

FA Cup Rotherham shock Saints

Football

AFP, London

Southampton became the latest Premiership club to crash out of the FA Cup at the first hurdle when they were beaten 2-1 by First Division Rotherham in a third-round tie at Millmoor on Wednesday.

Goals either side of half-time from Richard Barker and John Mullin gave Rotherham, promoted last season from the Second Division, a well-deserved win over the south coast club despite a penalty with 20 minutes remaining from Southampton's Latvian star Marian Pahars.

But elsewhere results went with the form book, the four other Premiership sides in action Wednesday all going through.

In delayed third-round ties Tottenham beat Coventry 2-0 and Bolton were 4-1 victors over Stockport.

Meanwhile at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea secured a 4-0 third round replay win over First Division Norwich and in the evening's other replay Blackburn beat Barnsley 3-1.

Rotherham were cruising to victory when Mullin raced onto Chris Sedgwick's through ball and gave Southampton's Wales keeper Paul Jones no chance with a powerful strike.

But Rotherham gave themselves a nervous finale when a pointless push on Southampton striker Kevin Davies by Andy Monkhouse led to Pahars' spot-kick lifeline.

"Those last 20 minutes lasted a lifetime," joked Rotherham boss Ronnie Moor. "They aged me - I feel about 64 at the moment."

"It was one hell of a game, a tremendous cup tie, and we were left hanging on a bit at the end but they are a good Premiership side."

Southampton manager Gordon Strachan said: "I'm happy with the way we played for most of the game and I'd be amazed if there's another game this season where we create as many chances."

Rotherham took the lead six minutes before half-time when Barker stole in unmarked to send in a diving header from Kevin Easton's free-kick.

For Southampton, surprise 1-0 winners against Manchester United

handed out the punishment Wednesday.

His team inflicted Stockport's 11th successive defeat, courtesy of goals from Gudni Bergsson, a Karim Fradin own goal, Henrik Petersson and star marksman Michael Ricketts' wonderful curling shot before Stockport's Jon Daly's netted a last-minute penalty.

"Anyone who sees this goal that he scored here will know why I pushed him for an England place," said Allardyce.

"Ricketts showed outstanding quality."

Chelsea goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini, who held Norwich to a goalless draw, was a near spectator Wednesday.

From an 11th minute corner Chelsea's Croatia international Mario Stanic rose for a header that crawled over the goalline.

Then Frank Lampard followed up Stanic's awkward long-range 56th minute spilled shot to set up a tie against Chelsea's London rivals and his old club West Ham.

For good measure, Italian veteran Gianfranco Zola added a third with an extraordinary near-post flick and substitute Mikael Forssell completed the scoring with a minute left.

Delighted Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri said of Zola's volley. "Only fantastic players like Maradona and Pele could have scored a goal like that."

Blackburn may be more interested in Premiership survival than FA Cup success but even their second-string side was too strong for Barnsley.

A 1-1 draw at Oakwell had given Barnsley hope but goals from Corrado Grabbi, David Dunn with a penalty - and Nils-Eric Johansson put Rovers on top.

Bruce Dyer pulled a goal back but Rovers, already in the English League Cup semi-finals, were through to a tough tie against First Division Millwall.

"I thought we won quite comfortably," said Blackburn boss Graeme Souness.

"We know what the priorities are, we have two very big games for us in the Premiership and then the League Cup semi-final so we needed to keep some players fresh," he added.

"We thought we could do that tonight and it turned out we got it right."

* Ties to be played on January 26 and 27.

Monday, January 21
3rd rd replay:
Peterborough v Darlington (1930GMT)

Revised English FA Cup fourth round draw after Wednesday's third round matches:

4TH RD
Preston v Sheffield United
Rotherham v Crewe
Charlton v Walsall
Tranmere v Cardiff
Gillingham v Bristol Rovers
York v Fulham
Darlington or Peterborough v Newcastle

Tottenham v Bolton
Chelsea v West Ham
Millwall v Blackburn
Cheltenham v Burnley
Everton v Leyton Orient
West Brom v Leicester
Middlesbrough v Manchester United

Ipswich v Manchester City
Arsenal v Liverpool



HE IS SPECIAL: Chelsea's Italian star Gianfranco Zola (R) is being greeted by a fan after scoring a wonder goal against Norwich City at Stamford Bridge on January 16.

Zola a la Diego!

Football

REUTERS, London

Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri has compared striker Gianfranco Zola to Diego Maradona and Pele after his fellow Italian scored a magical goal in their 4-0 FA Cup win over Norwich City.

Ranieri even hinted the 35-year-old could have a future in Chelsea's coaching set-up after Zola bagged their third goal in the third round clash at Stamford Bridge.

