

WC 2002 qualifiers

Super Eagles ease past Sudan

LAGOS, Jan 28: Nigeria's 'foreign legion' helped get the Super Eagles' 2002 World Cup qualifying campaign back on track here Saturday with a 3-0 victory over Sudan, reports AFP.

Two goals from Germany-based Victor Agali and a third by Arsenal striker Nwankwo Kanu secured victory for the Nigerians, desperate for points after their shock 2-1 loss to Liberia last year.

Nigeria had to wait for almost an hour before opening the scoring against a young Sudanese side who appeared undaunted by their star-studded opponents.

Agali, who scored in his debut game against Zambia two weeks ago, was again on target in the 57th minute when he clinically nodded home a cross from the left taken by Garba Lawal.

The lanky forward from Bundesliga outfit Hansa Rostock grabbed his second eight minutes later after Finidi George outpaced the Sudanese defence and delivered a pinpoint cross for Agali to head past goalkeeper Ahmed El-Nour.

Only the woodwork denied Agali a hat-trick in the 85th minute - but his shot cannoned off the post to allow substitute Kanu to tuck away the rebound.

Nigeria's victory over Sudan has improved their standing in the qualifying group for the 2002 World Cup. They have now recorded six points from three matches while Sudan stay on three points from two games.

Nigeria's next match will be away to old rivals Ghana on March 10.

Iraq, Lebanon renew rivalry

BAGHDAD, Jan 28: Iraq and Lebanon are set to revive memories of their thrilling Asian Cup 2000 2-2 draw when the two sides meet on Wednesday in a friendly in Beirut, site of their previous meeting, reports AFP.

Iraq, who went out to eventual Asian Cup winners Japan 4-1 in the quarter-finals, led Lebanon 2-0 after just 23 minutes only for the hosts, who failed to make it past the first round, to storm back and force the draw.

The Lebanese encounter is the first of a mini Middle Eastern trip by the Iraqis - they are to play Jordan twice and play two more matches in Tunisia - as they build up for the 2002 World Cup Group 6 qualifiers which take place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from April 21-25.

Whether they take place in Almaty is under appeal as the Iraqis wrote to FIFA to protest over the qualifiers being switched from their original venue of Kathmandu, which were due to take place from March 25-29, to their main group rival's base.

"Playing in Kazakhstan is unacceptable to us," FIFA official Hussein Mohammed said in a letter to FIFA general-secretary Michael Zen-Ruffinen.

Hussein said the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) had informed them FIFA was responsible for the venue switch, but neither body was immediately available for comment.

Bundesliga

Effenberg stars for Bayern

BERLIN, Jan 28: Bayern Munich's captain Stefan Effenberg struck in the 89th minute to salvage a 3-2 win over bottom club Bochum on Saturday and keep his side just one point away from leaders Schalke 04, reports AFP.

Effenberg scored the first and last goals of the match in front of just 32,000 fans in a half-full Olympic Stadium to cancel out the double strike from Bochum's Turkish midfielder Yildirim Basturk.

Brazilian striker Giovane Elber was Bayern's other scorer, taking his season's tally to 10, three behind Schalke's Danish international Ebbe Sand.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld was happy with his team's battling performance against the worst team in the division.

"I am very happy. The team never gave up and fought hard," he said.

We deserved the victory because we had more of the play," Schalke had set Bayern their target by beating Hansa Rostock 2-0 on Friday in the first match since the closest-run German championship for years went into a six-week winter break.

Third-placed Borussia Dortmund kept the race on the boil on Saturday by beating third-bottom club Energie Cottbus 2-0.

Fredi Bobic and Christian Nerlinger scored for the 1997 European champions in front of 61,000 fans, leaving their team on the same number of points as Bayern.

Kaiserslautern lost way in their race for the championship by drawing 0-0 with Wolfsburg and are now six points adrift of Schalke with 31 points.

Fourth-placed Bayer Leverkusen, who also have 31 points, play struggling VfB Stuttgart on Sunday.

FA Cup

Everton Aldridge-struck again



LONDON, Jan 28: First Division Tranmere Rovers, coached by former Liverpool favourite John Aldridge, provided the biggest shock in the fourth round of the FA Cup Saturday with a 3-0 win at Merseyside neighbours and Premiership strugglers Everton, reports AFP.

Aldridge, who scored the winner for Liverpool against Everton in the 1989 FA Cup final, masterminded the victory, Rovers' sixth Premiership cup scalp in 16 months.

Everton went the same way as West Ham, Coventry, Leeds, Middlesbrough and Sunderland against a Tranmere team who come to life against the top clubs.

