

Ronaldinho's path clear Barca in the frame too

 Football

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain completed the signing of Portuguese striker Pauleta from Bordeaux on Thursday, opening the way for their Brazil World Cup winner Ronaldinho to go to Manchester United.

However, PSG president Francis Graille has claimed Barcelona have already made a better offer than United for Ronaldinho.

Barcelona were understood to have offered 27 million euros (31 million dollars) plus French defender Philippe Christanval and Argentine midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme.

However, French newspaper reports on Thursday doubted whether Barcelona would be able to come up with the money as they had already delayed paying Monaco the five million euros (5.6 million dollars) for the French club's Mexican defender Rafael Marquez.

United were said to have offered 25 million euros plus additional payments based on the 23-year-old Ronaldinho's performance which

could raise the deal to 35 million euros (40 million dollars).

Last month, Barcelona failed to lure David Beckham to the Nou Camp with the England skipper preferring instead to move to Real Madrid.

United said Wednesday they



RONALDINHO

would be going back to Paris in an attempt to sign the Brazilian.

Graille said a recent cash injection of 20 million euros (23 million dollars) by majority shareholders Canal Plus TV would allow him to keep both Pauleta and Ronaldinho.

However, new coach Vahid Halilhodzic admitted there was only a slim chance now of Ronaldinho staying.

"Just because we sign Pauleta doesn't mean Ronaldinho has to go," he insisted before adding: "If I had been here a month earlier to talk things through with the player and his people I could have changed his mind."

The 30-year-old Pauleta was leading scorer in the French league last season with 23 goals.

Bordeaux confirmed his transfer to Paris in a statement. Reports put the fee at eight million euros (9 million dollars).

"He's the one player I had set my heart on," said Halilhodzic.

Manchester have refused to be drawn on their latest moves because as a listed company they cannot let details of their moves in the transfer market out before informing the Stock Exchange.

"We are pursuing our interest in the player," was all the club had to say.

Ronaldinho's brother and agent Roberto Assis has already agreed terms with united and United manager Alex Ferguson was reported to be poised to fly to Paris to clinch the deal.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Legendary Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta (R) shows a plaque given to him by the head of Argentina's Football Association Julio Grondona during a gala match to celebrate his country's first World Cup victory in 1978, at the River Plate stadium in Buenos Aires on July 9.

'Thank you Batigol'

 Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentinian football great Gabriel Batistuta was given a special award for his record goalscoring exploits for the national side here on Wednesday during a friendly match to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their first World Cup triumph.

The 34-year-old scored 57 goals in 78 internationals but never tasted World Cup glory, the 1998 quarter-finals being the nearest he got to a final in three renewals.

The former Inter Milan, AS Roma and Fiorentina star bade his

farewell to his devoted fans, though he left open the unlikely possibility of him once again returning to the international fold from which he announced his retirement last summer after exiting at the first hurdle of the World Cup finals.

"I believe you will never see me again in the national colours," he said.

"However if I feel well physically well we will see," he added.

Batistuta is the latest former top class player to join the lucrative route to football in the tiny Gulf state of Qatar having joined Al-Arabi on a two year contract.

It was reported he would receive 5.5 million dollars for the first year and 2.5 million dollars for the

second.

Qatar, with huge financial resources thanks to its oil and gas wealth, has attracted numerous ageing top-level players in recent months including 1994 Brazil World Cup winning striker Romario, France's 1998 World Cup winning defender Frank Leboeuf and German veterans Stefan Effenberg and Mario Basler.

Batistuta will be hoping for better fortune on the pitch than Romario, who returned to Brazil after just three months with Al-Saad having failed to score - though his bank balance swelled by 1.5million dollars.

De Boer goes to Galatasaray

AFP, Istanbul

Dutch international defender Frank de Boer on Wednesday signed a two-year contract with 2001 UEFA Cup champions Galatasaray after his release by Barcelona, the Istanbul club said on its official website.

The deal was signed in Amsterdam after two days of talks between Galatasaray boss Ozhan Canaydin and the 33-year-old de Boer.

