

Brazil-Nike deal

FIFA set to step in to block inquiry

GUATEMALA, Nov 19: The International Football Federation (FIFA) is set to block recent "serious interference" by two Brazilian parliamentary commissions into the country's football federation (CBF), announced FIFA secretary general Michel Zen-Ruffinen Friday, reports AFP.

"According to the information we currently have, we don't believe there is a real need to interfere, but we hope to obtain more information from the CBF," Zen-Ruffinen told AFP in Guatemala.

A Parliamentary inquiry was launched to investigate the mammoth contract, worth a reported 180 million dollars, signed between the CBF and American sportswear giants Nike.

The inquiry is trying to determine if the Brazilian national team's 10-year contract with Nike might harm the Brazilian game's interests and give Nike too much say in where they play and when.

"Quite naturally, we are following developments because, apparently, there is significant political interference," said Zen-Ruffinen, adding that FIFA regulations formally ban all political or judiciary interference in affiliated federations.

"It's not surprising that this case is provoking a lot of outside interest because of the prestige of Brazilian football, but it's not so different to those we've been confronted with in the past," he added.

Zen-Ruffinen stopped short of saying whether FIFA would eventually decide to suspend Brazil from international competition if the inquiry's "interference" in the case was confirmed, as FIFA president Joseph Blatter had indicated a few weeks ago.

"The executive committee's decision could lead to all sorts of possible conclusions," he concluded.

Scottish Premiership**Celtic go on a goal-spree**

GLASGOW, Nov 19: Leaders Celtic came from a goal behind to crush managerless Hearts 6-1 Saturday with a rampant display which keeps their Scottish Premier League title aspirations on track, reports AFP.

Colin Cameron stunned the home crowd with an early goal but Martin O'Neill's men hit back with goals from Joes Valgaeren, Lado Maravik, Henrik Larsson (2), John Mjallby and Stellan Petoh.

Celtic have 44 points from 16 matches and hold an eight point lead over closest challengers Hibernian who lost 2-0 at home to Aberdeen.

Asian youth soccer**Japan breeze into last four**

TEHRAN, Nov 19: Japan reached the last four of the Asian Youth Under 19 Championship with a comfortable 3-0 victory over Kuwait at the Shahrood stadium in Tehran here Saturday, reports AFP.

Together with Iran's 3-0 win over Oman, the result meant that the Japanese were through to the semi-finals.

Goals from Kazumori Ito, Sota Nakazawa and Koji Yamase clinched victory, which knocked Kuwait out of the competition and earned both Japan and Iran a place at next June's FIFA World Youth Championships in Argentina.

Japan now have seven points from three games, and will face Iran in their last group match on Monday.

J-League**Antlers stay on top**

TOKYO, Nov 19: A late strike from substitute Masashi Motoyama kept Kashima Antlers on top of the J-League's second-stage table on Saturday night, reports Reuters.

The 21-year-old attacking midfielder, a member of Japan's Olympic squad in Sydney, struck with just four minutes of sudden-death extra time remaining to earn Antlers a 2-1 victory at home to Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

Wins in extra time are worth only two points, but it was still enough to hold off Gamba Osaka and Kashima Reysol, who are second and third respectively on 28 points, just one behind Antlers with two games remaining.

Antlers went in front after 26 minutes with an own goal from Sanfrecce defender Tetsuya Ito, but the visitors pulled level on 65 minutes when Keisuke Kujiro headed home a free kick.

Motoyama, who has been described as Japan's Ryan Giggs by national coach Philippe Troussier, joined the action after 85 minutes and conjured up a memorable winner in the second period of extra time.

Receiving a pass from 1998 World Cup right-back Akira Narahashi, Motoyama cut in from the left and drove a low, right-foot shot into the bottom corner.

Serie A**Shevchenko denies Lazio**

ROME, Nov 19: A 54th minute goal from Andriy Shevchenko earned AC Milan a 1-1 draw at champions Lazio in a compelling Serie A match on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Lazio took the lead in the third minute when Dino Baggio unleashed a searing drive from 30 metres out that crashed into the top corner of Christian Abbiati's goal.

But despite the explosive opening, Lazio struggled to gain control of the game with Domenico Albertini orchestrating the game for the visitors, assisted by some lively movement

from Shevchenko in attack.

The Ukrainian, who scored a hat-trick in last season's 4-4 thriller at the Olympic stadium, gave an early reminder of his deadly finishing abilities when he conjured up enough space in front of the Lazio defence to drive a left-foot shot just wide of Angelo Peruzzi's left hand post.

