PARIS, Apr 18: Two goals in the last two minutes of extratime gave French champions RC Lens a 2-0 League Cup semi-final win over Sochaux and revived their hopes of competing in the UEFA Cup next season, reports Reuters.

Out of contention in the First Division title chase, ousted from the French Cup. Lens have no other choice but winning the League Cup to keep their European dreams alive. In the final at the Stade de

France next month, they will meet Metz or Montpellier, who play the second semifinal to-

The victory was hard fought as the northern team, who dominated throughout, had to wait for the 118th minute to see playmaker Daniel Moreira break the deadlock from a cross

by defender Cyril Rool. Lens added a goal in the very last second of play as Sochaux goalkeeper Vincent Fernandez left his goal to assist his teammates on a freekick.

Philippe Brunel took the ball, rushed towards the empty goal, and had no trouble in scoring the winner.

Despite a brave resistance throughout from Sochaux, the bottom-placed side in the First Division, the victory was well deserved as Lens twice hit the post in regular time through Vladimir Smicer and Tony Vairelles.

Sydneysider's protest plan

SYDNEY, Apr 18: A resident of Sydney's Bondi Beach vowed to lie in the path of bulldozers in a bid to stop the Olympic volleyball competition from being on the popular beach strip next year, reports AP.

Bondi Olympic Watch (BOW) spokesman Peter Winkler said Sunday the action group would protest against the event up to and during the 2000 Games and that he was prepared to "lie down in front of bulldozers" to stop it.

"BOW is utterly opposed to this project and will refuse to accept it under any circumstances," Winkler said. "This is public land and we will not give it over. We'll fight this fight right up to and including the Olympics.

About 1,000 residents opposed to the volleyball event at Bondi attended a fiery public meeting Sunday in which a spokesman from the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA) was heckled and verbally

abused. Volleyball project manager Stuart McCreedy told the meeting the OCA was committed to paying compensation to business and other groups and was close to reaching agreement with the local Waverley Council

McCreedy outlined plans for construction of a 10,000-seat stadium and playing surface on the beach.

on the issue.

He said effects on the beach and businesses caused by the construction of Olympic facili-ties would be minimal, reversible and acceptable.

"This facility will require 10 per cent of the beach during construction and will maintain long shore access for the public at all times," he told the meet-

Vialli stands by Rix

LONDON, Apr 18: Chelsea player-manager Gianluca Vialli has given his public support to the club's decision to stand by jailed coach Graham Rix, reports AFP.

Rix was imprisoned for 12 months for indecent assault and having under-age sex with a 15-year-old girl.

Chelsea immediately announced that although they did not condone what the former England international had done, he would be given his job back when he is released from jail in about six months' time. Vialli has avoided the topic ever since, but declared today:

"I love Graham Rix. "He has been punished for something which he has done and when that finishes, there is no reason why he should be

punished again. "When he comes back, he

will be made welcome - especially by me.' Vialli, who has avoided the

media spotlight over recent weeks, explained his decision to keep a low profile to Sky Sports before their coverage of his team's Premiership game against Leicester.

China fixes swimming

BEIJING, Apr 18: China's swimming association has set a low-key target for its swimmers at the Olympic Games in Sydney next year, state media reported today, says AFP.

The national swimming association medal target is for China's representatives to win one gold medal in the women's events and any medal in the men's events, Xinhua news

agency said. The lower expectations are mainly because of Chinese swimmers' poor performance at the 1996 Olympic Games and the fairly low world rankings last year, it said quoting sports

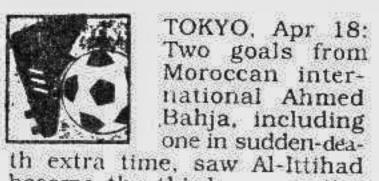
observers. China's women swimmers won one gold, three silver and two bronze medals at the 1996

Olympics. Preparations for the 2000 Games are concentrated on bringing to Sydney a 'clean' squad with absolutely no drugs, even if this is at the cost of gold medal hopes, said a top ranking official quoted in the report.



Players and officials of Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad soccer team, which won the Asian Cup Winners' Cup, celebrating with the trophy in Tokyo on April 18. - AFP photo

Al-Ittihad make Saudis proud



national Ahmed Bahja, including one in sudden-deabecome the third consecutive Saudi Arabian side to win the Asian Cup Winners' Cup when they defeated South Korea's

Chunnam Dragons 3-2 today. reports Reuters. Al-Ittihad followed in the footsteps of Riyadh sides Al-Hilal and Al-Nasr by emerging victorious in a bizarre game that saw three penalties, a red card for Chunnam centre-half Maciel Luiz Franco and the Koreans use three different goal-

keepers. Bahja claimed Al-Ittihad's first goal from the penalty spot after just 10 minutes when Choi Yoon-yeol was judged to have handled the ball inside the area but the Koreans were back on level terms four minutes later after international striker Roh Sang-rae headed home Kim Jung-heok's corner.

Chuquam were already on to their second goalkeeper by this stage after first-choice Park Jong-mun was injured in a clash with English striker Dalian Atkinson after just four minutes.

France's Thierry

Henry scored

twice as league

leaders Lazio

crashed 3-1 at

home to reigning champions

Juventus yesterday, their sec-

ond defeat in seven days at the

Olympic Stadium, reports

unbeaten run at home to AS

Roma, last Sunday, Lazio are

still four-points clear at the top

of Serie A, but second-placed AC

Milan, who play at Udinese to-

day, have a game in hand on the

and fourth respectively, both

wasted the chance to revive

points adrift of Lazio after los-

ing 3-0 at UEFA Cup semi-final-

ists Bologna while Parma,

seven points behind the league

leaders, were held 1-1 at home

Lazio coach Sven-Gorean

Eriksson put a brave face on his

side's latest setback. "After the

derby I was very worried. But

today, we were only beaten by

In the opening minutes,

their own title challenge.

Fiorentina and Parma, third

Fiorentina remained five-

After losing their 17-match

Reuters.

leaders.

to Sampdoria.

bad luck," he said.

Ten minutes into the second half his replacement, Park Chul-woo, was also heading for the treatment room after a rash tackle by Mohammed Al-Daghreeri that saw the Al-Ittihad man booked.

Aussie soccer

SYDNEY, Apr 18 (Reuters/ Internet): Sydney United were forced to put their minor premiership celebrations on hold following a 0-0 draw with lowly Gippsland Falcons in the Australian league on Sunday.

United were favourites to beat Gippsland and overtake South Melbourne for top spot in the standings. But Souths' defeated Can-

berra 1-0 so United, two points behind, must overcome Adelaide Sharks next week to lead the teams into the six-team championship playoffs. The composition of the

playoffs will not be settled until the final round. Marconi Fairfield, Sydney Olympic and Adelaide City are all in contention for the final two spots.

Northern Spirit clinched a finals berth in their debut season with a 1-1 draw at Newcastle on Friday.

Lazio's Italy striker Christian

Vieri was unfortunate to see a

20-metre shot hit the post and

have a 21st minute effort disal-

meant Juventus, resting

France's Zinedine Zidane and

Didier Deschamps as well as

Uruguayan Paolo Montero be-

fore next week's European Cup

semifinal with Manchester

United, did not have a shot on

Luca Marchegiani inexplicably

believed Henry's speculative

long-range shot was going wide

and watched in horror as the

ball rolled into the back of his

rated and, in the 45th minute,

Alessio Tacchinardi's pass split

a defence missing four first-

team regulars and Nicola

pulled a goal back for Lazio

with a near post header off

Pavel Nedved's corner in the

56th minute — the veteran

striker's first goal since Jan-

broke down on rock solid Juve

defending, and, in the 64th,

Action from the European Handball Cup match between Barcelona and Zagreb at

Barcelona on April 17. The home team won 29-18.

