

Italian football chief sends UEFA letter of protest

AFP, Rome

The High Commissioner of the Italian Football Federation, Gianni Petrucci, on Friday sent a letter to European football's governing body UEFA protesting at the refereeing of Spaniard Jose Garcia Aranda in Thursday's UEFA Cup tie between Liverpool and AS Roma.

The Italians, who had a nightmare night with Roma, Parma and Inter Milan all being knocked out leaving no Italian representatives in the last eight, are furious at the referee's decision to change his mind and award a corner to Roma instead of a penalty with the match delicately poised.

Roma were leading 1-0 at Liverpool, trailing 2-1 on aggregate, when the Spaniard at first awarded a penalty for apparent handball in the 77th minute against Markus Babbel but then changed his mind and pointed to the corner flag instead.

Petrucci, who is also president of the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), wrote that his federation had been left bemused by the refereeing of the Spaniard.

Roma coach Fabio Capello was fuming after the match saying that the referee should have stuck to his original decision.

"Of course it was a penalty," said Capello.

"The referee pointed to the penalty spot twice. But Batistuta hadn't seen the decision and instead ran to the corner flag to take what he thought was a corner."

"But because of that it looked like the referee changed his mind. But you can't just change your mind like that," he added.

Scottish Premiership Sara bloopers steal the show

AFP, Glasgow

A rare goal from Bert Konterman gave Rangers a 1-0 win over Dundee but they had to survive two missed penalties at Dens Park on Saturday.

Dundee striker Juan Sara was the man who wasted both spot kicks, and the latter miss led almost immediately to Konterman's winner.

Scott Wilson had brought Sara down for the first but the Argentinian's response was one of the most wayward spot-kicks in Scottish footballing history.

His second, which followed a Lorenzo Amoroso foul on Claudio Caniggia, was closer but still wide of Stefan Klos' goal.

Amazingly, the game also saw a third penalty miss, with Rangers substitute Billy Dodds the guilty man late on.

The result saw champions Rangers leapfrog Hibernian back into second place. Leaders Celtic face the Edinburgh club on Sunday.

A samba band was in the crowd to give musical accompaniment to any excitement produced by the home side but there was little on show until the final minute of the half.

That was when Sara went down under Scott Wilson's challenge right on the edge of the box and immediately the Rangers players, with Lorenzo Amoroso leading the way, began berating the linesman who had signalled to referee Hugh Dallas that it was indeed a foul challenge within the area.

In the end it did not matter as the striker took it himself and produced one of the most inaccurate spot kicks in living memory, blasting it both high and wide into a startled section of the crowd.

The snow had long since stopped by this point and the second half was played in sunshine.

It did not take long before Javier Artero had clipped the Rangers bar with an effort that followed Giorgi Nemsadze's clever lay-back and it was the Georgian who was the game's outstanding performer overall.

Once again this season Amoroso made major errors with some alarmingly wayward passing near his own goal but managed to go unpunished until his fateful slide in on Claudio Caniggia.

It was a relieved Italian who watched Sara miss from the spot again as the Argentinian slotted wide this time.

Then came Konterman's goal from a free-kick move and the stalled Rangers handwagon was rolling once more.

Referee Hugh Dallas was to point to the spot once more, at the Dundee end.

Substitute Billy Dodds, who had come on for Allan Johnston early in the second half, went down under Steven Tweed's challenge and elected to take it himself.

But it was not a day for spot kickers and Dodds marked his return from injury with a miss of his own, trundling the ball wide of a post.



Shola Ameobi (R) of Newcastle United kicks before Manchester City's Richard Dunne could challenge him during their Premiership encounter at St James' Park on February 24.

Premiership City wins at long last

Football

AFP, London

Bermudan international Shaun Goater fired Manchester City to their first win in 11 matches with a 1-0 win at Newcastle on Saturday, turning up the heat on English Premiership fellow strugglers Middlesbrough who lost 1-0 at home to Southampton.

