

ROK friendly
Troussier calls up old warriors

TOKYO, Dec 14: Japan coach Philippe Troussier on Thursday called up two 33-year-old strikers, Kazuyoshi Miura and Masashi Nakayama, for a friendly with South Korea here next week, reports AFP.



Paulo Sergio (C), Bayern Munich's Brazilian forward, finds himself sandwiched between SV Hamburg's Andrej Panadic (L) and Tomas Ujkalusi during their Bundesliga game at Munich on December 13.

Bundesliga
Schalke in pole position

BERLIN, Dec 14: Schalke 04 claimed the unofficial accolade of "autumn champions" in Germany as they lead the way at the season half way mark after previous leaders Bayer Leverkusen slid to a 3-2 defeat Wednesday at second bottom VfL Bochum, reports AFP.

Schalke, 2-0 winners Tuesday at lowly Unterhaching, have 33 points from 17 matches, two more than Leverkusen, who went down to a hat-trick from Bochum's Croatian star Marjko Maric.

SQUAD

- Goalkeepers: Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi (Yokohama), Seigo Narazaki (Nagoya)
- Defenders: Toshihiro Hattori, Makoto Tanaka (Iwata), Ruzo Morioka (Shimizu), Naoki Matsuda (Yokohama), Koji Nakata (Kashima)
- Midfielders: Toshiya Fujita, Hiroshi Nanami, Daisuke Oku, Takashi Fukunishi (Iwata), Tomokazu Myojin (Kashiwa), Shunsuke Nakamura (Yokohama), Masashi Moroyama (Kashima), Tomoyuki Sakai (Iwata), Junichi Inamoto (Osaka G), Shinji Ono (Urawa)
- Forwards: Kazuyoshi Miura (Kyoto), Masashi Nakayama (Iwata), Tatsuhiko Kubo (Hiroshima), Atsushi Yanagisawa (Kashima), Hideaki Kitajima (Kashiwa)

Ref who reported Wenger charged by FA

LONDON, Dec 14: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger's forthcoming appeal against a touchline ban could be boosted with the news that the fourth official who reported him - referee Paul Taylor - has himself been charged by the Football Association (FA) for allegedly using "insulting language", reports AFP.

French First Division
Aussie brings PSG down

PARIS, Dec 14: Paris Saint Germain saw their title hopes take a further dive on Wednesday as they lost 2-0 at high-flying Lille, who moved joint second with two goals from Australian star Mile Sterjovski, reports AFP.

Robert lit the post midway through the first half and the Parisians' luck went from bad to worse as Peter Lucchi was booked after fouling Edvin Murtari.

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Taylor, new to the top flight's list of match officials this season, reported the Arsenal boss over an incident in the players' tunnel at the end of the Gunners' opening Premiership game at Sunderland on August 19.

Wenger was handed a 12-match touchline ban for the incident but has claimed all along that Taylor overreacted and immediately lodged an appeal.

Wenger said: "All I have heard is that I can have a second hearing. My appeal has been accepted but I don't know when it will be heard."

Asked whether he was hopeful of the punishment being rescinded or cut, he said: "Cut - it would be a nice Christmas present."

Taylor was charged by the FA following a complaint brought against him by Notts County after a confrontation during a Second Division game at Meadow Lane on October 14.

PSG had hoped last week's home success over Metz would signal an upturn in their fortunes after a disastrous run at home and away.

But there was no such luck for new coach Luis Fernandez as they remain six points behind leaders Bordeaux.

"I have a young team and they are still learning," said Fernandez.

"We came up against a very confident opponent and we had a few chances. If we'd taken one of them things would maybe have worked out differently."

