

Leverkusen bow out

BERLIN, Oct 26 (Reuters/Internet): Even Rudi Voeller could not save Bayer Leverkusen from going out of the Champions League.

The former Germany striker, who stepped in as coach last Saturday after Christoph Daum resigned following a positive drugs test, maintained his perfect coaching record with a 1-0 victory over Spartak Moscow on Wednesday.

But the German side needed to win by more than two goals after losing 2-0 to the same opponents in Russia.

They will now finish third in Group A, whatever the outcome of their last match away to Sporting Lisbon on November 7, and will have to be content with a berth in the third round of the UEFA Cup.

"It wasn't really a victory, but more like half a defeat, because we're out," said Voeller, who has led Germany to three victories in as many matches since his appointment as national coach on a caretaker basis last July.

Leverkusen also beat Borussia Dortmund 2-0 for their first match under him last weekend and Voeller has now won his five games as coach, with 10 goals scored and only one conceded.

Voeller, expected to stay on as national coach after his contract ends in May next year, admitted that Spartak, who joined group leaders Real Madrid in the second phase of Europe's showcase club competition, deserved to go through.

"If you look at their two matches against us they were clearly the better team," he said.

Lyon keep alive hopes

HEERENVEEN, Netherlands, Oct 26: French side Lyon kept their European dreams alive in Group C with a 2-0 away win at Dutch side Heerenveen on Wednesday night, reports AFP.

The French struggled in the first half coming alive during the second period to revive their flagging chances of a Champions League second phase place after just two wins following five matches.

Lyon must beat Olympiakos in their final match by at least 1-0 or have a two goal cushion to oust the Greeks - 1-0 winners over already qualified Valencia - from the next round.

The Dutch had the upper hand during most of the first half and it was only thanks to good work by Lyon goalie Gregory Coupet that kept the French in the game.

Coupet deflected a strike in the second minute from Mika Nurmele and a header from Talan in the 19th.

Heerenveen's Daniel Jensen missed a shot played down the right by Nurmele, and Coupet was again called to save the day keeping out two strikes by Anthony Lurling in the 29th and 42th.

Lyon lost striker Sonny Anderson to injury and his replacement by Steed Malbranque revived their campaign.

After half time the French lifted their game and developed their forward offensive.

Heerenveen kept up the pressure and Harris Huizingh struck in the 53rd.

But Lyon opened the scoring in the 65th when Malbranque found the net from a shot by Tony Vaeles and ten minutes later Malbranque set up the winner when he fed Steve Marlet.

Lyon are second last in Group C with six points, six points behind already qualified Valencia on 12 and second-placed Olympiakos of Greece on 9 points. Heerenveen, on three points, are out.

Mihajlovic says sorry

ROME, Oct 26: Lazio's Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic Wednesday publicly apologised for insulting Arsenal's French midfielder Patrick Vieira in last Tuesday's Champions League clash between the two teams, reports AFP.

Mihajlovic, who last week admitted insulting Senegal-born Vieira, but denied the remarks were racist although he acknowledged referring to his opponent's colour, made his statement before Lazio met Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine in a Group B clash.

Mihajlovic, wearing a suit as he is currently suspended because of the incident, took to the field to make his statement.

"I know I made a mistake last Tuesday and I want to take advantage of this European night to apologise to all people of colour who were justifiably offended by the expressions I used in a particularly tense moment on the field," said Mihajlovic.

"But I want to deny the racist label that has been applied to me."

He then appealed to the fans, a large section of whom who barracked all of Arsenal's black players during last week's 1-1 draw, not to repeat the abuse henceforth.

"Please stop for ever the racist chants against players of colour," he said.

Mihajlovic went on to claim that former colleagues when he was at Sampdoria Ruud Gullit, Clarence Seedorf and Christian Karembeu - all black players - would confirm his good character.



