

Petit happy at Barca

PARIS, Jan 13: Dissatisfied French midfielder Emmanuel Petit, left out of the Barcelona first team, warned Saturday that he would not stay beyond this season with the Spanish side if he failed to gain a team place, reports AFP.

Petit, who was signed by the Catalan giants from Arsenal in the off-season, is unhappy because of his lack of playing time under Barca coach Lorenc Serra Ferrer, said he would stick with the club until season's end.

"To leave mid-season would amount to a failure in my eyes," said the 30-year-old world and European champion.

"Despite offers made to me from English and French clubs I've decided to stay until June."

But he warned, "If between now and then I find that I'm not given the chance of expressing myself on the field I'll study these offers closely. In the meantime I'm not going to comment further on my situation."

French sides Monaco, Lyon and Paris Saint Germain along with English outfits Manchester United and Fulham are among the clubs reported to be interested in signing the player.

Villa have an Angel

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 13: Colombian international striker Juan Pablo Angel finally got the go ahead for his 9.5 million pounds (14.5 million dollars) transfer from River Plate to English Premiership club Aston Villa on Friday, the Argentinian club said, reports AFP.

The 25-year-old, scorer of 30 goals in 40 appearances for River Plate in the past two seasons, had been expected to move to last season's FA Cup finalists - who are paying out a record fee for the striker - in late December, but the transfer was complicated by the fact that Angel's agent Gustavo Mascardi owned half of his contract.

The agent's demands for a fee in excess of one million dollars on top of half of the transfer fee initially led world football governing body FIFA to block the move.

However, River Plate president David Pintado said that the final snag had been sorted out.

"The deal was completed this morning (Friday). The only problem that remained to be resolved was a clause stipulating that in the event that Angel is transferred in the future, he would not be allowed to join an Argentinian club."

"In the end, it was agreed that if he returns to Argentina, River Plate have an exclusive option on him," he added.

Angel's signing ends a long search by Villa coach John Gregory for a striker which included failed bids for Celta Vigo's South African international striker Benny McCarthy and Liverpool's out of favour England international Robbie Fowler.

Just ask Asprilla

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 13: Controversial Colombian striker Faustino Tino' Asprilla knocked a player out cold after an opponent threw two punches at him - and said he was used to such rough and tumble after two years of 'war-like' football in England with Newcastle, reports AFP.

Asprilla, who had two up-and-down years with Newcastle under Kevin Keegan and Kenny Dalglish before rejoining Italy's Parma, is now with Brazilian side Fluminense and lost his cool after a defender twice deliberately hit him in a so-called friendly on Thursday.

Sports daily Lance quoted Asprilla as saying that there was only so much provocation anyone could take.

Maradona says it all

ROME, Jan 13: Argentine football legend Diego Maradona took a swipe on Friday at his homeland and praised Cuba, the country that nursed him back to health after his much-documented heart problems last year, reports AFP.

Maradona, appearing on popular gameshow "Dove ti porta il cuore" (go where your heart takes you) slammed Argentina's human rights record which he said compared unfavourably with that of the Communist island state.

"When Argentina voted against Cuba (to back the trade embargo) I was deeply ashamed," he told hostess Milly Corbelli.

"I felt bad as an Argentine. Argentina has no right to vote against anything because with us 30,000 people have disappeared."

"And in Argentina, people who have no money die, not in Cuba. Cuba is an example."

Maradona also espoused family values when he said he was worried about his daughters Dalma and Giannina now they are reaching the age where they go out at night-time.

"I let Dalma go out at night but at midnight I go and get her. If I ever see her crying because of something a fiance did to her then the fiance would have an accident."

Maradona also lambasted directors of his former club Napoli, ending speculation that he would be given an ambassadorial role for the Italian first division outfit.

Maradona in particular targeted Napoli director Corrado Ferlaino whom he blamed for the collapse of negotiations after he met club president Giorgio Corbelli at a top Rome hotel.

"I gave him another chance," said Maradona in reference to Ferlaino.

"But once again he betrayed me. I am sorry but I can't work at Napoli alongside such a person."

"In December when I came to Rome I had dinner with Ferlaino and brought my family with me."

