

Shootouts to remain

KUALA LUMPUR, May 18: Dreaded penalty shoot-outs are "a lottery" but will still be in place at the 2002 World Cup. FIFA president Joseph Blatter said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Blatter said FIFA desperately wanted to find an alternative to spot-kicks but so far no solution had been found.

Blatter was speaking after English giants Arsenal crashed to Turkey's Galatasaray on penalties after Wednesday night's deadlocked UEFA Cup final in Copenhagen.

"We have to find a solution so that we can end the lottery of penalty kicks," Blatter said.

"FIFA has set up a working committee to explore this area and we are welcoming suggestions," he said.

"At the moment though there is a provision to use penalties at the 2002 World Cup, after the normal period of golden goal extra time," he added.

Blatter, attending the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) congress in the Malaysian capital, said penalties reduced football to an individual sport.

Football is a team sport. But when you have penalties it becomes an individual sport and that is not good for the spirit of the game and it is not good for the individual," Blatter said, citing the 1994 World Cup final penalty shoot-out misses of Italian Roberto Baggio and Franco Baresi.

Blatter also ruled out the introduction of television replays to help match officials.

"All attempts to make football scientific must be resisted and avoid things like television replays," he said.

"Football must maintain its human features. We have to allow for the fact that football matches contain errors, errors from coaches, errors from players and errors from referees," Blatter added.

Friendlies

Keane, Kelly ruled out of Ireland squad

DUBLIN, May 18: Manchester United skipper Roy Keane and Leeds United defender Gary Kelly were ruled out of the Republic of Ireland squad named Tuesday for the matches against Scotland, Mexico, USA and South Africa, reports AFP.

The Republic take on the Scots at Lansdowne Road on May 30 before leaving for their three-match tour of America and Nike Cup games against Mexico in Chicago on June 4, USA in Boston on June 6 and South Africa in New Jersey on June 11.

Keane and Kelly have hamstring trouble.

The Irish Football Association have been told by Leeds that Kelly also has not recovered from hamstring trouble.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Alan Kelly (Blackburn), Shay Given (Newcastle), Dean Kiely (Charlton)

Defenders: Stephen Carr (Tottenham), Kenny Cunningham (Wimbledon), Gary Breen (Coventry), Richard Dunne (Everton), Peter Butler (Sunderland), Phil Babb (Liverpool)

Midfielders: Matt Holland (Ipswich), Mark Kennedy (Man City), Mark Kinsella (Charlton), Jason McAteer (Blackburn), Kevin Kilbane (Sunderland), Damien Duff (Blackburn), Steve Finnan (Fulham), Graham Kavanagh (Stoke), Stephen McPhail (Leeds)

Forwards: Niall Quinn (Sunderland), Robbie Keane (Coventry), Rory Delap (Derby)



Residents of Turkish capital Ankara partying in the city's main square on May 17 following Galatasaray's UEFA Cup triumph over Arsenal. —AFP photo

Celebrations spoiled by tragedy



ANKARA, May 18: Nationwide celebrations of Galatasaray's UEFA Cup victory, Turkey's first triumph in a European soccer tournament, were marred by a series of deaths early Thursday which left one person dead and 18 injured, reports AFP.

A 22-year-old man was stabbed to death and another was injured in a melee in the western city of Denizli, which broke between two groups of youths participating in a convoy of cars touring the city, Anatolia news agency reported.

Sixteen others were hit by stray bullets in festivities across the country as Turks practised their notorious tradition of celebration by firing shots into the air, despite warnings from officials.

Nine people, among them three children, were injured in Istanbul, and three of them were in critical condition, according to the all-news NTV channel.

In southeast Turkey, a one-year-old girl from the town of Kiziltepe was seriously wounded in the forehead, while two men in Batman and one in Malatya also sustained injuries, Anatolia

said. In the western city of Afyon, a police officer was injured in a brawl with fans when security forces tried to stop the gunfire. A 40-year-old man was hit by a stray bullet during the same incident.

