

## Sport

## Hagi appalled

BUCHAREST, May 12: Less than a week after pledging to return to fight corruption in the national soccer league, Romanian star Gheorghe Hagi acknowledged having second thoughts about the effectiveness of such an endeavour in comments published Friday, reports AFP.

"I no longer have any confidence in anything or anyone," said Hagi in an interview with the daily Pro Sport. "The (soccer) federation has no power and doesn't take any measures."

Hagi claimed important matches were decided for up to 60,000 dollars, a figure also cited by other Romanian soccer figures. He said that Romania's future performance as a national team was undermined by corruption and "match rigging."

Romania is due to play the Euro 2000 soccer championships and are seen as one of the best countries in southeast Europe. Many of their players have contracts with foreign clubs. Hagi plays for Istanbul's Galatasaray.

Hagi's latest attack on the way soccer is conducted came after Farul Constanta, the team from his home town on the Black Sea, was relegated. There are suspicions that the relegation may have been the result of match rigging.

Hagi, 35, said he was particularly upset with the chairman of two clubs who he claimed had too much authority — Jean Padureanu of Gloria Bistrita, and Gheorghe Stefan of Chehalul Pietre Neamt.

"They meet in a restaurant and write on pieces of paper: that one will get the title, that one will be relegated," he was quoted as saying.

Contacted for reaction, Stefan would only say: "It's his opinion and he has a right to that."

Last week, Hagi said he would return this summer to Romania to fight soccer corruption.

Hagi debuted for Romania at age 17. After the 1989 fall of communism, he signed on with Spain's Real Madrid, then moved on to Italy's Brescia and then to Barcelona, another Spanish club. He is very popular in Istanbul, where he now lives.

## Lyon coach set to leave

LYON, France, May 12: Bernard Lacombe coach of French First Division side Lyon announced Friday that he will quit the club at the end of the season because of pressure.

The 47-year-old former international midfielder blamed the difficult season for his decision to retire after four years as coach of the side, currently third in the French league.

"I quit. The match in Montpellier will be my last as coach of Lyon," Lacombe told, the Lyon Figaro.

"I made the decision two months ago after our elimination in the (French) League Cup against Bastia. We were playing against our opponents and our own supporters. It was too much," said Lacombe.

A native of the south eastern France region, Lacombe began his career as a player with Lyon (1969-1978), before joining Saint-Etienne (1978-1989), followed by Bordeaux (1979-1986).

He returned to Lyon, then in the Second Division in 1988 as sporting director and was appointed coach in 1996.

Lacombe's last match will be Lyon's game against Montpellier on Saturday, the final this season.

His successor has not yet been named, however, tipped as a strong contender is Luis Fernandez, coach of Spanish Primera Liga side Athletic Bilbao.

**Best fails to attend premiere of own movie**

LYON, May 12: Ailing British football legend George Best, recently out of hospital after treatment for alcohol abuse, failed Thursday to turn up to the premiere of a new film about his career, reports AFP.

The former Manchester United star stayed away for "health reasons," reports AFP.

Best needed emergency treatment after collapsing in London two months ago following decades of heavy drinking. He has since left hospital and has been told to give up alcohol to stay alive.

## All rumour

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the home of the game.

England have not won a series either at home or away to West Indies in more than 30 years and a brittle West Indies batting line-up, weakened by the absence of Lara, would have afforded them a great chance to make amends.

In 17 Tests, Lara has scored 1,980 runs against England at an average of 79.20 including a world record 375 in St. John's, Antigua, six years ago.

On the last tour to England five years ago, he hit centuries in each of the last three Tests of the six-match series and finished with 765 runs at an average of 85.00.

Once again, he will be called upon to shoulder the batting and help to restore the West Indies' reputation in the game.

## SQUAD

Jimmy Adams (captain), Sherwin Campbell, Curly Ambrose, Shivaraj Chanderpaul, Corey Collymore, Chris Gayle, Adrian Griffith, Wavel Hinds, Ridley Jacobs, Reon King, Brian Lara, Nixon McLean, Mahendra Nagamootoo, Franklyn Rose, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Courtney Walsh.

## Serie A preview

## Juve look to wrap it up



ROME, May 12: Italian giants Juventus should seal their 26th Serie A title on Sunday when a win over midtable Perugia will suffice no matter what closest rivals Lazio manage at Reggina.

Juventus lead Lazio by two points with one match to play. However, in most non-Juventus fans' eyes, it will be a title overshadowed by the controversial refereeing decision last Sunday that saw a last minute Parma equaliser against the Turin club ruled out and almost virtually handed the crown to them at the expense of their Roman rivals, reports AFP.

