

Coelho new Moroccan coach

RABAT, Oct. 28: Former Portugal coach Humberto Coelho, who resigned after the Portuguese lost their Euro 2000 semi-final to France, has been appointed coach of Morocco. The Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) confirmed Wednesday, reports AFP.

Coelho replaces former French-Polish coach Henri Kasperczak sacked on September 20 following a string of poor results.

Kasperczak replaced Frenchman Henri Michel last February but failed to bring success to the football-mad country and oversaw a humiliating 2-0 defeat at the hands of African minnows Gabon on September 2.

A statement issued by the FRMF Wednesday said that Coelho was elected unanimously after a six-hour meeting chaired by General Hosni Benslimane, FRMF president.

Coelho is expected here in the coming days to sign his contract.

Asprilla loaned

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct. 28: Colombian international striker Faustino Asprilla has been loaned by Palmeiras to fellow Brazilian First Division side Fluminense till June this year, Fluminense said on Friday, reports AFP.

The 30-year-old Asprilla, under contract with Palmeiras till 2002, will join his teammates at the Rio de Janeiro club on Monday.

Asprilla, known as much for his discipline problems as for his creative football, left Palmeiras last month after being arrested drunk and having fired shots into the air in a public place in his home town of Tulua in south west Colombia.

Negotiations with several Arab clubs did not work out and Asprilla returned to Palmeiras two weeks ago.

The former Newcastle player, who has been an international for 10 years, is one of the best ever strikers to come out of Colombia.

Vilarinho Benfica's new chief

LISBON, Oct. 28: Manuel Vilarinho, a 52-year-old businessman, has been elected president of Portuguese First Division club Benfica following a vote count Saturday from Friday's election, reports AFP.

Vilarinho received 62 percent of the vote by 21,804 club members against just 38 percent for his opponent, outgoing president Joao Vale, who had been in the post for three years.

Vilarinho has promised to boost the squad with two Brazilians - Fluminense playmaker Roger and Galatasaray striker Mario Jardel, who only joined the Turks in the summer after several highly successful seasons at Porto.

Former European champions Benfica are desperate to get back into the big time having won the last of their 27 Portuguese titles in 1994.

Last season they saw city rivals Sporting Lisbon win the crown.

Benfica are currently eighth in the table.

Houllier hits back

LONDON, Oct. 28: Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier has launched a furious attack on former Everton skipper Kevin Ratcliffe following a verbal assault on Nick Barmby in the build-up to Sunday's Merseyside derby, reports AFP.

The former France boss is angry with Ratcliffe, now boss at Shrewsbury, for criticising Barmby's shock summer move from Everton to Liverpool.

And Houllier feels that such comments from Ratcliffe could raise security problems at Anfield for the match.

Houllier said: "I was disappointed in the attack on him by Kevin Ratcliffe. He's also a manager and this could happen to him."

There was no point in tackling the issue, which is a very sensitive one particularly regarding the security in the stadium. It was very unfair on the boy."

In Ratcliffe's column in a local newspaper, the one time Wales star claims that Barmby "deserves everything he gets" from Everton fans at Anfield.

It is the first time Barmby has had to face the supporters of his former club following the acrimonious 6-million-pound (9 million dollars) move across the city to Liverpool in the summer.

Iraq fires its soccer fed

BAGHDAD, Oct. 28: The Iraqi Football Federation has been disbanded following the national side's elimination in the Asian Cup, Baghdad media sources reported today, says AFP.

The team lost 4-1 Tuesday to Japan in a Beirut quarter-final and the performance was slated by the Iraqi press.

The head of the outgoing federation is Uday Saddam Hussein, eldest son of the Iraqi president and who is also president of the Iraqi Olympic Committee.



Chinese football officials celebrate becoming the hosts for 2004 Asian Cup after a meeting of the Asian Football Confederation in Beirut on October 27. —AFP photo

2004 Asian Cup in China

BEIRUT, Oct. 28: China won the right to host the 2004 Asian Cup here Friday following a vote by the Asian Football Confederation executive committee, reports AFP.

China defeated a late rally from Thailand to win the vote 10-6 after a series of presentations from the three bidding countries.

Iran, the third country bidding for the tournament, withdrew from the running before the secret ballot.

In a surprise move, the AFC decided to bring forward the timing of the vote at Beirut's Sports City Stadium complex. It had initially been planned for Saturday following Friday's presentations.

