



Italian captain Fabio Cannavaro (R) picks a plastic ball during the official draw for the Gulf Cup in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cannavaro overwhelmed

Football

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Cannavaro, the man who held the world's most coveted sporting trophy when Italy won the World Cup in Germany two months ago, said he was overwhelmed by UAE's hospitality on Monday.

Cannavaro, the 33-year-old skipper of Italy, was on a lightning visit to the capital to grace the 18th Arabian Gulf Cup draw and said it was the first time in his career that he was experiencing such an event.

"I was nicely surprised with what little I have seen of the Arab world and, more importantly, I am pleased

with their kind and friendly nature," he said.

Cannavaro, who treated questions from the media here with the same cool and calmness with which he has handled some of the top strikers in the world, said he was in favour of TV replays to decide cases of diving.

Replying to a question from Gulf News, the Italian and Real Madrid central defender said, "Yes it is a problem as defenders find it difficult with some of the forwards resorting to professional 'diving' inside the box."

"I am for taking help from TV footage, but the only problem is this should be limited to very few selected moments. Otherwise the game will be affected with many

appeals. It should be selective or should not be used at all," Cannavaro said.

Recalling those treasured moments when he lifted the World Cup, Cannavaro said: "It was one of our greatest accomplishments. It was a great performance and we did it due to the efforts of our entire team," he said.

The short-statured Italian defender picked Brazil's Ronaldo as the most difficult forward to play against.

"That is why I signed for Real Madrid this season," he said in lighter vein.

Cannavaro said he would not mind coming to play in the region. "I would like to play anywhere. All I am interested in is to respect my contract

and do my best," said Cannavaro, who recently signed for Real Madrid.

Commenting on his experience in the Spanish league, Cannavaro said he did not find much difference between the Italian and Spanish Leagues.

"All leagues are difficult and the level is more or less the same," he said.

On the status of football in the region, Cannavaro said he has seen the Arab teams play in the World Cup and felt they were improving.

"It is possible for an African or Arab team to win the World Cup. With players from the regions playing in many other parts of the world, it is not difficult," he said.

Benitez defiant about title chances

AFP, Liverpool

Rafael Benitez has dismissed suggestions that Liverpool's title-assault is over just four games into the season as he prepares his team for the visit of Newcastle United to Anfield on Wednesday.

Back-to-back defeats to Everton and Chelsea has left Benitez's team playing catch-up, nine points behind early pacesetters Portsmouth after managing just one win.

Sunday's 1-0 defeat at defending champions Chelsea provoked a strong reaction from critics who believe Liverpool have already left themselves too much ground to make up as they chase a first title since 1990.

Benitez, however, disagrees arguing that there are still 34 games and more than 100 points to play for.

"This is not the time to be thinking about the league table," said the Liverpool manager, as he concluded his inquest into his side's failure at Chelsea.

"We need to keep going. It's a long race. All we can do is think of Newcastle and the next three points. We will see how close we are later on."

Should he allow himself a brief glance at the table then Benitez will discover his side is just six places off the bottom after an indifferent start.

True, Liverpool have only played one home game yet their inability to score away from home is in danger of costing them dear.

In three away games, they have yet to score from open play yet Benitez insists the team is improving even if that has not been reflected in recent results.

"As a manager, I need to see if the team is improving and it's clear to me it is," he added.

"The key for us is to start scoring goals. After three games away from home, in which we created a lot of chances, I'm sure we're going to start scoring soon."

"We'll see how the players are, but it's good for us to be back at Anfield now where we're usually stronger."

"Tactically, the team looks much better."

The visit of mid-table Newcastle, followed three days later by the arrival of Tottenham, gives Liverpool an opportunity to sort out their domestic troubles before they host Galatasaray in the Champions League on September 27.

Tiger has his way

Golf

AFP, Straffan, Rep of Ireland

US skipper Tom Lehman gave Tiger Woods what he wanted when he sent him out with Jim Furyk in practice for the Ryder Cup at the K-Club on Tuesday morning.

The golfing superstar has not enjoyed much success with playing partners in his four previous Ryder Cup outings and had an especially torrid time of it two years ago when his "dream" pairing with Phil Mickelson turned into a nightmare.

In the middle of a brilliant run of five straight wins, Woods made it clear that he would be keen to link up again with Furyk. The two played together in last year's President's Cup and finished unbeaten.

Lehman is not obliged to stick with his practice combinations when the real thing gets going with Friday morning's fourballs but barring a major upset Woods and Furyk, ranked 1st and 3rd in the world, will open proceedings for the challengers.

