

Scottish Premiership

Celtic go seven points clear

GLASGOW, Dec 11: Frenchman Didier Agathe struck in the final minute to give leaders Celtic a 2-1 win at Dundee on Sunday...

Celtic have 51 points after 20 matches, seven more than second-placed Hibernian...

Agathe's last-gasp goal gave Neil Lennon a winning start to his Celtic career at Denis Park. After his 5.75 million pound (8.25 million dollar) arrival this week...

But in the final seconds of the game Petrov's corner scrambled and the ball came to Agathe who rose at the far post to head home.

Title holders Rangers returned to domestic action following European disappointment with a welcome 2-0 victory over Motherwell...

Dutchman Bert Konterman headed Rangers into a 39th minute lead before Scottish international Barry Ferguson secured victory 12 minutes from time.

But this was a stuttering performance from the champions, who trail bitter rivals Celtic by 13 points...

Only the performance of Dutch international Michael Mols stood out as a beacon of hope that this really could end up as their season once again.

Israeli police to probe sex scandal

JERUSALEM, Dec 11: The Israeli police is to launch an investigation into allegations that members of the national under-21 football squad engaged in a sex romp with an 18-year-old woman...

The Israeli Football Association has already decided to charge seven young players with bringing the national team into disrepute and breaking its code of conduct over a similar sex orgy with the same woman on the eve of a European clash against Bosnia in October.

IFA lawyer Shalom Even-Ezra said the association had put the findings of its investigation into the hands of Israel's Attorney General Elyavim Rubinfeld, considering that it could be a police matter.

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.

But Even-Ezra said there were also allegations involving at least 15 players with the same woman at a Tel Aviv hotel after the match, which were the subject of the police investigation.

Seven players are already due to go before an disciplinary tribunal either Wednesday or Thursday over the pre-match sex bout, and face a two-year ban if found guilty.

Last month, IFA chairman Gavri Levy ordered the squad to be disbanded until the completion of the investigation.

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

Chilavert Paraguay's sportsman of the year

ASUNCION, Dec 11: Paraguay's charismatic international goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert, who is playing for struggling Strasbourg in the French First Division, has been voted his country's sportsman of the year, reports AFP.

The 35-year-old, known for his success from free kicks and the penalty spot, was chosen by Paraguayan sports journalists for his performances for the national team which is in contention to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

Chilavert has been criticised for his performances for Strasbourg, who are rooted to the bottom of the French league.

Redknapp wants Southgate

LONDON, Dec 11: West Ham boss Harry Redknapp on Monday declared an interest in taking Aston Villa defender Gareth Southgate to Upton Park, reports AFP.

The English Premiership club have money to spend following the 18 million pound (25 million dollar) sale of England international centre-back Rio Ferdinand to Leeds and Southgate is Redknapp's number one target.

"I would love to have Gareth Southgate here," Redknapp told Britain's Daily Express newspaper.



Barcelona superstar Rivaldo giving Espanyol defender Mauro Naves (R) all sorts of trouble during their Primera Liga encounter at Barcelona on December 10. -AFP photo

Primera Liga

Deportivo miss chance

MADRID, Dec 11: Spanish League champions Deportivo La Coruna missed an opportunity to move clear in the Primera Liga title race Sunday when they were held 1-1 by Rayo Vallecano, reports AFP.

Deportivo let a 1-0 lead slip and had to be happy with a draw which puts them level on 28 points with Valencia, but second outright on goal difference.

Valencia had gone to the top of the league on Saturday with a 2-0 victory over Real Sociedad.

Norway's John Carew and Juan Sanchez both scored in the second half to earn Hector Cuper's side the three points.

Meanwhile Malaga's Uruguayan Dario Silva equalled the fastest ever goal scored in the Spanish championship, held since 1997 by Paraguay's "Lobo" Diarte, by finding the net after just seven seconds in their 3-1 victory against Valladolid.

Deportivo, down to 10 men in the 52nd minute when Djalmirinha was sent off, went ahead thanks to Dutch striker Roy Makaay, recently back to fitness following an ankle injury in the summer.

