

Hiddink's dig at club bosses

With Russia not playing a game this week, Spartak Moscow coach Stanislav Cherchesov refused to allow striker Roman Pavlyuchenko and winger Vladimir Bystrov to attend the national team's training camp in Turkey's Mediterranean resort of Belek.

"Of course, I'm disappointed," the Dutchman told Reuters. "When we first announced our plans to hold this training camp soon after we qualified for the (Euro 2008) finals, all premier league clubs gave their approval."

"Then, suddenly some clubs decided to change their mind. I don't think it's fair."

"It also shows disrespect to the national team. We're trying hard to put together the best Russian team, so that it can compete on equal terms with all the major European powers and we need everyone pulling together, not trying to disrupt our preparation."

Other club coaches, including Dick Advocaat of Russian champions Zenit St Petersburg, and CSKA Moscow boss Valery Gazzayev were also initially reluctant to release their players.

"I don't think you can call what they'll be doing in Belek training -- it sounds more like a social get-together for a barbecue by the pool," Gazzayev said sarcastically. "But I'm a law-abiding citizen so I must let my players go."

Three players, Sevilla striker Alexander Kerzhakov, Nuremberg winger Ivan Saenko and Sporting midfielder Marat Izmailov, had still not arrived at the camp by Monday. "Saenko is injured, so he's not coming because he can't train anyway," said Hiddink. "But I hope that both Kerzhakov and Izmailov will still come, probably on Monday after they have played their league matches."

"What is important for me that every single player wanted to come here. They understand the importance of this training camp. I just hope that some of our coaches would also understand such simple things."

FRENCH CUP Minnows blaze a trail

Fifth division outfit Carquefou produced the shock of the French Cup in knocking out first division high-fliers Nancy on Sunday.

After a goalless 90 minutes the match came to life in extra-time when, instead of Nancy's superior fitness proving decisive, their hosts from a small town in Brittany, northwestern France, shocked them by first taking the lead, then going back in front after the professionals had levelled.

Laurent Delaune opened the scoring after 101 minutes of hard-fought action which had seen Nancy look nothing like the side standing third in the French table and dreaming of possible participation in the Champions League next season.

They emerged from their slumber briefly when Marc-Antoine Fortune levelled inside four minutes with a fortuitous lob, just before the end of the first period of extra-time.

But if the first division side thought they had earned at least a replay Sebastien Le Paih had other ideas and netted the winner with three minutes to go at a Stade du Moulin-Bousseau packed with 3,000 fans.

Elsewhere on Sunday, league champions Lyon were looking to swat fourth division Croix de Savoie while ten-times winners Marseille were meeting neighbours Monaco in the tie of the round.

On Saturday, Paris Saint Germain made it into the last 16 by ending the dreams of fifth division Le Poire-sur-Vie, 3-1 away, while holders Sochaux also advanced, on penalties, against Montpellier.

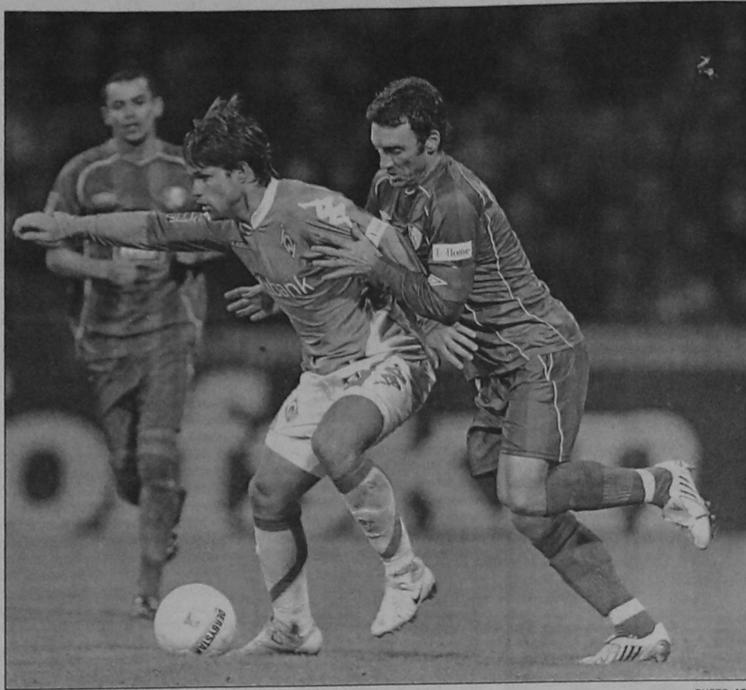
Le Poire were roared on by some 8,000 fans from their small town south of Nantes - the match being played in Nantes' own Beaujoire Stadium.

