

Platini promises UEFA 'evolution'

AFP, Paris

Michel Platini vowed to implement a football evolution rather than revolution in a manifesto-style letter sent to the 52 presidents of UEFA-affiliated football associations.

Platini will contest the European football governing body hot-seat with current incumbent Lennart Johansson in elections in February.

And in his first official communication to European association presidents, Platini promised not to make any drastic changes.

"I am not the candidate for revolution but the one for the evolution of football who will adapt to the realities of the 21st century without breaking its fundamental principles."

Platini promised to unify the football family, return power to UEFA's members and to improve solidarity among members.

And he also vowed to stamp out racism and xenophobia, sporting fraud, illegal betting, doping, embezzlement and corrupt agents.

"I am all for clean football," added Platini.

"No suspicion should hang over the fairness of competition or the validity of performances because cheating in football is a crime against the spirit of the game."

Liverpool consider legal action

AFP, Liverpool

English Premiership club Liverpool are considering legal action against the BBC after they were accused of 'tapping-up' a young Middlesbrough player.

The BBC's Panorama programme, broadcast on Tuesday, showed a Liverpool official talking to an agent about persuading Nathan Porritt, a teenage Middlesbrough player, to move to Anfield.

Approaching players contracted to other clubs is illegal under English football rules and Liverpool, along with Chelsea and Newcastle, who were all shown discussing payments to Porritt, could be charged by the Football Association.

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez insists his club had done nothing wrong and said: "We have taken legal advice because we were surprised."

"You have some rules but you can have good agents and bad agents, good managers and bad managers. They have to find solutions."

"If you talk about corruption, you can talk about a lot of things in life. There are good people and bad people and we have to continue with the good people."

FA charges Babayaro

AFP, London

Newcastle defender Celestine Babayaro was on Friday charged with violent conduct after flooring Liverpool's Dirk Kuyt with a fist in the face at Anfield this week.

The Nigeria international escaped censure at the time after his action went unseen by officials at Wednesday's Premiership game but was caught on video.

A Football Association statement announced: "According to fast track procedures for such cases, along with the charge Babayaro has been offered the automatic penalty of a three-match suspension."

"He has until 6pm on Monday 25 September to respond to the charge."

An independent disciplinary commission will hear the case next Tuesday.

The incident took place after Kuyt had grabbed his first goal to set Liverpool up for a 2-0 win.

Klinsi in Austria's assistance

AFP, Berlin

Former Germany coach Juergen Klinsmann is to meet Andreas Herzog, assistant manager of Euro 2008 co-hosts Austria, to offer advice, the 1990 World Cup winning striker said Thursday.

"I will happily meet Andreas and exchange information," said Klinsmann, who led hosts Germany to third place at this year's World Cup.

"But there is no question that I will give him private information about German players."

"Juergen is going to advise me on his ideas for training and preparation," said Herzog, who played with Klinsmann at Bayern Munich and Los Angeles Galaxy.

Herzog, 38, is Austria's most capped player (103) and is assistant to national team coach Josef Hickersberger.

Austria are jointly staging the 2008 European Championships with Switzerland.

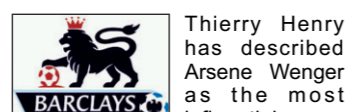


PHOTO: INTERNET

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry inspects his 'art' as he launches Arsenal's Charity of the Season's "The Willow Foundation's" Art Initiative at Emirates Stadium in London on Thursday. The Willow Foundation are inviting 50 top sports stars to create pieces of art which will be auctioned off to raise money for the charity.

Henry hails 'fantastic' Wenger

AFP, London



Thierry Henry has described Arsene Wenger as the most influential manager in English football over the last 10 years, just as he is about to celebrate a decade in charge of Arsenal.

The Gunners face newly-promoted Sheffield United on Saturday as they search for their first win at the Emirates Stadium since taking up residence at their new home last month.

