

Japanese stars nominated

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Japanese pair Hiroshi Nanami and Ryuzo Morioka have been named among four nominees for the Asian Player of the Year award for 2000. The pair are joined by Saudi Arabia's Nawaf Al Temyat and Lee Dong-gook of South Korea, with the winner being announced in Singapore on May 9.

Former Serie A-based midfielder Nanami, now back in Japan with Jubilo Iwata, picked up his nomination after being named the Most Valuable Player as Japan won the Asian Cup in Lebanon in October. It was the second time the east Asian nation had lifted the trophy. Shimizu S-Pulse central defender Morioka was named the same tournament's Best Defender while Lee, currently on loan at Werder Bremen in the Bundesliga, was the competition's top goalscorer with six goals in six games as Korea finished third. Al Temyat was a member of the Saudi side that reached the final in Lebanon. He also had a prominent role in Al Hilal's victory in both the Asian Club Championship in April and the Asian Super Cup in December, a win that qualified them for this year's FIFA Club World Championship. The eventual winner will succeed Iran's Ali Daei, who was not among this year's nominees.

Daei was the second Iranian to win the title in four years, after compatriot Khodadad Azizi claimed the 1996 award. The title in 1997 and 1998 went to Japan's Hidetoshi Nakata, currently with Italian league leaders AS Roma.

Other awards include Coach of the Year, for which European pair Philippe Troussier of Japan and Thailand's Peter Withe have been nominated, along with Iraq's Adnan Hamd and Nassr Al Johar of Saudi Arabia. Troussier is the favourite after guiding Japan to their Asian Cup victory. The Asian Football Confederation will also present awards for the Asian Young Player of the Year, Female Player of the Year and various teams of the year.

J-League So far so good for Sapporo

AFP, Tokyo

First Division newcomers Consadole Sapporo posted a second straight win beating one of the favourites Kashiwa Reysol 2-1 in the J-League football on Saturday.

New Brazilian import Will opened the scoring for Sapporo on a Koji Yamase pass in the 25th minute and added another in the 33rd minute before South Korea's Hwang Sun-Hong pulled one back in the dying moments.

"They had under-estimated us, but we proved we are ready to beat any team now. My players collected a rebound really well today," said Sapporo coach Takeshi Okada, former Japanese national coach.

"But we have to improve our game further," added Okada, who has set his eyes to finish among the top 10 in the 16-team First Division league.

Sapporo stood with a 2-0 win-loss record with the 1998 Asian club champions Jubilo Iwata for six points. Nagoya Grampus Eight and Vissel Kobe also took second straight wins for five points.

Two-time J-League champions Iwata, who won the season-opener 4-1 a week ago, took control from the very outset to overwhelm Sanfrecce Hiroshima 4-1 with Toshiya Fujita, Toshihiro Hattori and Naohiro Takahara scoring.

Dutch midfielder Tarik Oulida struck home an equalizer in injury time as Nagoya went on to add a decider through Yasuyuki Moriyama for a 2-1 victory over JEF United Ichihara.

Former Japanese international Kazuyoshi Miura, "King Kazu," led his new club Kobe with his first goal of the season for a 2-0 victory over FC Tokyo.

In other games, defending champions Kashima Antlers suffered a 2-1 defeat to Tokyo Verdy, while Shimizu S-Pulse downed Avispa Fukuoka 1-0 thanks to Ryuzo Morioka's header in the 73rd minute.

Brazilian substitute Adriano scored his first two goals in the league as Urawa Red Diamonds, who returned to the First Division this season, came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Cerezo Osaka.

Gullit odds slashed for Tottenham

REUTERS, London

Former Dutch international and Chelsea coach Ruud Gullit has emerged as second favourite to replace George Graham as manager of England's Tottenham Hotspur.

