

## Brave Lizarazu

MUNICH, Germany, Jan 12: France and Bayern Munich defender Biscuit Lizarazu will attend his club's winter training camp in Malaga, Spain, despite recent threats from Basque separatist group ETA, a club official Thursday reports AFP.

Lizarazu, who was born in Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the French Basque country, currently has two bodyguards, but was given the green light to go to Malaga by Spanish police.

The World and European champion will take part in Bayern's friendly match Friday against a Maltese select, in Valletta, and will remain with the team at their training base in Malaga prior to the league restart on January 26.

On Monday officials from the German champions had suggested that Lizarazu could possibly miss the camp.

In December Lizarazu's parents received a letter saying that their 31-year-old son must pay a "revolutionary tax" because he "played in the national team of an enemy state".

## Liverpool reject bid for Fowler

LONDON, Jan 12: Liverpool have turned down a 12 million pound (£17.5 million dollar) bid from English Premiership rivals Aston Villa for striker Robbie Fowler, reports AFP.

The move by Villa boss John Gregory came after the proposed transfer of River Plate striker Juan Pablo Angel collapsed.

But Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier dismissed the bid, claiming: "As soon as I heard that the Angel deal had collapsed I expected some kind of approach from Aston Villa, so it was no surprise."

"I told Robbie about it and I told him that we didn't want him to go. But if he wants to leave then there are offers for him - not just from Villa."

"Robbie told me he wants to stay, and that is fine. We want him to stay and we have turned down the offers for him."

Chelsea have also made their interest in England striker Fowler clear but have so far received no encouragement from Liverpool.

Fowler was left out of the squad for the Worthington Cup semi-final at Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old was involved in a late-night fracas outside a Liverpool bar last week, although he was the innocent party.

Houllier added: "We have four strikers, and if any one of them doesn't want to be taken down and fight for a place then they know what they can do."

"I have made it clear that any one of them who doesn't want the competition can do what Titi Camara did and come in and see me. It's up to them all."

Referring to the late-night incident, Houllier said: "He does have to understand that he has lost his place in the side because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He knows that. That means he has to work his socks off to win back his place."

## Rude awakening for Rok duo

PERUGIA, Italy, Jan 12: South Korea's Ahn Jung Hwan and China's Ma Ming Yu are finding that life with Italian First Division side Perugia is something of an ordeal, Gazzetta dello Sport reported Friday, reports AFP.

Perugia was the club that propelled Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata - already a megastar in his homeland - on the road to global stardom before his move to AS Roma.

But the club's latest two Asian imports are finding it hard to get a look-in and while Ahn is doing his best to adapt Ma has even stopped trying to learn Italian.

Ahn, 24, admits he was moved to tears in his early days at the club.

"The first month I had a dreadful interpreter," he explained. "Perugia coach Sere Cosmi would say 'do not pass the ball back' and he would translate it as 'always pass the ball back'."

Ahn has found it hard to get back in Cosmi's plans after appearing in his club's first two games of the season - partly because modest Perugia are exceeding expectations and in a comfortable midtable position.

But Cosmi insists he is still part of his plans, saying: "He will get over it, he will become a great player."

The future looks less bright for Ma, who this week scored a brilliant goal for the Chinese national team in their 6-3 friendly defeat by Lazio at Rome's Olympic Stadium.

But midfielder Ma admitted: "It will not change my life at Perugia. Here they are all better than me."

Dubbed 'nonno' (granddad) by his team-mates because he looks considerably older than his 30 years Ma has abandoned any attempt to learn the language and eschews social contact with his team-mates, preferring to eat in the Chinese restaurant above which he lives with his wife.

The fact that their three-year-old daughter had to stay in China does not make life any easier.

"Cosmi no longer says anything to me," said Ma.



NOTHING NEW! Football idol Diego Maradona being surrounded by Italian tax police on his arrival at Rome's Fiumicino airport on January 11. - AFP photo

## Diego on familiar ground!



ROME, Jan 12: Argentine football legend Diego Maradona arrived in Italy on Thursday evening and was

informed by tax police waiting for him at Fiumicino airport that he was being investigated for an alleged tax fraud of around 24.6 million dollars, reports AFP.

Maradona promptly laid the blame for the problem at the door of his former club side Napoli, telling Radio Mitre: "The problems with the tax authorities do not concern me but Napoli and (club director) Corrado Ferlaino."

There is no suggestion that investigators are looking at the club or Ferlaino in their inquiries but Maradona continued: "In my contract it was written in big letters that Napoli had to pay my bill. Let them go and collect (the money) from Ferlaino because he was in charge of the club when I was filling the stadium with 100,000 people."