Despite being forced to make two substitutions through injury, with Alessandro Costacurta and Francesco Coco being replaced by Brazilians Julio Cesar and Serginho, Milan continued to keep a firm hand on possession but lacked the incisiveness to carve out a clear-cut chance.

But nine minutes after the



AC Milan's Ukrainian goal machine Andriy Shevchenko (R) in action against Lazio in their Serie A encounter on November 18. - Internet photo

from Shevchenko in attack.

Lazio stepped up the tempo and in the space of 10 minutes Abbiati had to make three saves to keep his side level.

He got down well to block a close-range shot from Hernan Crespo with his feet and was then at full-stretch to keep out a Sintsa Mihajlovic free-kick, before again foiling Crespo with a diving save.

In the final minutes, with Lazio now firmly in the driving seat, Julio Cesar did well to hook away a goal-bound shot from Attilio Lombardo.

In Saturday's other game, a goal by substitute Christian Vieri, his first in eight months, earned Inter Milan a 2-1 home win over Perugia.

Inter took the lead after just nine minutes with a stunning left-foot strike from Alvaro Recoba at San Siro.

After dribbling past several Perugia defenders, the Uruguayan turned sharply to his preferred left foot and angled a shot into the top corner past goalkeeper Andrea Mazzantini.

Inter kept the pressure on Perugia's defence but were often exposed to Perugia's counter-attacks.

One of them led to a free-kick on the edge of the box in the 29th minute which Marco Materazzi curled into the top left-hand corner past the outstretched hands of goalkeeper Sebastian Frey.

Inter coach Marco Tardelli added more weight up front at the start of the second half - substituting midfielder Benoit Cauet for Vieri.

Tardelli's move paid off as the Italy centre-forward, making his third substitute appearance in three games, headed home the winner in the 77th minute.

Perugia came close to equalising with striker Luca Sardau's close-range shot, but Frey produced a great save to secure a much-needed victory for Inter.

The result leaves Monaco on 22 points, hoisting Claude Puel's side temporarily up to sixth place in advance of the remaining league games in the French top flight.

Paris SG, meanwhile, sitting in third position behind Bordeaux on 25 points, will be cursing a non-productive afternoon in the Principality which leaves their title aspirations in limbo - at least for this week.

Philippe Bergeron's side lacked creativity in the first half, though a shot from forward Laurent Leroy in the 14th minute threatened to bring the scores level.

Monaco, however, were more tactically aware and this proved crucial when Nonda beat the offside trap to run through and beat Lionel Letizi.

Vieri scoring his first goal since returning from a five-month injury lay-off, admitted he was still lacking in confidence because of his injury problems and echoed Tardelli's remarks about fear.

"I am still a little bit frightened when I go on the field but that's normal when you have been out for a long time," said the Italian international who spent much of his childhood in Australia.

His Perugia counterpart Serso Cosini was clearly disappointed his team did not snatch all three points, saying: "Until Vieri scored I was convinced we could go on and win it."

Nerves unnerve Inter!

MILAN, Nov 19: Fear remains the key problem for substitute Christian Vieri to earn all three points and produce signs of relief from the Inter faithful who had shrieked in anguish as the ball fell to Sardau's feet minutes earlier.

Even then Perugia threatened to snatch a point in the closing minutes and Tardelli said: "I suffered enormously in the last 15 minutes. But Vieri's goal was very important for the team."

Inter had made a barn-storming start, ending in Inter's opener from Uruguayan striker Alvaro Recoba after nine minutes but then seemed to lose the plot as Perugia fought back with defender Marco Materazzi grabbing an equaliser just before the half-hour mark.

"After Recoba's goal we went very quiet," admitted Tardelli, a key member of Italy's 1982 World Cup winning team. "We had moments of fear and it was not really a surprise when Perugia scored."

The turning point came after an hour when Perugia had a glorious chance to take a 2-1 lead but Inter's French goalkeeper Sebastien Frey pulled off a magnificent save from Luca

Sardau's close-range volley.

Fourteen minutes from time substitute Christian Vieri struck to earn all three points and produce signs of relief from the Inter faithful who had shrieked in anguish as the ball fell to Sardau's feet minutes earlier.

Tardelli, speaking after a hard-earned Saturday's 2-1 victory over Perugia at the San Siro, believes that his expensively-assembled crop of players will not be forged into an outfit capable of winning the Scudetto (Championship) until they have overcome the nerves that seem to afflict them - especially at their San Siro home.

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