

Schalke enter German Cup final

REUTERS, Berlin
Schalke 04 scored three goals in the opening 18 minutes as they crushed VfB Stuttgart 3-0 on Wednesday to reach the German Cup final.

The Gelsenkirchen club, who lost the lead to Bayern Munich when they crashed 4-1 at Energie Cottbus in the Bundesliga on Saturday, restored some pride in a one-sided semifinal.

Schalke will play amateurs Union Berlin in the final in Berlin on May 26. They beat Second Division Borussia Moenchengladbach on penalties in the other semifinal on Tuesday.

Schalke, who lifted the German Cup in 1937 and 1972, had a dream start, opening the scoring after just three minutes with a header by Ebbe Sand from Emile Mpenza's cross.

Three minutes later midfielder Andreas Moellers set up Gerald Asamoah who made it 2-0 with a powerful, left-foot drive from the edge of the box.

Belgian striker Mpenza killed the tie in the 18th minute when he collected a Michael Bueskens pass to add a third with an angled shot from just inside the penalty area.

Bundesliga strugglers Stuttgart's best chance came early in the second half when Brazilian Adhemar hit the bar from a free kick.

If Schalke, currently second in the Bundesliga two points behind Bayern, make it into the Champions League or its qualifying round Union will play in the UEFA Cup, even if they lose the final.

Bafana Bafana to woo England

REUTERS, Johannesburg
South Africa are hoping England will accept an invitation to play a friendly international in Johannesburg at the end of the year.

The South African FA (SAFA) said on Wednesday it had talked to its English counterpart about the possibility of England appearing in the annual Nelson Mandela Inauguration Challenge match.

Discussions were not concluded and an answer was expected later, SAFA added.

Portugal and Mexico have also been earmarked as possible opponents for the game, which commemorates

the inauguration of South Africa's first democratically-elected president in 1994.

Last year, world champions France played a 0-0 draw in the challenge match.

The fixture, which started in 1995, grew out of a special match arranged against Zambia in Johannesburg on May 12 1994, the day Mandela was sworn in as president.

Argentina, Brazil, Netherlands, Egypt and Sweden have also played.

Revised FA Cup fifth round draw

REUTERS, London
Revised draw for the fifth round of the English FA Cup after Wednesday's matches (Roman numerals denote division of non-premier league teams, MI denotes minor league side):
Leicester City v Bristol City (II)
Wycombe (II) v Middlesbrough or Wimbledon (I)
Bolton (I) v Blackburn (I)
Tottenham Hotspur v Stockport (I)
Liverpool v Manchester City
Arsenal v Chelsea
Southampton v Tranmere (I)
Sunderland v West Ham United
Ties to be played over weekend of February 17/18.

Hartson joins Coventry

REUTERS, London
John Hartson has finally completed his on-off transfer from English First Division side Wimbledon to Premier League strugglers Coventry City.
"We're delighted John Hartson is joining us. We've agreed terms with Wimbledon and that's a private matter between both parties," City chairman Bryan Richardson told the club website on Thursday.
The 25-year-old Welsh international striker will train with his new team mates today after ending a month-long saga during which the deal collapsed twice.
An original five million pounds transfer broke down when City striker Cedric Roussel refused a move in the opposite direction. Coventry then pulled out when the deal looked back on because they could not secure insurance on the player.
Hartson will be in the Coventry squad to face West Ham on Monday.



Tottenham Hotspur's Darren Anderton scores his side's second goal against fellow Londoners Charlton Athletic in their fourth round FA Cup encounter on February 7.

FA Cup Spurs claw past Charlton

Football
REUTERS, London

Tottenham Hotspur fans had their belief in destiny reinforced on Wednesday when their team scored three goals in six minutes to recover from 2-0 down and beat Charlton Athletic 4-2 in the FA Cup fourth round.

Minor-league Kingstonian suffered a heartbreaking 1-0 home fourth round replay defeat by Bristol City while First Division Blackburn won 5-2 at premier league Derby County.

Tottenham have an impressive history of winning trophies when the year ends in a one, including the double in 1961, League Cup in 1971 and FA Cup in 1981 and 91. But recent form pointed against more success in 2001.

