

International friendly
Argentina blank
Mexico

LOS ANGELES, Dec 21: Goals from Santiago Solari and Luciano Galletti lifted Argentina to a 2-0 victory over Mexico here Wednesday in a friendly international football match at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, reports AFP.

Argentina played a more cohesive, imaginative game from the start, and in the 14th minute they were rewarded with the first goal, a header from Real Madrid's Solari.

Galletti added the second goal in the 82nd, breaking free on the right and beating Mexican keeper Jorge Campos.

Mexico wasted three good opportunities, but for the most part they were too erratic to be effective.

The defeat was the second in Los Angeles for Mexican coach Enrique Meza, whose side was defeated 2-0 by the United States in his first visit to the Coliseum on October 25.

In 28 meetings between the two countries, 14 of them friendlies, Argentina leads the head-to-head record with nine victories, 13 draws and six defeats.

On a chilly night in front of a crowd of 55,000, a young group of Argentine players showed up a Mexican team packed with veterans.

Solari's goal -- a crisp header of a ball sent in by Lucas Castronan -- was his first in just his second appearance for Argentina.

Galletti, another of the youngsters called up by Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa, notched his first international goal.

For Mexico, the defeat was an unwelcome setback as they look toward a February 28 clash with the United States in Columbus, Ohio, in a 2002 World Cup qualifier.

Transfer
discussions
shelved

BRUSSELS, Dec 21: Further discussions on reworking the European transfer system have been shelved till January 12 following a meeting here on Wednesday between the European Commission (EC) and various football bodies, reports AFP.

A two-and-a-half hour meeting between officials from the EC, world football's governing body FIFA, its European counterpart UEFA, Europe's national leagues and international players union FIFPro ended fruitless.

In a statement, the EC said the meeting was "constructive" but added further discussions were necessary to find the best solution for the sport.

FIFA secretary general Michel Zen-Ruffinen said there were problems which meant further talks were needed on January 12.

Philippe Piat, vice-president of FIFPro, said there was complete disagreement on the question of amending current contracts.

Over the past two years and following player protests, the EC has been trying to square the circle and make the transfer system conform to the principles of competition and the free movement of labour as enshrined in EU labour laws.

The EC is looking in essence to uphold three principles - the free movement of players, ensure that clubs which bring through young players receive a fee if the player then leaves and also guarantee that contracts are respected.

But the EC admits that the free movement of players "cannot be applied to the letter" as sport has certain specific features.

To begin with, the EU wants FIFA to set down a basic framework in which to operate in future, to which it can then propose amendments where appropriate.

Probe panel
wants Bonfrere
sacked

LAGOS, Dec 21: A panel set up to probe Nigeria's poor soccer performance at the Sydney Olympics has recommended the dismissal of Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere, reports AFP.

Panel chairman Chive Kaave told reporters Thursday that all is not well with the Nigerian coaching crew.

The relationship between Bonfrere and his assistants, Shabu Amudu and Stephen Keshi, is less than cordial. Bonfrere accused them of disloyalty and sabotage while he was with the Olympic team in Sydney, he said.

He said the Dutch coach should be sacked to give way for the assistant coaches to ensure Nigeria's qualification for the 2002 World Cup.

There is deep-seated mistrust between the three coaches and if this is not checked, it could distract them from the task of qualifying the country for the next World Cup," he warned.

"We have advised that where the coaches cannot work together, Bonfrere be relieved of his job and the Super Eagles be handed to Amudu and Keshi or in the alternative Bonfrere be allowed to choose his own assistants," Kaave added.

Bonfrere recently accused the Nigerian footballing body NFA of delaying payment of his salaries, a charge the FA denied.



Luis Enrique (L) of Barcelona and Alaves' Martin Astudillo locked in a tussle during their Primera Liga outing at Barcelona on December 20. - AFP photo

Primera Liga

Carew keeps Valencia ahead



MADRID, Dec 21: Norwegian striker John Carew scored a late equalizer for Valencia in a 1-1 draw at Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday to earn top spot and then got sent off for his goal celebrations, reports AFP.

Carew's 84th minute strike cancelled out the 13th minute opener by Bilbao's Josu Urrutia meaning Valencia took over first place from Real Madrid in the Spanish football championship.

Valencia needed just one point from the match and nearly didn't make it before Carew's goal and celebrations which included an aggressive gesture with a finger.

