

Batistuta's Roma deal almost done

BUENOS AIRES, May 25: Fiorentina's Argentine forward Gabriel Batistuta declared here on Wednesday that he was on the brink of signing for Italian Serie A rivals AS Roma, reports AFP.

At a press conference on his arrival from Italy 'Batigol' as the prolific goalscorer is known said: "AS Roma weren't the only club to talk to me but they showed the most interest and convinced me with a serious project."

He added: "The deal's done but we have to sort out the details. Nothing's been signed yet."

Batistuta is in Argentina to play in a World Cup 2002 qualifier.

Asia Cup

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appreciated the decision" he said.

The BCB president also said that he has strictly instructed the members of the grounds committee not to talk or allow anybody unknown approach to them.

"I have also instructed the grounds committee not to provide any information about the weather or the pitch condition," Sabar said.

SL CAN GO TO BKSP

Sri Lanka received a rainy reception when the defending champions, led by Sanath Jayasuriya, arrived in the city yesterday. The first team to arrive in Dhaka, Lanka will take on hosts Bangladesh in the opening match of the Pepsi Asia Cup on May 28.

But their desire to have the feel of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, the venue of the four-nation meet that also includes India and Pakistan, was nipped in the bud due to heavy downpour. And they were confined to their hotel room.

More disappointing for the holders was the news that they would not be allowed to have any practice session at the stadium today. There is a slim chance for Sanath's men to practice at the BUET ground provided that the sun shines all the day. If it is not, they will have to travel down to BKSP, the only place with indoor practice facilities.

MATCH UP TO MIDNIGHT

The Duckworth-Lewis method is likely to play a major role in deciding a match when the Asia Cup begins here on May 28. The mathematical calculation, which only come to play for an over-curtailled match, is expected to be applied frequently because of the rain threat during the tournament. But Syed Ashraf Huq, the general secretary of the BCB, said that they have adopted a more liberal clause to the playing condition to ensure a full match.

"We will follow the ICC one-day playing condition. But there will be an additional two hours of play if needed to complete a match," said Ashraf, who is also the chief coordinator of the meet.

The option for additional two hours means the day-night limited-over match, which is scheduled to start at 2 pm and finish at 9.45 pm, could run up to 11.45 pm.

FOUR UMPIRES IN THE CITY

Four umpires, two each from Sri Lanka and Pakistan, have arrived in the city yesterday to conduct the matches of the Pepsi Asia Cup.

They are Salim Badar, Nazir jr. (Pakistan), BC Cooray and Ashoka de Silva (Sri Lanka). Two other umpires from India - AV Joyprakash and S Venkatraghavan - will fly in Dhaka tomorrow.

Match referee John Reid of New Zealand was also expected to arrive late last night.

Lanka vow

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of them could have scored a century on a given day. We don't have that strength now, but still we are improving." Whatmore said.

When asked about the receipt of his success with the Sri Lankans, Whatmore said that there was no magic in that and it was the players who should be given the credit for their extraordinary performance.

On his strategy in the Pepsi Asia Cup, Whatmore said depending on the situation they had many plans to follow. He also hinted that master Sri Lankan batsman Aravinda de Silva, who usually bats at number four, might open the innings along with Jayasuriya if situation demands.

The three-month rest after the Pakistan tour has helped the Lankan side a lot to prepare for the Pepsi Asia Cup, he said. The defending champions had a 10-week training camp for the tourney.

Sri Lanka will meet India in the second match on June 1 and Pakistan in the last match on May 5.

TEAM

Sanath Jayasuriya (captain), Mahela Jayawardena (vice-captain), Aravinda de Silva, Marvan Atapattu, Russel Arnold, Tilakaratne Dilshan, Indika de Saram, Romesh Kaluwitharana, Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralitharan, Upul Chandana, Nuwan Zoysa, Sanjewa de Silva and Kaushalya Weeraratne.

Officials: TB Kahelgamuwa (manager), Dave Whatmore (coach), Alex Kountouris (physio) and Trevor Chappel (fielding coach).



BORN CHAMPIONS: The Real Madrid team is over the moon while celebrating with the European Champions League trophy at the Stade de France in Saint Denis on May 24. —AFP photo

Emperor Real Madrid the Eighth

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and Redondo and with Roberto Carlos on the flank.

"In November when I took over the team, it was a challenge for me. I was really happy to play Liverpool in the 1981 final but I was not able to win."

"This victory is the triumph of the whole team who are an extraordinary group."

Valencia coach Hector Cuper said: "At this time, I'm feeling a lot of pain. There is no consolation. When you get to a final you want to win."

However he did admit Madrid had put in a great performance. "Real won fair and square and I think they were the better side," Cuper said.

Madrid made three changes from the second leg of the semifinal at Bayern Munich.

