

Shearer denies involvement

LONDON, Oct 6: England captain Alan Shearer has insisted he played no significant part in Ruud Gullit's departure from the Newcastle manager's position, reports AFP.

Shearer blamed a string of "disastrous results" rather than "player power" for Gullit's demise.

Shearer, also speaking for the first time of his reaction to being dropped to the substitutes' bench by Gullit, is adamant the only pressure brought to bear on the Dutchman before his resignation last month was to halt Newcastle's slide down the Premiership league table.

"I don't think Ruud resigned or was sacked because of player power. We had some disastrous results, and the decision was then taken by the chairman or whoever," said Shearer, in an interview with The Sun daily.

The striker's form along with his club's has improved since Gullit left to be replaced by former England manager Bobby Robson.

"Things needed changing, and the changes were made," he added.

Shearer does not hide his anger at having to sit on the substitutes' bench for first half of the Magpies' north-east derby with Sunderland.

"I had never been dropped in my career. So to find myself on the bench for a game as important as the one against Sunderland that Wednesday night was a shock, believe me," he admitted.

Rangers not interested in 'super-league'

GLASGOW, Oct 6: Rangers will not join Celtic in their efforts to break away from the Scottish Premier League, club chairman David Murray said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

At Celtic's annual general meeting on Monday, chief executive Allan MacDonald said the Glasgow side must explore the possibility of linking up with clubs from the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal to form a 'super-league' capable of securing television rights equal to those of the top nations in Europe.

Rangers' involvement in the venture is seen as crucial because without their Old Firm partner on board Celtic would enter the new league with no Scottish rival.

However, Murray is committed to the Scottish Premier League and believes more attention should be paid to raising the standard of the domestic game.

"We feel a sense of responsibility," said the Rangers supremo.

"I would see the main priority being to ensure that Scotland is one of the countries which get two representatives in the Champions' League, which would be a great incentive to clubs."

Celtic are entitled to their opinions and have their own vision for the future, but I don't think it is very practical."

Meanwhile, Rangers' Premier League home game against Hearts on October 23 is set to be called off in order to help the Ibrox club's Champions' League quest.

Rangers' 1-0 victory over PSV last week put them just behind Bayern Munich and Valencia in the race to reach the second group stage of the competition.

With two home games looming which could decide their fate, Hearts have agreed to Rangers' request to postpone the league game which falls between the two.

The decision is expected to be ratified by a meeting of the Scottish Premier League.

Azhar left

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day was the best," Borde said after the two-hour meeting.

"Keeping the future in mind we felt this team will deliver the goods."

The selectors have kept their options open in the bowling attack by naming three seamers alongside as many spinners.

The Indian squad:

Sachin Tendulkar (captain), Sadagopan Ramesh, Devang Gandhi, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly, Ajay Jadeja, Manav Prasad (wicket-keeper), Sunil Joshi, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh, Virender Sehwag, Venkatesh Prasad, Debashish Mohanty and Vijay Bhadrawaj.

Shamir Sakir

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The footballers did not let their mentor down. They prevailed over the personal adversities.

Despite winning the gold, the Iraqi coach Shamir could bear with the humiliation no more.

"I would never come back to Bangladesh," the Iraqi World Cupper moaned prior to his departure for Baghdad.

The treatment of Shamir by tour manager Gaffar might remind the nation of Gordon Cuthbert Greenidge, the ill-fated former coach of the Bangladesh cricket team. Like Shamir, the Caribbean coach also chose not to come to Bangladesh with his boys after the World Cup campaign, where they beat mighty Pakistan and fellow associate member Scotland in their maiden appearance in the mega event.

Much to the agony of millions of cricket lovers in the country, the awe-inspiring coach, who was sacked in the middle of the England tournament, remained absent then at a reception accorded by the Bangladesh Cricket Board at the National Parade Square in Agargaon, where too the Prime Minister was present.



LUNGI CRICKET: The "gentleman's game" is rapidly gaining popularity among the masses of Bangladesh. Although these rural cricketers do not have any proper clothing to put on, kits to play with and codes to be abided by, the passion for the game is hardly mistaken. At a remote Thakurbari area of Magura district, Daily Star's correspondent Md Hossain Seraj framed these enthusiastic young men playing a game that is yet to be methodically regulated by the Bangladesh Cricket Board countrywide.

