

# Rivaldo next Real catch?

## Football

INTERNET SOURCES, Madrid

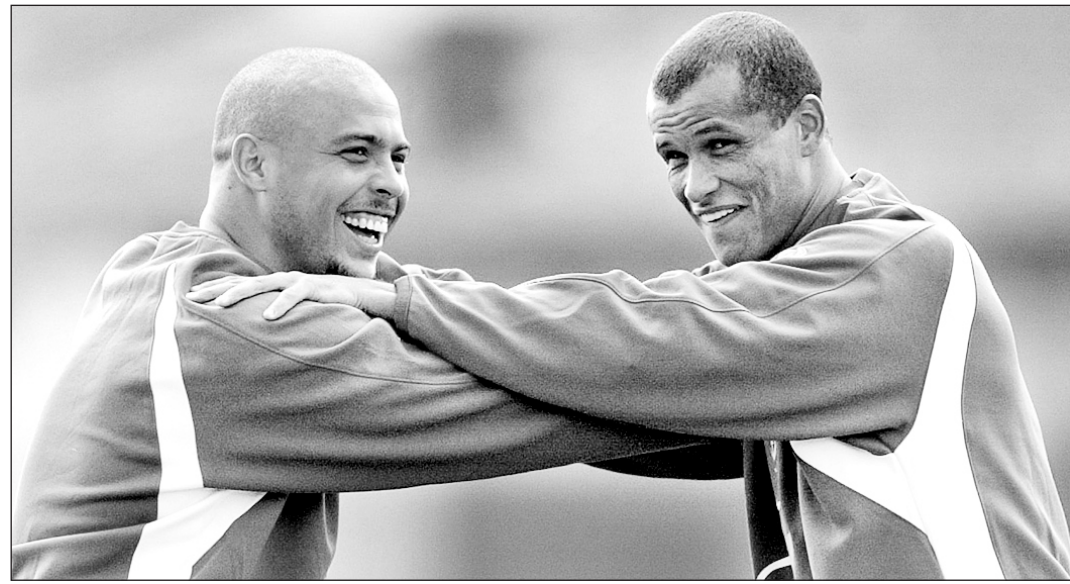
Brazil superstar Ronaldo has asked Real Madrid president Florentino Perez to sign his disgruntled compatriot Rivaldo from AC Milan, according to newspaper reports in Brazil. The two players apparently spoke at Ronaldo's 27th birthday party in Madrid on Monday, when Ronaldo promised to do everything he could to persuade Perez to sign the former Barcelona forward. Rivaldo has hardly played this

season after falling out with coach Carlo Ancelotti and is rumoured to be on his way out of the San Siro when the transfer window reopens in January. Although Milan won the Champions League and Italian Cup last season, Rivaldo had a disappointing first season in Italy, scoring just five goals in 22 league appearances. "I'm going to talk to my president and Rivaldo will be happy with us here at Real," Ronaldo reportedly said. Rivaldo later told Spanish sports daily AS that his friend Ronaldo had broached the subject of a return to

Spain and said he might be tempted to sound out Real. "You never know. I would be very proud to play for Real Madrid. But I have another two years on my contract in Milan and I owe my current club total respect. "We'll have to wait a few months to know if the two clubs will get together and reach agreement over a possible move to Real Madrid," said the midfielder star, who admitted to being unhappy in Italy. "It's a difficult situation for me as I don't get much opportunity to play and football is my life." Ronaldo's birthday celebration

was a real bash. However, teammate David Beckham came alone thus adding more fuel to the rumour of a marital crisis. But popstar wife Victoria didn't know what she missed! There was glamour and glittery abounds at Ronaldo's villa in the posh neighbourhood of La Moraleja. There was a real party with fireworks, a samba band flown in from Brazil, forty-five cows sizzling on the barbeque and a whole host of glamorous, beautiful people from all over the world. Meanwhile, Milan captain Paolo Maldini said Tuesday that Rivaldo

must earn the right to play for the European champions like every other member of the star-studded Serie A squad. "It's normal for him not to be happy but there are others like him who are not playing regularly, such as Cristian Brocchi and Jon Dahl Tomasson," Maldini said. "There are 25 of us and it is not easy finding a place in the team for player who is not at the top of his game. "It must be hard for a player like Rivaldo, a World Cup winner, if he is not able to give 100 per cent to a club that demands success."