City's win, their first at Newcastle in 33 years, pulled them to within a point of fourth from bottom Middlesbrough, whose defeat was the first in 11 Premiership matches under the stewardship of former England coach Terry Venables.

City boss Joe Royle was in understandably optimistic mood, insisting his team would stay up.

"I'm a great optimist anyway, but I've never thought anything different than we will survive," said Royle.

"I think we're too good to go down. With us winning and one or two other results going our way or half going our way, it puts us right back in the game."

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson said his talented 22-year-old defender Kieron Dyer was on the verge of withdrawing from the England squad because of his longstanding shin injury.

"He feels he can't give it his best and he doesn't want to go and play like that for England."

Middlesbrough went down to a 49th-minute goal from Southampton midfielder Mark Draper to give the victors a welcome boost after their traumatic 4-3 loss to Tranmere Rovers in the FA Cup earlier in the week.

Venables said: "We are not away from this and it's going to go to the end."

"I thought we started badly, we made one or two mistakes and then seemed to have the jitters for 20 minutes."

Squad for Spain friendly announced A Cole powered England

Football

AFP, Birmingham

New England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson on Friday named three Coles and sprang some surprises in his first squad for the friendly against Spain at Villa Park on Wednesday.

The Swede, the first foreigner in charge of the England team, included Manchester United striker Andy Cole, 19-year-old West Ham midfielder Joe Cole and uncapped 20-year-old Arsenal full-back Ashley Cole in his 31-man squad.

Chief among the surprises was the inclusion of 31-year-old Charlton left-back Chris Powell, who Eriksson said could help solve England's lack of left-sided defenders.

The defender was one of six uncapped players in the squad, along with Ashley Cole, 19-year-old West Ham midfielder Michael Carrick, Joe Cole, Everton defender Michael Ball and Sunderland midfielder Gavin McCann.

Powell admitted he was "stunned" by his inclusion.

"This has come as a total surprise to me. I'm proud, delighted and still a little bit stunned. It is a huge honour and I hope it reflects well on everyone at the club."

Eriksson said: "I'd (Grip - his assistant) and I are quite new to this situation but we have seen a lot of games."

"I'd been here almost three months, I have been here

Southampton manager Glenn Hoddle pronounced himself "absolutely delighted" with his team's performance.

"It was a nice feeling to be in the dressing room after this. I thought we deserved it and it was good to see Mark Draper get his first goal for the club."

Second from bottom Coventry look in dire danger of slipping out of the Premiership for the first time in 35 years, a home debut goal by Wales international John Hartson salvaging just a point in a 2-2 draw against Charlton.

Coventry manager Gordon Strachan admitted it would now take "a heck of a performance" for his side to avoid the drop.

After watching his side's eighth Premiership match without a victory, Strachan believes that four clubs are now involved in the relegation dog fight, Bradford, Coventry, Manchester City and Middlesbrough.

He said: "There is a small league now of four clubs and three of them, I think, will go down. We need to get to the top of that league."

In the chase for European places next season, Sunderland suffered a huge blow by losing 2-0 to Leicester while Ipswich and Leeds drew within a point of them with wins against 10-man Everton and Tottenham, who went down to their first Premiership home defeat of the season, respectively.

Bottom club Bradford look increasingly doomed after West Ham midfielder Frank Lampard celebrated his England call-up with both goals in a 2-1 victory to give the Hammers their first Premiership win of the year.

Lee Bowyer sealed a perfect week for Leeds, following their Champions League 4-1 thrashing of Anderlecht, when his goal sealed a come from behind 2-1 win over Tottenham, coached by former Leeds boss George Graham.

Les Ferdinand scored Tottenham's opener against Leeds, thanks to a mistake by his cousin Rio Ferdinand, the world's most expensive central defender.

But Ian Harte converted a disputed penalty awarded when Gary Doherty fouled Bowyer and the midfielder grabbed the win with an angled shot in the 57th minute.

Leeds boss David O'Leary said: "We went on to dominate the second half and should have scored more goals."

"We showed belief and a lot of character. We also played a lot of good football and I'm delighted to get the three points."

That's seven games unbeaten now and the lads are showing they are able to handle the situation of coming back to the Premiership from a European match.

Dean Sturridge opened the scoring for Leicester by heading past goalkeeper Thomas Sorenson and Sunderland's challenge was dealt a mortal blow with the second-half dismissal of midfielder John Oster for a second bookable offence.

Sturridge, making the most of the newly-created space, passed for Nigerian striker Ade Akinbiyi to bundle the ball into the net for the winner.

Ipswich got their first win in six Premiership and Cup matches when they scored twice following the dismissal of Everton's Ghanaian midfielder Alex Nyarko.

Two goals in three minutes from Matt Holland and Alan Armstrong kept Ipswich in touch with the clubs chasing UEFA and Champions League spots.

Derby County took three vital points in their battle for survival when Jamaican international Dean Burton converted a 42nd-minute penalty after Gareth Barry - surprisingly omitted from Eriksson's squad - had brought him down.

Runaway leaders Manchester United host second-placed Arsenal on Sunday.

Primera Liga Champions hold leaders

AFP, La Coruna

Spanish Champions Deportivo La Coruna came from 2-0 down to deservedly draw 2-2 with leaders Real Madrid on Saturday and leave the visitors without a win here since 1991.

Deportivo's fightback left them just four points off Real with third placed Valencia, who are six points behind Coruna, playing on Sunday.

Real had looked well in control when they went into the break 2-0 up thanks to an own goal by Helder and a penalty from Portuguese playmaker Luis Figo after Guri was brought down in the area.

However, Deportivo, who missed several golden opportunities with Dutchman Roy Makaay blasting over from five yards and then Fran heading over from the same distance, stormed back.

They reduced the deficit in the 51st minute through the outstanding Brazilian Djalminha, who tucked away a penalty after he was fouled by Figo in the area.

Their second-half dominance, which included Victor, Makaay and Djalminha hitting the post, was rewarded when Diego Tristan struck five minutes from the end.

Serie A

Baggio double saves Brescia

REUTERS, Milan

Brescia's Roberto Baggio scored twice against former club Fiorentina to earn a 2-2 away draw in Serie A on Saturday.

Fourth-placed Atalanta managed only a goalless draw at home to bottom club Bari.

Baggio, just back from injury, drove the ball home in the fourth minute after his header from a Dario Hubner cross had been parried by Francesco Toldo.

Fiorentina levelled in the 23rd minute when Nuno Gomes fed Enrico Chiesa and the ex-Italy striker cut into the area before unleashing a fine shot.

Brescia were on top after the break but it was Fiorentina who moved ahead in the 62nd minute when Chiesa found Portuguese international Rui Costa on the right and his cross was headed home by compatriot Nuno Gomes.

Five minutes later Baggio, who made his name with Fiorentina in the late 1980s before moving on to Juventus and AC Milan, earned Brescia a point with a stunning strike from a free kick.

Disappointing Atalanta almost went a goal behind at the end of the first half when Paolo Poggi, on loan from Roma, shot narrowly wide after bursting into the area.

Atalanta had the better of the latter stages but found the Bari defence resilient. Their best chance fell to Cristiano Doni in the 79th minute but he drove wide.



Real Madrid superstar Luis Figo (L) and Deportivo La Coruna's Roy Makaay going for the ball during their Primera Liga clash at La Coruna on February 24.

Hong Kong under-20 tournament Brazil champions

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

A golden goal from Diogo Siston gave 10-man Brazil a hard-fought 1-0 win over China in the final of the Hong Kong under-20 Youth tournament here Sunday.

Siston fired in a powerful 20-yard drive in the third minute of extra-time which hit the underside of the crossbar and bounced in to allow Brazil to escape with their pride intact at the end of the four-nation tournament which also featured Argentina and Japan.