Real Madrid's Albert Celades (C) trying to evade a sliding tackle from Sporting Lisbon's Sa Pinto (L) during their UEFA Champions' League fixture at Madrid on October 25. -AFP photo

Real simply too good

MADRID, Oct 26 (Reuters/Internet): Even the normally impassive Real Madrid coach Vicente del Bosque managed a smile as he said that he was highly contented by his team's comfortable 4-0 Champions League Group A victory over Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday.

"Well, I am very pleased for two reasons. First because we have won now the group and second because the concentration and level of interest of the players and the rhythm at which they played was excellent."

Del Bosque said that the victory, which saw them score their 500th goal in Europe's elite football competition, reflected their present level of form.

"We gave a demonstration of our control and authority, and that is always good. We seem to be capable of maintaining last

year's European domination and we are now showing much greater confidence in our home matches."

After first half goals from Guti and Savio the Real coach said he was glad to be able to rotate some of his players. He highlighted the role played by substitute Fernando Morientes who returned from a long-term injury to score Real's last two goals.

"It was great to see Fernando back in such good form and it was also nice to give players like Macca and Santiago Solari some time on the pitch."

McManaman appeared as a 52nd minute substitute in place of Luis Figo and played well in only his second Champions League match of the season after being otherwise sidelined for Spanish league games.

Newspaper reports have linked him with a loan move to Rangers in Scotland, but Del

Bosque was concentrating on the Champions League rather than transfer speculation.

"We can now go to Moscow for the last match and plan for the future rather than play under pressure," he concluded.

Sporting coach Augusto Inacio was frank in his assessment of the game.

"Real Madrid deserved to win. We came into the match with a lot of hope and expectation, but we just made too many errors."

"The first goal really hurt us and although I tried to change things round in the second half Real's next two goals completely sank us."

Inacio highlighted two key problems faced by his team.

"On the one hand we were unable to open up the Real defence and on the other we lacked concentration on our own defence. I hoped for more from my team, but it just wasn't our night."



Arsenal's Nigerian star Nwankwo Kanu (L) places the ball into the Sparta Prague goal during their UEFA Champions' League encounter at Highbury on October 25. -AFP photo

Gunners take group honours

LONDON, Oct 26: Arsenal won Group B of the Champions League Wednesday after an easy 4-2 win over Czech side Sparta Prague at Highbury, reports AFP.

The Premiership side were 2-0 up inside the first eight minutes but it could have been a completely different story had referee Alain Hamer penalised an apparent handball by Lee Dixon inside his own penalty area in the third minute.

But two minutes later French international Patrick Vieira fed Ray Parlour who unleashed a rocket from 25 metres which flew past keeper Tomas Postulka and into the top corner of the net.

Before Sparta had a chance to draw breath, Arsenal doubled their lead.

Frenchman Thierry Henry's neat touch sent compatriot Robert Pires speeding to the byline and his low cross was coolly converted by Lauren, arriving late into the penalty area.

It could have been three in the 10th minute when Jiri Novotny rolled an intended

back-pass into the path of Henry.

The former Juventus striker skipped past the onrushing Postulka but was forced wide and could only cut his shot into the side-netting.

Sparta composed themselves and came within inches of hauling themselves back into the contest when Parlour conceded a free-kick, just outside the Arsenal box, in the centre of the pitch.

Vladimir Labant swerved the set-piece over the wall towards the top corner but David Seaman sprang to his right to divert the shot onto the underside of the bar. The ball bounced back into play and Dixon thumped it to safety.

Ten minutes from the break Arsenal went further in front. Novotny tripped Nwankwo Kanu 20 metres from goal and the Gunners scored from the resulting free-kick.

Postulka ought to have held Henry's initial shot which was clipped over the wall, but he spilled it at the feet of Dixon

and the Arsenal veteran slotted home from close range.

Incredibly, five minutes before half-time, Seaman produced a carbon-copy of Postulka's blunder.

