

English Div One Charlton go four points clear

LONDON, Jan 16: Charlton beat Crewe 1-0 at the Valley on Saturday for their sixth successive win to move four points clear at the top of the English First Division, reports AFP.

A 13th-minute goal from Graham Stuart separated the sides, but Alan Curbishley's team may see their lead cut to one point again if Manchester City defeat Fulham at Maine Road on Sunday.

Curbishley said his team deserved the three points which kept their quest for a return to the Premiership on course.

"I think we deserved the three points today and I am just pleased to keep a winning run going."

"It would have been nice to score a bit more but I'd have settled for any win beforehand."

Crewe boss Dario Gradi said that poor passing was to blame for his team's defeat.

"Our passing from the back players was a little sloppy today, we didn't bring the ball out well enough."

"Having said that we had a good share of the game and looked as though we might do something at the end - but we didn't make the amount of possession count."

Ipswich kept on the leaders' heels with a convincing 3-0 victory over bottom club Swindon.

Mike Stockwell opened the scoring after 27 minutes and young striker Richard Naylor, with goals in the 37th and 82nd minutes, sealed the win at Portman Road.

Barnsley took the points at Selhurst Park as Dave Bassett visited one of his former clubs, Crystal Palace.

Two goals in the first 15 minutes were enough to bring a 2-0 win despite having David Tuttle sent off for deliberate handball.

Bruce Dyer grabbed the first and Darren Bernard converted a penalty for his 12th goal of the season.

Huddersfield's slide continued with a 2-0 defeat at Blackburn, the club rejuvenated by new manager Tony Parkes.

Damen Duff put Rovers in front after 29 minutes and Damien Johnson added the killer goal a minute before the break.

Cup heroes Tranmere found league football less inspiring than cup competitions and a 0-0 draw with Stockport did little for either club.

QPR, in the chase for the play-offs, went down to their first defeat at home with a Claus Jensen goal giving Bolton a 1-0 win.

Walsall came from behind to jump two places up the table with a 2-1 win over Sheffield United, losing in the league for the first time under Neil Warnock.

Portsmouth, under new manager Gary Higgs, gave away a two-goal lead to lose 3-2 at home to Wolves, with Ade Akinbiyi scoring the decisive goal in the last minute.

Grimby and Nottingham Forest produced a thriller at Blundell Park where the visitors finished with nine men and on the wrong end of a 4-3 scoreline.

Jack Lester and Lee Ashcroft put Town two up, only for Alan Rogers and a Mark Lever own goal to leave things all square.

Jon Olav Hjelde was sent off for a professional foul before Ashcroft netted a 67th-minute penalty to put the hosts 3-2 up before Kevin Donovan added a fourth.

Forest keeper Dave Beasant then joined Hjelde for an early bath and Rogers bagged a second for David Platt's men in the dying minutes to set up a dramatic finish but the home side held on for victory.

Birmingham got back to winning ways with two goals from Martin Grainger giving them a 2-0 victory over Norwich while West Brom and Port Vale ended goalless in the West Midlands derby.

Cerezo taking over Antlers?

TOKYO, Jan 16: Former Brazilian international Toninho Cerezo has emerged as the favourite to take over as manager of Kashima Antlers, reports Reuters.

Toninho was a member of Brazil's brilliant four-man midfield at the 1982 World Cup in Spain alongside Socrates, Falcão and Zico, who ended his playing career with Kashima in 1994 and is now the club's technical director and general manager.

Antlers, league champions in 1996 and 1998, fired Brazilian boss Ze Mario midway through last season and Zico took over as caretaker manager until the end of the year.

Toninho is now manager of Vitória Bahia in Brazil.

Kashima officials hope to make a formal announcement early this week and have Toninho in place to prepare Antlers for the Asian Cup Championship quarter-finals in the south-west Japan city of Kashima in the last week of February.

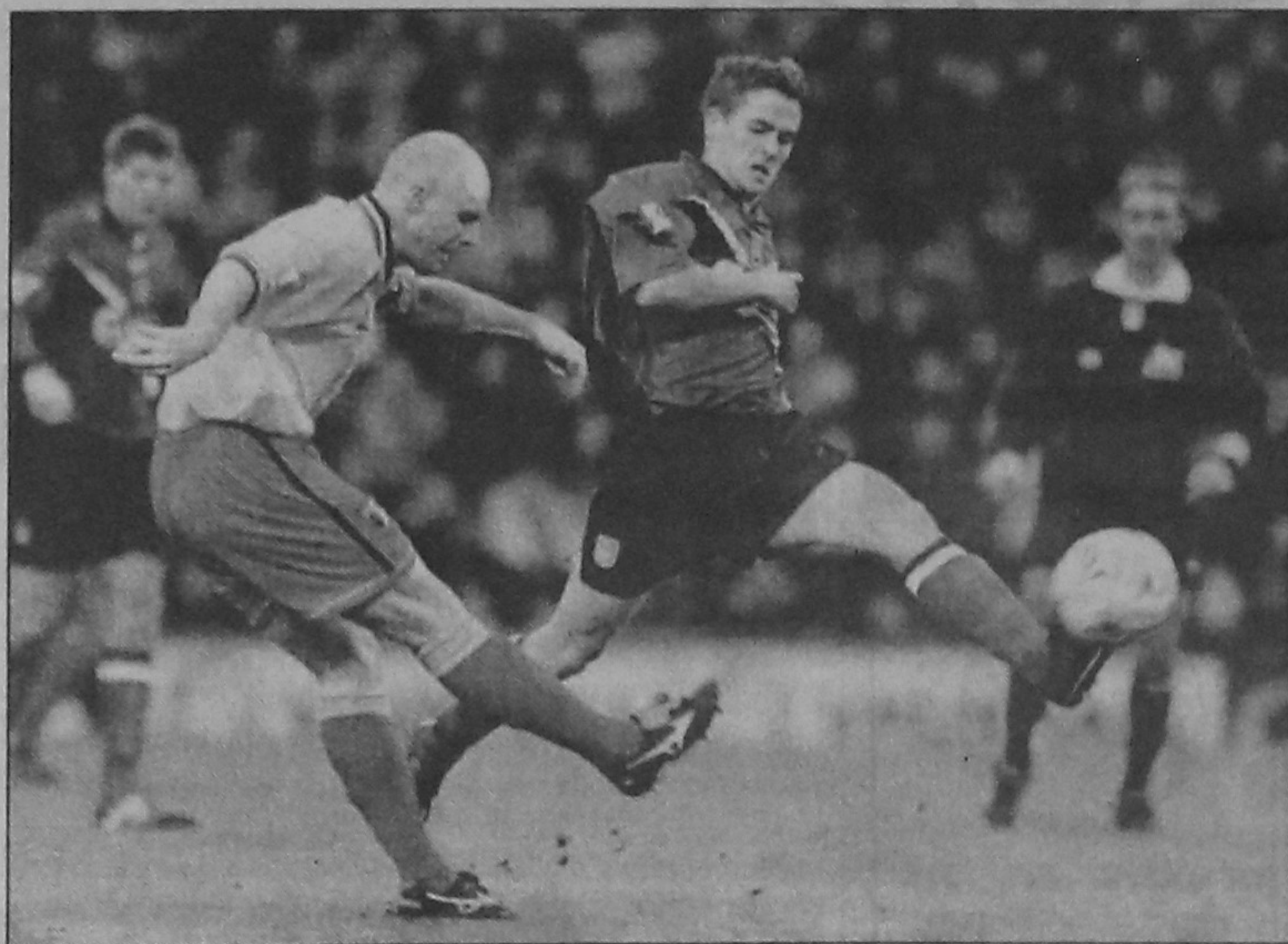
About half of J League soccer managers are foreigners.

Chamot may join Milan

MILAN, Jan 16: Argentina's international Juan Antonio Chamot is close to moving from Atletico Madrid to AC Milan, the Italian club's vice-president Adriano Galliani said on Saturday, reports AFP.

He said the clubs were not far from agreeing a transfer fee.

Galliani also said the departure of French defender Bruno N'Gotty, targeted by Real Madrid and Bordeaux, depended on the purchase of central defender Chamot.



Liverpool superstar Michael Owen (C) tries to intercept a shot from Robert Page of Watford during their Premiership encounter at Vicarage Road on January 15.