Vallecano's Bosnian striker Elvir Bolic however cancelled out Makaay's 33rd minute effort with a 71st minute equalizer.

Elsewhere Real Madrid's Luis Figo showed he was worth his 55-million-dollar price tag with a virtuoso goal in their 3-0 victory over Celta Vigo at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Ivan Helguera put Madrid ahead on 11 minutes and Figo displayed his extraordinary piece of skill with his right foot on 33 minutes.

He flicked the ball past one Vigo player to start his move then did it again to beat a second player before touching the ball home with the keeper about to intercept.

Brazil's Roberto Carlos made the match safe with a spectacular third goal for Real on the hour, his curling left foot shot completely bypassed the wall and shot into the top left hand corner.

"We got the result thanks to the extraordinary actions of some players and good defensive work," said Real coach Vicente Del Bosque after the game. Real are now just two points behind the leaders.

Barcelona, after a chaotic start to the season, managed to beat Espanyol 4-2 in their home derby at the Nou Camp stadium to give themselves hope of clawing up from fifth spot later in the season.

Celebrations of a different sort started early in the match when there was a standing ovation from the 70,000 spectators for Spain's victory in the Davis Cup final in the city the same day.

Rivaldo opened the scoring for Barca on 14 minutes after a superb pass from Patrick Kluyvert. The Dutch striker, with his back to the goal, beat the off-side trap with a stunning through ball, leaving the Brazilian to slot home with his first touch.

Barca extended their lead 10 minutes later when Xavi scored with a cracking 30-metre drive after good work by Simao Sabrosa on the right.

Rivaldo then notched up his eighth league goal of the season with a cool strike from the penalty spot after Kluyvert was adjudged to have been brought down in the area on 57 minutes.

Barca's fourth was the best of the game. Kluyvert made a run on goal and, when he saw his path blocked, back-kicked to Luis Enrique who curled a delicate shot past the despairing Espanyol custodian Juan Luis Mora.

Meanwhile Alves dropped from fifth spot to seventh following their 2-1 defeat against Racing Santander whose new coach Gregorio Manizano could not have done better.

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Inzaghi leaving Juventus?

ROME, Dec 11: Italian striker Filippo Inzaghi is on the point of leaving Juventus after being relegated to the substitutes bench for the last two matches, according to Monday's Corriere dello sport, reports AFP.

Inzaghi, sidelined for their 1-0 win over Parma at the weekend, is said to be very disappointed at the decision by coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"Superpippo" had reportedly expected to play once Alessandro Del Piero had left the field with a slight hamstring pull but Ancelotti preferred to play an extra midfielder in Gianluca Zambrotta.

Ancelotti explained his decision afterwards, saying: "I made this choice through necessity because we were leading and I needed an extra man on the right flank where we were having problems more than an extra striker."

Inzaghi, still according to the newspaper, did not appreciate Ancelotti's choice and said he might leave the Turin club next June if he is not guaranteed to start.

WC 2002

Ultimatum for DPRK

ROME, Dec 11: FIFA supreme Sepp Blatter said Sunday North Korea would be given until December 2001 to show they are capable of hosting matches in the 2002 World Cup, reports AFP.

Blatter, president of world football's governing body, said the "door would be left open" for North Korea to stage matches in the tournament, which is being co-hosted by South Korea and Japan.

Blatter said it was not for FIFA to make the first move on the issue, noting that there must be political willingness on the part of Pyongyang for the groundbreaking move to go ahead.

He said Japan would be unaffected if any matches were hosted by North Korea.

"Any matches in North Korea would reduce the number of games in South Korea. It wouldn't affect any of the games in Japan," he said.

North and South Korea have a history of bitter political rivalry and remain technically at war following the 1950-53 conflict on the peninsula.

French First Division

Bordeaux regain top position

PARIS, Dec 11: Bordeaux beat St Etienne 2-1 on Sunday night to oust Nantes, defeated 2-0 at Marseille, from the top of the French league table in a hotly contested match at the Parc Lescurie stadium, reports AFP.

