

Laser pens
bad for
eyesight

INTERNET, Undated

High-powered laser pens can do a lot more harm than just distracting an opposing player, like cause permanent blindness, and the fear is that the trend that's taken hold amongst European soccer fans will make its way to the United States.

Dr. Robert Josephburg, an ophthalmologist and retina specialist at the Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y., has warned Congress that swift action is needed to crack down on the use of the laser pens before serious injury occurs.

Last week, the world's two most famous soccer players, Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, were both targeted by opposition fans during a pair of matches between Real Madrid and Barcelona. Spectators shined the light beams into the eyes of the players, presumably in the hope of distracting them from their performances on the field.

What to WATCH
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
TEN Sports
UEFA Champions League
Juventus v Celtic
Live from 1:45am (Thursday)
TEN Action
UEFA Champions League
PSG v Valencia

Tevez lifts Man City

AFP, Birmingham



Carlos Tevez kept Manchester City's slim hopes of retaining the Premier League title alive as he earned Manchester City a 1-0 victory which left Aston Villa still rooted in the relegation zone on Monday.

Tevez punished Ciaran Clark's calamitous mistake in first-half added time at Villa Park to enable second-placed City to move within 12 points of runaway leaders Manchester United.

It was far from a vintage performance from Roberto Mancini's team, but the victory at least preserved their faint hopes of catching bitter rivals United.

Villa, meanwhile, remain in 18th and were once again left to rue a costly lapse of concentration from one of their players at a key moment.

Their forthcoming matches against fellow strugglers Reading and QPR now

take on even further importance as Paul Lambert's team try to beat the drop.

Villa created their best chance of the first half after 21 minutes when it required a Tevez clearance off the line to keep out Christian Benteke's header from Charles N'Zogbia's corner.

It was a narrow escape for the visitors and they responded almost immediately by registering their first genuine attempt of the game when Jack Rodwell's vicious shot had to be palmed over his crossbar by Brad Guzan.

It was to be Rodwell's final meaningful contribution after he

limped off shortly afterwards to be replaced by Edin Dzeko.

City threatened in the 32nd minute

when a free-kick from James Milner, up against the club he left to join City, evaded the wall, however Guzan was equal to it.

Villa had a fortuitous escape eight minutes before the interval when Yaya Toure and David Silva combined for feeding the onrushing Pablo Zabaleta, yet the captain's arcing shot ricocheted against the inside of the left post before being hooked to safety.

Guzan had to be at his best to thwart the dangerous Tevez, clawing away a curler which looked destined for the top-right corner.

As the clock ticked down in added time, Villa appeared to have survived the onslaught, but then came Clark's moment to forget.

The defender, Villa's last man, received a throw-in but

red in pos-
session. With
Dzeko now upon

him, he elected for a drag-back in a desperate attempt to get himself out of trouble only to slip.

Dzeko charged through before squaring to Tevez who, in typically clinical fashion, sold Guzan with a dummy before slotting past the beleaguered Clark, by now desperately attempting to make amends on the line.

It was ruthless finishing and, although harsh on Villa, they only had themselves to blame - Clark's furious protests for a foul by Dzeko were waved away by referee Mike Dean.

City picked up where they left off in the second half and Dzeko almost increased their lead with a half volley which bounced agonisingly beyond the left post.

Matthew Lowton denied City a certain second in the 55th minute with a clearance off the line to deny Tevez after another weaving run from the Argentina international.

At 1-0, Villa always stood a chance and they continued to battle manfully with a Gabriel Agbonlahor header and crisp Lowton drive both flashing wide.

Denmark suspend Bendtner

AFP, Copenhagen

The Danish football Federation (DBU) have suspended striker Nicklas Bendtner from international football for six months after being arrested for drink driving, they announced on Monday.

The 25-year-old who is currently on loan at Juventus from Arsenal was taken to a police station after being caught driving the wrong way down a street in downtown Copenhagen in the early hours of Sunday morning.

"The DBU have demanded that Nicklas Bendtner take six months off to think over his international future," read a federation statement.

"The DBU respect the rights of all players to have a private life, but we also have certain rules that need to be met by international players in their public behaviour," continued the statement.

Tito recovery most vital

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona president Sandro Rosell stated on Monday the club's most important priority this season is the recovery of coach Tito Vilanova, who is currently receiving treatment for cancer in New York.

"The absolute priority for the club is the recovery of (Tito) Vilanova, everything else is secondary. If we win some titles, great, but if we don't too bad," Rosell told a press conference.

Rosell visited the coach last week and said Vilanova was "very motivated and very implicated in the daily life of the club" adding that "God willing" Vilanova could return for a potential Champions League quarter-final if the team can overturn a 2-0 deficit against AC Milan in their home leg last 16 clash next week.

The four-time European champions are well on their way to a 22nd Spanish title as they hold a commanding 11 point lead on Atletico Madrid but have gone off the boil in recent weeks with defeats against Real Madrid in both the Spanish Cup and league as well as the reverse at the San Siro.

Celtic need a miracle

AFP, Milan



Juventus claim they are not taking the threat of Celtic lightly when the Scottish champions arrive in Turin hoping to pull off a Champions League miracle in their last 16 second leg on Wednesday.

Antonio Conte's side put one foot in the quarterfinals of Europe's premier club competition for the first time since being ousted by Arsenal in 2006 thanks to a 3-0 first leg rout of Neil Lennon's team in Glasgow last month.

While the fallout from that defeat landed mainly at the feet of Nigerian defender Efe Ambrose, who was guilty of errors before all three of Juve's goals, there is no escaping the enormity of the task facing Lennon's men.

The Champions League, however, has produced several shock results over the years, notably Manchester United's comeback against Bayern Munich in the 1999 final and AC Milan's defeat to Liverpool in the 2005 final despite holding a 3-0 half-time lead.

With those in mind, Juventus said "the Bhoys' desire to place a dent in Juve's qualification hopes means Conte is leaving no stone unturned".

That has meant "intensive tactical workouts" with a view to making sure Celtic do not score the early goal which could give the Scots the momentum needed to start working towards causing a huge upset.

Defender Giorgio Chiellini said: "Nothing is in the bag yet. We still have a lot to do and need to approach this game believing that."

While Conte could rest first team

regulars including Stephan Lichsteiner, Claudio Marchisio and Arturo Vidal -- all of whom played in Glasgow but are one yellow card away from suspension -- he is not short on quality.

Conte could welcome back Ghanaian midfielder Kwadwo Asamoah, who should be fresh after missing Friday's 1-1 Serie A draw away to Napoli, as well as French teenager Paul Pogba.

Since joining the Italians for free from Manchester United in the summer, Pogba has shown maturity beyond his years in midfield and scored some stunning goals to boot.

Reports in Italy suggest Conte's usual 3-5-2 formation will be spearheaded by strikers Fabio Quagliarella and Alessandro Matri, with Mirko Vucinic on the bench.

Negredo destroys Celta

REUTERS, Madrid



Resurgent Sevilla boosted their chances of returning to Europe next season when captain Alvaro Negredo netted his first La Liga hat-trick in a 4-1 victory at home to struggling Celta Vigo on

Monday.

The Andalusian side, UEFA Cup winners in 2006 and 2007, failed to qualify for continental competition last term for the first time in almost a decade, dealing the cash-strapped club a significant financial blow.

They started this season poorly but since the sacking of coach Michel in January replacement Unai Emery has revived their fortunes.

Monday's success lifted them to 10th

on 35 points with 12 matches left, six below a Europa League berth and eight behind Malaga who occupy the fourth Champions League spot.

"It's my first hat-trick in the league, the Cup and every other competition," smiling Negredo said in an interview with Spanish television broadcaster Marca TV.

"We have to be strong here at home and away too and it was important to win and keep climbing up the table," added the 27-year-old, who was given a rousing ovation by the home fans when he was substituted with just over five minutes left.

"This is the dynamic that we have to keep up now, we played very well tonight."

Negredo fired Sevilla ahead in the 12th minute at a rain-soaked Sanchez Pizjuan stadium when he was perfectly placed to slot home after Celta goalkeeper Javi Varas had palmed away a Jesus Navas cross-shot.

Pressure on PSG

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain are under pressure to clinch their place in the quarterfinals of the Champions League at Valencia's expense after their latest below-par domestic performance.

The French club are top of Ligue 1 and lead Valencia 2-1 from the first leg of their last-16 tie, but a 1-0 defeat away to Reims on Saturday came as a blow to Carlo Ancelotti's squad before Wednesday's game at the Parc des Princes.

Furthermore, bizarre comments by sporting director Leonardo -- who spent two years as a player at Valencia in the early 1990s -- will come back to bite PSG if they are unable to see off their Spanish opponents.

"Maybe we are not made to play in games like these," claimed the Brazilian after the defeat to a Reims side that had won just once in their previous 19 matches in all competitions.

"Perhaps we have a team designed more for Europe than the league."

The often tepid nature of their domestic performances this season and the contrast with their outstanding results in Europe would appear to back up Leonardo's claims, but for a man in his position to say such a thing was still a major surprise.

The massive investment in PSG's squad by their Qatari owners has, after all, been made with domestic as well as European success in mind.

Nevertheless, attentions are now fully fixed on the continental scene, and vital away goals from Ezequiel Lavezzi and Javier Pastore mean that PSG have the edge coming into the return leg of this tie, even if a late Adil Rami goal in the first leg allowed Valencia to maintain hope.

"I don't think the defeat to Reims will be a problem because everyone is focused on Europe," said the former Barcelona full-back Maxwell.

"This competition is very important and we will be giving everything to try and win it."

All will be well in the French capital if Ancelotti's side can progress to the quarterfinals of Europe's elite club competition, but they will need to cope without Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who begins a two-match European ban handed down for his sending-off towards the end of the first leg.

Italian midfielder Marco Verratti is also banned, meaning a Champions League start could be in the offing for David Beckham, who failed to make an impression as a substitute at the weekend.

"They are two important players. Ibrahimovic holds the ball up well and Verratti is young, good technically and controls the way his team plays," said Valencia's French left-back Aly Cissokho.



Paris Saint-Germain midfielder David Beckham (R) kicks the ball as teammate Javier Pastore looks on during a training session at the Parc des Princes Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP