

Copa Mercosur Flamengo's

SAO PAULO, Dec 21: Flamengo won the Copa Mercosur on Monday, drawing 3-3 away to Palmeiras in a thrilling final to South America's youngest cup competition, reports Reuters.

Substitute Le scored the title-winning goal in the 84th minute, less than ten minutes after coming on in the second leg of the all-Brazilian final.

Flamengo's 4-3 first leg victory meant Palmeiras needed to win to take the tie, decided on results rather than goal aggregate, to a third match.

Palmeiras seemed to be comfortably on their way when a penalty by Francisco Arce gave them a half-time lead which reflected their first-half dominance.

But the visitors stunned the home crowd after the break, turning the game around with goals by Cato and Rodrigo Mendes in a ten-minute spell. Palmeiras hit back immediately. Within a minute of Mendes' goal, Arce scored again, this time from a free kick, and Paulo Nunes then headed Palmeiras into a 3-2 lead.

Palmeiras coach Luis Felipe Scolari was about to replace striker Faustino Asprilla with a defensive midfielder when Le's goal shattered his plans six minutes from the end.

Le, a 20-year-old who has been given only a few first team outings since turning professional last year, wept after scoring his goal.

Flamengo won the title, their first in an international competition since 1981, despite selling top striker Romario to rivals Vasco da Gama last month. Romario finished as the Mercosur's top scorer with eight goals.

Palmeiras, who won the inaugural Copa Mercosur last year, were lucky to finish the first half with eleven men.

Referee Luciano Almeida and his assistants all missed an incident in which Colombian maverick Asprilla clearly elbowed an opponent in the face.

Former Brazil defender Junior Balano escaped with a yellow card for a hideous challenge on an opponent, which clearly merited a sending-off.

Palmeiras coach Scolari had berated his players after the first leg for not committing enough fouls.

The Mercosur is a made-for-television event featuring 20 of South America's biggest clubs, who take part by invitation.

Despite the dramatic 13-goal final, much of the tournament was a disappointment with many teams giving it low priority and fielding reserve line-ups.

Karpin Russia's player of year

MOSCOW, Dec 21: Russian international, midfielder Valery Karpin, who plays for leading Spanish side Celta Vigo, was on Monday named Russia's player-of-the-year, reports AFP.

Karpin was selected following a survey conducted by the oldest Russian sports daily, Sovetsky Sport, of more than 200 of the country's top football specialists and players.

Moscow Lokomotiv's midfielder Alexei Smertin took second spot, while Karpin's Celta teammate, midfielder Alexander Mostovoi, was third.

Lebouef regrets

LONDON, Dec 21: Frank Lehouf issued an apology to his teammates Monday for his moment of madness that looks to have put paid to Chelsea's English Premiership hopes, reports AFP.

But his apology may cut little ice with manager Gianluca Vialli as he contemplates a Christmas central defensive crisis that threatens even his now limited league ambitions.

And it certainly will not influence the FA when they receive referee Jeff Winter's match report on Lehouf's second half dismissal in his team's 2-0 defeat against Leeds at Stamford Bridge Sunday.

The Frenchman was dismissed for a second bookable offence on Harry Kewell in the space of seven minutes before stamping on the Australian and arguing his case with Leeds players and officials on the bench before belatedly accepting his deserved punishment.

"Frank knows he should not have done that and he has apologised to everyone," Chelsea full back Jon Harley said.

Already facing a two-match ban for his second red card of the season - he will miss the FA Cup 4th round and Premiership visit to Coventry - Lehouf can now expect further punishment after Winter confirmed he had noticed the stamp on Kewell although Lehouf was dismissed purely for the second yellow card.

It was the last thing Vialli needed to see having already lost his two other main central defenders to injury during the 2-0 defeat that left the Blues 17 points behind leaders Leeds in the league.

Marcel Desailly was unable to reappear for the second half after suffering a dislocated shoulder that could keep the former AC Milan star out for several weeks.

And to make matters worse, Desailly's replacement Jes Høgh then pulled up with a torn hamstring midway through the second half, forcing Chris Sutton to be pressed into service as an emergency centre-half.

The leaves just Bernard Lambourde as experienced defensive cover for a vital run of Premiership games over Christmas and New Year against Southampton, Sheffield Wednesday and Coventry that could decide if Chelsea can finish in the top three to make sure of a Champions' League place next season.



Carlos Gonzalez (L) of America de Cali and Atletico Nacional's Freddy Grisales fight for possession during their Colombian League match in Medellin on December 19. Nacional won 4-2.