But nervous AFC officials concerned at the possibility of horse-trading in the period between the presentations and the ballot brought the vote forward.

"We want the members to judge each bid on the merits of the bid and for no other reason," a senior AFC official who asked not to be identified told AFP.

At the vote for the 2000 tournament during the 1996 Asian Cup, China had been favourite but suffered a humiliating 14-2 defeat after last-minute lobbying on behalf of

Lebanon by the powerful west Asian bloc.

On winning the 2004 vote, China's 18-strong delegation - who have been in Lebanon campaigning for their bid throughout the Asian Cup - burst into roars of delight.

Zhang Jilong, vice-president of the China Football Association, described the win as "totally deserved."

"It is time China staged the Asian Cup. We have a very good bid and we will put on an excellent tournament, we totally deserved this," Zhang said.

"Many people worked very hard for this," he said. Peter Velappan, general secretary of the AFC, said China's size made it the logical venue for the showpiece Asian football tournament.

"China had the best bid and they had the most organised presentation," he said after congratulating the winning bidders.

"With a population of 1.2 billion people they are the obvious choice to showcase Asia's most important football tournament to the rest of the world," Velappan added.

The 2004 tournament will be played in four venues, Beijing, Jinan, Chengdu and Chongqing.

Fears had been raised by opponents of the bid that the distances between the cities would make travelling for matches expensive and costly.

But China officials insisted their travel arrangements would meet requirements of the AFC. Xiao Yangzong, said travel would not cause a problem. "It's not a factor - there are regular travel connections between all the cities," he said.

After the bad blood caused by the controversial decision to award the last tournament to Lebanon, AFC executive member and FIFA vice-president Qatar Mohammed bin Hammam called for unity within Asian football's governing body.

"We urge a spirit of unity and co-operation within Asian football," bin Hammam told the closed-door meeting, a witness told AFP.

China were also thought to have benefited from a 'guilt factor' after being denied the 2000 tournament, according to one official who spoke to AFP before the vote.

"I think with all the problems there have been in Lebanon - the problems with the stadium, the crowd figures, the promotion of the tournament inside Lebanon - a few people from west Asia who pushed for Lebanon last time maybe feel a bit guilty about what happened in 1996," he said.

Thailand officials were gracious in defeat.

"We applaud China and their bid, they did very well," said Viji Getkaew, president of the Football Association of Thailand.

Troussier doesn't buy it

BEIRUT, Oct. 28: Japan's charismatic French coach Philippe Troussier played down his side's virtual favourites tag for Sunday's Asian Cup final here on Saturday declaring that there were six reasons why the Saudi Arabians should be instead, reports AFP.

The 45-year-old, known as the 'white witch' doctor for the success he enjoyed in a nine year stay in Africa, admitted the only remedy for Japan to counter this was to stick with their offensive game-plan which has brought them 20 goals in five matches.

"However, I will not put in place tomorrow something that I tried in France," he said. "That is to play without a goalkeeper," he added.

However, he was desperate to dilute the anticipation in Japan that they were about to bring back their second ever Asian Cup title against the same opponents they beat 1-0 in 1992 to seal their first crown.

"Sure we beat them 4-1 in the first round and that is useful but it is clear one shouldn't consider it an advantage," the former Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and South Africa coach said.

"Firstly this is a final and it is 50-50, no team starts with more of a chance than the other."

"Secondly the Saudis have changed their coach, thirdly

they have changed the makeup of the team.

"Fourthly they are full of confidence after beating South Korea in the semi-final and the fifth reason is that they are virtually playing at home in Lebanon," the Saudis lobbied hard for the Lebanese to host the Cup.

"Finally and most importantly no Far Eastern team has ever won the trophy when it has been played in the Middle East," he added.

However, Troussier, who praised his players for their professional play throughout the tournament, said that there was one particular quality in the Japanese that was reassuring to him.

"It is true sometimes I complain the players are not emotional but it is I can see also a strength," he said.

"Because they do not get stressed like European players do prior to a big match and sometimes I believe they don't even know that they have a match the next day as they are so relaxed," he added.

Troussier, who exploded earlier in the week in frustration at the political machinations of the Japanese Football Association (JFA) and threw into doubt whether he would stay on in the post after the tournament, said that for Japan, winning the trophy was vital psychologically for his squad.

"It is not just important that

Mr Okano (head of the JFA) has a beautiful trophy sitting in his cabinet which he can admire every day," he said.

