

Rangers reject Van Bronckhorst bid

GLASGOW Dec 24: Rangers have rejected a 6 million-pound (9. million dollars) bid for Dutch midfielder Giovanni van Bronckhorst it was reported on Friday, reports AFP.

The 24-year-old star was outstanding in the Ibrox club's Treble-winning campaign last term and, although his form has dipped slightly this season, he remains an integral part of Dick Advocaat's first-choice line-up.

The former Feyenoord man has attracted interest across Europe and is the number one target of Atletico Madrid coach Claudio Ranieri.

Rangers chairman David Murray received a call from an unnamed agent who proposed a 6 million transfer - but the Ibrox supremo rejected the offer out of hand, the Press Association reported.

"We are not interested in selling Giovanni," Advocaat said. "We would not even entertain an offer of 6 million for him anyway."

"We are building a team here, not breaking one up. Other clubs, no matter who they are, must realise this."

And van Bronckhorst, who is preparing for Monday's final Old Firm clash of the century at Celtic Park, is happy with life in Glasgow.

"Of course it is flattering," he said.

"It's a good sign when the chairman says that because I must be doing well for the club and its nice to hear that."

"But I'm not too bothered about hearing transfer speculation because it's not the first time I've been linked with other clubs."

"I want to concentrate on other things and not think about it. It's better that I focus on Monday's game with Celtic."

Morrison hospitalised

WASHINGTON, Dec 24: Former heavyweight boxing champion Tommy Morrison, facing various drug and weapons charges, has been hospitalised to determine whether his HIV has developed into AIDS, reports Xinhua.

Morrison was at the Washington Regional Medical Center Thursday at the urging of his attorney, who said he has noticed a change in Morrison's physical and mental condition.

A judge on Tuesday revoked Morrison's bond and ordered him to jail after a Thanksgiving Day arrest on narcotics and weapon charges in Madison County.

Morrison began taking medication a year ago to treat the virus that causes AIDS.



RECOGNITION COMES FLOWING: Barcelona's World and European footballer-of-the-year Rivaldo (L) receiving the trophy for being the best Latin American player in the Spanish league from EFE news agency's information officer Miguel Platon at Barcelona on December 23.

Dugarry may lead mass departure



MARSEILLE, France, Dec 24: Marseille striker Christophe Dugarry met with directors of his former club Bordeaux on Thursday with a view to returning to his home city, sources close to the player revealed, reports AFP.

If a move is agreed Dugarry is likely to be the first of several players to leave the Stade Velodrome following the recent slump that has afflicted last-season's runners-up.

Dugarry hopes to tie up a deal with the French champions by the weekend with the fee believed to be in the region of 4 million pounds (6.3 million dollars) although Bordeaux regard that figure as being excessive.

The French World Cup winner, who will be 28 in March, had two unsuccessful spells with AC Milan and Barcelona after making his name with the Bordeaux team that featured France 98 team-mates Zinedine Zidane and Bixente Lizarazu.

Zidane remains his close friend and business partner.

Dugarry returned to France with Marseille in summer 98 but has not really clicked into impact with the Cote d'Azur club.

He was handed a five-match suspension by UEFA for his part in a brawl following the UEFA Cup semi-final with Bologna last season and then tested positive for Nandrolone over the summer.

However, Dugarry, who came

on as a substitute during the World Cup Final win over Brazil, successfully persuaded anti-doping officials of his innocence.

But Dugarry remains the most vilified footballer in



CHRISTOPHE DUGARRY

France and is frequently the target of abuse when playing for club and country. He has been particularly scapegoated by Marseille fans, who have in recent weeks made their contempt for the club's entire playing staff clear.

Marseille are in midtable, struggling in the European Champions League and last month sacked coach Roland Courbis.

They are also facing investigations for fraud and relations

between fans and players are at an all time low with fans verbally and even physically abusing players.

Dugarry openly admits he wants to go as he was particularly badly treated by rogue fans after a meeting on December 13. Players were jostled and their cars damaged by angry supporters with Dugarry bearing the brunt.

Bernard Casoni, who replaced Courbis as coach, and Marseille president Yves Marchand, have pledged that several players will leave the club during the midwinter break and will endeavour to bring in new faces before the French First Division resumes.

Casoni has already said avoiding relegation is his only priority for this season.

Dugarry did not exactly endear himself to Bordeaux's fans last season when his former club pipped his current employers to win the title on the last day of the season.

He cast doubt on the motivation of Paris St Germain players who lost 3-2 to Bordeaux in the last fixture.

There is mutual loathing between Parisian fans and Marseille and the normally partisan PSG supporters openly cheered on Bordeaux during that match.

Dugarry was strongly criticised by Bordeaux fans in the light of those remarks but now it looks as though he could be returning to the only club where he has been an unqualified success.

AFP ENGLISH FOOTBALL BRIEFS

COVENTRY: Swedish international defender Tomas Gustafsson could make his debut in English Premiership football for Coventry against Arsenal at Highfield Road on Sunday.

The 26-year-old former AIK Stockholm player is set to get his chance as the Sky Blues' have seven players on the injury list.

UNITED LONE MAY OUT

MANCHESTER: Manchester United defender David May has joined English First Division leaders Huddersfield on a month's loan.

The 29-year-old central defender will be available for the Terriers' holiday programme and is expected to make his debut at Crewe on Sunday. The move will help Huddersfield's injury crisis at centre-back with both Chris Lucketti and Ken Monkou out injured.

May, who cost United 1.4 million pounds from Blackburn in July 1994, links up again with former Old Trafford defender Steve Bruce, who is now manager at the McAlpine Stadium. (AFP)

WORTHINGTON QUILTS BLACKPOOL

BLACKPOOL: Nigel Worthington on Thursday resigned as manager of Second Division Blackpool, indicating he had taken the struggling side as far as he could.

The former Northern Ireland defender believed he could not improve his playing staff with the resources he had at his disposal and so has chosen to quit the Bloomfield Road hot-seat, the Press Association reported.

Nigeria's plea

LAGOS, Dec 24: Nigeria's build-up to next month's African Nations Cup is experiencing problems following the refusal of some European clubs to release the team's stars in time, reports AFP.

"We need players like Kanu (Nwankwo) and Babayaro (Celestine) for our final preparations. Unfortunately, their clubs have refused to release them in good time. We have therefore asked both CAF and FIFA to intervene," said Tijani Yusuf, secretary general of the Nigeria Football Association (NFA).

Arsenal, Chelsea, AC Milan and Paris Saint Germain are among the clubs the NFA have reported to FIFA for not releasing key players like Kanu, Babayaro, Taribo West and Austin Jay Okocha.

Arsenal star Kanu was voted African Footballer of the Year for the second time earlier this month.

The Super Eagles' build-up to the Nations Cup has been anything but smooth. A new Dutch coach, Jo Bonfrere, only arrived in the country after months of negotiations in December following the dismissal of his predecessor Thijs Libregts.

The Eagles training camp opened in Malaga, Spain on Monday and by Thursday only 16 of the 29 players invited had reported.

The team lost 4-1 to Spanish second division side Compostella in their first training match. They will play against a Basque selected side on Wednesday.

Critics have also trailed the Eagles choice of training camp with cold weather in Spain forcing them to train indoors.

"It does not make any sense for the team to train under the cold weather in Spain when they will be playing under far warmer conditions by the time they play their first match in the championship in Lagos," said Rafiu Ladipo, chairman of the Nigerian Supporters Club.

"The boys should come back immediately," he said.

Nigeria will co-host the 22nd African Nations Cup with Ghana from January 22 to February 13.

Russia's football boss extremely unhappy

MOSCOW, Dec 24: Russian Football Union (RFU) president Vyacheslav Koloskov on Thursday blasted this year's national squad and club performances as "extremely unsuccessful," reports AFP.

Russia's national team failed in their mission to qualify for the Euro 2000 finals despite at one stage recording six consecutive wins, including a 3-2 away victory over World Cup holders France.

Russia conceded a late goal to draw 1-1 with Ukraine in their last game and failed to progress.

Russia's Under-21 team performed no better, suffering a humiliating defeat at the hands of Slovakia in the European championships play-off.

Only the Russian Under-17 squad sweetened the bitter football-season pill, reaching the European finals under the coaching of Sergei Stukashov.

The RFU president also vented his anger on Russian clubs, who he said had proved themselves a "complete failure" in Europe.

Koloskov blamed the dismal performances - no Russian team managed to reach the spring stage of play in European competition - on poor coaching at every level of Russian football.

He said the majority of Russian coaches remained "insensitive" to the modern trends of the world's most popular sport.



President of Spanish Primer Liga club Atletico Madrid, Jesus Gil (C) leaving a court in Madrid on December 23. Gil, who is also the mayor of Marbella, has been removed by Judge Garcia Castellon from his post in the team following allegations of fraudulent dealings between Atletico and the city council of Marbella.

French honeymoon over?



LONDON, Dec 24: French World Cup-winning defender Frank Leboeuf and Marcel Desailly will both stay with Chelsea, the English Premiership club insisted Thursday, reports AFP.

The club's determination to hang onto the two Frenchmen comes after a spate of recent incidents which suggests that the French contingent in the English game - who have proved hugely successful in the 1990s - are beginning to tire of life in the Premiership.



EMMANUEL PETIT

Desailly, who joined Chelsea from AC Milan in summer 1998, had been linked with Italian Serie A giants Lazio but insisted Thursday he would stay with the London club.

And Chelsea's Italian coach Gianluca Viali made it clear Leboeuf would not be dismissed out of the club following his latest disciplinary skirmish after he warned the former Strasbourg defender that he would be advised not to get sent off again.

Leboeuf's dismissal against Premiership leaders Leeds United - his second red card this season - prompted inevitable speculation that his Chelsea days might be numbered and those rumours were heightened when the Blues signed Brazilian centre-back Emerson Thome from Sheffield Wednesday.

But Viali is adamant that Leboeuf is staying put while stressing that he will not tolerate any further outbursts of reckless indiscipline - from Leboeuf or any of his players.

"Frank Leboeuf is part of the club. He is going to stay here," Viali told Sky Sports TV channel.

But the Chelsea boss warned: "It might happen once but then it can't happen again. I'm not going to have that as a manager. I don't want anybody to jeopardise our chances to win

matches."

Meanwhile, Leboeuf's World Cup-winning team-mate Desailly has dismissed rumours that he is set to move to Lazio.

"There is nothing in the stories that I want to leave Chelsea," insisted Ghanaian-born Desailly.

"Although I'm happy, others may want me. I just want to stay and play for Chelsea. The stories are not true."

Had Desailly departed there would inevitably be speculation about the future of Chelsea's third French World Cup winner Didier Deschamps.

Deschamps joined Chelsea in the close season and said that his main reason for joining was so that he could renew his close friendship with Desailly which began in the early 1980s when the two played together in the Nantes youth team.

Ironically there are also signs of friction among at least two of the three French World Cup winners who play for Chelsea's London rivals Arsenal.

Patrick Vieira has been serving a six-match ban after spitting at Neil Ruddock after being sent off at West Ham while his compatriot Emmanuel Petit has also had several brushes with authority and was lucky to escape similar action after it was decided not to discipline him over claims he spat at Wimbledon striker John Hartson at the weekend.

Both Vieira and Petit - key members of the Arsenal double winning side in 1997-8 - have claimed they have had to endure anti-French prejudice in the top flight. Both have also maintained they have been unfairly punished by English referees.

Arsenal's third France 98 star Thierry Henry, however, seems to be settling in well in the English capital following his move from Juventus during the summer.

He replaced another Frenchman Nicolas Anelka who moved to Real Madrid citing unhappiness with the English lifestyle and in particular the media although he does not seem to be faring any better in Spain.

French players have played with great success in the English Premiership during the 1990s - a trend that began when Eric Cantona - an outcast in his homeland - inspired Leeds to the last ever old First Division title.

He then joined Manchester United and had even greater success there transforming a club that had not won the title for 26 years into the best team in the country.

