Milan duo set for Premiership

INTERNET, undated

The Milan pair of Nelson Dida and Alessandro Nesta are being associated with moves to Premiership clubs this summer.

The goalkeeper is apparently a target for Manchester United, while Chelsea want Italy stopper Alessandro Nesta.

doubt after the two parties have so far failed to agree terms over a new With the possibility of losing Dida for nothing next summer, and the

Dida's future at the club is in

probable capture of Juventus No 1 Gigi Buffon, the Italian giants are ready to cash in on the Brazilian. However, no decision on the South American will be made until

the Calciopoli verdicts have been Meanwhile, Chelsea are again being associated with a swoop for long-time target Nesta to strengthen

their defence The Stamford Bridge outfit are understood to be ready to make a bid of around 12m-pound for the newly crowned world champion.

However, it seems that the Lazio youth team product would only consider such a switch if the San Siro outfit are demoted as part of the match-fixing trial

Other whispers circulating around the peninsula have also linked Andrea Pirlo with a move to Real Madrid

New Real boss Fabio Capello is a massive fan of the playmaker who has just underlined his ability in Germany 2006.

Pirlo, formerly of Brescia and Inter, is understood to have a valuation of around 15m-pound even if Milan wouldn't want to lose him.

WC edges NBA!

AFP, New York

Sunday's World Cup final in Berlin scored big with US television viewers, with nearly 17 million tuning in for the clash between France and Italy -- topping audiences for the NBA basketball finals

According to preliminary data released by Nielsen Media Research, 11.9 million people watched live coverage of the final on the ABC network, while another five million chose the Spanish-language broadcast on the Univision channel.

The total represented an increase of more than 150 percent over the 2002 final, which was shown early in the morning, and around 30 percent over the 1998

tournament decider. In a country where football is still considered something of a minority sport, Sunday's viewing figures compared favourably with those for high-profile US sporting events.

It was four million more than the average audience for last month's NBA finals between the Dallas Mavericks and the Miami Heat and not far away from the average 17.1 million that watched last year's

baseball World Series. However, it was still nowhere near the highlight of the annual US sporting calendar, American football's Super Bowl, which attracted more than 90 million viewers in

Matrix, ZZ reunion?

INTERNET, undated

Marco Materazzi's agent believes a reunion between the Italy defender and Zinedine Zidane would make a 'nice moment'.

France legend Zidane was dismissed for headbutting Materazzi during the World Cup final defeat to the Azzurri, although it is unclear what the defender said to provoke the attack.

Claudio Vigorelli, Materazzi's agent, told BBC Radio Five Live: 'At the end of the day it is a thing between Zidane and Materazzi. My personal wish would be that one day they could meet again and maybe make a nice moment.

Hamann snubs Bolton

REUTERS, London

Former Germany international Dietmar Hamann has decided against joining Bolton Wanderers from Liverpool despite signing for manager Sam Allardyce's team the Premier League club said.

Bolton said on their official Web site that the midfielder will join another team in the coming hours. Liverpool announced Hamann's departure for the Trotters on Tuesday.

British newspapers reported on Wednesday that Hamann was ioining Premier League rivals

Manchester City instead "Bolton Wanderers wishes to clarify that although Didi Hamann signed a contract with the club, he has since had a change of heart and will sign for another football club within the next 24 hours," the club said, adding they would make no further comment.



Brazilian superstar Ronaldo wipes his tears at a press conference in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday.

Ronaldo blames critics

GERMANY 2006

AP, Rio de Janiero

Ronaldo believes Brazil have been criticised too harshly for not winning the World Cup "even though we're the best team in the world." Favoured to win a record sixth

World Cup in Germany, Brazil were knocked out in the quarterfinals 1-0 by France, who went on to lose to Italy in the final on penalty kicks. "I've seen and heard the criti-

cism, and it all seems very exaggerated," Ronaldo said at a news conference Tuesday. He acknowledged the team

didn't live up to expectations. "Our performance was below expectations. We just have to accept it," he said. "I think it's too much to look for a culprit for our

Cup, even though we're the best team in the world. Ronaldo has won the Cup twice,

in 1994 and 2002, and nearly won a third time in 1998, when Brazil reached the final but lost 3-0 to host He compared the sullen mood in

when the team defeated Germany 2-0 in the final in Japan. "Four years ago everyone was happy -- the press, fans, politicians everyone commemorating the fifth World Cup title," he said. "Now the

losers are just the players and the

Brazil with the ecstasy of 2002,

coaching staff." Ronaldo defended coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, who led the team to the title in 1994 and was expected to repeat the feat this year.

