

Lions hold world champs

PARIS, Oct 5: Olympic champions Cameroon showed they could hold their own against the elite when they drew 1-1 against world and European champions France in Paris yesterday. Patrick Mboma's spectacular overhead kick from a long throw cancelled out Sylvain Wilford's opener for the French at the Stade de France, reports Reuters.

"It's a great night," said Mboma. "We came here to prove we could vie with the French and that's what we did."

The home side went ahead after 20 minutes when Arsenal's Patrick Vieira delivered a perfect lob for club mate Wilford. He rounded goalkeeper Alioum Boukar and slotted the ball into an empty net.

But France, who were plagued by injuries, including Zinedine Zidane and goalkeeper Fabien Barthez, looked more vulnerable than usual.

Goalkeeper Lionel Letizi, a replacement for Manchester United's Barthez, was forced into a fine save by striker Samuel Eto'o in the 34th minute. Gaining in confidence, the Olympic champions equalised when Mboma, so often the hero in Australia, produced his magnificent overhead effort a minute from the break.

Substitute goalkeeper Richard Dutruel, in for the injured Letizi, spared the hosts further embarrassment by saving from Eto'o after striker ran unchallenged through the French defence in the 62nd minute.

For France, captain Marcel Desailly headed wide a free-kick from the left by substitute Laurent Robert 12 minutes from time.

"We were aware Cameroon were a very mighty side," said French coach Roger Lemerre. "For some of my guys it was hard to play here tonight as they were not at their best."

"We played euphoric opponents who were mentally and physically strong after their Olympic title."

Beckham scare for England

LONDON, Oct 5: England vice-captain David Beckham missed the squad's training session on Wednesday and is a doubtful starter for the World Cup qualifier against Germany on Saturday, the Mirror newspaper said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The Manchester United midfielder jarred his knee in Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Arsenal and is rated as only 50-50 to play in the final international at Wembley stadium.

England boss Kevin Keegan has asked Arsenal's Ray Parlour to stand by in case Beckham is ruled out altogether.

Beckham's absence would be a major blow to Keegan, who had previously said that any player who did not train on Thursday would not start the game.

Tragic

BUCHAREST, Oct 5: Dynamo Bucharest midfielder player Catalin Haldan collapsed and died during a friendly match in the southern city of Oltenita on Thursday, reports AFP.

Haldan, 24, had complained to a team-mate of feeling dizzy during the second half of the game against Santierul Naval and fell to the ground shortly afterwards. He was taken to hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Haldan, who had been on Dynamo's books since 1996, was a member of the Romanian Euro 2000 squad.

Beijing steps up bid to host 2008 Olympics

BEIJING, Oct 5: Beijing today stepped up its bid to host the 2008 Games, after celebrating its best showing yet in the Olympics, hauling in 28 golds from Sydney, reports AFP.

"Beijing is perfectly capable of organising the Games," chirped the front page of the People's Daily, outlining all the arguments in favour of Beijing's bid.

Among these, the communist party organ cited the Chinese capital's bustling economy, its efforts to deal with transport and pollution problems, along with the success of large international shows held in Beijing in the past.

But the paper especially focused on the "patriotic" aspect of Beijing's bid.

"Beijing's candidacy is the common wish of all the Chinese population, it is totally supported by the government and by the Chinese people," it said.

According to the Games organisation in Beijing, hosting the Olympic Games will not only do credit to one-fifth of the world's population, but will contribute to cultural exchanges between the East and the West, at the same time giving Chinese people an opportunity to contribute to the development and progress of humanity during the 21st century.

Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin showed his personal support to Beijing's candidacy by welcoming back the Chinese athletes on Tuesday from the Olympic Games in Sydney.

Chinese athletes brought back 28 golds, 16 silvers and 15 bronzes, the best showing for the mainland since China's return to the summer Olympic Games in 1984.

Night of the qualifiers

LONDON, Oct 5 (Reuters/Internet): With only the group winners guaranteed a place in the 2002 World Cup finals, Italy, the Netherlands and Ukraine need to record their first victories in Saturday's raft of European zone qualifiers.

But the biggest focus of attention will be on Wembley in London and the Ullevi stadium in Gothenburg.

England open their campaign against old rivals Germany in the last match to be played at Wembley before it is torn down and rebuilt.

After a poor Euro 2000, despite their 1-0 win over the Germans, England produced one of their best displays under Kevin Keegan to draw 1-1 with European and world champions France in Paris on September 2.