Tomas Rosicky swung a tame free-kick towards the Arsenal goal but the England keeper somehow dropped it onto Marek Kinal's toe then felled the Czech as he nudged the ball towards goal.

Referee Hamer pointed to the spot, booked Seaman, and Labant stepped up to reduce the arrears before a breathless first half came to a close.

Seven minutes after half-time Arsenal grabbed a fourth. Henry glided into the penalty area after dancing past two defenders and his cross was turned in by Kanu.

Arsenal, in total control, should have added to their total but squandered numerous chances to score more goals and Rosicky made the scoreline for the visitors by scoring a brilliant solo effort moments before the final whistle.

STANDINGS

PARIS, Oct 26(AFP): European Champions League first phase tables on Wednesday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

GROUP A										
Real Madrid (Spa)	5	4	1	0	15	7	13			
Spartak Moscow (Rus)	5	3	0	2	8	3	9			
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)	5	2	0	3	9	12	6			
Sporting Portugal (Por)	5	0	1	4	5	15	1			
GROUP B										
Arsenal (Eng)	5	4	1	0	11	5	13			
Lazio (Ita)	5	3	1	1	12	4	10			
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)	5	1	0	4	7	15	3			
Sparta Prague (Cze)	5	1	0	4	6	12	3			
GROUP C										
Valencia (Spa)	5	4	0	1	6	3	12			
Olympiakos (Gre)	5	3	0	2	6	4	9			
Lyon (Ned)	5	2	0	3	7	6	6			
Heerenveen (Ned)	5	1	0	4	2	8	3			
GROUP D										
Spartan Graz (Aut)	5	3	0	2	7	10	9			
Galatasaray (Tur)	5	2	1	2	8	11	7			
Glasgow Rangers (Sco)	5	2	1	2	8	5	7			
Monaco (Fra)	5	2	0	3	11	8	6			

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

PARIS, Oct 26(AFP): European Champions League first phase results on Wednesday:

Group A

Leverkusen, Germany
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 1 (Ballack 52) Spartak Moscow (Rus) 0

Madrid

Real Madrid (Spa) 4 (Guti 12, Savio 42, Morientes 62, 69) Sporting Lisbon (Por) 0

Group B

Arsenal (Eng) 4 (Parlour 5, Lauren 8, Dixon 35, Kanu 52) Sparta Prague (Cze) 2 (Labant 41-pen, Rosicky 90)

Rome

Lazio (Ita) 5 (Claudio Lopez 48, 68, 90, Favalli 54, Veron 56) Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 1 (Vorobey 41)

Group C

Athens
Olympiakos (Gre) 1 (Djordjevic 65) Valencia (Spa) 0

Heerenveen, Netherlands

Heerenveen (Ned) 0 Lyon (Fra) 2 (Malbranque 68, Marlet 78)

Group D

Monaco
Monaco (Fra) 4 (Contreras 6, Bonnal 18, Simone 22, Nonda 26) Galatasaray (Tur) 2 (Unsal 25, Bulent 63)

Graz, Austria

Spartan Graz (Aut) 2 (Juran 20, Prilasnig 94) Rangers (Sco) 0

Sturm sting Rangers

VIENNA, Oct 26: Austria's Sturm Graz maintained their 100 per cent home record in the Champions League Wednesday by beating Scottish champions Rangers 2-0 and threw Group D wide open, reports AFP.

On a night when victory would have put the Ibrox club through to the second phase they were sunk by Sergei Yuran's first-half goal and an injury-time clincher from Gilbert Prilasnig.

A miserable night for Dick Advocaat's men was compounded by the dismissal of Dutch defender Arthur Numan five minutes from time for a second bookable offence.

Sturm now top the group on 9 points after Monaco of France beat Turkish champions Galatasaray 4-2.

Defeat for Rangers means they must now win their final fixture at home to Monaco in a fortnight to advance in the competition.

The home side had rarely ventured into the Rangers half of the field but with 20 minutes gone they punished the Scots with an expert display of counter-attacking football.

