



Newcastle's Gray Speed (L) gets into a heated confrontation with Sunderland's Kevin Phillips (C) during their Premier League match on April 21.

Premiership

Boksic gives Boro lifeline

Football

AFP, London

Middlesbrough coach Terry Venables expressed his admiration for striker Alen Boksic on Saturday after the Croatian international found the net with a spectacular goal in the 3-0 win at Leicester.

The win moved Middlesbrough up two places to sixth from bottom, above both Derby and Everton.

Boksic chipped Leicester keeper Simon Royce from the edge of the area after a blistering run, a strong contender for goal of the season.

It took his tally for the season to 12 goals and helped steer Middlesbrough closer to Premiership safety.

With Derby, Coventry and Everton all losing it was a good day for Middlesbrough.

Venables said Premiership goalkeepers should be on their guard when Boksic has a sight of goal.

"Boksic is always liable to do that," said Venables. "When a keeper sees him 30 yards out, he's got to check his angles. It was top quality."

Boksic's goal followed Hamilton Ricard's opener and Paul Ince wrapped things up for Boro.

One more win should be enough to guarantee Middlesbrough's Premiership status.

"We achieved what we wanted and worked hard to get it," he said. "We've now had two good away wins but we are not taking anything for granted."

Middlesbrough are now sixth from bottom with 38 points, the same as Derby and Everton, but the

Wearsiders rise above them both on goal difference.

Bradford's Ashley Ward scored a goal in each half to hold off his side's inevitable relegation for another week, but his side's 2-0 win at home to Derby left the visitors in deep trouble.

Coventry look doomed after going down 2-0 at Ipswich who kept on course for a Champions League place next season.

Defeat for Coventry leaves them third from bottom with 33 points, two more than Manchester City who drew 1-1 against Premiership champions Manchester United at Old

Champions League exit in midweek by beating Everton 4-1.

Sweden international Frederic Ljungberg put the Gunners in front only for former Highbury striker Kevin Campbell to level the scores.

Arsenal stepped up a gear in the second half with defender Gilles Grimandi and French duo Sylvain Wiltord and Thierry Henry seeing off Everton's challenge.

Everton's Ghana international midfielder Alex Nyarko sensationally announced his retirement from football in a post-match press conference after receiving personal abuse from a fan during his side's

Italian's superb display.

Vieira raised doubts over his Highbury future after the midweek exit from the Champions League in Valencia when he said the club made a mistake in selling Marc Overmars and Emmanuel Petit in the summer and needed more quality players for next season.

But Wenger warned prospective buyers that Vieira is staying at Highbury.

"We will not listen to any offers for Patrick no matter what the amount," said Wenger.

However, Vieira, who is reportedly attracting interest from Italian giants Inter Milan and Juventus, is not ruling out a move away from Highbury.

"I have a contract at Arsenal to 2004 but you never know what will happen in football."

Leeds, the only English team left in the Champions League after their 3-2 quarter-final aggregate win over Deportivo La Coruna of Spain on Tuesday, won 2-0 at West Ham despite having David Baty sent off.

Chelsea's late push for a Champions League place suffered a setback with a surprise 1-0 home defeat to London neighbours Charlton while Aston Villa were held to a 0-0 draw by Southampton.

Sunderland, who still harbour faint hopes of a European place, were held 1-1 by Newcastle in the North East derby at the Stadium of Light.

On Sunday, League Cup winners Liverpool, who are course for a unique treble having made it to the final of the UEFA Cup and the English FA Cup, take on Tottenham at Anfield.

Premiership's top six

After Saturday's afternoon matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Manchester United	34	23	8	3	75	25	77
Arsenal	34	18	9	7	57	33	63
Ipswich Town	35	19	5	11	53	38	62
Leeds United	34	17	8	9	52	39	59
Chelsea	34	15	9	10	62	39	54
Liverpool	32	15	8	9	55	36	53

Trafford

Teddy Sheringham gave United the lead with a 71st minute penalty but City's Steve Howey slotted home an equaliser six minutes from time.

Two minutes later United captain Roy Keane was sent off by referee David Elleray for a high challenge on City skipper Alfie Haaland.