It was certainly an unusual welcoming committee for Maradona. The 10-year-old, who almost singlehandedly inspired Argentina to the 1986 World Cup trophy, arrived on a flight via Madrid from Buenos Aires but around 20 officers were waiting for him and asked him discreetly to accompany them to an office where the papers were served.

Maradona, who only last month was voted alongside Brazilian legend Pele as the greatest footballer in the 20th Century, had to sign a document saying he had been served with the claim and then left, clearly upset by the turn of events.

"It is always the same story when I come back to Italy," Maradona said, joking. "I have not got the money on me at the moment."

"I am fine and I do want to reassure my mother, my daughters and the people of Argentina. Of course people are trying to make this into a big

deal but it is all just a storm in a teacup."

After the order had been served a phalanx of police escorted the player - dressed in a green shirt and beige trousers - through a crowd of journalists and cameramen in chaotic scenes and Maradona, accompanied by his manager Guillermo Coppola, then got into a grey van that whisked him away to Rome.

The Argentinian, who last year recovered from severe heart problems, was in Italy to promote a series of commemorative medals for his 40th birthday in a commercial deal and was also scheduled to appear on a popular Italian television programme.

It has also been speculated that Maradona will attend Napoli's First Division game with Verona on Sunday but that is yet to be confirmed as any suggestions he would meet Ferlaino to discuss a possible role with the club he led to two Italian titles.

## Serie A preview

# Roma dictating terms



MILAN, Jan 12: AS Roma look to increase their stranglehold on the Italian First Division on Sunday with the lead-

ers hosting ailing Bari in a match that could see them inevitably stretch their lead to 11 points, reports AFP.

Carlo Ancelotti, coach of second-placed Juventus, declared this week that the race for the Scudetto was now a two-horse race between his team and Roma.

But Ancelotti knows that if Juve slip up in their home match against seventh-placed Bologna and Fabio Capello's Roma prevail that not many punters will put their shirt on the Zebros to rein in the thoroughbreds from the Italian capital.

But while Roma's imperial march towards what would be a first title in 18 years continues there will be two interesting sideshows in the weekend's Serie A programme as two former national coaches Dino Zoff and Arrigo Sacchi mark their return to frontline management.

And fate has conspired to ensure both Zoff and Sacchi will be revisiting battlefields where they have previously covered themselves in glory.

Zoff, who took the coaching vacancy at Lazio left by Sven Goran Eriksson's departure for England, takes the Italian champions to Udinese in his native Friuli region - the club where the 1982 World Cup winner began his legendary career back in 1961.

Udinese's Italian international midfielder Stefano Fiore faces the team that he is scheduled to join in the summer - but reports persist that Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti

and Udinese's sugar daddy Giampaolo Pozzo have agreed to bring the move forward and that it will take place immediately after the match.

Sacchi also returns to a happy hunting ground as he begins his second stint in charge of Parma with Sunday evening's match against Inter Milan at the San Siro. The scene of his greatest triumphs in his days as AC Milan coach.

Sacchi ended his first spell at Parma - when both coach and club were unknowns - to move to Milan where he lifted the sleeping giants to become the best club side in the world.

The coach has not said whether he will impose his favoured 4-4-2 formation on the Parma side bequeathed him by the sacked Alberto Malesani as he bids to add to the pressure on Inter's beleaguered coach Marco Tardelli.

Sacchi's former side AC Milan meanwhile, visit Fiorentina in a match that also has something of a managerial subplot.

Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni is stalling on signing a new contract - reportedly over a clause that says it will not be binding on the club if the Rossoneri fail to qualify for next year's Champions League.

And sources emanating from the boardroom say that Milan have earmarked Fiorentina's Turkish coach Fatih Terim - himself holding out on signing an option for next season - as their new man should Zac part with the club he led to the title two seasons ago.

And just to show how Machiavellian the world of Italian football management is, Zaccheroni topped the ante in his contract negotiations when he recently confirmed he had met Inter chairman Massimo Moratti in a restaurant.

He missed the meeting was accidental but it fuelled speculation that the latter wants Zac to cross over the San Siro divide should he decide to disown with Tardelli, who has only been in the job for three months.

If any coach is unsackable at present it is Capello who will be deprived of injured Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta, Brazilian defender Cafu and Cristiano Zucchi (both suspended) for the Bari game.

Brazilian midfielder Emerson could feature in his first game since the injury sustained in August shortly after moving from Germany's Bayer Leverkusen.

Juventus too have their personnel problems against Bologna with Antonio Conte and Alessandro Tacchinardi out although Dutchman Edgar Davids returns.

