

English League Cup Ipswich draw first blood

LONDON, Jan 10: In-form Ipswich, chasing European qualification on three fronts, took a step nearer their goal with a controversial penalty that gave them a 1-0 win over First Division Birmingham City in their League Cup semi-final first leg meeting at Portman Road on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Menotti, Bilardo fighting it off verbally

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 10: Former Argentine World Cup-winning coaches Cesar Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo stepped up a running feud on Tuesday with Bilardo complaining his predecessor was simply not in his league, reports AFP.

Menotti led Argentina to the 1978 World Cup, but Bilardo, who performed the same feat in 1986, said his feat was by far the greater as it came in Mexico whereas his rival's triumph was on home soil.

Bilardo, 61 and who is now hoping to make a career in politics, claims Menotti, a year older, has effectively lived off the former's own reputation "for 20 years."

Conti pleads for thieves' mercy

ROME, Jan 10: Italy's 1982 World Cup winning star Bruno Conti Tuesday appealed to thieves to return mementos from his football career after a burglary at his house, reports AFP.

Among the memorabilia stolen were seven medallions commemorating each of the seven matches he played for Enzo Bearzot's side during the 1982 tournament in Spain that culminated in the 3-1 victory over West Germany in the final.

Dortmund out with record fee for Czech

DORTMUND, Germany, Jan 10: Sparta Prague Czech international midfielder Tomas Rosicky joined high-flying Bundesliga outfit Borussia Dortmund for a German record 24.8 million deutschmarks (12 million dollars) on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Zoff under spotlight again

MILAN, Jan 10: Dino Zoff returned to front-line football management Tuesday, taking the helm of Italian First Division champions Lazio shortly after their England-bound Swedish Sven Goran Eriksson had announced his departure, reports AFP.



Dino Zoff(L) being presented to the media by Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti during a press conference at the club's headquarters in Formello on January 9.

Zoff, the club vice-president returned to front-line football management Tuesday, taking the helm of Italian First Division champions Lazio shortly after their England-bound Swedish Sven Goran Eriksson had announced his departure, reports AFP.

In his previous stint as coach of Lazio Francesco Rutelli, a Lazio fan who on Monday resigned as Rome's mayor to focus on his campaign as the left wing's candidate for Prime Minister, delivered a broadside at Zoff, accusing him of failing to stamp his personality on the team.

With either Berlusconi or Rutelli set to become the country's next Prime Minister Zoff would be forgiven if he chose to abstain at the election.

His relations with the media have also been difficult. As Italy coach Zoff often gave unassailable answers to banal questions and resolutely refused to smile.

He returned to Juventus for two seasons as coach before moving to Lazio for the first time in 1990. He later became club president but eventually gave up that title in 1998 when he succeeded Cesare Maldini as coach to the national side.

The English cautiously happy

LONDON, Jan 10: The world of English football welcomed the imminent arrival of Sven Goran Eriksson as coach of the national side Tuesday - but warned against expecting miracles from the Swedish guru, reports AFP.

Eriksson, the first non-Englishman to be appointed England manager, sensationally stepped down as coach of Serie A side Lazio on Tuesday.

The 52-year-old's departure from the Rome giants means he is now free to take up the England reins as soon as possible, a fact welcomed by coaches and officials Tuesday.

Leicester City manager Peter Taylor, who had been due to lead England in their home friendly against Spain on February 28, said he was now happy to make way for Eriksson.

"No-one was sure when Sven was coming over here to take charge of England and it is good that it is going to happen now, sooner rather than later," Taylor said.

"As a fellow manager you never like to see anyone leave a job. But with my England hat on it is good news that he can come over straight away. It clears a lot of things up for us," said Taylor, who will work closely with Eriksson as one of his coaches along with Manchester United's Steve McClaren.

of the national side and we do not think enough efforts were made to find an English manager - it was an insult to say there was no one good enough."

But now he has been appointed it is in everyone's interests to support Sven-Goran Eriksson wholeheartedly.

Former England midfielder Trevor Brooking, now chairman of Sport England, a body set up to develop grass-roots sport in England, said Eriksson should be given time to grow into the job.

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Sad Bertolotti says goodbye

MODENA, Italy, Jan 10: Francesco Bertolotti retired from football on Tuesday less than two months after the post-match assault by an opponent that left him fighting for his life, reports AFP.

Bertolotti, who played for Italian Third Division side Modena, confirmed in a press conference that he would quit after being advised to do so by doctors who helped him recover from a coma.

Accompanied by his wife and two children 33-year-old Bertolotti was on the verge of tears as he spoke.

Lazio lesson for China

ROME, Jan 10: Italian champions Lazio gave their England-bound coach Sven Goran Eriksson a winning send-off on Tuesday, beating the Chinese national team 6-3 at the Olympic Stadium in a match that brought down the curtain on the Rome outfit's centenary year, reports AFP.

