

## Sport

## Barnes fired

GLASGOW, Feb 11: Glasgow's Celtic sacked their coach John Barnes on Thursday after four months in charge of the Scottish Premiership club, reports AFP.

Barnes, 36, a former Liverpool and England winger, paid the ultimate price for an embarrassing 3-1 home defeat to Division One side Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the third round of the Scottish Cup on Tuesday night.

Director of Football Operations Kenny Dalglish will take temporary control of the club.

Celtic have also terminated the contract of Barnes' assistant Eric Black with immediate effect while Terry McDermott, also on the coaching staff, is leaving by mutual agreement.

Dalglish said: "It gives me no pleasure in any way shape or form to make this announcement. I think the three lads are tremendous fellows."

John Barnes is an admirable fellow and someone I think will go on in later years and establish himself as very successful in coaching or managing a football club.

In future years he will be successful. Unfortunately it will not be at Celtic Football Club.

## Chilavert to make International return

ASUNCION, Feb 11: Paraguayan goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert will line up for the national squad against Hungary here on Sunday. It was confirmed on Thursday, reports AFP.

Voted the best goalkeeper during the 1998 World Cup, Chilavert missed the Copa America in his home country last year because of political disputes with the Paraguayan Football Association.

## Gremio play down Ronaldinho move

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 11: Porto Alegre-based Brazilian club Gremio denied Thursday that they had received any bid from Spanish giants Barcelona for their young strike prodigy Ronaldinho, reports AFP.

Ronaldinho - no relation to the Inter Milan star known by the same name in Brazil but as Ronaldo to the rest of the world - has caught the eye of many foreign coaches since graduating to the Brazilian national team just before last summer's successful Copa America campaign.

"Gremio have received no offer from Barcelona at this moment of time," said the Brazilian club's president Jose Guarnieri.

Earlier Thursday Spanish sports paper AS said that Barca were interested in bringing Brazilian star striker Ronaldinho to the Primera Liga.

Ronaldinho - born Ronaldo de Assis Moreira - is known globally as Ronaldinho Assis and Ronaldinho Gaucha to distinguish him from his more illustrious namesake.

The two players also resemble each other - both have crew cuts, heavy-lidded eyes and gap-toothed smiles, although Ronaldinho is less mischievous than the Inter Milan star.

Barcelona's scouting team have been in Brazil watching the Latin American Olympic qualifying tournament and once more the Gremio forward caught the eye.

Since last summer he has been rumoured as a target for European clubs and Gremio officials have in the past slapped him with some would say ridiculous - 72 million dollars - price tag on his head. In the unlikely event of that price being met, it would be a world record.

## Italian Cup semis

## Lazio just too strong

ROME, Feb 11: Local favourites Lazio hardly broke sweat here Thursday as they romped to a 5-0 victory in their Italian Cup semi-final first leg match with unfashionable Venezia, reports AFP.

The Roman outfit all but booked a place in the Final, probably against Inter Milan who dispatched Cagliari 3-1 in their first leg match on Wednesday.

Lazio were formidable from the start even though they had rested several first team players, notably Chilean striker Marcelo Salas and Italian defender Alessandro Nesta.

It took 13 minutes for the floodgates to open when veteran striker Roberto Mancini, who has said he will quit playing at the end of the season, put the Biancocelesti ahead.

The same player struck again 10 minutes later and before the half-hour mark Yugoslav star Sinisa Mihajlovic, rated as the best freekick taker in the world, made it 3-0.

Fabrizio Ravanelli could even afford to squander a penalty at the end of the first period although Venezia goalkeeper Fabrizio Casazza deserved credit for the save.

The penalty had been awarded for a foul by Venezia's French defender Bruno N'Gotty on Lazio's Czech star Pavel Nedved.

After 58 minutes Lazio were again awarded a spot kick and this time it was dead ball specialist Mihajlovic who volunteered for service and he showed Ravanelli how to do it with a perfect spot kick.

The lesson in finishing seemed to pay off as Ravanelli rounded off the scoring with his side's fifth with two minutes remaining.

Only 8,000 fans bothered to turn up at the Stadio Olimpico and in truth the Venezia players must have bothered if the effort had been worth it.



Rigobert Song (L) of Cameroon battling for control against Tunisia's Jaziri Zied during their African Nations' Cup semifinal at Accra on February 10. —AFP photo

## African Nations' Cup

## Lions set up final clash with Eagles



ACCRA, Feb 11: Cameroon and Nigeria, two of African soccer's most entertaining teams, clashed through their Nations' Cup semifinals on Thursday to set up an intriguing finale to the tournament, reports Reuters.

