

Euro security beefed up

BRUSSELS, Apr 28: Belgium and the Netherlands, co-hosts of the Euro 2000 football tournament this summer, have signed police co-operation accords with the 14 other participating countries to guard against that perennial nemesis, hooliganism, reports AFP.

The exceptional measures, Belgian Interior Minister Antoine Diquesne said Thursday, are aimed at ensuring the June 10-July 2 tournament is "a real football festival" devoid as far as possible of the wanton violence that habitually stalks such events.

For eight EU countries - Germany, Denmark, Spain, France, Britain, Italy, Portugal and Sweden - and six others - Norway, Romania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Yugoslavia, that will mean furnishing plainclothes police "observers" to keep a close eye on known or suspected troublemakers, said Diquesne.

The unarmed police, 20 each from Britain and Germany, and five or six from the other countries, "will not be able to intervene directly, but will furnish intelligence" to local police, he said.

Germany and Britain, the hooligan capitals of Europe and whose teams clash in Charleroi, southern Belgium on June 17, have taken "the most energetic measures," said Diquesne.

Case in

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against Pakistan in Sri Lanka in 1994.

Prabhakar, fearing for his life, has so far refused to name the player.

An earlier inquiry by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), conducted by former chief justice Yashwant Chandrachud three years ago, absolved any Indian cricketer of wrongdoing.

But a fresh probe was found necessary after Cronje admitted dealings with Indian bookmakers when charged of match-fixing by New Delhi police.

Among those who attended Thursday's meeting were current superstars Sachin Tendulkar and Azharuddin, besides former captains Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar, Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and Bishan Singh Bedi.

Dalmiya led the team of administrators that included BCCI president A.C. Mutiah, secretary Jayawant Lele and former chiefs Madhavrao Scindia, Naren Salve and Indrajit Singh Bindra.

"I promise we will get to the bottom of the matter," Dhindsa said after the meeting. "If any players are found guilty they will be punished."

Dalmiya and Bindra, the two warring officials of Indian cricket who washed their dirty linen in public over the last fortnight, appeared satisfied at the government's initiative.

"The whole country feels cheated by what is going on," Dalmiya said. "It will be in the interest of Indian cricket if the atmosphere is cleared."

"I am delighted the government is taking an active interest in this. We will co-operate fully with the investigations."

Bindra, who last week promised to substantiate his charge that Indian players and officials were involved in match-fixing, welcomed the news of a separate probe.

"A government probe is different from what the BCCI carried out three years ago," he said. "I will be the first to help them in any way possible."

"If it is names they want they will get names."

Saudis, Japanese

From page 13

petition.

Inevitably their meeting, scheduled for the 50,000 capacity City Sportive in Beirut, drew attention for its political connotations although these were quickly played down by the Iranian coach.

"I don't believe this is a problem. We're not playing against their government," said Talebi.

"It'll be a very strong match, but a very fair match. It's a great match. It's always when we play Iraq. It's always emotional and important, but it is always very sporting. I know you're going to see a good game."

Lebanon, although they don't have a great tradition in Asian football, also concerned Talebi, who coached Iran at the 1998 World Cup.

The two sides will meet straight after the opening ceremony in front of what is certain to be a passionate capacity crowd in the City Sportive.

"Their national pride will be at stake," he says. "Maybe it would have been easier to play them in the third game. They beat our under-23 team recently and I know they are developing."

With the top two from each group and the two best third-placed teams all going through to the quarter finals, Saudi Arabia and Japan should have few problems reaching the second phase.

The toughest group of all may well be Group B, where World Cup regulars and 1990 Asian champions Korea Republic and Kuwait will be a serious obstacle to China's ambition to finally realise some of their potential at international level.

ROLL OF HONOUR

- 1956: South Korea
- 1960: South Korea
- 1964: Israel
- 1968: Iran
- 1972: Iran
- 1976: Iran
- 1980: Kuwait
- 1984: Saudi Arabia
- 1988: Saudi Arabia
- 1992: Japan
- 1996: Saudi Arabia

Premiership preview

Houllier wants no mistakes

LONDON, Apr 28: Manchester United may have secured their sixth English Premiership title in eight seasons last Saturday with barely a whimper of protest from the chasing pack but the race is heating up for the remaining top three slots and the prize of European Champions League football, reports AFP.

