

Scolari says no offer from England

REUTERS, Lisbon

Portugal's Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has confirmed he was approached by England's Football Association about managing their national side but says he has received no offer.

In an interview published on the Web site of *Diário de Notícias* newspaper on Friday, Scolari said he would weigh his options once his Portuguese contract runs out on July 31, after the World Cup in Germany.

England are looking to replace their first foreign manager, Sweden's Sven-Goran Eriksson, who will step down after the World Cup.

Asked if a decision had been made regarding the England manager's job, Scolari said: "Nothing. The coach has still not been chosen."

"There are four or five names and only within seven or 15 days will it be settled. My situation with Portugal remains the same until July 31."

The FA meeting "was a simple talk, informal and with the consent of the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF), since I am still a Federation professional, with a contract until the 31st of July, and up until then no one knows what is going to happen," he said.

"The job, the work situation, technical conditions were talked about."

Scolari, 57, led Brazil to the 2002 World Cup title and steered Portugal to the final of the European championships two years ago, knocking out England both times. Portugal were defeated in World Cup qualifying matches.

"I don't have just this offer, this idea, about England, I've got other teams, national sides and clubs. That's the life of a professional. I always honour my contracts," Scolari said.

Tigers' nightmarish

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There's a great deal of hope for them with a good base of young players now.

"They have good leadership from Dav. I think there are a lot of very encouraging signs for them," said Gilchrist.

When asked about the suggestion that Bangladesh should play against weaker opponents, the mercurial wicketkeeper said, "Playing against weaker opponents all the time might give you confidence but won't improve your game."

"We beat them heavily three years ago (in Australia), but I have definitely seen improvement here. It's certainly a step forward. They could have easily pinched off the first Test match and you all know that."

In terms of achievements, Bashar reflected on the beginning of the home season.

"When we started the series against Sri Lanka, nobody expected us to win anything. But after the first Test (against Australia) everyone had a different impression about us. I think this is our team achievement," said Bashar.

Whatmore also insisted that the performance of the third ODI was not the real picture of the team.

"Today's matches didn't do justice to the Test matches or the ODIs. It was a shame because it didn't really reflect the amount of credit that we earned so far, said Whatmore also marking that his team "are going in the right direction."

But Whatmore thought that there was a lesson to be learned from the Aussies in terms of the desire of the youngsters.

"The Australian youngsters really wanted to try hard so that they get the promotion in the side. They wanted to make sure that they are in the reckoning, whenever given a chance."

"When the younger guys play to give the others a rest, it proves how much of a depth they have."

WI, Zim out

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Pycroft said.

"There's no doubt that we can be competitive. Our batting is little under-cooked, but there's plenty of potential there, and our bowling is very decent, so I think we can be very competitive with the West Indies."

The Zimbabweans opened the trip with back-to-back wins over Antigua and Barbuda, and will be hoping to carry this momentum into the first two matches against a West Indies side still trying to sort itself out under new leadership.

SQUADS

WEST INDIES (from): Brian Lara (C), Ian Bradshaw, Dwayne Bravo, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Corey Collimore, Chris Gayle, Runako Morton, Deneesh Ramdin, Marlon Samuels, Ramnareesh Sarwan, Dwayne Smith, Jerome Taylor.

ZIMBABWE (from): Terrence Duffin (C), Chamunorwa Chibhabha, Elton Chigumbura, Charles Coventry, Keith Dabengwa, Ryan Higgins, Anthony Ireland, Blessing Mahwire, Keegan Meth, Tawanda Mupariwa, Edward Rainsford, Piet Rinke, Vusumuzi Sibanda, Gregory Strydom, Brendan Taylor, Prosper Uteya.



PHOTO: AFP

Sevilla players are ecstatic after beating Schalke 04 in their UEFA Cup semifinal second leg clash at Seville on Thursday.

It's a Boro-Sevilla finale



AFP, Paris

Massimo Maccarone hit a last-gasp winner to complete a remarkable and unlikely comeback from three goals behind as Middlesbrough beat Steaua Bucharest 4-2 to reach the UEFA Cup final.

