

Juve stars bid arrivederci

Football

AFP, Rome

The funeral air hanging over disgraced Italian super club Juventus deepens with each day and each new headline about the latest star to abandon the sinking ship.

Fabio Cannavaro, Lilian Thuram, Emerson, Gianluca Zambrotta, Patrick Vieira -- the list grows as players seek their fortunes elsewhere after the club's relegation to second division for its role in the match-fixing scandal that rocked Italian football.

Italy's richest club have been forced to sell its expensive big names as relegation and a 30-point deduction means they will not get back into the first division for another two seasons.

Florentina and Lazio, the two other Serie A clubs kicked down to Serie B, have so far made no announcements about transfers despite their ambitions being hobbled by deductions of seven and 12 points respectively next season.

Inter Milan, who were not implicated in the scandal, are making eyes at Fiorentina striker Luca Toni, who has made clear he is looking for the exit despite the assurances of

the Della Valle brothers who control the club.

And AC Milan, who were docked 15 points while being allowed to remain in first division, have admitted their squad's moral is at rock bottom, sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport reported Friday.

Yet the club claims it is still feeling expansive and has signed two players from Serie B side Ascoli and teenage midfielder Yohann Gourcuff from French club Rennes.

AC Milan could still challenge despite the points handicap, declared coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"Milan is still Milan from the point of view of its tactics and conduct ... we are still competitive," he told Gazzetta dello Sport.

After World Cup-winning captain Cannavaro and Brazilian Emerson joined former Juve coach Fabio Capello at Real Madrid, Juventus on Friday announced defenders Zambrotta and Thuram were sold for 11.4 million euros (14.4 million dollars) and five million euros respectively to Barcelona.

French international Patrick Vieira was bound for Inter Milan under a 13-million euro deal, a big discount on the 20 million euros Juventus paid Arsenal for the defender just a year ago, according to press reports.

Meanwhile, it seems a matter of time before French striker David Trezeguet and Sweden's Zlatan Ibrahimovic find fresh partners, with Corriere dello Sport reporting that AS Roma had made a substantial offer for the Frenchman.

The club believed the 28-year-old, who missed his shot in the penalty shootout that handed Italy its fourth World Cup, could be their "man of the moment", the newspaper said.

However, Trezeguet's agent told Corriere della Sera: "For David it's not a question of a change of scene ... he doesn't see any obstacle to going to Lyon because he lived a long time in France."

Inter would allow him to stay close to Turin while in favour of Real are his wife's Spanish origins and his good relationship with Capello.

Even World Cup hero Gianluigi Buffon, the goalkeeper who made a great save on a powerful header from French icon Zinedine Zidane in extra time in the World Cup final, is believed to have a foot on the gangplank.

Even though Buffon's agent this week said the 28-year-old was prepared to stick with Juve in Serie B, he was understood to be in negotiations with AC Milan, Gazzetta dello Sport said.



Lazio supporters hold a portrait of outgoing striker Paolo di Canio in a rally in support of the club in Rome on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Colombia firm on WC bid

Football

REUTERS, Bogota

The Colombian government said on Friday it was determined in its bid to host the 2014 World Cup after vice-president Fernando Santos met with South American Football Confederation (CSF) president Nicolas Leoz.

Leoz, however, remained cautious, adding that the federations of the 10 South American nations had already agreed to back Brazil.

South America is due to host the tournament under FIFA's rotation

system which continues in South Africa in 2010. The South American federations backed Brazil as their only candidate in 2003.

Colombia president Alvaro Uribe, in a surprise announcement last Saturday, said Colombia wanted to enter the race.

"It's not going to be easy but there are possibilities and we're going to do everything we can," Santos told reporters.

"I believe we need to work on every front so that we can compete and create some competition," he said. "Competition is healthy."

Leoz said: "It's not up to me to say that they can or can't do it, the

important thing is to have the dream. Sometimes it stays a dream, sometimes it becomes reality."

"We have to see if Brazil continues with its position and if there is backing from the Brazilian government," he added.

FIFA will choose the 2014 hosts in 2008.

Colombia was awarded the 1986 World Cup but pulled out for financial reasons and the tournament was instead held in Mexico.

