

English Division One
Charlton going great guns

LONDON, Oct 17: John Salako wrapped up a 2-0 victory for Charlton at Portsmouth on Saturday as Alan Curishley's men continue to set the pace at the top of the English First Division, reports AFP.

Charlton were always comfortable and never looked back once John Robinson set them on their way just before half-time.

Second-placed Fulham kept their unbeaten run going after a narrow win over struggling Swindon at Craven Cottage. Geoff Horsfield did the damage six minutes from time as Jimmy Quinn's side suffered late heartbreak.

Charlton lead with 22 points from nine games, ahead of Fulham, who have played a game more, on goal difference.

Manchester City, fourth on 20 points, blew a golden chance to keep the pressure on the south London side when they could only draw 1-1 at struggling Tranmere.

Joe Royle's side went ahead with a Kevin Horlock penalty five minutes into the second half but Rovers equalised with a spot-kick of their own, Alan Mahon netting from the spot on 82 minutes to earn his team a point.

Birmingham, third on 21, kept ticking over with a 2-0 victory over Crystal Palace at St Andrews.

Darren Purse (10) and John McCarthy (48) scored the goals. Ipswich continued to slip after they were hammered 4-1 at home by rampant QPR.

Matt Holland got the Suffolk side off to a dream start with his first goal of the season on three minutes but Rangers hit back through Gavin Peacock in the 33rd minute.

Stuart Wardley put the Londoners in front on 65 minutes and Rob Steiner scored twice in the last 10 minutes to complete a wonderful afternoon for Gerry Francis' men.

Huddersfield were brought back down to earth after their shock win at Chelsea in the Worthington Cup. They crashed to a 1-0 defeat at improving Bolton after Ricardo Gardner scored the decisive goal on the stroke of half-time.

Sheffield United defeated Nottingham Forest 2-1 thanks to two goals from Martin Smith at Bramall Lane.

McIlroy may
McMenemy

LONDON, Oct 17: Former Northern Ireland international Sammy McIlroy has emerged as the early favourite to succeed Lawrie McMenemy as his country's next manager, reports AFP.

McMenemy, 63, has rejected a new contract offer by the Irish Football Association (IFA) because he says he wants to return to club football.

He has hinted that an Ulsterman should be chosen to take his place.

Leicester boss Martin O'Neill appears beyond IFA's reach, but former Raith boss Jimmy Nicholl and under-21 boss Chris Nicholl - who resigned alongside McMenemy - are also front-runners for the top job.

The two Nicholls and McIlroy would be popular choices with the fans having starred in Northern Ireland's 1982 World Cup campaign.

McIlroy is currently manager at Macclesfield, but his position could soon be under threat following a run of disappointing results in Division Three after relegation last season.

McIlroy said this week he would not quit and Macclesfield's director in charge of publicity Colin Garlick said: "The position of the manager has not been discussed."

But it would be a surprise if McIlroy did not jump at the chance to coach his national side.

Jimmy Nicholl proved his managerial pedigree in his first spell with Raith Rovers, whom he led to a stunning cup win over Celtic in 1995.

Former Southampton and Watford boss Chris Nicholl would be a popular choice amongst the nation's young talent after earning respect for his handling of Northern Ireland's under-21 set-up.

Current Swindon boss Jimmy Quinn would also relish the opportunity to lead his country.

McMenemy's decision was not surprising in view of his unhappiness with the IFA's handling of contract negotiations from the start.

Asian Cup Winners Cup
S-Pulse see
off Shanghai

SHIMIZU, Japan, Oct 17: Shimizu S-Pulse of Japan won a second round tie against Chinese Cup champions Shanghai Shenhua 2-0 at the Nihondaira stadium in the Asian Cup Winners Cup on Saturday, reports AFP.

Sotaro Yasunaga opened the scoring with a left-footer in the 31st minute on a pass from Teruyoshi Ito and Brazilian striker Alex (Alessandro Dos Santos) made it two up on a free kick in the 54th minute.

In the first leg in Shanghai two weeks ago, S-Pulse and Shenhua fought it out to a goalless draw.

The S-Pulse finished runners-up in the Emperor's Cup in January, but replaced champions Yokohama Flügels, who were disbanded due to financial problems.



Gabriel Batistuta (L), Fiorentina's Argentine superstar, being marked by Parma's John Walem during their Serie A game. — AFP photo

Serie A

Eriksson fairly pleased

MILAN, Oct 17: Lazio may have missed out on the Italian league title last season, but coach Sven Goran Eriksson reckons they're on their way this time after demolishing Udinese at the weekend, reports AFP.

The 3-0 away victory, fully deserved after outclassing their opponents in every department, left them provisionally top of the table before the Serie A action continued on Sunday.

Eriksson was the convincing manner of the win, and the confidence that his team has been oozing since the season started.

"Being top at the moment doesn't interest me," said the Swede. "What's really important is having made a good start and that's what I'm really pleased about."

"We're on the right train, and now we want to stay there until March/April time, that's when the race for the league title gets decided."

As for the performance itself, he added: "In the first half we played almost perfect football. If only we could play like that all the time."

Club president Sergio Cragnotti was equally euphoric after goals from Argentinian Juan Sebastian Veron, who shook off the effects of jet-lag, Croatian Alen Boksic and free-kick specialist Sinisa Mihajlovic.

"It's just thrilling, just spectacular to see a team play an away match like this Lazio side does," said Cragnotti.

Veron, who returned from Argentina's midweek game against Colombia on Friday and took a connecting flight to Udine, said: "My body clock is six hours behind. The kick-off may have been 3.00pm, but for me the match felt like it was starting at nine in the morning."

Saturday also proved to be a minor breakthrough for Parma as they continued their progress up the table with a 2-0 win over Fiorentina at night, a result that should also be music to the ears of Arsenal fans.

Fiorentina had most of the possession and all the home support but were floored by two late goals from substitute Marco Di Vaio and World Cup winner Alain Boghossian.

Parma coach Alberto Malesani said: "The difference between Parma and Fiorentina was in the players' physical fitness. At the end, we had more gas in the tank than they did, and we took advantage of it."

Fiorentina coach Giovanni

Trapattoni got further evidence that things are not going his way this season, in Italy or Europe.

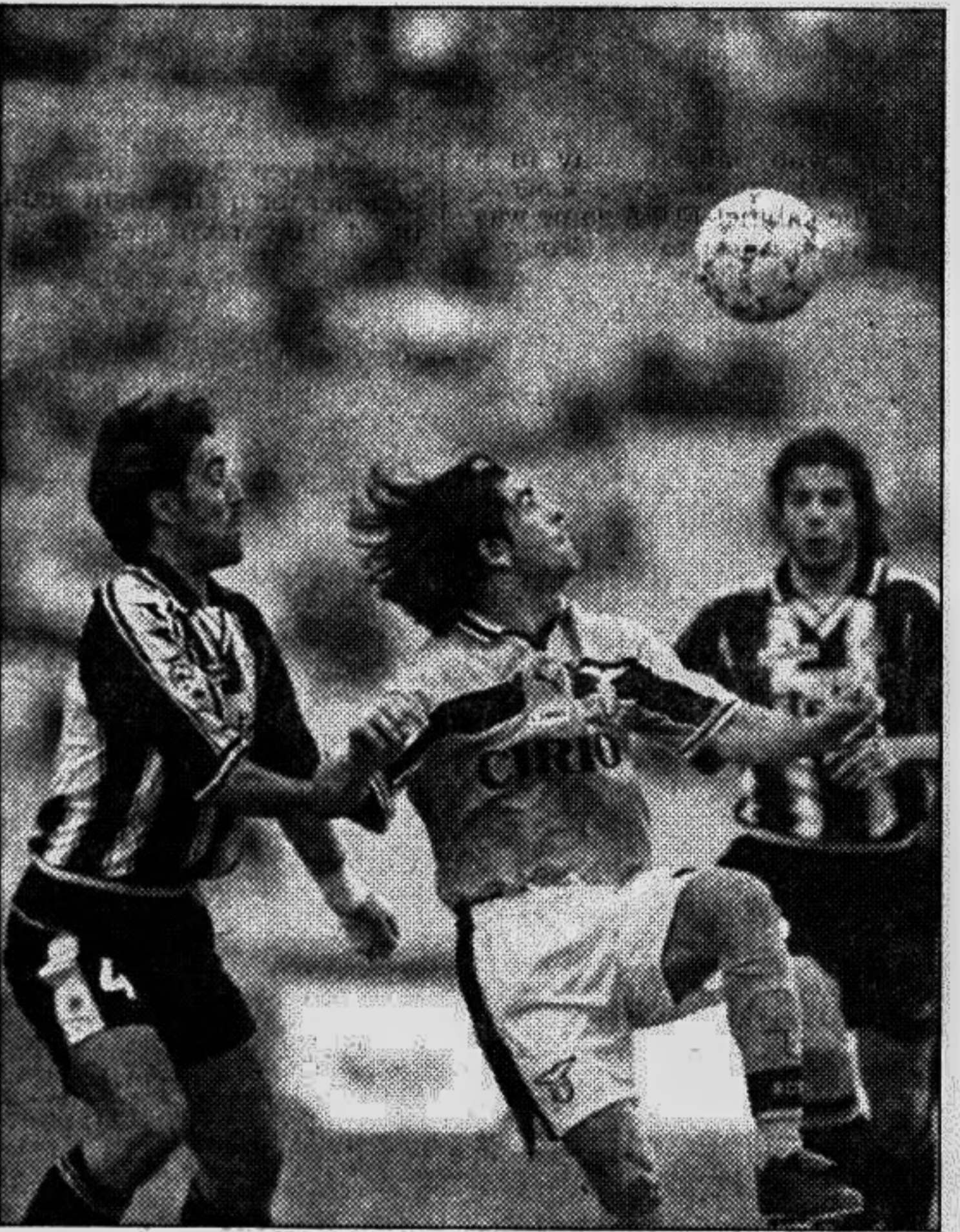
Another Serie A defeat was the last thing Fiorentina needed before this week's home tie with AIK Solna in the Champions League, a crucial one in their bid to catch

