

French First Div PSG the team to beat

PARIS, Oct 27: Paris Saint Germain will look to underline their domination of the domestic French football scene when they welcome Bordeaux on Sunday to the Parc des Princes, reports AFP.

PSG spent a French record half a billion francs (some 70 million dollars) in a summer transfer spree to attract the likes of Nicolas Anelka to the club but that is proving money well spent.

Already they are through to the second round of the Champions League and stand four points clear of nearest rivals Bastia, suggesting that a first league title in six seasons is just around the corner.

Bordeaux, who could only manage a 1-1 home draw with Scotland's Celtic in the UEFA Cup second round first leg on Thursday, might be forgiven for feeling theirs is a hopeless task as PSG have won all nine of their home games in the league and in Europe thus far.

PSG have no injuries and have in Anelka, Laurent Robert and Christian the most potent strike force around - while their defence has started to settle down.

Other sides are going to start being afraid of coming to the Parc des Princes, "granted defender and skipper Eric Rabesandratana.

Starting with Bordeaux, contrast that with the disparity at PSG's traditional rivals Marseille, who this time last year were in the Champions League but who, having just avoided relegation, are doing little better this time round.

The former European champions may have lifted the European Cup that PSG so covet back in 1993 but their current league position inside the bottom five does not augur well for any European football next season.

Even their supporters club are threatening to boycott Saturday's trip to Strasbourg - who are in even more of a predicament as they are just one off the bottom and have conceded 29 goals in just 12 games.

Marseille's Brazilian coach Abel Braga is pinning his hopes on a heap of goals from new signing George Weah, who flopped on his debut last week in the 1-0 home defeat by Lille.

Weah expects to be partnered by Brazilians Marcelinho and Adriano - but neither has impressed to date despite the 10 million dollars - so they cost between them.

Monaco, who can still just about progress in the Champions League if they win at Rangers in their final group game, travel to Troyes on Sunday needing three points just to stay in the hunt.

Diego ready for coaching?

BUENOS AIRES, Oct 27: Proving that he just can't keep out of the limelight Argentine football legend Diego Maradona is set to take over as coach of Argentine First Division club Almagro, the club's vice-president Dardo de Marchi said Thursday, reports AFP.

The club, sacked coach Mario Husillos after taking just four points from their opening ten games following promotion and promptly asked Maradona if he'd like to take over.

Maradona is currently in Havana recuperating after treatment for his drug problems but has accepted the offer.

De Marchi visited him in Cuba and told Argentine radio that he had a verbal agreement with the 1986 World Cup winner.

He added that Maradona, who turns 40 on Monday, hoped to be in place by the time Almagro face Racing Club at the weekend.

Maradona made it a condition of his appointment that his 1986 World Cup teammates Hector Enrique and Jose Luis Brown should join him in staff and the pair told cable channel TN that they were already on board.

Schmeichel out for eight weeks

COPENHAGEN, Oct 27: Danish international goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel will be out of action for up to eight weeks after undergoing an operation on his right knee, press reports said Wednesday, reports AFP.