Cameroon overcame Tunisia 3-0 in a match that produced the ultimate clash of styles. Italy-based Patrick Mboma getting on the score-sheet twice in Accra as the Indomitable Lions swept aside the rank outsiders in the second half.

Co-hosts Nigeria beat South Africa 2-0, playing in front of a packed 60,000 crowd in Lagos after the Confederation of African Football (CAF) backed down from their threat to make them play in an empty stadium.

The Super Eagles opened their box of tricks in the second half after Tijani Babangida scored in the first and 34th minutes to leave the Bafana Bafana down and out in Lagos before halftime.

Nigeria and Cameroon meet in Lagos on Sunday while the losers contest the third-place match in Accra on Saturday.

**CAMEROON-TUNISIA** The Accra match brought the attacking, skillful style of the Indomitable Lions face to face with the dour North Africans, whose inherently

rigid style has been made even more defensive by the influence of Italian coach Francesco Scoglio.

Scoglio's disciplined tactics had helped take Tunisia's limited squad further than expected, with the help of two 1-0 wins, a goalless draw and a 4-2 defeat by Nigeria.

Tunisia, beaten finalists in 1996, had the better of the first half hour, surprisingly taking the game to their opponents and carving out several clearcut chances which they were unable to convert.

They paid the price in the 49th minute when Mboma, who scorned several chances in previous games, fired Cameroon in front after the Tunisia defence failed to clear a long throw by Pierre Wome.

In the final 10 minutes the Cagliari striker set up the second for Real Madrid's Samuel Eto'o then scored the third as both he and Eto'o took their tallies in the tournament to three.

"This was a tactical duel between two teams who coaches come from different schools of thinking," said Cameroon coach Pierre Lechantre.

Cameroon returned to the final after a 12-year absence, having taken part in three successive finals between 1984 and 1988 when they won two and lost one.

Scoglio said: "We lost the match in the first half because

we missed too many chances."

## NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA

In Lagos, Ajax striker Babangida gave Nigeria a dream start, scoring in less than one minute with a run and shot from the edge of the penalty area.

He then side-footed home a second half an hour later, allowing Nigeria to relax and play some classy soccer for the remainder of the match.

South Africa, winners at home in 1996 and runners-up in Burkina Faso two years ago, created several chances midway through the second half but wasted them all.

Nigeria fans were allowed to watch their side's triumph despite the pitch invasion which halted their team's quarterfinal against Senegal for 10 minutes in the same stadium on Monday.

After crowd threw bottles on to the pitch during a group match against Congo, CAF had warned that Nigeria could play behind closed doors if there was further trouble. However, they let the co-hosts off with a small fine.

Nigeria effectively reached their second consecutive final. After beating Zambia to win in 1994 they refused to play in South Africa two years later and were banned as a punishment from taking part in Burkina Faso.

## Club-nation battle for Rivaldo, Roberto Carlos

MADRID, Feb 11: Eternal Primera Liga rivals Barcelona and Real Madrid are locked in a battle with Brazil Thursday over the release of their respective star players Rivaldo and Roberto Carlos for an international match between Brazil and Thailand, reports AFP.

The match is scheduled for February 23 just three days before the biggest rivals in Spanish football meet in a First Division match.

Barca boss Louis Van Gaal made his displeasure known at having to release Rivaldo, named last month as FIFA's World Player of the Year.

Van Gaal said: "This can not continue. Clubs spend millions on players. The player is in a difficult situation because he can not refuse to play for Barcelona or for the national team. It's very negative."

Meanwhile, Real president Lorenzo Sanz sighed: "We have already denounced this sort of thing several times."

Both players have made it clear they will never refuse a call-up to the national team with Real defender Roberto Carlos saying: "I would never refuse a call-up. To wear the national team shirt is a pleasure and an honour."

Rivaldo said he wanted to play both for Brazil against Thailand and for Barca against Real. He said: "I do not get tired in planes. Let everybody stop worrying. I will come back from Bangkok and will arrive in time to play the match [against Real]."

There has been speculation that the two Spanish clubs - sworn enemies - have been trying to interfere with the selections of Brazil coach Wanderley Luxemburgo.

