

Drugs caused booter's death?

BUCHAREST, July 26: Tests are being carried out on the body of Romanian football player Stefan Vrabioru here on Monday to see if drugs were behind his sudden death Sunday during his first ever match with his first division side Astra, reports AFP.

An initial autopsy proved inconclusive and the body will now be examined for signs that the player have used drugs, said Vladimir Belis, head of the Legal Medicine Institute here.

A row has erupted over the manner in which the 24-year-old player was transferred to hospital after collapsing after 13 minutes on the pitch during his first ever first division match.

It is alleged that the ambulance did not have a doctor or life support equipment.

The doctors federation have opened their own inquiry into the incident.

FA to probe into Pennant affair

LONDON, July 26 (Daily Mail/Internet): Two football agents today have been charged by the FA Premier League over Arsenal's two million pound signing of England schoolboy star Jermaine Pennant.

Mark Curtis and Sky Andrew have been accused of breaching rules and offering 'bungs'. The charges follow allegations that the young player's father, Gary Pennant, was handed 700 pounds in cash as part of a payment of 10,000 pounds.

Both agents deny breaking the rules and Mr Andrew, whose clients include England and Tottenham defender Sol Campbell, claimed that his evidence would implicate others. He said: "When I say what I have got to say then I feel sorry because a lot of people are going to run for cover."

Pennant, a winger, was 15 when he joined Arsenal for a deal worth two million pounds from Totenham County in January.

Tottenham had also shown an interest in him but none of the clubs involved is accused of any wrongdoing, which will be a relief for Arsenal which was involved in soccer's biggest 'bung' inquiry and led to former manager, George Graham, being banned from football for a year.

The FA has compiled a 200-page report on the case over the last six months and letters were sent to the two agents at the weekend informing them of the charges against them.

Curtis is accused of eight breaches of rules, including offering inducements and acting for more than one party.

Andrew, a former member of the British Olympic table tennis team, faces four accusations, two for acting in an unprofessional manner and two relating to offering inducements. They have 14 days to respond.

Winning start for Sao Paulo

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 26: Sao Paulo thrashed Atletico Mineiro 5-1 to go top of the Brazilian first division here Sunday on the opening day of the season, reports AFP.

With nine teams level on points at the summit Sao Paulo's ruthlessness in front of goal earned them top spot.

Luizao scored all four goals as reigning champions Corinthians beat newly promoted Gama 4-2 to go joint second with Botafogo.

Copa Libertadores winners Palmeiras also impressed with a 3-1 win over Juventude to take fourth spot.

Flamengo needed a goal from Brazil's 1994 World Cup hero Romario to earn a narrow victory 1-0 over Ponte Preta at the Maracana. The striker was playing despite being troubled with a foot injury.

Duncan cheers Ruud up

LONDON, July 26 (Daily Mail/Internet): Duncan Ferguson returns to full training today after a lengthy lay-off with a groin strain and could make his comeback at Celtic tomorrow night.

The 27-year-old Newcastle striker was sidelined for much of last season after his eight million pound move from Everton but recently has been seeing a specialist in Holland.

St James' Park manager Ruud Gullit said: "We are trying to see if he will be ready in time for the Celtic game on Tuesday. He has responded well to treatment, so he will be joining us for training again on Monday."

The return of the 40,000 pounds-a-week forward is welcome news for Gullit, with Alan Shearer's comeback delayed by an ankle injury.

Gullit, who made his Newcastle debut and first appearance on a football pitch for 18 months in the 2-2 draw at Reading on Saturday, said: "We have had a lot of injuries, knocks and niggles and therefore I made myself available."

"It's been a difficult progression because we also have a lot of international players and we have to give them a holiday."

The presence of 36-year-old Gullit in the second half inspired a Newcastle fightback with a penalty by James Coppinger and a Paul Robinson strike.



Yasser Radwn of Egypt (L) making a sliding tackle on Bolivia's Ivan Castillo during the Confederations' Cup clash at Mexico City on July 25. — AFP photo

Court to loosen BSkyB's grip

LONDON, July 26 (Reuters/Internet): A landmark London court ruling expected on Wednesday is set to break pay television giant British Sky Broadcasting's (BSkyB) stranglehold on coverage of English Premier League soccer, according to the Independent on Sunday newspaper.

