Serie A preview

Cuper wants style

Football

AFP, *Milan*

Inter Milan coach Hector Cuper hopes Sunday evening's trip to Udinese will be the perfect opportunity for his Italian First Division leaders to find the one ingredient missing from his side this season - sparkle.

Inter have laboured their way to the top relying on grit and no small luck as they have put together four wins and a draw in five matches.

Argentinian Cuper admits he is delighted to be at the summit but he added: "But I like my teams to play well too. Being top is great but I hope we can improve."

Whatever the rights and wrongs things are looking up for Inter.

Brazilian Ronaldo and Christian Vieri are returning to full fitness and Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba looks set to have his one-year ban for possessing a bogus passport greatly reduced.

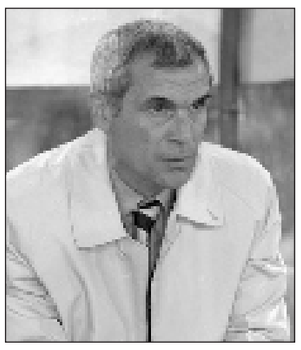
The hosts from Udine, managed by former Inter coach Roy Hodgson have personnel problems. Chilean David Pizarro and striker Roberto Muzzi are both suspended while defender Marco Zamboni is injured.

Hodgson may have to recall Argentinian Roberto Sosa who scored 14 goals last term but has been out of favour with the Englishman.

But by the time Inter and Udinese take the field at the Stadio Friuli *Serie A*'s Cinderella club Chievo may have hit the top on their own for the first time.

The newly-promoted outfit, based in Verona and who have never played in front of a 10,000 crowd at home, travel to Brescia, hoping to clinch top spot at least for a few hours and make it five wins out of six.

Chievo will be boosted by the news that Brescia coach Carlo Mazzone will be kept away from the action as he begins his five-match touchline ban for his astonishing



HECTOR CUPER

antics during and after the 3-3 Lombardy derby draw with Atalanta.

Mazzone taunted fans from the visiting club from Bergamo, even going as far as to suggest the city's women earned their income by immoral means.

The Chievo match could be an ideal chance for Mazzone to give Spanish midfielder Josep Guardiola, the former Barcelona idol, his first outing for his new club.

Juventus host Stadio Delle Alpi co-tenants Torino in the Turin derby. The "vecchia signora" (old lady), as Juventus are known in Italy, is showing signs of fatigue after a fine start to the season and are now winless in four games in all competitions.

They have yielded top spot to Inter and will be determined to get back to winning ways at home to their once-mighty rivals who are now something of a 'yo-yo' club - they go up one season and down the next.

AC Milan also came a cropper last time out in the league but will be confident of victory at home to bottom club Venezia.

Venezia have lost all five matches since returning to the top flight and this week coach Cesare Prandelli was sacked, with goalkeeping coach Sergio Buso in temporary charge.

Southerners Lecce host Fiorentina whose star striker Enrico Chiesa ruled out for the season. The club that has been threatened with bankruptcy can not afford a replacement.

Piacenza make the trip to Parma while Bologna visit Verona at the Stadio Bentegodi./p

The two Roman clubs play on Saturday with champions AS Roma visiting Perugia while Lazio host Atalanta at the Olympic Stadium.

FIXTURES

(13:00 GMT unless stated)

Saturday: Lazio v Atalanta, Perugia v AS Roma **(18:30)**

Sunday: Brescia v Chievo, Juventus v Torino, Lecce v Fiorentina, AC Milan v Venezia, Parma v Piacenza, Verona v Bologna, Udinese v Inter Milan

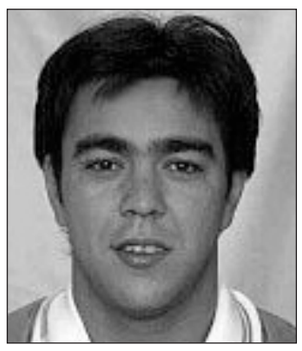
Recoba can play from October 31

AFP, *Rome*

Italian sports chiefs have slashed eight months off the one-year ban imposed on Inter Milan's Uruguayan striker Alvaro Recoba for his role in the bogus passports affair, ANSA news agency reported Friday.

Recoba will be eligible to return to competitive action on October 31 with his first game likely to be the league match with Lecce at the San Siro on November 4.

