

French First Division

Leroy denies Lyon

AFP, Paris

Jerome Leroy's late equalizer for Marseille in a 1-1 draw at Lyon prevented the hosts from taking provisional top spot in the French league on Tuesday night.

Leroy's 76th minute goal, which cancelled out Lyon's 51st minute penalty by Brazilian Sonny Anderson, was scored by one of the slowest headers ever to find the net in top class football.

Lyon keeper Gregory Coupet scrambled for the ball, but it's painstakingly slow flight left him completely bamboozled to earn the Riviera side a point.

Earlier, William Gallas fouled Steve Marlet in the area, who had been fed by an Anderson backheel, to give away a penalty.

Anderson fired the ball to the right of keeper Damien Gregorini, who dived to his left, to put Lyon in front.

In the day's other fixture, Rennes won 3-0 at home in a mid-table battle against St Etienne, heavily embroiled in the false passport scandal which has been sweeping European clubs.

Marseille remain in 15th spot, just one place ahead of the three-team relegation zone, and Lyon also stayed where they are in third, a point behind leaders Lille and Nantes, who meet on Wednesday.

Marseille coach Javier Clemente believed his side should have won the fixture after a goal which he claimed was not offside. "A Marseille victory would have been the right result," he said.

Skoro had headed home in-off the left hand post a minute before the penalty.

A Skoro header, which went narrowly wide, was also the best chance of the goalless first half, following a cross from the left by Yugoslavian midfielder Jovan Stankovic.

Lyon also had other chances to score, the best coming from Mar-

let, who shot on to the crossbar from a long cross from the left by Anderson seconds after the restart.

Lyon had the best of the match in the second half but it was Marseille who found the net. Leroy controlled a pass from Stankovic with his chest following a Djamel Belmadi freekick before heading into the net to earn a point.



Lyon's Marc-Vivien Foe (L) and Lucas Bernardi of Marseille are in pursuit of the ball during their French First Division fixture on February 6.

Best needs time to recover

AFP, London

Football great George Best is battling back well from pneumonia, his business manager said Monday while warning that his client could need at least four weeks to make a complete recovery.

Manchester United and Northern Ireland legend Best, 54, had a "comfortable" night Monday at Belfast City Hospital, where he was being treated, according to manager Phil Hughes.

"He is continuing to improve and feeling a lot more perky than he was, but he still has this cough and rasping in his throat," he said.

"I'd say it will be at least another week before he gets out, but it could be three or four before he is completely over this."

The illness has meant that Best had to cancel a number of engagements, and has also delayed work on a Manchester United video and a new autobiography, due out in May.

The star was admitted to hospital on Friday after developing a chest infection.

Best, a commentator with Sky TV, lives with his wife Alex near the fishing village of Portavogie, County Down, south west Ireland. Hughes added: "If he had his way, he'd be back in the studio by Saturday. But he knows he is going to have to rest once he gets home."

Best, famed as much for his hard-drinking lifestyle as for his phenomenal football skill, was a star for Manchester United in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1968 he helped the Old Trafford club win the European Cup for the first time and that same year he was voted European Footballer of the Year.



Middlebrough's Keith O'Neill (L) fights for possession with Gareth Ainsworth of Wimbledon during their FA Cup clash at Middlebrough on February 6.

FA Cup Wimbledon stay alive

AFP, London

Battling Wimbledon kept their hopes of a famous cup double over Middlesbrough alive with a gritty display in a 0-0 draw at the Riverside Stadium on Tuesday.

Terry Burton's First Division outfit held their own against the Premiership opponents in an uninspiring fourth round encounter to book a replay at Selhurst Park, where they have already dumped the Teessiders out of the League Cup this season.

The result was due at least in part to the brilliance of keeper Kelvin Davis, who made stunning saves from Croat Alen Boksic and Hamilton Ricard - although it was a gutsy all-round performance which meant they can still dream of a last 16 clash with Wycombe Wanderers.

Playing in front of just 20,625 spectators, Boro at least extended their unbeaten run under coach Terry Venables to 11 games, but there was little else to cheer on a night when they looked short on ideas and quality when it mattered.

Bogus passport holder Recoba returning home

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan's Uruguayan striker Alvaro Recoba arrived at Milan's Malpensa airport Tuesday evening to return to his homeland, hours after being quizzed by magistrates who have charged him with having a bogus passport.

Recoba, who last month signed a contract which reportedly makes him the highest paid player in Italy, will not be able to return to Italy until he has regularised his situation.

Recoba arrived at Malpensa from the northern town of Udine where he had been quizzed by magistrate Paolo Alessio Verni for two hours.

The 24-year-old was due to fly to Buenos Aires before getting a connecting flight to Montevideo.

West Ham sign Zamperini

LONDON, Internet

West Ham signed Italian teenager Alessandro Zamperini on a free transfer from Serie A leaders AS Roma on Friday.

Manager Harry Redknapp said he had signed the highly rated 18-year-old defender after he impressed in a closed doors match at Upton Park.

