

Voller has had enough

Football

AFP, Rome

Roma have begun their search for a new coach following the shock resignation of Rudi Voller.

Voller quit after Saturday's 3-1 defeat away to Bologna which left the ailing Serie A club languishing in mid-table with just four points from a possible 12.

Roma were 3-0 down inside the first 37 minutes before Bologna had two players sent off.

The visitors pulled a goal back, but despite their numerical supremacy they failed to break the nine men

down.

According to Italian media reports, former Porto coach Luigi Del Neri is favourite to take Voller's place.

Del Neri was sacked by the Portuguese club last month after falling out with the board of the Champions League holders.

The former coach of Verona-based Serie A side Cheivo was hired to replace Jose Mourinho, now at English Premiership side Chelsea, in June.

Other candidates for the Roma job include former AC Milan coach Arrigo Sacchi and former Chelsea and Watford coach Gianluca Vialli.

Voller, who took the Roma reins

on August 31 after Cesare Prandelli left the post to look after his sick wife, said he felt the team were not pulling in the same direction as he was.

"In the first-half it seemed as if we were playing a friendly match," said the 44-year-old, who quit as coach of Germany after he failed to take them beyond the first round at Euro 2004.

"No one player was to blame, they were all guilty and I have to take responsibility for that, so it was better that I left. I thought that the best way I could help the club was to quit."

"I may have made mistakes, but the players must give more. That is what I said to them. That is not the way a team in Serie A should perform."

Asked if leaving after just four league matches was a little premature, he replied: "I found it difficult and maybe in time I could have sorted things out, but time was something I didn't have."

Backroom man Ezio Sella will take charge of team matters for Roma as they prepare for Tuesday's crucial Champions League match away to Real Madrid.

Voller's short spell at Roma has been riddled with problems.

Earlier this week, UEFA told Roma they would have to forfeit their opening Champions League match against Dynamo Kiev after the referee was hit by a missile thrown from the crowd at the Olympic stadium.

In addition, Roma must play their next two home games in the competition behind closed doors.

Voller, who played for Roma between 1987 and 1992, also had trouble keeping striker Antonio Cassano in line.

The hot-headed Italy international was sent home from training last week because Voller said he was too tense and was a bad influence of the rest of the squad.



PHOTO: AFP

THE END IS WRITTEN ON HIS FACE: A dejected AS Roma coach Rudi Voller leaves the pitch at the end of the match against Bologna at Dall' Ara stadium in Bologna on September 25.



FOUR IS TO ONE! Real Madrid's Portuguese superstar Luis Figo (L) finds himself marked by four Athletic Bilbao players at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on September 25.

PHOTO: AFP

Serie A Another dark day for Roma

Football

AFP, Rome

Rudi Voller quit as Roma coach after the club's 3-1 defeat away to Bologna, while leaders Juventus dropped their first points of the season in a 1-1 draw at home to Palermo on Saturday.

Under Voller, Roma have taken just four league points from a possible 12.

Despite their draw, Juve held on to top spot with 10 points from four matches, while Roma dropped to 14th place.

Roma director Franco Baldini said he tried to persuade Voller, drafted in last month to replace Cesare Prandelli who left to take care of his sick wife, to reconsider his departure.

"Voller offered his resignation and I told him he should think about his decision because he was not responsible for such a poor performance," Baldini said.

"I told him he should take the decision when he is calmer, but he seemed to have made up his mind."

"I only hope it was a move dictated by the emotion of the moment. If Voller hasn't changed his mind by tomorrow morning, we will decide what to do."

Bologna had to play the last 39 minutes with only nine men after Giacomo Cipriani and Theo

Zagorakis were sent off, but by that time they were already 3-0 up.

French midfielder Mourad Meghni scored twice and Cipriani grabbed the other goal, before Cipriani and Greek midfielder Theo Zagorakis were both sent off.

Francesco Totti pulled one back for Roma just before the hour, but they failed to breach the nine men again.