Stray bullets slightly wounded another two people in the southern city of Adana, according to NTV.

Streets across the country turned into instant carnival venues with thousands of adults and children waving red and gold Galatasaray and Turkish banners after their 10-man team beat England's Arsenal 4-1 in a penalty shoot-out in Copenhagen late Wednesday.

The two sides had drawn 0-0 after extra-time.

Convoys of cars toured the cities' centers, specially decorated for the occasion, amid ear-piercing screams and the sound of horns, drums, fireworks and gunshots.

Turkey's newly-inaugurated President Ahmet Necdet Sezer issued a message of congratulations, saying the victory of the Istanbul outfit had displayed Turkey's determination "to compete with the world in any field."

Ankara Mayor Melih Gokcek said one of the capital's neighborhoods would be named after Galatasaray and a boulevard after their coach Fatih Terim, according to Anatolia.

In Istanbul, thousands celebrated the victory in Taksim square, a traditional venue for soccer festivities and the place where two British fans were stabbed to death last month ahead of Galatasaray's semi-final match against England's Leeds United.

Taksim, where a giant screen had been set up, was crowded with fans hours before the game kicked off in Copenhagen and more flooded into the area after the victory was secured, disrupting traffic and causing police to tighten security.

The same air of festivity gripped the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, at the heart of a 15-year Kurdish rebellion against Ankara.

Galatasaray's victory was the one and only issue on Turkey's television channels, with presenters wearing red and gold accessories and studios decked out in the colors.

Huge Galatasaray banners were hung from windows and balconies of houses and public buildings days before Wednesday's final.

Thugs under press attack



LONDON, May 18: Leading British newspapers on Thursday described scenes of soccer violence in Copenhagen as another outbreak of the "English disease," saying English soccer hooligans were "a curse on Britain," reports AFP.

The Guardian described the "outbreak of English disease" during the UEFA Cup final on Wednesday night as "close to epidemic."

It described fighting between rival fans from the Turkish team Galatasaray and England's Arsenal - leaving at least five seriously injured as "some of the worst scenes of football hooliganism since England fans rioted during the World Cup in France in 1998."

The mass-circulation tabloid The Mirror said the rioters "were not Arsenal fans, not even soccer fans, they are a curse on

this country and on the game of soccer."

"They came to kill. So where were the riot cops?" The Mirror asked.

The Daily Telegraph said: "Barbarians bring hate into the football arena. The final should have been behind closed doors or not at all."

But it warned that to cancel games as a result of hooliganism, "to confer that kind of power to nihilists and sociopaths, is to surrender control of sport."

The Times bitterly predicted a "long, sticky summer of violence, fear, tear gas and hate as thugs run riot, when England and their notorious band of travelling supporters arrive in the Low Countries ... the worst fear is that it will be the beginning of an orgy of violence."

The Independent said Copenhagen "does not bode well for a peaceful (Euro 2000) championships in the summer and said the wider implications

for English football ... could see the bid to stage the 2006 World Cup damaged."

The mass-circulation tabloid newspaper The Sun denounced what it called savages, saying the "curse of the yob is means we mustn't stage the World Cup."

The Daily Mail said Danish police were "out of their depth as drunken fans terrorised locals." The UEFA Cup was a "worthless trophy tainted by the blood of those who have been killed in the name of football," it said.

The Express said: "If Galatasaray fans are found to have provoked yesterday's violence, they must be banned from European competition until they learn their lesson. Such barbarity is not acceptable on either side."

Galatasaray won 4-1 on a penalty shoot-out after a 0-0 draw to become the first Turkish team to win a European club competition.

Polster hangs up his boots

COLOGNE, Germany, May 18: Toni Polster, Austria's former captain and one of the world's most prolific strikers, has announced his retirement at the age of 36, reports AFP.