— AFP photo

Premiership

Gunners gun Sunderland down



LONDON, Jan 16: A superb pair of double strikes by Arsenal's Croatian international Davor Suker and French partner Thierry Henry inspired the Gunners to a 4-1 win over Sunderland in the English Premiership on Saturday, reports AFP.

The win kept Arsenal in third, a point behind leaders Leeds United, but level on points with Manchester United, although the Red Devils, whom they meet on Monday week, have three games in hand - for Sunderland, who dropped to fifth, it left them with just one point from their last 12.

In other matches Chelsea failed to capitalise on Leicester City missing six first team players only drawing 1-1 at home - Dennis Wise grabbing an 85th minute equaliser for the Blues.

Czech Republic international Vladimir Smicer came off the bench in the second-half to give Liverpool the three points and fourth place with a 3-2 win over a gutsy Watford, who had fought back from 2-0 down to 2-2.

Despite their bravery Watford are now just a point off the bottom after Sheffield Wednesday prevailed 2-0 over third from bottom Bradford City.

Henry scored in the third minute beating the challenge by former Arsenal favourite Steve Bould and his right-footed shot was so powerful that despite keeper Thomas Sorensen getting a hand to it it still flew into the net.

Suker then scored the goal of the match, a memorable way to get his 10th for the club, as he curled a lob from the corner of the area that beat Sorensen and went in off the post.

The 32-year-old Croat added another a minute later hitting it first time into the Sunderland net after Henry's pullback from the by-line.

Arsenal oldboy Niall Quinn salvaged something when he fired past David Seaman with a left footed shot but Henry put the rest beyond doubt as he turned Bould and shot right footed under Sorensen's body for his 10th of the season.

Liverpool were very grateful to Smicer after Patrick Berger and David Thompson had given them a 2-0 lead only for Watford to hit back a minute either side of the break as Richard Johnson struck from 20 metres out and then their record signing, 1.5 million pound Icelandic international striker Heidar Helguson scored with a glancing header on his debut.

Leicester took a shock lead at Chelsea as Northern Irish international defender Gerry Taggart was given time by a static Chelsea defence to shoot past Ed Goey.

Chelsea, for whom Gian-

franco Zola was making his 150th appearance, grabbed a late point when Wise headed in five minutes from the finish.

Derby County won their second successive Premiership match with a 4-1 thrashing of Middlesbrough, who have now just one win in 10 matches.

Derby's hero was Marcus Christie who scored twice on his full debut for the club while Jamaican international striker Dean Burton also got in on the act with a superb goal, flicking the ball over his shoulder with his back to goal.

Boro's dreadful day continued apace as their Colombian international striker Hamilton Ricard had his weakly taken penalty saved by Derby keeper Mart Poom.

Andy Campbell briefly gave some hope to Boro shooting home from 20 metres in the 71st minute but Derby's Scottish international midfielder Craig Burley whacked in his first for the club since moving from Celtic in the final minute.

Everton preserved their proud unbeaten home record with a last minute equaliser through American Joe Max Moore in a 2-2 draw with Spurs.

The Liverpool side had briefly been in the lead through former Arsenal striker Kevin Campbell headed his 10th of the season.

However, Spurs, with only three Premiership away wins this season, hit back two minutes later as Chris Armstrong

tapped in after Sol Campbell's header came off the post.

Four minutes later David Ginola's long range effort put Spurs ahead as it took a deflection off veteran Everton defender Dave Watson and went over keeper Paul Gerrard's head.

