

C qualifying Palestine maze

AFP, Hong Kong
Palestine turned in a gutsy performance to pip Malaysia 1-0 Friday as Qatar cruised to a 2-0 victory over Hong Kong to cement top spot at the end of the first leg of their group's 2002 Asian World Cup qualifiers.

Group 3 favourites Qatar made a hat-trick of wins when a own-goal arising from a cruel bounce of Hong Kong foot sealed the tiny Gulf state's three points.

With a five point advantage over second placed Palestine few would bet against Qatar from moving into the second round when they host the return leg at the end of the month.

Palestinian striker Mohammed Al-Jeesh scored the only goal in the day's frenetic first match with a long range blast late in the second half that sent his teammates into rapturous celebrations before the referee crowd.

The breakthrough came in the 61st minute when a defensive blunder down the left forced the Malaysian keeper to hurriedly clear a ball straight to Al-Jeesh who took aim from 30 metres (yards) out and blasted the ball into the back of the net.

The Palestinians, made up almost exclusively of amateurs from the violence-wracked West Bank and Gaza, defended heroically throughout the second half as Malaysia launched wave after wave of attacks.

Palestine's Egyptian coach Mustafa Abdelghali was ecstatic by his team's performance.

"The result today came from God. This is a fantastic confidence booster going to Qatar at the end of the month. We still have a chance to qualify for the finals," he said.

The winners of the 10 preliminary round groups in Asia advance to two second round groups of five, the winners of which qualify for the finals in Japan and South Korea. A third team could qualify in a play-off against a European team.

That's outrageous!

AFP, London
The English Football Association (FA) on Friday said it is investigating whether a women's football team which triumphed 57-0 had a new British record for organised soccer.

The landslide victory was registered last Sunday when Willenhall Town women's team crushed West Midlands League Division One North rivals Burton Brewers.

FA statistician and librarian David Barber said staff at its Soho square headquarters in central London were trying to establish whether the monster scoreline is a new British record for senior football.

"In local football it's difficult to say if something is a record or not," said Barber.

"The best we can do is to say it's the biggest we have ever heard of."

Anything above 20 is obviously quite exceptional, and 45-0 could be a goal every two minutes and a's well above that."

Barber said the Doncaster Ladies, one of England's best female soccer outfits, once notched a 46-0 win against a village side in a county cup match.

He added: "It certainly puts that in the shade. I would think 7-0 is probably a British record."

Bottom-of-the-table Brewers, who are said to have a young and experienced side, next meet Willenhall in a cup match this Friday.

Premiership Joachim double downs Ipswich

AFP, London
Lilian Joachim scored twice as Aston Villa came from behind to defeat English Premiership rivals Ipswich 2-1 at Villa Park on Saturday.

Alun Armstrong made the breakthrough for the visitors before half-time but Joachim wrapped up two points with two second-half strikes to take his tally to five goals in six games.

The win was Villa's first at home in the Premiership since November.

Joachim handed in a transfer request at the beginning of the season after falling out with John Gregory but his passionate display seems to have won over the Villa manager.

Villa's assistant manager Steve Harrison was delighted for Joachim who is keeping Villa's record signing Argentinian Juan Pablo Angel out of the starting line-up.

"I am pleased for the little fellow," said Harrison. "He kept his eye for both goals."

"He has worked hard on one-on-one this month. He is happy in being and light in his step."



Tony Adams (R), the Arsenal captain, scoring with a header while Blackburn custodian Brad Friedel looks on during their FA Cup quarterfinal at Highbury on March 10.

FA Cup A Wycombe wonder

Football

AFP, London

Substitute Roy Essandoh fired lowly Second Division outfit Wycombe Wanderers into the semi-finals of the English FA Cup on Saturday for the first time in the club's short history.

Wanderers, who only achieved league status in 1993 and have never been beyond the second round of the world's most famous knock-out competition, beat Premiership high-flyers Leicester 2-1 in a thrilling contest at Filbert Street.

Essandoh came off the bench to head a dramatic 90th winner and earn Wanderers, managed by Lawrie Sanchez, scorer of Wimbledon's winner in the shock FA Cup final win over Liverpool in 1988, a place in the last four.

Hero Essandoh is on a two-week contract at Wycombe after the Ghanaian answered an advertisement which Sanchez had placed on the internet in a desperate bid to find a goalscorer.

