/Internet): Leaders Lazio made short work of Venezia on Sunday with goals in the opening 15 minutes from Sergio Conceicao and free kick specialist Sinisa Mihajlovic sealing their eighth successive victory at the Olympic stadium. Inter Milan are looking for a new manager for the second time this season after Romanian Mircea Lucescu resigned following his side's 4-0 defeat at Sampdoria and Wednesday's exit from the European Cup quarter-finals.

Lazio retain their five-point advantage in Serie A over Fiorentina who recovered from the second-half dismissal of Czech defender Thomas Repka to beat Piacenza 2-1 with a last minute goal from Carmine Esposito.

But the Florentine side's title challenge badly lost its way in the second half as first Simone Inzaghi levelled the scores with a 72nd minute penalty and then Repka was sent off.

In the dying seconds, however, German Jorg Heintrich raced to the by-line before crossing for Esposito's last gasp winner.

Parma looked to have salvaged a point after fighting back from Argentine Roberto Sosa's 23rd minute opener and the dismissal of Italy defender Fabio Cannavaro to equalise with a thunderous free kick from Paolo Vanoli in the 69th minute.

But Amoroso escaped Luigi Sartori in the final minutes to

beat Gianluigi Buffon. AC Milan's title hopes were also jolted when Yves Osmanovski's second goal of the match put Bari 2-1 up with 11 minutes left at the San Siro. But Maurizio Ganz's injury-time penalty grabbed a 2-2 draw for the home side.

Udinese's victory lifts them into fifth-place, a point ahead of Juventus and AS Roma who shared a 1-1 draw at Turin.

European Cup semifinalists Juventus looked destined for their first defeat in eight matches under new manager Carlo Ancelotti when Marco Delvecchio headed Roma in front. But defender Mark Iuliano equalised 17 minutes later.

At the San Siro, Milan made the most possible start as Osmanovski seized on a misked sliding tackle from Alessandro Costacurta to put Bari into a fifth minute lead.

German Oliver Bierhoff equalised before half-time but the home side were ruined by a series of misses when German Christian Ziege presented Osmanovski with his second in the 80th minute.

Like Fiorentina, however, Milan's title hopes were kept alive with last-ditch offensive as Duccio Innocenti handled in the area and Ganz converted the penalty.

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games, built the platform for England forward David Beckham to end his goal drought of the past 25 matches with a perfectly placed free kick after 67 minutes.

Everton, desperate for points to escape from the relegation zone, offered little but a tight defence. United had the sharpness of Norwegian striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to thank for the first goal in the 55th minute.

The ball control of Dwight Yorke created the chance for Solskjaer's 11th premier league goal, and Yorke was again involved as England defender Gary Neville scored a rare goal for 2-0 in the 64th minute.

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Everton reduced the deficit when Don Hutchison struck a powerful free kick past Peter Schmeichel in the 80th minute.

At Villa Park, Chelsea did not manage to convert their superiority into goals until the 59th minute.

Flo produced a match-winning performance and was on target to make it 1-0, then set up Goldbaek for 2-0 four minutes from time.

Flo also had the last word, giving Chelsea a 3-0 win in injury time.

Villa, Premier League leaders early in the season, suffered their fifth successive home defeat and have taken just one point from their last eight games.

On Saturday, Arsenal produced another solid performance to underline their championship defence, beating Coventry 2-0 at Highbury.

Goals by midfielder Ray Parlour and Dutch forward Marc Overmars in the 16th and 80th minutes kept alive the north Londoners hopes of completing a league and FA Cup double for the second year in succession.

Manchester United improved their points tally to 63 at the top from 30 games. Arsenal were on 59 and Chelsea, with a game in hand, had 56, two ahead of Leeds United in fourth.

"I have had difficulties working with this team," admitted Lucescu last Thursday.

Moratti likes to argue that the absence of the injured Ronaldo has weighed heavily on Inter's season.

"If we had been able to count on Ronaldo," he said on Thursday, "things would have been different."

But sceptics suggest that the seeds of Inter's current destiny were not planted on the playing fields of France when Ronaldo sustained his knee injury but in Moratti's office.

In his quest to win with the style and panache of his father's "Il Grande Inter", Moratti has laid out millions of dollars to put the likes of Ronaldo, Roberto Baggio, Youri Djorkaeff and Ivan Zamorano into the black-and-blue stripes.

But why, ask critics, was no defender bought last summer to replace the 35-year-old Giuseppe Bergomi?

Even when Croat Dario Simic was signed in January -- too late to play in Europe -- Moratti's insistence that Lucescu bring out the best of the strike talent at his disposal only compounded the errors of last summer's transfer campaign.

Moratti was the first to suggest the real cause of Inter's crisis lay far beyond the control of a manager.

"I am particularly angry with myself because I am the first person responsible for Inter," said Moratti.

"I also want to see who has been pretending to work and who has been working seriously."

Lucescu delivered his resignation to Sandro Mazzola, responsible for Inter's transfer dealings, before telephoning Moratti in New York.

According to agency reports, Moratti accepted Lucescu's resignation although the club will not officially announce his departure until Moratti returns from New York on Monday.

Inter are ninth with 36 points, 19 behind leaders Lazio, and their chances of qualifying for European competition next year are diminishing by the game. Their loss to Sampdoria only compounded the errors of last summer's transfer campaign.

Simoni, Lucescu's predecessor, said much the same after his dismissal last December and whoever advised Moratti to sack Simoni just days after the club qualified for the European Cup quarter-finals made a bad mistake.

Simoni's team, which finished second last year and won the UEFA Cup, were fiercely loyal to the coach.

Doctors said they had operated on Alvez for three hours.

**Boxer put in hospital**

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 22: Argentine lightweight Jorge Alvez was in intensive care on Sunday bout against the Dominican Republic's Jose Rosa.

Both fighters are recovering from a bout that ended in a draw.

Alvez, 29, was hospitalized with a fractured rib and a broken nose.

He was due to fight again on April 12.

Alvez's manager, Oscar Diaz, said the boxer had been operated on.

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