

Francis Tyson's British foe

LONDON, Dec 14 (Reuters): British heavyweight champion Julius Francis was confirmed on Tuesday as Mike Tyson's opponent for the former world champion's first fight in Britain on January 29.

Tyson, 33, is trying to resurrect his career after he was banned for biting Evander Holyfield's ear in their 1997 world title fight.

He last appeared in the ring on October 23 when his comeback fight against Orlin Norris was ruled a no-contest. Tyson punched Norris after the bell had sounded for the first round.

In his only previous fight outside the United States, Douglas lost his title to James "Buster" Douglas in Tokyo in 1990.

The fight against 35-year-old Francis is scheduled for Manchester.

Asked about Tyson's record of dirty tactics, Francis replied: "I know how to get down and dirty. I'm not going to let Tyson intimidate me with his dirty tactics."

"He feels pain and he bleeds just like anyone. Let the best man win."

Tyson's American promoter Jay Larkin told a news conference the fight was being staged in England to avoid "the darkness and anger that has surrounded previous fights".

Rafter unveils his book

SYDNEY, Dec 14: Two-time US Open champion Pat Rafter says he's prepared to sacrifice world rankings and disregard ATP tour rules next season in a bid to help Australia retain the Davis Cup, reports AP.

Rafter, who was recovering from shoulder surgery when Mark Philippoussis guided the Aussies to last week's Davis Cup final triumph against France, said missing the decider in Nice prompted a rethink of his comeback schedule.

"Missing the final, you realise how important Davis Cup tennis is and where I want to be," said the 26-year-old former World No 1 at the launch Monday of his book: "Rocket to the Top — on the road with Patrick Rafter."

"I would have liked to have been part of (Australia's campaign) more," said Rafter, who is hitting balls in practice and is on target for a January comeback.

He underwent surgery on his right shoulder in October after pulling out of the New York tournament in August following an injury plagued six months. He also missed the chance to defend his US Open title and Australia's Davis Cup semifinal against Russia.

Rafter said he had "every event penciled in" next year but would monitor his fitness before deciding whether or not to play in any tournament, despite new ATP rules which require top-ranked players to compete in the nine events which comprise the Masters series.

"The ranking doesn't mean anything to me next year. I don't like where (the ATP) have put the tournaments," Rafter said. "And if I went (overseas) I would find myself being injured or trying to chase points and it's not worth it."

Aussie Open admission fee reduced

MELBOURNE, Dec 14: Australian Open organisers on Tuesday dropped admission prices for the January 17-30 Grand Slam event after revealing that a new indoor court would not be completed in time, reports AP.

Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard made an inspection of the new 10,000-seat indoor facility at Melbourne Tennis Centre before announcing that the "ambitious project" of completing construction before next month's Australian Open had "been defeated by time constraints."

The 65 million Australian dollar (41 million US) stadium has a retractable roof and retractable seating and was expected to be an alternative to center court as an indoor venue on the site.