In that game, Manchester United striker Andy Cole picked up the mantle left by the now-retired scourge of the Germans, Alan Shearer, the matchwinner at Euro 2000.

Cole seems set to partner in-form Liverpool striker Michael Owen in attack against Rudy Voeller's team, who started their campaign with a 2-0 win over Greece. Before that, they also beat Spain 4-1 in a friendly.

A victory over England would put them firmly in control of group nine but caretaker coach Voeller and the German squad have been unsettled by a spectacular row between his planned successor next summer, Bayer Leverkusen's Christoph Daum, and Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoenes.

"We are no longer in a position to say we will go to Wembley and win," Voeller claims. England follow Saturday's clash with a trip to Finland on Wednesday.

Sweden tackle Turkey in Gothenburg in another enticing-looking encounter on Saturday which neither side will want to lose.

Sweden won their opening group four game 1-0 in Azerbaijan and joint coach Lars Lagerback knows Saturday's clash and the trip to Slovakia on Wednesday will prove a true test of his side's credentials.

"These are our toughest opponents in the group," he said.

Sweden are heartened by the good form of Celtic striker Henrik Larsson, while Bari's Yksel Osmanovski has been recalled to add a further option in attack.

Turkey are a force to be reckoned with in European football and they disposed of Moldova 2-0 in their first game.

They are without injured midfielder Umit Davala, while defender Ozal Alpay is suspended. Coach Senol Guner is hoping top striker Hakan Sukur of Inter Milan can shrug off a stomach bug to play alongside Arif Erdem in attack.

Turkey visit Azerbaijan on Wednesday and Guner is confident. "Our aim is six points," he said.

Italy, runners-up at Euro 2000, drew 2-2 in Hungary in their opening group eight game, a mediocre result which they won't want to repeat against Romania in Milan on Saturday.

Coach Giovanni Trapattoni has resisted the temptation to call up on-form goalscorer Simone Inzaghi but AC Milan's left-sided wing-back Francesco

Coco could make his debut. The Romanians, 1-0 winners over Lithuania in their first game, are without injured strikers Adrian Ilie and Ioan Vladou and would doubtless settle for a point.

Like Italy, the Netherlands dropped two points in their opening game in group two, a 3-1 home defeat in their opening group live game against Poland in Kiev was nothing short of disastrous and they will aim to redress the balance in Saturday's visit to fellow former Soviet republic Armenia.

Group live promises to be tight with Norway, who visit Wales on Saturday and the Poles likely to push Ukraine hard for the top spot.

Spain are strong favourites in group seven and should build on their opening win in Bosnia-Herzegovina by beating Israel in Madrid.

Austria open their campaign with a trip to nearby Liechtenstein. Group three is likely to be a straight fight between the Czech Republic and Denmark, who both won their opening games. The Czechs host Iceland and Denmark visit Northern Ireland.

Craig Brown's Scotland side also have a good opportunity to make it two wins out of two when they visit San Marino before next Wednesday's vital trip to group six favourites Croatia.

Belgium, who drew 0-0 with the Croats in Brussels in their first game, visit Latvia.

Ruling body FIFA has postponed Yugoslavia's group one games in Belgrade against Russia on Saturday and against the Faroe Islands on Wednesday due to the unstable political situation there.

The Cyprus will be no pushover, though, as they showed by beating Andorra 3-2 in their opening game.

Dutch success will be even more paramount if Portugal make it two wins out of two by beating Ireland, the group's dark horses, in Lisbon.

Ukraine are still smarting



Rudi Voeller, the German coach shades his eyes from the sun while watching his squad in practice at London on October 4. - AFP photo

Barca crazy about Owen?

LONDON, Oct 5: Spanish giants Barcelona, stung by two Champions League defeats, are ready to break the bank and offer an 85 million-dollar package for Liverpool's England striker Michael Owen, according to Thursday's Mirror newspaper, reports AFP.

The package would comprise a 55 million dollar transfer fee on a par with the record 56 million Barca received from Real Madrid for Portugal's Luis Figo in the summer - and around 30 million more for Owen himself.

Barca's reported interest comes after Owen, 20, said on Wednesday he could envisage leaving Liverpool and going abroad to further his international career.

Owen said that German clubmate Dietmar Hamann had told him playing abroad would make him a better player and told The Mirror: "Dietmar does have a point, because there's no doubt you do meet different people and different styles."

