



Real Madrid new recruits Mahamadou Diarra (L) and Fabio Cannavaro gesture during a training session in Madrid on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Capello invokes Real spirit

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Fabio Capello says the problem with a club which has won nothing since 2003 is that they have lost their "spirit" in recent seasons. Capello said the spirit he saw in his team the first time he coached at the Bernabeu, nine years ago when he landed the title in his only season in charge, has disappeared. "The first time I arrived here I straight away found the spirit I am talking about," said Capello, who joined from Juventus in the close-season. "I think the current team has lost a little of the madridista spirit." Capello was speaking in an

interview with El Mundo newspaper published Friday on the eve of the new season, in which he also described Ronaldo, whose future is in doubt, as "number one in the world." He told AS sports daily the problem of recent seasons was that Madrid had not put in sufficient physical work to beef up stamina and so would "suffer a bit for the first three or four matches." Real have been forlornly chasing Barcelona since their last Primera Liga title in 2003, just weeks before David Beckham arrived from Manchester United, the latest in a line of "galactico" stars which began with Luis Figo and continued with the likes of the just-retired Zinedine Zidane. Ever since, the success has dried up. Now Capello says there is no

time to lose in restoring Real's fortunes. "I don't believe in years of transition," he stressed. Capello observed the game has evolved substantially since he last sat on the Bernabeu bench. "I am not a magician... I have had to evolve as football has evolved also. The system today which has imposed itself in the competitive world is 1-9-1. First, there's the goalkeeper and then the key man, the goalscorer. Everyone else has to run about a lot and help out," said the Italian. On Ronaldo, recovering from a tibia operation but touted as set for a return to Italy, possibly with AC Milan or even former club Inter, Capello told AS: "We have to get Ronaldo back as soon as possible as he is number one in the world. He added he is looking forward to

pairing the Brazilian with new Dutch signing Ruud van Nistelrooy. "The two best goalscorers in the world are with Madrid," rejoiced Capello. Asked to explain Barca's recent success Capello said he believed the key was essentially simple. "It's the quality of the signings. We coaches are all very good - but if you don't give us good material we can't do anything." In contrast, however, Barcelona new boy Gianluca Zambrotta said the Catalan club's success was down to teamwork rather than individual talent, despite the presence of World Player of the Year Ronaldinho. "We are a united squad. Nobody thinks for himself but for the common good," said the Italy star.

Bayern close to Van Bommel

AFP, Munich

German champions Bayern Munich are on the brink of signing Dutch international midfielder Marc van Bommel, Bayern general manager Uli Hoeness said Saturday. Bayern originally wanted to take the 29-year-old van Bommel on loan but Barcelona refused. Now the clubs have struck a deal worth a reported 12 million euros. "Negotiations with Barcelona are at an advanced stage," Hoeness said. "The player will come to us next week for a medical and we hope to finalise the deal in the coming days." Van Bommel, a member of the Dutch World Cup squad, is seen as a replacement for German international captain Michael Ballack who joined Chelsea in the summer.

There has been speculation that the signing of van Bommel was to pave the way for the departure of England international midfielder Owen Hargreaves. Hargreaves, contracted at Bayern until June 2008, is the subject of a 25 million euro bid from Manchester United but Bayern have insisted he is staying put. "Hargreaves has a contract for another four years and Sir Alex Ferguson and Manchester United should plan without him," Hoeness said on Saturday. "He is an important part of our team."

Tevez row puts United on alert

INTERNET, undated

Carlos Tevez's agent has revealed that the Argentine forward is close to moving to an unnamed Premiership club. The South American missed training with his Brazilian club Corinthians this week amid rumours of a disagreement with coach Emerson Leao. Leao, who took over at Corinthians last week and stripped Tevez of the captaincy, has openly declared that he doesn't like having an Argentinian playing for the Sao Paulo club. The comment led Tevez to declare that he would never play for the club again, and the player has since been seen back home in Buenos Aires. Tevez's representative, Adrian Rucco, said on Friday "Tevez is very close to moving to an English club," without being drawn on potential interested parties. Manchester United have previously been linked with the 22-year-old forward and are thought to be in the market for a new striker following the sale of Ruud Van Nistelrooy to Real Madrid.

