

World TT meet begin today

PARIS, Aug 1: The 1999 World Table Tennis Championships, postponed because of the Kosovo crisis, finally start in Eindhoven, Holland on Monday with a new-look format just a year before the Sydney Olympics, reports AFP.

China, who earned all four Olympic gold in Atlanta and 13 of the 14 possible gold in the 1995 and 1997 World Championships combined, can reasonably be expected to sweep all five individual gold on offer this time.

The three doubles events and the women's singles should go to China with only the men's singles really holding a threat from the rest of the world's nations.

This Championships is doubly significant because the top 20 singles players on the world list published just after the World Championships will be automatically eligible for the Olympics, but only two from the same country.

The new world number one Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus, a world singles silver medalist in the English city of Manchester two years ago, Sweden's current world champion Jan-Ove Waldner, and Croatia's Zoran Primorac, who won the Brazilian Open in late June, form the biggest European threat to China for the men's singles gold.

Nothing has been patched up yet!

SYDNEY, Aug 1: Pete Sampras says he and Pat Rafter have patched up their differences, but the Australian repeated in column today that the American did not show opponents sufficient respect, reports AFP.

"I stand by what I said about him not giving his opponents sufficient respect, because there are times when he loses and gives no credit to his fellow player," he wrote in the Sunday Telegraph here.

"This is an issue that irks me, but I don't hate the guy. Nor did I want to hurt him. My comments about Sampras have been blown out of proportion."

In a telephone media conference last week from his Bermuda base ahead of his North American campaign for a third US Open crown, Rafter said Sampras had an attitude problem.

Sampras said in Los Angeles Saturday, the day he reclaimed the world number one ranking from the Australian, that the issue was over.

"I spoke to Pat the other day, we smoothed things over a little bit," said Sampras.

"He's not really that type of guy, probably some people in the media twisted things around. I respect Pat as a player and as a person."

Rafter said his comments were not personal and related purely to "the way we go about our business as competitors."

"We're all out there busting our backsides every week and if I can find an edge to beat Pete, then I'll use it."

He repeated that there have been times when he's been disappointed with what Pete has had to say," but added that he's probably annoyed with some of the things I do and say."

World chess meet starts

LAS VEGAS, Aug 1 (AP): Players were in a fighting mood in the opening rounds of the World Chess Championship.

When the final contest was completed Saturday after nearly seven hours of play, only 11 of the 36 scheduled games had ended in a draw.

Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, president of the sponsoring Federation Internationale des Echecs, made the ceremonial first move for Mathias Wahls before a standing room-only crowd at Caesars Palace hotel-casino. That started 100 players on their quest for a share of the 3 million dollars prize fund and the right to succeed Anatoly Karpov as the world chess champion.

Most of the world's top players are competing with three notable exceptions. Karpov and former FIDE champion Garry Kasparov — who claims to be world champion — refused to play because of disputes with the federation. Viswanathan Anand of India was unable to attend because of other commitments.

Costa-Vicente showdown

KITZBUHEL, Austria, Aug 1: Spaniard Albert Costa upset top seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia 7-6, 6-2 to reach the final of the 535,000-dollar Generali Open here on Saturday, reports AFP.

Clay-court specialist Costa, the number five seed, will meet compatriot Fernando Vicente, the 13th seed, on Sunday.

Vicente, who won his first ATP title earlier this season, earlier beat local favourite Stefan Koubek 6-4, 6-4 in the first semifinal.

Sunday's finalists have played four times, Costa winning three of those encounters.

Croatia Open

Norman, Tarango in final

UMAG, Croatia, Aug 1: Eighth-seeded Magnus Norman and Jeff Tarango battled their way Saturday into the final of the Croatia Open tennis tournament, reports AP.

Norman advanced by beating an exhausted Ivan Ljubicic of Croatia 6-0, 6-2, while Tarango stopped Albert Portas of Spain 7-6 (10-8), 6-0.



Richard Jezielski (R) of Troyes making a flying tackle on Paris Saint Germain's Mikael Madar during their French First Division encounter on July 31 at the Parc des Princes. — AFP photo

Lyon start on the wrong foot



PARIS, Aug 1: Olympique Lyon, who have spent 41.5 million dollars building a stadium for the Champions League, suffered an upset 2-1 home defeat by Montpellier in their opening match of the French season on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Lyon will now want to field record signing Sonny Anderson, who has just recovered from injury, as soon as possible after an unexpected defeat sparked by former France striker Patrice Loko's 25th-minute opening goal.

"Technically we were in form and we played a good away match," said Loko, whose side have five Inter-toto Cup games under their belts.

Substitute Cedric Barbosa added Montpellier's second in the 73rd, against the run of play as Lyon improved after the interval.

