

**Di Canio can't understand the fuss**

LONDON, Dec 18: West Ham's Italian striker Paolo Di Canio says he is surprised by the reaction to his gesture of sportsmanship at Everton on Saturday, when instead of scoring he picked up the ball as opposing keeper Paul Gerrard lay injured outside his area, reports AFP.

The Hammers were drawing 1-1 at Goodison Park as the game entered its final moments when Trevor Sinclair crossed for Di Canio, who had the goal at his mercy.

But seeing Gerrard lying prone the controversial Italian elected to catch the ball and sportingly pointed towards the corner.

Di Canio, who was banned for 11 games in 1998 for pushing over referee Paul Alcock while playing for Sheffield Wednesday, claims his actions "seemed like the right thing to do".

He said: "Just as I did not expect to be branded a psychopath when I pushed over Paul Alcock, I did not expect the praise I am getting now."

"I saw the goalkeeper doubled over, I saw his knee twisted in the wrong direction. With outfield players it is different, we occasionally have a fall. But I guess he is heavier and got his studs caught in the pitch."

"I could hear him screaming in pain and I understood right away it was serious. That is why I was yelling at Trevor Sinclair to stop so Paul could get some medical attention."

"Would I have scored? You can't say for sure, but without the keeper and a big, wide open goal, I'm sure I'd have had a good chance," Di Canio joked.

## Hiddink takes over South Korea

SEOUL, Dec 18: Former Dutch national coach Guus Hiddink on Monday signed a contract to lead South Korea's national soccer team over the next one and a half years in the 2002 World Cup campaign, reports AFP.

The contract with the Korea Football Association (KFA) is effective from January 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002.

"I'm glad and proud to be here," the 54-year-old Dutchman said after signing the contract with KFA General Secretary Cho Chung-Yun.

Hiddink vowed to do his best to make the South Korean team strong, asking for South Korean cooperation with his future work.

"I hope I can contribute my experience to the South Korean national team, but I can't do it alone."

Hiddink will bring in an assistant coach and trainer.

"In the coming weeks or days, I will present the two extra men who are helping the team," he said. He declined to name them.

Hiddink said he will focus on analysing the South Korean soccer team which remained "physically and mentally strong" but more tactical work needed to be done.

Financial terms of the contract were not disclosed. Local reports said it included a one-million dollar signing bonus, on top of a three million dollar salary.

South Korea which will co-host the 2002 World Cup finals with Japan has sought a big name replacement for current coach Huh Jung-Mu.

Hiddink has a formidable record in Europe. He guided PSV Eindhoven to the European Cup in 1988 and Real Madrid to the same title, although the Spanish giants sacked him shortly after.

He had been lined up for a job at Scottish side Celtic after being sacked by Spanish team Real Betis. He has also been in charge with Valencia in Spain and Turkey's Fenerbahce.

## Monaco tracking Sacchi

MONACO, Dec 18: Struggling French First Division champions Monaco are involved in advanced talks to recruit former AC Milan and Italian national coach Arrigo Sacchi, sources close to the club revealed Sunday, reports AFP.

Monaco's 2-1 home defeat Saturday to Rennes, their ninth in the league, leaves the reigning champions just four points clear of third-bottom Metz in 13th position in the French league.

With the club already out of Europe the pressure is mounting on coach Claude Puel.

And Monaco president Jean-Louis Campana is reported to be already in contact with Sacchi to replace under-fire Puel.

Meanwhile, Monaco defender Martin Djetou has denied reports that he is ready to join Italian outfit Juventus.

But he said that he was nevertheless interested in a move to Italy later this season and had been contacted by Inter Milan and AC Milan.

## Serie A

# Roma king of Rome



MILAN, Dec 18: A freak own goal by Lazio defender Paolo Negro gave Italian First Division leaders AS Roma a 1-0 victory in the "Roman derby of the Century" against the defending champions Sunday evening, reports AFP.

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Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni thought Bonazzoli had been offside and said: "I was satisfied with the performance - but not the goal - we deserved a 1-0 win at Bologna."

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