

Olympic hockey q'fiers Pakistan swamp Swiss

OSAKA, Mar 10: Formidable Pakistan overcame a sluggish start to thrash Switzerland 7-3 as Asian teams went on a goal hunt in the Olympic field hockey qualifying tournament here today, reports AFP.

South Korea and Malaysia also recorded huge wins on the second day of the 12-nation event which will send the top six qualifiers to the Sydney Games in September.

In Group A, New Zealand banked on a last-second goal from Phil Burrows to hold Britain to a 2-2 draw, while the erratic South Koreans earned the wrath of their coach despite a 4-1 rout of Poland.

Malaysia, thrashed 7-1 by Spain yesterday, bounced back to defeat Belarus by the same margin after being inspired by a fax message from a six-year-old boy in Kuala Lumpur.

Pakistan, playing their first match in miserably cold weather, received a scare when Switzerland ran up a 2-0 lead in the first 20 minutes, but after leading 2-1 at half-time was short-lived as Pakistan warmed up in the second session to pump in six goals.

Penalty-corner specialist Sohail Abbas, returning after a groin injury, and Mohammad Anis scored twice each as Pakistan showed no mercy on the Swiss, who had stunned Argentina on Thursday.

The cold got to us at the start but the boys adjusted well afterwards," Pakistani coach Islahuddin Siddiqui said.

The South Koreans, meanwhile, received a verbal lashing from coach Kim Sang-Ryul despite recording their second successive win in Group A.

The coach predicted that his side, which had struggled to defeat Belgium on Thursday, would face a tough time against Britain on Sunday.

Malaysia recovered after the drubbing against Spain as midfielder Suhaimi Ibrahim led the goal-spree against Belarus with a hat-trick.

Coach Stephen van Huizen said his team was inspired by a fax message sent by a six-year-old from Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia pumped in two goals by the 10th minute, before Ibrahim scored the third in the 22nd.

Belarus stood no chance in the second half as their inspired rivals scored four more goals, three of them in the last seven minutes before the final whistle.

Amunike feels like a 'slave' at Barca

BARCELONA, Spain, March 10: Nigerian international Emmanuel Amunike on Thursday slammed his club, Spanish giants Barcelona, for their treatment of him during injury claiming that they treated him like a slave, reports AFP.

The midfielder, who featured in the Nigerian 'Super Eagles' line-up in the African Nations Cup last month, has not played for the Spanish side for some time because he is considered unfit because of recurrent knee injuries.

Amunike, who refused a request from the club to sign a declaration stating that he is unfit to play, on Thursday underwent a series of tests by the team's doctor in a bid to determine his fitness.

"To say that I want to play again for Barca would be a lie. I don't like it here. They treated me like a slave... I couldn't train with the team," said Amunike, adding that he had been treated like "a madman or sick".

"I'm not asking for money or anything else, I'm asking that my contract be respected and I'll fight for it to be respected," he said.

"With everything that has happened these past two years there arrives a time where you need the help of the club and no one supported me," he added.

Amunike joined Barcelona in 1996, but only played a half season with the side before being injured.

UEFA look at scheduling problems

NYON, Switzerland, March 10: Football's European governing body (UEFA) met here Thursday in an unsuccessful attempt to find a solution for harmonising the international calendar.

However according to senior vice-president Antonio Matarrese of Italy there was some progress.

"The representatives of the different European leagues are going to work on drawing up an international calendar based on UEFA proposals, in other words August to May," said the Italian.

Football's world governing body FIFA have already announced their proposal for playing international fixtures between February and November with a month-long holiday in December and a month of preparation in January.

In regards to the Olympic football tournament in Sydney later this year UEFA failed to decide on a policy concerning the number of players over 23-years-old that will be allowed to play for each country.

"UEFA will contact the individual leagues to try to find a solution that will satisfy everyone," Matarrese added.

UEFA have scheduled another meeting to discuss these and other matters on April 13 in Nyon.



Leeds' Australian international Harry Kewell (C) exults after scoring the winner against AS Roma in their UEFA Cup encounter at Elland Road on March 9. — Internet photo

UEFA Cup 4th round 2nd leg

Italians fall to pieces

PARIS, March 10: Italian pre-eminence in Europe, shattered by Manchester United in the Champions League, died a spectacular death in the UEFA Cup as well on Thursday as two famous names made embarrassing exits, reports AFP.

