

Cech calls for Nedved's return

AFP, Prague

Chelsea keeper Petr Cech called Thursday for Pavel Nedved to quit national service and help the Czech Republic at Euro 2008.

The Juventus midfielder, with 18 goals from 91 caps to his name, called time on his international career after the 2006 World Cup.

But pressure has mounted for the 2003 European Footballer of the Year to return to the national fold.

Cech told the Dnes newspaper: "Pavel is part of the team, he's always made an important contribution to it. We're in real need of a player with such experience and blessed with such skills."

"His presence at the Euro would naturally be welcome, that's obvious," noted Nuremberg's Czech striker Jan Koller.

Czech defender Radoslav Kovac said Nedved was "in excellent form at the moment and would surely enjoy an excellent Euro".

Calls for Nedved to figure at Euro 2008 have grown following the long-term injury suffered by Arsenal midfielder Tomas Rosicky.

Since his international debut in 1994 Nedved has taken part in three European championships, helping his country to the final in 1996 and semifinals in 2004.

The Czech Republic start their Group A campaign against co-hosts Switzerland on June 7, with next up Portugal on June 11 and Turkey four days later.

Kidnap attempt forced Cruyff out of 1978 WC

AP, Madrid

Former Dutch soccer star Johan Cruyff claims a kidnap attempt, in which he says a rifle was held to his head, played a part in his decision to skip the 1978 World Cup.

Cruyff said the incident occurred the previous year, when he was nearing the end of a five-year stint with FC Barcelona.

"To play a World Cup you have to be 200 per cent," Cruyff told Catalunya Radio on Tuesday. "I had a rifle at my head, I was tied up, my wife tied up, the children were in the apartment in Barcelona. There are moments when there are other values in life."

Cruyff didn't say why his family was targeted or how the kidnap attempt failed. He told the radio station that police guarded his house for four months and escorted his children to school.

At the time, Cruyff's decision to skip the tournament in Argentina was widely attributed to his dislike of that country's military dictatorship. He also was at odds with the Dutch soccer federation at the time.

The Netherlands reached the final in 1978, losing 3-1 to host Argentina. Four years earlier, Cruyff led his country to its first World Cup final, when it lost to host West Germany 2-1.

Jelena, Maria advance

AFP, Charleston

Top seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic is off to another strong start at the WTA Family Circle Cup, beating qualifier Alexandra Stevenson 7-5, 6-0 in her opening round match Wednesday.

The defending champ Jankovic had failed to advance past the second round in three previous showings in the main draw of this 1.3 million dollar Tier I tournament before rolling to the title last season, dropping just one set in five matches.

That crown was one of four titles in a career year for the 23-year-old, who has yet to capture a championship this campaign.

Jankovic is coming off her first appearance in a final this season, losing to Serena Williams at the Sony Ericsson Open earlier in the month.

One of the top eight players to get a first-round bye, Jankovic's next opponent is Russian Anastasia Rodionova, who advanced with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Aravane Rezai of France.

If Jankovic is going to repeat as champion, she might just have to do it against Maria Sharapova in the final.

The second-seeded Russian is probably the favourite for the title after she broke through with her first career claycourt title at the Bausch and Lomb Championships on Sunday.

