

Mancini now a Lazio staff

ROME, April 1: Veteran striker Roberto Mancini joined Lazio's coaching staff on Friday, the first step in a new career for the 35-year-old who had already announced his retirement at the end of the season, reports AFP.

Mancini appeared for training at their Formello headquarters on Friday morning wearing the type of tracksuit used by team chief Sven Goran Eriksson and the rest of the coaching staff.

A club statement said: "Roberto Mancini, though continuing his services as a footballer, is today starting his collaboration with the technical staff under the orders of coach Sven Goran Eriksson."

Mancini, who made his Serie A debut in September 1981, is best known in Italy for the 15 years he spent at Sampdoria before following Eriksson to Lazio in 1997.

FIFA lifts ban on Benin

JOHANNESBURG, April 1: The suspension of Benin by world governing body FIFA because of government interference has been lifted, the African Football Confederation (CAF) confirmed Saturday, reports AFP.

CAF said the decision follows the resignation of an illegally-elected executive board to run football in the tiny West African country and a government commitment to free elections.

Barisal cricket

From Staff Correspondent BARISAL, Apr 1: Fakirbari Club defeated Suva Smriti Sangha by 6 wickets while Sangskrit Majlish outplayed Nazrul Pathagar-O-Club by 156 runs in the First Division Cricket League here at the Abdur Rab Serniabat Stadium today.

Winning the toss, Suva Smriti batted first and scored 83 runs in total losing all the wickets in 25.4 overs.

In reply, Fakirbari collected 86 runs losing only 4 wickets in 12.5 overs.

In the other play of the day, winning the toss Sangskrit Majlish made 253 runs losing 7 wickets in 38 overs.

In reply, Nazrul Pathagar-O-Club collected 97 runs losing all the wickets in 23.4 overs.

Pakistan lift

From page-13 Kallis ran back to judge the skier from Afridi off Klusener's first ball, then dived to his left to pick up the swirling ball inches off the ground.

South Africa grabbed three wickets for 16 runs as Nazir was stumped off a wide ball from Derek Crookes and Younis Khan was trapped leg-before by Klusener for four.

Inzamam and Yousuf Youhana added 65 for the fourth wicket when Kallis gave South Africa another lease of life with two wickets in the 43rd over.

He forced Youhana to pop an easy catch to short mid-wicket and then had Moyn leg-before to make Pakistan 209 for five. Abdur Razaq remained unbeaten on a brisk 28. Wasim Akram was not out on five when the overs ran out.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Sharjah Coca-Cola Cup one-day final between Pakistan and South Africa on Friday:

PAKISTAN: 263 for six in 50 overs (Imran Nazir 69, Inzamam Haq 53, Shahid Afridi 52, Abdur Razaq 28 not out; Lance Klusener 2/27, Jacques Kallis 2/57)

Table with columns: South Africa, Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Wasim, Waqar, Akram, Razaq, Afridi, Arshad and their bowling figures.

Result: Pakistan won by 16 runs. Man-of-the-match: Waqar Younis. Man-of-the-series: Waqar Younis.

Iqbal inspires

From Page 13 Z Hasan 10 1 37 1 Saikat 10 1 51 3 Mapatuna 5 0 32 0 Nasim 10 0 47 2 Sajib 3 0 13 0 Halim 2 0 22 0

Table with columns: WARI CLUB, Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Sajjad b Shahnewaz, Sadek b Shaimol b Shahnewaz, Nasim lbw b Biplob, Halim st Kamru b Rashed, Mapatuna c Kamru b Rashed, Mahabub b Rashed, Sajib st Kamru b Zia, Rawnak b Zia, Gamagee c Shaimol b Zia, Zakir c Nayan b Rashed, Saikat not out, Extras (lb-6, nb-4, w-8), Total (All out in 43.4 overs), Fall of wickets: 1-23; 2-42; 3-49; 4-78; 5-118; 6-127; 7-168; 8-168; 9-187.



Freiburg's Tunisian international Zoubaier Baya (L) and Unterhaching's Danny Schwarz fight for the ball during their Bundesliga encounter on March 31. — AFP photo

Dalglish sets standards

GLASGOW, April 1: Interim manager Kenny Dalglish has thrown down the gauntlet to all candidates for the next Celtic manager — that they must be better than him if they want the Parkhead job, the Press Association reported on Friday, says AFP.

