

# 'Don't call me Barbie'

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Ronaldo's wife Milene Domingues admitted Wednesday that she was determined to prove she is no 'Barbie doll' during the women's World Cup in the United States later this month.

The persistent media attention surrounding the 24-year-old during team training has led to the pretty blonde being dubbed 'Barbie' by teammates who have to survive on a ten-dollar a day allowance from the Brazilian football federation.

But after being called Mrs. Ronaldo, or Ronaldinha, after her husband of three years and Real Madrid star Ronaldo, Domingues takes the criticism which has even come from team coach Paulo Gonçalves, with humour.

"I'd really love to have her (Barbie's) waist," she quips.

"Funny when I was small I never played with dolls, I always pulled off

their heads to run out and play football."

Goncalves told the daily Folha that they rarely saw Domingues, who is a member of the women's team of Spanish side Rayo Vallecano, play and that she had been called up at the insistence of the Brazilian federation to popularise the game.

But Domingues, who along with the women's squad attended the training session of the world champion men's team at the Granja Comary, in Teresopolis on Wednesday, hit back at criticism.

"On the pitch I can't be such a Barbie, otherwise they'd criticise me," she said.

And the mother of three-year-old Ronald admitted she would not be allowing her husband, who scored both goals in Brazil's World Cup victory last year, to watch her play.

"Imagine if I missed a goal? He wouldn't let me forget it for two years," quipped Domingues after watching her superstar husband in training for the 2006 World Cup qualifier against Colombia.



THAT'S MY HUSBAND OVER THERE! Brazilian women's team player Milene Domingues (2nd from R), wife of superstar Ronaldo, points to something while attending with teammates the training session of the men's squad at the Granja Comary, in Teresopolis on September 3.

# Vieira's verdict

AFP, Paris

Arsenal skipper Patrick Vieira says Chelsea have the strongest side on paper but winning the English Premiership is as much about winning at clubs like Leicester City as taking points off Manchester United.

Vieira says France team-mate Claude Makelele is the ideal player for Chelsea who took their spending to 111 million pounds (175.5 million dollars) when they signed the hard-tackling midfielder from Real Madrid.

"Claude was just the player they needed," Vieira, here for France's Euro 2004 qualifier against Cyprus, told l'Equipe sports daily.

"If they gel, the Blues will be one of the favourites for the title. They have already got the best individual players, on paper, in Europe."

"But at the moment it's only on paper. The big challenge is how they're going to satisfy everybody. They're great players with strong characters. And players like that want to play -- every match."

"But the Premiership is not only about Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal. You can't rule out Liverpool and Newcastle despite their poor starts."

"But winning the championship is also about winning at clubs like Leicester. Those are the sort of matches where the title is won or lost."

Vieira, who returned after four months out following a knee operation, said he had been surprised by Arsenal's run of four wins.

"I didn't really expect it because we're not all at 100 per cent," he said.

"I'm convinced we can only get better."

And he believes Arsenal's policy of keeping out of the transfer market will pay off.

"The directors have gone for stability. Perhaps we could have strengthened the squad but when you see players like (Nwankwo) Kanu and (Dennis) Bergkamp on the bench you realise we've got some classy players."

Vieira will get a chance to see just how Makelele, Juan Sebastian Veron and Hernan Crespo are playing as a team when the Gunners tackle Chelsea at Highbury on October 18.

# Tailor-made for France



AP, London

France could clinch a European Championship final spot Saturday with a win over minnow Cyprus -- and continue the rebuilding after its embarrassing first round exit from last year's World Cup.

France is the only team with a perfect record in Euro 2004 qualifying -- 15 points from 5 games.

With three rounds of qualifying left, the fight for automatic qualification in most groups will go down to the wire. England, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Netherlands, Ireland and Spain all face crunch matches this week. The runners up of the 10 groups will make the playoffs.

Twenty matches are played Saturday and further 20 on Wednesday. The final qualifying round is on Oct. 11. Portugal automatically qualifies as host.

With a win Saturday at the Stade de France, site of its 1998 World Cup triumph, France would clinch Group 1 regardless of the result of its final two matches.

"We are not thinking about qualification yet, only about what we need to do on the pitch," French coach Jacques Santini said. "For the moment nothing is achieved and the players are conscious of that."

France could be without influential midfielder Zinedine Zidane who injured his ankle in Real Madrid's 1-1 draw with Villarreal Tuesday.

England plays Macedonia in Skopje hoping to avenge its 2-2 draw last October but with a midfield weakened by injuries to Paul Scholes, Trevor Sinclair and Steven Gerrard. Defender Rio Ferdinand is out with a kidney complaint and captain David Beckham hopes to recover from a groin injury.

"Almost for sure, it will be a midfield that has never played together before," England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said.

With Group 7 rival Turkey expected to win at Liechtenstein Saturday, the showdown for automatic qualification will likely be decided when England visits Turkey in October. England hosts Liechtenstein next Wednesday.

Turkey has 15 points from six games and England 13 from five.

In a bid to avoid hooligan violence that could see it thrown out of the tournament, England has rejected its ticket allocations for the matches in Macedonia and Turkey and mounted a strong security



DAVID BECKHAM

operation. "It's better not to have fans at the next two away games," Eriksson said. "If you have to make a choice, security is always more important than football."

World Cup runner up and Euro 1996 winner Germany has a crunch match in Iceland. The Germans trail Iceland by a point in Group 5, but have a game in hand.

Vales' winning streak was ended last month by Serbia-Montenegro, but it still has a two

# World champs' motivation



REUTERS, Teresopolis

Brazilian superstar Rivaldo has criticised the decision by FIFA that has forced his country to qualify for the 2006 World Cup, even though they are defending champions.

"This criterion is completely

wrong," he told reporters at Brazil's mountain retreat near Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday.

"We have to travel here, there and everywhere and it's a tremendous sacrifice."

Five-times champions Brazil launch the defense of their crown away to Colombia on Sunday in the steamy Caribbean port of Barranquilla. Three days later, they play their second qualifier at home to Ecuador in Manaus, on the banks of the Amazon river.

The South American team will play 18 qualifiers over the next 30 months as they attempt to maintain their record of being the only country to have played at every World Cup.

Until now, the defending champions have always been guaranteed an automatic place at the finals, but FIFA decided to change the rules

before the last World Cup.

However left-back Roberto Carlos, who like Rivaldo made transatlantic trips virtually every month to play in the qualifying competition for 2002, is confident Brazil would regain their best form.

"The first image is the one that stays," he said. "This is the first step for the 2006 World Cup. The prestige of the five-times world champions is at stake."

"Brazil only lose to themselves. If we play as we did at the last World Cup, it will be very difficult to beat us."

Carlos added that motivation would be sky-high.

"It's only when you're part of it that you understand what the Brazilian national team is all about," he said.

"We're not short of enthusiasm. I'm proud to be part of the team."

When the CBF [Brazilian Football Confederation] arrives at my house, I jump up and down with happiness.

"The first thing I did when I got here was to look at the badge of the CBF to see if they had put on the fifth star," he added, referring to the stars which each symbolize a World Cup title.

Meanwhile, Brazil captain Cafu said on Wednesday that he wanted to emulate Pele by playing in his third World Cup winning team and his fourth finals.

The AC Milan star said that the possibility of chasing Pele's records kept him motivated.

"How could I not be motivated if I'm equaling Pele's records for Brazil and I could even beat them," he said.

"Football is my motivation." Cafu played in the Brazil team which beat Italy on penalties after a

goalless draw in the 1994 World Cup final, lost 3-0 to France four years later and captained the side which beat Germany 2-0 to win a fifth world title in 2002.

He will be 36 when the 2006 World Cup is played and is already the only player to have taken part in three World Cup finals.

Pele won World Cup winners medals in 1958, 1962 and 1970, although he missed the 1962 final against Czechoslovakia because of injury.

He also played in 1966 when Brazil were knocked out in the first round.

"I want to play the same number of World Cups as Pele and increase my number of caps for the team," Cafu added.

# South America hit the road



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

The 2002 World Cup finished 433 days ago and the next final is still nearly three years away, but the qualifiers for the 2006 tournament get under way in South America on Saturday.

