

Sport

### First win for Maradona's Almagro

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 10: Argentine legend Diego Maradona who returned to Buenos Aires last month to take up his new post as coach of struggling First Division club Almagro, led his side to their first win of the season here on Friday night, reports AFP.

The team, newly-promoted to the First Division this season, have had a poor run and were winless after 17 matches.

Following Friday's surprise win against sixth-place Vélez Sarsfield, they are still bottom on 10 points on the penultimate day of the season.

Almagro opened the scoring in the 26th minute through Francisco Maciel, but Vélez equalised six minutes later through Eduardo Domínguez and took a 2-1 lead through Jairo Castillo on the stroke of half time.

However two second half goals from Maximiliano Bevacqua (60) and Cristian Aragon (78) sealed victory for Almagro.

Maradona had been undergoing treatment in Cuba for his drug problems before taking up the position on the eve of his 40th birthday.

Sunday is the crucial day in the chase for the Argentine league title between leaders Boca Juniors, who play Chacarita Juniors, and their closest chasers River Plate, who are just two points behind on 36, and play Huracán.

### MLS in crisis

MIAMI, Florida, Dec 10: The United States football league MLS is in a deep financial crisis according to a report in the Miami Herald newspaper here on Saturday, reports AFP.

The paper reported the MLS has debts of up to 250 million dollars accrued since the launching of the league in 1995.

Carlos Gilson, an MLS director, admitted, according to the Herald, that there was a large debt but emphasized the development plan of the league was in the long term.

The MLS has a large debt but our investors are remaining loyal and are going to endorse us. They support and they trust the development of this competition.

### Staelens signs Japanese Div Two Oita

BRUSSELS, Dec 10: Former Belgian international defender Lorenzo Staelens has signed a ten-month contract with Japanese Second Division side Oita, Belgian radio reported Sunday, reports AFP.

The 36-year-old Staelens, captain of Belgian first division champions Anderlecht, said he was interested in finishing off his playing career in Japan.

According to the reports, Staelens, who can leave Anderlecht on a free transfer, will be paid 328,000 dollars on signing the deal. 221,000 dollars for the season and further bonuses for wins.

The former Belgian international, capped 70 times for the national squad, previously played with Belgian sides FC Courtrai and FC Brugge before joining Anderlecht in 1998.

He was awarded the 'Golden Boot' award for being the most outstanding player in the Belgian league for 1999.

### Feyenoord's Leonardo in false passport probe

THE HAGUE, Dec 10: Dutch investigators are investigating a suspected false Portuguese passport held by Feyenoord's 17-year-old Brazilian winger Leonardo in the latest case of non-European Union players attempting to qualify as EU nationals, reports AFP.

The Dutch ministry believes that the promising player has a false passport and does not possess a work permit.

Prosecutors in Rotterdam have advised the club not to use the player until further notice.

The investigation is the latest twist in an increasing number of cases across Europe of players from outside the European Union attempting to bypass limits on the number of non-EU players allowed in teams.

The most high-profile case involves AC Milan's Brazilian goalkeeper Dida, who is under investigation for using a false Portuguese passport to secure a work permit.

And French club Saint Etienne could face league disciplinary action following doubts of the authenticity of their Brazilian player Alex's Portuguese passport.

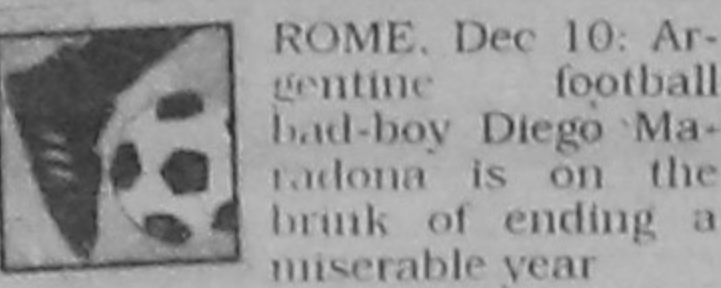
### SA give disgraced World Cup star another chance

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 10: Brendan Augustine, sent home from the 1998 World Cup in disgrace, has been recalled by South Africa for an African Nations Cup qualifier against Liberia here on December 16, reports AFP.

