

Zenden set for surgery

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Dutch international midfielder Bolo Zenden is set to undergo knee surgery Wednesday that will keep him out of action until the new year.

Zenden damaged the knee during last weekend's 1-0 win over Manchester City.

The injury is a blow to the 30-year-old who damaged the same knee at almost the same stage of last season, then ruling him out for the rest of the campaign.

Manager Rafael Benitez said: "It is not the same injury as last season, then he damaged his cruciate ligament.

"This time it is his medial ligament, but because it is the same knee the decision has been made that he must have the operation. He will be out for between four and five weeks."

Zenden had been hoping to stake a claim for a midfield role alongside Steven Gerrard with Xabi Alonso and Mohamed Sissoko ruled out with long-term problems.

He joins the injury list that not only includes Alonso and Sissoko, but also Mark Gonzalez, Harry Kewell, Stephen Warnock and Fabio Aurelio.

Spurs eye Taarabt

AFP, Lens

Tottenham are targeting Lens' teen-aged midfielder Adel Taarabt, sources at the French first division club revealed on Tuesday.

The 17-year-old is considered one of the emerging stars of the French scene and is anxious to move to the Premiership side after failing to agree a contract with Lens.

He told Tuesday's La Voix du Nord newspaper: "I've talked to Martin Jol (Spurs' manager). He really wants to sign me. I've visited White Hart Lane, I'm in a hurry to be there."

Lens, placed third behind Lyon in the league, refused to confirm the youngster's departure but they have acknowledged that he recently visited the north London club.

Taarabt has made just one appearance for Lens, against Le Mans on October 24.

If the deal goes ahead the French club will receive 3.5 million euros by way of compensation.

Spurs already have a number of French stars on their payroll, including international defender Pascal Chimbonda, Steed Malbranque and Benoit Assou-Ekotto.

Bierhoff backs Ballack

AFP, Berlin

Under-fire Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack will not let the stinging criticism in the English media affect him one bit, according to Germany's general manager Oliver Bierhoff.

"Michael will cope with the criticism. From my time in Italy I know that you do not listen to the headlines," Bierhoff, a former striker with AC Milan, said in Bild daily.

German international captain Ballack was the subject of negative headlines with newspapers and football experts getting the knives out following another disappointing display in Chelsea's 1-1 draw with Manchester United on Sunday.

Ballack, who recently turned 30, has struggled to settle at Chelsea since a free transfer from Bayern Munich in the summer playing just 16 games for the English champions.

Ballack's reported weekly salary of 128,000 pounds (244,120 dollar) means he is under constant scrutiny and Chelsea fans hope to see an improvement from the midfielder who has scored 35 goals in 75 internationals for Germany.

Dida given ultimatum

INTERNET, undated

Milan have issued an ultimatum to Brazilian keeper Dida as he continues to stall over a new contract.

The Rossoneri's chief officer Adriano Galliani is hopeful that the South American shot-stopper's negotiations will reach a positive conclusion soon.

With Dida out of contract in June, Milan need to discover his intentions in order to plan their transfer market strategy.

"I wish that Dida will renew in a short time to remove all uncertainties," explained Galliani.

"We hope to see him back on the pitch in January, a little earlier than expected after the injury.

"But if he won't sign, we would have to think about an alternative solution.

"He knows what our conditions are and he know also there are parameters to follow.

"Obviously, he's our first choice. "If he signs, he will be the regular keeper.

"Anyway, in January, we will remain with this squad. We won't enter the market."



PHOTO: INTERNET

AC Milan striker Ricardo Oliveira (R) turns away from Brescia midfielder Marek Hamsik during their Italian Cup clash in Brescia on Tuesday.

COPPA ITALIA

Young Milan in qtrs

Football

INTERNET, undated

Milan are safely through to the quarter finals of the Coppa Italia after a 2-1 win against Brescia on Tuesday.

After returning to winning ways in the League on Saturday against Messina, the club's mini revival continued at a cold Stadio Rigamonti.

Milan went into the game with a 4-2 first leg lead and with seven youth team players in their squad.

Boss Carlo Ancelotti clearly believed that qualification was firmly in the Rossoneri's control and their promising start suggested they'd stroll into the last eight.

Although Brescia threatened with Hamsik and Stankevicius, the five-time Coppa Italia winners took the lead on 15 minutes.

The impressive Gourcuff floated in a corner which was flicked on by Andrea Pirlo for Ricardo Oliveira to head home his second of the season from the six-yard line.