But Lazio's frenetic attacks

Substitute Roberto Mancini

Amoruso finished clinically.

Lazio's confidence evapo-

But in the 34th, goalkeeper

Lazio's early dominance

lowed for off-side.

Defender Jou Yeong-ho went into goal and 15 minutes later the Koreans went into the lead for the first time, Roh striking for his fourth goal in two games when he slotted the ball home from the penalty spot.

But the dismissal of Maciel, seven minutes from the end of the first half after a late tackle on Bahja, and the goal keeping crisis were to prove too much for Chunnam as time wore on.

As the pressure on the Korean defence mounted, Mohammed Al-Hawasi pulled his side level six minutes from time with a well-struck long-range effort that Jou could do little about and the game moved into golden goal extra-time.

Atkinson went close for the Saudis five minutes from the end of the first period of extratime when he shot over the bar from just inside the penalty

Three minutes later Kim Hae-kook pulled down substitute Ali Ahmed Hadi Mohammed and referee Ali Busjaim pointed to the spot.

Bahja stepped up to take the kick, only to see Jou stand his ground and make the save. However, the ball rebounded kindly to Bahja, who volleyed home the winner.

Henry put the match beyond the

home side pouncing after

Marchegiani could only parry

Dutch midfielder Edgar Davis'

he started, hitting the wood-

work but, with just one point in

three successive home matches,

Lazio may have thrown away

their hopes of a first title in 24

to rue what might have been at

Bologna but for their third suc-

Only a fractional offside de-

A minute later, Pasquale

cision stopped Edmundo

putting the visitors in front in

Padalino's ill-judged backpass gifted Russian Igor Simutenkov

Bologna's opener, before sec-

ond-half efforts from Stefano

Bettarini and Igor Kolyvanov

put the match beyond Fiorenti-

"In the 69th minute."

Vincenzo Montella won and

converted a second-half penalty

to give Sampdoria a precious

point at UEFA Cup semifinal-

ists Parma in their battle

- AFP photo

Fiorentina defender Guilio Fal-

cessive away defeat.

the 26th minute.

na's reach.

cone was sent off.

against relegation.

Lazio's defeat left Fiorentina

Vieri finished the match as

fierce freekick.

years.

Jubilo stay on top

TOKYO, Apr 18 (Reuters/Internet): Jubilo Iwata took a four-point lead in J-League standings after a flying header from midfielder Takashi Fukunishi earned them a 1-0 victory at home over the Yokohama F Marinos in seventhround matches on Saturday.

After 74 minutes, Toshiya Fujita curled a left-wing free kick into the Marinos penalty area where Fukunishi launched himself at the ball at the edge of the six-yard box.

The ball flew past Japan's World Cup goalkeeper. Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi.

Moments earlier, Marinos had been reduced to 10 men with the dismissal of national team captain Masami Ihara for his second yellow card.

The game had been billed as a shoot-out between last season's top two marksmen in the league -- Jubilo's Masashi Nakayama, who led the scoring chart with 36 goals, and Marinos' Shoji Jo, who was second with 25.

But both were held in check by tight defending. Jubilo's Hetory puts them at 18 points at the top of the 16-

team table. Defending champions Kashima Antlers stayed second, despite not playing because of their involvement in the Asian Cup Winners' Cup in Tokyo.

Third was Shimizu S-Pulse on goal difference after S-Pulse lost 2-1 away to Cerezo Osaka.

Juve upset Lazio plans Verdy Kawasaki, champions in 1993 and 1994, the first two years of the professional league. moved into fourth place on 13 points thanks to a 1-0 victory away to Gamba Osaka. The goal came from right-back Takuya Yamada after 17 minutes.

