

Southampton rope in Moroccan

LISBON, March 9: English Premiership strugglers Southampton signed Moroccan international defensive midfielder Tahar El Kalel from Portuguese giants Benfica on Thursday for a fee of around 400,000 pounds (550,000 dollars), reports AFP.

The 31-year-old, who played in both the 1994 and 1998 World Cup finals, said he should make his debut for Southampton on Saturday against Tottenham Hotspur.

"I am delighted with the contract because it suits everybody involved," he said.

The Southampton directors wanted it to go through quickly so I could play in the match with Spurs this weekend," he added.

Tahar, who also represented Morocco in the 1992, 98 and 2000 African Nations Cup finals, has been at Benfica since 1996 after a spell at Uniao Leiria.

Rennes striker apologises

RENNES, France, March 9: Rennes striker El Hadji Diouf, who was charged with involuntary wounding by French police after a car accident at the weekend, made an abject apology to his teammates and fans here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The 19-year-old Senegalese is to appear in court in April after the crash early Saturday morning which left four injured.

Diouf was also charged with driving one of the two cars involved in the collision without a licence.

"I present my excuses to all the people I have harmed, to Rennes football club, my manager and my teammates," said the contrite forward at a press conference.

He added: "As I'm still only 19 I also ask for the Rennes public to excuse me."

He promised in the future to set an example to the young.

Diouf, who joined the Breton side last year and who only suffered minor shoulder injuries in the accident, is likely to be hit by a stiff fine from his club.

Four thousand police officers for Euro 2000

THE HAGUE, March 9: Dutch police will have 4,000 officers on permanent duty to deal with trouble at the Euro 2000 finals in Holland and Belgium between June 10 and July 2, it was announced here Wednesday.

"We will have approximately 4,000 officers permanently active and in case of serious trouble, up to another 20,000 policemen will be called up for duty," announced police commissioner Theo Brekelmans.

Belgium are extremely sensitive to crowd violence after the Heysel disaster in 1985 when 39 Juventus supporters were crushed to death after fleeing from rampaging Liverpool supporters before the European Cup final.

The Heysel Stadium has been renamed Roi Baudouin and will host several matches during the tournament including the opening match on June 10 between Belgium and Sweden.

"We will implement a zero tolerance attitude towards any potential troublemakers. Euro 2000 must be a festival, but a safe festival," warned Dutch minister of the interior Peter van Zundert.

The Belgian and Dutch authorities will have a chance to test out their security measures on March 29 when Belgium host Holland in a friendly.

Hooligans may go to garages

BRUSSELS, Mar 9 (Reuters): The Belgian government is considering turning police garages into prison cells to cope with hundreds of arrests expected at the Euro 2000 soccer match between England and Germany, a newspaper said on Thursday.

Gendarmier Major Michel Rompen told Belgian paper De Morgen that at least 20,000 England fans were expected in Charleroi, south of Brussels, on June 17. Both England and Germany's supporters have a reputation for hooliganism.

"We expect that we may have to lock up more than a thousand hooligans," Rompen was quoted as saying.

"The local cells will be installed according to the legal requirements... That means they will have to have sufficient room and sanitary systems."

De Morgen said other Belgian cities hosting Euro 2000 matches -- Bruges, Liege and Brussels -- were also carrying out an inventory of all their available cells.

Rompen said Charleroi faced the problem of thousands of fans being unable to get into the 30,000-capacity stadium and wandering around the town instead.

Only 16 percent of seats have been reserved for the two teams' supporters, De Morgen said.

"They are not all hooligans but they will probably all run around the streets," he said.

"The mayor has said that there will be no general alcohol ban in the town. Our strategy is not based on overall bans but rather on immediate detention; zero tolerance of any disturbances."



THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC: Bayern fans display their gratitude to superstar Lothar Matthaeus at Munich on March 8. —AFP photo

Bayern's gift for Matthaeus

PARIS, March 9: The most capped player in footballing history made an emotional farewell to the European

game on Wednesday night as Lothar Matthaeus led Bayern Munich into the quarter-finals of the European Champions League with a 4-1 thrashing of Real Madrid, reports AFP.

Mehmet Scholl, Brazilian Giovane Elber and Alexander Zickler (2) ensured that Matthaeus was given the most rousing of sendoffs, scoring the goals as Bayern won the Group C second-phase match to join Barcelona in the last eight with two games still left to play.