Roma, forced to forfeit their opening Champions League match against Dynamo Kiev after the referee was hit by a missile and who must play their next two home games in the competition behind closed doors, came into the match hoping to resurrect their faltering title challenge.

But Bologna, 2-1 winners at Parma on Wednesday, exploited Roma's fragile confidence as early as the fifth minute.

Tommaso Locatelli knocked down Carlo Nervo's right wing cross for Meghni whose shot, hit with the outside of his boot, curled high into the top corner of the net.

Bologna doubled their advantage in the 34th minute. Locatelli dribbled into the penalty area before setting up Cipriani, whose right-footed cross-shot shot flew past helpless Roma keeper Ivan Pelizzoli.

Three minutes later, Bologna tightened their grip on the match and once again Locatelli was the provider.

Capped twice by Italy, Locatelli sent Meghni clear and the

Frenchman's left-footed shot gave Pelizzoli no chance.

Juventus, who won their first three matches without conceding a goal, were surprisingly held in Turin by the promoted Sicilians.

Christian Zaccardo's close-range header from Eugenio Corini's free-kick put the visitors ahead in the 17th minute, only for Zlatan Ibrahimovic to bundle home an equaliser shortly after the break.

Ibrahimovic's first effort, a powerful close-range header, was parried by Palermo keeper Matteo Guardalben, but the Juve forward was first to the loose ball and prodded it home.

Juve coach Fabio Capello lamented his team's lack of concentration that allowed Zaccardo to steal in at the back post.

"I'm happy with the performance, but the only negative thing is that we gifted them a goal from a set-piece," said the man who quit Roma to join Juve at the start of the summer. "That shouldn't have happened."

TOP SIX										
Italian league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Juventus	4	3	1	0	9	1	10			
Lazio	3	2	1	0	4	1	7			
Messina	3	2	1	0	6	4	7			
Cagliari	3	2	0	1	4	2	6			
Palermo	4	1	3	0	3	2	6			
Bologna	4	2	0	2	5	5	6			

Santini smells a rat

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur manager Jacques Santini accused referee Peter Walton of entering the Manchester United dressing-room at half-time and "smiling with their players and smiling with their staff" during Spurs' 1-0 defeat at White Hart Lane.

Santini also made it clear that he was unhappy that Walton, who has little experience of officiating at Premiership level, had been chosen to replace the respected Steve Bennett as referee just three or four days before the game.

"I have some good information as at half-time, when my players and my assistant coaches went off the pitch, we saw the referee in Manchester United's dressing-room, smiling with their players and smiling with their staff," said Santini.

"It's new for me but I don't understand the situation in this championship yet and I don't know what was said between the referee and the players of Manchester United."

"The referee was changed three or four days before the game. I am very surprised by this decision as in the Premiership we have the best referees and I am not happy with the decision to pick this referee - I would have preferred to see Mr Bennett on the pitch."

Santini's side were outplayed for much of the contest and United took all three points to go fourth in the Premiership thanks to a Ruud van Nistelrooy penalty after 42 minutes.

The hosts fought back after the break but could not break down a disciplined United defence that was well-marshalled by England defender Rio Ferdinand playing his second game since returning from an eight-month ban for missing a drugs test.

A spokesman for United denied Walton had been in the dressing room while manager Sir Alex Ferguson praised the performance of the official.

"Tottenham have been rejuvenated this season and their fans were fantastic, they cheered every pass and every challenge and this was a difficult game for us," said Ferguson.

"The fans tried to influence the referee but he did his job well and there were no contentious issues, just some hoo-ha. A lot of teams will come here and drop points but we defended well."

Scholes snubs Eriksson

AFP, Manchester

Sven-Goran Eriksson's hopes that Paul Scholes might change his mind about retiring from international football were effectively dashed on Sunday as the Manchester United midfielder insisted he would not reconsider.

The 29-year-old retired after Euro 2004 where he ended a three year goal drought for his country, scoring in the victory over Croatia, saying he preferred to help United on the domestic front and claiming that a combination of asthma and criticism of his play had also influenced his decision.

"I have no regrets about my decision and I don't think there is any chance of me changing my mind," he said on Sunday.