Leading bookmakers William Hill slashed his odds from 16-1 to 7-2 in the face of persistent support. Glenn Hoddle remains a clear 4-7 favourite to take over at White Hart Lane. Hills are also offering odds of 4-1 for Gianluca Vialli, 8-1 Terry Venables, 10-1 Dick Advocaat and John Gregory, 16-1 Alan Curbishley, Juergen Klinsmann, David Pleat and Peter Taylor.



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (L) of Manchester United locked in a tussle with Leicester City's Phil Gilchrist at Old Trafford on March 17.

Premiership

Pleat spurs Spurs

AFP, London

David Pleat emerged as an outside candidate for the Tottenham managership on Saturday after guiding the team to a comfortable 3-0 win over relegation-threatened Coventry at White Hart Lane.

Pleat, Tottenham's director of football, adopted the role of caretaker coach as the FA Cup semi-finalists began life without George Graham.

Graham, who only last Monday was being hailed for guiding Tottenham past West Ham in the FA Cup quarter-finals, was sacked as manager after falling out with the club's executive vice-chairman David Buchler on Friday.

Buchler said that Graham was sacked for breach of contract after disclosing details about the Premiership club's financial position to the press.

Pleat, Tottenham's manager when they finished third in the league and reached the FA Cup final in 1987, refused to take the credit for an easy victory and chose to salute his hard-working players instead.

"My wife could have run that team today," said Pleat. "I didn't change a thing, tactically or otherwise."

"It was the same team that won at West Ham last week and I didn't think about tinkering with it for even 10 seconds.

"They focused their minds very well today and helped one another in a team performance. They passed well, had good movement and scored the goals at the right times."

Former England coach Glenn Hoddle, a star performer with the Tottenham during the late 1970s and 1980s but now managing Southampton, has already been widely-tipped as Graham's successor at the North London club.

But Pleat could also be in the running despite playing down his chances of taking control of the team for a second term.

"I've not been asked that question, but I've heard other names mentioned," he said.

"All I was asked by Mr Buchler was to take charge of the team today. I never expected it to happen again.

"I don't know what the plan is but we will have so many players away with their international teams now until March 29 that I'll hardly see anybody on the training ground for a while."

Norwegian striker Steffen Iversen opened the scoring after 28 minutes with a glancing header and Les Ferdinand headed home from close range to increase Tottenham's lead.

Ukraine striker Sergii Rebrov finished off a sweeping move after 58 minutes to kill off the visitors whose 26 years in the top flight may well be coming to an end.

Southampton secured their fifth consecutive Premiership win with a 1-0 victory at home to Everton.

Hoddle refused to join in the Tottenham speculation.

"What happens at other clubs has nothing to do with me," said Hoddle.

Elsewhere runaway leaders Manchester United's remorseless charge to their seventh Premiership title in nine seasons continued as they scored twice in the last two minutes to beat Leicester 2-0 at Old Trafford.

Norway international striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and French defender Mikael Silvestre struck in the closing stages to secure victory for the title holders.

But France's World Cup-winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez pulled a thigh muscle in the warm-up and was replaced in the United goal by rookie Paul Rachubka. Barthez faces a fight to be fit for the first leg of United's European Champions League quarter-final against Bayern Munich on April 3.

Leicester's defeat at Old Trafford could prove costly as all their rivals for UEFA Cup or Champions league places won.

Ipswich are in third after beating West Ham 1-0, Sunderland recorded an impressive 4-2 away win at Chelsea - their first at Stamford Bridge since 1957 - while Leeds beat Charlton 2-1 away with their Australia striker Mark Viduka grabbing his 19th goal of the season after just 12 seconds.

In the battle at bottom of the table, basement club Bradford drew 2-2 against fellow strugglers Manchester City.

Alen Boksic scored twice for Middlesbrough in the 2-1 north east derby win at Newcastle.

Middlesbrough coach Terry Venables paid tribute to Boksic whose season has been ravaged by a string of nagging injuries.

"I've been fortunate enough to work with a lot of good front players, and he's top drawer," said Venables. "He's a wonderful player."

