

Dutch thump Ukraine

AFP, Rotterdam
Liverpool pair Dirk Kuyt and Ryan Babel were both on target as the Netherlands beat Ukraine 3-0 in a Euro 2008 warm-up match here on Saturday.

The Dutch shrugged off the absence of injured Robin van Persie and Mario Melchior, as well as rested Real Madrid stars Ruud van Nistelrooy and Arjen Robben, to score an important win ahead of the finals where they have been drawn against world champions Italy, France and Romania.

Marco van Basten's side were also without goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar who will not join up with the squad until Monday following his Champions League penalty shoot-out heroics with Manchester United in Moscow last week.

"We played very well even if Ukraine didn't put in a good performance," said van Basten.

"I saw some good football, some good combinations and great motivation. I have a lot of possibilities in my squad and with some positions it will be a difficult choice."

"I have a lot to think about. At centre forward, my first choice is Ruud van Nistelrooy but Klaas-Jan Huntelaar had a good game tonight and scored."

The Ukrainians mounted little in the way of a challenge and the Dutch were deservedly in front after 24 minutes when Kuyt headed in a cross from Giovanni van Bronckhorst.

In the 37th minute, Klas-Jan Huntelaar was set-up by Rafael Van der Vaart to score his seventh goal in 12 international to make it 2-0.

Van der Vaart was also influential in the creation of the third goal, supplying the crucial pass for Babel to score in the 64th minute.

The Netherlands will face Denmark in Eindhoven on Thursday before facing Wales in their last warm-up here next Sunday.

Greece suffer setback

AFP, Budapest
Defending European champions Greece slumped to a 3-2 defeat to Hungary on Saturday, just two weeks before the Euro 2008 tournament gets underway in Switzerland and Austria.

The result was a setback for the Greeks but was a convincing start for new Hungary coach, Dutchman Erwin Koeman, as he engineered a first win for his side over the Greeks since 1987.

Ioannis Amanatidis had given the Greeks the lead in the 45th minute only for Balazs Dzsudszaks to level for the Hungarians, who haven't qualified for Euro 2008, two minutes after the interval.

Roland Juhasz and Krisztian Vadocz then scored twice in the space of four minutes to give Hungary a 3-1 lead with Nikos Liberopoulos pulling back a consolation in the last minute for Greece.

Switzerland see off Slovakia

AFP, Lugano
Switzerland enjoyed a 2-0 friendly win over Slovakia on Saturday, just two weeks before the Euro 2008 championships, which they are co-hosting get underway.

Midfielder Valon Behrami opened the scoring in the 56th minute before he then turned provider seven minutes later setting up the second goal for veteran striker Alex Frei.

Captain Frei is now just one international goal away from the record of 34 set by Kubilay Turkulmaz.

He could equalise the record, or even beat it next Friday in St Gallen during the last warm-up match for the Swiss, this time against Liechtenstein.

ITALIAN CUP Roma gain revenge

AFP, Rome

AS Roma retained the Italian Cup after a 2-1 victory over Champions Inter Milan at the Stadio Olimpico here on Saturday to gain revenge for their defeat in the Serie A title race.

Goals from French centre-back Philippe Mexes and Italy midfielder Simone Perrotta sealed a ninth cup success, making them the most successful team in Italian cup history, alongside Juventus.

Inter substitute Vitor Pele scored a goal that even his more illustrious namesake -- the Brazilian legend who won three World Cups -- would have been proud of with a stunning 30-yard volley into the top corner that left Roma's Brazilian goalkeeper Doni rooted to the spot.

The two sides have contested the last four cup finals and Roma squared the recent mini-series following Inter's victories in 2005 and 2006.

Despite missing the game injured, Roma club captain Francesco Totti went up to receive the silverware from Italy president Giorgio Napolitano.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti said he was happy to win but that the result of one match shouldn't change the way people view a season as a whole.

"Lifting the cup is of little importance in the grander scheme of things, we need to give more merit to the way of working over the whole season," he said.

"If you look at the results we've had, we've won a lot of matches this season and not many fewer than the top European teams."

"We've done well and all the while tried to play football the right way."

"I told the lads before the game that they've had a great season and they can make it really special."

The defeat, which could be Inter coach Roberto Mancini's last in charge of the nerazzurri if Italian press reports are to be believed, denied him an incredible 11th cup success as a player and coach.