"We went into the game without any centre forwards," said Sanchez. "We've got six of them, as you saw at the end, hobbling across the pitch all injured."

"We didn't have any ourselves. We advertised on the internet because we didn't have any strikers."

"We had a makeshift forward line. We started with Keith Ryan (a midfielder) up front. And then we put Essandoh on for 10 minutes at the end. He's got his head on a cross and now he's a hero."

"His contract only runs until next Wednesday so I'll have to sit down and have a chat with him!"

Sanchez, who this week tried to sign former Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli, added: "Roy has scored and we didn't know him last Tuesday and that's the glory of the FA Cup."

"I've said to the players all along that it's a competition for heroes. If you stick your head in the right place suddenly everybody's talking about you."

The visitors, who beat First Division Wimbledon on penalties in the previous round, took the lead five minutes after half-time with a stooping header only for Turkey international Muzzy Izzet to level the scores 17 minutes later.

Sanchez's giantkillers - on 130 pounds (200 dollars) a man to beat Peter Taylor's side - had the last laugh, however, when Essandoh's bullet header snatched victory for the underdogs.

In Saturday's other quarter-final Arsenal defeated First Division high-flyers Blackburn Rovers 3-0 to advance comfortably to the last four.

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger, whose team faces a crucial Champions League clash with Bayern Munich on Wednesday, kept French duo Thierry Henry - the club's top marksman - and midfielder Patrick Vieira in reserve on the substitutes' bench.

There were only 75 seconds on the clock when Gunners' FA cup specialist Sylvain Wiltord drove them in front with his sixth goal in four matches in the competition.

A delightful dummy by Lauren allowed the ball to flow to Robert Pires on the right and he picked out Wiltord, his French international colleague, who hit the ball first time past Brad Friedel from 12 yards.

Friedel performed wonders three minutes later, tipping Dennis Bergkamp's chip over the bar.

But from the resultant corner by Ashley Cole, Arsenal skipper Tony Adams rose above everybody in the six-yard box to head home and double the home side's advantage.

Wiltord laid on the third goal for Arsenal nine minutes before the interval.

Bergkamp won the ball with a firm tackle and Wiltord, gaining possession on the left, spotted Pires pulling away from his marker on the far post.

The delivery was slightly over-hit but Pires pulled the ball down superbly before clipping it past Friedel from an acute angle.

On Sunday Liverpool's chances of emulating Arsenal's domestic League Cup and FA Cup double of 1993 can edge closer to reality when they make the short journey to bottom of the First Division Tranmere Rovers for their quarter-final clash on Sunday.

West Ham, conquerors of Premiership leaders Manchester United in the fourth round, could be without veteran defender Stuart Pearce when they welcome London rivals Tottenham to Upton Park for their quarter-final tie on Sunday.

The 38-year-old former England international sustained an ankle injury in Wednesday's night's 2-0 home defeat against Chelsea and hobbled out of the action after just eight minutes.

Pearce has performed heroically for the Hammers in previous rounds, most notably in West Ham's 1-0 win at Premiership rivals Sunderland in the fifth round.

Cragnotti the Roman

Football

AFP, Rome

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti has denounced what he considers attempts by the traditionally powerful northern clubs in Italy to destabilise the emergence of Rome-based sides Lazio and AS Roma as the dominant force in Italian football.

Cragnotti even hinted he would prefer arch rivals Roma to win the Scudetto than Juventus - Lazio are the only other team still in contention with that duo - as he launched a blistering verbal assault on the game's historic power base in an interview with Saturday's Corriere dello Sport.

Last year Lazio won their second ever Scudetto - and their first for 25 years - while this year AS Roma, who have not won a title since 1982-3, lead Juventus by six points.

Cragnotti believes the northern giants Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan - he mentioned the first two specifically - resent the fact they have been usurped by Rome.

And he believes they are behind a whispering campaign against his club's championship success last season which has been tarnished by revelations that their Argentinian midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron was falsely registered as a European Union player.

That case is currently the subject of ongoing judicial and football inquiries.

Cragnotti said: "In the last weeks I have heard a true and real lynching of Lazio, its directors and Veron about a case which cannot be judged by the sporting body until the judicial body has ruled."

Cragnotti made it clear who he felt was behind the whispering.

"You know full well who is in charge, and has been for a while, and who wields the power when it comes to voting," he said.

