

Anelka faces long lay-off

MADRID, Jan 12: Real Madrid's French international striker Nicolas Anelka has ruptured the meniscus in his right knee and will undergo an arthroscopy on Wednesday to determine the severity of the injury. The Spanish club announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

Anelka was injured in his team's ultimately futile 3-2 World Club Championship win over Raja Casablanca of Morocco in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday night and faces between six weeks and three months on the sidelines.

The nature of the injury was determined in a magnetic resonance test after the player arrived back here Tuesday. It proved a mixed tournament for Anelka, who finally opened his account with the Merengues and is top of the goalscoring charts with three goals ahead of Tuesday night's matches.

He missed a penalty, however, in the closing minutes of the 2-2 draw with Corinthians which ultimately cost his side a place in the final - and also picked up the injury.

Anelka joined Real last summer from English Premier-ship side Arsenal for a Spanish record 38 million dollars after one of the most bitter and protracted transfer wrangles in recent history.



Vasco da Gama's Edmundo (C) tries to evade Nexaca's Hernan Vigna (L) during their World Club Championship clash at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on January 11. —AFP photo

Milutinovic agrees to coach China

BEIJING, Jan 12: Globe-trotting Serb coach Bora Milutinovic said Wednesday he has agreed to take the helm of China's national team after talks with the Chinese Football Federation (FCF) here, reports AFP.

His primary target is to qualify China for its first World Cup final in Japan and South Korea in 2002.

"We've agreed in principle, but I am waiting for them to work out the small details," Milutinovic told AFP.

He said he would possibly sign later this week in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, where the national side is hosting a four-nation friendly tournament from January 14-16.

"This will be the biggest challenge of my life," said Milutinovic who has coached four different countries to World Cup finals - Mexico in 1986, Costa Rica in 1990, the United States in 1994 and Nigeria in 1998.

"Coaching the USA in the World Cup finals in 1994 was a big challenge, but China has never qualified so this will be very exciting."

FCF spokesman Dong Hua told AFP that talks with Milutinovic since his arrival in China last Thursday, had gone smoothly.

"All details have been settled. If nothing else happens, we will sign the agreement soon - probably in Guangzhou," Dong said.

Roma all set to welcome Nakata

MILAN, Jan 12: AS Roma were waiting for the nod from Perugia's Hidetoshi Nakata on Wednesday after the two Serie A clubs thrashed out a cash and player swap for the gifted Japanese midfielder, reports AFP.

Nakata, one of the revelations of Italian football last season, has yet to put his signature to the deal, Italian press reports said.

Roma are offering Perugia president Luciano Gaucci 30 billion lira (16 million dollars), Russian midfielder Dimitry Alenitchev and a share (joint ownership) of 19-year-old midfielder Manuele Blasi.

Gaucci would see a good return on his investment - with Nakata having joined Perugia from Japanese J-League's Bellmare Hiratsuka for around 3.5 million dollars in September 1998.

Nakata, who turns 23 later this month, should get Alenitchev's number eight shirt - the one Nakata wears for Japan - and an annual salary of three billion lire (16 million dollars) for a five-year contract.

Matthaeus may stop later this year

MUNICH, Germany, Jan 12: German legend Lothar Matthaeus announced here Tuesday that this was likely to be the year that he calls time on his glittering career, reports AFP.

"The year 2000 should be my last as a professional," Matthaeus told a press conference.

The 1990 world champion was for the first time putting a definite date on his impending retirement.

The 38-year-old Bayern Munich star is joining MetroStars of Major League Soccer in March, returning to his homeland for a farewell jubilee match with Bayern against a German selection in May.

Matthaeus is expected to be named by Germany coach Erich Ribbeck in his country's squad for Euro 2000 in June and July and that is likely to be his last big tournament as a player.

Matthaeus, known in Germany as "Lothar the Eternal", because of his longevity, has competed in a joint record five World Cups and with 143 appearances for Germany shares the record with Swedish goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli as the most capped international player.