On the day on which he was overlooked for the England manager's job, Steve McClaren had the considerable consolation of another extraordinary European night at the Riverside.

McClaren admitted he was not too sure how Middlesbrough had pulled off another remarkable comeback which gave them a 4-3 aggregate score.

"I haven't got a clue. Character, attitude," he said.

"I said lightning couldn't strike twice in the same place and it has done tonight."

"Let's go one step further and win the final."

Trailing 1-0 from the first leg, Boro had looked out of it as Steaua struck twice in the first 24 minutes to open up a 3-0 lead with two away goals.

Nicolae Dica, scorer of the only goal in the first leg, gathered the

rebound after Australia goalkeeper Brad Jones had parried a 25-yard drive from Petre Marin, slipped inside Gareth Southgate and tucked home their opener after 16 minutes.

Chris Riggott then headed a fraction past his own post, and then, as Bostina slung the ball in again, Dorin Goian directed a firm header on target.

Jones saved with an outstretched right-hand but the centre-back followed in for his fifth in the competition this season.

The game sprung to life when Gareth Southgate was subbed off for striker Massimo Maccarone, 3-5-2 became 4-4-2, and suddenly Boro looked a different team.

It was Maccarone, who got the winner in the last round, who started the fight-back, finding room on the right and accelerating onto Mark Viduka's pass to pull one back after 33 minutes.

There was not quite the same inevitable force about Middlesbrough this time, though, and although Viduka called the keeper into action again with a low volley, Boro manager McClaren felt the need to add an extra forward in Yakubu Aiyegbeni after 55 minutes.

The effect was immediate. Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink flicked a Maccarone cross just wide, and

then, as Steaua struggled to break out of their half, Viduka beat Carlos to a Stewart Downing cross to level the scores on the night.

Two needed, and 25 minutes to play. Fabio Rochemback crashed a 30-yard drive just over, but the third arrived after 73 minutes, Riggott sliding in after Carlos had got a hand to a Stewart Downing shot.

And then, in the 89th minute, a deep cross from Downing from the left, and there was the shining bald head of Maccarone to power a header past Carlos.

Meanwhile, an extra-time goal by substitute Antonio Puerta gave Sevilla a 1-0 win over Schalke of Germany on Thursday and a place in the UEFA Cup final.

The match had gone into the extra 30 minutes after the two sides failed to break the deadlock in either the first or second legs but it was the cool head of Puerta who settled the tie and gave the Spaniards a place in the final against Middlesbrough.

That takes place in Eindhoven on May 10.

Puerta scored with a left-footed drive past keeper Frank Rost from 12 yards out.

Sevilla will be playing in their first ever European final while Schalke had lifted the UEFA Cup in 1997.

DFB POKAL

Bayern eye Cup glory

AFP, Berlin

No German team has managed to win the league and cup double in successive seasons but Bayern Munich have a great chance of achieving that feat if they can defeat Eintracht Frankfurt in Saturday's German cup final.

Bayern clinched the double last season with a 2-1 cup final victory over Schalke 04 and will again start as favourites against a team 36 points below them in the German table.

If Felix Magath's team can overcome Frankfurt at Berlin's Olympic Stadium then a second successive double looks a formality with Bayern requiring just five points from the remaining three games to defend their Bundesliga crown.

"No German team has managed to defend the double so that is our target," said Magath.

For Magath the match also has added spice as Frankfurt sacked him as manager back in 2001.

It proved a blessing in disguise as he took over at VfB Stuttgart and his sterling work eventually netted him the Bayern job in July 2004.

Three-time winners Frankfurt may be outsiders but they underlined their pedigree with a 6-0 demolition of last year's finalists Schalke on route to their first cup final in 18 long years.

Bayern's German international goalkeeper Oliver Kahn has won the competition four times but for his team-mate Philipp Lahm it is all a new experience.

"This is my first big final and I cannot wait," said Lahm. "I want to lift my first title."

