

# Zola leaves a legend

Football

GUARDIAN, London

When foreign footballers arrive in the Premier League, it has become customary for their manager to add the caveat: "He'll take time to settle."

But not only did Gianfranco Zola, who bade farewell to Chelsea on Monday after seven seasons with the club, make an immediate impact by winning footballer of the year in his first season, he also found himself hailed as a model professional. It was English football that had to adapt to him.

It is little surprise that within 24 hours of becoming Chelsea's owner, Roman Abramovich had offered £3m for just one more season from the Italian. The Russian, a teetotal non-smoker, had never met the similarly abstemious Zola but could immediately recognise the impact of losing last season's top scorer as being more than just his 16 goals.

Zola will benefit in this, his 38th year, from a lifetime's self-denial with a season at Cagliari, his native Sardinia's representative in Serie B. Ahead of the medals and the memories Zola rightly considers his honourable reputation to be the biggest accomplishment of his time in England.

"My greatest satisfaction is off the pitch - for the way people consider me and the respect they gave me," said Zola, the £4.5m buy in 1996 who was last season voted Chelsea's best ever player. "Many people excel in games but when you have achieved that respect it is special."

"Money can give you many things but these sort of things cannot be bought. What I achieved in the way people regard me is remarkable for me."

Watching Zola train has had a similar effect on Chelsea's youngsters as the spur London Marathon runners must feel when overtaken by Sir Jimmy Saville. But Abramovich's £3m price on that inspiration came 48 hours too late.

Though he is too much a gentleman to admit it openly, privately Zola feels let down that the Chelsea chairman Ken Bates failed to let him know that a rescue package that would have allowed him to remain was on its way.

The forward had given his word to Cagliari that he would spearhead their promotion campaign if he was not offered an acceptable new deal by the time his previous contract expired last Tuesday.

"At first, although I had other offers, I wasn't thinking of leaving Chelsea," revealed Zola. "It was not my idea but unfortunately Chelsea were in a bad situation and couldn't find an agreement."

"This went on until July 1 when my contract expired and I couldn't leave the other [clubs] hanging on, I had to do something then. I don't blame Chelsea; they had more important problems than renewing my contract."

"But I feel bad. I feel sad. It was a painful decision for me to leave. When Chelsea came back in, it was a very difficult couple of hours for me."

However great the wrench of leaving Stamford Bridge is, it was not the first time Zola had headed for the exit. An end-of-season meeting with Gianluca Vialli broke down as Zola was told to remodel his game

