



AC Milan fans demonstrate in protest of the club's punishments in the match-fixing scandal in downtown Milan on Thursday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

## Abbondanzieri relishing Liga challenge

AFP, Madrid

Argentina's World Cup goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri said on Thursday he was looking forward to his new challenge in the Spanish first division with Getafe after joining from Boca Juniors in a 1.5-million-euro deal. "I'm very happy to be here and I am looking forward to it," said the 33-year-old who played in the Argentina team which made the quarterfinals at the World Cup but had to go off injured in the match against Germany which the team lost on penalties.

Abbondanzieri, nicknamed the "duck," was speaking as he was unveiled by club chairman Angel Torres.

Getafe are coached by former Germany and Real Madrid and Barcelona star Bernd Schuster.

## Hamburg snub Kluyvert

AFP, Hamburg

German club Hamburg have snubbed a move for Patrick Kluyvert because of the Dutch striker's suspect fitness.

Kluyvert, 30, had been close to joining Hamburg after being released by Spanish club Valencia, but the Bundesliga team pulled out of the deal after discovering he is still recovering from a recent knee operation.

The former Barcelona and Ajax star has suffered a series of injuries in the last two seasons and sustained the latest problem in February.

Hamburg sporting director Dietmar Beiersdorfer said: "For us this transfer is too much of a risk."

But Beiersdorfer insisted his club, who will play in the third round of Champions League qualifying, are determined to sign a top-class striker.

They have already had a bid for Aston Villa's Czech forward Milan Baros turned down and Beiersdorfer added: "We want to bring in reinforcements for our attack, but we will not sign a player if we don't think he will improve us."

## Arnold Australia's interim coach

AFP, Sydney

Graham Arnold was Friday announced as interim national coach for Australia's two Asian Cup qualifying matches next month.

Australia take on Kuwait in Sydney on August 16 and Lebanon in Adelaide on August 31 in their bid to qualify for the finals of the Asian Cup in July next year.

Arnold was an assistant coach under Guus Hiddink when Australia played in the recent World Cup in Germany. Hiddink has since taken up a contract to coach Russia.

"While our long-term coaching arrangements are critical, in the immediate term our priority is to optimise the preparation of our squad for the Asian Cup qualifiers," Football Federation Australia (FFA) chief executive John Oneill said in a statement.

"The players and management will benefit from the certainty, and indeed continuity that this announcement provides."

"We have every confidence that Graham Arnold, who has been involved as assistant coach for the past six years and has filled in previously, will keep the team progressing on the right track."

Arnold took charge of the Socceroos in their 3-1 win over Bahrain in their first Asian Cup qualifier in Manama last February.

"It's important that there is continuity within the coaching structure as we look to our next major competition, the Asian Cup," Arnold said in the FFA statement.

## Rossi has Azzurri dream

### Football

INTERNET, undated

Giuseppe Rossi turned down a place in the US team at this summer's World Cup to pursue his dream of playing for Italy.

Born in New Jersey, the 19-year-old has always had the option of playing for the United States as well as Italy, birthplace of both his parents and where Rossi moved with them when he was 12.

Recognising Rossi's potential, the USA were desperate to get the Manchester United striker to commit to an international future with them, with the possibility of a place in their 23-man squad for Germany tantalisingly raised in talks over the issue.

However, Rossi's goal has been to win a cap for Italy as long as he can remember.

And while the teenager recognises the difficulty of achieving the

aim, there is no way he could have chosen any other path.

"The USA asked me to play and I knew there was also an opportunity to go to the World Cup," said Rossi.

"But I also knew if I took that chance, I would never be able to play for Italy, which has been my dream virtually since the day I was born."

"I had to tell the USA the truth. I know it will be far harder trying to get in the Italian team than the United States but I have absolutely no regrets about the option I have taken."

Rossi has a far more immediate task in front of him just now though, namely forcing his way into Sir Alex Ferguson's Red Devils line-up on a regular basis.

Player and manager are in agreement that, after two highly successful seasons at reserve-team level, another year in the second string is pointless.

What Ferguson has not yet

decided is whether to keep Rossi for the season or let the youngster, whose new contract runs until 2010, further his education with six months away from Old Trafford.

Much may depend on whether United can secure a direct replacement for Ruud van Nistelrooy, whose departure is set to be confirmed any day soon.

But, while Rossi will not complain if Ferguson opts to let him leave for a short spell, he hopes he can remain where he is.

"I would prefer to stay and play," he said.

"If you have to choose between all the teams in the Premiership, the first one that pops into your head is Manchester United."

"I do need to get some more experience in the Premiership. If that means I have to go out on loan, then I will. But if there is the chance to stay here and play, that would be the ultimate."

## Bergkamp backs Arsenal challenge

### Football

AFP, London

Dennis Bergkamp believes this coming season will see Arsenal push London rivals and reigning champions Chelsea all the way for the Premiership title.

