

Fiorentina fans block railway

AFP, Rome

Almost 2,000 Fiorentina fans brought chaos to the country's railway system as they protested their team's demotion to Serie B as punishment for their role in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

Their action caused delays of up to six hours to services after they congregated at Florence's Campo Di Marte station which lies at the heart of the main Milan to Rome line.

Lines were cleared only after intervention by the police late on Monday night.

Fans also broke into the national team's training centre at Coverciano.

There they staged an hour-long protest where they sat spread out on the pitch to form the word "Basta", (Enough).

Fiorentina were relegated to Serie B and docked 12 points for their role in the match-fixing scandal which also Juventus and Lazio also demoted.

Roman offer for Kaka

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea president Roman Abramovich is reportedly about to make a shock multi-million offer to AC Milan for their playmaker Kaka. The Brazilian seemed bound to join Real Madrid after his team was penalised in Italy's match-fixing scandal, but the Blues have now joined the race.

Despite having already signed Germany's Michael Ballack and Ukraine's Andriy Shevchenko, Abramovich's ambition looks unquenchable.

But even a 70-million euros offer - according from French daily L'Equipe - should not be enough to lure Kaka to Stamford Bridge.

Indeed, the 24-year old spoke aloud of his attachment to the Rossoneri on Monday.

"My family and I are happy in Milan and that is why I renewed my contract until 2011," he told the Spanish AS newspaper.

But the Brazilian hinted that a move to the Spanish capital could be in store, especially since Milan have been deprived of Europe next season.

"The fact that Real are interested in me and want me is very pleasing. Real are as great a club as Milan, or possibly even greater," he said.

"I would only sign with Real after they had reached a deal with myself, but more importantly having satisfied Milan's requests," he finally concluded.

Kaka played for the last two seasons at the San Siro and scored 21 goals in 75 matches.

Turkey handed 'home' ban

INTERNET, undated

Turkey have been ordered to play their first three Euro 2008 qualifiers on neutral territory as punishment for their part in a brawl that took place after a World Cup qualification play-off against Switzerland in Istanbul last November.

Players, coaches and spectators were involved after the match that saw Switzerland qualify for the World Cup in Germany.

UEFA announced on Monday that Turkey's first qualifier against Malta will take place behind closed doors at the Commerzbank Arena in Frankfurt, Germany. The other two matches, against Moldova and Norway must be played behind closed doors in a UEFA affiliated country, at least 500km from Turkish borders.

Rivaldo reveals retirement date

AFP, Athens

Brazilian World Cup winner Rivaldo revealed on Monday he will retire at the end of the forthcoming season.

Rivaldo, 34, currently plays for Greek club Olympiakos but he is set to call it quits after one more campaign.

The former Barcelona midfielder, who won the World Cup in 2002 and was also voted European and World footballer of the year in 1999, told Greek newspaper Protathlitis: "I have already made up my mind. This is going to be my last season as a footballer. I want to finish my career in an Olympiakos shirt."

"I want to do something great next season and then I will go to Brazil to get some rest, but I assure everyone that this doesn't mean that I am not going to try my best in my last season at Olympiakos."



PHOTO: AFP

PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: The pack rides during the 187-km fifteenth stage of the 93rd Tour de France race from Gap to L'Alpe d'Huez on Tuesday.

Schleck tops 15th stage

Cycling

AFP, Alpe d'Huez

CSC rider Franck Schleck of Luxembourg claimed the coveted 15th stage of the Tour de France held over 187km between Gap and the summit finish of the Alpe d'Huez here Tuesday.

American Floyd Landis, who finished fourth, took back the race leader's yellow jersey from Spaniard Oscar Pereiro ahead of Wednesday's 16th stage.

Amstel Gold Race champion Schleck claimed his first ever Tour stage win after attacking former Tour

of Italy winner Damiano Cunego with just over two kilometres to race in the 14.9km climb to the Alpe's summit finish.

Cunego finished second, nearly a minute ahead of Stefano Garzelli who was at the head of a small group which contained race favourite Landis.

Landis, who unlike some of his close rivals kept his cool on the day's last climb, was another big winner on the day.

He now leads Caisse d'Epargne's Pereiro by 10sec. Frenchman Cyril Dessel of Ag2R is third overall at 2:02 with Russian Denis Menchov, one of the day's big losers, fourth at 2:12.

The first day in the Alps stayed true to its potential as a killer of yellow jersey dreams.

After nearly five hours of climbing and descending in hot and humid conditions the 21-hairpin climb to the legendary Alpe's summit claimed its first major victims.

Rabobank's Menchov, considered Landis's main rival before the stage, was left trailing on the first few kilometres of the Alpe as Landis raced ahead in pursuit of the stage leaders.

In the end, the winner of the punishing 11th stage in the Pyrenees lost over a minute to Landis.

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Thuram slams Materazzi

INTERNET, undated

Lilian Thuram has launched an extraordinary attack on Italy defender Marco Materazzi. "Players like him shouldn't exist," said the Frenchman.