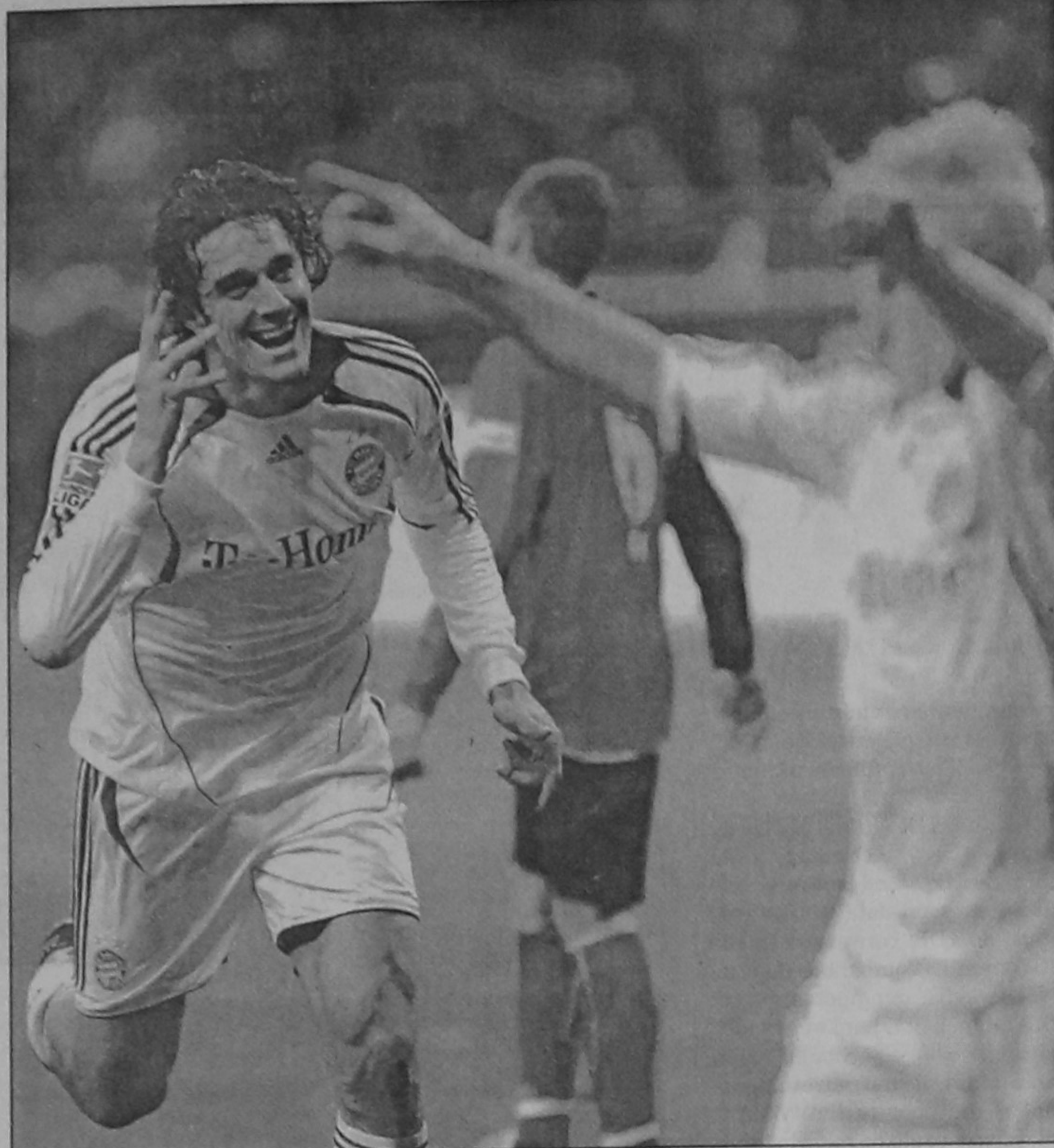
Sharapova demolished American Bethanie Mattek 6-0, 6-0 in Wednesday's night match.

In early results, fourth seed Elena Dementieva made little work of American Jill Craybas, 6-0, 6-2. The Russian reached the final here in 2005.

Next up for Dementieva will be No. 13 Victoria Azarenka, a 7-6 (7-4), 6-0 winner over Tiantian Sun.

Seventh seed Patty Schnyder also moved into the third round with a 7-6 (7-2), 6-0 win over Olga Govortsova.

The Swiss player next will face No. 11 Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland, who dispatched Romania's Edina Gallovits, 6-7 (7-9), 6-2, 7-5.