Horne shines in Kiwi show

JODHPUR, India, Oct 6 (AFP): Opener Matthew Horne hit 85 to lead an impressive batting display by the touring New Zealanders in a three-day match against the Indian board president's team here on Wednesday.

Craig Spearman made 56 and skipper Stephen Fleming 32 as the Kiwis, replying to the home team's 298, reached 248 for five by close of play on the second day.

Craig McMillan was unbeaten on 44 as the tourists gained useful batting practice ahead of the first Test starting at Mohali on Sunday.

Test off-spinner Harbhajan Singh showed what lies ahead for the Kiwis in the three-Test series by grabbing four wickets on the docile wicket.

Harbhajan, included in the Indian squad for the first Test earlier in the day, finished with four for 62.

Earlier, the Indian young Test hopefuls, resuming at 269 for eight, were all out for 298. Wicket-keeper Samir Dighse, 31 not out overnight, could score one more in before going down to seamer Shayne O'Connor.

O'Connor and Dion Nash picked up three wickets each. Left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori, who missed a hat-trick when he bowled Virender Sehwag and Davinder Bundela off successive balls on Tuesday, finished with 71 for 2 off 32.

overs.

Board XI skipper Hrishikesh Kanitkar staked a claim for the three-Test series against the tourists with a determined 99.

Rathour c McMillan b O'Connor 6

Mullick c Parore b Nash 9

Kanitkar c & b Harris 49

Shewag b Vettori 3

Bundela b Vettori 0

Dighse b O'Connor 32

Sanghvi c Parore b Nash 6

Sanghvi c Parore b Nash 0

Harbhajan c Spearman b Nash 26

Nehra not out 8

Extras: (b-4, lb-2, w-5, nb-4) 15

Total: (All out in 97.3 overs) 298

Fall of wickets: 1-21; 2-63; 3-163; 4-168; 5-168; 6-240; 7-255; 8-256; 9-274; 10-298.

Bowler:

	O	M	R	W
O'Connor	17	3	62	3
Nash	17.3	5	54	3
Vettori	32	5	71	2
McMillan	5	0	16	0
Wiseman	15	1	66	0
Harris	11	5	23	1

NEW ZEALAND: First innings

Horne c Zaidi b Harbhajan 55

Bel b Zaidi 8

Spearman c Dighse b Harbhajan 56

Fleming c Rathour b Harbhajan 32

McMillan not out 44

Harris lbw b Harbhajan 0

Parore not out 5

Extras: (b-4, lb-5, nb-9) 18

Total: (for 5 wickets in 80 overs) 248

To bat: S O'Connor, D Nash, D Vettori, P Wiseman.

Fall of wks: 1-38; 2-146; 3-179; 4-232; 5-232

Bowler:

	O	M	R	W
Zaidi	18	3	49	1
Nehra	11	1	35	0
Sanghvi	24	1	82	0
Harbhajan	22	3	62	4
Kanitkar	4	0	11	0
Shewag	1	1	0	0

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the three-day match between Indian Board President's XI and New Zealand at Jodhpur on Wednesday.

INDIAN BOARD PRESIDENT'S XI: First Innings (overnight 269 for 8)

Khoda run out (Wiseman/Parore) 32

Collins takes Scots into play-off

GLASGOW, Oct 6: Scotland sealed a place in the qualifying play-offs for the 2000 European Championship on Tuesday when John Collins' first-half penalty gave them a 1-0 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina at Ibrox, reports AFP.

The victory means Craig Brown's side are guaranteed to finish second in Group Nine behind the Czech Republic and now face a two-legged play-off in November to qualify for Euro 2000.

Scotland made the breakthrough against the run of play after 24 minutes thanks to David Hopkin flexing his muscles.

The Leeds star barged his way into the penalty area as Craig Burley played the ball in.

Hopkin was bundled over by Sergej Barbarez and Swedish referee Leif Sundell awarded a spot kick even though Kevin Gallacher appeared to be in an offside position.

Leeds midfielder Collins slotted the spot kick into the corner for the first goal in the qualifying campaign and his 12th in 56 international appearances.

Scotland's victory gave them 15 points, four more than Estonia and Lithuania, who visit the Scots in the final round of matches on Saturday.

Sir Alex relieved

MANCHESTER, England, Oct 6: Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was a relieved man on Wednesday after being cleared of illegal driving because he had severe diarrhoea, reports AFP.

Bury Magistrates Court heard how Ferguson was suffering from stomach cramps when he illegally drove on the hard shoulder of a motorway on February 26 outside Manchester in a desperate attempt to find a toilet.