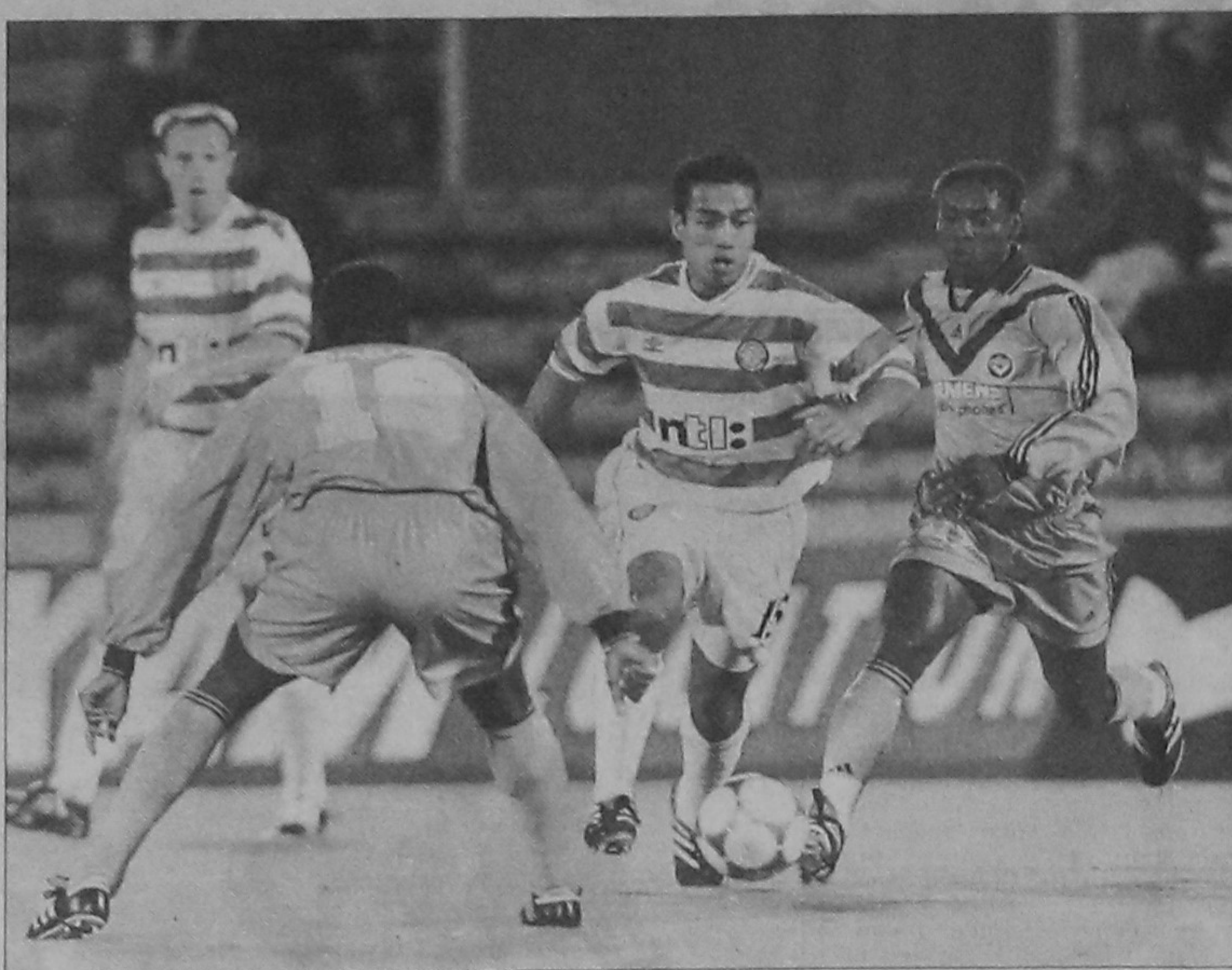
The 36-year-old Schmeichel has had knee problems for several weeks, but the injury worsened when he was playing for his Portuguese club side Sporting Lisbon in a European Champions League match against Spartak Moscow on October 17.

The operation went well, and surgeon Elif Larsen, who operated on Schmeichel told the daily paper Jyllands-Posten that the former Manchester United keeper would be able to play within two months.

That means he will miss Denmark's final friendly match of the year against Germany on November 15 at Copenhagen.

Three-game ban on Chilavert

BUENOS AIRES, Oct 27: Jose Luis Chilavert, the colourful Paraguayan international goalkeeper who plays for Argentinean first division side Velez Sarsfield, has been suspended for three matches following a clash with Boca Juniors striker Martin Palermo, reports AFP.



