

I want Real move: C Ron'

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo has stunned the football world by announcing that he wants to leave the club for Real Madrid.

One of Real's presidential candidates, Juan Miguel Villar Mir is keen to sign the player, and Ronaldo says he would like to open negotiations if he wins.

"I have told my agent I am prepared to leave. I want to do it in the best manner possible. I want to play for Real Madrid and dream of doing so," Ronaldo told Marca on Tuesday.

"I have gone with Villar Mir's project because it is serious and follows correct procedures. They have explained to me their plans and the next step is they will talk to Manchester United to open negotiations.

"Other candidates wanted me to sign a document which is not legal. Villar Mir has promised me he will talk to the club and all we have done is talk through an agent."

Real's presidential election on July 2.

Referees ruining

FROM PAGE 22

many footballers do not know the rules. Players have complained that referees do not understand football. The more pertinent question is, does FIFA understand football?

At the moment, they have little time to make a claim for competence. Past World Cups have been tarnished by laughable errors but, whether the failure of Tunisian Ali Benmoussa to spot Diego Maradona's Hand of God in 1986 or the shambolic display of Ecuadorian Byron Moreno four years ago, officials from emerging footballing nations for many of the more glaring blunders.

No longer: Ivanov, Poll and Merk come from established football powers; it is thought that the Englishman and the German were earmarked for high-profile games in the latter stages of the tournament.

Now FIFA may be running out of trusted officials. Paradoxically, this is a consequence of the doctrine of infallibility among referees that FIFA subscribes to.

Decisions are invariably upheld, suspensions rarely quashed and retroactive punishments rarely given to misbehaving players. With one official on the pitch acting as judge, jury and executioner, justice is neither done nor seen to be done.

A more rigorous appeals procedure, and a more democratic process, would benefit football and, in turn, referees. Ghana would have been especially grateful. Asamoah Gyan was suspended for taking a penalty after he thought the referee's whistle had blown; despite the protests of the Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech, he was then booked and banned.

Then Michael Essien was ruled out of the match against Brazil, despite the support of the USA coach Bruce Arena, after being harshly cautioned against the Americans. Cech and Arena, for their altruism, were ignored.

And on the pitch, referees could receive more assistance. What, for example, does a fifth official do? He certainly doesn't seem to make the first four any better. Instead, he could become the TV official, using replays to help the man on the pitch adjudicate correctly. But compare football with most other sports and the mistrust of technology seems positively anachronistic, if not wilfully stupid.

Few, however, would expect such suggestions to be introduced in the next World Cup in South Africa. In the meantime, however, expect more debatable decisions with, as the stakes grow higher, still greater consequences, and a commensurate diminishing of respect for the men in black.

For, if these are the best referees in the world, then who are the worst?

Who will whistle

FROM PAGE 22

Losing coach Marco van Basten criticised Ivanov's performance, but so did FIFA President Sepp Blatter, who said the refereeing itself "deserves a yellow card".

"The referee's actions harmed what could have been an excellent football match," the Swiss said.

Argentinian referee Horacio Elizondo was in charge for the opening game of the tournament and tradition dictates that the same man will not do both that game and the final.

So one name appears to be rising to the top of the list - Lubos Michel of Slovakia.

He has a solid CV, with three matches at the 2002 World Cup, five at Euro 2004 as well as two first-round games in this World Cup and the Brazil v Ghana second-round match on Tuesday.

And unlike another contender, Carlos Simon of Brazil, there is no danger of Michel's country reaching the final - under FIFA rules the referee cannot be from the same nation as either of the finalists.

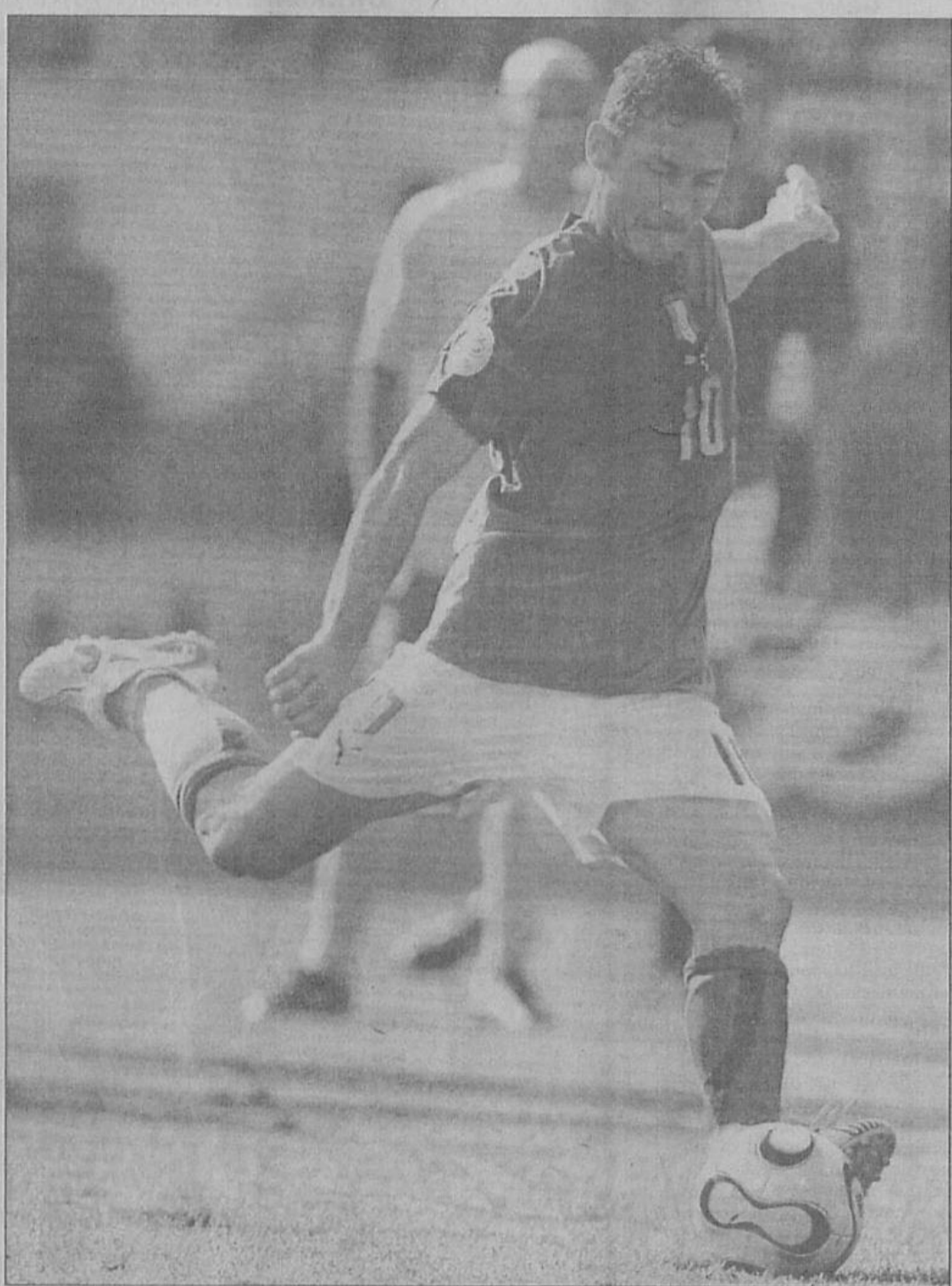


PHOTO: AFP

KNOCK-OUT KICK: Italian talisman Francesco Totti takes the absolute last-gasp penalty-kick that secured Italy's qualification to the quarterfinals at Fritz-Walter-Stadion in Kaiserslautern on Monday.

Redemption for Totti



INTERNET, undated

What goes around comes around in soccer, but sometimes it takes four years to complete the journey.

Italy's Francesco Totti erased his bitter memories of the 2002 World Cup with one swing of his right leg Monday, sending home a penalty kick as time expired to lift the Azzurri past Australia 1-0 and into the quarterfinals against Ukraine. The winner came against a Socceros team coached by Guss Hiddink made the reversal sweeter.