The Juventus stopper launched his broadside at the Inter ace after the latter clashed with Zinedine Zidane in the World Cup Final.

Despite the Italian being on the receiving end of a Zizou head-butt, the 34-year-old insists that Materazzi is the one who instigated the incident through provocation.

"The people who provoke should be the ones punished," outlined Thuram.

"Certain players like Materazzi shouldn't even exist because they are the sickness of this game and give a negative image."

"Unfortunately, my teammate just fell into the trap. Materazzi heavily insulted Zidane's family and I therefore understand Zidane's reaction even if he shouldn't have done it."

Despite the red card, Thuram concedes that the dismissal of Zidane probably had little to do with the outcome of the game.

"I don't think his sending off affected the result of the match," concluded the want-away Juve stopper.

Italy won the tie 5-3 on penalties after the game ended 1-1 with both Zidane and Materazzi finding the target in normal time.

RVN deal to be finalised today

AFP, Madrid

Manchester United's Dutch international Ruud van Nistelrooy was Tuesday due to finalise his 14-million-euro (18 million dollars) transfer to Real Madrid, Marca sports daily reported.

"Real Madrid will announce today the transfer of Van Nistelrooy," Marca wrote of the man who would be Real's first signing of the summer.

"An agreement has been reached for 14 million euros," Marca added, saying the Spanish side's sporting director Pedja Mijatovic would go to England to tie up the details.

"It will be the first transfer of the Fabio Capello era."

Capello is coaching the nine-times European champions for a second time after leaving Juventus.

Van Nistelrooy, just turned 30, lost his place at Old Trafford in the final quarter of the season as he fell out with manager Sir Alex Ferguson and was also a spectator as Holland went out of the World Cup to Portugal.

But Real see a man, who hit 95 goals in 150 appearances for the Reds in five years after signing from PSV Eindhoven, as key to bringing them their first silverware since 2003.

India's ex-captain commits suicide

AFP, New Delhi

Former India football captain V.P. Sathyan committed suicide on Tuesday by jumping in front of a speeding train near the southern city of Chennai, local media reported.

A suicide note in English recovered from Sathyan's body said he was ending his life because excessive drinking and gambling had left him bankrupt, the United News of India quoted local police as saying.

"I don't want to live in this world any more," the 40-year-old Sathyan said in the note addressed to his wife and read by police.

"I wanted to see you for the last time. But if I had done so, I would have changed my decision to end my life."

"So forgive me. I am leaving this world. The decision is entirely mine."

Sathyan, who was employed by a local bank as assistant manager, is survived by his wife and a 10-year-old daughter.

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Inter to sue Moggi

INTERNET, undated

Inter Milan will sue former Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi following comments made about their club president, said Inter owner Massimo Moratti on Monday.

Moggi, who no longer occupies any post at Juventus, is a major figure in the match-fixing scandal that has seen three teams relegated to Serie B. He told the Italian newspaper Repubblica that Inter were trying to take the moral high ground in the affair after heavy punishments were handed out to Juve, Fiorentina, Lazio and AC Milan.

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Chelsea, Bayern dealt seeding blow



INTERNET, undated

Arsenal, Manchester United and Liverpool will be among the top seeds for next season's Champions League but Chelsea have again missed out.

The Premiership champions will be among the second seeds despite the absence of Italian sides Juventus and AC Milan.

Beaten finalists Arsenal and 2005 champions Liverpool still need to qualify to take their place among the top seeds for the group phase.

Scottish champions Celtic will join Chelsea in the pot of second seeds.

The Blues now face the possibility of facing reigning champions

Barcelona who knocked them out of last season's competition at the first knockout phase.

Juventus and AC Milan are set to appeal against the punishments for Italy's match-fixing scandal which ruled that they could not compete in

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEEDINGS

First seeds: 1 Barcelona (Spa) 127pts, 2 Real Madrid (Spa) 120, 3 Inter Milan (Ita) 112, 4 Liverpool (Eng) 105.9, 5 Arsenal (Eng) 101.9, 6 Manchester United (Eng) 100.9, 7 Valencia (Spa) 95, 8 Lyon (Fra) 89.7.

Second seeds: 9 Porto (Por) 87.5, 10 PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 81.6, 11 Bayern Munich (Ger) 80.9, 12 Chelsea (Eng) 79.9, 13 Roma (Ita) 76, 14 Ajax (Hol) 60.6, 15 Celtic (Sco) 60, 16 Lille (Fra) 54.7.

the tournament next term.

Even if their appeals are successful, the result would not affect the seedings of the British clubs.

The Italian FA is expected to announce on 25 July that Roma, Chievo and Palermo will join Inter Milan in the Champions League.

While Celtic enjoy the highest ever ranking given to a Scottish side, Hearts, should they qualify, are likely to be one of the lowest seeds.

Uefa splits the 32 entrants into four pots of eight teams, divided according to their current European ranking.

Each group will contain one team from the top seeds, one from the second seeds, one for the third and one from the fourth.

The draw for the group stages will take place on 24 August in Monaco.

