

Milan deny Barcelona incentive

MILAN, Nov 7. AC Milan's vice-president delegate Adriano Galliani Monday denied the Italian outfit had been offered an incentive by Spanish giants Barcelona to defeat Leeds United of England in Wednesday's Champions League match at the San Siro, reports AFP.

Barcelona need Milan to beat Leeds to have any chance of progressing to the second phase and Spanish media sources had earlier Monday quoted Milan's Spanish striker Jose Mari as saying the club had received an offer from Barcelona.

Galliani said: "No director of Barcelona has made a proposition to AC Milan, its directors or its squad, of a win bonus in the match against Leeds."

In a published interview with Catalan sports daily Catalan Sports, Mari was reported to have said that his side had been offered 400 million pesetas (2.3 billion dollars) to defeat Leeds.

Phillips reveals gambling stories

LONDON, Nov 7. Sunderland striker Kevin Phillips, a regular member of the England squad under Kevin Keegan, revealed Monday that life under the former coach was difficult unless you liked gambling, reports AFP.

Phillips rarely got a game under Keegan despite regular finding the net for his club.

His claims follow Football Association (FA) chief executive Adam Crozier's comments last week that there were factions within the England camp and that morale was low.

The British media reported this weekend that several England players would bet as much as 10,000 pounds (15,000 dollars) a hand in card games, creating splits within the squad.

Phillips told The Sun newspaper: "If you were not a card player or a racing person then it was a little boring under Kevin Keegan."

"I used to spend a lot of time on my own in my room when I was with England."

The former Watford striker is now hoping new coach Sven Goran Eriksson will give him a chance to prove he can transform his club form to the international stage.

"I'll never have a season like last time when I got 30 Premiership goals and the European Golden Boot, but I never got a chance at Euro 2000," he added.

"I thought I should have been given a chance. I tried not to let it get me down. I now I am looking forward to the future."

Former England striker Alan Shearer played down talk of a cheer school among the England players Sunday saying that it did not have an effect on team spirit.

"Yeah, we played cards, but try and tell me that the lads in 1966 (World Cup winners) didn't play cards or the lads with Peter Shilton or Bryan Robson didn't play cards," said the Newcastle striker.

"It happens at every club so what's the problem?"

Viduka leads Soccerroos to Scotland

SYDNEY, Nov 7. Mark Viduka, who scored four goals for Leeds against Liverpool last Saturday, was one of 10 British-based players named by Australia Tuesday for next week's friendly international with Scotland in Glasgow, reports AFP.

Captain Paul Okon, who has played only one reserve game for English side Middlesbrough since breaking a bone in his foot in August, returns to the 20-strong squad.

Coach Frank Farina's squad for next Wednesday's Hampden Park clash includes only one Australian-based player - Perth Glory's Kasey Wehrman.

Squad

John Filan (Blackburn Rovers), Zeljko Kalac (Roda JC), Hayden Foxe (West Ham), Stephen Laybutt (Feyenoord), Stan Lazaridis (Birmingham City), Shaun Murphy (Sheffield United), Kevin Muscat (Wolverhampton Wanderers), Tony Popovic (Sanfrecce Hiroshima), Tony Vidmar (Glasgow Rangers), Luke Casseley (AFC Solihull), Brett Emerton (Feyenoord), Stuart Lovell (Hibernian), Paul Okon (Middlesbrough), Josh Skoko (Racing Green), Jimmy Tiatto (Manchester City), Kasey Wehrman (Perth Glory), Paul Agostino (1860 Munich), Mile Sterjovski (Lille), Mark Viduka (Leeds United), David Zdrilic (Unterhaching).

WC 2002 draw in December 2001

PARIS, Nov 7. The final draw for the 2002 World Cup finals will be held in just over a year's time in the South Korean coastal city of Incheon, football's world governing body FIFA confirmed Monday, reports AFP.

Busan, one of the cities due to host World Cup matches during the tournament being co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, was chosen as the venue for the draw on December 1, 2001 by FIFA's 2002 organising committee.

Tiger Cup

Goals, goals and more goals



SONGKHLA, Thailand, Nov 7. It was goals galore Tuesday night as Malaysia slammed Laos five goals past.

Laos while Vietnam hammered six past Cambodia in Group B matches at the Tinsulanon Stadium Tuesday night, reports AFP.

It was the first win for both Malaysia and Vietnam as they both played to a scoreless draw in their opening match on Sunday.

Both were expected to coast to comfortable wins as Laos and Cambodia are merely here to make up the numbers while Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore are the main contenders for a place in the semi-finals.

For Malaysia it was a good win as it was the first time they scored a goal in the Tiger Cup competition after four matches - three in the last event in Vietnam two years ago.

Coach Abdul Rahman Ibrahim was elated after his team's victory, losing to Laos 1-0 in the 1997 Sea Games in Indonesia and only managing a draw in the last Tiger Cup competition.

"We had to win this match against Laos after the draw against Vietnam and we managed to achieve our objective."

"I think at the end of the day perseverance paid off for the players' effort and though I am surprised by the margin of victory, it is a good result."

The draw against Vietnam was also a good result and now we have another good result ... so I cannot complain."

"I just hope that my players can continue their goalscoring act against Cambodia," said Ibrahim.

Laos coach Vattthana Outhensackda said he was disappointed with the result and did not expect Malaysia to score so many goals.

"Our marking was very poor and we allowed the Malaysians too much space. The defence was also not playing very well and we have a lot of work to do before the next match."

Vietnam, one of the favourites to move into the last four with Singapore, overcame their disappointment of being held scoreless by hammering Cambodia 6-0.

Most of the goals came in the second half as Cambodia defended very well in the first but only one goal down.

Vietnam coach Alfred Reidl said: "I think Cambodia played very well in defence in the first half but when we got the second goal in the second half, we were on the way to a comfortable victory."

"I think we were very lucky to score six goals as we were just looking for three points and not a big win," said Reidl.

Cambodian coach Joachim Fickert said his team had nothing to lose against Vietnam and tried their level best but were outplayed.

"We played well in the first half but in the second we crumbled under relentless pressure. I hope we do better in the next match and not concede so many goals," said Fickert.



Malaysian Rusdi Suparman (R) trying to shield the ball from Sayavong Phonepath of Laos during their Tiger Cup encounter in southern Thailand yesterday. —AFP photo

Tiger Cup

Hosts pass the Burma test



CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Nov 7. Host Thailand fashioned a tense 3-1 victory over Burma Monday to kick off their campaign in the Third Tiger Cup football tournament at the 700 Years Stadium here, reports AFP.

What was expected to be a lopsided match turned out to be a titanic struggle for the Thais, picked as favorites, against the Burmese who managed to keep the game close due to the spectacular saves of goalie Ko Ko Aung.

The outcome was still up in the air until veteran skipper Surachat struck the insurance goal in the 75th minute, left-footing the ball from 10 yards past an off-positioned Aung on the fringe of the box just as two Burmese defenders were about to collapse on him.

Thailand were able to pick up their first win in Group A, keeping abreast of arch rival Indonesia who earlier banked on their superior skills and a relentless pace to shut out the Philippines, 3-0.

"Our first goal I felt came at the right time but we had the tendency to step off the pedal."

"Our second goal also came at the proper moment but I was not too pleased with our marking. We also made elementary mistakes," said English coach Peter White of the performance of his Thai charges.

"The onus is on Thailand because we are the hosts. But I keep telling my boys not to keep on thinking about it too much," added White, "because the most important thing is that we got three points. This is what the match is all about."

Striker Kiatasuk Senamung, dubbed the Thai "Zico" and who plays for First Division Huddersfield in the English League, had a hand in both of the home team's first two goals.

He had a cracking 15-yarder on the left flank four minutes into the match, immediately somersaulting after scoring the goal, delighting the sell-out crowd at the 25,000-seating capacity stadium.

Then he set up Sakesan Pitrutana in the 47th minute, passing from the left wing near the fringe of the goalbox, who slammed an unstopable 30-foot volley.

"What can I say but that's what a quality striker 'Zico' is," White said.

But Burma, once a regional soccer power in the 60s and 70s, kept their poise, a tribute to the training of their own English coach, David Booth.

They continued to play their own game until striker Aung Syaw Kyaw Tun took a cross from the right wing then broke loose to shoot a sizzling 20-yarder at center beyond the reach of Thai goalkeeper Kittisak Rawangpa to pull Burma to within 2-1.

Rawangpa also had some spectacular saves of his own to prevent the marauding Burmese from getting back into the game after Surachat scored their third goal.

Despite the relatively easy victory, Indonesian coach Nanda Iskandar was far from satisfied, saying: "Indonesia is often compared with Thailand in performance. But we still have a lot of work to do. We're far from there yet."

"Indonesia didn't beat us, we beat ourselves," lamented Filipino coach Rodolfo Alicante.

"All of their goals were scored due to very basic errors on our part."

The Philippine team, barely formed two months before the tournament, Alicante added, were still far from being in top physical shape so couldn't keep up with their foes.

For the first 30 minutes, Indonesia found the Philippine defense a hard nut to crack until veteran skipper Aji Santoso saw an opening in the 32nd minute, chipping a 20-footer over Filipino goalkeeper Edmundo Mercado inside the penalty box on the right side of the net.

The Filipinos had their share of opportunities in the first half, although their best try came in the 40th through midfielder Ali Ngo, whose 40-yard blast on a direct free kick grazed the top of the crossbar before going out.

Indonesia settled down to dominate the second half while the Philippines seemed to wilt under the driving tempo of the opposition.

Right-wing Kurmiawan Yulianto scored his team's second goal in the 60th, slotting a 15-yard roller during a goalmouth scramble that signalled the beginning of the end for their outclassed rivals.

Eko Purdjianto settled the issue on the 84th, heading the ball on the right side of the net from a cross-pass.

The scoreline could have been bigger if not for the many foiled attempts by goalie Mercado who virtually fought a one-man battle to contain the Indonesians.

The lone yellow card was slipped on Filipino player Perang Temporosa who was caught tackling Gendut Christiawan from behind.

Fulham told to pay up for Koller

LONDON, Nov 7. First Division Fulham were told Monday that they will have to increase their bid if they want to sign Czech international striker Jan Koller, reports AFP.

The south London club, currently lying second behind Watford, have offered 6 million pounds (9 million dollars) for the giant Anderlecht striker, according to reports in Belgium.

But the club's general manager Michel Verschuereen, has accused Fulham of trying to sign him on the cheap and admitted it would be suicide to sell him.

Verschuereen told La Derniere Heure: "Firstly, Fulham aren't valuing Jan Koller at his true worth, we'll never let him go for so little."

"Apart from that, Koller deserves better than to develop in that division. Of course Fulham are right up the top of the league, but all the same."

"Finally, we need him. Anderlecht are on the point of qualifying for the Champions League. It would be suicide to weaken ourselves by selling him."

Koller, who stands at 6 feet 7 inches (2 metres), was impressive at Euro 2000 and helped Anderlecht defeat Manchester United 2-1 in their last Champions League clash.

'Batigol' full of confidence

ROME, Nov 7. Gabriel Batistuta's decision to end a long and fruitful association with Fiorentina in order to seek a challenge in Serie A with First Division rivals AS Roma is looking justified after the Argentinian striker soared to the top of the Italian First Division goalscorer charts, reports AFP.

After five games in the red and yellow colours of Roma Batistuta's tally of six goals leaves him two clear of his closest challengers and lifted his club to second place behind unfashionable Udinese.

And Batistuta proved the key man in Sunday's 4-2 triumph at Brescia with his second-half hat-trick helping the capital outfit overturn a 2-1 interval deficit in a match where they were deprived of their playmaker Francesco Totti, who is injured.

Batistuta believed that Roma showed the necessary grit - allied to their much-vaunted flair - to earn the victory.

The Argentinian told journalists: "The truth is that if we want to stay in the running with the teams that are contenders for the Scudetto (Championship) we must play the way we did after the interval."

"In the second half we played well, determined, we were nasty. Without making mistakes."

Batistuta admitted that he was still not 100 percent fit - he has had a nagging problem with his knee.

"It is getting progressively better," said the hirsute hitman. "But I want more. I do not feel at the full limit of my powers."

Batistuta joined Roma in the close season after a hugely successful stint at Fiorentina where he set a new club goalscoring record.

He had joined the Florence club from Boca Juniors in Buenos Aires and had previously played for Newell's Old Boys and River Plate.



Diego cheers up Lopez

ROME, Nov 7. Lazio's injured Argentinian striker Claudio Lopez was Monday dismissed from hospital after undergoing surgery on injured ligaments to his left knee that will rule him out of football for four months, reports AFP.

Lopez revealed that he had been cheered up by the support shown by his fellow Argentinians, notably 40-year-old legend Diego Maradona who rang Lopez to commiserate with him.