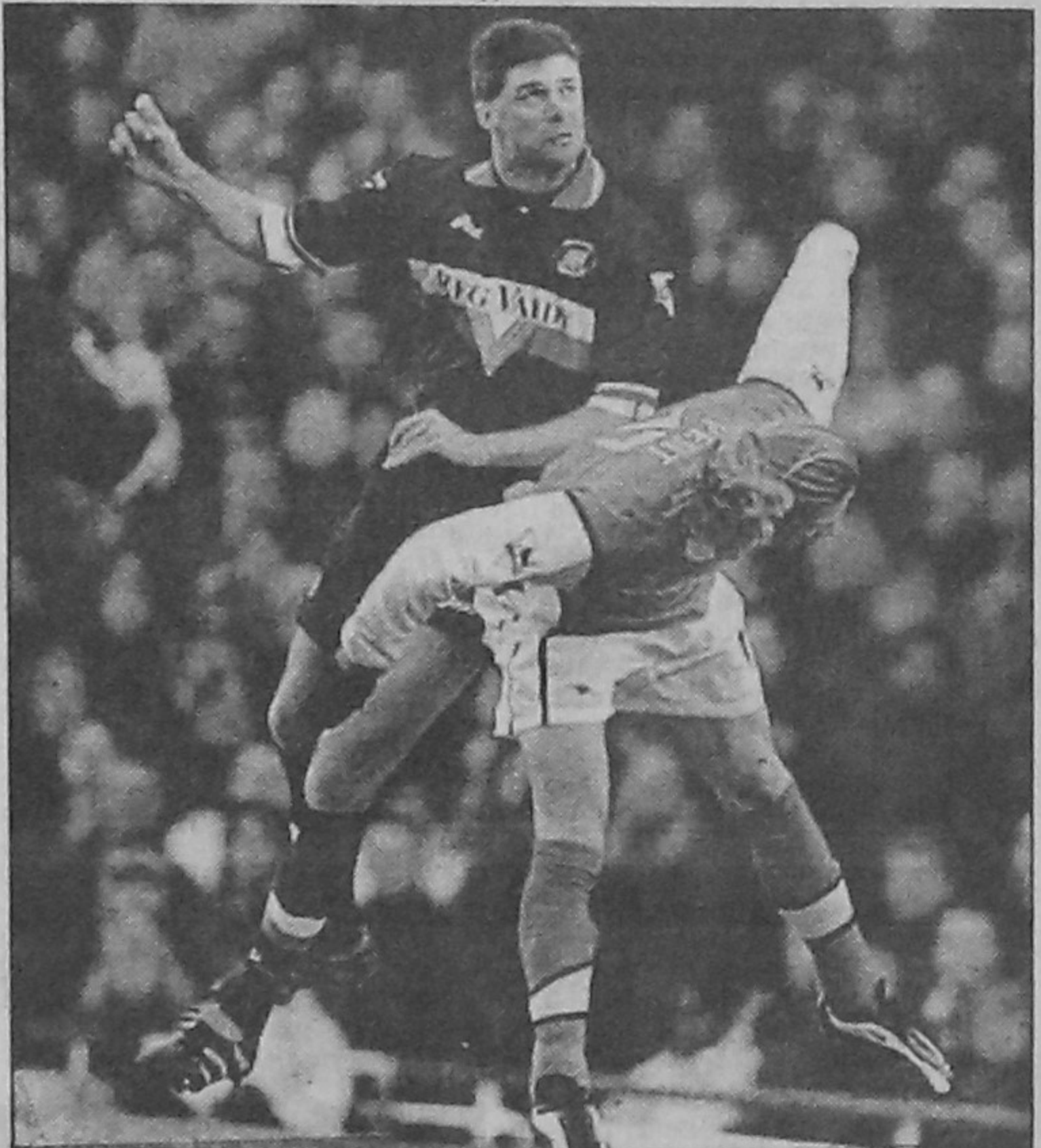
West Ham also grabbed a late point when fiery Italian striker Paolo di Canio levelled with minutes remaining after David James spilled Steve Lomas' cross at his feet - Di Canio was later involved in a push and shove display with James at the final whistle.

Aston Villa had looked in command when Benito Carbone set up dynamic midfielder Ian Taylor for his ninth goal of the season and seventh in seven matches in the first-half.

Coventry eased home 2-0 over Wimbledon with the inspirational Gary McAllister converted a penalty for his 100th career league goal - he also set up Robbie Keane for the second.

Wednesday grabbed what could prove to be three vital points in their fight to avoid the drop with two second-half goals as Nicolas Alexandersson shot home from 10 yards past keeper Matt Clarke, a former Wednesday player.

The hosts added a second, after a series of embarrassing misses by Sibori, when Bradford defender Andy O'Brien scored a brilliant own goal volleying past Clarke from Ian Nolan's cross.