They had drawn their last four games 0-0 -- including a dour encounter against Charlton in the league four days ago -- failed to score in seven of their last nine games and had not won a single away game in the league.

They fell behind after 11 minutes at The Valley as Chris Powell nipped in to head his first goal in 113 games for Charlton.
Charlton doubled their lead five minutes after the break when Matt Svensson squeezed the ball past Neil Sullivan.

A Richard Rufus own goal in the 58th minute -- Spurs' first in more than five hours of football -- gave George Graham's side hope.
And five minutes later Spurs

were ahead after two goals in the space of 60 seconds, Darren Anderton and

Oyvind Leonhardson turning the game on its head.
Sergey Rebrov completed the recovery to earn Spurs a home fifth round against First Division Stockport and leave their fans more convinced than ever that their name will be on the cup for a ninth time.

Derby went ahead in the first minute as Chris Riggot headed in a Craig Burley cross and then missed three great chances.

They paid for their profligacy when Gary Hiteroff equalised three minutes after the break and Marcus Bent headed Blackburn ahead 10 minutes later -- both goals coming from Jason McAteer

Latest odds

REUTERS, London
Tottenham Hotspur were cut from 9-1 to 11-2 joint third favourites to win the FA Cup after their comeback 4-2 victory at Charlton Athletic on Wednesday.
British bookmaker William Hill rated Liverpool 11-4 favourites with Arsenal, who play Chelsea at home in the fifth round, second favourites at 4-1.
Spurs, who now host Stockport, and Chelsea were 11-2.
Sunderland, who face fellow premier leaguers West Ham -- conquerors of Manchester United -- were 8-1.

French First Division

Lille leave it late

Football
REUTERS, Paris

Sylvain N'Diaye crashed home an equaliser seven minutes from time to give Lille a 1-1 home draw with Nantes in their top-of-the-table French First Division match on Wednesday.

Lille and Nantes now both have 44 points from 26 matches, with Lille remaining top on goal difference.

Nantes looked set for all three points after attacking midfielder Eric Carriere rounded off an excellent passing movement to give the visitors the lead just before halftime -- but Lille fought back impressively in the second half.

"We were very happy to get a point after a catastrophic first half," said Lille captain Djerson Boutoille.

Nantes were disappointed not to hold on.
"We were very close to breaking them after scoring first," said midfielder Stephane Ziani. "But now the suspense continues."

Girondins Bordeaux and Sedan both moved on to 43 points, leaving the top four sides all within a point of each other.

A penalty by Lilian Laslandes gave Girondins Bordeaux a 2-1 win at home to Monaco.

Monaco took the lead through Christian Panucci, but Pedro Pauleta's 13th goal of the season pulled Bordeaux level.

Cedric Mionnet scored with a back-heel three minutes into injury time to give Sedan a 2-1 win at home to Troyes and maintain their unbeaten home league record.

Troyes led through an early goal from Farid Ghazi but then had Eric Roy sent off for a second

yellow card just before halftime. Moussa N'Diaye equalised for Sedan with 12 minutes

left and then Mionnet grabbed the last-gasp decider.
Olympique Lyon, held 1-1 at home by Olympique Marseille on Tuesday, were fifth on 42 points.

Under-achieving Paris St Germain suffered a 3-1 home defeat by En Avant Guingamp -- prompting anger among their long-suffering fans as well as coach Luis Fernandez.

"I'm extremely unhappy and find it hard to swallow this defeat,"

said Fernandez. "I have a big squad and I division -- not winning it."

Relegation-haunted Metz ended a 12-match run without a win when they beat Bastia 3-2.

AJ Auxerre defeated struggling Toulouse 2-0 at home while Strasbourg gave themselves some hope of avoiding the drop with a 1-0 win at home to RC Lens, who had El-Hadj Diouf sent off in the first half.

Teddy Bertin cracked home a free kick from long range for the Strasbourg goal.



Sedan's Madjid Adjaoud (L) tussles with a Troyes player in the French First Division on Wednesday.

Italian Cup semifinal

Fiorentina ride on Rui

REUTERS, Rome
An inspirational display by Rui Costa helped Fiorentina to a 2-0 win over AC Milan on Wednesday and a place in the Italian Cup final.

The two sides had shared four goals in the first leg at the San Siro Stadium.