There was also good news for



ALVARO RECOBA

Inter's director of sport Gabriele Oriali who will also be welcomed back into the football fraternity on December 31. Oriali, a member of Italy's 1982 World Cup winning side, had also been punished with a one-year ban.

The imminent return of Recoba, 25 and dubbed 'El Chino', is a massive boost for Inter's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper whose side are top of the league

Recoba was one of many players enmeshed in the bogus passports affair last season which first exploded when Latin American players with Italian First Division side Udinese were arrested with false documents by Polish border officials.

Primera Liga preview

Can Betis end Celta run?

Football

AFP, *Madrid*

Real Betis can thank other clubs for their place on top of the Spanish league, with 16 points from seven games, but they will deserve to pat themselves on the back if they can win at Celta Vigo on Sunday and remain in pole position.

Celta are still unbeaten this season, they lie fourth only three points behind Betis, and their Balaidos stadium is an imposing citadel where visiting teams usually struggle to get even a point.

The Galicians have not lost at home in the league since January this year and the memory still lingers of the 5-1 thrashing Celta gave Betis the last time the Andalusian side visited, two years ago.

"Playing at home at the Balaidos is like having an extra player," Celta coach Victor Fernandez has said on more than one occasion.

"It isn't the biggest ground in the Spanish First Division (with a capacity of 31,800, the Balaidos is less than a third of the size of Barcelona's Nou Camp) but we get good crowds every time we play there and they support the team right up to the hilt," added Fernandez.

For the last few years the 21,000 socios - supporters' club members - have often had plenty to cheer - thanks to Fernandez and his attacking brand of football.

The 13 goals they have scored is second only to neighbours Deportivo La Coruna and they would have bagged plenty more if their Spanish international striker Catanha had been more accurate and added to his tally of three goals.

It is not a statistic that the Brazilian-born player will want reminding of, but he leads the Spanish First Division marksmen in off-target shots.

Betis for their part will want to bounce back after their humiliating 4-1 defeat on Wednesday in the Spanish Cup by Ceuta, with three of the Third Division outfit's goals

VICTOR FERNANDEZ

coming in extra time.

Despite missing several regular first team players, the Betis side still contained Brazilian international Denilson and the Spanish First Division's joint leading goal scorer, Argentine striker Gaston Casas.

"It was an embarrassment. They deserved to win and we paid the price for not concentrating. It will teach all our players a valuable lesson and maybe it will pay dividends in the league," said a humble Betis coach Juande Ramos.

Betis have a two point advantage over second-placed Barcelona, who play host to Valencia on Sunday.

Nobody has yet forgotten the corresponding fixture of the last campaign, the last match of the season, when a spectacular overhead shot from Rivaldo in the dying seconds completed his hat-trick and gave Barcelona a 3-2 victory.

The win also had the effect of securing Barcelona's place in this season's Champions' League, and relegating last season's Champions' League finallists to the UEFA Cup.

JUANDE RAMOS

"What happened last season is still on everyone's minds, but it should be remembered that perhaps Valencia are the one team that isn't frightened by going to the Nou Camp. Our results in recent seasons prove that we can give as good as we get when we go there," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez.

With his returning legions of international players, Benitez is expected to recall the likes of his Argentine duo of Pablo Aimar and Roberto Ayala, who were on World Cup duty for their country while Valencia were scrapping a 1-0 win over Villarreal last Sunday to remain - along with Celta Vigo - one of only two clubs in the Spanish First Division who are unbeaten.

Barcelona, despite an extensive injury list, survived without any further casualties Wednesday's Champions' League match against Olympique Lyon, which they won 2-0, and are expected to name the same side.

At the foot of the table, bottom club Rayo Vallecano play second-to-bottom Real Sociedad.

Sociedad coach John Toshack knows that his job is on the line, even if he is reluctant to admit it, with his club still without a win this season and having crashed out of the Spanish Cup on Wednesday, losing 2-1 to Third Division Hospitalet.

"I'm not going to talk my personal situation because I am still convinced this team can recover their composure," said the grim-faced Welshman on Thursday.

Defending champions Real Madrid can feel confident of getting some points from their visit to Alaves.

Real may currently be languishing in an unfamiliar 13th place in the Spanish First Division, but have beaten the Basque club 3-1 on their trips there in the last two seasons and have not been beaten in the league at Alaves for 47 years.