Perhaps more significantly, the Arsenal manager also has a chance

to mark his lengthy tenure, which has yielded three Premiership titles, four FA Cups, and appearances in both the UEFA Cup and Champions League finals, with a long awaited home win.

There was nothing quite like getting their season up and running then securing a late win at the home of old foes Manchester United last week, but Arsenal are hoping Emmanuel Adebayor's 86th minute winner will mean more than just three points come the end of the season.

Whatever happens this season, however, Henry is certain that Wenger has made an indelible mark on the Premiership, which seems to

have changed beyond all recognition since its inception in 1992. What is more, Wenger's insistence on playing rapid 'touch' football, his attention to detail and his ability to spot talent at its earliest stage has set him apart from his rivals in the domestic game.

"I think he has been the most influential manager in English football over the last 10 years," said Henry, who was signed three years into Wenger's reign in 1999.

"The way he sees the game, the way he wants the football to be played, he is very different to a lot of managers."

"There was a manager in France called Jean-Claude Suaudeau who

Alonso looks to mount challenge

AFP, Liverpool



Xabi Alonso claims Liverpool's home form will be crucial if they are to resurrect their title challenge after losing two of their opening five Premiership fixtures this season.

Rafa Benitez's side, who face Tottenham at Anfield on Saturday, climbed into the top half the table with a 2-0 home win against Newcastle in midweek, during which Spain midfielder Alonso scored with a shot from inside his own half.

Spurs head north aiming to halt their unimpressive start to the campaign, but with Liverpool deter-

mined to close the gap on Manchester United and Chelsea, Alonso has challenged Benitez's team to send Spurs back to London

FIXTURES

(1400GMT kick-off unless otherwise stated) Saturday Arsenal v Sheffield Utd, Aston Villa v Charlton, Fulham v Chelsea Liverpool v Tottenham (1145GMT), Manchester City v West Ham Middlesbrough v Blackburn, Reading v Man Utd (1615GMT) Sunday Newcastle v Everton (1500GMT) Monday Portsmouth v Bolton (1900GMT)

with another defeat on their travels following losses at Bolton and Old Trafford already this term.

Alonso said: "We knew we had three games at home starting with the Newcastle game and that it would be a key period for us."

"We know how strong we can be at Anfield and if we collect the points now we can quickly get towards the top of the table."

"Last season we had a few amazing unbeaten runs in the middle and then towards the end of the season. We know it's difficult to repeat that, but we also know we have the players here who are capable of doing it."

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PHOTO: INTERNET

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho (2L) eyes his charges during a training session at Stamford Bridge on Thursday, ahead of today's Premiership encounter against Fulham.

'Real are a disaster'

INTERNET, undated

Valencia coach Quique Sanchez Flores believes that Real Madrid have really been a disaster of late, and thinks it is almost impossible that they recover this season.

"With so many coaches, so many great players, and so many failures in big competitions, it has all been a huge disaster," said Flores as he let fly at Los Merengues.

"They forget about the team and prioritise the individuals. It is very difficult to win something like this," he continued, in an interview supposed to be about Valencia's clash with Barcelona.

He also called Real Madrid a team which lacked any form of leadership whatsoever, as the status of Raul in the team was in question, with the debate about a first team place making it difficult for him to command anything.

The former Getafe coach said he couldn't see any solutions to the problem either: "Casillas is very young, Guti has been marginalised."

His lashing at Real Madrid seems to have caught everyone by surprise, particularly because he has rarely said much on the issue at all. It will be interesting to see what reaction, if any, is coming from the Bernabeu.

Finally, he got around to the real subject of the interview.

"Barca are the best team in Europe, or at least among the top three," he said, shifting gears effortlessly. They have so many alternatives in attack. They can change gears at will, and have improved a lot in defence. They play very fast, moving the ball around well, and it is difficult to attack them."

Mirza closer to Hingis tie

AFP, Kolkata

Indian star Sania Mirza kept in line for a semifinal clash with top seed Martina Hingis as she got past resolute German Sandra Kloesel in the WTA Kolkata Open here on Thursday.