Enrico Chiesa opened the scoring on Wednesday after receiving a fine, through ball from Portuguese midfielder Rui Costa in the 41st minute.

Seven minutes from time an unmarked Rui Costa completed his brilliant performance by dribbling down the right and firing a shot into the top right-hand corner of the net.

Parma play Udinese on Thursday in the second leg of their semifinal. Udinese won the first leg 2-1.

Stam to sign new deal

REUTERS, Manchester
Manchester United's Dutch international defender Jaap Stam said on Wednesday that he expects to sign a one-year contract extension in the next few weeks.

Stam's current deal runs until 2004 but the new contract is expected to hand him a wage increase that will bring him in line with the club's top earners Andy Cole and Roy Keane.

"United have made me an offer which I'm very happy with," Stam said.

"It's only a few minor things we need to talk about and I would expect to sign something in the next couple of weeks."

Stam has only recently returned to action from a long-term Achilles injury, but is considered a key component in the United side.

But while his future looks secure, striker Teddy Sheringham has revealed he is still waiting for a new contract offer.

Sheringham told MUTV: "I've not been offered anything. That's all I can tell you."

Happy Higueta

REUTERS, Barranquilla
Colombia's Junior Barranquilla opened their Libertadores Cup campaign with a 3-1 win over Rosario Central on Wednesday as Rene Higueta, one of the most eccentric goalkeepers the game has ever seen, made his debut for them.
Higueta, 34, was soon up to his old tricks, dribbling the ball out of defence in his usual maverick style whenever he got the chance.
On one occasion, he was almost dispossessed in a near repetition of the famous incident at the 1990 World Cup in Italy when Cameroon's Roger Milla stole the ball from him in midfield and scored the goal that knocked out Colombia.
Junior took control of the group one match with two quick goals before halftime.
Orlando Ballesteros rifled home the first after the Rosario central defence failed to clear the ball, then Brazilian Marquinhos converted a penalty awarded for a foul on Eulalio Arriaga.
Playmaker Oscar Restrepo added a third in the 52nd minute to send Junior top of the group with three points on goal difference from Velez Sarsfield.
Pablo Sanchez scored a last minute consolation for the Argentine team to deny Higueta a clean sheet.

Spanish Cup

Barca squeeze thru'

Football
REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona reached the last four of the Spanish Cup after they fought out a nerve-jangling 1-1 draw with local rivals and Cup holders Espanyol in their quarterfinal, second leg, match at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

The result gave Barcelona a 3-2 aggregate victory and sees them qualify for the semifinals for the second year running.

In another tense encounter Celta Vigo advanced despite losing 2-1 to nine-man Real Mallorca -- the Galician side going through 4-3 on aggregate.

Real Zaragoza joined them in the last four after they defeated first division basement club Racing Santander 2-0, giving them a 3-1 aggregate win.

Barcelona took an early lead when Frank de Boer headed home

from a Pep Guardiola corner.
But an error by 19-year-old keeper Jose Manuel Reina allowed city rivals Espanyol to level after 20 minutes.

The Barcelona keeper jumped high for a seemingly harmless cross but spilt the ball as he hit the ground and Roger Garcia was on hand to put it into the empty goal.

The Espanyol defence gradually got the measure of the Barcelona front men and looked increasingly threatening on the counter attack, with both Raul Tamudo and Toni Velamazán going close on a number of occasions.

Tempers flared in the second half and Barcelona were reduced to 10 men when Dutch international Philip Cocu was red carded for a dangerous challenge on Tamudo in the 76th minute.

The visitors very nearly forced extra time in the dying moments of the match as substitute Akinori Nishizawa put the ball in the net,

only to find his goal disallowed for offside.

A headed goal from former Barcelona defender Miguel Angel Nadal gave Mallorca a first half lead against Celta Vigo, but Celta equalised on the night with another header from Catanha. Mallorca were reduced to nine men after Javier Oliazola and Cameroon international Samuel Eto'o were red carded in the second half. A late penalty from Vicente Engonga was not enough to save the tie for the Balearic islanders.

Racing Santander continued their run of ill fortune as they lost to Zaragoza. A deflected Toro Acuna free kick in the 33rd minute and a Xavier Aguado header early in the second half put the tie beyond the reach of the luckless Cantabrian side.