FIXTURES

Saturday: Real Zaragoza v Deportivo La Coruna, Sevilla v Mallorca, Alaves v Real Madrid

Sunday: Villarreal v Malaga, Barcelona v Valencia, Rayo Vallecano v Real Sociedad,Osasuna v Tenerife, Athletic Bilbao v Valladolid, Celta Vigo v Real Betis, Las Palmas v Espanyol

Bundesliga preview

Hitzfeld not satisfied

Football

AFP, *Berlin*

Ottmar Hitzfeld has demanded a dramatic improvement from his Bayern Munich side as the European champions face up to city rivals 1860 Munich in the *Bundesliga* on Saturday.

Bayern were held to a 2-2 draw in the Champions League by Feyenoord in midweek despite taking an early lead and only a second goal from Giovane Elber saved his team from defeat.

"I can't be completely satisfied," said Hitzfeld.

"A point was the minimum we wanted, but we wanted to win the game. After we went in front we had the chance to capitalise on that, but we let our opponents get back in the game. We were far too passive."

Bayern are second in the table, two points behind leaders Kaiserslautern who take on second from bottom Hansa Rostock - not that means an easy outing for the leaders.

In their last match, they were beaten by lowly VfL Wolfsburg and lost their one hundred percent record in the process.

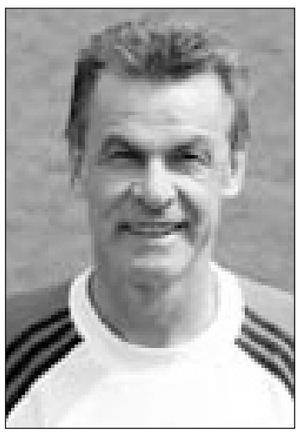
Bayern hope to take advantage of their rivals' shock at losing that game by leapfrogging them to claim top spot.

They were given a major boost this week with the return to training of international star Jens Jeremies who has been out of action with a knee injury since scoring in the Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid in May.

Elber, with six goals to his name this season, also thinks that Bayern are hitting form at the right time.

"Everything seems to be working for us up front at the moment, especially for me of course," said Elber.

"But I have to ride the wave, a time like this can quickly come to an



OTTMAR HITZFELD

end."

Third-placed Bayer Leverkusen, who defeated Fenerbahce in the Champions League in midweek, face Energie Cottbus with a chance of snatching second spot from Bayern Munich should the Bavarians slip-up in their derby clash.

They have bolstered their squad with the signing on loan of Jeff Cunningham from American side Colombus.

Overall, the return to *Bundesliga* action provides a welcome chance for German fans to shake off their World Cup gloom having watched their team struggle to a 0-0 draw with Finland on Saturday which means the national side must face Ukraine if they are to reach next year's finals.p

"You're too stupid to go to the World Cup," was the blunt message from mass-market Bild am Sonntag newspaper to Rudi Voller's team while the president of the German Football Federation, Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, said failure to qualify through the play-offs would be "a medium-sized catastrophe."

FIXTURES

Saturday: 1860 Munich v Bayern Munich, VfB Stuttgart v Schalke 04, Energie Cottbus v Bayer Leverkusen, SC Freiburg v St. Pauli, SV Hamburg v Hertha Berlin, Kaiserslautern v Hansa Rostock, Borussia Monchengladbach v Borussia Dortmund

Sunday: Werder Bremen v Nuremburg, Cologne v VfL Wolfsburg

Parma divided over Afghanistan

Football

AFP, *Parma*

Parma's multi-ethnic football team - numbering Christians, Muslims, Atheists as well as players from Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia - has been divided by the American-led military action in Afghanistan in response to the September 11 attacks.

SAVO MILOSEVIC

Friday's Gazzetto dello Sport interviewed players in one of the most multinational teams in the cosmopolitan Italian First Division and found a mix of responses to the raids first launched on Sunday night by US president George W. Bush.

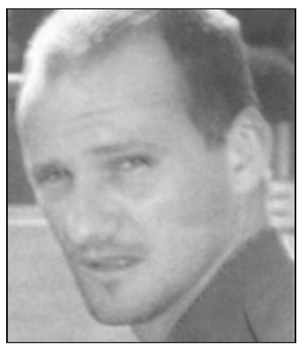
Brazil's 1994 World Cup winning goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel, a Protestant convert who previously played for Istanbul side Galatasaray, said he was worried by Islamic fundamentalism.