Argentina were the last South American nation to host the event in 1978 and Brazil staged the event in 1950.

Calciopoli appeals trial begins

Football

AFP, Rome

The appeals in Italian football's match-fixing scandal began early Saturday in a Rome hotel, Italian media reported.

A sporting tribunal must decide whether to confirm the relegation of Juventus, Fiorentina and Lazio to the second division for their part in influencing which referees were selected for their matches last season.

AC Milan are also appealing the decision to withdraw them from next season's Champions League.

Though the four teams have appealed, prosecutor Stefano Palazzi believes the penalties

imposed have been too lenient.

The tribunal is presided by Piero Sandulli in the presence of several of those implicated in the scandal, including referee Massimo de Santis, former president of the Italian football federation Franco Carraro and Diego della Valle, Fiorentina's club president.

The verdict is expected by July 27, which is also the deadline set by European football's governing body UEFA for clubs to be entered into European competitions.

The scandal broke in early May after transcripts of former Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi telling the head of Italy's refereeing commission what officials he wanted appointed to specific games were published in the Italian media.

Fergie expects RvN back

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Sir Alex Ferguson is prepared to roll out the welcome mat for Ruud van Nistelrooy's return to training with Manchester United on Monday. The Dutch striker's future has been the subject of speculation, with Real Madrid and Bayern Munich linked with the 30-year-old. A move had seemed inevitable given Van Nistelrooy's end-of-season bust-up with Ferguson, who hardly played the forward through the latter stages of the campaign then axed him in favour of Giuseppe Rossi for the final game against Charlton.

That prompted a furious response from Van Nistelrooy which resulted in him being kicked out of the team hotel, barred from playing in Roy Keane's testimonial and, to all intents and purposes, shunted

out of the Old Trafford exit door for good. Real quickly moved in once the World Cup was over and, with the new coach Fabio Capello confirming his interest in signing the former PSV Eindhoven man, it was thought Van Nistelrooy would be unveiled at the Bernabeu at some point this week.

Instead, discussions have stalled over the fee, with Real refusing to meet United's 15-million-pound valuation and starting to make veiled threats that they will not be held to ransom. Bayern remain hopeful of luring Van Nistelrooy -- a fluent German speaker -- to the Bundesliga. However, no deal will be completed over the weekend, meaning the forward is expected back at United's Carrington training base for the start of his pre-season work. Ferguson claims he will be delighted to see the forward, one of only eight players to score 150 goals for United, and would have no

problem if he was still part of his squad next season.

"Ruud is not definitely leaving and I expect to see him at training on Monday," said Ferguson. "I spoke to (chief executive) David Gill on the phone yesterday and there is no development as far as Real Madrid is concerned."

"They have made an offer, we have rejected it. That is where the situation lies. If they don't come back in and increase their offer, he won't be going and I would be content with that. It would not bother me one bit. He is a striker who can score upwards of 20 goals a season and there are not many of those going around."

Although Ferguson could be playing the diplomatic card, United have made no secret of their desire to play hardball over Van Nistelrooy, citing the 29-million-

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Real Madrid striker Antonio Cassano is under the challenge of FC Plymouth's David Norris during a friendly in Kapfenberg, Austria on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

The end of 'Los Galacticos'

Football

INTERNET, Madrid

A few years ago Florentino Perez was raising eyebrows across Planet Football with his audacious signing of some of the world's leading players.

Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo and David Beckham joined the likes of Roberto Carlos and Raul Gonzalez as the club's much-vaunted 'galactico' stars.

The 'galacticos' won relatively few trophies for the massive salaries they were paid, but at least -- thanks to an aggressive marketing campaign and to endless tours of Asia -- they made Real the club with the highest earnings in the world.

In the end, though, the monster created by Perez ended up devouring him, in true Frankenstein fash-

ion, and he plunged Real into crisis by resigning five months ago.

New Real president Ramon Calderon, a director under Perez, claims that he is moving away from the 'galactico' model.

"We no longer want a group of talented individuals," he said on Wednesday, "but rather a compact and well-balanced team of committed players."

Easier said than done. He has brought Fabio Capello back to the Estadio Bernabeu to build such a team, but faces the Labours of Hercules in his attempt to move on from the 'galactico' period.

Figo and Zidane have already left, Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo might do so shortly.

One of Calderon's first acts as president, though, was to extend the contract of Beckham until 2009, despite Capello's doubts about his value as a player.

"The contract extension for Beckham demonstrates," commented El Pais last week, "that the ability to sell shirts is still more important at Real Madrid than ability on the field."

In particular, Real's problem now is the average age of the squad, with ten players over 30.

Wednesday's signing of Fabio Cannavaro, 33, and Emerson, 30, from Juventus can only worsen this problem.

Real are changing from 'galacticos' into 'geriatricos' was the scornful comment on Wednesday from Barcelona sports paper Mundo Deportivo.

An online poll in Madrid daily Marca shows that 69 per cent of fans believe that 'the average age of the squad should be reduced'.

Moreover, 53 per cent of Real fans think that Barcelona have

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Plymouth make Real sweat

INTERNET, undated

Plymouth lost out only to a second-half penalty from Julio Baptista against Real Madrid in Kapfenberg, Austria.

Brazilian forward Baptista converted from the spot in the 75th minute to give Madrid a 1-0 victory in a pre-season friendly whose scoreline did not reflect a gulf in class between the cream of Europe and the Coca-Cola Championship.

A Real side featuring Jonathan Woodgate in defence alongside Ivan Helguera, as well as Guti and Italy international Antonio Cassano, were out to impress new manager Fabio Capello.

Instead in the Italian's first match in charge, Real were unable to impose themselves with the fluid football which might have been expected.

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Laporta to step down temporarily

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona president Joan Laporta and the club's board will step down next Wednesday in order to allow a presidential election at the club -- as ordered by a Spanish judge last Wednesday.

"I intend to stand again in the election to defend the interests of Barcelona," said Laporta after an emergency board meeting on Friday.

"We believe ours is a good project that deserves to continue." Judge Roberto Garcia Ceniceros upheld a complaint from three club members who said Laporta had already served his four-year tenure.

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.

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TOUR DE FRANCE

Landis set to succeed Armstrong

Cycling

AFP, Montceau-Les-Mines

American Floyd Landis is virtually assured of succeeding compatriot Lance Armstrong as the Tour de France champion after taking possession of the yellow jersey here on Saturday.

Phonak's Landis claimed the leader's jersey for the third time in the race following the 19th and penultimate stage, a 57km time trial won by unbeatable Ukrainian Serhiy Honchar of T-Mobile.

Landis, who finished the Tour's second race against the clock in third

place at 1:11 behind Honchar, now has a 59sec lead over Spaniard Oscar Pereiro ahead of Sunday's final stage over 154km from Sceaux to Paris.

The Caisse d'Epargne rider, who raced last from the field in the yellow jersey, began with a 30sec lead on Landis but despite losing his jersey he dug deep to finish 2:40 behind Honchar to secure second place overall.

Germany's Andreas Kloden, of T-Mobile, set the second fastest time of the day at only 41sec behind Honchar, the winner of the first time trial on stage seven.

Kloden's efforts propelled him into the top three, and a place on the podium in Paris after he moved up to

third overall at 1:29 behind Landis.

His performance, coupled with the collapse of CSC's Carlos Sastre meant the Spaniard dropped from second place to fourth overall at 3:13 behind Landis.

Australian Cadel Evans, who was overtaken by Kloden in the closing stages of their ride, despite starting three minutes before, finished 3:41 behind Honchar but that was enough for the Davitamon rider to hold on to fifth place overall.

Given the final stage is one in which the yellow jersey battle is not fought, Landis would have to fall ill or crash not to succeed his now retired compatriot Armstrong, whose team he left to pursue his

own ambitions on the race.

The 36-year-old Honchar meanwhile had started the day 85th in the remaining field of 141 riders, and his time -- thanks to powerful gearing and a sustained effort -- proved the reference that most thought could never be beaten.

Honchar said: "It was a very good time for me especially as it was a very long and hard ride."

"I'm just happy I could perform so well after such a hard race."

Landis, the third last to start, had a storming start and came over the first time check at 16.5km a second ahead of the Ukrainian.

The 30-year-old American fell

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Danish cyclist Michael Rasmussen takes the start on the 19th stage of the Tour de France at Le Creusot on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP