

Sport

Cameroonians in running for Africa's best

CAIRO, Dec 1: The African Footballer of the Year will be named here Saturday with a star from all-conquering Cameroon the likeliest successor to Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu, reports AFP.

A list of 27 candidates released by the African Football Confederation (CAF), whose media and technical committees select the star, includes five Indomitable Lions.

Striker Patrick Mboma from Italian Serie A club Parma and utility player Geremi Njitap from European Champions League holders Real Madrid of Spain appear the strongest contenders.

Midfielders Lauren Meyer from perennial English Premiership championship title challengers Arsenal, Samuel Eto'o from Spanish outfit Real Mallorca and Salomon Oluoch from French side Nantes are the other Cameroon contenders.

The Indomitable Lions won the 2000 African Nations Cup in dramatic fashion, beating hosts Nigeria in a penalty shootout, and the national under-23 squad struck gold at the Sydney Olympics.

Mboma was one of three over-age players permitted to play at the Olympics and success for him would crown a career that has improved steadily rather than spectacularly since arriving in Europe from Japan.

Cameroon have won the award six times since its introduction 30 years ago with goalkeeper Thomas 'Black Spider' Nkono and legendary striker Roger Milla being honoured twice.

Nigeria dominated the poll since CAF replaced a Paris-based magazine as organisers in 1994 with Kanu twice and strikers Rashidi Yekini and Victor Ikpeba collecting the most votes.

While the identity of the winner may be shrouded in secrecy, he will almost certainly be a midfielder or striker playing professionally with a European club.

The last goalkeeper to win was Moroccan Badou Zaki in 1986, the last player based in Africa was compatriot Mohamed Timoumi a year earlier, and the last defender was Tshimen Bwanga of the Democratic Republic of Congo 27 years ago.

Ghana will pip Nigeria to the WC 2002!

LAGOS, Dec 1: Ghana's Black Stars will beat major group rivals Nigeria to qualify for the 2002 World Cup, the top official of the Ghana Football Association (GFA) said here on Thursday, reports AFP.

"Ghana will qualify for the World Cup ahead of Nigeria because the Nigerians are now past it," GFA secretary general Wollayya Agere told reporters.

"Nigeria have seen their good days. Most of the players now have very little to offer the team."

"Only teams with young, selfless and determined players can lead their country to the World Cup and that's why we are very confident we will be the ones playing at the next World Cup," he added.

Ghana, four time African champions, are yet to play in the World Cup finals while Nigeria qualified for the second round in each of the last two tournaments in the United States and France.

The Black Stars lead the group for the 2002 World Cup to be jointly staged by South Korea and Japan.

Ghana beat Sierra Leone 5-0 in their opening game of the qualifying series while Nigeria could only manage a 2-0 victory at home against the same opponents.

The Nigerians also lost to unheralded Liberia in their second qualification game.

Sudan are the other country in the five-team group.

Blatter's green signal for DPRK

HAVANA, Dec 1: Sepp Blatter, President of football's governing body FIFA, said here on Thursday that he was willing to see North Korea host a couple of matches at the 2002 World Cup finals, reports AFP.

Blatter, who succeeded Joao Havelange in 1998, added a final decision would have to be reached by the time the draw for the finals was made in December 2001.

"When I was in Korea three weeks ago I said we had an open policy on the matter," he said.

"If the two countries can reach a political agreement then South Korea can give North Korea one or two matches," he added.

However, Blatter emphasised that FIFA could not make the first moves towards making it happen.

"We cannot make the first move it is up to the politicians... we can come in afterwards but not before," he said.

Should North Korea land a couple of matches it would add to their growing re-entry into the sporting world after they marched with South Korea at the Olympics opening ceremony in September and this week were granted a boxing world title fight by the WBC.



Lorenzo Amoroso (L) of Glasgow Rangers locked in an aerial tussle with Kaiserslautern's Miroslav Klose during their UEFA Cup third round first leg encounter at the Ibrox Stadium in Glasgow on November 30.

Serie A preview

Juve-Inter clash of the night



MILAN, Dec 1: Inter Milan host Juventus at the San Siro Sunday evening in a game that is assuming mammoth proportions for the coaches of both clubs, reports AFP.

Inter are yet to really turn the corner nearly two months into the reign of coach of Marco Tardelli and club chairman Massimo Moratti has ominously started letting it be known that he is dissatisfied with the progress being made.

He described last week's 0-0 draw with Vicenza as a step backwards and after the 6-1 thrashing by Parma in the Italian Cup this week he was incandescent with rage although he made his views known through the intermediary of the club's sporting director Gabriele Oriali, a team-mate of Tardelli's in Italy's 1982 World Cup winning team.

