

Scottish Premiership preview

Rangers the team to beat

GLASGOW, Oct 15: Russian international Andrei Kanchelskis is enjoying a new lease of life at invincible Scottish Premier League leaders Rangers, reports AFP.

The Ukrainian-born winger concedes he operated below-par for much of last term following his 5.5 million pound (9 million dollar) transfer from Fiorentina in July as he struggled to recapture the Manchester United form which made his name.

Kanchelskis was careful to evade the question of whether he still owes something to the Rangers support who have doubted his value amid criticism he is beginning to look a spent force.

But he was honest enough to acknowledge his contribution to the club's Treble-winning success last year was less than it might have been and he wants to make amends.

"Last season I played at 75 percent," he said. "This season I'm concentrating on playing at 100 percent."

"I think my form now is okay. I played 90 minutes against St Johnstone and most of the game at Dundee and Rangers won them both. I don't feel any pressure to prove myself. I just go on the pitch and give everything."

"Sometimes you have bad days in football but it's not a problem for me. I'm still going to work hard. Last season can hardly be considered a bad one for the club."

Rangers face a crunch home Champions League match against PSV Eindhoven next Wednesday and will hope to warm up by making it nine wins out of nine in the league when they visit Kilmarnock on Saturday.

Dick Advocaat's side already have a six-point lead over rivals Celtic, who have a game in hand and play host to Aberdeen, who managed their first point of the season in the 2-2 draw with Hibernian last time out.

Third-placed Dundee United, on 14 points, could find themselves seven points adrift of the Glasgow pair by the time we visit Dundee on Sunday.

Fixtures (kicks-offs 1400 GMT unless stated):

Saturday: Celtic v Aberdeen, Hearts v St Johnstone, Kilmarnock v Rangers, Motherwell v Hibernian.

Sunday (1705 GMT): Dundee v Dundee Utd

Kluivert repents

BARCELONA, Oct 15: Barcelona striker Patrick Kluivert apologised to his teammates on Thursday for the outburst that led to his sending-off in the 2-2 draw with Real Madrid, reports Reuters.

Kluivert's angry reaction to a tackle from Ivan Campo — he was caught on camera clearly hurling insults in the direction of the referee — came as Barca were leading 2-1 in Wednesday's Spanish league game.

The Dutch international was repentant on Thursday, although he insisted he was not swearing directly at the referee.

"I'm sorry, not only for myself but for the team," Kluivert said. "It was a game of high emotions."

"I did say something but it wasn't directed at the referee. I didn't insult him."

Kluivert will find out today the length of his suspension for the red card, his first since joining Barcelona at the start of the 1998-99 season.

Ivanisevic bows out

VIENNA, Oct 15: Local hero Stefan Koubek sent a weary Goran Ivanisevic crashing out of the Austrian indoor men's tournament 6-7, 6-2, 6-4 yesterday, reports Reuters.

Sixth-seeded Dutchman Richard Krajicek made the quarter finals with an easy 6-4, 6-2 win over Swede Magnus Larsson as seventh-seeded German Nicolas Kiefer eliminated Austrian teenager and Wimbledon junior champion Juergen Melzer 6-4, 6-0.

Clay-court specialist Koubek, who captured his first ATP tournament win in Atlanta in May, became Austria's number one player after reaching the fourth round of the French Open.

He said: "It was very important that I won on a hard court."

"Especially because I beat two players (American Jeff Tarango and Ivanisevic) who play better indoors."

Koubek's nerves got the better of him in the opening set and he missed five set points before Ivanisevic took the tiebreak 7-3 to go a set up.

Beckham, FA hold talks

LONDON, Oct 15: Manchester United and England midfielder David Beckham has met the Football Association (FA) to discuss his behaviour on the pitch, reports Reuters.

We can confirm there was a meeting on Tuesday. That's the end of the matter," the FA said on Thursday.

Soccer officials have said that the FA wanted to talk about incidents at recent matches. There was no question of the player facing any disciplinary action.

Beckham has been booked five times this season, including a yellow card in United's Champions League game in Austria against Sturm Graz when he kicked out at an opponent.

Serie A preview**Roma hope to cash in on Juve woes**

MILAN, Oct 15: AS Roma are looking to cut Juventus into bite-sized pieces this weekend when Fabio Capello's men walk out for the most appetising fixture in the Serie A, reports AFP.

The Olympic stadium hosted one of the best matches ever seen in Italy two weeks ago when Lazio drew 4-4 with AC Milan, and there should be another thriller there on Sunday night.

Roma are joint second on points with Lazio and team morale is high despite a suspension for skipper Francesco Totti and an injury that is set to rule out striker Marco Delvecchio.

Roma would also earn three points from beating Fiorentina, but a victory over the former world champions would be invaluable for building team confidence so early in the season.

Capello is counting on lone striker Vincenzo Montella to steer the ball home, with the help of a packed midfield that needs to be mobile enough to create scoring chances as well as stop them.