Augustine and Naughty Mokoena were kicked out of the national squad by French coach Philippe Troussier after leaving a camp in the French town of Vichy to socialise without permission.

### FIFA's awards night gala

# War of the greatest



DIEGO MARADONA

ROME, Dec 10: Argentine football bad-boy Diego Maradona is on the brink of ending a miserable year which began with a cocaine overdose by being declared FIFA's player of the century, reports AFP.

Maradona - rushed into intensive care after collapsing in January after a drug binge - has emerged as an unlikely favourite ahead of Brazilian legend Pele for the award at a gala FIFA awards night here Monday.

But their battle has taken a back-seat in the build-up to the evening amid raging speculation over just who should be declared the footballer of the 20th century -- Argentinian bad-boy Diego Maradona or Brazilian legend Pele.

In theory Pele should win hands down. The 'black pearl' enjoyed far greater success at international level than Maradona, a member of three World Cup winning squads and scorer of more than 1,000 goals in a glittering career that spanned three decades.

Pele is also widely held to have conducted himself flawlessly on and off the pitch, fabled for his sportsmanship and becoming a worldwide ambassador for football in retirement.

Maradona - with only one World Cup victory in 1986 to his name -- is a different proposition altogether.

While his individual footballing genius cannot be questioned, the portly playmaker has frequently found himself in the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

He has earned the dubious distinction of exiting two World Cups in shame. In 1982 he was sent off as Argentina were dumped out by Brazil, and in USA 1994 he was booted out of the tournament in disgrace after failing a dope test.

Even the highlight of his career, when he inspired Argentina to World Cup glory at Mexico '86, will be remembered as much for his 'Hand of God' goal against England in the

quarter-finals as for the stupendous individual effort which came later in the same match.

The list of Maradona's crimes and misdemeanours is lengthy, from taking potshots at journalists with an air rifle to facing a probe by Italian authorities over links with the Neapolitan mafia during his spell at Napoli.

However it is Maradona's drug problems that have been at the root of most of his woes.

Banned by FIFA for 15 months for testing positive for cocaine, he was hospitalised in Uruguay in January this year

for overdosing on the drug.

But while FIFA's world player of the year is decided upon by a poll of more than 1,000 top coaches and players, the player of the century has been left for fans to decide.

Which means that thanks to an Internet cyber-buzz from Maradona fans, Pele could be left out in the cold come Monday night.

French side Bordeaux, Vitesse Arnhem of the Netherlands and Belgium's FC Brugge are all being probed over transfer dealings totalling millions of dollars, the NRC Handelsblad reported.

The paper said Dutch and French investigators were investigating the transfers of players worth nine million euros (7.9million dollars) from Arkan's club Obilic to the three clubs.

The militia leader and entrepreneur Zeljko Raznovic - better known as Arkan - was gunned down in the lobby of a Belgrade hotel in January.

Arkan had been indicted by the international warcrimes tribunal in The Hague over a series of atrocities his paramilitary unit allegedly carried out during the Bosnian conflict.

NRC Handelsblad said the transfers were handled by Obilic's manager Ranko Stojic, a former player for Belgian club Anderlecht, who passed bribes to members of the clubs involved to persuade them to purchase the players.

Bordeaux bought Yvan Vukomanovic from Obilic in 1998. The Dutch newspaper said French officials began an investigation last month and believe that the transfer fee, which was not stated, bypassed Obilic's bank accounts and went straight into Arkan's pockets.

Vukomanovic has since left the French club.

Vitesse Arnhem are implicated in the transfer of Nenad Grozdic, while FC Brugge, one of Belgium's top clubs, bought five players from Obilic.

Belgian newspapers on Saturday quoted a director of Brugge, Antoine Vanhove, as saying that two assistant trainers had received 'envelopes' from Stojic.

"But they had immediately handed them over to the management of the club and since then they have been stored in the club safe so they could be used as evidence in any investigation," Vanhove told several newspapers.

The Brugge coach at the time of the transfers, Eric Gerets, who is currently coach at Dutch club PSV Eindhoven, has flatly denied accusations from the club that he received bribes.

Scottish Premiership

Hibs close in on Celtic

GLASGOW, Dec 10: Second-placed Hibernian beat Dunfermline 3-0 on Saturday to cut Celtic's gap at the top of the Scottish Premier League to four points - for a day at least, reports AFP.