On Sunday two of England's remaining representatives in Europe are in action with Champions League quarter-finalists Arsenal away to Aston Villa and UEFA Cup semi-finalists Liverpool hosting strugglers Derby.

Full-proof Yokohama



AFP, Yokohama

Yokohama, being touted as the birthplace of football in Japan, plans to leave nothing to chance in hosting the final match of the 2002 World Cup, and has put hoologans and earthquakes high on its checklist.

City fathers believe a World Cup success will help the biggest Japanese port boost its image amid tough competition in global shipping and trade, helping attract new businesses and tourists.

"We fear hoologans will raise a hell if, for example, England plays Germany here. We need to alleviate such fear among citizens," said Kenji Uotani, executive director of planning at Yokohama's city office.

The city will reinforce security, upgrade monitor cameras and separate spectators according to teams at its three-year-old 70,000-seat Yokohama International Stadium, he said.

Fans will be forced to use designated train stations and roads to prevent rival sides from mixing and clashing, officials said, pointing to violent incidents at the 1998 World Cup in France.

It will be the first World Cup finals to be held in Asia and the first to be co-hosted. And with about 450 days to go, hosts Japan and South Korea are shuddering ahead of their first encounter with hoologans.

Uotani said Yokohama may ask the countries concerned to prevent hoologans from leaving their shores, as each of them has its own blacklist.

City organisers, in cooperation with police, are also acquiring "know-how including anti-hoologan measures in Britain," he said.

Meanwhile, Uotani said, any major earthquake which could strike the city, would do no great damage to the flexibly-structured 60-billion yen (500-million dollar) Yokohama stadium, Japan's biggest football arena.

"Its wall may peel off but the structure itself has the strength to withstand it."

Seismologists warn there could be a repeat of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake which killed around 140,000 people in Tokyo and its vicinity, including this port, with a magnitude of 7.9 on the Richter scale.

Yokohama's rival port Kobe in 1995 was hit by a quake that killed more than 6,000 people.

"We have made our berths more resistant to quakes after the Kobe disaster," said Shinichi Kono, an official handling international relations at the port authority.

For the World Cup finals, the port is building a new international passenger terminal at its main pier to accommodate 70,000-tonne-class luxury liners such as the Queen Elizabeth II.

"We hope to see visitors come by sea although the business is limited," Kono said, adding the authority was negotiating with the Singapore-based company Star Cruise to open a regular route between the two cities.

Yokohama, a former fishing village which opened to foreign trade in 1859, overtook Tokyo as the nation's biggest port last year in terms of trade volume. Its two-way trade totalled 8,960 billion yen (75 billion dollars).

"The competition among ports is getting tougher every year and we hope to push ourselves ahead with the World Cup," said Kono, 43, who often takes his son to matches featuring J-League team Yokohama F Marinos.

"I have applied for a World Cup ticket," he said.

A local think tank, Hamagin Research Institute, forecasts the World Cup will bring spin-off economic activity worth 25.7 billion yen (215 million dollars) to Yokohama, which also home to one of the world's biggest Chinatowns.

The city has so far invested 1.8 billion yen (15 million dollars) in preparations as one of Japan's 10 World Cup venues. The sum does not include the cost of the stadium, which was built independently.

Ahead of the Cup madness, Yokohama is also staking its claim as the place where a football match was first played in Japan.

English trader James Mollison wrote in his memoirs that British sailors brought soccer to Yokohama before 1873 when the British navy instituted the sport at its academy in Kobe, a city brochure says.

WC 2002 qualifier

Montella back In Italian Fold

REUTERS, Rome

In-form striker Vincenzo Montella was recalled by Italy on Saturday for World Cup qualifiers against Romania and Lithuania later this month.

Montella, who has scored five goals in three games for Roma while standing in for the injured Gabriel Batistuta, last played for his country during Euro 2000.

He was the main addition to coach Giovanni Trapattoni's 23-man squad that saw three changes to the one which lost 2-1 to Argentina in a friendly in February. Christian Vieri, who set up the one goal against Argentina and scored five of Italy's eight goals at the last World Cup, was left out for Montella.

Atalanta Bergamo midfielder Cristian Zenoni and twin brother Damiano were dropped after appearing on the bench against Argentina.

Milan midfielders Demetrio Albertini and Gennardo Gattuso return after missing the Argentina game through injury.

Italy take on Romania in Bucharest on March 24 and Lithuania in Trieste on March 28.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Parma), Francesco Toldo (Fiorentina)

Defenders: Valerio Bertotto (Udinese), Fabio Cannavaro (Parma), Francesco Coco (Milan), Paolo Maldini (Milan), Alessandro Nesta (Lazio), Alessandro Pierini (Fiorentina), Giuseppe Pancaro (Lazio)

Midfielders: Demetrio Albertini (Milan), Luigi Di Biagio (Inter), Angelo Di Livio (Fiorentina), Stefano Fiore (Udinese), Gennaro Gattuso (Milan), Gianluca Pessotto (Juventus), Alessio Tacchinardi (Juventus), Damiano Tommasi (Roma), Gianluca Zambrotta (Juventus)

Forwards: Alessandro Del Piero (Juventus), Marco Delvecchio (Roma), Filippo Inzaghi (Juventus), Vincenzo Montella (Roma), Francesco Totti (Roma)

Cobi Jones to remain with Galaxy

AFP, Pasadena

Cobi Jones, who has appeared in all five Major League Soccer All-Star Games, signed a contract with the league to remain with the Los Angeles Galaxy on Saturday.

Among the league's most recognizable players, Jones is the Galaxy's all-time scoring leader with 48 goals. He chose to stay in the States despite interest from European clubs, including English Premiership club Leicester City.

"I am happy that everything came together for me to continue my career with the Galaxy," said Jones, who captained the Galaxy during their victorious Football Confederation Champions Cup run, which earned the club a berth in the FIFA World Club Championship.

"Southern California is my home and I'm looking forward to being part of the excitement in Spain this summer and helping this franchise get another chance to win the MLS title."

Aldridge quits Tranmere Rovers

AFP, London

Former Liverpool striker John Aldridge resigned as manager of First Division strugglers Tranmere Rovers on Saturday.

His decision came following the relegation-threatened club's 3-2 home defeat by Barnsley.

A club statement read: "Following Tranmere Rovers' defeat at home to Barnsley this afternoon, the board of directors have accepted the resignation of John Aldridge as manager of the football club."

Tranmere's latest league defeat leaves them rooted at the foot of the First Division, one point behind Queens Park Rangers and five behind fourth-from-bottom Stockport County.

Despite their poor league form, Tranmere reached the quarter-finals of the FA Cup, but were beaten 4-2 by Liverpool in that competition last Sunday.

Passport summit in Paris

AFP, Rome

Magistrates and police from Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, Britain and Spain will meet next week in Paris to discuss the false passport affair currently rocking European football, Italian paper Gazzetta dello Sport reported Saturday.

The paper claims prosecutor Paolo Alessio Verni, a lawyer from the northern Italian town of Udine who has been involved in investigating the affair in Italy, is the instigator of the meeting.



Juan Carlos Valeron(C) of Deportivo La Coruna is being challenged by Jose Moreno "Josico" (L) of Las Palmas on March 17.

Primera Liga

Deportivo lose precious ground

REUTERS, Madrid

Deportivo Coruna failed to close the gap on Spanish First Division leaders Real Madrid when they slumped to a 2-0 defeat away to Las Palmas on Saturday.

Headed goals by Josico and Alvaro, both of which came after corners from Vinnie Samways, gave the home side a 2-0 lead into the break and some determined defending in the second half saw them claim a well-deserved victory.

The result means second-placed Deportivo remain on 51 points, two ahead of Valencia and five behind Real Madrid who have the chance to extend their lead when they visit

Mallorca on Sunday.

The victory was Las Palmas' first in six games. They are now 11th in the standings with 35 points.