Hiddink guided the 2002 South Korean national team that eliminated Italy 2-1 in overtime in the second round en route to the semifinals. Totti was sent off with his second yellow card in extra time in that match. Minutes later Jung Hwan Ahn scored the winning goal with the man advantage. Totti atoned for that painful memory Monday.

"Today, we showed we have the right mentality to go a long way," he said. "To get results, you have to use your head, and we did."

England unfazed by performances



AFP, Baden-Baden

Rio Ferdinand has defended England's slow start to the World Cup and is confident they will raise their game against Portugal in Saturday's quarter-final showdown.

The Manchester United centre-half has been one of the few pluses for England so far this tournament, and he shook off a groin strain to help his team secure a 1-0 win over Ecuador in the second round.

But although England's performance against the South Americans was one of their worst of the tournament, Ferdinand is adamant that from now on it is only results that matter.

"Everyone keeps talking about performances, performances, performances -- but it's results that win tournaments," Ferdinand said. "The performance is a bonus. And that's how we look at it. If we get a good performance that's fantastic because that's what we aim for."

"But if it doesn't come and we get the right result, who's going to cry about that?"

Totti's latest peak fits in neatly with the ups and downs in the 29-year-old's career. A starter with his hometown Roma team in Serie A since he was 16, he is revered for spurning offers to join larger and more successful clubs.

But in the 2004 European Championships, Totti spat at a Danish player, petulance that cost him a three-game suspension and contributed to Italy's embarrassing elimination in group qualifying.

Still, Totti was considered a vital part of the 2006 national team, and when he broke his left leg in league play in February, the country went into a funk. Despite having eight screws inserted to stabilize the bone, Totti recovered ahead of schedule and was selected by coach Marcello Lippi.

"We will wait for him because we need him," Lippi said.

After starting against Czech Republic in Italy's group-clinching victory, Totti began on the bench against Australia, entering in the 75th minute.

Totti accepted the quasi-demotion but was ready when the call came.

"Lippi came to see me this afternoon and explained why he was leaving me out," Totti said Monday. "I

have no problem with that. He showed faith in me and picked me for the squad."

Playing a man down and having used all three of his substitutions, Lippi planned to use a 4-4-1 formation in extra time with Totti moving from midfield to striker.

Totti made that a moot point, although there was nervousness on the Italian sideline before his kick because of his history of trying cute chip shots in those situations.

"I told Totti on the bench, 'I hope you don't do one of your famous shots,'" Lippi said. "(His teammates) were very nervous about that."

Azzurri keeper Gianluigi Buffon was thinking of that heartbreak vs. a Hiddink-coached team when the game seemed destined for extra time. "You think back to Korea and you go, 'Oh, no, not again,'" Buffon said. "I didn't have the courage to look (at Totti's kick)."

No worries. Totti's shot was hard and true, catching the upper left corner of the net and sending Italy to the quarterfinals for the first time since 1998. A victory against Ukraine could send the Azzurri to the semifinals for the first time since 1990.

"I had no intention of trying a chip shot with the penalty," Totti said. "I was just concentrating on scoring."

Robinson blames grass

INTERNET, undated

Paul Robinson claims the dry German pitches are hurting England's passing game.

Robinson admits the team has not played well during their World Cup campaign and believes the best is yet to come.

The Tottenham goalkeeper said: "The conditions have made it hard for us."

"I think we are finding the pitches particularly difficult because they are not putting water on them."

"It's slowing our passing game down. We are finding it hard to get a rhythm."

England overcame Ecuador on Sunday in the first knock-out round to set up a quarter-final clash with Portugal, in Gelsenkirchen on Saturday.

Robinson said: "I wouldn't say we are particularly pleased with the way we are playing."

"We're getting results and we haven't played as well as we would like to play."

"I think we are finding it very difficult to get our passing game going."

"We got into the last 16 without producing what we know is our best."

"Ecuador, along with the Sweden game, was probably one of the better performances we've had but we still feel there's more to come from the team."

"The players we have got will rise to the occasion."

