

Boca beat Barca

ALICANTE, Spain, Aug 12: Argentine champions Boca Juniors edged out Barcelona 3-2 in a fiercely contested pre season friendly on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

A controversial goal from Antonio Barjho gave Boca the lead on 18 minutes, the linesman ruling that the striker's shot, which hit crossbar and post before bouncing down, had crossed the line.

The Argentine side went two up 10 minutes into the second half as Guillermo Barros Squeezed in a free kick but Barcelona reduced the arrears midway through the half. Boudewijn Zenden sliding in to convert Jari Litmanen's neat cross.

Boca restored their two-goal lead through Martin Palermo on 75 minutes before Luis Figo got back Barca back into the game once more with the pick of the goals. The Portuguese international, picking up the ball outside the Boca area, danced through a crowd of players and planted a shot into the far corner.

The Spanish champions came close on several occasions to an equaliser but with Patrick Kluivert still short of match fitness they lacked a cutting edge and had to settle for a narrow defeat their second in four days after their 1-0 reverse to Valencia in the Spanish Super Cup.

Keegan stands by Alan

LONDON, Aug 12: England coach Kevin Keegan on Wednesday backed Alan Shearer over his controversial sending off against Aston Villa last weekend, reports AFP.

Keegan reckons referee Uriah Rennie got it wrong when he gave Shearer his marching orders during Newcastle's United's 1-0 opening day Premier League defeat against Villa on Saturday.

Shearer, already booked, was dismissed for tangling with Colin Calderwood. It was the first red card of his career.

"The (Shearer) shouldn't have been sent off. I don't think you'd find anybody who'd look at that incident and say that's a yellow card and he deserved to be sent off. That was a mistake," Keegan told Sky News.

Keegan predicted Shearer would bounce back from the sending off and Newcastle's losing start to the season, which continued on Monday night with a 3-1 defeat at Tottenham.

"I've talked with him and he's fine," said Keegan. "The greatest thing that Alan Shearer has got going for him is that you can't knock him down. I don't suppose last week was the greatest week in his life because he lost two games and he got sent off. But you know he'll bounce back from it because he's got a lot of character and, if you've got that, you've got a chance."

Fergie not too sure about Keane

MANCHESTER, England, Aug 12: Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has admitted Irish midfielder Roy Keane may turn down a new contract offer because he is looking for a new challenge abroad, reports AFP.

Club captain Keane is due to tell United whether or not he has accepted their new offer by the weekend, with a host of Italian and Spanish clubs ready to snap him up if he decides to leave.

"The things he will be thinking about are not monetary," said Ferguson after Wednesday's 4-0 win over Sheffield Wednesday.

"I don't think money has come into it to be honest with you. The only reason he would want to leave is for the challenge of another league. Maybe he wants a change. Who knows? But we will see whether he's going to stay when the time comes and hopefully he will do so because he's such a marvelous player."

"The club have tried hard to construct a deal which will encourage him to stay. I have had some chats with him and he's certainly undecided when I have spoken to him."



Fabio Cannavaro (L), Parma's Italian international defender, being shown the red card by referee Jose Maria Garcia-Aranda Encinar during their Champions League qualifier against Glasgow Rangers' at Ibrox on August 11. — AFP photo

Rangers rock Parma

LONDON, Aug 12: Scottish treble winners Rangers beat UEFA Cup holders Parma 2-0 on Wednesday to raise hopes of a place in the Champions' League, reports Reuters.

Goals by Tony Vidmar and Claudio Reyna after Parma's Fabio Cannavaro was sent off in the 26th minute gave Rangers a memorable victory in the third qualifying round, first leg.

Other opening leg winners included last year's beaten finalists Dynamo Kiev, 1997 champions Borussia Dortmund, Chelsea, Fiorentina and Galatasaray.

Kiev, who lost to Bayern Munich in the semifinals last season, won 2-1 at Denmark's Aalborg.

They went ahead after 13 minutes with a goal from last season's midfield inspiration, Serhiy Rebrov, Ukraine's current leading scorer.