The paper said the Restrictive Practices Court was expected to allow rival media companies to broadcast live Premier League matches after BSkyB's current five-year contract expires in 2001.

The court has been considering a case brought by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), which argues that by selling broadcasting rights collectively, the 20-club league is acting as a cartel, pushing up prices and restricting viewer choice.

Victory for the OFT would undermine a controversial relationship which has revolutionised English soccer.

Cash from BSkyB, which has shown Premier League soccer since the elite division was created in 1992, has funded high-profile player imports which have made the English

league one of the most glamorous and lucrative in the world.

If the court finds against the broadcaster, which is contesting the case alongside the Premier League, a path will be opened for top clubs such as Manchester United and Arsenal to negotiate their own contracts with other media groups.

Such a verdict could also trigger a new round of bidding for Premier League Clubs by media companies keen to secure television rights. Last year saw a slew of takeover attempts, including BSkyB's abortive attempt to buy Manchester United.

BSkyB, a unit of media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's News International empire, paid 670 million pounds for exclusive live rights in a deal negotiated on a collective basis by Premier League clubs three years ago.

The contract permits BSkyB to transmit 60 matches live per season, out of 380 Premier League games played in total.

The OFT argues this is restricting viewer choice, as most matches are not shown live.

The British Broadcasting Corporation, which is also contesting the OFT case, pays

an additional 73 million pounds for an exclusive high-rights package.

The newspaper report said the court was likely to uphold the Premier League's right to negotiate on behalf of the clubs, but would rule against the use of exclusive contracts. Instead companies like BSkyB would be able to buy a chunk of games on a collective basis, leaving individual clubs free to sell rights to other matches.

The Premier League has argued that an end to collective negotiation would undermine the league's structure and widen the gulf between rich and poor clubs.

Wednesday's decision will be closely watched by other media companies, who are keen to use soccer coverage to drive pay TV uptake as the number of channels multiplies.

The planned BSkyB/United deal, which was blocked by the British government, was seen in part as an insurance policy were the OFT to win its case.

The OFT case has been heard before a three-man panel comprising a High Court judge and two lay members. Its ruling is scheduled for 1300 GMT on Wednesday.

Seedorf McManaman's minder

LONDON, July 26 (Daily Mail/Internet): Real Madrid rebel Clarence Seedorf has been appointed as a minder for Steve McManaman as he seeks to immerse himself in Spanish life.

The former Liverpool star, who is now on 55,000 pounds-a-week as the first major English player to move abroad under the Bosman ruling, has been taken under the wing of Holland midfielder Seedorf at Madrid's training camp here at Nyon.

Seedorf is acting as unofficial translator while the new boy learns the language. Along with everyone at Real, he expects great things of the most important summer signing, seen as their best hope of regaining the title from arch-rivals Barcelona.

Real are determined that the McManaman experiment does not fail and Seedorf, who had a public bust-up with coach John Toshack last season, said: "I have been reaching out to Steve because I know how difficult it can be for new players, especially when they are moving to an alien country."

"I have moved twice myself but, coming from South America originally, I didn't find it too bad to adjust to a Latin culture."

But Dennis Bergkamp, a great friend of mine, found it hard going from Holland to Italy and I can understand why. It is important that Steve feels

at home. As well as a language to learn, there is a whole different culture, different food and a new way of life.

"Everything has to be okay off the field if he is going to succeed and that is why some of the players are trying to make life easier for him. We all respect Steve, we know he has a great



STEVE MCMANAMAN

reputation but when you move to an entirely different country you must start at zero again."

McManaman, who arrived in Madrid on Monday and flew with the team on Wednesday, understands fully the need for a settled off-field life. He said: "I've got a house which I love and I think that's really important - being settled and not living in some hotel."

"I do need to get a lot better at the lingo - I accept that and it will come. But first and foremost, I've got to concentrate on football. There are huge expectations here but that goes with the club."

"People think they had a disappointing season last year when they finished second. There are big expectations on myself as well."

"It may take me a little while because of the change of country. Everything will be different but I believe I can do well. I hope to add to an already strong squad, a fantastic squad, and win lots of honours this year. That is why I came here."

"It's only been a couple of days and things are still new but I'm really lucky that a couple of 'the lads' speak English. They're helping me just now, there's been a great welcome and I hope that bodes well for the future."

