

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.

Dida's future at the club is in doubt after the two parties have so far failed to agree terms over a new contract.

With the possibility of losing Dida for nothing next summer, and the 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 revealed.

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 February.

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

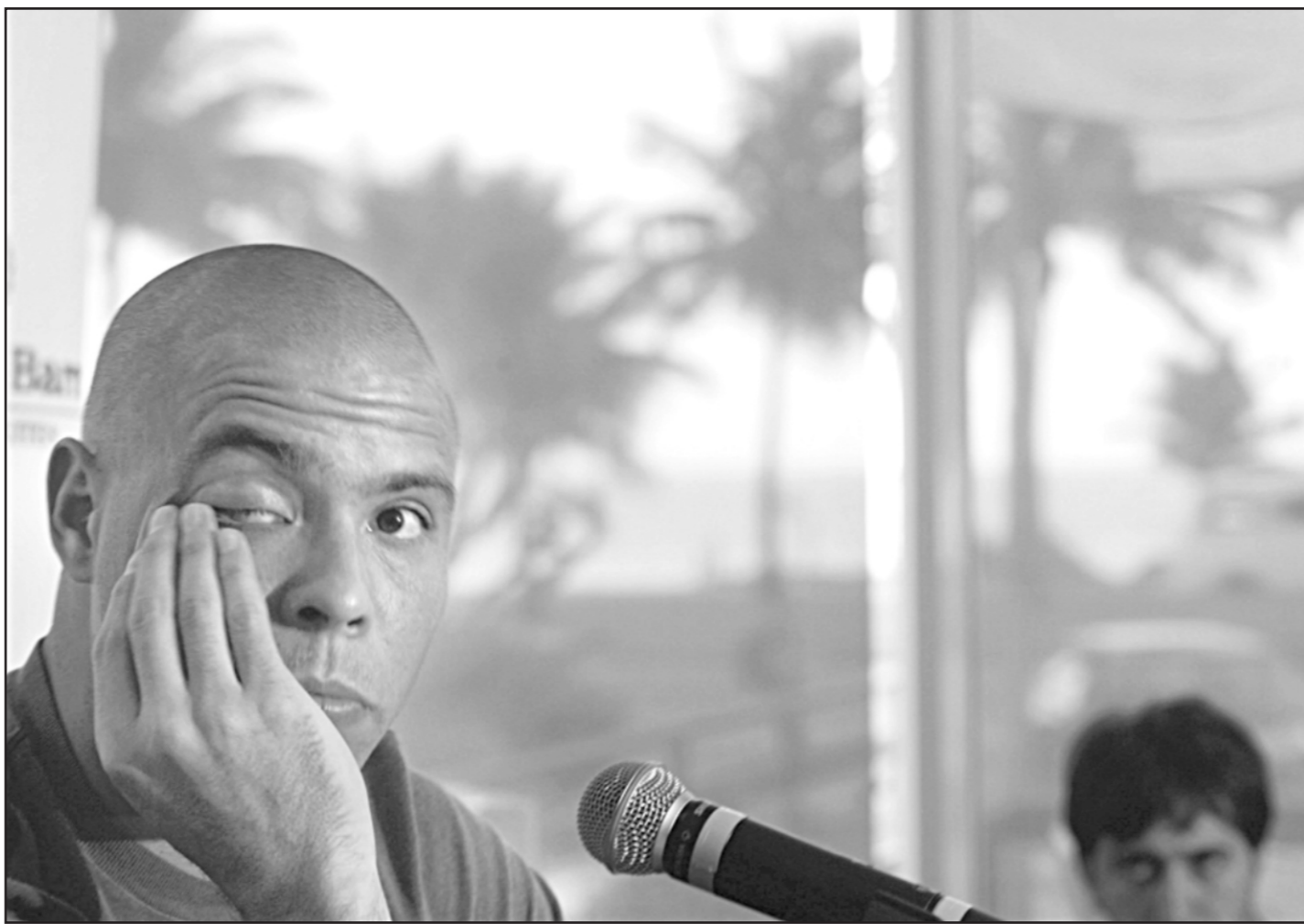
REUTERS, London

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 joining 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

AP, Rio de Janeiro

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 criticism, 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 elimination. Brazil won't win every 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 France.

He compared the sullen mood in Brazil with the ecstasy of 2002, 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 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

Italians join Rolling Stones on stage

AFP, Rome

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

Lead singer Mick Jagger, a big fan 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.

Italian daily Corriere della Sera said on Wednesday that Jagger was "not on great vocal form" but had "swung his hips like in the good old days".

The four ageing rockers played old favourites including "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Satisfaction" during the concert, the first in a European tour that will take the Stones to 11 different countries.

But it was the appearance of the two footballers that dominated coverage of the concert in Wednesday's papers.

