

## French honour for Ronaldo

AFP, Paris

World Footballer of the Year Ronaldo and British yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur were honoured by France here on Tuesday.

Two days after winning the Spanish league title with Real Madrid, Ronaldo was at the ceremony to collect the French Academy of Sports' Grand Prix 2002 award for the "best sporting achievement in the world" in recognition of his top-scoring exploits at the World Cup where he led Brazil to a fifth title.

Ronaldo was presented with his award by International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Jacques Rogge and Professor Gerard Saillant, the Paris-based surgeon who performed the career-saving surgery on the striker's knee injury two years ago.

The loudest round of applause of the night was reserved for MacArthur, who reinforced her star status in France by winning the Route du Rhum race last year.



President of the National Assembly Jean-Louis Debré (L) applauds Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo (after awarding him with the Grand prix de l'académie des sports in Paris on June 24. Gérard Saillant (R), the surgeon who operated on the Ronaldo when he was injured, is also present.

## Perez explains

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez accepted on Tuesday that the decision to replace coach Vicente del Bosque was a risk but defended

the move as being in the best interests of the club.

News that Del Bosque would be leaving Real after more than 30 years as a player and coach brought an angry reaction from some fans.

The walls at the club's Santiago Bernabeu stadium were daubed with graffiti on Tuesday as supporters expressed their feelings about

Del Bosque's departure.

"Time will tell if we're right or wrong," Perez said at a news conference at the Bernabeu. "Like all decisions there is an element of risk but we believe this is the start of a new era and we need someone new."

Real decided not to renew the contracts of Del Bosque and captain Fernando Hierro after a six-hour board meeting on Monday.

The announcement came less than 24 hours after the club had won a 29th league title, the seventh trophy of Del Bosque's four-season reign.

Perez said the club could not afford to take the "easy" decision to renew Del Bosque's contract for one more season.

"Politically speaking, it would have been easy to give Del Bosque a one-year extension but that wouldn't have been the right choice," Perez said.

"We had to decide whether to give him a new long-term deal or take the riskier option that we eventually decided on.

"It was important to take the decision with a cool head. Of course, we may have made a mistake but we believe what we've done is for the good of Real Madrid."

The front runner for the vacant post is Carlos Queiroz, the number two to Alex Ferguson at Manchester United.

"Carlos Queiroz is one of the people we are thinking of. He has the profile we are interested in," Perez told the news conference.

Real Madrid have already signed David Beckham from United and the appointment of Queiroz would ease the England captain's transition.

Meanwhile, United manager Ferguson said that he won't stand in the way of Queiroz taking over from Del Bosque as Real coach next season.

"This is a wonderful opportunity

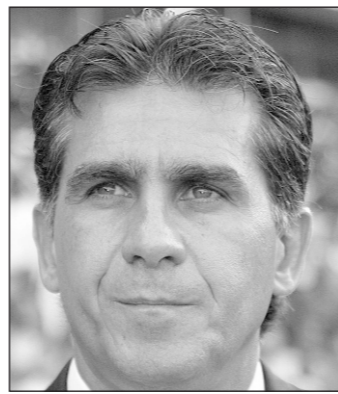
for him, too big a chance to turn down," Ferguson told the Daily Mail Wednesday.

Queiroz has a clause in his contract allowing him to leave Old Trafford if a foreign club makes an approach.

The 53-year-old Portuguese was expected in Spain on Wednesday for talks.

Queiroz's departure would leave a huge hole in Ferguson's coaching team.

The United boss took almost a year to identify Queiroz as the successor to Steve McClaren, so to lose him after just 12 months would



CARLOS QUEIROZ

be a massive blow.

Former United midfielder Mike Phelan, already on the first-team coaching staff, would be favourite to take over, although Ferguson would probably still need to bring in a new face at some stage.

Queiroz was formerly coach of Portugal, Sporting Lisbon and South Africa.

But having guided the Africans to the 2002 World Cup he quit before the finals and joined United last summer.



Real Madrid's president Florentino Perez during a press conference at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on June 24.

## Wenger happy where he is

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insisted Tuesday he was staying with the English Premiership side and not joining Real Madrid after the Spanish giants sacked coach Vicente del Bosque.

The Frenchman had been among the leading contenders to take over at the Bernabeu after Real axed del Bosque on Monday - just 24 hours after the club clinched the Spanish championship.

But Wenger insisted he would be staying at Arsenal.

"I can say 100 percent that I will be at Arsenal next season. I will not be leaving Highbury to go to Madrid," he told Tuesday's edition of the London Evening Standard.

"I have never broken a contract and I have no intention of breaking the one I have with Arsenal, where I have two years left on my contract."

Wenger, formerly in charge of Japanese team Grampus 8 and French outfit Monaco, has guided Arsenal to two Premiership titles and three FA Cups - including two doubles - since his arrival in north London back in 1996.

During his time in England, Wenger has also conducted an ongoing war of words through the media with Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson while their clubs have monopolised the Premiership trophy.

Last season United won the Premiership after overhauling long-time leaders Arsenal, who finished runners-up. But Wenger's men did beat Southampton 1-0 to win the FA Cup.

Real indicated earlier Tuesday that United assistant manager Carlos Queiroz was on their shopping list of replacements and if the Portuguese did go to Spain, no-one would be happier than Wenger at the thought that Ferguson's backroom team at Old Trafford had been upset.

## It's MU then?

Football

AFP, Paris

Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho could agree a move to Manchester United as early as Friday, his brother and agent Roberto Assis said Wednesday.

The Paris St Germain star is having talks with his club after being linked with 20 million euro moves to United, Real Madrid and Barcelona.

Paris St Germain insist the 23-year-old is staying in France and new president Francis Graille has refused to meet United chief executive Peter Kenyon.

But Ronaldinho wants his future decided as quickly as possible after



RONALDINHO

Brazil's elimination from the Confederations Cup.

"We will talk with the Paris St Germain president and hope to

wrap things up by Friday," Assis said.

"Ronaldinho would be very happy to play for Manchester United. Every good player wants to join a team like Manchester."

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, who last week bought England captain David Beckham from Manchester for 35 million euros, said Sunday he was interested in signing Ronaldinho and leaving him in Paris for a year.

Perez said Ronaldinho could not fit into the team next season because they already have three foreign players from outside the European Union.

New Barcelona president Joan Laporta, faced with debts of around 100 million euros, says he cannot afford to win a bidding war.

## Hell await England!



AFP, Saint Etienne

Turkish midfielder star Yildiray Basturk has predicted England will receive a 'welcome to hell' from Turkish fans at the Euro 2004 qualifier in Istanbul in October.

The first leg match in Sunderland in April which England won 2-0 was marred by trouble before, during and after the game and the English Football Association is not planning to take up its allocation of tickets after police in both countries warned fresh trouble could occur.

Basturk said: "This is one of our most important matches for some time. Our fans are fanatical, I hope they'll abide by the fair play rules but yes, England can expect a welcome to hell."

A venue has yet to be confirmed for the all important qualifier. Turkey lead England by two points but England have a game in hand.

calm in Turkey over the public address system in light of the fact that this was a grudge match for Turkey after Brazil had beaten them twice in last summer's World Cup.

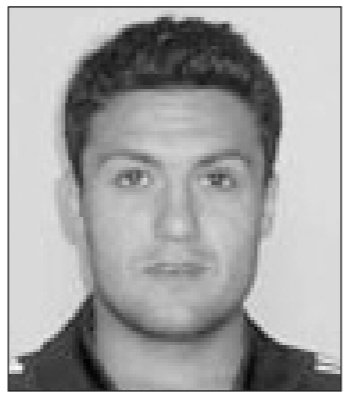
Given the prospect of problems the FA have urged England fans not to travel to Turkey.

Crowd disturbances marred Turkey's Group 7 clash against Macedonia earlier this month.

Disciplinary proceedings could be brought by UEFA after missiles were thrown onto the pitch during the game which the Turks won 3-2.

And one French-based Turkish fan was arrested and fined by French police after throwing water bottles onto the pitch during Turkey's game against the United States in the Confederations Cup last week.

Turkey play France in Paris in the semi-finals of the competition on Thursday and with a huge Turkish turnout anticipated the authorities will no doubt not be taking any chances concerning possible trouble.



YILDIRAY BASTURK

## Becks continues to charm

Football

AFP, Bangkok

England's football captain and glamour boy David Beckham was welcomed by 5,000 wildly excited Thai fans at an indoor stadium in the Thai capital Wednesday, as he embarked on the final leg of his whirlwind Asian tour.

The crowd of mostly screaming teenagers roared as their hero made his grand entrance at Hua Mark stadium, led by an entourage of some 30 traditional Thai dancers and musicians.

Decked out in a red, white and blue football kit and with his blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail, the former Manchester United star made a lap of the indoor field after being whisked here directly from Bangkok airport.

"Sawadee khap!" he said, thrilling his fans with the standard Thai greeting.

He is set to entertain the crowd, who each paid 100 to 300 baht (2.40 to 7.20 dollars) for a seat, with his famous free kicks before presenting an award to the winner of a local tournament and making a speech.

"He's a hero. He's talent touched my heart," swooned 18-year-old university student Saichol Boontaitam, wielding a magazine picture of the superstar.

"I want to tell him how much I love him."

Pimparat Gandhathagur, 20, another student, claimed she was the first person to arrive at the stadium this morning, staking out her spot for seven hours ahead of the fashion icon's arrival.

"I want to see my hero. I love him, everything about him," she cried, wearing a gold-chain with the famous Beckham "7", a well-worn England jersey and a Beckham watch.

Beckham's off-season tour has been given extra prominence after his transfer last week to Spain's Real Madrid in a deal worth up to 35 million euros (41.25 million dollars).

A news conference scheduled later in the day has been barred to the international press. Thai journalists have been issued with strict guidelines of what they may ask by

the public relations firm handling the visit.

Barred topics include his relationship with Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson, his wife Victoria's pop career, and how much he was being paid for his Asian tour.

Reporters were instead requested to ask him about his World Cup experience last year and his thoughts on Asian football.

The high-profile couple made a surprise private arrival in the kingdom on Sunday from Tokyo. Beckham then made whistlestop appearances in Malaysia and Vietnam before returning here Wednesday.

During his visit to Vietnam's southern metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City, Beckham said that his off-the-pitch promotional work was not

detracting from his on-field performance.

"I keep both sides totally separate because I have to," the midfielder told local reporters.

"My biggest passion comes from the field. When I step onto that field that's all I'm thinking about."

"People think I do a lot of promotional work, more than I actually do, but really to me the most important thing is my football and I never let anything get in the way of that," he said.

The pony-tailed Beckham arrived in Ho Chi Minh City on Tuesday night and spent several hours showcasing his array of footballing skills on Wednesday before being whisked off to the airport.

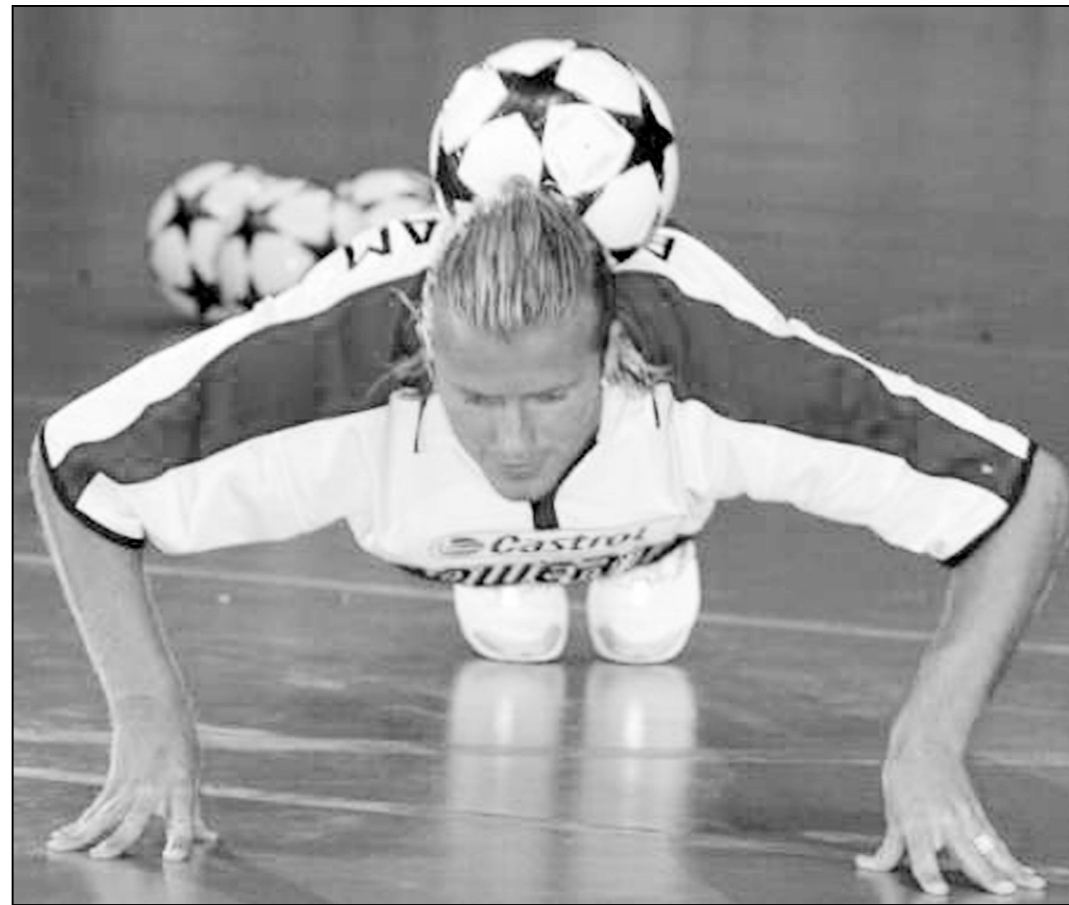
The 28-year-old icon, who owes

his fame as much to his footballing talent as to his good looks and trend-setting fashion statements, acknowledged the influence of his wife on his wardrobe.

"I think Victoria has got a lot to do with what I think about fashion and things like that. Obviously she's my wife so when I ask her if I look nice in something I value her opinions."

"She's got a lot to do with it but most of the decisions of what I wear and what I do with my hair are mine," he said.

British media reports have estimated that the week-long Asian promotional swing by the Beckhams will earn them one million pounds (1.66 million dollars).



PUSH-UPS LIKE BECKHAM! David Beckham does push-ups with the ball on his back during a meet-the-fans session at an indoor stadium in Bangkok yesterday.

## COLOMBIA V CAMEROON

## No clear favourites



AFP, Lyon

Colombia could be forgiven for being extra motivated when they take on Cameroon in the Confederations Cup semi-final here Thursday.

The South Americans last met the African champions at the 1990 World Cup when the Indomitable Lions prevailed 2-1.

That loss hurt deeply in Bogota but Colombia coach Francisco Maturana - who was also coach at the 1990 World Cup finals - refuses to regard this encounter as a chance for revenge.

"The players here aren't the same, neither for Colombia nor for Cameroon," said the coach, who is in his fourth spell in charge.

"The two teams are totally different," added Maturana, a qualified dentist who was also in charge of Colombia for the 1994 World Cup finals when he resigned amid allegations of death threats over their poor performance which saw them

lose to hosts United States and exit in the first round.

"The football of the past doesn't count for much now - the important thing is what's happening today."

The Copa America champions have proved themselves gifted in the technical department on this their Confederations Cup debut.

Maturana's men were unlucky to lose to France 1-0 in their opening match, the damage inflicted by a questionable late penalty, but they got back on track beating minnows New Zealand and then Japan 1-0.

Playmaker Giovanni Hernandez said he felt like crying after he capitalised on an error by the Japanese defence to get the second half winner.

"Getting through to the semis has strengthened our mental resolve to get the best result," said the 27-year-old Deportivo Cali player.

He predicted: "Colombia will essentially be relying on its technical quality to contain the physical nature of Cameroon."

"We can't be thinking about what we've done up to now, we just have to give our all to ensure we get the best result possible."

After a clean bill of health was issued for all his key players Maturana has the luxury of fielding a full strength side as both Inter Milan's Ivan Cordoba and the pacey Elson Becerra had to sit out the last

game due to suspension.

Not many meanwhile would have predicted before the competition started that it would be Cameroon and not world champions Brazil topping Group B.

But German coach Winfried Schafer's team made it into the last four with a 0-0 draw against the United States to add to their stunning 1-0 defeat of an out-of-sorts Brazil at the Stade de France, and a victory over Turkey by the same margin.

Already the African champions showing here has gone some way to restore their wounded pride incurred after their first round elimination at the World Cup - a far cry from 1990 when they made it through to the quarter finals.

One of the stars of Schafer's side, Real Mallorca's Samuel Eto'o, said: "There are no minor matches - they're all difficult - and here we are again trying to beat Colombia."

"Nothing's impossible and we'll be doing everything to try and qualify."

Eto'o will be leaving the squad after Thursday's game to return to Mallorca to help his club try and lift the Spanish Cup.

Up to now Cameroon have not conceded a goal - they'll be hoping Idris Kameni maintains that fine record come Thursday night.

## Parreira fights back



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, reacting to the inevitable barrage of criticism following his experimental team's

Confederations Cup exit, said on Tuesday he would need to field 15 forwards to keep all his critics happy.

Parreira was predictably bombarded with selection suggestions after Monday's 2-2 draw with Turkey in France, commentators back home agreeing that his biggest mistake was to leave out midfielder Alex.

The Cruzeiro player brought new life to the five-times world champions when he came on for

Ricardinho midway through the second half and Brazilians wanted to know why he didn't start.

"We have to have a balanced team and I had to choose between Ronaldinho and Alex," Parreira told a Brazilian round table television programme by telephone from France. "Ronaldinho is a little more experienced so he was chosen."

"I have great admiration for Alex but we played perfectly well without him for the first 45 minutes," he added, referring to the first-half when Brazil led 1-0 but could have easily scored more goals.

Reading a list of some of Brazil's top players, Parreira added: "We've got Robinho, Diego, Renato, Elano, Paulo Almeida, Ronaldo, Rivaldo... - if we wanted to field all of these players that the supporters want in the team, I would have to play with 15 forwards."

"But we have to have balance. There's no point in having 15 names and no team."

Parreira, forced by club commitments to take a second string side to the competition which clashed with the Brazilian championship, South American Libertadores Cup and

Spanish championship, refused to be downhearted.

"I've seen a lot of good things here," he said. "Remember that we are working for the World Cup, that is our target."

Parreira, who named 11 uncapped players in his squad, said some had found international football a bit of a shock.

"It's a very big jump from club to national team," he said. "In the game against Cameroon, (striker) Gil was shocked by the marking. Of course, next time they will be more confident."

Former coach Emerson Leoao was sacked after Brazil finished fourth in the same tournament two years ago but there seemed no danger that Parreira, given full-backing by the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) beforehand, would suffer a similar fate.

The CBF's website said Tuesday that Parreira had thanked his team for their efforts.

"The coach... reaffirmed that all the players deserved their chance and could be picked again," it said.