

## Italy transcends to hell

**Football**

REUTERS, Rome

Less than a week after winning the World Cup, Italy's soccer universe has been turned upside-down with top clubs ousted from the elite league for match-fixing.

An Italian sports tribunal delivered the verdicts late on Friday, punishing Italy's most successful team Juventus with relegation to Italy's second-tier Serie B along with Fiorentina and Lazio.

The fourth club involved, AC Milan, owned by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, was also heavily penalised over Europe's biggest football scandal in decades, starting next season's Serie A campaign minus 15 points.

"Mighty Blow", read the headline of top sports newspaper, La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"To Hell", screamed a front page column in Italy's leading newspaper Corriere della Sera. It counted 120 hours from Italy's World Cup win to the moment when "two generations of soccer establishment were wiped out".

"I think the verdict was unjust, not all the elements that led to the investigations were properly considered," said Rome resident Fabrizio Caccamo.

Others praised the ruling, saying rough justice was needed to purge the sport of chronic corruption.

"I totally agree with the verdict. Everybody had to pay for what they did, even if Milan was more lucky than the other teams involved," said another fan Marco Rossi.

The scandal broke in May with the publication of intercepted telephone conversations between a former Juventus official and Italian soccer authorities discussing refereeing appointments.

As well as the clubs, the tribunal barred a number of club officials from the game for varying periods.

Former Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi, who was at the centre of the scandal, was banned from the game for five years and ex-Federation president Franco Carraro for four and a half years.

Moggi said there had been no wrongdoing.

"No match was fixed, no referee was pressured," Moggi was widely quoted as saying by the Italian media on Saturday.

The decision also threatens to prompt an exodus of prized players, such as World Cup captain Fabio Cannavaro and goal-keeper Gianluigi Buffon, from famous Italian teams.

Real Madrid, whose new coach Fabio Capello guided Juventus to the two championships they were stripped of on Friday, have made no secret of their interest in picking up Cannavaro and fellow Juventus player Brazilian midfielder Emerson at bargain-basement prices.

The teams are expected to present their appeals in the coming days. The process has to proceed at speed so it can be completed by July 25 -- the UEFA deadline for the Italian football federation to submit their list of teams for next season's Champions League.

Television companies, with lots of money riding on teams now heading for Italy's soccer hinterlands, said they were still waiting for the outcome of the appeals process to decide whether to renegotiate their broadcast rights.

"We've still got to decide. It's only a few days until July 25. We'll decide then," Mediastar Chairman Fedele Confalonieri.

## Serie A giants stunned

**Football**

AFP, Rome

Juventus, Lazio and Fiorentina reacted with fury on Friday after they were all relegated from Italian football's top-division and banned from Europe for their part in the country's match-fixing scandal.

Juventus were also deducted 30 points from their total for next season and stripped of their last two league titles. Lazio and Fiorentina were penalised seven points and 12 points respectively.

AC Milan will stay in Serie A but will lose 15 points and will also be kicked out of the Champions League.

The decisions were handed out just five days after Italy won the World Cup with a penalty shoot-out victory over France in Berlin.

Juventus president Giovanni Cobolli Gigli said he was stunned by the decision and that the club will appeal.

"It's incredible," he said. "We were expecting a fairer sentence. We don't understand how we can be excluded from the championship."

"Juve is the only team which has clearly shown a desire to change. To be in Serie B with a 30-point deduction is absolutely unacceptable."

"We do not understand the different legal treatment applied to the four cases under consideration. As the facts have clearly demonstrated, the episodes relating to Juventus under the observation of the sporting tribunal are without question comparable to those with which the other teams are charged."

"The difference being that in our case only two matches have been called into question. Therefore our priority is to look after the interests of our fans and those of the minor share holders, and we will do this straight away, by appealing to the Consiglio Federale (of the Italian football federation)."

Luciano Moggi, the former director of Juventus whose attempts to have specific referees assigned

to his club's matches sparked the scandal, was hit with a five-year suspension.