Ronald de Boer was dispossessed in the middle of the pitch and just two passes later, Yuran was bearing down on the Rangers goal with only Barry Ferguson tracking back.

A dip of the shoulders was enough to wrong-foot both debutant keeper Jesper Christiansen and Ferguson allowing the Russian striker to tap the ball into an empty net.

Billy Dodds took the place of Rod Wallace for the final 20 minutes of the match as Rangers chased the goal which would have made their Champions League progress so much easier.

But they suffered another set-back after 85 minutes when Numan was ordered off, the Dutch defender penalised for an obstruction.

With virtually the last kick of the ball, Prilasnig coolly slotted the ball into the corner of Christiansen's net with the Rangers defence all at sea.

Valencia's first loss

ATHENS, Oct 26: Predrag Djordjevic scored a second half penalty to give Olympiakos a 1-0 win over Valencia in their Champions League Group C second phase tie here on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The result gave the Greek club nine points in the group, three behind already qualified Valencia but they are still not certain of qualification themselves.

That depends on their last fixture with French outfit Lyon, who can go through instead if they win by 1-0 or with a cushion of more than two goals.

Djordjevic scored in the 65th minute, blasting a shot to the right side of the net past Valencia keeper Santiago Canizares. The penalty was awarded to the delight of the 55,000 home spectators when a charging Stelios Giannakopoulos was tripped up just inside the box by Valencia defender Didier Deschamps.

Olympiakos controlled the ball for most of the match and made the most threats against scoring against a Valencia side missing five of its regular starters.

Coach Hector Cuper decided to rest three for the Spanish League given that his side were already through. Two others were injured.

Valencia's best opportunity came when a shot by defender Amadeo Carboni in the 35th minute was turned away by Olympiakos goalie Dimitris Eleftheropoulos.

Olympiakos dominated play in the first half and applied much of the pressure resulting in seven corner kicks to just one for Valencia.

Lazio turn on the style



ROME, Oct 26: Lazio booked their place in the second phase of the European Champions League Wednesday, recovering from a first-half sucker punch to deliver a 5-1 knockout blow to the Shakhtar Donetsk of Ukraine at the Olympic Stadium, reports AFP.

The visitors stunned their hosts by taking the lead through Andri Vorobey after 41 minutes with a rare foray into Lazio territory.

But goals in the second period from Claudio Lopez (hat-trick), Giuseppe Favalli and Juan Sebastian Veron ensured that the Roman outfit progress from pool B alongside England's Arsenal.

Lazio's Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson was relieved to see his team hit form after a traumatic time on and off the field.

"Finally I have found my old Lazio," said the coach. "But most of all I saw in the lads the spirit that helped us win the title last year. But now I want us to continue in the same vein."

His Shakhtar counterpart

Viktor Prokopenko lamented: "To play at the same level as Lazio you have to stay concentrated for all of the 90 minutes. The Lazio goals were all masterpieces but they stemmed from our mistakes."

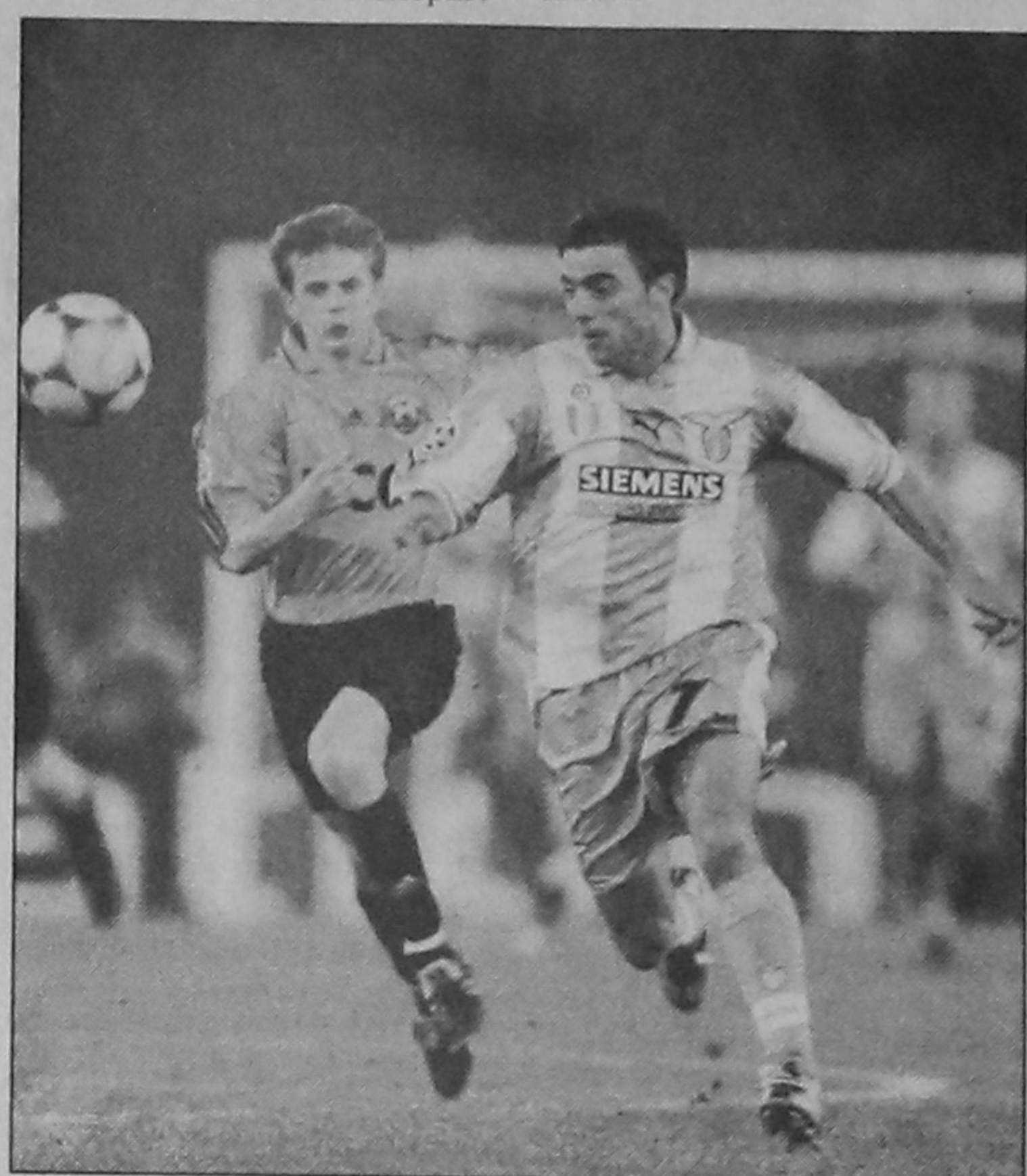
The Italian champions immediately took the game to the Ukrainians and visiting goalkeeper Yuri Virt was in the thick of the action.

First he was called into action to deny Pavel Nedved and then he made a fine save from Argentinean midfielder Veron, who tested him from a freekick.

That was only for starters and he soon dealt with a Fernando Couto header before rushing off his line to deny first Lopez and next Simone Inzaghi.

Virt's save from Lopez - the Argentinean was a member of the Valencia side that reached last year's final - was particularly noteworthy.

But after 22 minutes the Italians finally put the ball in the net only for French referee Alain Sars to intervene. Lopez floated the ball to Inzaghi, who netted but Sars chalked the goal off for offside when the Lazio player had appeared to time his run to perfection.



Lazio's Claudio Lopez (R) trying to take possession ahead of a Shakhtar Donetsk player during their European Champions' League match in Rome on October 25. -AFP photo

Virt was looking invincible and again came to his side's rescue, blocking an Inzaghi shot with his legs.