In a second round match peppered with unforced errors and service breaks, Mirza prevailed 7-5, 6-3 to set up a quarterfinal with French teenager Aravane Rezaï.

In the first set, in which she earned a warning for racket abuse, Mirza managed a crucial break in the 11th game and went on to dominate the match.

"The last five games were better than the ones I played earlier," said 19-year-old Mirza. "It doesn't make a difference whether you play ugly or pretty tennis. What matters is the win."

"The second set saw Mirza concede a 3-1 lead but the Hyderabad girl bounced back in superb fashion to notch up service breaks in the fifth, seventh and ninth games to wrap up the match."

"I did not want to play a three-setter today. I wanted to get over with it as soon as possible. I made some technical mistakes in the first set but played better in the second," said Mirza.

Aware that fourth seed Rezaï awaits her in the next round, fifth-seeded Mirza said: "Rezaï is a very talented player. It will be a tough match."

Earlier, seventh seed Nicole Pratt joined the list of seeds to fall by the wayside when she was conquered by Russian Olga Poutchikova 6-2, 2-6, 6-2.

Italian Alberta Brianti, who ousted third seed Yuliana Fedak in the first round, advanced after battling an injured ankle to overcome Indonesian Angelique Widjaja 7-6 (9/7), 3-6, 6-3.

Russian Alla Kudryavtseva and Uzbek Iroda Tulyaganova made the round of eight with straight-set wins.

Veira slapped with ban

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan midfielder Patrick Veira was handed a three-match ban by the Italian football league's disciplinary council on Thursday for the red card he received in the Serie A match against Roma.

The France captain was sent off on Wednesday night for picking up two yellow cards in his side's 1-0 win at the Olympic stadium, an offence which would normally result in a lighter penalty.

But Veira was hit harder for allegedly using foul and abusive language towards the referee.

Inter director Marco Branca said the club would be appealing against the punishment.

Veira was also sent off in the Champions League defeat against Sporting Lisbon last week.

'30 years, 30 goals'

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid's Brazilian star Ronaldo has vowed to score a goal for each year of his life this season as he joined the growing ranks of thirtysomethings at the Spanish giants on Friday.

"30 years, 30 goals" ran the headline in the sports daily AS, in reference to the Brazilian's promise to "train as never before" to score 30 goals compared to just 14 for the Primera Liga runners-up last season.

Ronaldo, who turned 30 on Friday, joins Real's ageing brigade which includes Brazilians Roberto Carlos, 33, and Emerson, 30, Italy's Fabio Cannavaro, 33, England's David Beckham, 31, and Dutch star Ruud van Nistelrooy, 30.

And the local press questioned whether the striker, who earned 10 million euros last season, really has the ability to net the 30 promised as he struggles with weight and form.

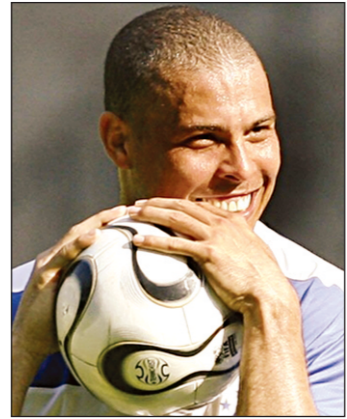
Ronaldo has just returned to training two months after undergoing a knee operation in Brazil and is not expected to be picked by coach Fabio Capello before October. He

has not scored for Real since April 8 last.

Capello has ordered the chubby striker slim down by at least six kilos, and he is now just two kilos short of his target.

Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon remains confident however that their star can regain his top form, telling AS that Ronaldo has "a hugely positive and admirable attitude and is in great form".

But sports daily Marco commented wryly: "He can't eat any birthday cake to mark the occasion."



RONALDO

Bayern victims of World Cup: Rummenigge

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich are victims of their own success with their army of international players suffering from World Cup hangovers, the club's director general Karl-Heinz Rummenigge claimed on Friday.

