



PHOTO: AFP

Catania supporters light a torch during their high-voltage derby against Palermo at Catania's Massimino Stadium on Friday which later turned violent leading to the death of a policeman and scores other injured.

Catania chief to step down

INTERNET, undated

Catania President Antonio Pulvirenti has suggested ending his tenure after their fans caused the death of a policeman.

"Finding out about this death was incredible," said the patron who had bitterly criticised the referee and blamed Palermo fans for the trouble straight after the 2-1 defeat on Friday night.

"In the Press room I was commenting on the game and the result, while outside all this was happening."

"There shouldn't be football in Catania, because it's all turned to dust by actions like this. A man died and it's meaningless to talk about football."

Last night director Pietro Lo Monaco announced the news that the 38-year-old police officer had been killed and immediately noted he would leave football. "This is a world I don't recognise," he said.

Now Catania President Pulvirenti has joined him in hinting at an end to his hugely successful time in charge of the club.

"I am enormously upset at this and at this moment in time I intend to call it quits. It cannot be an immediate move purely for administrative reasons, but from tonight this sport no longer fits with me."

Catania have also shut down their official website, leaving only a message. "We apologise, but it seems truly absurd to be writing about football at this time. Our thoughts are exclusively with the family of Chief Inspector Raciti, who lost his life trying to safeguard the public during a match."

Real, Barca to wage war over C'Ron

AFP, Madrid

Spanish heavyweights Real Madrid and Barcelona are poised to slug it out in a bid to prize star winger Cristiano Ronaldo away from Manchester United, Spanish sports daily Marca predicted on Saturday.

Despite Sir Alex Ferguson insisting Ronaldo is going nowhere Marca suggest a price tag of 45 million euros might be enough to secure the services of the Portugal international.

Real and Barca have already locked horns for a United player with the 2002 battle for David Beckham with Real prevailing in that transfer skirmish.

On Wednesday one of Ronaldo's agents, Sergio Alves, was quoted in The Sun newspaper as saying offers for next season might be looked into if they came from a big club like Real Madrid or Barcelona.

This prompted Ronaldo teammate Patrice Evra to suggest that any agent asking for a transfer request for Ronaldo would be well advised to approach Ferguson armed with "a bazooka".

"Sir Alex Ferguson would know exactly how to welcome him. Protective equipment would be needed before going into the manager's office," the Frenchman said.

Drastic measures called for

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi has promised drastic measures to confront soccer violence after clashes by rampaging fans at a match left a policeman dead and over 150 people injured.

Prodi's comments came as Italy's football stadiums fell silent on Saturday with all play in the country's leagues suspended indefinitely after the death of Filippo Raciti, 38, on Friday.

Prodi, who had already described the violence as a "degeneration of sport," said he would meet Interior Minister Giuliano Amato and Sports Minister Giovanna Melandri on Monday to come up with ideas for a "robust" measure.

"We cannot continuously put the lives of police officers at risk and need a remedy that makes soccer clubs feel responsible (for fans' actions) and radically changes the situation," Prodi told reporters in Bologna.

The latest violence prompted a

wave of outrage in Italy, even though rowdy brawls at Italian football matches are hardly uncommon. Fans fighting each other or the police, and flares, firecrackers and explosives are often as much part of a Serie A match as banners, chants and cheering.

Raciti's death has resulted in the immediate suspension of all play by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), which also called for a moment of silence on Saturday and Sunday.

"A strong signal was needed until we find measures to prevent certain episodes," said the FIGC's chief commissioner Luca Pancalli.

He has called an indefinite halt to all matches, including Italy's international friendly against Romania in Siena on Wednesday.

Italian officials have suggested a speedy return to the stadiums for fans and players is unlikely, with minister Amato quoted as saying he would no longer send his police force into football stadiums under existing conditions.

"Enough is enough," he told Italian television. "Violence is everywhere, but violence in the stadiums connected to a game -- I find that truly

unacceptable."

Amato is also expected to address the Chamber of Deputies on Tuesday. The Italian Olympic Committee, one of Italian sport's governing bodies, will hold an extraordinary meeting on Sunday to discuss the situation.