A goal from Portuguese international Pauleta 10 minutes after the break, following Marc Wilmoth's first effort on the half-hour, mean Bordeaux can dream of repeating their 1999 title triumph.

It was their first victory since November 23, when they beat Werder Bremen in the UEFA Cup, and Bordeaux also ended a four-match goal drought.

Bordeaux rode their luck in the fourth minute when keeper Ulrich Rame palmed a shot from Brazilian Alex onto the crossbar but then fell behind in the 29th minute when Senegal's Pape Sarr headed home from a cross by Norway's Bjorn-Tore Kvanne.

Then came Wilmoth's goal, helping home a superb lob by Pauleta into the St Etienne net. Pauleta, who might have scored a lobbed goal in the 20th minute only to see St Etienne keeper Jeremie Janot save with his fingertips, finally scored.

He got on the end of a Wilmoth's cross to shoot right-footed past Janot for his 10th goal of the season.

Second-placed Nantes, just a point behind Bordeaux but level on points with Sedan, beaten 2-0 at Lille on Saturday, could however regain pole position at Corsican side Bastia on Wednesday.

Marseille meanwhile ended a run of five victories for Nantes, leader at the start of the weekend, with a 2-0 win at the Stade Velodrome on Sunday.

Marseille's victory, thanks to first-half goals by Belnadi and Marcelinho, both set up by George Weah, lifts them out of the relegation zone by three points.

Serie A

No stopping Roma



MILAN, Dec 11: AS Roma continued to lead the rest of the Italian First Division a merry dance with a 2-1 victory over Udinese at the Olympic Stadium setting fixtures with city rivals Lazio and Juventus, reports AFP.

Only Juventus really kept the pressure up on the capital club with a 1-0 victory over Parma in Turin, secured by a solitary goal by defender Ciro Ferrara after 14 minutes.

The remainder of the chasing pack conceded more ground to Roma who now look set to grab the title of winter champions - a meaningless prize - bestowed on the team leading the standings at Christmas.

But AC Milan's Ukrainian Andriy Shevchenko threw down the gauntlet to Roma's Argentinian idol Gabriel Batistuta with his two goals in the 4-1 defeat of Lecce establishing him on a level with Batistuta who

Their golden couple of Francesco Totti and Batistuta had then 2-0 to the good before Udinese's Roberto Muzzi pulled one back on the stroke of the interval.

Totti missed a penalty in the second period but Roma's job was made easier when Brazilian Valentin Alberto was dismissed for Udinese.

Juventus were the only team to show any interest in staying in touch with Roma with Ferrara's goal settling the match at the Stadio Delle Alpi and lending further credence to their coach Carlo Ancelotti's boast that his side will be in the title race until the very last day of the season.

With Juventus due to visit Roma on December 23 that sets up a potential classic at the Olympic Stadium.

Roma's co-tenants at the Olympic Stadium Lazio - the defending champions - restored morale with a 4-1 spanking of Vicenza in front of the, however, fans of their victims.

Champions League. Pavel Nedved of the Czech Republic scored twice and Argentinian Hernan Crespo one as the visitors swept to a 3-0 lead before Sierra Leone striker Mohamed Kallon pulled one back but Chilean Marcelo Salas struck two minutes from time to restore the three-goal margin.

Equally impressive were Milan who dispatched Lecce 4-1 at the San Siro where the visitors had beaten Inter Milan earlier in the season.

Brazilian Leonardo set the ball rolling after 19 minutes only for Alessandro Conticchio to restore parity for the unfashionable Lecce but then Shevchenko came up with two goals, the second from a penalty.

Spaniard Jose Mari turned a romp into a rout with the fourth in the closing minutes.

Atalanta are showing signs of flagging after their superb early season run that established them as unlikely challengers.

They found Perugia impossible to break down and had to settle for a 0-0 draw at Bergamo.

Bologna also faltered in their pursuit of Roma when they succumbed 2-0.

Antonio Bellavista opened the scoring and then Antonio Cassano doubled the lead just after the interval, further putting himself in the shop window ahead of the opening of the winter transfer market.

The teenager is being tracked by a host of leading Serie A clubs notably Inter Milan - Cassano knows Inter coach Marco Tardelli well from playing under the 1982 World Cup hero when he was Italy under-21 coach.

Francesco Lima of Bologna was dismissed in that match.

On Sunday evening's game between this season's underachievers, 10-man Fiorentina beat Inter Milan 2-0 in Florence.

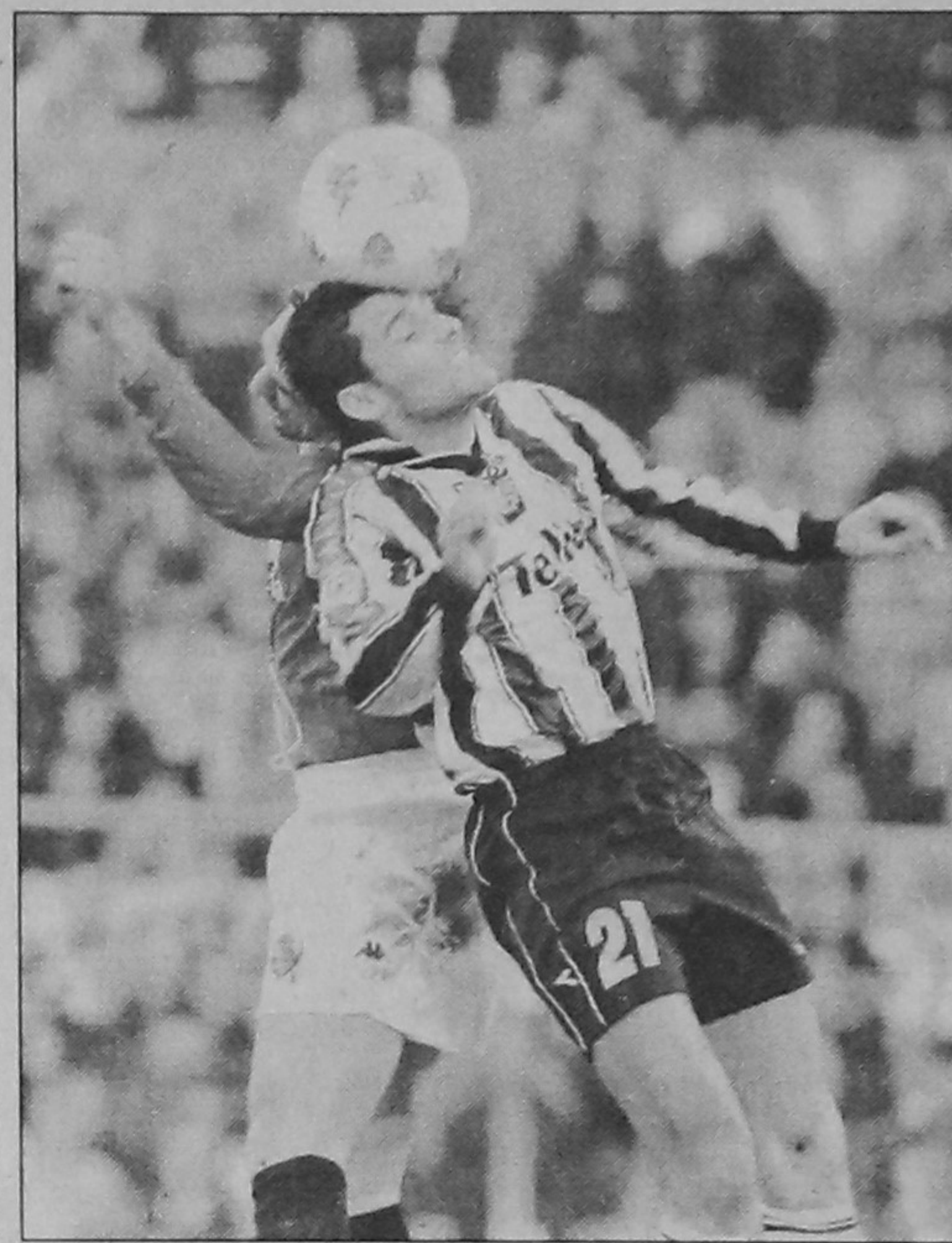
Former Italian international Enrico Chiesa gave the home side the lead after 49 minutes but then had Paolo Vanoli sent off two minutes from time for fouling Inter substitute Robbie Keane.