Defender Steve Yates headed two fine goals and Jason Koumas, the architect of many of Tranmere's lightning attacks, grabbed the other.

Aldridge was beaming after the result particularly as Rovers were under the cosh early on.

"The lads were terrific," he said. "They had to ride the storm early on, but once we'd scored we grew in confidence and stature."

"Everton had to chase the game and we could hit them on the break. If they'd scored in that opening spell the game would have been very different."

"I had 11 - 14 with the substitutes - heroes out there and they gave everything."

Two goals in the dying minutes from Liverpool's substitutes booked their place in the fifth round with a dramatic 2-0 win over Premiership rivals Leeds at Elland Road.

Leeds, who had beaten their opponents 4-3 at Elland Road in the league earlier in the season were heading for a replay until two minutes from time when Nicky Bamby came off the bench to put the League Cup finalists in front.

A goal in stoppage time from record signing Emile Heskey sent Leeds crashing out.

The day was an emotional one for two of Leeds' most promising young footballers.

Midfielder Lee Bowyer, 24, and defender Jonathan Woodgate, also 24, are due at Hull Crown Court on Monday on charges - which they both deny - of causing grievous bodily harm and affray following an attack on an Asian student a year ago.

Arsenal overcame an early scare before trouncing First Division Queens Park Rangers 6-0.

A goal from Sylvain Wiltord, sandwiched by own goals from Chris Plummer and Matthew Rose, put Arsenal in control before Wiltord grabbed his second.

Wiltord's French international team-mate Robert Pires fired the fifth and Dutchman

Dennis Bergkamp completed a miserable day for Gerry Francis and his team. Francis admitted Rangers had been "murdered."

"After the first two goals we just had to go for it and send on an extra striker, but Arsenal murdered us with their passing and movement which was exquisite," Francis said.

"It was desperately disappointing because we went out with the right attitude and you couldn't tell who was the Premiership team in the first half-hour."

Second Division Wycombe, managed by Lawrie Sanchez, scored of Wimbledon's winning goal in their historic 1-0 win over Liverpool in the 1988 FA Cup final, surprised First Division Wolves with a narrow 2-1 win.

Non-league Kingstons, second bottom in the Conference league, were denied a famous win by a last-minute equaliser in an exciting 1-1 draw.

Jim Smith's Derby, fourth from bottom in the Premiership, were held to a goalless draw at Ewood Road by First Division high-fliers Blackburn.

Sunderland edged Ipswich 1-0 in the all-Premiership tie at the Stadium of Light thanks to Daniele Dichi's 23rd minute effort.

Shaun Goater's goal three minutes into stoppage time gave Manchester City a 1-0 win

over fellow Premiership strugglers Coventry City at Maine Road.

Southampton beat First Division relegation candidates Sheffield Wednesday 3-1 at The Dell.

Aston Villa's woeful form continued with a 2-1 home defeat by midlands rivals Leicester where Darius Vassell (Villa) and Callum Davidson (Blackburn) were both sent off.

Nigerian Ade Akinbiyi, Leicester's record buy, fired the visitors ahead only to be pegged back by Julian Joachim's equaliser.

A late goal by Icelandic international Arnar Gunnlaugsson secured the victory for Peter Taylor's men.

Charlton scraped past the determined challenge of non-league Dagenham and Redbridge but only after extra-time in a full-blooded third round replay.

The part-timers, who came within four minutes of going through at The Valley, performed superbly but succumbed eventually to Shaun Newton's strike within 36 seconds of the start of extra-time.

On Sunday Cup holders Chelsea travel to First Division Gillingham, the team they thumped 5-0 in last season's quarter-final, while runaway Premiership leaders Manchester United host West Ham at Old Trafford.



Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler (front) flicking the ball with the out step of his left foot during an FA Cup fourth round match against Leeds United at Elland Road on January 27. --AFP photo

Mondragon's passport false



METZ, France, Jan 28: French authorities confirmed on Saturday checks had revealed the Greek passport of Metz's Colombian international goalkeeper Farid Mondragon was false and they were not willing to grant him a residency permit, reports AFP.

The 29-year-old, one of a group of foreign players in the French league whose passports from European Union countries have come under suspicion, must now apply for a tourist visa in Colombia to return to France for the March 14 court hearing into how he obtained the passport.

The passport put forward by Mondragon is not recognised by the Greek authorities as being issued by the Greek government," Jean-Pierre Raffy, a top local government official in the Moselle department in eastern France, told AFP.

"On the basis of information received from the Greek authorities, (the prefecture) was



FARID MONDRAGON

not in a position to issue a residency permit for a national of an EU member state to Farid Camilo Mondragon," he added.