Dalglish replaced sacked head coach John Barnes in February after arguably the worst period in the club's history which culminated in them crashing out of the Scottish Cup to Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

But after assuming control, Dalglish has led the team to better times and capped that off with victory in the CIS Insurance Cup final over Aberdeen.

However, the game in which they are judged on by their demanding supporters is the Old Firm battle and last week's disastrous 4-0 defeat to Rangers will have left a bitter taste in the mouth.

He has promised firm answers by the end of March and now with just hours remaining this month he gave his broadest hint yet that if he was felt to be the best man for the job then he would take it.

Dalglish said: "The best guy will get the job because Kenny Dalglish is not important in the context of the head coach."

"Then it's not the best one available then I don't think he deserves to get it."

"We don't want to leave ourselves open for people to say who is the best one? Asking a question about myself is a little bit different."

"I've never said that I did or didn't want it but I've always said that the best person for the job is always the best."

Dalglish has also dismissed speculation the club have had any talks with any managers but he admitting they have started the ball rolling.

Former Wimbledon manager Joe Kinnear has gone on record as saying he has been approached by a Scottish club while John Toshack, Bertie Vogts and Co Adriaanse have



KENNY DALGLISH

been linked with the vacancy. But Dalglish, who is preparing his squad for the Premier League game with Kilmarnock on Sunday, now moves have yet been made.

Dalglish added: "Nothing has changed as regards Celtic Football Club — regarding football anyway. We've had discussions and we've taken the thing forward since last Sunday."

"There's been a lot of speculation and a lot of names branded about regards the position but we haven't spoken to anyone. "We don't have any shortlist, we have a list like a telephone

book that we are going to have to go through but we will have discussions in private.

"We know we'll have to pick the best possible candidate available. The list will remain confidential and the discussions with the people will remain confidential."

Nigeria won't release Babayaro

LAGOS, April 1: A Nigerian Football Association (NFA) official said they would not be releasing Celestine Babayaro for two of Chelsea's matches early next month as he was needed for World Cup duty, reports AFP.

Chelsea has asked that the international defender be released for their European Champions League match on April 5 and for a match against Liverpool on April 9. "I am afraid we can't grant Chelsea this request as we also need the player about that time too," Nigeria Association Football (NFA) official Salihu Abubakar told AFP.

He said Nigeria would be playing against Eritrea in a World Cup preliminary match next month.

Abubakar said another Nigerian player Austin Fregene of German club Fortuna Dusseldorf will also not be released to his club.

Last week, Nigeria and Chelsea clashed over Babayaro for the Olympic qualifier against Zimbabwe before FIFA ruled in favour of the English club.

FIFA favoured Nigeria for not applying for the player's release two weeks ahead of the match according to regulations.

Bundesliga F'burg, D'burg earn victories

BERLIN, April 1: SC Freiburg and MSV Duisburg eased their relegation fears on Friday night as both earned victories in the German Bundesliga to end runs without a win.

Sixth from bottom Freiburg beat SpVgg Unterhaching, two places above them, 4-3, for their first win in nine games.

MSV Duisburg remained bottom of the table even though they won 3-0 at fifth from bottom Ulm. Markus Beierle, Dietmar Hirsch and Uwe Spies got the goals as the western German club won for the first times in seven matches.

On Saturday, Eintracht Frankfurt host Arminia Bielefeld in another relegation tussle.

Also on Saturday, leaders Bayern Munich play at VfL Wolfsburg, who have never won a single point against the top European club. Munich will be without injured captain Stefan Effenberg, Mehmet Scholl and Alexander Zickler.

Bayer Leverkusen, level on points with Munich, travel to 1860 Munich where they have won three of their last four matches.

Asian Nations Cup Israeli TV team in Qatar

DOHA, April 1: An Israeli TV team has travelled to Qatar to cover an Asian Nations' Cup football qualifying competition and interviewed a sports official of the Gulf Arab state, an AFP correspondent reported on Saturday, says AFP.

Two journalists from Israel's Channel Two interviewed the president of Qatar's football federation, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hassan al-Thani, a member of the emirate's ruling family.

In the opening match on Friday, Qatar beat Palestine 1-0. Jordan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan are also competing for a place at the finals in Lebanon from October 12-27.