The first ball will be kicked in Buenos Aires where twice champions Argentina, who provided one of the most spectacular flops of last year's tournament in South Korea and Japan, take on neighbours and arch-rivals Chile.

Brazil, who beat Germany 2-0 in Yokohama on June 30 last year to win an unprecedented fifth world title, launch their defence one day later in the steamy Caribbean port of Barranquilla, new FIFA rules having deprived them of a guaranteed place in the finals.

Ronaldo, who scored both goals against Germany in the 2002 final, will play the first World Cup qualifier of his remarkable career.

Recent qualifying competitions have kicked off on small Caribbean islands but a curious combination of circumstances deprived the likes of Dominica and Dutch Antilles from briefly capturing the attention of the football world.

The 2002 qualifiers were launched in Port of Spain, where Trinidad beat the Dutch Antilles 5-0, while the road to France in 1998 began at a rickety cricket ground on the tiny Caribbean island of Dominica.

This time, the action will focus on the 60,000-capacity Monumental stadium on the banks of the River Plate, venue for the final in 1978 when Argentina beat the Netherlands.

The early start is the result of a compromise between FIFA and the South American nations, who wanted to retain their marathon qualifying tournament in which the 10 teams play each other twice.

Previously, the qualifiers were squeezed into 18 months, angering European clubs who lost many of their South American players on a monthly basis as they journeyed across the Atlantic to represent their countries.

By spreading the qualifiers over

a longer period, the South Americans have managed to retain the format while fitting in with FIFA's co-ordinated calendar. However this compromise has produced anomalies.

Three years is a long time for a team to stay intact and the Argentina side that will launch the campaign on Saturday could have a very different look to the one which finally competes in Germany -- providing they qualify.

The 2006 World Cup qualifiers begin before the 16 finalists have been settled for next year's European championships while three Champions League finals, two African Nations Cups and a Copa America will be played between Saturday and the 2006 finals.

By July 2006, Brazil's Cafu, who is due to captain his team on Sunday, will be 36, Rivaldo will be 34 and even Ronaldo will be nearing his 30th birthday.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira will be 63 and assistant director Mario Zagallo will be a month short of his 75th birthday. Former World Cup hero Romario, ever-hopeful of a national team recall, will be 40.

Argentina's match with Chile will be immediately followed by Ecuador against Venezuela in Quito and Peru against Paraguay in Lima. The remaining match on Sunday is between Uruguay and Bolivia.

The top four teams from South America will qualify for the 2006 finals, with the fifth playing off for a further spot.

Last year, FIFA took away the "half" place for the fifth team and gave the Oceania region a direct slot at the finals, but they backtracked at another meeting in May.

Argentina, who have not missed a World Cup since 1970, and Brazil, the only country to have played at all 17 finals, are considered almost certain to qualify.

Colombia, Uruguay and Paraguay are considered the strongest of the other contenders, although Peru, Chile and Ecuador are likely to put up a fight.

Baseball-loving Venezuela are the only members of the South American Confederation who have never qualified for the World Cup finals, but they have improved vastly in the last two years.

Bolivia, now led by former Chile coach Nelson Acosta, appear to depend too heavily on playing their home matches in La Paz, at 3,600 metres above sea level.

While their opponents appear to be getting better at adapting to the conditions, Bolivia have not won a game at low altitude since they beat Guatemala in March 1999.

# Primera Liga

# Deportivo blank Bilbao

Football

AFP, Madrid

Deportivo La Coruna scored an impressive 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday to earn the only 100 per cent record in the Spanish first division just two match days into the season.

Juan Carlos Valeron opened the scoring at Deportivo's Riazor stadium after 11 minutes as he continued to relish his return to competitive action after a season lost to injury.

Uruguayan striker Walter Pandiani waited just two minutes after being introduced as a substitute to score Depor's second goal and seal the three points.

# Diouf fined for spitting

Football

AFP, Glasgow

Senegal football star El-Hadji Diouf was fined 5,000 pounds here on Thursday for spitting on a fan during a UEFA Cup quarter-final between his club Liverpool and Scottish giants Celtic.

Diouf pleaded guilty at Glasgow Sheriff Court to assault under provocation for spitting at Celtic's Parkhead stadium on March 13.

The incident happened when Diouf got tangled up with some of the Celtic supporters at the edge of the pitch while going to retrieve the ball late in the second half.

After being slapped on the back of the head by one of the fans, the player retaliated by spitting as he pulled away.

He was subsequently dropped from Liverpool's squad for the return leg, fined two weeks wages by the club and banned for two matches by European

Deportivo had beaten Real Zaragoza 1-0 in their season-opening match on Sunday.

In Wednesday's other matches, Real Mallorca bounced back from their opening day defeat as they beat newly promoted Real Zaragoza 2-0 at home with Cameroonian international Samuel Eto'o converting from the penalty spot for the second time in consecutive matches.

Dutch forward Arnold Bruggink had scored first for Mallorca.

Espanyol defender Alberto Lopo struck the equaliser four minutes into stoppage time to earn his side a 2-2 draw with Real Betis in Seville, while Atletico Madrid achieved their first points by edging past Albacete 1-0.

# Troussier's Dirty Dozen!

Football

AFP, Dinan, Qatar

Qatar's French coach Philippe Troussier said on Thursday his job of transforming the Persian Gulf state into a major football force was so tough it reminded him of a Hollywood movie.

"I have taken this team in a commando spirit - it is my Dirty Dozen project," said Troussier referring to the Robert Aldrich war movie where a group of no-hope soldiers are spirited away from prison cells to take part in a do-or-die wartime mission.

The 48-year-old Troussier, who took Japan to the second round of the World Cup last year and who has been in charge at Qatar for just five weeks, has been handed the task of taking the team to the Gulf Cup, Asian Cup and the World Cup finals in Germany in 2006 - a feat the tiny oil and gas-rich state has never managed in the past.

Troussier, who was preparing his team for a friendly against Algeria here on the west coast of France on Thursday, admits that having also coached Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and South Africa, this could be his toughest job yet.

"There is no football culture in Qatar," said the man nicknamed the White Witch Doctor.

Qatar's native population is just 300,000 out of a 700,000 total and where the domestic football league is made up of a 10-team top-flight and six-team second division.

"The football federation is very rich but the team is a poor relation. It's necessary to build an identity."

"When you ask a Qatari player why he has chosen this life, he sometimes says it is to make a living, because he has seen it on television but there isn't really a career plan behind it."

"To go and play abroad isn't a priority."

"There is a lack of maturity amongst the players. The coach

# Roonie blackmailer charged

AFP, London

Police investigating threats against the agent of Everton striker Wayne Rooney have charged a man with blackmail.

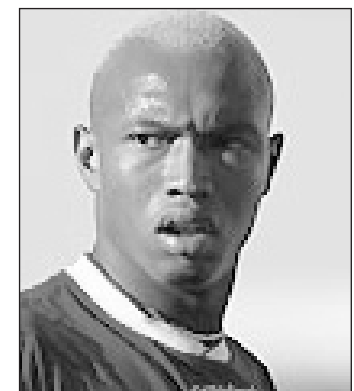
The move followed newspaper allegations that millionaire agent Paul Stretford had threats made against him.

Cheshire police said a 41-year-old man from Liverpool had been charged with blackmail against a businessman and had been bailed to appear before magistrates' court on September 9.

Stretford, 44, is one of the game's most prolific agents with dozens of stars on his books as well as Rooney, who is valued at more than 20 million pounds.

His company, Proactive Sports Group, had always insisted none of the alleged offences had been directed at the teenage Everton striker.

The accused man was named as Liverpool boxing promoter John Hyland. His solicitor, Peter Quinn, said Hyland denied the charge.



EL-HADJI DIOUF

football's governing body UEFA. The 22-year-old, voted African player of the year for 2002, was bought by Liverpool from French club Lens for around 10 million pounds (15 million dollars) after playing for Senegal in the World Cup last summer.

He struggled to make an impact in his first season in English football but his form in the current campaign has been encouraging for Liverpool fans.