

Portugal maul Liechtenstein

VADUZ, Apr 1 (Reuters/Internet): Portugal maul the part-timers of Liechtenstein 5-0 in their European soccer championship group seven qualifier on Wednesday but made heavy weather of it.

The scoreline flattered Portugal, whose first four goals came from set-pieces as their strikers struggled to find a way through a packed Liechtenstein defence.

Despite the vociferous support of a crowd made up mainly of Portuguese emigrant workers, the visitors had difficulty in playing their usual fluent, attacking game on a bumpy pitch.

The victory kept them top of the group with 12 points from five games, one point more than Romania who scrambled to a 1-0 win over Azerbaijan.

"These games are often difficult. The state of the pitch did not help," Portuguese coach Humberto Coelho said after the game.

Florentina midfielder Rui Costa, one of four Italian first division players in the squad, opened the scoring after 16 minutes with a penalty.

But Portugal then had to wait 33 minutes before Barcelona winger Luis Figo added a second with a finely struck free-kick from the edge of the box.

In between, striker Joao Vieira Pinto squandered several chances, including a missed header virtually on the goal line.

Pinto's Benfica team mate Paulo Madeira helped calm Portuguese nerves with two headed goals in the 54th and 60th minutes, both from corners.

Portugal's only goal from open play came in the 73rd minute when Costa sent a thundering shot into the roof of the net after a fine move started by Deportivo Coruna striker Pedro Pauleta.

Chapuisat double lifts Swiss bid

ZURICH, Apr 1 (Reuters/Internet): Stephane Chapuisat scored once in each half to fire Switzerland to 2-0 victory over Wales on Wednesday as they got their European championship qualifying bid firmly off the ground.

The Swiss, who managed only a draw and a defeat in their first two group games, have now won twice in five days following their 1-0 win over Belarus on Saturday.

Switzerland are now second with seven points behind Italy on 10, both teams having played four games.

"We had a great 10 days together with a lot of solidarity," said Swiss coach Albert Grass, who had come under attack by the Swiss press for his team's previous poor results.

"It was a remarkable first half but perhaps we didn't play aggressively enough. I was very nervous. But perhaps now the journalists will put their pens away for a while."

Chapuisat thrust the Swiss ahead after four minutes when he gathered a long pass over the top of three Welsh defenders and drove home a left-footed shot.

Wales' best scoring chance came late in the opening half when Andy Johnson's well-struck header off John Robinson's cross came under the left post.

The Swiss continued to have the better of the exchanges in the second half, Chapuisat putting the match out of reach in the 70th minute with his 17th goal for his country.

Taking Patrick Muller's cross in the goalbox, Chapuisat neatly volleyed it past a helpless Welsh substitute keeper Mark Crossley, who had replaced the injured Paul Jones midway through the opening half.

"It was a great match but most importantly we got the win and moved up in the rankings," said Grass. "Before the week a lot of people thought we were finished but we have raised some hope with two great wins."

"Our next game against Italy in Lausanne will not be easy but if we continue the calibre of play we have shown here, we can do something."

Six Indonesian soccer fans killed by train

JAKARTA, Apr 1 (Reuters/Internet): At least six Indonesian soccer fans were killed on Thursday when they were hit by a train in Jakarta, police said.

They were among a group of fans who leapt off a convoy of trucks that were taking the fans back to their villages. The six died when they ran into the path of an oncoming train.

Security forces were returning the fans out of fear they would stir up trouble during soccer matches in the city later on Thursday, trouble that could lead to riots, a police spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Zainuri Lubis told Reuters.

"From initial reports, about six people were killed after they were run over by a train," he said.

The death toll was not final, he added.

About 200 soccer fans were being trucked by the military to police barracks on Thursday before being returned to their respective villages in central and east Java.

Riots are common during Indonesian Football League matches where opposing soccer fans fight each other and vandalise their surrounding areas.



Striker Christophe Dugarry (No 11) being congratulated by France teammate Marcel Desailly after scoring the second goal in the world champions 2-0 Euro 2000 qualifying win against Armenia at Saint-Denis on March 31. France won 2-0. — AFP photo

France struggle past Armenia

PARIS, Apr 1 (Reuters/Internet): France dominated a weak Armenia side but only managed to beat them 2-0 in their Euro 2000 group four qualifier on Wednesday despite fielding a trio of central strikers throughout the second half.