Moratti, it should not be forgotten, has already used nine coaches in his five years in charge of the ailing giants and Tardelli knows that a defeat at the hands of the club where he spent the best years of his playing career will not help his cause.

Tardelli's Juventus counterpart Carlo Ancelotti has also been feeling the heat since his club's elimination from the Champions League but the 2-1 victory over Verona last week has left his position looking a little more secure after the Turin giants were linked with their former player Gianluca Vialli and Udinese coach Luigi De Canio in recent weeks.

But with the Championship title the only major prize still in their reach Juve know defeat would leave them nine points adrift of pace-setters AS Roma if it seems likely the capital club

wins their match at Perugia and that would leave Ancelotti with little room for manoeuvre.

Roma's match at Perugia sees Roma's Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata return to the club where he found fame and fortune in Italy but with his chances of a return to the starting line-up looking slim given the form of Fabio Capello's side.

Instead the centre of attention at Perugia will be Roma's Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta who is already carving out the same legendary status at Rome as he did in Florence during his nine-year stint with Fiorentina.

His goal last week that defeated his former club was a quality strike and Batistuta and his family also met Pope John Paul II this week.

It would cap a memorable week if Serie A leading scorer Bati-gol (nine goals in seven matches) should be on the mark at Perugia.

Roma's arch-rivals and reigning Italian champions Lazio, meanwhile, host Reggina on Saturday afternoon to give them time to recover for Tuesday's Champions League do-or-die clash with Leeds United of England.

While victory in an Italian Cup match over Udinese this week has taken some of the heat off the club is failing to launch a worthy title defence and a failure against Leeds would leave their hopes of progress in Europe looking slim.

That would inevitably lead to pressure on their Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson to accelerate his departure to coach England in the summer.

Reggina, meanwhile, have had seven consecutive defeats since the opening day victory over Inter Milan that ended the

reign of Inter coach Marcello Lippi and ushered in Tardelli.

They are also in the dog-house following the crowd scenes that led to the premature abandonment of last week's home match with Brescia, who were leading 3-0 when the game was halted.

But Atalanta remain the only unbeaten side in the division although they face a tough battle to preserve that record when they visit Parma on Saturday evening.

Parma's 6-1 victory over Inter, which followed a 2-0 triumph over Lazio in the league, confirmed their recovery from a bad start and Bergamo-based Atalanta will need to be at their best to maintain their proud record.

Napoli will be aiming for their first triumph of the season at home to Bari while Brescia visit Verona for what is bound to be a contentious derby match.

Faith Terim's Fiorentina make the trip to Lecce while Bologna, riding high in fourth place, will be hopeful of consolidating their good start with a home clash with Vicenza.

Udinese, who are beginning to slip after their table-topping exploits of the early season, will hope to halt the slump at home to AC Milan whose coach Alberto Zaccheroni and German striker Oliver Bierhoff will be returning to the club where they first became established names in Italian football.

FIXTURES

Saturday: Lazio v Reggina, Parma v Atalanta (19:30 GMT)

Sunday: Bologna v Vicenza, Lecce v Fiorentina, Napoli v Bari, Perugia v Roma, Udinese v AC Milan, Verona v Brescia, Inter Milan v Juventus (20:30 GMT)

Luxemburgo's sourceless millions



BRASILIA, Dec 1: Former Brazil coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, sacked in September after a run of

poor results and amid allegations of improper conduct, amassed a fortune incompatible with his profession, a Congressional commission of inquiry into Brazilian soccer said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Politicians grilled the disgraced coach for more than five hours and then told him they could not understand how he had received the equivalent of more than nine million dollars during the last five years.

"What is the origin of your income?" asked Senator Alvaro Dias, president of the commission in the Senate. "I think this deserves an explanation."

Luxemburgo was also asked about the influence of sponsors in the Brazilian national team, the fact that he had 30 different bank accounts in the last five years and why he had used a fake birth certificate - which stated that he was three years younger than he really is - for most of his career.

The former coach, who lost his job after a series of poor performances with both the Olympic and the senior teams, is one of the central figures in the investigation into Brazil's so-called 'national passion'.

His dismissal came amid allegations, which he has denied, that he took commissions on the sale of players when he was a club coach.

The inquiry has started following a disastrous period for Brazilian soccer, which, in addition to the demise of the once proud national team, is in domestic disarray.

Using special powers which allow it to investigate an individual's bank accounts, the inquiry confronted Luxemburgo with his financial dealings. Senator Geraldo Althoff, the



LUXEMBURGO

hearing.