"It is for me vital that we win so it will add 30 kilos to the mentality of each player and will make it an advantage for them every time they play an international match because they will have the confidence of being winners," he added.

However, Troussier, who took over the post after the 1998 World Cup where Japan failed to gain a point and lost even to fellow minnows Jamaica, refused to accept that a defeat would be laid at his door personally.

"I remember two years ago when we lost to Brazil the French newspapers titled it 'Brazil 2 Troussier 0' and it has always been the case even with the Japanese papers," he said.

"However, defeat or victory is a shared experience because of course the coach must take some responsibility but it is also the players on the pitch who once the match kicks-off are responsible for the outcome."

"If my players assume their responsibilities on Sunday and show the same calmness and maturity they have done in twice coming from behind to win and once to draw, when we were at 10 men. Then the headlines hopefully will read Japan and not Troussier beat Saudi Arabia for the Asian Cup," he added.

Bergkamp thankful

LONDON, Oct. 28: Dennis Bergkamp here Friday thanked Arsenal fans for making him feel wanted at the English Premiership club, reports AFP.

The Dutchman claimed earlier this week he had been shown "a lack of respect" by the club over contract negotiations.

But Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has moved quickly to make sure the striker's demands are being listened to, while Bergkamp admits he was touched by the fans' show of support for him during the Champions League 4-2 win over Sparta Prague.

The 31-year-old came on as a second-half substitute, and even while he was warming up to come on Highbury fans chanted his name.

"I must thank the fans for their backing at this time," Bergkamp told his website.

"I've had a lot of e-mails and messages of support, and the ovation I received on Wednesday was just incredible. "I must admit I wasn't sure what would happen. But I got massive support, and it was - without meaning to be dramatic - very emotional for me. I've seen and been through a lot in my career, but that was a big moment."

Bergkamp revealed: "I'm much happier now after the problems with my contract negotiations earlier in the week. To me, the situation is much clearer now."

"Mr Wenger has spoken to me and Mr (David) Dein Arsenal vice-chairman has spoken with my agent. Hopefully, we'll sort out the situation soon. At least we're talking and on the same wavelength."

Seaman out of action

LONDON, Oct. 28: England goalkeeper David Seaman is out of the Arsenal team against Manchester City at Highbury on Saturday after damaging a shoulder and with deputy Alex Manninger also injured, veteran John Lukic plays his first Premiership match for three years, reports AFP.

Lukic, who will be 40 in December, gave a heroic performance in Arsenal's 1-1 Champions League draw with Lazio in Rome two weeks ago when Seaman pulled out with a back problem and is likely to be between the posts for the next three games.

Frank staying put at Barca

BARCELONA, Oct. 28: Barcelona's Dutch defender Frank de Boer said Friday he wanted to stay at the club despite spending several games this season on the bench, reports AFP.

"I am very happy here to show my qualities," said de Boer, who added that "I have never said I want to leave - I just said it's normal not to be happy at being on the bench."

Lazio players meet Pope

VATICAN CITY, Oct. 28: Pope John Paul met soccer players from Italian champions Lazio on Friday and condemned football violence as degrading and offensive, reports Reuters.

The Pope, a keen sportsman in his youth, held an audience with hundreds of members of Lazio Sporting Club, including the footballers who won the Rome club the coveted Serie A and Italian Cup titles last season.

He greeted the athletes as "sky-blue and white friends," a reference to the colours which Lazio's founders, aspiring to Olympic ideals, adopted from the Greek flag 100 years ago.

He told Lazio members they had written "a very interesting page in the book of Italian sport" since the club was founded by a retired army officer on January 9, 1900.

The Pope urged an end to violence which has blighted football in Italy and elsewhere.

"Every now and then, unfortunately, things happen in the sporting world which degrade the true meaning of sport and effect not only sports people but the community itself," the 80-year-old Pontiff said.

"Passionate support for a team must never be allowed to offend people or damage the well-being of the whole. Sporting competitions must always retain their character of healthy and conciliatory entertainment."

FIFA suspends Tanzania

DAR ES SALAAM, Oct. 28: World football's governing body FIFA has suspended Tanzania after the east African country's football association rejected FIFA's instructions to work with two officials accused of embezzling funds, sports officials said Friday, reports AFP.

"Our emergency committee has decided to suspend the Football Association of Tanzania (FAT) with immediate effect and until further notice," a FIFA letter to FAT dated October 26 said.

