

Marseille being looked into

MARSEILLE, France, Dec 9: French prosecutors on Wednesday opened an official inquiry into the Marseille soccer club for possible fraud, illegal accounting and the use of false documentation, sources at the city's prosecutor's office said, reports AP.

The financial irregularities relate to the 1997-1998 season, when Marseille spent heavily on transfer fees for new players. Five or six transfers during that period are under scrutiny, sources said on customary anonymity.

Investigators completed a six-month preliminary investigation into the club earlier this month, questioning a number of key figures including Jean-Michel Rousier, who quit as Marseille club president last spring.

The new inquiry is likely to last three or four months.

A separate investigation that looked into the links between Marseille and its supporters' clubs was dropped.

Marseille isn't new to controversy. During the reign of Bernard Tapie, former president, the club was stripped of the 1993 French championship after paying Valenciennes players to throw a match.

It was prevented from defending the European champions league crown it won the same year, and was later relegated to the Second Division by the French Football Federation.

Toray Steffi's swansong

TOKYO, Dec 9: German star tennis player Steffi Graf will play a farewell exhibition match against Japan's Kimiko Date at the 1.08-million-dollar Toray Pan Pacific Open tournament in February, reports AFP.

The match will be held on February 6 after the singles and doubles finals of the Tier One event, the next biggest following the four Grand Slam events and the year-ending WTA Tour Championships.

It is part of the 'Steffi Graf World Tour' after the German, now 31, quit this year ending her illustrious career in which she scooped 22 Grand Slam wins and 107 tournament wins.

Graf, who injured her knee before the 1997 final, took part in the Tokyo indoor event seven times and won three times in 1986, 1990 and 1994.

Graf chose to play Date, who became the only Japanese player to win against a world number one player by beating Graf at the Fed Cup in April 1996 before retiring at the end of the same season.

The main draw will be led by current world number one Martina Hingis of Switzerland, former world number ones Lindsay Davenport and Monica Seles from the United States.

Hingis started the season as the number two and returned to the top by winning the singles title here before temporarily surrendering the top spot to Davenport after her shock first-round defeat at Wimbledon.

Davenport, who clinched the Wimbledon title beating Graf in the final, has played Hingis three times this season and won all matches, including the Chase Championship final last month.

Al Sugiyama will carry the best local hope, while American Alexandra Stevenson, who caused a sensation by reaching the semifinals at Wimbledon this season, will make a Japan debut.



Ronaldo in a cheerful mood during a media conference at Inter Milan's training base in Appiano Gentile on December 8.

Ronaldo in good spirits

APPIANO GENTILE, Italy, Dec 9: Inter Milan's Brazilian star Ronaldo said on Wednesday that he was pinning his hopes on playing again this season after being ruled out for at least four months following surgery, reports AFP.

Ronaldo, who damaged tendons in his right knee during a 6-0 win over Lecce in the Serie A on November 21, appeared at Inter's training base here on crutches after surgery in Paris late last month.

"Doctors told me that I could be fit in four months time," said the 23-year-old. "Obviously it's important not to rush things. I just hope that there will be no more bad luck round the corner for me."

"I know nothing about medicine, so all I can talk about is how I feel and I feel positive."

More important though, the Brazilian said: "I have also been guaranteed that the injury will not affect my level of performance when I return."

Ronaldo thanked his fans,

the club and his fiancée Milene for their support during the last two weeks, along with that of Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero who has just returned from long-term injury.

"Now I feel pretty good," he said. "But the first few days after the operation were difficult. And I'll admit it, I was worried."

But he added: "Now things are better. Everybody says I'll be back at 100 percent and I'm going to try to do just that. I'll do everything I can try to shorten the period of recovery, but I'll have to do it calmly and safely."

He went on: "I've always been a happy sort of guy and that's the way I want to stay. I've always had to suffer to reach my objectives, nothing has ever been handed to me on a plate."

"And I'm not going to change that attitude now. I'm going to lift my head up, work hard and do everything to get through all this quickly. That's the approach I'm going to take."

Along with his physical problems, Ronaldo hopes that his bad luck will also leave him alone, after more than a

year of torment, injury and poor form in the wake of the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

"With this, I hope that almost everything that could happen has happened - because what's happened to me I wouldn't wish on any player," he vowed.

Ronaldo said he hoped to marry Milene in church in July next year - and will go through with the civil ceremony in Brazil later this month.

Ronaldo said that his wedding would not be an extravagant affair unlike that of Manchester United playmaker David Beckham's earlier this year.

"I am organizing it at the moment. It will be a very simple church ceremony and I hope it will take place next July."

Looking ahead to this weekend, when his teammates face Serie A rivals Juventus, he said: "It's going to be a very tough game, as it always is. I hope Inter win, even though the game isn't going to decide anything."