But PSG, keen for an eighth Cup success amid a dismal league campaign, went about their business professionally and won with goals from Bernard Mendy and a double from Ivorian striker Amara Diane.

"We weren't too hot in the first half but got better thereafter," said PSG coach Paul Le Guen. "Poire counterpart Stephane Motin admitted he was sad that the adventure was over."

"I am frustrated but the adventure was always going to stop one day. I am proud of my lads."

Another fifth division side, Lyon-Duchere lost out to the only goal, scored for top flight Lille by Nicolas Fauvergue.



Werder Bremen midfielder Diego (C) holds off Borussia Dortmund midfielder Thomas Zebel during their Bundesliga clash in Bremen on Sunday.

Bremen fall off the pace

Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf was disappointed as his ten-man side allowed Bayern Munich to open a three-point gap following his team's 2-1 defeat at struggling VfL Bochum on Sunday.

Bremen's Danish striker Daniel Jensen put the hosts ahead just before half-time, but Bochum fought back and equalised when forward Benjamin Auer's right-footed shot beat goalkeeper Tim Wiese on 68 minutes.

Werder's Brazilian international defender Naldo was dismissed when he was shown a straight red card with twenty minutes left after a bad tackle on Bochum striker Stanislav Sestak.

And Bochum's Algerian international defender Anthar Yahia gave his side victory with a header on 84 minutes to put his side 11th in the league.

"We could not get the point and it was a similar situation to Dortmund, where we were knocked out of the German Cup last week where we just couldn't stamp our authority," said Schaaf.

"We can't afford to do this again, we need to be much more resilient." The result keeps Bremen second while Schalke 04 are up to fifth after their comfortable 4-1 win over VfB Stuttgart with Kevin Kuranyi and Heiko Westermann celebrating their call-ups for Germany's friendly against Austria next week with goals.

Kuranyi headed Schalke into a 32nd minute lead and made it 2-0 with a shot on 52 minutes, before picking up a yellow card as Stuttgart midfielder Antonio da Silva levelled the scores with a free-kick on 61 minutes.

But uncapped Westermann, who is expected to make his debut in Vienna on Wednesday, put his side into a 3-1 lead with a header on 76 minutes before Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto scored on his debut with a goal in the 92nd minute.

On Saturday, Hamburg slipped back to fourth in the table as Bayer Leverkusen claimed third spot with late 3-2 win at Energie Cottbus with German striker Simon Rolfes converting a late penalty.

Bayern had to survive a fightback in Rostock on Friday before the German giants came away with a 2-1 win.

Bayern cruised into a 2-0 half-time lead courtesy of goals from Frank Ribery and Luca Toni.

But coach Ottmar Hitzfeld's side made a nervous start to the second-half as their defence leaked an early goal by Rostock's Enrico Kern.

A penalty by Hanover's Hungarian midfielder Szabolcs Huszti just before half-time gave his side the lead in Hamburg before Croatian striker Ivica Olic bagged his eighth league goal of the season as Hanover had Sergio Pinto dismissed late in the game.

There was a goal feast in Duisburg as the league's bottom side drew 3-3 win over mid-table Borussia Dortmund.

Nuremberg stay in the bottom three after their 2-0 defeat at Karlsruhe, who are sixth.

Hertha Berlin were humbled 3-0 at home to Eintracht Frankfurt as their 20-year-old Czech international striker Martin Fenin enjoyed a dream debut which leaves both sides in mid-table.

And Arminia Bielefeld were beaten 1-0 at home to VfL Wolfsburg to hang just above the relegation zone.

"We didn't play well enough and probably didn't deserve to be in front, and after that we just didn't do enough to win the game," said O'Neill.

"There was not enough creativity and we didn't do enough to win the game." Villa were in front after 69 minutes when Shaun Maloney's corner was flicked on by Olof Mellberg and former Villa defender Aaron Hughes, attempting to hook clear, succeeded only in deflecting the ball off his knee and into his own net.

Villa's lead was short-lived though as Hodgson's side levelled four minutes later. Bullard's cross was perfectly weighted for Simon Davies to run across his marker and glance a shot into the far corner.

Bullard wasn't finished yet. In the 86th minute, Curtis Davies fouled Diomansy Kamara and Bullard stepped up to curl the free-kick past Scott Carson.

"We had a fruitful and constructive discussion. On essential points there is an agreement between Hitzfeld and the ASF delegation," the ATS news agency reported an Association official as saying.

Hitzfeld, 59, said in December he would not stay at Bayern after season's end.

During his first spell in charge, from 1998 to 2004, he won the 2001 Champions League to add to the one he obtained in charge of Borussia Dortmund in 1997.

He returned for a second spell at Bayern a year ago but said he would not stay beyond June.

Hitzfeld has won four Bundesliga titles with Bayern, to add to a pair won with Dortmund.

He knows the Swiss game well having played for Basel, Lugano and Lucerne between 1971 and 1983 and then coaching Zug, Aarau and Grashoppers from 1984 to 1991.

Kuhn, 64, will bow out after overseeing the Swiss attempt to make a mark at Euro 2008 which they are co-hosting with Austria.

Defoe to replace Agbonlahor

AFP, London

Portsmouth striker Jermain Defoe was on Sunday called up to the England squad for Wednesday's friendly international against Switzerland at Wembley after the withdrawal of Gabriel Agbonlahor.

Agbonlahor injured a hamstring in Aston Villa's 2-1 Premier League defeat against Fulham at Craven Cottage on Sunday.

England boss Fabio Capello has now turned to Defoe, who moved from Tottenham last week and marked his debut with the equalising goal in a 1-1 draw against Chelsea on Saturday.

"He was fouled just before half-time and felt his hamstring," said Villa boss Martin O'Neill.

"Of course he is disappointed. It was a boost for him to be called up (by England) and had been thoroughly deserved."

Hodgson backs his charges

AFP, London

Roy Hodgson believes Fulham can use their 2-1 win over Aston Villa as a springboard to avoid relegation.

Hodgson's side had gone 14 matches without a win and were in danger of being cast adrift in the bottom three.

But Jimmy Bullard ended that winless run when he struck with four minutes to play at Craven Cottage on Sunday after Simon Davies had cancelled out Fulham defender Aaron Hughes' own goal.

Bullard's match-winning performance will give Fulham renewed hope of beating the drop and Hodgson said: "On the back of a draw at Bolton it was a good result and narrowed the gap. This is the first step on the ladder."

"There are a lot of positives but it's only a start. We have got to build on this and there are many more games to go."

It was fitting that Bullard should be the game's key figure. The midfielder only recently returned from 18 months out with a knee injury and this was the kind of moment he would have dreamed about during his gruelling rehabilitation.

Bullard said: "After so long out to comeback like that is unbelievable. I can't believe I scored the winner. "Just to be out there kicking a ball, let alone scoring, is fantastic."

"Even when I went a goal down we still believed. We know we are still in a fight but if we show that every week we will be fine."

Villa's eight-match unbeaten run in the league is over but manager Martin O'Neill will be just as worried by an injury to Gabriel Agbonlahor, who was forced off at half-time with a hamstring problem that looks certain to rule him out of England's friendly against Switzerland on Wednesday.

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Greene calls it a day

Athletics

AFP, Paris

Maurice Greene, the Olympic 100m champion in 2000, announced his retirement Monday citing recurring injuries that have dogged his career in recent years.

"Injuries are every sprinter's worst nightmare, and I seem to have been constantly fighting them for the past three seasons," Greene said on the Internet site of his agent.

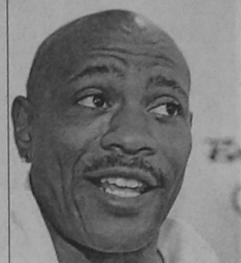
"So I have decided to retire from competing in the sport which I love and which has given me so much over this past decade."

Greene was Olympic champion in 2000 and a three-time world champion in 1997, 1999, and 2001. But since winning bronze at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, he has had a series of injuries hampering his career.

Veteran Greene, 33, made the announcement in Beijing on a pre-

Olympic visit with a group of world and Olympic champions athletes, including Tyson Gay, the US 100m and 200m men's world champion.

Greene said he was sorry he



MAURICE GREENE

would not be competing in the Beijing Olympic Games but felt confident that a new generation of US runners such as Gay would guarantee continued success for the US

team. "I am going to always wish I was going to run here in Beijing," he said. "But I believe Tyson is capable of taking my spot and to bring the gold medals back for the United States."

He said his future probably lay in coaching. "I have been coaching some athletes and you know, just trying to help them achieve great things," he said. "It's something I like."

Greene, who is based in Los Angeles, said he would consider coaching Chinese sprinters in the future.

China's has produced only one men's track star, 110m hurdler Liu Xiang, who is world and Olympic champion and also holds the world record.

"We in America have been doing the sprints for so long, we know what works," he said. "If we had someone over here to help the Chinese train, I think they could compete just as well."

We were lucky, says Mancini

AFP, Rome

Inter coach Roberto Mancini admitted his side did not deserve the penalty that earned them a 1-0 victory over plucky Empoli at the San Siro on Sunday.

It was the second time in three league matches that Inter had benefited from a controversial penalty to earn a victory.

Ighli Vannucchi was penalised in the first half when a Julio Cruz shot inside the area crashed off the defender's head.

The ball may or may not have then glanced off his hand but television replays proved inconclusive. If it did, Vannucchi certainly had no intention and no way to avoid it.

Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic then smashed home the resulting spot-kick, just as he had done two weeks ago when Parma's Fernando Couto was sanctioned, and also sent-off, in an almost identical incident.

What made things worse for the visitors was that Empoli later missed a penalty through Luca Saudati and went home empty-handed.

Inter held on impressively with 10 men, the third time in four matches they have had a player dismissed - in this case France captain Patrick Vieira, who was making his first start since October due to injury - in the first half.

"I'm happy about the victory, we

worked hard for it," said Mancini. "It became a dangerous situation given that we were a man down for a long time."

"We're making life hard for ourselves because it's the third time in a short space of time that we've been reduced to 10 men."

Mancini said he thought neither penalty should have been given. "Neither our one nor the penalty awarded to Empoli should have been given," he added.

"These things change the course of the match, for good or for bad. (They) are penalties that shouldn't be given because I don't think that Vannucchi intentionally touched the ball with his hand."

"In this situation a player is trying to protect himself, not handle the ball."

Inter centre-back Marco Materazzi admitted that he was rightly adjudged to have brought down Saudati for the Empoli spot-kick.

"For me it was a penalty. I raised my leg, my opponent did well to get the ball. When he fell to the floor I thought how naive I was."

"I straight away put my hands on my head. Now they tell me that looking at the television replays there is doubt."

"It could be given or not given, but when it happened I was convinced it was the right decision to give it."

That will inevitably cue more cries from the Italian press that Inter are being favoured by referees.

The same thing happened after

the Parma match two weeks ago, in which Inter came back to win 3-2 after trailing 2-1 late on before the penalty award.

Inter felt they were harshly treated in the press, which analysed a host of poor penalty decisions that have gone their way this season - while ignoring any others that might have gone against them.

It triggered a two-week press boycott from the champions, who spoke only to the official Inter TV channel and Inter website during this period.

The victory, coupled with Roma's miserable 3-0 defeat at Siena, pushed Inter's lead at the top of the table out to eight points.

Aguero suffers ankle injury

AFP, Madrid

Argentine international striker Kun Aguero will be unable to take part in Wednesday's friendly match with Guatemala after being ruled out for a week with an ankle injury.

Atletico Madrid striker Aguero sustained the injury to his right ankle in Sunday's 1-1 draw with Murcia and the club confirmed that he would be unable to fly to the United States for the friendly in Los Angeles.

The 19-year-old Aguero, who joined from Independiente for 20 million euros, is Atletico's top-scorer this season with nine goals.

Samba's freeze in cold

Football

AFP, Paris

Brazil's samba superstars have caught a European winter cold sending a worrying chill through the world champions.

Pato, one of their brightest stars and tipped to be a major force at the 2010 World Cup, has been ruled out of Wednesday's friendly against Ireland in Dublin and faces a long lay-off after damaging ankle ligaments on Sunday.

The teenager had fired a late winner in AC Milan's 1-0 win at Fiorentina to boost his team's hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League but then suffered his devastating injury.

"Pato has twisted his ankle, it's a serious thing," said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti. "Now we must wait 48 hours

before we have a better idea of his condition." The 18-year-old has been a revelation this season scoring four goals in six games since making his debut for the European champions in January.

Pato's compatriot and World Cup winner Ronaldo is also having problems at the San Siro having played only four times all season due to a combination of calf and thigh injuries.

"Now we have an attacking emergency, Pato won't play next Sunday. We hope to get Ronaldo and (Filippo) Inzaghi back," said Ancelotti.

Milan were linked with a move for Ronaldinho during the transfer window, although Ancelotti always insisted that the Barcelona star was not part of his plans.

Ronaldinho has struggled to regain a starting place in the Barca side in recent weeks as he battles for fitness.

"Ronaldinho is getting his fitness back but we have to be calm and not expect too much because he needs time," said Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard whose side are six points behind Real Madrid in the Spanish title race.

Ronaldinho, who injured his left knee in the defeat to Real Madrid in December, celebrated his 200th appearance for Barca when he came on for Lionel Messi in the 68th minute of the 1-0 win over Osasuna.

In France, six-time champions Lyon are also without their boy from Brazil with skipper Juninho not having played for three weeks because of a broken toe.

All things considered, Brazil will be thankful that their World Cup qualifying campaign doesn't resume until June 14 when they travel to Paraguay who lead the South American standings.



AC Milan forward Alexandre Pato buries his head in the ground in pain after damaging ankle ligaments in their Serie A match against Fiorentina at Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence on Sunday.



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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Cryptogram grid with numbers 1-58 and a clue: Today's Cryptogram Clue: It equals L