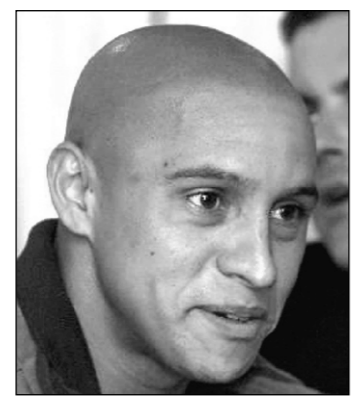


Primera Liga preview Real eyeing straight sixth

Football AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid, buoyed by five consecutive league wins, are aiming to make it six in a row at Celta Vigo on Saturday and take over as the Spanish league leaders for the first time this season.

the main reasons Real Sociedad are unbeaten this season is that they have been very difficult to break down away from home.



ROBERTO CARLOS

times this season, the second highest tally in the Spanish first division and more than any Madrid or Valencia player can boast of having bagged.

1960s after one of his buildings collapsed and killed dozens of people, returned to familiar form last weekend by lambasting the squad and their coach Luis Aragones.

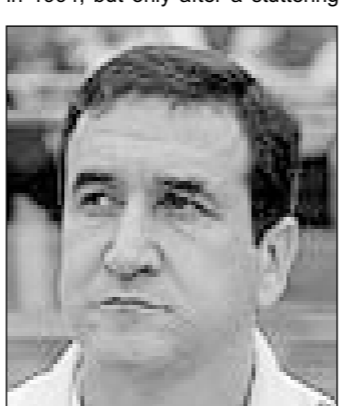
By Thursday, a truce had broken out in what one Spanish sports daily described as 'Atletico's civil war', with Gil apologising to Aragones and the squad, but who knows what effect the damaging spat has had on dressing room morale.

Barcelona still lie down in eighth place but have won their last two games and have started to look in the league something like the side that has been laying waste to opponents in the Champions League.

Relishing the prospect

Football REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Carlos Alberto Parreira threw away his reservations and agreed to coach Brazil for a third time on Wednesday, undaunted by the '24 hours-a-day suffering' during his previous stint in one of soccer's hottest seats.



CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA

qualifying campaign in which he was ridiculed by often vicious media criticism. The goading reached its height after a qualifying defeat in La Paz against Bolivia in 1993 but, even after Brazil beat Italy on penalties to win the title in Pasadena, Parreira was still under fire for fielding an allegedly lacklustre team.

for over 20 years and the pressure was unbearable for everyone. It was 24 hours-a-day suffering. "But the situation now is different. "Brazil have been to the last three World Cup finals and won two of them.

Far from worrying about the pressure, Parreira - who took Ronaldo to the 1994 World Cup finals as a 17-year-old and will now have the chance to coach him in his prime - said he was excited by the prospect of working with some of the world's top players.

"Our players are the best in the world, so much so that they are imitated by others," said Parreira. "And this is a very good moment with a lot of new players appearing such as Diego, Robinho, (Corinthians striker) Gil and (Corinthians full-back) Kleber.

Serie A preview Milan's Bologna mission

Football AFP, Rome

League leaders AC Milan must end Bologna's flawless home record on Sunday if they are to avoid a third defeat on the road and maintain this season's quest for a 17th Italian championship.

all his offensive players against an intelligent Bologna side would be a mistake.

"This idea is not adaptable against a team like Bologna," said the 43-year-old former Juventus player. "It would be suicidal."



CARLO ANCELOTTI

could be rested while compatriot Serginho and Danish striker Jon Dahl Tomasson are carrying minor knocks.

dropped just four out of a possible 21 points at the San Siro, while newly-promoted Modena have lost five times away from home this season, conceding 14 goals.

Inter are expected to welcome back Italy's leading goalscorer Christian Vieri who has recovered from a hamstring injury.

Fifth-placed title-holders Juventus, who are four points adrift of the two Milan clubs, welcome Reggina to the Stadio Delle Alpi on Sunday.

2001 champions Roma hope to have lone signing Olivier Dacourt available for their home clash against Chievo. The 'flying donkeys' of Verona, who continue to defy all expectations, are currently fourth in the table.

An Iranian record!

Football AP, Tehran

In a taboo-breaking step in this conservative Islamic state, an Iranian soccer club has started allowing female soccer fans into its stadium to watch games.

southern Iran. Sahar Alvandi, a 17-year-old student, was overjoyed to be one of the first Iranian women to step into a soccer stadium.

"My dream came true today," Alvandi said. "I still can't believe I'm in a soccer stadium in the Islamic Republic where it has so far been the realm of only men in Iran."

Nigeria has what it takes?

Football AFP, Lagos

Despite scepticism at home about Nigeria's bid to host the 2010 World Cup, a top bid committee official said Thursday the country has everything to make a success of staging the soccer finals.

But the head of Nigeria's bid committee for the event, Segun Odegbami, insisted: "There is a lot that is good about this country and as such we should not allow the negative things to becloud us. We should not condemn ourselves."

Games which the country has hosted at a loss. "The World Cup is one event which guarantees you profit, no matter how much you have invested. You cannot say the same for competitions like the Nations Cup and the All-Africa Games, which Nigeria has staged in the past," Odegbami argued.

Elber can leave

Football AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich manager Uli Hoeness said Thursday that dissatisfied Brazilian star Giovane Elber was free to leave the Bundesliga leaders at season's end if a good offer was made.

"He hasn't played like we expected him to and we can't bow to him the whole time," said Hoeness. "If the transfer fee is adequate and he wants to leave he can go in the summer."



GIOVANE ELBER

Elber, whose contract with the 17-time Bundesliga champions runs until June 2004, has criticised the club for not showing him sufficient respect.

But Hoeness said: "We've always paid his salary on time and this shows enough respect. He's paid a salary for a world class player but has not given much of late."

Bellamy signs fresh deal

Football AFP, London

Welsh international striker Craig Bellamy has signed a new deal with English Premiership side Newcastle which will keep him with The Magpies until the end of the 2006-07 season.

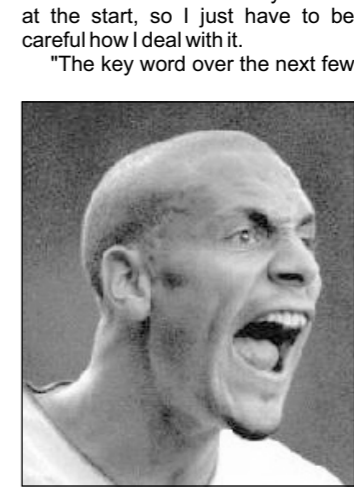
one. We have a talented young squad, an excellent manager and backroom staff and the fans are fantastic. "For me it is a dream come true. I am playing for one of the biggest clubs in Europe - we're involved in the major competitions and everyone at the club is focused on success.

Premiership preview Rio's rallying cry

Football AFP, London

Manchester United's record signing Rio Ferdinand has two aims for 2003: he wants the club to overhaul leaders Arsenal's five-point advantage at the top of the table and to make sure he plays his part in helping them achieve that.

"It wouldn't matter who we were playing, West Brom or someone in the top five, we would still need to win." But the man most likely to stiffen United's resolve, club captain and controversial Republic of Ireland midfielder Roy Keane, is expected to miss the game as he continues his cautious recovery from the hamstring strain which forced him off in last Saturday's FA Cup victory against Portsmouth.



RIO FERDINAND

days is patience and we'll see what happens. It's frustrating," he added. Meanwhile West Brom boss Gary Megson said he was trying to bring in Nigerian international Ifeanyi Udezue, a 23-year-old defender with PAOK Salonika on loan for the rest of the season.

Birmingham. "At the moment Ljungberg is injured and Patrick will still be out (with a groin strain)," Wenger told Arsenal's official website on Thursday.

Ray Parlour is fit again but Wenger added the Englishman was short of match practice. "Ray is available but he needs a couple of games in the reserves."

"He is going to be a massive asset for us," Roeder told Sky Sports of the lifelong West Ham fan. "Lee plays at his best when he's under pressure and we're in a pressure situation here," Roeder added.

Veron at ease

Football AFP, Rome

Manchester United midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron says now he has settled in England he has no intention of a quick return to Italy.

Dacourt now Roma's

Football AFP, Rome

France international Olivier Dacourt has completed his loan move to Italian first division side AS Roma from Leeds United after passing a medical here, the English Premiership club confirmed Thursday.

defeats to Arsenal and Ajax. On his arrival in the Italian capital on Wednesday evening, Dacourt said he was relishing the prospect of helping Roma revive their season at home and in Europe.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer
ACROSS 1 The Supreme Court, e.g. 5 Nourished 8 Send out 12 Surpass a simmer 13 Meadow 14 Work-bench attachment 15 Related to cooking 17 Singer Fitzgerald 18 Trent pal? 21 Scare-crow stuffing 24 Sly 25 Milne 26 Plain 30 Coach 31 Terrific 32 Appomattoch VIP 33 Religious school 35 Arm bone 36 Battle the clock

21 Resorts inter-national? 22 Rove 23 Jacques, e.g. 26 Divinely authoritative 27 Role for Calista 28 Actress Russo 29 Calendar quota 31 Summer-time pest 34 Van Gogh subject 35 Herschel's 1781 discovery 37 McBride of 'Boston Public' 38 Sorts 39 Pinta partner 40 Witnessed 41 Bullets 44 Multi-purpose truck 45 Firmire 46 Vitaminoly 47 Thither

Sixteen-year-old Swiss hot prospect Johannes Djourou will join English champions Arsenal at the end of this season, the player's father told Swiss newspaper Dimanche.ch's website on Thursday.

CRYPTOQUIP

U I I M K W T E W B G X T L U L M A J T E Y S M H W J T U F X L G A F B W M U I M Y J L M S W K F A W B W M S U V F X S U W M B I G J T E . Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF SHEEP NEED SHEARING, DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE BAA BAA SHOP? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals S

Crossword grid with numbers and letters. Includes a list of words and a clue for the Cryptoquip puzzle.