Polster made his name in Germany playing for Bundesliga clubs Cologne (1993-1998) and Borussia Monchengladbach (1998-2000) before playing out his last few games with SV Salzburg. He made his decision public after his new club lost the Austrian Cup final after a penalty shoot out to Graz AK.

"I didn't want to talk about my retirement before the match, but it really was my final game. I think it is the right moment," Polster told Austrian television.

Vienna-born Polster began his football as a trainee with Austria Vienna (1973-1987). He moved to Italy for one season with Torino (1987-1988), then went south to Spain - FC Seville (1988-1991) and Rayo Vallecano (1992-1993) - before moving to Cologne in the Bundesliga.

Polster will work as a television commentator at next month's European Championships for Eurosport - Austria did not qualify for the tournament - and also has a contract with Borussia Monchengladbach starting July 1 to work in their public relations and marketing department.

Croatia squad for France friendly

ZAGREB, May 18: Croatian squad for a friendly international against France to be played in Zagreb on May 28, announced on Thursday by Croatian coach Miroslav Blazevic.

SQUAD
Goalkeepers: Drazen Ladice (Dynamo Zagreb/Cro), Zeljko Pavlovic (LASK Linz/Aut)

Defenders: Igor Stimac (West Ham United/Eng), Dario Sinic (Inter Milan/Ita), Robert Jarni (Las Palmas/Spa), Stepan Tomas (Dynamo Zagreb/Cro), Mario Cvitanovic (Dynamo Zagreb/Cro)

Midfielders: Daniel Saric (Dynamo Zagreb/Cro), Boris Zivkovic (Bayer Leverkusen/Ger), Zvonimir Soldo (VfB Stuttgart/Ger), Aljosa Asanovic (Panathinaikos/Gre), Robert Kovac (Bayer Leverkusen/Ger), Niko Kovac (Hamburg SV/Ger), Jasmin Agic (Rijeka/Cro), Krinovic Juric (Torino/Ita)

Forwards: Mario Stanic (Parma/Ita), Alen Boksic (Lazio/Ita), Davor Suker (Arsenal/Eng), Milan Rapalic (Perugia/Ita), Davor Vugrinec (Trabzonspor/Tur), Jurica Vucko (Hajduk Split/Cro)

Taffarel salutes team spirit



COPENHAGEN, May 18: Galatasaray goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel hinted that he may leave the Istanbul club this summer after helping them to lift the UEFA Cup Wednesday, the first ever victory for a Turkish team in European competition, reports AFP.

Brazil's 1994 World Cup winning goalkeeper may have had to rely on the woodwork for his latest victory in a penalty shoot-out but his man-of-the-match performance in normal time helped his club to their landmark triumph, thanks notably to extra-time saves from Arsenal strikers Thierry Henry and Nwankwo Kanu.

Taffarel, who signed a two-year deal after the 1998 World Cup, said: "My contract is up" without elaborating on his plans.

He also admitted he did not speak Turkish, joking that he only knew two words - gok guzel (very good).

But the Brazilian was more forthcoming about the match itself after a flawless exhibition of penalty-taking from the Turks ensured a 4-1 shoot-out victory after a goalless draw.

Davor Suker and Patrick Vieira both struck the woodwork for the Londoners although Taffarel will no doubt boast his formidable record when he has played some part in that.

"I think today everybody was brilliant and the whole team deserved to win not just myself," said the former Parma and Atletico Mineiro player.

"It's difficult to analyse but I think we did a great thing for Turkey. The people in Turkey are like the people in Brazil - we as footballers can make a lot of poorer people happy."

Poor children will indeed benefit from Taffarel's man-of-the-match show - he will donate his 10,000 euro (dollar) cheque, as is the custom for the man voted best player, to charity - he chose Italian children's organisation Caritas.

But the 34-year-old from Porto Alegre, who has also played in Italy, ruled out any possibility of a return to the Brazilian national team, saying "I am very sorry but I am finished with the national team. I am over 30 and in Brazil they do not take players as old as I am."