Las Palmas, whose president warned earlier this week that they may be forced out of business, were determined to put their financial worries behind them and pushed forward from the start.

Midfielders Edu Alonso and Jorge Lopez exploited some sloppy defending to threaten on the right, forcing Deportivo to concede a corner in the opening attack. It was after another corner in the fourth minute that the home side took the lead. Samways' fine cross was headed on to the post by Argentine forward Mario Turdo and Josico nodded in the rebound. Deportivo, looking weary after their

midweek Champions League exertions, were continually out-thought and outplayed by Las Palmas. In the final minute of the first half Las Palmas struck again from another Samways corner.

Brazilian defender Alvaro rose high at the far post to send a powerful header past the goalkeeper Jacques Songo'o.

Young striker Guayre could have put Las Palmas even further ahead in the opening minutes of the second half but he sent two shots over the bar and then saw a powerful header well saved by Songo'o.

Deportivo coach Javier Irueta decided to ring the changes and bring on Dutch international striker Roy Makaay and Brazilian midfielder Emerson but it was all to no avail.

Bundesliga

Derby honours Bayern's

REUTERS, Berlin

German champions Bayern Munich overcame city rivals TSV 1860 Munich 2-0 on Saturday to move three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga standings. Three days after their 1-0 victory over Arsenal earned them a place in the last eight of the Champions League, the Bavarians maintained their winning ways to stay on course for a third successive German title.

Second-half goals from Brazilians Elber and Paulo Sergio enabled

Bayern to win what turned out to be an exciting derby.

Victory put them on 49 points, three ahead of Bayer Leverkusen who moved up to second place with a 3-1 win at title-chasing rivals Borussia Dortmund, now third a further point adrift.

Watched by 69,000 fans in a packed Olympic stadium, the match was a keenly contested affair with several opportunities falling to both sides until Elber struck from close range in the 48th minute.

Paulo Sergio put the issue beyond doubt from a counter-attack 10 minutes from time.

"A derby is a great occasion for the fans and I think this game did not

disappoint them," Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said.

"It took us time to get into the match but we played really well overall."

The Bayern players were blasted by club president Franz Beckenbauer after a comprehensive 3-0 defeat to French side Olympique Lyon in the Champions League earlier this month.

Hitzfeld had also criticised his team after a string of worrying performances but he looked delighted on Saturday.

"It's been a very successful week," he said. "Things can change really fast in football."

However, there was some bad news for striker Carsten Jancker who left the pitch after 12 minutes with a stomach muscle injury. The setback makes him a doubtful starter for Germany's World Cup qualifiers against Albania and Greece later this month.

Leverkusen scored twice in the opening 10 minutes on their way to a hard-earned victory in Dortmund. The visitors opened the scoring after seven minutes when midfielder Bernd Schneider struck from 45 metres, surprising Dortmund goalkeeper Jens Lehmann on the edge of the penalty area.

Striker Ulf Kirsten then exploited a blunder from Dortmund defender Christian Woerns to make it 2-0 from close range. Woerns made amends by reducing the arrears with a header in the 15th minute. Dortmund kept pushing after that but despite tremendous support from a capacity crowd of over 68,000, they never came back.

Leverkusen stayed in control even after Germany midfielder Michael Ballack was sent off with 15 minutes to go and increased their lead through substitute Thomas Brdaric in stoppage time.

"We wanted to make it clear as quickly as possible that we had come here to win and we managed to do that," said Leverkusen coach Bert Vogts.

"Shortly after the break we missed a great chance to make it 3-1 and that put us under a bit of pressure. This is an important win which will boost our confidence."

Dortmund coach Matthias Sammer said his men deserved at least a point. "We started slowly and gave away two goals from stupid mistakes but after that we fought well," he said. "A draw would have been a fair result."



Bayern Munich's Brazilian forward Paulo Sergio(L) consoles 1860 Munich's former German international Thomas Haessler after their derby game on March 17.