

Premiership

Henry makes Magpies pay

Football

AFP, London

Thierry Henry made sure Arsenal will stay top of the English Premiership for at least another week with a late penalty which condemned Newcastle United to a 3-2 defeat at Highbury on Friday.

France international Henry stepped up to the spot to cheekily chip the ball past United keeper Shay Given in the 79th minute after Newcastle's Jermaine Jenas had handled the ball as he jumped early to head it away.



thigh strain and Brazilian Edu came on in his place.

Two minutes later United equalised after a scrappy push forward that left Frenchman Laurent Robert with the easiest of tap-ins past Jens Lehmann after Kieron Dyer had done all the work.

Arsenal fought back and Ljungberg, who went off for the last 20 minutes of the match with an ankle injury was unlucky not to get his head to an inviting cross from Lauren on the right.

Arsenal started the second half as they did the first waiting only four minutes before almost increasing their lead.

Ljungberg jumped onto a ball put through by Wiltord and as Given ran out the Swede chipped a delightful lob goalwards only to see it come off the post.

Arsenal underlined their intentions with Wenger bringing on Robert Pires for fans' favourite Ray Parlour only minutes after Arsenal defender Ashley Cole was substituted for Frenchman Pascal Cygan.

The hosts second goal of the match came after Newcastle's feisty winger Robert received a yellow card for a tackle from behind on Ljungberg.

The resultant freekick had the Newcastle defence in a panic, and Jenas in particular, the midfielder losing Gilberto who ran in to beat Given with a close-in header six minutes after the hour mark.

Newcastle battled back however and only minutes later had levelled again after a through ball from Jenas down the left handed Frenchman Bernard a rare shot on goal despite the close attention of Arsenal captain Martin Keown.

Bernard's first-time shot from only eight yards out seared past Lehmann and smashed into the Gunners' net.

Newcastle came alive briefly, with Alan Shearer, still searching for his 250th League goal, sending in an inviting cross for Craig Bellamy.

However five minutes later Jenas' hand ball left the referee no option but to point to the penalty spot.

Henry, who missed the last penalty he took, simply chipped the ball straight at Given, who dived to his left, and into the net.

Ranieri bans title talk

AFP, London

Claudio Ranieri has banned title talk from the Chelsea dressing room, despite growing signs his expensive new squad are set to mount a sustained challenge to Manchester United and Arsenal.

The Blues, who spent 111 million pounds in the summer after Roman Abramovich's takeover, have dropped just two points so far in the Premiership and made a winning start to their Champions League campaign.

But the Italian manager knows the dangers of allowing expectations to rise too high too quickly.

"It's too soon to speak about the championship," Ranieri said.

"I'd like to be in this situation in May but we're only in September now."

Ayala to end career at Valencia

REUTERS, Valencia

Argentine international defender Roberto Fabian Ayala wants to finish his career at Valencia after finally agreeing a new contract with the Spanish club.