Bobby Petta (C) of Celtic trying to go through Bordeaux players Lassina Diabate (L) and David Sommeil during their UEFA Cup clash at Bordeaux on October 26. - AFP photo

UEFA Cup second round first leg

Heskey's timely strike

PARIS, Oct 27: A goal just two minutes from time by England striker Emile Heskey saved beleaguered Liverpool's blushes at Anfield on Thursday as he secured a narrow 1-0 UEFA Cup success against Czech outfit Slovan Liberec, reports AFP.

Heskey finally gave the crowd something to shout about with his fifth goal in three games as the four-times European champions laboured to break down a massed Czech defence in their second round, first leg meeting.

Robbie Fowler missed a penalty for Liverpool in the 54th minute but Heskey was in the right place at the right time as a Nick Barmby effort was deflected into his path.

His shot was deflected and England striker Heskey reacted first to hammer the ball into the roof of the net.

Scotland's Celtic scored a useful 1-1 draw at French side Bordeaux, who were UEFA Cup finalists in 1996.

Christophe Dugarry headed Bordeaux in front on 21 minutes while Swedish striker Henrik Larsson levelled three minutes later from the spot.

Chelsea's conquerors St Gallen of Switzerland, meanwhile, have it all to do in the return leg after losing 2-1 at Club Brugge, the Swiss goal coming from Charles Amoah.

Italy's AS Roma scored a useful 1-0 win at Portugal's Boavista. Vincenzo Montella on

target 15 minutes from the end. The individual performance of the night came from Themistoklis Nikolaidis of Greek side AEK Athens as he blasted four goals in 27 minutes in a 5-0 home success over Denmark's Herfølge.

With the Champions League bagging most of the media attention the UEFA Cup has become a humble affair - and it clearly failed to inspire former European champions Ajax.

The Dutch former giants slumped to a 1-0 defeat at Lausanne of Switzerland, for whom Javier Mazzoni scored the only goal seven minutes before the break.

Italy's Parma, however, have something of a love affair with the competition having lifted the trophy twice - in 1995 and 1999.

And they duly decided to take things seriously as two second half goals from Marco Amoroso handed the Italians a 2-0 first leg win over Croatia's Dinamo Zagreb.

Germany's Hertha Berlin, level on points with Bayern Munich at the top of the Bundesliga, thanked goals from Michael Preetz after eight minutes, Stefan Beinlich seconds after the interval and a 65th-minute effort from Piotr Reiss for a 3-1 home win over Amica Wronki.

"I think we've laid the foundations to go further - though we missed chances in the first half. We let a few passes go astray," said coach Jurgen

Rober. Berlin tasted Champions League football last season but Rober earlier suggested the club had to recognise that a place in Europe was worth having whatever the competition.

French side Nantes, who have made little impression since a 1995 league title, would go along with that.

The Canaries beat MTK Budapest of Hungary 2-1 at their Stade Bejaoui and battled back from a goal down after Bela Illes scored for the Hungarians in the 28th minute.

Pierre Aristy finally levelled after 63 minutes with a neat header and Nicolas Gillet cracked home a 73rd-minute winner.

Other results saw Alaves score a 3-1 away victory at Norway's Lillestrom while Porto, relegated to UEFA Cup action this season after several Champions League campaigns, drew a drab, goalless affair at Wisla Krakow of Poland.

Austria's FC Tyrol earlier edged Germany's VfB Stuttgart 1-0 but the Germans played two thirds of the match with ten men after midfielder Jens Todt was dismissed for hacking down Alfred Hortnagel.

Stuttgart coach Ralf Rangnick said the decision was harsh.

"If you get a red for fouls like that then by the end you'll only have five or six players left on the pitch," he asserted.

Primera Liga preview

Nostalgic Barca coach

MADRID, Oct 27: Real Madrid's current coach, Florentino Perez, has accepted the offer of Barcelona coach Jose Luis Brown, should join him in staff and the pair told cable channel TN that they were already on board.

He added that Maradona, who turns 40 on Monday, hoped to be in place by the time Almagro face Racing Club at the weekend.