Primera Liga

Now it's Bilbao blues for Real

Football

AFP, Madrid

Mighty Real Madrid slumped to their second league defeat of the season on Saturday when they lost 2-1 to Athletic Bilbao, a team which started the day firmly in the relegation zone.

Real, whose coach Jose Antonio Camacho quit on Monday to be replaced by Garcia Remon following their desperate start to the season, were without the injured Zinedine Zidane while Roberto Carlos was dropped.

But even with Raul back in the starting line-up, they struggled to

make any impression on the match, never threatening the Bilbao goal in the first half, and were made to pay for some comic book defending.

Carlos' replacement Raul Bravo had a nightmare match and was at fault for both goals.

The first arrived after 10 minutes when Ismael Urzaiz was left unmarked and scored past Iker Casillas from close range.

Santi Ezquerro scored the second goal when he got in front of the hapless Real defender to head powerfully home on the stroke of half-time.

The scoreline could have been a lot worse had Casillas not pulled off a number of good saves.

Raul, with his first goal since March 20, reduced the deficit in the 51st minute after being set up by a super backheel from Guti, but the Madrid superstars were unable to find a leveller which would have least have put them in good spirits ahead of next week's crucial Champions League clash with Roma.

England skipper David Beckham endured a miserable night failing to impose himself on the game and was replaced on the hour while compatriot Michael Owen was left on the bench.

Earlier Atletico Madrid beat Villarreal 1-0 with a goal from Salva Ballesta in the 41st minute to earn

revenge for their defeat at the hands of their countrymen earlier this season in the final of the Intertoto Cup.

TOP SIX										
Spanish league standings after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Valencia	4	3	1	0	12	5	10			
Barcelona	4	3	1	0	9	2	10			
Atletico	5	3	1	1	6	2	10			
Real	5	3	0	2	4	3	9			
Espanyol	4	2	1	1	6	3	7			
Osasuna	4	2	1	1	7	5	7			

Bundesliga Stuttgart in command

Football

AFP, Berlin

VfB Stuttgart continued their unbeaten start to the season with a comfortable 3-0 win over Bayer Leverkusen at the Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium on Saturday.

Bayer defeated Stuttgart 2-0 on the final day of last season to demote them into the UEFA Cup but Stuttgart took revenge in fine style to ensure Matthias Sammer's unbeaten run as manager stretched to nine matches.

Despite the win, Stuttgart lie second with unfashionable VfL Wolfsburg holding on to top spot after a dramatic late 2-1 victory over Kaiserslautern at the Volkswagen-Arena.

Argentine striker Diego Klimowicz struck in the dying seconds to guarantee Wolfsburg another week as the Bundesliga pacesetter.

Comeback kings Bayern Munich banked an important 3-1 win at home to SC Freiburg.

Dutch international Roy Makaay and German international duo Torsten Frings and Michael Ballack were all on target.

The three points lift Bayern, who face Ajax on Tuesday in the Champions League, to fourth place in the German table one point behind champions Werder Bremen.

A 20-minute hat-trick from substitute Miroslav Klose guided Bremen to a 4-1 win at VfL Bochum underlin-

ing their determination to hold on to the Bundesliga crown.

Despite a spate of injuries, Stuttgart showed no sign of taking their foot off the gas in their rout of Leverkusen.

A rare goal from German international Philipp Lahm on 12 minutes got the ball rolling and Martin Stranzl doubled that lead with half-time approaching.

Leverkusen goalkeeper Hans-Jorg Butt was at fault for both goals and was then beaten by a Silvio Meissner penalty in the final minute, capping a miserable afternoon.

Since defeating Real Madrid 3-0 in the Champions League Bayer have drawn 2-2 with FC Nuremberg, lost 3-2 to Bremen in the cup and now tasted defeat at Stuttgart.

While Leverkusen never recovered from going behind, Bayern showed their determination to reclaim the German championship with a hard-fought 3-1 win over Freiburg.

With three minutes on the clock, Burkina Faso international Wilfried Sanou put Freiburg ahead, tapping home a cross from the right with Bayern's backline stretched.

Dutchman Makaay equalised on 19 minutes scoring his fifth goal in a row thanks to some woeful defending in the Freiburg backline.

Goalkeeper and captain Oliver Kahn, returning from a bout of flu, then made a vital save from Alexander Ischvili before Frings put Bayern ahead in the 45th minute following a clever Makaay lay-off.

German international captain Ballack netted on 83 minutes to relieve the tension at the Olympic Stadium.

Bremen also needed to dig deep to defeat Bochum with the 4-1 scoreline flattering the German champions.

Record five million euro signing Klose, a second half substitute, stole the show heading Bremen into a 2-1 lead in the 70th minute.

Further strikes (87, 89) helped Klose to a fine treble as he staked a claim for a place in the starting line-up.

On Sunday, SV Hamburg manager Klaus Toppmoller has just one game to save his skin with a home match against Hertha Berlin.

Only three points is good enough to save the former Bayer Leverkusen handler from the axe with potential successors, such as Hungary national coach Lothar Matthaus, already being sounded out in the media.

TOP SIX										
German football league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Wolfsburg	6	5	0	1	11	5	15			
Stuttgart	6	4	2	0	13	5	14			
Bremen	6	4	0	2	14	6	12			
Bayern	6	3	2	1	10	8	11			
Mainz 05	5	2	2	1	8	7	8			
Leverkusen	6	2	2	2	10	11	8			

Football

AFP, London

A rare goal from Ashley Cole fired Arsenal to a 1-0 win over Manchester City on Saturday as the

Gunners maintained their slender advantage over Chelsea at the top of the English Premiership.

On a day which saw Chelsea and Manchester United also win by a single goal, Arsenal needed a deft finish from the England left-back to sink a spirited City and extend their

record-breaking unbeaten run to 47 Premiership matches.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger paid tribute to the way Manchester City had battled.

"They played a Cup game and they showed a side to their game that I didn't know," the Frenchman said.

The compliment was returned with interest by City manager Kevin Keegan, who tipped Arsenal to win the Champions League.

"I think they are the best side I have ever managed against in my time in the Premiership," said Keegan, a European Cup winner during his playing days with Liverpool.

"They have had some trouble in Europe. But it wouldn't surprise me if they won the European Cup this year. It really wouldn't."

Didier Droga spared Chelsea's fans a third consecutive goalless draw with a late winner at Middlesbrough.

The 24-million-pound striker side-footed past Mark Schwarzer after Frank Lampard's well-worked contribution caught out the Boro defence to ensure Jose Mourinho's side remain two points behind Arsenal.

Chelsea have managed only seven goals in their seven games so far -- compared with the 22 Arsenal have hit -- but Mourinho insisted the floodgates would open soon.

"One day - we don't know where or when - a team will be unlucky and we will score from every situation in the game and somebody will have a four or five-nil," he said.

Tottenham's unbeaten run under new manager Jacques Santini fell victim to Manchester United's revival as Alex Ferguson's side came away from White Hart Lane with a 1-0 win.

A Ruud van Nistelrooy penalty three minutes from the break made the difference in a tight encounter.

Spurs full-back Erik Edman conceded the spot-kick when he was spotted tugging John O'Shea and van Nistelrooy converted with his usual confidence for his first league goal of the season.

Bolton held on to fourth place, ahead of United on goal difference, thanks to a 1-1 draw with Birmingham.

Tunisian defender Radhi Jaidi scored his second goal in as many



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal's Ashley Cole (R) executes an overhead kick while Manchester City's Paul Bosvelt (L) takes cover at The City of Manchester Stadium on September 25.

TOP SIX										
English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Arsenal	7	6	1	0	22	7	19			
Chelsea	7	5	2	0	7	1	17			
Everton	6	4	1	1	8	6	13			
Bolton	7	3	3	1	12	9	12			
Man Utd	7	3	3	1	8	12	12			
Newcastle	7	3	2	2	14	11	11			