Monaco win appeal, St Etienne docked points

AFP, Paris

French champions Monaco, who were deducted two league points after former Chilean defender Pablo Contreras was found to have played with a false Italian passport, have won their appeal against the sanctions, Monaco president Jean-Louis Campora announced Tuesday.

Monaco were initially deducted the points on January 30 after Contreras' passport turned out to be false.

However after Tuesday's successful appeal with the French league (LNF) the Principality side remain in 12th position 11 points adrift of leaders Lille.

Meanwhile the same commission ruled that the points for the St Etienne-Toulouse match, won 1-0 by St Etienne on December 2, should be awarded to Toulouse due to St Etienne's involvement in the false passports scandal.

St Etienne duo Alex of Brazil and Ukrainian goalkeeper Maxim Levitsky, now at Spartak Moscow, were found guilty of playing with false Portuguese and Greek passports respectively.

Later on Tuesday, St Etienne's other Brazilian Jose Aloisio was suspended for a month, with a two-month suspension to be activated for another offence, for using a false Portuguese passport.

Toulouse, struggling in 16th place, look to gain three points, while St Etienne should lose the three points awarded to them for that December 2 win, and three other points in the form of sanctions, instead of the seven-point sanction initially inflicted following the guilty verdict on Alex and Levitsky.

St Etienne, however, have submitted an appeal and, for the moment, neither Toulouse nor St Etienne will change position in the French league table.

Rome giants meet minister over stadium purchase

AFP, Rome

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti and his AS Roma counterpart Franco Sensi met Treasury Minister Vincenzo Visco Tuesday to discuss their interest in purchasing the Olympic Stadium.

The two Roman clubs are currently co-tenants at the Stadium that hosted the 1960 Olympic Games and the 1990 World Cup Final.

The publicly-owned stadium is due to be auctioned off and the minister is poised to name the minimum price at which the stadium would be sold.

"It's an important project," said Cragnotti. "And now we are waiting for a public auction to acquire the stadium together with the Roma president and to have our stadium. Today we took a little step forward but there is a long way to go."

WORLD FOOTBALL BRIEFS

AFP

World football briefs on Wednesday:

SMALL CLUBS WANT TO MODIFY UEFA CUP FORMAT

NYON, Switzerland

Europe's middle-of-the-road clubs said here on Wednesday they want to see the UEFA Cup changed from a knockout format to a group system like the Champions League.

About 60 club representatives, at the headquarters of the continent's football governing body UEFA, however rejected the idea of reviving the Cup Winners Cup, played for the final time in 1999.

UEFA general secretary Gerhard Aigner said: "Most clubs want to retain the current format in the Champions League but want a reform of the UEFA Cup."

France's Jean Fournet-Fayard, president of UEFA's competition commission, added many middle-of-the-road clubs are claiming they do not play enough European games and want a group system like the Champions League.

UDINESE REFERRED TO DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

Rome

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) have referred Udinese director general Pierpaolo Marino and club secretary Sigfrido Marcati and four players to their disciplinary committee in relation to the bogus passport scandal currently afflicting the game.

The players concerned are all Latin American - they are Brazilian trio Alberto, Jorginho and Warley and Paraguayan Da Silva. Warley has since returned to Brazil where he is on loan at Gremio.

The FIGC indictment accuses the club of the use of false passports apparently issued by Portuguese authorities in the aim of avoiding the maximum limit of registered non-European players.

REAL LEGEND SANCHIS TO END CAREER

Madrid

Real Madrid captain Manolo Sanchis, a virtual legend after 18 seasons at the club, on Wednesday

said he would be retiring from football at the end of this season.

The 35-year-old defender will end his career with a record few players in history could match at club level.

On the domestic front, he has won seven Spanish league titles, (85/86, 86/87, 87/88, 88/89, 89/90, 94/95 and 96/97), two Spanish Cups (88/89 and 92/93), five Spanish Super Cups (88/89, 89/90, 90/91, 93/94 and 97/98) and one League Cup (84/85).

At international level, he has won two European Cups (97/98 and 99/00), one Intercontinental Cup (1998) and two UEFA Cups (84/85 and 85/86).

Sanchis told a press conference: "There is nothing left for me to win. Even in my wildest dreams, I never thought at the start of my career I would have won so many titles."

Sanchis is the last of the great Real Madrid side of the 80's including Emilio Butragueno, Miguel Gonzalez 'Michel', Rafael Martin Vazquez and Miguel Pardeza.

Sanchis has also played 48 times for the full Spanish side, 16 times at under-21 level and twice for the Olympic team.



FIFA president Sepp Blatter (L) makes a point while UEFA chief Lennart Johansson looks on during their talks with the Swedish government on the soccer players' transfers issue in Stockholm on February 6.

Cheju's chief attraction

AFP, Sogwipo, South Korea

The South Korean island of Cheju has no professional football team but is going to have one of the most stunning stadiums ever used in the World Cup finals.

