



PHOTO: AFP

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (C) holds the World Cup trophy as the other members of the team express their euphoria of World Cup victory at Circo Massimo in Rome on Monday night.

Winners take trophy to stricken Pessotto

Italian captain Fabio Cannavaro and fullback Gianluca Zambrotta have shown off their newly acquired World Cup trophy to former team mate Gianluca Pessotto, hospital sources said Tuesday. The pair paid a visit to the Juventus team manager, who is being treated in a Turin hospital following a suicide attempt, after celebrating the Azzurri's victory at a huge party at Rome's Circus Maximus on Monday night. They were later mobbed by hundreds of supporters as they left Le Molinette hospital and had difficulty reaching their car. Pessotto, 35, jumped from his office window on June 27 after complaining to his wife he was struggling to adapt to the team manager's role since retiring as a player in May. Doctors said his condition improved slightly on Sunday after ruling he should not watch the television broadcast of the Italy-France final because it would be too tiring. Zambrotta visited his friend, who was capped 22 times for Italy, in intensive care just days before scoring the opening goal in Italy's 3-0 quarter-final win over Ukraine in the World Cup.

Hasselbaink joins Charlton

English Premiership club Charlton signed former Middlesbrough striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink on a free transfer on Tuesday. Dutch international Hasselbaink, 34, was out of contract after new Middlesbrough manager Gareth Southgate told him he could leave the Riverside Stadium. Hasselbaink also had talks with Celtic but the Scottish champions could not agree a wage package to lure him to Parkhead. The ex-Chelsea player becomes Charlton boss Iain Dowie's second signing since he took charge at The Valley earlier this summer, following the capture of Leeds teenager Simon Walton. Dowie told the club's website: "He brings leadership to the club. He is a leader generally around the place, in the dressing room and on the pitch. "He's played internationally for Holland and his goal record is outstanding. "He brings goals to the club and also an infectious enthusiasm, he is a bubbly character and always has a smile on his face."

Grosso, Ribery & Lahm catch the eye

In a tournament short on star quality, a Frenchman who could dribble, an Argentine who hit the shot of his life and an Italian defender with a knack for the spectacular were among the handful of revelations. The 2006 World Cup featured an official award for best young player but it must have been hard to come up with a shortlist. The award went to Lukas Podolski, the 21-year-old German striker who scored three goals but missed too many clear chances, especially when it really mattered in the semi-final defeat against Italy, to be considered a real success. Other players tipped as contenders, including Wayne Rooney and Lionel Messi, had little impact but there were a few older newcomers, as it were, who did shine at these finals. The 23-year-old Franck Ribery had not started a game for France before the World Cup and ended up playing a major part to their run to the final. The winger, despite finishing on the losing side, did not let his side down in the final against Italy, almost scoring in extra time before he was substituted. "The most important thing is to have lots of fun," he had said with refreshing calm before the semi-final win over Portugal. "I'm young, I've got a great job and I'm enjoying myself. I don't see why I should put myself under any kind of pressure." Ribery scored a fine goal in France's 3-1 win over Spain in the second round and impressed everyone with his skill on the ball. While Messi and his fellow young Argentine striker Carlos Tevez were limited to bit parts, the stand-out for the South Americans was Maxi Rodriguez, the 25-year-old who scored three goals. The highlight was a breathtaking volley that gave Argentina their winner in extra-time against Mexico in the second round. It was all the more remarkable for coming from his weaker left foot - "the one I use for getting on the bus," he said. Maxim Kalinichenko, a 26-year-old battling back after injury, looked outstanding on the wing for Ukraine