Marseille fans go berserk

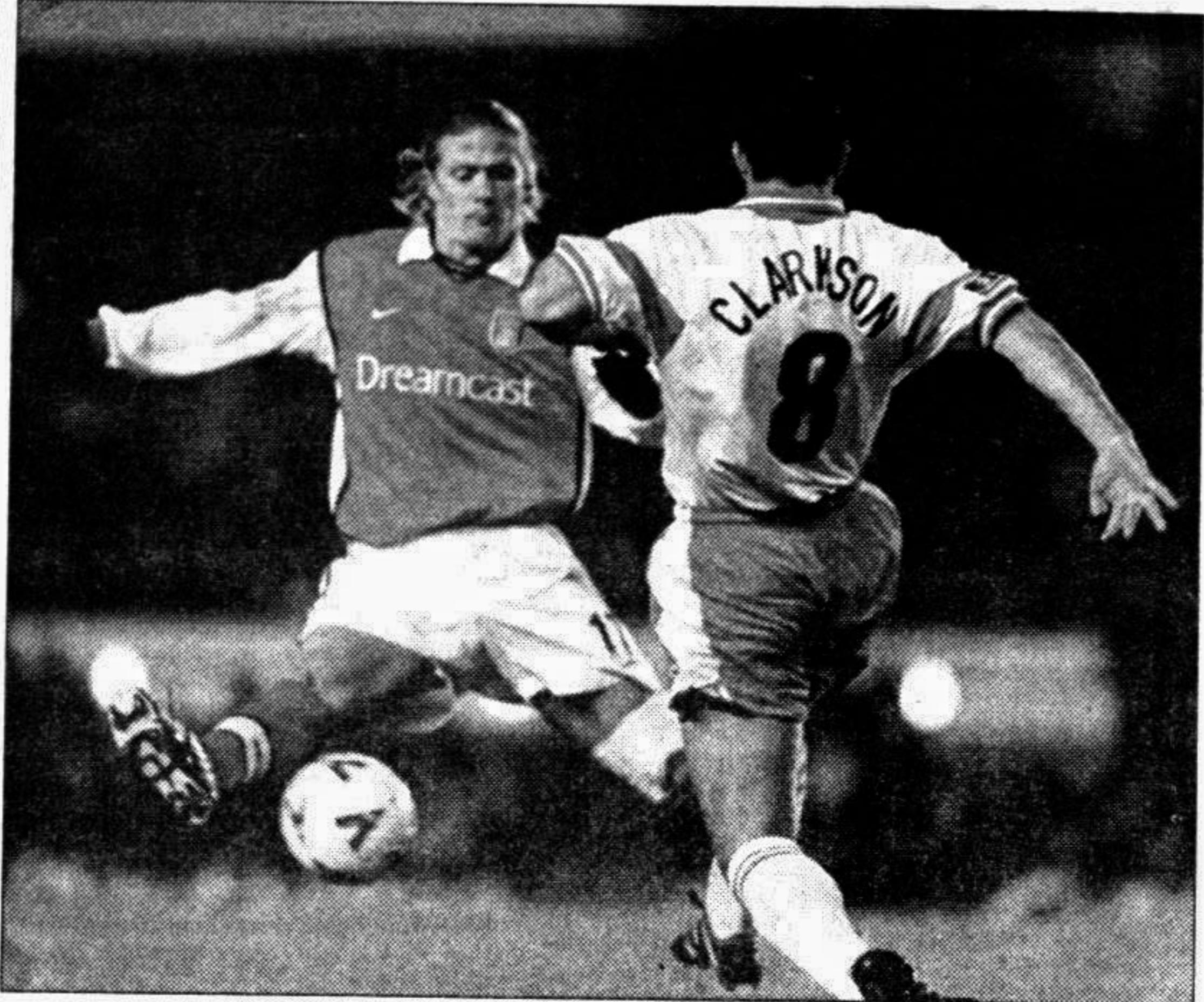
MARSEILLE, France, Dec 14: Furious fans of ailing French footballing giants Marseille went on the rampage at the team's training ground here on Monday damaging players cars and manhandling several members of the team, reports AFP.

The fans, who watched in disbelief as Marseille went down 5-1 to newly-promoted St Etienne on Sunday leaving them eighth in the table 13 points off leaders Monaco, also fired smoke bombs onto the roof of the training centre.

The supporters, who had been invited to a meeting with club directors and players, damaged the cars of captain Robert Pires and defender Sébastien Pérez and then jostled several players, singling out Pires fellow World Cup winner Christophe Dugarry in particular.

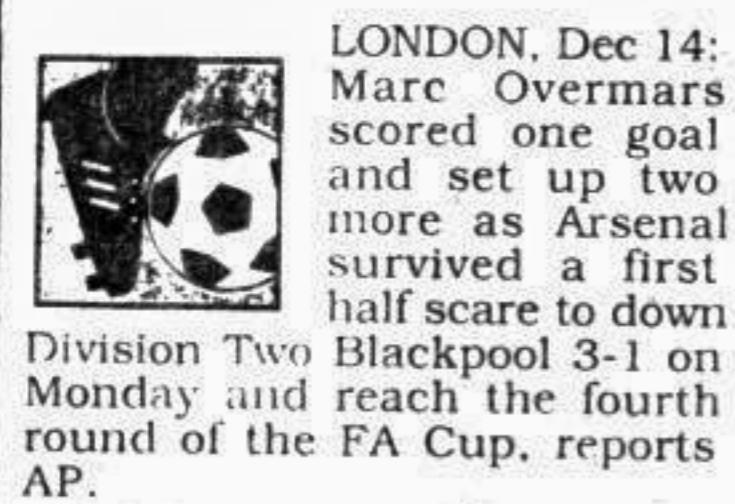
Marseille, who won the 1993 European Cup before being relegated because of a match fixing scandal, are currently undergoing the most traumatic season since the end of the Bernard Tapie era.

They are bottom of their Champions League group, under investigation over fraud allegations involving transfers and with little hope of winning the title.