"Galliani (AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani), Milan, Juventus, the big clubs in the north want to keep us out of all the activity of the league but they will not succeed."

Warning to his theme, Cragnotti said: "The Roman supremacy, at this moment, is very wor-

rying for the northern clubs who are no longer winning and dominating. So they are trying to break the capital in two."

Cragnotti, who made his fortune in marketing tomato ketchup, even hinted he would rather see Roma win the Scudetto than a northern side.

When asked if he wanted his co-tenants at the Olympic Stadium to triumph, he said: "Not as a Lazio man, no but as a representative of the city I am happy that the supremacy in the championship remains in Rome."



Diego Tristan (L), the Deportivo La Coruna striker, trying to round off Numancia's goal-keeper Alvaro Nunez during their Primera Liga game at La Coruna on March 10.

French Cup Lyon escapes

AFP, Paris

French Champions League hopefuls Lyon came within a whisker of a humiliating Cup defeat at the hands of fourth division amateurs Fontenay here Saturday.

Lyon - who last week thrashed German giants Bayern Munich 3-0 in Europe - looked set to crash down to earth spectacularly after going a goal down to the plucky part timers.

After midweek hero Sidney Govou scrambled an 80th minute equaliser to push the game into extra time Lyon looked to have secured their place in the quarter finals when a Christophe Delmotte goal gave them a 2-1 lead.

But the minnows from Fontenay conjured up a 119th-minute equaliser through Ducourneau to force a penalty shoot out against their more illustrious rivals.

Fontenay were feted like champions by the 10,000 fans despite missing their fifth penalty to go out 5-4 in the shoot out.

Nantes, who overcame fourth division national heroes Calais in last year's final, beat fifth division Carcassonne 3-0 in lashing rain on Saturday to book a place in the Cup quarter finals.

With Carcassonne and Fontenay going down, Saturday's giant-killing exploits were left to former French and European football giants Reims, now of the Third Division.

The 1956 European Cup finalists beat First Division outfit Bastia 1-0 in the day's biggest upset.

Litigiously, Reims goal-heros were former Bastia defender David Ducourtioux, who sunk his old club with a 44th-minute cross shot.

Auxerre beat Vannes 2-1 away to book their place in the last eight with goals from Djibrill Cisse and Stephane Guivarch, back from injury.

Primera Liga Deportivo thrash Numancia

AFP, Madrid

A second-half goal blitz helped Deportivo La Coruna move to within two points of Primera Liga leaders Real Madrid with a 4-1 drubbing of Numancia here Saturday.

Walter Pandiani and Diego Tristan both bagged a brace of goals each as Numancia were outclassed in the final 45 minutes after managing to hold their opponents to 0-0 at half-time.

The result was the perfect confidence-booster for Deportivo, who face a crunch clash with AC Milan at the San Siro on Tuesday to decide which of the two teams goes through to the Champions League quarter-finals.

Deportivo coach Javier Irureta will have been heartened that Pandiani and Tristan both got on the score-sheet again Saturday.

Pandiani had been his team's hat-trick hero in the amazing 4-3 win over Paris St Germain in Europe last week, with Tristan scoring the winner.

Elsewhere Saturday Valencia cranked up the pressure at the top of the Spanish First Division with a 1-0 win over Osasuna thanks to a Kily Gonzalez strike 13 minutes from time.

The win cements Valencia's third place position in the title race.

In Saturday's other match Athletic Bilbao drew 1-1 at home to Villarreal. Urzaiz' 81st minute effort cancelling out Martin Palermo's goal on 19 minutes for the visitors.

League leaders Real Madrid face relegation-threatened Real Sociedad in Sunday's matches, with fourth placed Barcelona taking on Real Mallorca at the Nou Camp.



AC Milan's Kaladze (C) vying for the ball with Atalanta's Nicola Ventola (L) during their Serie A fixture at Bergamo on March 10.

Serie A

Atalanta hold Milan

Football

AFP, Milan

AC Milan tuned up for next week's do-or-die Champions League clash with Spain's Deportivo La Coruna in an unconvincing style Saturday, drawing 1-1 with Atalanta in Bergamo in an Italian First Division match.

Milan took the lead somewhat fortuitously with a freak own goal by Atalanta's Stefano Lorenzi but then Maurizio Ganz bagged an equaliser for the hosts before having what would have been a winner chalked off for offside.