Algerian leader hails Zidane

letter of friendship, a letter of consolation," he said, adding that in his opinion, Zidane remains "the best player in the world". Zidane, the French-born son of Algerian immigrants, who was playing in his last World Cup tournament, stunned fans when he was given a red card during Sunday's final after he head-butted Italian defender Marco Materazzi. Italy went on to beat France 5-3 on penalties. Speculation on what might have provoked Zidane has focused on alleged racist remarks from Materazzi, who according to lip readers called him "the son of a terrorist whore" on the pitch. Materazzi denies uttering such a thing. Bouteflika, who arrived in London earlier Tuesday for the first official visit to Britain ever by an Algerian head of state, said Zidane was a footballing hero who had never lost "his human dimension". What happened to him during Sunday's final in Berlin "could have happened to any man," he said, adding that "our duty is not to judge; our duty is to understand" what happened. "It is perfectly clear that he has our solidarity because he is of Algerian heritage and because he is the best (football) player in the world," the president said. To underline the point, Bouteflika -- who spoke in French -- then repeated three times: "He is the best player in the world, the best player in the world, the best player in the world."

Real chase Juve trio

Real Madrid have admitted that they are keen on signing the Juventus trio of Fabio Cannavaro, Emerson and Gianluca Zambrotta. The threesome have been strongly linked with the Spanish giants as a result of the Calciopoli situation which may see their club demoted to Serie B or lower. As a result, a host of their top stars would inevitably leave and boss Fabio Capello who quit Turin for Madrid last week would welcome his former pupils with open arms. "All three have contracts with Juventus, but we have the advantage that all three want to come to Real and that simplifies things," Real sporting director Predrag Mijatovic told the AS newspaper. Reports in the peninsula over the last few days have associated numerous Juve players with loan moves to Madrid, but the former Yugoslavian striker insists that will never happen. "We don't want anyone on loan here," continued the man who once scored the only goal of a Champions

Bayern close in on RvN

Bayern Munich are ready to speak to Manchester United about signing Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, club chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has said. "The player wants to come to us. We know that," Rummenigge said in a newspaper interview carried on Bayern's website on Monday. "Now we will approach the thing with all calm. We have to speak with the player and naturally with Manchester United. But there are no grounds for haste." Van Nistelrooy stormed out of the club after being omitted from United's final Premier League game last season having spent most of the latter part of the campaign on the bench. He still managed to finish the season as United's top scorer with 21 league goals. The 30-year-old striker scored once at the World Cup. Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has launched a bid to sign France winger Franck Ribery from Marseille, according to reports on Tuesday. Wenger is keen to bring Ribery to the English Premiership club after watching the 23-year-old play a starring role in his country's run to the World Cup final and has said to have made a 10 million pounds offer. Real Madrid and French champions Lyon have also reportedly expressed interest in Ribery and the Spanish club are thought to have made a 26 million pounds bid. But the Guardian newspaper claims Ribery, who is contracted to Marseille until 2010, may prefer a move to the Emirates Stadium in London. Ribery believes Wenger can transform him into one of the world's top players in the same way he improved his France team-mate Thierry Henry and that may prove the decisive factor in any transfer, the paper said.

Cisse joins Marseille

French striker Djibril Cisse has joined Olympique Marseille from Liverpool on a season's loan, a source close to the Ligue 1 club said on Tuesday. The 24-year-old is to be officially introduced to the local media on Wednesday, the source said. Cisse missed the World Cup finals in Germany after he broke his leg during France's last warm-up match against China on June 7. Cisse is not expected to be back in action before October. The striker joined the Merseyside side from AJ Auxerre in 2004. Manager Rafael Benitez usually put him on the bench last season. Cisse said he wanted to come back to France, Marseille being his first choice of club.

Lack of lasting memories



REUTERS, Berlin

Italy's victory over France in Sunday's World Cup final brought the curtain down on one of the best tournaments ever staged, despite some negative thinking from coaches and continual cheating from players. The final itself will go into the record books as second only to the 1990 final as the worst ever played, Italy lifting the World Cup for the fourth time in their history after a shootout win. Generally speaking when they were not trying to conf referees, or searching for imaginary blood or bruising from injuries they never suffered, most of the 32 teams that started the competition a month ago produced some excellent football among some very mundane fare. Italy's 2-0 extra-time semi-final win over hosts Germany in Dortmund was probably the classic match of the tournament -- in stark contrast to their penalty shootout victory in the final -- although Argentina's 2-1 second round win over Mexico in Leipzig which featured a spectacular extra-time winning goal from Maxi Rodriguez, was another superb game. But there were fewer goals scored (147) in the finals than in either 1998 (171 goals) or 2002 (161 goals), the first two tournaments to comprise 64 matches and 32 teams and only 1990 had a lower goals per game ratio. There were fewer shots on target and a record number of 28 red cards shown, the last to France captain Zinedine Zidane. Those statistics of course, do not