Defenders Aitor Karanka and Michel Salgado, both suspended in Germany, came into the side in place of Julio Cesar and Cameroon's Geremi.

Morientes, out injured for the last match, joined Nicolas Anelka of France in attack in place of Brazilian Savio.

Valencia's Kily Gonzalez of Argentina, who hurt his left knee in training on Tuesday night at the Stade de France, started the match and Gerardo came in at left back in place of Sweden's Joachim Bjorklund.

Madrid had most of the possession in the first half with Valencia, nearly always on the back foot, looking hopeful in the odd counter attack.

Anelka, fed by Raul, saw his header arrow towards the top left hand corner on the quarter-

hour but it was pushed away by Valencia keeper Santiago Canizares in one of the best chances of the half.

Then came one of Valencia's counter attacks with Lopez darting through but when he squared the ball to the right, Mendieta could only hit a soft low shot into the hands of Casillas.

Karanka, not flashy but competent in Madrid's central defence, a couple of times just got his boot to the ball in the final tackle.

McManaman had a shot from the edge of the box on the half hour in forcing Canizares, diving to his right, to deflect the ball round the post.

Salgado was yellow carded for a tackle on Angelo in the 37th minute and a minute later Gerardo's name went in the book of Italian referee Stefano Braschi in a foul which was to lead to a goal.

From the ensuing Carlos freekick from 25 metres, the ball deflected out to Salgado on the right, Anelka got a touch on the bi-line and, off balance, Salgado fired the ball to the far post with a curling left foot effort.

Then came Morientes' moment of glory as he beat Yugoslav international defender Miroslav Djukic to head home and put Madrid ahead.

After the break, Madrid supporters at the north end of the stadium were able to begin their party which will no doubt go well into the night and possibly extend into the weeks to come.

A McManaman right-footed volley from the edge of the box found the right side of the net and his big smile said it all.

"I just decided to go in off Roberto's (Carlos) throw in, the lad's headed it out clear to me and you know, the eyes were shut and the volley went in," McManaman said.

"This is without a doubt the biggest game I've ever played in and the fact that we've come out winners is fantastic."

"As I've always said we have gone along in this, the most important thing is the team. We've got a fantastic victory. It's important that we are in the Champions League next season, so a great night all round," he added.

Striker Romanian Adrian Ilie came on for left back Gerardo as Cuper played a positive card in his bid to prise back a goal.

Ironically it was the gap that they left at the back which allowed Raul to hit on the break and run half the length of the pitch on his own for the third, clinching goal.

Djukic tried his best to run back and get the ball off the line but Raul checked to the right round Canizares and slotted the ball home from an angle.

Madrid, who just before the goal brought on Brazilian Savio for Morientes, made two further substitutions, fielding Sanchis for Anelka and Fernando Hierro for Salgado.

They looked like mere cosmetic changes, however, to allow those players to say they were on the pitch in Madrid's moment of triumph.

Media salutes champions

MADRID, May 25: The Spanish media celebrated Thursday after Real Madrid won the European Champions League title on Wednesday night in Paris, making it a record eighth time they have lifted the European Cup, reports AFP.

Real beat rival Spanish league side Valencia 3-0 at the Stade de France in Paris in what turned out to be a one-sided - but nonetheless exciting - match.

"Prouder than a peacock," "Real, Kings of Europe", "The 8th wonder of the world" were just some of the headlines littering the front pages of Spain's papers here on Thursday.

"With an ease which hardly anyone was expecting, Real Madrid knocked out Valencia in a crushing victory, no matter which way you look at it," said the daily El Pais.

"Prouder than a peacock, Real Madrid starts the 21st century by crushing Europe," wrote the sports paper Marca.

"Real Madrid sealed the heights in Paris, the place where they won their first European Cup in 1956," it added.

"No other team can boast so many European titles," said the paper, but also spoke about "Valencia's ordeal" at the hands of an excellent Madrid.

"Real Madrid have put themselves on the path to a ninth European Cup," according to the wave of optimistic reports in the daily AS newspaper.

ABC said: "There's no doubt that the Champions League title fits them like a glove."

Amidst the barrage of praise for Real, only the local media in Valencia were sorry about their team's defeat.

"Pain and tears in Paris," was Las Provincias' headline.

Victory a blessing

PARIS, May 25: Real Madrid's 3-0 victory over Valencia in the European Cup final has provided a major boost to the debt-ridden club - who are believed to be as much as 250 million dollars in the red, reports AFP.

Real, who need financial clout to satisfy demanding supporters with star signings, could earn as much as 30 million dollars from revenue associated with their Champions League qualification for next season.

That is roughly the figure the Spanish club have amassed from their 17 games this season if one considers gate receipts, sponsorship, TV and prize money, according to UEFA figures and the Spanish press.

A club like Madrid could not exist in say France or Germany, for example, where financial solvency is necessary to be accepted by the national league.

Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz has repeatedly said in the Spanish press that it would be a financial disaster if Madrid did not qualify and they had only finished in a UEFA Cup spot in the Spanish championship.

The King of Spain has not paid off Real's debt, despite a bizarre yet persistent rumour, but such wild stories regular features of life in football-mad Spain.

Real Madrid are a veritable social institution and their success, vital in the capital city, is seen as a question of regional pride with the more affluent Barcelona football club their main rivals.

Spanish clubs have, in the past, reportedly benefited from generous tax advantages from the authorities.

Authorities have begun to clamp down, however, and control the financial affairs of 16 clubs, including Valencia and Real, following Atletico Madrid's going into receivership at the end of December last year.

Whatever the financial implications, supporters were delighted with Real's emphatic win, their eight success in the competition.

Euro championship for ladies in 2003

PARIS, May 25: A new European women's football championship should be up and running from 2003, Markus Studer, spokesman for European football's governing body UEFA said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

McManaman the toast of England

PARIS, May 25: Steve McManaman helped boost the footballing reputation of Englishmen abroad with the second goal in Madrid's 3-0 win over Valencia in the Champions League Cup at the Stade de France on Wednesday night.

He skipped into the box to hit a right-footed volley past hapless keeper Santiago Canizares and his smile was as wide and bright as this magnificent French stadium.

"I just decided to go in off Roberto's (Carlos) throw in, the lad's headed it out clear to me and you know, the eyes were shut and the volley went in," McManaman said.

"This is without a doubt the biggest game I've ever played in and the fact that we've come out winners is fantastic."

"As I've always said we have gone along in this, the most important thing is the team. We've got a fantastic victory. It's important that we are in the Champions League next season, so a great night all round," he added.

Apart from his 67th minute goal, he had also had a great chance during the first period.

On the half hour, the former Liverpool playmaker shot from the edge of the box to force a great save from Canizares, diving to his right to push the ball round the post.

McManaman did give Madrid fans a little scare though when Valencia had a low-key penalty appeal for his alleged trip on Gaizka Mendieta just before teammate Roberto Carlos was booked in the 59th minute.

Easily recognizable with his mop hairstyle and pale complexion, he cuts a different figure to his Latin teammates but his skill level is surely in the same bracket.

McManaman, rested by England coach Kevin Keegan for Saturday's international against Brazil so he could concentrate on this match, never really won over the respect of the English press in his Liverpool days.

However he has earned a great deal of regard from the Santiago Bernabeu terraces and the Spanish footballing intelligentsia in general.

Keegan saluted the performance of McManaman and believes England will benefit from the confidence he will have gained when they play in

the European championships. The entire England squad watched McManaman score the second goal in Real's 3-0 win over Valencia in Paris on Wednesday night.

Now Keegan will be looking for McManaman to produce the same sort of display when he links up with his Euro 2000 teammates after enjoying the celebrations in Madrid.

"Steve McManaman was tremendous," Keegan told reporters at the England training camp at Bisham Abbey. "And, if he wasn't the man-of-the-match, then I don't know who was - and there were a lot of great performances from Real Madrid players."

"We are absolutely delighted for him. We are looking forward to seeing him join up with the squad and bringing the extra confidence with him that he will have gained from such a great result and performance."

"But I have told him to go and enjoy whatever the Spanish do after they have won something, go back and celebrate the occasion with his teammates, with whom he seems to be getting on fantastically well."

"I want him to go and enjoy things and I know what it is like to play in a foreign side in a European Cup final."

"Then he can come and join us, watch the Brazil game with us - which he will not be considered for - and then hopefully focus on Euro 2000."

McManaman said he had received several calls of congratulation from his England teammates after the match.

"My teammates kept ringing my mobile phone," he said.

McManaman has been included in England's 28-man pre-squad for the June 10 to July 2 European championships in Holland and Belgium.

Though in the past he has been an inconsistent performer for England and has never been an automatic first-teamer, it would surely be absurd if he didn't make the final 22 on this performance.

McManaman also went one better than Keegan who, playing abroad in Germany, was in the Hamburg side which lost to Nottingham Forest in the 1980 final.

McManaman has continually said in footballing terms it was the right choice to leave the rainy climate of north western England to move to the more feel-good weather in the Spanish capital.

And, with a 1999/2000 European Cup winners medal, the sun has also come out on his sporting career to prove him right.



Real Madrid's England star Steve McManaman (R), who also scored, congratulates Raul after his strike against Valencia in the Champions' League final. —AFP photo

AFP EURO 2000 BRIEFS



combat the ever present threat of crowd trouble.

Euro 2000 is being hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands between June 10-July 2.

ITALY LOSE VIERI

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BRUSSELS, May 25: Strict drink bans are to be imposed in the four Belgian cities to host next month's Euro 2000 championships to reduce the threat of crowd trouble, the city authorities said on Wednesday.