Tevez, signed from Boca Juniors for a South American record fee of 18million dollars in December 2004, is valued at around 37 million euros, although United will face stiff competition for his signature from Bayern Munich and AC Milan.

O'Neill calls for squad strengthening

THE GUARDIAN

Martin O'Neill will urge the American billionaire Randy Lerner to forget talks of extending his contract as manager at Aston Villa and instead give priority to improving the playing squad before the transfer window closes. Lerner is close to assuming full control at Villa Park after acquiring 59.69% of the club's shares, and it was thought he would immediately reward O'Neill, who signed a 12-month rolling deal when he arrived, with a long-term contract. However, the Villa manager believes his own future is secondary. "I will be talking to Mr Lerner and I will be giving him an overview of the squad's strengths and I think more than anything that is the major issue," he said. "The length of contract doesn't bother me a jot. I am not going to disappear tomorrow morning. I want to be here for the long haul." O'Neill has until Thursday midnight to make new signings and although there is money available, the kitty would grow significantly if he can convince Lerner, who is set to replace Doug Ellis as chairman on September 5, of the need to bring in new blood. O'Neill said he "wouldn't be holding out" on that prospect and has prepared for the possibility of waiting until the January window. The Villa manager said he was looking forward to working with Lerner, who has phoned to offer his congratulations on the early results. "I think he's well intentioned," he added. "He wants to learn and he wouldn't pretend to know absolutely everything but I was pleasantly surprised what he knew about football."

Kezman set for Fenerbahce move

AFP, Madrid

Serbian international striker Mateja Kezman is set to move to Turkish first division side Fenerbahce from Spanish outfit Atletico Madrid. Agreement has been reached in principle and details of the financial deal will be released Monday, the Spanish club said on their website. Fenerbahce are reported to have paid seven million euros (nine million dollars) for the 27-year-old who transferred to Spain from English Premiership side Chelsea in June 2005 for nine million euros (11.5 million dollars). After four successful seasons with Dutch side PSV Eindhoven from 2000-2004, Kezman did not have the same success at Chelsea or Atletico, where he scored eight goals in 30 Primera Liga games. His departure has been expected since the arrival of Argentine Sergio Aguero and Spaniard Miguel Angel Ferrer, with the club also chasing Dynamo Moscow's Portuguese midfielder Maniche.

Mourinho under pressure

AFP, Blackburn



Jose Mourinho has been a virtual stranger to adversity during his glittering managerial career, but the Chelsea manager finds himself under peculiar scrutiny ahead of the Premiership meeting with Blackburn on Sunday. The reigning English champions have started the season with a stutter, having been beaten by Liverpool in the FA Community Shield and then suffering a surprise defeat at Middlesbrough last Wednesday. Not even a routine victory over Manchester City on the Premiership's opening weekend could disguise the fact that Chelsea -- who marked the defence of their league crown last year with nine straight wins -- have looked strangely distracted. They are already three points adrift of Manchester United, whose slick football and attacking zest have set the standards so far this season. For most clubs, a mediocre start would be shrugged off as mere rustiness; at Chelsea it has pro-

duced an intense bout of soul-searching amongst squad and management alike. John Terry, the club captain, was apparently so disgusted with the side's performance that he vented his frustrations on a water cooler in the Riverside's away dressing room, while Mourinho himself bemoaned his players' complacent attitude after back-to-back titles. "Overall, Middlesbrough's attitude was much stronger than ours and I think we did not deserve more," he said, explaining Wednesday's defeat. "The point is, we know why we were champions twice. I know and I think the players also know why, and it was not with this attitude, that's for sure." Chelsea have reacted to this adversity in time-honoured fashion: by battenning down the hatches and adopting a siege mentality. The club's communications department cancelled Mourinho's weekly press conference on Friday, presumably to allow him more time to plot Chelsea's return to form. He is fortunate that the hectic nature of the Premiership match schedule allows an immediate opportunity for redemption, and victory at Blackburn would represent a powerful statement of intent