"Diego is still the greatest of them all," said Lopez after revealing Maradona had rung him to lift his spirits.

Current Argentina boss Marcelo Bielsa and Jorge Valdano, a member of the 1986 World Cup-winning team, have also been in contact with Lopez.

The striker, dubbed 'El Pijo', said he had been touched by the gesture of his fellow Argentinians in the Lazio team - Diego Simeone, Hernan Crespo and Juan Sebastian Veron who wore t-shirts saying: "Don't give in, Pijo!" during Saturday's 2-0 victory at home to Bologna.

English clubs on a spending spree

LONDON, Nov 7. The demand for success prompted English football clubs to forget about potentially dramatic changes to the transfer system last month, reports AFP.

Only 8.5 million pounds (12.3 million dollars) was spent by clubs on players in September compared to 21 million pounds (33 million dollars) a year earlier, as clubs waited to see what happens in the transfer market.

But a Daily Telegraph table revealed Tuesday that caution was put on the backburner last month, with a total of nearly 28 million pounds (40.5 million dollars) splashed out - almost twice as much as at the same stage last season.

Premiership teams Middlesbrough and Chelsea were the clubs to invest heaviest on new talent, splashing out 8 million pounds, and 7.8 million pounds respectively on Ugo Ehiogu and Jesper Gronkjaer.

Clubs like Aston Villa have held back on deals and are waiting to see what happens, although many believe a definitive decision on whether the current system will be abolished will not be decided until January.

Weah becomes club captain

MARSEILLE, France, Nov 7. Liberian forward George Weah of troubled French First Division Marseille has been appointed team captain, sources at the club confirmed, reports AFP.

The decision to replace Patrick Blondeau with Weah was taken on Monday night by club chief Robert Louis-Dreyfus after individual interviews with players at Marseille's training ground.

The appointment was later confirmed by team members speaking under anonymity.

Blondeau had replaced current Arsenal forward Robert Pires as team captain in January when the club was then enduring a relegation crisis towards the end of season 1999-2000.

Marseille are currently sitting in the relegation zone, and are once more enduring a mini-crisis, witnessed in recent days with the resignation of club president Yves Marchand and the sacking of sports manager Eric Leclerc.

Di Meo was said to have resigned Monday, but conflicting reports, confirmed by a source close to Di Meo, suggested he was sacked before Marseille's 0-1 defeat to Rennes on Saturday.

Club's sports director, Marcel Dib, is reported to be next in Dreyfus' firing line.

Weah, who joined Marseille from English Premiership side Manchester City mid-October, will now be expected to succeed where Blondeau failed, namely assuring the cohesion of the team, and successful dialogue between the club and its groups of fanatical supporters.

Chilavert kept waiting

STRASBOURG, France, Nov 7. Injured Strasbourg goalkeeper Thierry Debes is ruled out of his side's Sunday league encounter with Bordeaux after he sustained a serious neck strain, the club announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

Debes will now be replaced by Christophe Eggmann, as recent signing Jose Luis Chilavert is still serving a four-month ban handed down while playing for Argentine club Velez Sarsfield.

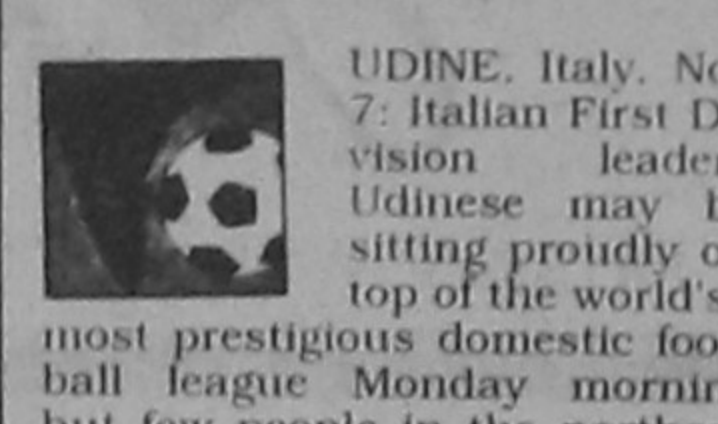
The Paraguayan international goalkeeper served one match of the ban in Argentina, one last weekend against Toulouse and, unless his appeal on behalf of Strasbourg is successful, he will miss the Bordeaux match.

Debes, who openly criticised the club's signing of Chilavert after signing a five-year contract at the start of the season, was only part of the starting line-up after it was revealed that Chilavert's ban would apply in France.

Debes was injured during the match against Toulouse after colliding with a team-mate and is unlikely to return to training before next week.

Strasbourg are currently sitting in the relegation zone, in 17th place on 12 points.

Udinese enjoying the moment



UDINE, Italy, Nov 7. Italian First Division leaders Udinese may be sitting proudly on top of the world's most prestigious domestic football league Monday morning but few people in the northern town are kidding themselves that their dominance will last, reports AFP.

Instead those associated with the unfashionable 104-year-old football club and the inhabitants of one of Italy's less well-known towns are enjoying their moment in the sun before they are inevitably eclipsed by their richer and bigger competitors.

Ligi De Canio, the coach who has plotted Udinese's rise to the summit, is no exception to the rule and subscribes to the feeling that he and his charges must enjoy the moment while it lasts.

"We are up against some very good teams with the likes of Parma, Juventus and Roma," admitted the Udinese coach, known to all and sundry as Gigi. "But we are happy to be occupying that place right now."

The Mayor of the town in Italy's Friuli region, not far from the border with Slovenia, Sergio

Cecotti was a little more bullish than De Canio, describing the club as a 'little jewel'.

He said: "Udinese have not got to the top of the table by accident but by hard work."

Paolo Maurensig, a local author, believes the town with a population of 200,000 can only benefit from the exposure obtained by the club's heroics.

He said: "It is a fact that football today has given Udine a worldwide profile. That is a positive thing. Let's just enjoy this magic moment. And we hope the run continues."

By the extravagant standards of Italian football Udinese's success has been built on a shoestring budget with a shoestring international midfielder Stefano Fiore their only real star.

Fiore, a key player in Italy's Euro 2000 campaign, was signed by Udinese from Parma in 1999 but is expected to leave the club at the end of the season with Italian champions Lazio believed to have won the race for his signature.

But other players have contributed to the run with Roberto Muzzi and Argentinian Roberto Sosa logging three goals each in the five games so far where Udinese - with four wins and a draw after five matches - have

counted mighty Inter Milan and Juventus among their victims.

Defender Valerio Bertotto joined Fiore in the ranks of the Italian senior team last month when he made his "Azzurri" debut against Georgia while Massimo Margiotta - a member of Italy's Olympic team - may be the next to step up to senior level.

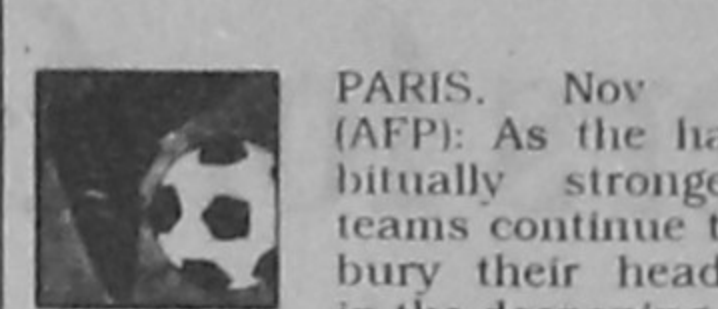
Other players to impress have been Danish midfielder Martin Jorgensen and midfielder Gianluigi Gianfranceschi whose dominance over Zinedine Zidane in the 2-1 victory over Juventus last week was so complete that France's World Cup winning midfielder was substituted at the interval.

A one-point lead at the top is a slim margin indeed and next up for Udinese is a tough match with improving Parma.

De Canio will be hoping that his 15 minutes of fame - to quote the late pop artist Andy Warhol - might stretch to 20 or even half an hour but is candid about his side's prospects of being top of the pile when the Scudetto is sewed on to the shirts of the new Italian champions.

"We are destined to return to the ranks," said De Canio. "We are just happy with this moment - full stop and no more."

Sedan season's surprise



PARIS, Nov 7. As the habitually stronger teams continue to bury their heads in the deepening sands of the French First Division a new kid on the block was basking in the glory of being league leader Monday.

Sedan, who owe their immediate status as league leaders to a 0-3 win against fellow league minnows Guingamp on Saturday, returned to the top of the French First Division for the first time in 30 years.

The recent elevation of the Ardennes club might not seem too surprising, given their excellent form of late, and the current and fluctuating state of the rest of the French league.

Paris St Germain - the team largely tipped for domestic honours this year - sit second after a 1-0 defeat away to Auxerre, while 1999 league champions Bordeaux are in third position.

In a more threatening position sit Lyon, perhaps the next well-known major club, who sit in 10th place on equal points (19) with 11th-placed fellow Champions League contenders Monaco.

Sedan's recent status as league leaders has led the French sports press to hail 'Les nouveaux Verts' (The new Greens) in reference to the highly successful Saint Etienne side of the 1970's.

That may prove a tad whimsical, given the fickle nature of the French league, but Sedan coach Alex Dupont is plain-talking when he describes his

side's historic rise to the top spot.

Speaking in Monday's sports daily L'Equipe, Dupont said: "It's not by chance that we're here. This (first place) is the fruit of hard work, self-sacrifice and experience."

"Before the match we said to each other, as usual, that two defeats would not tear the bottom out of our hopes, nor would two wins send us spiralling."

"But although we would like to maintain our position, preferably in the top three, we know that the race for points is on."

Such a casual, down-to-earth approach goes hand-in-hand with the club's heritage, and shows that proper spending and hard work can be a formidable match for the big spending clubs.

Last year, however, Sedan did not have it so good.

The league intervened at the end of their first season back in the top flight since 1974, in which they finished seventh to force the building of a new stadium.

Then coach Patrick Remy was sacked, the official line being that he supported his players in their strike over the lack of training facilities.

Now with a newly-built 17,000-seater stadium, and no need to train in the local park as work on proper training facilities is underway, Sedan are forging ahead with a style of play just as attractive as the team they have been billed to live up to.

Recent acquisition Tony Brogno, a Belgian international who finished top scorer in Bel-

gium with 30 goals for Westerlo last season, is keeping his name on the top scorers' sheet, with six from 14 games.

If rumours are to be believed, and aside from his goalscoring qualities, the little striker was bought to attract potential supporters from nearby Belgium.

Rumours aside, the club are showing the rest of the French elite how to play football with a style which, attacking in nature, is leading by example.

Improvements, however, could be made according to Dupont.

"This team is capable of impressive play and, even if they know how to get themselves out of a mire when needed, there could still be a few improvements."

"I would like an improved collective game, a lot of work done in our defensive midfield area and in the way the ball is moved out of midfield."

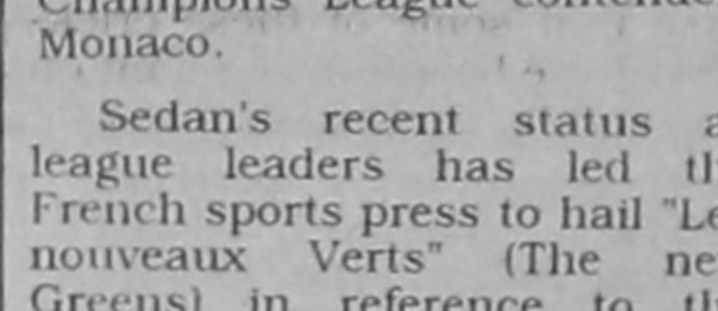
Improvement or not, if Sedan want to join Monaco, PSG and Lyon in next year's lucrative Champions League, they will have to finish in at least third place, an idea Dupont still finds surreal.

"We are seeing how fast things have evolved, but the big teams are still in the race for the league title, even if they are currently handicapped by their European aspirations."

"But their means (financial) oblige us to remain calm."

For the moment, calm is the last thing on the minds of the fanatical support in the Ardennes.

Marseille booters' nightmare



MARSEILLE, France, Nov 7. Marseille players have revealed that they fear a repetition of last season's training ground attack and that the atmosphere at their Velodrome stadium is paralysing them with fear, reports AFP.

"When we walk out on to the pitch we feel afraid," admitted midfielder Jerome Leroy, normally known for his tough guy status.

After Saturday's 0-1 home defeat to Rennes, former Marseille player Jocelyn Gourvenec, now at Rennes, explained his side's victory: "They didn't play. They all had the jitters."

South African international Pierre Issa, 25, was whistled by his own fans every time he touched the ball, his mistakes worsening under the pressure. Issa, a former favourite, is said to be deeply hurt.

"In his position many others would refuse to play," said Leroy in defence of Issa.

Cristi Pongu, out with a long term injury was physically as-

saulted by a fan as he watched the recent defeat to Lille.

While Marseille fans have formerly been known to back their side like no other supporters in France, the whistling started after the first stray pass this weekend.

Nor is the abuse reserved just for the players. The club's owner Robert Louis Dreyfus, who has invested 90 million dollars of his own money in the club, sat rigid as the leader of a supporters' group insulted him, his wife and the club with the aid of a megaphone on Saturday.

The decline began a year ago when the side was eliminated from the Champions League and suffered a home defeat against Lens just before Christmas.

A section of the fans turned up at Marseille's training ground roughing up players and vandalising cars.

A year later Peter Luccin, Stephane Dalmat, Robert Pires, Fabrizio Ravanelli, Christophe Dugary, Stephane Porato and Ivan de la Pena have all left the side, many with bitter memories.

According to a source close to the club, defender Sebastian Perez, who was beaten in the attack, and William Gallas, the side's brightest young hope, both wish to leave in the winter break.

Club captain Patrick Blondeau regrets the behaviour of this minority but admits that the phenomenon may put off potential signings.

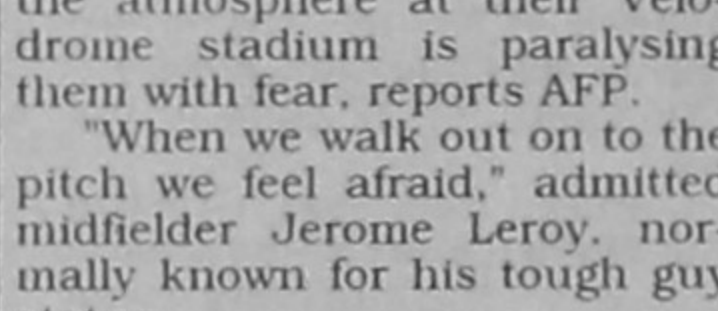
Bruno Ngotty, who arrived from AC Milan in the close season, had the chance to equalise late on Saturday. But he was whistled as he ran up to take the free kick and subsequently looted the ball high and wide.

"Fifteen minutes before the end there was no-one supporting us, I don't even know if they were still watching," the defender explained.

"When you are a supporter you have to go all the way," he added.

The fear is, some supporters will go all the way and lead another attack on the players. The supporters may fear relegation, but the players are now as afraid of them.

MU staring at losses



LONDON, Nov 7. English Premiership leaders Manchester United risk missing out on a 25 million pound (37.5 million dollar) windfall should they fail to beat Dynamo Kyiv in Wednesday's Champions League clash at Old Trafford, reports AFP.

Failure against the Ukrainian side would cost them at the very least 10 million pounds (15 million dollars) - the amount qualification for the second group stage involves - plus the chance to earn another 15 million pounds (22.5 million dollars) in the later knockout stages.

United's Finance Director David Gill told the Observer: "Clearly it is a very big game for us, both on and off the pitch, and everyone understands that progressing in Europe is a key element of our financial performance."

What happens on the pitch determines what happens off it, so it's important financially.

But we're all confident the team will go through."

Shares in Manchester United fell sharply a fortnight ago after their 2-1 defeat away to Anderlecht.

United could bank around 25 million pounds in prize money, gate receipts, television revenue and additional merchandising if they go on to win.

Napoli keep faith with Zeman



NAPLES, Italy, Nov 7. The Napoli board Monday kept faith with their Czech coach Zdenek Zeman despite the weekend 2-1 home defeat by fellow strugglers Vicenza that left the club stranded at the bottom of the Italian First Division with just one point in five matches, reports AFP.

The club's decision comes after overnight speculation that Zeman would pay the penalty for his side's poor start to the season with only a 1-1 draw at Lecce sparing them from the ignominy of a whitewash.

Defeat for the 1999 European champions would be a massive setback for the club's finances and could limit their spending in the transfer market.

United have to win to be sure of progressing alongside Dutch champions PSV Eindhoven and Belgian title holders Anderlecht.

Sir Alex Ferguson's men lie third in their group, with just seven points from five games; their Dutch and Belgian rivals already have nine points each.

A draw would see United drop into the much less lucrative UEFA Cup as the third-placed team. A Kyiv victory, however, would mean United finish bottom and miss out on European competition altogether.

Historically the omens are not good for United. They have never beaten a team from the former Soviet Union in Europe and Dynamo have scored in all their European games away from home this season.