The world champions joined Ukraine at the top of the group -- both sides have 11 points and the same 8-3 goals record after five qualifiers.

But the French, who scored through Sylvain Wiltord and Christophe Dugarry at either end of the first half, are indebted to third-placed Iceland, who shocked Ukraine by snatching a 1-1 draw in Kiev.

France went ahead inside three minutes when Patrick Vieira won the ball and sent his Arsenal team mate Nicolas Anelka away on a jinking run over to the left where he laid the ball off for fellow striker Wiltord.

The Girondins Bordeaux player rifled the ball past Armenian keeper Roman Berezovsky for his first France goal in his third international.

Despite a shot on target two minutes later from Vieira and chances for Anelka and Dugarry before the half hour, France did not increase their lead until first half injury time.

An inswinging corner by Youri Djorkaeff to the far post found defender Alain Boghossian, who headed across goal. Laurent Blanc connected but his header came down off the crossbar and bounced high in front of Dugarry who headed the ball in from one metre.

With David Trezeguet replacing his World Cup team mate Dugarry after the interval, France had three strikers in attack but the massed Armenian defence made it difficult for them to create clear chances.

Berezovsky saved from Dorkaeff at close range in the 48th minute and superbly tipped over a drive from outside the box by substitute midfielder Robert Pires in the 73rd.

Wiltord also blasted just over the bar after a fine cross from well out on the left by Djorkaeff in the 55th.

Trezeguet headed into the net in the 78th minute but the ball was ruled to have just crossed the byline before the cross came in.

Three minutes later Boghossian had a volley tipped onto the bar by Berezovsky and in the dying seconds, captain Didier Deschamps' chip was struck a little too hard and went over.

Armenia, held at bay by the sound French defence, throughout the 90 minutes, also spoilt some promising counter-attacks with wayward passing.

Their first shot at goal, not until injury time, came from defender Sarkis Hovannisyan and sailed over the bar.

A minute later, winger Karapet Mikaelyan had their only shot on target from a free kick but it went straight into the arms of Fabien Barthez.

France coach Roger Lemerre said: "The crowd asked for more goals but that does not take into consideration the Armenians, who defended well."

"We must do a lot more work up front. Not everything is right, especially with the final pass."

Poland, who needed to win the tie to have a realistic chance of qualifying for the Euro 2000 finals, could not get their attack going despite making five changes in their starting line-up after a 3-1 defeat in England last Saturday.

"We were focused but after the match at Wembley we simply ran out of steam in the second half," said Tomasz Waldoch, whose first half header, which sailed just over Magnus Hedman's goal, was Poland's best scoring opportunity of the game.

German referee Markus Merk stopped the match for about a minute midway through the first half as Polish fans started fighting among themselves but police quickly restored order.

Poland's Radoslaw Michalski and Dariusz Adamczyk were booked as well as Sweden's Joachim Bjorklund.

Sweden travel to England for their next group match on June 5, while Poland entertain Bulgaria a day earlier.

Sweden forge five points clear

CHORZOW, Poland, Apr 1 (Reuters/Internet): Sweden beat Poland 1-0 in their European championship qualifying match on Wednesday to maintain their 100 per cent record in group five and go five points clear of nearest rivals England.

Sweden lead the group with 12 points from four games, followed by England with seven and Poland with six.

Midfielder Fredrik Ljungberg put Sweden ahead in the 36th minute, capping a long run down the flank with a hard shot which went through the Polish goalkeeper's legs.

Sweden were rarely threatened and could have added to their lead several times in the second half, with several opportunities created by the headers of lanky forward Kennet Andersson.

But Sweden could not capitalise further, with top marksman Henrik Larsson, whose 25 goals for Celtic are the most in the Scottish league this season, rarely touching the ball.

"We are satisfied. After a tough start everything went according to plan. We gained an important three points but still these are not the points which will decide on advancing to the finals," Sweden's assistant coach Lars Lagerback said.

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Yugoslav booter's protest

SEOUL, Apr 1: A Yugoslav footballer, playing in the professional league here, has staged a lone on-field protest calling on NATO to end air strikes on his homeland, reports AFP.

Drakulic Sasa flashed a "NATO stop assault" message to the crowd after scoring the winning goal for Suwon Samsung in their 2-1 victory over Puchon SK Electronics on Wednesday night.