The Dutchman, who called time on his 11-year career with the Gunners at the end of last term, believes Chelsea are vulnerable despite the arrival of Michael Ballack and Andriy Shevchenko at Stamford Bridge.

"I think last year gave a lot of teams some confidence because Chelsea dropped points here and there and lost a few games they weren't expected to," Bergkamp said ahead of his testimonial match at Arsenal's new Emirates Stadium this weekend.

"Liverpool, Manchester United and us will be up there this year as well. There is more of a chance for the other teams this year than in the last two years," the 37-year-old added.

"They've bought Shevchenko and they already have the likes of (Didier) Drogba, but you can't play them all. You can have six world-class strikers, but you can

only play two, or maybe three, at a time."

"From us being favourites two years ago it's different now, and maybe we are not favourites anymore."

"But I feel with this team, every year they are getting stronger and stronger, they are more experienced and many of them played in the World Cup, and if they can bring that to this team I really think they can challenge," the Dutch master explained.

"Last season our Champions League run gave us a lot of confidence and at times we took that into the league."

"And with a good pre-season and a good start they can build on that and keep it going again. They have the experience, it's not new to them."

Bergkamp also said he wanted Ashley Cole to stay with Arsenal, following increased speculation concerning the England left-back's future.

Cole, 25, criticised Arsenal for the way they dealt with last season's infamous "tapping up row" with Chelsea but Bergkamp remained hopeful the defender would stay a one-club man.

"I believe it's special for a team and the fans to have a

player who is one of their own."

"It's good for the club to have a player who has come through the ranks and he's obviously a great player, as he showed again at the World Cup."

Arsenal opened Friday their new 390 million pounds home, just 66 days after bidding farewell to Highbury, just a short walk away in north London.

The 60,000-capacity ground will on Saturday host to its first game when Dutch giants Ajax, the club where Bergkamp began his career, provide the opposition for the playmaking forward's sold-out testimonial.

"Every player should be inspired to play here," said Bergkamp of the Emirates Stadium.

An open training session Friday was watched by some 20,000 fans. Afterwards manager Arsene Wenger confirmed talismanic striker Thierry Henry was due back in training on August 2 after playing for France at the World Cup before voicing his hopes for the new season.

"We believe we have a great team here and we want to challenge for the title and of course the Champions League again. We also want to add one or two players," the Frenchman explained.

## Fowler not finished yet

### Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler insists he still has a major role to play at Anfield despite the arrival of Wales international Craig Bellamy.

The 31-year-old former England attacker also believes he can play at Premiership level for a few more seasons yet.

"I'm not as old as some people seem to think I am and, hopefully, I've got a few more years left in me playing at the top level," said Fowler who has a total of 176 goals from 346 appearances in two spells with the Merseyside giants.

"I want to be at Liverpool for as

long as I can and if that means performing as well as I did towards the end of last season to get a new contract then so be it."

"I'm happy being back at Liverpool and if the manager plays me, he plays me. If he doesn't play me, I'll support whoever plays. But obviously it goes without saying I want to play."

"I've kept myself in good shape. I'm not going to sit here and say I'm the ultimate professional and that I've been working 24/7 in the summer. But I've done a bit and pre-season is about getting fit as well. I'm still continuing to do that so hopefully by the start of the season I'll be firing," he told the club's official website.

Fowler is also confident the

Reds will be firing on all cylinders come the start of the season as they look to challenge Chelsea's recent domination of the Premiership.

"Obviously Chelsea have got some fantastic players and nobody me, I'll support whoever plays. But he's a hard job to win the league," he added.

"But we've not got a bad squad ourselves and we'll wait and see what happens."

"If we put a run together like we did at the end of last season then anything can happen."

"I'm not going to say we're confident of doing this and that. We'll go about our business quietly but confidently."

## Jose wants to trim squad

### Football

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho has revealed the fear of losing any more of Chelsea's stars has prompted him to trim his squad.

Mourinho arrived at Stamford Bridge with the policy of having two players for every position but last summer's departure of Tiago and the likely exit of Damien Duff has changed his thinking.

The Chelsea boss was reluctant to sell Tiago to Lyon while he is consigned to losing Duff to Tottenham - both victims of the Barclays Premiership champions' large squad.

And to prevent any more unwanted transfers, Mourinho is ready to use a core group of 20 adaptable players in a bid to keep everybody happy.

"I had a situation last season where I lost Tiago, a player I like very much, because he was afraid of not having enough chances to play at Chelsea," he said.

"Now there is a chance I could

lose Damien Duff, another player I like. Why? Because he's afraid he won't get as many matches as he wants."

"The reality is when you have a squad of such high quality and high numbers, some players find it difficult. Players want to play."

"People look at footballers as people who are focused on money. This is not true. More important to them is to play football."

"They can leave a big team like Chelsea and will be ready to lose money in relation to their contracts because they want to play football."

"The way to deal with this is to have a small squad where everybody feels they will play matches."

