

Match-fixing case Six players banned in Italy

REUTERS, Rome

Six players have been banned for match-fixing following an Italian Cup tie last year, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) said on Friday.

Fabio Gallo, Sebastiano Siviglia and Luciano Zauri of Serie A side Atalanta Bergamo and Alfredo Aglietti and Massimiliano Allegri of Pistoiese in Serie B were suspended for one year, the FIGC's disciplinary committee said.

Former Atalanta player Giacomo Banchelli -- now with Empoli -- was banned for six months.

Atalanta's Cristiano Doni and Pistoiese's Daniele Amerini, Girolamo Bizzarri and Gianluca Lillo were cleared of accusations.

The decision follows a cup tie between Atalanta -- in Serie B last season -- and Pistoiese on August 20. The match ended 1-1 after Atalanta scored at the end of the first half and Pistoiese equalised three minutes from time.

SNAI, which organises betting on Italian football, said it had registered suspiciously heavy betting on the game, including many bets for a 1-0 scoreline at halftime and a fulltime score of 1-1.



David Trezeguet (L), taking a kick, while Zinedine Zidane looks on during a training session of the French national team at Clairefontaine on March 22.

France won't relax

Football

AFP, Paris

World and European champions France are wary of the threat posed by Asian Cup champions Japan when the two meet in a friendly international at the Stade de France on Saturday.

Both teams are pre-qualified for the 2002 World Cup - France as holders and Japan as co-hosts - but any fears the French will be complacent were dismissed by Arsenal midfielder Robert Pires.

"Japan is a nation that has to be taken seriously," he said at the French training camp at Clairefontaine.

"It will be an interesting test for us and for them. They are a team we will have to keep an eye on."

France needed a penalty shoot-out to beat Japan last time they met, in the Hassan II tournament in Morocco last June which the French used to prepare for their triumph in Euro 2000.

Inspirational French playmaker Zinedine Zidane, who scored in the match in Casablanca, said on Thursday: "We had problems

against the Japanese last year. We just can't afford to be complacent and we have to stay focused.

"Japan are a lively and technical team, who will be wanting to show what they can do now, 14 months ahead of the World Cup."

French coach Roger Lemerre agreed, saying the team coached by Frenchman Philippe Troussier would "give everything" in the clash on Saturday.

Troussier, feted as a hero in Japan after masterminding the Asian Cup triumph over Saudi Arabia in Beirut in October, said his players were looking forward to comparing themselves against the World Cup holders - even though they would not see much of the ball.

"We want to pick up knowledge from the best in the world, and that means the world champions," he said.

"Normally we control the match when we play against Asian teams. But (on Saturday) we are going to be chasing after the ball for 70 percent of the match."

Troussier and his staff were remaining tight-lipped on Thursday about the team to face France, but European-based stars Hidetoshi Nakata of AS Roma, who missed the Asian Cup triumph, and forward

Akinori Nishizawa of Spanish side Espanyol were expected to be picked.

Nishizawa, who has struggled to establish himself in Spain, said on Wednesday the match would be a yardstick for the progress made by Japanese football.

"It's not a question of comparing ourselves to the French team," he said.

"When we play a team of this level, the most important thing is judge what we need to do to progress in our own game and in our play as a team.

"So it'll be a test so that we can advance in the future, so we can reach a higher level in a year's time, because the World Cup is the one that counts."

He added: "As a forward, I very rarely get the chance to play against a defence as strong as the French."

Two of the key members of the 1998 World Cup-winning team, Parma defender Lilian Thuram and talismanic goalkeeper Fabien Barthez of Manchester United, will miss the match though injury.

They are expected to be replaced by Paris Saint-Germain goalkeeper Lionel Letizi and Bayern Munich defender Willy Sagnol.

Keane wants performance

AFP, Nicosia

Ireland skipper Roy Keane has called on his side to stay focused and live up to their favourites tag when they take on a Cyprus in World Cup qualifiers here Saturday.