After a run of five consecutive victories, second-placed Liverpool were held to a goalless draw by Merseyside rivals Everton last Friday - but Gerard Houllier's side need only a point to be sure of joining Europe's elite next season.

Houllier wants to wipe out the memory of Liverpool's poor performance at Chelsea last season when his new-look side head to Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

The Frenchman is ashamed of three Liverpool displays since he took sole control of team affairs - last season's visits to Derby, Coventry and Chelsea.

With the Reds already recording impressive victories at both Pride Park and Highfield Road during this campaign, the Liverpool boss wants his side to defeat the Blues and secure the points which would guarantee them European football next season.

There were three games last season where I came away from the match ashamed at what had happened," said Houllier.

"We went to both Derby and Coventry this season and put the record straight by playing well and getting two good victories."

"Now we must do the same at

Chelsea and banish that memory. We were awful. In the end the 2-1 scoreline flattered us because we could have been three or four goals down very early on."

With a Champions League place realistically beyond them, Chelsea can improve their chance of finishing fourth - which carries a UEFA Cup place - by beating Liverpool, although Gianluca Vialli's side can also book their European ticket should they beat Aston Villa in the FA Cup final.

Third-placed Arsenal will be hoping for their 10th straight victory when they travel to Goodison Park to tackle Everton.

The Gunners will be boosted by the return of Nwankwo Kanu, who was away on international duty in Nigeria last weekend.

With their Champions League dream still alive, albeit fading fast, Leeds must beat relegation-threatened Sheffield Wednesday on Sunday to stay in the hunt.

This local derby always carries an edge and when the team they are playing are battling desperately to stay in the Premiership, David O'Leary's young guns know they are in for a bruising battle.

Despite two wins in their last three league matches, however, Wednesday are still favourites to join Watford in Division One next season.

They do, however, have a game in hand over Bradford and Wimbledon above them, and if they win this weekend safety could remain possible - depending on results elsewhere.

Judgement day awaits both Bradford and Wimbledon at

Valley Parade on Sunday. The make-or-break relegation showdown is Bradford's biggest game in the club's history - and Paul Jewell's side go into the match in good spirits.

Their victory over Sunderland on Monday ended a miserable run of one point from 36 on their travels.

Wimbledon, who have two more points than Bradford with three games left to play, have lost their last seven league matches.

Their preparation for Sunday's game has been hampered by the absence of coach Egil Olsen, who flew to Norway on Wednesday to receive an award for services to Norwegian football.

But Wimbledon striker Carl Cort, linked with a move to Leeds next season, believes the arrival of the Norwegian has upset the balance of the side.

He said: "The main problem since day one has been that we've conceded too many goals, which we never used to do."

"A lot of players didn't like Egil's new formation. Although you get used to it, if the players are less confident in the formation and have no confidence in the manager, then they will not perform well."

English Premiership matches on Saturday (kick-off 1400GMT unless stated):

- Aston Villa v Sunderland, Bradford v Wimbledon, Chelsea v Liverpool, Everton v Arsenal, Newcastle v Coventry, Southampton v Leicester, Tottenham v Derby, Watford v Manchester United (1030GMT), West Ham v Middlesbrough
- Sunday: Bradford v Wimbledon, Sheffield Wednesday v Leeds (1500GMT)

Van Nistelrooy deal on ice

LONDON, Apr 28: Manchester United said on Thursday that they "cannot proceed at the present time" with the transfer of PSV Eindhoven striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, reports AFP.

The Premiership champions released a statement saying the record 18.5 million pound (£29.6 million dollar) transfer deal hangs in the balance after the striker and PSV Eindhoven refused to meet Manchester United's extra demands.

United do not want to complete the deal until the 23-year-old Dutch international has proved he has fully recovered from his knee injury.

Van Nistelrooy failed one fitness test on Tuesday before returning to Holland on Wednesday - and United want to wait until he has made his comeback from the medial ligament injury.