His last competitive appearance for Bayern should be against Real Madrid on March 8 said: "I want to prepare well as I have for the last 20 years."

Vasco confirm final showdown with Corinthians Romario settles the issue

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 12: Even a rest day for his terrible twin Edmundo could not dampen the threat of Brazilian striker Romario as he Tuesday scored the winner to take Vasco da Gama through to the final of the inaugural World Club Championship, reports AFP.

Romario struck with 20 minutes remaining to complete a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Mexico's Necaxa, who had had the temerity to take the lead at the Maracana stadium but who finally had to settle for a place in the third place play-off at the expense of Manchester United.

The Mexicans, the reigning CONCACAF champions, took the game to their hosts early on and highly-rated Ecuadorian playmaker Alex Aguinaga slotted them ahead after just five minutes with a low shot from just inside the box.

Stunned by that, Vasco, desperate not to miss out on a final against Sao Paulo-based compatriots Corinthians, jumped back and Odvan timed his jump perfectly as he headed home at the far post following a corner on the left on 14 minutes.

Odvan had only come on as a substitute five minutes earlier following an early injury to Junior Baiano.

Romario, who scored twice against United last Saturday to break the hearts of the English Premiership and European champions, ensured he would bag the headlines once again as he settled matters in the 70th minute, ending an exciting run with a low shot past Necaxa keeper Hugo Pineda.

The crowd vociferously acclaimed the veteran striker as he in turn milked the applause. They then welcomed Edmundo into the fray in place of Donizete.

Vasco coach Antonio Lopes insisted afterwards that "Corinthians are clear favourites" for the final.

"They are Brazilian champions and strengthened their squad last month and they have massive support. I think they are the stronger team," said Lopes - possibly trying a little Brazilian kidology.

"Whatever happens, a match between Vasco da Gama and Corinthians will always be a Brazilian classic. It will be a good, hard-fought game," promised Lopes, who praised Necaxa's technique and his own side's resilience.

"If Vasco had not applied themselves to the extent they did in the second half we certainly wouldn't have emerged as winners," he said.

Romario likewise praised Necaxa.

"We knew they would move the ball around intelligently and they made things hard for us."

Necaxa coach Raul Arias said he was disappointed as he felt a place in the final had been 'there for the taking'.

"Our goal was to get to the final and personally I thought we could have managed it. When we were 1-0 up we had chances to go further ahead but unfortunately we made mistakes and we lost," Arias said tersely as he looked to Friday's play-off.

"We now have to think about Real Madrid. They are a great team, there's no doubt about that. We can't afford to make any mistakes."

Earlier, United had thanked two first-half goals from South African youngster Quinton Fortune for a 2-0 win over Australian makeweights and Oceania champions South Melbourne.

United, who celebrated their first win here, were hoping that a Necaxa defeat would let them sneak into the third place play-off.

But although the Mexicans obliged by losing, they still just grabbed second place in group B on goal difference.

AT A GLANCE

POINTS TABLE									
FIRST ROUND									
Group A	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts		
X-Corinthians	3	2	1	0	6	2	7		
Real Madrid	3	2	0	0	8	5	7		
Al-Nassr	3	0	0	3	5	9	0		
Yokohama	3	0	0	3	5	9	0		
Group B									
Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts		
X-Vasco da Gama	3	3	0	0	7	2	9		
Necaxa	3	1	1	1	5	4	4		
Manchester United	3	1	1	1	4	4	4		
South Melbourne	3	0	0	3	1	7	0		