Maxim Shatskiy made it 2-0 in the 39th minute and although Frank Strandli pulled one back for the hosts 10 minutes into the second half, Kiev will be confident of progressing. Chelsea needed 76 minutes to break through 10-man Skonto Riga and then scored twice in a minute.

Latvia international keeper Aleksandrs Kolinko had made a series of great saves to keep Chelsea at bay after Skonto full back Andrejs Tereskips was sent off for kicking Frank Leboeuf in the 33rd minute.

Chelsea looked in danger of an embarrassing goalless draw until substitute Celestine Babayaro shot home in the 76th minute and Gustavo Poyet

smacked in a second a minute later. Chris Sutton, signed for 15.7 million dollars from Blackburn Rovers in the close season, made up for an early miss to add the third six minutes from time.

Dortmund won 1-0 at Czech side Teplice with a 66th minute goal from Christian Nerlinger, who drove home a Fredi Bobic header from eight metres out.

Teplice went close in the 28th minute when midfielder Petr Fousek fired over the bar and Dortmund goalkeeper Jens Lehmann made two good saves to keep the lead intact.

Fellow Germans Hertha Berlin, back in Europe after a 20-year absence, beat Anorthosis Famagusta of Cyprus 2-0.

Iranian striker Ali Daei headed the first after just two minutes and Michael Preetz, last year's Bundesliga top scorer, with 23 goals, made it 2-0 from close range in the 58th minute.

Fullback Daniele Adani marked his Fiorentina debut with a goal at each end as his

Batistuta's knee in trouble

FLORENCE, Italy, Aug 12: Fiorentina's Argentine international striker Gabriel Batistuta could be out of action for two weeks after he limped out of Wednesday's Champions' League qualifier with Poland's Widzew Lodz with a knee injury, reports Reuters.

Batistuta was withdrawn after just six minutes of the game, which Fiorentina went on to win 3-1.

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Adani, who completed his move from Serie B side Brescia this month, put the Florentines ahead with a diving header from a free kick after 17 minutes.

Italy midfielder Sandro Cois doubled Fiorentina's lead with a header on 57 minutes but 16 minutes later Adani turned the ball into his own net with his right knee to make the score 2-1 and give the Poles hope for the second leg.

Enrico Chiesa crashed a late free kick against the crossbar before Portuguese midfielder Rui Costa restored the home side's two-goal lead with a fine individual strike in injury time.

Galatasaray had an impressive 3-0 success at Rapid Vienna thanks to first half goals by Hakan Unsal and Fatih Akcel and one in the last minute by Gheorghe Hagi.

Goals from Russia internationals Alexander Shirko and Andrei Tikhonov gave Spartak Moscow a 2-0 home victory over Partizan Belgrade while Valencia won by the same score at Hapoel Haifa.

The Israelis had much the best of the match but Argentine Claudio Lopez curled in a cross-shot after 68 minutes and Javier Farnios drove in the second six minutes later.

PSV Eindhoven winners in 1998, could only manage a 0-0 draw at Moldova's Zimbru Chisinau.

Croatia Zagreb against Hungarian champion MTK Budapest also ended goalless. There were red cards for Edin Mujcin of Croatia and Gabor Almai of MTK.



Veteran Romanian international Gheorghe Hagi (R) celebrates after scoring for Turkish side Galatasaray during Champions' League first round clash against Rapid Vienna in Vienna on August 11. — AFP photo

SEA Games football

Thailand, Vietnam through to final

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Aug 12: Rampant Thailand swept aside Singapore 2-0 Thursday to put themselves a match away from a fourth straight Southeast Asian (SEA) Games football title, reports AFP.

The defending champions' final opponents Saturday are Vietnam, who edged past Indonesia by a single goal in the other semi-final match.

The Thais, managed by former England and Aston Villa forward Peter Withe, took the game to the Singaporeans from the kickoff and it was no surprise when their captain Kiatasuk Senamuang set up Tawan Sripan for their first goal.

Tawan lashed home an unstoppable shot from the edge of the box at the 21st minute.