PSV and van Nistelrooy are unhappy with this condition and the Dutch club claim the transfer has hit an "impasse".

The United statement read: "Manchester United are very disappointed that the transfer of Ruud van Nistelrooy from PSV Eindhoven cannot proceed at the present time."

PSV spokesman Pedro Salazar-Hewitt said: "PSV and Ruud van Nistelrooy cannot agree to the additional conditions which Manchester United have requested for the completion of the transfer of Ruud to Manchester at this moment."

Ruud does not agree to these conditions because they will put in danger his rehabilitation at

this moment.

"He just wants to get on with his rehabilitation and he has been doing very well."

"At this moment the transfer is at an impasse."

United want to see van Nistelrooy play before they complete the deal, which will be the biggest in British football.

PSV have pencilled in his comeback for their final league match of the season against NEC Nijmegen on May 14 and United want to see him come through this game before they write out a cheque for the Dutchman.

"The question is whether the knee is stable or not stable and if it is not stable there may be a problem," he told Sky Sports.

"But he (van Nistelrooy) has recovered very well, better than even our doctor expected but, even when he is recovering well and the knee is stable, he does not seem able to do what the doctors of Manchester United feel is necessary to fulfil their medical tests."

Asked if he thought the deal would eventually go ahead, Van Raay replied: "It's a little bit too early to say. We have now the opinions of the specialist and the doctor and we will discuss the situation between the management of PSV and the management of Manchester United."

"We've had discussions this afternoon with Manchester United. Our position is clear and their position is clear."

"I respect the position of Manchester United and Manchester United say they can understand the position of PSV and Ruud van Nistelrooy."

"I have the problem that if Ruud van Nistelrooy is leaving PSV I need a replacement striker and my preference is to resolve this situation in the course of the next week."

"We will discuss it further and I will not have contacts with any other group during that process. That is not my way of doing business. If we come to conclusion that a transfer is not possible then there could be other clubs involved."

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RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

PSV held a meeting with Van Nistelrooy and his agent Roger Linse Thursday afternoon.

They wanted the deal completed as soon as possible to allow them to concentrate on the search for van Nistelrooy's replacement.

PSV president Harry van Raay admitted: "There is, at this

Primera Liga preview

Crunch time for Deportivo

MADRID, Apr 28: Deportivo La Coruna will be hoping the wheels don't fall off their Spanish title bid when they make a difficult-looking visit to their Galician neighbours Celta Vigo on Sunday, reports AFP.

Seeking their first-ever championship, Deportivo hold a five-point lead over Barcelona with four games left to play in the Primera Liga after a morale-boosting 2-0 win over Real Sociedad last weekend.

The team will have been buoyed by this week's announcement that coach Javier Irureta is extending his contract for a year.

The club, founded in 1906, have twice come within a whisker of landing the title in recent years, and have topped the league now for the last five months.

This is "le crunch", according to Barca's Ronald de Boer.

"If Deportivo win against Celta, then it's all over," forecast the Dutch player.

"But on the other hand if they lose there will still be something for us to play for."

The Catalan giants travel to the Spanish capital to face second division-bound Atletico Madrid.

On paper this looks a relatively easy assignment for Barca coach Louis Van Gaal but victory is by no means assured given their last trip to the Vicente Calderon stadium, in the Spanish Cup, ended in an embarrassing 3-0 defeat.

In Monday's semi-final second leg Barca refused to play Atletico in protest at the Spanish Federation's refusal to change the date of the game.

Atletico, no doubt, would give their right goalpost to swap a place in the Cup final for a couple of points to save their place in the top flight.

Lying third, one point off Barcelona and half a dozen off

Moya advances to qtrs.

BARCELONA, Apr 28: Carlos Moya continued his rehabilitation after a serious back injury with a disciplined 7-6, 7-6 victory over Swiss Marc Rosset to reach the quarterfinals of the Barcelona Open on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Moya struggled throughout to deal with Rosset's impressive first serve in a match with no breaks but he held his nerve well to win both tie-breaks, 7-4 in the first set and 7-2 in the second.

