

Rangers plan to carry on

GLASGOW, Aug 27: Glasgow Rangers are aiming to complete a glorious week by beating Hibernian and going six points clear at the top of the Scottish Premier League on Saturday, reports AFP.

The reigning Scottish champions are in buoyant mood after their historic aggregate win over Italian giants Parma in midweek which saw them qualify for the group stages of the European Champions League.

Dick Advocaat's side travel to Edinburgh to face Hibs with a three point advantage over arch-rivals Celtic who entertain Hearts on Sunday.

Ominously for Celtic and the rest of the division, Rangers are generating a formidable momentum at this early stage of the season having taken a maximum 12 points with four straight wins.

In the weekend's other matches, struggling Aberdeen, suffering their worst ever start to a season, will go in search of their first victory of the new campaign when they play host to St Johnstone.

Motherwell play at home to Dundee on Saturday while Dundee United entertain Kilmarnock 24 hours earlier.

Scottish Premier League matches on Saturday (matches 1400 GMT)
Hibernian v Rangers
Motherwell v Dundee
Sunday (1400 GMT)
Aberdeen v St Johnstone
Celtic v Hearts
Dundee Utd v Kilmarnock

Radchenko Japan bound

IWATA, Japan, Aug 27: Former Russian international Dimitri Radchenko is to move to struggling J-League club Jubilo Iwata, a club official said Friday, reports AFP.

The 28-year-old forward from Spain's Deportivo La Coruna has already signed a temporary contract earlier this month in Barcelona. He will arrive in Japan soon to seal a final contract after a medical check, the official said.

Local papers estimated his transfer fee at 20 million yen (179,000 dollars) and salary at 312,500 dollars.

Jubilo won the first stage of the season, but have dropped to third from the bottom in the 16-team second stage after Hiroshi Nanami moved to Italian Serie A club Venezia and striker Masashi Nakayama was benched through injury.

Euro 2000 Russian 18 for qualifier

MOSCOW, Aug 27 (AFP): Russia's national team head coach Oleg Romantsev on Thursday announced his squad for the 2000 European championship Group Four qualifier matches against Armenia on September 4 and Andorra on September 8.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Alexander Filimonov (Spartak Moscow), Stanislav Cherchesov (Tirana/Aut).

Defenders: Yuri Drozdov, Alexei Smertin, Igor Chugayev, Alexei Lokomotiv Moscow, Viktor Onopko (Oviedo/Spa), Dmitry Khlestov (Spartak Moscow), Igor Yanovsky (PSG/Fra).

Midfielders: Dmitry Alenichev (AS Roma/Ita), Viktor Bulatov, Yegor Titov, Andrei Tikhonov (all Spartak Moscow), Vladimir But (Borussia Dortmund/Ger), Valery Karpin (Celta Vigo/Spa), Sergei Semak (CSKA Moscow), Dmitry Khokhlov (PSV Eindhoven/Ned).

Forwards: Vladimir Bestashnykh (Racing Santander/Spa), Alexander Panov (Zenit Saint-Petersburg).

Vicenza bus attacked

VICENZA, Italy, Aug 26 (AFP) - Vicenza were counting the cost of losing an Italian Cup tie on Thursday after angry fans caused thousands of dollars worth of damage by attacking their team bus.

Vicenza, relegated from the Serie A to the Serie B at the end of last season, were thrashed 3-0 by modest Alzano, stretching fans' patience to breaking point.

A group of supporters ambushed the bus as it returned to the Menti stadium here overnight, throwing bottles and rocks which dented the bodywork and smashed windows.

Police had to be called in to form a human cordon around the players as they later left the scene by their cars.

Christian coming to Paris

PARIS, Aug 26: Brazilian international striker Christian Correa Dionisio has signed a five year deal with French first division side Paris Saint Germain, the French club announced here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Previously with Internacional of Porto Alegre, Christian, a member of the Brazilian squad which won the Copa America, underwent a medical test in the headquarters of the French league leaders on Wednesday and will begin training with his new side next week.

The signing ends a dispute between the player's agents, PSG and his former club.

UEFA Cup qualifiers

Favourites go through



PARIS, Aug 27: Europe's little big guns - the teams not good enough for a direct European place but too good for the continent's ultra minnows, duly came through their UEFA Cup qualifying encounters Thursday - but not all went on a goal spree.