United, who crashed out of the Champions League at the quarter-final stage to Bayern Munich on Wednesday, wrapped up their third successive title last Saturday.

Second-placed Arsenal got back to winning ways after their

defeat.

Nyarko, Everton's 4.5 million pound (7.2 million dollar) summer buy from French club Lens, pleaded to be substituted in the 70th minute at Highbury after an Everton supporter ran onto the pitch and offered to swap shirts.

Nyarko told the Press Association: "This is the fourth or fifth time this has happened and that's it. I'm finished with football."

After the match Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insisted midfielder Patrick Vieira is not for sale at any price after the France interna-

national's superb display.

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Belozoglu says sorry to Figo

AFP, Istanbul

Galatasaray striker Emre Belozoglu, whose elbow in the face of Real Madrid winger Luis Figo during Wednesday's European Champions League tie in Spain resulted in the Portuguese international suffering a broken nose, has apologised to the player, the Turkish newspaper Radikal reported Sunday.

In a letter addressed to Figo the Turkish international said: "It was with great sadness that I heard that your nose had been broken. But it was absolutely not a deliberate act. I apologise and wish you success in your career."

Figo's face came into contact with Belozoglu's elbow in the second half and his nose immediately started to bleed. He continued playing but was taken off in the 85th minute and replaced by Savio.

Real sustained a 5-3 aggregate victory in the quarter-final, second leg match.

Figo underwent operation Friday in Madrid and indicated that he was determined to return to training Saturday in preparation for Real's Primera Liga tie Sunday against Real Zaragoza.

Second Serie A nandrolone case exposed

AFP, Rome

An unnamed Serie A footballer has tested positive for nandrolone in a test taken after a recent championship match, Italian press agency ANSA reported on Saturday.

The urine test was taken by the Italian Olympic committee and processed at their lab in Rome and Raffaele Guariniello who is leading the inquiry into doping in Italian sports has demanded access to player's file.

Lazio's Portuguese defender Fernando Couto tested positive for nandrolone on Saturday in a second assessment of a urine test that had previously shown traces of the banned drug.

French Cup

Third Division Amiens in final

AFP, Paris

Amiens beat First Division Troyes on penalties to join Strasbourg in the final of the French Cup which means either a Third Division side or a relegated team will be in the UEFA Cup.

France will on paper will have a very weak entry to next season's UEFA Cup following the May 26 final at the Stade de France.

Northern French side Amiens played an organized, disciplined match and even dominated Troyes on several occasions.

With the match 0-0 after extra time, Amiens won 4-2 on penalties. It is Amiens' first appearance in this cup final and comes a year after little club Calais reached the same stage.

On Friday, Strasbourg, already relegated from the French First Division, had some joy by beating leaders Nantes in the other semi-final 4-1. The Alsation club seem to have had a golden touch in the cup having beaten Lyon 3-0 in the previous round.

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'Vieira staying' insists Wenger

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insisted Saturday that midfielder star Patrick Vieira is not for sale at any price.

The French international had another storming performance in the Gunners' 4-1 win over Everton at Highbury.

Vieira raised doubts over his Highbury future after the midweek exit from the Champions League in Valencia when he said the club made a mistake in selling Marc Overmars and Emmanuel Petit in the summer and needed more quality players for next season.

But Wenger, who said he wants to keep the present Arsenal squad together and will buy only one or two additions in the summer, said Vieira is going nowhere.

"We will not listen to any offers for Patrick no matter what the amount," said Wenger.

However, Vieira, who is reportedly attracting interest from Italian giants Inter Milan and Juventus, is not ruling out a move away from Highbury.

"I have a contract at Arsenal to 2004 but you never know what will happen in football."



DALMATSI! Stefan Dalmat (L), Inter Milan's French recruit, and namesake Emiliano Dalmat of Fiorentina, battle for possession at Milan during their Serie A fixture on April 21.

European scene

Football

AFP

Serie A

ROME

Two goals from Christian Vieri helped Inter Milan defeat Fiorentina 4-2 at the San Siro stadium in the Italian championship on Saturday night.