Mondragon, who played for

Colombia in the 1998 World Cup finals, returned to Colombia on Thursday on international duty and to apply for a visa to replace the false Greek passport.

He is expected to play in two friendlies in the United States against the USA and Mexico.

Raffy said Mondragon would be able to return to France if he obtained "either a 90-day tourist visa or a work visa" on his Colombian passport.

"The passport was not issued by the Greek authorities, but it is up to the justice system to examine the conditions in which the passport was obtained and to determine if Mr. Mondragon was aware that the passport was illegal," Raffy said.

The Colombian 'keeper, who was signed from Argentine club Independiente last season, told investigators this month that he had knowingly used a false Greek passport.

The passport affair has put the spotlight on some of the French league's top players.

Blatter apologises to South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 28: FIFA president Sepp Blatter has apologised to South Africa over events surrounding their failed bid to host the 2006 World Cup football tournament, reports AFP.

The head of the Zurich-based world controlling body spent the weekend here talking to officials from Southern Africa countries and watching South Africa defeat Burkina Faso in a World Cup qualifier.

Blatter, who owed his election as president in 1998 largely to African votes, was a staunch supporter of South Africa in the build-up to the 2006 vote last July.

But the shock abstention of Oceania delegate Charles Dempsey from the final round of voting gave Germany a 12-11 victory over South Africa and foiled the strongest challenge by an African nation.

Had Scottish-born Dempsey backed South Africa as instructed by his region, former Swiss army colonel and FIFA secretary-general Blatter would have had the casting vote.

Africa has never staged the quadrennial showcase of international football despite having more members of FIFA than any other continent, and the South African campaign was based on the need for equality.

"I would like to apologise to the South African people, and the great man Nelson Mandela for what happened regarding the 2006 World Cup bid," Blatter told a media conference.

"South Africans must remember they have not lost completely. You won the credibility and the respect of the world and did not lose because you were not competitive enough."

Blatter said South Africa lost because of an imbalance within the 24-member FIFA executive committee that decides World Cup hosts. Europe has eight votes and Africa only four.

He added that a special FIFA congress in Argentina during July would debate rotating the World Cup between continents to avoid a repeat of the 2006 bid debacle.

Serie A

Perugia blank Reggina

MILAN, Jan 28: Perugia defeated Reggina 2-0 in the Italian First Division Saturday night to consolidate their midtable position and worsen the relegation plight of the team from Reggio Calabria, reports AFP.

Defender Marco Materazzi put Perugia ahead from the penalty spot after 20 minutes.

It was another fine performance by the highly rated former Everton defender who this week turned down a move from German giants Bayern Munich, insisting he would only consider a move to an Italian club.

Seven minutes before the interval Perugia playmaker Fabio Liverani, also being watched by several leading clubs, made it 2-0 for Serse Cosmi's outfit.

Korean midfielder Alm-Jung Hwan came on as a substitute for Perugia's Luca Saudati in the second half and things got worse for Reggina when Lorenzo Stovini was dismissed with 16 minutes remaining.

It was just what the doctor ordered for Perugia whose recent good form had come undone with consecutive defeats at the hands of Brescia and Juventus.

Earlier Saturday Lecce were held 0-0 at home by Bologna whose Argentinian striker Julio Cruz had a goal disallowed for handball.

Bologna coach Francesco Guidolin admitted: "I would not have liked to win like that."

His Lecce counterpart Alberto Cavasin was equally philosophical, saying: "We gave everything but Bologna defended in depth and with pride."

Sunday's programme will see leaders AS Roma bid to defend their three-point lead at the top of the division when they host Napoli.

Second-placed Juventus host Vicenza while the clash between fourth-placed Fiorentina and third-placed defending champions Lazio is the pick of the weekend games.

Greek international hurt in car crash

ATHENS, Jan 28: Greek international defender Giorgos Amanatidis was seriously injured in a car accident here Saturday after returning from training with club Olympiakos, reports AFP.

Amanatidis, 31, was rushed to the Tsamios Hospital in Piraeus where his condition was listed as serious following the smash.

He was undergoing tests in the emergency room of the hospital to determine if surgery is needed. He reportedly had head and chest injuries.

Press reports said Amanatidis was driving his car from the Olympiakos practice field when he lost control of the vehicle in wet conditions and smashed into an electrical utility pole at 6:45 p.m. local time.

Amanatidis has played for Olympiakos since 1992 and has played for the national team nine times. Reports this week had linked the player with a move to French side Lyon, with Dutch giants Dutch Ajax Amsterdam and Spain's Valencia also believed to be interested.