Latin soccer scene

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 21: River Plate won the Argentine championship on Sunday in one of five title races to be decided in the final stages of the weekend and the only one to be settled on a conventional league basis, reports Reuters.

All the others were decided by two-leg finals. Underdogs Pachuca won the Mexican title with a golden goal while Atletico Nacional claimed the Colombian championship by winning a penalty shootout.

Liga de Quito and Blooming won in Ecuador and Bolivia respectively, both teams claiming the title for the second year running.

Peru's final was postponed for 24 hours due to fears of crowd trouble.

MEXICO
Underdogs Pachuca, who began the season with the aim of avoiding relegation, won their first title with a dramatic golden goal win over Cruz Azul.

Argentine Alejandro Garcia scored in the second minute of extra time after a goalless 90 minutes in Sunday's second leg. The first match was a 2-2 draw with Garcia scoring both of his team's goals.

Pachuca had never reached the knockout stages since the current format was introduced in 1970 and this time made the last eight. They then eliminated defending champions Toluca and Atlas, who had finished 12 points ahead of them in the championship's first stage.

Pachuca, from the town of the same name, are the oldest first division club, having been founded by a group of British miners.

As with River Plate in Argentina, Pachuca claimed the first title - the Inverno (Winter) - of the season which features two championships.

COLOMBIA
Atletico Nacional won the Colombian championship on Sunday, beating America on

penalties after the two-leg final had finished level on aggregate. It was the first time the Colombian championship had been decided by the penalty lottery.

Atletico, playing at home in Medellin, won the shootout 4-2 after being held to a goalless draw in Sunday's second leg. The first leg in Cali had ended 1-1.

The match, played in front of a 48,000 crowd, was a dour defensive affair with neither team prepared to take risks.

BRAZIL
Corinthians beat Atletico Mineiro 2-0 in the second leg of the final to send the tie to a third and final match.

Striker Luizao scored both goals in a cynical, dirty match but was set off in the last minute for kicking an opponent in the knee.

The game's low point was a hideous tackle by Corinthians defender Joao Carlos on Atletico's Robert in the 15th minute. Joao Carlos flew first into Robert's leg from behind, committing an obvious red card offence, but was not even cautioned by referee Marico Resende de Freitas.

The official let numerous other tackles, dives and handballs also go unpunished.

Atletico had won the first leg 3-2. The tie is decided on points rather than goal aggregate.

BOLIVIA
Blooming won the title for the second year running as they overcame The Strongest in the final.

Blooming, from the eastern city of Santa Cruz, won the second-leg at home 3-2, the same score by which they had won the first leg in La Paz on Wednesday.

Victor Hugo Antelo, who holds the record for the most goals scored in Bolivian soccer history, shot Blooming in front with a 15th-minute penalty before Limberg Gutierrez and Martin Maracho gave them a 3-

0 half-time lead. The Strongest, coached by former Argentine international Mario Kempes, fought back in the second half with goals by Ronald Arana and Sandro Coelho.

ECUADOR
Liga de Quito won the title for the second year running, beating army club El Nacional 3-1 in the second leg of the final for a 4-1 aggregate win.

International Eduardo Hurtado, who played this year in Major League Soccer in the United States, scored twice with the weekend with Quito's Magglo also scored the first leg winner.

It was Liga de Quito's sixth title.

PERU
The final was postponed on Sunday to avoid possible crowd trouble, Peruvian Football Association president Humberto Ugarte said. The game was due to be played later on Monday.

The decision was made after it was discovered that supporters of home side Alianza Lima had bought tickets in the area reserved for fans of away team Universitario with the intention of attacking them.

Defending champions Universitario won the first leg of the two-match final 3-0 and are set to hold to on their crown as the tie is decided on goal aggregate. Alianza fans had warned that they would not allow Universitario to do a lap of honour in their stadium if, as seems likely, they win the championship.

COSTA RICA
Alajuelense won the first stage of the championship with a game to spare on Sunday, a 3-2 win over Santa Barbara giving them an unassailable four-point lead over Saprissa. The defending champions won their game with two goals by Wilmer Lopez and one by Luis Diego Arana.

Athletics thru' the century

LONDON, Dec 21 (Reuters): At least one athlete returned home from the ill-conceived and disorganised 1900 Paris Olympics with something to celebrate.

John Walter Tewksbury features in few history books and is on nobody's list of all-time champions. However, the Pennsylvania sprinter, who had never competed on a grass track before, won the 200 metres and 400 hurdles in Paris and picked up three further medals.

Tewksbury was the first of the US sprinters who have dominated 20th century athletics.