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Visitors Deportivo will be favourites to win this tough away fixture after they retained their unbeaten record in Europe to qualify for the second stage of the Champions League in midweek. Deportivo's Brazilian midfielder Mauro Silva is a doubtful starter.

REAL ZARAGOZA (20) v MALAGA (12) (1900)

Bottom-placed Zaragoza are the only side in the division still looking for their first win this season. Caretaker coach Luis Costa will be hoping his side can contain Malaga's Panama-

lian striker Dely Valdes. He headed two goals in last week's 2-1 win over Villarreal.

VILLARREAL (11) v ATHLETIC BILBAO (14) (1815)

Athletic coach Torrijo Rojo has said he was worried by his team's loss of form last week in their 3-0 home defeat by Las Palmas. He should have Spanish international midfielder Julien Guerrero back for this tricky away match.

SUNDAY

CELTA VIGO (7) v REAL VALLADOLID (8) (1700)

Unbeaten Valladolid will be a tough nut for Celta to crack, especially after the hard-fought midweek UEFA match away to Real Star Belgrade which the Galician club lost 1-0.

ESPANYOL (19) v REAL OVIEDO (9) (1700)

Espanyol, revitalised by the return of striker Raul Tamudo, stroled to a 4-0 UEFA victory over Austrian side Graz AK on Thursday. But they will not find it easy against Oviedo who completed a convincing 3-1 win over Celta Vigo last week.

OSASUNA (15) v VALENCIA (1) (1900)

Valencia coach Hector Cuper rested key midfield players Gorka Mendietia, Ruben Baraja and Kily Gonzalez for the Champions League match against Olympiakos. He is expecting them to be rested by Real Madrid coach Vicente del Bosque in the hope his back problems will clear. Fernando Morientes should be given his first start after his two goals in Wednesday's 4-0 Champions League win over Sporting Lisbon.

RAYO VALLECANO (2) v ALAVES (5) (1700)

Both teams have demonstrated that last season's placings were no fluke. This is likely to be a close affair with miserly defences unlikely to give anything away.

REAL SOCIEDAD (18) v REAL MADRID (4) (1700)

Real Sociedad's new coach Periko Alonso faces a tough test as he takes the reins after the sacking of Javier Clemente at the start of the week. Local favourite Alberto could return in goal after the recent poor performances of Clemente's Swedish signing Mattias Asper.

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RESULTS AT A GLANCE

PARIS, Oct 27(AFP): UEFA Cup second round, first leg results on Thursday:

Porto
Boavista (Por) 0 AS Roma (Ita) 1 (Montella 74)

Barcelona
Espanyol (Spa) 4 (Tamudo 15, Galca 18-pen, Sergio 29, 45) AK Graz (Aut) 0

Liverpool
Liverpool (Engl) 1 (Heskey 88) Slovan Liberec (Cze) 0

Basel
FC Basel (Swi) 1 (Tchouga 62) Feyenoord (Ned) 2 (Kalou 60, Bosvelt 84)

Madrid
Rayo Vallecano 1 (Quevedo 17) Viborg (Dan) 0

Halmstad, Sweden
Halmstad (Swe) 3 (Svensson 13, Selakovic 34, Andersson 56) 1860 Munich (Ger) 2 (Max 35, Hassler 37-pen)

Bordeaux
Bordeaux (Fra) 1 (Dugarry 21) Celtic 1 (Larsson 24)

Milan
Inter Milan (Ita) 0 Vitesse Arnhem (Ned) 0

Bruges
Club Brugge (Bel) 2 (Lembi 54-pen, Vernant 77-pen) St Gallen (Amoa) 29

Belgrade
Red Star Belgrade (Yug) 1 (Drulic 61) Celta Vigo (Spa) 0

Crete, Greece
OFI Crete (Gre) 2 (Kolitsaris 41, Mauro 77) Slavia Prague (Cze) 2 (Netsas 30, Rado 68)

