



PHOTO: AFP

PRACTICING THE RECOBA SPECIAL: Uruguay's star striker Alvaro Recoba practicing free kicks at Melbourne on November 19.

Recoba wary Soccerroos



AFP, Melbourne

Coach Frank Farina has cautioned his Australian team against the scoring threat from Uruguay ace Alvaro Recoba at free kicks ahead of Tuesday's home World Cup qualifier here.

With goals likely to be at a premium in an anticipated tight two-leg series, the Inter Milan virtuoso could be pivotal in getting Uruguay to the World Cup finals for the first time since 1990.

The South Americans, forced to make a hurried trip across the Pacific straight after clinching fifth place in the Conmebol group last week, have lost key forward Dario Silva with a shoulder injury, exerting extra pressure on 25-year-old Recoba.

Recoba is likely to play just behind either Venezia striker Federico Magallanes or Lecce's Javier Chevanton before 96,000 Australian fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where he is lethal, especially at dead-ball situations.

"Recoba is a bit special," Farina said Monday. "He's obviously got a lot of talent, that comes not only with the ball at his feet and coming forward, but at dead-ball situations he's very dangerous."

Farina has obtained plenty of Uruguay match videotapes and has highlighted the skills of Recoba to his players.

"The game that we watched, Uruguay-Colombia, there were six or seven set pieces just outside the box and he forced the 'keeper to a save every time, and not just catching it, but at full stretch on a number of occasions."

"So, singling out any one individual, yes, it would have to be Recoba."

But Farina said he couldn't coach his team not to concede free kicks in

dangerous positions, citing situations which sometimes were beyond players' control.

"Obviously, we can work on the actual dead-ball situation, but not in trying to avoid giving it (free kick) away."

Farina announced the same team that held world and European champions France to a 1-1 draw here eight days ago.

"I was very happy with the performance against France, in the first and second halves a lot of positives came out of it and the whole purpose of that match was to prepare us for these two (Uruguay)," he said.

Farina chose Leeds United maestro Harry Kewell up front with his clubmate Mark Viduka, preferring to use the attacking skills of Birmingham City's Stan Lazaridis and Feyenoord right-midfielder Brett Emerton to bring width to the Australian attempts to break down the well-marshalled Uruguay defence.

The Australian coach defended Viduka against his record of scoring only twice in 17 full internationals.

"Viduka is looking in great shape, but mentally and physically, he's training exceptionally," said Farina.

"He's invaluable when you look at what he contributes to the team in terms of creating opportunities and space for other individuals, that's something you can't replace."

Farina expects Uruguay's non-sensense defence, which conceded only 13 goals in 18 Conmebol games, to target match-winner Kewell.

"He gets that week out in the English Premier League," Farina said.

"He is well equipped to handle it. It's part and parcel of the game at this level."

"The beauty is that if Harry is targeted we've got players like Emerton, Lazaridis and Viduka who will still be able to unlock things. We have got a lot of match winners."

Uruguay coach Victor Pua was not expected to name his team until

90 minutes before Tuesday's match.

SQUADS

Australia (with shirt numbers): (1) Mark Schwarzer, (2) Kevin Muscat, (3) Craig Moore, (4) Shaun Murphy, (5) Paul Okon (capt), (6) Tony Vidmar, (7) Brett Emerton, (8) Josip Skoko, (9) Mark Viduka, (10) Harry Kewell, (11) Stan Lazaridis.

Uruguay (likely): Fabian Carini; Washington Tais, Paolo Montero, Dario Rodriguez, Alejandro Lembo; Gianni Guigou, Pablo Garcia, Alvaro Recoba, Gonzalo de los Santos; Nicolas Olivera, Federico Magallanes.

Referee: Graziano Cesare (Ita)

Blazevic wants to stay on

AFP, Tehran

Miroslav Blazevic, the coach of Iran's doomed attempt to reach the World Cup finals, said here on Sunday that he wants to stay in the job and lead the team into the qualifiers for the 2006 tournament.

"I must study the conditions of the contract, but I would like to stay in Iran for another four years," said the Croatian who saw his team's hopes of making it to the finals in Japan and South Korea next year disappear when they were beaten by the Republic of Ireland in a play-off last week.

Although Iran beat the Irish 1-0 here on Thursday, they lost 2-1 on aggregate after being beaten 2-0 in Dublin last Saturday.

The Iran Football Federation were to meet on Saturday or Sunday to decide the future of Blazevic whose current deal runs out in January.