His Princeton teammate Frank Jarvis won the Paris 100 metres in 11 seconds flat. Ninety-nine years later Maurice Greene holds the current world record of 9.79 seconds and is an early favourite for the 2000 Sydney Olympics title.

The present day structure of track and field was largely in place at the turn of the century with the sport well established in the United States and Europe.

Running, jumping and throwing, the most elemental of human pursuits, provided the heart of the ancient Olympics and remained at the centre of the modern games.

An early if comical indication of the drug problem which has severely affected the credibility of the sport in the latter part of the century came in the 1904 St. Louis Olympic marathon.

The American gold medalist Thomas Hicks was revived en route with strychnine and brandy chasers, although he was beaten to the finish line by Fred Lorz, who admitted he had hitched a ride for most of the journey.

**PADDOCK LEAPS
FOR TAPE**
Charles Paddock, born in the first year of the century, was the first great US sprinter, literally leaping at the tape at the finish while Finns dominated the middle and longer distances.

Paavo Nurmi, later to run foul of the draconian rules on amateurism, was the best of them all, winning nine Olympic golds and setting 31 world

records. Nurmi was a man ahead of his time, running with a stop watch in his hand during both training and competition.

Even Nurmi's record-breaking achievements paled in comparison with an extraordinary afternoon's work by Jesse Owens, possibly the greatest track and field athlete of the century.

In 1935, Owens broke five world records and equalled another in the space of an hour. In the following year the black American embarrassed the Nazis at the Berlin Olympics by winning gold in the 100, 200, long jump and 4x100 relay.

Babe Didrikson, who switched from basketball to track and field and eventually to golf was even more versatile.

During three hours at the 1932 Olympic trials she took part in eight of the 10 events and won six of them. At the Los Angeles Olympics, Didrikson won the 80 metres hurdles in world record time, finished second in the high jump and won the javelin.

A significant blow for women was struck after World War Two by Dutch sprinter Fanny Blankers-Koen. A 30-year-old mother of two, Blankers-Koen exploded pre-conceptions that she was well past her competitive best by winning four track golds at the 1948 London Olympics.

**ZATOPEK
ASTONISHES
AND AMAZES**

Four years later at the Helsinki Games it was the turn of Czechoslovakia's Emil Zatopek to amaze and astonish. Zatopek reaped the rewards of an unprecedented severe training regime by completing the 5,000-10,000 double and winning the marathon at his first attempt.

Outside a major championship the most famous race of the century was staged at the Iffley track in Oxford, England on May 6, 1954.

Roger Bannister, a slight English medical student, fell over the line exhausted after becoming the first man to break the four minute barrier for running a mile.

He was succeeded by a series

of outstanding milers, the most notable being the tough Australian Herb Elliott, who broke the world record in the 1960 Rome Olympic 1,500 metres final.

The eternal city also provided the backdrop for barefoot Ethiopian Abebe Bikila to win the first of two Olympic marathon medals, signalling the emergence of the Africans who have come to dominate middle and long-distance events.

Bob Beamon took advantage of the thin air at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics to extend the world long jump record to 8.90 metres, maybe the most startling single athletic feat of the century.

Drugs became common currency during the next 20 years, helping a series of East European women to world records which still stood at the turn of the century.

The most notorious doping case involved Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson who tested positive after beating Carl Lewis in the 1988 Seoul Olympics 100 metres final.

Lewis emulated Owens by winning a quartet of gold medals at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. He went on to win four Olympic long jump titles and was named in 1999 as the International Amateur Athletic Federation's athlete of the century.

He was succeeded as the world's leading sprinter by Michael Johnson who set a world 200 record while completing the first Olympic 200-400 double at the 1996 Atlanta Games. Johnson later broke the world 400 record at the 1999 world championships.

Africa, badly affected by the Olympic boycotts of the late 1970s and early 1980s, later monopolised middle and long distance running with the Kenyans to the fore.

At the turn of the century, Moroccan Hicham El Guerrouj was king of the middle distances, holding the world 1,500 and mile record. Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie, world 5,000 and 10,000 record holder, established a similar hegemony in the long distances.

Dunga on Jubilo list

HONG KONG, Dec 21: Brazilian World Cup-winning captain Carlos Dunga could take his first step into soccer management as coach of Japanese and Asian champions Jubilo Iwata, reports Reuters.

Current coach Takashi Kuwahara has said he intends to stand down after one of the most successful seasons ever by a Japanese club. Jubilo lifted the J-League title, the Asian Club Championship and the Asian Super Cup.