"We've not lost a game yet, we're through to the last eight. As long as we keep winning that's the important thing."

French official

FROM PAGE 22

of England and Russia's Valentin Ivanov.

Saules said he attributed their errors to the fact that the referees were now required to be too close to the action, meaning officials were chosen more for their physical condition than their judgement.

"The referees are in perfect physical condition, but the closer they are to the ball, the less they can see."

"The referees (for the World Cup) are made to train as if they were in the army every day. They are running too much and I am not sure that is the best thing."

FIFA President Sepp Blatter criticised Ivanov's handling of Portugal's stormy 1-0 win over Netherlands in which the Russian showed a World Cup record four red cards and 16 yellow.

"The referee's actions harmed what could have been an excellent football match," Blatter said.

The referees' committee is due to meet on Wednesday to name the officials for the quarterfinal matches.

Both plan

FROM PAGE 19

the players.

"I think we have used the atmosphere to pump us up and we start very fast," Metzelder explained. "Emotions are running high and we use them."

For the first time in the country's history a sports psychologist, Hans-Dieter Hermann, has been employed to prepare the Germans mentally.

"Every player needs a strategy to help him prepare," said Hermann.

Germany have

FROM PAGE 19

in the second round on Saturday.

"We're fully fit and I'm sure we won't have to reduce our intensity on Friday at all," Klinsmann said. "In fact, we're going to step things up."

Germany have already brought one negative run to an end at this World Cup, when a 1-0 victory over Poland gave them their first win over a fellow European team at the finals of the World Cup or European Championship in 10 years.

Germany

FROM PAGE 19

"We're hungry for success. We weren't far off beating Argentina in the Confederations Cup," said Klinsmann in allusion to last year's semi-final loss on penalties, before the Argentinians went on to a 4-1 drubbing by Brazil.

"We want to be out there on July 9," the date of the final.

Back at Huntington Beach, they're just a few weeks away from the annual Huck Finn Fishing Derby, where competitors dress up as characters from Mark Twain novels and look to land the biggest fish.

Two years ago, the talk back in Germany was of Klinsmann being over his depth, but having slipped ever more comfortably into coaching garb, he has cast his rod into World Cup waters to haul in Costa Rica, Poland, Ecuador and Sweden.

If he beaches the Argentinians, he'll be angling for a place in history behind Franz Beckenbauer and Mario Zagallo, the only men to get winners medals around their necks as player and coach.

Commentator loses objectivity



REUTERS, Beijing

The dramatic climax of Italy's 1-0 victory over Australia on Monday proved too much for China's most popular television commentator, who departed from his normal objectivity with a passionate paean to Italian football.

Huang Jianxiang, who was commenting for an audience of millions on the state-run CCTV, was unable to control his enthusiasm when Fabio Grosso went down in a challenge and a last-minute penalty was awarded to the Italians.

"Penalty! Penalty! Penalty!" he screamed. "Grosso's done it, Grosso's done it!"

"The great Italian left back! He succeeded in the glorious traditions of Italy! Facchetti, Cabrini and Maldini, their souls are infused in him at this moment!"

"Grosso represents the long

history and traditions of Italian soccer, he's not fighting alone at this moment! He's not alone!"

Chinese television audiences, expected to rise to an accumulated total of 10 billion before the end of the tournament, are not often served up such South American-style passion and Huang's bias has provoked a storm of controversy in the media.

More was to come when Francesco Totti converted the penalty to win the match and Huang had a special mention for Australia's Dutch coach Guss Hiddink, whose South Korea side knocked Italy out of the last World Cup.

"Goooooal! Game over! Italy win! Beat the Australians!" he shouted, his voice now breaking. "They do not fall in front of Hiddink again! Italy the great! Left back the great! Happy birthday to Maldini! Forza Italia!"

"The victory belongs to Italy, to Grosso, to Cannavaro, to Zambrotta, to Buffon, to Maldini, to everyone who loves Italian soccer!"

"Hiddink ... lost all his courage

faced with Italian history and traditions ... He finally reaped fruits which he had sown! They should go home. They don't need to go as far away as Australia as most of them are living in Europe. Farewell!"

