

Crystal Palace may go for Oman custodian

DUBAI, Jan 23: Oman's international goalkeeper Badr Jumaa said Tuesday that he could be playing for Crystal Palace in the English First Division next season, reports AFP.

O'Leary admits court case effect

LONDON, Jan 23: Leeds United manager David O'Leary admitted Tuesday that the court case hanging over Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate has affected the club's quest for honours this season, reports AFP.

Despite magnificent performances in the Champions League, in which they still have a good chance of making the last eight, Leeds have struggled in the Premiership and are languishing in the bottom half of the table.

Bowyer, 24, and Woodgate, 21, are due at Hull Crown Court from January 29 on charges - which they both deny - of causing grievous bodily harm and affray following an attack on an Asian student a year ago.

O'Leary revealed the impact the impending case has had on his team. "Once the implications of the episode sunk in, players were adversely affected," he said.

"One room at the Thorp Arch (Leeds) training complex became a solicitor's office. There was too much going on, too many people missing training sessions, then going off to be interviewed in police stations.

"It's been very disruptive. It affects everybody, not just those who have been charged.

"People have not really appreciated what strain we have been under this season. We have had many people going off to police stations to be interviewed and players have missed training here, there and everywhere.

"I have been planning things only to be told on the morning of the sessions (training) that this person and that person was required to make a statement."

Leboeuf finds support

PARIS, Jan 23: Chelsea defender Franck Leboeuf on Monday received the backing of French internet site www.football365.fr after its English equivalent had launched a cheeky campaign to finance his departure, reports AFP.

World Cup winner Leboeuf, who is currently being linked with a move to reigning French champions Monaco, was once voted the most hated man in football by England's football365.com.

In a letter, the French site gave their total support to Leboeuf, adding their English colleagues had "gone much too far."

The English site had said for every call it received from its surfers they would contribute 10 pence (0.15 dollars) towards buying the 32-year-old central defender an airline ticket back across the English Channel.

Leboeuf, who was left out of the Chelsea team which thumped Ipswich 4-1 on Saturday, has been eclipsed at Stamford Bridge by emerging 20-year-old defender John Terry.

He is now heavily tipped to leave the west London club for a fee of around 3 million pounds (4.5 million dollars).

Too much TV injures Ferdinand!

LONDON, Jan 23: Leeds coach David O'Leary revealed Monday that Rio Ferdinand, the world's most expensive defender, is set to sit out Wednesday's Premiership match at Aston Villa after injuring himself in a freak accident.

O'Leary said that Ferdinand, an 18-million-pound (27-million-dollar) summer signing from West Ham, strained a leg when he rested it on a coffee table.



West Ham United's Cameroon international defender Rigobert Song (L) launches himself for a tackle on Kevin Lisbie of Charlton Athletic during their Premiership game at The Valley in London on January 22.

Premiership

Di Canio saves Hammers' day

LONDON, Jan 23: A goal from West Ham's Italian striker Paolo Di Canio 16 minutes from time earned

West Ham a point in a fiercely-contested 1-1 draw at London rivals Charlton on Monday, reports AFP.

Charlton, who were out to avenge a 5-0 thrashing by West Ham at Upton Park, took an early lead through Sean Bartlett after seven minutes.

But the visitors dominated the game from then and were unfortunate not to be level before Di Canio's strike.

Charlton coach Alan Curtis was glowing in his praise of his London neighbours.

"They are the best team we have played this season," said Curtis, a former West Ham player. "England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson was treated to a passionate London derby for the fifth instalment of his guide to English football."

The former Lazio coach, who arrived 10 days ago, witnessed the likes of Joe Cole, Michael Carrick and Frank Lampard press their international claims.

But it was Charlton's early endeavours that reaped reward with the opener through a cool finish from Bartlett.

Paul Konchesky burst through midfield to slip the South African into the box and he beat Craig Forrest from 15 yards for his third goal since arriving on a long-term loan

from Swiss side FC Zurich. The visitors were dominant before the interval and a quickly taken free-kick involving Nigel Winterburn and Lampard sliced open the Charlton defence only for Di Canio to drag his shot wide.

Claus Jensen forced Forrest into a rare stop on the stroke of half-time with the keeper parrying a 20-yard curler.

Charlton began the second period as they had the first but the skills of Di Canio and Frederic Kanoute were checked for the most part by the outstanding Richard Rufus.

Cole must have impressed Eriksson. The precocious playmaker was only kept off the scoresheet by a goal-line block from Andy Todd.

Di Canio was booked in the 71st-minute booking as his frustration grew but his mood changed three minutes later with a wonderful leveller.

The Italian danced his way across the edge of the area and threaded his shot into the top right-hand corner.

A point apiece leaves neither side closer to the destiny of their seasons with both entrenched in mid-table.

STANDINGS

LONDON, Jan 23 (AFP): English Premiership table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Table with 10 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, GF, GA, Pts. Includes Manchester United, Sunderland, Arsenal, Liverpool, Ipswich, Newcastle, Leicester, Chelsea, Charlton, Tottenham, West Ham, Leeds, Aston Villa, Southampton, Everton, Middlesbrough, Derby, Man City, Coventry, Bradford.

Karambeu slams English style

LONDON, Jan 23: Middlesbrough midfielder Christian Karambeu became the latest Frenchman to

criticise standards in the Premiership on Tuesday by describing tactics in England as amateurish, reports AFP.

The dreadlocked World Cup and Euro 2000 star joined Frank Leboeuf, Nicolas Anelka and Emmanuel Petit in finding fault with the domestic game.

"It is as though teams are making things up as they go along," said the French international.

"The game in England is physical and played up in the air, and I find that there is a lack of preparation.

"I scored a goal against Manchester United which was very important for me, especially as there was movement in the build-up to it.

"That is the type of play that I learned at Nantes, and found again with Sampdoria and Real Madrid and it is something that I miss here.

"There is clearly movement in English football, but it is only in a vertical direction.

"Besides, movement is not just about attacking. It is bringing the ball forward, passing, breaking free and creating space for your teammates.

"England invented football, and the game and everything affecting it all stem from here - supporters and the business aspect as well.

"The sport has become professionalised to an extreme by the Premiership. However, it also remains amateurish in a host of respects," he told Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper.

Despite his criticisms, Karambeu insists he has no regrets about joining the North East club.

The Frenchman, who is married to Wonderbra model Adriana Sliedenkova, has helped his side to an eight-match unbeaten run which has taken them out of the relegation zone.

"Boro were a natural choice for me," said Karambeu. "I have never gone where people expect me to."

"Because I am married to Adriana people think that I live in capital cities, drive round in a Rolls Royce and am surrounded by bodyguards.

"But that's not my thing. I live for the reality of my job and I got an offer to come to Middlesbrough.

"It's true to say my wife would have preferred Italy or Spain but for me there were no doubts.

"English people treat football as a spectacle - that is crystal-clear. It first struck me when I was here with the French team during Euro 96."

Reform MP loses bid to stay on as Iran's FA head

TEHRAN, Jan 23: The Iranian reformist MP who heads the national football federation has failed in his bid for re-election to the post, federation sources told AFP on Tuesday.

Mohsen Safai-Farahani, a deputy from Tehran and close ally of President Mohammad Khatami, did not garner enough votes to make it to the deciding round of elections to be held in the coming days, they said.

The election comes just after the signing of former Croatian national manager Miroslav Blazevic as new head coach of Iran for the run-up to the 2002 World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea.

Blazevic replaced Jalal Talebi, who stepped down in October after favoured Iran crashed out of last year's Asian Cup with a quarter-finals loss to South Korea.

Blazevic led Croatia to a surprise third-place finish at the 1998 World Cup in France.

Dynamo's Kaladze Serie A bound

MILAN, Jan 23: Dynamo Kiev's Kakha Kaladze is set to sign for AC Milan, the Italian club's internet site reported on Monday, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old Georgian defender is already in Milan for a medical, the site reported. No fee or length of contract was mentioned in the report.

Grobelaar puts up a bold face

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 23: Bruce Grobelaar does not fear a possible lengthy ban by FIFA over match-fixing allegations, reports Reuters.

The former Liverpool and Zimbabwe goalkeeper, who had a libel damages award overturned in a London court last week, said in a South African television interview on Monday that he felt free to continue his coaching career.

Grobelaar, now coach of South African Premier League club Super Sport United, said: "I was acquitted in a court of law and I cannot be charged again. I lost a libel action not a court case so there is nothing FIFA can do to me."