France winger Tony Vailles, signed from 1998 champions RC Lens, pulled one back with a volley 11 minutes

from time for Lyon, who come into the European Cup in the third preliminary round in 10 days time.

"It's always hard to start a season with a defeat, but it's not the end of the world and I hope we can learn from it," Vailles said.

Olympique Marseille, pipped to the title by Girondins Bordeaux in May, top the opening day standings after a 3-0 home win over Sedan, back in the top flight after 25 years.

Bordeaux beat Bastia 3-2 at home on Friday.

Former Everton striker Ibrahim Bakayoko, man of the match at the Velodrome, put Marseille in front in the 26th minute from Fabrizio Ravanelli's headed pass.

France's Christophe Dugarry — playing while his doping case is under appeal — chipped a fine second goal seven minutes later.

Sedan goalkeeper Nicolas Saby saved a Peter Lucca penalty in the 76th minute before Marseille substitute Djamel Belmadi struck a brilliant third goal in injury time.

We had an average match and were a bit nervous but we succeeded in scoring at the right moments against a Sedan side with nothing to lose," coach Rolland Courbis said.

Paris St-Germain hit the woodwork three times before overcoming 10-man Troyes 1-0 after the promoted team's captain Frederic Arpinon became the first player sent off in the first division this season.

Arpinon was shown the red card for violent play in the 54th minute and six minutes later Laurent Robert scored the only goal with a free kick, which took a deflection off Troyes' Sedan side.

Michael Owen will miss the start of the Premier League season next week, his club Liverpool confirmed on Saturday, reports Reuters.

"Michael is training hard and running well but the season has come too early for him," said manager Gerard Houllier, who forecast mid-August was a more likely start date.

"He will not be involved next Saturday and realistically it will be at least another couple of weeks before he is fit."

Owen has not played since early April when he suffered a torn hamstring and tendon damage in a goalless league draw at Leeds. The teenager has also missed England's last two Euro 2000 championship qualifiers against Sweden and Bulgaria.

SA fall to Namibia again

WINDHOEK, Aug 1: Namibia eliminated South Africa from the Castle Cup Southern Africa championship for the second successive year with a 4-1 penalty shootout victory after a 1-1 draw here on Saturday, reports AFP.

South Africa were superior in the opening half of the quarter-final at the Independence Stadium and went ahead after 32 minutes through a powerful header by Pollen Ndanya off a corner.

Another corner produced the equaliser four minutes into the second half when Simon Utton headed into the path of Johannes Hindjou, who pushed the ball over the line from close range.

Namibia were inspired by the goal, won much more possession and when South Africa did break through they found goalkeeper and man-of-the-match Ronnie Kanalelo in superb form.

The player, who cannot command a regular first-team place with South African champions Sundowns, defied Ndanya twice within three minutes midway through the second half.

Kanalelo maintained his inspirational form in the shootout, stopping shots from captain Thabo Mngomoni and Matthew Booth, while Namibia converted four consecutive kicks to send their fans into a frenzy.

Mega bid for Beckham dismissed!

LONDON, Aug 1: Manchester United have turned down "an audacious bid" by Italian Serie A side Fiorentina for England international David Beckham.

The British Sunday Mirror said Fiorentina offered a world record fee of 56.7 million dollars in their effort to recruit Beckham.

Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni was quoted in the paper as saying he had been urged to approach United by his Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta.

Saint Trapattoni: "We did try an audacious bid to bring Beckham to Italy but United had no interest in selling him."

Batistuta was quoted as saying: "I told the club to get Beckham, whatever the cost."

"With him in the side I would score at least 10 more goals a season because he is the best crosser of the ball in the world. He is the midfield player I rate above all others."

Policemen hurt in Belgrade violence

BELGRADE, Aug 1: Seven people, including four policemen, were injured in crowd violence during and after a football match in Cacak, central Serbia, on Saturday, medical sources said Sunday.

One of the policemen was seriously injured.

Eight supporters of Red Star Belgrade were Sunday given prison terms after appearing in court on charges relating to incidents during the match between Red Star and local team Borac.

Seven were given one-month jail terms and another a 40-day term, officials said.

Spanish press anticipate Anelka deal

Owen has to wait

LONDON, Aug 1: Injured England striker Michael Owen will miss the start of the Premier League season next week, his club Liverpool confirmed on Saturday, reports Reuters.

"Michael is training hard and running well but the season has come too early for him," said manager Gerard Houllier, who forecast mid-August was a more likely start date.

"He will not be involved next Saturday and realistically it will be at least another couple of weeks before he is fit."

Owen has not played since early April when he suffered a torn hamstring and tendon damage in a goalless league draw at Leeds. The teenager has also missed England's last two Euro 2000 championship qualifiers against Sweden and Bulgaria.

SA fall to Namibia again

WINDHOEK, Aug 1: Namibia eliminated South Africa from the Castle Cup Southern Africa championship for the second successive year with a 4-1 penalty shootout victory after a 1-1 draw here on Saturday, reports AFP.

South Africa were superior in the opening half of the quarter-final at the Independence Stadium and went ahead after 32 minutes through a powerful header by Pollen Ndanya off a corner.

Another corner produced the equaliser four minutes into the second half when Simon Utton headed into the path of Johannes Hindjou, who pushed the ball over the line from close range.

Namibia were inspired by the goal, won much more possession and when South Africa did break through they found goalkeeper and man-of-the-match Ronnie Kanalelo in superb form.

The player, who cannot command a regular first-team place with South African champions Sundowns, defied Ndanya twice within three minutes midway through the second half.

Kanalelo maintained his inspirational form in the shootout, stopping shots from captain Thabo Mngomoni and Matthew Booth, while Namibia converted four consecutive kicks to send their fans into a frenzy.

FAM, AFC differ

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1: The Football Association of Malaysia disagrees with the Asian Football Confederation's proposal to boycott the qualifying rounds of the 2002 World Cup, an association official said Sunday, reports AP.

Deputy president Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah said the Malaysian soccer group has asked AFC president Sultan Ahmad Shah to find a friendly solution to the problem.

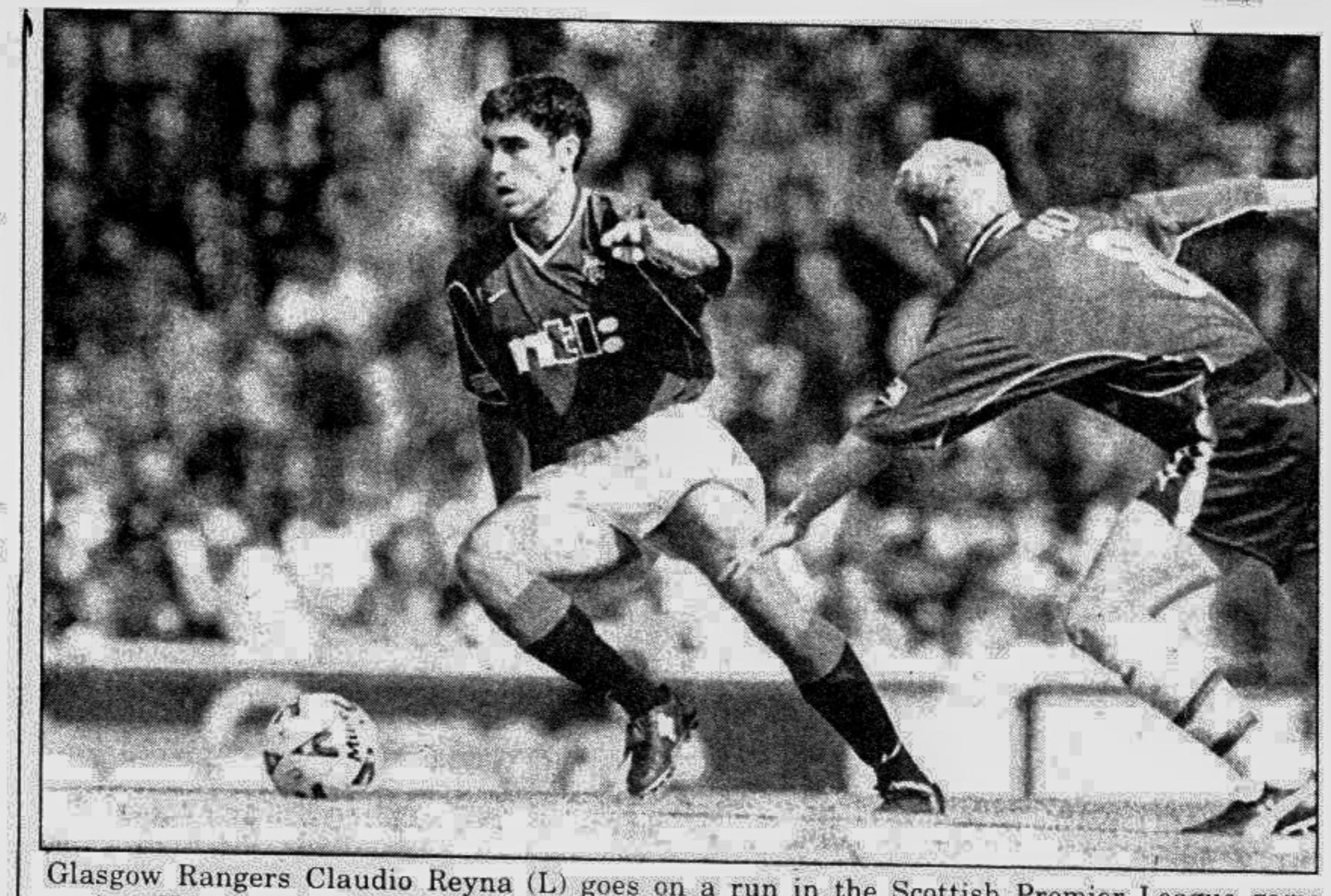
AFC members walked out of a meeting with FIFA, the soccer world's governing body, in Los Angeles on July 9 to protest Asian teams only receiving four berths in the final rounds of the 2002 World Cup, to be held jointly in Japan and South Korea.