tell the whole story, but they do indicate a trend towards more defensive football, with more coaches using a safety first lineup of four defenders, five midfielders and a lone attacker. The 4-5-1 system is not the most adventurous, and as a result too many matches had too few goal attempts and goals. Despite the conservatism of the coaches and the implausibility of recreating the high-scoring days of the 1950s, the World Cup always produces surprises and this one was no exception. There were also some incredible and dramatic stories which will also live long in the memory. After their failures at the 2002 World Cup and the European Championship in Portugal two years ago, no-one realistically expected France to meet Italy in the final. But France, somehow rediscovering the self-belief if not the grandeur of their World Cup winning year of 1998, made it all the way to the end, largely on the astonishing reincarnation of Zidane as one of soccer's all-time greats. Playing the last match of his outstanding career and losing so poignantly on Sunday, makes his one of soccer's greatest comebacks, even if it ended on such a low note. Italy's route there was no less absorbing in human terms, played out against the backdrop of the biggest scandal to hit Italian soccer in years. Eight Juventus club mates took part in the final, either from the start or as substitutes. World Cup finalists on Sunday, their futures are now far from certain with the authorities waiting to deliver their verdicts in the scandal later this week. Germany were desperate to repeat their home triumph of 1974, and although they failed, coach Jurgen Klinsmann won a nation over by playing fast, attacking exciting football with a team lifted up by a wave of emotion. Miroslov Klose finished as the tournament's top scorer with five goals and although Germany had to settle for third place they played an enormously significant role in making the World Cup so successful. Defending champions Brazil never really convinced, despite starting the competition with four straight wins to establish an all-time World Cup record of 11 successive victories. Ronaldo also scored three times to set a record of 15 goals in three World Cups but their reign ended when France beat them 1-0 in the quarterfinals. England, who had been widely tipped to reach at least the last four, also went out at the same stage, a hapless campaign ended by another defeat in a penalty shootout to Portugal, who reached the semis for the first time since 1966. Among the debutants were four African nations: Ghana, Ivory Coast, Angola and Togo, whose World Cup descended into farce over a players bonus dispute, coaches coming and going and a threat not to play a match. Other debutants like Trinidad & Tobago and Ukraine, who reached the quarter-finals also made their mark as did Australia who won their first ever matches in the finals and were a little unlucky to go out to eventual winners Italy in the second round. Ghana, who scored wins over the Czech Republic and the United States, and Ivory Coast, unlucky to be placed in a tough first round group also impressed -- pointing the way forward to Africa's first World Cup in four years' time.

Deschamps pens Juventus deal



AFP, Rome

Former French World Cup winner Didier Deschamps has been named new coach of Juventus, in the wake of Fabio Capello's departure to Real Madrid, the club announced Monday. Deschamps, 37, captained France to victory in the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000. Deschamps joined Juventus as a player in 1994 and won three Scudetti and one Champions League with the Turin club. He later played for Chelsea in the English Premiership, winning the FA Cup, before ending his career in Spain with Valencia. As a coach, he guided Monaco to a Champions League final in 2004. Juventus said Deschamps had signed a two-year contract. However, there is no guarantee he will spend those two years in the Italian top flight as Juventus are expected to be relegated early this week for their part in a match-fixing scandal. If Juve are dropped to the second, or even third division as has been asked for by prosecutors in the case at a Rome sports tribunal, they could lose most of their star players. Internationals such as new Italian world champions Gianluigi Buffon, Fabio Cannavaro and Gianluca Zambrotta, Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovich, France's David Trezeguet or even Czech Pavel Nedved are all likely to jump ship rather than spend a season in the lower divisions.



DIDIER DESCHAMPS

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. Includes crossword grid and CRYPTOQUIP puzzle.