Magistrates agreed with the Manchester United manager's defence that it was an emergency and they cleared the 57-year-old on Tuesday.

Italy sans Totti against Belarus

FLORENCE, Italy, Oct 6: Italy coach Dino Zoff lost one of his top men on Tuesday when AS Roma playmaker Francesco Totti was ruled out of their Euro 2000 qualifier against Belarus with a groin strain, reports AFP.

Totti was examined here by national team doctors, who said he would not be able to play in Saturday's decisive Group 1 match in Minsk.

The player told ANSA news agency that he would be out for three weeks, although team doctor Andrea Ferretti claimed to have made no such diagnosis when the two men met here.

Totti reckoned that he'd probably have to miss two Sundays through suspension, so perhaps he just made a deduction, said Ferretti. "For the moment, he just has to follow the course of treatment and rest."

Totti was sent off during Sunday's 3-1 league win over Fiorentina.

The injury will also deal blow to Roma, who are currently riding high in second place in the Serie A, as the doctors recommended a three-week rest for the team captain.

Giggs ready for Wales return

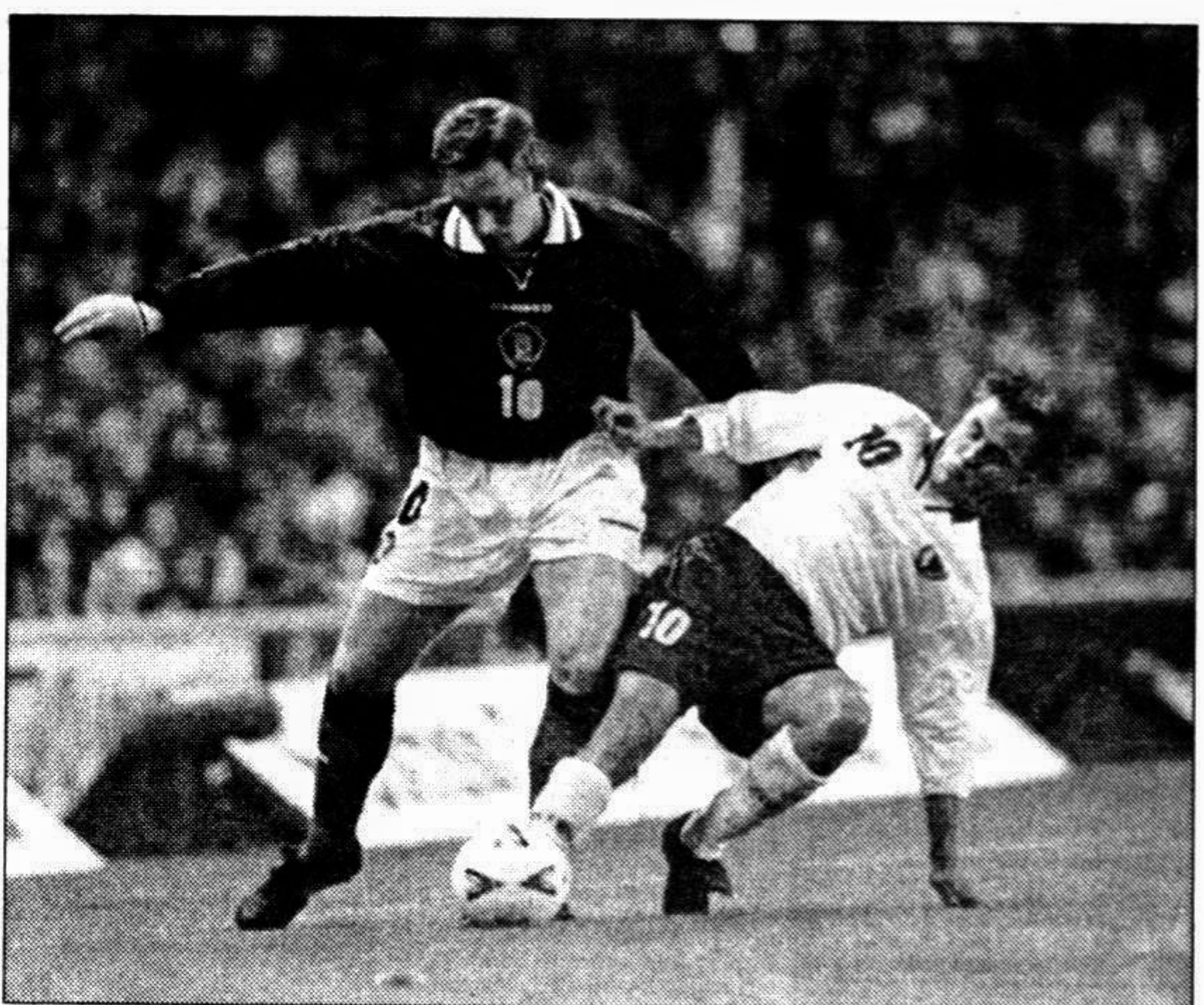
CARDIFF, Oct 6: Manchester United's Welsh winger Ryan Giggs could be set for a remarkable return from injury against Switzerland in their Euro 2000 qualification game on Saturday, reports AFP.