The Serie A side increased their lead soon after thanks to a Zoboli own goal. The defender, who was perhaps fouled by Marco Borriello at the time, accidentally put a Gourcuff volleyed cross past his own goal-keeper.

Although Oliveira created a sublime chance for himself in minute 35, Brescia finished the half well.

Possanzini and Stankevicius wasted close range opportunities, before the home boys hit back. A wonderful quick counter-attack saw Hamsik slot home a perfect Possanzini pullback just before the break.

The second period opened with a dangerous Pirlo free-kick and a Cristian Brocchi long ranger, before Brescia went close to making it 2-2

on the night. Former Under-21 international Del Nero came off the bench and his angled shot across the face of goal just drifted wide.

Oliveira then went close after his header from a Borriello cross was tipped over, before Brescia struck the woodwork. Zoboli set himself up for an overhead kick in a packed area and his acrobatic 73rd minute effort skimmed the crossbar.

Substitute Gilardino -- on two occasions -- and Oliveira attempted to make the Rossoneri's grip on the game even tighter, while Jadid was denied by Zeljko Kalac, but it ended Brescia 1 Milan 2.

The latter will now play the winners of the Arezzo-Livorno tie which currently stands at 2-1 to the Serie B minnows.

Korea too good for Bangladesh

Football

AGENCIES, Doha

South Korea proved too hot to handle for Bangladesh in their opening Asian Games football match here Tuesday, running out 3-0 winners, but it was a far from convincing display.

Captain Lee Chun Soo, who has the experience of two World Cup campaigns behind him, gave coach Pim Verbeek the ideal start, putting his side ahead after just two minutes at the deserted Al-Gharrafa stadium.

The Ulsan star, instantly recognisable because of his dyed-blond hair and brightly coloured boots, latched onto a through ball from Jung Jo Gook and coolly slotted it beyond the reach of Bangladeshi keeper Shakil.

A rout appeared to be on the cards but the Koreans, who took bronze at the last Games on home soil in Busan four years ago, failed to capitalise on the early breakthrough. Bangladesh restricted Korea to the single goal at half-time, thanks to some determined defending.

A fightback was always unlikely though, Bangladesh failing to record a single shot on goal in the first 45 minutes, compared to Korea's 10.

The onslaught continued and the pressure told in the 59th minute when substitute Park Chu Young delivered the killer punch when he cleverly worked himself an opening in the Bangladeshi penalty box and slashed the ball home.

The K-League player, brought into the action early in the second period, doubled his tally fifteen minutes later with a well taken half-volley from just inside the box.

But Verbeek is concerned that his young charges were unable to score more goals after creating 29 shooting chances to Bangladesh's none in an embarrassingly one-sided affair.

"The final 30 minutes of the second half I am not happy with my team," he said.

"They were too slow and had bad position in front of goal. You have to keep the tempo high against a team defending with 10

players in their own half."

Korea are hunting for their first Asiad football gold since 1986. Their toughest task in Group B should come from Bahrain, who edged Vietnam 2-1 in the other match on Tuesday.

In other matches, Kuwait thrashed Jordan 3-0 and hosts Qatar handed Kyrgyzstan an identical defeat. Uzbekistan beat United Arab Emirates 2-1 while Thailand squeezed past Palestine 1-0.

Sayed Mohamed Adnan netted twice as Bahrain established a 2-1 half-time lead over Vietnam at the Al-Gharrafa Stadium. Bahrain dominated possession and it was no surprise when Adnan opened the scoring in the 33rd minute with a spectacular lofted shot that fooled keeper Vinh Loi To.

Seven minutes later, Cong Vinh Lee surprisingly equalised when deftly controlling a hopeful ball over the top and calmly placing it in the back of the net. Two minutes before half-time, Adnan converted a penalty to restore Bahrain's advantage.

Bahrain dominated possession, but created few clear cut opportunities after the break. Incoming rain could not dampen Vietnam's enthusiasm though and they continued to test their opponents with some pacy moves down

both flanks.

However, they lacked cutting edge and must work on this before facing one of the medal favourites, Korea, in their next match on Saturday.