Samaranch optimistic

LAUSANNE, Switzerland, Dec 9: The International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch said he was confident he will win approval of a package of reforms prompted by the corruption scandal which erupted a year ago, reports AP.

Samaranch said the reforms are the "last step" in the IOC's campaign to restructure itself and bring a close to the worst crisis in the organisation's 105-year history.

"We have accomplished a lot in a very short time," he said. "This crisis has allowed us to move forward in a way we would have never been able to do otherwise. It showed IOC members that we must modernise our institution."

The IOC executive board opened meetings Wednesday to prepare for this weekend's crucial meeting of the full mem-

bership. The general assembly will vote on a series of 50 proposed reforms, including new age limits, terms of office and possible bans on visits to Olympic bid cities.

The meetings came exactly a year after the Olympic movement was thrown into turmoil by allegations of vote-buying in the selection of Salt Lake City as host of the 2002 Winter Games.

Samaranch has staked his reputation on getting the reforms passed. Next week, he travels to Washington to testify before a Congressional committee and will need ammunition to convince skeptical lawmakers that the IOC has changed for the better.

He did not reply directly when asked whether he would resign if the reforms failed to win adoption.

"I have to be optimistic," he said. "Maybe some recommendations will have some

changes. But, in general, I think the session will approve them."

"It is time to convince the IOC members that we need a deep reform in our organisation. The most important thing is to put aside personal interests and do what's best for the IOC."

Samaranch said the IOC had acted swiftly and forcefully to clean up its act following the Salt Lake scandal. He cited the expulsion of six members and resignation of four others, the creation of an ethics commission, the opening of sessions to the media, and the establishment of a world anti-doping agency.

A special 80 member commission, with Henry Kissinger among its members, drafted a series of proposed reforms intended to make the IOC younger, more modern, more democratic, more representative and less susceptible to corruption.

The proposals include:

Tyson to fight Francis on Jan 29

NEW YORK, Dec 9: Mike Tyson apparently will fight Julius Francis, the British Commonwealth champion, on January 29 at Manchester, England, reports AP.

The fight is all but signed, a boxing source told The Associated Press on Wednesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

This would be Tyson's first fight since his one-round no-contest with Orin Norris on October 23 at Las Vegas. It would also be his first outside the United States since he lost the undisputed heavyweight title when he was knocked out in the 11th round by James "Buster" Douglas in Tokyo in 1990.

The site for the 10-round bout would be the MEN Stadium in Manchester. The fight would be seen on a delayed telecast on Showtime, beginning at 10 pm EST in the United States.

Francis, who turned 35 Wednesday, has a 21-7 record, with 11 knockouts. He has won his last three fights, all defenses of the British title he won in 1997.

In two fights before those three victories, he lost a 12-round decision to Axel Schulz on February 29, 1998, in Germany. He was stopped in the second round by Vasili Klitschko April 18, 1998, in Germany.

Tyson (46-3, 40 knockouts) fought only twice in 1999. He knocked out Francois Botha on January 16 at Las Vegas and knocked down Norris with a head blow after the bell. Norris injured his right knee in falling and could not continue. The fight was a no-contest because referee Richard Steele ruled the punch after the bell was an accidental foul.

After the Norris fight, the Nevada State Athletic Commission let it be known it would like to see Tyson fight elsewhere.



Amoroso (R) of Fiorentina falls under pressure for Lassina Diabate of Bordeaux during their Champions League tie at Bordeaux on December 8.

Reaction in Europe

TOKYO, Dec 9 (AFP): Here are some reactions to the European draw for the qualifying round of the 2002 World Cup:

Group 1
Yugoslavia, Russia, Switzerland, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Faroe Islands

Branko Blatovic, a top official of the Yugoslav football federation, said Yugoslavia could not be unhappy with the draw. "There are some groups which are more difficult than ours. Four of the teams could be considered as strong."

European teams: Yugoslavia, Russia, Slovenia and Switzerland. Blatovic said.

"It added that Luxembourg and Faroe Islands could influence the ranking of these four teams."

Yugoslav midfielder Dragan Stokovic: "We have found ourselves in a group with four strong teams. We have to be wary, the Russians in particular will be a difficult rival."

Group 2
Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Cyprus, Andorra, Estonia

The Dutch beat the Irish at Euro 88. USA 94 and the play-off for Euro 96 and Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard is looking forward to renewing their old rivalry.

"Of course in the past we've played them several times and they've been really tough opposition for us," he said.

"They have a typical English style of playing and they're physically very strong. They're a very good team and they promise to be two very interesting matches."

Republic of Ireland manager Mick McCarthy refused to be fazed: "I won't dwell on the past. Holland still have some great players but times and personnel change and I feel we could be capable of beating them."

"Portugal were the best runners-up to qualify for Euro 2000 and so must carry a threat. It is a tough but interesting

group - but put it this way, it could have been a great deal worse. We could have been in the top seeds in our group."