Jagger delighted the audience with a quip about Materazzi, who was headbutted in the chest by French player Zinedine Zidane during the World Cup final on Sunday.

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

Richards, 62, was hospitalized in New Zealand last month with a brain haemorrhage 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 Fiji.

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

'C'Ron not for sale'

INTERNET, undated

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

The future of the Portugal 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 fully expects him to honour that contract."

"The club will not listen to any offers for Cristiano."

"Cristiano is one of the brightest young stars in world football, as 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 today.

"There are possibilities for me to continue at Manchester United but there are other possibilities as well," he said.

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

Real Madrid eye top stars

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 have offered 20 million euros (25 million dollars) for the 29-year-old Toni, besting by about 10 per cent a previous offer by 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 Serie A season.

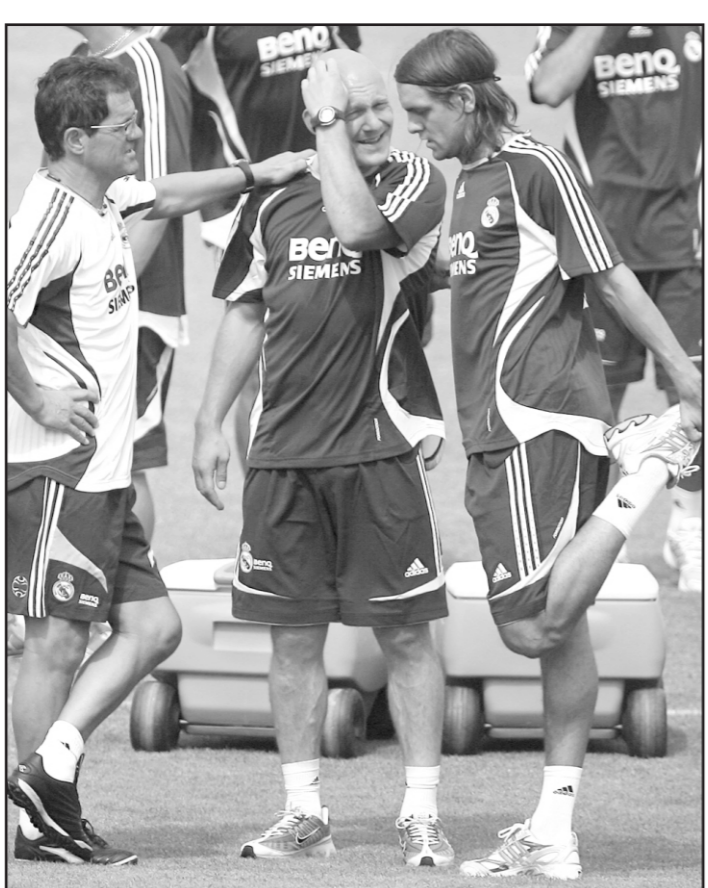
His Florence side are under trial in Rome for alleged involvement in a wide match-fixing scandal and face relegation to the Serie B along with AC Milan, Lazio, while title holders Juventus could be dropped two divisions.

With the sentence in the sports trial due later this week, several big clubs have begun negotiations with the four beleaguered sides and their players.

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 days."

"All of them have a contract

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.

Wenger adamant Cesc will stay

AFP, London

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 from Barcelona in 2003, started for Spain during this summer's World Cup and new Real manager Fabio 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

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.'

Ronaldinho apologises

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

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 website.

"I regret having left the World Cup without showing our true capabilities."

"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, five-time 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



RONALDINHO

Bayern, Real chase Ruud

INTERNET, undated

And naturally with Manchester United. But there are no grounds for haste."

Real Madrid's interest might force them to speed up negotiations, with the Spanish club's new manager Fabio Capello including the 30-year-old among a list of

players he would like to bring to the Bernabeu. "It seems as though Fabio likes Van Nistelrooy," said their newly elected president Ramon Calderon. "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.

Calderon also confirmed the club's interest in Milan's Brazil international Kaka and Arsenal's Spanish midfielder Cesc Fabregas. "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 down with Arsenal and negotiate."

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

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	EASY	SHAD	EWWE
	SEE	ENDS	
	SKI	DOST	ALBA
	HEBREW	AFLAOT	
	ILLUOME	TRVINE	
	APIEMAN	NOONE	

CRYPTOQUIP
K G L Q R Y Z L W C W Y Z L W
Y W S N V J W N R I K G L R Y V C
F P Q Q L W N V C K I H L Q Y P V S
G N B F L R Q R Y F N V C N B H J K N L V F
Saturday's Cryptquip: WHEN IRISH PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT A REALLY BEAUTIFUL LADY, I WONDER IF THEY TALK O' BELLE.
Today's Cryptquip Clue: K equals T
The Cryptquip 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.