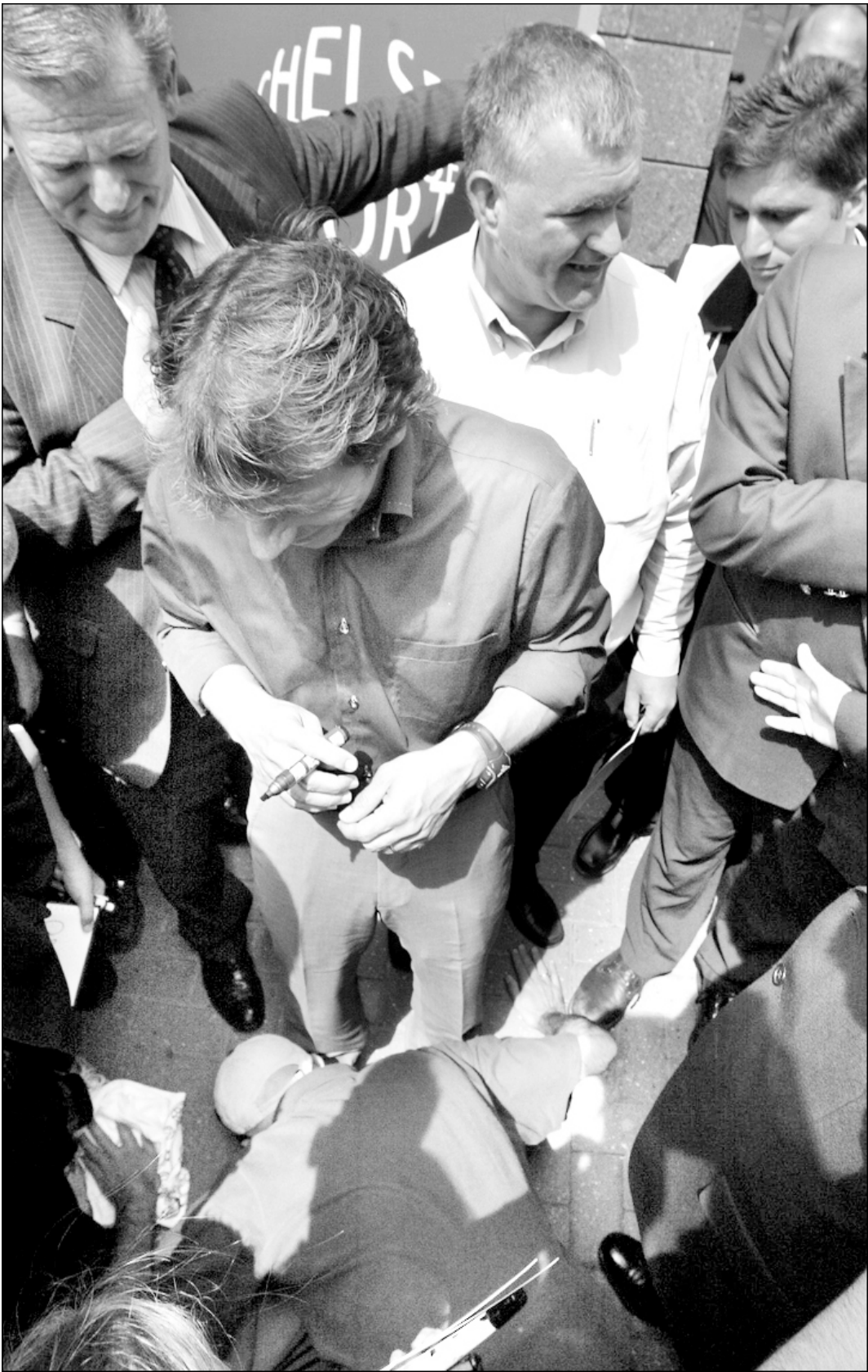


PHOTO: AFP

THANK YOU FOR THE MEMORIES: A Chelsea fan kisses the feet of Gianfranco Zola (C) outside Stamford Bridge in London on July 7.

on that of his then manager.

Zola complained to Bates, intimating that, if Vialli wanted another Vialli, he would have to leave. That the discreet Zola should have expressed such disquiet was enough to signal to Bates that his manager had lost the dressing room. Eight weeks into the new season, Vialli was sacked.

Yet even that lowest episode of Zola's Chelsea career is recalled in diplomatic terms. "With Gianluca there were moments where we had different opinions but that doesn't mean I don't have respect for some-

one. I always respected Vialli and I think he always respected me."

Yet Zola always earned such respect. Able to punch more than his 10st 10lb, it would be hard to find anyone in football who would disparage him.

So English football has emerged from its dark ages with Zola as one of the torchbearers, but the relationship has been reciprocal. The Italian recognises the devotion of English fans to the game.

Recalling the last day of the 1997-98 Premiership season, he said: "I will never forget when we played

Bolton at home when we needed a draw to get to the Uefa Cup and they needed a draw to avoid relegation."

"We won 2-0 and their supporters started clapping us. That really says something."

It is all too easy to be hyperbolic in the overblown world of football but Zola is one of the very few players to merit special treatment. He received that yesterday as, at the end of his farewell press conference, he was given an ovation by the journalists.



HARRY KEWELL

## Kewell very close

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Australian striker Harry Kewell was expected to complete a six million pound (10-million-dollar) move to Liverpool after passing a medical at Anfield, it was reported Tuesday.

Kewell is said to have agreed personal terms with the English Premier League club and was expected to fly out with the Liverpool squad to Switzerland on Thursday for a pre-season training camp.

The Liverpool Echo said Leeds and Liverpool had not yet finalised the exact transfer fee and that appeared to be the reason a Kewell interview with the Australian television network Channel Nine announcing his move was not aired on Tuesday.

"It feels great to have it, but I haven't signed it yet," Kewell told Channel Nine on Tuesday. "I will have to wait until Tuesday, that's when I'm going to

## Bergkamp offer not good enough

AFP, London

Dennis Bergkamp's agent has dismissed the new contract Arsenal are offering the Dutch striker as "too embarrassing for words".

Bergkamp has reportedly been proposed a one year deal but on a lower salary than he was receiving before.

His agent, Rob Jansen, told Tuesday's Evening Standard: "The contract Arsenal have offered Dennis is too embarrassing for words."

"I am not going to make public the amount of money involved, but I want to say that this is not the way to deal with people."