"After Lassana Diarra played four or five first-team matches and played in the European Under-21 competition, he had a lot of clubs wanting to buy him."

"It was only possible to tell him he would play if he stayed by having a smaller squad. The squad is top quality but short on numbers."

"In this manner young players won't be afraid to come to Chelsea and I can keep everybody happy."

"I want multi-functional players.

We have five or six players who can easily adapt to different positions. It's a 20-man squad but with more alternatives for each position."

Mourinho's change of approach does not extend to left-back, however, where the Portuguese manager is determined to have two



JOSE MOURINHO

options.

Wayne Bridge has ended his loan spell at Fulham and will be staying at Stamford Bridge but a vacancy will open up when Asier del Horno returns to Spain, with Valencia leading the chase.

Ashley Cole is the hot favourite to be installed as Del Horno's replacement but Mourinho will not comment on mounting speculation the Arsenal defender will join next week.

"It's true that possibly we need a left-back. Del Horno would prefer a move and we are trying to help," he said.

"But we must protect Chelsea's position on the business side. If he goes back to Spain we need a good left-back."

"I don't want to say Ashley Cole is the best because in European football there are five or six very good left-backs."

"Cole is an Arsenal player and it's not correct to talk about him. The transfer window is open and for sure we'll have two left-backs."

"One is Wayne Bridge and maybe Del Horno can be the other one."

## Japan unveil Osim

### Football

AFP, Tokyo

Former Yugoslav coach Ivica Osim signed a contract on Friday to become Japan's new national coach as the Asian champions seek to rebuild after their early exit from the World Cup.

Osim, who piloted the former Yugoslavia to the quarterfinals of the 1990 World Cup in Italy, signed a contract with a price tag of some 200 million yen (1.7 million dollars).

The 65-year-old Bosnian has won plaudits in Japan for raising JEF United Chiba into title contention from the bottom of the J-League since becoming their coach in 2003. Chiba won the J-League Cup last year.

"I feel honoured. It's like a marriage. Everything goes well at the beginning, but nobody knows how it goes as the time goes on," Osim said.

"Like a marriage, we need everybody's support."

Osim said it was important that his new national team take advantage of the traditional pace of

Japanese sides.

"Japanese players are very quick and aggressive. The speed of their running and movement is quick as well. The previous national team was not as quick as I



IVICA OSIM

expected. I believe they can play quicker," said Osim.

Osim did not mention Japan's failure at the World Cup, where it lost two matches and drew another, under former coach and Brazilian legend Zico.

Zico had vowed to take Japan to the second round of the World Cup, and possibly as far as the semifinals as his predecessor Frenchman Philippe Troussier did in 2002 on home turf. Four years earlier Japan made a winless debut in France.

"Japan is an advanced country in every aspect, but it's not always so in football. Football has been progressing, and Japan must catch up with this progressing football all the time," said Osim.

"We will have two matches very soon. For me, there's no friendly match. I must think about what we can do in a tight schedule -- to use the current main players or to change them drastically," Osim said.

Osim's Japan will make their debut in a friendly here on August 9 against Trinidad and Tobago, who ended their first-ever World Cup finals campaign with two losses and one draw in the first round in Germany.

Japan will use the friendly as a warm-up for their home Asian Cup qualifier against Yemen on August 16.

## Barcelona set for election

### Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona have been ordered to hold an immediate presidential election by a Spanish judge who upheld a complaint from three club members that Joan Laporta had already served four years.

"An electoral process to choose a new board must be called as soon as possible," Judge Roberto Garcia Ceniceros said in a statement on Wednesday.

He ruled that according to the club's statutes the year ran from July to June, and that as Laporta officially took power on June 22, 2003 the period before the end of that month constituted his first year in office.

Laporta's four-year term would therefore have expired on June 30 this year.

A club spokesman said an emergency meeting of the board had been called for Friday to discuss the matter.

Laporta won the 2003 election pledging to buy England midfielder David Beckham when he came to power. The move did not materialise but Laporta did sign Brazilian Ronaldinho.

Since then the Catalan club has won two Primera Liga titles and the Champions League in May.

Despite the success over the last two seasons Laporta has faced criticism from some quarters.

A number of board directors, including vice-president Sandro Rosell, resigned last year because they had become disenfranchised

with his increasingly domineering style.

Last October he was forced into a U-turn to accept the resignation of his brother-in-law Alejandro Echevarria who it was revealed had once been a member of a foundation honouring former dictator Francisco Franco.

The revelations sent shockwaves through a club that has traditionally identified itself with Catalan nationalism and opposition to right-wing dictator Franco who ruled Spain with an iron hand between 1939 and his death in 1975.

Fans have also complained about the lack of tickets made available to them for this year's Champions League final in which they beat Arsenal 2-1 in Paris.



Barcelona president Juan Laporta arrives at the Nou Camp on Friday for a meeting with board members on the upcoming elections.

PHOTO: AFP