Giggs appeared to be out for two months after aggravating a hamstring injury against Wimbledon a fortnight ago.

But he reckons he still has a chance to play against the Swiss and help former teammate Mark Hughes claim the Welsh manager's job on a permanent basis.

"The injury is clearing up nicely, and the key to it is the next few days to see if I'm okay to play," Giggs said.

"I rate my chances at 50-50 at the moment. I have done some running with the United physios, but obviously that is a lot different from playing a game."



Bosnian Edin Mujcin (R) and Scotland's David Hopkin fight for possession during their Euro 2000 qualifier.

Zoff angry at critics

FLORENCE, Italy, Oct 6: Italy coach Dino Zoff has lashed out at his critics after they accused him of favouritism by calling-up Juventus' erratic star Alessandro Del Piero, reports AFP.

Del Piero is back in the squad for the first time in a year following a slow recovery from knee surgery. He is now hoping to play at least some of Saturday's Euro 2000 qualifier in Minsk against Belarus.

Zoff's decision surprised some people as Del Piero is still short of form and fitness, and his performances have ranged from the inspired to the downright unwatchable, as on Sunday, when he was substituted.

But Zoff lost his temper after allegations that he was doing both Del Piero and Juventus a favour, at the expense of the national interest.

"There is nothing strange whatsoever in this call-up," he said at the team's training base here. "And it's simply not true that Del Piero is coming here expecting to play. It's all rubbish."

"Players get picked because they offer certain guarantees and I won't accept people talking about bias. I don't show any favouritism even to my own son, let alone when it comes to selecting the national squad."

"I might make a mistake, and I can be criticised, but I am honest and it's offensive to say that I'm doing Juventus a favour or anyone else for that matter," he fumed. "I am thinking only about the national team."

"Del Piero may not be 1,000 per cent, but given that he is a true champion, his 700 might still be enough."

And he dismissed a re-call for Gianfranco Zola, who made headlines here after a sparkling performance for Chelsea against AC Milan in the European Champions' League last month.

"I'm thinking about him," Zoff said. "But given that we've already got a wide choice of first-rate attackers, you can't simply change your opinions because of one good match."

Del Piero himself was frank about his performances this season and his presence in the squad.

"I've played badly in some matches," he said. "It would be stupid not to admit it. But, without going into the details, I've been surprised by some of the comments that have been made about me."

"During the good times, people have exaggerated things in my favour. So to be coherent, I have to accept it when people exaggerate in a negative way too. But some of the comments, I just can't understand."

He added: "There's no such thing as a guaranteed place in the national team, but I'm here to try and win a place in it."

Del Piero may want to silence the critics in Italy, but he has another reason for wanting to make his mark at international level.

A major trophy with the national team is something that's badly missing from my career," he said. "I've won cups and league titles with Juventus, but in the national shirt I've lost at Euro 96 and the 1998 World Cup."

"I must admit I've been thinking about Euro 2000. I just hope that after Saturday it all becomes a bit more official."

Djorkaeff applauded

COLOGNE, Germany, Oct 6: French World Cup winner Youri Djorkaeff has been applauded by fans and management alike as the saviour of Kaiserslautern after scoring another two goals for them against Unterhaching Sunday, reports AFP.

"Djorkaeff played like a world champion," coach Otto Rehagel enthused, while members of the club's board of directors put him on a pedestal with the most legendary of Kaiserslautern players Fritz Walter, a stalwart of the 1954 West German World Cup winning side.

"Light footedness, ideas and inspiration -- that is the brilliance of Djorkaeff," Rehagel added as a new sense of confidence seeped back into the Red Devils' camp, positively invigorating it after Rehagel's bitter public wrangle with captain Gernot Zorner last month which threatened to capsize the entire team boat.