Scotland's Celtic - the first British club to lift the Champions Cup back in 1967 - made short work of Welsh part-timers Cwmbran at Parkhead despite an uninspiring performance, wrapping up a 10-0 aggregate victory with a 4-0 canter in their second leg.

Nineteen-year-old substitute Jamie Smith shook the home side out of their lethargy on his debut, smashing home the second from the edge of the area just past the hour.

The teenager's goal doubled an advantage given to them in the ninth minute by Norwegian striker Harald Brattbakke.

Johan Malby made it three and second half substitute Tommy Johnson bagged number four in injury-time.

More Scottish success came with Kilmarnock's heart-stopping success after extra time against Iceland's KR Reykjavik.

The Ayrshire outfit were only saved from a 1-0 aggregate defeat against the Icelandic part-timers by Paul Wright's penalty in the last minute of normal time.

That took the contest into extra-time and in the 92nd minute substitute David Bagan curled home a stunning winner to send Kilmarnock into the first round draw proper.

St Johnstone crept through against Finland's VPS Vaas with super sub Miguel Simao hammering both goals in a 2-0 win to send his side into the UEFA Cup proper for the first time in 28 years.

Belgium's Anderlecht, the 1983 UEFA Cup winners, crushed Iceland's Leiftur 9-1 on aggregate following a 3-0 win in Thursday's away leg.

Grasshopper of Zurich, coached by Englishman Roy Hodgson, cruised through as they ousted Irish part-timers Bray Wanderers even with star striker Stephane Chapuisat on the bench.

Leading 4-0 from the first leg in Switzerland a fortnight ago, Grasshopper handed out another four-goal lesson.

They stretched their lead after just six minutes when Avram Ibrahim finished clinically from 10 yards and went two up after 39 minutes when Patrick De Napoli crossed for Tikva to head home.

The agony continued for Bray as De Napoli escaped the offside trap to flip the ball home from close range.

Substitute Andre Muff bagged the fourth to complete an 8-0 aggregate win.

Elsewhere, it was alphabet soup time as various shades of

also-ran made the most of their 90-minutes of fame - some even living to fight another day.

Northern Ireland's Linfield didn't quite make it as they could only draw 1-1 at home to Georgia's Lokomotiv Tbilisi, who advanced 2-1 on aggregate.

Ireland's Cork City beat Sweden's experienced IFK Gothenburg 1-0 on the night at home but still slud out 3-1 on aggregate.

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Blatter hoping for the best

ZURICH, Switzerland, Aug 27: A threatened boycott of the 2002 World Cup finals by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will not go ahead, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said here on Thursday, reports AFP.

The head of football's world governing body was speaking following the signing of an agreement between co-hosts South Korea and Japan confirming the organisational details of the first World Cup to be held in Asia and the first to be organised by two countries. The AFC threatened to boycott the final after Asia got only four places at the tournament, including those for joint hosts Japan and South Korea. They were offered a play-off chance against a European nation but continue to demand for five automatic berths.

Blatter said on Thursday: "There will be no Asian boycott. I shall be meeting personally with the AFC President, His Royal Highness Sultan Ahmad Shah, in the next two weeks, just as I have had discussions with the four Asian members of the FIFA Executive Committee and will have clarified the situation before the Executive meets in Las Vegas on October 1-2."

Blatter said that the Organising Association Agreement signed here on Thursday between FIFA and the two national organising committees demonstrated that the 2002 World Cup would be a cohesive event.

"There will be only one World Cup, jointly organised, and not two World Cups organised separately," he said.

Lennart Johansson, chairman of the FIFA World Cup organising committee, said that the agreement was a sign of the growing co-operation between the Japanese and Korean organising committees.

Defending champions Manchester United were Thursday handed a relatively easy draw for the group stages of the European Champions League - in marked contrast to their epic march towards their European Cup victory in May.

Last year, United were done no favours by the draw, having to face Bayern Munich, Barcelona and Borussia Dortmund in the group stages before a quarter-final with Inter Milan, a semi-final with Juventus and culminating in their titanic victory over the Juventus of the final against Bayern Munich.

This year, manager Sir Alex Ferguson's blood pressure should not be as severely tested with United's Group D opposition coming in the form of French side Marseille, Croatia's Croatia Zagreb and unfancied Austrian Sturm Graz.

Marseille, runners-up to Bordeaux in the French first division last season, have shown signs of decline this term with the departure of such stalwarts as Laurent Blanc, Cyril Doreau and Titi Camara.

But reaction from the French side was positive even though they effectively conceded top spot in the group to United.