"I am not bitter for myself, but for the teams implicated and for their supporters," he said on Friday.

"No match was fixed, no referees were favoured. It is why Juventus and the other clubs, but especially the fans, are frustrated by this sentence."

Fiorentina were equally angry. "It's a profound injustice," the club said in a statement.

"Out of respect for the city, the fans and the dignity of all those concerned, Fiorentina will battle with all its means to have the light shone on the facts and on its absolute innocence concerning all accusations of fraud."

Lazio president Claudio Lotito, who was handed a three-year ban from all sporting activities, said he was stunned by the club's punishment.

"It's a sentence we were not expecting," he said. "Lazio has never tried to violate ethical rules."



PHOTO: AFP

FALL FROM GRACE: A file photo taken May 14, 2006 shows Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero (C) holding the Italian Serie A trophy aloft after the club retained the Italian league title.

## Transfer merry-go-round in prospect

**Football**

REUTERS, Milan

The demotion of Juventus, Lazio and Fiorentina to Serie B following a ruling by a sports tribunal looking into match-fixing allegations is certain to prompt a transfer merry-go-round across Europe.

Juventus had eight players involved in this month's World Cup final and few, if any, will be expected

already been heavily linked with a move to Inter Milan who have not been involved in the scandal in any way.

Fiorentina's Czech defender Tomas Ujfalus and Bulgarian striker Valeri Bojinov would also be attractive targets for clubs looking to take advantage of the club's difficulties.

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GIANLUIGI BUFFON



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to stay with the Turin club and start next season in Serie B.

The imposition of a 30-point penalty on Juventus for next season means they are almost certain to have to pass at least two seasons in the second tier -- a highly unattractive prospect for their top international players.

Three of Italy's hugely impressive World Cup winning defence will likely be looking for new clubs now and there will be no shortage of suitors for Azzurri captain Fabio Cannavaro, goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and attacking full-back Gianluca Zambrotta.

who will not find it hard to get a new contract in the top flight in Italy or elsewhere.

If there is a top player at Juventus who might stay loyal it is forward Alessandro Del Piero who is an idol of the fans and might also find it tough to find a big name club willing to pay out a large fee for a 31-year-old.

Juve's French trio of defender Lilian Thuram, midfielder Patrick Vieira and striker David Trezeguet will also be attractive targets for the continent's leading clubs and newspapers have already begun speculating on their likely destinations.

Fiorentina striker Luca Toni has

football.

There is now a question mark over AC Milan's highly-paid collection of internationals. Even though Milan avoided relegation, a 44-point penalty imposed on last season's standings means they will miss out on Champions League football.

Club owner Silvio Berlusconi has the resources to survive a season without the income from Europe's premier club competition but an absence from Europe might unsettle some of the club's top performers such as Brazilian Kaka who has been a reported target for Real Madrid.

## VERDICT BLOW-BY-BLOW

AFP, Rome

Italian football finally got the bad news it had been expecting for weeks as four of the country's top clubs were punished for their parts in the match-fixing scandal that has rocked the country.

Here is a blow-by-blow account of the punishments handed down to the clubs and some of Italian's leading football administrators:

### JUVENTUS

- Relegated to Serie B and deducted 30 points next season.
- Stripped of last two league titles from 2005 and 2006 seasons, and demoted to last place in the 2005 season.
- Former Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi given five-year ban.
- Former Juventus chief executive Antonio Giraudo given five-year ban.

### AC MILAN

- Deducted 15 points next season and kicked out of the 2006-07 Champions League.
- Docked 44 points from last seasons total Serie A points.
- AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani given one-year ban.
- Club official Leonardo Meani banned for three years and six months.

### FIorentina

- Relegated to Serie B and deducted 12 points next season.
- Fiorentina president Andrea Della Valle banned for three years and six months ban.
- Fiorentina honorary president Diego Della Valle given four-year ban.

### LAZIO

- Relegated to Serie B and deducted seven points next season.
- Lazio president Claudio Lotito given three-year ban.
- Lecce, Messina, and Treviso, who had finished in the Serie A relegation zone, will now not go down to Serie B and keep their places in the top flight.