Graeme Le Saux whipped over a low corner from the right flank, Zola let the ball get halfway between his legs before striking a volley with the heel of his right foot into the roof of the net.

"This goal was fantasy, magic. Only Maradona, Pele, the big players, can do this. He's a wizard," Ranieri told reporters afterwards.

Zola had joined Napoli as Maradona's understudy in 1989, when Argentina's World Cup winner wore their number 10 shirt. Ranieri took over the helm of the Serie A club for the 1991-92 season - amid Maradona's departure after his descent into drugs first became public.

Looking back, Ranieri said: "At Napoli the number 10 was gone and the chairman asked who can we buy? I say no, I want Gianfranco, and he played all that season."

"I trust Gianfranco, I believe in Gianfranco. He's very meticulous. He always trains a lot and for me... I am Italian, he's Italian, he's a good 'visiting card' in England."

Looking ahead for Zola, Ranieri said: "All doors are open for him. I want him to stay."

"If he wants to join the coaching staff I would be happy, but I don't know if the chairman wants that many staff!"

Zola himself dedicated the strike to the family of a young boy suffering from cancer who he had met a couple of weeks ago, but who has subsequently died.

"He was suffering a lot but he managed to give me a smile. I promised to give him something special. Unfortunately, he's no longer with us. I wish wherever he is he sees this goal and I dedicate it to his family," the Sardinian said.

As for the goal, he added: "I can't really shoot with my left foot so I crossed my legs... You can't think about it, you just do it. I'll never try again."

Spanish King's Cup Figueres in history books

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Figueres became the first Third Division side to reach the semifinals of Spain's King's Cup when a goalless draw at home to Cordoba earned them a 2-0 aggregate win in a tense quarter-final.

Figueres, who beat Barcelona in the second round to produce the first big shock of this season's competition, made it through to the last four despite Second Division Cordoba having almost all the possession in the second leg.

The tiny Catalan club were joined in the semifinals by Real Madrid, who went down 1-0 at Rayo Vallecano in their quarter-final second leg but were never really threatened as they completed a 4-1 aggregate win.

Deportivo Coruna also made it through after a much tougher second leg at Valladolid. They needed a penalty from Diego Tristan in the second period of extra-time to clinch a 3-2 aggregate victory.

Depor had their 2-0 lead from the first leg wiped out inside 36 minutes as Valladolid struck through a Fernando header and a poacher's goal from Mario and the favourites were in serious trouble when they had Enrique Romero sent off on 98 minutes.

Javier Irureta's side produced

their best football after being reduced to 10 men, though, and they clinched victory as Walter Pandiani was brought down in the box and Tristan stepped up to convert the spotkick.

Pandiani received his second yellow card two minutes from time but Irureta's nine-man team managed to hold on.

The semifinal line-up is completed by Athletic Bilbao who eased through with a 3-0 aggregate win over Villarreal on Tuesday.

Cordoba's best chance to force their way back against Figueres fell in first-half injury-time when a full-blooded Jose Carlos Soria strike from close range was well saved by the goalkeeper.

They renewed their attack after the break but a second yellow card for Daniel Lopez Ramos after 58 minutes gave their opponents vital breathing space and they held out to complete a famous win.

Real Madrid moved a step closer to the first piece of silverware of their centenary season despite defeat in a game that offered precious little in the way of entertainment.

Rayo had a brief flurry at the start but a Real side that featured just five first-team regulars managed to kill the game off.

Roberto Peragon's neat finish from a long ball over the top two minutes into second-half injury-time was at least reward for all Rayo's hard work.

Gunners supremo angry

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal chairman Peter Hill-Wood has reacted furiously to reports that star midfielder Patrick Vieira has held secret talks with Real Madrid about a possible transfer.

The coveted French World Cup winner is said to have been offered a 24-million-pound five-year deal to move to the Bernabeu.

But Hill-Wood is annoyed that the two parties appear to have met without the Highbury club's knowledge.

"From what has been coming out it seems Patrick has met Real Madrid," Hill-Wood told Thursday's Daily Star.

"It is very irritating when you take a lot of time and trouble to sort out lucrative deals with players and then find out it is a waste of your time."

Vieira's contract expires in 2004 but Arsenal are determined to hang onto one of their most prized assets for as long as possible.

"There is no point in having a world-class stadium, which we will start building soon (at Ashburton Grove), and not have a world-class team to go into it," said Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein.

"You don't get that by selling your best players," he told The Daily Mail.

Vieira's trip to the Spanish capital was uncovered after Spanish journalists working on a motor-racing story at Barajas airport spotted the player with his agent Marc Roger, the Daily Telegraph reported.