Alcohol consumption will be forbidden within the security perimeter at each of the stadia hosting the Belgian fixtures.

One of the venues, Charleroi, has outlawed the drinking of alcohol from glass or metal holders in public areas, while in Bruges thresholds are to be imposed on the strength of beer allowed - three percent in the zone around the stadium and six percent around the rest of the town.

These measures form just part of the huge security operation being undertaken here to

combating the ever present threat of crowd trouble.

Italy's Euro 2000 hopes suffered a major blow on Wednesday when the world's most expensive

striker Christian Vieri was ruled out of the tournament with a pulled right thigh muscle.

The 26-year-old, who moved from Lazio for 50 million dollars last summer, was injured in a collision with Parma keeper Gianluigi Buffon during Inter's 3-1 Champions League play-off win over Parma on Tuesday and had to go off in the 30th minute.

The decision to cut Vieri, who was just returning after pulling the same muscle on March 27, from the squad was taken after he underwent a scan at the Italian training centre on Wednesday.

Italian coach Dino Zoff, the 1982 World Cup winning captain, decided not to replace him in his initial squad of 26 ahead of deciding on his final list of 22.

Zoff faces another problem with veteran captain Paolo Maldini, who has been laid low for the past month with a right foot injury and faces a race to be fit for Euro, which takes place in Belgium and the Netherlands from June 10 to July 2.

FLORENCE, Italy, May 25: Italy's Euro 2000 hopes suffered a major blow on Wednesday when the world's most expensive

striker Christian Vieri, who was ruled out of Euro 2000 on Wednesday with a thigh injury, will be staying at Inter and not as was reported be returning to rivals Lazio.

Also staying will be Italian international goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi - who was not chosen by national coach Dino Zoff to play in the Euro 2000 finals which start next month.

Lippi also said that the fall-out with Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba were inevitable after he dropped him for the last three matches, but refused to comment on the comments made by veteran playmaker Roberto Baggio after the Parma match.

Recoba was - not surprisingly - unhappy with the fact that he was too often left on the bench.

"I don't want to stay (at Inter) to play small clubs or play in the president's garden," he said.

"I'm disappointed because I didn't play in the club's three most important matches," he added after the playoff match on Tuesday night.

Baggio also had words to say about the coach after the match where he scored two goals.

"If Lippi stays, there's no reason for me to stay," he said.

Inter's president, Massimo Moratti, held a meeting with Lippi this morning to confirm his support for the coach.

"We are keeping Lippi. He has once again shown himself to be a very responsible man, and that's why Inter want to stick with him and make plans for the team's future which were discussed during our meeting," said Moratti.



KILLER BLOW: Raul (No 7), the Real Madrid super-striker, about to go past a diving Valencia custodian Canizares to score his team's third goal. —AFP photo

Party spoiled by trauma

MADRID, May 25: The new champions of European football, Real Madrid, were to return home Thursday to find a city recovering from a pitched battle between police and fans which left at least 230 injured, reports AFP.

Real's 3-0 victory over Valencia was further overshadowed when a plane carrying at least 150 people, mainly Real Madrid supporters, crashed with a cargo plane on a runway at Paris' Charles-de-Gaulle airport, killing a pilot.

Fighting broke out early Thursday in Madrid's central Cibeles Square, when fans among a 100,000-strong crowd, which had gathered to celebrate their team's victory in Wednesday's European Champions League final in Paris, threw bottles at police.

Police responded with rubber bullets and tear gas, before charging to disperse the crowd. The 230 injured included at least 50 police officers, according to Madrid's emergency medical service.

At least four people were arrested, according to Spanish media reports. The police have given no official arrest figures.

Several journalists working for the international media were roughly treated by the police and have made formal complaints.

None of the fans were seriously injured, with most suffering cuts from broken glass, a spokesman for the emergency medical service told AFP.

The plane crash happened just before 3:00 a.m. (0100 GMT)

when the wing of an Air Liberte passenger jet carrying 150 people hit the cockpit of a cargo plane owned by the British firm Stream Line, killing the co-pilot of the cargo aircraft.

None of the passengers were injured and all later boarded another Air Liberte flight to return to Madrid.

The pilot of the cargo jet was injured but there were no passengers on board.

Police said the circumstances surrounding the collision remain unclear, but preliminary reports suggest that both planes had received authorization for take-off from the same runway.

Public prosecutors have launched an investigation into the accident, airport officials said in a statement, adding that a parallel inquiry would be run by the transportation ministry.

In Madrid sporadic clashes between fans and police continued through the night after supporters left Cibeles Square.

A total of 1,350 officers were deployed to police the celebrations, and the same number were on standby Thursday to return to the square, where the victorious team was set to appear later Thursday with their trophy, the European Cup.

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