Reports had suggested last month that apart from Galatasaray, Turkey's Fenerbahce, Greek club Panathinaikos and English Premiership side Blackburn Rovers had been interested in signing de Boer, a former Ajax player.

Chivu has to wait

REUTERS, Milan

AS Roma have been banned from international transfer deals by world soccer's governing body FIFA due to an outstanding debt to a Peruvian club.

The ban means that Roma's 18 million euro transfer of Romanian defender Cristian Chivu from Ajax Amsterdam is now on hold until the Serie A club can satisfy FIFA that they have settled the outstanding sum.

Chivu was unveiled as Roma's first major signing of the close-season on Wednesday after agreeing a five-year deal with the Italian side.

Roma and Ajax have agreed an 18 million euro transfer fee for the 22-year-old central defender.

But on Thursday FIFA said the registration of Chivu as a Roma player cannot be completed due to the ban.

"FIFA has informed AS Roma, via the Italian FA as per standard communication policy, that a ban on international transfers has been imposed on the club until their financial obligations to the Peruvian club Sporting Cristal, in relation to the transfer of the player Gustavo Vassallo Ferrari, have been met," a FIFA spokesman said.

A spokesman for Roma declined to comment but the club is expected to make a statement later on Thursday.

Teixeira again

 Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Ricardo Teixeira was elected president of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) for the fifth successive time Wednesday amid a battle of court orders.

Teixeira, standing for the "Five-times world champions" party, beat Carlos Alberto Oliveira by 46 votes to one with two abstentions.

His latest victory comes two years after a Congressional investigation accused him of tax evasion and described his administration as "negligent."

The result was briefly suspended when Itamar Vasconcelos, a member of Oliveira's opposition group,

won an injunction from a court in the city of the Belo Horizonte, which ruled the electoral college was too small.

But the CBF said Wednesday that it had won a court order of its own within four hours, overturning the injunction.

"Do you think that the CBF would organise an election, with the backing of all the clubs, knowing that the result could be overturned," said the CBF in a statement. "Of course not. Some people just want to appear."

The presidents of Brazil's 27 regional soccer federations and 22 of the country's biggest clubs voted, but critics claimed the second and third division clubs should also be allowed to take part.

Teixeira, who has been in charge of the CBF since 1989, described the election as totally democratic.

The corporate Nakata!

 Football

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese football star Hidetoshi Nakata, whose future with Italian Serie-A side Parma is up in the air, is to use his head as a part-time corporate executive to help revive a Tokyo confectioner as well as nod in goals.

Sweet maker Tohato, restructuring itself after bankruptcy, said Thursday it has signed up the 26-year-old international midfielder as a "Chief Branding Officer" to help the company package new products and establish a code of conduct.

Nakata will participate in Tohato's weekly business strategy meetings once or twice a month from his Italian base by telephone video conferencing, a company spokesman said.

He will also take part remotely in Tohato's debate on management planning but not appear in

adverts for the firm. Nakata already endorses a range of products in Japan including Vodafone mobile telephones and Canon digital cameras.

His contract will run for three years with an annual salary of 12 million yen (100,000 dollars).

"With my overseas perspective, I have been worried about Japan's lack of spirit," Nakata was quoted as telling the company. "I would be glad to cooperate if there is anything I can do to help revive a Japanese company."

Nakata, a high school graduate with a keen interest in mathematics, has said in the past he wanted a career outside football one day and might acquire qualifications in such professions as accounting.

Tohato filed for court protection from creditors in March with estimated liabilities of 46 billion yen (380 million dollars), which mostly derived from its excessive investment in real estate ventures such as golf courses.

Blatter for club cuts

 Football

AFP, London

The world's leading football championships should radically reduce the number of clubs in them so as to avoid a repeat of the tragic death of Cameroon international Marc-Vivien Foe, said FIFA supremo Sepp Blatter on Wednesday.

