

Sport

Israel FA to charge players

JERUSALEM, Dec 4: The Israel Football Association has decided to charge seven members of the national under-21 team over allegations they engaged in a sex orgy with an 18-year-old woman before an international tie, officials said Monday, reports AFP.

The seven will be charged before a disciplinary tribunal with bringing the national team into disrepute and breaking the IFA's code of conduct, they said.

The players face a two-year ban if found guilty by the tribunal, expected to begin a hearing in the next few days.

Last month, IFA chairman Gavri Levy ordered the squad to be disbanded until the completion of the investigation into the scandal over the sex orgy.

The young players allegedly enjoyed a romp with the woman before their Euro 2002 Group 7 qualifier against Bosnia on October 10, in the latest sex scandal to rock national football.

In March, several members of the national team narrowly escaped disciplinary action after claims they were involved in a sex romp on the eve of their humiliating 5-0 thrashing by Denmark in a Euro 2000 playoff in November last year.

The team's chief coach Shlomo Sharf resigned after the disastrous Euro 2000 performance, although he denied any knowledge of the players' antics.

He was replaced in December by former Denmark and Finland coach Richard Moller Nielsen.

Nishizawa's instant impact

BARCELONA, Dec 4: Japan's star international striker Akino Nishizawa made an immediate impact for his new club Espanyol here on Sunday by scoring four goals in his first training session, reports AFP.

However, the 24-year-old, who scored five goals in Japan's triumphant Asian Cup campaign in October, admitted he could have scored more.

"If I had understood what my teammates were saying to me I would have played better," said Nishizawa, who has quickly acquired the nickname 'Aki'.

Nishizawa added that he had been taking Spanish courses for several weeks, once cash-poor Espanyol, last season's Cup winners, had indicated an interest in taking him on loan.

Bizarrely given his performances in the Asian Cup he said he was a bit off-form owing to a lack of competitive matches.

Nishizawa, who has been loaned out by Cerezo Osaka until the end of June 2001, believed that what he had seen of Espanyol's play in their 2-0 home defeat by Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday would suit him.

"The team attacked really well and in a way that should be compatible with my style," he said.

Despite his four goals in training, Espanyol coach Paco Flores said it was too early to say how Nishizawa - who is only the second Japanese player to join a top-flight Spanish side - would work out.

"It is too early to assess him but we will continue to monitor his performances in training this week," Flores said.

Jancker, Lizarazu out of Arsenal match

MUNICH, Germany, Dec 4: Bayern Munich will travel to London without French international Bixente Lizarazu and German striker Carsten Jancker to face Arsenal in the Champions League on Tuesday, reports AFP.

The German champions had a fine 2-0 home win over Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday night but lost Lizarazu to injury in the warm-up.

German international striker Jancker, who scored Bayern's opener after five minutes on Saturday then left the pitch in the 67th minute complaining of back pain.

Despite the two notable absences, Bayern go into the Champions League second phase clash in improved spirits after ending a poor spell of two defeats and a draw in the German league.

Nonda injured

MONACO, France, Dec 4: Monaco striker Shabani Nonda will be out until the winter break, missing three league matches, after taking a bad knock on his left thigh in Monaco's 1-0 victory over Strasbourg on Saturday, reports AFP.

The 22-year-old, who was named in the top ten African players of the year on Saturday, is due to have a scan Sunday afternoon to assess the extent of the damage.

Nonda arrived at Monaco in an 18million dollar close season deal, a record even at the wealthy principality outfit, and has scored seven league goals despite struggling to find an understanding with strike partner Marco Simone.

Champions Monaco will hope to improve significantly on a miserable first half season that sees them in 12th spot on 25 points from 19 matches and eliminated from all European competition.

Serie A

Draw good enough for Roma



MILAN, Dec 4: AS Roma only managed a 0-0 draw against 10-man Perugia on Sunday, but still extended their lead in the Italian First Division to four points, reports AFP.

Second-placed Atalanta had lost ground on Roma overnight by going down to their first defeat of the season 2-0 at Parma on Saturday.

Juventus missed the chance to draw level in second spot with the Bergamo-based minnows when they threw away a two-goal advantage in a thrilling 2-2 draw at Inter Milan.

That Sunday night showdown watched by 75,377 at the San Siro got off to a frenetic start with Juventus taking a 2-0 lead within 10 minutes in an opening period dominated by French World Cup winning players.

First David Trezeguet netted his fifth Serie A goal of the season from close range after a delightful interchange of passes involving Zinedine Zidane and Alessandro Del Piero.

Just three minutes later Zidane let fly from 25 yards and watched his shot nestle in the top corner via the fingertips of Inter keeper Sebastian Frey, another Frenchman.

