



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil winger Daniel Carvalho (L) shoots with the left foot to score in the friendly against Norway at the Ullevaal Stadium in Oslo on Wednesday.

Kaka, Ronaldinho return for Brazil

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil have recalled Ronaldinho and Kaka for next month's soccer friendlies against Argentina and Wales in London.

However, there is still no place for strikers Ronaldo and Adriano, both heavily criticised for their performances at the World Cup, former captain Cafu or goalkeeper Dida.

Coach Dunga, who replaced Carlos Alberto Parreira following Brazil's quarterfinal exit in Germany, had omitted Ronaldinho and Kaka from his first game in charge against Norway.

Dunga also named 21-year-old forward Rafael Sobis, who was the inspiration for Internacional as they won the Libertadores Cup, the South American equivalent of the Champions League.

The squad was announced in a statement on the Brazilian Football Confederation's official Web site.

Brazil face neighbours Argentina at Arsenal's new stadium on Sept. 3, their first meeting since Brazil's memorable 4-1 win at the Confederations Cup final in Germany last year.

They play Wales two days later at White Hart Lane.

Ronaldo derby continues

INTERNET, undated

The paths of Milan and Inter are set to cross again this summer in the race to sign Ronaldo.

The Brazilian star, who is currently recovering from a knee injury, has been with a move to Milan after they lost out on Hernan Crespo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic to city rivals Inter.

Ronaldo has made no secret of his affection for the city of Milan, despite his controversial departure from the Nerazzurri in 2002 and would welcome a return to Serie A.

The 29-year-old striker will have to face fierce competition for a shirt in Madrid, after new arrival Ruud Van Nistelrooy added to their already substantial attacking options.

Inter are also interested in the player and may consider a swap deal, including long-time Real target Adriano.

The Emperor has admitted his admiration for the Merengues' outfit, although he reiterated his intention to stay at Inter on Tuesday.

However, Inter owner Massimo Moratti opened the door for some high profile player departures, admitting the time had arrived for Inter to sell and suggesting that nobody was untouchable.

If the Adriano were to leave the San Siro, Moratti may use part of the money to buy Ronaldo, winning yet another duel with Milan after netting Crespo and Ibrahimovic.

The Liga club are willing to let Ronaldo go and do not rule out either option, despite the recent dispute with Milan over Kaka.

Real President Ramon Calderon's decision to abandon the idea of buying the Milan midfielder may now pave the way for a reconciliation between the two clubs and Ronaldo's transfer to the Via Turati outfit.

Ronaldo has recently returned to training and began running on Wednesday, the first session since his knee surgery.

Brazil held at Norway

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

During his playing days, Brazil's coach Dunga was famous for dishing out meaty tackles to the opposition but his team were on the receiving end as they drew 1-1 away to Norway in his first match in charge.

Norway gave away 31 free-kicks during the match and it was almost impossible for Brazil's new-look team to get into their stride against such systematic fouling.

"If it had been a World Cup match, they would have had at least three players sent off," said Dunga.

Dunga was also unimpressed by Norway's unbeaten record in four matches against Brazil, pointing out that three of the games were friendlies in Oslo and the other was in France during the 1998 World Cup.

"Would I accept a rematch in Rio

de Janeiro? Of course, no problem at all" he said. "After all, Brazil are five-times world champions and took part at the last World Cup."

A second-half goal by debutant midfielder Daniel Carvalho gave Brazil a deserved draw in Oslo, wiping out Morten Gamst Pedersen's opener which was scored with the help of a blunder by goalkeeper Gomes, also making his first appearance.

Dunga's first job is to restore some pride to the Brazilian team after what was widely regarded as a lethargic World Cup display by overweight players who lacked passion and fighting spirit.

He said he liked what he saw after deciding to leave out big names such as Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Adriano and Kaka.

Dunga has included Ronaldinho and Kaka for their next match, against Argentina in London on Sept. 3, but Ronaldo and Adriano may

have to shed some kilos before they get another chance.

"I think Brazil gave what the supporters expect, which is love for the shirt and determination, as well as our technique," he said.

"Determination and fighting-spirit are not enough," he added.

"I like to see good football, with dribbling and improvisation, which is something we began to do in the second half and will continue doing."

Dunga even praised his substitutes for their attitude.

"It's very important that the players on the bench have the national team spirit," he said.

"I told the players that we must always remember our childhoods when we wanted to be footballers and that today, we're here, in the national team, at the top."

Debut defeat for Donadoni

Football

AFP, Livorno

World champions Italy's new life under Roberto Donadoni hardly gave their fans much to crow about as they were defeated 2-0 by Croatia in their friendly match here on Wednesday.

Donadoni, who replaced Marcello Lippi after he retired from the post having beaten France in the World Cup final in July, will point to the fact that he opted to select a squad with only one of the World Cup group of 23 in it but nevertheless it was hardly an auspicious homecoming for the Azzurri.

However the Croat victory was overshadowed by unsavoury scenes at the beginning of the

match as their fans formed a human swastika in their part of the stands which is even more pointed given the 'Ultra' Livorno fans are known for their left wing political leanings.

