



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

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 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."

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.

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."

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.

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 Sébastien 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."

The latest violence prompted a

Woodgate, Dyer back for England

Football

REUTERS, Yarm, England

Defender Jonathan Woodgate and attacking midfielder Kieron Dyer have been recalled by England coach Steve McClaren for the friendly against Spain at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

McClaren named uncapped Manchester City midfielder Joey Barton in an England squad for the first time on Friday and also recalled Aston Villa midfielder Gareth Barry, who won the last of his eight caps in 2003.

Central defender Woodgate is enjoying a consistent season with hometown club Middlesbrough on a one-year loan, after being plagued by injuries in his two-year stay with Real Madrid.

Woodgate, who won the last of his five caps in March 2004, is set to step in should McClaren opt not to risk captain John Terry, out since Dec. 13 with a back problem that required surgery. Terry is expected to make his club return at Charlton on Saturday. "He's somebody that has proved himself at international level," McClaren said of the 27-year-old Woodgate.

"He has that pedigree but unfortunately it has never been brought to fruition because of injuries over the last three years," the coach told Sky Sports News.

"They have been devastating for the player but it shows the kind of

character he's got to have come through that and start playing at the level he's doing. He's a fantastic player who can come out of defence and create."

Dyer has struggled with injuries since he last featured for England in March 2005 but McClaren believes he has regained his sharpness.

"I've always admired Kieron and this is a great opportunity after a couple of years in the wilderness."

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)

McClaren said. "Kieron is one of those attackers with pace who can beat players and create. He's doing that for Newcastle and he's done it for England before. We'll see how he's shaping up."

McClaren said Barton's selection would not harm team unity despite the midfielder criticising established England internationals for publishing autobiographies following the unsuccessful World Cup campaign.

"That will not be an issue," McClaren said.

"That's the beauty of England. They can be rivals on a Saturday and play against each other and hate each other but when they come to play for England it's a common cause."

"He's been playing well and has forced his way through. I've always thought he was a very good player, England potential. It's one of those unknowns until he is thrown into the den to prove himself. He has earned the right to be picked."

Spain's visit will be England's last friendly before they resume Euro 2008 qualifying next month with a Group E double-header, kicking off away against Israel on March 24, followed four days later by an away tie against Andorra to be played in Barcelona. England are third in the seven-team group with seven points from four matches, three behind leaders Croatia who they lost 2-0 to in October.

"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.

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 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".

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SICILY DERBY TURNS VIOLENT

Italian soccer in limbo

AFP, Rome

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.

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 Sammarinese, died from a brain haemorrhage after being kicked in the face by a fan of rival team Cancelliere.

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

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.

"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

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 champion

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.

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."

and 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."

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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, Marko 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.

Bayern remain in fourth place with 35 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.

Open 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



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.