Taffarel first earned his reputation as a shoot-out tallisman when his spot kick save from Daniele Massaro helped Brazil lift their historic fourth World Cup in 1994 against Italy - Roberto Baggio also missed for the Italians.

Four years later his prowess helped Brazil defeat Holland in the France 98 semi-final to set up an ill-fated final meeting with France.



THANK YOU ALMIGHTY: Galatasaray's former Brazilian international custodian Claudio Taffarel gestures towards the heavens after the victory over Arsenal. — Internet photo

Barca boss calls it a day



BARCELONA, May 18: Barcelona president Josep Lluís Nunez, the longtime leader of one of Europe's richest and most successful soccer clubs, announced his resignation on Wednesday after a meeting of the board of directors, reports Reuters.

A club spokesman said his successor would be chosen in elections set for July, after which Nunez would remain on board long enough to oversee the transition.

"The president has called it his final act in service of the club," spokesman, Josep Maria Antras said.

In 22 years at the helm, Nunez, 68, oversaw the most successful period in the football club's century-long history. His term of office does not officially expire until 2002, but growing discontent from the fans apparently undermined his will to carry on.

On May 10, and estimated 300 people charged the director's box after Barcelona were knocked out of the semifinals of the Champions League. A few days later, he said "At this moment, I'm very sure I'm not carrying on."

Among the candidates to replace Nunez is club vice-president Joan Gaspart who said on Wednesday that he was "thinking seriously" of applying for the job.

Barcelona, a source of pride in the wealthy Catalonia region of northeastern Spain, is famous for its rivalry with real Madrid, Spain's other premier club.

The 68-year-old businessman, who made a fortune in

real estate, took over the presidency of Barcelona in 1975, and during his time, the team won more than 25 cups, among them seven league titles, six Spanish Cups and one European cup.

Nunez is considered one of the most powerful men in Catalonia after the regional head of government Jordi Pujol.

He once teased the longtime political boss by saying, "Pujol, tell them that the president of Barca (the football club) is more important than you."

He also liked to refer to "Barcelona, the city that carries the name of our club ..."

It was Nunez who brought Dutchman Johan Cruyff to the club - first as a player, and then in 1988 as manager - ushering in a golden era which culminated in Barcelona winning the European Cup in 1992.

It also established close ties to Dutch football that continues to this day under coach Louis van Gaal.

Some say it was Nunez's falling-out with the popular

Cruyff, and the departure of the Dutchman in 1996, that marked the decline of Nunez's hold on the club.

He has fended off several attempts to unseat him but has prevailed in elections for five terms of office.

Nunez was also behind the signing of Argentine Diego Maradona in 1982. In 1996, he signed Brazil's Ronaldo, then the most expensive player in Spanish football.

He has also worked hard to develop Barcelona's business interests, trying to push through a controversial theme park extension to the Nou camp stadium.

Barcelona's failure this season to make the Champions League final and their expulsion from the Spanish Cup semifinals earlier this month tested the fans' patience, leading to renewed demands for him to go.

Barcelona's only hope for glory this season lies in winning the league. They sit three points behind leaders Deportivo Coruna with one game left.

Hassler plans for future



COLOGNE, Germany, May 18: German international Thomas Hassler, who has 97 caps to his name, said Wednesday that he is considering hanging up his boots after one more season with Bundesliga club 1860 Munich.

"I'll play one more season and then see to it that I call it a day," Hassler told local media.

Spurs in talks with Acuna

SANTIAGO, May 18: English Premiership club Tottenham are negotiating to sign Chilean international midfielder Clarence Acuna, the Chilean media reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Rene Orozco, president of Acuna's club Universidad de Chile, said he hoped a deal would be signed in the next few days, but did not reveal a fee.

Acuna, who failed a drug test ahead of Chile's World Cup qualifier against Peru on April 26, is a 25-year-old who joined Universidad de Chile in 1997 from the O'Higgins club.