"FIFA will be getting a letter from my lawyers."

The English FA said it would examine the judgement against Grobelaar after a British court overturned an 85,000 pounds (125,100 dollars) libel award made to him over match-fixing allegations last Thursday.

Three judges upheld an appeal by The Sun newspaper against the damages and said they were satisfied Grobelaar had corruptly taken money to fix games.

The matter, not least its international consequences, will be raised at the first opportunity with FIFA, the FA said.

The South African FA said on Friday it would write to the FA in London for further clarification on the implications of the appeal court judgement. It said it would respect any decision taken by FIFA.

After being cleared of match-fixing charges, Grobelaar was found guilty of misconduct by the FA in September 1997 for breaking betting rules. He was given a suspended six-month ban and fined 10,000 pounds (14,720 dollars).

On Sunday, Grobelaar said he had "no qualms" about the decision nor the possibility of a ban as he coached his club to a 3-0 win over premier league rivals Santos 3-0 in Pretoria.

Tardelli staying another season?

MILAN, Jan 23: Inter Milan's beleaguered coach Marco Tardelli will stay at the helm of the struggling Italian First Division outfit until next season at least, Inter's sporting director Gabriele Orlandi insisted Monday, reports AFP.

Orlandi, a team-mate of Tardelli's in Italy's 1982 World Cup winning side, gave his colleague the vote of confidence after Inter had been linked with Argentinian coach Hector Cuper, currently with Spanish First Division outfit Valencia.

"We are satisfied with the work of our new coach and at the same time perturbed at the false information we are reading in certain newspapers or hearing on certain television programmes," said Orlandi.

"We deny having had any contact with Cuper. I can give the assurance that Marco Tardelli will be on the Inter bench not only this season but also for next as his contract stipulates."

Orlandi then threatened legal action for any future false information.

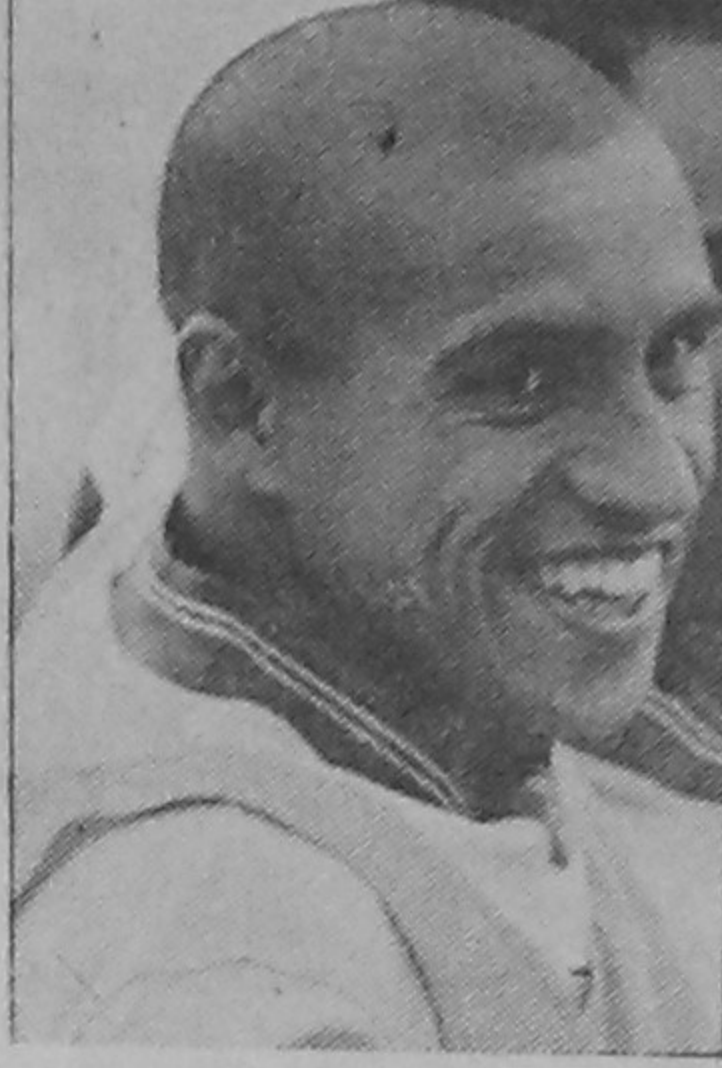
Tardelli took the reins from the sacked Marcello Lippi in October but Inter's plight has worsened in his three months in charge.