"You would definitely broaden your experience by going abroad. There are plenty of options there for me."

Owen sprang to prominence at the 1998 World Cup, scoring one of the goals of the tournament in a 2-2 draw with Argentina, but forced England out on penalties.

But at Euro 2000 England coach Kevin Keegan substituted him in all three matches.

Owen was on the bench again for last month's friendly against France but came on and scored in a 1-1 draw.

He is set to partner Manchester United's Andy Cole in Saturday's World Cup qualifier against Germany as both look to inherit the mantle of the now retired Alan Shearer.

Milosevic joins protesters

BELGRADE, Oct 5: Yugoslav international striker Savo Milosevic joined demonstrators protesting against his namesake, President Slobodan Milosevic, and enjoyed a kick about Wednesday with them in Belgrade, the Glas Javosti daily reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Milosevic, who plays for Parma in Italy's Serie A, showed his support for the protesters by turning up clad in a t-shirt of opposition group Otpor (resistance) and played in a game the movement had arranged to show their disapproval at "electoral fraud."

Milosevic, who starred for Yugoslavia at Euro 2000, explained he wanted to show his support for the demonstrators who are trying to force President Milosevic to recognise opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica as the winner of the September 24 presidential election.

"I am a footballer, not a politician. I did not want to make a political statement ... but I felt I had a moral obligation to be with my people and support their will," the Beta news agency quoted former Aston Villa striker Milosevic as saying.

He added everyone should "pray for a peaceful outcome" to the current crisis in Yugoslavia.

Mandela meets French heroes

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 5: A world statesman met world champions here Thursday as former South African president Nelson Mandela was introduced to the French football squad.

Both sides looked duly impressed with the other as they met at 82-year-old Mandela's villa just the north of the city - close to where he was arrested in 1961 before his long years in prison for having fought against apartheid.

Mandela shook hands with the players in turn as they emerged from a long overnight flight here ready to face South Africa in a friendly on Sunday.

The French drew 1-1 with Cameroon on Wednesday night at the Stade de France, on the outskirts of Paris.

South Africa friendly is another in a series of warm-ups for the 2002 World Cup, for which France have already qualified as holders.

The presence of hordes of press photographers threatened to sour the occasion as Barcelona midfielder Emmanuel Petit observed "they are spoiling our party a bit" and Marcel Desailly admitted their presence meant it was difficult to "savour this unique moment quite as we had wished."

But the players agreed that meeting Mandela had been a great moment as he stepped forward to welcome them.

Mandela also had a quiet word with World Cup-winning coach Aime Jacquet, who is now the French Football Federation's technical director.

Current coach Roger Lemerre said it meant a lot to him to meet Mandela.

"You get a real inkling of what freedom is all about when you meet a man like that," he said afterwards.

Striker Nicolas Anelka cast off his habitual sour demeanour as he proffered a huge smile to Mandela.

French skipper Desailly was delighted to meet the Nobel Peace Prize winner.

"It's really wonderful to see how he has remained so down to Earth. I can only praise his love of life and this simplicity which is so impressive."

"We didn't have the time but I would have loved to talk longer with him."

New coach to be unveiled Monday

Salas interests Inter



MILAN, Italy, Oct 5: Italian giants Inter Milan announced Thursday they would unveil their new coach on Monday following the sacking of Marcello Lippi earlier this week, reports AFP.

Argentine Daniel Passarella, currently in charge of the Uruguayan national team, as well as Marco Tardelli, a 1982 World Cup winner with Italy and coach of the under 21 squad, are both rumoured to be hot favourites for the post.

The club have categorically denied the possibility of former Sampdoria and Lazio star Roberto Mancini moving to the San Siro, from his post as assistant coach to Sven Goran Eriksson at Italian champions Lazio.

Lippi was sacked following a

disastrous start to the season which began with their elimination from the Champions League by Swedish minnows Helsingborgs at the last qualifying hurdle.

They then lost their opening league match 2-1 at Reggiana, prompting Lippi to say "If I were the president, I would sack everyone, players and coach."

President Massimo Moratti promptly took Lippi's advice and sent the former Juventus coach packing.

He now needs a replacement to lead the side for the next league match at home on October 15 against Napoli.

Meanwhile Moratti is all set to hold talks with his Lazio counterpart Sergio Cagnotti on the possible arrival of Chilean international Marcelo Salas at the San Siro, the Rome-based club announced Thursday.