Roma were clearly the more hyped of the teams from the off as they looked to make up for last and Austria.

weekend's Scudetto disappointment.

Inter had the first shot on target through Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic but most of the action happened at the other end of the field.

French winger Ludovic Giuly was wildly off target when well placed and Perrotta had a shot race.



Roma midfielder Simone Perrotta celebrates after scoring the second goal against Inter Milan during their Italian Cup final at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday.

blocked by Romanian centre-back Cristian Chivu.

But Roma took the lead on 35 minutes through a clever corner routine that caught Inter napping.

Chile midfielder David Pizarro crossed to the near post and Mexes timed his run perfectly before flicking the ball into the roof of the net.

At this point Inter -- who were being cheered on by just a few thousand of their fans, leaving an entire end almost empty in the stadium -- seemed barely interested.

And they fell two behind just after the restart as Perrotta ran at

the heart of a defence that was backing off and played a one-two with Montenegro striker Mirko Vucinic before slotting into an empty goal with Inter's veteran second-choice goalkeeper Francesco Toldo drawn out of position.

Inter were furious as they thought their Brazilian midfielder

was fouled in the build up.

That finally sparked them into life and Portuguese midfielder Pele's thunderbolt got them right back in the match.

Inter almost equalised moments later but Argentine centre-back Nicolas Burdissio's header came back off the post.

Inter threw everything but the kitchen sink at Roma after that but created nothing to suggest they might score. Tellingly, though, their players hardly looked upset at the finish even sharing jokes with the Roma players.

Having won four league titles at Ajax, as well as the Champions and the UEFA Cup -- in 1992 -- two barren years in Serie A forced a career rethink and a move to the English Premiership.

But with ambitious Fulham, not Manchester United, who had already expressed interest.

However, Sir Alex Ferguson eventually got his man in 2005 after several years trying to find a long-term replacement for Danish great Peter Schmeichel.

Even if he had already earned veteran status by then at 34, Van der Sar has since repaid the faith of the Old Trafford laird by contributing manfully to back-to-back domestic titles and his Moscow exploits mean he can henceforth hope to be spoken of in the same breath as Schmeichel himself.

A decade ago, Van der Sar scored a penalty in a league game for Ajax and, having emulated Schmeichel's United vintage, he will now seek to equal the feat of the 1988 class headed by current coach Marco Van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard.

And if it comes to yet another penalty showdown, then so be it.

He and his Dutch teammates are not lacking in experience in that regard.

Kaka battles for fitness

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian striker Kaka, who has had an operation on his left knee, left hospital here on Saturday.

The reigning FIFA World Player of the Year will be recuperating from surgery in Sao Paulo for about two weeks, said the Brazilian squad doctor Jose Luiz Runco.

Runco added Kaka would miss friendly matches against Canada on May 31 and Venezuela on June 6.

But by not giving an exact date for his return, Kaka could be available for South American World Cup qualifiers against Paraguay on June 15 in Asuncion and against Argentina in Belo Horizonte, in the south east of Brazil, on June 18.

Kahn in Kolkata

PTI, Kolkata

Famous German soccer team Bayern Munich arrived in Kolkata by a special Lufthansa flight from Indonesia.

Upon arrival at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, the team members were received by IFA president S B Ganguly, Secretary Utpal Ganguly, AIFA vice-president Subrata Dutta.

A large number of media persons thronged the airport to cover the arrival of the famous European football team who are going to play an exhibition match against Mohun Bagan, Asia's oldest football team, on Tuesday.

Nearly 90,000 tickets for the match on Tuesday have already been sold as it would be the farewell match for ace German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn.

The enthusiasm among media persons and photographers were palpable with all eyes on Kahn. Cameramen blazed their flashbulbs as he dressed in a black coat and dark sunglasses emerged from the airport lounge, waving.

After some refreshments at the airport's VIP lounge, they were led out of the airport's VIP gate and the team headed for the team hotel in buses under heavy security.

Terry haunted by memory

AFP, London

John Terry, whose penalty miss cost Chelsea the chance of winning the Champions League final, said he will be "haunted forever" by the memory of that moment.

Terry said in an open letter to the fans published on the club's website he had been sleeping very badly and, at some level, was hoping it was all just a bad dream.

