

Friendly with Brazil Bielsa's SOS to Euro-based stars

BUENOS AIRES, Aug 31: Belgrano Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa called up several of his foreign-based stars Monday for Saturday's prestige friendly with Brazil, reports AFP.

Injured Fiorentina striker Gabriel Batistuta is the one big absentee but among the Euro-based stars called up are Eduardo Berizzo (Marseille), Nelson Vivar (Arsenal), Jose Chamot (Atletico Madrid), Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan), Roberto Ayala (AC Milan), Fernando Redondo (Real Madrid) and forwards Hernan Crespo and Ariel Ortega (both Parma).

Many top Euro-based players missed the recent Copa America in Paraguay. Bielsa is under pressure following Argentina's poor showing in the Copa where they exited to eventual winners Brazil in the quarter-finals.

The team's performance in Paraguay had an element of farce about it with Boca Juniors striker Martin Palermo missing an unprecedented three penalties in one match during the 3-0 defeat in the group stages by Colombia.

Another striker Jose Luis Calderon, of Independiente, then became involved in a public slanging match with Bielsa at the airport on the way home with only intervention from senior players preventing a brawl.

Significantly neither Calderon or Palermo is included in this latest squad.

Argentina and Brazil will meet next Saturday at River Plate's Monumental Stadium.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Roberto Bonano (River Plate), Pablo Cavallero (Espanyol/Spa)

Defenders: Roberto Sensi (Lazio/Ita), Roberto Ayala (Milan/Ita), Javier Zanetti (Inter/Ita), Jose Chamot (Atletico Madrid/Spa), Juan Sorin (River Plate), Mauricio Pochettino (Espanyol/Spa), Eduardo Berizzo (Marseille/Fra), Walter Samuel (Boca Juniors), Nelson Vivas (Arsenal/Eng)

Midfielders: Cristian Gonzalez (Valencia/Spa), Fernando Redondo (Real Madrid/Spa), Claudio Husain (Velez Sarsfield), Marcelo Gallardo (Monaco/Fra), Diego Simeone (Lazio/Ita), Juan Sebastian Veron (Lazio/Ita)

Forwards: Ariel Ortega (Parma/Ita), Hernan Crespo (Parma/Ita), Claudio Lopez (Valencia/Spa), Gustavo Lopez (Celta Vigo/Spa), Guillermo Barros Schelotto (Boca Juniors)

United close to signing Taibi

MANCHESTER, England, Aug 31: European champions Manchester United will tie up a deal for Italian goalkeeper Massimo Taibi on Tuesday, it was reported Monday, reports AFP.

Venezia player Taibi had the first part of his medical at Old Trafford Monday and will complete his tests Tuesday before the deal, which is worth a reported 4.5 million pounds (7 million dollars), is finalised. Ferguson has also been changing a centre-half to strengthen his backline following injuries to Ronny Johnsen, Wes Brown and David May.

However he revealed that there will be no other new face before the Champions League transfer deadline.

Ferguson said: "Massimo had some of his medical today and he will do the rest tomorrow and then he will be a United player. We have tried to get someone else, but it's very difficult now."

Raimond van der Gouw has been deputising for the injured Mark Bosnich and with youngster Nicky Culkin the only reserve. Ferguson swooped for Taibi because he feels he needed more competition among his goalkeepers.

"With Peter Schmeichel being the number one here, and not only number one at Manchester United but in the world, no-one could displace him," he said.

"Now that Peter's gone and in view of Mark's injury, we have reviewed the situation."