Indra Sadhan Daud rattled Thai goalkeeper Wirat Wangchan's crossbar eight minutes later and captain Mohammad Nazri Nasir nearly scored as half time approached when a Thai defender botched a headed clearance.

But the Thai midfield, marshaled by Thawatchai Intrakul and Tawan, finally overwhelmed Singapore who were also guilty of lax marking.

This was duly punished late in the match when Thawatchai found himself in acres of space on the right side and drilled home a rising shot inside the far post.

Meanwhile Vietnamese midfielder Nguyen Hong Son settled the issue in the other semi-final. Vietnam have yet to concede a goal in this tournament.

The Thais, who are also undefeated, have scored 22 goals so far while conceding only one. They have kept an iron grip on the football SEA Games title since 1993 when they won it in Singapore.

They beat Vietnam in the 1995 final on home soil and won again against Indonesia in a riot-marred 1997 final in Jakarta.

Lothar to play for MetroStars next year

BONN, Aug 12: Lothar Matthaeus is to leave Bayern Munich after 11 years at the end of December and move to the New York-New Jersey MetroStars, the German club confirmed on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Bayern said they had agreed to the 38-year-old player's request to end his contract at the end of this year. Matthaeus is to start playing in the US from February, Bayern said in a statement.

"I have much to thank the club for and it is in my interests to leave the club on as successful and positive a note as possible," said Matthaeus.

The veteran libero said in June he would play for the US club from the beginning of the Major League season in March.

Matthaeus, who helped Bayern to win their 15th German title and to reach the European Cup final last season, was voted German Footballer of the year for a second time in his career in July.

Bayern said they would organise a testimonial match for the 1990 World Cup-winning captain in the near future.

Gullit takes the blame

LONDON, Aug 12: Newcastle United manager Raulo Gullit has blamed himself for the English Premier League club's poor start to the new season after previously criticising the attitude of his players, reports Reuters.

"We have crumbled in our last two defeats and I take the responsibility for that," Gullit was quoted as saying in English newspapers today.

"When things like this happen it means I haven't done my job properly. I am in charge so it is all my fault not the fault of anyone else."

Newcastle lost 1-0 to Aston Villa in their first match of the league season, with captain Alan Shearer sent off for the first time in his career, and then 3-1 to Tottenham Hotspur on Monday.

The top clubs - Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen, Borussia Dortmund, Kaiserslautern, Hertha Berlin - are all looking ahead eagerly although champions Bayern are already facing injury problems.

Oliver Kahn, Stefan Effenberg, Samuel Kuffour and new Brazilian signing Paulo Sergio will all miss Saturday's opener at home to Hamburg. Striker Giovanni Elber, who hasn't played since tearing knee ligaments against Hamburg in March, is a definite starter but hasn't re-found his confidence yet.

As always Bayern have the biggest budget, helped along by UEFA millions after being runners up to Manchester United in the lucrative European Cup, and are obvious favourites to win a record 16th Bundesliga crown.

They showed their underlying strength this week by beating Benfica Lisbon 2-1 in a friendly witnessed by no less than 80,000 fans.

Pulling up half a head behind them are Leverkusen who have grown beyond themselves in stature and reputation since the great motivator Christoph Daum took over as coach three years ago.

Then relegation candidates, Leverkusen are now a legitimate football power and Daum is not afraid to let it be known.

The way things look at the moment I would say that fin-



Chelsea's Gianfranco Zola (C) races through the Skonto Riga defence during their Champions' League first round first leg fixture at Stamford Bridge on August 11. Chelsea defeated the Latvian visitors 3-0. — AFP photo

Villa take solo lead



LONDON, Aug 12: Manchester United, Leeds United and Aston Villa all registered easy victories in the English Premier-ship on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Villa's 3-0 win over Everton was their second successive three-pointer and moved them top of the table with two games gone, above the only other 100 percent side Arsenal on goal difference.

Villa went in front at Villa Park after nine minutes, Julian Joachim latching onto a Dion Dublin flick and firing into the net.