The Italian fans responded by chanting tributes to the thousands of Italians that were massacred by the Yugoslav partisans led by Marshal Tito during World War II.

On the pitch the Croats had the match wrapped up by half-time as goals by Brazilian-born striker Eduardo and midfielder Luka Modric gave their 37-year-old coach Slaven Bilic a dream start to his career as national coach against a team that numbered just 38 caps in total to its name.

Donadoni, though, was not going to blame his players for the defeat.

"I cannot blame the players," said 43-year-old Donadoni, whose previous coaching post was with Livorno.

"They did what they could at this stage of the season."

"We knew that the Croats would be in a lot better shape than us

"I am disappointed to have lost, but I am not disappointed by the performances of the players. They all did their best and they paid for two mistakes," added the 63-times capped former winger, who was part of the team that was third in the 1990 World Cup and lost to Brazil in the 1994 World Cup final.

However despite Donadoni's charitable words about his team he will no doubt welcome back most of the World Cup winning side for the Euro 2008 qualifier against Lithuania in Naples on September 2.



PHOTO: AFP

Italy's stand-in captain Massimo Ambrosini (C) shoots at goal as teammate Cristiano Lucarelli (R) and Croatia midfielder Jerko Leko look on during their friendly in Livorno on Wednesday.

Becks to stay at Madrid

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid are close to agreeing a deal to extend David Beckham's contract beyond the end of the season, club president Ramon Calderon said.

"We have spoken with his agent and we are agreed that we should extend his contract," the Real supremo told Spanish sports daily AS on Thursday.

"Beckham has told me that he is happy in Madrid, that his children are happy, that Brooklyn speaks Spanish.... He is delighted with things and for Madrid he is a vital player for his contribution on the pitch and for what he represents."

Beckham joined Real Madrid on a four-year contract from Manchester United in 2003, but has yet to win a major trophy at the club. Spanish media have reported that Real want to extend his contract until 2009.

The midfielder arrived late for Real Madrid training on Wednesday after his flight from England was delayed and new coach Fabio Capello hinted that he would be sanctioned by the club.

"It is an internal matter, but the rules are the same for everyone," the Italian told a news conference on Thursday.

Lehmann taken to hospital

INTERNET, undated

Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann was taken to hospital following his side's friendly against Sweden in Gelsenkirchen on Wednesday night. The 36 year-old reportedly suffered blood circulation problems during the night, and was taken to hospital, where it was discovered he had low blood sugar levels.

He was able to leave hospital after receiving treatment and according to the German football federation, travelled back to London to join Arsenal ahead of their opening Premiership fixture on Saturday against Aston Villa.

Tavano signs for Valencia

AFP, Madrid

Italian striker Francesco Tavano on Wednesday signed a four-year deal with Spanish side Valencia from Serie A outfit Empoli.

Tavano, 27, scored 19 goals for the Italian side last season, finishing second among the Serie A's top scorers behind Fiorentina's Luca Toni.

Details of the transfer were not revealed but according to press reports Empoli had requested 10 million euros from Inter Milan for the player earlier this summer and were turned down as too expensive.

Valencia have been on the look out for a striker since Spaniard Miguel Angel Ferrer left for Primera Liga rivals Atletico Madrid.

No dream ending for Nedved

AFP, Prague

There was no dream finale for Czech international midfielder great Pavel Nedved who played his final game for the national side in a 3-1 friendly loss to Serbia in the south eastern town of Uherske Hradiste on Wednesday night.

"I've thought about this for a long time, and I think the time has come to leave," said a tearful Nedved, as streamers around the stadium read: "Farewell Pavel and thanks."

"I've a heavy heart. My life as a player passed before my eyes, I felt so many emotions.

"I can't even remember how I played so many things were going through my head," added the 33-year-old Juventus player, who left the pitch to a standing ovation.

Nedved, European Footballer of the Year in 2003, scored 18 goals in 90 appearances for the Czech Republic.

He retired from the international scene after Euro 2004 only to return to help the Czechs qualify for the World Cup.

The father of two has starred in two editions of the European Championships, helping his country to second place in 1996 and the last four in 2004. He made his international debut in 1994.

The Czech Republic had gotten off to a strong start when Jiri Stajner put the hosts ahead after just three minutes.

Danko Lazovic, however, grabbed the equaliser for Serbia four minutes before the break with Marko Pantelic (54) and Aleksandar Trisovic (72) completing the victory for the visitors.

McClaren restores English pride

Football

AFP, Manchester

England thrashed European champions Greece 4-0 in a friendly at Old Trafford on Wednesday to put the frustration of their lacklustre run to the World Cup quarterfinals behind them.

McClaren altered England's game plan to make the players' football simple, free-flowing and as exciting as it is in the Premiership -- a rare sight towards the end of his predecessor Sven-Goran Eriksson's tenure.

Afterwards, the smiling boss stressed the straightforward ethos of teamwork, possession, attitude and discipline as he reflected on his first test, a warm-up for the 2008 European Championships qualifying campaign, which kicks off in September.

But in doing so, he seemed to criticise implicitly Eriksson's tactics and preparation, which he witnessed first hand as one of the Swede's assistants during his five-

year reign.