Salas has recently found himself out of the Italian champions' starting line-up, following the arrival of strikers Claudio Lopez and Hernan Crespo from Valencia and Parma respectively.

Lazio also have rising Italian star Simone Inzaghi among their ranks, which has pushed Salas even further down the pecking order.

Inter are still without their injured Italian international Christian Vieri, while new Turkish signing Hakan Sukur and Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba have failed to impress.

European champions Real Madrid have also shown an interest in Salas and English Premiership side Chelsea could also re-enter the race for his signature, despite Inter having a headstart in negotiations.

Tigana's full life at Fulham



LONDON, Oct 5 (AFP): Frenchman Jean Tigana, who has led Fulham to the top of the English First Division, is enjoying life in the English capital and even impressed wine tasters by launching a new vintage on Wednesday.

During the unveiling of a new white wine, Domine La Dona, at the world famous Harrods department store, former international star Tigana exuded happiness with his lot.

"I never thought there would be so many people," he said.

"It's been 14 years that I've been passionate about football management and wine and each time I have a day off I return to Cassis" in the south of France, where Tigana owns 180 hectares of land.

Accompanied by club president and owner of Harrods Mohamed Al Fayed as well as his player-coach John Collins, Tigana took advantage of his vast knowledge of wine to describe the new vintage as very fruity.

The players have not yet tasted the wine but perhaps they'll have the chance if we

can win the league," said Tigana, who lamented there were not enough bottles to go around.

Since arriving at the posh southern London suburb, just down the road from Fulham's more illustrious neighbours Chelsea, Tigana has led his side to a perfect nine victories out of nine matches, prompting comparisons with compatriots Arsene Wenger and Gerard Houllier, coaches of Arsenal and Liverpool respectively.

"The outlook is positive but there is still a lot of work to do and improvement to be made in all areas," said Tigana.

"Before arriving, my objective was to win the club promotion and to bring some experience to the club."

"The atmosphere here is fantastic and the passion of the fans in the stadiums surprised me."

"We spend less time on discipline as the players are very professional and very interested. I lead a fantastic life," he enthused.

The 44-year-old is the fourth Frenchman to bring his football knowledge to England following Wenger, Houllier and Patrice Bergues, who is an assistant at

Liverpool.

His shrewd signing of French youth international Louis Saha from French outfit Metz has already shown the fans he has an eye for talent as the youngster has sparked to life.

After resigning as coach of Monaco in January 1999 Tigana briefly became a player agent, notably looking after African players in France.

Capped 52 times for his country, he was a member of the brilliant French side of the 1982 World Cup in Spain before being cruelly bowing out to West Germany on penalties but two years later lifted the European championship in Paris, beating Spain 2-0 in the final.

The wily midfielder was also a member of the 1986 World Cup team that brilliantly beat Brazil in the quarters before once again falling at the semi-final stage to West Germany.

He guided Monaco to the French title in 1997 and is now looking to take Fulham back to the top flight for the first time since 1969.

FIFA-UEFA transfer meeting



LONDON, Oct 5: World and European soccer officials gather in Zurich tomorrow to hammer out proposals aimed at avoiding the destruction of the game's transfer system, reports Reuters.

The European Commission has set a deadline of October 31 for soccer to find an alternative to the current system - which it sees as restrictive and an infringement of workers' rights.

Though the issues involved are complex, the threat from Brussels to the continent's favourite sport is a simple one.

Unless radical changes are made to the transfer set-up, the rules which dictate players' club careers will be outlawed by EU Competition Commissioner Mario Monti.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has predicted chaos, but the Commission's argument is only a logical extension of the Bosman ruling by the European Court of Justice in 1995.

After a case brought by Belgian footballer Jean Marc Bosman, the court ruled that players should be free to move when their contracts had expired and that any number of EU players could be hired by EU clubs - lifting restrictions in both areas.

Footballers were like dentists, plumbers and all other workers - they had the right to do their job in any EU country.

the court said in its landmark decision.

Now the Commission has taken that argument into the realm of workers' terms and conditions.

Monti believes that if a disaffected bricklayer or bus driver is free to give notice, so should a professional footballer - even if he has signed a five-year contract.

However, that freedom strikes at the very heart of a billion-dollar business in buying and selling footballing talent, generating profits for big and small clubs alike.

The conflict of interest between clubs and EU officials could not be greater, and nor could the stakes.

The unenviable job of finding a third way has fallen to a joint FIFA/UEFA working group which meets here tomorrow.

