



Bayern Munich striker Roque Santa Cruz (L) skips a challenge from Rene Aufhauser of Red Bull Salzburg during their Bulls Cup match in Salzburg on Tuesday. Bulls Cup is a friendly tournament involving Red Bull Salzburg, Bayern Munich and Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan.

Kuerten on comeback trail

AFP, Costa do Sauípe, Brazil

Former world number one Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil won his first match in 18 months by defeating Italy's Filippo Volandri 6-3, 6-1 in the first round of the Brazilian Open here on Tuesday.

The three-times French Open winner was sidelined for most of last year as he attempted to recover from a hip operation he underwent in 2004. His last win was for Brazil in a Davis Cup tie against Uruguay in September 2005.

His world ranking has slumped down to 1,076th and he needed a wild card to play in his home ATP tournament, a title he has won twice before in 2002 and 2004.

But he needed just 46 minutes to see off Volandri on the Costa da Sauípe claycourts, serving 13 aces in the process, and he goes on to play against another Italian, Alessio Di Mauro, in the second round.

"I knew it was just a matter of time," Kuerten said. "I'm improving physically and this win should give me confidence."

Schwarzer makes City pay

AFP, London



Australia goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer saved two penalties as Middlesbrough won a shoot-out 5-4 against Bristol City at the Riverside to book an FA Cup fifth round tie at home to West Brom this weekend.

Spot kicks were required after the fourth round replay had finished 2-2 following extra-time.

Earlier, Schwarzer's fellow Socceroo, Mark Viduka came off the bench to make it 1-1 after City forward David Noble put the visitors in sight of an upset.

"We were probably caught a little off guard," a relieved Schwarzer told Sky Sports. "We were a little sluggish -- but they did very well and put us under a lot of pressure."

And Viduka added: "It was one of those classic cup ties. We had so many chances, we should have buried it and finished it off."

"I couldn't believe it (when City scored their late equaliser). I thought we'd done enough to win the game," the Australian said.

In the day's other fourth round replay teenage striker Chris Martin came off the bench to score the extra-time winner in Norwich's 3-2 win against Blackpool which will see the Championship side away to Premiership champions Chelsea this weekend.

At the Riverside, Boro striker Yakubu Aiyegbeni had an extra-time penalty saved and then hit the post in the shoot-out after the Premiership side and City, who play in League One, English football's third tier, shared four goals just as they'd done in their original fourth round tie at Ashton Gate.

Schwarzer gave Boro an edge when he saved the first kick of the shoot-out from Phil Jevons. Viduka then made no mistake with his spot-kick but City, after Jevons' miss, were also finding the back of the net during the shoot-out and the score was tied at 4-4 when Yakubu stepped up.

He was probably caught a little off guard," a relieved Schwarzer told Sky Sports. "We were a little sluggish -- but they did very well and put us under a lot of pressure."

And Viduka added: "It was one of those classic cup ties. We had so many chances, we should have buried it and finished it off."

By that stage City keeper Chris Weale had already out-thought the Nigerian striker when he stayed put in the centre of his goal, rather than dive early, to save from Yakubu, who often strikes penalties down the middle. But this one had no power and Weale saved comfortably in the end.

In the shoot-out, Weale didn't have to do anything as Yakubu clipped the right post. But the next penalty saw Schwarzer save from Craig Woodman and, with the tie now into sudden death, Boro youngster Adam Johnson sealed victory.

Bristol, who had been 2-0 down in the first tie, went ahead in the 23rd minute when Andrew Taylor played Noble onside from Alex Russell's through ball and he slid a shot under Schwarzer.

There were only 21 minutes left when Boro drew level when Viduka, on at half-time, headed in England winger Stewart Downing's cross from close range.

In the 95th minute Jamie McCombe brought down Yakubu but he never looked comfortable taking the penalty and Weale saved.

However, it looked as if the forward had settled the tie when he followed up a Johnson shot parried by Weale.

But with three minutes of extra-time left McCombe turned in Scott Murray's cross to set up a shoot-out.

Blackpool who play in League One, the division below Championship Norwich, went into the lead through Michael Jackson's header before Darren Huckerby, who scored in the original 1-1 draw, equalised 12 minutes from time.

Huckerby then put the Canaries ahead in extra-time before Shaun Barker levelled from close range. But with a penalty shoot-out looming, Martin scored.

Martins sorry for Nigeria snub

AFP, London

Newcastle striker Obafemi Martins on Tuesday apologised for refusing to play for Nigeria in last week's friendly against Ghana.

Martins, who missed the 4-1 defeat to tend to his sick mother, told BBC Sport: "I apologise to the Nigeria Football Association (NFA) and the players because it was a very important game. But I also believe my mum was more important."

The NFA were angered by the player's absence, describing him as unpatriotic and referred the case to their disciplinary committee.

Martins says despite this row he will be available to play for his country in the future.

"When I am called upon I will play for them, because you have to respect the national team."

"I do respect the Super Eagles a lot, so anytime they call I will come and play."

Altintop on his way to Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04's Turkish midfielder Hamit Altintop announced on Wednesday that he is to join Bayern Munich next season on a three-year contract.

"I've accepted an offer from Bayern," he told Sport Bild newspaper.

"You don't get chances like this very often in your life," he added.

The 24-year-old player, who was born in Gelsenkirchen, is under contract with Schalke until the end of the season.

Since he joined the club in 2003 he has made 101 first team appearances, scoring eight goals.

Bayern manager Ottmar Hitzfeld confirmed the move of a player he described as having a big physical presence, in attack and in defence.

Altintop is the second signing at Bayern for next season after Aachen's German international Jan Schlaudraff.

Roma given go-ahead

REUTERS, Rome

The Italian government confirmed on Tuesday that AS Roma's Champions League last 16 first-leg match against Olympique Lyon on February 21 would kick off at the scheduled time of 8.45pm (1945 GMT).

All night matches in Italy were suspended as part of a new anti-hooligan plan introduced following the death of policeman Filippo Raciti outside a Serie A match on February 2.

"We didn't doubt that (we would get approval for the late kick-off) because we know the Olympic Stadium is safe," Roma's sporting director Daniele Prade said.

The Olympic Stadium is one of six Serie A grounds that comply fully with security regulations governing Italian stadiums.

Earlier on Tuesday, Roma avoided a fine when the disciplinary committee of Italy's Football League found the club not responsible for the small section of supporters who whistled during the one-minute's silence in memory of Raciti that preceded the Serie A game against Parma at the weekend.

The whistles were quickly drowned out by applause from the rest of the ground.

"The great majority of the spectators clearly showed they wanted nothing to do with this kind of behaviour," read a statement on the Football League's Web site.

Aachen players get booze ban

AFP, Berlin

Two players of German first division team Alemannia Aachen have been punished by their club for being involved in a drink-driving accident, sporting director Jorg Schmadtko said.

Marius Ebbers and German international Jan Schlaudraff were involved in an accident on Sunday after a night out.

"Marius will have a fine, a warning and will be suspended for the match against Bayern Munich on Sunday," Schmadtko told Express newspaper, while adding that Schlaudraff will suffer only a fine.

Ebbers was at the wheel of Schlaudraff's Porsche when it careered into crash barriers on a motorway at around 0830GMT on Sunday.

He has had his driver's licence rescinded although he claimed he felt in perfect condition to be behind the wheel. According to Schlaudraff, his alcohol level was 0.51 grammes per litre of blood -- just over the legal driving limit of 0.50.

Vieira confident about UCL chances

AFP, Rome

Patrick Vieira believes his Inter Milan side have what it takes to win the Champions League this season.

Inter are 11 points clear at the top of Serie A and on course to retain the title, but the 30-year-old former Arsenal and Juventus midfielder feels the European Cup is also well within their grasp.

"We have the squad to do it," the France international was quoted as saying in Wednesday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"If nobody gets distracted and we remain focussed on all our objectives, it can be done. It will be tough, but we can do it."

Inter, who won the European Cup in 1964 and 1965, host Valencia in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie next Wednesday before the return match in Spain a fortnight later.

Vieira joined Inter from Juventus last summer after the Turin club were demoted for match-fixing.

Jewell charged over ref outburst

AFP, London

Wigan boss Paul Jewell has vowed to fight an improper conduct charge imposed over his outburst at the referee who was in charge of his side's controversial 2-1 defeat by Arsenal on Sunday.

Jewell angrily confronted match official Phil Dowd at the final whistle after Arsenal came from a goal down to snatch a late victory.

The Wigan manager had been infuriated by Dowd's failure to award a penalty -- which replays suggested he should have done -- when Arsenal's Mathieu Flamini challenged Emile Heskey in the area at a time when Wigan were

leading 1-0.

Jewell, who could yet face further charges from the Football Association (FA) relating to his subsequent comments to the media on Dowd's performance, has said he will be making his own complaint to the governing body about the official allegedly telling some of the Wigan players to "off" when they remonstrated with him at the end of the match.

"We, as a club, will be fighting this tooth and nail," Jewell insisted on Tuesday. "We owe it to our supporters to fight this, because if I just shrug my shoulders and do nothing when I feel an injustice has been done, it would be letting them down."

"I have been overwhelmed with the support I have had from inside

the game, big figures who I respect a great deal. They have told me in no uncertain terms that I must take this all the way, and that's what I intend to do."

Wigan's sense of injustice over the outcome of the match was fuelled by the fact that they had appeared to be on course to end Arsenal's unbeaten record at the Emirates Stadium after Denny Landzaat fired them ahead with a superb 30-yard strike shortly before half-time.

But they were pegged back by Fitz Hall's own goal and then overhauled when Tomas Rosicky headed in Julio Baptista's cross with five minutes remaining.

The defeat left Wigan five points above the relegation zone.

Rossi wants UEFA glory

INTERNET, undated



Giuseppe Rossi is looking forward to making his European debut with Parma. "I want to win the UEFA Cup," said the starlet. The Ducali will visit Braga on Thursday in the last 32, having finished top of Group D, and the 20-year-old Italian-American is eager to do well in his first international match with his new club.

"I have often played the League Cup in England, which has the same rules as the UEFA Cup, but this trophy is obviously more prestigious," said the Manchester United owned star.

"Everyone would like to win it. In fact, we are going to Braga to do well, so we can then fight for qualification in

the return leg at Parma. "Tomorrow's match will be a difficult one as Portuguese sides are very technical," added the January arrival.

"I have heard that there might be some Manchester observers there for me. I only want to play, if they want to come and see me then they will be welcome."

The Portuguese clash will be Claudio Ranieri's first on the Gialloblu bench after he replaced the axed Stefano Pioli this week.

"He is a great professional and has lots of experience. I am sure he will do well with us," concluded Rossi.

Braga and Parma have never met before in European competition, but the Portuguese side defeated Cheivo in the first round of this season's UEFA Cup to reach the group stage.

The second leg will be played on February 22 and the winners will face Tottenham in the last 16, with the home tie scheduled for March

Bayern look to Premiership

INTERNET, undated

Ottmar Hitzfeld has revealed he intends to use the style football played in the Premiership as his example for his Bayern Munich side as they look to work themselves back into the race for the Bundesliga title.

Hitzfeld led Bayern to Champions League glory in 2001 during a six year reign at the club, and stepped back into the job at the end of last month after his successor Felix Magath was sacked for a poor run of results in the league.

"We have to have big ambitions," Hitzfeld told Sport Bild. "The Premier League must be our example. A quicker tempo, more movement on the pitch, and more application -- that's what we want."

Exercises in training have also revealed Hitzfeld's desire to play with a higher defensive line, in order for the team to function more as a unit.

"We need to stay more compact," Hitzfeld explained. "That way, our passing game and our interplay will improve automatically."

Hitzfeld's assistant Michael Henke spent time in London observing Arsenal, and insisted: "We can certainly follow Arsenal's example regarding quick passing and interplay."

Kirkland out with injury

AFP, London

Wigan goalkeeper Chris Kirkland could be out of action for up to six weeks after he announced he needed surgery on a torn finger ligament.

The 25-year-old England international sustained the injury in training and will have the operation on Thursday.

"I am viewing this as a minor setback and just one of those strange injuries that happen from time to time," Kirkland told Wigan's website on Wednesday.

"I am not going to get down about it, that is for sure," the former Coventry and Liverpool keeper added.

Wigan physiotherapist Alan Tomlinson said: "I don't like to put timescales in place because it can vary, depending upon how quickly the injury heals."

"That said it is a pretty straightforward procedure and I would envisage Chris will be playing within six weeks."

Wigan are currently five points clear of the Premiership relegation zone.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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