"His earnings as a soccer coach are not compatible with this startling financial movement over the last years."

Luxemburgo said he had received income from property and car sales but Dias described the explanation as unsatisfactory, adding that the additional income still did not explain how he had become so wealthy.

Luxemburgo was asked to justify numerous transactions over the last few years as his personal finances were opened

to public viewing in a session broadcast nationwide on cable television.

The most dramatic moment came when he was asked to name the agent who he claimed in a television interview last month had offered him money to put a player in the national team.

Luxemburgo said he did not want to give the name as he did not have proof and denied he had made an outright allegation during the programme. The commission played a recording of the declaration three times and warned Luxemburgo that he could be arrested for covering up the truth if he did not co-operate.

The coach denied that sportsman giants Nike had interfered in the running of the national team during his two years in charge. "Nike never interfered in my work," he said.

"We sat down at tables at talked, Nike and the CBF presented proposals for possible friendly matches and I said whether I was interested or not."

Luxemburgo was also asked why he had used a birth certificate stating he was born in 1955 instead of 1952, a matter which is also being investigated by the federal police.

"My father, who has passed away, gave it to me," said Luxemburgo.

He emphatically denied accusations made by former business associate Renato Alves that he had taken commissions on transfers earlier in his career.

He added: "I would like to thank the president and the senators for the opportunity to be able, for the first time, to speak to the Brazilian nation in a direct way, so that we can clear up all these doubts."

"It has been four months of suffering for me and my family, being crucified and bombarded without the chance to defend myself."

UEFA Cup

Albertz makes the difference

GLASGOW, Dec 1: A goal two minutes from time from former German international Jorg Albertz gave Scottish giants Rangers a 1-0 victory over German club Kaiserslautern here at Ibrox on Thursday in the UEFA Cup third round, first leg, reports AFP.

Kaiserslautern, who were going down to their fifth successive defeat, were reduced to 10-men only minutes before Albertz' goal when Jorgen Pettersson was sent-off for a second bookable offence.

Rangers, the reigning Premier League champions, should have won the match earlier but wasted a succession of strikes before Albertz, nicknamed 'The Hammer' struck to consign the Red Devils to playing catch-up football in the second leg.

Kaiserslautern coach Andreas Brehme, who scored the penalty that brought Germany the 1990 World Cup with a 1-0 win over Argentina, said his side had stuck at it well but in the end couldn't last the whole 90 minutes.

"It was strange really as we had the better of the second-half," Brehme said.

"We went forward more and created more chances," he added.

Rangers were fortunate to finish with a full complement of players as striker Michael Mols, who was inches away from the opening goal in only the third minute, slipped Kaiserslautern keeper George Koch in the face in the first half after his opponent had stood on his foot.

Fortunately for Mols French referee Gilles Veissiere had not spotted it and took no action.

Rai's swansong January 14

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 1: Former Brazil captain Rai said on Thursday he would end his playing career on January 14 in the colours of Sao Paulo for a friendly match against Flamengo, reports AFP.

The 35-year-old midfielder was part of Brazil's 1994 World Cup-winning side and had a successful spell as captain of leading French club Paris Saint Germain - with whom he won the 1996 Cup Winners Cup - but ended his competitive playing career in July because of injury.

Rai, whose half-brother Socrates starred for Brazil in the 1982 and 1986 World Cup finals, will concentrate on running an association for underprivileged children which he set up with fellow Brazilian footballer Leonardo, who plays for AC Milan.

Stojkovic extends career

NAGOYA, Japan, Dec 1: Yugoslavia's World Cup skipper Dragan Stojkovic, who had announced he would retire at the end of this season, will continue to play another six months for Nagoya Grampus Eight, reports AFP.

"I'm going to finish my career in Japan. The only thing I missed here is to win the J-League title. That is what I want to accomplish," Stojkovic told reporters at Nagoya's home ground in central Japan Thursday.

He said he would go back to Paris, where he has his home, after his retirement in July next year.

Stojkovic, now 35, joined the J-League First Division club in 1994 and signed a one-year extension to his contract last December.

He received the J-League's most valuable player award in 1995.

Italian Cup results

ROME, Dec 1(AFP): Italian Cup quarter-final first leg result on Thursday:

Fiorentina 6 (Leandro 29, 65 Bressan 36, Chiesa 40, 58, Rui Costa 73) Brescia 0

Wednesday  
Lazio 2 (Stankovic 85, Nedved 87) Udinese 1 (Margiotta 47)  
Parma 6 (Serena 18-og, Micoud 33, Montano 34, Amoroso 38, Appiah 53, Sartor 61) Inter Milan 1 (Recoba 44)

Tuesday  
AC Milan 4 (Leonardo 30, 65, Jose Mari 53-pen, Chevchenko 87) Atalanta 2 (Ganz 19, Nappi 45-pen)

ROK plans special coins for WC 2002

SEOUL, Dec 1: South Korea will produce 14 special coins next year to mark the 2002 World Cup football finals that will be co-hosted by the country with Japan, its central bank said Friday, reports AFP.