Everton, who included unsettled Francis Jeffers on the bench, were down to 10 men early in the second half when Scottish international John Collins was sent off for a second bookable offence.

Dublin quickly made it 2-0 to Villa, scoring with the outside of his right foot after 57 minutes and Ian Taylor walloped in the third five minutes from time to wrap up a routine Villa victory.

United were troubled even less by Sheffield Wednesday at Old Trafford, winning 4-0.

Ryan Giggs, a surprise starter from injury, played in the cross and Paul Scholes converted to give United a ninth-minute lead.

The Welshman repeated the trick 10 minutes before the interval, this time Dwight Yorke heading home to put United well in control.

Andy Cole made it 3-0 following a David Beckham corner after 54 minutes and substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjaer pilfered a rebound to make it four four minutes from the end.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side are two points adrift of the leaders on four points.

Leeds signed Coventry striker Darren Huckerby earlier on Wednesday but their other 5 million pound (7.5 million dollar) capture Michael Bridges showed he may not be needed with a sparkling hat-trick in Leeds' 3-0 win at Southampton.

The 20-year-old chipped his first after only 11 minutes, added a close range second for Leeds six minutes in the second half and completed his hat-trick with a near post header 18 minutes from time.

Leicester City beat visiting Coventry City 1-0 in the night's other Premiership game.

Leicester went ahead after 24 minutes through a Muzzy Izzet penalty after Neil Lennon was felled in the area.

Coventry lost David Burrows in the second half, the left-back earning a red card for an elbow on Robbie Savage which left the Leicester midfielder's face covered in blood.

English Premiership table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Aston Villa	2	2	0	4	0	6
Arsenal	2	2	0	4	2	6
Man Utd	2	1	0	5	1	4
Leeds	2	1	0	3	0	4
Chelsea	1	1	0	0	3	3
Tottenham	2	1	0	1	3	2
Liverpool	1	1	0	2	1	3
Bradford	1	1	0	0	1	3
West Ham	1	1	0	0	1	3
Wimbledon	2	1	0	1	5	3
Middlesbrough	2	1	0	1	3	3
Leicester	2	1	0	1	2	3
Sunderland	2	1	0	1	2	3
Southampton	2	1	0	1	1	3
Derby	2	0	1	1	2	1
Everton	2	0	1	1	1	1
Coventry	2	0	0	2	0	2
Watford	2	0	0	2	2	0
Newcastle	2	0	0	2	1	0
Sheff Wed	2	0	0	2	1	0



Manchester United and England international Paul Scholes (No 18) puts the Reds ahead against Sheffield Wednesday in their Premier League match. — AFP photo

Bundesliga starts Saturday



COLOGNE, Germany, Aug 12: Football fans in this country can finally put the morale-crushing performances of the German national team in South America behind them this weekend and get some relief from a fresh season of the Bundesliga, reports AFP.

The top clubs - Bayern Munich, Bayer Leverkusen, Borussia Dortmund, Kaiserslautern, Hertha Berlin - are all looking ahead eagerly although champions Bayern are already facing injury problems.

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ishing third would make it a lost year for us. Qualifying for the Champions' League is a must. A spot in the UEFA Cup is just not acceptable for our concept," he said.

Daum has often been bitten in the past by such bold statements and made to eat humble pie but this time he wants to put the club's ambitions clearly on the table let the players rise to them.

"Our goal of winning the league isn't pressure, it's a challenge," Daum added. "It should make the players happier in their work and make set free energy."

Leverkusen begin their campaign Friday at Duisburg. Borussia Dortmund, who last had reason to smile in 1997 when they won the Champions League, have their second ebb season behind them and now plan to reach for the sky again.

34 year old coach Michael Skibbe survived his apprentice year relatively unscathed and has taken his rebuilt side into within 90 minutes of qualifying for the Champions League.

Dortmund's 0-1 victory over Czech side FK Teplice in the away leg of their Champions League tie Wednesday was the right result but it revealed deficits in team homogeneity. Expectations are high to justify the 40 million Marks Dortmund invested in new talent during the off season - among them German internationals Fredi Bobic and Christian Wornos.

"Troublemaker" Thomas Hassler has been sent south to 1860 Munich leaving Andreas Moller the undisputed king of Dortmund's midfield. Moller will face off with French star Youri Djorkaeff Saturday, who made a sudden and unexpected move last week from Inter Milan to Kaiserslautern.

He was given a rapturous reception by Kaiserslautern's followers and is the answer to captain Ciriaco De Soria's prayers. After winning the league in 1998 Siorza complained loud and long last season that Kaiserslautern desperately needed reinforcements to stay at a high level.

The arrival of his former Inter teammate leaves him free to vacate the midfield and permanently bolster Kaiserlautern's shaky defence.

The big clubs have got stronger but at the bottom end there is something for the common man as well.

Bavarian pair Unterhaching and SSV Ulm are making their Bundesliga debuts while Arminia Bielefeld are back for another crack at the big time after relegation a year ago. No one expects either Unterhaching or Ulm to stick around long.

Unterhaching got knocked out of the German Cup in the second round by a third division side last weekend and coach Lorenz-Gunther Kostner concedes that his team's not ready yet for the Bundesliga.

Unterhaching is an outer suburb of Munich with a mini budget of 18 million Marks and can squeeze 9,000 people into its tiny local ground.

Living in the shadows of 1860 Munich and Bayern, Unterhaching's modest goal this season - which starts at Eintracht Frankfurt Saturday - is not to become the worst football side ever to grace the Bundesliga.

That dubious record is held by Tasmania Berlin who got just eight points in the 1995/96 season. Unterhaching are slowly gaining cult status as sympathisers throw their weight behind the underdog.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1. Fankroll
2. Haiku or limerick
3. Piglets' pop
4. Harvard's rival
5. Earthenware pot
6. Garfield's pal
7. Which? 15
8. Boy king
9. Incessant
10. Money under the table
11. Blue
12. Plate
13. Plate
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DOWN

1. Become
2. Actress
3. Clear
4. Redcap
5. Flamenco
6. Differently
7. Spars
8. Tenant
9. Valtalla
10. Verdi
11. Spool
12. Car
13. Jalopy
14. Ship
15. Attention
16. Lip
17. Mysterious
18. Character
19. Dine
20. Mouse
21. Mexican's money
22. Acknowledged
23. Incessant
24. Scramble
25. Piece
26. Junior
27. Bill's partner
28. Remnant

CRYPTOQUIP

P Y T H L R L V T D P N K P O Y F K C T S E

P Y T F T E M D V N K E

"ORMOCMLKR SMOC"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A THIEF ROBBED A LAUNDROMAT, WOULDN'T IT BE A WHITE-COLLAR CRIME?

Today's Cryptoquip clue: R equals S

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Leeds rope in Huckerby



LEEDS, England, Aug 12: English Premiership club Leeds United on Wednesday agreed a 5.5 million pound (£8.8 million dollar) deal for Coventry City striker Darren Huckerby, reports AFP.

Leeds have been searching for a goalscorer since Dutchman Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's departure to Spanish club Atletico Madrid a week ago for 12 million pounds.

The capture of the 23-year-old former England Under-21 and B international takes Leeds manager David O'Leary's spending to just over 19 million pounds this summer, with more cash in the bank.

United chairman Peter Ridsdale said: "I am clearly delighted with this signing because Darren is someone we have been tracking for some time."

We have agreed a fee with

Coventry of 4 million pounds, which will rise to 5.5 million due to add-ons relating to both our performance and the performance of the player.

"We have also agreed personal terms and subject to a medical, assuming he is fit, he will sign for us later this afternoon."

"We will have to wait and see whether Darren fits into our squad, but we are obviously adding to it with a quality striker who has proved himself against us and top opposition in the past."

But just because we have signed Darren, it does not stop our quest for bringing in a strong centre-forward. The money is still there for David to do that."

The deal represents good business for Coventry, who signed Huckerby from Newcastle for just 1 million pounds in November of 1996.