Bayern Brawl

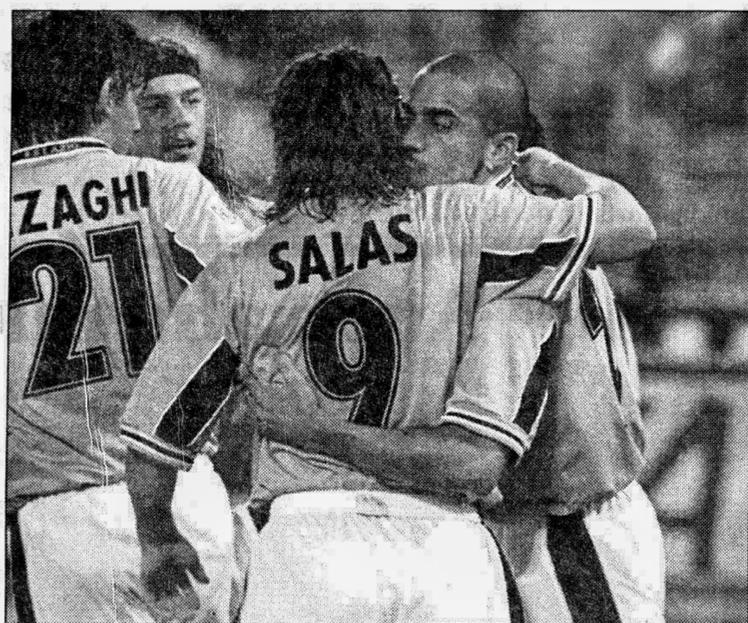
Bild publish video footage

MUNICH, Germany, Aug 31: German mass daily Bild on Tuesday fuelled the flames of dressing room unrest at Bayern Munich by turning up video evidence of the training ground clash between Lothar Matthaus and Bixente Lizarazu, reports AFP.

Bild, which gained access to a fan's video footage, showed a picture of Lizarazu hitting out at Matthaus in training last Friday, adding the caption: "Lizarazu's left hit Matthaus full in the face. You can clearly hear the sound of the blow."

Reigning Bundesliga champions Bayern fined French World Cup winning defender Lizarazu some 5,000 dollars for his action but 1990 World Cup winning captain Matthaus afterwards played down the incident and said he had not really been struck.

Asked by Bild about the setting in the light of the video evidence, Matthaus said: "I just tried to protect Lizarazu. You shouldn't try to push out flames. You always get this kind of thing. For me the affair is long closed."



Juan Veron (R) being greeted by his Lazio teammates after the Argentine scored against Cagliari during their Serie A clash on August 30. —AFP photo

Serie A

Fresh faces save Lazio



ROME, Aug 31: Sven Goran Eriksson may have watched Lazio make a winning start to the season, but the coach was more happy with the points than the performance here at the Olympic stadium, reports AFP.

Lazio followed up their European Super Cup victory over Manchester United with a 2-1 Serie A win over Cagliari on Monday night.

But the Sardinian club had the hosts in all sorts of trouble at the beginning and at the end of a match decided by a deflected freekick by Juan Sebastian Veron and a Simone Inzaghi goal. Both men were making their debut.

Inzaghi, whose elder brother Filippo scored for Juventus on Sunday night, converted a 63rd minute penalty after Cagliari's goalkeeper tripped Chilean striker Marcelo Salas, Lazio's matchwinner in Monte Carlo.

Lazio looked to have the match sewn up, only for Uruguayan playmaker Fabian O'Neill to pull one back for the visitors in the 78th minute and re-open the final stages of the match.

But Lazio, who lost last season's league title on the final day, confirmed their place among the favourites this time around, despite the summer sale of Inter Milan's Christian Vieri.

Eriksson, whose men lost the league title on the final day last season, admitted: "We didn't have a great game, but we got an important result and for that I'm not just happy, I'm absolutely delighted."

"People will just have to be patient. What counted was making a good start, not so much to be there at the top of the table, but to start on the right foot and not have lost any ground."

"They made us suffer a lot, especially in the first half," he said. "We started better in the second, but towards the end we paid for the tiredness which set in and Cagliari became dangerous again."

"But with all respect to them, I think we deserved to win." Club president Sergio Cragnotti meanwhile fired a poison dart at his former hero Vieri, who was sold to Inter after a falling out between the two men.

Vieri scored a remarkable hat-trick on his debut on Sunday but a euphoric Cragnotti said: "Vieri? Thanks, but I'd rather have Simone Inzaghi."

As for Monday's match, he said: "Cagliari had us in trouble with their constant pressure and we were only able to play good football from time to time. But these three points were important for the league table."

"What's more, making a good start is half the job done," he added, recalling the club's major problems last autumn. "And fortunately, this time we have made a good start."

Table with 2 columns: Team and Points. Rows include Lazio (11), Fiorentina (10), Lecce (10), AC Milan (10), Juventus (10), Parma (10), Perugia (10), Fiorentina (10), AS Roma (10), Udinese (10), Venezia (10), Bologna (10), Torino (10), Cagliari (10), Bari (10), Verona (10).



Mario Stanic (C) of Parma scores the equaliser against Perugia during their Serie A encounter on August 29. The match ended 1-1. —AFP photo

Anderson lifts Lyon



PARIS, Aug 31: Costly Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson hit the winner for Lyon in an eventful 1-0 home victory over nine-man Paris Saint Germain on Sunday, reports AFP.

The Brazilian star, signed in the close season from Barcelona for 16 million dollars, scored from a penalty in the 51st minute to give some pay back for the heavy investment by Lyon officials.

It was also a pick-me-up for club president Jean-Michel Aulas who collapsed on Sunday and was not able to be at the Stade Gerland for the game.

Monaco, who beat Troyes 3-0 a couple of hours earlier on Sunday, were on top of a French league which has four clubs all on 10 points. PSG were knocked down to second spot, ahead of Lyon and Auxerre.

Anderson gave no indication of the nagging thigh injury he has had since a knock in a Spanish league game at the end of May.

Lyon had two good chances in a low-key first half. Anderson got behind the PSG defence with about a quarter hour gone but twice in succession had shots blocked.

Pierre Laigle tested PSG keeper Bernard Lama towards the end of the half but the keeper managed to block his shot.

Five minutes after the break however the match exploded into life.

First Anderson was clearly brought down by Lama, perhaps lucky to stay on the pitch for his professional foul. Anderson

shot to the left as Lama dived the other way to put Lyon ahead.

A couple of minutes later both PSG's Ali Benarbia and Lyon's Serge Blanc were sent off after squaring up to each other. Benarbia tried to headbutt Blanc who responded by lashing out with a fist but neither strike made contact.

Then with just under half an hour to go, PSG's French international Laurent Robert was sent off for a two-footed tackle in a tussle with Florent Laville. It was in such difficult circumstances that striker Christian, in the Brazil squad for the Copa America, came on as substitute to make his debut.

Nigeria's Jay-Jay Okocha, also brought on near the end, had a curling free kick saved in the final minute in PSG's last chance to equalize.

Meanwhile six people were injured and four others were arrested following trouble by supporters in front of the stadium before the match. About 200 police were involved in restoring order.

Earlier in the day, Lyon president Aulas collapsed and was taken to hospital though press officer Olivier Blanc denied he had had a heart attack. Blanc added Aulas had been allowed home and watched the match on television.

David Trezeguet scored two of the goals in Monaco's victory over Troyes but then had to go off with a pulled hamstring and is expected to be out for about a 10 days.

As consolation, he remained top of the French goalscoring list with seven goals. Dado Prso, a former player at Corsican club Ajaccio, came on for Trezeguet.

Trezeguet found the net in the 31st minute from close in and then in the 44th minute with a downward header following a corner by Italy's Marco Simone. Simone went on to hit a third for Monaco and his fourth of the season with 13 minutes to go after a quick free kick taken by Marcelo Gallardo.

Claude Puel's team are confirming their status as title challengers following the large financial investment by club officials.

New recruits Simone and Gallardo were perhaps the two best players on the pitch, and Ludovic Guily was also a key member of Puel's side.

A minute's silence was observed before both matches following the death of former national coach Georges Boulogne.

Nanami gaining ground

MILAN, Aug 31: Venezia's Hiroshi Nanami may not have won all three points last weekend, but the Japanese ace is clearly winning the confidence of his new Italian teammates, reports AFP.

Nanami came on as a second-half substitute against Udinese on Sunday and set up their equaliser before hitting the woodwork with a long shot from a free-kick, coming a whisker from completing a dream debut.

"Coming on was an emotional moment for me, and although the match was already underway, I was still able to show the fans something of what I can do," said the former Jubilo Iwata ace.

Though disappointed with finding the top of the post and crossbar, "I thought the ball had gone in," he added. "My teammates allowed me to take the shot, and that's a positive sign."

"It shows that although they don't know me that well yet, they already believe in my abilities. It's a shame though that (Filippo) Maniero got sent off, because that interrupted things and we just had to defend from then on."

Nanami is now a candidate to start Venezia's next league outing, at Torino on September 12, but the midfielder is not expecting any favours.

"The coach picks the team, according to the game," he said. "All I can do is work hard on improving myself, day after day, and to give everything in training as well as in the match."

As for his first experience of Italian soccer, Nanami said: "Venezia have great fans, it's fantastic to be play in front of crowds like these. It's just a shame about that crossbar."

There were no regrets though from club president Maurizio Zamparini, who said: "When Nanami came on the pitch, Venezia became more dangerous."

"He is a class player who only has to be patient and learn to understand Italian football."

Religious weekly asks writer to come clean

ROME, Aug 31: A religious weekly that has caused a storm in Italian soccer by publishing a confession of match-rigging is now calling on the letter's anonymous author to go public, reports AFP.

"The storm broke last week when 'Famiglia Cristiana' published a letter from an unidentified footballer saying: 'Father, I have sold myself in an extremely important match... I have falsified the championship.'"

There was no indication as to who the player was, which team he played for and which championship - Serie A, B or C, or even amateur - was involved.

Italian magistrates have since waded into the affair, opening three separate investigations, despite several priests' insisting that the secret of the confessional, even one on paper, is sacrosanct.

But the magazine is about to try and resolve the controversy by making a plea to the author of the letter to own up.