"The suspension has the following consequences: Your national association forfeits its right to vote at the FIFA and CAF (African Football Confederation) congress."

ZZ picks up 5-game ban

NYON, Switzerland, Oct. 28: Juventus midfielder Zinedine Zidane has been suspended for five matches for head-butting a German player, European football's governing body UEFA said here on Friday, reports AFP.

The Frenchman, star of the 1998 World Cup-winning squad as well as the Euro 2000 championship side, had feared at least a three-match ban after he head-butted Hamburg's Jochem Kientz during the Italian side's 3-1 Champions League home defeat by the Germans last Tuesday.

But UEFA made an example of him as they clamped down hard for what was a second offence.

Zidane, whose red card was the tenth of his career, was also dismissed against Spanish Primera Liga champions Deportivo La Coruna at the Stadio delle Alpi earlier in the tournament.

UEFA reduced his ban on that occasion from two games to one allowing him to participate in last Tuesday's game.

But this time there was no comeback for Zidane after Kientz received a fractured cheekbone and concussion, putting him out of action for two weeks, as a result of the clash.

Zidane was in contrite mood earlier.

"What can I say? I am supposed to set an example to young players. So Tuesday's incident sits badly with that."

"I should never have been aggressive towards the player - I do not have the right to act like that or to give this image of myself," he told L'Equipe.

"I committed a dreadful foul. Anyone can lose their cool, it's human - but that's no excuse," he said.

Juventus coach Carlo Ancelotti said he thought the length of the ban was a little harsh.

"We think it seems excessive," Ancelotti told the Serie A club's website.

"But be that as it may this punishment will be an extra incentive for Zidane to give his all in the league," Ancelotti added.

Juventus were also fined 25,000 Swiss francs (13,800 dollars) for bad conduct by fans and the team following the Hamburg defeat.

The ban will rule Zidane out of their UEFA Champions League match against Panathinaikos FC in Athens on November 8, and four other UEFA club competition matches, European football's governing body said.

An appeal may be lodged provided it is received by UEFA before midnight on October 30.

ZINEDINE ZIDANE

Blatter's plan slated

ZURICH, Switzerland, Oct. 28: FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Friday unveiled the FIFA-UEFA joint working group's proposals for a future transfer system - but European players' union chief Gordon Taylor blasted the task force and walked out of the final session, reports AFP.

The task force agreed that the priority had to remain the protection of young players' interests, meaning in effect that clubs will be unable to poach young stars before they are at least 18. While clubs who have brought players through their youth system will be able to demand fees for players who move on.

But the issue of contract length remained a bone of contention as the participants moved into Friday's final round of discussions with delegates from national associations.

World football's governing body FIFA and its European counterpart UEFA say that contracts should be for a minimum period except when all three parties involved (the player and the buying and selling clubs) agree otherwise."

No player should be transferred more than once in any 12-month period, but there will be two transfer windows per annum.

Blatter regretted Taylor's walkout as the discussion went ahead without representatives of the latter's international footballers' union, FIFPro.

"We are very disappointed that the players' representatives chose not to attend," said Blatter. "But we continue to be ready to pursue the dialogue

with them."

In less conciliatory vein he added: "The FIFPro have de-capitalized the working group."

He said he understood the FIFPro had not turned up "because there is dissent at the heart of the movement."

Blatter later accused Taylor on the fringes of the meeting and asked why his organisation had not attended.

"Tell me why you didn't come to the meeting when you had told us Thursday that we could count on you."

Taylor began to explain himself but Blatter interrupted to tell him: "Stop speaking and saying nothing. Tell us clearly the reasons for your absence."

To which Taylor replied that FIFPro believed the task force proposals were ambiguous. "Thankyou," responded Blatter curtly.

FIFPro had held informal discussions with the task force Thursday night but believed

that the proposals enunciated Friday would meet with European Commission approval.

The proposals have to be submitted to European Competitions Commissioner Mario Monti in Brussels next Tuesday.

The Commission have set themselves a deadline of December 31 to reach a conclusion on the issue.

Rather than show up and criticise the proposals FIFPro earlier submitted a series of counter proposals - but Taylor was informed that the plenary session had broken up without FIFPro's alternative proposals even being discussed.

"This is indicative of the way the whole process has been handled over the past two months," blasted Taylor.

"The proposals are too ambiguous, although they are designed that way because essentially all the leagues and associations want to do is try to maintain things as they are."

They have done little to address the legal concerns of the European Commission and we will now have to pursue an independent course."