Set in former mandarin groves between an extinct volcano and centuries old fishing villages, the Sogwipo World Cup Stadium will be a personal triumph for Kang Sang-woo, mayor of the island's main city.

Kang took on powerful central government bureaucrats who laughed at the bid to host matches for the 2002 finals on an island best known for welcoming honeymoon couples to its beaches.

But Lennart Johansson, president of the influential European

football governing body, UEFA, said during a recent visit to Cheju



that Sogwipo was one of the most beautiful settings for a football match he had ever seen.

Behind the stadium is the 1,950 meter (5,900 feet) Mount Halla, which last erupted several thousand years ago but still dominates the island. Down the slope, every morning dozens of elderly women put on diving gear to go swimming around the rocky coast for sea cucumbers and shellfish.

But Kang, who has had to raise more than 100 million dollars to build the stadium, admitted as he watched seven-day-a-week work to get it finished that it has taken a lot of determination.

A tangled mass of steel and huge construction cranes cover the pitch. The project is scheduled to be ready in December, but it

Hitzfeld extends contract

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld is set to sign an extension to his contract which will link him with the club till June 30 2004, the club said in a statement on Tuesday.

Hitzfeld agreed terms with club president Franz Beckenbauer for a contract which outstrips his old one, due to expire on June 30 2003, the statement added. The exact details of the deal are yet to be finalized.

"We have done some very good work the last few years and I like it at the club," said 58-year-old Hitzfeld, who has been with Bayern since 1998.

"I consider an extension to my existing contract as proof that the club has confidence in me. I'm looking forward to my future years here."

Hitzfeld, who led Borussia Dortmund to the European Cup title in 1997, is generally considered to be a prime candidate to become Germany's international coach at some stage.

Roma's tonic called Emerson

AFP, Rome

Brazilian midfielder Emerson is emerging as the perfect hangover cure for Italy's newly-crowned 'winter champions' AS Roma.

The midfielder joined Roma from German outfit Bayer Leverkusen in the summer but in August during the pre-season he ruptured a cruciate ligament on his left knee, leaving him on the sidelines as his new club made the early-season running in Serie A, establishing an eight-point lead at one point.

But after waiting patiently for almost six months and undergoing rehabilitation the man from Pelotas - full name Emerson Ferreira da Rosa - has come back to bolster the 'capolista' (league leaders) just as they appeared to be faltering.

A home draw against bottom club Bari and a 3-2 defeat at AC Milan saw Roma's lead dwindle to three points as Emerson was judged still not match-fit.

But Emerson, 25 in April, has played in the two most recent matches with Napoli (3-0) and Parma (2-1) that have seen Roma recover their early season form

and extend their lead to six points. That has seen Roma earn the title of winter champions, a purely symbolic accolade bestowed on the team that tops Serie A at the halfway point of the season.

Perhaps more importantly it has restored the 'giallorossi' as clear favourites for the real title.

It is almost like signing a new player for Roma and the player is happy with his progress, saying "I am satisfied with my perform-

ances and I think I have played like I ought to. I am getting better with every game."

Capello is also pleased with his new weapon, saying: "All he needs to do now is find his rhythm - I am going to have a look at him in different positions but I think he is a very capable player in several roles."

Emerson is being compared as the successor to another Brazilian Paulo Roberto Falcao, the playmaker in the last Roma side to win the Scudetto in 1982-3.

Falcao is still revered in Rome for his role in that team alongside the likes of Italy's 1982 World Cup winners Bruno Conti and Francesco Graziani and Carlo Ancelotti, now coach to Juventus.

Like Falcao he is a superb passer of the ball with great technique but with Capello liking to play Francesco Totti behind a front pairing of Gabriel Batistuta and Marco Delvecchio Emerson is taking on a more holding role with Roma - he is also an accomplished tackler.

If Roma win that elusive title in June then the moment Emerson helped steady Lazio's Capello's ship will be seen as one of the key moments in the campaign.

EMERSON

Nakata's fingers crossed

AFP, Rome

AS Roma's Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata could be given a rare start in Sunday's Italian First Division match with Bologna due to injury doubts over star playmaker Francesco Totti.

Skipper Totti underwent a scan on a left leg injury which he picked up in Sunday's 2-1 victory at Parma and was duly prescribed treatment for strained adductor muscles.

Nakata, who has featured little in Roma's lineup since joining the club from Italian Serie A rivals Perugia, came on as a substitute for Totti on Sunday after he came off injured in the 85th minute.

In the end, the government loaned about one third of the cost which will have to be paid back after the tournament, said Kang, who will face local elections just before the World Cup finals start.

One of the fishermen, Mrs Ahn, said: "The stadium is not for me. It is for the young people, I don't care."

But the mayor insisted "the people are behind this, they want this." He added: "We have hosted summits between South Korean leaders and (former US) president Bill Clinton and (Chinese) President Jiang Zemin, this will bring more international attention on Cheju."

About 8,000 seats will be taken out of the stadium after the World Cup circus leaves. What will happen then?