Daily sports paper Marca claimed that Roberto Carlos was not originally selected for the Thailand match but was added to the squad after pressure from Barcelona to ensure that their rivals too would be deprived of a key player.

An indication of the mistrust between the Meringues and the Catalans was given by Real vice-president Juan Onieva when asked if Real and Barca might make common cause and refuse to release their players.

Onieva said: "We have no confidence in Barca. They would betray us."

## Seville president quits

SEVILLE, Spain, Feb 10: Rafael Carrion quit Thursday as president of Seville, who are bottom of Spain's Primera Liga, reports AFP.

## Spanish Cup qtrs

## Barca lesson for Osasuna

PAMPLONA, Spain, Feb 11: Barcelona virtually assured themselves of a Spanish Cup semifinal spot on Thursday when they beat Second Division Osasuna 4-0 in the first leg of their quarterfinal clash, reports Reuters.

The Spanish league champions only exerted their superiority in the final 30 minutes and Osasuna, currently ninth in the Spanish Second Division, were their equal for the majority of the game.

Several chances went begging for Osasuna in the first half when only bad luck and poor finishing stopped them finding the net.

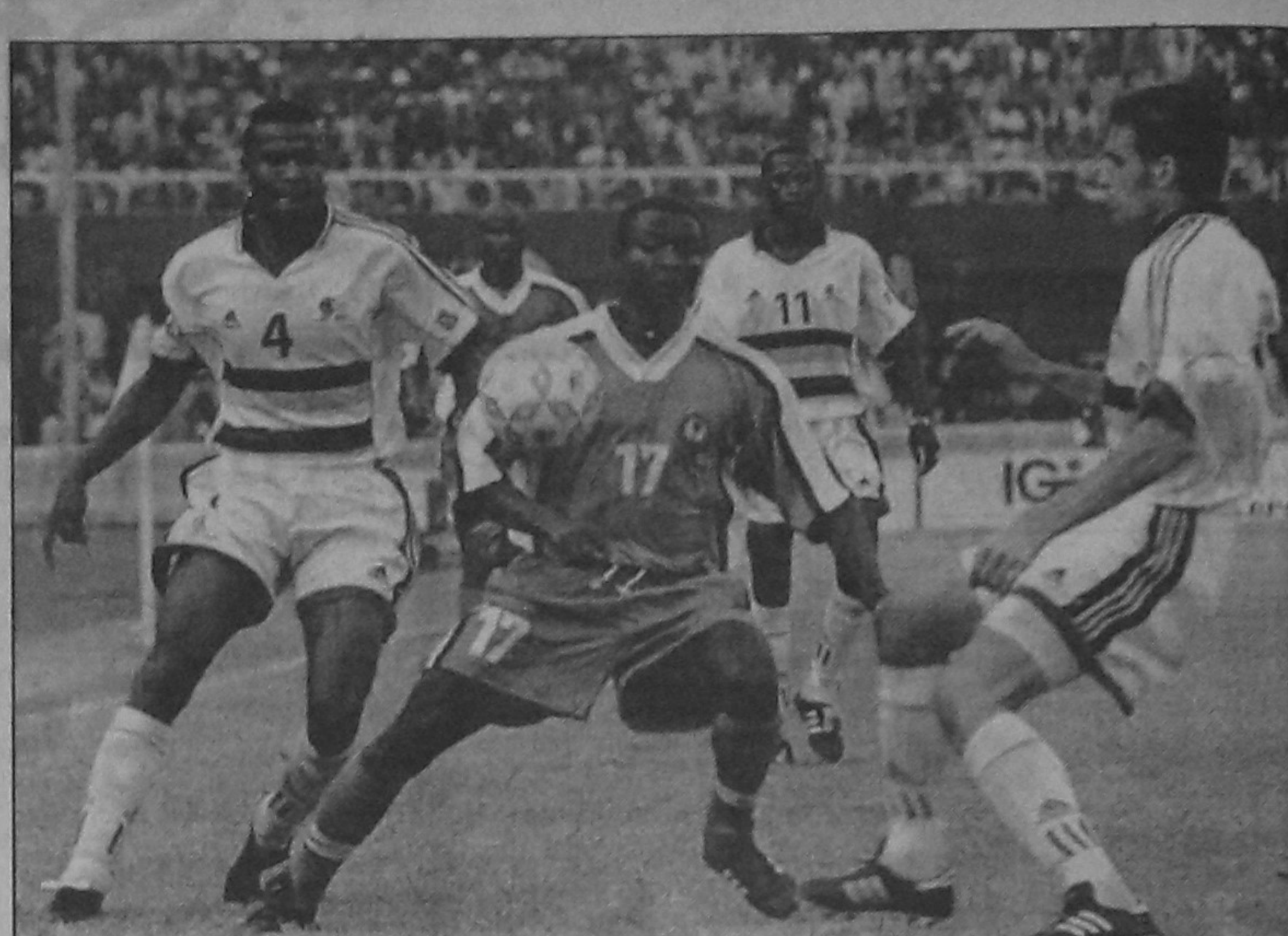
However the tide started to turn in Barcelona's favour with Luis Enrique Martinez's first goal after 36 minutes.