Leaders Celtic, who have 48 points after 19 games, and a game in hand on Hibernian, travel to Dundee on Sunday.

Ulrik Laursen's fifth minute goal put Hibernian on their way to their 13th victory in 20 league games.

Dunfermline were then reduced to 10 men when midfielder Rob McElroy was sent off and David Zetell and Miru Paatelainen made the visitors pay with further goals for the Edinburgh club.

New Hearts head coach Craig Levein got his first win with a comfortable 3-0 victory over Kilmarnock at Rugby Park.

Hearts first goal came just before the break with Steve Fulton shooting home from 14 yards after working a nice one-two with Colin Cameron.

Andy Kirk settled the destination of the points in a five-minute spell after the break, capitalising on two defensive errors by the home side to score twice.

St Johnstone beat St Mirren 2-0 at McDiarmid Park where John Paul McBride scored three minutes before the break and striker Keigan Parker settled the encounter 13 minutes from the end.

Euro flops Rangers host Motherwell on Sunday.

Serie A

Brescia held by Napoli

MILAN, Dec 10: Brescia were held to a 1-1 draw here Saturday by fellow Italian First Division strugglers Napoli, reports AFP.

A draw was probably a fair result in a match where home favourites Brescia bossed the first half while Napoli prospered in the second.

Stefano Diana had given Brescia the lead after 30 minutes only for Fabio Pecchia to equalise 13 minutes into the second half for Napoli.

In the earlier match Reggina ended their run of eight consecutive defeats by grabbing a last-gasp equaliser to earn a 1-1 with Verona.

In a match played at Catania - Reggina were denied home advantage because of crowd trouble during their recent 3-0 defeat by Brescia -- Emiliano Bonazzoli gave Verona the lead in the opening minute.

Bonazzoli's strike -- his fourth of the season -- looked like giving them the points until Lorenzo Stovini equalised in the third minute of injury time for Reggina.

### Euro clubs' Arkan connection!

THE HAGUE, Dec 10: Three football clubs in France, Belgium and the Netherlands are being investigated for allegedly receiving bribes from murdered Serb warlord Arkan, it was reported here Saturday, reports AFP.

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Paris Saint Germain's Aliou Cisse (R) tackling Jonathan Jages of Metz during their French First Division encounter at Paris on December 9. - AFP photo

### French First Division

# Anelka lifts PSG spirit



PARIS, Dec 10: Depleted Paris Saint Germain finally came up with the long-awaited goods as they fought off Metz for a 1-0 win in coach Luis Fernandez's first match in charge at the Parc des Princes, reports AFP.

The capital side, who were reduced to 10 men early in the second half, held on to the slim 1-0 goal lead thanks to international forward Nicolas Anelka, but were lucky to escape with all three points.

The Paris club moved up a couple of places to eighth spot after their win.

Defending French league champions Monaco fought back from two goals down to draw 2-2 at Guingamp.

Gregory Lacombe and Norwegian John Arne Riise both scored in the final quarter-hour after Guingamp's Bruno Rodriguez and Fabrice Florese had given Guingamp their impressive first-half lead.

Rodriguez also hit the crossbar from a freekick on 56 minutes and surely a three-goal advantage would have killed off Monaco.

Lyon, who beat Spartak Moscow 3-0 in the Champions

League in midweek, kept up their form to claim a 1-0 victory over Bastia, their first at their Gerland stadium for exactly two months.

Lyon, whose last league win at home was a 3-0 thrashing of Lens on September 9, moved up from ninth spot to seventh.

Sedan missed the chance to go top, losing 2-0 at Lille, and, at the other end of the table, basement club Toulouse had some cheer with a 1-0 win over Lens.

In other matches, Auxerre drew 2-2 with Troyes, Strasbourg had a 1-1 draw with Rennes.

Meanwhile PSG were shown that new coach Luis Fernandez's arrival is no instant cure for their league malaise as Metz showed the French international legend they hadn't come just to make up the numbers.

With a change of formation at 3-5-2 that the Parisians seemed hardly able to exploit, Metz proved the more opportunist in the first 45 with a number of real chances threatening the goal of Lionel Letizi.