Win or lose Frankfurt will secure a UEFA Cup spot as Bayern have already sealed a Champions League berth through the league.

Thrice for Thierry

AFP, London

Arsenal skipper Thierry Henry on Thursday became the first player to be named Footballer of the Year for the third time.

The 28-year-old was chosen for the prize by the Football Writers Association.

Sir Stanley Matthews, Kenny Dalglish, John Barnes and Gary Lineker all won the award twice.

The French international has enjoyed a remarkable season breaking the Gunners' all-time goalscoring record and leading Arsene Wenger's team to their first Champions League final against Barcelona, in Paris on May 17.

The striker was Footballer of the Year in 2003 and 2004 with Chelsea's Frank Lampard picking up the prize last season.

Chelsea's John Terry came second, Manchester United's Wayne Rooney third and Liverpool's Steven Gerrard fourth.

Gerrard was named the players' Player of the Year last Sunday.

Aussies beef up

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gain an edge as they seek to avenge losing the Ashes last September for the first time in 16 years.

The series is due to begin later this year.

"In our short-term planning, the centre will play a significant role in helping Australia win back the Ashes next summer with the Australian team basing itself here in the build-up to the Ashes series," he said.

The long-term goal was to establish a centre that will help Australia maintain its dominance of world cricket.

"The role of the centre is simple -- to help Australia remain at the top of world cricket, not only for today, but for generations to come," Sutherland said.

"We are confident that this new facility coupled with the existing practice facilities will help us achieve this goal."

PREMIERSHIP

Chelsea aim for title



AFP, London

Chelsea are looking for a double helping of satisfaction on Saturday - not only sealing a second straight English Premiership title but doing so against their closest challengers, Manchester United.

Nine points ahead of United with three games left to play, Chelsea need just a single point at home to the Red Devils to keep the Premiership trophy at Stamford Bridge for another year.

To celebrate in front of United boss Sir Alex Ferguson's disgruntled players following Saturday's match would once and for all emphasise how the balance of power in English football has shifted towards west London.

It would also considerably ease Chelsea's misery at losing last weekend's FA Cup semi-final to Liverpool, midfielder Joe Cole said.

"While everyone is disappointed about last Saturday, there is nothing we can do except look forward to beating Man United," he told Chelsea's in-house television channel.

"We want to win it at home. It will be a fantastic season with back-to-back titles which has not been done by Chelsea before."

Cole's England team-mate Wayne Rooney admitted that watching the Chelsea players celebrate would be a crushing blow.

"We want to go there and win," he said. "It would be devastating if

we only get a draw and they're celebrating around us."

Realistically, United have almost no prospect of snatching the title. Even winning at Stamford Bridge - something no other team has managed in the Premiership this season - would do little to improve their chances.

United would then have to win their last two games and hope Chelsea lost both of theirs, while also overturning Chelsea's goal difference, currently superior by 12.

If there is precious little tension at the top of the table, many of the other teams go into the weekend with everything to play for.

At the bottom, while Sunderland are already relegated and West Bromwich have all but joined them, the third spot has turned into a titanic battle between Birmingham and Portsmouth.

Harry Redknapp's men travel to ninth-placed Wigan on Saturday, while Birmingham are at home to Newcastle, another revitalised side now chasing a UEFA Cup place.

Newcastle look set to have England striker Michael Owen back for the first time since he broke a bone in his foot on December 31.

"I've been training since Monday and it has been really good, much better than I thought," said Owen.

Further up the table, Tottenham could move seven points clear of Arsenal in the race for fourth, and the Champions League qualifying spot it brings, if they beat Bolton at home on Sunday.

However, Arsenal would have two games in hand and would

expect to reduce the deficit away at Sunderland on Monday.

The Gunners could still have the last laugh on their north London rivals even if they finish one place below Spurs in fifth.

Wednesday's 0-0 draw at Villarreal put them in the Champions League final, and victory against Barcelona on May 17 in Paris would put Arsenal back in the competition next season - at Tottenham's expense - regardless of who finishes fourth.