He slipped as he was about to take the spot kick, bringing out United's 6-5 penalty shoot-out victory in Moscow after the match had finished at 1-1 following extra time.

Had Terry converted, it would have been the winning penalty but then Manchester United keeper Edwin Van der Sar saved from Nicolas Anelka to end Chelsea's dreams.

Addressing the club's fans, players and employees, Terry wrote: "I am so sorry for missing the penalty and denying you the fans, my teammates, family and friends the chance to become European champions."

"Many people have told me I don't need to say that but I feel I need to, that's just me. I have relived that moment every minute since it happened. I have only slept a few hours and wake up every time hoping it's all been a bad dream."

"I have had some amazing support from fans, current and ex-players, family and friends and I need to thank everyone for that. But I am a big man and I take responsibility for us not winning."

"I am and always will be Chelsea through and through. I will give my all on and off the pitch to win this trophy as a player and one day as a manager. And I am sure we will win it."

"That night in Moscow will haunt me forever and I feel I have let everybody down and this hurts me more than anything I am not ashamed about anything."

"This is a trophy I have tried so hard year after year to win and it was just an uncontrollable reaction. I wear my heart on my sleeve, everybody knows that."

The road to Rome (where the 2009 final takes place) starts here, we have to try and turn this experience into our advantage. I am very proud of how far we have come this season with everything that has gone on. Thank you for all your support for the season."

Terry's statement was released just hours after manager Avram Grant was sacked after less than a season in charge.

Croatia edge Moldova

AFP, Rijeka

Croatia won 1-0 against Moldova at the coastal town of Rijeka on Saturday in their first warm-up match ahead of next month's Euro 2008 finals.

Croatian captain Niko Kovac scored the goal in the 30th minute, shooting home after Ivan Rakitic headed the ball on to him from the right.

The game lacked a competitive edge as both coaches were clearly trying out different combinations.

Chelsea sack Grant

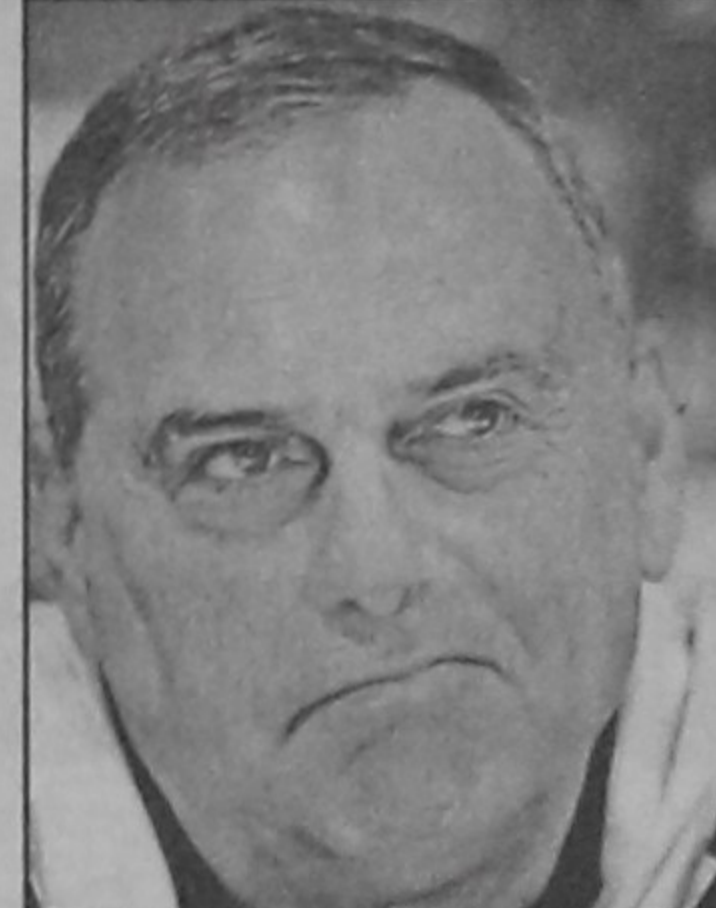
AFP, London

Avram Grant was sacked as manager of Chelsea on Saturday after less than one season in charge and in the immediate aftermath of the club's heartbreaking Champions League final defeat.