Arsenal as the Group B runners-up behind Barcelona.

As the fans whistled and booed outside, Trapattoni lamented: "We have an important match on Tuesday and we'll need all the support we can get. And I don't think we deserve all this protesting for the way we played."

STANDINGS

Table with 7 columns: Serie A table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points). Rows include Lazio, Inter Milan, AS Roma, Juventus, AC Milan, Reggina, Parma, Fiorentina, Perugia, Bari, Udinese, Lecce, Torino, Bologna, Verona, Venezia, Piacenza, Cagliari.



Lazio's superstriker Marcelo Salas (C) under pressure from a Udinese defender. — AFP photo

Lemerre not leaving?

PARIS, Oct 17: French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet said Wednesday that France coach Roger Lemerre had decided against resigning from his post, reports AFP.

Lemerre, who replaced World Cup winning coach Aimé Jacquet last year, said at the weekend that he was contemplating his future even though France's 3-2 victory over Iceland last Saturday ensured the world champions qualified for next summer's European Championships.

But Simonet told France Inter radio station: "For me the Lemerre affair is over. I met him this morning at the Federation (building). He assured me he would see out his contract (until next July) and he intended to do everything for us to be on the podium at Euro 2000. He confirmed to me he would stay in his job."

Lemerre's decision to stay, if confirmed, will now see attention switch from the coach to the team with indications that friction between Lemerre and some of the senior players could have caused Lemerre's disenchantment.

But his position has been strengthened by the fact that France qualified directly and there is now growing speculation that he could launch a purge, leading to inevitable questions about the future of the older players such as Laurent Blanc, Didier Deschamps and Marcel Desailly.

Veteran defender Blanc, a stalwart of the World Cup win-

ning side although he missed the final through suspension, admitted as much Monday when he told L'Equipe: "From now until Euro 2000 there are six months anything could happen. If it is decided that the (2002) World Cup is the objective there could be some spring-cleaning."

"They should let us (the senior players) know if we carry on or if we stop."

In an apparent warning that the senior players would not go quietly should Lemerre decide

DC United
blank Miami

WASHINGTON, Oct 17: Jamie Moreno scored in the 34th and 88th minutes to give regular-season champion D.C. United a 2-0 victory over Miami here Saturday in their Major League Soccer playoff opener, reports AFP.

United, bidding for a fourth consecutive trip to the United States premier league football final, grabbed a 1-0 edge in the best-of-three Eastern Conference semi-finals.

Reigning MLS playoff champion Chicago Fire opened defense of the crown with a 2-1 loss at Dallas in a Western Conference playoff opener.

The Burni got a goal from Ecuador's Ariel Graziani in the 52nd minute and another from Mark Fantel off a Graziani pass in the 75th while Chicago's John Ball added the lone Fire goal in the 97th.