"When I hit that shot, maybe I had some help from up there," said the elated Siston, who plays alongside star Romario for Vasco da Gama in the Brazilian First

Division. Brazil, who squeezed past Japan on penalty kicks in the preliminary round, were under huge pressure after they lost midfielder Anderson Da Silva who collected his second yellow card for swan diving and trying to earn a penalty in the 89th minute.

But even though down to 10 men, Brazil went all out on the attack and reaped the dividends immediately. "Yes, there was a change of plan in extra-time. We went more on the offensive. We knew the only way to get out with a win would be to attack and not go on the defensive," said Brazilian coach Eraldo Torres.

Both teams created a raft of chances but frustratingly failed to find the net. Lucas de Santos came

close twice to breaking the deadlock but was prevented by the woodwork and diving Chinese keeper An Qi. China's best chances fell to Wang Xinxin who was off target on a couple of occasions. While Brazil added another title to their recent collection -- having won the under-20 South American championship earlier this month -- China were the revelation of the tournament having beaten Argentina 3-1 and then pushing Brazil into extra-time.

"We played well but were beaten by a more skillful side. We have to improve on our technical skills if we are to challenge top sides like Brazil and Argentina consistently," said Chinese coach Shen Xianglu.

Bundesliga Draw doesn't bother Bayern



Bayern Munich's Elber (R) trying to negotiate the ball while FC Cologne's Moses Sichone prepares to intervene during their Bundesliga game on February 24.

Football

AFP, Berlin

German champions Bayern Munich continued their poor recent league form on Saturday being held to a 1-1 draw at home to Cologne, but managed to retain their Bundesliga lead as the top three sides failed to win.

The Bundesliga giants, who all but secured their place in the Champions League quarter-finals with a 3-0 defeat of Spartak Moscow on Wednesday, maintain a two-point cushion on title-chasers Schalke 04 who had to settle for a 0-0 home draw in their Ruhr derby match with Borussia Dortmund.

Bayern were fighting from the outset after being behind for 40 minutes as Cologne, defeated in their previous three matches, opened the scoring in the 27th minute through midfielder Markus Kreuz.

The Munich side were playing with a depleted squad with Swiss international Ciriaco Sforza, German's Alexander Zickler and Michael Wiesinger all out injured.

It showed in their performance and the hosts were whistled off the pitch at half-time by a disappointed Munich crowd.

Bayern lifted their game after the break finding the net 20 minutes into the second half with a header from German international striker Carsten Jancker.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said his players were feeling the effects of their midweek victory at Spartak Moscow.

"Cologne played well and made life hard for us. We needed 45 minutes to run the tiredness out of our legs but in the second half we were more aggressive but unfortunately it didn't lead to a goal."

"We'll have to be satisfied with a point."

Schalke had a tougher task on paper against rivals Dortmund. But it was a lacklustre derby match which was just enough to move Dortmund up one spot to third position ahead of Bayer Leverkusen who suffered a 3-1 humiliation at home on Friday night to newly-promoted minnows Energie Cottbus.

A double from Romanian Vasile Miriuta in the 33rd and 62nd

and a header from Croatian Antun Labak in the 42nd threw a spanner in the works of Leverkusen's title bid.

Leverkusen gave a less than inspiring performance coming away with a late consolation goal in the 74th from Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto.

The win lifts Cottbus in their bid against the drop and they are now fifth from the bottom. Relegation-threatened Hamburg secured a vital 3-2 win over VfL Wolfsburg giving them their first victory in eight games with Iranian international Mehdi Mahdavi getting their third.

1860 Munich ended Freiburg's ten-match unbeaten run winning 3-0 away, inspired by two first-half goals from Bulgarian international Daniel Borimirov - the third came in the 50th minute from Markus Schrohr.

Werder Bremen won 2-1 away at Eintracht Frankfurt scoring through Brazilian striker Zlatan and Claudio Pizarro, with the hosts getting on to the scoresheet only thanks to a last minute own goal by Bremen's Frank Baumgart.