But just as Inter's coach Marco Tardelli - under pressure after less than two months in the job - was starting to despair his veteran French defender Laurent Blanc headed home from an Alvaro Recoba corner, still only 13 minutes had elapsed.

Another Recoba corner saw Christian Vieri find the net but as the San Siro crowd rose to hail an equaliser referee Stefano Braschi disallowed it.

But Inter finally drew level after 65 minutes when midfielder Luigi Di Biagio's quick-taken freekick beat Edwin van der Sar helped by a deflection. Tardelli reflected on having Vieri's goal chalked off, said: "There is no use looking back but I thought Vieri's goal was good. But I am not making a big deal about it."

His Juventus counterpart Carlo Ancelotti blamed his team for allowing Di Biagio to take the freekick quickly for the equaliser.

The lack of attention for the equalising goal was unforgivable," said Ancelotti, who clearly had no sympathy for his players who berated Braschi for not giving them more time to form their wall.

Roma were up against a Perugia side intent solely on holding the visitors who did not include "Japanese" midfielder and former Perugia idol Hidetoshi Nakata in their starting line-up.

Manuele Blasi was dismissed for Perugia with seven minutes remaining but they managed to hang on for a point.

"I am disappointed," admitted Roma coach Fabio Capello. AC Milan had a profitable trip to early season pacesetters Udinese, winning 1-0 in a game that saw Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni return to the club where he first made his name.

The vital strike came early in the second half from Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko - the eighth of the season for the

forward who this week was given European Union status.

Zaccheroni said: "I was particularly happy with the performance today and what is more we go the three points as well. But Udinese impressed me too."

Udinese coach Luigi De Canio said: "We saw we were playing opponents who were growing in confidence as the game went on."

Bologna looked like building on their fine start to the season when Argentine forward Julio Cruz netted an opener after 33 minutes of their home match with Vicenza.

But eight minutes later Vicenza's striker Luca Toni restored parity with a spectacular overhead strike to ensure the match ended 1-1.

taking an 11th-minute lead at home to Fiorentina through Alessandro Conticchio.

But Fiorentina hit back after the break from the penalty spot through Enrico Chiesa, for once picked in the starting lineup by the Florence club's Turkish coach Fatih Terim and the match finished 1-1.

On Saturday goals from Frenchman Sabri Lamouchi and Concacaf ensured Parma defeated Atalanta 2-0 to end their opponents' proud record as the last unbeaten outfit in the Italian First Division.

Atalanta - coach Giovanni Vavassori said: "We had many chances to get a good result but we just could not score. The first defeat had to come some time and we lost to a very good team."



Juventus superstar Alessandro Del Piero (R) and Inter Milan's Argentine international Javier Zanetti fighting for possession during their Serie A encounter at Milan on December 3. —AFP photo

Napoli finally recorded their first win of the season at the ninth attempt, beating Bari 1-0 with former Juventus striker Nicola Amoruso scoring on the stroke of half-time.

It did not take long for Verona to draw first blood in their home derby match with Brescia.

Former Brescia player Emiliano Bonazzoli opened the scoring with an angled shot and then followed the tradition established last week by Roma's Gabriel Batistuta and Parma's Sergio Conceicao of refusing to celebrate a goal against a former club.

Alberto Gilardino notched a second for Verona six minutes from time and despite Dario Hubner's late consolation for Brescia, Gilardino's strike also sealed all three points.

Lecce were also early birds.

Shearer may miss a month

LONDON, Dec 4: Alan Shearer will see a specialist on Monday to determine the extent of his recurring knee problem, but Newcastle manager Bobby Robson fears that the former England captain could be out of action for up to four weeks, reports AFP.

Shearer missed his first game since Robson took charge 15 months ago (the 1-1 Premiership draw against Aston Villa on Saturday) because of a flare-up of the tendonitis in his knee which reared its head during Euro 2000.

He then had a cortisone injection to ease the problem but Shearer broke down again in training on Friday.

In an ideal world Robson would love to rest Shearer who



ALAN SHEARER

he claimed is a "flogged horse" so he could also recover from back and hamstring problems which have also affected him.

But he has found that impossible to do with summer signing Carl Cort not expected to return until mid-January from injury.

Robson said: "Since I've been here Alan's played every game up until Saturday. Every game for us, every international last season, then every game in Euro 2000 and the same for us this season."

"It's not something that requires an operation. It's something that treatment and rest, and in the past a cortisone injection, has done the trick for him."

"It did the trick with England, and enabled him to play, and in August when it flared up again with us."