FIFPro's biggest grievance surrounds the compensation system that is being proposed by the Task Force.

Taylor believes that instead of allowing national law to override the current system, with an arbitration panel to sit in cases of dispute, if a player wishes to terminate his contract the fee should be decided by the length of the contract which remains and the salary the player is being paid.

For the meeting not to even discuss our alternatives is very disappointing to say the least."

CBF-Nike deal looked into

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct. 28: Brazilian MPs on Friday ran a fine tooth comb through the text of a 160 million-dollar contract between the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) and sports leisurewear giant Nike, reports AFP.

A parliamentary investigative commission (CPI) has been set up to shed light on the exact relationship between football and big business - but the content of the mammoth contract itself is the big talking point here.

Under pressure from legislators to be transparent throughout the deal the CBF was obliged to hand over a copy of the agreement and lingering suspicions about the future of the deal were able to exercise a large say in the Brazilian national team's friendly schedule.

Both the CBF and Nike have not been forthcoming on the issue leading to thinly-veiled criticism that they are keeping

the affair under wraps.

Daily paper Estado de Minas exclusively published sections of the deal suggesting that the parliamentarians' fears are well-founded.

Article 20.1 of the contract stipulates that no information pertaining to the contract should be made available either to the national, regional, local or international media, according to the paper.

Another article says that Brazil should make their senior squad available for "a minimum of 50 friendlies or exhibition matches with a minimum of three a year for each year of the contract."

The contract is to cover ten years.

Estado de Minas gave the story headline treatment.

The CBF have turned Nike into the owners of the Brazilian team," was the paper's reaction.

MPs are already holding an enquiry into transfers following the affair of former national coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, sacked as coach earlier this

month.

Senators have called for the lifting of banking secrecy rules on CBF accounts with Luxemburgo standing accused of receiving commission for player recommendations while in charge.

Legendary football star Pelé, former FIFA president Joao Havelange and Luxemburgo are among several leading Brazilian sporting figures who are set to give evidence before a parliamentary probe into fraud in Brazilian football.

Two inquiries, one before the senate and the second before the parliament, will investigate whether alleged fraud occurred during transfers such as that of star players Ronaldo of Inter Milan and Romario and irregularities in contracts signed with sports company Nike running into 400 million dollars.

Pelé will be questioned because he was sports minister at the time of the alleged irregularities, while Havelange was head of football's world governing body at the time.

ROK boat rocking

BEIRUT, Oct. 28: South Korea have a finer World Cup pedigree than fellow 2002 World Cup hosts Japan but it was clear on Thursday that the changing of the guard was taking place and that the Japanese were on the rise while the Koreans look set for a difficult period.

The Japanese, under the excellent guidance of French coach Philippe Troussier, showed their mettle for the third successive match in coming from behind to beat China 3-2 while Korea produced a lifeless performance in going down 2-1 to Saudi Arabia.

Their coach Huh Jung-Moo, whose world weary air has progressed to one of exhaustion since the start of the campaign, looks like paying the price for not delivering Korea their first Asian crown in 40 years.

The former PSV Eindhoven midfielder, who took up the

post after the debacle of the 1998 World Cup finals had cost Korean icon Cha Bum-Kun his job, has become increasingly tied up with queries.

Pelé will be questioned because he was sports minister at the time of the alleged irregularities, while Havelange was head of football's world governing body at the time.

There has already been too much talk about this," he said.

"I don't want to think about it or care about it for now."

"Whatever the decision is I will accept it," he added.

Huh, though, put his side's lack of preparedness and mental toughness down to inexperience, particularly after they lost 1-0 to Kuwait in the first round and visibly bristled at the suggestion that under him the side had regressed.

"This is a team in transition. We only have three or four players who played in the last World Cup and the new crop are yet to learn how to settle down and control a game," he said.

It was the same against the Saudis. I told them to relax and play their natural game as they did against Iran in the quarter-final (they won 2-1 with a golden goal) but this time when they went 1-0 down they panicked and the second goal came soon after," he added.

While Huh may well not be around to bring this squad on there are grounds for optimism with striker Lee Dong-Gook - the 'Lion King' - proving one of the stars of the tournament with five goals.

His talismanic presence in the final quarter of the match with Iran seemed to rattle the previously dominant three-time champions and it was he who scored the killer golden goal.

"With Lee around I am confident that we will always be capable of scoring goals even against the world's best defences," Huh said.