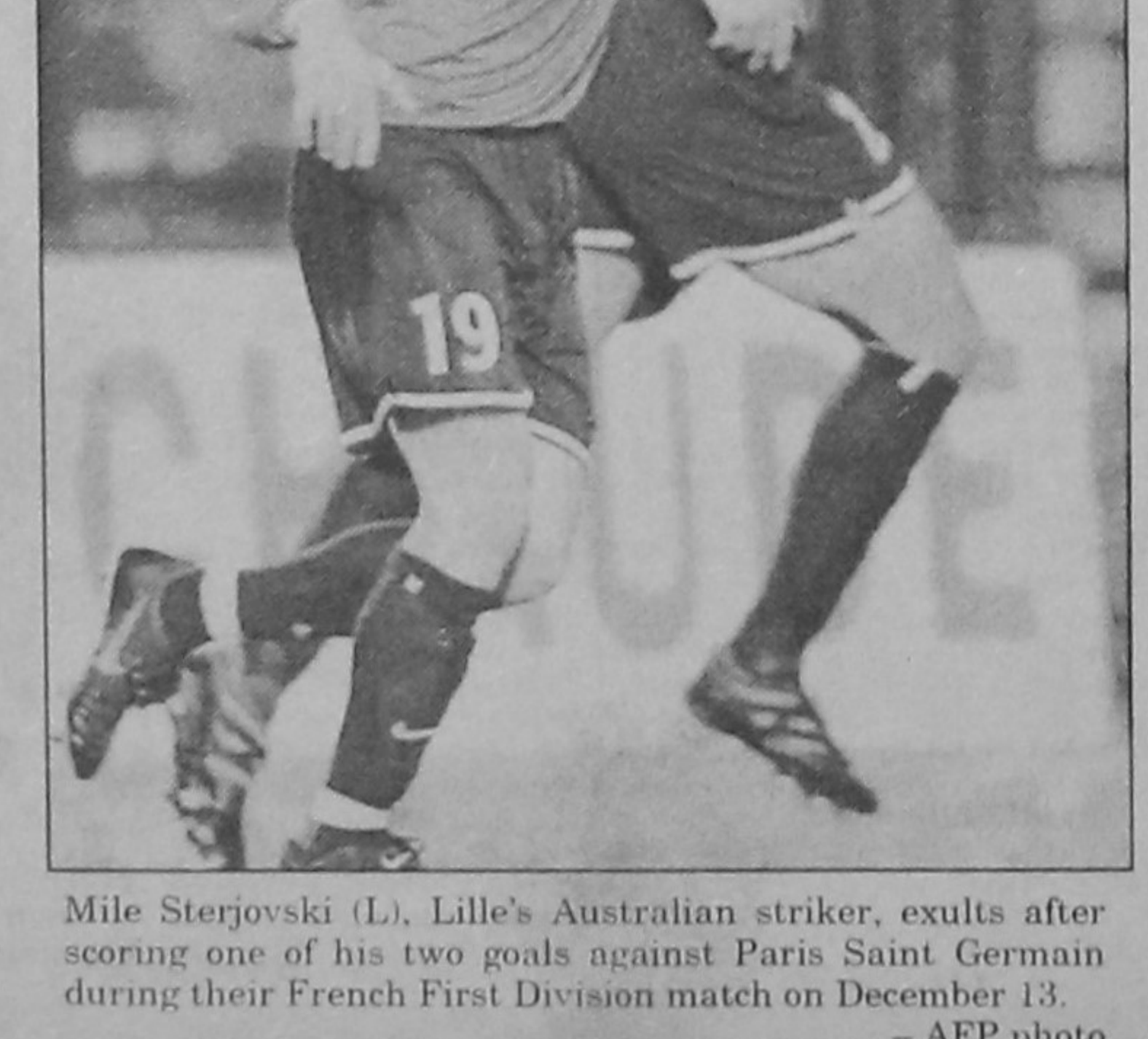
Wednesday's match was a replay of the sides' match two weeks ago, abandoned due to rain with the score at 1-1.

PSG would have settled for that but Sterjovski had other ideas, firing a rasping effort past Lionel Leuzi in the PSG goal and then heading home the second to clinch the points.

Nantes, meanwhile, have just like PSG, suffered an attack of nerves. Having led the table two weeks ago they suffered their second straight defeat, losing 3-1 to Bastia.

Last weekend's defeat to Marseille was Nantes' first in the league since October 29, but Bastia showed up the Canaries' shortcomings again as the Corsicans won with goals from Cyril Domoraud on 38 minutes, Piotr Swierczewski two minutes before the break and Nestor Fabriti own goal on the hour.

Sebastien Mace scored a late consolation for Nantes, who stay a point behind leaders Bordeaux having wasted their game in Dijon.



Mile Sterjovski (L), Lille's Australian striker, exults after scoring one of his two goals against Paris Saint Germain during their French First Division match on December 13.

Italian Cup
Fiorentina, Milan confirm last four spot

MILAN, Dec 14: Fiorentina and AC Milan joined Udinese and almost certainly Parma in the last four of the Italian Cup Wednesday, reports AFP.

In Bergamo Atalanta won 2-1 but missed two penalties and failed to overturn the 4-2 first-leg lead established by Milan at the San Siro.

Striker Marco Nappi gave the home side hope after 13 minutes with a left-foot shot after turning on the edge of the Milan box.

But six minutes later it was Croatian veteran Zvonimir Boban who restored parity.

Cristiano Doni missed a penalty for Atalanta, well saved by Cristian Abbiati and the same goalkeeper denied Nicola Ventola from the spot two minutes from time after Milan's Brazilian central defender Roque Junior was dismissed.

Doni then scored in stoppage time but the match finished 5-4 on aggregate.

Fiorentina lost 3-1 at Brescia but given the fact that the Florence side had won the first leg 6-0 meant that the result was never in doubt.

Argentinian Andres Yllana gave the home side the lead only for Fiorentina's Brazilian striker Leandro to level the score on the night eight minutes after the interval.

Gianluigi Orlandini put the home side back in front from the penalty spot before Uruguayan Alejandro Correa made it 3-1, but given the huge first-leg margin there was little celebration for any of the goals.

Udinese had grabbed their place in the semis with a 4-1 victory over Italian champions Lazio on Tuesday night, overturning a 2-1 first leg deficit for a 5-3 aggregate win.

On Thursday Parma will hope for an easy night at the San Siro, having trounced Inter Milan 6-1 in the first leg at the Stadio Ennio Tardini.

Hollywood touch for Rome derby
ROME, Dec 14: Hollywood screen stars Leonardo Di Caprio and Cameron Diaz will be faces in the crowd when Lazio face AS Roma in this weekend's Serie A crunch derby match, reports AFP.

The actors are in Rome filming director Martin Scorsese's forthcoming movie 'Gangs of New York' the ANSA news service reported.

Bonfrere threatens to go to FIFA

LAGOS, Dec 14: Nigeria's Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere on Thursday threatened to lodge a complaint with world football governing body FIFA over irregular payment of his salary and allowances, reports AFP.

"When I return from my holidays, I will give them some time to pay me. If nothing happens, I will have to take my case to FIFA," Bonfrere told a local radio station.

"We cannot continue to work like this, I have to be paid regularly," he added.

Bonfrere, who is in his second stint as Nigeria coach, is on a monthly salary of 30,000 dollars and recently complained he was owed four months' pay.

The Dutchman left his previous job in Nigeria over non-payment of his salary after leading the country to soccer gold in the Olympics in 1996.

Several foreign coaches including Frenchman Philippe Troussier and German Manfred Hoener were also owed several months' pay by the often cash-strapped Nigeria Football Association during their stints with the national squad.

Deschamps out until next year

VALENCIA, Spain, Dec 13: Injured Valencia defender Didier Deschamps will not play before the New Year, the former France captain said on his website on Saturday, reports AFP.

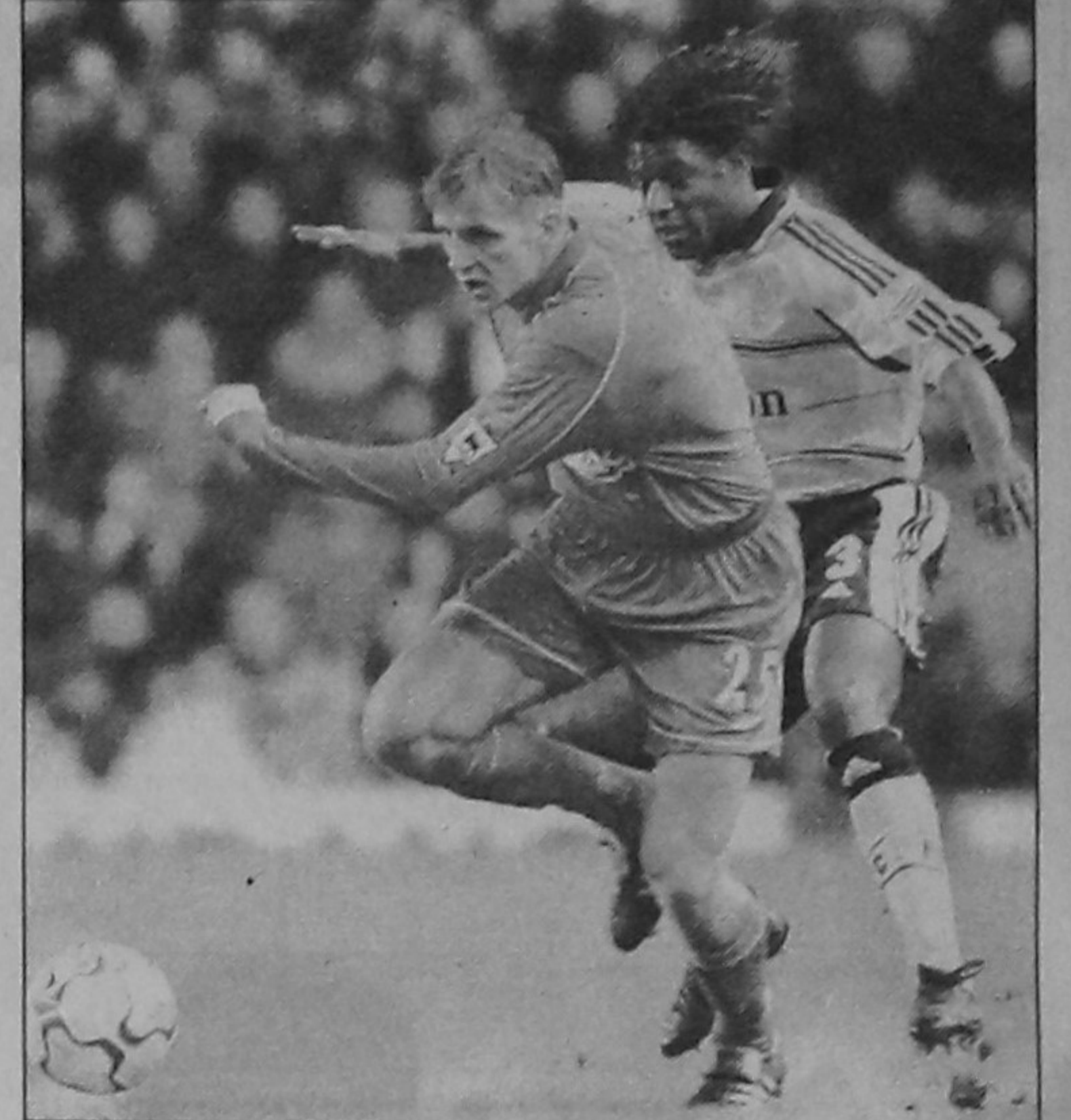
"It's recovering slowly, I'm cycling and swimming but it's still painful when I walk," Deschamps said of his badly inflamed ankle strain that he picked up in early November.

The 32-year-old said that Valencia, who lead the Spanish league and got off to a winning start in the second phase of the Champions league, were putting him under no pressure and that he felt calm and relaxed at the club he joined in the close season.

Deschamps captained France to World Cup and European Championship victories, winning his 101st cap in the Rotterdam Euro 2000 final. He also won the Champions League with Marseille and Juventus, where he spent five seasons.

English League Cup
Liverpool thru' to semis

LONDON, Dec 14: England international Michael Owen scored the extra-time goal which put Liverpool on their way to a 3-0 League Cup quarter-final win over Fulham on Wednesday, reports AFP.



Liverpool's fresh recruit Igor Biscan (L) breaking free from Fulham's Rufus Biscan during their English League Cup quarterfinal at Anfield on December 13.

Fulham stretched Liverpool to the limit during normal time but the home side wrapped up the game when Czech international Vladimir Smicer and Nick Barnby barged further goals in the final minutes of extra-time.

Liverpool will play the winner of the delayed quarter-final tie between First Division Crystal Palace and Sunderland.

Owen made the breakthrough when he fired in at the second attempt - his first header being blocked on the line by Andy Melville - after a Smicer cross from the right, seconds before the extra time break.

Liverpool grabbed their second win in eight minutes remaining. Barnby raced away down the right wing before pulling the ball back for Smicer to place his shot high into the net.

Barnby then raced away to belt in the third in the dying seconds to give the scoreline a flattering look for Liverpool.

Diego dedicates it to Cuba

HAVANA, Dec 14: Argentine soccer legend Diego Maradona, still snarling from his feud with Brazilian ace Pele over a FIFA prize, flew back into Cuba late Wednesday, saying he hoped to show his newly won award to President Fidel Castro, reports Reuters.

"I dedicated it to the Cuban people, who have treated me marvelously... and especially to the living history that is Fidel Castro," a beaming Maradona told Reuters after landing in Havana, where he has been under medical treatment this year.

Maradona was returning from Europe, where earlier in the week he controversially shared with his great Brazilian rival Pele FIFA's "player of the century" award in Rome.

"Before going back to Argentina, I wanted Fidel to see a prize won with absolute cleanliness," added Maradona, who plans to spend a week in Cuba before returning to Buenos Aires for Christmas and New Year with his family.

The 40-year-old former soccer ace, whose career was blighted with drugs and other scandals, had spent most of 2000 in Cuba where Castro offered him a refuge from the

media spotlight to treat a life-threatening heart condition.

What would have been the highlight of his year, however, turned into yet another controversy, when Maradona thought he was the sole winner of FIFA's "Player of the century" award only to find he was sharing it with Pele.

The Brazilian won the backing of FIFA's Football Family - officials, journalists and coaches - while the Argentine topped a poll of fans on the association's official Website.

"No, no, I don't share the prize at all. I went to Rome to receive it out of respect for the people who voted for me, but if there is a man who does not know how to lose, it is Pele," Maradona insisted in Cuba.

In what appeared a deliberate snub to Pele, Maradona left Monday night's gala awards ceremony in Rome early after taking his own prize and before Pele took the stage to collect his.

"It really gives me tremendous pride to have beaten him (Pele), but I also have a feeling of pity for someone who wants to win when he didn't win," he said.

"They had to invent another prize. They invented it on-the-spot so they could put Pele's name," added Maradona, who

has often been critical of FIFA throughout his career.

Maradona and his manager Guillermo Coppola proudly displayed their prize next to a Cuban flag in Havana airport.

"I defended football as Fidel defends his people. That's why I think 50 per cent of this prize is Cuban and 50 per cent Argentine," he added, paying tribute also to Cuban doctors who have been treating him since January.

Castro, whom Maradona considers a personal friend, has visited the Argentine twice this year at the exclusive health spa he is living in on the outskirts of Havana.

The parallel FIFA votes for Pele and Maradona sparked furious debate between Argentines and Brazilians and the stand-off between the two giants of world soccer came after weeks of rant over the terms of the awards.

FIFA initially planned to name just one player of the century and Argentines were convinced Maradona had won it.

That outraged Brazilians who argued the Web-based vote was unfair and claimed the Argentine Football Federation had led a concerted campaign to swing the vote Maradona's way.

UEFA Cup
Roma for settling scores

ROME, Dec 14: AS Roma are looking to lay the ghost of the 1983-4 European Cup Final after being paired with English Premiership outfit Liverpool in the last 16 of the UEFA Cup, reports AFP.

In that final - played in Roma's home Olympic Stadium - Liverpool won the title on a penalty shootout after the match finished 1-1.