After 11 minutes winger Gerald Batelle's searching cross to Danny Boffin, hovering alone at the edge of the box, left the midfielder a chance to fire home

but the volley flew wide of Letizi's post.

Seven minutes later Metz midfielder Gregory Proment was given time to shoot but his effort sailed over the bar.

A minute later a cross from the left fooled PSG, and big PSG defender Sylvain Distin, as Batelle ran on to the ball and got a free header, although it flew just wide of the post.

Anelka, however, gave the Parc des Princes faithful reason for cheer only minutes after the break when he ran on to a through ball from Laurent Robert.

Running past a trio of defenders the French international forward chipped the ball over the advancing Fayd Mondragon.

Fernandez's tactics were thrown into disarray when in the 55th minute defender El Karkouri Talal was sent off for a second bookable offence. The volatile Moroccan was also at the centre of the penalty which gave Calatasaray a 1-0 win over Paris in Tuesday's Champions League encounter.

On Sunday, troubled club Marseille host leaders Nantes and Bordeaux, the 1999 league champions, entertain St Etienne.

### Bundesliga

# Schalke in the lead



BERLIN, Dec 10: Schalke 04 took provisional pole position in the Bundesliga on Saturday following a 2-1 home victory against basement club VfB Stuttgart, reports AFP.

Borussia Dortmund, twice Bundesliga champions and European Cup winners in the last decade before their form dipped after coach Ottmar Hitzfeld left for Munich, are in second spot after a 3-0 victory over Unterhaching.

German champions Bayern Munich could only draw 0-0 at Kaiserslautern later on Saturday in another big fixture.

Whoever wins out of Bayern Leverkusen and Hertha Berlin on Sunday will grab top spot.

Schalke have 30 points, Dortmund 29, Leverkusen and Berlin both 28 and Bayern 27.

At Gelsenkirchen, Schalke went ahead through Czech Republic's Radoslav Latal on 21

minutes and Poland's Tomasz Waldoch scored the winner on 90 minutes after Stuttgart's loan Ganea had equalised for the south west German club.

Waldoch headed home an Andreas Moller cross for victory against a 10-man Stuttgart side following the expulsion of Bulgarian Krassimir Balakov on 58 minutes for two yellow cards.

Stuttgart coach Ralf Rangnick could now be on the verge of being sacked for poor domestic results, although his side reached the fourth round of the UEFA Cup after beating Holland's Feyenoord on Tuesday.

Schalke coach Huub Stevens said afterwards: "We played badly but won the points. Our creative players had not done what was asked of them. It's a pity for Stuttgart but we had the kind of luck when you are top of the table and Stuttgart had the fortune of a club at the bottom."

Rangnick for his part said: "It was a brutal result for us because we were the better team during the whole match. We allowed Schalke virtually no chances and I think merited a draw."

1860 Munich coach Werner will be pleased that his side have moved up from 16th place, a relegation position, to 12th thanks to a 2-1 win over east German side Hansa Rostock.

Nigeria win FIFA award

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 10: Nigeria have emulated South Africa by winning the FIFA Mover of the Year competition, reports AFP.

The annual award from the controlling body of international football goes to the country that makes the most progress on the monthly rankings and Nigeria pipped Honduras for first place.

Runners-up to Cameroon in the 2000 African Nations Cup, the Super Eagles won nine matches this year, drew four, lost one, scored 30 goals and conceded 10.

Only Liberia proved too strong for the star-studded Nigerians, winning a World Cup qualifier 2-1 in Monrovia last July. The best Super Eagles results were 4-0 home triumphs over Eritrea and Namibia.

Cameroon finished third and Madagascar eighth in a competition previously won by Colombia, Croatia, Jamaica, South Africa, Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia.

Iraq wants match with Bayern

BAGHDAD, Dec 10: Iraq national team coach Milan Zivadinovic said on Saturday that he would be seeking a friendly match against German side Bayern Munich, reports AFP.