A draw was in the event the bare minimum for Milan for whom Tuesday's night Champions League clash is already being billed as the match that will herald the demise of coach Alberto Zac-

cheroni should the San Siro outfit, who must win, fail to qualify for the quarter-finals.

Milan took the lead after 25 minutes with a freak goal.

There seemed little danger as home goalkeeper Ivan Pelizzoli came out of goal but somehow wires were crossed and Lorenzi headed the ball into his own net.

But Atalanta fought their way back into the match and after 63 minutes they equalised through Ganz.

Gianpaolo Bellini did the spadework, setting up Ganz who squared the match with an acrobatic finish.

Minutes later Ganz had the ball in the net again but it was ruled out for offside although it was a team-mate rather than the 'scorer' who had strayed out of bounds.

Earlier Vicenza had prevailed

2-0 at home to fellow relegation rivals Napoli.

Their striker Luca Toni gave them the lead after 55 minutes, converting after good work from Vincenzo Sommese who had won the ball in midfield before serving Toni.

The second goal came in injury time with Carmine Esposito centring and Fabio Firmiani scoring.

Toni, reputedly a Manchester United target, was substituted by Firmiani after 78 minutes was taken to hospital after the match but tests revealed no serious damage.

Napoli president Giorgio Corbelli later said that coach Emiliano Mondonico's job was not at risk. Mondonico only took over at Napoli in November after his Czech predecessor Zdenek Zeman was fired.



Rudi Vata (R) of Energie Cottbus, bringing down Bayern Munich striker Giovane Elber during their Bundesliga clash at Munich on March 10.

Bundesliga

Bayern back on track

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich shot back to the top of the German First Division by beating Energie Cottbus 2-0 on Saturday as previous leaders Borussia Dortmund were held 2-2 by SC Freiburg.

Bayern quickly put their 3-0 midweek Champions League drubbing at Lyon behind them with an opening goal from veteran German international Mehmet Scholl after a cross from Frenchman Bixente Lizarazu.

Captain Stellen Effenberg added the second 13 minutes later, knocking in a header from giant striker Carsten Jancker in front of 38,000 fans at the Olympic Stadium.

Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer, who had severely criticised his team after the Lyon defeat, had a smile back on his face. He described Lizarazu's cross as "perfect". "We could have filmed that to show as a lesson," he added.

Bayern's first win in the league for five matches came at a perfect time - they face Arsenal in Munich on Wednesday for a crucial

Champions League showdown. Victory also avenged their defeat to the Bundesliga minnows from earlier in the season.

Elsewhere Dortmund gave up a 2-0 lead to draw at mid-table SC Freiburg, allowing Bayern to go one point clear at the top.

Dortmund went into the lead with goals from Brazilian midfielder Dede and Italian striker Giuseppe Reina, before Freiburg's Tunisian forward Adel Sellimi pulled one back with a penalty in the final minute of the first half.

Sellimi popped up again with the 58-minute equaliser to deprive Dortmund of a valuable win.

Dortmund coach, former German international star Matthias Sammer, said: "I am disappointed. We gave away two points today."

"The penalty was the crucial moment because at 2-0 up at half time we'd basically won the match."

"But this result proves that we're still not at the top level yet. If we had been, we would have taken all three points."

Freiburg trainer Volker Finke was understandably happier: "That was an advert for football today."

Hertha Berlin kept up the title chase and are lying fourth, three points behind Bayern, after a 1-0

win over Hansa Rostock thanks to a last-minute strike from Hungarian midfielder Pal Dardai.

Bayern Leverkusen are third after beating Werder Bremen 3-0 on Friday with goals.

Fifth-placed Schalke 04 drew 0-0 with Eintracht Frankfurt in Saturday's late match.

VfL Wolfsburg provided the biggest scoreline of the day with a 6-1 thrashing of lowly Unterhaching.

Cologne are just above Wolfsburg in the table after a 3-2 win at VfL Bochum.

Iordanescu takes over Al-Ain

AFP, Dubai

Former Romanian national coach Anghel Iordanescu has been recruited by Emirati club Al-Ain for the 2001-2002 season, the club confirmed Saturday.

Iordanescu, who led his country's national team to the World Cup quarter-finals in 1994, takes up his post later this month after agreeing a deal in the region of 450,000 dollars.