The coins will include two gold, four silver and one bronze coin that will be minted from next May, said the Bank of Korea.

A one-ounce gold coin will cost 30,000 won (about 25 dollars), a one-ounce silver coin 10,000 won and a one-ounce bronze coin 1,000 won.

Primera Liga preview

Real back in league action



MADRID, Dec 1: Valencia and Deportivo La Coruna take their battle for leadership of Spain's Primera

Liga on to the road this weekend, while bottom club Osasuna face a torrid ordeal against wounded giants Real Madrid, reports AFP.

Real missed their opportunity to be crowned world club champions on Tuesday as they lost 2-1 to Argentina's Boca Juniors in Tokyo.

While the Intercontinental Cup means more to South America than the multi-millionaire European clubs, third-placed Real can be expected to take out their frustration on Osasuna, who have won just one match out of 12 this season.

The Spanish football federation has classed the match as high-risk because of the traditionally hostile welcome the team from the capital receive from supporters in Pamplona, which is near the separatist Basque country.

Valencia, led by the impressive Spanish international Gendietzi, travel to Valladolid in a bid to hold on to top spot.

Mendieta and Argentinian

striker Kily Gonzalez were on target when Valencia beat Oviedo 2-0 last weekend.

Deportivo La Coruna, Spain's third representative in the later stages of the Champions League along with Real Madrid and Valencia, will be looking to continue their impressive form away on Saturday at Barcelona's uncelebrated club, Espanyol.

La Coruna include 30-year-old Brazilian midfielder Djalminha, who this week signed a contract keeping him at the club until 2005, but must do without the services of Nourredine Naybet, the Moroccan is one of the few Muslim players in Spain's multi-national league to observe Ramadan.

There has been little to cheer on the claret and blue side of the Catalan capital this season, with Barcelona failing to progress to the second phase of the Champions League.

The giant club face a tricky test at Celta Vigo on Saturday but must win if they want to keep in touch with the leaders, five points ahead of them.

A Spanish court ruling that Celta Vigo's Russian midfielder Valery Karpin can be classed as a European Union player provoked an angry response on

Thursday from the Spanish footballers' association (AFE).

The AFE fears that the ruling will open the floodgates for non-EU nationals to play in Spain and will ask the government to take measures to prevent 'very severe consequences'.

The association fears that the ruling has effectively killed off plans to reduce the number of foreign players on the Iberian peninsula.

Back on the field on Sunday, fourth-placed Real Mallorca take on struggling Real Zaragoza while Athletic Bilbao, a big club languishing in 14th place, take on surprising Alaves, who are riding high in seventh position.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1700 GMT unless stated): Rayo Vallecano v Racing Santander, Valladolid v Valencia, Espanyol v Deportivo La Coruna (1800 GMT), Osasuna v Real Madrid (1915 GMT), Celta Vigo v Barcelona (2000 GMT)

Sunday (1600 GMT unless stated): Real Sociedad v Las Palmas, Oviedo v Malaga, Alaves v Athletic Bilbao, Villarreal v Numancia, Real Zaragoza v Real Mallorca (1900 GMT)

Premiership preview

Awesome MU against Spurs



LONDON, Dec 1: Premiership leaders Manchester United will be looking to extend their eight point advantage at the top of the table on Saturday when they entertain Tottenham at Old Trafford, reports AFP.

United have 36 points from 15 matches, eight more than Arsenal, and nine more than third-placed Ipswich.

Chelsea, Leeds and Liverpool were all tipped to challenge United this season but all have failed to keep pace with the title holders.

Second-placed Arsenal appear to be the biggest threat to Sir Alex Ferguson's men but having lost three times as many games as United they still face an uphill battle to take the crown.

Northern Ireland boss Sammy McIlroy fears the Premiership is becoming 'boring' because United are so good.

The former United star cannot see anyone catching them even though there are six months of the campaign left.

"Manchester United are looking very, very strong favourites and it's not even Christmas time," said McIlroy.

"The majority of the Premiership sides have conceded the title and that just shows how far Manchester United are above the rest."

"They've already got an eight-point lead and remember they had a one-point lead at this time last year and went on

to win it by double figures. They just seem to be slipping into another gear and it's just frightening really."