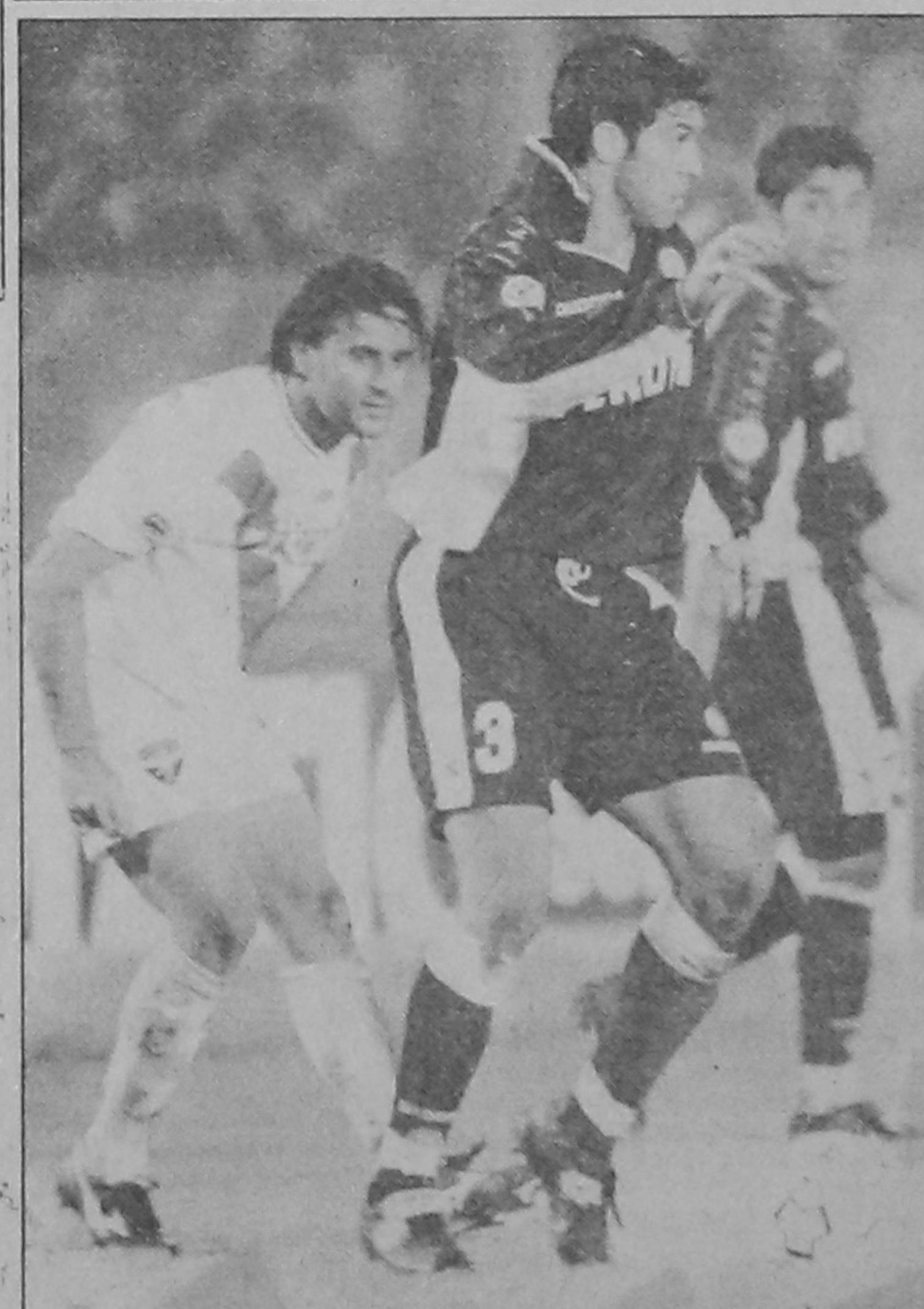
"I want to ask Franz Beckenbauer, with whom I have close friendly relations, for a friendly match between the Iraqi national team and Bayern Munich," Zivadinovic, a Yugoslav, announced to the Iraqi press.

The match would help us to prepare for the Asian qualifying matches for the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea," added Zivadinovic.

Iraq sit in Group 6 alongside Kazakhstan, Macau and Nepal, with the qualifiers commencing on 25 March 2001.



Ray Parlour (R), the Arsenal midfielder, exults after scoring one of his three goals in the Premiership game against Newcastle United at Highbury on December 9. - AFP photo



Facundo Quiroga (No 3) of Napoli is in possession of the ball during a Serie A fixture against Brescia at Brescia on December 9. - AFP photo