The 30-year-old centre back, whose original deal had been due to



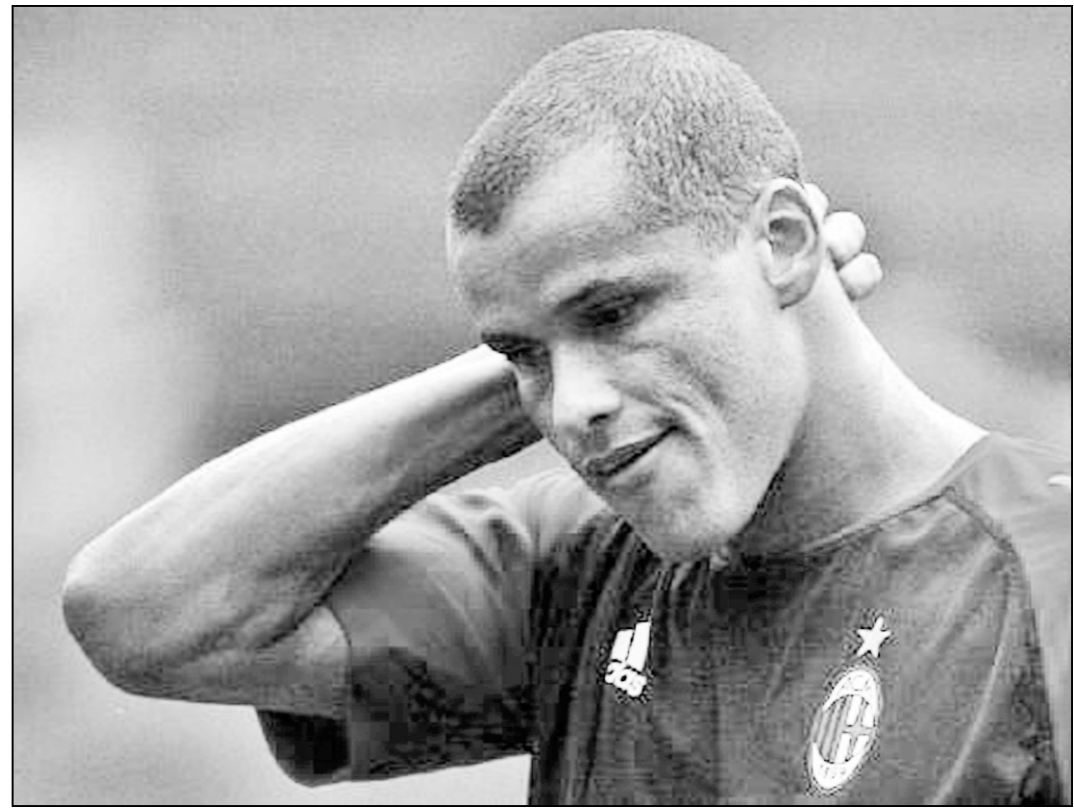
ROBERTO FABIAN AYALA

expire in June 2005, brought an end to months of speculation about his future this week by signing a new deal tying him to the club until 2007.

"Thank God things worked out and I'll be carrying on here," Ayala said on Friday.

"I'm delighted the negotiations worked out."

"The important thing is that we keep growing and keep winning titles. I want to finish my career at Valencia. I'm here to help the club."



The Rivaldo mystery

Football

REUTERS, Milan

When Rivaldo signed for AC Milan just 14 months ago the club's captain Paolo Maldini welcomed him as "one of the greatest ever to pull on our red and black shirts".

Rivaldo had just starred in Brazil's World Cup win in 2002 and few would have argued with Maldini's view that he merited being placed in the same category as Marco van Basten, Gianni Rivera or Ruud Gullit.

But after leaving the club by mutual consent on Friday after barely making an impact, the Brazilian is more likely to find his place in Milan's history books alongside French striker Jean Pierre Papin in the category marked 'great player who wasn't needed'.

By the end of his time in Italy, Rivaldo was like the Ferraris owned

by his teammates - classy and expensive but only ever seen at the training ground.

Milan had signed Rivaldo on a free transfer after he had cancelled his contract with Barcelona and the deal was cited as a sign of the club's ambition to return to the summit of the European game.

But right from the outset of his time at Milan it was clear that the club's coach Carlo Ancelotti considered him an optional extra and not a key component of the team.

Rivaldo featured in the early stages of the campaign but only because Andriy Shevchenko was injured and Ancelotti opted to play Filippo Inzaghi as a lone striker with Rivaldo and Rui Costa in support.

The Brazilian showed flashes of his undoubted ability but never more than flashes.

There were few of the spectacular long-range strikes that were his trademark at Barcelona and he found it hard to adapt to the closer marking

and limited space in Italian football.

When Shevchenko returned to fitness Rivaldo was no longer a first choice player and niggling injuries reduced his chances even when there was an opening.

Milan went on to win the Champions League last season but Rivaldo watched the victory on penalties over Juventus in May from the substitutes bench at Old Trafford.

In a game crying out for some of the inspiration and imagination top Brazilians are famed for, Ancelotti banked instead on the occasional brilliance of speedy winger Serginho.

As if that wasn't a big enough snub for Rivaldo, in the opening Serie A game of this season 21-year-old Kaka, a summer signing from Brazilian club Sao Paulo, was handed a debut as Rivaldo was left on the sidelines again.

That was the moment when the World Cup winner realised there was no future for him at Milan.