Lehman said after the US team arrived in Dublin on Monday that he had already decided his line-up for the opening fourballs and had a good idea of who would also be playing in the afternoon foursomes on Friday.

Also looking set to play on Friday morning as expected if Tuesday's practice at the K-Club is anything to go by were Phil Mickelson in harness with Chris DiMarco and David Tom with Chad Campbell.

The final selection would likely be from two out of the three other pairings that were out on the course.

These saw Lehman's wildcard choices Scott Verplank and Stewart Cink taking in hand a rookie each in the shape of Brett Wetterich and JJ Henry.

The two other rookies in the US 12-strong team, Vaughn Taylor and Zach Johnson played together, but it was unlikely they would be in action on Friday's opening day of competition in the biennial competition.

Both the US and European teams arrived in Dublin on Monday

and have three days of practice at the K-Club, 30 miles (45 kilometres) west of the Irish capital before Friday.

Four fourballs will get things going on Friday morning with four foursomes to follow in the afternoon. Saturday will see the same format with all 24 players in action on Sunday for the 12 closing singles ties.

Europe's first practice session got under way later in the morning with skipper Ian Woosnam teaming up his spearhead Colin Montgomerie with Englishman David Howell in his first group, allying the Scot's huge experience in the competition with the Englishman's fine recent form.

The Welshman then followed the nationality card by pairing Swedes Robert Karlsson with Henrik Stenson, Spaniards Jose Maria Olazabal with Sergio Garcia, Irishmen Paul McGinley with Padraig Harrington and Englishmen Paul Casey with Luke Donald.

In the final pairing he again

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Tiger Woods of the United States Ryder Cup Golf Team tees off on the fourth hole during the first practice day for the Ryder Cup in the Republic of Ireland on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Domenech can't believe Gallas sale

INTERNET, undated

France coach Raymond Domenech has revealed his surprise at Chelsea's willingness to allow William Gallas to join Premiership rivals Arsenal.

Gallas, the 29-year-old France defender, was seeking a move from Stamford Bridge and eventually signed for the Gunners on transfer deadline day, with Ashley Cole moving in the opposite direction.

Domenech is quoted in the Daily Express to have said: "I can't believe what Chelsea have done. I can't believe they let Gallas go. For a coach, he's the best defender in the world."

"Look at the positions he can play - anywhere along the back line, all with exactly the same ability. If I had been (coach) Jose Mourinho I would never have done it. Any club lucky enough to have William should never allow him to leave."

"Since I've been French coach, we've lost only one game, against Slovakia this year - and that was the only one in which he didn't play."

Robson leaves West Brom

AFP, London

West Bromwich Albion coach Bryan Robson has parted company with the club by mutual consent, the Championship outfit said Monday.

Robson, the former England captain who had been in the post for nearly two years, had come under pressure from unhappy home fans following their 1-1 draw against Southampton at the weekend.

West Brom, relegated from the Premiership in May, said in a statement: "The board would like to thank Bryan Robson for his efforts during his 22 months in charge and wishes him well for the future."

Chairman Jeremy Peace said: "After much deliberation, and in view of the results since early 2006, it has been decided that a change is necessary if the club is to achieve its aims for this season and beyond."

"This is a very important time for West Bromwich Albion. With promotion a priority, the board felt that, given the club's current league position, the best way forward was to agree to make a change now."

Nigel Pearson will assume control of first team affairs while the club considers all available options and will be at the helm for Tuesday's League Cup clash with Cheltenham.

Robson said he backed West Brom for promotion back into the Premiership.

"I've really enjoyed the short time I've been at the Albion," he said.

"The fans have been different class and I just hope, with the squad of players in place, that they get back up to the Premier League, which I really believe they will do this season."

"I do think there's a really good squad at the club and that it's only a matter of time before they get it right, climb the table and win promotion."

"As far as I'm concerned, the matter is now closed."

PSG a la Claudia Schiffer

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain are to French football what Claudia Schiffer is to l'Oreal, according to the club's coach Guy Lacombe.

Lacombe, who was speaking after PSG's weekend victory at Monaco, was complaining that his side get a raw deal from referees.

Just as Schiffer is the face of l'Oreal, PSG are the most high profile team in the league and thus referees exploit the media glare surrounding the capital club to enforce the strict letter of the law.

Lacombe was furious that his side were not awarded several penalties (against Monaco). It's very difficult to accept. How is it that we can go to Sochaux and see what we don't see in the majority of the other matches."

