

White House dinner beckons Keller

MADRID, Feb 12 (Reuters/Internet): Rayo Vallecano's American goalkeeper Kasey Keller has been invited to a White House dinner with the king and queen of Spain, Marca reported on Saturday.

Keller, in exceptional form for the Madrid club since signing from Leicester City in the close season, will join the Spanish royals at dinner on February 23.

"This is a great honour for me," Keller was quoted as saying by Marca. "To tell the truth, at first I thought it was a joke, but now I realise it's not I'm very happy."

"It's not every day you get the chance to have dinner at the White House."

Keller has been given permission by the club to attend the function, which is conveniently taking place on a free Wednesday for Rayo, ninth in the Spanish first division.

WC 2006

CAF undecided about support

LAGOS, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): The Confederation of African Football (CAF) will support one of Africa's two bids for the 2006 World Cup finals after FIFA inspection visits to Morocco and South Africa.

CAF general-secretary Mustapha Fahmy said on Saturday that his organisation would make its decision after studying the inspection reports, but would not tell the other candidate to withdraw.

CAF has consistently promised to pronounce themselves in favour of one of the two African bids -- the others are Brazil, England and Germany -- but has delayed an announcement despite pressure from both Morocco and South Africa.

"We don't understand why everyone wants us to proclaim in favour of one of the two candidates when no one is making a fuss about their being two European countries bidding for 2006," Fahmy said.

"But maybe, and I underline the word maybe, it's important for us to make a stand and we'll wait to study the reports from the inspection trips before taking a decision."

"Even then, we could never tell a sovereign country to withdraw from the race. We have asked both countries before to stand down in favour of the other but if they both want to continue, that's their right."

Both Morocco and South Africa are due to receive inspection visits from FIFA next month but any endorsement from CAF would not be forthcoming until June, when their executive committee next meets.

That would be less than a month before the FIFA executive committee votes to decide the destiny of the 2006 World Cup in Zurich on July 6.

Last month, CAF president Issa Hayatou admitted he was in a quandary over the need for the African soccer authority to endorse one of the candidates.

"But what must I do?" he asked a media conference in Accra before the start of the African Nations Cup finals. "You tell me, maybe you've got the solution."

Fish ends international career

ACCRA, Feb 13: Mark Fish announced his retirement from international football on Saturday, citing distaste for the South African federation as the reason for his decision, reports Reuters.

The 25-year-old defender, who plays for Bolton in the English first division and has 58 caps, told Reuters: "I don't like the way the federation treat the coaching staff, or run football in South Africa."

The people that run South African football should not be there," Fish said he had asked coach Trott Moloto not to play him in the African Nations Cup third-place play-off against Tunisia, won 2-1 by South Africa, as he had an injured toe.

That means that Thursday's 2-0 semifinal defeat by Nigeria was his last game for the Bafana Bafana.

Fish said the decision to quit was a difficult one.

"All the European-based players love playing for our country, but a footballer's career is a short one."

"In the end we all have to look after ourselves first."

Fish said the time he had spent apart from his family had been a nightmare.

"I am a professional and can adapt to the change in climate for African football, but I spend a lot of time away from my wife and little one," he added.

As for Thursday's defeat he said: "You can't concede a goal after 40 seconds to that class of opposition and expect to get away with it, but we have never had to qualify for this tournament before and that was a major achievement."

"I sat down man-to-man with Trott Moloto, and told him I feel it is in my best interest to just worry about my club career."

"Making this announcement now means I won't play in South Africa's July tour," he said. "If I don't have an off-season this summer, I won't have had a rest for three years."

Fish said he hoped to be fit for Bolton's FA Cup quarter-final against Charlton Athletic next weekend.

European football scene

UNDATED, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): AC Milan went second in the Serie A, Real Madrid scraped through in the Primera Liga, Olympique Marseille were shown the door in the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich recorded a comfortable win during Saturday's action in Europe.

SERIE A

ROME: AC Milan moved second after surviving a Bologna

Struggling Verona picked up a useful point with a 1-1 draw at Bari.

New signing Domenico Morfeo gave Verona the lead in the 39th minute but Rachid Negrouz equalised five minutes later.