Sunderland's veteran Northern Ireland striker Niall Quinn (L) locked in a tussle with Emmanuel Petit of Arsenal during their Premiership game at Highbury on January 15.

— AFP photo

Matthaeus' ultimatum



MUNICH, Germany, Jan 16: Lothar Matthaeus, Bayern Munich's legendary German international, has issued an ultimatum to his club.

Matthaeus said on Saturday, before adding: "As I said in the past, I do want to come to New York."

Sunday January 23 is the date he has fixed for a gesture from New York, which also coincides with the end of a training camp at the Spanish resort of La Manga.

"Up till now, no one has contacted me. They have my telephone number and could ring me," said Matthaeus, who believed it was not up to him to ring the New York club.

On Friday, just hours after Matthaeus' concerns became

of five World Cups, is still supposed to make his MLS debut on March 18 against the Miami Fusion.

"I now want to consider my position in the next few days," Matthaeus said on Saturday, before adding: "As I said in the past, I do want to come to New York."

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LOTHAR MATTHAEUS

public, Major League Soccer (MLS) officials said they were still confident Matthaeus would join the American championship.

Master of lob dead

LYON, France, Jan 16: Former professional footballer Yves Mariot, who earned one international cap for France before retiring to run a Tote betting shop and cafe, died Saturday in hospital here at the age of 51, reports AFP.

Mariot, who according to close relatives was admitted to hospital on Wednesday night with severe head injuries, had a trademark manoeuvre on the left wing which involved a neat lob using both feet to flick the ball over an opposing player's head.

His fleeting appearance on the international stage came in 1975 when French coach Stefan Kovacs picked him for a friendly against Portugal.

After stints with local clubs Nancy, Sedan and Lyon, Mariot moved to Bastia where his club career peaked, starting in the 1978 UEFA Cup final for the Corsican outfit against 3-0 winners PSV Eindhoven.

Nothing going right for Fiorentina

VENICE, Italy, Jan 16: Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni needs to find a quick answer to his team's problems or risk the embarrassment of losing twice to Venezia in the space of four days, reports AFP.

By a quirk of the fixture list, Fiorentina's 2-1 defeat on Saturday came in the run-up to their Italian Cup quarter-final, first leg here on Tuesday.

The league upset left Trapattoni with precious little time to find out what went wrong, as his team continue to under-perform in Italy.

In the Champions League, they have knocked out Arsenal and beaten holders Manchester United. But in the Serie A, they have 13 fewer points on the board than at this stage last season and scored 14 fewer goals.

And their poor showing here at the weekend against a team fighting to avoid relegation has only made things worse for their mystified coach.

"Now I'm going to have to ask the players what happened," he told reporters. "In the past, we haven't pushed forward enough in away matches, we've always seemed to have the brakes on."

"In this case, we didn't do that - but we were still too slow. I need to find out whether it's something physical or psychological."

He added: "We've got a few players coming back who have real personality (like Moreno Torricelli and Angelo Di Livio) and if it is a psychological problem, then we will already have found a solution."

Skipper and star striker Gabriel Batistuta, who scored Fiorentina's equaliser here - his ninth in 16 appearances - is also below-par compared to last season, when he notched 18 goals in 19 games.

Looking back at the first half of 1998-99, Trapattoni said: "At that time, we had players on excellent form and we had a great Batistuta... at the moment we are missing a lot of players."

World Club Championship

Edilson player of the tournament

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 16: Corinthians' striker Edilson was voted player of the inaugural FIFA World Club Championship on Saturday - a day after helping them beat Brazilian rivals Vasco da Gama on penalties in the final, reports AFP.

Edilson, who scored two goals in the tournament, received 221 votes from the 1000 journalists covering the event while Vasco's Brazilian international striker Edmundo, who also netted twice including a brilliant individual effort against Manchester United, finished runner-up with 189 votes.

Keane keen to end in Scotland

LONDON, Jan 16: Manchester United captain Roy Keane has revealed he would like to finish off his career at Celtic, reports AFP.

United won their battle to keep 28-year-old Keane at Old Trafford last month when he signed a lucrative new deal.