"At Sochaux we were the victims of PSG's place in French football. PSG are what Claudia Schiffer is to l'Oreal."

"We could have had two or three penalties (against Monaco). It's very difficult to accept. How is it that we can go to Sochaux and see what we don't see in the majority of the other matches."

Rugged PSG defender Mario Yepes gave away two penalties against Sochaux.

Italian Federation chief stands down

Football

REUTERS, Milan

The head of the Italian Football Federation, Guido Rossi, has resigned from his post after he was appointed chairman of Telecom Italia.

Rossi's staff and vice-commissioner Vito Gamberale, who had been tipped as a possible replacement, also resigned leaving the Federation facing a second major change in personnel and raising questions about the reforms begun in the wake of the country's match-fixing scandal.

The Italian news agency ANSA said Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) had put lawyer Massimo Coccia into the role of caretaker commissioner but a meeting on Thursday could appoint a new full-time head of the Federation.

Another vice-commissioner Demetrio Albertini, the former AC Milan midfielder who is in charge of the Federation's 'technical affairs' said he was willing to continue in his role.

Rossi was appointed as emergency commissioner of the Federation in May after Franco Carraro resigned as president amidst the match-fixing scandal that shook the Italian game.

The former head of Italy's stock market regulator was charged with introducing reforms in the national game but his appointment to head Telecom Italia led to calls for him to give up his position.

The news agency ANSA quoted Rossi's staff as saying: "The commissioner and his assistants, collectively and individually, note that the conditions do not exist for the continuation of the work that has been undertaken to bring (Italian football) back to health."

"Therefore with that reasoning they have brought forward the end of their mandate," said the statement.

ANSA said that Rossi had offered to stay on until the end of October in order to complete the reforms his team had begun but that scenario had been rejected by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) which had appointed him.

CONI were meeting on Tuesday to discuss the situation and president Gianni Petrucci said that he formally accepted the resignation.

Giovanna Melandri, Minister for Youth and Sports, said it was vital that the reform programme begun by Rossi be completed.

"I am grateful to the professor for all his efforts and the work carried out up until now. Now, it is important to rewrite the rules and to finish this process and not turn back," she said.

DFB launches racism probe

REUTERS, Berlin



The German soccer federation (DFB) said on Monday it had launched an investigation into "racist incidents" at Saturday's Bundesliga match between

Alemannia Aachen and Borussia Moenchengladbach.

"During Saturday's match in Aachen, there was racist abuse directed first from the Aachen fan area at Moenchengladbach's Brazilian striker Kahe and then from the Moenchengladbach supporters at Aachen's Zambian player Moses Sichone," the DFB said in a statement on its Website.

According to German media reports and spokesmen for the two clubs, referee Michael Weiner had an announcement broadcast in the

stadium at halftime threatening to halt proceedings if the Aachen fans did not stop chanting "Asylant", German for asylum seeker, at Kahe.

After the announcement, the Moenchengladbach fans began abusing Sichone, the reports and spokesmen said. Aachen won the match 4-2.

Racism has been a prominent issue in the German media in recent weeks in the run-up to Sunday's state election in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in which the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) won 7.2 percent of the vote.

The DFB last week fined Hansa Rostock's regional league side 20,000 euros (\$25,310) after fans chanted racist slogans at Schalke 04's black striker Gerald Asamoah in a German Cup match. Rostock is in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Moenchengladbach spokesman Markus Artzt told Reuters on Monday the club would use its next home

match to step up its campaign against racism.