Tardelli is the ninth coach to work under Inter president Massimo Moratti during his five-year stint at the once-mighty club.

The thoughts of Roberto Carlos

MADRID, Jan 23: Real Madrid defender Roberto Carlos said on Monday he rates fellow Brazilian Rivaldo of Barcelona ahead of Portuguese team mate Luis Figo, reports Reuters.

"Between the two players, I think I'd go for Rivaldo because



ROBERTO CARLOS

he's Brazilian," Roberto Carlos said in an interview with Spanish news agency Europa Press.

"Figo knows I've got enormous respect for him but Rivaldo is a player I live a lot."

Roberto Carlos has been left out of the Brazil team in recent games but the fullback said he was not concerned.

"The less said about the national team situation the better," he said.

"There's a new coach at the moment, I'm very happy here. Playing well here will open the doors for me."

"If they've left me out for two or three games it's to try out someone else. It's not something that worries me."

"I wouldn't say it's a great objective of mine (to get back in the side), I've had nine years in the national team and I've experienced a lot."

But he had harsh words for those back home who criticise Brazilians playing in Europe.

"Being a success in Europe bothers a lot of people in Brazil," he said.

"Look what's happened to Rivaldo. People think that if you've been world number one you don't need to play for the national team or you lose your love for the shirt."

"People want trouble. They want to talk about you, but not the good things."

Roberto Carlos, who says he still wants to finish his career in Brazil, refused to rule out moving to another Spanish club.

"If I said I'd never move elsewhere in Spain that might be a lie. I'd leave Real Madrid if the people decided they didn't want me any more."

"As for Barcelona, there's a 99 per cent chance that I won't go there."



RIVALDO

De Boer forsees Barca revival

BARCELONA, Jan 23 (Reuters/Internet): Barcelona defender Frank de Boer has warned Spanish league leaders Real Madrid not to write off his side's title chances after a highly satisfying

weekend for the Catalans, reports AFP.

De Boer got the only goal on Saturday's 1-0 win over Valencia - a result that stretched Barca's unbeaten run to 14 games in all competitions - and then watched as Real were held to a 2-2 draw at Valladolid 24 hours later.

Real continue to lead the standings by two points from Deportivo Coruna, with Barcelona a point further back.

Vicente del Bosque's side can increase their lead to five points by winning their game in hand against Real Zaragoza on Wednesday but de Boer is convinced Barcelona's title chances are improving all the time.

"It was a great result for us against Valencia, de Boer said on his website at www.icons.com. "Real Madrid have to play at Valencia next week."

"Winning the league title now has to be a real possibility for us if we can continue our good run. We're up to 14 games without defeat now."

Luis Enrique, who was sent off in the Valencia game, also

warned that Barcelona are getting stronger all the time.

"Anyone who underestimates us is going to pay for it," said the Spanish international midfielder. "We've got a lot to say in this title race and we're now in a position to do it."

"We're getting stronger at a key moment in the campaign."



LUIS ENRIQUE

Primera Liga preview

Real eyeing five-point gap

MADRID, Jan 23 (Reuters/Internet): Real Madrid aim to show just how much progress they have made in 14 months under coach Vicente del Bosque, and go five points clear in Spain in the process, when they take on Real Zaragoza on Wednesday.

"It was one of the key moments in my career as Real coach," del Bosque recalled this week.

"I don't have very good memories of that night. It was a tough blow for us, at a time when we weren't in top form."

Del Bosque, who had been coaching the youth teams at Real, was virtually unknown outside the club and few expected him to be able to turn around what was fast turning into a crisis.

Against all the odds, Real went on to be crowned European champions last season and this year things are looking even better.

Despite a 2-2 draw at Valladolid on Sunday, Real were proclaimed winter champions with a two-point advantage at the top.

Victory against a Zaragoza side with five players injured would stretch that lead to five and keep them firmly on course for a first league title since 1997.

Del Bosque has cut a modest figure during his highly successful time in charge, though, and he continues to insist that the side cannot afford to be complacent.

"We should remember that Zaragoza are a dangerous rival," he said. "They scored five goals against us last time here and the backbone of their side is virtually unchanged."