PRIMERA LIGA

MADRID: Argentine forward Rolando Zarate saved the day once again for Real Madrid by scoring a 75th-minute goal in a

the team's 1-0 victory over lowly Merida in the Copa del Rey quarterfinal first leg.

Elsewhere Saturday, Valladolid held Valencia to a 0-0 draw at home. Valencia stay with 33 points and Valladolid with 28.

In Bilbao, Diego Tristán had moments of glory and others of misery. He scored first to put Mallorca ahead in the 23rd minute but then equalised for

minutes from veteran Sénégal striker Amara Traoré to paved the way for Gueugnon's second round victory.

To score two goals from the start was the ideal scenario. Maybe in the end Gueugnon were simply too good for Marseille.

Marseille, who are having a disastrous season, were already out of the League Cup and they are closer in the standings to the relegation zone than a European qualifying place.

They are at home to their biggest rivals Paris St Germain, 2-0 winners at Fifth Division Beaune-les-Dames, in the First Division on Tuesday.

"I'm angry and a bit discouraged. We must react against PSG," Casoni said.

Marseille can take some heart from their fightback in the final half hour when they were goals down.

Former PSG striker Florian Maurice, making his first appearance for more than a month after injury, and Cyrille Pouge pulled back two quick goals. Defender Yannick Fischer added a third from a corner in injury time.

But Casoni said: "Success goes to those who are more daring. It's not 20 minutes from the end of the match that we should wake up."

Marseille were one of three First Division sides eliminated in the second round.

St Etienne, who have won the trophy six times, lost at home to second division Lorien 4-3 on penalties following a 0-0 draw on Friday.

Le Havre went down 1-0 away to third division Red Star who have won the trophy five times -- four in the 1920s.

Metz survived a scare at fourth division St Quentin, snatching an equaliser in the dying seconds of injury time before winning 3-1 after extra time.

Olympique Lyon, who have won the French Cup three times, beat Troyes 1-0 at home in the only all First Division tie of the second round.

France winger Tony Vareilles scored the only goal in the 22nd minute, volleying home a cross from the right by defender David Linare.

First Division leaders Monaco won 2-1 away to Third Division Thouars while defending league champions Girondins Bordeaux crushed Fourth Division Porto-Vecchio 4-1 in Corsica with two goals from substitute Christophe Dugarry.

Holders Nantes routed Sixth Division amateurs Montceau-les-Mines 6-0.

BUNDESLIGA

MUNICH: League-leading Bayern Munich became the first team in more than two years to beat Unterhaching at home, snapping their tiny neighbour's unbeaten home streak at 25 matches with a 2-0 victory.

Paulo Sergio and Mehmet Scholl scored for the winners.

No 2 Leverkusen -- three

points behind Munich -- edged VfB Stuttgart 1-0 on Paulo Rink's 72-minute goal. Borussia Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw by SSV Ulm at home as new coach Bernd Krauss was booted after just two weeks on the job. Other scores Saturday: Hansa Rostock 1, VfL Wolfsburg 1; MSV Duisburg 2, Eintracht Frankfurt 3.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

DUNDEE: Celtic moved to within seven points of leaders Rangers with a 3-0 victory at Dundee. In other Scottish Premier League results, Motherwell won 2-0 at Kilmarnock. St Johnstone's match with Hibernian was called off at halftime because of snow with the game tied 0-0.

1,000 Bundesliga appearances for Rehhagel

BERLIN, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): Kaiserslautern coach Otto Rehhagel, who made history this weekend with his 1,000th Bundesliga match, said he had enjoyed every bit of his prolific career and had no plans to retire.

"Everything was great, not only the happy times," Rehhagel said after his men's 2-1 victory over Arminia Bielefeld on Friday.

LINUPS

SOUTH AFRICA: Andre Arendse, Lucas Radebe, Mark Fish, Pierre Issa, Frank Schreman, Alex Bapela, Pollen Ndhlanya (Siyabonga Noymete, 51st), Eric Tinkler, Isaac Sha; Thabo Mngome (John Moshoeu, 21st), Shaun Bartlett.

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