Sunday matches find Los Angeles at Colorado and Columbus at Tampa Bay.

to rebuild he said: "No one has managed to push us out yet."

Blanc's seniority in the team is such that he is known as 'the President' in the France dressing room.

Before the Iceland match Lemerre had indicated that senior players were exercising a lot of influence in the dressing room.

Speaking at a press conference at Clairefontaine Lemerre had said: "If it (my job) is difficult it is because the others (the senior players) are very strong. Sometimes the players push us towards what they want and sometimes one is obliged to give in and follow."

Lemerre, Jacquet's right-hand man during the World Cup, had baffled journalists with his public pronouncements in the 24 hours following France's qualification - they had gone into their final Group Four match in third in the Group.

Immediately after the match a terse Lemerre said he considered his mission accomplished. He then said: "After today, I am and will remain the biggest supporter of French football." He then left the press room, refusing to take questions.

Asked Sunday if he would be in charge for France's next match, a home friendly with Croatia in November, Lemerre replied: "God only knows."

He said he needed a period of reflection before deciding what he would do. But, if Simonet is correct, Lemerre will now lead France in Holland and Belgium next summer. His contract with the world champions runs out next July.

Scottish Premier League
Kilmarnock end
Rangers run

GLASGOW, Oct 17: Celtic closed to within four points of leaders Rangers with a 7-0 demolition of bottom club Aberdeen in the Scottish Premier League on Saturday, reports AFP.

Swede Henrik Larsson and Australian Mark Viduka each hit hat-tricks for Celtic who capitalised on Rangers' failure to win for the first time this season. Dick Advocaat's side drew 1-1 at Kilmarnock.

Rangers lead the table on 25 points, four clear of Celtic who have a game in hand.

Celtic beat Aberdeen, who have earned just one point this season, out of sight at Parkhead.

John Barnes' side face UEFA Cup action against French league leaders Lyon in midweek, but will have energy to spare after being afforded an exhibition match by the visitors, whom they beat 5-0 at Pittodrie earlier this season.

It took 17 minutes for the deadlock to be broken through Eyal Berkovic, but the way to goal was always open after that.

Larsson struck twice just before half-time to put the points beyond doubt, but there was to be no Celtic let-up in the second period with 3 Viduka claiming a rapid double.

The Australian punished a Robbie Winters error on 62 minutes then crashed home another four minutes later as Larsson turned provider.

The talented Swede secured his personal treble after 76 minutes with a typically athletic header against an Aberdeen side that was already run ragged before Viduka made it seven late on.

Aberdeen manager Ebbe Skovdahl revealed keeper David Preece had been taken to hospital with concussion after the match.

"We have a problem with the keeper," said the Dane. "He has had to go to hospital because he cannot remember anything - I wish I was him after that defeat."

Barnes was delighted with Larsson in particular.

"As much as Henrik is a great goalscorer and a great footballer, the biggest attribute he has is his attitude," he said.

"He works as hard as anyone for the team and on the pitch he's a model professional for the side."

Michael Jeffrey ended Rangers' proud record and salvaged a point for Kilmarnock at Rugby Park.

The Liverpool-born former Fortuna Sittard and Newcastle striker struck in the 73rd minute to stun the Premier League leaders.

Rangers had gone into the match on the back of eight successive league wins and Giovanni van Bronckhorst put them ahead after 26 minutes.

Advocaat was furious with his team afterwards.

"There was only one player in my team today who did OK and that was Craig Moore. All the others were not on the park," he stormed.

"If you can't bring commitment to a game like this then you will have problems. It was a very disappointing result, and the way we played we were lucky to get one point. I saw straight from the kick-off that we would have problems today."

Hearts went third on 14 points despite being held 1-1 at home by St Johnstone.

Gary McSwegan's long-range effort gave Jim Jefferies' side a seventh-minute lead but Nathan Lowndes curled in a superb equaliser for St Johnstone 12 minutes into the second half.

At the bottom Motherwell earned a 2-2 draw at home to Hibernian thanks to a 67th-minute equaliser by Steve McMillan.

Overmars set
to leave

LONDON, Oct 17: Dutch international winger Marc Overmars is set to leave Arsenal and seek new challenges with both club and country, according to a newspaper report on Sunday, reports AFP.

The 26-year-old said: "I went to England to win the League title and FA Cup with Arsenal. That happened quicker than I thought possible."

"If you realise your ambitions so quickly, you start dreaming about new challenges. My next aims are to win a major trophy with Holland and to win a League championship trophy with a club in another country."

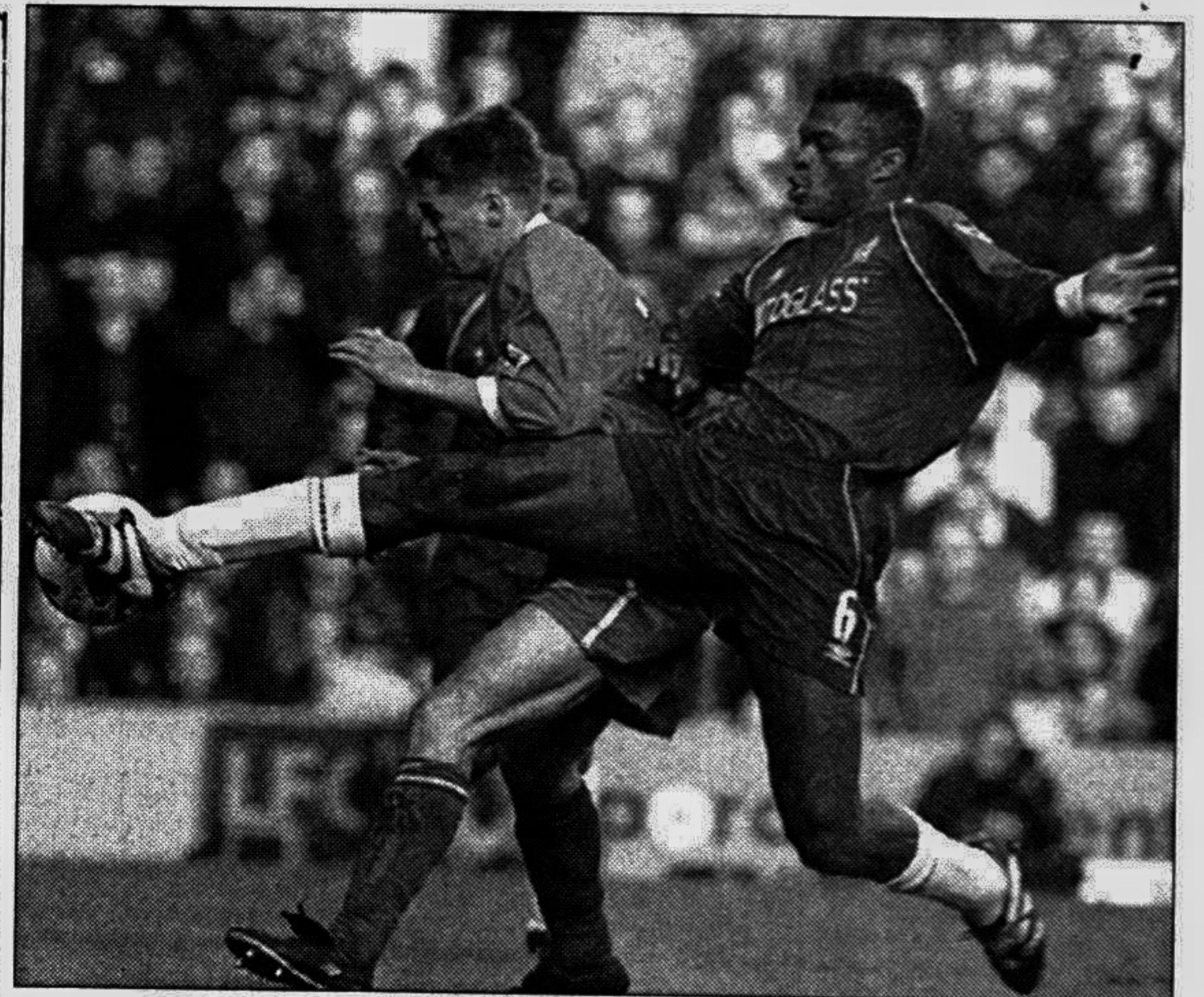
My current contract expires in 2004. I wouldn't be surprised if something happens before that," quotes The Mail on Sunday.

Overmars also revealed that he could have already left the Gunners had the Highbury board not blocked a clause in his original contract when he joined from Ajax in 1997.

He said: "When I first joined Arsenal three years ago, I asked for a clause that I could leave for a set fee of 10 million dollars. Arsenal wouldn't allow that."

"At the time it seemed like a bizarre amount. Now such a fee would be negotiated by most clubs."

"If I'd had that clause in my contract last summer I probably would have gone. It doesn't matter that the clause isn't there. We'll just see what the future brings."



Chelsea's French international defender Marcel Desailly (R) tackling Liverpool superstar Michael Owen during a Premiership match. — AFP photo

Premiership

Chelsea stumble at Liverpool

LONDON, Oct 17: Premiership title contenders Chelsea were left licking their wounds on Sunday after suffering the worst possible preparation for next week's crunch Champions League clash with Galatasaray in Turkey, reports AFP.

Gianluca Vialli's side lost 1-0 at Liverpool on Saturday, had Marcel Desailly and Dennis Wise sent off and saw defender Frank Leboeuf limp off with a serious looking ankle injury.

David Thompson fired Liverpool's winner two minutes into the second-half and Chelsea were left with a mountain to climb after Desailly was dismissed for a second bookable offence when he brought down Danny Murphy to concede

a penalty missed by Michael Owen.

Wise was sent off for the ninth time in his Chelsea career for violent conduct when he slapped Liverpool's Czech striker Vladimir Smicer.

After the defeat, Chelsea's second of the season in the league, Vialli declined to criticise referee Mike Reed.

"I do not wish to talk about the referee. But there were too many fouls and too many stoppages to allow the game to flow," said Vialli, whose side visit Galatasaray on Wednesday.

"You just have to accept when the referee blows his whistle - you must accept it, right or wrong. I accept it and Dennis accepts it, there's nothing more to add."

Chelsea slipped to sixth as a result, six points behind leaders

Leeds who equalled a club record of nine successive wins by beating bottom side Sheffield Wednesday 2-0 at Elland Road.

The teenager capitalised on a horrendous error from Owls keeper Pavel Srnicek to slot the ball home on 72 minutes and added a second six minutes later.

But O'Leary was far from impressed.

"We got out of jail today," he said. "The difference was we took our chances and Sheffield Wednesday didn't."

Andy Cole struck twice as Manchester United kept up the pressure a point behind Leeds in second place with a 4-1 win over Watford at Old Trafford.

Cole, a Dwight Yorke scissor-kick and Denis Irwin's penalty made it 3-0 by the break and Cole's second five minutes into the second half left no way back for Watford who pulled a goal back through Richard Johnson but also had Mark Williams sent off.

Watford manager Graham Taylor was lavish in his praise of Yorke and Cole.

"They're the best in the country by a mile," said the former England boss, who signed originally Yorke for Aston Villa.

"At club level this is the best twosome in the country and these boys can finish."

"I felt we had our bottoms smacked a little bit today, but I did say that would happen to us when we moved up two divisions in two seasons."

John Collins fired Everton ahead against Arsenal at Highbury but Lee Dixon equalised and a Davon Suter double strike put the Gunners in command. Nwaikwo Kanu made it 4-1 in the last minute.

Nervy Leicester went fifth but failed to kill off 10-man Southampton and had to endure a nervy last few minutes at Filbert Street after seeing their two-goal lead halved by Marian Pahars.

Kevin Davies was dismissed for Saints and the home side seemed to have the game wrapped up after first-half goals from Steve Guppy and Tony Cottee but Dave Jones' spirited side made Leicester fight all the way for the points after little Latvian Pahars scored six minutes from the end.

Derby manager Jim Smith was given a birthday present to forget as Tottenham won at Pride Park. Chris Armstrong's goal on 36 minutes settled the affair as the Rams continue to struggle at the wrong end of the Premiership.

Rampant Coventry eased past 10-man Newcastle 4-1 after a first-half blitz at Highfield Road.