The normal Italian hysteria followed with death threats against the referee Massimo de Santis' mother and cries of foul play which usually comes from the southern Italian sides who consider that their northern cousins, including AC Milan and Inter, are heavily favoured by referees.

However, realistically when the dust settles Lazio will have to look at themselves and wonder how did they let a second successive title slip from their grasp - they went down by a point to AC Milan last year - and coach Sven Goran Eriksson may well pay the penalty for that.

Despite spending lavishly and bringing in virtually a whole new midfield in the shape of Argentine stars Diego Simeone and Juan Veron they once again succumbed to another period of mid-season blues allowing the much more mundane but consistent Juventus to slip through on the inside.

Juventus, for whom Dutchman Edgar Davids has been the star, should have no trouble in wrapping up the three points required at Perugia, whose form has slipped alarmingly in the last few weeks.

Perugia's owner Luciano Gaucci has tried to give his players up this week with the threat that they are playing for their careers against Juventus but with safety assured and little else to play for it is hard to imagine that they will heed his words - despite the fact he has gone through 13 coaches in nine years.

Lazio should also prevail at Reggina, who have performed miracles to stay up following their promotion last season, and hang on to the hope that somehow Juventus slip-up as they did against unfashionable Verona a fortnight ago when only Davids looked as if he was interested.

Elsewhere Inter Milan and Parma look set for a Champions League play-off match as both lie on 55 points and have

relatively straightforward matches to finish with.

Inter, who have denied reports that Australian-born record buy Christian Vieri will

be on his way in the summer following a miserable season of injury and who pushed club president Massimo Moratti to the limit when he posed nude for a credit card advert, must rebound from their woeful 4-0 home defeat by Fiorentina last Sunday and win at Cagliari.

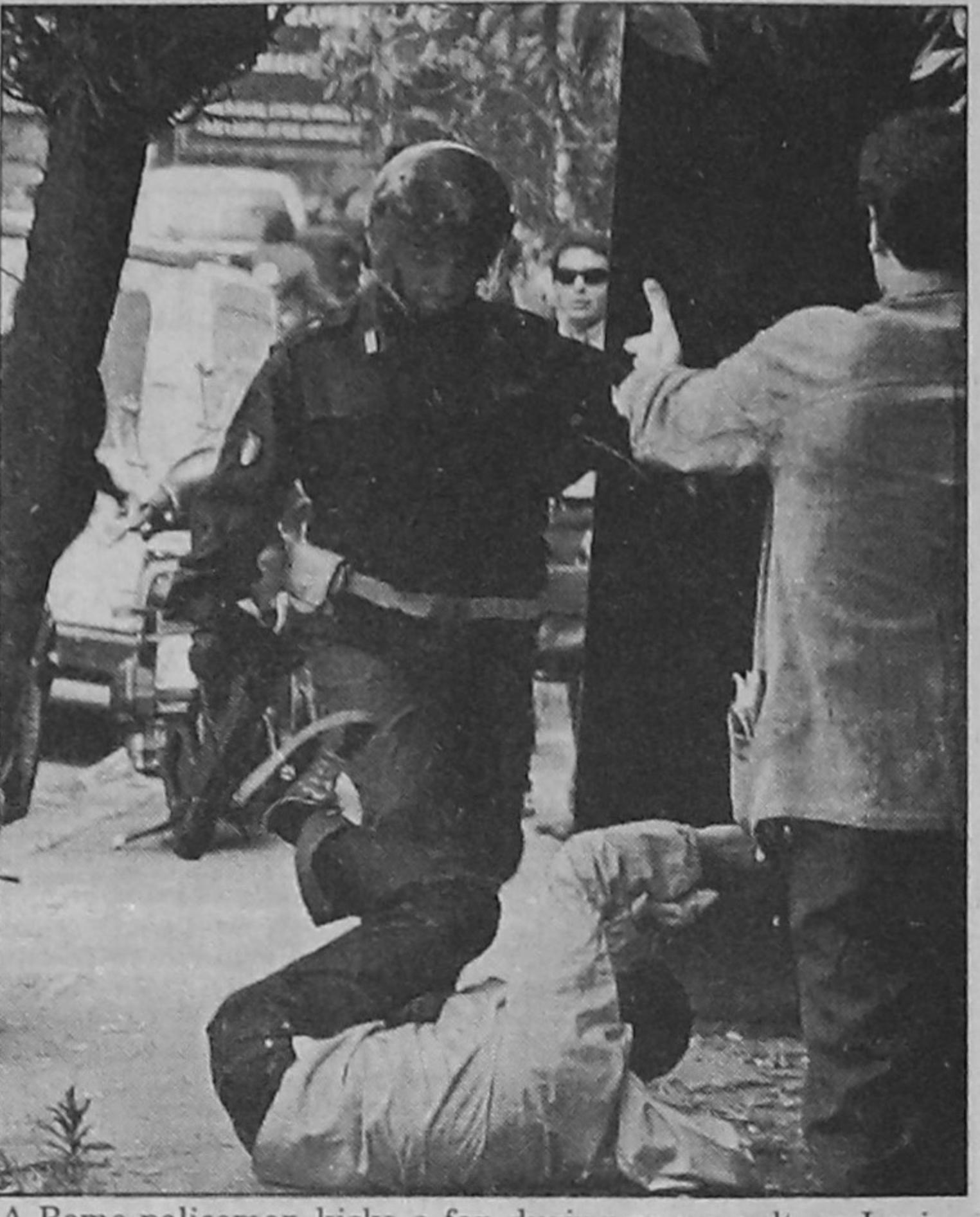
Parma, who have been frustratingly inconsistent all season, host Lecce, who have also done well to stay up having gained the reputation of being something of a yo-yo club.