Fifth-placed Marinos were joined on 12 points by Sanfrecce Hiroshima, who won for the fourth successive league game, 2-0 away to JEF United Ichihara, and by Cerezo.

At the other end of the table, Kyoto Purple Sanga collected their first points of the season with a 1-0 victory away to Urawa Reds, with an early goal from Brazilian playmaker Sidiclei.

The Urawa-Kyoto game drew the day's highest crowd, 18,654, but Kyoto's win was not enough to move them off the bottom.

Merson in need of help

LONDON, Apr 18: England international Paul Merson, a confessed alcoholic, told a British Sunday newspaper that he had relapsed "big time" in his battle against drink, reports Reuters.

"I have relapsed big time and I am struggling," the Aston Villa player told the News of the world

"I can see it all slipping

The newspaper said Merson, who confessed to alcohol and cocaine addiction in 1994 when he was at Arsenal, had to asked for or been given payment for the interview. It said the player broke down

in tears as he admitted to drinking one and a half bottles of vodka during an eight-hour session in London. "After four and a half years

without a drink I decided I needed one," he said. "I had been arguing with my wife Lorraine and felt lonely, so I went out and got sloshed." The News of the World quoted English Football Asso-

saddened by the news: "Everyone has admired the way Paul has fought this problem. We will be taking to him to see what we can do." The newspaper quoted Merson as saying his wife had asked for a separation three weeks before the incident and

ciation (FA) executive director

David Davies as saying he was

he was struggling. "I don't want money. I want my life back. I find it so hard at the moment," he said. "The problem ain't the drink, it's the problems that come with it."

Merson spen't six painful weeks in a rehabilitation clinic to cure his drink and drugs ad-diction in 1994. He told the News of the World that he was seeing a counsellor again. "I've done wrong and I've got to start all over again," he said.

United go four points clear



LONDON, Apr 17 (Reuters/ Internet): Goals by Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. Teddy Sheringham and Paul

Scholes gave Manchester United a comfortable 3-0 home win over Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday to open a four point lead at the top of the

English premier league.
United now have 67 points from 32 games. Arsenal, who play Wimbledon on Monday, and Chelsea, who host Leicester City on Sunday, both have 63. All three have played 32 games.
Fourth placed Leeds United missed a chance to significantly

close ground when they could only draw 1-1 at 10-man Charlton Athletic. Every match in the premier

league was preceded by a scrupu-lously observed minute's silence in memory of the 96 fans who lost their lives in the Hillsborough disaster 10 years ago this week. Manchester United manager

Alex Ferguson went on to the pitch to thank the 55,270 crowd for their behaviour and the team did their bit with an easy Ferguson rested several

first-teamers ahead of next week's European Cup semifinal second leg at Duvets but his youth team would probably have overcome Wednesday.

The visitors seemed more concerned about protecting their place at the top of the fair play league - and a possible back door entry to Europe than winning the game and United took full advantage.

Solskjaer reacted sharply to shoot them ahead after 35 minutes and then crossed for Sheringham to glance in a clever header just before half-

Scholes shot in a deflected third in the 62nd minute and there was barely a tackle made in anger from then on.

"After the efforts of last Wednesday you couldn't ask for more and it just showed the spirit that's in the whole squad," said Ferguson, in reference to the epic FA Cup game against Arsenal.

"It's good for Teddy and Ole to get the goals, they will be confident of playing in any game

"You have to look at the big picture. I've got to play my pool at this time of the season when

the team is playing well."
Ferguson said he was confident that Ryan Giggs would be available to play on Wednesday. "He's coming along and should be jogging tomorrow. But he's touch and go - hopefully he'll be fit," he said.

Everton were the only one of the bottom seven to win - 3-1 at Newcastle - and they climb to 15th place, five points clear of the drop zone.

On-loan Kevin Campbell was again the hero after scoring both goals in last week's win over Coventry. On Saturday he put the Merseysiders ahead after 42 seconds and grabbed the second just before the break.