The test showed him positive for isoproterenol, a medicine to ease breathing that used to be freely on sale at pharmacies. Acuna could face a suspension, but Orozco said Tottenham were not concerned as they knew it was a technical offence and not one involving hard drugs.

Tottenham know that Acuna is a player of quality and that the case does not involve hard drugs," he said.

Acuna would be the second big off-season signing for Spurs following their 11-million-pound (17.6-million-dollar) deal for Dynamo Kyiv striker Sergei Rebrov earlier in the week.

Rebrov has agreed a five-year contract, thought to be worth around 25,000-pound-per-week (40,000-dollar), after passing a medical at White Hart Lane and has returned to Ukraine until he is granted a work permit.

but added that he "might have a change of heart in the next few days."

Hassler, 33, is feeling good after boosting his career, which was in tatters just 12 months ago, but the crowning achievement would be a recall to the German national side for the Euro 2000 finals which take place next month.

Calls for his return to the national side are growing louder, in particular from fellow player Oliver Bierhoff, who insists he needs the midfielder's crosses to score goals.

Hassler says he has not received any clear signal from coach Erich Ribbeck when they last spoke about four weeks ago, but whether he will be selected for the championships remains to be seen.

"I will just have to wait until Monday (when Ribbeck is set to announce the team). It's best if I don't say anything and let myself be surprised," said Hassler.

In a parting blow, Hassler used the interview to take a swing at his old club Borussia Dortmund, who cast him off a year ago to Munich after just one, unhappy season.

Dortmund are one of Germany's richest teams with a star-studded squad but they are currently languishing in 14th place in the Bundesliga, a place plagued by a confidence crisis and haven't won a game since the start of the year.

"You can't imagine how happy I feel about that," Hassler said with glee. "When I look back at the season just gone I have to say, it's been pretty good. Everyone in Dortmund said I was passed my best. They have football experts in charge there who know as much about football as I know about breakdancing," he added.

England game won't be shifted

BRUSSELS, May 18: The European Championship match between England and Germany will take place in Charleroi, Belgium, regardless of what the European parliament thinks, the Belgian foreign ministry said Thursday, reports AFP.

Galatasaray

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After 23 minutes Vieira had a brightening moment after bringing down HAGI but referee Antonio Lopez Nieto brandished the red card only to quickly rethink and show the yellow.

Vieira was at the hub of much of Arsenal's good work while HAGI, until his dismissal, was always involved for the team from Istanbul.

Buoyed by chants of "Hagi, Hagi" from the Galatasaray supporters, the Romanian produced a delightful piece of skill to beat Bergkamp but spoiled it by hitting his pass out of play.

Three minutes before the break the Istanbul outfit missed a glorious chance to take the lead when Erdem blazed his shot wide after good work from Capone and Sukur.

After 48 minutes Galatasaray again came very close to scoring when Buruk Okan fed Sukur whose shot came back off a post.

The game was electric and after 51 minutes Keown fired over with Taffarel out of position, from point-blank range after a lovely move involving Vieira, Silvino and Henry.

Popescu was the next name in the book after illegally halting a promising Arsenal break.

A swift Marc Overmars counterattack then saw Parlour volley narrowly wide as the game again swung towards the Londoners and the Dutchman himself fired wide after good work from Henry.

But the match went into extra-time and HAGI's dismissal brought a change in the game with Arsenal pushing and Galatasaray sitting back but still prepared to strike on the counter-attack.

The Golden Goal did not come but Galatasaray, whose coach Terim said his team were not planning on extra-time and penalties, were unerring from the penalty spot.

Primera Liga preview

Judgement day Friday



MADRID, May 18: Deportivo La Coruna need just a point at Espanyol on Friday to secure their first-ever Spanish championship and wreck Barcelona's hopes of salvaging something for their season, reports AFP.

Barcelona and Real Zaragoza, three points behind the league leaders from Galicia, both have chances of winning the title on Friday but the ball is firmly in the court of Deportivo coach Javier Irujo.