The two men were later joined by Santos Marquez, Vieira's agent in Spain, and Marguerite Faucone, the lawyer involved in Nicolas Anelka's acrimonious transfer from Arsenal to Real, the paper said.

The Telegraph said there was no suggestion Vieira had personally met Real officials, but that his representatives had conducted talks which made a transfer inevitable.

Meanwhile the Daily Mail reported that Real would offer Arsenal a staggering 50 million pounds for Vieira - with the condition that he signs before the end of the transfer window on January 31.

Italian Cup Milan show Lazio the door

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Lazio's season was effectively ended after a 3-2 defeat against AC Milan in the Italian Cup quarter-final second leg at the Stadio Olimpico.

Trailing 2-1 from the first leg, Lazio went further behind on aggregate after just four minutes when a fine run by Serginho was finished off at the far post by Jose Mari.

Serginho then hit the bar, but Lazio equalised on the night when Czech international Karel Poborsky burst down the right and Simone Inzaghi volleyed home.

Milan's former Alaves forward Javi Moreno was a constant threat to the home defence, slightly over-running the ball when one-on-one with Angelo Peruzzi in the Lazio goal.

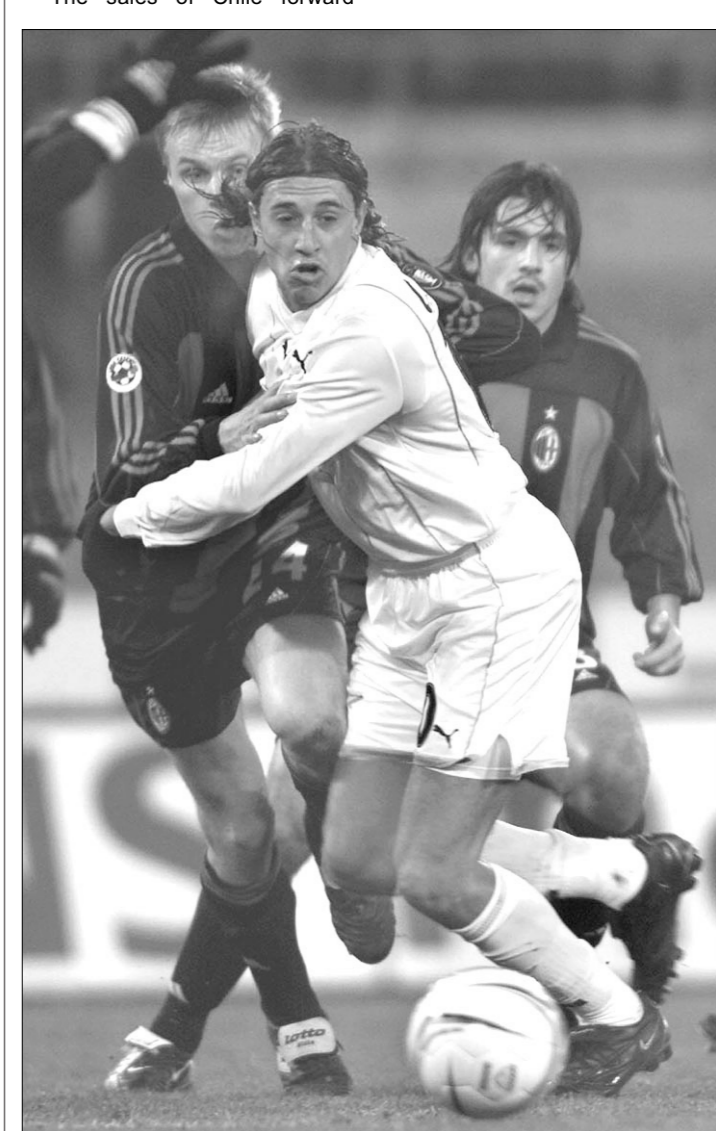
Early in the second half Moreno volleyed against the bar, but he restored Milan's two-goal advantage with a low shot into the far corner in the 55th minute.

Three minutes later Moreno beat the offside trap to ensure a Milan victory, although Lazio's Argentine forward Hernan Crespo did pull back a consolation goal with 15 minutes to go.

Lazio fans made no secret of their disgust at the home team's recent performances, as they displayed banners paying homage to West Ham forward and fellow fan Paolo Di Canio.

Flags were burned and many supporters from the Ultras area in the Curva Nord walked out midway through the first half.

The sales of Chile forward



Hernan Crespo (R), Lazio's Argentine superstar trying to keep out AC Milan's Danish recruit Martin Laursen at Rome on January 16.