Victory for the Spaniard, who took his first ATP title for more than a year at Estoril this season, earned him a quarter-final tie with Tommy Haas, the German number nine seed who beat Greg Rusedski in his third round match.

In a similar encounter between two big-serving players, which did not feature so much as a break point in the opening set, Haas overcame Rusedski 7-6, 6-3.

The best tennis of the day came from Ecuadorian number three seed Nicolas Pietrangeli. He took just 65 minutes to beat Slovakian Dominik Hrbaty 6-2, 6-2.

Pietrangeli, who beat defending champion Felix Mantilla with similar ease in his first match on Wednesday, goes on to face Marat Safin after the Russian beat Gaston Gaudio 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Deportivo, are Real Zaragoza who are still by no means out of the title hunt and will fancy their chances of eating into their deficit against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

In one of those ironic quirks in the programme book Real Madrid have an away fixture against Espanyol - the side that knocked them out of the Spanish Cup in midweek.

Real coach Vicente del Bosque appears poised to reintegrate troubled Nicolas Anelka back into his side. The French international is back training and seemingly over the tendonitis problem in his right knee which caused him to skip a session Monday.

At the foot of the table, strugglers Real Betis have a date with Real Mallorca, sitting pretty in the middle of the table while bottom club Sevilla take on Oviedo, who are lying just outside the relegation zone.

Rivalry between Sevilla and their city tenants Real Betis is acute, with Sevilla's Francisco claiming: "If we win and Betis are saved our fans will kill us."

FIXTURES

- Saturday: Rayo Vallecano v Valencia - 16:00 GMT, Espanyol v Real Madrid - 17:00 GMT, Atletico Madrid v Barcelona - 19:00 GMT
- Sunday: 16:00 GMT, Alaves v Real Valladolid, Racing Santander v Numancia, Real Sociedad v Malaga, Sevilla v Oviedo - 17:00 GMT, Real Zaragoza v Athletic Bilbao, Real Mallorca v Real Betis - 17:30 GMT, Celta Vigo - Deportivo La Coruna

Bundesliga preview

Bayern aim to catch them

BERLIN, Apr 28: Bayern Munich will be anxious to brush aside struggling Hansa Rostock and close in on Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday, reports AFP.

The defending German champions, sitting three points off the pace with three games left, will be counting on extracting maximum points from their humble visitors - who are lying fifth from bottom and have yet to register an away win all season.

Rostock, though, may take some solace from Bayern's recent form which has delivered just one win - last weekend against Borussia Dortmund - from their last three games.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld still has the treble in his sights although he said this week he was willing to sacrifice the German Cup by fielding a reserve team in the final as he is unhappy at its timing.

Bayer Leverkusen face a more taxing away match this weekend - at third-placed but fading Hamburg SV.

Leverkusen downed Werder Bremen 3-1 last week to signal their determination to clinch their first-ever Bundesliga title.

Both the leaders and Bayern have already booked their Champions League seats next season, with Hamburg odds on to join them, but the fight for the final spot is still raging.

Fourth-placed Hertha Berlin's 1-0 verdict over relegation-threatened SSV Ulm brought the coveted European prize nearer, and they will be looking to further their cause Friday when they host SC Freiburg.

The two clubs snapping at Hertha's heels, 1860 Munich and VfL Wolfsburg, face away games at Schalke 04 and Eintracht Frankfurt respectively.

time this weekend as the Italian league leaders take on Verona and rivals Lazio face lowly Venezia, reports AFP.

Verona are five points clear at the top with three matches left. The arithmetic says that Juventus are 99 per cent of the way to their 26th Serie A title, but must wait another week before adding that last one per cent.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti is not expected to spring any surprises like last week's replacement of Filippo Inzaghi with Darko Kovacevic.

The Yugoslav should take up his familiar place on the subs' bench while "SuperPippo" partner Alessandro Del Piero, who looks to have shaken off a thigh strain. The pair will be supported by France's Zinedine Zidane.

Alessio Tachincardi should return from injury, making Uruguayan hard man Paolo Montero the only possible deflection. Should he fail a fitness test, his place at the back will go to Croatian Igor Tudor.