RESULTS									
Jan 5, at Sao Paulo.									
Real Madrid (Spain) 3, Al-Nassr (Saudi Arabia) 1.									
Corinthians (Brazil) 2, Raja (Morocco) 0.									
Jan 6, at Rio de Janeiro.									
Manchester United (England) 1, Necaxa (Mexico) 1.									
Vasco da Gama (Brazil) 2, South Melbourne (Australia) 0.									
Jan 7, at Sao Paulo.									
Real Madrid (Spain) 2, Corinthians (Brazil) 2.									
Al-Nassr (Saudi Arabia) 4, Raja (Morocco) 3.									
Jan 8, at Rio de Janeiro.									
Vasco da Gama (Brazil) 3, Manchester United (England) 1.									
Necaxa (Mexico) 3, South Melbourne (Australia) 1.									
Jan 10, at Sao Paulo.									
Real Madrid (Spain) 3, Raja (Morocco) 2.									
Corinthians (Brazil) 2, Al-Nassr (Saudi Arabia) 0.									
Jan 11, at Rio de Janeiro.									
Manchester United (England) 2, South Melbourne (Australia) 0.									
Vasco da Gama (Brazil) 2, Necaxa (Mexico) 1.									
Third Place									
Jan 14, at Rio de Janeiro.									
Real Madrid vs Necaxa, 1900 GMT.									
Final									
Jan 14, at Rio de Janeiro.									
Corinthians vs Vasco da Gama, 2200 GMT.									

Weah now Chelsea's!

LONDON, Jan 12: Former FIFA World Player of the Year George Weah did not hide his disappointment Tuesday as he reluctantly moved from Italian champions AC Milan to English Premiership outfit Chelsea on loan until the end of the season, reports AFP.

The Liberian international forward, voted the world's best player in 1995, emotionally claimed Tuesday he had been forced out of Italy by Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani, who did not want to sell the player to a rival Serie A club.

Weah whinged: "I've signed on loan for six months, but if I like it over there I won't be coming back to Italy."

"I would have liked to have finished my career with Milan. But it just wasn't possible."

Neither was it possible for Weah to join up again with former Milan coach Fabio Capello, now in charge of title rivals AS Roma.

"I wanted to go to Roma. But Galliani said that I couldn't strengthen an opponent. I wanted to stay in Italy... this way, they've ruined my life," ranted Weah.

Chelsea are hopeful Weah will make his home debut against Tottenham Hotspur at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday night.

But Weah will not be eligible for Chelsea's Champions League campaign after representing Milan in an earlier round against Galatasaray.

Italian newspaper the Gazzetta dello Sport had reported Tuesday that Weah had decided to accept a move to French club Olympique Marseille but that move fell through.

Weah, now 33, was linked with Marseille last week fol-

lowing the arrival of yet another striker at the Serie A champions, Spaniard Jose Mari.

Chelsea managing director Colin Hutchinson was optimistic that the Liberian will be available for the match at Stamford Bridge against Spurs.

But he added that Weah himself had wanted a move to increase his chances of "regular" football after finding himself out in the cold at Milan.



GEORGE WEAH "George Weah wasn't featuring frequently and he wanted to play regularly," Hutchinson told ClubCall.

"Milan have just signed Jose Mari from Spain and clubs all over Europe have been trying to get him but, fortunately, we have pulled it off and he is with us until the end of the season."

"I am in Milan at the moment and the faxes are working at 100 miles per hour to get all the paperwork to the Premier League and the Football Association and, providing they say everything is in order, he will be registered - but he cannot play until we have got international clearance."

"We have made a request via

England for the clearance and Milan are asking the Italian FA to do their bit."

"So, fingers crossed, if everything comes together, he could be available for selection against Tottenham on Wednesday night."

"He is saying his goodbyes to Milan at the moment and will leave for London tomorrow (Wednesday) morning."

The Liberian began his European career in 1988 at Monaco before moving to Paris St Germain and then joined Milan in 1995.

The decision to move to Chelsea came after Galliani stated that the club would not agree to a move to another Italian club.

Ronaldo in Paris for check-up

PARIS, Jan 12: Brazil striker Ronaldo arrived at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris today to have medical tests on the knee that underwent surgery on November 30, it was revealed by a Paris clinic today, reports AFP.

After checking in Ronaldo, accompanied by his wife Milene and two companions, went for tests at around 13:00 GMT.

It was expected that the Inter Milan striker would leave for Italy in the evening. On Thursday he is due to begin a rehabilitation programme including gymnastics, cycling and swimming supervised by his personal fitness coach Nilson Petroni.

He should be able to start running again in mid-February, according to Inter.

The Brazilian partially ruptured a tendon in his right knee on November 21 during his club's match with Serie A rivals Lecce.

South Melbourne happy anyway

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 12: South Melbourne coach Ange Postecoglou said Tuesday he and his players were happy to have had the chance to take part in the inaugural World Club Championship - even if a 2-0 defeat by Manchester United left them with three defeats in as many outings, reports AFP.

Postecoglou said the Australians, who took part in the FIFA tournament as champions of Oceania, had learned a lot from the experience.

"I think the most important thing for the lads was not the two-and-half million dollars (prize money) but the experience."

"We were playing against some of the best teams in the world in the Maracana stadium."

"So I think that, above all, that was the most important thing. We are very, very happy," said Postecoglou.

South Melbourne lost 2-0 to finalists Vasco da Gama and 3-1 to Mexican outfit Necaxa before also losing to a below-strength United but the team were never outclassed as many had predicted beforehand.

Baggio suspended for one match

ROME, Jan 12: Parma midfielder Dino Baggio was Tuesday handed a one-match suspension after being sent off in the Italian league match against Juventus on Sunday, reports AFP.

Baggio, who was on Monday dropped from the Italian national team, scythed down Juventus' Gianluca Zambrotta when his team trailed 1-0. Parma later rallied to draw 1-1.

Shown the red card, Baggio responded by spitting in disgust at the decision and making a gesture to the referee.

French First Div Lyon remain hot on Monaco's heel

PARIS, Jan 12: Lyon scored two late goals to force a 2-2 draw away to Paris St Germain on Tuesday night and maintain second place in the French league standings, reports AFP.

Goals from Brazilian striker Christian and Laurent Robert (penalty) put PSG in command before Lyon came roaring back in the dying minutes to grab a draw through strikes from Sonny Anderson and Tony Vairelles.

Monaco still lead the championship with 42 points from 20 matches, ahead of Lyon with 38 from 21 and PSG with 37 from 21.

Christian opened the scoring at the Parc des Princes after 15 minutes with a close-range tap-in after good lead-up work by Ali Benarbia and Igor Yanovskii.

Robert then made it 2-0 after 60 minutes when a penalty was awarded after Lyon defender Cedric Uras handled in the area.

Lyon bitterly contested the decision, but the unflappable Robert coolly slotted the spot kick home.

Lyon launched a wave of attacks after conceding the second goal and goalkeeper Bernard Lama made a superb save to thwart substitute Frederic Kanoute with 12 minutes remaining.

Brazilian Anderson reduced the margin with a header 11 minutes from the end and Vairelles then scored with a low shot at the far post after a corner to make it 2-2 with just two minutes remaining.

PSG were without several star players but will be annoyed at a missed opportunity. Midfielder Jay Jay Okocha and defender Godwin Okpara were with Nigeria preparing for the African Nations championship, while Jimmy Algerino and Mickael Madar were injured.

Lyon were delighted with their tightback.

"The championship race isn't over yet," said coach Bernard Lacombe. "We've got a big match against (fourth-placed) Auxerre at the weekend but we are still here."

Metz earlier hauled themselves clear of the relegation zone with a shock 2-1 win over champions Bordeaux at the Stade Symphorien.

Gerard Baticle and Frederic Meyrieu got the goals as Metz moved into relative mid-table safety and further dented Bordeaux's already fragile hopes of retaining their crown.

Bordeaux are in fifth place, 12 points in arrears of leaders Monaco, who have a game in hand.

Metz took the lead midway through the first half through Baticle - their recent signing from Auxerre - and went 2-0 up eight minutes into the second half when mop-haired Meyrieu took advantage of a slip to build up and hammered home a left-foot shot from edge of box.

Bordeaux were strangely subdued and their recent French international signing Christophe Dugary made little impact, but they did spark into life late in the game.

Leading scorer Sylvain Wilrodt reduced the deficit when he took a pass from recent signing Sylvain Legwinski, jinked cleverly on the edge of box and then hit home a powerful shot from the edge of the box.

With 13 minutes left, Bordeaux carved out several chances to equalise but could not find a way past the increasingly frantic Metz defence.

"Everything has started very well for me in Metz," said a delighted Baticle after the win. "I didn't take me long to settle down and develop a rapport with my new teammates."

The remainder of 21st round matches are scheduled for Wednesday night with leaders Monaco away to mid-table Troyes.

Fortune fires MU young guns

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 12: Fortune smiled belatedly upon Manchester United's young braves at the Maracana stadium here Tuesday as South African youngster Quinton Fortune scored twice to hand them a 2-0 win over Australia's South Melbourne at the World Club Championship, reports AFP.

Fortune, excused from South Africa's training camp for the African Nations Cup as he bids to break through into United's first-team set-up, took advantage of coach Sir Alex Ferguson's decision to give United's youngsters their chance with goals in the eighth and 20th minutes to press his claims in style.

His contribution finally gave United their first win in their final Group B match of the tournament and kept alive hopes that the English Premiership and European champions could reach the play-off

the final while a point would ensure the Mexicans go to the play-off in United's place.

Ferguson fended off criticism of United's showing and said he was quite happy overall, even though his men will return to England empty-handed.

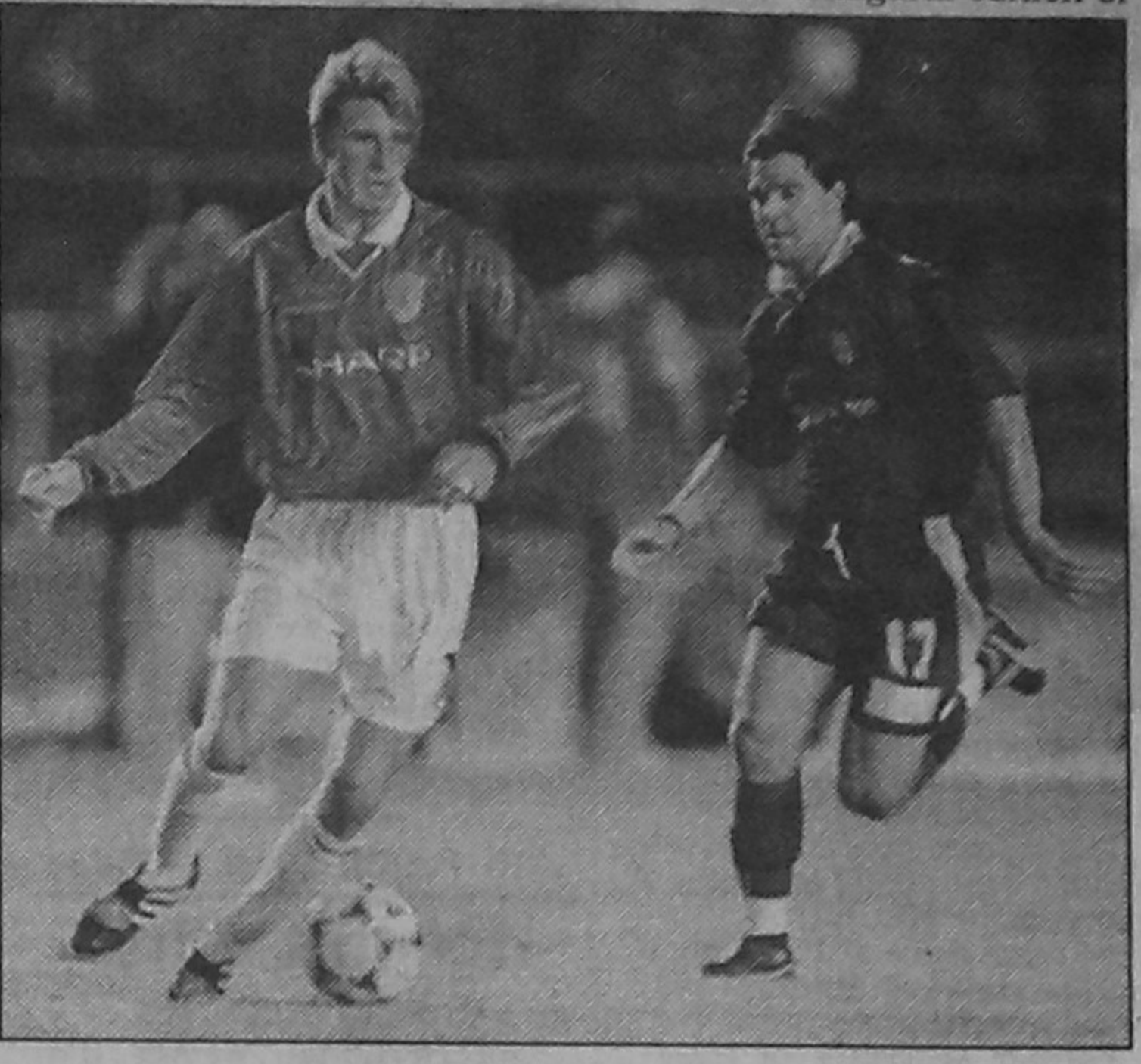
"I'm quite happy. We could maybe have done better but the place is empty and we're not used to playing in front of no people," Ferguson said.

"We'll be in the next one and depending on the venue, if it's done at the right time of year and with the proper preparation it could be something special."

Ferguson was full of praise for winger Fortune.

"He got off to a bad start with an ankle injury when he first arrived, but he has great feel, good balance, he's a good crosser of the ball and as we saw tonight he can get a goal, so I'm very pleased for Quinton."

Ferguson was determined to give the fringe players a chance to impress given that last Saturday's defeat by Vasco meant they could no longer reach the final of the inaugural edition of



Manchester United's star midfielder David Beckham (L) and Jim Tsekis of South Melbourne are in pursuit of the ball in their World Club Championship fixture in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday. —AFP photo

for third place.

United finished on four points from their three matches - the same as Mexico's Necaxa, who were facing group leaders Vasco da Gama in the final group encounter later Tuesday.

Vasco needed a draw to reach

the FIFA event.

Fortune, who had said earlier it would be the fulfilment of a dream to play in the same stadium graced by his boyhood idol Pele, grabbed the chance with both hands.

Unfortunately for Fortune,

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP DIARY

SAO PAULO, Brazil, Jan 12(AFP): Sao Paulo-based Corinthians are set to be without Brazilian international central defender Joao Carlos for Friday's final of the inaugural World Club Championship.

Final in Rio against either fellow Brazilians Vasco da Gama or Mexico's Necaxa, reports AFP.

Joao Carlos pulled a muscle in his left thigh shortly after the start of Monday's 2-0 win over Saudi side Al Nassr which put Corinthians into the final on goal difference ahead of Spain's Real Madrid.

He eventually had to give way to Adilson, who is now likely to start the final in his place.

"It would be a huge disappointment to miss the final," Joao Carlos told AFP.

"I've played through the whole of a really long season (Corinthians have played some 90 matches all told this season) and to miss out in the most important match of them all would be difficult to take," said Joao Carlos.

He revealed he felt a little better than 24 hours earlier but feared he would not be fit in time for the final showdown in the Maracana.

"Either way we have a big squad and whoever plays will do a good job," said Joao Carlos.

As he sweats on his fitness Corinthians' midfielder Ricardo, who scored the first goal against Al Nassr before going off with a knock, is set to be fit for Friday although the man who came on as a first-half substitute in his place, Edu, stands by.