The English language protest was written in bright red on a T-shirt Sasa wore under his blue club jersey.

Sasa, one of six Yugoslavs playing professionally in South Korea, had earlier said he was very worried about his parents and sister.

"I have spent sleepless nights thinking about my family," the Chosun daily quoted Sasa as saying. "I have been calling home every day but since March 28, I have not been able to get through," he said.

An official of another team said he felt sorry for the players, and hope the crisis will end as soon as possible.

"I see the players standing inside the phone booths trying to get through."

As phones have been cut, they know they can't but they keep trying just hoping," the official was reported saying.

Yugoslavia's football union have called all their foreign-based players and coaches to boycott their teams because of NATO airstrikes launched against their homeland over the Kosovo crisis.

But this has not affected those playing in South Korea.

Euro 2000 scorelines



LONDON, Apr 1: Iceland, who upset Russia earlier in the competition and drew with World Cup champions France, shocked powerful Ukraine with a 1-1 draw Wednesday in one of 16 European qualifying matches across the continent, reports AP.

Also in Group 4, Russia picked up their second straight victory after losing their first three matches -- with a 6-1 thumping of winless Andorra.

Latvia took over the leadership of Group 2 with a 0-0 draw against Greece.

In Riga, Greece and Latvia's scoreless draw was enough to give Latvia the group lead over Norway on goal difference.

Latvia, who began playing internationally only eight years ago, upset Norway earlier 3-1.

New Greek coach Vassilis Daniil had said his side needed a win to gain a place in the 16-team final. Latvia and Norway have seven points in four games, but Latvia have a two-goal difference to one for Norway. Greece remained No 3 with six points in five games.

Group 3
In Chisinau, Moldova.

Northern Ireland drew 0-0 with Moldova in a lacklustre match. The closest chance came early in the second half when Northern Ireland's Steve Lomas blasted a shot that Moldova goalkeeper Ivan Dinov saved.

The Irish claimed it counted, saying the save came after the ball crossed the line. Moldova have only two points in five games and Northern Ireland have five in as many games.

Group 4
In Kiev, Ukraine, Ukraine settled for a disappointing 1-1 draw with pesky Iceland. Iceland earlier beat Russia 1-0 and drew with world champions France 1-1.

Ukraine's Vladyslav Vaschuk got his side a 1-0 lead in the 57th but Iceland equalised in the 66th on Larus Sigurdsson's goal.

Iceland, a country of only 250,000, have nine points in five games and Ukraine has 11 in five.

In Moscow, Russia got their second victory dispatching Andorra 6-1 as striker Vladimir Beschastnykh scored twice.

Group 5
In Vilnius, Lithuania, Estonia picked up two goals from Sergie Terchov in the 49th and 77th to beat Lithuania 2-1.

Arturas Fomenka scored for Lithuania in the 83rd. Estonia have seven points from five games and Lithuania have four from five games.

Three matches were postponed because of NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia: Slovenia vs Albania in Group 2, Croatia vs Malta and Yugoslavia vs Malta, both in Group 8.

Group 7
In Baku, Azerbaijan, Romania defeated Azerbaijan 1-0 as Florentin Petre scored in the 49th to five Romania 11 points from five games.

Azerbaijan have lost each of their five qualifiers.

In Bratislava, Slovakia, Slovakia and Hungary fought to a 0-0 tie to give each side eight points in five matches.

Group 9
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Czechs stop Scotland



GLASGOW, Apr 1: The Czech Republic beat Scotland 2-1 on Wednesday to take a huge step towards another appearance in the European Championship -- and end Scotland's long unbroken home record, reports Reuters.

An own goal from Scotland's Matt Elliott and a fine strike from Vladimir Smicer at Celtic Park gave Scotland coach, Craig Brown, the first competitive defeat at home in his six-year reign.

A second-half goal from Eoin Jess could not prevent the Scots losing at home for the first time in 13 games.

The Czechs, who lost the final of Euro '96 to Germany, notched up their fifth successive win of the qualifying campaign.

Jozer Chovacecs' side now have a maximum 15 points and hold an eight-point lead over Estonia and Scotland. The Scots have played one match less than the Czechs who they meet again in Prague on June 9.

Chovacecs said afterwards: "I am pleased to have history -- that's our first win on Scottish soil."

"We now need to perform as well in the second half of the qualifying campaign to ensure we make the finals."

Brown, though, remained defiant, insisting Scotland's hopes of reaching their third successive European Championship.

onship, were not finished. "We have six games left and we can win them all, provided we have a full strength team to choose from, I believe we can win in Prague," he said.

The injury problems which wrecked the Scots' preparations were plainly evident.

Scotland, without a recognised striker, and using midfielders Neil McCann and Jess, were simply too lightweight in

attack to cope with a physical Czech defence.

Rangers player McCann had an excellent first-half causing endless problems and Czech keeper, Pavel Srnicek, made a vital save in the 10th minute to push McCann's shot over the bar.

Ten minutes later, Srnicek flamed David Hopkin's header off the line.

But the Scots were unlucky to concede an own goal after 28 minutes when Pavel Nedved's free-kick missed target Jan Suchoparek, and instead struck the side of Elliott's head and went past goalkeeper Neil Sullivan.

Eight minutes later, Patrik Berger played a superb reverse pass to allow Smicer to beat the offside trap, and the Lens forward steered a right foot shot in off the far post to make it 2-0.

Virtislav Lokneric missed a golden chance to increase the lead in the 58th minute before Jess pulled Scotland back into the game in the 67th minute.

A long throw-in-David Hopkin came off Suchoparek and Jess pounced with a diving header for his second goal in 15 internationals.

Substitute Don Hutchison almost netted in aspirated late fightback, but a sour note came when Scotland captain Gary McAllister was substituted after being continually jeered by some of the 44,513 crowd in what could his 57th and last appearance for his country.

Argentina, Holland draw



AMSTERDAM, Apr 1: Gabriel Batistuta made amends for first half misses, netting in the 84th minute to earn Argentina a 1-1 draw against the Netherlands after Dutch scorer Edgar Davids had been sent off, reports Reuters.

The match was billed as a friendly. The reality was anything but that.

Scores of niggling challenges culminated in a crude chop by Davids on Batistuta in the 73rd minute and his dismissal for a second bookable offence.

An altercation between several players followed minutes later and, shortly afterwards, Valencia left winger Claudio Lopez cut a ball back from the line and Batistuta charged in to score.

With a minute to go, he might even have got the winner against the Dutch, co-hosts with Belgium of the 2000 European Championship finals.

Earlier Davids had appeared the hero with a solo in the 10th minute. He blasted AC Milan defender Roberto Ayala from the ball and, ignoring Marc Overmars who appeared free on the left, unleashed a fearsome shot into the top left corner.

Argentina had three good opportunities to equalise. Dutch keeper Edwin van der Sar made a point-blank save from Juan Veron in the 24th minute but the best chances fell to Batistuta.

In the 28th minute, Veron put Batistuta through but the striker scooped the ball over the net, two minutes later, with plenty of time and only Van der Sar to beat, "Batigoal" hit the post.

In the second half the Dutch again emerged the sharper side and coped easily with Argentine counters, particularly as Davids mopped up in the centre.

Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard said it was a fair result. "We played against a very strong side ... we had our chances, chances to make it 2-0

but they had theirs to score and then we had to play the last 20 minutes with 10 men," he said.

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa said his side had improved in the closing stages of the second half.

"We missed many chances in the first 10, in the second we really started to play deeply, although of course our equaliser came partly because they were a man short," he said.

The game featured 16 players who had fought out a heated World Cup quarterfinal in the cauldron of Marseille and at times Wednesday's match, with nothing at stake, competed for it in technicality. July's game, which the Dutch won 2-1, saw two players sent off.

"It was very tough out there today but it was also pretty attractive football," Dutch player Clarence Seedorf said.

Venezuela hold Colombia

MARACAIBO, Venezuela, Apr 1: Sixteen-year-old midfielder Johnnie Montano saw the start of his international career Tuesday night, helping Colombia to a 0-0 draw with Venezuela in a Copa America prep match for both sides, reports AP.

Montano, a member of the Colombian side which finished next-to-last at the South American U17 Championship in early March, entered the game in the 54th minute as a replacement for Frankie Oviedo.

Both sides started quickly but the game degenerated more or less into a series of errors that stunted the attack of the two teams.