'The coach can't be the only one guilty for the defeat of the national team." he said.

There was some personal success for Ronaldo, who scored three

goals to eclipse former German star Gerd Mueller as the World Cup's alltime leading scorer with 15 goals. He also was the Cup's third-highest scorer with three goals, two behind German striker Miroslav Klose. Ronaldo confirmed he's consid-

ering surgery on his left knee, and said he was consulting Brazil team doctor Jose Luis Runco. "We'll talk with Runco and see

what's the best way to resolve this problem," he said. FC Barcelona striker

Ronaldinho, twice voted the world's best player, also apologised for the team's disappointing play. "Many expected a brilliant perfor-

mance from the team and especially from me. Which didn't happen," he said in a statement on his website. "I regret we left this World Cup without showing our qualities, and what

C'Ron not for sale'

Football

Manchester United have declared their intention to keep hold of Cristiano Ronaldo.

The future of the Portuga winger has been the subject of intense speculation over the past three weeks, with the 21-year-old twice claiming he would like to move to Spain

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson initially suggested he would try to keep Ronaldo at Old Trafford and those comments have been reinforced by the Old Trafford outfit this morning

'Manchester United has noticed the increasing media speculation over the future of Cristiano Ronaldo,' said a statement released by the Red Devils.

'The club can confirm there is no possibility of Cristiano being sold. 'Cristiano recently signed a new contract until 2010 and the club

'The club will not listen to any offers for Cristiano. 'Cristiano is one of the brightest young stars in world football, as

fully expects him to honour that

demonstrated by his performances at the World Cup and Manchester United is not in the business of selling their best young players.' Ronaldo, who is spending time

on his home island of Madeira following the World Cup, was quoted in the Portuguese media

'There are possibilities for me to continue at Manchester United but there are other possibilities as well,'

'Everything is open, if I have to leave Manchester United I don't

want to leave on bad terms because it is a club that has contributed to my evolution as a human being and as a professional. 'It is an issue that has to be

discussed in the next few days. For

the time being I want to distance myself from football. The most important thing is to rest and go back to Madeira. 'I have no reason to leave the club, they have always supported

me, they always gave me guarantees of being able to evolve as a player.' he added.

There is still nothing concrete. During this week I believe the issue will be resolved.

'If it's a question of staying there it will be fine. if I leave it will also be fine. It is still a question that has to be decided, I have four days to resolve it.'

Italians join **Rolling Stones**

on Tuesday

of Italy's World Cup winning football team, welcomed the 60,000-strong audience to the San Siro stadium in Milan with the words "Hello Milan, hello Italy, you are the world champions," spoken in Italian.

The tour had had to be postponed after Keith Richards. the Stones' guitarist, fell from a palm tree while on holiday earlier this year and had to undergo a brain operation.

said on Wednesday that Jagger was

Flash" and "Satisfaction" during the concert, the first in a European tour

age of the concert in Wednesday's papers.

World Cup final on Sunday.

Richards, 62, was hospitalized in New Zealand last month with a brain haemhorrage and had to undergo an operation to drain blood from his brain. following his plunge from the palm tree on the South Pacific Ocean island of

The tour had to be postponed from May to July to allow him time to recover.

on stage

The Rolling Stones were joined on stage by Italy's football champions Alessandro Del Pierro and Marco Materazzi as the band kicked off the European leg of their tour in Milan late

Lead singer Mick Jagger, a big fan

Italian daily Corriere della Sera

"not on great vocal form" but had "swung his hips like in the good old The four ageing rockers played old favourites including "Jumpin' Jack

that will take the Stones to 11 different But it was the appearance of the two footballers that dominated cover-

Jagger delighted the audience with a quip about Materazzi, who was headbutted in the chest by French player Zinedine Zidane during the

"Materazzi and (Keith) Richards have something in common tonight -they both recently had head-related problems," he said.