French First Division

Lille romp to top



PARIS, Jan 28: Unfashionable Lille, who were promoted last summer, went top of the French championship on Saturday after a 4-

after being 1-0 up.

A double by Dagui Bakari inspired Lille to a comprehensive victory over a St Etienne side who were going down to their fourth successive away defeat.



Jean Guy Wallemme (L) of Saint Etienne puts pressure on Lille striker Dagui Bakari during their French First Division encounter at Lille on January 27. --AFP photo

1 thrashing of former giants St Etienne, reports AFP.

Lille, who won the last of their two titles back in 1954, lead on goal difference from Nantes after they were beaten 3-1 by Lyon.

Bordeaux' 3-0 defeat of the other fallen giants of French football, Marseille, on Friday lifted them to within a point of Nantes.

However, their successors as French champions Monaco slipped deeper into the relegation mire beaten 2-1 by fellow relegation contenders Toulouse

Les Verts look set for a long hard fight against relegation should their appeal against being docked seven points over the false passport affair fail.

Doubles were the order of the day as Lyon's French international winger Vikas Dhorsoo grabbed two and Steed Malbranque the other to see off the 'Canaries', who scored through Nicolas Gillet and missed a penalty to make it 2-2 when Stephane Ziani smacked his effort against the crossbar.

Malbranque scored the pick of the goals to put Lyon 2-1 up

Uncertainty over Leboeuf



LONDON, Jan 28: English Premiership club Chelsea said on Sunday they had agreed a three-million-pound (4.4 million-dollar) deal with French champions Monaco to sell defender Frank Leboeuf, reports AFP.

But Monaco president Jean-Louis Campora denied the report.

"I deny this report and I maintain that Leboeuf no longer interests us," he said.

The 33-year-old French international Leboeuf is keen to return home and a deal must be done by Wednesday, the French transfer deadline.

Monaco raised their initial bid of two million pounds and Chelsea found a replacement in signing 25-year-old South African international defender Pierre Issa on a three-month loan with a view to a permanent deal.

Chelsea managing director Colin Hutchinson told Club-Call: "Monaco are still keen to take Frank. He definitely wants to go there."

The transfer window in France closes on January 31 and we have now got a deal with Monaco.

"But they have to do one or two bits and pieces at their end before the deal can progress."

"Frank is fully aware of the picture. Chelsea have made it possible for him to go, but it's now up to Monaco to come to

us and say that they're ready to conclude the deal."

Leboeuf, who arrived at Chelsea in June 1996 for 2.5 million pounds, made his name at Stamford Bridge but has been critical of English football on several occasions.

While Leboeuf is currently in the French national side following the international retirement of Laurent Blanc, the emergence at Chelsea of centre-back John Terry has pushed him out of the first team.

Monaco are currently languishing in 14th place in the French First Division and lost 2-1 to relegation candidates Toulouse on Saturday.

Saudis want Santrac

BELGRADE, Jan 28: Former Yugoslavia coach Slobodan Santrac is considering an offer to coach Saudi Arabia's national team after rejecting a similar offer to lead China's team, Belgrade daily newspaper Glas Javnosti reported Sunday, reports AFP.

Santrac, who took Shandong Luneng to the Chinese First Division title in 1999, has reportedly rejected China's offer in order to consider other jobs, the daily said.

Among those offers is one from Saudi Arabia to take over from Nassir Al-Johar, the daily said.

If Santrac accepts the job, he would take over in time for Saudi Arabia's World Cup qualifying match against Mongolia on February 8, it added.

It was unclear whether Santrac would accept the offer.

Primera Liga

Challengers drop points

MADRID, Jan 28: Barcelona and Deportivo La Coruna missed the chance to crank up the pressure on Spanish league-leaders Real Madrid on Saturday, both teams ending out disappointing draws, reports AFP.

Deportivo fought back from 2-0 down away at Athletic Bilbao, Dutch international striker Roy Makaay scoring a brace to earn the reigning champions a point against the Basque side.

Makaay struck in the 36th and 39th minutes after Athletic had taken the lead through early goals from Inigo Larrañzar and Aitor Larrazabal.

The result left Deportivo four points behind leaders Real Madrid in the title race.

Real can go seven points clear if they defeat Valencia in Sunday's match.

Meanwhile Real's arch-rivals Barcelona also had to settle for just one point on Saturday, playing out a goalless draw away at Malaga.

In Saturday's other match Barcelona's city rivals Espanyol thrashed Real Zaragoza 5-0 to move up the table to ninth place.

Ismael Urzaiz (L), the Athletic Bilbao striker locked in a tussle with Deportivo La Coruna's Luis Miguel Ramis during their Primera Liga game at Bilbao on January 27. --AFP photo