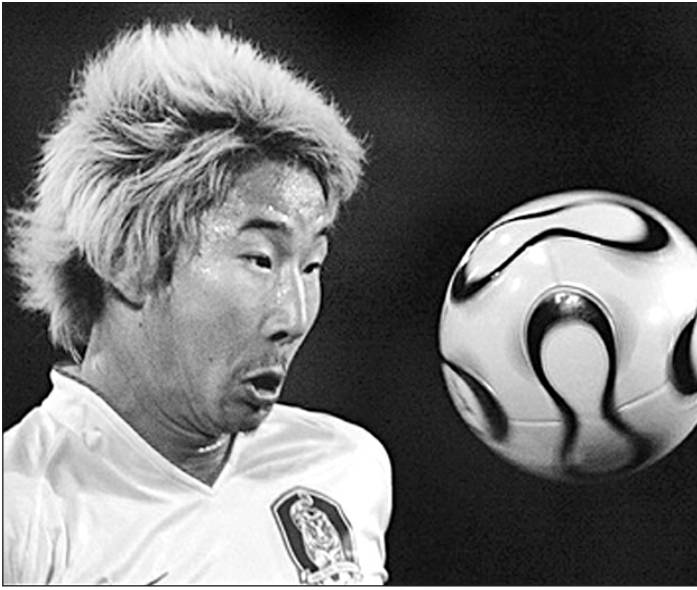
For Bahrain, their next encounter comes against Bangladesh also on Saturday.

Playing their first game of the football tournament in front of an enthusiastic home crowd, Qatar made a thrilling start after a superb cross by Hussein Yaser Abdulrahman found Sebastian Quintana, who slipped it effortlessly past the Jordanian goal-keeper in the 6th minute of play.

The game then settled into a pattern of alternating forays by each side into the others' territory, without any clear advantage or chances forthcoming to either team. Qatar held on to the one goal advantage through to the end of the first half.

Jordan started the second half in a more positive mood, taking the game to the Qataris more than had been the case in the first half, but to no avail. After a scramble in the Jordanian goal mouth in the 69th minute Qatar's Lamy Abdel Mohd scored, followed by another goal two minutes later for an ecstatic Abdulrahman Hussain.

Qatar play Uzbekistan on Saturday.



LEE CHUN SOO

EPL chief wary of salary caps

INTERNET, undated

Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore has spoken out against Minister for Sport Richard Caborn's backing for salary caps and a role for UEFA in legislating domestic competition.

European ministers are discussing a White Paper for sport in Brussels, with Caborn a key mover in attempts to reform the way football is governed and make it more 'inclusive, transparent and accountable'.

However, Scudamore insists domestic football should be run from this country without EU and UEFA interference.

He wrote in The Times: "Ask any fan who their main rivals are or which match they care most about, and the answer is local.

"The structure of our club football, including FA and League cups and right down through the Football League and the Conference, is the envy of European football -- and no other country gets close to replicating it in terms of strength and depth or passion and participation.

"It is domestic club football that is the driving force behind European competition and not the other way round."

On the proposal that salary levels should be linked to turnover, Scudamore added: "(This) actually locks in an advantage to the big clubs, because they have the highest turnover. It would also mean that the likes of Wigan, Fulham and Middlesbrough would probably not be in the Premier League. Is this what we really want?"

"The Premier League has huge respect for Richard Caborn and the job he does, but there is no need for a pseudo-European Sports Minister pushing an agenda that runs counter to continued success for the Premier League."

Miccoli in doubt for Man U trip

AFP, Lisbon

Benfica's Italian striker Fabrizio Miccoli is in doubt for next week's Champions League match against Manchester United after he injured his left thigh muscle in a weekend Portuguese league match.

The 27-year-old former Italian international trained separately from his teammates on Tuesday and club officials ruled him out of the Lisbon team's line-up for Friday's domestic match against cross-town rivals Sporting.

Miccoli was substituted in the 49th minute of Saturday's 2-1 home win against Maritimo after he hurt his muscle while challenging for the ball.

After the match Benfica striker Nuno Gomes said he hoped the player, who scored twice during Benfica's 3-1 Champions League win over Danish side FC Kobenhavn on November 21, would make a quick recovery.

"If he doesn't it will be a huge loss," the Portugal international said.

If Benfica defeat United at Old Trafford on December 6 they will qualify for the knockout stages of the European competition.

Benfica are in third place in the 16-team Portuguese league, seven points behind second-placed Sporting, although they have played one game less than their rivals.

Stand closed for PSG games

REUTERS, Paris

The Boulogne Kop, an area of the Parc des Princes where Paris St Germain's most extreme fans traditionally assemble, has been closed on police orders until further notice following the death of a PSG fan last week.

Paris police chief Pierre Mutz said the closure will take effect from Sunday's Ligue 1 match against Toulouse. The kick-off has also been brought forward three hours from six o'clock in the evening to three in the afternoon.

"Access to the lower part of the tribune of the Boulogne Kop will not be granted on Sunday and it will remain closed even for season ticket holders until further notice. It will affect about 2,000 fans," Mutz said after a three-hour meeting with the club's officials at police headquarters on Monday.

A policeman shot dead 25-year-old Julien Quemener and injured another while under attack from fans following PSG's 4-2 defeat by Israeli team Hapoel Tel Aviv in a UEFA Cup match last week.

Witnesses said the policeman opened fire on a mob of PSG fans who were chasing a Jewish supporter of the Israeli team outside the stadium following the match.

However, the Hapoel fan said the policeman did not have the intention of killing.

The fan's death triggered a nationwide debate about how to rid soccer of violence and racism in France.

Neville speaks of 'special' Fergie

Football

INTERNET, undated

Phil Neville has admitted it was only after leaving Manchester United he realised how extraordinary a manager Sir Alex Ferguson is.

The Everton full-back is looking forward to facing his former club at Old Trafford tonight.

Neville, 29, arrived on Merseyside in the summer of 2005 after graduating to United's first team -- and England -- from the youth ranks.

He told MUTV: "It looks like he (Ferguson) still has the fire in his belly.

"Now I am not working with him, some of the things he does makes me laugh.

"You can see the mind games he plays with other clubs and players, both his own and those from other teams.

"When you are at Manchester United, you tend to get caught up in it all because you are fighting for the

same thing.

"At the time, you do not realise just how special a manager he is."

Neville said he adopted good traditional habits during his years at United.

"You might be 3-0 up and winning a game comfortably but if you let your standards drop you could expect a real rollicking," he said.

"It was a good lesson in the sense you want to keep going for the full 90 minutes. It teaches you the winning habit."

Neville admitted Ferguson scared him rigid when he was breaking into the team.

"As a youngster, all I can remember about the manager was total fear when he came into the dressing room," said Neville.

"You could hear him coming down the steps and I used to scamper out of the way. He was this headmaster-type figure.

"As a youngster, it was quite intimidating to see him.

"Unless you had done something really wrong you would never get the

hairdryer as a youth team player.

"But when you got into the first team, if things were not going well, you were there to be told off. And he tells you in no uncertain terms."

Everton have made a good start to the season but manager David Moyes is only too aware of the challenge they face against United.

He said: "I will need more than 11 men the way they are playing at the moment.

"While we have to make it difficult for them, we must also try and express ourselves.

"This is a great place to play your football. We have to go and enjoy it."

With striker Andrew Johnson sidelined with a hamstring injury, James Beattie has a chance to re-establish himself in the side.

Moyes said: "We want him to get back into a good run of form. Hopefully he can do that.

"Andrew's injury is not too bad but we are not sure how long it will keep him out."

Blades clip Hornets

AFP, Watford



Danny Webber struck late against his former club Watford to earn Sheffield

United a crucial 1-0 win in Tuesday's relegation struggle at Vicarage Road.

Webber, who only opened his Premiership account in the Blades' 1-0 win at Newcastle at the start of the month, came on for Christian Nade in the 73rd minute.

And manager Meil Warnock's switch proved a matchwinning one as Webber, who left the Hornets in 2005, gave the visitors a vital three points with his close range header two minutes from time.

Watford were down a man after Chris Powell was given his marching orders in stoppage time after

picking up two bookings.

United had created the better chances in a match short on quality, with first Nade and then Rob Hulse hitting the post, before Chris Morgan headed the ball onto Richard Lee's bar with Webber heading the rebound into the bottom left hand side of Lee's net.

But Watford were aggrieved as replays showed Webber to be offside.

United's third win of the season left them treading water one place above Watford in third from bottom but on 13 points with Newcastle and Blackburn.

Warnock, reporting on what he described as the biggest game of the season for his side, said: "We overcame the physical battle and at half-time the dressing room was like Emergency Ward 10.

"We created chances, hit the post twice and I thought it was not

going to come but it was a great team effort.

"Chris Morgan epitomised the whole team tonight. We were determined to win and I thought we showed that tonight."

He added: "It was the biggest game of the season, we said if you want to stay in the Premiership you have to win tonight, make no mistake about that.

"It's absolutely fantastic to come away with three points. It was hard work but I thought we were magnificent."

Watford manager Adrian Boothroyd was unhappy at the goal but believed the result was fair.

"The goal was offside but let's be right about things, we didn't perform tonight."

"They hit the post twice and deserved to win, simple as that."



PHOTO: INTERNET

Sheffield United striker Rob Hulse (top) jumps to avoid a sliding tackle from Watford midfielder Tommy Smith during their Premiership encounter at Vicarage Road on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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