Valencia are still in third but without and the Bergamo side visit Reggina who are looking for a third win in a row after climbing off the bottom of the division last week by beating Parma - and sealing Malesani's fate.

Another southern side showing signs of renewed life is Napoli who will hope to build on the win that hastened Eriksson's departure at Lazio by another triumph on their travels, this time at Verona.

Lecce host Vicenza while on Saturday afternoon Brescia is the destination for Perugia.

**FIXTURES (14:00 GMT unless stated)**  
Saturday: Brescia v Perugia, Fiorentina v AC Milan (19:30 GMT)

Sunday: Juventus v Bologna, Lecce v Vicenza, Reggina v Atalanta, AS Roma v Bari, Udinese v Lazio, Verona v Napoli, Inter Milan v Parma (19:30 GMT)

## Emerson back in action

ROME, Jan 12: AS Roma's Brazilian midfielder Emerson played his first full match since August on Thursday, featuring in a team that beat village side Fiumicino 3-0 in a friendly, reports AFP.

Emerson, 24, played all 90 minutes of the game but could not say if he would be first for Sunday afternoon's First Division match with Bari.

"Everything went well," he said after the match. "But it is too early to make a decision about Bari. I will see how it goes overnight."

"But as far as today is concerned I am happy, my knee has done well - the most important thing is the psychological aspect," continued the man whose full name is Emerson Ferreira da Rosa.

Roma coach Fabio Capello said: "Against Bari he alone will decide and he will tell me whether he is ready to go at least on the bench."

Capello revealed he was toying with the idea of playing Emerson in the right-back position vacated by his compatriot and 1994 World Cup-winning defender Cafu, who will be suspended against Bari.

Emerson, who joined the club from German outfit Bayer Leverkusen in the summer, had stints in Brazil with Botafogo and Gremio.

## Sahara Millennium Cup

### Great starts by Jordan, Uruguay

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Results in the Sahara Millennium Cup football tournament on Thursday.

**Preliminary league**  
**GROUP THREE - AT GOA**  
Jordan 1 (Faisal Suleman 88) Romania 0

**GROUP TWO - AT COCHIN**  
Uruguay 2 (Alexandro Zuparic 20pen, Ricardo Varela 30) Iceland 1 (Jan Hunksson 32)

H-U 2-1

## Petrescu moves to Saints

LONDON, Jan 12: Bradford's Romanian international wing-back Dan Petrescu has completed his move to Premier-league Southampton; the club confirmed Friday, reports AFP.

The Romanian signed a two-and-a-half year deal after the two clubs agreed a nominal fee.

Petrescu had been informed by new Bantams boss Jim Jeffries that he, along with Benito Carbone and Stan Collymore, does not have a future at Valley Parade.

Petrescu could go straight into the Saints' squad to face Charlton at The Dell on Saturday.

## Beckham sings for new coach

LONDON, Jan 12: England skipper David Beckham on Friday called on critics of new England coach Sven Goran Eriksson to forget the debate over his nationality and throw their weight behind the Swede, reports AFP.

Eriksson has already come under fire because Eriksson is England's first foreign manager, but Beckham insists it is time to put those differences aside and unite behind Eriksson.

"I think he's got to be given a chance by everyone," said the Manchester United star on the club's television station MUTV.

"Media wise, they can make or break you really and it's important that everyone gets behind him from the start whatever anyone thinks whether it should be an English manager or a foreign manager."

"At the end of the day he is the England manager and everyone has to get behind him."

There's a lot of pressure playing for England, let alone managing them, so it's important we all get behind him.

# Coaches steal the limelight



PARIS, Jan 12: Two former coaches of the Italian national team, Arrigo Sacchi and Dino Zoff,

this weekend return to frontline club management while the man Zoff replaced prepares to manage England, reports AFP.

While Sacchi and Zoff settle into the managerial chain again two of their European counterparts will be feeling their collars nervously.

Suave Argentinian Hector Cuper, who has taken Real Mallorca and Valencia to successive European club finals, will be trying to convince Valencia fans his negative tactics are the right ones in the top of the table clash with champions Deportivo La Coruna.

In France Monaco's Claude Puel, who as a rookie coach stunned many by guiding the side to last season's title, will hope that the champions start the second-half of the season on a winning note against third-placed Sedan as they stand just four points above the relegation zone.

While AS Roma look to increase their stranglehold on the Italian First Division on Sunday by hosting ailing Bari, Sacchi takes the Parma club he is managing for the second time to face Inter Milan at the San Siro, the scene of his greatest triumphs in his days as AC Milan coach.

Sacchi ended his first spell at Parma - when both coach and club were unknowns - to move to Milan where he lifted the sleeping giants to become the best club side in the world.

Zoff, the goalkeeper for Italy's 1982 World Cup-winning team, takes charge of Italian champions Lazio for their fixture at Udinese, where he began his career in 1961.

Zoff stepped in from a position on Lazio's board to fill the

vacancy left by Eriksson's departure to guide England's national team.

Eriksson signed the England contract last year and then insisted he would stay at the home-based club until the end of the season, but a run of poor domestic and European Champions League results prompted accusations that his mind was already on the England job.

A 2-1 defeat at home to struggling Napoli on Sunday proved the final straw for the fans - and Eriksson, who shocked his players by resigning on Tuesday.

Cuper was verbally mauled by his club's supporters after the humiliating King's Cup exit to Third Division side Guadix, and a 1-0 win against lowly Racing Santander last Sunday was not enough to keep the growling pack at bay.

Influential playmaker Gaizka Mendietra has been lending Cuper his moral support after



ARRIGO SACCHI  
The coach faced press accusations of strangling Valencia's ambitions with unadventurous tactics.

Valencia and Deportivo La

Coruna will battle it out on Saturday to decide who will stem the irresistible charge of Real Madrid to another title.

The European Champions, who registered their seventh successive victory with a 3-1 win over Alaves last Sunday, sit joint top with Valencia - the team they beat in last season's European Cup - on 35 points but with a game in hand, have a chance to prolong their winning spell as they host midtable side Oviedo.

Puel has no need of press comment to tell him that his job is in danger - a glance at the French league table will tell him everything he needs to know: last year's champions are lying in a miserable 15th place.

As the French league returns from its winter break, Monaco face Sedan, a club that normally would be expected to be in relegation trouble but instead are looking down on their richer relations and dreaming of qualification for European competition.

The worries appear to be piling up for Puel.

He bolstered his squad with Italian defender Christian Panucci and former Romanian international striker Florin Raducioiu, who promptly admitted that he was far from match fit.

To add to his woes Chilean international defender Pablo Contreras is having his Italian passport checked by the French league authorities in the latest case to come under the micro scope.

At least Puel can take comfort from the plight of another of France's glamour clubs, Marseille, sitting one place below Monaco.

Former Spanish national coach Javier Clemente knows that life on the French Riviera may get chilly if his team lose to second-from-bottom Toulouse on Saturday, when league leaders Nantes face Auxerre

## Primera Liga preview

# Top spot beckons Real



MADRID, Jan 11: In-form Real Madrid have a chance to go top of the Spanish First Division this

Sunday while fellow title contenders Valencia and Deportivo La Coruna fight it out to decide who will stem the Merengues' New Year tide, reports AFP.

The European Champions registered their seventh successive victory with a 3-1 win over Alaves last Sunday.

The capital outfit, who sit joint top with Valencia - the team they beat in last season's European Cup - on 35 points but with a game in hand, have a chance to prolong their winning spell as they host midtable men Oviedo.

But they will be without Brazilian international midfielder Flavio Conceicao, who will be out for three months due to a groin injury.

However, Valencia will be just as determined to prove that they can last the pace after taking their foot off the gas of late.

Their Argentine coach Hector Cuper was publicly mauled after the humiliating King's Cup exit to Third Division side

Guadix, and even a 1-0 win against lowly Racing Santander last Sunday was not enough to keep the growling pack at bay.

On the pitch influential playmaker Gaizka Mendietra has been lending Cuper his moral support after Cuper was accused of effectively burying Valencia's ambitions in the sand with unadventurous tactics.

And on the field Cuper is looking to Norwegian international John Carew, who has scored seven of Valencia's last 13 goals and came to the Catalan side's rescue last week with a solitary goal, to get Valencia back on track.

Undoubtedly, Deportivo will do their best to capitalise on Cuper's ill fortune, and any subsequent negative effects on the team.

But the Spanish champions have their own domestic troubles after they too were knocked out of the King's Cup, by Second Division Tenerife, and got their New Year off to a poor start with a 3-1 defeat to steady homeboys Valladolid.

It seems like trouble is brewing at all the major clubs in the Liga.

Barcelona are no exception

## Premiership preview

# Wise for a fight-back



LONDON, Jan 12: Chelsea captain Dennis Wise, who seemed set to leave the club just

a week ago, has called for the team to pull together to salvage their season as they face London rivals Arsenal on Saturday, reports AFP.