The return of Brazilian stars was a plus for both Deportivo La Coruna and Barcelona, who were third and fourth in the table after Wednesday's games.

The 1999 FIFA world player of the year Rivaldo scored twice and Patrick Kluivert hit the other as they led 3-0 against Alaves. But Alaves hit back through a penalty by the league top scorer Javi Moreno, who now has 13 goals, and another strike by Brazilian Magno for a 3-2 final result.

The club from Vitoria even saw the goal which would have

STANDINGS

	Spanish football league table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):								
Valencia	16	9	5	2	28	10	32		
Real Madrid	15	10	2	3	34	18	32		
Deportivo La Coruna	16	9	4	3	28	14	31		
Barcelona	16	8	3	5	32	24	27		
Real Mallorca	16	7	5	4	21	19	26		
Rayo Vallecano	16	6	6	4	33	25	24		
Alaves	16	7	3	6	25	18	24		
Villarreal	16	6	5	2	19	18	23		
Real Oviedo	16	7	2	7	20	25	23		
Malaga	16	6	3	7	26	25	21		
Las Palmas	16	6	3	7	20	34	21		
Athletic Bilbao	16	5	5	6	21	22	20		
Real Zaragoza	15	4	7	4	18	16	19		
Celta Vigo	16	3	9	4	16	19	18		
Espanyol	16	5	3	8	17	21	18		
Numerica	16	4	4	8	18	26	16		
Racing Santander	16	3	5	8	19	28	14		
Osasuna	16	2	7	7	16	24	13		
Real Sociedad	16	3	3	10	15	35	12		

Serie A preview

Roma eying merry Xmas



MILAN, Dec 21: Italian First Division leaders AS Roma host Juventus at the Olympic Stadium

Friday night in a pre-Christmas showdown that could go a long way to deciding the title, reports AFP.

The stakes are high. Victory would see the hosts put a nine-point gap between themselves and the chasing pack although Atalanta would have the opportunity to trim that lead back to six when they entertain outfit Inter Milan the day after.

Defeat would see Juve close the gap to three and give Roma plenty of food for thought as they put their feet up during the two-week Christmas break.

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Real welcome back
'The Vulture'

MADRID, Dec 21: European champions Real Madrid said Wednesday their former striker Emilio Butragueno would return to the club next month as assistant to general sporting director Jorge Valdano, reports AFP.

The 37-year-old Butragueno, nicknamed "The Vulture", will take up the post on January 15 after leaving his current job as an aide to Spanish Secretary of State for Sport Juan Antonio Gomez Angulo.

His arrival is part of a shake up of administrative posts at the club under new president Florentino Perez who brought in Valdano and who has also named former star Alfredo Di Stefano as honorary president.

Butragueno spent 12 seasons with Real, winning six league titles. He then played three seasons for Atletico Celaya of Mexico before hanging up his boots in April 1998.

Palmeiras players collapsed on the field in disbelief and the crowd of 20,000 fell eerily silent.

Palmeiras had led 3-0 at

halftime in the all-Brazilian

final after Francisco Arce, Magrao and Tuta scored in the last

10 minutes of the first half.

Former Atletico Madrid and Middlesbrough player Juninho Paulista was involved in all four

goals as Vasco hit back after the break.

Juninho won the penalties

from which Romario scored

Vasco's first two goals. He

scored the third himself and

then produced the shot which

led to Romario's final goal.

Romario, still one of the world's top players at the age of 34, took his personal tally in all competitions this year to a club record 64.

Several Vasco players dedicated the triumph to former coach Oswaldo Oliveira, who

had been bizarrely sacked after

a game on Saturday for hugging

rival coach Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Scolari is a bitter personal enemy of Vasco director Eurico Miranda.

The only disappointment for

Vasco was the performance of

central defender Junior Baiano.

The former Brazil international needlessly gave away the penalty

from which Palmeiras scored

their first goal and was

sent off for the third time this

year in the second half.

The match was the third of

the final after Vasco won the

first game and Palmeiras the

second. It was a rare high point

in the three-year history of the

Mercosur, a made-for-television

event in which most games are

played in empty stadia and in

which many teams choose to

field reserve sides.

The competition features 20

of South America's biggest

clubs, who are handpicked by

the South American Football

Confederation (CSF). Almost

exactly the same teams take

part every year.

Palmeiras have been in all

three Mercosur finals. They

beat Cruzeiro in 1998 and lost