But Keane will be only 31 when that runs out, and a move to Celtic then clearly appeals.

"I've got another three years left after this season but whether I'll be in the team then I really don't know," said Keane. "I'm not one for looking too far ahead but if in two to three years my contract was up again I wouldn't mind a transfer to Celtic," he told the Sunday Mirror.

"That would be nice to finish my career off."

China shock Uruguay

GUANGZHOU, China, Jan 16: Veteran striker Hao Haidong scored on a superb toe flick to lead hosts China to a 1-0 upset win over Uruguay Sunday in the championship final of the Four Nations friendly tournament, reports AFP.

Cheered on by a roaring home crowd, the Chinese went ahead for good with an almost miraculous goal in the fourth minute.

All alone on the attack, Hao raced into the penalty area, collected an aerial pass launched from mid-field and calmly looped it high over the head of the onrushing goalkeeper.

Uruguay came back strong, manufacturing several excellent scoring opportunities before the interval, but neither side were able to make good of their chances in the remainder of the hard-fought match.

The South American powerhouse brought only five national team regulars, with the remainder mainly consisting of young talent fighting for the country's under-23 Olympic team.

Nonetheless, the championship trophy for China, who beat New Zealand by the same score on Friday, represents a moral victory as they head into qualifiers for the Asian Cup later this month against Vietnam, the Philippines and Guam.

Following its failure to secure a berth in the Sydney Games, China last month sacked British head coach Bobby Houghton and on Saturday inked a two-year contract with well-travelled Serb coach Bora Milutinovic.

But it was interim co-coaches Jin Zhiyang and Chi Shangkun who guided them in the Four Nations tournament.



Bologna's former Brazilian international Ze Elias (L) under pressure from Duccio Innocenti of Bari during their Serie A clash at Bologna on January 15.

— AFP photo

European soccer scene

UNDATED, Jan 16 (Reuters): Venezia shocked Fiorentina in the Italian Serie A, while in Spain, Atletico Madrid held Rayo Vallecano. Away in France leaders Monaco had an impressive victory in Saturday's action around the continent.

SERIE A

Filippo Maniero scored deep into injury time to give relegation threatened Venezia a 2-1 win over 10-man Fiorentina.

Maniero took advantage of a gaping hole in the Fiorentina defence to stroke home a volley with the inside of his right foot in the fourth minute of time added on.

Fiorentina centre back Aldo Friscano had been sent off for a tackle from behind moments earlier and his absence in the heart of the visiting defence was keenly felt.

Venezia had taken the lead after 14 minutes through midfielder Sergio Volpi. He hammered a shot past goalkeeper Francesco Toldo from 20 metres after Fiorentina had made a mess of clearing their lines.

Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta pulled Fiorentina level on the stroke of halftime with his ninth league goal of the season, a simple close-range header at the back post after a cross by Andrea Tarozzi.

Venezia, with only three wins from 16 matches before Saturday, had by far the better of the match and would have wrapped up their victory earlier had it not been for Toldo's fine performance between the posts.

Fiorentina have not won away in the league for almost a year. Their defeat was their fifth in Serie A this season and leaves them adrift in ninth place in the 18-team league.

In Saturday's other match, Bologna stole a goal from Bari two minutes from time when Giuseppe Signori converted a low pass from Ze Elias.

PRIMERA LIGA

Manaco's magic pair of David Tezeguet and Marco Simone struck again as their side beat Stade Rennes 3-1 to stretch their lead to 10 points in the French first division.

Tezeguet, who scored twice in the opening 17 minutes, and Simone, who made it three before halftime, have scored 29 goals between them this season.

"We have opened the gap we wanted on our rivals," Simone

Spain striker Kiko Narvaez stole the individual spotlight for Rayo Vallecano as they drew 1-1 with Atletico Madrid in a dull derby.

Kiko showed glimpses of his mastery in his most impressive display since making his comeback just before Christmas after a 13-month absence through injury.

The striker was the architect of Atletico's 27th minute goal when he held off Rayo midfielder Helder Domingos before cleverly splitting the defence for Carlos Aguilera to sweep his shot over goalkeeper Kasey Keller.