Heading the list of shame in the rogues' gallery of losers were proud Juventus, thrashed 4-0 by Spain's Celta Vigo, but holders Parma were not too far behind, going down 3-1 at Germany's Werder Bremen to crash out with their own fourth round return.

AS Roma also departed the scene after losing 1-0 at Leeds United who advance by the same score courtesy of a second half thunderbolt from Aussie hotshot Harry Kewell.

It doesn't get much worse than this for the big-spending Italians, who lost Udinese on Tuesday following an away goals defeat by Czech league leaders Slavia Prague and who may now reflect that the hegemony of Serie A is in mortal danger if not dead and buried.

Vigo, struggling to keep pace with the top five in Spain after a good start, caught Juve cold with a goal inside 30 seconds from Frenchman Claude Makelele.

Juve's night would get far worse and by half time they were two goals and two men down.

Without inspirational leader Zinedine Zidane, not fully fit and left on the bench until late on, Juve, with just one league defeat all season, were rudderless.

On 26 minutes Antonio Conte received a second yellow card for a crude tackle and five minutes later Alessandro Birindelli, facing his own keeper two metres out, bundled the ball into his own net following a corner.

Seconds before the interval, Juve, three times UEFA Cup winners, had Paolo Montero ordered off for appearing to strike out at Valery Karpin.

In the second half, Juve's Dutch keeper Edwin van der Sar made two howlers to gift two close range goals to South African Benny McCarthy and hand Juventus their second worst loss in their illustrious European history.

The club's worst defeat ever came in 1958 when the Italians

lost 7-0 to Austrian club Vienna SK in only their second ever European game.

"I'm disappointed. Eleven men against eleven we could have done it and maybe even ten against eleven," said crest-fallen Juve coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Vigo next face Lens of France, who prevented an all-Spanish match up by knocking out Atletico Madrid 4-2 on the night, 6-4 on aggregate, aided by two headers from Pascal Nouma.

Leeds killed off Roma when Kewell struck a thunderous 20-yard shot which keeper Francesco Antonioli could only palm into the roof of the net to take David O'Leary's men through to the last eight and set up a two leg encounter against Slavia Prague.

O'Leary could not hide his

delight afterwards.

"Nobody thought we'd come this far in the competition but we got about them from the very start," he enthused.

"We then got our goal then we closed them down. We worked hard and rode our luck over the two games but overall I thought we deserved to win through."

"I'm just so proud of them as it's a great, great achievement."

Roma began to show their frustration with two of their players sent off in the final minute.

Zago had already been booked in the 69th minute when he upended substitute Alan Smith in injury time, his second bookable offence.

And French left-back Candela followed seconds later for headbutting Darren Huckerby.

Bremen bundled Parma out despite losing the opening leg 1-0 with goals from Christophe Dabrowski, Marco Bode and an own goal from Fabio Canavaro with Mario Stanic heading a consolation.

It was a far cry from Parma's 3-0 blasting of Marseille in last season's final.

Bremen next face England's Arsenal, the bookies' new favourites after the Gunners saw off Spanish league leaders Deportivo La Coruna 6-3 on aggregate, despite losing 2-1 in Spain.

Thierry Henry put Arsenal ahead midway through the second half, with substitute Sanchez Victor levelling and another sub, Ivan Perez, snatching the winner for a low victory on the whistle.

Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira said: "When you come to a place like this you have to concentrate for 90 minutes and we did a good job, but I think the most important thing is that we are going to go through."

Despite Vigo's heroics, it was a mixed day for Spain, given Deportivo's exit and that of Atletico.

Real Mallorca did go through and will now play Turkish outfit Galatasaray, who knocked out former European champions Borussia Dortmund 2-0 on aggregate after a goalless draw in Istanbul.

Mallorca had already done their hard work in beating French champions-elect Monaco 4-1 in the home leg and only Marco Simone's 33rd-minute goal gave the French any cheer as they won 1-0 on the night.

Liverpool break bank for Hesky

LONDON, March 10: Liverpool on Thursday agreed a club record 11 million-pound (£17.5 million dollars) fee for Emile Heskey, making the Leicester and England striker the second most expensive British player ever, reports AFP.