Luis Enrique drove forward to the edge of the box and found Rivaldo out wide on the left. The Spanish international midfielder then found space in front of the Osasuna goal and side-footed the Brazilian's cross into the net.

Barcelona's second goal also came from Luis Enrique just after the hour.

He chested down a long ball from the midfield and then volleyed past Osasuna goalkeeper Ricardo Sanz.

Dani Garcia struck a vicious swerving long-range shot after 74 minutes and Dutch international Patrick Kluyvert completed the scoring with a goal a minute into injury time, when he finished off a Rivaldo pass.



Nigeria's teenage sensation Julius Aghahowa (C) being closely marked by South Africans Issa Pierre (R) and Lucas Radebe during their African Nations' Cup semifinal at Lagos on February 10. —Internet photo

## Football power unites Nigeria



LAGOS, Feb 11 (AFP): In the often divided city of Lagos, in the often divided country of Nigeria, football is more than a national sport. When the home team is winning, it is a power in uniting the nation.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, just recovering from more than 15 years of hardline military rule, is regularly the scene of ethnic and community conflicts between its two main religions and more than 200 ethnic groups.

In the semi-desert north, mainly Muslim Hausa speakers dominate. In the tropical south, largely Christian Yorubas and Ibos are the main groups. Dozens of other communities vie for a place.

Many Nigerians despair at their country, riven by ethnic and political divides.

When the national Super Eagles team performs badly, the despair can be frightening. After a draw against lowly Congo in the opening stages of the African Cup of Nations last week, fans threw bottles onto the pitch and attempted to attack the players.

But wins against Morocco, Senegal and South Africa this week have put the team, replete with stars used to playing in the European leagues, into the final against Cameroon Sunday, uniting the country.

In the semi-final against

South Africa Thursday, 40,000 cheering, drumming, horn-blowing fans packed into Nigeria's National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos, chanting "Up Nigeria, Up Nigeria" and singing the national anthem.

"Nigeria, Nigeria. I love my country," screamed Bola Ayodele, her face painted in the green and white of the flag.

In a country that only 30 years ago fought a bloody civil war to stop the eastern Ibo people from seceding, two of the top stars - Nwankwo Kanu who plays for England's Arsenal, and Augustine Jay Jay Okocha, of France's PSG - are Ibo.

Teenage goal sensation Julius Aghahowa, renowned for his post-goal backflips, is from the Bini people of Benin City. The two-goal hero of Thursday's match, Tijani Babangida, of Dutch side Ajax, is a northern Hausa.

Captain Sunday Oliseh comes from the minority Delta region, while midfielder Mutiu Adegboye and goalkeeper Ike Shorunmu are southwestern Yorubas.

"We are one big, happy family," Babangida told AFP Friday, still basking in Thursday's win.

"When I'm playing for the Super Eagles I'm first a Nigerian and then a Hausa man," he said.

"Among my best friends in the team is Emmanuel Amunike, who is Ibo. We have played for various Nigerian teams since 1990 and we have

stayed together in victory and in defeat," he said.

"As a group, we cannot be more united," said striker Benedict Akwuegbu, an Ibo who also speaks Hausa fluently. "We may have our differences but mostly these have to do with the football itself, not with whether you are from the north or south," he said.

Even the songs sung on the terraces are sung in Nigeria's different languages, including "Ose O" or "Thank you, God" sung in Yoruba when the team has won.

"God blessed Nigeria with oil and football," said Lagos lawyer and football fan Ahmed Maiwada after Thursday's match.

Nigeria may have its problems, but Maiwada noted: "When we are winning on the soccer pitch, we all forget our problems and differences. At that time we are united as we could possibly be as a people." According to Paul Hamilton, a former Super Eagles coach, it is Nigeria's bad political leadership and economic decline that have exacerbated its ethnic divides. Good times, like football, erase those ideas.

"In Nigeria, football is the unifying factor. Whenever an organised match is being played anywhere in this country, people from the different ethnic groups come together," he told AFP.

"When the victory they hope for comes they are united, as if they are from the same womb."

## Primera Liga preview

## Numancia trial for Deportivo



MADRID, Feb 11 (Reuters / Internet): Spanish leaders Deportivo Coruna face a tricky test at Numancia on Sunday (kickoff 1830 GMT) after reversing their recent indifferent form with a 5-2 thrashing of Real Madrid last weekend. Numancia have remained unbeaten in the First Division this season at their home Los Pajaritos stadium -- capacity 10,000 and the smallest venue in the top flight.

Barcelona and Real Madrid are among the clubs who have failed to defeat the team guided by former Spanish international Andoni Goikoetxea.

"Deportivo will want to do well here but we are prepared to fight, fight and fight again," Goikoetxea warned. Deportivo believe they can end Numancia's 11-game unbeaten streak.

"Of course, we can win at Numancia," said Deportivo's Dutch striker Roy Makaay. "We are motivated as well by what happened in our Riazor stadium earlier in the season," he added.

Back in September, Numancia managed a rare away victory, winning 2-0.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta is expected to name an unchanged team, although a space may be found on the bench for Cesar Martin, out for four months because of a pelvic injury.

Numancia central defender Ivan Rocha is injured and Goikoetxea is undecided about who will replace suspended first-choice goalkeeper Alvaro Nunez.

**Other matches (league positions in parentheses; kickoff times 1600 GMT Sunday unless stated):**

**VALLADOLID (14) v VALENCIA (7) (Saturday, 1700)**

Valladolid have lost once in their last 10 games. Valencia going for third consecutive league win despite suspension of impressive young striker Gerard Lopez, erratic form of goalkeeper Santiago Canizares and uncertainty over the future of top striker Claudio Lopez.

**ATHLETIC BILBAO (6) v REAL MALLORCA (10) (Saturday, 2000)**

Athletic's Spanish international winger Joseba Etxeberria faces late fitness test after suffering back problems. Mallorca have only won once in 13 league visits to the San Mames stadium - nearly 40 years ago.

**REAL MADRID (8) v MALAGA (12) (Saturday, 2000)**

Real Madrid's key defender Michel Salgado suspended and striker Fernando Morientes

faces late fitness test. Malaga defender Fernando Sanz, son of Real Madrid president, makes emotional return to the club where he spent all his professional career before moving last close season. Malaga not won at the Bernabeu in 20 league visits.

**CELTA VIGO (4) v REAL SOCIEDAD (19)**

Dressing room disputes threaten to disrupt Celta's title challenge. Yugoslav defender Goran Djorovic suspended by the club. Real Sociedad, without an away league win this season, have Spanish international midfielder Francisco de Pedro set to return after almost three months out injured.

**REAL ZARAGOZA (2) v RACING SANTIANDER (18)**

Zaragoza unbeaten at home this season. Rayo have lost six of their 11 away games. Zaragoza missing Brazilian striker Poalo Jamelli because of a hamstring injury. Rayo defender Carlos Lorens suspended.

**RACING SANTIANDER (18) v ATLETICO MADRID (13)**

Racing's Salva Ballesta and Atletico's Jimmy Floyd Hasselbank, First Division's two marksmen, hoping to unravel two of the poorest defences.

Atletico's problems at the back aggravated by suspension of former Spain international Carlos Aguilera.

**ESPANYOL (15) v SEVILLA (20)**

Sevilla have impressed few this season but struggling Sevilla have only scrambled three points away. Key defender Cristobal Parralo fully fit and ready to return for Espanyol.

**ALAVES (5) v REAL OVIEDO (16)** Surprise package Alaves should be too well organised to allow Oviedo first away win of season. Alaves defenders Cosmin Contra and Antonio Karmونا expected to return to the line-up.

**REAL BETIS (17) v BARCELONA (3)**

Barcelona, winners on their last three league trips to Seville, bidding to re-start title challenge after surprise 1-0 defeat by Alaves last Sunday. Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal may keep Dutch compatriot Ruud Hesp in goal after a good display in Thursday's 4-0 Spanish Cup win over Osasuna.

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