

# Schalke coast to win

SOCCERNET



Schalke's caretaker coaching trio made it three wins from three with a rout of Energie Cottbus in the Bundesliga tonight.

Mike Buskens, Youri Mulder and Oliver Reck took temporary charge following the sacking of Fred Rutten three weeks ago and guided Schalke to another convincing win which lifts them to within two points of the top five in the standings.

Christian Pander and Halil Altintop put the hosts in control in the first half, and Jermaine Jones and Kevin Kuranyi added goals after the break.

Cottbus missed the chance to escape the relegation zone and they remain 17th, a point from safety and now with a worse goal difference than rock-bottom Karlsruhe.

Their leaky defence was evident as early as the fourth minute when Pander's left-footed shot from outside the box found the bottom left corner, and soon after only a fine save from Gerhard Tremmel kept out Levan Kobiasvili.

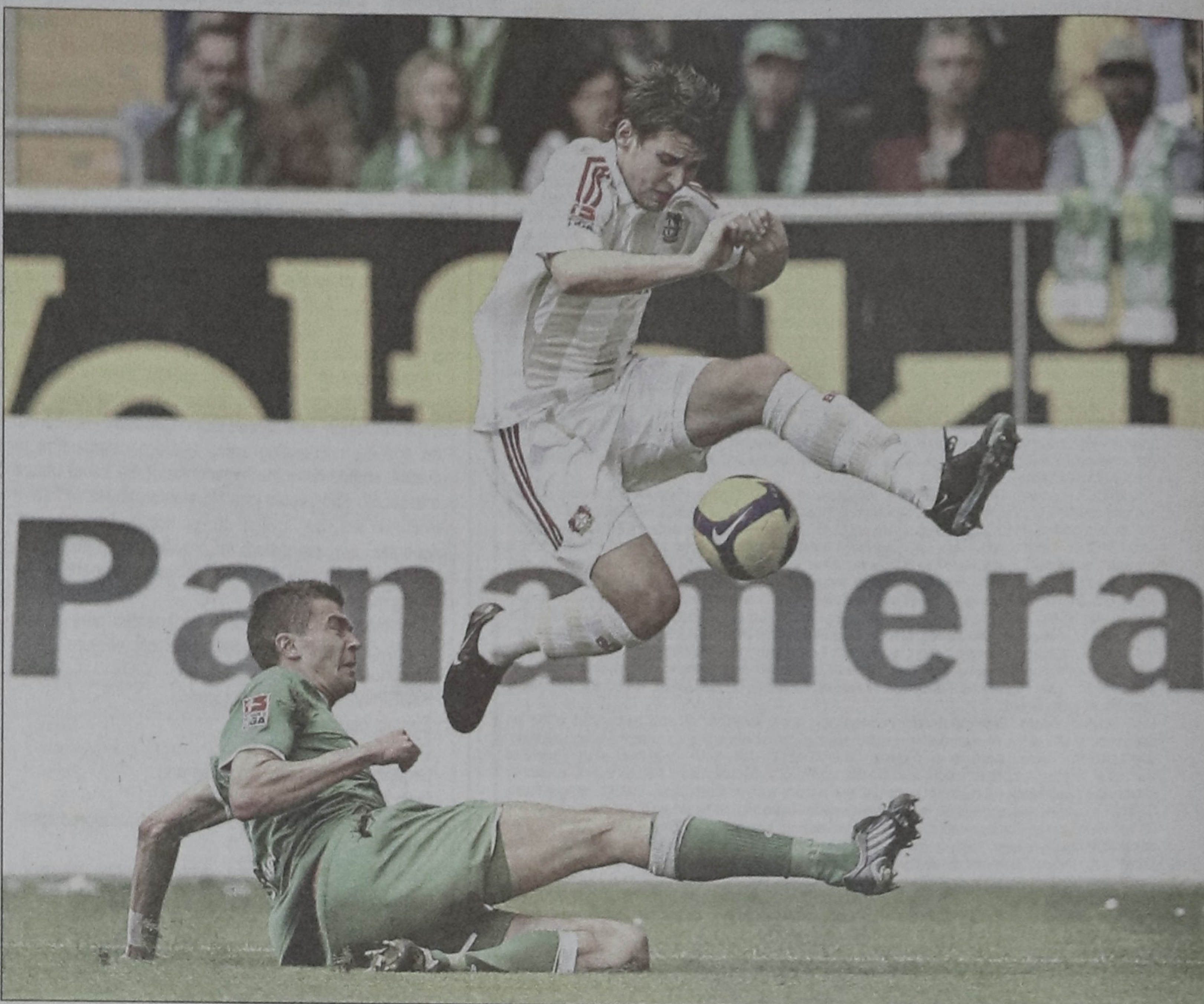
In the 23rd minute Kuranyi laid the ball off on the edge of the box to Altintop, who unleashed a low shot into the bottom right corner to double the lead.