Corinthians are chasing the first ever international title in their 90-year history.

HAPPY GOAL HUNTING SAO PAULO: FIFA's inaugural World Club Championship is proving something of a goal bonanza with an average of 3.6 goals per game.

With only four matches still to be played, 36 goals had been scored in 10 matches with Real Madrid's French striker Nicolas Anelka top of the goalscorers standings on three goals.

Vasco da Gama's controversial duo Romario and Edmundo, with two goals apiece ahead of Tuesday's clash with Necaxa, are both hoping to overhaul Anelka.

A REAL DISSAPPOINTMENT SAO PAULO: Real Madrid may have been voted club side of the 20th Century by world governing body FIFA, but they could not live up to their tradition as the pioneers of international football at the beginning of the new Millennium.

The team that won the first five European Cups was hoping to become the first side to win this inaugural World Club Championship but Corinthians of Brazil beat them to the final on goal difference.

Real also won the first ever Intercontinental Cup Final in 1960. That match has until now determined the title of club World Champions.

The exit of the Merengues also dashed hopes of a final that would be a repeat of their 1998 Intercontinental Cup Final with Vasco da Gama, who ironically are named after a real life pioneer - a medieval Portuguese seafarer.

nal at the expense of Real Madrid of Spain.

Real, who only finished the match with eight men, beat Raja Casablanca of Morocco 3-2 but Corinthians won through because of a superior goal difference and are now likely to face fellow Brazilian Vasco da Gama, who only need a draw with Mexico's Necaxa to reach the final.

But it was a Colombian not a Brazilian who was the hero of the hour as far as Sao Paulo's press was concerned.

Veteran Colombian Freddy Rincon scored the crucial second goal with just eight minutes remaining and dominated Tuesday morning's headlines.

"He belongs to Brazil and he belongs to the World" said sports paper Lance in reference to Rincon.

Lance added: "The 33-year-old (Rincon) is the heart of the team, everything he did was good."

The Gazeta Esportiva agreed, saying of the Colombian: "With his usual sharpness, (Rincon) the leader of the team scored the second goal and raised the hearts of the fans who were at that time desperate as time ran out."