In August 1999, an Israeli junior handball team took part in a Doha tournament, becoming the first team from the Jewish state to officially travel to an Arab country.

Qatar set up commercial ties with Israel in 1996 but relations have since been frozen, pending a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process.

WC 2006 German, Romanian ministers take stands

PRETORIA, April 1: Visiting Romanian Sports Minister Crin Antonescu said Friday he supported South Africa's bid to host the 2006 soccer World Cup while German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer stood by his country's bid, reports AFP.

Antonescu said: "The vote comes from the chairman of the Romanian Football Federation, Mircea Sandu, but by seeing how popular football is in this country, I shall support South Africa as a candidate."

He is in South Africa for four days, and on Friday signed an agreement with South African Sports Minister Ngconde Balofour to promote cooperation in the arena of sport.

At a separate press briefing, German minister Fischer said, "May the best (country) win and the others will support the winner. I definitely hope Germany wins."

Asked about negative publicity in Germany about South Africa's bid, he said: "That's a very delicate question. This is not a political issue, it is more important, it is football." Deputy President Jacob Zuma, standing alongside Fischer, told reporters, "Africa has never had this opportunity and I'm sure it will be important for Europe as well if Africa won. Europe will take it with a smile."

Fischer is due to leave South Africa late Friday after a two-day visit which has coincided with the meeting of the German and South African bi-national commission.

South Africa is competing against Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco for the 2006 World Cup. FIFA is to announce the winning bid on July 6.

Charlton stay out of reach

LONDON, April 1: Scott Parker's first senior goal was enough to earn Charlton a battling 2-1 victory over Queen's Park Rangers and extend their lead at the top of the English First Division to 16 points, reports AFP.

Alan Curbishley's side now stand just two victories away from guaranteeing automatic promotion to the Premiership after a hard-earned victory over their London rivals.

Parker struck with three minutes remaining to earn the three points just six minutes after Rangers had levelled the scores through Gareth Taylor.

Curbishley's side had taken the lead on two minutes through Shaun Newton and had seemed on course for a comfortable victory after dominating most of the game.

But when Taylor equalised on 81 minutes the home side seemed destined to stutter in their attempts to gain an instant return to the top flight.

But Parker, who had only been on the pitch for three minutes, turned in a close range shot from Andy Hunt's cross to secure victory for Charlton.

AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

JOHANNESBURG, April 1: South African club SuperSport United scored in the last minute to get the coaching career of former Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar off to a winning start in Africa.

United defeated Costa do Sol from Mozambique 2-1 at Caledonian Stadium in Pretoria Friday night to win the first-round tie 3-2 on aggregate and they will face Al-Itihad of Libya or Great Olympics of Ghana next.

Defender Japie Motale was the South African hero as he rose to head home a free kick from former national team captain John Moeti. Cameroonian Jean-Paul Bang Penda scored the other United goal after 20 minutes.

Captain Jossias levelled 10 minutes into the second half for Costa, who had Vitinho sent off, and it took several superb saves from goalkeeper George Platts to keep out the Mozambicans.

Victory was a welcome diversion for the colourful Grobbelaar as SuperSport are among eight teams fighting to avoid relegation from the richest national championship on the continent.

Egyptian giants Zamalek, African champions a record four times and among the favourites to lift the Cup Winners' Cup, cruised into the last 16 with a 4-0 thrashing of Tanzanian visitors Young Africans.

Malian Ismail Coulibaly opened the scoring after 20 minutes. Abdelhamid Bassiouni struck the second soon after and late goals from Khaled al-Ghandour and Abdelhamid Ali completed the rout.

Al Fayed is seeking a replacement for Paul Bracewell, sacked by the ambitious Egyptian millionaire on Wednesday after a string of poor results.

If appointed Tigana would become the third Frenchman to coach an English side after Gerardo Houllier at Liverpool and Arsene Wenger at Arsenal.

"Lots of names have been put forward. Nothing is finalised, we are still looking," Fulham's public relations consultant, Max Clifford, told the paper.



BRUCE GROBBELAAR

FULHAM TARGET TIGANA

LONDON: Jean Tigana, the former French midfielder and Monaco manager, has emerged as a leading contender to become the next boss at Fulham.

Tigana, 44, is believed to have held talks with the English First Division side's owner, Mohamed Al Fayed. The Times newspaper reported Saturday.