"To say goodbye like this was extraordinary," said a clearly moved Matthaeus, who will join the New York/New Jersey MetroStars later in the week. "This night will remain with me a long, long time. I will never forget the reaction of the fans as I left the field."

"I thank the team and salute them for not getting distracted by the media hype surrounding my departure," Matthaeus added as he surveyed the dozens of banners proclaiming "thanks Lothar" in the stands.

Elber said Bayern had played out of their skins to make the occasion one of the greatest nights in the Bavarian history.

"We turned in a remarkable performance. Bayern Munich really proved they are one of the greatest teams in the world tonight," said the classy Brazilian forward.

Skipper Stefan Effenberg echoed that sentiment.

"We moved the ball around, rapidly creating decisive chances. And not just against anybody but against Real Madrid and remarkable players."

Bayern, beaten by Manchester United in last year's final, now have 10 points from four matches in Group C, ahead of seven-time European champions Real and Dynamo Kyiv, both on six. Rosenborg are out of contention on one.

AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS



FRANK LEBOEUF

not have the money to pay the big transfer fees or wages necessary to bring in the top players.

"I can't see myself leaving apart from going to Real Madrid where I have always dreamed of playing, but I don't think they would be interested in me."

"Last year we broke a lot of records: lowest number of goals conceded in a season, most consecutive games unbeaten and best defence in the Premiership which shows how we've steadied our defence."

"The problem is some of the players are getting on in age and also coming to the end of their contracts which could break up the stability of the team which we have to avoid."

"Myself, Didier, Marcel but also Wise (Chelsea captain Dennis) and Poyet (Uruguayan) are in that situation but for the good of the club we have to make this transition and

continue to build on what we've achieved and continue to take Chelsea forward."

ILLGNER OUT FOR FOUR WEEKS
MADRID: Real Madrid's second-choice German keeper Bodo Illgner who was injured in training on Monday will be out of action for four weeks, the Spanish club announced on Wednesday.

The 32-year-old veteran, who was a member of the German team that won the 1990 World Cup final, is suffering from severe arthritis in his shoulder.

Despite the fact that tests revealed there was no ligament damage, Illgner was ruled out of the key return leg match against Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Kyiv's second straight 2-1 win over Rosenborg knocks the Norwegian side out and lifts the Ukrainians level on six points with Real Madrid, beaten again by Bayern Munich.

Kyiv travel to Madrid next week after having lost 2-1 at home to the Spaniards. They have a better goal difference but will have to win in Spain to level the two rivals' head-to-head record.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

PARIS, March 9 (AFP): Colored results of European Champions League matches on Wednesday night:

- Group C**
In Trondheim, Norway: Rosenborg (Nor) 1 (Berg 38) Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) 2 (Rebrov 32, 67)
- In Munich, Germany**
Bayern Munich (Ger) 4 (Scholl 4, Elber 30, Zickler 79, 90) Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Helguera 69)
- Group D**
In London, England: Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Wise 27) Marseille (Fra) 0
- In Rotterdam, Netherlands**
Feyenoord (Ned) 0 Lazio (Ita) 0

Villa confident of keeping Carbone

LONDON, March 9: Aston Villa on Wednesday said they are confident Italian striker Benito Carbone will sign a long-term contract with the FA Cup semi-finalists before Saturday's Premiership match at home to Coventry, reports AFP.

Carbone only committed himself to Villa until the end of the season after signing from Sheffield Wednesday in October.

But Villa boss John Gregory is optimistic that the Italian will put pen to paper on a lucrative new deal by the weekend.

That will mean Villa will have to pay out another 750,000 pounds (1.2 million dollars) to Wednesday to add to their initial 250,000 pound (400,000 dollar) down payment as part of the agreement made when Carbone moved from Hillsborough.

It still represents a cut price capture for a player who would be worth several times that amount on the open market.

Carbone was originally understood to be looking for a 40,000 pound-a-week (64,000 dollar-a-week) deal but he has lowered his financial sights after Villa refused to break their wage ceiling.

Now Gregory is hopeful that another meeting with Carbone in the next 48 hours will be the last before he pledges his future to Villa.

Gregory said: "We've got another meeting later this week but I'm very hopeful that by the weekend Benito will have signed a long term contract with us."