Group 3
Czech Republic, Denmark.

Group 4
Belgium, Scotland, Croatia, Latvia, San Marino

Scotland coach Craig Brown insisted that his side must be wary of the threat of Latvia as well as Croatia and seeds Belgium in Group Six.

But Brown believes that the Scots can pull through in an even-looked five team group.

"It is a very even group. I would imagine that Croatia, Scotland and Belgium would be on top. We have a chance from that group."

Belgian coach Robert Waseige: "It's not a killer draw. This group should be very tight with Scotland and Croatia as the main opponents. It's difficult to say who are the favourites. The important thing is to not waste points against the weaker sides. Anyway, it's very good to be in group with only five teams."

"There is nothing we can do about it - I can't influence the draw. England are a very good side with a good name. We will see what happens."

Group 5
Sweden, Turkey, Slovakia, FYR Macedonia, Azerbaijan, Moldova

Turkish national team coach Mustafa Denizli: "It's a good group. We know our rivals very well. But the rivals in our group are not important to us. Our target is set and I believe we will achieve it."

Group 6
Italy, Romania, Lithuania, Hungary, Georgia

Italy coach Dino Zoff: "In theory it's not a bad draw. Other groups seem more difficult. But the danger is to consider the draw as too easy. I would have preferred to have a group with six teams and to play matches where there is more of a challenge."

Romania coach Emeric Ienei: "It's a very strong group. We will be playing against powerful Italy and Hungary. Even though Italy is not the golden team of the 1950s in the past few years they have had some good results."

Group 7
Germany, England, Greece, Finland, Albania

England coach Kevin Keegan: "It will be a tremendous, very interesting group. It caused a bit of a gasp. Germany have won the World Cup three times and I think only Brazil have won it more, so it's tough. We've got Greece, Finland and Albania as well, so it's very interesting."

"I suppose the good news is that it can't go to penalties this time," he added, before joking. "We'll be practising just in case they change the rules."

German coach Erich Ribbeck said that he had had a beer with Keegan on the eve of the draw and joked that their two sides would be thrown together again.

TV Guide

Friday 10th December 1999

(All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme)

BBC

6:00 BBC World News 6:30 HARDtalk 7:00 BBC World News & Asia Today Inc World Business 9:00 World News 9:30 Asia Today Inc World Business 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 HARDtalk 11:30 World Living: Earth Report 12:00 World News 12:30 Money View presented by Sucharita Ghose 1:00 World News 1:30 HARDtalk 2:30 World News: Beyond Red 3:00 World News 3:30 Hard Talk 4:00 BBC World News 4:30 World Living: Talking Movies 5:00 BBC World Today 6:30 World Focus: Beyond Red 7:00 BBC World News 7:15 World Business Report 7:30 BBC World Today: Asia & Pacific 8:30 World Living: Talking Movies 9:00 BBC World News 9:30 Hard Talk 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 World Living: Question Time India Talk 11:00 World News 11:30 Top Gear 12:00 BBC World Today 1:30 Hard Talk 2:30 World Focus: Correspondent 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 World Living: 4:30 Europe Direct 5:00 BBC News Inc. World Business Report

CHANNEL V

7:30 Tea With [V] (Back to Back Vids) 8:00 Virtual [V] (Back to Back Vids) 8:30 Tea With [V] (Back to Back Vids) 9:00 [V] On Campus 9:30 Tea With [V] (Back to Back Vids) 10:00 [V] Line 10:30 [V] Line 11:00 [V] Line 11:30 [V] Line 12:00 [V] Line 12:30 [V] Line 13:00 [V] Line 13:30 [V] Line 14:00 [V] Line 14:30 [V] Line 15:00 [V] Line 15:30 [V] Line 16:00 [V] Line 16:30 [V] Line 17:00 [V] Line 17:30 [V] Line 18:00 [V] Line 18:30 [V] Line 19:00 [V] Line 19:30 [V] Line 20:00 [V] Line 20:30 [V] Line 21:00 [V] Line 21:30 [V] Line 22:00 [V] Line 22:30 [V] Line 23:00 [V] Line 23:30 [V] Line 24:00 [V] Line 24:30 [V] Line 25:00 [V] Line 25:30 [V] Line 26:00 [V] Line 26:30 [V] Line 27:00 [V] Line 27:30 [V] Line 28:00 [V] Line 28:30 [V] Line 29:00 [V] Line 29:30 [V] Line 30:00 [V] Line 30:30 [V] Line 31:00 [V] Line 31:30 [V] Line 32:00 [V] Line 32:30 [V] Line 33:00 [V] Line 33:30 [V] Line 34:00 [V] Line 34:30 [V] Line 35:00 [V] Line 35:30 [V] Line 36:00 [V] Line 36:30 [V] Line 37:00 [V] Line 37:30 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