

Photo of the Day



Johnny Collinson prepare to ski in Alaska. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Football racism 'no black and white' issue in central Europe

Battlelines are being drawn in Romania

BUCHAREST: As the dust still rises on football's night of racist accusations in Paris, the battlelines are being drawn in Romania, home of the fourth official whose use of the word "negru" prompted a player walk-off during Basaksehir's Champions League match against Paris Saint-Germain.

While some believe that Sebastian Coltescu and the comments he made were the product of linguistic misunderstanding, others feel that it is simply emblematic of a society riddled with racism and homophobia. This is what happened. In the 14th minute of Tuesday's game, a touchline argument broke out over accusations that Coltescu had described Basaksehir's Cameroonian assistant coach Pierre Webo as "negru", the Romanian for "black". "It's the black over there," he said.

guists from Romania have been analysing every word from every aspect with every nuance.

In Bucharest, many voices are calling for patience until governing body UEFA releases its findings. On social networks, however, there is broad criticism of the European football authorities and suggestions of double-standards for not having reacted when Romanian sportsmen have been referred to as "Gypsies" - a pejorative term designating the Roma. But the President of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) Razvan Burleanu is firm. "These words have no place in a stadium," he said. Ditto for Sports Minister Ionut Stroe, who quickly presented his "apologies in the name of the Romanian sport".

In the local media, however, opinions are divided. "In Romanian, to say that someone is black ('negru') is not

'Laxity'

Asztalos is getting used to these matters with other incidents of supporters imitating monkey cries or throwing a banana in the direction of a Brazilian player. In an interview with AFP, he denounced the "laxity" of the clubs and of the Romanian professional football league (LFP). In neighboring Bulgaria, similar incidents punctuated a qualifying match for Euro 2020 against England in October 2019. The subsequent fall-out led to Bulgaria coach Krasimir Balakov resigning along with the country's FA chief, Borislav Mihaylov. Several Bulgarian clubs, as well as the national team, had previously been sanctioned by UEFA for "racist behavior" in the stands. In 2014, Levski Sofia supporters openly defied a campaign by the European body by deploying a banner proclaiming "Say 'Yes' to Racism". In the Balkans too, monkey noises and racist chants have repeatedly earned the Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin federations fines and closed-door matches for the respective national teams.

If the Croatian federation regularly condemns such behavior, sometimes accompanied by Nazi chants, it also throws the blame entirely on "hooligans". In 2012, Belgrade was the scene of a mass brawl at the end of an U21 Euro qualifier between Serbia and England. Serbian fans, who had been monkey chanting England's Danny Rose, invaded the pitch while players and management of the two teams exchanged insults and blows.

Roma targeted

In Romania, analysts say the main targets of hate speech are the Roma. Gelu Dumnicu, a sociologist from the Roma minority, bristles when supporters chant "Death to the Gypsies" or brandish placards paying tribute to the pro-Nazi Marshal Ion Antonescu, who had advocated the "Final Solution" (extermination) for the Roma during the Second World War. According to Dumnicu, the sanctions that have been imposed by UEFA - largely fines and playing games behind closed doors - have partially achieved their goal, as supporters "are starting to fear being penalized". "But coercion alone does not solve the problem as long as it is not coupled with, or rather preceded by, education on the matter," he told AFP. Bulgaria, like other countries in the region, has tightened sanctions against hooligans, now liable to fines of up to 2,500 euros and 25 days in detention. Asztalos says that Romania, for its part, has "made efforts" to combat racism "but there is still a long way to go". — AFP



PARIS: A stadium employee displays a banner reading 'No to Racism' in an empty grandstand before the UEFA Champions League group H football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Istanbul Basaksehir FK at the Parc des Princes stadium. — AFP

That has become the key line of the debate, the one that led to Basaksehir's Senegalese forward Demba Ba remonstrating with the official in English. "When you mention a white guy, you never say 'this white guy', you just say 'this guy', so why when you mention a black guy do you say 'this black guy'?" he can clearly be heard saying. The players walked off, returning the next day with a different set of officials to finish the match, since when sportsmen, sociologists and lin-

an offense, but a reference to the color of their skin, a simple precision," said veteran sports journalist Ovidiu Ioanitoaia. His younger colleague Theodor Jumata, however, takes a different view. "It is the most brutal expression of racism, the very essence of humiliation," he says. President of the anti-discrimination Council (CNCD), Csaba Asztalos, stressed that "sport, and football in particular, cannot be immune to this very present scourge of Romanian society".

Verstappen on top in Abu Dhabi practice

ABU DHABI: Max Verstappen topped the times ahead of his Red Bull team-mate Alex Albon in yesterday's third and final free practice for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The Dutchman clocked a best lap in one minute and 36.251 to finish half a second ahead of the London-born Thai driver as the Milton Keynes-based team shone in perfect conditions at the Yas Marina Circuit before today's season-ending race. Renault's Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon locked out the second row ahead of Lando Norris, fifth for McLaren, and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton who was sixth in the leading Mercedes.

In an unusual-looking top ten, as most teams prepared for the much-cooler conditions expected for qualifying later on Saturday, Lance Stroll was seventh for Racing Point ahead of Carlos Sainz of McLaren. Valtteri Bottas, who had topped the times in Friday's second session after Verstappen had been fastest in the first, was ninth in the second Mercedes ahead of last weekend's Sakhir victor Sergio Perez in the second Racing Point.

It appeared that the team were not all treating the session with the same level of competitive intent - Mercedes, in particular, seemed to be holding back on engine power to preserve their units. Ahead of the final event of the campaign, reliability may be an issue as engines and other parts reach the end of their Formula One seasonal life span. In beautiful conditions, with an air temperature of 25 and the track at 38 degrees, the session began slowly and 16 minutes had passed before Nicholas Latifi was first man out in his Williams.

Mercedes emerged five minutes later and Bottas swiftly went top on softs only to be replaced by Albon and his team-mate Verstappen. Hamilton persevered with his softs and split the Red Bulls with 15 minutes remaining. The champion continued working and trimmed Verstappen's advantage to two-tenths as both Ferraris found speed, Leclerc taking fifth and Vettel seventh ahead of a remarkable Russell, who had hoisted his Williams beyond expectations. In the final 10 minutes, a flurry of action saw a rush of improved times as the teams fine-tuned ahead of qualifying, scheduled for later in cooler conditions at dusk. — AFP

Rams move into top spot; first win over Patriots since 2001

LOS ANGELES: Rookie Cam Akers rushed for 171 yards as the Los Angeles Rams gained a measure of revenge for a 2019 Super Bowl loss with a 24-3 rout of the New England Patriots. The sting of a one-sided 13-3 defeat 22 months ago in the Super Bowl in Atlanta, Georgia was still fresh in the minds of the players and coaches for the Rams, who had not beaten the Patriots since 2001, a string of six straight losses. "For me personally it felt good to get a little payback," said Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald. Akers more than doubled his previous best rushing effort, an 84-yard performance in a 23-20 loss to the San Francisco 49ers on October 29.

Quarterback Jared Goff threw for two touchdowns and the defense smothered the Patriots offense as the Rams moved a half game in front of the Seattle Seahawks for first place in the NFC West Division. The Rams have now won four of their last five games. Kenny Young also had an outstanding game, returning an interception 79 yards for a touchdown. He had one of a half dozen sacks for Los Angeles forcing Patriots quarterback Cam Newton to take a seat in the fourth quarter. "Our defense played lights out," said Donald.



INGLEWOOD: Cam Akers #23 of the Los Angeles Rams is tackled and pushed out of bounds by Devin McCourty #32 of the New England Patriots during the first half of an NFL game at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. — AFP

Newton threw for just 119 yards before being replaced by Jarrett Stidham for the Patriots whose uphill battle to make the playoffs just got much more difficult. New England was going for a sweep of the SoFi Stadium tenants after stomping the Los Angeles Chargers 45-0 on Sunday. This was the first meeting between the two since the Patriots Super Bowl romp where Goff completed just 19 of 38 passes and failed to throw a touchdown. The Rams gained 166 yards in the first quarter on Thursday. They got a touchdown and a field goal on their first two possessions, highlighted by Goff leaping into the end zone from 11 yards out. Akers ran for 84 yards on nine carries in the first quarter.

Matt Gay added the 35-yard field goal. Young intercepted Newton's toss and scampered untouched into the end zone just 14 seconds into the second quarter and the rout was on. "Everybody is playing great football. It is fun to play. We will continue to strive for great things," said Donald. This was a clutch win for Los Angeles, with a contest against the winless New York Jets next week ahead of season-ending games against the Seahawks and Arizona Cardinals that could determine the division winner. — AFP

Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait Masters Tennis Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK) Masters Tennis Tournament was held under the patronage and presence of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The event marked the conclusion of a series of tournaments organized by RNAK in cooperation with Kuwait Tennis Federation and was held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

Kuwait's National team member (from Yarmouk Club) Essa Salman Qabazard won the men's singles title, while Yasmeen Al-Shamali won the ladies singles. Qabazard won the title after defeating Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi in the final match with the score of 6/2 - 6/4, as Al-Awadhi took second place.

Yasmeen Al-Shamali defeated Sarah Behbehani 2-1 to claim the ladies title. The final match was also attended by Deputy Chairman of KTF Abdelsamad Al-Aryan, and CEO of Tamdeen Sports Company Mohammad Mustafa Al-Marzouq, RNAK General Manager Martijn Belgraver and Head Tennis Coach Nuno Marques.

Results of the three previous tournaments were as follows: The first tournament winner in the men's singles is Abdelhameed Jumaa, and the Ladies was won by Iman Mitwalli; the second tournament was

won by Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi (for men) and Dana Al-Fulaj won the Ladies. The third was won by Essa Qabazard (for men) while Sarah Behbehani won the ladies title. The masters tournament saw the best 8 players in men and 8 in women based on their previous results in the series.



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah thanked Tamdeen group for their efforts. He also thanked RNAK for its efforts in organizing the four tournaments. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said that players of both genders showed good technical levels and wished them best of luck.

