

Brave Lizarazu

MUNICH, Germany, Jan 12: France and Bayern Munich defender Bixente 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 take a knock-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 move to tears in his early days at the club.

The first month I had a dreadful interpreter," he explained. "Perugia coach Sersel 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 Japan 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

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.

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 Suleiman 88) Romania 0 H-0

GROUP TWO - AT COCHIN

Uruguay 2 (Alexandro Umpierrez 26pen, Ricardo Varela 30) Iceland 1 (Danurursson 32) Iceland 1 (Danurursson 32)

H-2:1

Petrescu moves to Saints

LONDON, Jan 12: Bradford's Romanian international wing-back Dan Petrescu has completed his move to Premiership rivals 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.

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

Atlanta are still in third but witting and the Bergamo side visit Reggina who are looking for a third win in a row after climbing off the bottom of the Parma - 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 to Lazio with another triumph on their travels, this time at Verona.

Leicester 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)

Monday: 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)

Diego on familiar ground!

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

met 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 Ferlano."

There is no suggestion that investigators are looking at the club or Ferlano 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 Ferlano because he was in charge of the club when I was filling the stadium - with 100,000 people."

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 Saturday's First Division game with Verona on Sunday but that is yet to be confirmed as any suggestions he would meet Ferlano 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 leaders hosting ailing Bari in a match that could see them conveniently stretch their lead to 11 points.

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 Zebras to rein in the thoroughbreds from the Italian capital.

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 chairman Massimo Moratti in a restaurant.

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