Marseille's Italian striker Fabrizio Ravanelli said: "We have landed on our feet. Manchester United are favourites for top spot but we can finish second which would be enough to qualify."

"I know Sturm Graz and Croatia Zagreb well. The Austrians are very tough and solid at home. Zagreb have an excellent technique but we are favourites to finish second."

"When I was in England (with Middlesbrough) I played at Manchester. It is very difficult to go to a stadium where 60,000 people are backing the home team."

Bayern, meanwhile, will have to work hard in Group F after being put in a tough group alongside former winners PSV Eindhoven of Holland, Spanish side Valencia and Scottish champions Rangers, who accounted for Italian giants Parma in the qualifying round.

It will provide a moment of nostalgia for Rangers manager Dick Advocaat, who was formerly coach of PSV.

Slovenian minnows Maribor, surprise conquerors of big-spending French side Lyon in the preliminary round, have the dubious reward of a place in Group A alongside Italian giants Lazio, Ukraine's Dynamo Kyiv, who lost to Bayern in last year's semi-finals, and Germany's Bayer Leverkusen.

Group B is another potential dogfight involving Spanish champions Barcelona, English side Arsenal, Italian outfit Fiorentina and Swedish team Aik Solna.

The meeting with Barca will bring back some very unhappy memories for the Italian club.

Fiorentina drew 1-1 at the Nou Camp in the 1997 European Cup semi-finals but with skipper Gabriel Batistuta suspended, they went down 2-0 at home to the Spanish club in the home leg with the match being wrecked at the end by missile-throwing from the Florence crowd.

The scenes, which brought shame on Italian football, saw plastic bottles of water, coins and other objects rain down on the pitch and Swedish referee Anders Frisk twice suspend play.

Barcelona, with Ronaldo in the team, went on to win the tournament while Fiorentina had their pitch suspended by UEFA.

Arsenal will also be looking to redeem themselves after an exit in the group stages last year.

The third English representatives Chelsea have been handed a very tough draw in Group H alongside Serie A champions AC Milan, German side Hertha Berlin and Turkish outfit Galatasaray who have been a thorn in the side of English teams in this competition, notably United.

Seven-times winners Real Madrid of Spain face 1987 winners FC Porto, Greek outfit Olympiakos and Norwegians Molde in a relatively easy Group E.

Group G is another easier assignment with Russians Spartak Moscow lining up with French champions Bordeaux, Sparta Prague of the Czech Republic and Willem II Tilburg of the Netherlands.

Dutch champions Feyenoord and Germany's Borussia Dortmund - both former winners - will be expected to progress in Group C against Norway's Rosenborg and Portugal's Boavista.

Boavista's appearance in the competition is historic as they are the first Portuguese side outside the traditional three of Benfica, Porto and Sporting Lisbon to compete in the Champions League.

The top two teams in each of the eight groups will advance.

Bayern meanwhile will have Mario Basler and Lothar Matthaus back from injury. After seven weeks on the sidelines midfielder linchpin Stefan Effenberg may even push himself to come back too.

Top of the table Eintracht Frankfurt entertain Duisburg, while Bayer Leverkusen go to struggling VfB Stuttgart.

Both clubs possess enormous potential. The difference is that Leverkusen are sky high after their 2-0 over Bayern last week while Stuttgart are crushed and disorganised. After their 3-0 mauling at Hamburg coach Ralf Rangnick is under pressure to alter his system.

Borussia Dortmund and Hertha Berlin qualified for the Champions League Wednesday evening but both showed they still have a long way to go if they want to make an impression in the competition.

On Sunday, Dortmund travel to SSV Ulm, the next stage of coach Michael Skibbe's difficult task of forging a team out of a squad of highly talented individuals.

Some Dortmund fans even booed their side in midweek after beating Czech club TK Teplice 1-0 and demanded Skibbe's head because of the unattractive style of football that was played.

Weekend's Bundesliga fixtures:
Saturday
VfL Wolfsburg v Hansa Rostock, Hertha Berlin v Werder Bremen, VfB Stuttgart v Bayer Leverkusen, Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt, SC Freiburg v Munch 1860
Sunday
SSV Ulm v Borussia Dortmund, Eintracht Frankfurt v MSV Duisburg

The Bayern Munich side will have to work hard in Group F after being put in a tough group alongside former winners PSV Eindhoven of Holland, Spanish side Valencia and Scottish champions Rangers, who accounted for Italian giants Parma in the qualifying round.

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