Al Fayed is seeking a replacement for Paul Bracewell, sacked by the ambitious Egyptian millionaire on Wednesday after a string of poor results.

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"Lots of names have been put forward. Nothing is finalised, we are still looking," Fulham's public relations consultant, Max Clifford, told the paper.

Tigana was tipped as a possible coach for the French national side when Aime Jacquet stood down after delivering France the 1998 World Cup but Tigana's club, Monaco, refused to release him and Roger Lemerre got the job.

Tigana, capped 52 times and a member of the French team that took the 1984 European Championship, led Monaco in January 1999 to join the French football federation as an agent and coach.

Fulham, lying 10th, 31 points off Division One leaders Charlton, are currently being looked after by German caretaker boss Karlheinz Riedle and Roy Evans. The ex-Liverpool coach was signed up as assistant on Friday.

Other names in the frame for the London club are Roy Kinnear and Terry Venables.

SEA JOINT BID FOR 2010 WC

SINGAPORE: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are making a joint bid to host the World Cup 2010 football championships, a report said Saturday.

Francis Loo, council member of the ASEAN Football Federation, told the Straits Times he would meet top officials of football's governing body, FIFA, in Geneva next week to present the joint Southeast Asian initiative.

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Asian Cup qualifier Iran maul Maldives

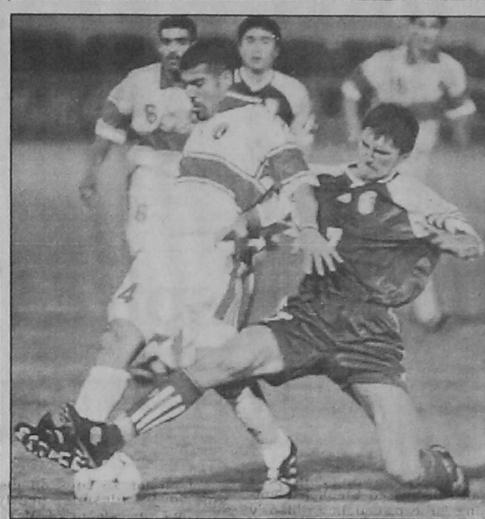
ALEPPO, April 1: Hertha Berlin striker Al Dai scored three times and Iran opened their Asian Cup qualifying effort Friday with an 8-0 rout of Maldives, reports AP.

The lopsided victory follows similar routs by Iran over Maldives in qualifying for the 1998 World Cup. Iran twice beat the island nation in 1997, 9-0 and by a World Cup record 17-0.

Syria played Bahrain later Friday in the second game of the Group 8 doubleheader.

Hashimi Nasab gave Iran the lead in the 19th minute and goals by Mahdawi Kiya (20th), Kher Wasat el-Deen Mohamadi (23rd), Hameed Akhtari (32nd) and Dai (38th) had the former three-time Asian Cup champ well in control by halftime.

Only the winners of the Oct. 12-26 Asian Cup finals in Lebanon, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, Indonesia, China and Japan already have qualified along with host Lebanon and defending champions Saudi Arabia, who receive automatic berths.



Kazakhstan's Avedyen Igor (R) tries to tackle Badran Al-Shaqran of Jordan during their Asian Cup qualifier in Doha on March 31. — AFP photo

Bomb trauma led to the tragedy?

NICOSIA, April 1: Teammates of a Yugoslav footballer found hanged in his apartment in the Cypriot town of Larnaca claimed on Friday that he had still been traumatised after a NATO bomb destroyed his home last year during the Kosovo crisis, reports AFP.

Perica Adzic, 31, was found hanged from a sheet in his flat on Thursday night in the sea-coast town by his teammates from First Division outfit Ethnikos Achnas.

Police said they were treating the case as a suicide and did not suspect foul play.

Kikis Philippou said Adzic had been given permission on Wednesday for a brief leave of absence to visit his family in Serbia because he had been worried about their safety.

He had been due to fly out of Cyprus on Friday but his teammates found Adzic dead on Thursday night after he failed to turn up for practice.

"We heard that in the war he had some problems because a bomb was dropped near his house and destroyed it," Philippou said.

Other sources at the club said the midfielder had been in the house when the bomb landed.

"I knew something was bothering him," teammate and fellow Serb Dragoslav Music said. "He had problems but nobody could guess it would end up like this."

Music said his countryman had recently been spending lots of time with a new girlfriend.