Wenger adamant **Cesc will stay**

Football

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger on Wednesday told Real Madrid to forget about signing Spanish midfielder Cesc Fabregas

Real's president Ramon Calderon recently revealed his club's interest in Fabregas, but Wenger made it clear he will resist any attempts to sign the talented teenager. Fabregas, who joined Arsenal

Capello has reportedly made him one of his top transfer targets. But Wenger knows how important the 19-year-old is to his side's

attempts to challenge Chelsea for the Premiership title and he told the club's webiste: "I would like to make it clear that Cesc Fabregas is not for sale and we will not be listening to any offers for him.

"Since making his first-team debut nearly three years ago, Cesc has progressed remarkably well, with his performances rightfully earning him a place in the Spain World Cup squad. "At 19 years old, Cesc repre-

sents the future of Arsenal football club and we are looking forward to him being a major part of our plans from Barcelona in 2003, starred for for many years to come." Spain during this summer's World Cup and new Real manager Fabio

The north London team are reportedly close to adding to their squad, with Barcelona's Argentina striker Javier Saviola likely to complete a four million pounds move in the next two weeks

Saviola for **Arsenal?**

INTERNET, undated

Argentina international Javier Saviola could be poised for a move to Arsenal, according to the striker's agent.

The 24-year-old Saviola has struggled to make an impression at Barcelona and was loaned to Sevilla last season,

helping them lift the UEFA Cup.

Saviola's agent Alfredo Cabrera Brizuela told The Sun: 'He will make his decision based on football and that points to the Gunners.

'He will have no problem playing in England because he is a world-class player and will be successful in any country.

'This week is very important because he wants to have a holiday knowing he has his future sorted out.'

hours after Brazil's elimination by

France as fans vented their anger

at his insipid display.

Ronaldinho apologises much of the fans' criticism after failing to town was burned to the ground just

reproduce the form he showed

A statue of him in a southern

throughout the season at Barca.



AFP, Rio de Janiero

Ronaldinho has asked for help from Brazilian fans to make up for the national team's dismal failure at the World Cup in Germany.

The world player of the year and his 'Selecao' teammates did not sparkle as expected and were one of the tournament's huge disappointments as they crashed out in the quarter-finals to France.

"Many people were waiting for a brilliant performance from the team and especially from me, something which did not happen," said the Barcelona star on his personal "I regret having left the World

Cup without showing our true There is nothing I can say to change the past. For this reason I

want to say sorry." Ronaldinho said he was taking a month off on holiday to be able to return fresh for next season to give his best for the national team, fivetime winners who had started the tournament as favourites.

"It is not this time that we claimed a sixth world title, but with your help, we will get over the mistakes of 2006 for the World Cup in South Africa in 2010." Ronnie has borne the brunt of



Bayern, Real chase Ruud

Football

THE GUARDIAN

A dire last few months for Ruud van Nistelrooy, which saw the Dutch striker sidelined at Manchester United after falling out with Sir Alex Ferguson and dropped by Holland during a disappointing World Cup, look likely to end with his transfer to one of the biggest clubs in Europe. Last night Real Madrid and Bayern Munich were jostling for position as the queue started to form for his signature.

The German champions, whose attack currently includes another Dutchman, Roy Makaay as well as the Germany striker Lukas Podolski, claim to be the player's choice. "He wants to come to us. We know that," said their chairman Karl-Heinz Rummeniage. "Now we will approach the thing with all calm. We have to speak with the player

39 Comical

41 Ark

42 Metal

Caesar

craftsm

vessel

variety

working

compan-

52 Erstwhile

53 Grumpy

54 Trawle

55 Juror, in

56 Storm

theory

center

45 Fictitious

49 Cattle

cookie

3 Weevil's

target

4 Conclu

sion

6 Zodiac

7 Phnom

sandy

expanse

Never-

fading

11 Race

place

17 "Golly!"

8 Vast

5 Generally

need

27 Give up

29 "Caught

30 Pecan or

33 Eddie

who

cashew

26 Pest

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

5 Matter-

horn or

Jungfrau

garment

13 Sheltered 51 Not

8 Ganges

12 Press

side

14 "So be it"

15 Pinochle

16 Cursive

writing

18 Old gold

Rome

21 Forbidden

20 Robust

act

23 Historic

music

lover

28 Soon, in

verse

31 Water (Fr

34 Thanks

giving

abbr.