DREAM PROSPECT: An AFP file photo of superstars Ronaldo (L) and Rivaldo.

# Best of the rest gear up

## UEFA CUP

REUTERS, London

The reality of life outside the money-spinning Champions League will hit home for a number of Europe's elite clubs this week when the UEFA Cup takes center stage with 48 first-round, first-legs. Former European champions Barcelona and Liverpool begin the road to next year's final in Gothenburg with trips to unfamiliar surroundings in Eastern Europe. Barcelona, who have made an unbeaten start to the Spanish league season under coach Frank Rijkaard, open in Slovakia against Puchov, while Liverpool face Slovenia's Olimpija Ljubljana. Barcelona's unique record of never having failed to qualify for Europe was threatened last season when they exited the quarterfinals of the Champions League. But a strong surge under then coach Radomir Antic took them from 12th in the league to sixth and a UEFA Cup place. The Catalans could be without Philip Cocu against Puchov after the Dutch international was substituted late in the 1-1 draw with Osasuna on Saturday with a recurrence of a left knee problem. Rafael Marquez should deputize if he is unfit. Valencia, beaten Champions League finalists in 2000 and 2001, also find themselves in the UEFA Cup this season. Rafael Benitez's side, who crushed Atletico Madrid 3-0 on Saturday to maintain their unbeaten start, take on AIK in Stockholm on Wednesday. The 16 teams who lost in the third qualifying round of the Champions League enter the competition, including another former European champion, Borussia Dortmund. Dortmund, who face Austria Vienna, were humbled in the Champions League qualifiers by Club Brugge after a penalty shoot-out and their absence from Europe's premier club competition this season still haunts coach Matthias Sammer. "I was certainly irritated not to be a part of it. But quite simply it isn't just the best teams that play in the Champions League, but those that have qualified for it," Sammer said in a recent interview on the club's Website. "It isn't nice to have to watch from the outside, but the simple fact of the matter is that we failed to qualify." Sammer has a long injury list to contend with -- defender Christoph Metzelder, midfielder Torsten Frings and striker Marcio Amoroso are sidelined -- and their preparations for the trip to the Austrian capital will not have been helped by a 1-0 reverse at VfB Stuttgart in the Bundesliga on Saturday.



PHOTO: AFP

LET'S SEE WHO'S THE TOUGHEST! Barcelona stars Luis Enrique (L) and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst going through an exercise drill in Trnava on September 23 ahead of their UEFA Cup match against FK Matador Puchov.

Vienna, who won the league and Cup double last season, are coached by German Juergen Loew and will be desperate to inflict more problems on Dortmund. AS Roma, who top the fledgling Serie A standings on goal difference after drawing 2-2 away at Juventus at the weekend, will be confident of securing a healthy first leg lead at home to Vardar Skopje. The Italians, beaten UEFA Cup finalists in 1991, must be wary of underestimating their Macedonian rivals, who toppled CSKA Moscow in the second round of Champions League qualifying and provided a tough test for Sparta Prague before bowing out at the next stage. The 1999 winners Parma, who like Roma have seven points from their first three Serie A matches after an impressive 3-2 win at Lazio on Sunday, travel to Ukraine to face Metalurg Donetsk. UEFA's seeding system avoided any major clashes but the draw still

provided some interesting match-ups, none more so than the Anglo-Turkish clash between Blackburn Rovers, coached by former Galatasaray boss Graeme Souness, and Genclerbirliigi. Tensions have run high between English and Turkish supporters since two Leeds United fans were killed in Istanbul in 2000. England play Turkey in a decisive Euro 2004 qualifier in Istanbul next month and the English FA have urged fans not to travel for safety reasons. But Blackburn expect to have around 500 supporters travel to Ankara-based Genclerbirliigi on Wednesday and say they have not been advised of any special security measures. Two other former UEFA Cup winners feature in this year's competition, with 1997 champions Schalke, who qualified via the Intertoto Cup, away to Croatia's Kamen Ingrad in the first leg, while 2002 winners Feyenoord host Austria's Karnten.