"He seemed to want to be with his girlfriend all the time, but if I knew what he was contemplating I wouldn't have left his side," said a shaken Music, who was one of two teammates

to find the body.

Some 27 Serb footballers are playing in the Cypriot First Division this season, many of them refugees from last year's air war over the Kosovo crisis.

Like the majority of Serbs, most Greek Cypriots are also members of the Orthodox church and there over last year's US-led NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic.

Philippou said that Adzic was "an honourable player and a respected professional who always did his best and never complained. He will be missed."

Akers out of action

CHICAGO, April 1 (AFP): Michelle Akers, women's football's all-time scoring leader, will miss the next three months after suffering a dislocated shoulder but expects to play for the United States at the Sydney Olympics.

Akers will undergo surgery on Tuesday or Wednesday in Orlando, Florida, on her right shoulder, which was injured when she fell after colliding with a goalkeeper last Sunday in a US team training match.

"This is definitely a bummer," Akers said. "But I am confident that the recovery will go quickly. I am shooting to return to the team as soon as possible and be fit and ready for the Olympics."

An examination found no bone, cartilage or rotator cuff damage. The biceps anchor was pulled from the insertion point in her shoulder, doctors said.

Akers, 34, has scored 104 goals in 147 games for the US team, which defeated China in last year's final to capture the Women's World Cup crown.

Assuming a typical rehabilitation period, Akers will be ready to return in July and resume full-time training 2 1/2 months before the start of the Sydney Olympics.

Akers originally separated her right shoulder in a game against Russia in Rochester, New York on September 18, 1998. She re-injured the shoulder in a bizarre event during the 1999 Women's World Cup.

Akers was circling the field in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and high-fiving fans after the victory when a fan grabbed her hand, pulling her off her feet and popping her shoulder out of joint. The injury last weekend was the first time she had dislocated the shoulder.

South Africa cries foul in battle to stage World Cup

Bad publicity surrounding this year's African Cup of Nations football tournament has been used to undermine the continent's chances of staging the World Cup, claim South African sports officials. They are stepping up their campaign to host the 2006 event, reports Gemini News Service, angrily dismissing what it sees as rivals' attempts to derail their bid.

By Mohammad Allie from Accra

Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco. FIFA president Sepp Blatter has said repeatedly that an African country should host the finals as long as it can meet the high international standards required.

The biennial Nations Cup, which ended in mid-February, was plagued by power cuts in Ghana by disturbances in Lagos when Nigerian fans hurled stones and plastic bottles after their team's goalless draw against unfancied Congo and by a pitch invasion in the Senegal match, and by the eccentric reaction of Ivory Coast's military leader after his side's first round elimination.

General Robert Guei ordered the national team to be detained in army barracks for two days "to teach them lessons in patriotism and discipline." They were forced to undergo military drills in front of television cameras.

"None of this has anything to do with South Africa's attempt to stage the first World Cup soccer finals on African soil, say officials.

"Nigeria is a sovereign country some six hours' flying time from London and seven hours from South Africa. We do not assume that events in Kosovo, just one hour's flight from Germany, will affect the German and English bids. The events in Nigeria are simply nothing to do with South Africa," Danny Jordaan, the South Africa bid committee's chief executive, was quoted by Britain's Guardian newspaper as saying.

The South African bid will be under close scrutiny when inspectors from the sport's international governing body FIFA (Federation of International Football Associations) visit the country for five days in March.

"We're ready to host the FIFA team and let them see for themselves the South Africa has what it takes to host the World Cup," said the country's bid committee.

Rival bids for the 2006 tournament have been submitted by



FIFA president Sepp Blatter. Backs Africa

The South Africans claim that some European news reports have suggested that, as a result of the trouble at the Nations Cup, Blatter has been reconsidering his support for an African host.

The detentions — and threats of further punishment in Ivory Coast angered FIFA, which called on local football officials to intervene. Basile Boli, a retired Ivorian-born French player contacted by the world body, said: "The country has taken a battering. But it's not just about the Ivory Coast — it's the whole of Africa that looks bad in the eyes of FIFA."

South African bid organisers distanced their country from the problems, and hit out at the adverse press reports.

"The English media have always been looking at anything to discredit our bid," said Jordaan. "Their latest attempt to link the problems at the African Cup of Nations to our



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