Elsewhere on Saturday, third-placed Liverpool take on Aston Villa at home, hoping to close the gap on Manchester United, who are three points ahead with a game in hand.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated):
Saturday
 Birmingham v Newcastle, Charlton v Blackburn (16:15 GMT), Chelsea v Manchester Utd (11:30 GMT), Liverpool v Fulham, Middlesbrough v Everton, Wigan v Portsmouth
Sunday
 Tottenham v Bolton (1500 GMT)
Monday
 Manchester Utd v Middlesbrough (1900 GMT), Sunderland v Arsenal (1615 GMT), West Bromwich v West Ham (1900 GMT)

SERIE A

Juve splitting at the seams



AFP, Rome

The pressure mounting from AC Milan's hot pursuit of leaders Juventus in the Italian championship run-in is beginning to tell on the reigning champions.

Juve manager Fabio Capello had to dive between Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic and France midfielder Patrick Vieira to stop the pair reportedly coming to blows during a training session in Turin on Thursday.

Juve's temperatures and stress levels have been raised by a five-game streak of draws and the gradual disappearance of a 14-point lead over Milan.

That was the gap on February 5 after 23 matches but with just three to play, Juve hold a slender three-point gap over the 2004 champions with a trip to Siena on Sunday while Milan host Livorno.

Carlo Ancelotti's side, though, will have to quickly bounce back

from the disappointment of bowing out of the Champions League in midweek against Spain's Barcelona in the semi-final.

Milan are in danger of finishing a second successive season without a trophy if they fail to overhaul Juve who have won three of the last four scudetto titles.

Milan's last two games look together on paper as they travel to Parma and host Roma, while Juve take on Palermo at home and Reggina away.

If the pair finish level on points at the end of the season, though, Milan will be crowned champions courtesy of their better head-to-head record - they won at the San Siro and drew at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Things are not well across the city from AC where Inter Milan's star Brazil striker Adriano has been told by the club's president Massimo Moratti to finish the season strongly to avoid being shipped out at the end of the campaign.

"He needs to do well in these final games of the season and then he should stay with us," stressed the 60-year-old oil tycoon.

Inter, who still have a mathematical chance of being champions, can secure third place in the table if they win at Empoli on Sunday and fourth-place Fiorentina fail to take three points in Sicily at Palermo.

Of greater concern for the Viola, though, is holding off Roma for the final Champions League qualifying place.

The 2001 champions trail Fiorentina, who last won the title in 1969, by three points but have a tough weekend match at Chievo, themselves chasing a UEFA Cup spot.

FIXTURES

(all 1300 GMT kick-off)
Sunday
 AC Milan v Livorno, Cagliari v Parma, Chievo v Roma, Empoli v Inter Milan, Lazio v Lecce, Palermo v Fiorentina, Reggina v Messina, Sampdoria v Udinese, Siena v Juventus, Treviso v Ascoli

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca nearly there



AFP, Madrid

After their match at Sevilla was washed out last Sunday, runaway league leaders Barcelona have another chance to clinch their second successive Spanish championship this weekend but will need Valencia to help them.

The Champions League finalists have to beat relegation-threatened Cadiz in front of their home fans on Saturday and then wait to see if Valencia drop points at home to struggling Alaves on Sunday if they are to take the title.

"Let's win the league title and then I think we'll be able to concentrate on the Champions League," said a euphoric Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o on Thursday.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard is likely to keep his cards close to his chest about whether he will draft in some reserves against Cadiz and give some of triumphphant stars, like Ronaldinho, a rest in the wake of them ousting Milan on Wednesday.

"I just hope we don't have any reaction to our European efforts," commented an ever-cautious Rijkaard.

"But there isn't a good or bad moment to celebrate the league title," added Rijkaard, reflecting on the fact that Barcelona may have to wait just a little longer to complete

the first leg of their bid for a domestic and continental double.

Valencia beat Alaves 3-0 when they last visited the intimidating Mestalla stadium three seasons ago but might not be fully confident of a similar result, which would put Barca's championship celebrations on hold, this time around.