The centrepiece of the meeting will be the progress report from a task force set up last month to brainstorm the transfer issue with European leagues, clubs and players' unions.

More than just a talking shop, the task force has been charged with coming up with a global plan that can be put to the Commission before the month is out.

One set of suggestions has already been slapped on the discussion table by FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

His idea is for a ban on transfers for players under 18.

a compensation system for players who leave their clubs before the age of 24 and the abolition of transfer fees for those over 24.

However, it remains to be seen just how the compensation fee would be calculated and Blatter's proposals are unlikely to be popular with clubs.

A meeting of the G-14 group of top European clubs earlier this week suggested resistance to change remains strong.

While there was no objection to leaving the under-18s alone and a compensation system for older players, though the G-14 set the limit at 23 rather than 24, the binding contract remains a sticking point.

Europe's top clubs insist that existing contracts be honoured and that the option of signing a five-year deal should still be available to players.

Though no-one underestimates the Commission's clout, the footballing establishment has powerful allies in German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The two men issued a joint warning to the Commission last month against radical changes, with Schroeder later insisting: "It is definitely a matter for political leaders to address."

For the moment, the ball is with soccer officials. The Commission has made its move and on Friday the response from the "beautiful game" should be a great deal clearer.

AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

Oct 5: AFP football briefs on Thursday:

S/h all cap

CANIGGIA JOINS DUNDEE

GLASGOW Former Argentina international striker Claudio Caniggia signed for Scottish Premier League Dundee on Wednesday and immediately vowed to boost the club's position in the table.

The 33-year-old forward, a member of the side captained by Diego Maradona which lost the 1990 World Cup final to Germany in Rome, has signed for the Dens Park club until the end of the season and is expected to make his debut against Aberdeen next week.

Caniggia, who helped Italian side Atalanta to promotion last season but has not played since March, said: "I'm happy to be at Dundee for more than one reason. I have joined friends who are at a very ambitious club that is doing very well."

"My intention is to do well to repay the trust of my club and I will do what I can to

make the club even better."

SCOTLAND LOSE BURLEY

GLASGOW: Craig Burley is out of Scotland's World Cup qualifier in San Marino on Saturday.

The Derby midfielder is not regarded as fit enough to take part especially as Scotland have a much tougher assignment in Croatia four days afterwards.

Scotland manager Craig Brown is desperate for Burley to play in Zagreb, so has already ruled him out of his weekend plans.

Burley, who had suffered a back injury early in the season, reported a hamstring problem in training Wednesday.

Brown said: "The news is good and bad. Craig Burley misses the opening game. He may well be fit to play in Croatia."

Scotland's other injury doubts were Sunderland's Don Hutchison and Paul Dikov of Manchester United.

DORTMUND SETS FLOTATION DATE

FRANKFURT: German top flight outfit Borussia Dortmund are to become the country's first football club to be quoted on the stock market after manager Michael Meier on Thursday set a flotation date of October 31.

Meier revealed the issue will open on October 23 and added that the former European champions would "always seek to strike a balance between economic and sporting interests to satisfy both supporters and shareholders."

Dortmund have won the Bundesliga title five times, most recently in 1996.

They went on to win the Champions League a year later and are currently third in the table. The club add to a growing trend among leading European sides who have floated in recent years, including most notably English Premiership giants Manchester United.

"Our objective is to get this organised before June and the opening of the transfer market," he said.

Dreyfus put a damper on suggestions that the new partner would be Mansour Ojeh who was major shareholder at TAG-Heuer (and who is also associated with Ron Dennis at McLaren) while Dreyfus was chairman of that company.

"He would have called me (if he was interested) but we have

n't spoken for three months," Dreyfus confirmed, before adding that the deviation and enmity prevailing at the club made it harder to find investors.

"I know many potential investors and it makes them nervous (Marseille's internal wranglings) not so much that I get attacked but because of the destructive atmosphere," he explained.

Dreyfus said that he had appointed Jean-Louis Pietri as No2 at the club specifically to mediate between president Yves Marchand and sporting director Eric Di Meco, to help the club run more smoothly.

In the same interview Dreyfus said that the sacking of Marcello Lippi at Inter Milan shouldn't affect the proposed arrival at Marseille of Chilean striker Ivan Zamorano and that 30 million francs was available to that end.

Dreyfus' Marseille dreams



PARIS, Oct 5: Robert Louis-Dreyfus, the top share-holder of French First Division side Olympic Marseille,