Jefferson Farfan shot wide on the half-hour mark and Tremmel made an excellent low save to deny Vicente Sanchez just before the break.

Sanchez was off-target early in the second half, but Jones made no mistake in the 60th minute when he was put through one on one with Tremmel.

It remained one-way traffic for the rest of the game, save for Cottbus' sole chance when Dimitar Rangelov shot straight at Manuel Neuer with four minutes remaining.

There was still time for Kuranyi to add some gloss to the scoreline, the striker racing clear of the visitors' defence and finishing past Tremmel with aplomb.



Bayer Leverkusen striker Patrick Helmes (R) jumps over a slide-tackle from Wolfsburg defender Jan Simunek during their Bundesliga clash in Wolfsburg on Saturday. Wolfsburg won 2-1.

# It's Ukraine v Germany

INTERNET, undated



Ukrainian football fans on Friday were slowly starting to believe that European silverware might actually return to the former

Soviet republic in the form of the UEFA Cup title. Dynamo Kiev meet Shakhtar Donetsk in an all-Ukrainian semifinal after they eliminated French sides Paris St Germain and Olympique Marseille, respectively, on Thursday.

The German Bundesliga will also have a team in the May 20 decider in Istanbul as SV Hamburg play Werder Bremen in the other semi. Hamburg ousted England's Manchester City in the quarters, and Bremen prevailed over Italian side Udinese.

If the two rivalries weren't big enough, Kiev and Donetsk as well as Hamburg and Bremen will in fact meet four times in total over the next weeks.

National cup semifinals between the sides take place on April 22 in Germany and Ukraine. The UEFA Cup semis are April 30 and May 7. Bremen host Hamburg in the Bundesliga on May 10 while Kiev and Donetsk clash in the Ukrainian league on May 26.

"No matter what happens, for the first time ever we will have a Ukrainian side in a European final," said veteran Dynamo Kyiv supporter Mark

Zahorodko. "We have been waiting for this a long time."

Until Thursday, the best performance by a Ukrainian club in European competition after the Soviet breakup was in 1999 when Dynamo led by a youthful Andriy Shevchenko managed a Champions League semi-final.

Dynamo won the European Cup Winners' Cup as a Soviet Union team in 1975 and 1986.

"I think we could be seeing a beginning of a return of our days of greatness," said Dynamo owner Hryhory Surkis, in an Inter television interview. "But we have much work before us."

In keeping with a deeply-set Ukrainian sports tradition of never openly admitting things are going well, web comments often were restrained.

"Great, now we have to play Dynamo five (sic) times in three (sic) weeks," complained AntiEvis, a pro-Shakhtar contributor on the authoritative Dynamomania.com web site. "For sure, it's going to a war."

But Shakhtar owner Rinat Akhmetov told his club's website: "It is better to have a problem like this, than if there were no Ukrainian teams there (in the semifinal) at all."

Professional Ukrainian football commentators were cautious as they looked ahead to the final against Hamburg or Bremen.

"The way to Istanbul is now open," wrote long-time Ukraine football observer Evhen Sidash. "But to get the Cup, we must fight."

Hamburg have lifted the Cup Winners' and Champions Cup in the past, but their last

trophy is a German cup from 1987. Now they have a treble in sight, though, as apart from the German and UEFA Cup they are also third in the league just three points off the top.

Bremen are stranded in the Bundesliga midfield but have been more successful than Hamburg in recent years, a German league and cup double in 2004 their latest big success. They also have a Cup Winners' Cup trophy from 1992.

Hamburg sports director Dietmar Beiersdorfer named the multiple meetings with northern rivals Bremen "strange" but agreed with Bremen sports director Klaus Allofs that the games are "great for us fans."

His coach Martin Jol warned ahead of what promises tense and tight matches that "we must win a trophy."

It is the first time in the UEFA Cup that two teams from one country meet in one semi-final and two teams from another in the other tie.

However, the German Bundesliga once provided all four semi-finalists, in 1980, with Eintracht Frankfurt eventually lifting the trophy.

The Kiev vs Donetsk meeting is the second all-Ukrainian tie in Europe, following a Kiev vs Metalist Kharkiv meeting in the round of 16.

Bundesliga teams, by contrast, have met on 16 previous occasions, and there were also 17 matches between teams from East and West Germany. The last German UEFA Cup winners were Schalke 04 in 1997 and the last finalists Borussia Dortmund in 2002.

# Walcott ready to learn

Football

AFP, London

As a season of fluctuating fortunes and injury woes approaches a thrilling climax, Arsenal winger Theo Walcott has begun to reflect on what has been a steep learning curve.

With Arsenal struggling for form over the first four months of the season, the England flier was bedeviled by a persistent injury to his shoulder.

No sooner had it been jarred by a tackle or collision than it popped out and would have to be slipped back into the socket by Walcott himself, causing untold agony.

The injury provided a fitting metaphor for Arsenal's autumn, when they were serene one moment and excruciating the next, apparently incapable of consistency.

But that is now little more than a bad memory.

The north Londoners have swaggered into the Champions League semifinals and have almost certainly rubber-stamped their participation in next season's competition thanks to an 18-game unbeaten league run.

Fittingly, Walcott's troublesome right shoulder has also settled.

The 20-year-old underwent surgery last November after suffering a serious dislocation while training with England and has reported no ill effects since returning in March.

It is sweet relief for Walcott, who had struggled to remember a time when he did not have to play through the pain barrier.

Even his first Arsenal goal, in the 2007 League Cup final against Chelsea, was tinged by agony.

"I had a massive strapping on that day and it still popped out a few times," he recalled.

"I hid it quite well, but the pain was excruciating."

"The right shoulder was always the worst because it would pop out and pop back in - you know, like Mel Gibson in 'Lethal Weapon'."

It was not simply Walcott's muscles and joints that were hardened during his convalescence.

He returned a tougher character - less easily deterred and, in response to Wenger's urgings, more eager to grasp responsibility with Arsenal.

The French manager reaped the rewards when he was forced to ask four players under the age of 22 - including Walcott - to take penalties in the cauldron of Roma's Stadio

Olimpico, in the Champions League first knockout round. None missed.

"I'd never experienced a shoot-out before as a player," Walcott said. "I'm normally watching at home and want to see it go to penalties for the excitement."

"As a player, taking a penalty like that is hard. You walk up to take the kick and it's like walking in slow-motion: your throat goes dry, you can't hear anything."

"It was such a relief for me to see it go in in Rome, but it showed how much strength of character we've got because we came through with young players."



THEO WALCOTT

FORMULA ONE

## Vettel claims pole in China

INTERNET, undated

Sebastian Vettel claimed the first pole position for the Red Bull team at the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix on Saturday as Brawn GP were brought back to earth. The German Vettel, 21, clocked 1 minute 36.184 seconds for the 5.451-kilometre lap on the Shanghai International Circuit in a dramatic qualifying session.

Former world champion Fernando Alonso impressed with second place in a Renault in 1:36.381, with Australian Mark Webber third on the grid for Sunday's race in 1:36.466 minutes.

Red Bull got their first pole in their fifth F1 season. Vettel has his second career pole, the first coming at the 2008 Italian GP which he also won to become the youngest race winner, then at the Toro Rosso team.

Jenson Button, who had won the first two season races from pole, had to be content with fifth place in the day in 1:36.532 in the Brawn, with Brazilian teammate Rubens Barrichello fourth in 1:36.493 minutes.

Button leads the championship with 15 points from his wins in Australia and Malaysia ahead of Barrichello (10) going into Sunday's 56-lap race.

## Gerets turns down Belgium

AFP, Brussels

Marseille's Belgian coach Eric Gerets has turned down the chance to become the coach of his country's national team, the Belgian Football Federation (URBSFA) revealed on Friday.

The president of the federation's technical committee "contacted Mr Eric Gerets with regard to the appointment of a new national team coach", according to a statement from the URBSFA.

"Mr Gerets declared himself honoured to have been considered for a role which he cannot take up in the immediate future, but remains open to proposals in the medium to long term," the statement added.

Gerets, 54, "thanked the federation for the interest in him they had shown", the brief statement concluded.

Belgium are looking for a successor to 55-year-old Rene Vandereycken, who was sacked at the beginning of the month after a string of poor results in Belgium's World Cup 2010 qualifying campaign.

"I've always said that to be coach of your own country is an honour," said Gerets last week. "I haven't changed my opinion. It would be ideal when it is possible for everyone at the right time."

# 'We owe Guus a trophy'

Football

AFP, London

Michael Essien has revealed the prospect of delivering silverware for temporary manager Guus Hiddink is proving a major incentive for the Chelsea squad.

Ghana midfielder Essien is now fully recovered after a seven-month lay-off with a knee injury and ready to play a full part in his club's bid for honours.

When Hiddink took charge following Luiz Felipe Scolari's dismissal in February, Chelsea were out of form and in danger of falling out of the top four of the Premier League.

But the arrival of the Dutchman - together with Essien's return to fitness - has helped transform the club's season with Chelsea not yet out of the title race and facing a Champions League semi-final against Barcelona.

With Hiddink set to return to his full-time job as coach of the Russian national team at the end of the season, Essien admits the Blues squad would hate to see the manager leave empty-handed.

"Guus has come in and done a great job," the midfielder said.

"He has his own style of managing this team, how he talks to his players, and so far things are going well for us. We'll see what happens next. "Everybody knows what a

good manager he is. He knows how to talk to players and he has his own style which is very different to the others I've played for here.

"Hopefully we can win something for him before he leaves. But we'll see what happens. We have some really big games coming up that



MICHAEL ESSIEN

aren't going to be easy. We'll just have to try our best to win those games."

Essien, 26, damaged knee ligaments whilst on international duty last September but has made an immediate impact since coming back - especially in the Champions League quarterfinal against Liverpool when he marked Reds skipper Steven Gerrard out of the game.

While the player admits his spell on the sidelines was frustrating, he believes he is

now stronger than ever ahead of the climax to the campaign.

He added: "While I was injured I watched all the games from home, and in the stadium. All I wanted to do was to get myself fit and come back and join the team."

"Now I think the knee is stronger. It's feels perfectly normal. There's no pain in there now. Maybe I'm more hungry for the coming games now. It was a very long lay-off for me, but I'm happy to be back."

Essien's versatility has already seen him used in several midfield positions by Hiddink but the player himself insists he has no preference where he plays.

And after initially falling foul of referees when he first came to England, he is confident he has now adapted fully to the Premier League and has cleaned up his disciplinary record.

"I don't know where my best position is," he said. "I don't mind working for the team. I'll play anywhere I'm asked to play."

"I'm not a different player. I'm still the same player. When I first came here, I was more physical and the referees got it wrong against me."

"But I've adapted to English football and I don't get the cards I used to do. I do jump in but I try to be fair. I don't take the player as well, which is why I don't get the cards I used to. It came naturally. That's football."

## Lifeline for Viduka

AFP, Newcastle

Mark Viduka could remain at Newcastle beyond the end of the season, manager Alan Shearer has revealed.

Australian international Viduka is set to be involved for the first time in seven weeks when Newcastle travel to Tottenham on Sunday in search of crucial points to boost their Premier League survival bid.

A string of injuries this season have restricted Viduka to just one start and five substitute appearances, well short of the number of games the 33-year-old requires to trigger a 12-month contract extension when his current deal expires in the summer.

It has been widely expected the former Melbourne Knights striker will see out the remainder of his career by returning to Australia in a bid to earn a place in the national squad for next year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

But, intriguingly, interim manager Shearer, who is expected to be confirmed in the role long-term at the end of the season, has refused to rule out the possibility of Viduka staying at St James' Park for the 2009-10 campaign.

He said: "That's something we'd have to look at come the end of the season. I've said to Mark 'look, we want you fit for the remaining games then we'll see what happens after that'."

"It's fair to say Mark probably wouldn't have played again this season if things hadn't changed but just having him available to play some part is great."

## Klinsmann is optimistic

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich coach Jurgen Klinsmann on Friday said he was optimistic the club would retain the league title and that his job was safe.

"Qualifying for the Champions League is mandatory - but of course our target is the title," said Klinsmann ahead of Saturday's meeting with Bielefeld, adding he wanted his men to take maximum points from their remaining seven games even if Ze Roberto and Lukas Podolski will miss the match.

"We think (leaders) Wolfsburg and (third-placed) Hamburg will endure a few slip-ups," Klinsmann forecast as Bayern seek to overhaul Wolfsburg's three-point lead and keep Hamburg, resurgent under Martin Jol, at bay.

Klinsmann has been much criticised amid the recent heavy defeats at Wolfsburg (5-1) and in the Champions League at Barcelona (4-0) but said he had met club officials Thursday to map out next season's plans.

# Kuranyi back in focus

Football

INTERNET, undated

Coach Fred Rutten, general manager Andreas Mueller and club legend Olaf Thon have been axed or quitting Schalke 04 while the man really tipped to leave, striker Kevin Kuranyi, is enjoying a stunning comeback to popularity at the club.

Kuranyi, 27, is even hoping for a return to the German national team from which he walked out during a 2008 World Cup qualifier.

The Bundesliga season has been a difficult one for Schalke as their title dreams soon turned into mediocre mid-table showings.

Fingers were pointed among others at Kuranyi, who came in 2005 from VfB Stuttgart but was never a real fan favourite.

He fell even more out of favour for wasting too many scoring chances and was swiftly linked with a winter break move. However, Mueller, then still in charge, vetoed a move Kuranyi had

seemingly desired himself by saying that "anything is possible."

That did not boost Kuranyi immediately as he found himself on the bench on several occasions.

But while Rutten and Mueller were axed, Kuranyi eventually found the net again, scoring in each of the last two wins against Karlsruhe and Bielefeld.

He now has a season tally of 11, and 51 in total for the club, as Schalke dream of a place in Europe again under the reign of the caretaker trio of Mike Buskens, Youri Mulder and Oliver Reck, with the next game set for Friday night against lowly Energie Cottbus.

"It is always good to contribute to team victories," the Rio de Janeiro-born Kuranyi said modestly. "But we should only think from match to match and then see what is possible."

And while Thon announced on Thursday that he is quitting as advisor to the Schalke board after the season for not being informed of club

decisions in an appropriate way, Kuranyi is considering an extension of his contract which currently runs until 2010.

"Schalke are the first party for talks," he said, dismissing all transfer speculation in summer.

The good showings on the pitch have not only reconciled him with fans and club officials, they have also renewed his desire to wear the Germany jersey again.

Not nominated for the World Cup qualifier with Russia, Kuranyi famously left the tribune at half-time, prompting coach Joachim Loew to announce that Kuranyi won't be picked again under his reign.

Kuranyi, who was frustrated by Loew and about missing the 2006 World Cup, has by now realized he made a mistake said "my biggest wish" is to be recalled.

Loew has not commented on this, but Kuranyi, who scored 19 times in 52 caps, will need to do his share by scoring more Schalke goals.