

Sport

Daei blasts Bayern

HONG KONG, Oct 11: Iranian international striker Ali Daei has criticised former club Bayern Munich, saying the club's management bows to media pressure when it comes to team selection, reports Reuters.

Daei, who scored both goals in Hertha Berlin's 2-1 European Champions' League win over Chelsea, was quoted in the Asian magazine AFC News as saying that his lack of appearances for Bayern was down to coach Ottmar Hitzfeld bowing to journalists' opinions.

"I wanted to play more but at Bayern I think that names play for the team not players," said Daei. "In Bayern journalists pick the team but in Berlin if I train well then I play and the trainer picks the team. At Bayern there's too much pressure from the media."

Daei joined Hertha from Bayern during the summer in a deal worth 3.7 million dollars, the highest fee paid for an Asian player, and has scored three times in the Champions' League.

His form this year is in marked contrast to last season when he played just over 20 matches, mainly as a substitute, and scored six times.

"Berlin is good for me," said Daei who was in Hitzfeld's squad for the European Cup final last season but was not used.

"They're not a big club like Bayern but the club have a lot of good players and a good coach. Everyone is friendlier than at Bayern and I think all the players here are friends."

"In Berlin we don't have the same problems as in Bayern. There's not the same attention from the media and I think I'll find it easier to work there."

However, Daei stressed that his time spent at the club dubbed "FC Hollywood" was not all doom and gloom.

"Last year wasn't bad for me," he said. "Last year I learned so many things and I played with good players in a big club and I think that now I'm a better player. I learned so many things from players like Lothar Matthaeus."

Iran, Denmark friendly drawn

COPENHAGEN, Oct 11: Iranian goalkeeper Hadi Tabatabaei and Danish counterpart Peter Schmeichel were in top form Sunday as the teams played a scoreless tie in a friendly match, reports AP.

The Danes had five scoring chances in the opening half, the first one after 15 minutes when Tabatabaei saved Chelsea mid-fielder Bjorne Goldbaek's shot.

Minutes later, Ali Daei — one of Iran's best players who plays for German club Hertha Berlin — tested Schmeichel with a header. Iranian forward Mehdi Mahdavikia later dribbled through the Danish defense, but was stopped by Schmeichel.

The Danish goalie made his best save of the game in the 68th minute, blocking the ball after three Iranians were left unmarked by the Danish defense.

Ebbe Sand, a member of Denmark's successful World Cup team in France last year, came close in the 76th minute as the Schalke striker's shot flew just wide of the post.

In the 71st minute, Belgian referee Eric Blaere booked Ali Mousavi of Iran.

It was the second time the two countries met. In 1972, Denmark won 4-0 over Iran in the Olympic tournament.

Andre, Yevgeny enter Colonial Classic

MELBOURNE, Oct 11: World number one Andre Agassi, winner of the French and US Opens, and Australian Open holder and second-ranked Yevgeny Kafelnikov will head the field at the Colonial Classic here in January, reports AFP.

Pete Sampras, the Wimbledon winner who will try to break Australian Roy Emerson's record of 12 singles Grand Slams at the Australian Open, is on standby for the tournament which is the lead-up event to the Australian Open starting January 17.

Australian No 1 Pat Rafter, who briefly held the world No 1 spot this year, is also in the eight-man field for the January 12-15 event, as well as former Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands, defending champion Thomas Enqvist of Sweden and German Nicolas Kiefer.

Colonial Classic tournament director Colin Stubbs said Monday the final two places in the field would be filled within the next few weeks.

Sampras is recovering from a back injury which forced him to withdraw from the US Open, but has said he plans to play all the Grand Slams next year and the Super 9 tournaments.

"Until he sees how his injury is going, he is not prepared to commit to the events which prepare him for the Grand Slams," Stubbs said.

"It will be three or four weeks before we know if he plays the Colonial Classic but we are saving a place for him," he said.

Apart from his double Grand Slam year, Agassi has also won in Hong Kong and Washington and was a finalist at Wimbledon and Los Angeles.

Army v'ball

Three more robin league matches of the annual Army volleyball championship were held, yesterday at the Momenshahi Cantonment, reports UNB.

Savar Area defeated Bogra Area while Rangpur Area beat Dhaka Signals and Comilla Area outplayed Air Defence Artillery by 3-1 sets.



England captain Alan Shearer scores his side's first goal with an overhead kick against Belgium in their Euro 2000 qualifier on October 10. England won 2-1. — AFP photo

Lalas calls it a day

KANSAS CITY, Missouri, Oct 11: Defender Alexi Lalas, a key player in the resurgence of international soccer in the United States and one of the first marquee players of Major League Soccer, has retired, reports AFP.

Lalas, 29, made the announcement after his MLS team Kansas City fell 1-0 to the Los Angeles Galaxy Saturday night.

Lalas was a starting defender for the United States in the 1994 World Cup, when host nation America reached the second round for the first time since 1930 and the second time in six World Cup appearances.

But the 6-foot-3-inch defender, easily recognizable by his long red hair and goatee, also was one of the problem players on the 1998 squad, which had a disastrous showing in France and finished last in the 32-nation tournament.

Lalas was one of the most outspoken critics of coach Steve Sampson after being benched following Team USA's 2-0 in the first game of group play.

This is simply a question of following my heart and thus

makes it more difficult to explain to people why or how I came to this decision," Lalas said. "At 29, I definitely feel that I could continue to play for some time, but this is not about age or ability. It is personal choice and something that I feel is right at this moment in my life."

Sampson was fired after the 1998 World Cup, but two-time Olympian Lalas has made few appearances for the national team under new coach Bruce Arena, who is preparing for 2002 World Cup qualifying.

Lalas also is the only American player to appear during the modern era in Serie A of the prestigious Italian soccer league, playing for Padova in the 1994-95 season and half of the 1995-96 campaign.

He returned to the United States in 1996 and relentlessly served as a spokesman for the MLS, which continues to try and create a niche in the country.

The 23-year-old takes away 46,000 dollars in prize money, but more importantly, the prestige of having won the most tournaments on the ATP Tour this year.

Norman has been level on four alongside world number one Andre Agassi and the injury-idled Pete Sampras.

But he waited out a Sunday rain delay which allowed the completion of only one game before coming back Monday to win as dry weather prevailed.

"This is great, it's a dream," said the winner. "But it was a really tough win over Marcelo."

Both world number seven Rios and second seed Norman were catching a flight later Monday for Singapore, site of this week's final Asian event of the season on the Tour.

Rios is top seed while Norman is third behind Australian Mark Philippoussis at the indoor tournament.

The rain interruption was the second in as many years for the Shanghai event.

1998's inaugural firale was eventually played on a Monday, with Michael Chang beating Goran Ivanisevic. A day of drizzle Sunday at the Xian Xia Tennis Centre prevented more than one game from being completed.

Rios, holder in Singapore, had been looking for his third title in Asia after winning trophies in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 and Singapore.

Both men have enormous talent as playmakers, but neither of them have ever shown it in a national shirt.

A mis-placed fault in Del Piero at the World Cup finals cost Zoff's predecessor Cesare Maldini, his job and the Juventus star has yet to fully recover from a year out through injury.

Totti has been on exceptional form for AS Roma for the past two years, but has largely failed to deliver it on national service.

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"And I expect a lot too from Del Piero because someone like him, if he's fit, can decide a match, whether it's for Juventus or for the national side."

With present and post world champions France and Germany only scraping into the final, Zoff was comforted by the fact that his team were not alone in suffering over the weekend.

"Spain look to be the best team," he said. "But them aside, I think we are on the same level as the others."

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