Fed Cup

France blank Russia

PARIS, Apr 28: France's women put their Russian counterparts firmly in their place Thursday in World Group C of the Federation Cup with a convincing 3-0 victory, reports AFP.

Sandrine Testud struck first for the visitors, recording a 6-1, 6-4 win over a lacklustre Elena Likhovtseva who seemed strangely out of sorts.

Next came Julie Halard-Decugis who had to work harder against Russia's much photographed but not so often victorious Anna Kournikova.

And France rubbed salt in to the wound with a sound performance in the doubles with Halard-Decugis and Nathalie Tauziat sinking the hapless Kournikova and Likhovtseva 6-3, 7-6(7/5).

Earlier in Pool C Belgium snatched a surprise 2-1 win over Australia in a suspense-filled tie.

In Group A Spain were equally ruthless, defeating Italy 3-0 even though their opponents had the home advantage in a tie played at Bari.

Germany beat Croatia 2-1 in the other tie at Bari in the same pool.

In Group B the Czech Republic posted a 2-1 win over Austria at Bratislava while Switzerland had a winning 2-0 lead over hosts Slovakia at Bratislava.



A moment from the Premier Division kabaddi league encounter between Bangladesh Army and BDR yesterday. —Star photo

Serie A preview

Waiting continues for Juve

MILAN, Apr 28: Juventus may have the champagne ready, but their wait to open it looks set to continue this weekend as the Italian league leaders take on Verona and rivals Lazio face lowly Venezia, reports AFP.

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Though Verona have all but avoided the prospect of relegation, Ancelotti is taking nothing for granted.

"It's a very tricky away match," he said. "They haven't been beaten in 12 games and are the most on-form side at the moment."

"We'll be going there to win - and we mustn't do anything to encourage Lazio or give them confidence. Lazio are quite capable of taking nine points from their last three matches and we've got Parma next. They haven't lost for eight games."

Lazio should certainly win at home to Venezia, who would then be condemned to relegation to the Serie B. Cagliari and Piacenza are already assured of the drop, but two more teams must join them.

Sunday's spotlight will also be on the race for one of Italy's two slots in the preliminary rounds of the European Champions League. Four clubs are involved - AC Milan (54pts), Parma (54), Inter Milan (52) and AS Roma (51).

Milan will be counting on Andriy Shevchenko, the Serie A's top scorer with 22 goals in his debut season, for their game here with Piacenza.

Shevchenko, who bagged Ukraine's winner against Bulgaria on Wednesday, will be

partnered by Spaniard Jose Mari, preferred to off-form German Oliver Bierhoff.

The bad news for the reigning champions is in defence, where Alessandro Costacurta and Argentinian Jose Antonio Chamot are both suspended.

Parma will have to be wary of goal-happy Udinese - only four teams have scored more than the northeastern club - while Inter need to beat Perugia away if they are to make any headway.

However, Inter will be without midfielder Luigi Di Biagio, who pulled a muscle in Italy's 2-0 midweek win over Portugal.

Roma have the most difficult job - away to a Bari side who need the points if they are to stay just outside the relegation zone.

Roma's inspirational skipper Francesco Totti, the scorer of Italy's second goal on Wednesday, is suspended and will be replaced by Japan's Hidetoshi Nakata.

Serie A fixtures (all 1300 GMT Sunday)

- Bari v AS Roma, Cagliari v Bologna, Fiorentina v Lecce, Lazio v Venezia, AC Milan v Piacenza, Parma v Udinese, Perugia v Inter Milan, Torino v Reggina, Verona Juventus

French First Division preview

Fighting over places

PARIS, Apr 28: With Monaco already crowned as champions the focus of interest in the French First Division falls on the race for the two remaining places in next year's European Champions League and the battle against relegation to Division Two, reports AFP.

Realistically, three teams are fighting over the two remaining tickets to Europe's top club competition: Lyon, Paris St Germain and Bordeaux.

And at the other end of the table only a miracle can now save Montpellier - with Le Havre and Nancy looking likely to join them.

Third-placed Paris St Germain may be glad to get out of the French capital after their League Cup Final humiliation at

the hands of Second Division Gueugnon.

But a trip to Corsica on Sunday, where local favourites Bastia are undefeated at home this season, is a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire.

But the islanders will have to do without a suspended trio - goalkeeper Eric Durand, defender Franck Jurietti and midfielder Lilian Nalis - while defender Frederic Mendy is also a likely absentee.

Bastia are mathematically still in with a chance of Champions League football but the UEFA Cup looks the more likely alternative for the Corsicans.

PSG have refused to speak to the media for three days as they recovered from the Gueugnon humiliation.

Their talented but temperamental playmaker Ali Benarbia will miss the Bastia match through suspension while their Nigerian midfielder Jay Jay Okocha is a doubt with flu.

Veteran goalkeeper Bernard Lama has conjunctivitis while striker Kaba Diawara has a tendonitis problem.

PSG will be anxious to win one of the two Champions League spots after another trophyless season - and also aim to ensure they avoid another meeting with Gueugnon in the UEFA Cup next season.

Second-placed Lyon, who visit Lens on Saturday, will also be anxious to grab something out of a disappointing campaign when they had expectations of something better after a French record spending spree last summer.

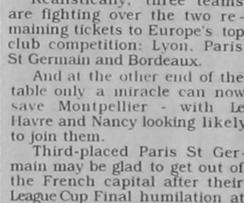
That outlay was intended to bankroll a dual assault on the French Championship and the Champions League but Slovenian outfit Maribor knocked them out of the continental championship in the preliminary round while Monaco have beaten them to the domestic prize.

Their president, Jean-Michel Aulas, has promised the fans at least one major signing this summer with the indications being that the player concerned is Chelsea's French World Cup-winning defender Frank Leboeuf.

They will have to do without their Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson at Lens - he is suffering from an inflamed cartilage. Youngster Sydney Gouvou stands by to replace him.

Lens, who should avoid relegation, are handicapped by the absence of injured Joseph-Desire Job and Jocelyn Blanchard while Eric Sikora is suspended.

Bordeaux may have conceded their title to Monaco but, if league form is taken as the yardstick, they are the form team in France at the moment



Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario makes a backhand return against Italian Giuliana Casoni during their Fed Cup match in Bari, Italy on April 27. —AFP photo

and will be determined to take three points at St Etienne to boost their Champions League campaign.

Apart from their humiliating 3-1 French Cup semifinal defeat by Calais they have been in fine form domestically. Skipper Michel Pavon and Sylvain Legwinsky are both suspended, however, while Mathieu Beda is an injury doubt.

Sylvain Wilford is back in training with the Girondins following his suspension by the club - which led to him being thrown out of the French national team by Roger Lemerre.

Bordeaux coach Elie Baup will decide whether to select Wilford just before the match. That would mean the former Rennes forward would again be available for Euro 2000.

Jerome Alonzo replaces Jeremy Janot in goal for St Etienne.

Monaco could be forgiven for taking it easy in their away match with Sedan, who are chasing a UEFA Cup spot.

It has been another memorable week for the principality team with their Argentinian playmaker Marcelo Gallardo named French Player of the Year and Philippe Christavan Young Player of the Year.

Gallardo, Mexican Rafael Marquez and Chilean Pedro Contreras will miss the Sedan clash while defender Cedric Elzeard is ruled out for the team based on the Franco-Belgian border.

At the other end of the table, Montpellier are boosted by the news that Metz's French international goalkeeper Lionel Letizi is out of their match but even a victory would be a case of shutting the stable door when the horse has bolted.

FIXTURES

- Saturday: St Etienne v Bordeaux, Sedan v Monaco, European Lyon, Le Havre v Strasbourg, Troyes v Rennes, Nancy v Nantes, Montpellier v Metz
- Sunday: Bastia v Paris St Germain, Auxerre v Marseille

Copy United, says Sacchi

MILAN, Apr 28: Former AC Milan and Italy coach Arrigo Sacchi claimed on Thursday that Serie A clubs should take a leaf out of Manchester United's book when it comes to club management, reports AFP.

Sacchi, who guided Milan to championship and European Cup success from 1987 to 1991, also said that leagues like the Premiership and the Primera Liga had overtaken the Serie A for quality of football.