Athens
AEK Athens (Gre) 5 (Nicolaidis 48, 52, 64, 75, Zicos 61) Herfølge (Den) 0

Lausanne, Switzerland
Lausanne (Swi) 1 (Mazzoni 38) Ajax (Ned) 0

Parma, Italy
Parma (Ita) 2 (Amoroso 61, 79) Dinamo Zagreb 0

Nantes, France
Nantes (Fra) 2 (Aristony 63, Gillet 73) MTK Budapest (Hun) 1 (Illes 28)

Berlin
Hertha Berlin (Ger) 3 (Preetz 8, Beinlich 46, Reiss 65) Amica Wronki (Pol) 1 (Piskula 88)

Drammen, Norway
Lillestrom (Nor) 1 (Holland 84) Alaves (Spa) 3 (Alonso 2, Tellez 22, Contra 47)

Innsbruck
FC Tyrol (Aut) 1 (Mair 53) VfB Stuttgart (Ger) 0

Moscow
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 1 (Lokov 38-pen.) Inter Bratislava (Svk) 0

Krakow, Poland
Wisla Krakow (Pol) 0 FC Porto (Por) 0

TUESDAY RESULTS:

Osijek, Croatia
Osijek (Cro) 2 (Bjelacic 27, 90) Rapid Vienna (Aut) 1 (Radovic 37)

Udinese, Italy
Udinese (Ita) 1 (Margiotta 90) PAOK Salonica (Gre) 0

Bremen, Germany
Werder Bremen (Ger) 4 (Ernst 16, Herzog 28, Baumann 56, Rode 72) Genk (Bel) 1 (Sonck 35)

Daum paid for confidence

BERLIN, Oct 27: Disgraced Christoph Daum, sacked as Bayer Leverkusen coach earlier this month after testing positive for drugtaking, took an earlier test in secret which turned up negative, leading him to believe he had nothing to lose by taking the official one. Bild reported Friday, reports AFP.

Daum, who as well as his Leverkusen post lost his chance to become German national coach next summer, took the secret test in the Netherlands and Bild said he then agreed to the second one because "he was sure it would be negative."

The shock news came as the prosecutor's office in the Rhineland town of Koblenz said it had opened an enquiry into Daum, alleged to have taken cocaine, and searched his Cologne apartment in the early hours of Friday morning.

Police also searched his Leverkusen office, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office said, confirming a report in the Rhein-Zeitung.

The spokesman told AFP that in all five people were under investigation for alleged drug offences with two suspected dealers arrested.

Leverkusen manager Reiner Calmund told Bild he was unaware of the Dutch test.

"That's the first I've heard anything about that. I can't rule it out - I can see the logic behind it. Until know I just couldn't fathom out why he agreed to the (second) test."

But Professor Herbert Kaferstein from the Cologne University institute which carried out the test on Daum said he was sure the result of that test was not open to question.

"We analysed three different hairs and reached a clear result," Kaferstein told Bild, adding he could not judge the methods used by other foreign laboratories.

Friday's investigations and arrests came amid a huge police dragnet aimed at pinpointing drug dealers in the western region of Rhineland-Palatinate as well as Cologne and Aachen.

The Cologne prosecutor is already investigating Daum having opened an enquiry into possible drugs offences last Monday.

Pabna soccer

PABNA, Oct 27: The Merit Second Division football league begins at the local stadium tomorrow, reports UNB.

District Sports Association has organised the league sponsored by Square Lotteries Ltd.

Some 20 teams, splitting into four groups, are taking part in the meet.

In the opening match, Shaheed Hamid Dilu Sangsad will take on Antola Club at 3 pm.



FIFA'S BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR THE GREATEST : FIFA President Sepp Blatter presenting Pele with a trophy on the occasion of the football legend's 60th birthday at Zurich on October 26. - AFP photo

Happy birthday Pele

ZURICH, Switzerland, Oct 27: With a simple birthday cake adorned by 60 birthday candles

football's world governing body FIFA celebrated the birthday of Brazilian footballing legend Pele here Thursday, reports AFP.