Grant's future at the English Premier League giants has attracted fierce speculation almost from the time he inherited the Stamford Bridge reins from Jose Mourinho eight months ago.

And just three days after his side came off second best in a penalty shoot-out to Manchester United in the Champions League final in Moscow the 53-year-old Israeli's tenure is now at an end.

Names in the frame to succeed the Israeli include Barcelona's Frank Rijkaard, Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini, Russia's Dutch boss Guus Hiddink and Manchester City coach, and former England boss, Sven-Goran Eriksson.



AVRAM GRANT

Despite the constant questioning of his position Grant, a close friend of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich, had been credited with leading the club to their first ever Champions League final.

He also overtook their late surge for the league title, taking United down to the final day of the season before they were forced to settle for

second place. The club announced the sacking in a statement on their official website.

"Chelsea Football Club can confirm that Avram Grant has had his contract as manager terminated today (Saturday)," the statement read.

"This follows meetings over the last two days. Everybody at Chelsea FC would like to thank Avram for his contribution since taking over as manager last September."

"We will now be concentrating all our efforts on identifying a new manager for Chelsea and there will be no further comment until that appointment is made."

The futures of Chelsea assistants Steve Clarke and Henk Ten Cate are unclear, but no official word has yet been given on their positions.

Reports in the British press suggest Grant may return to a job upstairs at Stamford Bridge as director of football, a post he held under Mourinho before he was plucked from relative obscurity to occupy one of the hottest seats in football.

A 'really bad' season

AFP, London

Former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has described Chelsea's season as "really bad" and said their campaign could be described as great only by someone with "the philosophy of a loser".

Mourinho, who left the English club in September, made his comments on the day that the man who succeeded him, Avram Grant, was sacked, eight months after he replaced Mourinho at Stamford Bridge.

Mourinho, asked in an interview with The Observer newspaper whether the season had been a good one as depicted by Grant, replied: "That depends on your

philosophy of leadership."

"In my philosophy it was a very bad one because in football 'almost' means defeat and Chelsea almost won the Carling (League) Cup, almost won the Champions League and almost won the Premier League. Almost is nothing."

"After two titles per season for the last three years there were zero titles this season, which in my philosophy means a really bad season. Maybe in the philosophy of a loser this was a great season, which I respect," he said in the interview published on Sunday.

Mourinho admitted to being "very sad" at Chelsea's defeat in Moscow to Manchester United in the Champions League final, adding that the supporters, the board and the players "deserve more".

"I am very sad about what hap-

pened. In the last two years this team lost a Champions League final and a Champions League semi-final on penalties. The supporters deserve more, (the players) and some others deserve happiness. I still think of them as my boys."

However, he added: "I believe that after an empty season new success will come to Chelsea. And I will always be a Chelsea supporter."

Mourinho is being linked with a return to Stamford Bridge alongside names including Frank Rijkaard, Guus Hiddink, Roberto Mancini and Marcello Lippi.

Grant was being linked with a move to Manchester City if Sven-Goran Eriksson is sacked by Thai owner Thaksin Shinawatra.

FRENCH CUP Lyon complete double

AFP, Paris

Lyon completed a memorable first league-cup double on Saturday when they beat Paris Saint Germain 1-0 in the French Cup final to add to their seventh successive championship.

Lyon's fourth French Cup, coming after wins in 1964, 1967 and 1973, was fittingly secured by

Sidney Govou who scored the extra-time winner.

Govou, goalkeeper Gregory Coupet and Brazilian playmaker Juninho are the only three players who have featured in all of Lyon's seven league title campaigns.

Lyon coach Alain Perrin said of those three players afterwards: "This was a great way to pay homage to 'Juni', 'Sid' and Greg who won all seven titles and who might perhaps now leave for other clubs."

And on rumours that he might

be leaving Lyon, Perrin added: "My future? I came to Lyon to stay."

PSG, who won the League Cup this season but only narrowly avoided relegation, were unlucky not to have settled the tie in normal time, hitting the woodwork on two occasions.

Zoumana Camara saw a 10th-minute attempt come off the post before veteran striker Pedro Pauleta, probably playing his last match for the club, thought he had scored with a left-foot drive on the half-hour mark only to see Anthony Revilleire clear the ball off the line.

In first half injury time, defender Sylvain Armand headed the ball from a Jerome Rothen free-kick into the net past Coupet only for the effort to be ruled out for offside.