"I still intend to get a good outcome from this situation but we are disappointed with the way Arsenal have behaved."

Bergkamp, who is remaining in Holland until his future is resolved, had hoped to finish out his career at Highbury and was intending to put pen to paper on a new deal back in May.

The 34-year-old, who has won two Premiership titles, three FA Cups, made 79 appearances for his country and played at the World Cup, said at the time: "The boss (Arsene Wenger) told me months ago that he wanted to carry on with me for another season."

"I want it as well so hopefully there won't be any problems."

Bergkamp was a 7.5 million pound (12m dollar) signing from Inter Milan in 1995.

## Lucio's Roma chances still alive

AFP, Rome

AS Roma's hopes of signing Bayer Leverkusen's Brazil defender Lucio are still very much alive, according to Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

Last week Leverkusen accepted Roma's bid of 15 million euros (17.15 million dollars) for the Brazilian international, but the deal collapsed after the player failed to agree personal terms.

Lucio then insisted he would stay another year in Germany amid reports that Roma's Serie A rivals Juventus had hijacked the transfer by offering Leverkusen more money to sign him for the start of the 2004-05 season.

But the Gazzetta said Tuesday that Lucio could become a Roma player in the next 48 hours after the Italian club raised their bid to 20 million euros (22.6 million dollars) and offered the 25-year-old better terms.

It is believed that should he join the 2001 Italian champions, Lucio will earn 3 million euros (3.4 million dollars) a season.

Lucio, whose full name is Lucimar da Silva Ferreira Lucio, has made 65 appearances in three seasons for Leverkusen and scored 12 goals.

He has played 25 times for Brazil including the 2002 World Cup final win against Germany, but is yet to score in an international match.

The Gazzetta said if Lucio still refuses to move, Roma will turn their attention to Ajax's highly-rated Romanian defender Adrian Chivu.

# Heart failed Foe

Football

AFP, Paris

Cameroon international Marc-Vivien Foe's death was caused by a heart condition, and not drugs, France's state prosecutor announced at a press conference here Monday.

"He died from natural causes," Xavier Richaud confirmed.

A post mortem last Friday and further blood and urine tests conducted by an International Olympic Committee-sanctioned Swiss laboratory in Switzerland revealed "the complete absence" of drugs, Richaud confirmed.

He said Foe, a 28-year-old father of three, was probably suffering from a congenital heart condition.

"He was suffering from a cardiomyopathy hypertrophica

(abnormally enlarged) left ventricle, something that is almost untraceable without carrying out an extensive examination."

The state prosecutor suggested the heart problem was likely caused by intense activity and the malformed ventricle a result of "the overall effect of physical activity overtime".

"There was a degeneration which triggered a major reaction in the heart," he added.

The Lyon midfielder, who spent last season on loan at English Premiership side Manchester City, died after collapsing in the 72nd minute of his country's Confederation Cup semi-final against Colombia here on June 26.

When the issue of possible drug use was first raised it was dismissed out of hand by Sepp Blatter, president of world football's governing body FIFA.

"It is cynical to suggest this," Blatter told a press conference on the eve of the June 29 Confed Cup final which Cameroon wanted to play in honour of their fallen teammate.

"All the drug controls so far (during the Confederations Cup) have come back negative. Let us wait on the results of the French coroner in this case," he added.

Cameroon team doctor Olivier Assamba had also denied doping had anything to do with his death.

His widow Marie-Louise has claimed team doctors should have prevented him from playing because he had been suffering from dysentery.

The veteran of two World Cup finals (1994/2002), Foe was buried in the Cameroon capital Yaounde on Monday in the presence of Blatter and the Cameroon president Paul Biya.



PHOTO: AFP

State prosecutor Xavier Richaud speaks at a press conference in Lyon on July 7.

# Scenario suits Ronaldinho

Football

AFP, Paris

A bid by Paris St Germain to buy Bordeaux's Portuguese striker Pauleta might open the way for their Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho to join Manchester United.

The L'Equipe sports daily reported Tuesday that PSG had offered eight million euros for Pauleta who has only one year left on his contract at Bordeaux.

"If we get a good offer we have to listen because next year he'll be worth nothing to us," Bordeaux coach Elie Baup told L'Equipe.

Under European labour laws governing the movement of players, Pauleta would be free to join another club for nothing when his contract expires.

A Pauleta move could accelerate the departure of Ronaldinho for Old Trafford.

L'Equipe said United had improved their offer to 25 million euros plus additional payments based on performance that would make the deal worth 35 million euros (40 million dollars).

That would match the Real Madrid offer. The Spanish club were prepared to leave Ronaldinho at Paris for a year but if PSG sign Pauleta they would no longer need Ronaldinho.

"If Pauleta is going to sign for Paris it'll be done by Wednesday," A PSG insider told L'Equipe.

Bordeaux were reported to have already found a successor to Pauleta, leading scorer in the French league last season, in a Brazilian called David who plays for Cruzeiro.

The only stumbling block would



RONALDINHO

# Ready for Real

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Soccer superstar David Beckham and his Real Madrid teammates have been given the green light for their much-anticipated Hong Kong appearance, government officials said Tuesday.

The Spanish champions with new-boy Beckham will take on the Chinese national side at Hong Kong's stadium on August 8 as part of the territory's package of events to help kickstart its ailing tourism industry.

"The visit of the top Spanish football team, which boasts some

of the world's most popular superstars including Beckham, Zidane and Ronaldo, will showcase Hong Kong as a truly world-class city, an ideal venue for international sports and cultural events, and a powerful magnet for investment and tourism," said Hong Kong Secretary for Home Affairs Patrick Ho after a contract signing ceremony paving the way for the match.

Real will visit the former British colony as part of an Asian tour that will also take in China, Japan and Malaysia.

Beckham is a big draw in East Asia. On a recent solo promotional tour he was greeted by hundreds of fans at stops in

Japan, Thailand and Malaysia.

With Beckham, and the publicity machine that accompanies him, Real Madrid will be looking to open up the lucrative Asian market where football is growing increasingly popular.

"The enthusiasm generated by the duel between this super squad and our national team will no doubt stimulate domestic spending, too," added Ho.

The match is a centrepiece of the Relaunch Hong Kong campaign, created in the wake of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome virus outbreak, which frightened tourists away from Asia and decimated the tourism industry.

## Ranieri's warning

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri has warned he will not tolerate any interference in team affairs following the arrival of the club's new owner Roman Abramovich.

However, the Italian does not expect the Russian billionaire to make any attempt to influence playing matters at Stamford Bridge.

"I don't permit interference on the technical side and if something like that was to happen my departure is a sure thing," he told The Mirror.

"The arrival of Roman Abramovich won't influence my work. Directors have not done so before at Chelsea, and nor do I think they will now. Shareholders have never advised me what to do."

Reports have already linked Abramovich with Roma coach Fabio Capello.

# Doing what he does best!

Football

AFP, London

No sooner has David Beckham settled into his new job at Real Madrid than he's out in the Spanish summer heat lensing a soft-drink commercial, the Sun newspaper reported Tuesday.

The England captain was spotted Monday "kitted out in a smock and sleeveless tunic" -- plus not-quite-matching sunglasses -- during a seven hour stint on the set of the 90-second Pepsi-Cola spot,

the tabloid said.

In a dispatch from Medinaceli, where shooting has been underway for three days, the Sun said Beckham stars as a player "in an olde worlde football team" with fellow footballers Raul, Ronaldo and Roberto Carlos.

"We've been told to say nothing about what goes on or we'll be sacked," an extra was quoted as saying.

A pair of fuzzy telephoto pictures in the Sun showed Beckham sitting with a blonde "co-star" and standing attentively in his gladiator get-up -- holding what looks like a can of soft drink in his right hand.

# The 'Bull' back home

Football

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's all-time leading scorer Hakan Sukur rejoined 2001 UEFA Cup champions Galatasaray on Monday after a troubled spell with English Premiership outfit Blackburn Rovers, the Istanbul club said on its official website.

"Galatasaray has signed a contract with Hakan Sukur," read the brief statement.

"Sukur, who signed an empty contract, took his place in the team at evening training. The team will leave for Austria on Tuesday to prepare for the new season," it added.

The 32-year-old, dubbed the "Bull of the Bosphorus", played for

Galatasaray between 1992 and 2000 except for a three-month spell with Italian side Torino.

He later joined Inter Milan and Parma before joining Blackburn Rovers in December last year.

His career in England got off to the worst start possible when he broke his leg in a training ground accident shortly after joining the club. He also underwent hernia surgery during a two-month spell on the sidelines.

In May, Sukur signalled he wanted to leave the club, telling Turkish newspapers that he was homesick and that he had "problems" with Rovers boss Graeme Souness, with whom he worked with before at Galatasaray.

Souness for his part stated back in April that he would like him to stay as he felt he was acclimatising to the Premiership.