Primera Liga Alaves climb to second

AFP, Madrid

Alaves moved up to second place in the Spanish First Division after their 1-0 win over Celta Vigo on Sunday, while Valencia hung onto their unbeaten record but could only draw 0-0 at home with relegation-threatened Tenerife.

Deportivo La Coruna lead the way in Spain, with 26 points from 13 games, after their 3-1 win over Real Sociedad on Saturday, but Alaves are only two points adrift and continue to have the meanest defence in the top flight of Spanish soccer.

A goal from the edge of the area by Pablo Gomez after just six minutes - the midfielder's first for more than three seasons - was enough to give the Basque side all three points but they spent the remainder of the game resisting an onslaught by Celta. Doriva and Catanha both saw several efforts go close but in the end Celta, after going unbeaten for their first ten games, succumbed to their third successive league loss.

Valencia slip to fourth place with 22 points, the same tally but an inferior goal difference to Barcelona, who drew 0-0 at Las Palmas on Saturday, after an unimpressive draw against a Canary island side that belied their lowly status.

The Argentine pair of Bruno Marioni and Hugo Morales are the tormentors of Deportivo seven days ago - proved again that they are one of the most potent partnerships in the Spanish First Division at the moment and ran Valencia ragged for 90 minutes.

Valencia had to fight a fierce rear guard action for the final 15 minutes as they were reduced to ten men following the dismissal of Miguel Angel Angulo, who elbowed an opponent in the face after he had only been on the field five minutes.

Real Zaragoza had high hopes before their game at Valladolid of their 37-year streak of having gone without a win in the Zorrilla stadium was about to come to an end, especially after last week's victory over Real Madrid.

However, the optimism proved to be misplaced, as the home side dominated proceedings.

Cauathemco Blanco - the hero of Mexico's recent World Cup qualifier against Honduras, which clinched qualification for the finals next summer - got Valladolid off their marks from the penalty spot on 21 minutes, after Zaragoza defender Xavier Aguado had brought down Jesus Sanchez.

Fernando Fernandez added a second goal for Valladolid after 70 minutes. Real Betis moved up to fifth place with a 2-0 victory over bottom club Rayo Vallecano, both goals coming within the space of less than six minutes in the second half.

Rayo were reduced to ten men just three minutes after the break after Moises Arteaga was given his marching orders and Betis took advantage of the mis-match five minutes later when Portuguese international Joao Tomas broke the deadlock.

Betis' Argentine striker Gabriel Amato added a second for the Seville side shortly afterwards.

Malaga eased their relegation woes with an emphatic 2-1 win over Osasuna, both the Costa Del Sol club's goals coming in similar style.

Defending champions Real Madrid moved menacingly up to seventh place after their 2-1 win over Sevilla on Saturday.

Cuper focused on Scudetto

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan coach Hector Cuper broke an old taboo Saturday night when he admitted he believed his team was in contention for the league title.

The Argentinian, usually a dour figure, was in bullish mood after Saturday night's 0-0 draw with champions AS Roma at the Olympic Stadium.

The former Valencia handler defied the tradition whereby coaches traditionally refuse to consider themselves candidates for the title until the closing months of the season.

"Of course I think that Inter is capable of winning the Scudetto," said Cuper.

"Mind you having played Juve, AC Milan and Roma the same goes for them."

Inter's failure to beat Roma in front of 70,000 predominantly Roma fans prevented them from going top of the table ahead of Sunday evening's Verona derby where surprise leaders Chievo face local rivals Verona.

Despite being handicapped by the loss of key strikers Ronaldo, Christian Vieri and Alvaro Recoba for most of the season Inter are looking more in the mould of their ironman coach who strikes each of his players in the chest in the tunnel before they take the field to focus their minds.

In 10 matches so far they have only had one reverse - that setback was the Milan derby when in 18 minutes of madness Inter - leading 1-0 - lost concentration and allowed AC Milan to score four goals in a game that finished 4-2.

Apart from that mini-breakdown Inter have looked a formidable team although the lack of firepower up front has sometimes prevented them converting winning situations into the final product.

Vieri returned to league action against Roma for the first time since the opening day 4-1 victory over Perugia while Ronaldo's latest comeback could happen next week-end against Fiorentina.

Roma president Franco Sensi also said he felt Inter were contenders for the title.

"Inter's the best team I have seen this year," said Sensi.

