

# Gunners' eyes on treble



AFP, Paris

Notions of the 'treble' will resurface for ambitious Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger on Wednesday as the English Premiership high-flyers bid to transfer impressive domestic form to the European stage.

Yet on a night when the last four quarterfinalists, from Groups C and D of the Champions' League, will be decided, Arsenal face the biggest logistical challenge in a Group D where everything is still to play for.

Arsenal take on Juventus, who are already out of the competition, in Turin while Bayer Leverkusen face an uphill battle to outscore their English counterparts away to on-form Group D leaders Deportivo La Coruna to claim the coveted second spot.

Group C is a more straightforward affair. Real Madrid, who play away to Panathinaikos, are already qualified but the Greek side, in second place, will be looking to use significant home advantage to keep that position.

Panathinaikos need only a point but are likely not to sit back against the reigning Spanish champions.

The Greeks will be without the services of midfielder Angelos Basinas and defender Sotiris Kyrgiakos, both suspended, and defender Leonidas Vokolos who is doubtful with a leg injury.

## Nee kneed out

AFP, Lyon

Lyon striker Frederic Nee will be out for the rest of the season after injuring his right knee during a reserve team match, the club said on Monday.

Tests revealed torn knee ligaments which will need an operation and keep him out for the rest of 2001/02. To add to his woes, he broke his right big toe in the same incident when he collided with the opposing keeper in the final minute.

The 26-year-old Nee has one cap for France, earned in the Confederations Cup last June.

## Man United hope Beck will stay

Reuters, London

Manchester United are optimistic England captain David Beckham will agree a new contract with the club before the World Cup.

"I am sure we will get it done, hopefully before the end of the season or the World Cup," chief executive Peter Kenyon told BBC radio on Tuesday. "There is no such thing as 100 percent but we are very, very confident."

Beckham, whose current United deal expires in the summer of 2003, has been discussing a new contract with United officials for some time.

Media reports claim Beckham wants around 80,000 pounds a week under a new deal, with image rights on top.

The value of the image rights have been the main sticking point for the 26-year-old, but United have grown increasingly confident of keeping their prize asset following Alex Ferguson's decision last month to stay on as manager.

## Florentina face judicial inquiry

AFP, Florence

A Florence court on Monday ordered that a judicial inspection be carried out on ailing Italian Serie A outfit Florentina, ANSA news agency reported.

Florence businessman Vincenzo Pilla has been appointed to thoroughly examine the books of the club which is looking odds-on to be relegated to Serie B after a season when their playing squad has been decimated by injuries and forced sales to meet the club's crippling debts.

The court will reassemble on May 29 to decide which is the best way forward after Pilla presents his report.

Florentina president Ugo Poggi said that he welcomed the move.

"I think this decision is a positive one because it will show that the accounts situation is not as bad as we have made out," Poggi said.

"It's also positive that a judicial inspector stands beside the board because he can see that the economic situation of the club is decidedly good."

"With this decision I hope that when the tribunal next meets that the case could be consigned to the archives."

Less impressed were the club's long suffering fans whose spokesman Walter Tanturli, in reference to club owner and movie mogul Vittorio Cecchi Gori, said:

"Besides it is nothing but a mouthful of oxygen for Cecchi Gori. We were hoping for a shake-up to persuade the owner to leave."

The good news for coach Sergio Marcarian is that defender Ioannis Goumas is fit and available for selection. Madrid coach Vicente del Bosque meanwhile is expected to send seven of his reserve side to Athens.

Portuguese side Porto, in third on three points less than Panathinaikos, face a tough battle away to Sparta Prague who have only pride to play for after being eliminated from the competition.

Currently struggling on the domestic front, where they are on the brink of losing their league

### FIXTURES

European Champions' League second phase matches on Wednesday:

#### Group C

Panathinaikos v Real Madrid

Sparta Prague v FC Porto

#### Group D

Deportivo La Coruna v Bayer Leverkusen

Juventus v Arsenal

place, synonymous with a place in Europe next season, to Benfica, Porto will be doubly determined to win at Prague and hope for Real Madrid to win at Panathinaikos.

Porto will be without injured goalkeeper Vitor Baia for Wednesday and defender Carlos Secretario, who will sit out a suspension.

Arsenal sit second in Group D with seven points and have hit a rich vein

of form since going down 2-0 to Deportivo at home two weeks ago.

A 2-1 league win against Aston Villa on Sunday, complete with a penalty save from 'keeper David Seaman and a peachy game-winning lob from French maestro Robert Pires, suggested the Londoners are back to their old selves.

Wenger could bring in veteran Gunner Tony Adams alongside Sol Campbell in central defence in the wake of Igor Stepanov's injury.

Adams has been fit to play for a few days, but, without a tune-up game in the reserves, Wenger may not want to hasten his return. He has only played five games this season and he had a recurrence of a foot injury against Gillingham in the FA Cup last month.

Arsenal's hopes of winning the treble -- Champions' League, Premiership and FA Cup -- has been boosted by Juventus' absences.

Veteran defender Ciro Ferrara, one of four survivors from the Juve that won the 1995-6 Champions' League in Lippi's first stint at the club, is ruled out of the match through suspension.