"I understood at Ancona, where I was left on the bench for the whole game. If you don't play in games like that, I thought, then you will never play in the big matches," he said on Friday.

A few weeks later Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani responded to rumours of Rivaldo's discontent by saying that, while the Brazilian was welcome to stick around, Milan would not stand in his way if he wanted to leave.

It was hardly a vote of confidence or an attempt to motivate a player who was costing the club a reported 4.5 million dollars in annual wages.

With Rui Costa and the highly promising Kaka both vying for the creator's role behind Inzaghi and Shevchenko, Rivaldo had become little more than a hefty item on the payroll.

Given the backing of Milan's owner, Italian Prime Minister and billionaire businessman Silvio Berlusconi, the wages could be covered.

But when Rivaldo spoke to Brazilian newspapers about his "humiliation" and suggested Ancelotti had an unspecified ulterior motive for leaving him out then the prospect of dressing room discord emerged.

A meeting on Thursday between Ancelotti and Rivaldo was said to have cleared the air, but in fact it left the Brazilian deciding he needed some fresh air.

Now it is only a question of whether Rivaldo's future is a return to the heat of Spain or the fresh challenge of the colder breezes of England's Premier League.

Arsenal's Thierry Henry (R) gives Newcastle United's Kieron Dyer the slip during their Premiership encounter.

may have trouble putting a first class team together for Tuesday.

"It looks like we've lost (Fredrik) Ljungberg and Ashley Cole and possibly Patrick (Vieira), who has a muscle strain. We'll have to wait and see for Patrick."

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson, who has now seen his side go six games without a win, could only lament the outcome of the match - the timing of which was affected by their 5-0 rout of Dutch side Breida in midweek.

"It's unbelievable to think that they're at the top of the league and we're at the bottom," said Robson, whose side remain in 19th place.

"We've really only had one day to prepare for this match and they've had six. It was a cruel night, but we held on well, the legs were good and we were unlucky on the goals.

"It's been a really difficult night for us."

After dominating the rain-soaked early period Arsenal opened the scoring after a cross from the right by Bisan Lauren left Newcastle's Titus Bramble with what looked like an easy clearance.

However the defender missed his first time swipe and Henry, at the back post, simply tapped the ball past Given.

Vieira was then forced off with a



England manager Sven Goran Eriksson and his girlfriend Nancy Dell'Olio watch from the stands the English Premier League match between Arsenal and Newcastle at Highbury on Friday.

Eriksson staying

Football

AFP, London

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson will see out his contract despite the cool-headed Swede admitting he wants to return to club management some time in the future, the Football Association affirmed Saturday.

Eriksson, who this week was linked with a future coaching job at Premiership high-flyers Chelsea, reopened the debate over his future on Friday when he spoke at a business conference.

"I have always said that maybe one day I would be going back to club football," said Eriksson.

"First, I would like to finish the job I have. I am extremely proud. We have a big game against Turkey and

hopefully we will do well in Euro 2004.

"Then, one day, back to club football, but where I don't know."

Despite persistent rumours that Eriksson, a former coach of Lazio, will ditch England for club football the Swede insists he is happy to see out his contract with England, to run until after the 2006 World Cup.

The FA moved to insist that Eriksson's latest comments did not conflict with this intention.

"Further to the comments attributed to Sven-Goran Eriksson, we wish to reaffirm that he remains under contract with the FA until 2006," said the FA's head of media Adrian Bevington.

"Contrary to some reports, there are no escape clauses in this deal.

"We are perfectly happy with the situation and delighted with the job that Sven is doing."

Wenger Sol searching

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is praying that defender Sol Campbell can return to training this weekend to help ease a growing injury crisis ahead of the Gunners' Champions League match on Tuesday.

Arsenal stayed top of the Premiership on Friday with a hard-fought 3-2 win over Newcastle at Highbury however the cost of the operation was the potential loss of Patrick Vieira, winger Fredrik Ljungberg and defender Ashley Cole.

Wenger has revealed that central defender Martin Keown also took a knock in the match - won thanks to a 79th-minute penalty by Thierry Henry - possibly leaving him without four key elements for Tuesday's trip to Lokomotiv Moscow.

American tycoon raises MU stake

Football

AFP, London

Malcolm Glazer, owner of Super Bowl champions Tampa Bay, has increased his stake in English Premiership soccer champions Manchester United.

United revealed in a statement to the Stock Exchange that Glazer's stake in Manchester United plc had risen to 3.17 per cent, which represents over eight million shares.

Glazer shot to fame in the United States when he splashed out 192 million dollars in 1995 for the struggling Tampa Bay franchise.

He funded a new 200 million-dollar stadium and helped drag the

club out of the doldrums, culminating in this year's Super Bowl victory.

Glazer, whose family made their money from the oil and gas industries, is listed as the 244th richest American by Forbes magazine, worth an estimated one billion dollars. He was recently tipped to buy the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team.

The Florida-based businessman, who was born in New York and has six children with his wife Linda, is not believed to have had any direct contact with United, instead preferring to buy up shares discreetly.

But Stock Exchange rules mean investors must make it clear if they acquire over 3 per cent of a company, which Glazer did Thursday to prompt United's statement.

Scolari not so popular



AFP, Lisbon

Nearly two in three Portuguese doubt World Cup-winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari will be able to lead Portugal to victory during the Euro 2004 finals which the country will host, a poll published Friday showed.

A total of 63.1 per cent of those surveyed said the Portuguese national team does not have what it takes to win the tournament, the Aximage poll carried out for daily newspaper Correio da Manha found.

Only one in four were confident of victory while the rest were undecided.

As hosts, Portugal automatically qualify for the football finals, which will take place from June 12 to July 4.

The poll found the Portuguese public is divided on the performance of national coach Scolari, who was supposed to usher in a new era after the country's embarrassing first-round exit from the World Cup last year.

Only 41.7 per cent of respondents said they thought the 54-year-old Brazilian has done a good job since he became Portugal's national coach in January, while 44 per cent felt his performance was either bad or "so-so".



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

The Portuguese squad has had a mixed performance in friendlies which has failed to convince fans and led to growing media questioning of Scolari's strategy for the team.

After Portugal suffered a 3-0 drubbing against Spain earlier this month, disappointed fans whistled and waved white handkerchiefs to show their displeasure with Scolari and the national squad.

The loss to Spain led sports daily A Bola to declare "Scolari's honeymoon period is over".

Overall Portugal has a 5-2-2 record under Scolari, who led his native Brazil to their fifth World Cup title last year.

The telephone poll of 600 men and women was carried out September 16-17.

Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has admitted that star midfielder Rivaldo will have to get playing quickly if he wants to hang on to his Brazil shirt.

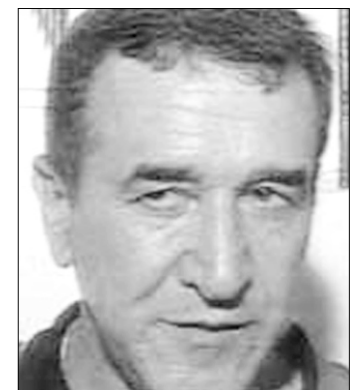
Former Barcelona star Rivaldo was released by AC Milan, the winners of last season's Champions League, on Friday having spent a disillusioned year at the Serie A giants.

And while a number of top clubs are now said to be vying for his signature, Parreira affirmed that any player who was not training and playing could not be expected to be selected for the World Cup winners.

"I think that a player who doesn't train and who isn't playing can not be considered for selection for the national team," Parreira told reporters here on Friday.

It means Rivaldo will have to find a club quickly if he is to be included in Parreira's squad for Brazil's two qualifying matches in November for the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

Rivaldo on Friday asked AC Milan to release him after recently spending time on the substitutes' bench and having scored only five



CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA

goals in 22 appearances last season.

The 31-year-old, who has been linked with Real Madrid and also with a move to the English Premiership, fell out of favour with coach Carlo Ancelotti and admitted he was frustrated at not having been given a real chance.

"I just cannot accept that I have so few opportunities to show what I can do," Rivaldo said on Friday.

"That became clear to me at Ancona where I stayed on the bench during the whole game.

"If I am not allowed to play in games like that I certainly will not be picked for the big clashes."