A Liverpool spokesman confirmed: "The two clubs have agreed a fee and subject to a medical we expect to sign the player tomorrow."

Only England captain Alan Shearer, who cost Newcastle 15m pounds, will have cost more than Heskey, who could make his debut at Saturday's home clash with Sunderland.

Heskey's pace and power have lit up the Premiership this season and now he has earned the chance to fulfil his ambition of teaming up alongside Michael Owen, one of the main attractions in his wanting to move to Merseyside.

His profile rocketed after he produced a stunning full debut for England against Argentina at Wembley last month.

Heskey's team-mate Matt Elliott said he was disappointed the striker was leaving Filbert Street but felt it was inevitable.

"I don't think you can blame Emile," the defender told Sky Sports television.

"I suppose the lure of going to one of the glamour clubs of the country was too much. Liverpool is Liverpool at the end of the day, although Leicester fans would say we're an emerging club."

"You've got to be realistic. It's good business for the club. Emile is a fantastic player but I'm a lot of money for any club, let alone Leicester. You'd like to think we could buy three or four players with that money."

"It was becoming inevitable that something was going to happen at some stage. We wanted Emile to stay for as long as possible, but that hasn't been the case and we wish him all the best because he's a lovely feller."

FA discipline Di Canio

LONDON, March 10: Italian striker Paolo Di Canio was slapped with a 5,000 pound (£7,500 dollar) fine and severely censured by the English Football Association (FA) Thursday for making an insulting gesture during West Ham's Premiership clash with Aston Villa on January 15, reports AFP.

Di Canio, who scored a late equaliser in the 1-1 draw at Upton Park, was caught on camera making a middle-finger salute, although there was no indication to whom it was made.

The 31-year-old protested his innocence after being charged with misconduct, but the FA's disciplinary committee decided to fine and censure him.

Villa fans had barracked Di Canio during the game after an incident in the League Cup tie between the teams just four days earlier.

PSV after Carew

THE HAGUE, March 10: Top Dutch side PSV Eindhoven have made an official bid for the services of Norwegian striker John Carew, the ANP agency announced on Thursday, reports AFP.

Club manager Nils Skulte confirmed that the Dutch league leaders were interested in signing 22-year-old Carew from Norwegian champions Rosenborg.

"I've already spoken several times with my colleague at PSV Frank Arnesen and there has been an offer for Carew," said Skulte.

PSV Eindhoven are looking for reinforcements next season since they will be without key strikers such as Belgian Luc Nilis, who is heading for English Premiership side Aston Villa, and Dutchman Ruud Van Nistelrooij, being targeted by both Chelsea and Arsenal.

Carew has also been approached by other top sides now Valencia, Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund and Premiership side Leeds United.

Serie A preview

Win or bust for Inter

MILAN, March 10: Inter Milan take on Lazio this weekend for the first of two matches which Marcello Lippi's men must win if they are to stand a chance of becoming champions, reports AFP.

Their other crunch fixture will be on April 16 when league leaders Juventus come to San Siro. But first, they have to make up the three points which separate them from second-placed Lazio.

Inter's fortunes have revived markedly since Christmas, following a judicious splash on the transfer market for Dutch playmaker Clarence Seedorf and Colombian defender Ivan Cordoba.

Before the festive season they had lost five times. Since, they have been beaten only once - winning seven and drawing two - and reaching the Italian Cup final against their same opponents on Saturday night.

Last Sunday, Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba and Chilean strike partner Ivan Zamorano steered them a 2-1 derby victory over reigning champions AC Milan and the same team should be out at the Olympic stadium.

Neither of Lippi's first-choice strikers is available -

Ronaldo should be back from surgery for the Juventus match, while Christian Vieri is set to return from injury the following week against Bologna.

And Italian bookies have already made their minds up - a win for Lazio is on the cards, despite their disappointing 0-0 draw against Feyenoord in the Champions League on Wednesday night.

Lazio squandered a seven-point lead at the end of last season, but Juventus are unlikely to do the same - having lost only one league match so far.

Further down the Serie A table, two sides are level on 45 points - AS Roma and AC Milan - and both currently have a better chance of getting a Champions League place than winning the title.

Roma are away to Cagliari, second from bottom but still fighting, while Milan host another side trying to beat the drop - Verona.