"I would not have done the same thing for Bill Clinton. In return he has betrayed me again; Ferlaino thinks only of money and not the good of Napoli."

Corbelli was more circumspect in his reaction.

"It was a calm meeting and at the end we decided to take time to think about it," Corbelli said.

"Currently there are not the conditions for the project we have talked about in the last few days," he added.

The Napoli president also defended his boardroom colleague Ferlaino.

"Ferlaino is Napoli Football Club... it is he (Maradona) who wanted this (the split), Napoli must go forward," he said.

The title of the programme might have appeared providential given the heart problems that almost ended his life last year but he was in a good mood, embracing children, juggling a football and then an orange and telling Corbelli "You get more beautiful every time I see you."

However, Maradona did refer to his brush with death last year.

Pointing up to heaven he said: "The fellow with the beard (God) told me not to die. It's reassure them."

"I had to phone Argentina to reassure them I had not been shot. I have broad shoulders but it gets worse every time."

The player insisted however that the tax police who had greeted him at Fiumicino had been "very nice".

Maradona's outburst ended any talk of a job with Napoli but he had given a hint of his disenchantment with Ferlaino the night before after his shock encounter with the tax authorities.

The paper quoted Pirouzi manager Nasser Ebrahimi, who was given a six-month ban by the Iranian football federation, saying the friendlies would be held in March. It did not say who the other opponent would be.

Iran and the United States have not had diplomatic relations since April 1980, several months after Islamic radicals stormed the US embassy in Tehran and took the staff hostage.

Los Angeles, however, has one of the largest Iranian expatriate communities in the world.

PSG play down Ronaldinho story

PARIS, Jan 13 (AFP): Paris Saint Germain, struggling to relaunch their fading season, denied reports Friday that they have signed Brazilian international Ronaldinho de Assis Moreira, nicknamed "Gaucho".

French radio station Sport O'FM said Ronaldinho, out of contract at Gremio of Porto Alegre next month, had agreed a five-year contract.

Sport O'FM said Ronaldinho, who turns 21 in March and who recently turned down offers of a much-improved contract with Gremio worth around 30,000 dollars a week, could be in action for PSG within the week.

But PSG said the report was unfounded.

"PSG wish to deny the story carried today on a Parisian radio station according to which Ronaldinho has been officially taken on by Paris Saint Germain," a club statement said.

The images can be found by accessing the MyTg window on the website and then clicking on the 'special' section.

Supporters are also invited to submit their own photographs or videos of fans misbehaving to the Milan office of the company for publication on the web.

Iran may play 2 US friendlies

TEHRAN, Jan 13: Iran's popular Pirouzi football club will play two friendlies in the United States in March, newspaper reports said on Saturday, reports AFP.

Pirouzi, one of the most popular sides in football-mad Iran, will play a match against the Los Angeles Galaxy, the Iran News said.

Seven players and both managers from Pirouzi and Tehran neighbours Esteghlal were slapped with heavy suspensions and fines earlier this month after a bad-tempered derby sparked violent fan rioting.

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Net thugs

MILAN, Jan 13: Internet users are being encouraged to shop Italian football hooligans to the police in a new anti-violence campaign launched by a leading website on Friday, reports AFP.

Finninvest's site www.jumpy.it is publishing images of unnamed hooligans filmed while committing acts of violence and is encouraging surfers who recognise the culprits to either contact the webmasters or inform the police of who they are.

The images can be found by accessing the MyTg window on the website and then clicking on the 'special' section.

Supporters are also invited to submit their own photographs or videos of fans misbehaving to the Milan office of the company for publication on the web.

Crowd misbehaviour is a regular occurrence in Italy and the serious incidents before, during and after last weekend's clash in Rome between Lazio and Napoli have fuelled calls for a crackdown.

Japan bring in the French Connection

PARIS, Jan 13: France coach Roger Lemerre and former Paris Saint Germain boss Philippe Bergeroo have been called in to help the Japanese national football squad prepare for their World Cup campaign, reports AFP.

European title-winning coach Lemerre has been invited by long-time friend and Japan coach Philippe Troussier and the Japanese Football Federation to take part in a coaching seminar in Tokyo until January 17.