The AFC also intends to boycott the 2002 World Cup qualifying rounds if their demand for five places for the Asian teams is not met.

"Of course we will fight for five places for Asian teams but we will ask AFC president to resolve the problem personally with FIFA president Sepp Blatter," Tengku Abdullah told reporters.

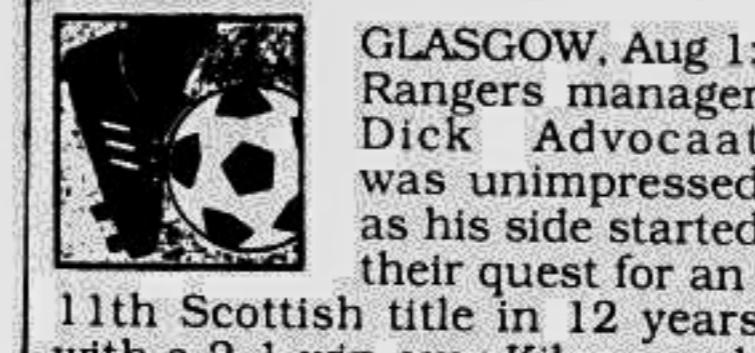
The AFC also intends to boycott the 2002 World Cup qualifying rounds if their demand for five places for the Asian teams is not met.

The AFC also intends to boycott the 2002 World Cup qualifying rounds if their demand for five places for the Asian teams is not met.



Glasgow Rangers Claudio Reyna (L) goes on a run in the Scottish Premier League game against Kilmarnock at Ibrox on July 31. — AFP photo

Reyna rallies for Rangers



GLASGOW, Aug 1: Rangers manager Dick Advocaat was unimpressed as his side started their quest for an 11th Scottish title in 12 years with a 2-1 win over Kilmarnock at Ibrox on Saturday, reports AFP.

United States international Claudio Reyna rifled in a 68th-minute winner for the champions but Advocaat was furious after poor defending by Craig Moore, who was later substituted, had allowed Kilmarnock back into the game.

Reyna scored with an angled drive after being set up by Jorg Albertz three minutes after Kilmarnock's Ally Mitchell had been left unmapped to score from eight metres.

Rod Wallace grabbed a superb opening goal for Rangers six minutes before the break when he controlled a long pass and volleyed it into the net on the turn.

Advocaat was far from happy, however. "It was a very nervous game from our side today," he said. "I felt that the Craig Moore substitution had to be made when it was made."

When asked what the solution was to Moore's defensive shortcomings, he added: "That I took him off. Everybody gets some respect but it depends how long it takes."

"Otherwise we have to make a decision about the team. I know what I have to do, but I don't know yet whether to do it," the Dutchman added, hinting at a possible recall for out-of-favour Colin Hendry.

"It wasn't only the defence I'm not happy with. I thought Claudio did very well but he was the only one in my opinion who did, as all the others were not in

their best form."

In other action Hearts provided the best performance of the day when they demolished UEFA Cup contenders St Johnstone 4-1 at McDiarmid Park.

Gary McSwegan drilled the Edinburgh side ahead after 30 minutes and Austrian midfielder Thomas Floegl made it two midway through the second half.

An own goal by Darren Dods made it 3-0 after 78 minutes and Colin Cameron scored a fourth two minutes later before John McQuillan's 83rd-minute consolation for St Johnstone.

The whole team played well and I would have settled for winning 4-1 before the game," Hearts boss Jim Jefferies said.

"But we won't go too far because we won the first league game last season against Rangers."

New low in attendance

GLASGOW, Aug 1: Scottish crisis club Clydebank's financial situation was not helped on Saturday when only 29 people paid at the turnstiles to watch their 2-1 Scottish League Cup first round defeat by East Stirlingshire.

Magnus Skoldmark had put United ahead against the run of play after 14 minutes before Willie Falconer levelled for Dundee seven minutes into the second half.

Last year's runners-up Celtic visit Aberdeen on Sunday.

Real win friendly

MILAN, Aug 1: An injury time strike from Fernando Morientes gave Real Madrid a 3-2 win over Inter Milan in a friendly at