Fergie eyes Juve stars

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson saw his transfer kitty boosted on Tuesday and immediately set his sights on the potential clear-out of players at scandal-hit Italian giants Juventus.

Under a complex refinancing scheme, the Old Trafford club said that an agreement has been made which will see their annual interest payments slashed by almost 30-percent.

The plan will see charges on loans fall from 90 million pounds per year to 62 million pounds.

United's overall debt has still increased to 660 million pounds under the plan, but the club has

been able to cut the amount borrowed at huge cost from hedge funds.

"This move represents good housekeeping," said a club spokesman.

"It ensures that Sir Alex Ferguson will be provided with sufficient funds to compete in the transfer market."

Any money available could be used to finance a move for any one of a host of stars expected to seek an escape route from Juventus who were relegated to Serie B for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

"We held things back until we knew what the Juve situation was," Ferguson told the BBC.

"Now we know where we're going in terms of making inquiries and maybe definite offers for one or

two players."

Meanwhile, Ferguson is convinced Cristiano Ronaldo will overcome the hostile reception he is set to receive when the new season begins.

The Portuguese winger angered England fans when demanding clubmate Wayne Rooney be sent off during the World Cup quarter-finals.

"There will be no problem with Cristiano. He reacted positively and it didn't affect him when he was booted at the World Cup - he played very well and has a fantastic attitude," Ferguson told The Sun.

One man who won't feature at Old Trafford this season is Dutch international striker Ruud van Nistelrooy who was due to finalise his 14-million-euro (18 million dollars) transfer to Real Madrid later Tuesday.



GIANLUCA ZAMBROTTA

Chelsea facing Zambrotta snub

Football

INTERNET, undated

Juventus full-back Gianluca Zambrotta will only consider a move to Chelsea if his club fail to reach an agreement with AC Milan, according to his agent.

Chelsea are in race with Real Madrid and Barcelona to sign the World Cup winner and a representative of the Barclays Premiership champions will discuss a move with Juve later this week.

However, it is AC Milan who appear to have the upper hand in the negotiations.

Zambrotta's wish is to stay in Italy but not at Juventus, and the only club that can afford the transfer and that have shown a keen interest is AC Milan, Zambrotta's agent Giuseppe Bonetto said.

"Should Juve fail to reach an agreement with AC Milan then Zambrotta will consider the other alternatives."

"An agent representing Chelsea will meet Juventus in the next few days."

"It will be down to Juventus to make the decisions and let us know what the options are once there is something concrete."

"Chelsea are not the only ones interested in Zambrotta as Real Madrid and Barcelona are also keen to sign the player."

Juve were relegated to Serie B for their part in the match-fixing scandal.

They will also start next season with a 30-point deficit, meaning they are set to spend two seasons outside the top flight.

Meanwhile, Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has revealed Chelsea are unlikely to be at full strength for the Community Shield as several players will still be recovering from the World Cup.

The Blues face Liverpool in Cardiff on August 13 with Mourinho prepared to rest some of his biggest names as they complete their recovery from Germany.

Williams Gallas and Claude Makelele featured for France in the final while Ricardo Carvalho and Paolo Ferreira contributed to Portugal's passage into the last four.

In contrast, Manchester United have already been able to field a near full strength side for the opening game of their pre-season tour to South Africa, a 4-0 victory over the Orlando Pirates on Saturday.

Mourinho claims Chelsea's rivals will be better prepared for the new campaign and does not expect to have a full squad to select from until late August.

Manchester United played in South Africa with a first XI, we cannot do this," Mourinho told Chelsea TV.

"I believe our first part of the season will be quite difficult. For example, when we play the Community Shield, Liverpool have already played Champions League matches and have been training for a month."

"When we play Manchester City in the first game it will be a very similar situation so I think we won't start in the full position."

"We have a lot of quality and I believe everyone will be back fit with a lot of enthusiasm."

"But the reality is we have to play with half the team for our first game in the United States. Some of them will not be ready to play in the

Community.

"It's a competition and it's a cup we enjoyed winning last season and of course we want to win this time around as well, but I'll look at it in a different way."

Chelsea's World Cup stars will return to pre-season training over the next two weeks.

The Blues will travel to the United States for a pre-season training camp and will play the Major League All-Stars on August 5.

Athletic Bilbao have joined the race to sign Chelsea defender Asier Del Horno.

Del Horno had been expected to join Valencia in the next few days but his former club Bilbao have now declared an interest in bringing the 25-year-old back to San Mames.

"We are ready to equal the 7million euros (£4.8million) offer made by Valencia to Chelsea for Asier del Horno," Bilbao president Fernando Lamikiz told television station Bilbaovision.

"Then we would have to analyse the player's salary and negotiate with him."

Del Horno spoke earlier today about Valencia's interest and he admitted he would relish the opportunity to return to Spain.

"I would love to return to the Primera Liga because it's a competition that I am very familiar with," he told Valencian newspaper Las Provincias.

"I am very honoured by the interest from Valencia."

"For the time being, though, my club is Chelsea and for that reason I have gone to pre-season training with them."



RIVALDO