

Boro bemoan Argentine FA's inaction

MIDDLESBROUGH, England, Oct. 22: Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson has protested to the Argentine FA over delays holding up the transfer of teenage striker Carlos Marinelli from Boca Juniors, reports Reuters.

The English premier league club announced last month that they had signed the "new Maradona" for 1.5 million pounds (2.4 million dollars).

But Marinelli has still not received the necessary international clearance and cannot even play for Boro's reserve team as a result.

"We have sent a strong protest. It is not fair on a young player who is in limbo," said Robson.

The Argentine FA should release the papers but we think the problem lies with Boca Juniors."

Middlesbrough claim Boca have not paid the necessary tax on the transfer, part of which should go to the Argentine FA.

"The matter is out of our hands unfortunately, all we can do is be patient at present," said a club spokesman.

Marinelli had to sit out a reserve game on Wednesday night against Sheffield Wednesday, in which Paul Gascoigne made a comeback after a two-match suspension.

Blazevic steps down as Croatia coach

ZAGREB, Oct. 22: Croatian coach Miroslav Blazevic has quit his job, national television reported here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Blazevic put his decision down to Croatia's elimination from the Euro 2000 qualifier at the hands of Yugoslavia and persistent media criticism.

The recent tragic history of the two countries had made the match a highly-charged fixture which Croatia needed to win to take first place in group eight.

However, Croatia finished in third place in group eight after being held to a 2-2 draw by Yugoslavia, who qualified automatically coming top of the group.

Following criticism Blazevic said: "I don't try to justify myself, but without players like Boban, Stjepic, Simic... it's difficult."

Blazevic led Croatia to third place in last year's World Cup.

Top guns come face to face

PARIS, Oct. 22: Champions League participants Bordeaux and Marseille, last season's champions and runners-up, top the bill in the French league Saturday when they clash head on at Bordeaux's Stade Lescure, reports AFP.

Marseille, buoyed by their success in midweek over Manchester United which left the French outfit top of their group and destined for the next phase, will not have forgotten their last trip to Bordeaux - it ended in a 4-1 thrashing late last season.

That proved a big psychological blow to the 1993 European champions and while they finished the season wounded a resurgent Bordeaux took heart to go on and lift the title for the first time since 1987.

Bordeaux are fourth in the table after a slow start with five points to make up on leaders Auxerre, while Marseille, who likewise took a long time to get out of the blocks, are sixth a point further back.

Crucial to Bordeaux's recent renaissance has been the improved form of striker Sylvain Wiltord and his link with Lilian Laslandes, with the pair scoring 11 out of the club's last 12 goals.

Wiltord crucially headed the winner at Spartak Moscow on Wednesday night.

Saturday's other match sees Rennes, who have clawed their way out of trouble in the past few weeks, host ten-times champions Saint Etienne, riding high in seventh spot on the back of seven goals by Brazilian discovery Alex.

Sunday sees another appetising clash as Auxerre travel to Monaco, currently third in the table.

Auxerre almost went down last season - but why coach Guy Roux, in his 39th season at the club, has coaxed a revival out of a side which has welcomed back prodigal son Stephane Guivarc'h after his unsuccessful sabbatical in Britain.

Since his return, Guivarc'h has hit eight goals in 11 matches and is just one off the leading total of nine by Monaco's David Trezeguet.

Auxerre will hope to profit from the absence of Monaco keeper Fabien Barthez, who is injured and replaced by inexperienced Tony da Silva.

Monaco, despite their talismanic skipper's absence, will not lack motivation as they can go top themselves with a win.

Second-placed Lyon, two points adrift and buoyed by last week's win at Marseille, should get three more points on the board as Bernard Lacombe's side host strugglers Nancy at the Stade Gerland.

Paris Saint Germain have lodged themselves in fifth place, level on points with Bordeaux despite their hopeless inconsistency which saw the club from the capital sandwich home defeats by Marseille and Monaco with a brilliant four-goal display at Nantes.

PSG host promoted Sedan on Sunday knowing their opponents have adjusted well to the top flight with five wins in their 11 games to date.

In other action, Montpellier host Bastia, Strasbourg face Nantes, Metz welcome talleniers Le Havre and Troyes meet Lens in a clash of bottom four clubs.