Preview

The real thing starts now



AFP, Paris

The serious stuff starts for Champions League aspirants on Tuesday when old foes Manchester United and Bayern Munich clash as the second stage of European football's premier club competition gets underway.

The bloated, double group phase format of recent seasons means even the elite can afford several first-phase defeats and still reach the last 16.

But now the going gets substantially more difficult.

Nowhere is that better illustrated than by Tuesday's action in Group A, where Bayern's meeting with United is a clash of the titans rich in history - distant as well as recent.

The two clubs fought out a pulsating final in 1999 which Bayern looked set to win, ending a 23-year barren spell, when they led 1-0 with the 90 minutes all but up.

Enter Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to steal the cup from under the Bavarians' noses in the most dramatic of finales.

But Munich has had an emotional association with United for so much longer.

The city is forever engraved on the club's heart following an air crash which decimated legendary manager Matt Busby's squad on February 6, 1958, on the way back from a European Cup tie at Red Star Belgrade.

The plane, which had refuelled in Munich, went down in atrocious weather and 23 passengers on board were killed, among them brilliant young stars such as Duncan Edwards.

Ten years on and United would lift the trophy, the first English side to do so, under Busby before Alex Ferguson's side finally brought the trophy back to Old Trafford with the 1999 success.

But this year there is a potential twist in the tale as Ferguson, looking to retire by winning the final in his native Glasgow next May, grapples with criticism of his side and accusations that some stars have been at the club too long.

United have blown hot and cold in the league and failed to win their first phase group after Deportivo La Coruna beat them twice.

Now, as the United board chase a successor for Ferguson and the gossip mounts, one name keeps coming up - Bayern's Ottmar Hitzfeld.

With the memorable exception of two years ago, the motto would appear to be "if you can't beat them

make him join you."

That's because Hitzfeld has a strong record against United, having coached Dortmund to the 1997 title after knocking the English Premiership champions out in the semi-finals with 1-0 successes in both legs.

Hitzfeld, who has led Bayern to three straight league titles, became the first coach to lead different sides to the Champions League title with Bayern's win last May over Valencia.

On the way he steered Bayern to

Bayern have the return of the equally combative midfielder and skipper Stefan Effenberg, who played Saturday after a three-month injury layoff in the defeat at Werder Bremen.

But Paraguayan international forward Roque Santa Cruz is out for two months after ankle surgery, meaning Peruvian Claudio Pizarro and Brazil's Giovane Elber will lead the attack with Carsten Jancker in reserve.

Hitzfeld said he would decide about Effenberg's chances of starting nearer the match.

"I must be flexible. There is no absolute timetable and Stefan now has to fight his way back into the squad on merit," Hitzfeld said.

Challenging Bayern and United in Group A are Portuguese debutants Boavista, who twice held Liverpool in the opening phase, and French champions Nantes, who despite abysmal league form - Saturday's loss at Rennes left them bottom - dumped out Lazio.

Group B sees Liverpool resume their quest for a fifth European title - and first since 1984 - at home to Barcelona, who include Brazilian star Rivaldo after resting him in Saturday's league draw with Las Palmas.

Liverpool enjoy the psychological advantage of having knocked Barca out of the UEFA Cup last season on the way to winning the competition - and they have not forgotten Barcelona's accusation that they had "murdered" football after a dismal 0-0 first-leg draw at the Nou Camp.

"The simple fact is they never had a shot at home. So I think there was a bit of sour grapes," Anfield veteran Gary McAllister told the Sunday Telegraph.

"What helps in Europe is that we are never going to get done on the break, not by anyone."

"For me, Real Madrid are the team to beat this season but I can safely say that if we went into the Bernabeu we could do it," he added.

Turkey's unpredictable Galatasaray host Serie A stars AS Roma in the group's other game, leaving Liverpool to contemplate a later reunion with the Romans, whom they beat in their rivals' back yard the 1984 final.

Wednesday sees poor travellers Arsenal begin their tough Group D campaign at Deportivo La Coruna while Juventus host German dark horses and current Bundesliga table-toppers Bayer Leverkusen.

In Group C, eight-time champions Real Madrid travel to face Sparta Prague, who were highly impressive in the opening stage, while FC Porto meet Panathinaikos in Greece.

Serie A

Verona prevail in city derby



AFP, Milan

A thrilling 3-2 victory for Verona in the city derby Sunday saw surprise Italian First Division leaders Chievo crash to only their second defeat in 10 outings in their debut Serie A season.