The Manchester United star - who will win his 50th cap in the Group Two clash - said it was time for Ireland to show they could handle the pressure of picking up points when expected.

The Irish have been the surprise package of the group so far, securing impressive draws away against Portugal and the Netherlands.

Now Keane is urging his team-mates to concentrate on collecting three points in a match that manager Mick McCarthy has described as a "potential banana skin."

"Getting to major finals is what it is all about," said Keane.

"It has been a bloody long time since my last one in America in 1994 and it is time for us to deliver again.

"We've done our rebuilding, the squad is mainly an experienced one now and we've got to show we can handle these types of games when we start as favourites.

"We've found it easier sometimes to play well when we've been underdogs like in Holland and Portugal at the start of the season, but now we've got to make sure we pick up points that should be ours on merit."

Keane insisted his half-century of caps was of little significance.

"The fact it is my 50th cap tomorrow means absolutely nothing to me. I should have had many more than that by now, nearly ten years after joining the Republic squad but all I'm interested in is getting the wins we need to be on the top level.

"Hopefully my team-mates think a similar way when they come and train with the national squad and I believe they do.

"We've come to Cyprus, enjoyed the weather and the facilities but at the end of the day the only consideration is getting two wins from these next two matches. Nothing else must be allowed to distract us."

'Reggae Boyz' in visa limbo

AFP, Kingston

Just three days before their crucial 2002 World Cup qualifier in Mexico, the Reggae Boyz are experiencing visa problems which could force the postponement of the game, Jamaica Football Federation (JFF) President Captain Horace Burrell said Thursday.

The 32-man contingent was expected to leave the island late Thursday evening for Mexico City, but according to the Burrell, the new regulations now being imposed by the Mexican embassy are creating havoc.

"We went to the Mexican embassy yesterday (Wednesday) but we were told that each member of our delegation must pay 156 US dollars and must also have their fingerprints taken," Burrell said.

"The strange thing about this is that, the fans travelling to Mexico for the game do have not to meet this requirement," he added.

"Therefore I contacted the ministry of foreign affairs and they will be meeting with the Mexican embassy in the course of today to have the situation remedied urgently.

"We need to go to Mexico at least two days before and if this cannot be sorted out we will just have to ask FIFA to postpone the game," he added.

Burrell continued: "I am just hoping that the Mexicans are not engaging in psychological warfare. They must remember that they will have to come to Jamaica and if they impose these things on us, I am sure our government will do the same," said a visibly upset Burrell.

Jamaica are seeking their second consecutive win in the North and Central American and Caribbean zone qualifying tournament after edging Trinidad and Tobago 1-0 at the National Stadium one month ago.

Japan Youth Cup

Hosts to face Mexico in final

AFP, Tokyo

Hosts Japan stormed back from two goals down to beat Chile 4-3 on Friday and earned a final berth against Mexico in the under-20 Japan Youth Cup football tournament.

Substitute Yutaka Tahara was the hero of the night, scoring a hat-trick, all by a heading, with the last one striking home in the 87th minute for the decisive lead.

Mexico, who failed to qualify for the world youth championships, gained something to cheer themselves up by beating qualifiers Ukraine 2-1 earlier in the day at the Tokyo Stadium.

Ukraine, Chile and Japan have earned a place in the championships to be held in Argentina in June.



A combo of photos showing Brazilian superstar Roberto Carlos grimacing during his testimony before a congressional commission in Brasilia on March 22.

Carlos answers on Ronaldo

Football

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil and Real Madrid star Roberto Carlos told a parliamentary inquiry on Thursday that Ronaldo was so sick before the 1998 World Cup final he was unable to speak.

Roberto Carlos said Ronaldo, then 21, was tense and fell ill before Brazil's 3-0 defeat to France in Paris, but he denied that his mysterious state of health was due to the atmosphere within the Brazilian camp.

"The atmosphere during the World Cup was one of the best I've known in any team and one of the

best within the national team," he told the inquiry, which is probing the contract signed between the Brazilian football federation and US sportswear manufacturers Nike.