The Swiss told a press conference in London that he would put his proposal to the world governing body's congress in October in Doha, Qatar, and if accepted, take it to FIFA's centenary congress in Paris in May 2004 for ratification.

Blatter acknowledged that if successful it would take time for the measures to be adopted but he added it was high time that club football accepted that players were not machines that could be asked to play relentlessly.

"We must do something otherwise we will never get off this carousel of too much football with no holidays for the players, injuries and even deaths," said Blatter, who attended the state funeral of Foe in the Cameroon capital Yaounde on Monday.

The ideal number in a league should be 16, have 30 league matches and then Cup

matches and international club matches on top.

"I will bring this up in the congress in Doha where it can be discussed and then it shall be decided at the ordinary congress in May next year in Paris.

"If such a decision is taken by the congress I am sure everyone will abide by it, but it will not happen immediately, there needs to be time to adapt and it will take place step by step."

Foe died after collapsing in the 72nd minute of his country's Confederations Cup semi-final against Colombia in the French city of Lyon on June 26.

The cause of death for the 28-year-old Lyon midfielder, who spent last season on loan at English Premiership side Manchester City, was diagnosed as a rare heart problem.

Blatter's proposal received a muted response from English football's governing body, the Football Association (FA) - the Premier League has 20 teams in it at the moment.

"Clearly this is hypothetical and is not an issue of discussion at this time.

"However as a national association the English FA would always endeavour to abide by FIFA rules."

Inter rope in Fadiga

AFP, Milan

Senegalese international midfielder Khalilou Fadiga signed for Italian giants Inter Milan on Wednesday from French Cup winners Auxerre for a fee of 3 million euros (3.4 million dollars), the buying club announced.

The 28-year-old signed a three year contract - thought to be worth 600,000 euros a year to him - with last season's Champions League semi-finalists.

Fadiga was inspirational in midfield for Senegal in last year's World Cup finals - scoring one goal - where they reached the quarter-finals before exiting to a golden goal by Turkey.

The left sided midfielder, capped 32 times scoring three times, had been involved in controversy before the tournament started when he had been charged with stealing a gold necklace from jewellers in the Korean city of Daegu.

However, he said the affair had been a prank gone wrong and returned the necklace while the charges were dropped after the store keeper asked the police to do so.

It allowed the team to concentrate on their opening match with then holders France - it did the trick as Senegal sensationally beat them 1-0.

Fadiga, who holds a Belgian passport after spending six years there in which he won the Belgian title with FC Bruges, had a successful season with Auxerre following the World Cup playing 34 times and scoring just once, finishing on a high note when they lifted the French Cup after beating Paris Saint Germain 2-1.



PHOTO: AFP

President of the African Football Confederation Issa Hayatou (L) shakes hands with his Asian counterpart, Qatar's Mohammed bin Hammam (C) while the president of the Lebanese football confederation Hashem Haidar looks on after their press conference in the Beirut on July 9.

AFC, CAF friends

 Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and its African counterpart have buried the hatchet following their bitter three-year row over the 2006 World Cup vote.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) snapped all relations with the AFC after Asia voted for Germany instead of South Africa in the closely-contested 2006 World Cup ballot three years ago.

Furious CAF officials accused Asia of betrayal after Germany scraped home to leave South Africa broken-hearted.

All contacts between the two continental associations were scrapped, meaning the end of Afro-Asian club and national team competitions, as well as exchange programmes for match officials.

However both the AFC and CAF have now decided to put the row behind them, a statement released here Thursday said.

AFC President Mohamed Bin Hammam held a meeting with African soccer chief Issa Hayatou in Beirut Wednesday where the two bodies announced the resumption of relations.

"I am delighted to be re-establishing firm links with the Confederation Africaine de Football, as our friends and brothers in the development of football," bin Hammam said.



PHOTO: AP

VISA ASSURED! The Brazil under-23 squad take a photo with the US ambassador in Mexico Antonio Garza (second from L) as they wait for their visa in Mexico City on July 9, 2003. The team was headed to the United States to partake in the upcoming CONCACAF Gold Cup tournament.