Former French international goalkeeper Bergeroo has accepted an invitation to examine nine Japanese goalkeepers from February 18-24.

Following his stay in the Tokyo suburb of Tsukuba, Lemerre will then travel to a thermal spa at the southern island of Kyushu where the French squad will train before defending their World Cup title in 2002.

Eriksson gains their trust

LONDON, Jan 13: England's fickle football media heaping praise on incoming national team manager...

Sven Goran-Eriksson Saturday, swooning in unison after the Swede's polished display at his first full press conference, reports AFP.

Eriksson, who was thrust into the England job six months ahead of schedule after quitting Lazio earlier this week, received glowing reviews across the board after being presented to the press on Friday.

The mass-selling tabloid The Sun - which in the past has been responsible for some of the most relentlessly vitriolic campaigns against English managers - trumpeted on its back page: "We're right behind you Mr Eriksson!"

The paper told its readers: "While some sad papers have poured scorn on the appointment of the new England coach, The Sun is backing him all the way."

The Sun praised Eriksson's performance in Friday's introductory press conference at the English FA's headquarters.

"For the first time this season we had a quality performance from England," the paper observed.

"Sven Goran Eriksson handled his opening day with an assurance we have not come to expect from our managers. Gone are Glenn Hoddle's 'them boys' and Kevin Keegan's misplaced passion."

Eriksson begins his tour on Saturday when he watches West Ham United against Sunderland and will take in Ipswich Town against Leicester City. He will get his first look at Manchester United when they play Aston Villa at Old Trafford next week.

"I see as many players as possible first," he said.

"I haven't had the chance to see too much English football with what was happening at Lazio but Tord Grip (Eriksson's assistant) has been here for a few months and has seen many players."

"He has told me about many young players I don't know and I think the future should be good for the national team."

Although reluctant to provide a list of likely contenders, Eriksson did name West Ham midfielder Joe Cole, Manchester United defender Wes Brown, Leeds United goalkeeper Paul Robinson and Liverpool duo Emile Heskey and Steven Gerrard as players Grip had recommended.

"But you can't win without experience and England also have players with a great deal of experience of playing at the top level regularly," Eriksson added.

"Beckham and Scholes are world class players - any manager in the world would say so - but it is up to every player to show me he is good enough."

Eriksson said it was wrong to label him as a 4-4-2 man. "At Lazio last year we often played 4-3-3 or 4-5-1. I am always flexible, not maybe when I was young but definitely now."

"But you select your best players and then select your system."

Eriksson seems to know what he is talking about - which is a first," the paper commented.

The Daily Mail said that behind Eriksson's "silky facade... is a will of pure Swedish steel."

"The charm offensive was clever. As a stranger in a strange land, Eriksson's first press conference was a talk in rather than the bark-back sessions which characterised the press on Friday."

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to a lone protestor outside FA headquarters on Friday, dressed as a British John Bull in full Union Jack regalia.

The man in the John Bull outfit outside 25 Soho Square was an embarrassing reminder of the blinkered imperial past we are surely trying to escape even in the year 2001 we have Colonel Blimp and his one-eyed Rude Britannia reminding us of all our yesterdays," The Sun reported.

The Daily Telegraph said Eriksson's press-conference charm had been an articulate response to the one-man protest.

"The first foreigner to manage England marched into his new office yesterday, past the stuntman in the Union Jack outfit... and outlined his plans to cure the lame Three Lions."

"After hearing the Swede's thoughtful words, the xenophobic outpourings of the man outside just seemed like a load of old John Bull," the paper stated.

But the Daily Mirror sounded a note of caution. The newspaper, which had described Eriksson as a loser earlier this week, praised the display of the former Lazio coach.

However the Mirror warned of possible rough times ahead.

"Whatever he does, Eriksson knows he will never be able to disguise - nor want to - his nationalistic, and there will always be some who will use it against him - waiting him to fall simply because he is a foreigner," the paper said.

No need to rush things

LONDON, Jan 13: England's new manager Sven Goran Eriksson said on Friday all talk of selection, formation, tactics, preparation and captaincy was on hold until he had had time to get to know the players, reports Reuters.