The inquiry is seeking to establish whether Nike put pressure on team chiefs to play Ronaldo - one of its most high-profile sponsored stars - in the final even though the player was unfit and had reportedly suffered convulsions in the hours leading up to the match.

But Roberto Carlos refused to reveal what exactly was wrong with Ronaldo, with whom he had shared a hotel room before the match.

He said that as the pair watched a match on television to kill time, "I

saw him looking extremely tense and feeling unwell.

"He couldn't speak but he seemed to want to call someone."

The Real Madrid star said Ronaldo had told him earlier that he had to undergo a few medical tests but that he wanted to play in the final.

"Who wouldn't have wanted to play in the World Cup final?" said Roberto Carlos.

The defender told the inquiry he knew nothing of Nike's alleged involvement in team selection, adding that a representative of the company was present at all training sessions but his role was restricted to handing out kit.

L'pool have Asian plans

Football

AFP, Singapore

English Premiership side Liverpool are to limit their July Asian tour to just two matches, ruling out Friday the prospect of adding Hong Kong or another city to their schedule.

But the glamour club left open the possibility of more frequent visits to the region, saying this tour launched "a major new commitment" to Asia.

A full-strength Liverpool side will play in Singapore against a "Select XI" on July 16 and three days later will play the Thai national side in Bangkok, club chief executive Rick Parry said.

The Reds were earlier considering a match in Hong Kong or China, but Parry said it was no longer

possible to extend the itinerary. "No. As far as we are concerned the dates are finalised," he told a match promotion in Singapore.

Liverpool's confirmed pre-season tour has sandwiched the Asian sector between a week in Switzerland and a tournament in the Netherlands.

However, Parry did not rule out an extended Asian tour in the future as he gave an assurance the touring side this July would be the full first squad including superstar players Michael Owen, Emile Heskey, Patrik Berger and Robbie Fowler.

"The tour is the first part of a major new commitment by the club to Asia," he said, adding that adoring Asian fans made up a "significant proportion" of Liverpool's estimated 10 million supporters worldwide.

"We see this as a great opportunity

to bring the Liverpool brand and all it represents to this part of the world," he said.

"We have a great support base here. It's about building a stronger bond with our existing supporters."

Liverpool are on a charge this season, aiming for a unique Cup treble. They have already bagged the League Cup and are in the semi-finals of the FA Cup and the UEFA Cup.

They also had the satisfaction of beating Manchester United 1-0 in a Premiership fixture.

Manchester United are also touring Asia in July with matches in Kuala Lumpur on July 22, Singapore on July 24 and in Bangkok on July 28.

Carbone's Boro move collapses

AFP, London

Italian striker Benito Carbone's free transfer move from Middlesbrough to English Premiership rivals Bradford collapsed Thursday after the two parties failed to agree on the length of contract.

Carbone, 29, was looking for a three-year contract while Boro were only prepared to offer a one-year deal.

Bradford chairman Geoffrey Richmond had decided to let Carbone quit the club for nothing in a bid to cut the wage bill.

Boro matched Carbone's salary demands and the mercurial Italian passed a medical early Thursday in anticipation of the move.

But the move fell through at the 11th hour and the transfer deadline has now elapsed.

Carbone, who has endured a turbulent time at both his previous English clubs Sheffield Wednesday and Aston Villa, signed a four-year contract with Bradford last August and is reportedly earning one million pounds (1.5 million dollars) a year.

He started his career at Torino before ending his Italian Serie A career with Inter Milan after spells at Reggina, Casert, Torino again and Napoli before moving to England.

One match suspension for PSV

AFP, Nyon

Dutch side PSV Eindhoven were given a one-match stadium ban by UEFA on Wednesday following crowd trouble at the UEFA Cup quarter-final match against Kaiserslautern on March 15.

The ban means they will have to pay their next match in a UEFA Cup competition at least 100 kilometres from Eindhoven.

Gerrard, Seaman expected to be fit

AFP, London

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said Friday he expects midfielder Steven Gerrard to be fit for Saturday's World Cup qualifier with Finland at Anfield.

The Liverpool youngster has been struggling to be fit for Eriksson's first competitive match in charge of the England team because of his back problems.

But Eriksson, who also expects goalkeeper David Seaman to be fit to face the Finns, said of Gerrard: "He practised today (Friday) without any problems.

"He did almost everything. If he does not have a reaction tonight he will be fit for tomorrow (Saturday)," the Swede said at a press conference held at England's hotel in Chester, north-west England.

"His chances of playing are much better than 50-50. Yesterday (Thursday) I was a little bit worried but after practice today I feel very positive about it.

"I have had players in the past with those kind of problems and I know it's very difficult but hopefully he'll stay fit in the future."

The former Lazio boss also expects to be able to field Seaman. "He did everything yesterday (Thursday) and today (Friday) and has no more (fitness) problems," he said.

Duberry revealing all

Football

AFP, Hull

Leeds United defender Michael Duberry told his trial here Thursday that he was prepared to sacrifice his popularity at the club to save himself from a conspiracy charge.

Duberry, 25, told the jury at Hull Crown Court, where he has given evidence that fellow defender Jonathan Woodgate had confided in him that he had been in a fight with Asians: "I think that I might come out of this looking bad because you could say I have sold out my mate to save myself."

"I might not be liked at Leeds United, but in saving myself that's what I had to do."

Duberry, who is accused of helping to cover up the alleged involvement of Woodgate, team-mate Lee Bowyer and two other men in the brutal attack on student Sarfraz Najeib in Leeds city centre in January last year, said he had told his two teammates and manager David O'Leary that he was going to "tell the truth" in court.

Duberry has admitted lying to police when he told them Woodgate and four of his friends had come to his home by taxi on the night of the attack, when he had in fact given them a lift.

He said his explanation had led

Nedved suspended for three games

AFP, Nyon

Lazio midfielder Pavel Nedved has been hit with a three-match ban for his tackle on Leeds youngster Alan Maybury during last week's Champions League clash at Elland Road.

Nedved was banned for three European club matches by European football governing body UEFA at a disciplinary hearing here late Wednesday.

The tackle, which came in the dying minutes of the teams' 3-3 draw, was branded "disgraceful" by Leeds manager David O'Leary.

Nedved was not punished by the match referee because the challenge was not spotted. But after studying video evidence UEFA's control and disciplinary body decided to ban the Czech international.

to a series of other lies.

Asked whether he had spoken to O'Leary before deciding that he would tell the court that Woodgate had told him he had been in a fight with Asians, Duberry said: "I might have done, yes, definitely. That was, I think, last week. I might have mentioned what my decision might be."

"I said I would tell the truth. I didn't go into the contents of what I would say but I would tell it how it is, which is the truth."

He said before giving evidence he had told Bowyer as well as Woodgate. But he had only discussed it at length with his close family.

England international Woodgate, 21, of Middlesbrough, midfielder Bowyer, 24, of Leeds, Neale Cavenny and Paul Clifford, both 21, of Middlesbrough, deny causing grievous bodily harm with

intent to Najeib, 20. They also deny affray.

Najeib, of Rotherham, Yorkshire, suffered serious injuries including a broken leg and fractured cheekbone.

Duberry, Woodgate, Clifford and Cavenny also deny conspiracy to pervert the course of justice after the attack.

Duberry insisted he was not covering up for others: "I am not protecting anyone. I protected other people from January 12 to Monday afternoon and now I am saying my hand has been forced and I have got to tell the truth."

"I have to stand here in front of the jury and tell my account of what happened. They are the ones who will have to decide whether it is the truth or not."

The trial was adjourned until Monday.



Michael Duberry of English Premiership side Leeds United, leaving the Hull Crown Court on March 21 after giving his testimony on the assault on an Asian student.