It's marvellous for Manchester United because they are in a great position, but it's also a situation where people are saying it's getting boring because they are so far in front. It's just a shame people aren't pushing United harder.

"At the beginning of the season it looked like Arsenal could push them but they were level with them, but there's an eight-point gap now."

"Here we are in November talking that it might be all over. The bookies aren't taking any more money and instead they're taking bets on who's going to be second - it's just crazy."

Reigning champions United are formidable at the Theatre of Dreams.

The title holders have beaten on home soil this season and the last time they lost in front of their own fans in the Premiership was back in December 1998 when Middlesbrough won 3-2.

Since that defeat Ferguson's men have taken 93 points from a possible 105 at home.

If the omens weren't bad enough for Tottenham, the North London club have failed to win on their travels this campaign.

United's closest challengers, Arsenal and Ipswich, have relatively easy home fixtures.

The Gunners host Southampton at Highbury and Ipswich, the Premiership newcomers, the surprise package of the season, entertain second-bottom club Derby.

Although United may be providing the best on field drama they cannot match Chelsea for off-field intrigue. The big-spenders were expected to be one of United's closest challengers this season but they are currently in 15th place.

Earlier this week their English coaches Graham Rix and Ray Wilkins, who were former boss Gianluca Vialli's deputies, were sacked, as new boss Claudio Ranieri tries to impose his authority on the club.

On Sunday they entertain Premiership new boys Manchester City, who have 11 points to Chelsea's 10.

The Londoners have won just two games at home this season and another failure to collect three points this time would see the club heading towards the relegation zone.

FIXTURES

(kick-off 1500GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Arsenal v Southampton, Aston Villa v Newcastle, Bradford v Coventry, Ipswich v Derby, Leicester v Leeds, Liverpool v Charlton, Manchester United v Tottenham, West Ham v Middlesbrough

Sunday: Chelsea v Manchester City (1600GMT)

Monday: Sunderland v Everton

Bundesliga preview

Bayern's toughest test yet



BERLIN, Dec 1: Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld will attempt to wake his players from their

recent autumn slumber as league leaders Bayer Leverkusen arrive in town for the German championship's match of the weekend, reports AFP.

Bayern may have won a record 16 national titles, but that reputation will mean nothing to the colourful Bavarian support this Saturday if their team do not improve on the recent record of one point from the past three games.

If in need of a statistical cushion on which to rest their weary imaginations, Bayern Munich's support can take comfort in the fact that Leverkusen have lost all six previous matches in the Bavarian capital.

But Berti Vogts' Leverkusen side, sitting a point clear ahead of Schalke 04 after a convincing 4-2 home win against Kaiserslautern last week, seem as ready now as ever to turn the tables.

Schalke, meanwhile, despite

some good recent performances may have it all to do to ninth-placed Wolfsburg, who have yet to be beaten at home.

The Gelsenkirchen side scraped a 2-1 at home against basement boys Bochum last week - thanks to a late goal from the league's leading scorer Danish international striker Ebbe Sand - and followed that result with a 2-1 win over Borussia Dortmund in the German Cup midweek.

Dortmund, who travel to struggling VfB Stuttgart, were boosted midweek with the news that they had acquired the services of 28-year-old Norwegian international striker Jan Derek Sorensen under a free transfer.

Sorensen, who will arrive in January from Norwegian side Rosenborg, will reinforce Dortmund's forward line which has been weakened by the absence of Heiko Herrlich, who has been diagnosed as suffering from a brain tumour.

Stuttgart may be in 16th place, but on scoring terms are up their with the best with 20 goals scored from 14 games and could come away with full hon-

ours.

Hertha Berlin will be keeping an eye on favourable results from top of the table matches as they practically look to guarantee themselves three points against lowly Freiburg.

Although Berlin have conceded a none-to-impressive 21 goals, they also have the best attack in the league, having scored 32 from 14 games.

Freiburg field Bayern to a home draw last week, and beat leaders Leverkusen 3-2 in the Cup midweek, but may find the imposing glare of the capital's Olympic stadium a different affair.

FIXTURES

Friday (18h15 GMT): Unterhaching v Werder Bremen

Saturday (13h30 GMT unless stated): Cologne v Munich 1860, VfB Stuttgart v Borussia Dortmund, VfL Wolfsburg v Schalke 04, VfL Bochum v Eintracht Frankfurt, Hertha Berlin v SC Freiburg, Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen (1815 GMT)

Sunday (15h30 GMT): Kaiserslautern v SV Hamburg, Energie Cottbus v Hansa Rostock

French First Division preview

PSG's credibility at stake



PARIS, Dec 1