Rayo equalised in the 31st minute when Atletico's Paraguayan defender Carlos Alberto Gamarra handled in the area and wing-back Carlos Llorens blasted the spot kick home off the crossbar.

Kiko, who has yet to regain full match fitness, was eventually replaced by midfielder Roberto Fresnedoso in the 80th minute.

The Atletico player's contribution proved vital as top scorer Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink struggled to make any impact thanks to effective marking by Rayo defenders David Clotet and Jean-Francois Hernandez.

The result lifted Rayo to fourth in the table with 30 points, seven behind leaders Deportivo Coruna, while Atletico rose two places to 12th.

FRENCH FIRST DIVISION

Monaco's magic pair of David Tezeguet and Marco Simone struck again as their side beat Stade Rennes 3-1 to stretch their lead to 10 points in the French first division.

Tezeguet, who scored twice in the opening 17 minutes, and Simone, who made it three before halftime, have scored 29 goals between them this season.

"We have opened the gap we wanted on our rivals," Simone

said. "It is crucial to score as many points as you can against teams who are not in contention for the title."

Coach Claude Puel said: "We relaxed a little bit after the first goal but we cannot complain. It is nice to have such a lead as we can now afford a couple of mishaps."

Argentine Marcello Gallardo set up Monaco's first goal with a superb cross for Trezeguet to volley home.

Ludovic Giuly, like Gallardo a highly influential player, crossed for Trezeguet who made it two from close range eight minutes later.

And Gallardo was again the provider for Simone's goal just before halftime.

Rennes, reduced to 10 men after Elhadji Diouf was sent off, had to be content with a consolation goal scored by Christophe Le Roux in the 51st minute.

Olympique Lyon, who have scored only 27 goals this season, lost second spot to Auxerre who beat them 2-0. Both sides trail Monaco by 10 points.

Olivier Kapo scored Auxerre's first in the 26th minute and Steve Marlet the second from a free kick after 68 minutes.

The dismissal of Auxerre defender Laurent Ciecelski 10 minutes from time came too late to help Lyon.

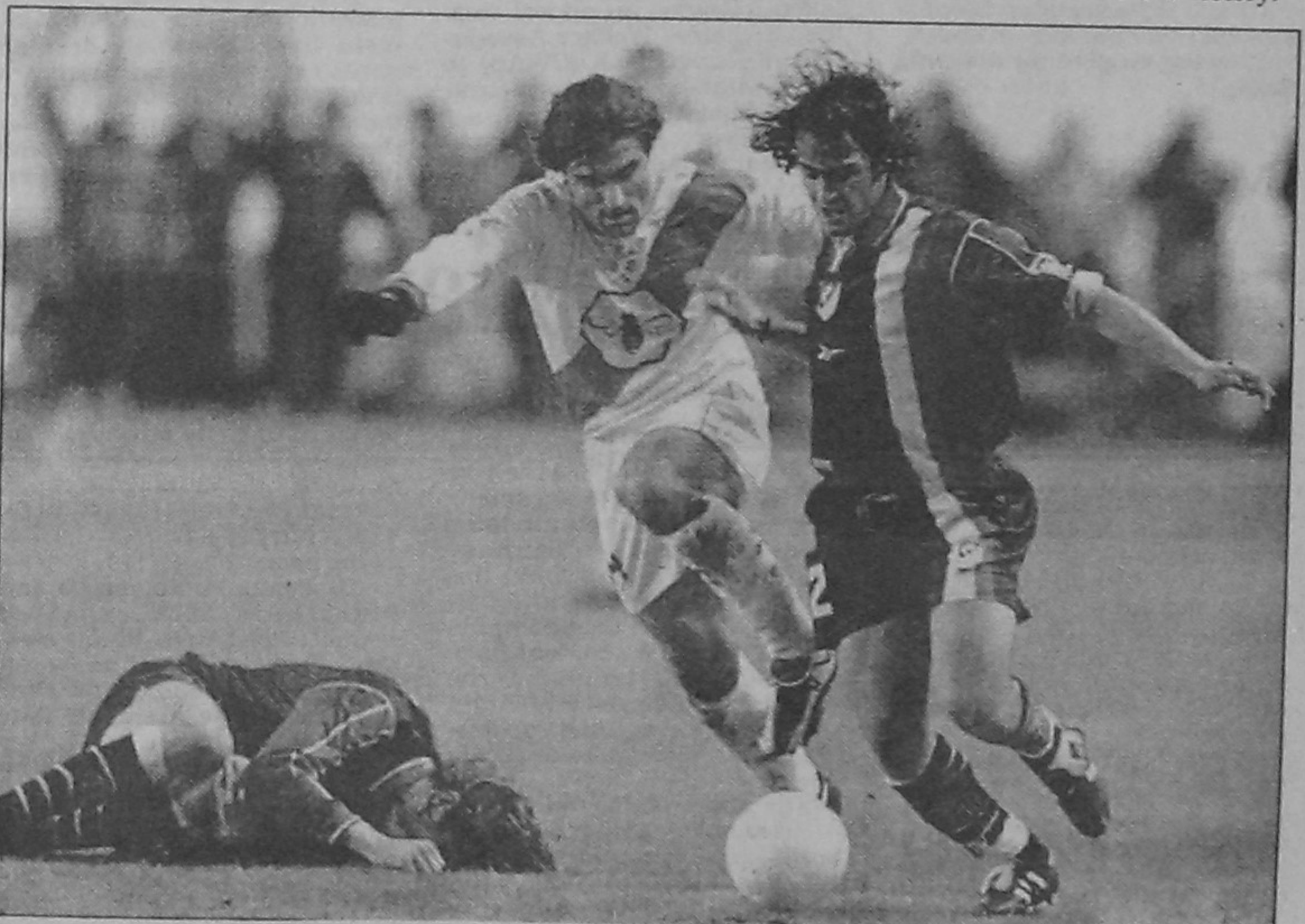
"It was not easy... it's a victory we won with our guts," said Auxerre coach Guy Roux.