PSG's luck continued to desert them on the hour mark when Coupet made another important save from Mario Yepes before Kim Kallstrom cleared off the line, via the crossbar, as Camara followed up.

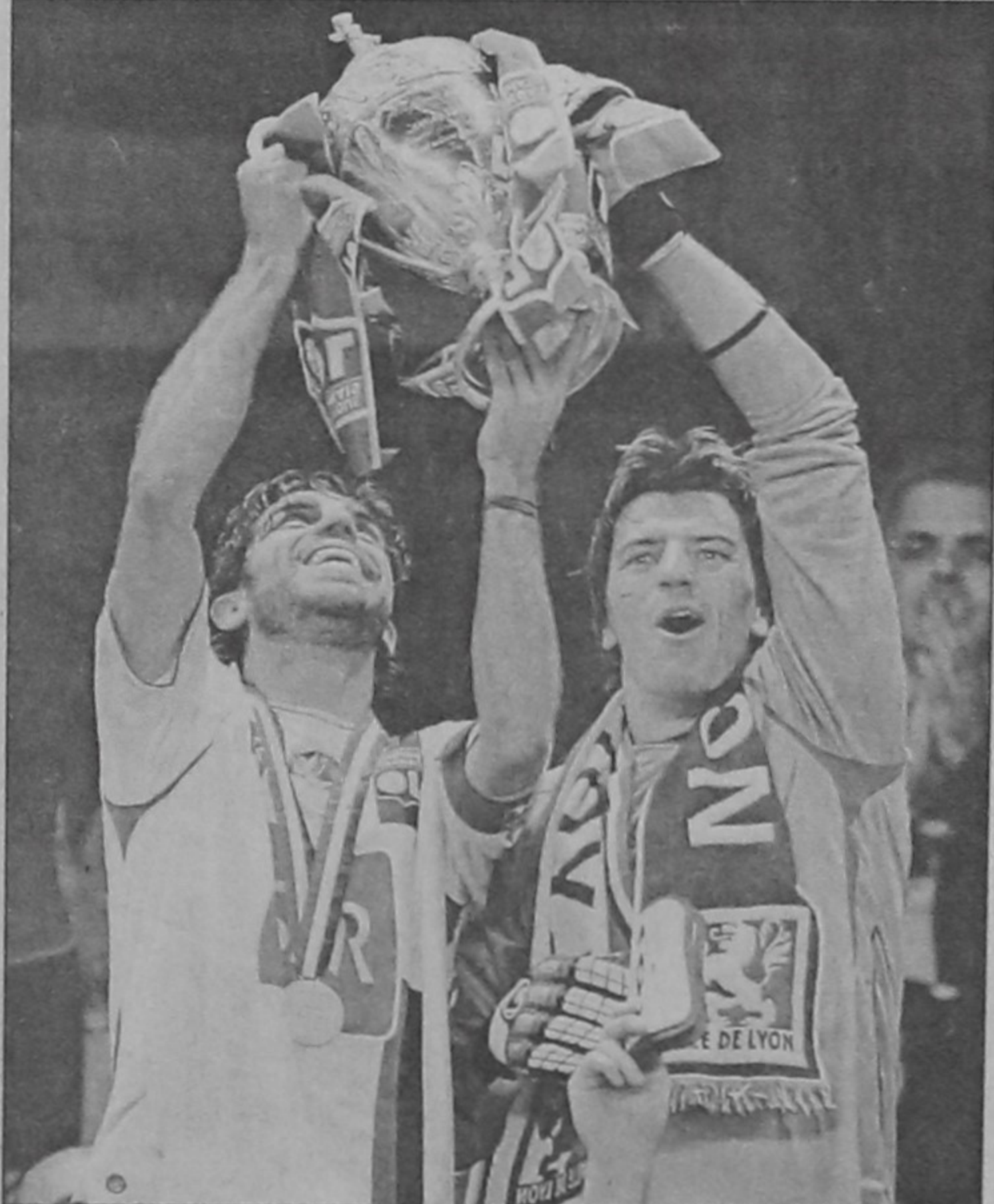
Substitute Bernard Mendy then thought he had won the final for PSG in the fourth minute of injury time at the end of the game only to see his close-range drive superbly saved by the in-form Coupet.

Lyon had gone into the match under a cloud after veteran defender Patrick Muller had left the squad without permission on Friday to join up with the Swiss national team to prepare for Euro 2008.

French international striker Karim Benzema almost scored in the first half after a sweet one-two with Brazilian teammate Fred only for his sharp drive to miss the target.

Substitute Mathieu Bodmer then saw his header midway through the second half cleared off the line by Yepes with keeper Jerome Alonzo well beaten.

Lyon made PSG pay for their misses when Govou scored in the 103rd minute. A cross from Benzema confounded the PSG defence and Govou was the more alert to the ball and fired in from an acute angle past Alonzo.



Lyon captain Juninho (L) and goalkeeper Gregory Coupet hold aloft the trophy after their victory over Paris Saint Germain in their French Cup final at the Stade de France in Paris on Saturday.

Hamilton masters Monaco

AFP, Monaco

Britain Lewis Hamilton won Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix and reignited the scrap for this year's drivers' world championship with a memorable drive for McLaren in a race of treacherous wet and dry conditions.

For the 23-year-old Englishman his first win on the famous Mediterranean street circuit was a dream result in his favourite race.

Hamilton came home three seconds clear of his friend Pole Robert Kubica in a BMW Sauber with Brazilian Felipe Massa third for Ferrari after starting from pole position.

This was the Briton's second win of the season and the sixth of his career.

Australian Mark Webber in a Red Bull was fourth.

Ferrari's defending drivers world champion Kimi Raikkonen of Finland endured a wild race of

accidents and incidents and finished ninth, failing to score a point.

This all left Hamilton on top of the title race again for the first time since the season opening race in Australia.

He has 38 points now with Raikkonen on 35 second and Massa third on 34.

Hamilton made a dazzling start and found a way past Raikkonen going into the first corner Ste Devote on the inside to take second behind Massa.

As rain began to fall steadily, and with Hamilton's teammate Heikki Kovalainen starting from the back of the grid following a pre-race stall, the contest turned into a circus of chaos.

There were incidents and accidents with double world champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso involved twice in collisions and Hamilton himself smashing into the barriers on lap six at Tabac.

His rear right tyre was left hanging as he returned to the pits.

from 15th to the top ten by now but the rain played havoc with the race for several minutes as Alonso, followed by Coulthard and Sebastian Bourdais crashed off into the barriers at Massenet.

Then Raikkonen was given a 'drive-through' penalty because Ferrari had failed to fit his car's tyres properly more than three minutes before the start of the race.

After he had performed his punishment, the running order at the top was Massa followed by Kubica and then Hamilton who had pitted and recovered.

On lap 16, as the field grappled with the wet slippery conditions, Massa spun off and recovered his car at Ste Devote, gifting Kubica the lead in his BMW Sauber.

The Pole stayed there until he had to pit and that put Massa back in front until he pitted after 32 laps.

Hamilton then took over and opened up a commanding advantage.

Amazingly, the German driver Adrian Sutil, who revels in the special conditions of Monaco, was fourth for Force India at this stage.

It was clear Hamilton was in command providing the weather did not intervene again and his lead was so luxurious he could pit after 53 laps and stay out in front when Massa followed suit three laps later.

Massa's second stop also cost him a position as he was passed 'in the pits' by Kubica.

With 17 laps remaining, Nico Rosberg caused the second Safety Car intervention when he lost control in the swimming pool complex and wrecked his car in a massive accident.



His spot-kick stop from Nicolas Anelka crowned Manchester United kings of the continent but Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar might prefer it if penalties do not stand between success and failure for the Netherlands at Euro 2008.

That's because, while last week's shootout win over Chelsea provided the 37-year-old from Voorhout with one of his finest moments, battles of wits from 12 yards have more often than not meant heartache at international level.

Van der Sar, who has won a Dutch record 123 caps, says he may retire from the game when his United contract expires in June 2009, so Euro 2008 will be his last chance of international glory.

But when it comes to being put on the spot the Dutch, champions in 1988, do not have a good recent record.

The Oranje lost to Italy in a semi-final shootout in 2000, having suffered the same fate at the same stage against Brazil in the 1998 World Cup and lost to France in the Euro 96 quarters.

Conversely, it was Van der Sar's save from Olaf Mellberg which

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