Should AC Milan lose at home to Udinese and Parma and Inter win then there will be a three-way battle for the two remaining Champions League places and a chance to avenge Italy's appalling performances in European competition this season.

## FIXTURES:

Sunday (kick-offs 1300 GMT): Bari v Bologna, Cagliari v Inter Milan, Perugia v Juventus, Parma v Lecce, Torino v Piacenza, Lazio v Reggina, Verona v AS Roma, AC Milan v Udinese, Fiorentina v Venezia

EDGAR DAVIDS



A Rome policeman kicks a fan during an assault on Lazio supporters who were engaged in a sit-in in front of the FIGC (Italian Football Association) headquarters. The Lazio devotees were protesting a highly controversial refereeing decision which may have cost the club the Serie A title.

## Keegan leaves it to luck

LONDON, May 12: England coach Kevin Keegan is adamant that his side will not prepare for the possibility of a penalty shoot-out deciding their fate at Euro 2000 this summer, reports AFP.

Despite having seen England crash out of two World Cups, in 1990 and 1998, as well as the 1996 European Championships on spot-kicks, Keegan insists that there is nothing to be gained from practising the art of sudden death deciders.

In an ITV documentary entitled 'Spot of Bother', which is due to be televised next week, Keegan says: "I can't tell you who scored penalties, but I can tell you who missed them."

England skipper Alan Shearer shares the same opinion, telling the same programme: "It's down to luck. Sometimes you are better off just spinning a coin."

But Newcastle boss Bobby Robson, who still bears the scars of England's shoot-out loss to Germany in the 1990 World Cup semi-finals, has blasted such thoughts.

He said: "You have to practise. It's about your nerve, your mentality, kicking quality, making a decision and not changing it, keeping your head down and knocking the ball in."

His views are backed by German legend Franz Beckenbauer, who masterminded that victory in Italy.

"It is best that a player becomes accustomed to taking penalties," he said.

When he is comfortable with his technique, the rest of the process is about strength of mind. We never left anything to chance."

## Worms, Sforza Bayern targets?

COLOGNE, Germany, May 12: German Bundesliga outfit Borussia Dortmund on Thursday denied reports that Bayern Munich were interested in buying German international Christian Worms, reports AFP.

Kicker magazine reported Thursday that Bayern had made a 14.5 million Mark (6.7 million dollar) offer for Worms, but this was promptly dismissed by Dortmund's sport director Michael Zorc.

"They have not asked about him nor has any price been set, it's all speculation," Zorc said.

Bayern tried to sign Worms a year ago when he moved from French side Paris St. Germain back to Germany but a dispute opened up about the size of the transfer fee and he signed instead a three year contract until June 2002 with Dortmund.

Bayern are on the hunt for quality defenders to replace Markus Babbel and Lothar Matthaeus and a top notch midfielder.

Kaiserslautern's Swiss international Ciriaco Sforza has been singled out as a candidate for the latter position, especially after his public bust-up with coach Otto Rehhagel earlier in the season.

Sforza played the 1995/96 season for Bayern but left under a cloud when he forced his way out of his contract to chase a big offer at Inter Milan.

Bayern captain Stefan Effenberg, another difficult personality who was initially unwanted at Bayern two years ago, has spoken out in favour of Sforza's return.

"When you can have a player of Sforza's class you have to forget things which happened in the past," Effenberg said.

During the season, when Bayern threw out Mario Basler for ill discipline it was speculated that Bayern might swap him for Sforza. Basler did indeed move to Kaiserslautern but Sforza stayed after patching up his brittle relationship with trainer Rehhagel.

Sforza remains under contract to Kaiserslautern but has let it be known he would not be unwilling to go to Bayern.

The only Saturday match sees the two relegated sides Atletico Madrid and Sevilla battle it out.

## FIXTURES:

Saturday: Atletico Madrid v Sevilla

Sunday: Real Valladolid v Real Mallorca, Alaves v Numancia, Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao, Racing Santander v Deportivo La Coruna, Real Zaragoza v Malaga, Celta Vigo v Valencia, Real Sociedad v Barcelona, Rayo Vallecano v Real Oviedo

Barcelona, four clubs are fighting for the third and fourth Champions League spots.

Fourth-placed Valencia, on a high after reaching the May 24 Champions League final in Paris, have a tough task at Celta Vigo. Valencia coach Hector Cuper knows his side will need to try and surge ahead of Zaragoza and Alaves, who all have 60 points.

Alaves and Zaragoza have easier matches, against Numancia and Malaga who have nothing left to play for this season.

Next week comes a crunch match for those European places when Valencia host Zaragoza in their last match of the season.

With 59 points, sixth-placed Real Madrid travel to Real Betis hoping to claw their way back into Champions League contention although they, like Valencia, have the safety net of their Stade de France final to fall back on.

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According to Forax, that means FIFA's 6 plus 5 rule would be unlikely to go through.

The Bosman ruling of December 15 1995 stated that football was acting against the Treaty of Rome and the free movement of workers within the EU by restricting clubs to just three foreign EU players on the pitch at any one time.

Meanwhile Real Sociedad will be looking to dismiss any lingering doubts about First Division survival against Barca.

A victory for Galicians Deportivo this season would sign

## Bundesliga preview

## Glory beckon Leverkusen



COLOGNE, Germany, May 12: Bayer Leverkusen go into this weekend's penultimate Bundesliga round on the threshold of greatness, reports AFP.

Despite having seen England crash out of two World Cups, in 1990 and 1998, as well as the 1996 European Championships on spot-kicks, Keegan insists that there is nothing to be gained from practising the art of sudden death deciders.

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England skipper Alan Shearer shares the same opinion, telling the same programme: "It's down to luck. Sometimes you are better off just spinning a coin."

But that Leverkusen should

feel overconfident. Leverkusen

are fresh after a two week break in which

Bayern played the German Cup

physically exhausted. Leverkusen, however, are fresh after a two week break in which they should come to me and I will explain to them personally."

Jens Lehmann will have it especially tough Saturday. The out of form keeper made his name at Schalke before doing to Dortmund last year and switching to AC Milan.

"I really, really want to put a goal past Jens Lehmann," Schalke captain Olaf Thon said. "My free kicks are good at the minute, I might even get one in from 20 metres. Maybe I'll even get to a penalty seeing as (Marc) Wilmots missed our last two."

Kaiserslautern will be without injured French star Youri Djorkaeff at Freiburg as they bid to hang on to a UEFA Cup spot. Djorkaeff's manager quashed talk Thursday that he may leave after just one season if Kaiserslautern don't qualify for Europe.

There is potential spot in the Champions League at stake for combatants 1860 Munich and Hertha Berlin. Martin Max, who scored a hat trick against his old side Schalke in the previous round also has hopes of finishing the season as the Bundesliga's top scorer.

Fates will likewise be decided Saturday at the base of the table. Six teams can still go down - Freiburg (37 points), Frankfurt (36), Borussia Dortmund (36), Hansa Rostock (35), SSV Ulm (32) and Bielefeld (29) - but only two have to.

Dortmund have primed themselves for an emotional battle with bitter derby rivals Schalke, especially after Schalke fans held up a provocative banner a fortnight ago with the message: "Send Dortmund down to the Second Division and all is forgiven."

Not that Leverkusen should

feel overconfident. Leverkusen

may be 13th on the table but

they have really turned it on

of late and are currently one of

the league's most in form teams.

Bayern Munich also travel

to a club far beneath them on

the table but Arminia Bielefeld

still have a theoretical chance

of staying in the top flight and