An unapologetic Huang later said he could not remember what he had said in the heat of the moment and his preference for Italy was because he had commented on Serie A for many years.

"I'm more familiar with Italian players ... and I don't like Australians indeed," he said. "I was hoping they'd do badly here."

Australia recently joined the Asian Football Confederation and from the next World Cup will contest for one of their qualification spots.

"Do you remember how China were blocked from going to the Spain World Cup in a qualifier in 1987?" Huang said.

"It was a team just like Australia, all of whom were living and playing in England but with New Zealand passports. It still hurts ... and in 2009, Australia will be just like New Zealand at that time."

Coaches learn to cope



REUTERS, Berlin

Coaches under pressure from the heavy expectations of fans and media back home have found a wide variety of ways to cope with tension on the touchline at the World Cup -- smoking, jumping, cursing and even prowling.

Managing a team at the finals has always been a health hazard but Mexico's Ricardo La Volpe increased the risks by chain-smoking on the bench -- until FIFA told him to stop.

The intense pressure in Mexico on the Argentine-born coach to ensure his team progressed in the tournament, with critics wanting him sacked regardless, may help explain La Volpe's unusual habit of blowing smoke at his reserve players.

But La Volpe is not the only coach under scrutiny back home to have left his mark on the sidelines.

Germany's Jurgen Klinsmann has been reincarnated as the elated striker he was a decade ago, celebrating goals with athletic jumps high into the air, flailing arms and euphoric hugs with the rest of his team.

"You just catch the fever with them," Klinsmann said.

He began his coaching in 2004 with a studied seriousness, smiling and pumping a clenched fist after goals.

But now he seems like a player once again, exploding with joy

that seems to uncork the tension after two years of battering from a myriad of German critics and second-guessers.

"There are so many emotions on the bench," the 41-year-old said. "I'm obviously not out there shooting myself. But I'm just happy. The further we go, the more you excited you get."

Klinsmann has been no match for Portugal's Brazilian-born coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, however.

The emotional Scolari has prowled his technical area like a tiger, bringing a heightened sense of "gamesmanship" by whipping up a storm and doing everything to give his team an advantage.

"Sometimes it is like war...I am used to that," Scolari said after beating Netherlands 1-0 to reach the quarter-finals.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum, Sweden coach Lars Lagerback remained the epitome of Scandinavian tranquility even after his fancied team were ousted by hosts Germany 2-0.

Lagerback showed almost no emotion before flying home as his team's golden era drew to a premature close, accompanied by a good old-fashioned bashing in the Swedish media.

But Lagerback kept his cool, calmly fending off calls for his head at a news conference in Bremen on Sunday. He looked more like an unflappable accountant than a maligned coach and said he would not quit because he is still under contract.

He added that media had exaggerated expectations.

"Kick Lagerback" was a headline in Sweden's Expressen daily.

"He's a competent tactician," wrote the Aftonbladet. "But cowardly, cautious and weaknesses have long plagued his teams."

U.S. coach Bruce Arena will also not be forgotten soon.

It did not require any special skill in lip-reading to understand the New Yorker's expletive-filled shouts at the referee who flashed red cards at two of his players and then disallowed a late goal in their 1-1 draw with Italy.

Arena's use of four-letter commentary to the referee in their 2-1 loss to Ghana could also easily be understood by English-speaking television viewers around the world.

Perhaps the most original coaching strategy in the dugout, though, was used by Saudi Arabia's Brazilian-born coach Marcos Paqueta, their 15th manager in 12 years.

He diagrammed plays in the dugout on a magnetic board, wore small ear plugs and spoke into a tiny hand-held microphone.

Costa Rica coach Alexandre Guimaraes had more to worry about after the finals than when he was pacing the touchline.

He had a premonition in Germany about the stormy welcome awaiting him at home in Latin America after the Ticos lost all three Group A matches. His intuition was proved right.

"Dog! Dog! Dog!" was the shout from a group of unhappy fans when Guimaraes stepped off a plane in San Jose. "Coffee pickers are needed," read a sign. "Only requirement is lack of shame."