Penalty misses from Italian World Cup winners Bruno Conti and Francesco Graziani - aided by the "spaghetti legs" psychological tricks of Liverpool goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar who wiggled his legs to distract the Roma penalty-takers - handed the Cup to Liverpool for the fourth time.

Roma's Brazilian playmaker at the time Paulo Roberto Falcão was much criticised for refusing to take a penalty.

Conti said: "The memories are certainly not good ones because nothing is worse than getting to a European Cup Final and then losing on penalties in front of your own fans."

Liverpool were the dominant team in Europe in those days but now are also-rans even in their own domestic league while Roma - inspired by Italian Francesco Totti and Argentinian Gabriel Batistuta - have established a six-point lead in the Italian First Division.

Conti said: "The 1984 Roma team was a good one - we had won the title the year before - but this one is no less."

"But we must give Liverpool a lot of respect. They are no

longer the team to beat in England but at this level all the games are difficult."

Roma boss Fabio Capello said: "It is without doubt the opponent we least wanted to face, the most difficult team we could have faced. They will be two big matches in famous stadiums. Liverpool are one of the three top English teams alongside Arsenal and Manchester United and trained by Frenchman (Gerard) Houllier, who is a very good coach."

Totti believed the match would be a good opportunity for Roma to put their 1984 flop behind them, saying: "I was only a child when that final was played but I remember it all. It could be a good chance for us to banish the memories of that final."

Radebe to sign fresh deal

LONDON, Dec 14: Leeds skipper Lucas Radebe has agreed to a new deal with the club that will see him end his playing career at Elland Road, reports AFP.

The 31-year-old, currently in South Africa ahead of his Saudi prince gifts 60 cars to Al-Hilal

RIVADI, Dec 14: Billionaire businessman Prince Al-Walid bin Talal has presented the Saudi football club Al-Hilal with 60 luxury cars for winning the Asian Super Cup, reports AFP.

The cars were awarded to the players, Romanian trainer Ilie Balaci, and the club's administrative and technical staff, said the office for the prince, who with an estimated 20 billion dollars is ranked the world's fifth richest businessman.

Al-Hilal claimed the Asian Super Cup and a place at next year's FIFA World Cup Championship, drawing a second leg in Riyadh on Monday with Japan's Shimizu S-Pulse 1-1 and taking the tie 3-2 on aggregate.

country's African Nations Cup clash with Liberia, is expected to sign the new contract next week.

Radebe's agent Gary Blumberg said Thursday: "As far as we're concerned the contract talks have been concluded. All that remains now is for Lucas to sign the papers."

"We hope that he will sign immediately on his return to Yorkshire and we hope that this will be the last rolling contract Lucas signs to sign."

"He loves the place, he loves the fans and he hopes that he will be there right to the end of his career."

Radebe, who was rested for Saturday's Premiership defeat at Southampton as he was struggling with an ankle injury, had said Wednesday that he did not want to be frozen out on a regular basis following 18-million-pound (25-million-dollar) Ferdinand's arrival at Elland Road.

"I think the gaffer wanted to rest me a bit, but if he wants to play with two centre-halves and they are Jon (Woodgate) and Rio (Ferdinand), that could be a problem for me."

"But I'm a professional. I know I'm not a young man anymore and I want to be in the first team. At this stage I can't afford to be on the bench. I've only got so many years left in my career."

And Blumberg added: "Leeds fans should have no concerns. Lucas is encouraged by the signing of Rio Ferdinand. Every time he sees a new player arrive he gets excited and phones us to tell us that another quality player has been brought to the club."

Scottish Premiership
Rangers continue climb

GLASGOW, Dec 14: Scottish title holders Rangers came from behind to beat Aberdeen 3-1 at Ibrox on Wednesday and cut the gap behind league leaders Celtic to 10 points, reports AFP.

Second-half strikes from German-born Billy Dodds and captain Jore Albertz earned the giants after Dutch international Michael Moles had cancelled out Arvid Stavrum's 11th-minute opener.

Rangers still have a game in hand on their cross-city rivals and the result also means Aberdeen still have not won at Ibrox since 1991.