"We have financial parameters that we still have to work within and we have a ceiling as to what we are prepared to pay players."

"But we are quite hopeful that everything will have been done and dusted by the Coventry game."

Rebrov inspires Kyiv

TRONDHEIM, Norway, March 9: A goal in either half from Serhi Rebrov handed Dynamo Kyiv a potentially life-saving 2-1 victory here Wednesday to get the Ukrainians back on track in Group C of the European Champions League, reports AFP.

Rebrov, a member of the side which reached the semi-finals last season alongside sidekick Andriy Shevchenko - who promptly left for AC Milan - struck in the 32nd minute with a neat header from a corner following a bright opening spell by the Norwegians.

Orjan Berg scrambled home the equaliser six minutes later and John Carew should have put the home side 2-1 to the good but he slid a close-range effort wide.

Rebrov was far more decisive as he netted the winner in the 67th minute, sliding in a loose ball from the edge of the box amid confusion in the Norwegian defence.

Kyiv's second straight 2-1 win over Rosenborg knocks the Norwegian side out and lifts the Ukrainians level on six points with Real Madrid, beaten again by Bayern Munich.

Kyiv travel to Madrid next week after having lost 2-1 at home to the Spaniards. They have a better goal difference but will have to win in Spain to level the two rivals' head-to-head record.



Dynamo Kyiv's star striker Serhi Rebrov is denied a goal as his header is stopped by Rosenborg custodian Arni Gautur Arnason at Trondheim on March 8. —AFP photo



Dennis Wise is over the moon after scoring against Marseille on March 8. —AFP photo

Wise wins it for chelsea

LONDON, March 9: Chelsea edged French side Marseille 1-0 in their European Champions League

Group D rematch at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday with England international midfielder Dennis Wise scoring the only goal of the game after 27 minutes, reports AFP.

Gianfranco Zola's header hit Wise on the back and the Chelsea captain reacted quickly to turn the ball smartly past goalkeeper Stephane Trevisan.

Marseille, however, were unlucky not to leave with a point with substitute Ivan de la Pena striking a post nine minutes from time and Ivory Coast international Ibrahim Bakayoko shooting inches past the post with seconds remaining.

Gianluca Vialli's side took revenge for their defeat by the same scoreline at the Stade Velodrome last Tuesday - when French international midfielder Robert Pires scored the winner.

The victory extended Chelsea's unbeaten home record in Europe to 33 games dating back to 1958.

Zola was full of praise for his captain, whose winning goal put Chelsea in a strong position to qualify for the last eight.

When asked if there is a better English midfielder in the country right now the Sardinian replied: "No, not at the moment. He is on top of his game and is a big influence on the team and it is no surprise that he is back in the England team."

He (Wise) is also playing with very good players around him, especially me!"

Frenchman Frank Leboeuf said, however, that there is still

a long way to go. "We go to Feyenoord next week and they have beaten both Marseille and Lazio away from home - and that is a better record than ours so we can take nothing for granted," he said. "We have got two very hard games ahead of us."

Uruguayan Gustavo Poyet shot powerfully wide in the first minute as the hosts gave an early warning to Bernard Canon's side.

But in their eagerness to get the better of the early exchanges, Chelsea had French international Didier Deschamps booked after eight minutes for a late challenge.

Four minutes later Norwegian international Tore Andre Flo broke free on the right wing and whipped in a low cross for Zola but his strike was smothered by Trevisan.

Poyet's goalbound header was turned over by Trevisan after 14 minutes as Chelsea started to apply the pressure but they dropped their guard a minute later when Cyrille Pouget shot inches wide of Ed de Goey's goal after Pires sliced through the Chelsea midfield.

The visitors grew in confidence and former Everton striker Bakayoko had a shot deflected wide after 23 minutes. Once more the architect was Pires.

Chelsea, however, continued to attack and on 27 minutes Wise made the breakthrough.

Flo's cross was headed down by Zola and the ball bounced kindly for Wise, who slid the ball past Trevisan.

Two minutes later Zola almost put the Blues further ahead when clean through, but Trevisan came rushing out to save at the Italian's feet.

Marseille went in search of an equaliser and Bakayoko nearly supplied it but his drive was parried wide by De Goey.