Lazio eased to a 2-0 half-time lead over the visitors, who coached by bohemian Yugoslav Bora Milutinovic finished fourth in October's Asian Cup finals, to ensure the match was effectively over at the interval.

Their Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved set up the opener after four minutes for Simone Inzaghi and then after 26 minutes Chilean forward Marcelo Salas doubled the lead, lobbing goalkeeper Jiang Jin.

Mancini too leaving

ROME, Jan 10: Lazio assistant coach Roberto Mancini announced Tuesday he would leave the club after the evening friendly match with the Chinese national team, reports AFP.

Mancini was assistant to Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson who left the Italian champions Tuesday to take up his appointment with the England team but club president Sergio Cragnotti overlooked the former Italian international and instead appointed club vice-president Dino Zoff as coach.

"I have really enjoyed it here," said Mancini. "But this is my last day with Lazio. I was Eriksson's main assistant and therefore I must take my share of the responsibility."

Lazio superstar Marcelo Salas (L) wrong-footing China's Li Weifang during their exhibition match at Rome on January 9.

Ronaldo volunteered to play

BRASILIA, Jan 10: Striker Ronaldo told Brazil's parliament on Wednesday he insisted on playing the 1998 World Cup final because he felt well and medical tests were normal, reports AFP.



An AFP file photo of a dejected Ronaldo after the shocking defeat against France in the 1998 World Cup final.

The 1996 and 1997 FIFA world player of the year had had convulsions hours before their 3-0 defeat against France at the Stade de France just to the north of Paris on July 12.

Ronaldo, speaking on the first day of his testimony before the parliamentary commission (CPI) which is investigating irregularities in Brazilian football, said: "After medical tests were clear and I felt well, I insisted on playing the final."

The CPI is also investigating tax evasion by players, the Nike contract, and the sale of youngsters to foreign clubs, allegedly with false passports.

Sacchi renews romance

PARMA, Italy, Jan 10: Former Italian national team boss Arrigo Sacchi admitted on Tuesday he was rekindling a love affair as he returned to Italian First Division side Parma where he first came to prominence as a coach, reports AFP.

Sacchi replaces Alberto Malessani, who was sacked by the club late on Monday, and has signed a two-and-a-half year contract with the club.

The 55-year-old veteran admitted he was looking forward to his new challenge but said it would take some time to assess the players at his disposal.

Uncertain in exile

LONDON, Jan 10: Norway's British-based players remain in the dark over their international futures, reports AFP.

Manchester United pair Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Ronny Johnsen as well as Steffen Larsen of Tottenham and Rauger's Tore Andre Flo are likely to find out later this week if their suspensions have been lifted.

The Norwegian football association (NFF) have imposed the bans on the quartet for failing to sign a new sponsorship contract.

The situation seemed to have been resolved late on Monday when the players union brokered a deal.

But at the 11th hour the NFF president Per Ravn Omdal refused to sign the agreement, saying he must first talk to his board.

called Sant'Alberto e Casalborsotti but we are both football men," said Sacchi.

"I am not saying it is a drug but it is almost. We are not free to choose as we think ourselves to be."

Parma's transition to the top flight was completed in 1990 with promotion to Serie A.

Blackburn defender Henning Berg the players' spokesman, believes the public debate and the public outcry over the bans could have been avoided.

"This problem could have been handled better," he said. "The players have been put under enormous pressure."

"We can't have a situation where the sponsors or the marketing people dictate who can play for Norway."

MONACO, Jan 10: French champions Monaco have signed Romanian striker Florin Raducioiu on a six-month contract with an option for an extension at the end of the season, the club said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The fee paid to Dynamo Bucharest for the 30-year-old, who holds an Italian passport, was not immediately revealed.

He led the side formed in 1913 in honour of the town's illustrious composer Giuseppe Verdi to Serie B in 1986 before making his name as a coach with AC Milan.

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Petit not pleased at all

BARCELONA, Spain, Jan 10: Frustrated French midfielder Emmanuel Petit, left out of the Barcelona first team, joked it wasn't worth shooting club officials in an effort to get his place, reports AFP.

Petit and keeper Richard Dutruel, also of France, told Spanish media on Tuesday they were unhappy after being dumped from coach Lorenzo Serra Ferrer's plans.

Petit, who did not play in Sunday's 3-2 victory at Real Oviedo, said: "I train hard and I feel my best on the pitch but I feel frustrated. Then again, what can I do? Get a gun and shoot everybody?"



TORE ANDRE FLO



OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER



Lazio superstar Marcelo Salas (L) wrong-footing China's Li Weifang during their exhibition match at Rome on January 9.