"We have to make sure history doesn't repeat itself."

Del Bosque will recall Ivan Helguera after his suspension for the Valladolid game while Steve McManis could also return to the starting line-up in place of Savio.

Italian Cup semis

Milan look for 1st leg advantage

MILAN, Jan 23: Revitalised AC Milan look to consolidate their recovery Thursday when they play Fiorentina at the San Siro in

their Italian Cup semi-final first leg match, reports AFP.

That match comes 24 hours after the other semi-final first leg when Parma make the trip to Udinese.

But the Milan match is the more appetising fixture as it gives Milan an early chance for revenge after their 4-0 thrashing at the hands of Fiorentina earlier this month.

That match heightened speculation that the San Siro side were preparing to ditch their coach Alberto Zaccheroni and would quickly move to engage Fiorentina's Turkish coach Fatih Terim.

The rumours were fuelled last week by Terim's announcement he will leave the Florence club at the end of the season but Milan responded in the best way possible, beating Serie A leaders AS Roma 3-2 at the weekend.

Both sides - still in the running for Champions League spots - are likely to rest some key players for Thursday's match.

Wednesday's game will see Udinese host Parma in much better shape after their first win of the year at Napoli at the weekend.

The northern side had been in freefall for two months after the impressive start that saw them top the Serie A table for the first time in their 104-year history earlier this season.

Parma will be aiming to give their coach Arrigo Sacchi his first win since returning to the club where he made his name.

FIXTURES

Wednesday Udnese v Parma (20:00 GMT)

Thursday AC Milan v Fiorentina (20:00 GMT)

Lentini to play Second Division

MILAN, Jan 23: Gianluigi Lentini, once bought by AC Milan for a world record fee from Torino, on Monday joined Italian Second Division outfit Cosenza on a free transfer, reports AFP.

Lentini has been inactive since last summer when he parted company with Torino to whom he returned after a relatively unsuccessful time at Milan.

He had been offered the chance to play in China with Dalian Wanda in Japan and the United Arab Emirates but preferred to stay in Italy until the right team came along.

Cosenza, based deep in Italy's south, are in contention for one of the four places in the Italian First Division next season and believe Lentini will give them an extra dimension.

In 1992 he moved to AC Milan for 22 million dollars - a world record - but he never managed to live up to his tag. He twice played in European Cup Finals, losing both times in 1993 to French outfit Marseille and in 1995 to Ajax Amsterdam of Holland.

ENGLISH FOOTBALL BRIEFS

Jan 23 (AFP): English football briefs on Tuesday:

OWEN CONCERN FOR LIVERPOOL

LONDON: Liverpool coach Gerard Houllier revealed Monday that striker Michael Owen is likely to face two weeks on the sidelines after suffering yet another hamstring injury.

That means that the 20-year-old England striker will take no part in an important week for the Merseysiders.

Liverpool face a make-or-break week that sees them play Crystal Palace on Wednesday in the League Cup semi-final second leg and then an FA Cup fourth round clash at Leeds on Saturday.

Owen underwent a precautionary scan on his right hamstring after Saturday's 0-0 home draw against Middlesbrough.

"Michael is definitely out of the game on Wednesday. He felt his leg at the end of the Boro game," said Houllier.

"It is his hamstring which is causing the problem and we will need to find out exactly how bad it is. He said he felt something in his leg."

"At this stage I would say he will probably be out for two weeks, but we will know more later this week."



MICHAEL OWEN

DYER RETURNS TO TRAINING

LONDON: Newcastle and England midfielder Kieron Dyer was told Monday that he does not have a serious injury after undergoing stringent medical tests on what was believed to be a shin splints problem.

Dyer, who was playing as an emergency striker before serving a two-match suspension, has been complaining of pain in both shins.

But the 22-year-old has been given the all-clear to resume training and could be back in time for the Premiership trip to Chelsea on January 31.

ERIKSSON MEETS BORO MANAGERS

LONDON: New England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson continued his whirlwind tour of Premiership clubs Monday when he met up with Middlesbrough management duo Terry Venables and Bryan Robson.

The 52-year-old Swede, who watched Sunderland's 0-0 draw with Bradford at The Stadium of Light on Sunday, visited Boro's Rockliffe Park training ground and spent 30 minutes with former England coach Venables and Robson before heading back to the capital from Newcastle Airport.