"It's not just by chance that Bayern, Werder Bremen, Hamburg and Leverkusen aren't at the top of their form at the moment," Rummenigge said.

"I get the impression that the clubs who contributed lots of players for the World Cup are paying a heavy price," he told the side's official magazine.

"This year the internationals only had very short holidays and an insufficient amount of time to prepare."

He suggested that to compensate for the World Cup effect the league season should have been delayed to allow players time to properly recover.

After five games Bayern are sitting third, one point off Hertha Berlin, Werder Bremen, runners-up to Bayern last season, are only ninth, with Bayer Leverkusen in 13th and Hamburg two places behind.

Barca wary of 'black beast' Valencia

AFP, Madrid



Sevilla may be leading the league but there is no doubt that the match of the weekend should be when Barcelona play host to bitter rivals Valencia on Sunday.

Barcelona lie second and Valencia third, both teams still have 100 per cent records and, with two victories apiece, the pair have also won four of the past five Spanish first division titles.

Valencia also have the unusual accolade of going five seasons without losing in the reigning

Spanish and European champions' citadel of their own Nou Camp stadium.

In Spanish parlance, Valencia have become Barcelona's 'bestia negra' which translates as 'the

FIXTURES

(1800GMT kick-off unless otherwise stated) Saturday Real Betis v Real Madrid (2000) Sunday Atletico Madrid v Sevilla (1700), Celta Vigo v Osasuna, Getafe v Athletic Bilbao, Gimnastic Tarragona v Racing Santander, Levante v Deportivo La Coruna, Real Mallorca v Espanyol, Real Sociedad v Recreativo Huelva, Villarreal v Real Zaragoza, Barcelona v Valencia (2000)

'black beast', the terrifying monster that always comes to haunt you.

"We are very motivated to bring their streak to an end," commented Barca's playmaker Xavi Hernandez on Thursday.

"Valencia is always a difficult rival. They have made a good start to the Primera Liga and the Champions League despite having injury problems. As a squad they are very competitive."

"It doesn't matter that this game has come early in the season when not quite so much is hanging on its outcome. It's special, it's going to be entertaining. Everybody wants to play in these sort of games and wants to win as well," added the Spanish international midfielder.

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PHOTO: AFP

Sania Mirza of India plays a forehand against German Sandra Kloesel in the Sunfeast Open in Kolkata on Thursday.

Palermo look to keep momentum

REUTERS, Milan



Top of the table Palermo go into Serie A's fourth round of games on Sunday with a maximum of nine points, as Sicilian football enjoys a rare moment in the spotlight.

For three decades the island's teams have languished in the lower divisions but on Wednesday Palermo went clear at the top of Serie A with a 5-3 derby victory over Catania and head to Empoli on a high.

Catania, who have also impressed, face second-placed Messina in another all-Sicily encounter on Saturday but it is Palermo's start to the season that has caught Italy's attention.

Five different players were on target against Catania, but while Palermo have scored more goals (11) than any other side they also have the worst defensive record -

conceding seven in a record matched only by Reggina.

"We are showing that we are a team that has plenty of sources for goals and which produces good football," said coach Francesco Guidolin after the derby victory.

"But we need to keep our concentration levels higher while keeping our prolific record in front of goal," he added.

While Palermo enjoy their first spell alone at the top of the table, champions Inter are hoping they

can catch up quickly and prove why they were clear pre-season favourites.

Roberto Mancini's side made a stuttering start to the season but on Wednesday they finally looked the part in an impressive 1-0 win at Roma.

Inter will be without Patrick Veira for Sunday's home game with Chievo after the French midfielder was sent off in Rome.

Mancini left out Brazilian striker Adriano, who has looked well short of his best, and opted for Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Hernan Crespo in attack against Roma with the latter grabbing the winner.

Inter and Mancini have already come in for criticism but Wednesday's win will ease some of the pressure.

Juventus's relegation to Serie B and the eight-point penalty inflicted on AC Milan in the match-fixing scandal led to Inter becoming favourites to win the 'scudetto' and their patchy early season form

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