"It was, above all, to mark the occasion," said FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who presented Pele with a miniature football in gold, during the ceremony attended by football stars including Germany's Franz Beckenbauer, France's Michel Platini and Roger Milla of Cameroon.

"I'm 60, so what," said a smiling Pele, whose birthday was on October 23. "It's great to be 60. It's like having a new

lease of life. Old age has never been an enemy in my life. On the contrary I'm going towards it with serenity."

"I'm happy. This is my family, the footballing family," added the South American superstar, who helped the Brazilian national team to three World Cup victories in 1958, 1962, and 1970.

In his career he played in 1,363 matches and scored 1,282 goals. His best season was 1958, when he scored 139 times.

"Football then was not like today. There weren't big publicity contracts. Now I take advantage of it and at 60 I have a lot to achieve," he said.

And the former star added that there was no question of him returning to football in the

capacity of coach despite several lucrative offers.

"The day I quit I said that there was no question of me coaching a club or national team. I just refused an offer Monday of 25 million dollars for a two year contract to coach a team who want to win the 2002 World Cup," said Pele.

"What interests me is young people," he said.

And the former Brazilian sports minister brushed aside accusations that he was only interested in self-enrichment.

"I've nothing to be worried about. I'm honest. Financially I have nothing to hide. I know that there's an inquiry into morals in Brazilian football, but I'm not worried. I've nothing to hide," added Pele.

Premiership preview

Poor Saints face wounded MU

LONDON, Oct 27: If Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson can't get his team's next opponents after Tuesday's 2-1 Champions League defeat by Anderlecht he might well have chosen Southampton, who face the Premiership leaders at Old Trafford on Saturday, reports AFP.

Former England coach and current Southampton manager Glenn Hoddle celebrates his 43rd birthday here on Friday but he can have no realistic expectation of a late present from his team.

On Monday the 'Saints' as the perennial Premiership strugglers are known, went down to a 2-0 defeat against United's local rivals Manchester City.

That left the club in 17th place, just two points above the relegation zone.

Even worse for Southampton, Sir Alex is in a bad mood after his club's European defeat.

"Our defending in the first 25 minutes was a nightmare," he said.

"Ronny (Johnsen) is usually very decisive but he didn't look ready."

"Maybe he was not 100 percent but the time it took him to get warmed up cost us a little bit."

They (Anderlecht) created so many chances during that period and we can't be happy about that."

Now a placid Ferguson is a beast best handled with care: an angry one is to be avoided and the tongue-lashing his players received after their midweek loss could lead to a vastly improved performance against the seemingly weaker opposition at the weekend.

The bad news for United is that their captain Roy Keane is still struggling with the hamstring injury that kept him out of the Anderlecht match. The Republic of Ireland midfielder is rated doubtful for the Southampton game.

Better long-term news for United came when their Wales winger Ryan Giggs announced he had opened discussions with the club over a new contract.

"My approach to the club is a clear sign that I want to stay at Manchester United," Giggs told his website. "We have great side, who are still relatively young... There is no reason to leave."

Chelsea are at home to London rivals Tottenham. New coach Claudio Ranieri came to Chelsea vowing to sign more English players but his first purchase was Croatian midfielder Slavisa Jokanovic.

This week Italian Ranieri has been trying to secure the services of Ajax winger Jesper Gronkjaer who is from Denmark - hardly a well-known part of England either. But the eight million pounds (12million dollars) deal has been delayed because Gronkjaer has groin trouble.

Chelsea are currently in eleventh place but are only five points behind Liverpool in third so hopes of European football next season are still very much alive.

But there was relief for Ranieri with last week's six-goal thrashing of Coventry, striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink proving his effectiveness with four of his own.

Tottenham have been making steady progress this season and are in eighth spot. They ended a run of four straight defeats with victory over bottom of the table Derby.