The president of the Italian Footballers' Association, Sergio Campana called for the leagues to be halted for at least a year.

His suggestion -- though unlikely to be followed -- would at least give Italian clubs the chance to modernise their old-fashioned stadiums to bring them into line with those in other top European leagues.

Fiorentina goalkeeper Sebastian Frey says he is not surprised by the violence.

The Frenchman told sports daily L'Equipe on Saturday. "There had already been several incidents with the referees last summer. Now violence is back around the stadiums."

"If we go on like this people will not come to the stadiums. We are in a vicious circle."

All matches cancelled

AFP, Rome

All Italian football matches were suspended on Friday after a 38-year-old policeman was killed when violence flared during and after the Serie A match between bitter Sicilian rivals Catania and Palermo.

The policeman was named as Filippo Raciti while another officer was believed to be seriously injured.

Hundreds of people were hurt as fighting continued after the game.

As a result of the tragedy, the Italian football federation (FIGC) announced that all matches, professional and amateur, scheduled for this weekend would be cancelled and that the suspension was likely to be indefinite.

Next week's friendly international between Italy, the World Cup winners, and Romania in Siena was also called off.

Football federation (FIGC) chief Luca Pancalli said that the suspension of the matches could last longer and the matter will be discussed next week.

"One day is not sufficient," said Pancalli. "Without drastic measures, we can't play again."

"We will immediately set up a commission to discuss the situation between sport and politics. It's not possible to carry on like this. If this is football, then I'm stopping everything."

He said that he would meet with Italian prime minister Romano Prodi on Monday.

"Football in Italy must stop and take stock. Enough is enough," said Pancalli.

SICILY DERBY TURNS VIOLENT

Italian soccer in limbo

AFP, Rome

Italy was in shock Saturday after football violence claimed a second life in six days and brought a halt to all Italian championships until further notice.

Policeman Filippo Raciti was killed on Friday when violence flared during and after the Serie A match between bitter Sicilian rivals Catania and Palermo.

Raciti, 38, died after a home-made bomb was thrown into his car. He leaves behind a wife and two sons.

Scores of people were also injured as fans fought running battles with police for several hours. Fourteen fans were arrested, all of them supporting Catania.

Last Saturday Ermanno Licursi, a director of Calabria-based amateur team Sammartinese, died from a brain haemorrhage after being kicked in the face by a fan of rival team Cancellese.

The editorial in the Gazzetta dello Sport was particularly heartfelt after another night of shame, laying the blame at the door of

Italian society as a whole and not just football fans.

"Where did they come from these masked boys who ran in the night in Catania, between the teargas and the rubble-ridden streets?", it wrote.

"From whose houses did they come, from which schools, which bars? We still don't know, but on their conscience, and ours, is the weight of a stupid atrocity, a policeman torn to pieces."

"A policeman, remember his name: Filippo Raciti. One of those who tried to placate the trouble-makers outside the stadium."

"Now he is dead, taken by a wave of shame just days after Ermanno Licursi was booed in the face and left to die."

"What goes through the heads of these boys when they go to a match, what sickness were their scarves, banners and flags soaked with?"

"Whose sons are they and what transforms their passion for sport into fury?"

"Italy, we have a problem, and don't just look at our football fans."

"Have a look at the fabric of this country, look at who governs and

organises our schools, look into our homes and at our families."

The most disturbing aspect of Friday's violence was that it was premeditated, with one fan suggesting a disturbing level of preparation in making the bomb which took Raciti's life.

Friday's game had already been brought forward from Sunday because of fears over public safety, but even the rescheduling of the match and an early evening kick-off did nothing to quell the unrest.

The game was suspended after an hour when tear gas, used by police to halt trouble inside the stadium, drifted onto the field.

Following talks between Italy's Sports Minister Giovanna Melandri, Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) president Gianni Petrucci and acting Italian football federation (FIGC) president Luca Pancalli, it was decided all matches, professional and amateur, would be cancelled until further notice.

G14 expects Platini consultation

Football

AFP, Paris

G14 boss Thomas Kurth told AFP Friday that he expects new UEFA president Michel Platini to consult his group before making any drastic changes to the Champions League format.

"(Platini) wants to know our position and he will come to us," said the general manager of G14, a group made up of 18 of the continent's richest and biggest clubs. "We are ready to tell him what we think."

Platini campaigned as a cham-

pion of the smaller clubs and nations in Europe in his UEFA presidential bid and has already said he will reduce the maximum number of clubs from any one country allowed into the Champions League -- from four to three.

G14 are dead set against that proposal as that would mean only three teams from Italy, Spain and England qualifying for the Champions League each year. That could leave some G14 members scrambling around in the UEFA Cup.

They also want to talk to Platini about one of their biggest gripes,

the release of players for international duty without compensation.

"We have our general position but no concrete propositions, that's not for us to do," added Kurth. "We are working with FIFA and it takes time but some time between now and the end of the season there should be some concrete propositions."

Kurth also revealed Bayern Munich's spat with G14, whom they threatened to leave last year, has been resolved.

"That misunderstanding has been resolved," said Kurth. "The clubs have a habit of talking about things amongst ourselves."

Nightmarish start for Hitzfeld

REUTERS, Berlin



Ottmar Hitzfeld's second spell in charge of Bayern Munich began in miserable fashion on Friday as the faltering champions suffered a 3-0 defeat at Nuremberg.

Bayern fired Felix Magath and reappointed Hitzfeld as coach on Wednesday, after a goalless draw left the club eight points behind the Bundesliga leaders in fourth place.

Hitzfeld's return saw matters go from bad to worse as Nuremberg sealed an easy victory over their Bavarian rivals with goals from Ivan Saenko, Markus Schroth and Robert Vittek.

The result means Bayern, cham-

pions for the past two seasons, have taken just a point from their first three matches since the long mid-season break.

They are certain to fall even further off the title pace as Werder Bremen and Schalke 04, who lead the standings with 42 points apiece, meet at the Weserstadion on Sunday.

VfB Stuttgart, in third place with 35 points, are at Borussia Dortmund on Sunday.

Bayern remain in fourth place with 34 points after their sixth defeat of the league season.

Once again Bayern were dreadful in midfield, rarely managing to string together more than a couple of passes.

Owen Hargreaves was back in the side for the first time since breaking his leg in September but the England midfielder contributed little beyond a couple of long shots.

"I knew it was going to be difficult

and now I've seen just how much work there is to do," Hitzfeld said. "We played with very little self belief, and that was a real disappointment."

Nuremberg took the lead in the 13th minute when Saenko rounded goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and fired home from a tight angle on the right.

Bayern's one clear chance came in the 22nd minute when Roy Makaay ran on to a quick through ball from Willy Sagnol, steadied himself and cracked in a shot that Raphael Schaefer did well to turn round the post.

Nuremberg continued to look dangerous and made it 2-0 when Schroth was left unmarked to head in a great cross from Vratislav Gresko with 19 minutes to go.

Another collective defensive failure gave Nuremberg a third in the 86th when Vittek had time and space to control the ball and knock it past Kahn to complete a dismal night for Bayern.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn (R) dives in vain to block a header from Nuremberg's Slovakian striker Robert Vittek (L) during their Bundesliga match in Nuremberg on Friday.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Paul Robinson (Tottenham), Ben Foster (Manchester United, on loan at Watford), Chris Kirkland (Wigan)

Defenders: Gary Neville (Manchester United), Phil Neville (Everton), Rio Ferdinand (Manchester United), Jonathan Woodgate (Real Madrid/ESP, on loan at Middlesbrough), Jamie Carragher (Liverpool), Michael Dawson (Tottenham), Micah Richards (Manchester City)

Midfielders: Aaron Lennon (Tottenham), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Owen Hargreaves (Bayern Munich/GER), Michael Carrick (Manchester United), Stewart Downing (Middlesbrough), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Chelsea), Scott Parker (Newcastle), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Gareth Barry (Aston Villa), Joey Barton (Manchester City), Jermaine Jenas (Tottenham), Kieron Dyer (Newcastle)

Forwards: Wayne Rooney (Manchester United), Peter Crouch (Liverpool), Jermain Defoe (Tottenham), Andrew Johnson (Everton)