Newcastle's Alan Shearer (L) scores his team's second goal against FC Zurich. — AFP photo

Blair greets FIFA inspectors



LONDON, Oct. 22: British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Thursday threw his weight behind England's

bid to host the 2006 World Cup as he welcomed a team of inspectors from world body FIFA to Downing Street, reports AFP.

Blair met a delegation led by Alan Rothenberg in the Cabinet Room of Number 10 and made a personal plea to capture the biggest prize in sport.

The premier told the five-strong delegation that England had the experience and facilities to do justice to the tournament which would build on the success of Euro 96, which it also hosted.

"I think the whole of the country is really excited about it," Blair said.

"We have put all this effort and energy into this because we can offer something to the whole world."

Football's best minds have put together the package with a great deal of care and consideration," he said.

"Our stadiums are in really good shape so we are proud with what we have done and we think we can do it," he added.

England's 1966 World Cup hero Sir Bobby Charlton was among those present at the meeting, along with Sports Minister Kate Hoey and Tony Banks, the Prime Minister's special envoy charged with capturing the tournament for England.

English Football Association officials, who had earlier given the FIFA delegation an official presentation of the bid at their Lancaster Gate headquarters, were also taking part in the meeting.

Rothenberg, from the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Football, was the man who masterminded the World Cup USA '94 tournament.

Over the next six days he will meet with officials and inspect stadiums along with fellow delegates Walter Sieber from Canada, Jilong Zhang from China, Yousaf Yaqoub Al-Serkil from the United Arab Emirates, Richard Read from Australia and Urs Kneubuhler from Switzerland.

Their tour will begin at Wembley on Friday.

On the steps of Number 10 Rothenberg said Blair's appeal had been a very personal one.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting him previously and know what a tremendous football fan he is, so he expressed his enthusiasm and how important he feels it is for the tournament to come to Britain."

Rothenberg said the final decision was not up to the five-strong delegation, but their findings would be crucial in deciding where the 2006 World Cup would be played.

Documents drawn up in advance of the visit detailing Britain's bid had been so comprehensive the delegates were left with few questions, he

Yevgeny in qtrs

LYON, Oct. 22: Former French Open champions Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Gustavo Kuerten prolonged their stay in France on Thursday, advancing to the quarterfinals of the Lyon Grand Prix, reports AFP.

Kafelnikov, the top seed and second ranked player in the world, was forced to work for his extension, however, battling past Sweden's Magnus Larsson 7-5, 7-5.

Kuerten, seeded third, overcame a shaky start to move past 1995 champion Wayne Ferreira of South Africa 7-6 (7-5), 6-3.

Seeking his third title of the season and the sixth of his career, the Brazilian star will take on sixth-seeded Nicolas Lapentti of Ecuador in the quarterfinals.

Lapentti snuffed out the home crowd's hopes when he posted a 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 victory over Sébastien Grosjean, the last French player remaining in the tournament.

Eighth-seeded Vincent Spadea of the United States, the player Kafelnikov will meet in the quarterfinals, made two impressive recoveries to defeat compatriot Jim Courier 6-4, 6-4.

Juventus' Nigerian international Sunday Oliseh (Top) locked in an aerial tussle with a Levski Sofia defender during their UEFA Cup second round first leg encounter at Sofia on October 21. Juve won 3-1. — AFP photo

Juventus' Nigerian international Sunday Oliseh (Top) locked in an aerial tussle with a Levski Sofia defender during their UEFA Cup second round first leg encounter at Sofia on October 21. Juve won 3-1. — AFP photo

Sport

Jamaican misfit!

GLASGOW, Oct. 22: Ipswich Town's Jamaican-born striker David Johnson pledged his international future to Scotland on Thursday to the disappointment of Wales, reports Reuters.

The decision meant the player, courted by manager Craig Brown in a move that has sparked controversy in Scotland because Johnson has no family ties with the country, will become the first black player to wear the dark blue shirt.

Johnson has turned out in the past for Jamaica's senior team, but not in competitive internationals. He has been in the England under-21 and B squads and was called up by Wales for their last Euro 2000 qualifying, but did not play.

Northern Ireland had also expressed an interest.