Arsenal's Emmanuel Petit blocks Blackpool's Phil Clarkson shot during their FA Cup third round encounter at Highbury on December 13. — AFP photo

Overmars bails Arsenal out



LONDON, Dec 14: Marc Overmars scored one goal and set up two more as Arsenal survived a first half scare to down Division Two Blackpool 3-1 on Monday and reach the fourth round of the FA Cup, reports AP.

There were fears that Arsenal, a seven-time FA Cup winner, might join the four other Premier League clubs already eliminated from the competition when Blackpool levelled in the first half for 1-1. But second half goals by Tony Adams and Overmars made sure that Arsenal were safe.

At Portman Road, veteran Wales player-manager Mark Hughes, who remains a Saint until the end of the season, missed the target with a header from only six yards (metres) midway through the first half.

Without Dennis Bergkamp, David Seaman, Patrick Vieira, Martin Keown and Nigel Winterburn because of injuries, the Gunners fielded a weakened lineup but still took the lead midway through the first half against Blackpool when Gilles Grimandi fired home from 20 yards from a pass by Overmars.

But Blackpool, struggling near the foot of Division Two, hit back with an equaliser seven minutes before half time when the unmarked Phil Clarkson turned home a cross from Paul Beesley to silence the Arsenal faithful at Highbury.

The Gunners were back in front in the 65th minute after a period of strong pressure when Adams fired home from close range from another pass by Overmars. And the Dutch winger added a third in injury time to ensure that Arsenal are at home to Hereford or Leicester in the fourth round.

Hereford held Premier League Leicester to a 0-0 tie and Rushden and Diamonds gained a 1-1 tie at Division One Sheffield United and both must replay next week.

Other replays outstanding after the weekend games are Newcastle-Tottenham, who tied 1-1 at White Hart Lane on Sunday, Everton-Exeter, Luton-Fulham, Torquay-Queens Park Rangers, Plymouth-Reading, Gillingham-Walsall, Blackburn-West Bromwich Albion and Oxford-Notttingham Forest.

Richards also headed against the crossbar in the second half as Southampton earned a visit to Aston Villa for a place in round four.

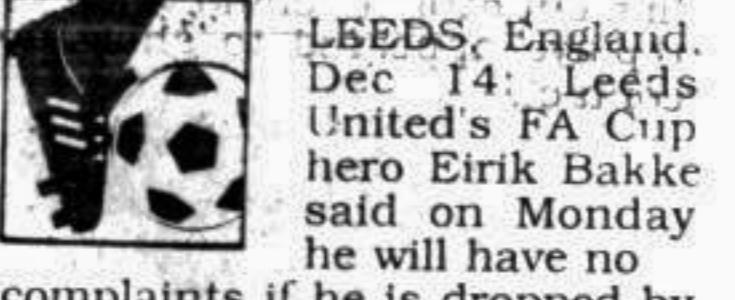
The big upsets of the third round were Derby losing 1-0 at home to Division Two Burnley, Division Two Wrexham's 2-1 ousting of Middlesbrough, West Ham's 1-0 loss at Division One Tranmere and Watford's loss at home to Birmingham.

The two surviving non-league teams, Hereford and Rushden and Diamonds, were in the fourth round draw although they haven't yet advanced from the third round.

Hereford held Premier League Leicester to a 0-0 tie and Rushden and Diamonds gained a 1-1 tie at Division One Sheffield United and both must replay next week.

Other replays outstanding after the weekend games are Newcastle-Tottenham, who tied 1-1 at White Hart Lane on Sunday, Everton-Exeter, Luton-Fulham, Torquay-Queens Park Rangers, Plymouth-Reading, Gillingham-Walsall, Blackburn-West Bromwich Albion and Oxford-Notttingham Forest.

Bakke doesn't mind



LEEDS, England, Dec 14: Leeds United's FA Cup hero Eirik Bakke said on Monday he will have no complaints if he is dropped by manager David O'Leary despite scoring both goals in the 2-0 victory at home to Port Vale, reports AFP.

The Norwegian Under-21 midfielder does not expect to become a regular in the Leeds side just because his first goals for the club on Sunday earned the Yorkshire club a fourth round tie away to Manchester City.

"I have to take the chance the boss has given me, but Batts is important for the team and hopefully he will be back on Wednesday because he is good for the team."

"We have a big squad and we win matches together. If I don't play on Wednesday and the manager decides to play Batts or someone else, that's okay."

"It's good that we have a big squad like this and if we are to go on in all the cups and in the league, we need a big squad."

Bakke was injured against Southampton at the end of last month and O'Leary insists he does not know when he will return.

"I couldn't say," he said. "He just wasn't right for Port Vale and he will be right when he's right."