Djorkaeff's statistics from Sunday's game showed he touched the ball 69 times and had seven shots on goal, two of which went in in the 66th and 82nd minutes.

Former Inter Milan teammate Sforza, back to his best, scored with a classy bicycle kick in the first half while Harry Koch blasted home a 20 metre shot for Kaiserslautern's 4-2 win.

Even with Djorkaeff's brilliance in attack though -- which has produced three Bundesliga goals and two in the UEFA Cup -- Kaiserslautern are yet to win a single point away which has left the 1998 champions limping along in 13th place.

Sire and not just talk about it."

Djorkaeff has proved the perfect compliment to German international Olaf Marschall up front. Marschall, a sly goal sneak in the area who is only dangerous from close quarters, balances up his French partner's more creative manner."

Derby after Carbone

LONDON, Oct 6: English Premiership strugglers Derby County are to make another attempt to sign Sheffield Wednesday's unsettled Italian striker Benito Carbone, reports AFP.

Aston Villa had hoped to clinch the signing of the 28-year-old Italian this week, but now Derby are making a fresh attempt to attract him to Pride Park after a previous bid fell through.

Derby manager Jim Smith told the Sheffield Wednesday website: "We are trying to resurrect the deal. We are looking to bring Carbone in until the end of the season for a nominal fee that will suit both parties."

The move has been in dispute with Wednesday all season. Matters came to a head when he stormed away from a match against Southampton and he wasn't even on the bench for Wednesday's 5-1 win against Wimbledon on Saturday.

Indian promoter pulls punches

NEW DELHI, Oct 6: An Indian sports promoter accused by a British tabloid of trying to bribe English and New Zealand cricketers threatened on Wednesday to sue the paper for "malicious" damages.

"I don't believe this, it's a fit case to sue the paper," the Delhi-based promoter, Ashim Khetarpal, told AFP. "I will do it."

The News of the World reported last week that Khetarpal was being investigated by Scotland Yard after former England all-rounder Chris Lewis alleged he was offered 300,000 pounds to fix the Old Trafford Test against New Zealand last summer.

Lewis told the paper he met Khetarpal at a newsagent's shop in London and was offered the money to fix the match.

When Lewis refused, the paper claims, Khetarpal contacted New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming.

A Scotland Yard spokesman told the tabloid that the England team would be quizzed over the allegations.

Khetarpal admitted meeting Lewis, but only to seek help to sign up English players to play a benefit match for Indian cricket administrator Mohinder Pandove.

"I went to England to sign up players for the match," he said. "Unfortunately the game has got cancelled now."

"If I had 300,000 pounds to throw away, I would not be in this business."

Khetarpal is reported to have arrived in England with an unnamed Indian businessman and checked into the Holiday Helland signs for Brondby

COPENHAGEN, Oct 6: Norwegian international Roger Helland has signed for Danish First Division outfit Brondby, the club revealed on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Helland, 26, capped twice for the national side. Is currently with Norwegian side SK Brann and will join the Danish club in January 2000.

Lewis said the state of mind of these people, I suppose to them it is a business.

"If they are offering 300,000 pounds at the bottom of the chain, there must be an awful lot of more money involved in it," Lewis said.

Khetarpal said he would not have left his business card with the players if he had anything to hide.

Anelka attends Chirac dinner

MADRID, Oct 6: Real Madrid's French international forward Nicolas Anelka did attend Tuesday's Spanish government's dinner in honor of visiting French President Jacques Chirac despite reports Monday that he had snubbed the invitation, reports AFP.

The player arrived alone with two signed Real Madrid shirts, one for Chirac and one for Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar.

Reports Monday said that the 20-year-old had declined the invitation because protocol had not allowed him to bring his brother and adviser Didier with him.

Football-loving Chirac, an ardent fan of the French national team, had laughed off the apparent snub, saying: "I don't want to intrude in the family business of Mr Anelka." Aznar had said all he wanted Anelka to do was score goals, something he is yet to do with his new club.

Anelka moved to Real in the summer in a 23 million pounds (38 million dollars) switch from English Premiership side Arsenal after a protracted and bitter transfer wrangle.



Four heroes of the Kathmandu triumph — (L-R) skipper Jewel Rana, striker Alfaz Ahmed, Shahajuddin Tipu and goalkeeper Biplab Bhattacharjee. — Star photo by Anisur Rahman