Bayern Munich striker Luca Toni (L) embarks on his trademark celebration after scoring against Eintracht Frankfurt during their Bundesliga match at the Commerzbank-Arena in Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Toni restores Bayern's lead

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich who went behind against Eintracht Frankfurt and struggled for periods hit back mainly thanks to a double by Italian striker Luca Toni to notch up a 3-1 away victory and restore their 10-point advantage at the top of the German league on Wednesday.

Bayern look set to earn their 21st league title with just five matches to go.

Ottmar Hitzfeld's men, who beat Borussia Dortmund 5-0 on Sunday, had a poor first half despite the return of France international Franck Ribery who had been rested at the weekend.

However Ribery, like the whole of the Bayern team, did not play up to the usual high standard against more focused and motivated opponents.

Eintracht went ahead after a superb move which concluded with a Benjamin Koehler header who made the most of both Brazilian Lucio and Frenchman Willy Sagnol failing to mark him.

Frankfurt almost went two goals to the good before the break but Ioannis Amanatidis failed to find the target though Bayern's

defence, and Michael Rensing who replaced number one keeper Oliver Kahn, had been put on the backfoot.

Bayern looked to have more stability in the second half when Lukas Podolski came on and they equalised with half an hour to go from a header by Belgian international defender Daniel Van Buyten.

Frankfurt were under a great deal of pressure in their goalmouth but Rensing made some good saves.

Ribery went off midway through the half but then on it was all Bayern as Italian World Cup winning striker Toni got two more goals, for his 19th of the season, to seal what might prove to be a crucial victory in the season run-in.

Hitzfeld said afterwards: "We had a lot of luck today because Frankfurt could have led 2-0 and perhaps even deserved to win this

match but we came back well after the break."

More good news for Bayern was that Borussia Dortmund, whom they face in Saturday's German Cup final, had a major setback in losing 3-1 at home to Hannover.

On Tuesday, second-placed Werder Bremen won 2-1 at Hansa Rostock, three days after thrashing third-placed Schalke 04 5-1.

Germany international Torsten Frings opened the scoring with a 57th minute shot for his first league goal since November 2006 but Rostock drew level in the 76th minute through Sebastian Haegele.

Bremen got the winner with eight minutes to go however. A penalty kick was saved by the Rostock keeper but the ball fell nicely to Ivan Klasnic who made no mistake with the rebound.

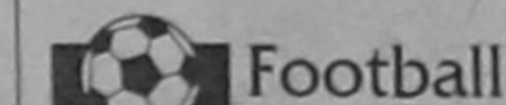
Schalke showed their fighting spirit with a 5-1 win over lowly Energie Cottbus, including four goals from Kevin Kuranyi.

It was hard to say if the Ruhr club had benefited from the axing of coach Mirko Slomka, and the fielding of two interim coaches, or whether it was merely the poor showing of Cottbus.

Fourth-placed Hamburg could only get one point following their goalless draw at Hertha Berlin but would have won if Ivica Olic had not messed up his penalty kick.

TOP SIX									
German football league table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Bayern Munich	29	18	9	2	55	17	63		
Werder Bremen	29	16	5	8	62	41	53		
Schalke 04	29	14	9	6	47	31	51		
Hamburg	29	12	12	5	37	21	48		
VfB Stuttgart	29	15	3	11	48	43	48		
Bayern Leverkusen	29	14	5	10	50	31	47		

Hicks steps up Parry attack



AFP, London

Liverpool co-owner Tom Hicks stepped up his attack on Rick Parry on Thursday, the Texan tycoon branding the chief executive's reign at Anfield as "a disaster".

Hicks also took a fresh swipe at George Gillett, warning his co-owner that the stalemate over the club's future will continue until he agrees to sell his stake.

And he said it had been Gillett and not him who had orchestrated the meeting with Jurgen Klinsmann in New York last year which undermined Reds manager Rafael Benitez.

Hicks has demanded Parry's resignation and vowed that his top priority if Gillett were to sell to him would be to offer Benitez a one-year extension to his current deal.

In a wide-ranging interview with Sky Sports News he also revealed that he plans to rid the club of all debt by heading up a group of financial backers willing to invest in the club.

Hicks blamed Parry for Liverpool's failure to compete commercially with their Premier League rivals.

"Look at what's happened under Rick's leadership. It has been a disaster," claimed Hicks.

"We have fallen so far behind the other leading clubs. We should have the stadium built three or four years ago. We have two or three major sponsors when we should have 12 or 15."

"We are not doing anything in Asia, the way that Manchester United and Barcelona are, and we have a tremendous number of fans in Asia."

"We have still got the top brand

in the world of football but that's no good if you don't know how to commercialise it."

"Rick needs to resign from Liverpool FC. He has put his heart into it but it is time for a change. You have to be able to work with the manager and Rick has proved he can't do that."

"At the first meeting we had with Rafa he talked of the number of players he had missed out on because he (Parry) was too slow. Too many times nothing happens."

Turning to his relationship with Benitez, Hicks said: "If I were to buy George out the first thing I would do is offer Rafa a one-year extension to make sure he is going to be here up to when we get the stadium."

"Hopefully we could have some success and then extend him again."

"I think we will continue to have success. I think Rafa has unique skills, he motivates the team and we have some great players who are learning how to play with each other."

Hicks and Gillett took over the club in February 2007 but Hicks admitted their relationship had now completely broken down.

"At this point it is unworkable," he stated.

"We started this as friends but 50-50 is a difficult business proposition because you cannot do anything without your partner's approval."

"If George doesn't sell - because I am not going to sell - I guess we stay in this position that we are in."

"I am planning to make him a very attractive offer. If I had a majority on it (ownership of Liverpool) I could put more capital in."

"My goal is take all the debt off the club except the working capital needed and get the permanent financing totally in place for the stadium."

Players risk trial by tape

AFP, Vienna

Referees at Euro 2008 will have the power to discipline a player for faking injury after a match with the use of video evidence if the original incident went unnoticed.

"Simulations aimed at deceiving the referee will be punished by a yellow card for anti-sporting behaviour," UEFA emphasised at a seminar for the dozen men in black officiating at Euro 2008.

"Those which aren't picked up by the referee during the game can be sanctioned later by the disciplinary authorities," European football's governing body added.

UEFA has reminded Euro 2008 referees that "any actions using excessive force, including the illegal use of arms or elbows" must be dealt with by a red card.

"Players must feel secure," UEFA stressed.

UEFA is also putting the accent on respect from players for any decision taken by a referee.

"Players involved in a collective appeal must realise that the key members of the appeal, including those who run up to join in, will be given yellow cards."

Managers are reminded to behave responsibly and that any over the top criticism of the referee will be dealt with accordingly.

Carlos out for season

AFP, Istanbul

Fenerbahce's Brazil defender Roberto Carlos is set to miss the rest of the season as he continues his recovery from an injury suffered in February.

The former Real Madrid star picked up a knock to his shin in his Turkish side's Champions League game against Sevilla, and is now receiving treatment in Brazil.

A statement on Fenerbahce's website on Thursday reported: "The treatment for his injury will continue for the rest of the season."

According to press reports here Carlos, who is being treated by medical staff at another of his former clubs, Palmeiras, will not regain full fitness for at least three months.

ITALIAN CUP Inter held, Roma win

AFP, Rome

Serie A title rivals Inter Milan and AS Roma face tough away ties in their Italian Cup second leg matches after Inter were held 0-0 by Lazio and Roma beat Catania 1-0.

Inter fielded mainly a second string side against Lazio in a match that featured little of note from either side, though the hosts main concern will be the exit in the 38th minute of veteran Portuguese star Luis Figo.

AS Roma had squeezed out a 1-0 win at home to Catania in the afternoon match, with talisman Francesco Totti scoring the only goal in the 47th minute.

The match had offered little in the first-half with Roma - fielding effectively a second string side - going closest through Cincinno.

However, Totti, who crucially missed both quarterfinal legs of the Champions League clash with Manchester United which Roma lost, ensured the capital side travel to Sicily for the second leg with a goal two minutes into the second-half as he lashed in a shot from the right.

"The fans don't like the fact that we borrowed a lot of money to buy the club but I will fix that."

Hicks then ruled out any chance of Dubai International Capital (DIC) taking control at Anfield.

"I did talk to Dubai about being a 49 per cent partner but it just didn't work out. They didn't share the same vision I have and I didn't think they could become minority partners. I am not going to have any more 50-50 partners."

On the infamous meeting in New York last year about Klinsmann becoming manager Hicks added: "George became good friends with him (Klinsmann) a year ago."

"I got this call from George out of the blue in which he says 'have your people do their research on Klinsmann'. He and Rick set up the meeting in New York. I did go to the meeting along with my son Tom."

"Rick Parry had already met with Jurgen alone for a couple of hours when we arrived. We all then spoke to him for another four hours."

"Afterwards I told the truth to a reporter who asked the question and suddenly it is 'Tom Hicks tried to get Jurgen Klinsmann'."

"George initiated it but we all participated."

Hicks admitted it was frustrating that his unpopularity with Liverpool fans has prevented him from bringing his whole family to Anfield to watch matches.

"My family loves Liverpool. The sad thing is that right now we can't go there as a family until we get this thing sorted out."

Juve boost UCL hopes

INTERNET, undated



Juventus sailed to an easy 3-0 victory over Parma on Wednesday evening to consolidate third place in the Serie A table.

David Trezeguet put the Bianconeri ahead in the 16th minute before Raffaele Palladino doubled their advantage on the half-hour mark.

Parma's hopes of getting back in the game were crushed when midfielder Stefano Morone headed into his own net with 13 minutes remaining.

The Gialloblu's miserable night was completed a minute later when veteran defender Fernando Couto sent off for a second yellow card.

The outcome sees Juve climb seven points clear of fourth-place Fiorentina with five games remaining.

The encounter at Turin's Olympic Stadium should have been played last month but was rescheduled following the death of a Parma fan who was on his way to the stadium to watch the match.

Claudio Ranieri's men went into the game in a buoyant mood following last weekend's 3-2 triumph over AC Milan.

But it was Parma that had the first chance of the game in the

opening minute with Couto's powerful header going wide.

Hasan Salihandzic, who scored a brace last weekend against Milan, replied with a flying header from Alessandro Del Piero's free-kick which went just wide of the far post.

The hosts continued to surge forward and should have broken the deadlock in the 10th minute.

Trezeguet latched onto Christian Molinaro's cross but his header went off target. Juve efforts finally paid off with Trezeguet taking advantage of confusion inside the Parma area following a corner kick to fire past Parma goalkeeper Luca Bucci.

Parma fans called for offside against the Frenchman but to no avail.

The visitors struggled to get past Juve well-organized defense as Juve continued to dominate.

Bucci was called into action to

TOP SIX									
Italian football league table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):									
Inter Milan	33	22	9	2	61	21	75		
Roma	33	21	8	4	61	33	71		
Juventus	33	18	10	5	59	30	64		
Fiorentina	33	16	8	9	47	34	56		
AC Milan	33	14	10	9	50	31	52		
Sampdoria	33	15	7	11	46	38	52		

EURO 2008 BRIEFS

AFP, Vienna

The 2008 European football championship in brief:

RIISING TO THE OCCASION
Fans with a little extra cash can watch games during the Euro while enjoying one of Vienna's most famous sights. An event organiser plans to equip several gondolas on the Riesenrad, the capital's 111-year-old ferris wheel, with television screens. After yelling themselves hoarse, guests will then be able to enjoy a quiet dinner in the revolving ferris wheel for an evening that is sure to please both Mister and Madam.

EXCLUSIVE
VIP tickets for the championship are still available, but hurry. Ninety-eight per cent have already been sold and the remaining seats range from 2,000 euros (3,191 dollars) for the quarterfinals to 8,000 euros for the final. For that price, you'll get the presidential box and luxurious catering. But at 90 euros per

minute, you'd better not be late.

SURVIVOR

Reality TV has finally caught up with the Euro. In a new show called "Das Match" (The Match), 20 Austrian personalities are having their footballing skills -- and will -- tested by former national manager Hans Krankl during a rigorous one-week football training camp. No sweets, no cigarettes, no alcohol and no injuries: the rules are simple. At the end of the week, three of these aspiring Ronaldinhos will be voted off. The lucky 17 will then face their biggest test: a match on June 5 against the finalists of a similar show in Switzerland.

SAINT CRISTIANO
Players cross themselves when they enter the pitch, fans pray for victory and stars are treated like gods. Is football the new religion? That is the question posed by a new exhibit at Vienna's Dommuseum due to open on May 21. On display: trophies alongside communion cups, relics mixed in with fan memorabilia. Football brings people

save Antonio Nocerinos right-footed strike on target. It didn't take long for Juve to extend their lead as Palladino got past defender Damiano Zenoni before firing a right-footed strike into the back of the net.

Parma should have reduced the deficit before the break but Bernardo Corradis effort from the edge of the area proved an easy catch for goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

The Ducale club showed more desire after the re-start but suffered a setback soon after with Corradi forced to leave the pitch through injury.

In the 53rd minute, Nocerino's central right-footed strike warned the hands of Bucci while at the other end Reginaldos header was off target.

With 18 minutes remaining Pavel Nedved almost made it 3-0 with his a powerful strike from the edge of the area that fizzed wide off Bucci's far post.

Parma could not withstand the pressure any longer, conceding the third goal of the evening soon after.

Morrone's attempt at a headed clearance from Tiagos cross stunned Bucci and ended up beating the Parma keeper.

The Gialloblu struggled with their numerical inferiority once Couto was sent off and Juve held on without any scares.

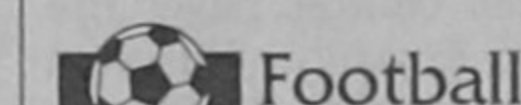
The result leaves Parma just one point clear of the drop zone.

together like religion used to, the museum says. Is it a coincidence the Euro final will be played on a Sunday?

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE #1
Crash courses in Spanish and Russian are the new craze in the northern Austrian province of Tirol. Local businesses, keen to bank in on the hordes of fans who will be flocking to Innsbruck during the championship are enrolling in droves in language courses. Swedish fans, whose team will be playing in the Tirolean city, will probably have to resort to English however to be understood.

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE #2
The Austrian Red Cross has published a medical vocabulary booklet in 12 languages to help rescue services communicate with fans during the competition. English and the languages of all participating teams are included in the booklet, except Romanian and Swedish. German volunteers might also need a dictionary to understand their heavily-accented Austrian and Swiss counterparts.

PSG ride on Pauleta



AFP, Paris

Former Portuguese international striker Pedro Pauleta saved ailing French football giants once again on Wednesday as he came off the bench to score the only goal in a 1-0 win and end lower league side Carquefou's dreams of French Cup glory.

The 34-year-old marksman has been the standout player for the Parisian outfit this season - which hasn't been hard as they fight against relegation - and his goal gives them hopes of at least achieving a cup double this term, having won the League Coupe earlier this season.

PSG lived dangerously though after establishing their lead and Carquefou should have levelled four minutes from time but somehow PSG keeper Jerome Alonzo blocked the ball at close range three times.

Whilst Carquefou may feel hard done by as they certainly penetrated the PSG area on several occasions, the team made up of students, bankers and even a barman can rest

on their laurels having eliminated Marseille in the previous round and have earned around 600,000 euros for their exploits - their budget for this season was only 500,000.

Pauleta, though, rested determined that the Cup was a distraction.

"Cup matches are very difficult to play and to score in," said Pauleta. "Staying in the top division remains the priority, and its good for the morale."

Bordeaux's hopes of the domestic double came crashing to earth earlier on Wednesday when they lost to Second Division Sedan - finalists of the competition in 2005 - on penalties after the match finished 0-0 following extra-time.