Alan Shearer missed an early penalty then scored one eight minutes from time but Scott Gemmill made sure for

"It was a terrific victory for us, especially after losing here 4-1 in the Cup recently," said Everton manager Walter Smith. "We scored after a minute against Liverpool but lost so I

was delighted that this time we went on to win it -- and deservedly so." Other results went Everton's way as second-last Southampton and third-last Blackburn-Rovers battled to a pulsating 3-3

draw at The Dell. Southampton trailed 3-1 a minute into the second half but were handed a lifeline from an unlikely source after an hour as Mark Hughes scored his first

goal of the season. Latvian substitute Marian Paharas headed the equaliser in the 85th minute and Southampton then had three efforts cleared off the line in a

grandstand finish. That result gave Nottingham Forest a temporary stay of execution but their 1-0 home defeat to Tottenham - courtesy of a Steffen Iversen goal - still means they need a mathematical miracle to stay up.

Forest have 21 points. Southampton 31, both from 34 games. Blackburn and Charlton are on 32 points from 33 games while Coventry and Everton both have 37 from 34.

The battle for fifth place stayed hot as current occupiers Aston Villa won 1-0 at Liverpool but West Ham United stayed on their heels with a 5-1 thrashing of Derby County and Middlesborough are not out of it after winning 2-1 at Coventry.

Leverkusen sail on Kirsten



(Reuters/ Internet): Three goals from Germany Ulf Kirsten -

Bayer Leverkusen hammer crisis-hit Borussia Moenchengladbach 4-1 in the German first division on Saturday. The victory enabled Lev-

erkusen to consolidate their second place by stretching their lead on third-placed Kaiserslautern to six points. Last year's champions were

beaten 2-1 by Hansa Rostock on Friday. With runaway leaders Bayern Munich virtually certain to take the title, interest focuses on the battle between Leverkusen and Kaiserslautern for the second spot and the direct access to the Champions' League that goes with it.

Kirsten had four chances in the match and converted three, in the 14th, 54th and 67th minutes.

Germany head coach Erich Ribbeck, who was in the stands

and will on Monday name his team for a friendly against Scotland on April 28, could only be impressed. The Leverkusen marksman.

who ended the last two seasons as the Bundesliga's most prolific scorer, now has 16 goals to his credit. Leverkusen midfielder Cars-

ten Ramelow completed Saturday's demolition with a goal in the 78th minute. Once mighty Moenchengladbach, who stay bottom with al-

most all hope gone of escaping relegation, scored through Swedish striker Jorgen Pettersson in the 65 minute. 'We played better and better. said Leverkusen coach Chris-

toph Daum. "I am confident we can hold on to second place." Bayern Munich warmed up for Wednesday's European Cup semifinal return leg at home to Dynamo Kiev in ideal fashion

are 10 points clear.

by beating strugglers Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1 on Friday. They

There was plenty of action in

Bochum, where VfB Stuttgart opened up a 3-0 lead thanks to Nigerian Jonathan Akpoborie. who struck in the 42nd, 45th and 53 minutes.

But VfL Bochum recovered to grab a 3-3 draw. Stuttgart 'keeper Franz Wohlfahrt helped them fight back when he brought down

midfielder Andreas Zeyer in the box in the 60th minute. Wohlfahrt was sent off and Iranian Mehdi Mahdavikia converted the resulting penalty. Striker Kai Michalke scored the home side's second goal in the 78 minute before South African Delron Buckley levelled from close range with 10

minutes left. "The referee was wrong to send me off," said Wohlfahrt.

"Zeyer fell deliberately." Television replays seemed to show the Austrian veteran was probably right.

Hamburg SV entertain Borussia Dortmund in the last match of the weekend programme on Sunday.



Patrick Kluivert (R) Barcelona's Dutch international striker, going part Mallorca's Argentine defender Lionel Siviero during their primera liga clash at Nou Camp on April 17. Barca won 2-1. - AFP photo

Federation Cup roundup France split their opening sinmate, Hrdlickova, needed only



LONDON, Apr 18: Switzerland felt the absence of Martina Hingis and Patty Schnyder. losing both opening singles matches Saturday

and trailing Slovakia 2-0 in the quarterfinals of the Fed Cup World Group, reports AP. Karina Habsudova routed Emmanuelle Gagliardi 7-6, 6-0 and 24th-ranked Henrieta

Nagyova prevailed over Caecilia Charbonnier, ranked 444 places lower, 6-2, 5-7, 6-2. The Slovaks can clinch the match by winning just one of Sunday's singles or the doubles.

Hingis has said the Fed Cup. the women's equivalent of the Davis Cup, is too much for her schedule and reportedly demanded a one million Swiss franc (about 600,000 dollars) appearance fee, which the Swiss federation refused to pay.

But Schnyder, who had agreed to take part, is in the middle of a running battle with nearly everyone around her because of her relationship with 42-year-old trainer Rainer Harnecker, a "healer" who is reportedly under investigation by German police for possibly breaking laws on alternative health care.

She sent a fax to her team stating that she would not compete in Fed Cup competition un-til her controversial relationship with Harnecker had been accepted by colleagues, family and the media.

In other World Group I matches Saturday, Russia and

gles and were tied 1:1 in Moscow, Italy and Spain also split in Reggio Calabria, and the United States led Croatia 2-0 at Raleigh, North Carolina.

That US-Croatia match should have been in Zagreb but was moved to the United States because the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia has virtually halted all commercial flights over the Balkan region.

In World Group II matches, one level below Group I, Belgium held a 2-0 lead over the Netherlands, Australia was two up on Austria. The Czech Republic took a 2-0 lead over Belarus in the World

kova and Kvetoslava Hdrlickova. Chladkova beat Natasha Zvereva 6-3, 7-6, and Hrdlickova overpowered Olga Barabanschikova 6-1, 6-4 in the first

Group II playoffs on Saturday

with victories by Denisa Chad-

day of competition. Zvereva is the top Belarusian player, currently ranked 17 on the WTA Tour rankings. But she was unable to overcome the 118th ranked Chladkova.

Zvereva was ahead 2-0 in the first set, but lost four consecutive games as she made six double faults to lose the set. She fired two aces in the second set to come back from 3-5 and was ahead 6-5. But a tired Chladkova forced it to 6-6 and won the first four points in a tiebreaker to win the match.

It was her first win in two tries for the Czech Republic in the Federation Cup. Her team58 minutes to defeat Barabanschikova in straight sets.

Barabanschikova committed eight double faults and first held her serve when she was down 0-5 in the first set. Leading 2-0 in the beginning of the second set, she then lost four consecutive games, two of them to love, and was never back in the match.

The match between Japan and Germany has been postponed until April 24-25. At Reggio Calabria, Italy's

Silvia Farina fought back from a set down to defeat Spain's Virginia Ruano-Pascual after Magui Serna had given the visitor the lead with a 6-2, 6-4 beating of Rita Grande. Farina, Italy's top player,

needed over 2 hours to get past Ruano-Pascual 5-7, 6-3, 6-0. In Moscow, Australian Open finalist Amelie Mauresmo gave France the lead by overpower-

ing Elena Likhovtseva 6-2, 6-2.

But Tatiana Panova rallied the

home team by beating the expe-

rienced Nathalie Tauziat 6-4, At Raleigh, North Carolina, Chanda Rubin finally subdued Iva Majoli after nearly three hours, converting the fourth time she was up a break and

serving for the match. Rubin, subbing for the injured Lindsay Davenport, gave the Americans the lead with a 7-6, 4-6, 10-8 victory.

Comparatively, Seles had a rather easy time, taking only 63 minutes to beat Silvija Talaja

6-3, 6-1.