Shakhtar's Nigerian defender Isaac Okoronkwo then conceded a ball to Lopez but again Virt stood firm, tipping the ball over the bar for a corner.

Finally the visitors stirred and Vorobey fired his first warning salvo after 36 minutes, forcing Lazio keeper Angelo Peruzzi to parry his angled drive.

Then Lopez came close to opening the scoring for the Italians, lobbing Virt only for Okoronkwo to scramble back and hack the ball off the line.

A minute later - after 42 minutes - came the sucker punch from the Ukrainians.

Vorobey outpaced the Lazio defence and lashed a left-footed shot inside Peruzzi's near post.

Eriksson must have feared, the worst and he brought on Hernan Crespo and Dejan Stankovic for Roberto Baroni and Inzaghi after the interval.

But early in the second period he was reassured as his team equalised. A header, looking back sat up nicely for Lopez who hooked the ball past Virt from close range.

Six minutes later it was 2-1 to the team from Rome.

Defender Giuseppe Favalli was both creator and scorer. There seemed little danger when he received the ball on the left wing but he nutmegged Okoronkwo before firing a fierce drive across Virt and into the far corner.

And three minutes later the game was over as a contest when Lazio made it 3-1 with Veron curling a freekick just inside Virt's nearpost.

After 68 minutes it was 4-1 with an unmarked Lopez sprinting half the length of the pitch and rounding Virt before scoring.

The final goal came in injury time with Crespo feeding Lopez who claimed his hat-trick with an angled finish.

It was vintage stuff from the Italian champions and just what the doctor ordered after a week of controversy and poor results in Europe and at home.

Lazio's Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, serving a two-match suspension, apologised before the match for the insults he aimed at Arsenal's Patrick Vieira in last week's 1-1 draw between the teams and begged supporters to desist from racist chanting.

When a small section of the Lazio crowd started jeering Okoronkwo the rest of the home support quickly drowned out the chants of the racists.

Monaco stay afloat



MONACO, Oct 26 (Reuters/Internet): Monaco survived two second-half dismissals to beat Galatasaray 4-2 and keep alive their hopes of reaching the second phase of the Champions League.

The French side, who had only one win before Wednesday, raced into a 4-1 halftime lead against the Group D leaders and held on in an ill-tempered second half despite red cards for Franck Jurietti and Martin Djeter.

Sturm Graz now top group D on nine points with Galatasaray and Rangers on seven and Monaco on six.

The Turks host Sturm and Monaco go to Glasgow in the final round of matches on November 7.

Because of the head-to-head records a win for Monaco

against Rangers would send them through.

"Now our fate is in our hands, thanks to this victory and the Glasgow match will be decisive," Jurietti said.

"I'm going to miss the Glasgow match but I trust my team mates," he added.

Monaco went ahead in the sixth minute through Chilean defender Pablo Contreras from a cross by Marco Simone.

The Italian then set up youngster Nicolas Bonnal for the second goal in the 19th minute before scoring himself with a fine volley three minutes later.

Hakan Unsal pulled one back but Burundi's Shabani Nonda, who had hit the post in the 26th minute, made it four in the 26th minute thanks to a fine shot from outside the box.

It didn't go so smoothly after the break as defender Jurietti

was dismissed on the hour for a foul on Hakan.

Defender Korkmaz Bulent grabbed the visitors second goal shortly before Djeter's 53rd but a red card in the 63rd - apparently swearing at Norwegian referee Rune Pedersen after a foul on another Turkish player.

Monaco recovered from the double blow to dominate the last half hour, who not only kept the UEFA Cup holders at bay but could even have scored a fifth.

"The result makes a big difference and it was important to react," said Monaco manager Claude Puel.

"We showed a lot of moral strength in holding the end of the match. I hope we can keep the solidarity we showed in the end as a lesson for the future," he added.

A graveyard in every sense