FIXTURES (1400 GMT unless stated):
Saturday: Bologna v Venezia, Lazio v Inter Milan (1930 GMT)
Sunday: Cagliari v AS Roma, AC Milan v Verona, Perugia v Lecce, Piacenza v Juventus, Reggina v Udinese, Torino v Fiorentina, Bari v Parma (1930 GMT)

Club president Sergio Cragnotti said: "I'm expecting a great performance against Inter, because the players have a lot of anger inside them and the positive way of dealing with that is to vent it on the pitch."

Coach Sven Goran Eriksson, who rested Croatian striker Alen Boksic for the match with



Celta Vigo's Alexander Mostovoi (R) evades a tackle by Juventus' Tacchinardi during their UEFA Cup match in Vigo on March 9. — AFP photo

European football preview

UNDATED, March 10: Spanish First Division leaders Deportivo La Coruna face a tricky opponent in Valencia, Bayer Leverkusen bid to catch table toppers Bayern Munich in Germany while in France, Paris Saint Germain and Sedan vie for a Champions League spot in action around Europe over the weekend, reports AFP.

PRIMERA LIGA

MADRID: Leaders Deportivo meet sixth-placed Valencia while Alaves, who have caused a stir by edging into second spot, host Real Sociedad, flirting with the drop.

Ironically, the last time Deportivo welcomed Valencia with the former sitting at the top of the pile came six years ago. Then, they slipped up with a penalty miss which handed Barcelona the title right at the death of the season, a title which Deportivo have still never won.

Valencia impressed with their midweek win over Fiorentina and coach Hector Cuper insisted that "for Valencia there are no limits."

Real Madrid, who welcome back Brazilian Saviro, have to bounce back from their poor European form and should have few problems at the Bernabeu against tailenders Sevilla.

Reigning champions Barcelona, who head Zaragoza and Real only on goal difference, meanwhile travel to an Athletic Bilbao side still hopeful of a UEFA Cup finish.

Barcelona want history to repeat itself as the Catalan club sewed up the title last season at Bilbao following a 3-1 win.

Athletic Madrid, mired in the bottom three and booed out of Europe by Lens on Thursday, will look for three vital points at midtable Valladolid and will hope that new-old coach Raddy Antic, in charge since last week

for his third spell at the club, can weave some magic.

BUNDESLIGA

MUNICH: Leverkusen, currently trailing reigning champions Bayern by two points in the Bundesliga, go into Saturday's tricky home clash against VfL Wolfsburg looking to grab all three points and attempt to close the gap on the leaders.

Leverkusen are unbeaten at home this season while Wolfsburg are chasing a UEFA Cup place and haven't lost since league play resumed after the winter break.

Bayern host improving Schalke 04 after the emotional send-off for Lothar Matthaus, the world record holder for international appearances and who is set to start new career at New York/New Jersey Metros.

Bayern, fresh from thrashing Real Madrid for the second time in a week, will be out to ensure there are no slip ups after losing their last league outing at VfB Stuttgart.

Third-placed Hamburg SV, whose keeper Hans-Jorg Butt was linked with a possible move to European champions Manchester United this week, host the unpredictable SSV Ulm side at the Volksparkstadion looking to consolidate their placing in view of a possible Champions League slot next season.

Hamburg, who won the European Cup in 1983 upsetting a highly fancied Juventus side that included French legend Michel Platini, should return to the competition barring a late season collapse.

Hertha Berlin, virtually eliminated from this season's competition when they lost 1-0 to Sparta Prague this week, will have to pick themselves up as they visit a MSV Duisburg side desperate for points.

Bremen, fresh from their fine win over Parma, host SC Freiburg on Sunday.

FRENCH FIRST DIVISION

PARIS: PSG and Sedan take centre stage this weekend as they both bid for a Champions League slot.

Runaway leaders Monaco travel Sunday to Auxerre, who have similar goals to PSG and Sedan.

PSG coach Philippe Bergeroo is boosted by the return of defenders Edouard Clisse and Godwin Okpara from injury.

And Moroccan international defender Talal El Karkouri, who boycotted a recent training session after a row over money, is fully fit after a knock to his left foot in last weekend's 1-0 defeat by Strasbourg in the Cup.

But still absent is skipper Ali Benarbia, recovering from a strained muscle, while Laurent Leroy is suspended.