Portuguese playmaker Rui Costa made the game safe for Fiorentina however with a goal in injury time.

On Saturday Napoli's Fabio Pecchia hit an equaliser to give his side a 1-1 draw with fellow strugglers Brescia who had taken the lead through Stefano Diana.

And ailing Reggina ended a run of eight consecutive defeats when Lorenzo Stovini equalised in injury time after Emiliano Bonazzoli had given visitors Verona a first-minute lead.

That match was played at Catania because of recent crowd trouble by Reggina fans.



Gabriel Batistuta (L) of AS Roma and Udinese's Valentin Alberto locked in a heading duel during their Serie A game at Rome on December 10. -AFP photo

had to settle for one goal against Udinese.

Roma looked to have sewed up the match after 35 minutes but in the end had to hang on against 10-man Udinese, the early season pacesetters.

That result will help keep Sven Goran Eriksson in his post - there has been pressure on the Swede to hasten his departure to take the England job in the summer after poor recent form, notably in the

Bundesliga

Leverkusen club Berlin



BERLIN, Dec 11: Bayer Leverkusen thrashed 10-man Hertha Berlin 4-0 on Sunday in a winner-takes-all battle to shoot to the top of the Bundesliga table, reports AFP.

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

Leverkusen, without German international sweeper Jens Nowotny and playmaker Michael Ballack, both injured, ended a run of three home de-



Hertha Berlin's Iranian international striker Ali Daei (R), being checked by Bayer Leverkusen defender Boris Zivkovic during their Bundesliga fixture on December 10. -AFP photo

A win for either side would have put them top but Berlin, pacesetters at the beginning of the weekend, must now settle for fourth spot.

Schalke 04, who won 2-1 at home against bottom club VfB Stuttgart to take provisional top spot on Saturday, are now second a point behind Leverkusen.

Borussia Dortmund twice Bundesliga champions and European Cup winners in the last decade are in third spot after a 3-0 victory over Unterhaching on Saturday to leave them two points behind the leaders.

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

Levelling elimination by AER Athens from the UEFA Cup in midweek.

German international Oliver Neuville scored in the seventh and 19th minutes to put them ahead at the break and Carsten Ramelow, in the 67th minute, and Paulo Rink, from the spot with eight minutes to go, completed the scoring.

Ulf Kirsten might have given Leverkusen another goal in the 72nd minute but he failed to score from his spot kick. Berlin's Brazil Alex Alves was sent off the same minute for violent conduct.

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.

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.

Meijer leaves for Germany

HAMBURG, Germany, Dec 11: Out-of-favour Dutch striker Erik Meijer has left English Premiership side Liverpool for German giants SV Hamburg, the Bundesliga side said Monday, reports AFP.

Meijer, 31, returns to Germany after spending four years with Verdingen and Bayer Leverkusen between 1995 and 1999.

He has been out of the reckoning at Liverpool this year and has hardly figured in the first team.

River's Placente Bundesliga bound

BERLIN, Dec 11: River Plate defender Diego Placente will join German league leaders Bayer Leverkusen after the winter break, German weekly magazine Kicker reported on Monday, reports AFP.

Argentine Placente will play another two matches with his current club before joining Leverkusen for 6.1 million dollars on a contract till 2005.

Placente has an Italian passport meaning he will not be restricted by quotas of foreigners outside the European Union (EU).



Liverpool striker Emile Heskey trying to burst through the Ipswich defence during their Premiership match at Liverpool on December 10. -AFP photo