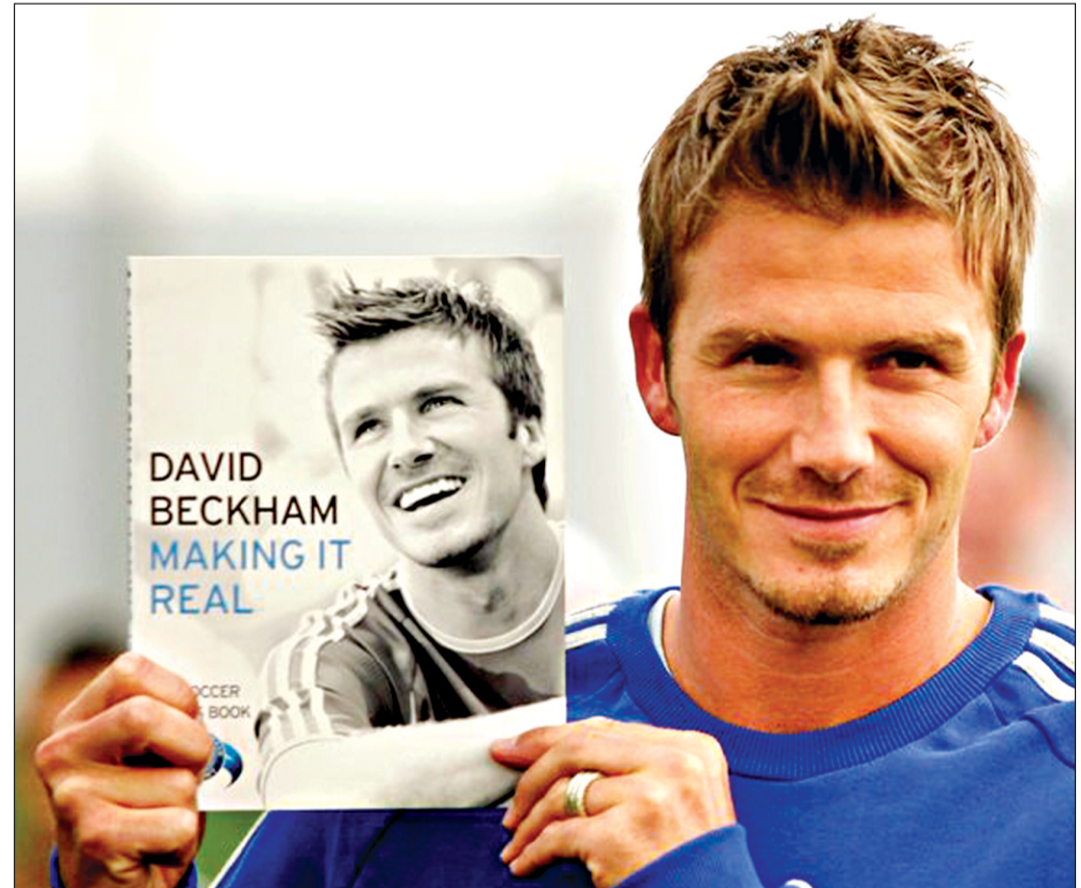
"This is something that does not belong in a soccer stadium," he said. "We are surprised that our fans were involved in something like that because we have not had any problems of that kind before."

Thorsten Pracht, a spokesman for Alemannia Aachen, said the club very much regretted what had happened and it fully supported the action taken by the referee.

The club already had an active campaign against racism in soccer and this would be intensified in light of Saturday's incidents, he told Reuters.

The DFB said Weiner had prepared a report on the incidents for a special investigating committee and both clubs had been asked to make immediate statements.

Aachen and Moenchengladbach both said they would likely provide their statements to the DFB on Monday.



Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham poses during the promotional launch of his new book, "Making It Real" at the David Beckham Academy in London on Monday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

England don't need me: Beckham

Football

AFP, London

The quality in the current England side is such that former captain David Beckham admits he will not be needed to guarantee their berth in the Euro 2008 finals.

Beckham, 31, hankers after an England comeback, but he expects new head coach Steve McClaren to steer the team into the European finals whether or not he is brought back into the squad.

"I'm certain England will qualify without me," said the high-profile Real Madrid midfielder, who had a poor World Cup earlier this summer and then decided to give up the captain's armband.

"They have a good team and great players and a very good chance of winning something at some point soon," said Beckham.

"The new regime and the new manager is important but what really matters is the players."

"There is a good team spirit and I'm sure not much has changed since the World Cup." Beckham continues to smart following McClaren's decision to axe him from the England squad after the World Cup.

He had intended to play on for his country, and was caught by surprise when McClaren, who succeeded Sven-Goran Eriksson last month, omitted him from his first squad.

Owen Hargreaves has been wearing the number seven shirt, Steven Gerrard has slotted in on the right flank, and John Terry has captained the side well enough so far.

Although Hargreaves is not expected to play again until November after breaking his left leg, and Aaron Lennon is set to be absent for a similar spell with a knee problem, Beckham will not

be waiting by the phone for a call from McClaren ahead of next month's qualifiers against Macedonia and Croatia.

"I'm not thinking about playing for England again. That's for other people to decide."

"All I can do is enjoy my football in Spain, work hard and see what the future brings."

"The reason I didn't retire from international football is because I want to play for my country."

"The injuries may have increased my chances of making the squad but I'm not the right person to ask."

Beckham also ruled out a return to the English Premiership.

"I don't think I will ever return to the Premiership to be honest," he said.

"I played for Manchester United for many years and they are the team I support and love."

"I don't think I could put another shirt on and play against Man United at Old Trafford."