"Muslims, even the best ones, are made like that," said Taffarel. "They think they are better than anyone else, they are the only ones who know the truth. I spent so many years in Turkey and my friends in Istanbul always tried to convince me to become a Muslim, become like them.

"There is no respect for others, that's why I am afraid: radicalism terrifies me."

Stephen Appiah, from Ghana, disagreed. "I am a Catholic, in my country I have always lived side-by-side with Muslims and I have never had problems. This was inevitable because Bush wanted it. But he is wrong. You can not bomb a whole country to get one man."

Yugoslav striker Savo Milosevic, a Serb who demonstrated against NATO airstrikes in his homeland and also participated in the demonstrations that helped oust Slobodan Milosevic from power, said: "I have an incredible fear... (Osama) Bin Laden and his friends are abusing Islam, I have many friends who pray to Allah but none of them would dream of going and attacking the



CLAUDIO TAFFAREL

Twin Towers."

Midfielder Sabri Lamouchi, a Frenchman of Arab descent and a Muslim, opined: "I can not believe a man can do what Bin Laden did. I would not let my daughter see what happened in New York, not now or ever. They say this is a religious war but in the Bible, the Koran and the Torah it does not say you can kill to take power."

Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata, an Atheist, said: "Bin Laden got it wrong, so did the United States."

The club's coach Renzo Ulivieri, who as a child survived Allied bombing raids during World War II, said: "Always fight against terrorism, but never go to war. I am one of that naive group of people who thinks you can work things out. I am happy to be naive."

Koubadya Kader, a Muslim from Togo, added: "I am a Muslim but Westerners must know that Bin Laden has nothing to do with us or Allah. In the Koran it is written that to kill is a mortal sin. War is inhuman."

Ronaldo in Maradona, Rai's farewell

Football

INTERNET, *Rio de Janeiro*

Internazionale FC striker Ronaldo is going to play in two matches dedicated to Argentine idol Maradona and former Brazilian international Rai.

Rai will be honoured in a friendly between his former club Paris Saint-Germain FC and a Brazilian all-star team coached by football legend Pele.

Rai was a star in the French league from 1993-1998. His former PSG teammates George Weah, David Ginola, Alain Roche, Youri Djorkaeff and Bernard Lama are expected to feature in the game.

Pele will train the Brazilian team with Claudio Tafarel, Cafu, Edmilson, Sonny Anderson and Inter Milan superstar Ronaldo in the squad. All the profit will go to the "Gol de Letra" foundation established by Rai and compatriot Leonardo in 1999 to support the education and professional training of disadvantaged youth.

Rai had played for Brazil national team during the World Cup 1994 and also performed in the Brazilian First Division for Botafogo and San Paolo.

Meanwhile Ronaldo is also expected to play in Maradona's farewell match at Buenos Aires' Bombonera stadium.

And Maradona is going to take part in the squad of all-stars in the match against Argentina's current and former national team players.

Premiership preview

Leeds-L'pool game of the day

Football

AFP, *London*

Liverpool, unceremoniously dumped out of the League Cup by First Division upstarts Grimsby in midweek, face an even tougher examination when they welcome Premiership leaders Leeds to Anfield on Saturday.

While the Merseysiders were losing their grip on the trophy they won last season together with the UEFA and FA Cups, Leeds were thumping Leicester 6-0 at Filbert Street to go comfortably through to round four.

But despite the teams' contrasting cup fortunes, Leeds and England goalkeeper Nigel Martyn is expecting a backlash from Gerard Houllier's wounded soldiers.

"Liverpool's defeat was the shock result of the night but I have no doubt that it will be a different situation entirely on Saturday," said Martyn on his personal website.

"We'll see a very different Liverpool side, if not in personnel then in mental attitude, I'm sure.

"But having made such a great start to the season we're in good form and while we know it will be a very difficult game, it is one that we are all looking forward to and will go into it full of confidence."

Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler, who is expected to play in the absence of the injured Michael Owen, believes a good result against their bitter rivals will bury the memory of Tuesday's ignominious defeat.

"Someone once said that football is a funny game and it's results like ours last night which prove that it is," he said.

"But if we get a good result against Leeds on Saturday, then I think everyone will forget about that defeat. Not only that, a win would give us a lot of confidence for when we play away to Dynamo Kiev in the Champions League next Tuesday."

Fowler missed the League Cup third round tie because of a heavy cold but resumed training on Wednesday.