The Swede met the English media at the FA's headquarters in central London but refused to be drawn on his ideas for reviving the national team's fortunes.

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captain but warned that Eriksson might not consider the 34-year-old player as part of England's future.

"He might have other plans. He has some good youngsters (pointing through) said the Frenchman."

Eriksson might be lucky in that he is arriving at the right time.

The Swede himself said he was confident of turning around England's World Cup qualifying campaign, starting with the games against Finland and Albania in March.

"We still have six games to play and of course we can win them."

"We have to improve and I will listen to what previous England managers have to say when I meet them with their clubs over the next few weeks."

Glenn Hoddle (Southampton), Terry Venables (Middlesbrough) and Bobby Robson (Newcastle United) are all now in charge of premier league clubs while Graham Taylor is back at first division Watford.

"I don't want to criticise those before me and everything I have done before is also now history."

"In football - for the players and for me - you have to show every day."

"People can have their opinions on me and I can only reply by winning games."

COLOGNE, Germany, Jan 13: Disgraced German football coach Christoph Daum admitted taking cocaine Friday after returning from a three-month self-imposed exile in Florida, reports AFP.

Former Bayer Leverkusen coach Daum had been lined up to take control of the German national team in June but was ruled out of contention amid allegations of cocaine-fuelled orgies with prostitutes.

Daum had initially denied the allegations but was caught out after analysis of a hair sample suggested he had taken illegal drugs. A second test proved inconclusive.

But on returning from the United States, Daum told a press conference here Friday: "I admit I have taken cocaine in the past."

"I took the drug in private. There's no question of me being an addict or being ill as a side effect," the 47-year-old added.

"I am aware of the scope of this error and I am ready to assume responsibility for it," Daum said.

Earlier this week Daum called for the matter to be resolved and said he was anxious to resume his coaching career.

Rudi Voller, who has successfully stepped into the breach as German national coach, said he was pleased but surprised to see Daum return.



Argentine football legend Diego Maradona addresses a press briefing in Rome on January 12. - AFP photo

French First Division Lens, Lyon share points

PARIS, Jan 13: Lens' Argentinian striker Esteban Furbes on Friday lit up the first French league match after the three-week winter break but ultimately failed to prevent the match with Lyon ending 0-0, reports AFP.

The hard fought point moved Lyon up to fourth place ahead of Bordeaux on goal difference, though Bordeaux can leapfrog them by just taking a point at Guingamp on Saturday.

In a highly competitive game in front of a near-capacity crowd at Lens' Felix-Bollaert stadium, Furbes, who was signed last year for six million dollars from English Premiership club Derby after doubts arose there about the authenticity of his passport, gave Lyon's Brazilian central defender Edmilson a torrid night.

In two almost identical chances in the first half Furbes skillfully controlled two long passes on his chest inside the Lyon penalty area, before turning his marker and shooting sharply.

But he blasted the first chance over the bar and although Lyon goalkeeper Gregory Coupet was beaten by the second shot, the ball rebounded off the crossbar.

The second-half lacked the bite of the first and Furbes was replaced in the 70th minute by Antoine Sibierski, who came close to breaking the deadlock for the 1998 French champions with a free kick which rolled just past the post in the dying minutes.

Lyon had their best chance early in the first half when Steed Malbranque's close-range shot was parried by Lens goalkeeper Guillaume Warmuz.

Lyon's French international Vikasli Dhorasoo had his appeals for a penalty turned down despite seemingly being tripped in the box by Ferdinand Coly as he raced towards the goal.

Edmilson completed a forgettable night by totally missing after Cameroon international Marc-Vivien Foe had headed down a cross into his path just metres from the Lens goal.

Lens moved into eighth place after the match, but will probably be dislodged when the bulk of the league programme takes place on Saturday, when leaders Nantes face 12th-placed Auxerre.



Lens' Elhadji Diouf (L) tangles with a Lyon player during their First Division encounter on January 12. - AFP photo



Former Bayer Leverkusen and national team coach Christoph Daum gestures during a press conference on January 12. Daum admitted that he took cocaine. - AFP photo