Verona overturned a 2-0 Chievo lead to inflict the second reverse of the season on Luigi del Neri's side whose previous setback at the hands of Juventus also came after they had led 2-0.

Chievo's lead is now cut to a single point.

First-half strikes from Brazilian Eriberto and a Eugenio Corini penalty appeared to have put Chievo on course for a four-point lead after a weekend where Juventus, 3-1 victors over Parma, were the only leading side to win.

But a Massimo Oddo penalty immediately reopened the game. After the break Chievo striker Massimo Marazzina was sent off and Verona - known locally as Hellas Verona because of the city's Greek community - levelled when Chievo's Salvatore Lanna scored a farcical own goal.

Almost immediately Argentinian Mauro German Camoranesi scored the winner to the delight of the bulk of the 41,000 capacity crowd at the Stadio Marc'Antonio Bentegodi shared by both teams.

The only consolation for Chievo was that they remain top over Inter Milan, held 0-0 by champions AS Roma on Saturday.

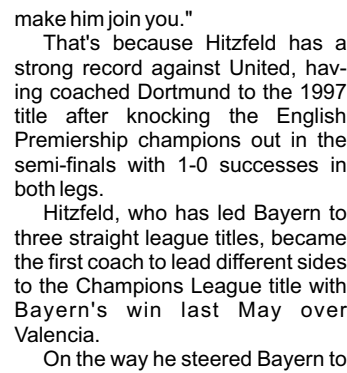
A clearly disappointed del Neri said: "It was a game played at an intense pace but I can't blame the boys who gave it their all."

His Verona counterpart Alberto Malesani celebrated wildly with supporters and later said: "Verona has had so little to celebrate in these last few years so I am really happy tonight."

Earlier strikers David Trezeguet and Alessandro Del Piero helped Juventus end a six-match domestic winless streak.

Second-half goals from both men - Frenchman Trezeguet had already scored before the break - ensured a losing Serie A start for Parma's new Argentinian coach Daniel Passarella and lifts Juve to joint third.

Earlier Parma's French midfielder Sabri Lamouchi equa-



WEEKEND'S FIXTURES	
TUESDAY	
Group A	Bayern Munich (Ger) v Manchester United (Eng)
	Boavista (Por) v Nantes (Fra)
Group B	Galatasaray (Tur) v AS Roma (Ita)
	Liverpool (Eng) v Barcelona (Spa)

WEDNESDAY	
Group C	Panathinaikos (Gre) v FC Porto
	Sparta Prague (Cze) v Real Madrid (Spa)
Group D	Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) v Arsenal (Eng)
	Juventus (Ita) v Bayer

home and away quarter-final wins over Ferguson's charges.

The season United won the competition they also drew twice in the group stages with Bayern, meaning Hitzfeld has racked up four wins and two draws in seven Champions League encounters with his Scottish adversary.

And the disciplinarian has in so doing managed to rip away the FC Hollywood label which in the past stuck to Bayern, a club long famed for kingsize player egos.

Ferguson, equally a believer in discipline, argued ahead of Saturday's first win in a month in the Premiership, over Leicester, that criticism of United was exaggerated.

"There is no question of anyone at Old Trafford feeling we have reached the end of the line. Empires crumble from within, but our foundations are rock solid. There are no cracks," said Ferguson in his programme notes.

While United hope to have Roy Keane anchoring their midfield



PHOTO: AFP

PREMATURE CELEBRATIONS: Ecstatic Chievo players celebrate a goal during their derby against city rivals Verona on November 18. Chievo however lost 2-3.

led Trezeguet's opener with a shot that took a deflection off Gianluca Zambrotta but the game tilted towards Juve when Parma's Argentinian midfielder Mathias Almeyda was sent off for an innocuous foul.

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said: "We are back on the winning path and that's important but the spirit has always been good here."

Meanwhile, Bologna missed a chance to grab a share of top spot when they were defeated 1-0 at Lecce thanks to a fine Bruno Cirillo goal - Inter Milan themselves failed to grab pole position Saturday night

when they were held 0-0 by champions AS Roma.

Lecce had defender Alessandro Conticchio dismissed but goalkeeper Antonio Chimenti saved a late penalty from Bologna's Argentinian forward Julio Cruz.

"We can't just blame Cruz because we missed several chances," said Bologna coach Francesco Guidolin.

New AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti saw his side held to a 0-0 draw by Piacenza at the San Siro in his first league appearance since replacing sacked Turk Fatih Terim.