Paris St Germain could close the gap on Monaco when they travel to Girondins Bordeaux today. They lie fourth on 37 points.

Nante's Antoine Sibierski scored twice, from a 22nd minute penalty and a header early in the second half, in a 3-0 victory over Troyes.

Sibierski then set up the third goal for Frederic Da Rocha on the hour.

Nancy beat Bastia for their fourth consecutive 1-0 victory.



Atletico Madrid's Argentine recruit Hernan Solari (L) lies on the ground while teammate Hugo Leal (R) battles for possession with Rayo Vallecano's Luis Zambrano during their Primera Liga encounter at Madrid on January 15.

— AFP photo

AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

VIGO, Spain, Jan 16: Celta Vigo's French goalkeeper Richard Dutruel, who was tipped to join Spanish Primera Liga rivals Barcelona next season, has told club bosses that he would reconsider if the offer was right, the Spanish press reported Saturday.

"I'm giving the club another chance to keep me," said Dutruel. "They know that I've had offers from major European clubs. If they give me an offer which matches that which I have given them, then I'll consider staying with Celta."

The 27-year-old former keeper with French side Paris Saint Germain has come under increasing pressure from Celta fans because of his reported move to reigning champions Barcelona and his team's poor showing in the Spanish league with three defeats in four matches.

Dutruel, who joined Celta in 1996, said he was the scapegoat for the team's woes, but had not yet signed a deal with any other club and was willing to stay put if the price was right.

FIGO PORTUGUESE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LISBON: Luis Figo, captain of Spanish side Barcelona has received the Portuguese player

of the year title for the fifth consecutive year.

The 27-year-old was awarded the title Saturday by Portugal's leading sports journalists.

Benfica's 23-year-old midfielder Nuno Ribeiro was given the newcomer of the year title.

ENGLAND FANS GIVE THUMBS-UP TO EINDHOVEN

THE HAGUE: The English Football Supporters' Association (FSA) have given the thumbs-up to the Dutch town where England will launch their Euro 2000 bid, the ANP agency reported here Saturday.

Representatives from the FSA visited Eindhoven Friday to meet with police and local groups and carry out an inspection of the venue which will stage England's June 12 clash against Portugal.

A FSA spokesman said that they did not foresee any problems, particularly as the stadium resembled many English grounds.

The delegation will travel to

the Belgian town of Charleroi in the