Montella said: "It's important to beat Juventus because it would give us an extra boost. We have to set our sights high, but without drifting into the realms of fantasy."

"I want to do well and to get at least one goal, seeing that Juventus are the only team I've never scored against," said the striker.

If Capello has men physically unavailable, Juventus' problem is all psychological.

Alessandro Del Piero and

Zinedine Zidane still haven't overcome the effects of a prolonged recovery from surgery, while Filippo Inzaghi is firing blanks and team spirit is at a low ebb.

The quality of the football is poor, by Juventus' own admission, and they were lucky to snatch a late winner against Venezia that has left them fourth in the table, one point behind Lazio.

Despite all the warning signals, coach Carlo Ancelotti insisted: "This match against Roma comes at just the right time. We need to play a top-level side."

"It will be an important test," he said, "though not a decisive one at this stage of the season."

"Del Piero isn't on form but I still say that he'll only get it back by playing. Zidane is a bit better off, while for Inzaghi the problem is a bit different because it's not related to a recovery from serious injury."

If Juventus and Roma were to cancel each other out in a draw, the first to celebrate would be Inter Milan, who stand to increase their two-point lead at the top this weekend.

Marcello Lippi's men are away to Venezia and ought to take all three points. Ronaldo is fast recovering his former glory and strike partner Christian Vieri should pass a late fitness test on an injured foot.

If Lazio have to settle for a point away to Udinese on Saturday, and they will probably be without Argentinian midfield general Juan Sebastian Veron, Inter stand to double their lead over the two Rome clubs.

'El Phenom' getting better

MILAN, Oct 15: Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo looks finally to have put his troubles behind him and is poised to start only his second Serie A game of the season against Venezia on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Ronaldo, who has struggled for both form and fitness for most of the past year, appeared to be almost back to his best in two games in the past week.

He played 70 minutes for Brazil against the Netherlands in a friendly on Saturday and then on Tuesday put in an impressive performance for Inter in a friendly against Grasshoppers.

With Inter's current number one striker Christian Vieri suffering from a niggling foot injury, it is widely expected that Ronaldo will start in Venice.

"My condition is improving a little with each day," Ronaldo was quoted as saying by Gazzetta dello Sport. "Step by step I am re-finding my old form. I can now train longer and harder and I am getting the results of that."

The Brazilian has been restricted to just one league start this season — away to Roma on September 12. After a poor display he was substituted 13 minutes into the second half.

With Inter coach Marcello Lippi seemingly content with Vieri and Chilean Ivan

Zamorano in attack, rumours began to circulate that Ronaldo could leave Inter.

Newcastle United manager Bobby Robson wanted him on loan, while Italian press re-

ports claimed Lazio, who once

tried to sign Ronaldo from Barcelona before he moved to Inter, were ready to make a bid.

But Ronaldo has publicly committed himself to Lippi's

side.

He said he was moved by the reception he was given when he came off the substitutes' bench in the 2-1 win against Fiorentina in Inter's most recent game on October 2 and said he wanted to win a title for the fans.

His personal life also seems to be more settled. His girlfriend Milene Domingues is expecting their child in April and with his recent trip to Kosovo to lend support to children's projects, he appears to be working hard to rebuild his image and popularity.

Perhaps more importantly, the growing conflict between his club and country also seems to have been resolved.

After a meeting with Inter officials this week, Brazil coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo agreed to use Ronaldo more sparingly and leave him out of less important friendly matches.

Brazil's high number of friendlies in recent years had led to concern at Inter that Ronaldo was playing too much and was heading for burn-out.

Luxemburgo believes Ronaldo will soon be back to his peak now that Inter and Brazil are coordinating their efforts on the player's behalf.

"There is an opportunity for us to work hand in hand to bring Ronaldo back to the top of world football. I am sure that little is lacking now and he will soon be back to his best," the Brazil coach said.

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United are still recovering after

a poor start to their campaign,

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Troyes.

But Etienne, recovering after

a poor start to their campaign,

will fancy their chances at

Troyes.

But if Auxerre are the good

news story of the French first

division then Lens are streets

ahead in the 'could do better'

stakes.

The team that was crowned

champions the season before

last is now bottom of the league

having seen star players Tony

Vairelles (to Lyon), Frederic

Debut (to Barcelona) and

Stephane Dalmat (to Marseille)

depart in the summer.

Roux had been forced to sell

his best players including

French World Cup winners

Stephane Guivarch and Lionel

Charbonnier and playmaker

Sabri Lamouchi. He was also

furious when he was prevented

by his club chairman from re-

placing Almeida Jacquet as

coach to the French national team

after the victorious World Cup

campaign.

To the relief of Auxerre and

French football in general Roux stayed on for a 39th cam-

paign. And this season, without

ever investing the huge funds

made available to their rivals,

Auxerre are at the right end of

the table.

Roux, who has a lucrative

sideline as a popular TV pundit,

made only one significant move