In an editorial to be published later this week, extracts of which were passed to ANSA news agency on Tuesday, the paper said: "The confessor is asking him, as we have done, to show the humility and the courage to make a public declaration."

The editorial said the footballer has to accept his "moral and legal responsibility towards civil law."

And it added that: "The person concerned has to consider this obligation of their conscience... above all because they have not limited themselves to a one-to-one talk with a confessor but to have written to a newspaper."

Under Italian law, fraud in the world of sport is dealt with severely and could lead to a prison sentence of between six months and two years and a fine of up to three million dollars.

Basler's penalty

MUNICH, Germany, Aug 31: Bayern Munich's maverick playmaker Mario Basler has been fined over 10,000 dollars Friday night in a night club just a day before Bayern's Bundesliga game with Unterhaching, reports AFP.

It is the biggest fine Bayern have imposed on a player and comes just 48 hours after it emerged that the German champions had fined French World Cup winning defender Bixente Lizarazu for a training ground fracas with Germany's 1990 World Cup winning captain Lothar Matthaus.

Undeniably a gifted player Basler has a reputation for neglecting his professional duties in favour of his social life and has recently been linked with a move to Kaiserslautern.

His Friday night out did not end until he left the club at 3am. Earlier Monday it emerged that Kaiserslautern's Swiss playmaker Cristiano Sforza was set for a showdown meeting with club officials after criticising boss Otto Rehhagel, raising speculation of a swap deal with Basler and Sforza going in opposite directions.

A single goal from Paraguayan teenager Roque Santa Cruz was enough to give Bayern a 1-0 win over Unterhaching.

US Open underway Seeds start smoothly



NEW YORK, Aug 31 (AP): The US Open is the perfect stage for Andre Agassi, especially in the bright lights of Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I've always enjoyed playing at night," Agassi said the crowd. "It almost feels like theatre out there. They're just there to be entertained and enjoy."

Seeking his third consecutive Grand Slam tournament final, the second-seeded Agassi capped the opening day of the year's final Grand Slam tournament Monday night with a 6-1, 6-1, 6-3 thrashing of Sweden's Nicklas Kulti.

Agassi, of the United States, won the French Open in June and reached the final of Wimbledon in July. He was in complete control against Kulti, making only four unforced errors in the opening set. He needed only 75 minutes to grab a spot in the second set.

"It's never as easy as it looks," said Agassi, who equalled his best performance at the National Tennis Centre. In 1997, he lost only four games in a second-round victory over Romanian Adrian Panaitescu 6-0, 6-2, 6-2.

It definitely wasn't easy for 10th-seeded Marcelo Rios, of Chile, who outlasted Martin Damm of the Czech Republic 6-4, 7-6, 3-6, 5-7, 6-1.

Only one seeded player lost on Day One: No 6 Amanda Coetzer of South Africa, who fell to Romanian Irina Spilrea 6-1, 7-5.

Among Monday's winners in the women's singles were top-seeded Martina Hingis and No 3 Venus Williams. Spilrea's on-court bump partner two years ago.

Joining Agassi and Rios in the men's second round included No 3 Yevgeny Kafelnikov, No 8 Carlos Moya and No 12 Richard Krajicek.

Lindsay Davenport, of the United States, begins the defence of her women's singles title when she faces Corina Morariu of Boca Raton, Florida. Tuesday night's key match pits defending men's champion Australian Patrick Rafter, seeded fourth, against Frenchman Cedric Pioline.

Pete Sampras, of the United States, the men's top seeded player and Wimbledon champion, won't play his first-round match until Wednesday.

A first-round loser at Wimbledon after a declaration of independence from her mother and coach, Melanie Molitor, Hingis had her mom at court-side against Monday night.

Hingis raced through the first set, then survived three breaks of her service in the second set to beat No 74-ranked Czech Kveta Hrdlickova 6-1, 7-5.

Hingis, 18, said she regretted the spat and split with her mother, especially the timing of it, and said, "I won't make that mistake again."

Since Wimbledon, Hingis won two of the three tournaments she entered, all with her mother at court-side.

"I just wanted to try it on my own," Hingis said of the ill-timed Wimbledon experiment. "It didn't work out. It's great that she wanted to do it with me again. I'm very happy about that and that we found a way to come together. That's why I was able to win tournaments again."

Spilrea made 31 unforced errors to 28 for Coetzer, but had 10 more winners than her South African opponent, 14-4.

In the opening match in Arthur Ashe Stadium, Jelena Dokic of Australia was unable to duplicate her Wimbledon surprise, when she shocked Hingis. This time she fell 7-5, 6-1 to No 10 Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario.