from Mourinho's chastened charges. Not that the Portuguese relishes trips to East Lancashire. Two years ago, he complained bitterly about what he perceived as Rovers' overly physical tactics after Dutch winger Arjen Robben was forced off with injury. Then, at the tail-end of last season, the club's 1-0 defeat sparked another incandescent outburst from Mourinho, though this time his ire was focussed on the standard of refereeing. There is scope for more upset at Ewood Park, especially with Benni McCarthy lurking in the Rovers ranks. The South African striker -- who quit FC Porto in a 3.1 million pound (5.85 million dollars) deal earlier this summer -- rejected the chance to move to Chelsea a year ago as he did not want to accept a bit-part role at Stamford Bridge. Mourinho could be made to rue his decision on Sunday. "Benni is a natural finisher," said Rovers manager Mark Hughes. "We have just got to get him in positions where he has an opportunity to strike at goal. "If we can get him in those positions, more often than not he will do very well for us."

Reading sign De La Cruz

AFP, London

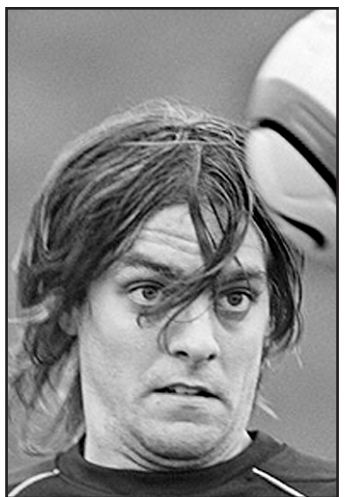
Reading completed the signing of Ecuador's World Cup defender Ulises De La Cruz on Friday on a one-year deal, the Premiership club announced. The 32-year-old right-back, who left Aston Villa at the end of last season, has been training with Reading for a week but is not fit enough to feature in Saturday's game against Wigan. "I was quite surprised Ulises was still available. He is a player who can compete at this level," Reading manager Steve Coppell told the club's official website. De La Cruz played 99 games for Villa in a four-year stint at the Midlands club. "I have been training with the players for the last few days and really enjoyed it," he said. "I will work hard for a place in the side. I want to keep playing for my country so I need to get into the Reading team."

I'm coming home: Woodgate

INTERNET, undated

Jonathan Woodgate has confirmed that he is on his way back to England. The Real Madrid ace has been told by the Spanish giants that they want him to get regular first team football and he is ready to seal a switch back to The Premiership in the coming days. Real have accepted at least one loan offer, as it has been confirmed that Middlesbrough have indeed made a move for the Teesside-born player. Former club Newcastle also appear to be keen, while Arsenal are also being strongly linked to make a move - but Liverpool ruled themselves out of the running on Friday. Woodgate himself has accepted the fact he will be spending next season in The Premiership.

"I am going away to play on loan for a year, in the next few hours I will know which team I will be playing for," he said.



JONATHAN WOODGATE "All the English that want me I like, and it will be a positive thing for me to return to England."

"I need to play games in order to prove I am strong and that I am totally recovered from injury, but here (Spain) it is hard to get continuity. "It is better that I have one season playing in England and in one year I will return to Madrid and demonstrate that I am good football player." Injuries have limited Woodgate to just nine league starts since his 13.5 million pound move from Newcastle in 2004. Real still see a future for Woodgate but they want him to prove his fitness - although reports are suggesting that they will look to seal a deal for Roma star Cristian Chivu of Roma. Chivu could arrive to help bolster Real's squad whilst Woodgate is away and then in 12 months the Englishman could compete for a place in Fabio Capello's squad.

I was the scapegoat: Moggi

Football

AFP, Rome

Luciano Moggi, the man at the centre of the Italian match-fixing scandal, said Friday he was the scapegoat for the furore. Speaking at a press conference in the Tuscan city of Siena, the former general manager of Juventus said he was the fall guy and that former Italian football federation (FIGC) president Franco Carraro and current Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) president Gianni Petrucci were the architects of the whole affair. "You need proof before you start making accusations and in this case there is no proof, only theories," said Moggi, who received a five-year ban

from any kind of involvement in sport from the FIGC for his part in rigging matches. "I didn't do anything illegal. The referees were not friendly towards Juventus. "My job was to protect the club and we were up against more than one opponent each week, starting with Franco Carraro." Carraro was initially banned from sport for four-and-a-half years before a successful appeal put him in the clear. Moggi then took a swipe at Petrucci, who was not charged or part of any investigation. "Even he must take a share of the blame," he said. "How can you let a former consultant of Inter Milan (Juve's fierce rivals) be in charge of Italian sport?" The match-fixing scandal broke

in May after transcripts of Moggi telling the head of Italy's referees association which officials to appoint to specific Juventus games were published in Italian newspapers. Moggi was found guilty by of using his power and influence as the key figure at Italy's most successful club to assert control of the pool of referees and high-ranked FIGC officials. Juventus were demoted from Serie A to the second division with a 17-point penalty for the start of next season by the FIGC for their involvement in fixing matches during the 2004-05 season. They were also stripped of the league title they won last season and the season before that.

Ronaldinho glad to be facing Chelsea

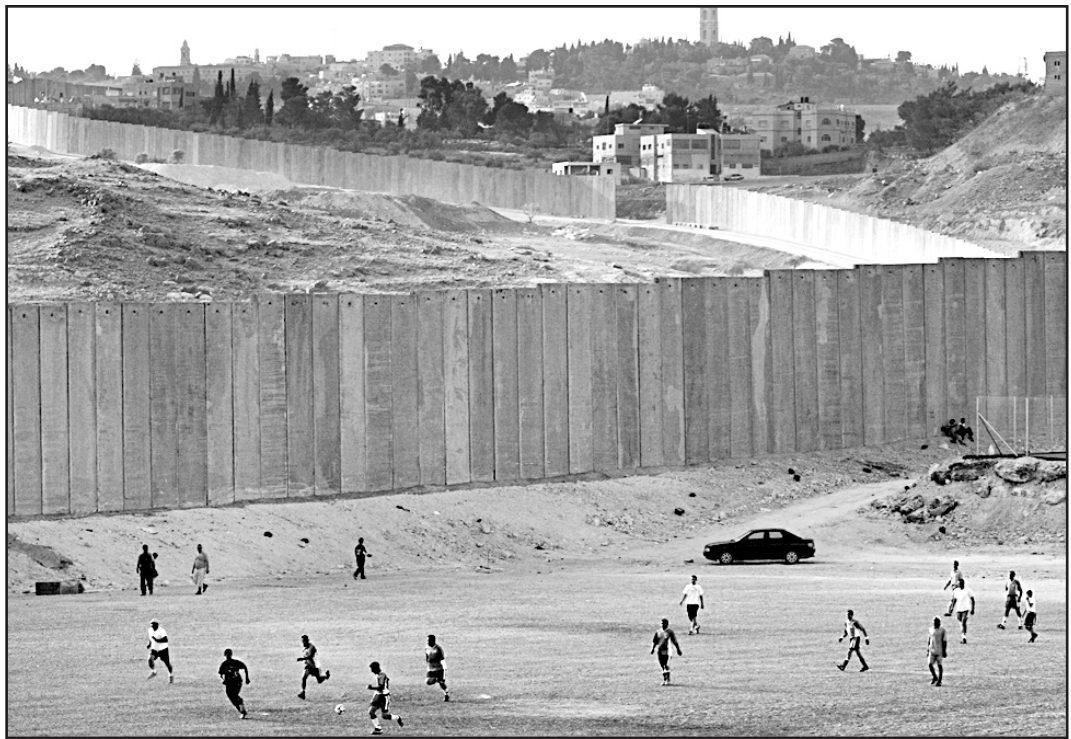
REUTERS, Monaco



Barcelona star Ronaldinho has expressed his relief at playing Chelsea in the group stages of this season's Champions League. Following Thursday's draw in Monaco, Blues manager Jose Mourinho's side face Barca in European football's premier club competition for the third successive season. On the previous two occasions the meetings have been in the last 16, and turned into hostile affairs with no love lost. This time around the two teams are in Group A, along with German side Werder Bremen and first-timers to the tournament, Bulgarian champions Levski Sofia. But it is the renewed rivalry between Chelsea and reigning European Cup holders Barca that will again capture the imagination. World player of the year and Barcelona star Ronaldinho again knows no quarter will be given, but is happy to take on Chelsea

early. "Chelsea have always been very difficult opponents in past seasons," said Ronaldinho. "Both teams have world-class players, and with the way we know each other we are going to have to put a lot into the two games. "But I think it's better we meet Chelsea now as they're such a strong team, rather than having to cope with them later. "At least we can both go through. It gives you impetus, but we cannot discount Werder Bremen because they are also a strong team." In particular, Ronaldinho has noted the additions at Stamford Bridge of Michael Ballack and Andriy Shevchenko, and added: "Chelsea will be stronger still. "They have signed high-quality players, so they will certainly be stronger than last season and that will make things more difficult for us." Ronaldinho, though, was left to lament Barca's failure to sign close friend Thierry Henry from Arsenal to strengthen the Catalan giants' chances of retaining the trophy. Henry was strongly linked with

a move to the Nou Camp last season before finally signing a new four-year contract with the Gunners. But Brazil striker Ronaldinho has not given up hope of working with the France international. He remarked: "It was disappointing (Barca did not sign Henry). "There were great expectations amongst the fans who were placing a lot of hopes on his arrival. "He is one of the best strikers in the world, and a friend of mine, but we have now signed other players. "I wish him all the best and maybe one of these days we will play together." Even without Henry, though, Ronaldinho feels Barcelona can retain the trophy, and become the first team in Champions League history to do so. "No one has ever done it before, and we want to go into history by becoming the first team to do it again," added Ronaldinho.



Palestinians play a game of football under the shadow of the controversial Israeli separation barrier that divides the West Bank town of Abu Dis from east Jerusalem.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

A crossword puzzle grid with clues. The clues are: ACROSS: 1 Young woman, 5 Supporting, 8 Couples, 12 Car, 13 Mound, 14 Incite, 15 Demolition crew, 17 Gull's cousin, 18 Composer Erik, 19 Stroked soothingly, 21 From square one, 24 Karaoke need, for short, 25 Sailing vessel, 28 Not pizzicato, 30 Weeding tool, 33 Mess up, 34 Cause, as havoc, 35 "Nightmare" street, 36 Society page word. DOWN: 37 Landers and Coulter, 38 Does arithmetic repeatedly, 41 Leave out, 43 Edict, 46 Spingard Medal, 50 Rue the marathon legend Bobby, 51 He'll get a grip, 54 Comedian Caroline an ice-cream flavor, 55 Corn spike, 56 Excavation, 57 Affirmative one, 11 Fax actions, 16 Under-standing, 7 Grate, 8 Half an ice-cream, 9 Miserable, 10 Shrek is one, 11 Fax actions, 16 Under-standing, 20 Wild and crazy, 22 Have coming, 23 Songbirds, 25 Existing, 26 Exist, 27 Twisted violently, 29 Barrel, 31 On in years, 32 Bad --, Germany, 34 Carry on, 38 Carelessness?, 40 Neighbors, 42 Office-holders, 43 "Phooey!", 44 Canyon come-back, 45 Rams fans?, 47 Lotion additive, 48 Honeycomb compartment, 49 Get ready, 52 Cheerleaders' call, 53 Prior to.

A cryptogram puzzle grid with a key: VMKO ZYJ'XK XKRCCZ NJON - MY WY BKK RGWYX ERSYO Y X EHC CYO, H'E BRZ WMKZ'XK VKCGYSK SRWWB. Yesterday's Cryptquip: FRANCE ONCE USED A CERTAIN COIN AS CURRENCY, UNTIL THEY EVENTUALLY HAD LIVRE FAILURE. Today's Cryptquip Clue: X equals R. The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.