"But you just can't keep pushing cortisone into somebody. If the surgeon thinks it's time for another injection then he'll give it to Alan, but not while the problem is painful."

"It's got to settle down, and will take a couple of weeks to do that, and then you can inject."

Reyna sparks diving row

GLASGOW, Dec 4: Rangers midfielder Claudio Reyna has stoked the fire ahead of the UEFA Cup second leg at Kaiserslautern by claiming that many German coaches encourage diving, reports AFP.

The Bundesliga side were guilty of the offence in their 1-0 first leg defeat at Ibrox on Thursday and Jorgen Petersson was ultimately dismissed after receiving a yellow card for one "prat-fall".

But United States international Reyna, who spent three seasons in Germany with Bayer Leverkusen and Wolfsburg, admits that the art of gamesmanship is thriving in the country under the nurturing of German coaches.

"Every coach I have ever had in Germany told me that if someone hits you, fall down and in the box you look for penalties - that's a normal part of their game," said Reyna.

"My first experience in Europe was in Germany and that is the first thing you learn. It's normal to try and get away with what you can and the coach tells you that."

Bundesliga

Klose rectifies close call

BERLIN, Dec 4: Defender Martin Klose scored twice in the dying minutes of the match to inspire Kaiserslautern to a 2-1 win over SV Hamburg on Sunday, reports AFP.

The Red Devils, as they are known, had to endure an anxious few minutes before celebrating their first win in six matches as Hamburg keeper Hans-Jorg Butt reduced the deficit in the 90th minute with a penalty.

Elsewhere on Sunday Energie Cottbus lived up to their name with a hard-earned 1-0 win over Hansa Rostock in the battle of the former East German Bundesliga sides despite being reduced to 10 men on the hour.

The win lifted them off the bottom and out of the relegation places leaving four-time champions VfB Stuttgart, who lost 2-0 on Saturday to Borussia Dortmund, wallowing in the tailend Charlie position.

At the other end of the table it is Hertha Berlin who stand proudly atop it after Saturday's 2-2 draw against SC Freiburg was enough when Bayern Munich beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-0.

Berlin and Leverkusen both have 28 points, but the team from the capital have a superior goal difference.

Rix understands sacking

LONDON, Dec 4: Former Chelsea assistant manager Graham Rix has claimed he "fully respects" the decision to relieve him of his duties at Stamford Bridge, reports AFP.

After eight years with the club Rix this week parted company with the Blues as under-fire boss Claudio Ranieri decided to replace Rix, co-assistant Ray Wilkins and goal-keeping coach Eddie Niedzwiecki with his own staff.

But Rix has insisted that he holds no grudges against the Italian.

"I fully respect the decision of the manager and the club and would like to thank them for eight extremely happy years," the Englishman said in a statement.

"It is a fact in football that clubs change managers. Often when this happens the staff also have to change, with the new manager bringing in his own associates and people."

"This is understandable and to be perfectly honest I have been in a difficult position at the club this year."

"I am a person who works hard and has to participate and being left on the sidelines has been difficult."

Former Arsenal midfielder Rix also thanked Chelsea for the help they had given him during his spell in prison after being found guilty of having had sex with an under-age girl.

"They gave me incredible support and backing for which I will be eternally grateful. That incident is now behind me."

Scottish Premiership Hearts' heart breaking loss

EDINBURGH, Dec 4: Nine-man Rangers clung on for a 1-0 victory against Hearts here at Tynecastle on Sunday in a spectacle to rival last week's Old Firm derby in incident if not goals, reports AFP.

Jorg Albert's 12th-minute penalty provided the only goal of the game but Rangers then saw Claudio Reyna and Arthur Numan sent off.

Rangers boss Dick Advocaat refused to comment on the decisions made by referee Stuart Dougal to dismiss his players.

"The result was excellent, but the way we got it was not the best performance," said Advocaat.

"But it was difficult with two players off. That is the decision of the referee, what can I say about it?"

In the day's other Premier League match former Strasbourg striker David Zitelli scored twice for Hibernian as they beat Motherwell 3-1.

Rangers incredibly had the best of the second-half chances but overall they had goalkeeper Stefan Klos to thank for some breathtaking stops, including an amazing block with his legs at the death to deny Andy Kirk.

The German had been going the other way to the striker's header and it was only fitting that he received all the plaudits from his team-mates on the whistle.

All this overshadowed the fact that this was Craig Levein's first match as Hearts' chief coach. He will know his side are triers if nothing else.

It took Rangers 12 minutes to take the lead. Lorenzo Amoruso was the supplier with a long ball over Steven Pressley's head for Barry Ferguson to run on to.