Bergeroo's counterpart at Sedan, Patrick Remy, is not so fortunate however, having to juggle his team around four missing men, including key striker Alex Di Rocco.

Christophe Dugarry, who in December switched from Marseille to Bordeaux - both beaten by English clubs in the Champions League this week - is uncertain to return to his old home for Saturday's other big game as the striker is still nursing a double fracture on his hand.

Marseille are desperate to pull themselves into mid-table safety, with a mere four points cushioning them from the tentacles of the relegation waters.

Monaco, meanwhile, have an even clearer incentive to win their seventh title after exiting the UEFA Cup Wednesday following a 4-2 aggregate defeat by Spain's Real Mallorca.

George Best hospitalised

LONDON, March 10: British soccer legend George Best was in a London hospital on Thursday night with suspected liver failure for the second time this week, The Sun newspaper reported Friday, reports AFP.

The tabloid quoted Best's wife as saying the renowned hard-drinking 53-year-old

out as soon as tomorrow.

"Bestie" was rushed by ambulance to hospital earlier in the week after collapsing with stomach pains, but discharged himself claiming to be feeling better.

Best, who appears on Sky Sports' Saturday afternoon football programme as an expert commentator, was nicknamed the fifth Beatle after he burst onto the football scene at the age of 17 at the same time as the pop group rose to stardom.

Bestie made his First Division debut for United against West Bromwich Albion in September 1963 and hit the big time at once, becoming the first footballer equivalent of a pop star and a key symbol of the swinging 1960s.

On the field, he continued to dazzle. He helped United win the League title in 1965 and 1967 and a year later picked up the English and European footballer of the year awards as United became the first English team to win the European Cup, Best scoring in the 4-1 triumph over Benfica at Wembley.

The team, which also featured Bobby Charlton and Dennis Law, was one of the greatest English club sides ever.

But Best left top-class football in 1972, appearing for a number of clubs on both sides of the Atlantic over the next 11 years before finally hanging up his boots.

He then became better known for his unpredictability and battle with the bottle.

In 1984 Best hit rock bottom when he served two months of a 12-week jail term for drink driving and assaulting police officers.

The handsome Irishman grew up in a harsh Belfast neighbourhood, dribbling a

tennis ball around the streets as he honed his astonishing skills.

He joined Manchester United at 15 after a scout telegrammed manager Sir Matt Busby with the message, "I think I've found a genius".

Arsenal's French international Thierry Henry brings the ball under control during the game against Deportivo La Coruna on March 9.



Arsenal's French international Thierry Henry brings the ball under control during the game against Deportivo La Coruna on March 9. — AFP photo



GEORGE BEST former Manchester United idol is in hospital and looks terrible.

Best's personal assistant Philip Hughes said the former Northern Ireland international was spending a second night in west London's Cromwell Hospital, predicting "He... may be in hospital a few days or could be

World Cup 2006

Fact-finders reach South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, March 10: The six-strong team of inspectors from football's governing body FIFA arrived here on Thursday with praise for South Africa's bid to host the 2006 World Cup, reports AFP.

American lawyer Alan Rothenberg, heading the team as it makes its final tour of the five bidding nations, told reporters that South Africa's bid documentation had been among the "most handsome" he had seen.

But FIFA's inspection intended to "look behind the documentation," Rothenberg said.

South Africa is competing with Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco to host the World Cup, not ever staged in Africa in its 70-year history.

You will see and feel the passion for soccer in this country," bid committee chairman Irvin Khoza promised the FIFA team.

The inspectors will meet President Thabo Mbeki in Pretoria on Friday and visit most of the nine stadiums across the country where World Cup events could be staged. Another four stadiums are being built.

It will also inspect security, transport, accommodation and other facilities.

The tour will end the tour on Robben Island, the ex-Island

prison off Cape Town where former president Nelson Mandela spent the bulk of his 27 years in apartheid jails.

South Africa's bid has a strong emotional slant, with its officials urging that it is Africa's turn to host the World Cup and that the event will enhance the country's emergence into democracy after apartheid was voted out in 1994.

"The tournament can be the greatest incentive and inspiration to all the people of this country, not only in sport, but in all aspects of life," South African Football Association (SAFA) president Molefi Oliphant told the inspectors.

FIFA is to decide on the successful bid on July 6.