The victory sees Celta climb to sixth and close in on a UEFA Cup spot while Deportivo are left licking the wounds of a painful week after being eliminated from the Champions League by Leeds on Tuesday.

Deportivo were forced then to eat humble pie as Real Madrid crushed Hertha Berlin's 1-0 half-time lead after

left foot drive into the top left corner of Jose Molina's goal.

Russia's Alex Mostovoi sealed this Galician affair when his sudden sidefooted shot flew past an unsuspecting Molina from the edge of the area on 69 minutes.

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Deportivo were forced then to eat humble pie as Real Madrid crushed Hertha Berlin's 1-0 half-time lead after

mered bottom spot VfL Bochum 5-0 to keep their title aspirations intact.

Bayer Leverkusen though dropped two crucial points in a 1-1 home draw with Hamburg SV.

With just four games remaining in a pot-boiling finale Schalke have 55 points, Bayern have 53, Dortmund 52, Leverkusen 50 and Hertha and Kaiserslautern 49, though the latter play Sunday.

Cup-finalists Schalke have hit a purple patch with perfect timing, goals from Jorg Bohme on 56, Marco Van Hoogdalem on 79 and Emile Mpenza on 84 overturned Hertha Berlin's 1-0 half-time lead after



Bayer Leverkusen's Brazilian star Ze Roberto (R) is checked by Nico Hoogma of Hamburg during the Bundesliga game at Leverkusen on April 21.

The Milan side, who lost 3-1 to Juventus in their last match, moved up to fifth spot, a point ahead of Atalanta and AC Milan, which gives them hope of getting into a top four, European Champions League spot.

Marco Tardelli's side, disappointing against Juventus, came back impressively with a good team performance plus Vieri's good showing despite muscular problems.

It was a setback for Fiorentina and new coach Roberto Mancini and the team missed injured Portuguese playmaker Rui Costa.

Vieri shot Inter ahead in the 11th minute from a long-distance shot and made it 2-0 with a penalty following a foul by Czech Tomas Repka on Dutchman Clarence Seedorf.

France's Stephane Dalmat found the net two minutes before the break with a 40m shot and Turk Hakan Sukur added the other in the 56th minute. Mauro Bressan and Enrico Chiesa went on to pull two goals back for the Florentines.

Atalanta and AC Milan have a chance of knocking Inter down from fifth spot at Perugia and Lecce on Sunday.

In Saturday's earlier match Napoli and Brescia drew 1-1, with the rest of the matches on Sunday.

AS Roma, who lead by four points, travel to 11th-placed Udinese and second-placed Juventus travel to Parma, in fourth spot.

A Real Madrid victory at Real Zaragoza on Sunday will see them go 11 points clear of second-placed Deportivo.

Deportivo opened the scoring on 53 minutes when Juan Carlos Valeron latched on to an inch perfect cross from Portuguese defender Helder to score his first goal on 27 minutes.

Five minutes later, Yugoslav international defender Goran Djorovic equalised with a peach of a

Galatasaray on Wednesday to show the champions they are at best Spain's number two.

Sebastian Deisler's 34th minute strike.

Hertha could have been two up at half time had Brazilian striker Alex Alves not missed a penalty.

Schalke had beaten three other major league rivals over recent weeks: Bayer Leverkusen 3-0, Kaiserslautern 5-1 and Bayern 3-1 last weekend.

Otmar Hitzfeld's Bayern had a relatively easy tie at Frankfurt, with goals from Mehmet Scholl on 22 minutes and Michael Tarnat on 90, after qualifying for their third consecutive Champions League semi-final on Wednesday beating arch rivals Manchester United.

Standings

Serie A top six

After matches played on Saturday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

AS Roma	26	18	5	3	50	23	59
Juventus	26	16	7	3	45	21	55
Lazio	26	16	4	6	47	27	52
Parma	26	12	7	7	39	22	43
Inter Milan	27	11	8	8	38	34	41
Atalanta	26	10	10	6	31	21	40

Primera Liga top six

After Saturday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Real Madrid	30	20	5	5	66	30	65
Deportivo La Coruna	31	17	6	8	60	38	57
Valencia	30	15	7	8	48	25	52
Real Mallorca	30	14	10	6	42	35	52
Barcelona	30	14	9	7	67	47	51
Celta Vigo	31	13	8	10	43	44	47

Bundesliga's top six

After Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Bayern Munich	30	16	5	9	57	35	53
Schalke 04	29	15	7	7	54	28	52
Borussia Dortmund	30	15	7	8	54	37	52
Bayer Leverkusen	30	15	5	10	51	38	50
Hertha Berlin	29	16	1	12	52	47	49
Kaiserslautern	29	15	4	10	45	44	49

Italy squad for South Africa friendly

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni on Saturday named the following squad for the international soccer friendly against South Africa at Perugia on April 25:

SQUAD

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

Defenders: Daniele Adani (Fiorentina), Valerio Bertotto (Udinese), Fabio Cannavaro (Parma), Paolo Maldini (AC Milan), Marco Materazzi (Perugia), Alessandro Nesta (Lazio), Giuseppe Pancaro (Lazio).

Midfielders: Francesco Coco (Milan), Angelo Di Livio (Fiorentina), Stefano Fiore (Udinese), Fabio Liverani (Perugia), Alessio Tacchinardi (Juventus), Damiano Tommasi (AS Roma), Gianluca Zambrotta (Juventus).

Strikers: Alessandro Del Piero (Juventus), Enrico Chiesa (Fiorentina), Filippo Inzaghi (Juventus), Vincenzo Montella (AS Roma), Francesco Totti (AS Roma).

Crash of the Eagles



AFP, Lagos

Nigerians woke up Sunday shocked and disappointed at the reality that the Super Eagles have suffered a major set-back in World Cup qualification following the 1-0 loss in Sierra Leone this weekend.

The headlines of the local newspapers conveyed the disappointment of most Nigerians after the top Europe-based stars were defeated by bottom team Sierra Leone in a crucial Group B tie in Freetown.

The Sunday Tribune headlined its report of the match "Oh, what a shame!" while The This Day titled its own account "Sierra Leone bundle Nigeria out of World Cup". The Post Express headline screamed "Disaster in Freetown".

The Sunday Punch, which ran its story under the headline "Sierra Leone end Nigeria's World Cup dream", reported "...the loss practically ends the Eagles World Cup dreams."

The reaction on the streets was not any different from those of the papers.

"I woke up this morning hoping the result in Sierra Leone was just a nightmare," said Kenneth Eghas, a sports columnist.

"By this result, Nigeria is almost out of the World Cup as we now have to depend on other teams to see whether we could still nick it."

The Nigeria Football Association (NFA), coach Jo Bonfrere and the country's top foreign-based pros like Nwankwo Kanu of Arsenal and Austin "Jay Jay" Okocha of Paris Saint-Germain have been popular targets of criticisms by fans and journalists alike.

Tanko Abdullahi, a TV sports analyst, said: "Our top players are past it. We need to look elsewhere for their replacements."

"Bonfrere too has nothing to offer again. He is not the same man who won gold at the Olympics in 1996. He has failed us."

Nigeria, who have featured at the last two World Cups, remain in third place in the five-team qualifying group which also includes Liberia, Sudan and Ghana. They have seven points from five matches.

The Eagles next World Cup qualifier is against Liberia on May 5 in the southern oil-city of Port Harcourt.

Couto's faces long ban

AFP, Rome

Lazio's Portuguese international Fernando Couto faces a long suspension from football after it was confirmed that he had tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone, the Italian Olympic committee (CONI) announced on Saturday.

The 31-year-old's B sample confirmed the finding from his A sample that he had taken the steroid - he failed the test following the Serie A match against Fiorentina on January 28.

A file has been forwarded to the Italian Football Federation disciplinary commission which will decide what action should be taken against the player, who could be suspended as of next week while awaiting the commission's decision.

Couto, who had been named in Portugal's team for the international friendly against France on April 25 in Stade de France, risks a ban of between eight and sixteen months in addition to a maximum three-year prison sentence under tough new Italian anti-doping laws brought in last January to stamp out drug taking in sport.