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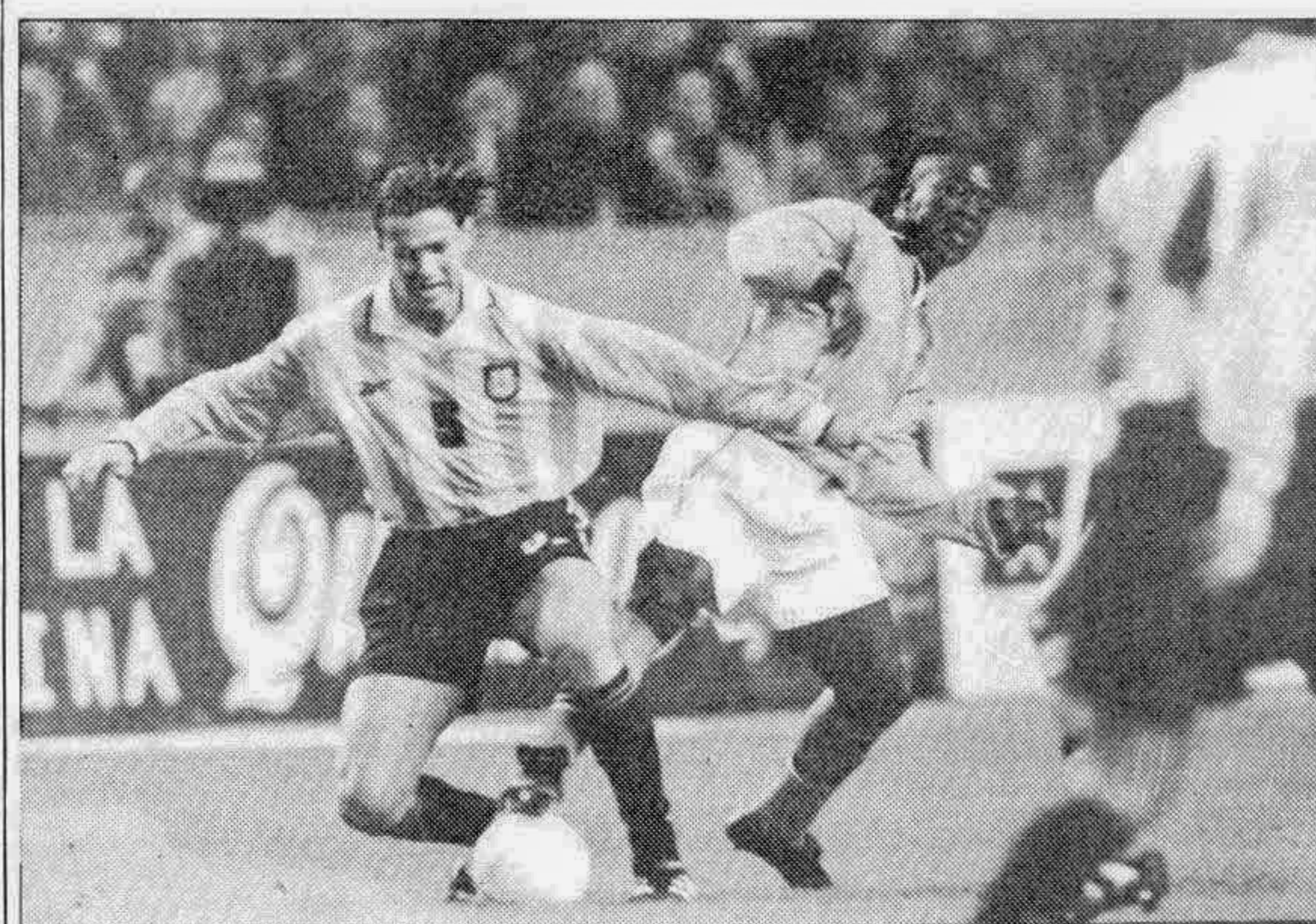
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Yang signs for Eintracht

BEIJING, Apr 1: Chinese international striker Yang Chen has signed a permanent deal with German First Division club Eintracht Frankfurt, Chinese media said today, reports AFP.

The 25-year-old, who scored six goals in a loan spell with the German side, signed a two-year contract for a transfer fee of 3.65 million yuan (440,000 US dollars), China's national broadcaster CCTV reported.



Argentine midfielder Fernando Redondo (L) and Dutch playmaker Clarence Seedorf locked in a tussle during their friendly at Amsterdam on March 31. The game ended 1-1. — AFP photo