Toshack, who expects to shed six players and buy one more before the season starts, said: "Steve is a great talent. We're lucky to have him and I'm sure he'll settle in well here."

Boro after Leonardo, Ziege

MIDDLESBROUGH, England, July 26: English Premiership side Middlesbrough have confirmed that they are on the trail of AC Milan pair Christian Ziege and Leonardo, reports AFP.

Middlesbrough have been linked with the German and Brazilian for weeks and manager Bryan Robson has admitted that he has made inquiries.

Now the Teessiders are hopeful that there could be some movement within the next fortnight.

"We have had preliminary discussions about both Ziege and Leonardo coming to Middlesbrough," said chief executive Keith Lamb on Sunday.

"So far, AC have not dismissed our interest. We have yet to speak to either player but Christian knows of our interest."

"We anticipate further discussions but it's a little bit premature to say the deal will be wrapped up in the next two days."

Robson has never been afraid to set his sights on high-profile players, but he has flatly denied claims that he is set to break the bank to get the men he wants.

The former England skipper reacted angrily to claims that he was prepared to pay midfielder Leonardo 60,000 pounds



LEONARDO

(90,000 dollars) a week to move to the Riverside Stadium. "People are just putting whatever figure they want on players," he said. "I haven't even spoken to Leonardo on personal terms."

"He's a top class player and if there are top class players about

and they're at a reasonable price, then we're in for them."

Robson admits that his dealings in the transfer market have proved frustrating so far this summer and he is yet to clinch any new signings with the new season only a fortnight away.

Zambia thru' to All-Africa soccer finals

HARARE, July 26: Zambia became the fifth qualifiers for the 1999 All-Africa Games football finals in Johannesburg when they defeated Zimbabwe 2-1 here yesterday, reports AFP.

Bernard Makufi lead the visitors a 40th-minute goal, Benjamin Mwaruwaru levelled seven minutes into the second half and Dudley Fichile headed the 61st-minute winner.

Zambia qualified 5-1 on aggregate after winning the first leg of the Zone 6 third-round tie 3-0 in Lusaka two weeks ago and join South Africa, Algeria, Mauritius and Uganda at the quadrennial event.

Fed Cup Williams take USA to final

ANCONA, Italy, July 26: Venus and Serena Williams took the Fed Cup tennis final against Russia, reports AFP.

The action started two and a half hours late after a heavy afternoon downpour played havoc with the clay surface, with the match poised at 1-1 after Saturday's singles rubbers.

But the final outcome was soon put beyond doubt as first Venus crushed Italian number one Silvia Farina in well under an hour and then younger sister Serena handed out more of the same to Rita Grande.

The two sisters then joined up to smash Adriana Serra Zanetti and Tathiana Garbin 6-2, 6-2 in the doubles.

Perugia's protest

PERUGIA, Italy, July 26: Perugia president Luciano Gaucci said Sunday that he had written a complaint to UEFA about the referee who ordered his team's Intertoto tie to be abandoned on Saturday night, reports AFP.

The referee called the match off during extra time after a second bout of missile-throwing aimed at one of the linesman, responsible for two offside decisions which cost Perugia two goals against Turkish club Trabzonspor.

The visitors were leading 3-1 when the game was abandoned.

Now UEFA is expected to award the Trabzonspor a 3-0 victory, putting them into the semi-finals, and to take disciplinary action against the Italian club.

But Gaucci made sure he got in first by claiming the referee had been "too hasty" in his decision to call the game off and that "it would have been sufficient for him to keep to the regulations and switch the linesman in question to the opposite side of the pitch."

And echoing claims made earlier by his son Alessandro, the club's managing director, Luciano claimed there had been no off-side infringement by Perugia for their first disallowed goal.

The club president, who clearly doesn't expect UEFA to replay the fixture, felt his team would have improved by next week's semi-finals.

"If we had got through this round, there would have been improvements, both in terms of our game and our physical stamina," he said. "Now all that's left for us is the league championship."

Ince set to join Middlesbrough

LONDON, July 26 (Daily Mail/Internet): Paul Ince will sign for Middlesbrough within the next 48 hours after agreeing a settlement figure with Liverpool.

The Anfield club, who transfer-listed their former captain, accepted a bid of one million pounds 10 days ago from Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson.

Since then, 31-year-old Ince has been involved in a wrangle over the cash value of the remaining two years of his contract, thought to be worth around one million pounds.

