

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 Bells, 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 Notts 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 act in the lucrative market of youth footballers.

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.

Luzia 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 Copinger 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 see up 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 highlights 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 club president, who clearly doesn't expect UEFA to re-play 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."

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

Sport

Fed Cup

Williams take USA to final

ANCONA, Italy, July 26: Venus and Serena Williams both clocked up 6-1, 6-1 victories here on Sunday night to crush Italy and guide the USA into a Fed Cup tennis final against Russia, reports AFP.

The action started two and a half hours later 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 Tatiana Garbin 6-2, 6-2 in the doubles.

Perugia's protest

PERUGIA, Italy, July 26: Perugia president Luciano Gauci said Sunday that he had written a complaint to UEFA about the referee who ordered his team's Interito 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 linesmen, responsible for two off-side decisions which cost Perugia two goals against Turkish club Tranzispor.

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

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

But Gauci 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 re-play 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."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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