Premiership leaders Leeds are chasing glory on four fronts and Wednesday's match against Leicester at Filbert Street will be their third cup tie in six days.

Bakke is determined to keep their juggling act going and said: "I'm looking forward to the match on Wednesday."

"It's an important match. We've won two cup games so far and now we want to win the third one as well."

Bakke's father Svein, who has just taken over as Wimbledon's chief executive, was at Elland Road to watch his son's man-of-the-match performance against Port Vale.

"I'm delighted to score the two goals and hopefully I can keep going," he said after clinching a fourth-round trip to Manchester City.

"But we will see what happens - Ole Gunnar Solskjær scored four for Manchester United and I don't know if he will keep his place."

"I have to take the chance the boss has given me, but Batts is important for the team and hopefully he will be back on Wednesday because he is good for the team."

"We have a big squad and we win matches together. If I don't play on Wednesday and the manager decides to play Batts or someone else, that's okay."

"It's good that we have a big squad like this and if we are to go on in all the cups and in the league, we need a big squad."

Bakke was injured against Southampton at the end of last month and O'Leary insists he does not know when he will return.

"I couldn't say," he said. "He just wasn't right for Port Vale and he will be right when he's right."

Premiership leaders Leeds are chasing glory on four fronts and Wednesday's match against Leicester at Filbert Street will be their third cup tie in six days.

Bakke is determined to keep their juggling act going and said: "I'm looking forward to the match on Wednesday."

"It's an important match. We've won two cup games so far and now we want to win the third one as well."

Bakke's father Svein, who has just taken over as Wimbledon's chief executive, was at Elland Road to watch his son's man-of-the-match performance against Port Vale.

from Sogndal, insists the team is more important than any individual.

"I'm delighted to score the two goals and hopefully I can keep going," he said after clinching a fourth-round trip to Manchester City.

"But we will see what happens - Ole Gunnar Solskjær scored four for Manchester United and I don't know if he will keep his place."

"I have to take the chance the boss has given me, but Batts is important for the team and hopefully he will be back on Wednesday because he is good for the team."

"We have a big squad and we win matches together. If I don't play on Wednesday and the manager decides to play Batts or someone else, that's okay."

"It's good that we have a big squad like this and if we are to go on in all the cups and in the league, we need a big squad."

Bakke was injured against Southampton at the end of last month and O'Leary insists he does not know when he will return.

"I couldn't say," he said. "He just wasn't right for Port Vale and he will be right when he's right."

Premiership leaders Leeds are chasing glory on four fronts and Wednesday's match against Leicester at Filbert Street will be their third cup tie in six days.

Bakke is determined to keep their juggling act going and said: "I'm looking forward to the match on Wednesday."

"It's an important match. We've won two cup games so far and now we want to win the third one as well."

Bakke's father Svein, who has just taken over as Wimbledon's chief executive, was at Elland Road to watch his son's man-of-the-match performance against Port Vale.

"That would see him out for a lengthy spell just when we need him most."

"That would see him out for a lengthy spell just when we need him most."

Sport

Eng-Ger match UEFA won't change kick-off time

LONDON, Dec 14: UEFA, European football's governing body, on Monday ruled out any change to the kick-off time for England's Euro 2000 match against Germany in June despite fears of possible trouble, reports AFP.

The game in Charleroi, Belgium, on June 17 is due to start at 8.45pm local time and Belgian organisers have already launched a security review.

UEFA insist the kick-off time cannot be changed and are confident their security arrangements will cope with any potential trouble.

A UEFA spokeswoman said: "The draw is the draw and we are sticking to it. The kick-off time cannot be changed."

"All matches in the European Championships have the same risk and we are not making a special case for any of them."

There are no flights out scheduled for after the match and local accommodation for the thousands of fans is limited.

Jacques van Gompel, the mayor of Charleroi, said: "We will have to review all our security measures."

"It's the match people are dreading, I've said all along that we will need extra assistance."

According to the Press Association, the FSA (Football Supporters' Association) are concerned over the possibility of trouble occurring between rival fans and will visit Charleroi on a fact-finding mission.

Euro 2000

Germany's warm-up matches

BERLIN, Dec 14 (AFP): Germany pre-Euro 2000 warm-up matches announced on Monday:

Feb 23 - Netherlands in Amsterdam

Mar 29 - Croatia in Zagreb

Apr 26 - Switzerland in Kaiserslautern (Ger)

June 3 - team and venue to be announced

June 8 - Liechtenstein in Freiburg (Ger)

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—