

Olsen to coach Iraq

AFP, Oslo

Egil Roger Olsen, a former manager of Norway and English side Wimbledon, revealed here Monday that he has signed a three year contract to coach Iraq.

The post was left vacant after Brazilian Jorvan Viera stepped down after guiding the team to a spectacular 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia to lift the Asian Cup in July.

Confirming his appointment the 65-year-old Olsen, who coached Norway from 1990 to 1998, told NRK radio on Monday: "I've just signed (the contract)."

Under his reign Norway qualified for the World Cups in the United States in 1994 and France four years later.

Olsen, nicknamed 'Drillo' for his dribbling skills as a player with 16 international appearances to his credit, was appointed manager of Wimbledon in 1999 but was sacked after one season on the London club's relegation from the Premiership.



Manchester City goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel (L) saves at the feet of Aston Villa forward Shaun Maloney during their Premier League match at the City of Manchester Stadium in Manchester on Sunday.

Sven remains grounded

AFP, Manchester



Sven-Goran Eriksson has dismissed talk of Manchester City breaking into the top four next May despite his side moving second following the single-goal victory over Aston Villa on Sunday.

Michael Johnson's second half goal extended City's 100 percent home record under the new manager and moved Eriksson's side to within a single point of early league leaders Arsenal.

But the former England coach moved to play down the growing expectation surrounding the club, insisting the head of the Premiership table will carry a familiar look at the end of the campaign.

"I would be very happy if the league was finished now," said Eriksson, who denied reports he has been promised a 150 million pound

transfer budget.

"I don't feel we should start talking about a top four finish. I think the four top places are for the four top clubs (Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester United and Liverpool) but in football you never know.

"But I think the league will be tighter this year, even for the big four. A lot of teams have invested heavily and I don't think anyone will go through the season and lose just one or two games. It will be tight until 10th, 11th or 12th."

Eriksson hailed the display of Johnson, 19, who claimed his second match-winner of the season and insisted the teenager has the perfect midfield mentor in the experienced Dietmar Hamann.

"Michael Johnson is an all round midfielder," he added.

"You can't say he has one speciality, he is good at everything and it is rare you can say that about a young player. And how he took the goal today showed maturity.

"I never saw Manchester City live last season but when I came here he told me he played the last nine games and said he came into the team and saved them. He's very confident!

"It's gold to have a midfielder who can score goals. It's absolutely fantastic and the goals he has scored have been extremely important.

"I'm positively surprised by Hamann. He seems to be getting younger and younger. You expect him to tire in the second half but he is getting stronger and we need him because his football brain is better than anyone."

Eriksson omitted Stephen Ireland from his squad after the Republic of Ireland midfielder admitted last week he had lied about the death of both his grandmothers in a bid to secure his release from international duty but stated the youngster's club future is not in doubt.

"I'm quite sure Stephen Ireland will be the same player we had before he

went on international duty when he starts training again," Eriksson added.

"He is young, and an extremely good footballer and we can't afford to lose him. When you are young you make mistakes and you pay for them. But life goes on, he will be ready for the next game I hope."

Villa manager Martin O'Neill admitted his frustration as his side failed to build on the impressive victory over Chelsea two weeks ago before the international break.

"We have no excuses because the break was the same for everyone," O'Neill said.

"But as a club manager, I wish we had had a game immediately after that. We have got plenty of work to do but that doesn't stop me being excited about the team.

"John Carew has played with a groin injury. But strikers benefit from scoring goals and I am sure he will get a great lift when he gets off the mark for us this season."

Schaaf excited at Real challenge

INTERNET, undated

Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf says his side's UEFA Champions League Group C opener against Real Madrid is "an absolute highlight".

Bremen enter the group stage for the fourth successive season. However Tuesday's trip to the Santiago Bernabeu promises to be a unique affair.

"It's an absolute highlight, just as we see all matches in the Champions League as highlights."

A visit to Madrid would scare some coaches but not Schaaf.

"You look forward to these kinds of games," he said. "International competitions are still something special.

"Everyone - all the players and the support staff - is looking forward to the matches, and in Bremen you can see that there's great enthusiasm once more."

Coaching Bremen since 1999, Schaaf has helped the Bundesliga club hold their own at the continent's elite level, and they go into the tournament with one eye on the knockout phase.

"Because we haven't been able to achieve this objective year in, year out, I think we don't belong among the truly major clubs - but I do think we've set standards that are astonishing for a club like ours," he said.

If facing 'Los Meregues' in the 2007/08 opener wasn't tough enough, Schaaf is looking forward to tackling their other Group C rivals, Olympiacos and Lazio.

"We're playing against opponents we haven't met before - that is obviously very exciting," he added.

"Real Madrid are the team that stand out but Olympiacos and Lazio are also significant names."

Schaaf, whose team finished third in the Bundesliga last season, said meeting Europe's finest remains a crucial element of the appeal of the tournament.

"It's nice to be able to measure ourselves against the best teams," he said.

The German believes that the competition is a proving ground, making good players into great ones.

"The UEFA Champions League can give a terrific boost to one player or another - they can perhaps end up doing things that were not expected of them - and on the other hand, we've seen that it exposes players' limitations."

Pantelic fires Hertha

AFP, Berlin



Hertha Berlin are up to fifth in the Bundesliga table after birthday boy Marko Pantelic scored two second-half goals to seal his side's 2-1 win at Duisburg on Sunday.

Pantelic, who celebrated his 29th birthday on Saturday, crashed home his first goal on 61 minutes and then produced a carbon-copy for the second nine minutes later as Hertha moved up to fifth as Bayern Munich stay top.

Duisburg hit back when Slovakian striker Klemen Lavric grabbed a consolation goal with a header 12 minutes from time, but Hertha held on.

And last season's second-division champions Karlsruhe are just behind them in sixth after they

came from behind to win 2-1 away at Wolfsburg.

Wolfsburg's veteran Polish midfielder Jacek Krzynowek had put his side ahead when he rifled hom his shot from 25 metres out.

But Karlsruhe hit back when Swiss defender Mario Eggimann headed home with an hour gone and then defender Christian Eichner grabbed the winning goal on 79 minutes to make the win safe.

On Saturday, Miroslav Klose spared Bayern Munich's blushes with a second-half header as the Bundesliga leaders stayed top of the table with a 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 at the Allianz Arena.

This was Klose's fourth league goal of the season and calmed Bayern's nerves to maintain their unbeaten record as his equaliser gave his side their narrow one-point lead over second-placed Aminia Bielefeld.

Schalke had taken the lead

against the run of play when Croatian midfielder Ivan Rakitic slammed home his shot from the edge of the penalty area on 35 minutes to beat Bayern's goalkeeper Oliver Kahn.

But the German giants, chasing their 21st crown as national champions, got back on level terms when a Franck Ribery free-kick was headed into the path of Klose and the German striker, the top scorer at last year's World Cup, headed home on 54 minutes.

Defending Bundesliga champions VfB Stuttgart picked up a much-needed three points with a 3-0 win at home to Energie Cottbus as Cacau, Ewerthon and Germany's player of the year Mario Gomez scored to lift their side to ninth.

Second-placed Aminia Bielefeld routed bottom-side Hansa Rostock 4-2 to keep the pressure on Bayern.

Bayern Leverkusen enjoyed a 2-0 win over ten-man VfL Bochum after French midfielder Marc Pflertzel was sent off for a second yellow-card.

PSG on the rise

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint Germain notched up their second victory of the season and in the process hinted at their title potential with a 2-1 win at Monaco on Sunday.

For Monaco, who slip to fifth in the league, it was the second consecutive loss after the 2-1 defeat to Bordeaux.

The win takes PSG into the middle of the pack in 11th with 11 points.

Monaco looked dangerous early on with Parisian keeper Mickael Landreau saving a shot from Colombian striker Juan Pablo Pino in the 22nd minute and then from Frederic Piquionne in the 25th and Nene in the 29th minute.

However the Parisians opened the scoring shortly before half-time with a well directed free-kick from Jerome Rothen which found Sylvain Armand who headed home.

After the break Monaco replaced Pino with the Czech giant Jan Koller.

But PSG were unfazed and scored their second goal in the 53rd minute when Rothen found Amara Diane, who out-jumped midfielder Lucas Bernardi at the far post.

Monaco fought back making use of Koller who forced two majestic saves from Landreau in the 66th and 77th minutes.

The home side were finally rewarded with a goal from a free kick by Jeremy Menez in the 85th and continued the pressure but the Parisians held on for a moral-boosting away win, their second after the 2-0 win over Mans.

PSG coach Paul Le Guen said: "This was a victory for our talent for much of the game. This should give us renewed confidence. We said we were coming here to win, and we proved it."

Monaco manager Ricardo felt hard done by, saying: "We deserved a point. We played well but were a little naive."

In Sunday's late match in form Rennes beat Lorient 1-0 to move up to fourth place, one point behind the leaders.

On Saturday Lens striker Aruna Dindane handed leaders Nancy their first defeat of the season as six-time French league champions

Lyon closed the gap to just one point.

Dindane's 70th-minute penalty supplied Lens and their new coach Jean-Pierre Papin their first win of the season.

But Nancy remain top of the standings with 16 points after seven games, one point ahead of Lyon who thrashed tailenders Metz 5-1, helped by a first-half hatrick from Karim Benzema.

Marseille were plunged deeper into crisis as Toulouse claimed a resounding 2-1 victory and their first win at the Velodrome in 44 years.

Three days before their Champions League opener against Turkish side Besiktas, Albert Emon's men looked a shadow of the team who finished runners-up behind Lyon last season.

They are sitting 15th with just seven points from eight games, having garnered just two points from four home games this season.

Valenciennes drop from second position to fourth after losing 2-0 at Le Mans, as third-placed Bordeaux were held 1-1 at Lille in a game the highlight of which was the debut of former Dutch star Patrick Kluivert for the hosts.