Welsh Football Association (FA) secretary general David Collins told BBC radio he was disappointed.

"Until the player has undertaken a championship game for Wales obviously he's still at liberty to make a choice and he has exercised that choice," he said.

"I'm sure the team manager will be speaking with him... there must be great disappointment throughout the principality that he's made this choice."

Johnson, who was at Bury after an apprenticeship at Manchester United, joined Ipswich in November 1997 for 800,000 pounds (\$1.34 million) as their record signing.

He was able to choose his country because he holds a British passport and reached his decision after watching Rangers beat PSV Eindhoven 4-1 in the Champions League on Wednesday.

He is eligible for Scotland's Euro 2000 play-offs against England but Brown was quoted on Monday as saying Johnson would not be thrown straight into the side.

Brown said Johnson would strengthen the squad but regular strikers such as Billy Dods, Kevin Gallacher and Mark Burchill were "ahead of Johnson in the queue."

They were also due to meet the Prince of Wales at a St James's Palace reception on Friday.

The FIFA executive committee will make its decision on the 2006 host in July 2000.

South Africa are considered the favourites, ahead of Germany, England and Brazil with Morocco the outsiders.



LOOK WHO'S TALKING: Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson (R) faces opponent Orlin Norris during a press briefing at the MGM Grand Hotel in Nevada on October 20. — AFP photo

Norris still feels the same

LAS VEGAS, Oct. 22 (AP): Orlin Norris finally is getting a fight he wanted a decade ago.

"I felt like I could beat him 10 years ago," said Norris, who will fight Mike Tyson on Saturday night. "Nothing has changed."

Norris' attitude might remain the same, but a lot has changed in 10 years for the two fighters, especially for Tyson.

In 1989, Tyson was the

some undisputed heavyweight champion. Now he is 33 and making yet another comeback. He is a fighter who maintains the power of his glory years, but whose fast hands and quick feet have been slowed by time and inactivity.

Tyson, however, remains an

attraction, a man held in the

brash glare of a celebrity built on his boxing achievement and his out-of-ring problems.

"People love Mike Tyson,"

said Dan Goossen, president of promoter America presents.

They love to see him lose.

"He has done so much for the

game and I think he deserves a

lot of the attention he gets," said the 34-year-old Norris.

Tyson was a 12-1 favourite to win the 10-round match in the MGM Grand Garden.

A decade ago the odds

against Norris would have been

similar to the 42-1 odds that

Norris has a crafty style, one

that can frustrate an opponent and also baffle a crowd.

In October 1989, Norris had a 22-1 record, but because of his style he was not in the heavyweight championship mix. He won eight of his next 10 fights, outpointing former heavyweight champion Greg Page in 1989 and future champ Oliver McCall in 1990 and losing a decision to former champ Tony Tucker in 1991.

In 1991 he shed more than 9 kilograms (20 pounds) to enter the 85.5-kilogram (190-pound) cruiserweight class. He won the WBA in 1993 and lost on an eight-round knockout by Nate Nillier in 1995.

For much of his career, Norris has boxed in the shadow of younger brother Terry, who was a flashy junior middleweight champion.

Norris will try to frustrate Tyson for 10 rounds. Botha did it for most of five rounds, winning all of the first four on two cards and three of the four on the third card. Then the South African got a little too cocky in the fifth, dropped his guard and was knocked out by a right to the jaw.

"Botha fought Tyson the right way," Norris said. "Botha did a lot of things right. He impressed me, more or less, as a boxer. He didn't stay in front of Tyson until the last round. Botha used the jab, he used his right hand and speed. My job is not to get hit with the big shot."

Bright a trusted name



LAS VEGAS, Oct. 22 (Reuters): The

boxing people hoping for one final financial

fighting with Mike

Tyson ironically have brought

back the one man in the former

champion's life who seems

never to have been all that

fixated on Tyson's money in the

first place.

Not that Jay Bright hasn't

become financially comfortable

and certainly not drawn to

the neon lights of boxing, is

back mostly to try to provide

some stability to the former

undisputed heavyweight champion's chaotic life.

Of course, it could be argued

that trying to bring stability to

Tyson would be like the captain of the

Titanic attempting to