Club doctor Antonio Giner has been as busy as Valencia coach Quique Flores during the last week. David Villa, who scored a five-minute hat-trick in Valencia's 3-0 win at Athletic Bilbao last Sunday, blocked a shot with his jaw on Wednesday and suffered a slight dislocation although the Spanish international striker could still be fit to face Alaves.

Playmaker Pablo Aimar is recovering from the alarming bout of benign meningitis he contracted two weeks ago while winger Francisco Rufete had not kicked a ball for nearly a week before Thursday.

Valencia's Spanish international midfielder David Albelda is also suspended.

The death of midfielders means that Valencia's impressive young central defender Raul Albiol, who could yet feature in Spain's World Cup squad, is likely to be pushed further up the field.

Third-placed Real Madrid travel to Osasuna, who are one place and one point below them, on Sunday.

Both sides are now able to breathe a sigh of relief after the elimination of

Villarreal from the Champions League on Tuesday.

If Villarreal had won Europe's top club competition, the fourth side in Spain would have been relegated to the less-lucrative UEFA Cup but Real and their Pamplona-based opponents are now both likely to qualify for the Champions League barring a late-season collapse.

Real are likely to be without midfielder Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez, who sprained his right ankle in training on Thursday while Zinedine Zidane, who announced on Wednesday he will retire after the World Cup, is suspended.

FIXTURES

Saturday
 (kick off times in GMT)
 Real Betis v Athletic Bilbao (1800), Deportivo La Coruna v Celta Vigo (1800), Barcelona v Cadiz (2000)
Sunday
 Getafe v Villarreal (1500), Malaga v Racing Santander (1500), Real Sociedad v Sevilla (1500), Valencia v Alaves (1500), Real Zaragoza v Espanyol (1500), Atletico Madrid v Real Mallorca (1700), Osasuna v Real Madrid (1900)

COMMISSIONER GOLD CUP

Khulna beat Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Khulna moved into the second round defeating Nilphamari by 4-1 in the Commissioner Gold Cup Football Tournament which kicked off at the Dinajpur Stadium on Friday.

Teams from 14 districts are taking part in the tournament which was inaugurated by, among others, national team captain Arif Khan Joy. The participating teams are: Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Jossore, Khulna, Barga, Sirajganj, Rangpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Yesardi, Pabna, Chuadanga, Rajshahi and Naogaon.



PHOTO: STAR

Players and organisers pose before the start of the Commissioner Gold Cup football tournament in Dinajpur on Friday.

Sublime Flemo punishes SA

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the day and the first with the second new ball. Vettori pulled Ntini's first delivery for four but in trying to repeat the shot two balls later he spooned a catch to Andre Nel at mid-on.

Instead of whipping through the rest of the batting, South Africa's bowlers failed to find a consistent line and length and did not manage to bowl a maiden until Kallis sent down the 36th over of the day. By then New Zealand were in command.

South Africa led the three-match series 1-0.

SCOREBOARD
 Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the second Test between South Africa and New Zealand at Newlands on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 265-6)

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Fulton c Boucher b Steyn | 36 |
| Fleming not out | 27 |
| Styris c Dippenaar b Ntini | 11 |
| Astle lbw b Ntini | 50 |
| Oram run out (Prince) | 13 |
| McCullum lbw b Ntini | 5 |
| Vettori c Nel b Ntini | 11 |
| Franklin not out | 46 |
| Extras: (b-1, lb-6, nb-9 w-1) | 26 |
| Total: (For 7 wkts in 90 overs) | 427 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-50, 2-62, 3-82, 4-188, 5-237, 6-259, 7-279. | |
| To bat: J Patel, C Martin | |
| Bowler | O M R W |
| Ntini | 29 2 106 4 |
| Steyn | 21 3 68 1 |
| Nel | 25 3 85 1 |
| Kallis | 15 4 45 0 |
| Boje | 22 4 66 0 |
| Smith | 13 2 39 0 |
| Amla | 1 0 4 0 |
| Umpires: M Benson (ENG), A de Silva (SRI). | |