A minute later Jerome Leroy almost levelled but De Goey miraculously palmed his shot away as the Frenchmen came to life with Pires behind every move.

After 38 minutes Leboeuf joined Deschamps in the referee's notebook for overreacting to a challenge from Bakayoko as tempers began to fray.

Leboeuf's free-kick flew straight at Trevisan four minutes later with Chelsea finishing the half strongly.

Pouget was booked after 50 minutes for fouling Wise as Marseille battled to gain control of midfield but with the Chelsea captain showing the kind of form that has taken him back into the England squad, the French side struggled to break out of their half.

Zola went close with a drive inside the box and Poyet sent a header over the bar while at the other end Leroy blasted a shot straight at Leboeuf when he had had teammates better placed to score.

With Zola in inspirational form and finding plenty of space on the right he was proving a handful for the Marseille defence - but still Chelsea could not find a second goal to kill off the visitors.

The Londoners were nearly made to pay 15 minutes from time when Stephane Dalmat's pass found Jacques Abardonado with a clear run at goal but he blazed his shot way over the crossbar.

Spanishiard de la Pena gave Chelsea another scare after 81 minutes when his powerful free-kick crashed off the left upright and De Goey had to be at his best moments later to turn Leroy's scissor-kick out for a corner.

Then, with time running out, Bakayoko's shot flashed wide of the post much to the relief of the home supporters.

Lazio denied in Rotterdam

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, March 9: Revenge failed to materialise for Serie A giants Lazio as they were unable to breach a resolute Feyenoord defence in a 0-0 draw in European Champions League Group D here on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Dutch side, who began their second phase with a dismal defeat at Chelsea, had stunned the Italian title contenders 2-1 last week in Rome to take control of the group against all expectations.

Following that reverse, Lazio - who are four points behind Serie A leaders Juventus - resolved to take instant revenge on a side which had shattered their 18-match unbeaten streak in European competition.

But although Sven Goran Eriksson's visitors, who last season lifted the Cup Winners' Cup, had the lion's share of both possession and chances, luck did not shine upon the Rome-based outfit in front of a 43,000 crowd at the De Kuip Stadium.

The result left Lazio in third place in the group, two points adrift of both Chelsea, whom they face at Stamford Bridge in their final match, and Feyenoord.

Crucially, the Dutch, should they end up level on points with Lazio after the six-match programme, would finish above the Italians as Feyenoord's win in Italy gives them the better head-to-head record.

Feyenoord were happy to soak up long periods of pressure but might have broken the deadlock when Patrik Pauwe brought a fine save out of Luca Marchegiani from a vicious freekick.

But both sides were giving nothing away and last week's Feyenoord hero Jon Dahl Tomasson had a quiet evening while Marcelo Salas and Roberto Mancini had little chance to shine for Lazio, though both forced good saves from the hosts' Polish keeper Jerzy Dudek in the first half.

Tomasson's strike partner Julio Cruz tried to rouse his teammates on the counter attack in the second period but without success.

Czech magician Pavel Nedved nearly won it for Lazio with 20 minutes remaining but his shot from a narrow angle on the left side of the box hit the upright.

Salas then missed with a header and a lob as time ran out on the Italians just as they threatened to snatch full points from Leo Beenhakker's charges.

Leeds to keep Kewell at any cost

LEEDS, England, March 9: Peter Ridsdale chairman of English Premiership highfliers Leeds United said on Thursday that he was prepared to pay whatever it took to keep Australian playmaker Harry Kewell at the club and ward off the growing interest from European clubs, reports AFP.

Ridsdale, who shares equal credit with coach David O'Leary for Leeds' successful season as he has backed the Irishman's belief in investing in young talent, believes that the 21-year-old Australian international could become one of the all-time greats.

"In Harry we have a player who has the potential to be one of the greats," Ridsdale told the Sun newspaper.

"There is no problem in making a player one of the best paid in the UK if he deserves it. There is no doubt if Harry continues making the progress he has been he will be one of the top eight players in the country - and we would reward him."

Kewell, who has scored a career best 11 goals already this season as Leeds have soared to second in the Premiership just four points off leaders Manchester United.



Feyenoord's Argentine striker Julio Cruz (L) locked in an aerial tussle with compatriot Nestor Sansini of Lazio at Rotterdam on March 8. —AFP photo