Dunga, who played for Jubilo for three seasons, has emerged as one of the favourites to replace him.

Kuwahara, 51, was named the coach-of-the-year in May by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) but says he will seriously consider quitting after the Emperor's Cup, Japan's annual knockout tournament which ends on January 1.

Dunga, who won the 1997 J-League title with the club, spent the weekend with Jubilo club officials while on his way to Macau to play in a match commemorating the former Portuguese colony's return to Chinese rule on Thursday.

Jubilo president Tadanori Arata was quoted in the December edition of Asian football magazine AFC News as saying he would like to see the former Stuttgart and Fiorentina midfielder return to the club.

"We still have a great relationship with him and hope that some day... (he) will come back and coach," Arata said.

"Dunga is going to Italy to get his coaching licence... and hopefully he will come back and be for us what Zico has been for Kashima Antlers."

Zico became general manager at Kashima, who won the league title in 1996 and 1998, after joining the club in the early days of the J-League as a player.

Juve-Inter match being looked into

TURIN, Dec 21: Prosecutor Raffaele Guariniello has opened an inquiry into the controversial December 12 Italian league match between Juventus and Inter Milan, judicial sources said Monday, reports AFP.

Juventus won the match 1-0 despite referee Daniele Tombaoli sending off their goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar.

A linesman wrongly told the referee that the Dutch goalkeeper, well outside his area, had used his hands to block a shot from Ivan Zamorano.

TV replays showed that the contact was with the keeper's chin and chest. Van der Sar was suspended for one match after the incident.

Guariniello has already met with former referee Angelo Cerina, who is a member of the Italian referees commission, to discuss the case.

Cologne let Azizi go

BERLIN, Dec 21: German Second Division leaders Cologne said today they had released Iranian international striker Khodadad Azizi, reports Reuters.

The unsettled Azizi, 28, joined the club in 1997 and had a contract until June 2000. He has been linked to Turkish first division side Antalyaspor.

Sheffields won't unite

SHEFFIELD, England, Dec 21: Derek Dooley, chairman of English First Division side Sheffield United, on Tuesday ruled out a merger between his club and city rivals Premiership strugglers Sheffield Wednesday, reports AFP.

Dooley, who has been with Sheffield United both as a player and as an administrator for 20 years, claimed that unlike his predecessor Mike McDonald he would not be looking for both sides to come together.

"A merger is definitely not on while I am here," he said.

McDonald was keen to bring about the merger and despite his leaving the club there were still worries he would sell his shareholding in Sheffield United to Charterhouse, the company which holds a major stake in Wednesday.

But Dooley, who is highly respected by both Sheffield clubs, killed off the idea and said: "I know how true fans are feeling, having been with the club for over 20 years through good and bad times."

Women's WC FIFA decision after 6 months

SYDNEY, Dec 21: Australia will have to wait another six months to learn whether they will stage the 2002 women's football World Cup, the national association said Tuesday, reports AFP.

World body FIFA have extended the deadline for bids to April and will now make a final decision in June.

"Australia is still the major applicant and I haven't heard of any other submissions being made," Australian Women's Association chief executive Warren Fisher said.

"The Cup has already been held in the United States, Asia and Europe and I believe we will have a wonderful tournament. We've learned from the experience of USA '99 and we plan to be equally as good."

Fisher said a four-nation Australia Cup tournament had been organised featuring the US, Sweden and the Czech Republic from January 7-13, rsm/am

Reuters' football rankings

LONDON, Dec 21 (Reuters): Bayern Munich, buoyed by two league victories in four days in the Bundesliga, climbed two places to second behind Lazio in Reuters European club rankings this week.

TOP 20 CLUB RANKINGS (last week's position in brackets)

		Points
(1)	1 Lazio	Italy 104.21
(4)	2 Bayern Munich	Germany 91.01
(3)	3 Juventus	Italy 88.28
(5)	4 Manchester United	England 87.76
(7)	5 Rangers	Scotland 86.96
(8)	6 Dynamo Kiev	Ukraine 85.12
(11)	7 Parma	Italy 85.06
(6)	8 AS Roma	Italy 84.74
(9)	9 AC Milan	Italy 84.58
(10)	10 Deportivo Coruna	Spain 84.09
(12)	11 Monaco	France 83.00
(16)	12 Bayer Leverkusen	Germany 80.98
(14)	13 Sparta Prague	Czech Republic 80.92
(15)	14 Spartak Moscow	Russia 80.05
(20)	15 Porto	Portugal 79.97
(22)	16 Hamburg SV	Germany 79.64
(17)	17 Celtic	Scotland 79.54
(9)	18 Inter Milan	Italy 79.52
(21)	19 Barcelona	Spain 78.76
(13)	20 PSV Eindhoven	Netherlands 78.11

WORST FIVE RANKINGS
(468) 469 Sheffield Wednesday England 19.20
(469) 470 TPV Tampere Finland 18.41
(471) 471 Beltsini Slovenia 17.71
(472) 472 Aberdeen Scotland 12.53
(473) 473 Alki Larnaca Cyprus 11.64

(Computer rankings based on this season's results only taking into account strength of league, ratio of wins to defeats and ratio of goals scored to goals conceded bonus points for European club competition results)

SUCCESSIVE WINS
Deportivo Coruna Spain 7
Sporting Lisbon Portugal 6
Anorthosis Famagusta Cyprus 5
Hajduk Split Croatia 5
Helsingborg Sweden 5
Manchester United England 5
Porto Portugal 5

SEASON RECORD
Dynamo Kiev Ukraine 12

UNBEATEN RUNS
Obilic Belgrade Yugoslavia 18
Dunaferr Dunaujvaros Hungary 16
Slavia Prague Czech Republic 16
Dynamo Kiev Ukraine 15
Hajduk Split Croatia 15

SEASON RECORD
Dinamo Bucharest Romania 18
Obilic Belgrade Yugoslavia 18

SUCCESSIVE DEFEATS
Alki Larnaca Cyprus 12
Arminia Bielefeld Germany 6
Eintracht Frankfurt Germany 6
Sartid Smederevo Yugoslavia 6
Lahti Finland 5
Orebro Sweden 5
Pirin Blagoevgrad Bulgaria 5

SEASON RECORD
Alki Larnaca Cyprus 12

SINCE LAST WIN
Beltsini Slovenia 16
Lommel Belgium 16
Zirka Kirovohrad Ukraine 15
Montpellier Italy 14
France France 13

SEASON RECORD
Beltsini Slovenia 16
Lommel Belgium 16
Zhemchuzhina Sochi Russia 16

Best attacks	Goals	Games	Average
Anorthosis Famagusta (Cyprus)	31	12	3.25
Omouia Nicosia (Cyprus)	38	12	3.17
PSV Eindhoven (Netherlands)	53	17	3.12
Olympiakos Piraeus (Greece)	34	11	3.09
Celtic (Scotland)	52	17	3.06

WORST ATTACKS	Goals	Games	Average
Shumen (Bulgaria)	6	15	0.40
Beltsini (Slovenia)	7	16	0.44
Chernomorets Odessa (Ukraine)	7	15	0.47
Dobrudzha Dobrich (Bulgaria)	8	15	0.53
Zirka Kirovohrad (Ukraine)	8	15	0.53

BEST DEFENCES	Goals	Games	Average
Dynamo Kiev (Ukraine)	6	15	0.40
Slavia Prague (Czech Republic)	7	16	0.44
Levski Sofia (Bulgaria)	7	15	0.47
Hapoel Tel Aviv (Israel)	8	16	0.50
Juventus (Italy)	7	14	0.50

WORST DEFENCES	Goals	Games	Average
Alki Larnaca (Cyprus)	44	12	3.67
Anagninis Dherinia (Cyprus)	39	12	3.25
Aberdeen (Scotland)	54	17	3.18
Skeld Oslo (Norway)	75	26	2.88
Apollon Paphos (Cyprus)	33	12	2.75

LEADING SCORERS (major leagues only)
1 Ruud Van Nistelrooy (PSV Eindhoven) 22
2 Mario Jardel (Porto) 20
3 Ole Martin Aarst (Genk) 18
4 Toni Brogro (Westerlo) 18
5 Kevin Phillips (Sunderland) 18
6 Pierre Van Hooijdonk (Vitesse Arnhem) 17
7 Savo Milosevic (Real Zaragoza) 16
8 Salva (Racing Santander) 15
9 Sonny Anderson (Olympique Lyon) 14
10 Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink (Atletico Madrid) 13
Marco Simone (Monaco) 13

GOALS-PER-GAME IN LEAGUES
1 Norway 3.83
2 Cyprus 3.77
3 Belgium 3.49
4 Netherlands 3.38
5 Scotland 3.21
6 Slovenia 3.08
7 Croatia 2.92
8 Spain 2.90
9 Romania 2.87
10 Greece 2.84
11 Israel 2.83
12 Switzerland 2.81
13 Germany 2.78
14 England 2.76
15 Denmark 2.75
16 Ukraine 2.69
17 Yugoslavia 2.68