Gordan Petric, one of four ex-Rangers in the home side, came across to cover and committed himself to the tackle.

His snap decision meant there was no room for error and within seconds Ferguson had gone to ground.

Albert, the supplier of that late UEFA Cup winner against Kaiserslautern on Thursday, made no mistake from the spot with his trusty left foot this time.

Premiership

Brief respite for Chelsea



LONDON, Dec 4: With the storm clouds gathering and the whiff of crisis in the air, Chelsea assured embattled Italian coach Claudio Ranieri some much-needed breathing space as they scraped past Manchester City 2-1 at Stamford Bridge, reports AFP.

But despite having led 2-0 at half-time, Gianfranco Zola and Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink having scored two fine goals, they were still assured a decidedly nervous final 10 minutes, standing on the brink of another setback, as City pulled a goal back through Paul Dickov

and even threatened to equalise.

At least, for Ranieri's sake, the London club held on - just - although some of their defending was as desperate as their season could have become if they had dropped another much-needed two points.

And while it may have seemed like a frantic relegation struggle towards the end, that was probably no surprise as the two teams started - and ended - the day in 14th and 16th places in the table respectively.

Victory was everything for Chelsea though, given that they had failed to win their previous five games, had just lost to Charlton and Everton, and had



Marcel Desailly (L), Chelsea's French international defender, locked in an aerial tussle with Manchester United's Lee Crookes during their Premiership fixture at Stamford Bridge on December 3. —AFP photo

controversially parted company with four back-room staff during the week.

They were therefore indebted to the first-half strikes by Zola and Hasselbaink, as well as City's generosity in defence.

But it has been Chelsea's relatively solid home form which has kept their heads above the swelling water levels all season and so it proved again for all of their flitting with disaster near the end.

Not that all of Chelsea's problems have been cured overnight. After all, their over-riding weaknesses remain away from Stamford Bridge.

However, even though Dickov, who had come on as a substitute, pulled a goal back with nine minutes left and City pressed with commendable spirit in an attempted second-half comeback, an equaliser never materialised.

And while staying in the Premiership would in itself represent a successful season, City continue to struggle to stay just clear of the relegation zone despite progress in the League Cup.

However, any worries that they would struggle to find the breakthrough were dispelled courtesy of City's Norwegian captain Alfie Haaland.

For when the midfielder received a throw-in in his own half, so bad was his control of the ball that he actually managed to set Zola clear into the penalty area.

The Italian striker does not waste opportunities like that and, after keeping ahead of Steve Howey, he curled a neat shot just inside the far post in the 28th minute.

On the stroke of half-time Zola set Dutchman Mario Melchiot galloping down the right flank and, having reached the byline, he pulled a superb cross straight into the path of Hasselbaink, who converted from close range with undisguised glee.

While Chelsea's Gustavo Poyet hit the top of the bar with a header, City were given hope of an unlikely comeback with nine minutes left.

Dutch goalkeeper Ed de Goey tamely parried a shot by Kevin Horlock straight into the path of Dickov, who volleyed first-time straight back past the keeper. But it was not enough for Joe Royle's strugglers.

WORLD FOOTBALL BRIEFS

Dec 4(AFP): World football briefs on Monday.

DESAILLY SAYS EUROPE DREAM ON

LONDON: Marcel Desailly has insisted Chelsea still have the quality to qualify for Europe after they completed the first stage of their attempt to haul themselves back from the brink of a crisis.

Before a 2-1 victory against Manchester City on Sunday, Chelsea had gone five games without a win and controversy was raging around the club after the decision to dismiss four backroom staff.

However, the French international defender, who led the side by example as captain in the absence of the suspended Dennis Wise, declared: "The team is progressing for sure."

"We have another game at home next week (against Derby) and we can now work this week in a good condition."

"We are already working a lot tactically and physically, the most important thing is mentally to be a bit cleverer."

"We also definitely have to improve our game away from home, otherwise it's going to be difficult for us, but we still have quality."

"We will soon get back some players who are injured though, like Jesper Gronkjaer who arrived in January, Mario Stanic and Albert Ferrer, and everything is about confidence."

He added: "We definitely need the Champions League for the club. The objective [at the start of the season] was the Premier League but the minimum now is the Champions League."

"Maybe we can come back behind Manchester United and Arsenal if they use a lot of energy playing in the Champions League."

"I still believe we can do it because the group is still positive there is no bad mentality between us. The quality is still there."

I DID NOT HELP LAZIO: TAYLOR

LONDON: England caretaker-manager Peter Taylor has angrily denied reports that he has colluded with Sven-Goran Eriksson in plotting the downfall of Leeds in Wednesday's Champions League game with Lazio.