Wise has decided to stay with the Stamford Bridge club he joined a decade ago after a last-minute intervention from chairman Ken Bates, who contacted the tough-tackling midfielder last weekend as he was about to speak to Graeme Souness, the manager of First Division club Blackburn.

Bates, as well as managing 'director' Colin Hutchinson and teammates led by Gianfranco Zola, managed to persuade Wise to stay.

Wise, who had been upset about being dropped or played out of position by boss Claudio Ranieri, must now wait to see if he is picked in his favoured central midfield role against Arsenal at Highbury.

Chelsea are ninth and their expensively-assembled squad has failed to win away from home this season while the second-placed Gunners are unbeaten at home in the Premiership this season.

Wise told the club's official website: "I'm sure we can still achieve something this season - we know we can, we're a quality team."

"We've had a few players injured who are coming back now and we're gradually getting up there and in the next round of the FA Cup, with a good draw away to Gillingham."

"We can go on from there. As a group now we need to be all together in this and win something or get into Europe."

Arsenal's Thierry Henry, scorer of 13 Premiership goals this season, and Chelsea's Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink, who has bagged 12 in the Premiership, will be fighting for honours.

Dutchman Hasselbaink has a great record against Arsenal, having scored in all of his previous FA Cup appearances against the Gunners.

League leaders Manchester United completed their first step to achieving the domestic

Double when they beat Fulham 2-1 in the FA Cup last weekend.

However, ahead of their clash at bottom club Bradford, Sir Alex Ferguson has been hit by injuries to Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt - just when he thought his treatment room was emptying with the return to action of Teddy Sheringham, Jaap Stam and Andy Cole.

The Manchester United manager has signed Scholes off for two weeks to recover from a rib injury, while Butt is struggling to be fit for Saturday's match after taking a knock on his hip.

Ferguson said: "Paul suffered the rib injury against Ipswich just before Christmas, and I only used him as a substitute at Newcastle."

"Then he got a bang on it again and aggravated it against West Ham on New Year's Day."

"He has torn cartilage in his rib cage, so after he missed the Fulham game I'm now giving him two weeks off."

"He'll probably be back for selection against Aston Villa a week on Saturday."

But injured his hip against Fulham on Sunday, and Ferguson said: "The challenge took the skin off the hip bone."

"It was a bad and painful knock, and I think Nicky will be struggling for Bradford."

If Butt is ruled out Ferguson could move David Beckham or Phil Neville inside to partner Roy Keane in the heart of the midfield.

**FIXTURES (all 15:00GMT unless stated)**

Saturday: Arsenal v Chelsea, Aston Villa v Liverpool, Bradford v Manchester United, Everton v Tottenham, Manchester City v Leeds, Middlesbrough v Derby, Newcastle v Coventry, Southampton v Charlton, West Ham v Sunderland

Sunday: Ipswich v Leicester (16:00GMT)



New England manager Sven Goran Eriksson during a photo session at the Football Association's headquarters in London yesterday. - AFP photo

## Eriksson will do the talking



LONDON, Jan 12: Sven Goran Eriksson opened a new era for England on Friday and ex-

pressed confidence that he would lead the team through to the 2002 World Cup finals, reports AFP.

But Eriksson, who arrived in London after resigning as coach of Lazio earlier in the week, warned: "It's time for the talking to stop."

"I am here now finally. I look forward to starting. So far there's been a lot of talk in Italy, England and Sweden."

"But now from tomorrow I am going to start and the talking can stop," said the 52-year-old Swede, the first foreigner to coach England.

Eriksson will get an early

taste of what the English game can offer when he runs the rule over his first Premiership match Saturday.

"I am going to see West Ham against Sunderland tomorrow, then tomorrow evening I will travel up to Ipswich to talk to Peter Taylor and see the game (Ipswich versus Leicester) the day after," the Swede explained.

Eriksson said the manner of his leaving Lazio was a disappointment after the club's poor form in recent months but he had to put that behind him.

"I was very disappointed about that (Lazio) but pleased to be here," he told reporters.

Eriksson will undertake a 10-week crash course on the English game prior to England's next World Cup qualifier against Finland, though his first game is a February 28

friendly against Spain.

"I think we have about 10 weeks before we're going to play the game against Finland for World Cup qualification so in 10 weeks I hope to see a lot of the games," Eriksson said.

"I believe that we shall qualify for the World Cup and I must remain positive. There are still six games to play so of course we have a big possibility to qualify so that's the first aim of course."

But Eriksson admitted he was under no illusions as to the size of the task facing him.

He added: "I know it is a very important and difficult job, a big job, a fantastic job - it's a big big challenge for me."

"I've been a manager for many many years but I've never had a national team before, I hope I can do a good job."