A missed penalty by Deportivo's Yugoslavian Miroslav Djukic in the final match of the 1993/94 season, after Brazilian Bebeto refused to take the spot kick, handed the title to Barcelona.

Barcelona, who play Celta Vigo, are again breathing down Deportivo's neck.

Should Deportivo lose, the scenario gets a little complicated. In that case, should Zaragoza win at Valencia and Barcelona fail to get three points at the Non Camp, Zaragoza, the 1995 European Cup Winners Cup champions, would earn the Spanish crown.

Of course if Deportivo lost, Zaragoza failed to win and Barcelona beat Vigo, the title would go to the Catalans, whose president Josep Lluís Nunez has reportedly resigned and whose coach Louis Van Gaal is set to leave.

"We have the most important 90 minutes of the club's history," said Deportivo president Augusto Lendoiro.

Barcelona have promised a 300-million-peseta (1.8-million-dollar) bonus to city neighbours Espanyol to beat Deportivo, Madrid sports daily Marca reported on Tuesday.

These types of deal are reported to be common practice in Spain.

Deportivo were also reported by Marca to be on a total bonus of 500 million pesetas (three million dollars) from their own club should they win the championship.

Espanyol have nothing to play for in their last league match and will no doubt be thinking of their May 27 Spanish Cup final against Athletic Madrid.

Barca must also do well

Zola to wait until FA Cup final

LONDON, May 18: Chelsea striker Gianfranco Zola said on Wednesday he will discuss his future with the London club after Saturday's FA Cup final, reports AFP.

The Italian will form a key part of the Blues front-line as they bid to salvage their season with victory against Aston Villa at Wembley.

But the Wembley showpiece could be his last for the club and it has been widely reported that the Sardinian could be set for a summer move to Turkish club Fenerbahce.

Zola denies a deal has been with the Turks but admitted that he needed to talk with club officials to see whether he is still wanted.

against Celta to ensure playing in the European Champions League next season after being ousted by Valencia in the semifinal of this year's competition.

Apart from the top three, Real Madrid, who host Valladolid, Alaves and Valencia, who occupy the next three places, are all guaranteed European action next season.

The top four will be in the Champions League, the fifth and sixth in the UEFA Cup, with the Spanish Cup winners also earning a UEFA place.

However if the winner of the Real Madrid versus Valencia Champions League final next Wednesday does not finish in the top four, the fourth-placed team in the league will only play in the UEFA Cup.

Alaves will be hoping to upstage Athletic Bilbao, who are led by French coach Luis Fernandez for the last time.

Behind the top six, the next four clubs would be able to compete in the Intertoto Cup which could lead to a UEFA Cup place.

Celta Vigo, Mallorca, who host Athletic Madrid, Real Valladolid and Rayo Vallecano, who travel to Sevilla, are currently in the seventh to 10th positions.

Real Betis, Athletic Madrid and Sevilla are already assured of finishing in the bottom three relegation places.

FIXTURES:
Friday: Real Madrid v Real Valladolid, Valencia v Real Zaragoza, Barcelona v Celta Vigo, Athletic Bilbao v Alaves, Mallorca v Athletic Madrid, Deportivo La Coruna v Espanyol, Sevilla v Rayo Vallecano

UEFA Cup heroes to be awarded state medal

ANKARA, May 18: Galatasaray will be awarded a state medal of honour for winning the UEFA Cup - the first ever European football triumph by a Turkish team - Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said Thursday, reports AFP.

A cabinet decree has been prepared to present the club with a state medal for their achievement," Ecevit told reporters here, extending his congratulations to the club.

Galatasaray's 10-man team beat England's Arsenal 4-1 in a penalty shoot-out in Copenhagen late Wednesday after the two sides had drawn 0-0 after extra time.

"I watched the game on television and I could not get enough of it," Ecevit added.

Galatasaray's victory was a rare sporting success for Turkey, leading to nationwide celebrations which were unfortunately marred deadly brawls and gunfire.

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