### OFFICIALS

- Italian football federation (FIGC) president Franco Carraro banned for four years and six months.
- Vice-President Innocenzo Mazzini suspended for five years.

### REFEREEING OFFICIALS

- Head of Referees Association Pierluigi Pairetto banned for two years and six months.
- President Tullio Lanese banned two years and six months.
- Vice-president Gennaro Mazzei banned for one year.

### REFEREES

- Massimo De Santis banned for four years and six months.
- Paolo Donnarini banned for three years and six months.
- Gianluca Paparesta banned for three months.
- Pasquale Rodomonti, Paolo Bertini, Domenico Messina, Gianluca Rocchi and Paolo Tagliavento cleared.

### LINESMEN

- Claudio Puglisi banned for one year.
- Fabrizio Babini banned for a year.

## Cole hits out at Arsenal

AFP, London

England full-back Ashley Cole looks set to have sealed his departure from Arsenal with a scathing attack on the London club in his new book.

The 25-year-old player was sanctioned by the Premiership last season and fined 75,000 pounds for an illegal transfer-talk meeting with Chelsea.

But Cole claims the Gunners used him as a scapegoat over the "tapping up" affair with the Premiership champions.

He has since signed a contract extension with Arsenal but has now revealed his bitterness at the club.

"Arsenal hung me out to dry, using me as a scapegoat to get back at Chelsea," said Cole in a blurb to promote his book quoted in The Sun.

"The board rewarded me with an insult and three years of loyalty back in my face."

"I'll reveal the shattering truth about who fed me to the sharks. It changed my view forever on the club I regarded as family."

Cole also has a dig at Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger saying

## Hearing went 'fine' for Matrix

INTERNET, Zurich

"Everything went fine" for Italy's World Cup-winning defender Marco Materazzi at his meeting with FIFA officials on Friday, according to the player's agent.

Soccer's world governing body opened disciplinary proceedings against Materazzi on Thursday in an attempt to discover what he said to Zinedine Zidane moments before the Frenchman head-butted him in the Germany 2006 final.

Zidane was sent off for the incident in extra time, and Italy won the match on penalties.

Materazzi, who was accompanied by his lawyer and Italian Football Federation external relations executive Sergio Di Cesare, was quizzed for 1 1/2 hours on Friday morning at FIFA's headquarters.

"Marco was optimistic after the hearing," Di Cesare said.

## USA sack Arena

**Football**

AFP, New York

United States coach Bruce Arena has been dismissed after a disappointing performance at the World Cup, US Soccer Federation president Sunil Gulati said Friday.

Arena met with Gulati and US Soccer secretary general Dan Flynn here at LaGuardia Airport for more than four hours on Thursday and spoke twice to Gulati Friday before the announcement.

"I've reached the decision that we will not be renewing Bruce's contract. We will start an immediate search for someone to guide the program going forward," Gulati said.

"Bruce Arena didn't become a bad coach in the games. It has much more to do with eight years and us looking for a fresh approach."

"He has given us credibility worldwide. He certainly left the program a lot better than when he found it."

"The difficult part is we have an

extraordinary guy as our coach. We weighed that against the eight-year issue and decided we needed the newness.

"We've not talked to any potential coaches. We will start that process now."

Arena, who may take over at Major League Soccer's New York Red Bulls, insisted in a statement that he leaves with football in the US in good shape. He said: "I would like to thank the players, coaches and staff who have been with the program over the last eight years."

Their tireless effort has helped transform the national team program into something we can all be proud of.

"I am extremely optimistic about the future of the sport in our country. As for me, I am planning to take some time off to weigh my future opportunities."

US officials will now begin to consider options for a new coach for the team looking ahead to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

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PHOTO: AFP

A NEW LOOK: Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson (C) is joined by players (L-R) Ryan Giggs, Kieran Richardson, West Brown, John O'Shea, Paul Scholes and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer during the launch of their new jersey held at Durban on Friday.