England put their exit from the tournament on penalties to Portugal behind them -- and proved there was life after the axed David Beckham -- in an assured display against the visiting Greeks.

John Terry headed England's first goal after 14 minutes and Chelsea teammate Frank Lampard made it two on 30 minutes. Liverpool striker Peter Crouch tapped in number three five minutes later and took his personal goal haul to eight in eight internationals on 42 minutes.

"I couldn't wait for the game to start," McClaren revealed, stressing that he had only had three days to prepare his team and instruct them in how he wanted things done.

"They took it all on board and delivered a performance that we now need to produce consistently. They set the standard -- now we're looking at sustainability and continuity."

Centre-half Terry, McClaren's new captain after the global superstar Beckham quit following the

Portugal match, led by example throughout.

Another player he singled out for praise was man-of-the-match Owen Hargreaves.

The Bayern Munich midfielder was cheered throughout the game, at the very ground where he was booed in the World Cup build-up by fans doubting his value.

Most of Hargreaves' 34 previous England caps had come in bit-part substitute appearances under Eriksson. Now McClaren has made him the linchpin of the team in the holding midfield role.

"We dominated the midfield area and that's the way we'll win it. We got great balance in there," McClaren said.

McClaren said that instilling the players with tactical nous and making them comfortable with different formations would be a major part of his match preparation.

"I'm looking at flexibility and I'm looking at players being tactically aware," he said.

"Mid-way through the second



PHOTO: AFP

England captain John Terry (R top) leaps high to head in the first goal against Greece in their friendly at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Faubert saves French blushes

Football

AFP, Sarajevo

Julien Faubert scored in injury time to give World Cup finalists France a fortunate 2-1 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina here on Wednesday in a friendly international.

The Bosnians had taken a 16th minute lead through captain Sergei Barbarez before disgruntled Chelsea defender William Gallas levelled four minutes before half-time on the eve of his 29th birthday.

Faubert was sent on as a second-half substitute by coach Raymond Domenech wearing the No 10 jersey adorned by retired legend Zinedine Zidane and the 23-year-old Bordeaux -- one of Zidane's former clubs -- midfielder more than repaid that faith by

slotting home right footed in the dying seconds.

Domenech, who became an unlikely hero after taking his side to the World Cup final penalty shoot-out loss to Italy in July, was delighted with the attitude of his players.

"I saw a team that reacted well, who were organised, who showed hunger and who won."

"It is excellent that we have won with this confidence that makes all the difference."

"One saw above all players with a real appetite for the game."

"The others (the new ones) saw what had happened at the World Cup, and those who returned to the team were obliged to raise their game a little bit."

The first half had been an entertaining spectacle with a fair amount of hard-tackling going on which generally went unpunished.

However the Bosnians deservedly took the lead in the 16th minute through Barbarez who seized on a knockdown in the area to half volley it past Gregory Coupet.

Louis Saha looked far more lively up front than Thierry Henry and it was the Manchester United man who three times looked like levelling affairs, once from a knockdown from Henry his shot was beaten away by the keeper Kenan Hasagic with his legs.

Then Saha, who was suspended for the World Cup final, had a header just go wide of the post and then another shot which was again beaten away by the keeper with his legs.

However Bosnia also had a fair amount of efforts and were unfortunate not to go 2-0 up when German referee Frank-Xaver

Loew starts on a high

Football

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

New Germany coach Joachim Loew enjoyed a winning start as his side trounced a hapless Sweden 3-0 in a friendly here on Wednesday exactly the same result as when the two sides met in the second round of the World Cup finals.

It was the perfect beginning for Loew, who took over from Juergen Klinsmann after this summer's World Cup, and the team will now be full of confidence for their first Euro 2008 qualifier against the Republic of Ireland in Stuttgart on September 2.

"We tried to bring the momentum from the World Cup into this match," explained Loew.

great to win my first game 3-0. It is a positive sign for the Euro qualifiers.

"I think you could see our team matured at the World Cup and we have a lot of confidence from that tournament. We just have to carry on in the Euro qualifiers."

For his Swedish counterpart Lars Lagerback it was a case of an unpleasant deja vu.

"It was almost a repeat of the World Cup," bemoaned Sweden coach Lars Lagerback.

"We played against one of the best teams in the world tonight and if they play like they did tonight they will qualify for the European championships."

Loew started with seven of the team that defeated Portugal 3-1 in the World Cup third-place play-off under Klinsmann's regime and watched on as Germany raced into a two-goal lead after just eight

minutes. Bernd Schneider scored only his second international goal in the fourth minute after a clever cutback from Tim Borowski.

World Cup Golden boot winner Miroslav Klose, presented with his German Player of the Year award before the game, then stole centre stage taking advantage of some slack defending to bend in an eighth minute shot.

Sweden were shell-shocked -- just like they were when Germany scored twice in the first 12 minutes of their last 16 World Cup victory -- and it got worse.

Klose grabbed a second with a trademark header in the 44th minute taking his tally to 31 goals in 63 matches.

The Werder Bremen forward is now his country's current top-scorer