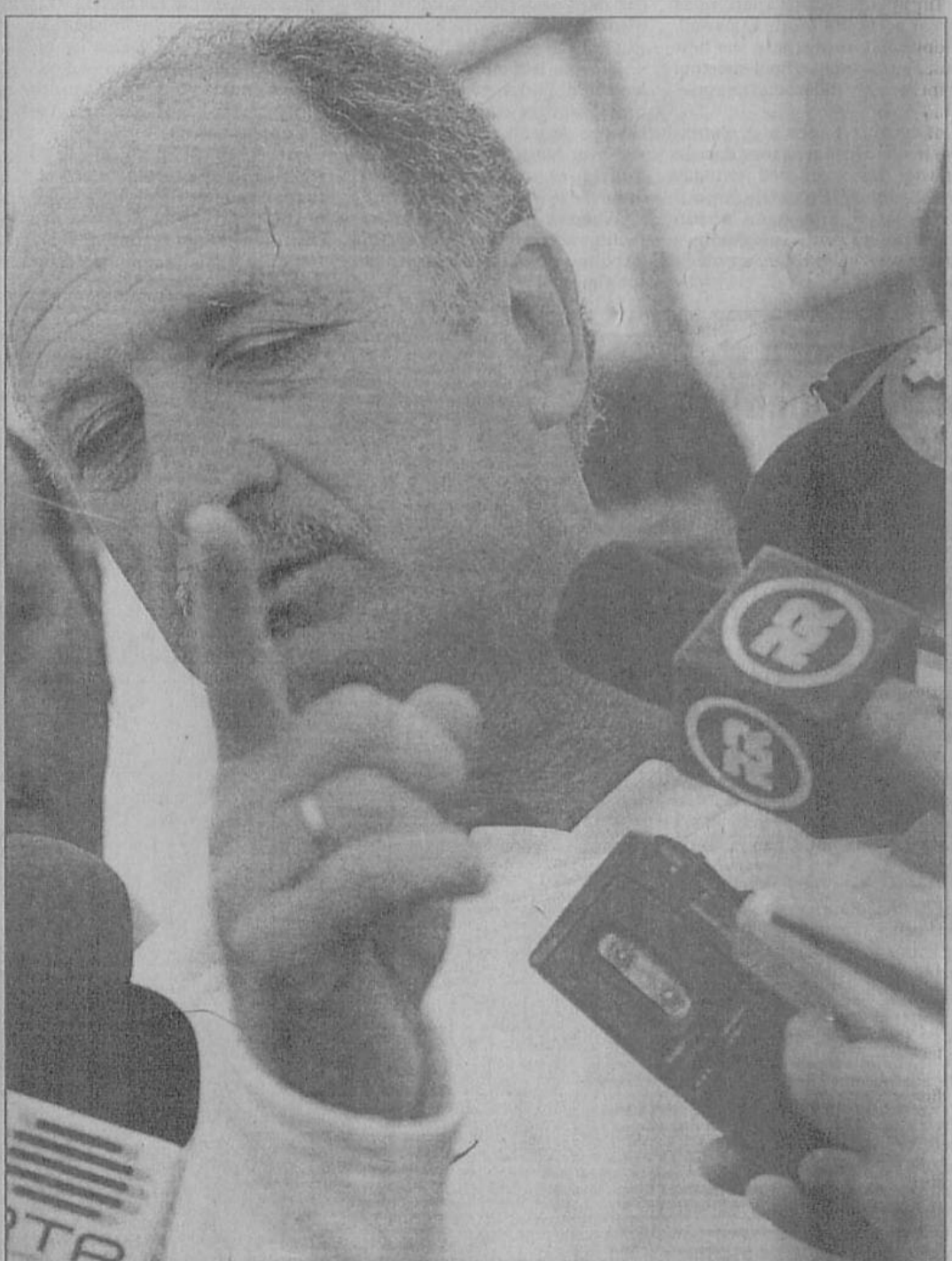


PHOTO: AFP

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari makes a point as he speaks to the media at the team hotel in Mariefeld on Monday.