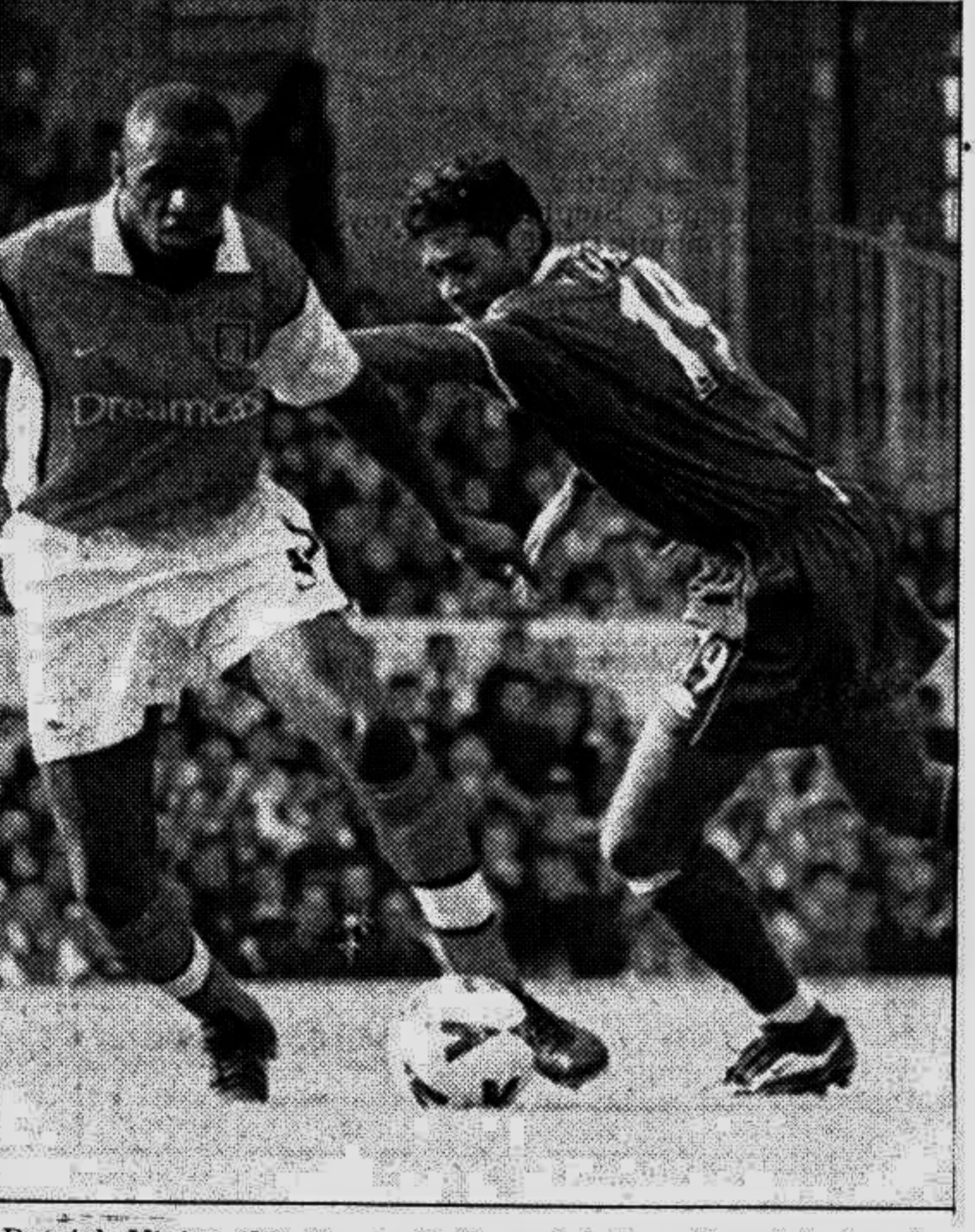
Mustapha Hadji put the icing on the cake in the last minute as 10-man Newcastle never recovered from three early goals and the dismissal of defender Warren Barton.

Carl Cort scored a simple goal as Wimbledon overcame struggling Bradford for their first home win of the season.

Dean Windass made the score 3-2 in the last minute but Egil Olsen's side deservedly hung on to put City deep into the relegation mire and ease their own plight.

STANDINGS

Table with 7 columns: Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points). Rows include Leeds, Man Utd, Arsenal, Sunderland, Leicester, Chelsea, Everton, Tottenham, Aston Villa, West Ham, Liverpool, Coventry, Middlesbrough, Southampton, Wimbledon, Watford, Derby, Bradford, Newcastle, Sheff Wed.



Patrick Vieira (L), Arsenal's French international trying to go past an Everton defender. — AFP photo

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Choi Yo-Sam of South Korea (C) makes a victory gesture after stopping Thai Saman Sorjatoroug in Seoul. — AFP photo