French defender Lilian Thuram is

not yet fully recovered from a strained adductor muscle in his right leg and trained apart from his teammates on Monday.

In the absence of Ferrara and Thuram, the likely centre-back pairing will be of Croatian Igor Tudor and Mark Iuliano.

Tottenham's fourth loss on the trot leaves Hoddle desperate to halt the slide in form that has seen Spurs' season unravel in recent weeks.

Against Charlton, Spurs created several openings but were robbed of a goal after some superb keeping

Lippi's team are eliminated even though they have a better head-to-head record with Leverkusen and could yet manage the same with Arsenal but Lippi has no complaints about the elimination.

"We deserve to be out because our rivals have been better than us," he said.

Arsenal's bid could be given a boost if high-flying German Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen, who like Arsenal also have seven points in group D but less favourable goals difference, maintain their poor away record at Deportivo.

Leverkusen forwards Dimitar Berbatov and Thomas Brdaric were

on target again for the ambitious German outfit on Saturday in a 2-0 away win at VfB Stuttgart, prompting coach Klaus Toppmoller to sing their praises.

Midfielder Carsten Ramelow, suspended in Leverkusen's victory, is back in the reckoning.

Deportivo, with 10 points and a healthy goal difference, are already assured of qualification. But favours from the Galicians at their blue-and-white decked Riazor stadium are likely to be few and far between.

Coach Javier Irureta is expected

to line-up a virtually second string side with expected absences including Juan Carlos Valeron, Diego Tristan, Fran and Romero, all injured, and Lionel Scaloni and Victor suspended.

## Brazil doesn't impress Pele

AFP, Tokyo

Football legend Pele said Tuesday Brazil need to improve their organisational set-up to boost their chances of winning the World Cup finals.

"We know we have good players," he told reporters here. "But we don't have a team organised yet for the World Cup."

Brazil has struggled recently to live up to high expectations, in part because many players are based in Europe and the team has not had sufficient preparation time, said Pele, on a three-day visit to Japan.

"Argentina, England, France, Portugal, Italy ... All these teams are already organised," he said. "Italy has a very good team."

The Brazilian, himself a member of three World Cup-winning teams, said the first World Cup finals to be held in Asia would not give any of the major contenders to lift the title an added advantage.

Japan and South Korea are co-hosting the month-long tournament that kicks off on May 31.

"I think this World Cup will be very special. It will be neutral for all," he said, referring to the success of the top European and South American teams when the finals have been played in their regional backyards.

The 61-year-old Pele also said the second tier of football nations, such as Japan and the United States, were catching up with the traditional giants of the game.

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Brazil's football legend Pele attends a news conference in Tokyo on Tuesday to promote an anti-impotence awareness campaign. Pele met reporters in Japan sporting a new role as educational ambassador for Pfizer, the US drug firm known for its impotence cure Viagra.

## Liberia, Zim back Blatter



REUTERS, Johannesburg

Liberia and Zimbabwe will back FIFA president Sepp Blatter in his bid for re-election against the leader of African football Issa Hayatou, who announced his candidacy at the weekend.

And Blatter has also received support in Europe from Germany.

Edwin Snowe, president of the Liberian Football Association, says he will launch a campaign called 'Friends of Blatter in Africa' to seek support for the incumbent FIFA president.

Zimbabwe Football Association president Leo Mugabe has also said he would vote against Hayatou in what is expected to be a tightly contested race.

Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Hayatou, 55, ended weeks of speculation by announcing he would stand, saying on Saturday he was confident of overwhelming support from Africa in his bid to unseat Blatter.

China plays its group games in South Korea, co-host of the finals along with Japan. However, the CTS said it is unlikely to obtain any more than 3,000 additional tickets.

China has been gripped by football frenzy since the national team sealed qualification late last year for the World Cup finals.

But only the very rich or well-connected in China will be able to travel overseas to watch the games, given the relatively high cost of the tickets, air travel and lodging.

Sepp Blatter, who has come under fire in recent weeks over allegations of financial mismanagement and vote-rigging, says he expects to remain as president of world soccer's governing body FIFA.

"I am very confident that in a year I will still be at the head of FIFA, that I will still continue to be able to continue my activities at FIFA," Blatter said in an interview on Swiss television on Monday.

Blatter faces a fight to retain his position after Cameroonian Issa Hayatou, 55, president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), declared his candidacy on Saturday for world soccer's top job. A decision is due at the FIFA Congress in May.

Blatter rejected the allegations of financial mismanagement and vote-rigging, saying such comments made him sad.

He said the allegations arose from infighting within the ranks of world soccer.

Blatter also dismissed allegations FIFA faced severe financial trouble following the collapse last year of the ruling body's marketing agent ISL-ISMM.

He said any talk of FIFA being in financial difficulty was "nothing else other than a very, very liberal interpretation of the truth".

At an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee earlier this month, it was agreed that an internal audit of FIFA's finances should be set up. The decision was seen as a major defeat for Blatter.

But the president said he had recommended that FIFA have an internal audit "as is customary in companies".

Blatter was elected FIFA president in 1998, beating UEFA president Lennart Johansson by 111-80 votes at the FIFA Congress in Paris.

away from Turin. Other potential venues are Reggio Emilia (between Parma and Bologna) and Monza, the town near Milan that is more famous as the home of motor racing.