# Solskjaer out for three months

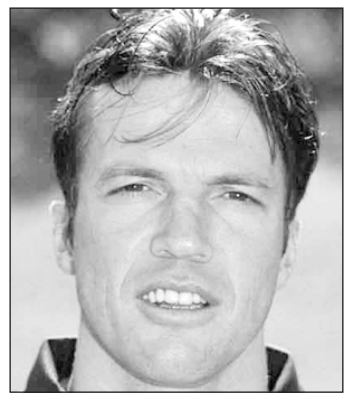
AFP, Manchester

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will be out of action for three months after the Norwegian international underwent surgery on his right knee, Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson confirmed on Wednesday. Solskjaer, who has taken over David Beckham's role on the right of United's midfield, had been struggling with the problem for a number of weeks and United decided it was better for him to miss matches now rather than later in the season. "We've adopted the same policy as last season where anything that needs to be done this early we get it done," Ferguson told the Manchester Evening News. "It is a blow for us and there's nothing we can do about it now that the transfer window is closed but I feel I have a good enough squad to cope. "We have alternatives like Ronaldo, Diego Forlan and Darren Fletcher. We'll just get on with it." United are already without Brazilian World Cup winner Kleberson because of a dislocated shoulder and Paul Scholes has only just begun a tentative recovery from a hernia problem that has kept him out since the end of last month. Solskjaer, 30, has proved to be one of Ferguson's best ever buys, having cost just 1.5 million pounds when he was signed in 1996. The Norwegian's striking nous has made him a firm favourite with the Old Trafford faithful and his ability to adapt to a midfield role played a big part in the club's decision to cash in by selling Beckham to Real Madrid this summer.

# Matthaeus wants German job

AP, Belgrade

Former German star Lothar Matthaeus wants to become the German national coach, but acknowledges that it cannot happen soon. "It would be a great honor for me to become Germany's trainer," Matthaeus, now in charge of Partizan Belgrade, told the daily Sport on Tuesday. "My dream always was that once I finish my playing career, I take over my country's national team.



LOTHAR MATTHAEUS

"But I cannot say this could happen next summer because I have a contract with Partizan until 2005." Matthaeus played a record 150 games for Germany and led it to the World Cup title in 1990, the year he earned one of his two FIFA Player of the Year awards. He played 302 matches for Bayern and won the UEFA Cup with the team. Following a brief coaching spell with Rapid Vienna, Matthaeus took over Partizan last December. He has passed his biggest coaching test so far by qualifying the Serbian champions for the Champions League this season. Belgrade "has accepted me in a right way, and I have done here well both professionally and privately," Matthaeus said. Earlier this month, Matthaeus -- who has gained a celebrity status in Belgrade -- revealed his latest, much publicized romance with a 32-year-old Serb woman.

# Bests parting ways

## Football

AFP, London

The wife of football legend George Best said Tuesday she was separating from her husband. Alex Best, 31, issued a statement saying she would be living apart from the 57-year-old former Manchester United and Northern Ireland star



GOOD OLD DAYS: A file photo of British football legend George Best and wife Alex.

following reports that her husband, who had a liver transplant to help combat the damage done by his alcoholism, had started drinking again and was having affairs with other women. In her statement Alex Best said: "It's with deep sadness that I have to announce my separation from George Best. "I have tried to be there for him during his recent well-catalogued

problems but the situation is now that it is not right for us to be together at this time. "I have always supported George and always will but for the present we will be living separate lives," added Alex, who married Best in 1995. Best had his life-saving liver operation just over a year ago and special tablets were placed in his new liver which cause an allergic reaction if mixed with alcohol. However, despite being warned that any more alcohol could kill him, Best was seen drinking in a Surrey hotel in July where he was arrested. He was subsequently released without charge. Best has since been photographed with other women, and been the subject of a number of kiss-and-tell revelations in the British press. A spokesman for the couple said later Tuesday he was trying to contact George for a comment. Best was one of the stars of the Manchester United team that won the European Cup in 1968 and a combination of talent and good looks made him Britain's first 'superstar' player, paving the way for the lucrative endorsement deals enjoyed currently by the likes of David Beckham. But drinking helped cut short his playing career and his troubles in dealing with his personal problems have made him the subject of thousands of newspaper articles for more than 25 years. However, recently he has enjoyed a new role as a football analyst with British satellite broadcaster Sky Sports.

# That's the spirit



AFP, Ankara

Turkish and British fans played a friendly match here Wednesday to shrug off their violent image and foster good-will ahead of an UEFA Cup game between Blackburn Rovers and Genclerbirliigi later in the day. The behaviour of fans attending Wednesday evening's game will be closely watched ahead of a potentially explosive Euro 2004 qualifier between Turkey and England to be played next month in Istanbul. About 100 fans from the two sides met in bright sunshine at a training pitch belonging to the Ankara-based Genclerbirliigi, with officials from the two clubs looking on. The friendly was organised by a group of fans who met over the Internet. Club officials lent support to the idea and helped set up the game, which the Turkish side won 4-2. "The welcome we were given here was warmer than we expected," Bjard Bakke, a 22-year-old Blackburn supporter, said. "Whatever the outcome of the game tonight, we have decided to go out to drink together," he said. Blackburn and Genclerbirliigi were to meet Wednesday evening in their first match in the UEFA Cup. Turkish and English football authorities are keen to cool tensions in the run-up to the critical Euro 2004 qualifier between their national teams in Istanbul on October 11. The winner of that game will qualify automatically for the finals in Portugal next summer with the loser going into a play-off. Fearing repetition of violence that has often marred games between the two sides, the English federation has turned down its ticket allocation and has urged fans to stay away. In the most recent incident, England's victory against Turkey in Sunderland in April was tarnished by pre-match violence, pitch invasions and racist taunting of the Turkish fans by home supporters. The UEFA fined England and warned that further misbehavior by their fans would result in exclusion from the competition. Turkish fans, on the other hand, won notoriety in 2000 when two Britons were stabbed to death in a streets brawl in Istanbul ahead of a UEFA Cup game between Galatasaray and Leeds United.

# Fitting tribute to Di Stefano

## Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid beat River Plate 3-1 here Tuesday to lift the Santiago Bernabeu Trophy, named after the club's late former president. This year's edition of the trophy, inaugurated in 1979, enjoyed added poignancy as it marked 50 years to the day since the legendary Alfredo di Stefano made his debut for Real, with whom he won eight league championships and five European Cups in a row from 1956. Di Stefano, now 77 and who started out with River Plate, received a commemorative plaque at the start as he briefly basked in the spotlight once more as the players formed a 'guard of honour'. The match itself, aside from a fine drive from Santiago Solari ten minutes after the break and a pair of Javier Garcia Portillo headers, lacked the explosiveness of a Di Stefano, Real leaving out Ronaldo and resting Raul as well following the rib injury he suffered in Sunday's league win at Malaga. Indeed, the match was one Real's



ALFREDO DI STEFANO

Ronaldo and Raul the hosts struggled to impose themselves early on, despite the promptings of Zinedine Zidane and David Beckham. Earlier, Di Stefano had praised

the fighting qualities of the England skipper, whose flowing hair at least provided one link to the "blond arrow" who preceded him five decades earlier. But with the match essentially a friendly Beckham gave way to Borja Fernandez after 36 minutes and Zidane and Roberto Carlos just played the opening half. Nunez fired wide before Solari headed against the post in the 15th minute from a Portillo cross. Finally, after 55 minutes, Solari struck against his old club, weaving his way inside the box and crashing home from an acute angle. Three minutes later Portillo headed home to dispel lingering doubts over the outcome and repeated the trick 12 minutes later. Lucho Gonzalez drove in an 80th-minute consolation for River. Real thus restored some prestige having lost last year's match against Bayern Munich, who also won the opening two editions of what used to be a four-team competition. The hosts' last win had come against Santos of Brazil in 2000. Liverpool and Everton made a guest appearance in the late 1980s but both lost out.

# Napoli punished for tragedy

## Football

REUTERS, Rome

Napoli have been ordered by the Italian Football League to play their next five home games behind closed doors after violence at the weekend in Avellino in which one died and more than 30 police were injured. None of the matches can be played at their San Paolo stadium. The suspension will begin from September 27's Serie B match against Ascoli and will end on November 9 when Salernitana visit, the League said in a statement on its official website on Wednesday. It is not yet clear where Napoli, Maradona's former club, will play these matches which will not be watched by any supporters. No immediate comment from Napoli was available. Napoli supporter Sergio Ercolano died on Monday as a result of injuries sustained when he fell more than 30 feet after

scaling the outer wall at Avellino's Partenio stadium. As medics arrived to help him, hundreds of Napoli fans invaded the pitch and fought with police in the worst outbreak of violence seen in Italian football in recent years. The match was eventually called off. A separate judgment by the League -- which governs clubs in Italy's top two divisions -- is expected by Italian media to award Avellino an automatic 3-0 win. Ercolano's death was the worst in a series of incidents to mar Italian football. Last season, matches involving Serie A sides Como and Torino had to be abandoned because of crowd trouble. Torino received a similar five-match stadium ban after their fans rioted during a match against AC Milan in February this year. In Serie B, supporters attacked Napoli captain Francesco Baldini in his car last November and Messina goalkeeper Emanuele Manitta was punched unconscious by a fan during a match against Cagliari the same month.

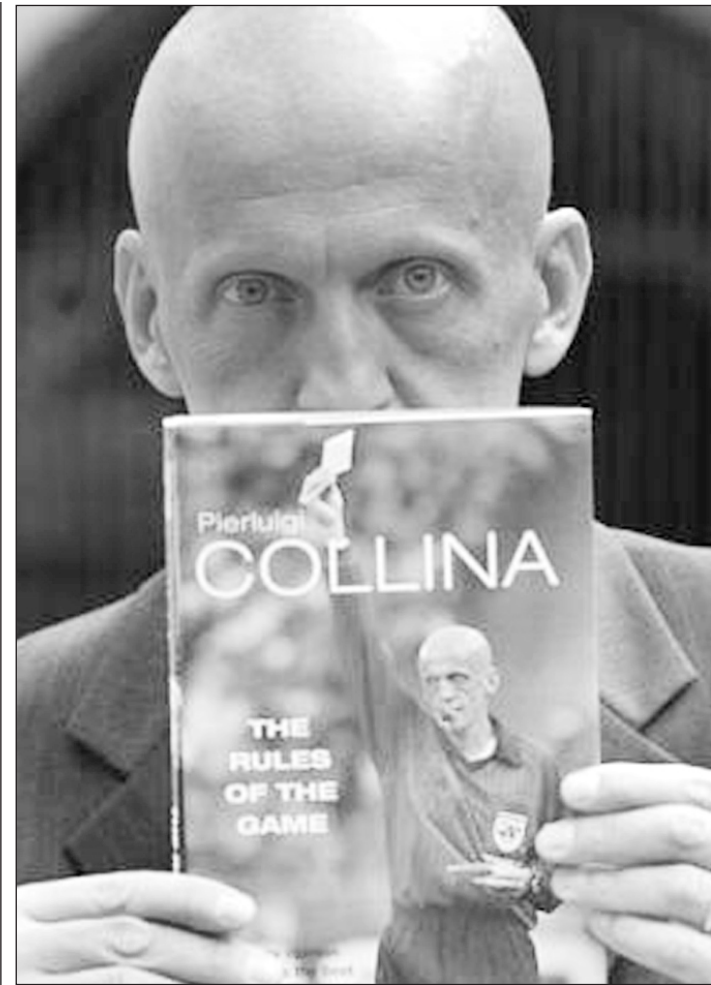


PHOTO: AP

LAWMAKER! Italian top referee Pierluigi Collina holds up a copy of his new book "The Rules of the Game", during a photocall in London on September.