Cantona retired before they won the European Cup and the World Club Championship but he will be remembered in the club's history as the key player that turned long-time under-

achievers into the best side in the world.

Last season the club's fans voted him as the greatest player in the team's history - not bad considering the likes of Sir Bobby Charlton, George Best, Duncan Edwards, Denis Law and now David Beckham have also donned the famous red shirt.

Another Frenchman to excel in England has been David Ginola - another to be cold shouldered in his homeland.

He first of all starred for Newcastle before last season being named player of the season



MARCEL DESAILLY

in the Premiership even though his club side Tottenham had a mediocre season, mitigated only by victory in the League Cup.

Arsenal and Chelsea's Frenchmen too have helped their club sides win silverware but there are signs that the Anglo-French entente cordiale may be wearing thin.

Grant joins Everton exodus

LONDON, Dec 24: Tony Grant has become the latest player to leave English Premiership side Everton after joining Division One side Manchester City in a 450,000 pound (726,925 dollars) deal, reports AFP.

Midfielder Grant is reunited with former Blues boss Joe Royle, the Maine Road manager, who has long been an admirer of the 25-year-old.

The player, who recently enjoyed a successful two-month loan spell with Tranmere, agreed personal terms and a medical on Thursday, and he will link up with his new team-mates to prepare for their clash at West Brom on December 26.

Grant is the third star to leave Everton inside a week after Gareth Farrelly and John O'Kane signed for Bolton.

Trip down Olympic Memory Lane

LONDON, Dec 24 (AP): Baron Pierre de Coubertin's vision brought us Jesse Owens, Carl Lewis and Alberto Tomba and launched the career of Muhammad Ali.

What he didn't envisage were the terrorist murder of 11 Israeli team members at Munich, persistent disruptive political boycotts, the Ben Johnson doping scandal that smeared the name of sport and a vote-rigging can of worms that shamed the entire Olympic movement.

The Olympic Games has moved a long way since de Coubertin revived the ancient event practised by the Greeks and created a platform for the first modern Olympics in 1896.

A century later it is big money and an Olympic gold medal transforms many of its owners into millionaires. It costs billions to stage an Olympics and that's why sleaze has crept into the bidding. Ask Salt Lake City, who will stage the 2002 Winter Games, yet was at the centre of a vote-rigging scandal that almost brought the movement to its knees.

The first Olympics in Athens in 1896 attracted only 311 competitors - all male - from 13 nations while some 10,000 from 200 countries are expected to turn up for Sydney 2000.

Now the Olympics are open with highly paid soccer and tennis stars rubbing shoulders in the athletes village with the big names track, swimming, gymnastics and figure skating, there have even been moves to bring gold into the games.

But even the early Games weren't free from political turmoil.

At London in 1908 the Russians tried to prevent the Finnish team using their flag and the English objected to the Irish using theirs.

But Owens made the biggest political statement of all at Berlin in 1936. The grandson of slaves, the black American ex-Hitler's racist policies by winning the 100 and 200-metre sprints and the long jump to the fury of the German Chancellor.

The Winter Games were added to the sports calendar in 1924 while the intervention of World War II put the Olympics on hold for 12 years. The Germans and Japanese, the defeated nations of the war, weren't invited to compete in London in 1948, where versatile Dutch sprinter Fanny Blankers-Koen won four golds.

A big star of the 1952 Games in Helsinki was Czech long-distance runner Emil Zatopek, who won the 5,000, 10,000 metres and marathon to go with the 10,000 gold and 5,000 silver from four years earlier. His wife, Dana, also won gold in the 1952 javelin.

That was the year the Soviet Union competed as a united force for the first time and began four decades of Olympic success, funded by the state. Many Olympics became a straight fight between the

United States and the Soviet Union at the top of the medals table with Soviet-backed East Germany also becoming a major force although some of its methods were later to be exposed as blatant cheating through doping.

The 1968 Summer Games were held at altitude at Mexico City and included the amazing Bob Beamon long jump leap of 8.90 metres (29 feet 2 1/2 inches) - breaking the existing mark by 0.55 metres (21 3/4 inches) - and Lee Evans 43.86 for the 400 metres which stood for 20 years.



JESSE OWENS

It also had the black power salute by American 200-metre stars Tommie Smith and John Carlos as they stood on the rostrum their aim outstretched with a black glove on their fist as the US anthem was playing.

That also was the year that Frenchman Jean-Claude Killy emulated the feat by Austria's Tony Sailer by winning all three Alpine skiing gold medals to establish himself as the biggest name in skiing.

American swimmer Mark Spitz won seven gold medals in the pool at Munich in 1972 while 17-year-old Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut, with her elfin figure and beaming smile, became a star around the world after her three golds.

After Korbut's exploits Romania's Nadia Comaneci, only 14, became the first competitor to record perfect scores of 10.00 on the way to three golds in 1976 in Montreal and followed that with two more in Moscow four years later. Like the Russian, she inspired thousands of girls around the world to take up gymnastics.

Over at Lake Placid in 1980, Ingemar Stenmark, from a town in Swedish Lapland, won the slalom double during a career that made him the winningest skier of all time.

African nations led a boycott of the 1976 Games at Montreal because of a political issue relating to a sport which was not even part of the Olympics - rugby union - while the Ameri-

cans, backed by West Germany and Japan, refused to go to Moscow in 1980 in protest at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The Soviets responded by staying away from Los Angeles in 1984 when Lewis started his long and glittering Olympic career, emulating Owens by winning both sprints and the long jump but also collecting a fourth gold in the short sprint relay.

He repeated his 100 triumph at Seoul four years later when Canada's Johnson, first across the line, was disqualified as a drugs cheat, and Lewis collected his second long jump gold medal in a row. The American won the long for the third time in 1992 in Barcelona and collected a relay gold medal to make it a record eight in total.

Over on the ski slopes of the Winter Games with three golds and two silvers over three Olympics between 1988 and '94 even though the flamboyant Italian stayed well away from the downhill and super giant slalom races partly on the instructions of his mother.

Among the other sports stars to make an impact at the Olympics were Kenya's middle distance star Kip Keino, Finnish long distance runners Paavo Nurmi and Lasse Viren, Ethiopian marathon star Abebe Bikila, Norwegian figure skater Sonja Henie, Hungarian swimmer Tamas Darnyi and Australia's Dawn Fraser, Turkish weightlifter Naim Suleymanoglu and Cuban heavyweight boxer Teofilo Stevenson.

Keino sparked a Kenyan revolution in middle and long distance running with a gold in the 1,500 metres and silver at 5,000 at Mexico City in 1968. To get to the 1,500 final on time, he had to jog through a traffic jam.

Nurmi won nine Olympic golds, although five were in events that no longer exist, between 1920 and '28. At Paris in 1924, he won the 1,500 and 5,000 races within an hour of each other breaking the Olympic record each time.

Viren's performances were boosted by the controversial though not illegal practice of blood doping and won the 5,000 and 10,000 metres gold medals at both the 1972 and '76 Games.

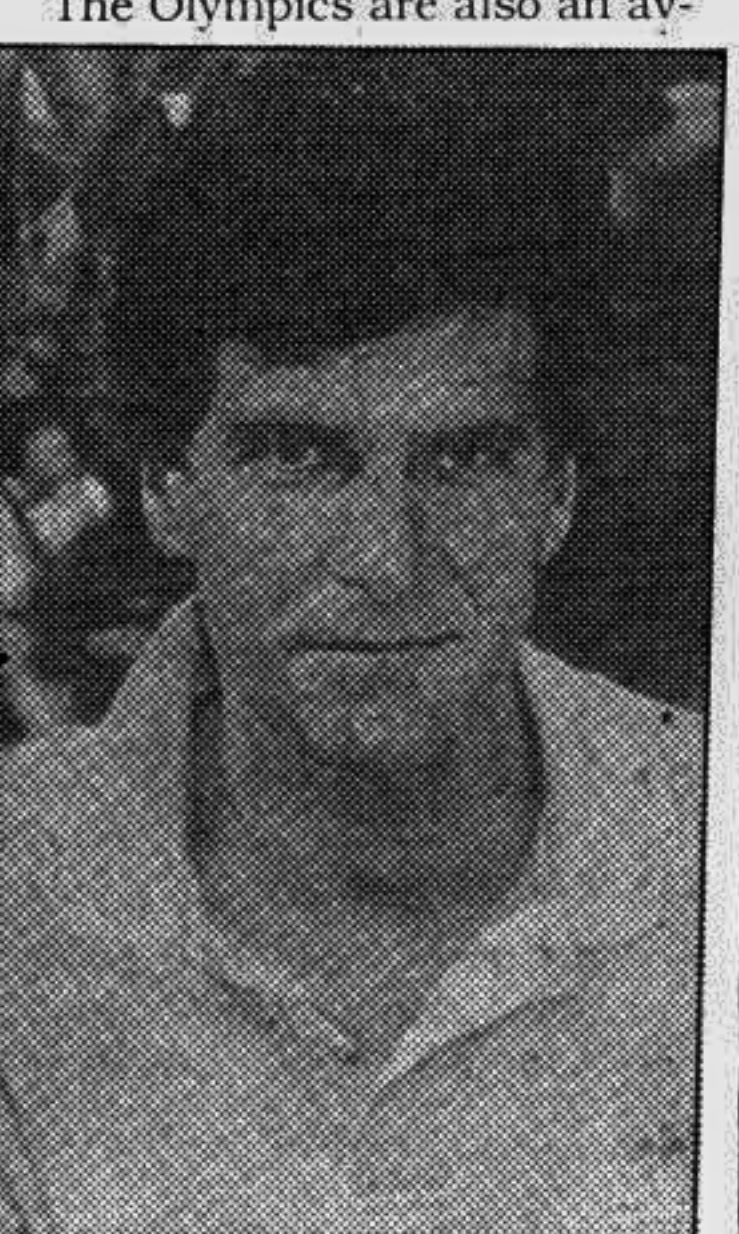
Bikila, a member of the Ethiopian Imperial Bodyguard, won back to back marathons in 1960 and '64 each time breaking the world's best time while Henie won three Olympic titles in a row between 1928-36 and Fraser did the same in the 100m freestyle between '56-64.

Darnyi, who could only see out of one eye, won both the 200 and 400 individual medleys in 1988 and '92 while the 4-foot-11 (1.50-metre) Suleymanoglu, known as the "Pocket Hercules" because he could lift three times his 132-pound (59.9 kg) body weight, won golds at three Games in a row between 1988 and '96.

Stevenson, who frequently turned down pleas to turn pro, succeeded George Foreman as Olympic heavyweight champion and reigned supreme from 1972-1980, winning three golds in a row with only one of his opponents going the three-round distance.

But he remained an amateur even though other Olympic stars went on to make huge earnings as pros. Lennox Lewis, the 1988 Olympic superheavyweight champion, now is undisputed heavyweight champion of the world.

The Olympics are also an av-



MARK SPITZ

enue for those sports that rarely get the spotlight away from giants such as soccer and basketball. Gymnastics, figure skating, swimming and Nordic skiing don't often get big coverage until the Olympics come round and give a platform for such stars as Comaneci, skating star Katerina Witt, and Nordic skier Bjorn Daele.

Basketball played a minor role in the Olympics until the Americans, who had won every gold medal since 1936, lost for the first time in 1972 to the Soviets in a highly controversial ending.

In 1992, they entered their "Dream Team", which included stars such as Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Patrick Ewing, Larry Bird and Scottie Pippen, to win the title, overwhelming everyone by wide margins. The soccer competitions have been restricted to amateur or players age under 23 so they don't pull the spotlight away from the World Cup.

But the sport made a big impact at the 1996 Games when a Brazilian lineup that included Ronaldo and a powerful Argentina team were upstaged by Nigeria, who became the first African nation to win an Olympic team event.

The first women's competition ended with a win by the United States over China in the biggest crowd ever to see a women's soccer game, 76,481 at Sanford Stadium, Athens, Georgia.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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26 Altitudes (Abb.)	Solution time: 22 mins.		
28 "Scent of a -"	GAP WALL JARS	45 Race driver	46 Not "for"
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