Alelco Madrid, who took a 4-1 aggregate victory over Third Division Granada on Tuesday, join the successful trio in the draw for the semifinals.



Espanyol's Japanese striker Akinori Nishizawa (R) celebrates after he scored the goal which was subsequently disallowed during their Spanish Cup encounter against Barcelona at the Nou Camp Stadium on February 7.

Scottish League Cup semifinal

Celtic win Old Firm derby

Football
REUTERS, Glasgow

Celtic have clinched their place in the Scottish League Cup final by defeating Rangers 3-1 as three players were sent off in an ugly climax to a bruising game.

Claudio Reyna and Michael Mols of Rangers and Celtic's Lubomir Moravcik were all shown the red card after Reyna's scything tackle on Bobby Petta of Celtic sparked a mass confrontation.
There were also 11 yellow cards.

Two goals from Henrik Larsson - taking his total for the season 37 - killed off Rangers, as Celtic, the holders, set up a final at the National Stadium on March 18

against Kilmarnock.

Now the Glasgow rivals will reconvene in the league on Sunday at Celtic Park for the second instalment of this Old Firm derby double-header.

However, any suggestion that the two clubs would save themselves for the more important league match evaporated as the players tore into each other from the first whistle.

Celtic went ahead after six minutes when Ramon Vega thumped a header against the bar from Alan Thompson's free-kick and Chris Sutton volleyed in the rebound.

Larsson made it 2-0 in 16 minutes, pouncing on a mistake by Rangers defender Robert Malcolm and lobbed goalkeeper Stefan Klos.

Jorg Albers reduced the deficit

with a penalty in the 36th minute when Vega pulled down Scott Wilson in the box.

The half ended with players squaring up as they left the pitch and officials trying desperately to restore calm.

Celtic were awarded a penalty of their own after 68 minutes when this time Wilson made the error and hauled down Larsson, allowing the Swedish striker to send Klos the wrong way from the spot.

In the final minute, Reyna, who had been booked in the first half for a brutal foul on Paul

Lambert, cut down Petta and the United States captain was then involved in a melee in which Slovakian international Moravcik and Rangers' Dutch international Mols were dismissed for throwing punches.

Banking on Mr Miracle

REUTERS, Oakland

The task at hand looms large, but Bora Milutinovic approaches it with his own characteristic aplomb.

Known as "The Miracle Worker," Milutinovic is the only coach in history to take four countries to the second round of the World Cup finals, but now the jovial Serb faces perhaps his biggest challenge: guiding the People's Republic of China to the 2002 finals in South Korea and Japan.

"Results for me right now don't matter," Milutinovic said just before his team lost 2-1 to the United States in another preparatory friendly at the end of last month.

"Right now, I am looking for the right players, trying to play as many games as possible, getting the team some experience."

The 56-year-old Milutinovic is in his second year in charge of the squad from a country that has a population of 1.3 billion, but is still taking baby steps in the world of international soccer.

Their long-term aim is to gain some of the respect neighbours Japan and South Korea have garnered.



had with the United States to prepare as I would like to. I had 92 games between 1991-94 with the U.S., but we are making progress."
Milutinovic took Mexico (1986), Costa Rica (1990), the United States (1994) and Nigeria (1998) to the second round of the World Cup but past glories mean little when there are rumblings in the Chinese media and soccer circles for

Milutinovic to produce results, especially following losses to Egypt and Iran in recent friendlies.
"The pressure is part of the job," he said. "But for me, I would rather lose all the friendlies and qualify for World Cup." China field a team that is physically fit and very quick, yet technically far from astute -- and unlike the women's team, the Chinese men are tagged as chronic underachievers.

A single Olympic appearance (1988) and a trip to the Asian Cup championship in 1984 where they lost to Saudi Arabia stand as China's only major international merits.

The 12-team Chinese professional league is now six years old and beginning to produce better players with the versatile Fan Zhiyi now established at English First Division club Crystal Palace. Increased corporate sponsorship make it possible for the team to travel more and improve training and playing facilities.

"We are making improvements," said Li Xiaoguang, the general manager of China's national teams.

BORA MILUTINOVIC