35 Network

37 Unlikely

winner

of lines

walkway

coins of

1 Kimono

United. But there are no grounds

Real Madrid's interest might



RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

tions, with the Spanish club's new manager Fabio Capello including the 30-year-old among a list of

and naturally with Manchester players he would like to bring to the Bernabéu. "It seems as though Fabio likes Van Nistelrooy," said their newly elected president Ramón Calderón. "He could complement Ronaldo.

> Relegated to the bench at Old Trafford for the final run-in last season, Van Nistelrooy nevertheless scored 21 Premiership goals, five more than the club's next highest scorer Wayne Rooney and second only to Arsenal's Thierry Henry. He walked out of the club when he was left out of the team for United's final Premiership game against Charlton, and scored only one goal in the World Cup.

Calderón also confirmed the club's interest in Milan's Brazil international Kaka and Arsenal's Spanish midfielder Cesc Fábregas. "Of course I would like for Cesc to be one of our signings,' he said. "We had an agreement with the player during the presidential elections but we have yet to sit

Real Madrid eye top stars



Real Madrid's new coach Fabio Capello (L) chats with players Thomas Gravesen (C) and Jonathan Woodgate during the first training session of the season in Madrid on Wednesday.



INTERNET, Milan

Spanish top club Real Madrid are keen on snatching Fiorentina striker Luca Toni and other Italian world champions who appear set on leaving their scandal-ridden clubs, news reports said on Wednesday

The Spanish club are said to

million dollars) for the 29-year-old Toni, besting by about 10 per cent a previous offer from Inter Milan. The towering forward scored two goals at the World Cup, only in part living up to his fame of ruthless

hitter who notched 31 goals in the

have offered 20 million euros (25

Serie Aseason. His Florence side are under trial in Rome for alleged involvement in a wide match-fixing scandal and face relegation to the Serie B along with AC Milan, Lazio, while title holders Juventus could be dropped two divisions.

With the sentence in the sports trial due later this week, several big clubs have begun negotiations with the four beleaguered sides and Real manager Predrag Mijatovic

was quoted as saying earlier this week that his club 'looks to have the three players of Juve. (Fabio) Cannavaro, (Gianluca) Zambrotta and (Brazilian) Emerson in seven 'All of them have a contract

Italy's win over France.

of them want to come to Real, and this makes things simple. They will not be loans. We want to own our players, according to our tradition.' The club from the Spanish capital have already snatched

clause forcing us to pay Juve, but all

Also in Real's sights are Milan's Brazilian midfielder Kaka and Andrea Pirlo, who impressed at the World Cup and appears to be considering a transfer to Madrid.

former Juve coach Fabio Capello.

1,600 gambling arrests

AFP, Bangkok

Nearly 1,600 people have been arrested in Thailand for illegal gambling during the month-long World Cup, involving some 22.2 million dollars in wagers, police said Wednesday.

Police arrested 1,593 people across the country, including 770 in Bangkok alone, and they had collectively handled 845 million baht (22.2 million dollars) of illegal bets. police Lieutenant General Ajiravid Subarnbhesaj said. About one third of those arrested

were bookies, he added. Thailand did not have a team in the World Cup but is passionate about football and about gambling on the games, which ended on Sunday with

22 Pour -DOWN 24 Classical troubled 1 Edges waters Solution time: 24 mins.

57 Entangle-Qatar 46 Paradise 47 Saxophone 48 For fea that

inspired "The French Conneclord's due 36 Gardener at times 38 Psychia trist 19 Capital of 40 Homer's interjec 42 Broadway dud 43 Unaccompanied

FPQQLWNVC KIHL, 44 Protuberance GNBFLRQ RYFNVC NBHJKNLVF

Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHEN IRISH PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT A REALLY BEAUTIFUL LADY, I WONDER IF THEY TALK O' BELLE Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals T

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

QRYZLW YWSNVJWNRI KGL

down with Arsenal and negotiate. By Eugene Sheffer 2 Sandwich 24 Tripod 25 Rowing