An agreement has now been reached and Robson said last night: "I am certain now that Ince is our player. I am hoping that the deal will be fully completed within the next two days."

Robson also rubbished suggestions from Spain that he is preparing to make another attempt to bring Brazilian forward Juninho back to his club from Atletico Madrid.

Denise books Seville ticket

BIRMINGHAM, England, July 26: Denise Lewis, the European and Commonwealth heptathlon champion, will chase her first World Championship title in Seville next month after banishing injury fears, reports Reuters.

"All systems are go," Lewis said after giving herself a competitive test in four individual events at the British championships over the weekend.

Lewis, hampered by a calf injury, pulled out of two heptathlons earlier this summer, and had not competed for more than a month.

She gained all the reassurance she needed over the two-day Championships by producing results that came close to her best marks in the heptathlon.

The most outstanding performance of the final day came in the women's 400 metres where Katherine Merry, a newcomer to the distance, won in a Championship best time of 50.62 sec.

In the men's 200 metres, Commonwealth champion Julian Golding turned on the power in the finishing straight to come home in a championship best 20.20 sec.

Steve Backley, the European javelin champion who has been struggling with niggling injury and technique problems so far this summer made a return to something like his best form, winning with 87.59 metres.

Kelly Holmes, dogged by injury since winning a silver medal at 1,500 metres at the 1995 World Championships, continued her rehabilitation when she won the 800 metres in 1:59.86.

The men's 1,500 metres title went to John Mayock (3:39.12) for the fifth time as he passed the number of titles in the event won by former British greats Roger Bannister, Seb Coe and Steve Ovett.

Anelka saga nearing end

LONDON, July 26: Arsenal striker Nicolas Anelka is expected to join Lazio for 22 million pounds (34.85 million dollars) today after weeks of negotiation, British media reported, reports Reuters.

Lazio agreed to meet the premier league club's asking price for the French international after cutting the wages offered Anelka over a proposed five-year contract.

The Italians had originally offered 18 million for Anelka, who has not hidden his desire to leave London. But Arsenal would not move on the price, forcing Lazio to cut the wages offered to the player.

His agent Marc Roget said: "We've yet to reach agreement in personal terms because Lazio decided they want to pay him less to make up for what they are giving Arsenal."

"He's thinking things over at the moment but I am hopeful I can persuade him to accept Lazio's offer and that a deal can be concluded by Monday night."

Lazio refused to comment on the reports in the British press that the move had been virtually settled. "We are still in discussions and any further announcements will be made only

if a deal is reached," a spokesman said on Monday.

Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger told Anelka on Saturday he had 48 hours to settle the transfer or return to the north



NICOLAS ANELKA

London side, champions in 1997/98, for pre-season training.

Despite Anelka's repeated criticism of the club and life in London, Wenger insisted he would hold no grudges if the deal with Lazio fell through.

"I talk to Nicolas a lot and still like him. He is being badly advised."

"If he returns, we'll call all the players together. Nobody knows what the reaction of the players and the fans will be like."

Anelka's French and Arsenal team mate Emmanuel Petit suggested the player had been badly advised and overplayed.

"There have been clubs this summer who have promised to pay me double what I am earning at Arsenal. But I have said no to them."

"That is because I am happy in London and happy playing for Arsenal. I'm concerned about the money situation in football. With the Anelka transfer, I think we are talking about too much money for one player."

Anelka's move would smash the British club record transfer fee set by England striker Alan Shearer when he moved from Blackburn to Newcastle for 15 million pounds.

Batistuta sinks Villa

EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey, July 26: Striker-supreme Gabriel Batistuta led Fiorentina to a convincing 4-0 win over Aston Villa here Sunday in the inaugural Gotham Cup friendly tournament.

The 30-year-old Argentinian, in his ninth season with Fiorentina, scored two goals and was voted Most Valuable Player of the four-club event.

He left the game early because of the sweltering heat, but by then the Italian club led 3-0.

Pedrag Mijatovic opened the scoring when he trapped a pass from midfielder Manuel Rui Costa just outside the six-yard box and slammed it into the net in the 19th minute.

Shortly after the half-hour mark, Batistuta and rival captain Gareth Southgate ran into the penalty box, and as Batistuta was about to break clear he was held by Southgate.