Leicester boss Taylor was said to have given his England successor the low-down on Leeds when the pair had a meeting in Rome last week.

But a fuming Taylor insisted he and Lazio coach Eriksson had purely talked about England matters and made only a passing reference to Leeds.

Taylor is backing David O'Leary's side to spring another shock against the Italians after their previous successes against the likes of AC Milan and Barcelona in the first group phase.

Taylor, whose team defeated Leeds 3-1 in the Premiership on Saturday, told the Press Association on Tuesday: "To say I have helped Sven in providing information about Leeds is totally wrong."

"Nothing in fact, could be further from the truth. When I went to Rome last week to see Sven I did say to him that Leeds United are a very good team."

"But that was the extent of our conversations as regards Leeds United. I was there to talk to him purely about England matters and nothing else. Nothing was said about Leeds."

"It is an understatement to say that I am annoyed about what has been suggested."

Taylor added: "Although we beat Leeds on Saturday they are still a tremendously talented team who have achieved some fantastic results in the Champions League already this season."

"They now have to go to Rome to face Lazio but I see no reason why they can't produce another outstanding result."

He added: "We definitely need the Champions League for the club. The objective [at the start of the season] was the Premier League but the minimum now is the Champions League."

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Boro's final try for Venables



TERRY VENABLES

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But following Saturday's 1-0 Premiership defeat at West Ham, and given the poor performance, Middlesbrough chairman Steve Gibson and chief executive Keith Lamb are believed to have made a further attempt to lure Venables to the Riverside on his terms.

Robson himself had claimed after the game that Venables was the only man more capable than himself of lifting the Premiership strugglers out of trouble.

"Myself and Terry Venables worked very well with England, and I felt that was the best move for Middlesbrough at this time," he said.

"He's a very good coach but he was not able to help due to other commitments."

Robson appeared to have decided that the best way forward for Boro now was for him to take the challenge on his own shoulders.

"It's a case of me getting my head down, I have looked around and I don't think there is anyone better than myself."

"I will try to turn things around, I have got the full support of the players and everyone at the club and I will try to turn it round."

He added: "We definitely need the Champions League for the club. The objective [at the start of the season] was the Premier League but the minimum now is the Champions League."

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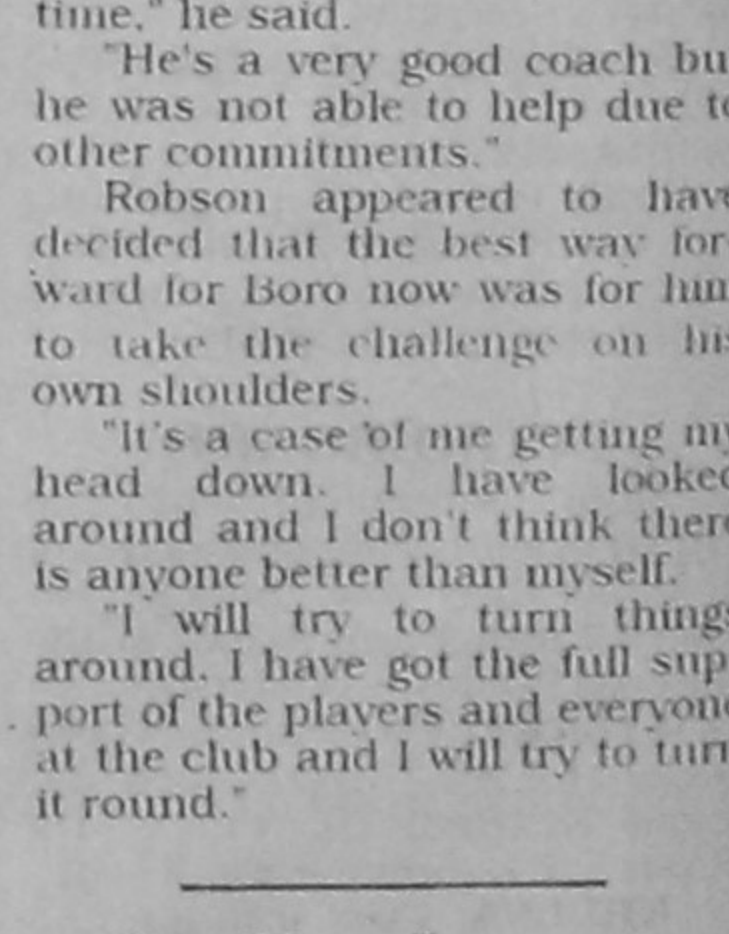
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Ballack out of action



MICHAEL BALLACK

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