Other early winners in women's singles were No 8 Jana Novotna, No 12 Barbara Schett, No 13 Dominique Van Rost and No 15 Amelie Mauresmo.

There were no early surprises on the men's side as No 3 Yevgeny Kafelnikov, No 8 Carlos Moya, No 10 Marcelo Rios and No 12 Richard Krajicek moved into the second round.

Agassi, winner of the French Open and runner-up at Wimbledon, showed he's ready to contend for a second US title as he rolled to a 6-0, 6-1, 6-3 victory over Nicklas Kulti.

Kafelnikov defeated Spain's Alberto Martin 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Moya stopped Slovak Dominik Hrbaty 7-6, 6-3, 6-4; Rios struggled to a 6-4, 7-6, 3-6, 5-7, 6-1 victory over Martin Damm; and Krajicek eliminated Phillip King of the USA National Boys' 18-and-under champion from Long Beach, California, 6-1, 6-4, 6-0.

Latin football scene

RIO DE JANEIRO, Aug 31: Fluminense fans fought and hurled rocks on to the pitch and their club's Third Division match was abandoned with the team 2-0 down at Vila Nova. Corinthians extended their winning sequence at the top of the First Division to seven games, reports Reuters.

BRAZIL

Fluminense fans ran riot and the referee abandoned the club's third division match at Vila Nova early in the second half after police using tear gas had failed to contain the violence.

Fluminense, once one of the top first division clubs in Rio de Janeiro, were losing 2-0 to Vila Nova when nearly 300 fans began fighting in the stands and throwing sticks and rocks on to the pitch. They also attacked their own players.

The referee interrupted the game in the 39th minute before calling it off in the 47th minute when it became clear that the police were unable to contain the violence despite directing tear gas at the crowd.

Fluminense goalkeeper Gabriel was attacked twice by fans who had looted and wrecked shops in Vila Nova before the game.

Police escorted the Fluminense followers from the stadium. No injuries were reported and no arrests were made.

Corinthians maintained their lead in the first division championship and extended their winning streak to seven games when they beat arch-rivals Sao Paulo 1-0 on Sunday.

Corinthians are now only one win away from equaling

the championship record set by Atletico Mineiro in 1977. They face Flamengo on Wednesday.

Disgruntled Flamengo fans at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium jeered their team after a 4-3 defeat by Gremio on Sunday.

Ze Alcinzo scored a hat-trick for Gremio with goals in the 22nd, 69th and 85th minutes. Emerson netted the other Gremio goal in the 48th minute. Fabio Baiano, Beto and Romario scored for Flamengo in the sixth, 39th and 52nd minutes.

ARGENTINA San Lorenzo maintained their lead in the first division with a difficult 1-0 win over Talleres de Cordoba.

Boca Juniors beat Chacarita Juniors 2-0 on Sunday to rejoin River Plate in second place.

River Plate defeated Estudiantes de la Plata 4-1 with a brilliant display on Saturday.

MEXICO Brazilian striker Bebeto continued to disappoint Neza (Toros) fans as his new club suffered their third defeat in a row on Sunday — a humiliating 5-0 home defeat by Atlas.

Miguel Zepeda and Juan Pablo Rodriguez each scored twice, including a penalty apiece. Antonio Urteaga completed the scoring in the 86th minute.

Atlas are second in the table behind Necaxa, who beat Pachuca 4-1 for their third straight victory.

In other games, UNAM (Pumas) beat Atlante 3-2, reigning champions Toluca had a difficult time beating Morelia

1-0 and Cruz Azul drew 1-1 with UAG (Tecos).

PERU Alianza Lima consolidated their lead in the Clausura (Closing) championship by beating Melgar 1-0.

Sport Boys moved up to second after beating Juan Aurich 2-0, while Alianza Atletico dropped to third after losing 3-2 to Sporting Cristal.

BOLIVIA Real Potosi maintained their lead in Group A with their fifth consecutive victory in the Clausura (Closing) championship, beating Guabira 2-0 on Sunday.

The Strongest climbed to second place after an agonising 3-2 win over current champions Blooming, who were leading 2-0 with only 25 minutes to go.

Wilstermann inflicted a devastating 8-0 defeat over relegation candidates Destroyers.

Independiente de Sucre maintained their lead in Group B by winning 2-1 against Real Santa Cruz. Oriente Petrolero and Bolivar drew 0-0, while Union Central beat San Jose 4-0.

Leicester beat Watford

LONDON, Aug 31: Leicester City moved up to fifth place in Premier League, six points behind leaders United, with a 1-0 home win over Watford on Monday, reports Reuters.