Referee Noel Kenney awarded a penalty which Batistuta converted to give Fiorentina a 2-0 lead in the 36th.

Three minutes later, Kenney whistled Aston Villa a penalty when Fiorentina defender Pasquale Padalino deliberately stopped the ball with his left arm.

Forward Dion Dublin took the kick, but keeper Francesco Toldo saved the shot when he guessed correctly and dived to his right. Batistuta made his presence felt again in the 48th when he capitalized on a nice pass from Mijatovic and had only keeper David James to beat to make it 3-0.

Batistuta, still considered one of the best forwards in the world, came out in the 88th minute and stood and applauded from the bench when Rui Costa scored the fourth and final goal.

The scoreboard shows that



GABRIEL BATISTUTA

we got a bit of a thrashing," admitted Aston Villa manager John Gregory. "We had a mountain to climb when we trailed 2-0. I thought we were given a lesson in how to finish off a match."

Fiorentina manager Giovanni Trapattoni said his team had not yet achieved top physical condition but he was satisfied with the result. He praised Major League Soccer club New York-New Jersey Metrostars for hosting the tournament at this time of the year, and Gregory agreed.

"The object was to come here to play in difficult conditions against quality opposition, and I think we did a good job," Gregory said.

In the consolation match earlier Sunday, Panathinaikos beat Ajax 3-2, and breathed a sigh of relief when they learned that an ankle injury to Agelos Basinas was less severe than first feared.

Basinas, who scored the first goal of the match, was first thought to have broken his ankle, but was diagnosed later with a severe sprain that will sideline him for only two weeks.

Villa had beaten Ajax on penalties and Fiorentina beat Panathinaikos in the opening matches on Friday.

Leo backs L'pool imports

LESTER, July 26 (Daily Mail/Internet): Gerard Houllier's gamble on an influx of foreign talent has received the backing of a European coaching great.

Dutchman Leo Beenhakker, who saw his Feyenoord team turned over 2-0 by Liverpool in the final of the Belfast Challenge on Saturday, admitted that bringing in half-a-dozen players at once can cause problems.

But he believes Houllier's move will not turn into an act of French folly. Beenhakker, former coach of Real Madrid, said: "I know that Liverpool have signed some good players, individually very strong."

"The hard job is to turn them into a good team, a group capable of playing together and for each other."

"Houllier will do that because he is an excellent coach."

"We could see that Liverpool are a strong team. We know the way they play football in England, tough and physical, and we could see that."

"We lost the physical battle first and, after that, we lost the football match."

Beenhakker seemed to pinpoint the problem of Liverpool in recent seasons, a lack of dig on occasions, leading to all of those daft results and daffier nicknames for a squad of underachievers.

Be sure that Houllier has

also taken note of that failing, if his signings this summer are anything to go by with strength and size a recurring theme among the new arrivals.

Finland centre half Sami Hyypia is a perfect example, the 3.5 million pound signing fitting in alongside Jamie Carragher on Saturday and



GERARD HOULLIER

prompting Dutch forward Peter van Vossen to comment: "Liverpool now look to have a solid defence, something which is very important."

"I was impressed by Hyypia. He looked composed, he is tall and good in the air - and strong physically."

A lot of hopes are resting on the shoulders of the 26-year-old international, who was rarely caught out by the starting Feyenoord forward line of Van Vossen, former Russia international Igor Korneev and Sierra Leone's hottest export, Bonaventura Kalou.

They have been looking for a 'new Alan Hansen' at Anfield for so long, spending millions in the process, that it might have been quicker and less expensive to simply hire the cloning scientists who created Dolly the sheep for a little work on the side.

Hyypia is the latest to be burdened with the tag but Houllier said: "For me it all starts with the forwards doing their defending, making life easier for the rest."

"Then, if the players at the back can pass the ball cleanly and properly, you have something to build on. We now have the players who can do that."

"Slowly but surely our new players are trying to get into the team, doing well in these pre-season matches, but it's difficult when you get to the Premiership."

"So far, they have shown great spirit, great attitude and they look as if they will be assets." One of those assets, Vladimir Smicer, played for just under 20 minutes but more than enough to prove his worth.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS		DOWN	
1 Hampton's instrument, for short	43 Piratic potation	11 Carries on wildly	17 Powerful lyric poem
6 Pop	44 Leave out the pink	19 Lyrical poem	21