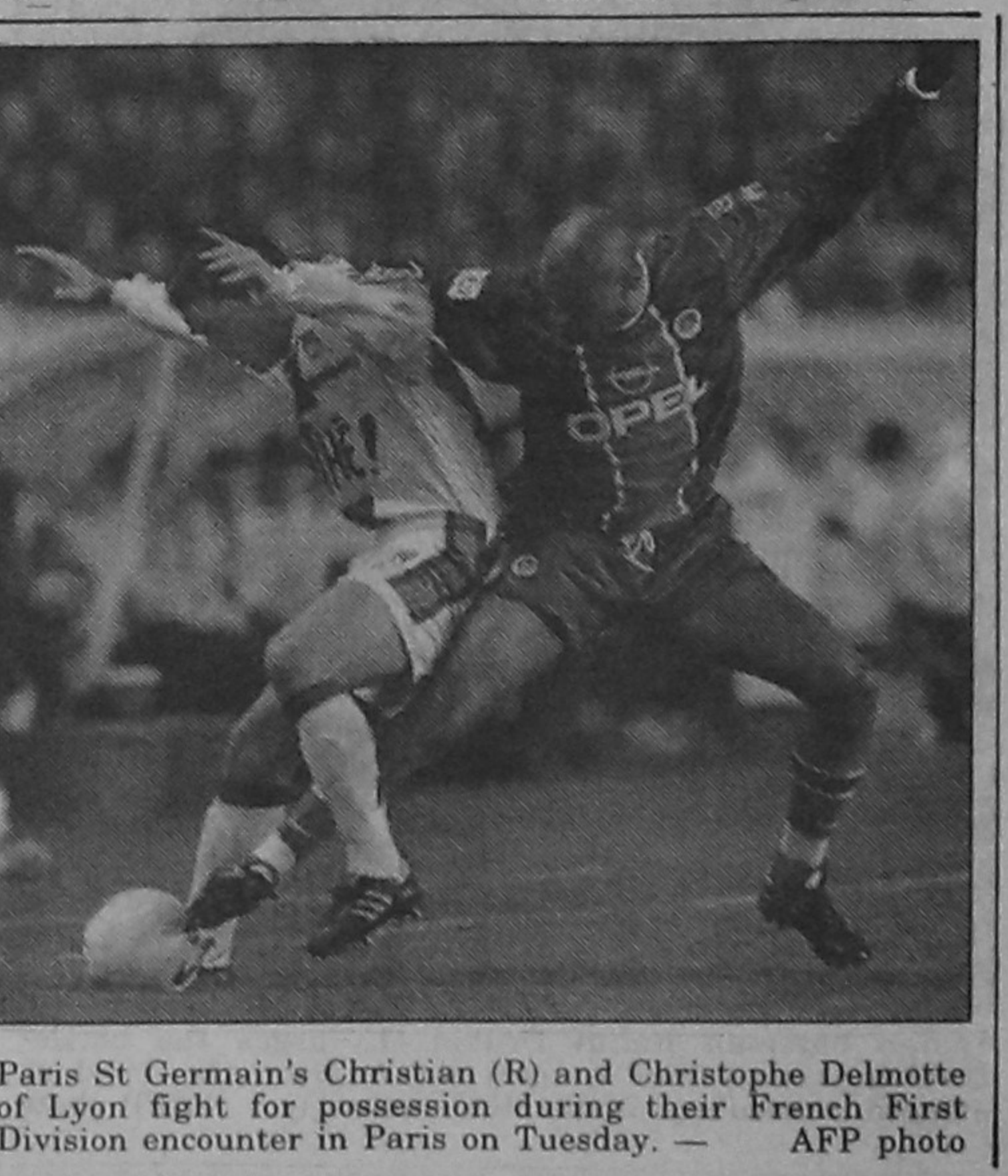
The papers could not hide their pleasure that both European contenders had perished at Brazilian hands - England's Manchester United had already been eliminated by Rio outfit Vasco da Gama.

The Folha da Sao Paulo said: "Real wins but Europe is out."

Particularly targeted was Real golden boy Raul, who Gazeta Esportiva said: "Showed throughout the tournament he came to Brazil just to pose."

PRESS PAMPERS CORINTHIANS SAO PAULO: Brazil's press waxed lyrical Tuesday about Sao Paulo outfit Corinthians, whose 2-0 victory over Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia Monday saw them reach FIFA's inaugural World Club Championship Fi-

NUMBER NINE IRKS BECKHAM! RIO DE JANEIRO: Manchester United golden boy David Beckham may have managed to obtain a Vasco da Gama shirt from the Brazilian club's star striker Romario - but when he learned he could buy a replica of Ronaldo's Brazil national team shirt he refused.



Paris St Germain's Christian (R) and Christophe Delmotte of Lyon fight for possession during their French First Division encounter in Paris on Tuesday. — AFP photo

While visiting Rio's famous Christ the Redeemer Statue that towers over the city from a mountain top Beckham went to a tourist vendor to buy a replica Brazil shirt for his baby son Brooklyn.

But when he discovered that the shirt had Ronaldo's number nine on he decided not to purchase the jersey. The Inter Milan striker has recently criticised Beckham.

KAREMBU REGRETS MARACANA MISS RIO DE JANEIRO: French World Cup-winning defender Christian Karembu will now miss the third-place play-off match in Rio after becoming one of three Real Madrid players dismissed in their ultimately futile 3-2 victory over Raja Casablanca of Morocco.

Karembu, who is from New Caledonia, admitted he was "disappointed" not to have the chance to play in Rio's famous Maracana arena, where the third-place play-off and final will be staged.

All Real's group matches were played at Sao Paulo's Morumbi Stadium.