Milan defender Alessandro

Premiership Leeds' dream run ends

AFP, London

Leeds boss David O'Leary was left seething with referee Graham Barber Sunday after his side had crashed 2-0 at Sunderland, their first Premiership defeat of the season.

O'Leary was incensed Barber did not award a penalty for a Bert Haas trip on Republic of Ireland striker Robbie Keane at a time when Leeds were chasing the game.

Barber instead chose to book Keane for diving, the second time this season the 21-year-old has been shown the yellow card for such an offence.

"The referee found it difficult to contain his anger at the decision which could have given Leeds a lifeline."

"The penalty incident was a disgrace," he fumed.

"I had a great view of it at the time and I saw it again straight after the game."

"The referee has to make an instant decision, but I thought it was a penalty and the Sunderland people thought the same. And when you see it on television, it was a disgraceful decision."

Leeds were 2-0 down at the time of the Keane incident, with Sunderland having scored early second half goals through Julio Arca and Kevin Phillips, the latter's seventh goal of the season.

The eventual victory prevented Leeds from returning to the top of the table and ended Sunderland's miserable hoodoo against their Yorkshire nemesis, having previously lost the last six encounters.

Crucially, Leeds were without key duo Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell - both on World Cup duty with Australia - while Lee Bowyer was sidelined with a hamstring injury.

For Sunderland, it was their first League victory over Leeds for 13 years and their first on home soil for 21, with the three points easing the pressure on under-fire boss Peter Reid.

After a previous run of just one point out of 12, the victory lifts Sunderland away from the relegation zone, with Reid hailing the performance as his side's "best all season."

Chelsea's designs on the Premiership title look hollow after a dismal 0-0 draw at Goodison Park where a hard-working Everton justifiably claimed a point.

The result means that Chelsea have now drawn seven of their 12 matches though they are still only four points adrift of top spot.

In the day's other match, strugglers Ipswich lost 2-1 to early Premiership pace-makers Bolton at Portman Road.

Gudni Bergsson and Michael Ricketts gave Bolton a two-goal lead with Matt Holland scoring a consolation goal for Ipswich just before half-time.

Costacurta, a team-mate of Ancelotti in the great Milan side of the late 1980s, was red carded in the second half for a brutal challenge and Piacenza defender Filippo Cristante soon followed for a less clearcut offence.

"The team still seems to have problems expressing its talent," admitted Ancelotti.

Brescia striker Luca Toni gave his side an early lead at Perugia but the hosts hit back when Brazilian international Ze Maria converted an 18th-minute penalty following a foul on Giovanni Tedesco. It finished 1-1.

Lazio striker Hernan Crespo confirmed his return to form when he inspired his side's 4-1 win at nine-man Udinese.

Crespo gave Lazio a second-half lead and Udinese were further disadvantaged when their Italian international defender Valerio Bertotto was dismissed.

Fabio Liverani added a second before Honduran international Jorge Caballeros reduced the arrears for the northerners.

Substitute Claudio Lopez - also Argentinian - and Crespo's second ensured a handsome victory after Udinese's talented Ghanaian defender Mohammed Gargo also saw red.

Lazio coach Alberto Zaccheroni, who omitted Spanish midfielder Gaizka Mendietia and Stefano Fiore as he did in the recent match with Brescia, hinted at possible transfer outings when he said: "This victory is down to how our team has started to grow - something which began when we beat Brescia 5-0."

The plight of bottom club Venezia continued when they went down 1-0 to Atalanta at Bergamo. The home team opened the scoring through striker Fausto Rossini and the Venice outfit is still winless after 10 matches.

Atalanta's Luca Saudati and Venezia's Antonio Marasco were both sent off.

Fiorentina and Torino fought out a 0-0 draw in a basement battle at Florence.

On Saturday, champions AS Roma and Inter Milan also deadlocked 0-0 at the Olympic Stadium.

Inter's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper said: "Of course I think that Inter is capable of winning the Scudetto. Mind you having played Juve, AC Milan and Roma the same goes for them."

Serie A's top six

Italian First Division table after weekend matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Chievo	10	6	2	2	20	11	20
Inter Milan	10	5	4	1	15	9	19
Juventus	10	4	5	1	17	10	17
AS Roma	10	4	5	1	14	7	17
Bologna	10	5	2	3	7	6	17
AC Milan	10	4	4	2	17	12	16