"Hopefully I will be available for the Leeds game. I was back in training again today (Wednesday), and I didn't feel too bad after my workout in the gym," he said.

ROBBIE FOWLER

Leeds top the Premiership with 17 points from 7 games, five more than sixth-placed Liverpool who have a game in hand on the Yorkshire men.

Arsenal, in second place, travel to the south coast to tackle Southampton who have failed to win at their new St Mary's Stadium this season since moving from The Dell.

Worryingly for the Saints, Arsenal have not yet lost on the road, with three wins and a draw to their credit.

Reigning champions Manchester United face a tough test at the Stadium of Light where Sunderland are the hosts.

However, with captain David Beckham in sparkling form for club and country it's no wonder the Old Trafford club start as favourites.

Just four days after his last-minute goal forced a draw with the Greek national side, Beckham proved to be the nemesis for Grecian giants Olympiakos on Wednesday as he scored in United's 2-0 Champions League Group G win.

Beckham's goal and a late one from substitute Andy Cole handed United only their second away win in their last 11 Champions League trips, and was enough to send them to the top of the group.

It was Olympiakos' first defeat in 14 home matches in the Champions League.

Basement boys Leicester, who appointed former Wimbledon boss Dave Bassett as their new manager this week, travel to unbeaten Chelsea, yet to win at home in the Premiership.

The Londoners, who had to wait seven months before chalking up their first away victory last season, are performing better away from Stamford Bridge this campaign. The Blues have won twice on their travels but have drawn all three league games on home soil.

Derby, who parted company with manager Jim Smith after seven years, visit Tottenham with new boss Colin Todd at the helm.

Todd's first game in charge came on Wednesday when he saw his side thumped 5-2 at Fulham in the League Cup.

FIXTURES

Saturday (all 1400GMT unless stated): Bolton v Newcastle, Charlton v Middlesbrough, Chelsea v Leicester, Ipswich v Everton, Liverpool v Leeds **(1100GMT)**, Southampton v Arsenal, Sunderland v Manchester United

Sunday: Aston Villa v Fulham **(1500GMT)**, Blackburn v West Ham

Monday: Tottenham v Derby

Can China keep Bora?

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AFP, *Shenyang*

China's football heroes take on Qatar Saturday already safely qualified for their first-ever World Cup Finals, but doubts over the future of their charismatic coach are threatening to spoil the party atmosphere.

Bora Milutinovic secured China's place in Japan and South Korea next year with the side's 1-0 win over Oman last Sunday, giving him the chance to lead out a record-breaking fifth nation at the world's greatest football event.

But the question now vexing Chinese fans is whether a new challenge will lure away the well-travelled Serb before the tournament begins.

It was long known Milutinovic's contract ran only to the end of their World Cup qualification campaign, which finishes on October 19 with the game in Uzbekistan.

This was seen a get-out clause for Chinese football authorities if the man known in China as "Milu" failed to deliver -- but such as been his success team bosses now fear more glamorous sides might come calling.

Newspapers on Friday cited domestic Internet football sites linking Milutinovic with the struggling Brazilian side.

It was also reported last week that when German football legend Franz Beckenbauer telephoned the Serb to congratulate him, Milutinovic cheekily asked if the struggling soccer giants needed the services of a coach who could guarantee them World Cup qualification.

Milutinovic who has previously led Mexico, Costa Rica, the United States and Nigeria out at football's ultimate stage, kept fans wondering after the Oman game by refusing to comment on his future.

However on Friday the often enigmatic Yugoslav seemed to hint it was likely he would stay, saying the matter was up to China's football authorities.

"I am happy that I have kept my promise to bring the Chinese team into the World Cup. It is up to the association whether I will coach the team during next year's tournament," he told a press conference.

Whatever the doubts, the 50,000 or so fans packed into the Wulihe Stadium in the football-crazy north-eastern city of Shenyang will be preparing to celebrate their team's success.

Huge celebrations broke out across China last weekend after they guaranteed their spot at the head of Asian qualifying group B, getting into the World Cup Finals at last after a series of near misses.

Saturday's match will also be a chance for players to book their places in the side going to Japan and South Korea, with Milutinovic promising to give some less established squad members a chance.

Milutinovic has stressed that despite qualification, the hard work as only just begun.

"The real road to the World Cup for the Chinese team start's with Saturday's match," he told Friday's Beijing News Daily: