

## Esperance, Raja set for final

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 25: Esperance of Tunisia and Raja Casablanca of Morocco edged closer to the African Champions League final despite failing to win this weekend, reports AFP.

Title holders ASEC of Cote d'Ivoire ended the perfect Group 2 record of Esperance with a 1-0 victory in Abidjan and Raja drew 0-0 in Accra against Hearts of Oak of Ghana.

There were handsome successes in the other matches with Al-Ahly of Egypt outclassing Shooting Stars of Nigeria 4-1 in Cairo and Dynamos of Zimbabwe humiliating Saint Louisienne of Reunion 7-2 in Harare.

Raja need one point when they host Al-Ahly on November 7 in the final round to top Group 1 while a draw for Esperance at home to Dynamos 24 hours earlier will ensure first place in the other section.

ASEC needed three points to keep alive their wafer-thin chances of a second successive final appearance and the only goal came with 15 minutes left through 18-year-old Bakary 'Baky' Kone.

'Baky' is one of many rising stars promoted to the first team this year when new French coach Jean-Marc Guillou ditched the squad that defeated Dynamos 4-2 on aggregate in the 1998 final.

Esperance, suffering their first loss in nine qualifying and pool matches, had veteran goalkeeper and captain Chokri al-Ouaed ordered off at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Stadium.

Dynamos became the first team to score seven goals in a group match since the Champions League was launched two years ago as they avenged a shock away loss to Saint Louisienne.

Hearts of Oak dropped out of contention after being held on a waterlogged Accra Sports Stadium pitch and had star striker Ismael Addo sent off midway through the second half.

Former champions Al-Ahly struck regularly in each half against struggling Stars with substitute Alaa Ibrahim scoring off his first touch before Duke Effiong sprinted from halfway to grab a consolation goal.

## Scottish Premier League

### Celtic leave it very late

GLASGOW, Oct 25: Morten Wieghorst scored with a controversial injury time header to earn Celtic a 2-1 victory at St Johnstone in the Scottish Premier League on Sunday night, reports AFP.

The Dane's far post effort which hit the woodwork was adjudged to have crossed the line in a dramatic finale which earned the visitors an unlikely win.

It looked a point at best for them after Mark Burchill delivered a vital moment of evidence in his bid to prove himself a worthy long-term replacement for Henrik Larsson.

Training to Nathan Lowndes' 29th minute opener, which stemmed from a rare Paul Lambert error, Celtic equalized after Burchill's 48th minute individual effort.

The loss of Larsson with a broken leg in Lyon on Thursday night had dominated the build-up to this contest with Celtic faced with proving they can cope without him.

Celtic closed the gap on leaders Rangers to one point with the opportunity to move top should they defeat Motherwell in midweek.

St Johnstone scored with their first attack when Celtic were punished for a moment of slackness inside their own half.

Lambert delayed in possession and was robbed by Paul Kane who fed George O'Boyle. His through ball was finished smartly by Lowndes for his eighth goal of the campaign.

Celtic's response was a Wieghorst shot which was deflected wide, but they were still struggling to sustain any kind of momentum and Saints moved to the interval with their advantage intact.

Celtic took just three minutes after the restart to draw level and it was a goal out of virtually nothing after Regi Blunker played a hopeful pass to the feet of Burchill.

The 19-year-old Scotland international had both John McQuillan and Stuart McCluskey closing him down but spun expertly to create the space to drill a low shot just inside the post.

### Prosecutors favour jail term

ESSEN, Germany, Oct 25: Four German football hooligans who brutally beat up and nearly killed a French gendarme during last year's World Cup should be given long jail sentences, the prosecution said at their trial Monday, reports AFP.

Daniel Nivel, who was beaten within an inch of his life at Lens in northern France in June 1998, was in a coma for months and has been left handicapped.

Prosecutor Joachim Lichtenhagen demanded 14 years in prison for the chief accused, Andre Zawacki, 28, who is said to have repeatedly beaten Nivel with the stock of his tear-gas grenade-launcher and is charged with attempted murder.

Lichtenhagen sought between six and eight years for the other three - Frank Renger, 31, Tobias Arno Reifschlaeger, 25, and Christopher Rauch, 24 - who are accused of assault causing grievous bodily harm.

The trial opened in the German Ruhr Valley town of Essen on April 30 and a verdict is expected on November 5.

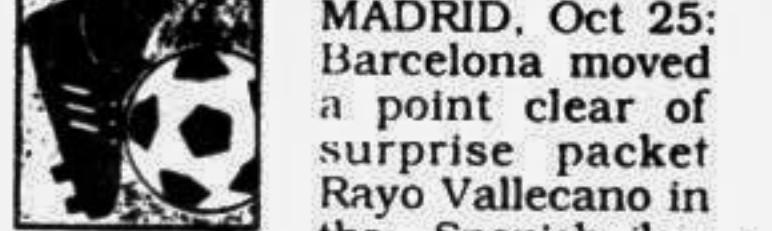


Real Betis' Brazilian star Denilson trying to make his way through the Rayo Vallecano defence during their Primera Liga match at Madrid on October 24. Betis won 3-1.

— AFP photo

## Primera Liga

### Betis upset Vallecano plans



MADRID, Oct 25: Barcelona moved a point clear of surprise packet Rayo Vallecano in the Spanish league after a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao at their majestic Nou Camp while Real Madrid lost further ground after a 1-1 draw at Seville, reports AFP.

Rayo Vallecano suffered a costly 3-1 reverse at home to Real Betis Sunday, inspired by two goals from Alfonso.

But third-placed Celta Vigo maintained their title challenge with a 2-1 home win to Espanyol, while Real Zaragoza, one point behind, trounced Racing Santander 4-1.

Barcelona, who let slip two points against modest Numancia last week, didn't touch the heights of Tuesday's 4-2 Champions League win over Arsenal at Wembley as they picked up another three points Saturday night.

In truth, they didn't need to as Bilbao shot themselves in the foot when Aitor Larrazabal earned himself a red card after 36 minutes for pulling Luis Figueroa's shirt having earlier second booking.

A fierce effort from Brazilian Rivaldo from the left was well saved by Bilbao keeper Imanol Etxeberria.

From the resulting corner Etxeberria missed the ball under pressure from Luis Enrique, who appeared inadvertently to

hand the ball to his own keeper.

With a little over ten minutes remaining Figo slotted home a spotkick he had won himself with a bustling run into the area and Dani then beat the offside trap to steer home the fourth in the final moments.

Earlier, a goal eight minutes from time by Spanish international Raul rescued an off-colour Real Madrid as the reigning world champions drew with Kily Gonzalez and Gerard Lopez Segu, the win hoisting them up to three points.

Minutes later, van Gaal withdrew Rivaldo to give a run out to another of his Dutch internationals Boudewijn Zenden.

Real had hoped to welcome back England winger Steve McManaman back after a thigh muscle injury but he failed to recover in time.

In the evening's other match, Valencia continued their recent improvement after an appalling start to the season, beating Deportivo La Coruna 2-0 with goals in either half from Kily Gonzalez and Gerard Lopez Segu, the win hoisting them up to three points.

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