

## Two more years for Becks in Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon said he will offer David Beckham an extension of at least another two years on his current contract.

Beckham has been left out of Steve McClaren's current England squad and lately has not been playing regularly for Real, leading to unfounded speculation last week that he would retire in two years.

Calderon denied those rumours, and said Wednesday that both he and Real coach Fabio Capello wanted the dead ball specialist to stay.

He said: "Beckham is the kind of player who attracts interest from other clubs and I know he has a lot of offers because he is a key player in many ways."

"I think he will sign for two more years, that is to say that he will stay here for this season and two more."

The 31-year-old Englishman's current deal with the Spanish giants runs out at the end of the season, but his spell at Real has been boosted by the backing of Capello.

## Germany's English war!

REUTERS, Berlin

A German magazine has declared war on English-language terms that have infiltrated the country's soccer in recent years and urged Germans to banish some of the Anglicisms that have been creeping into the game.

The Deutsche Sprachwelt magazine published on Wednesday a list of 11 German terms it said German soccer coaches and players should use instead of popular English terms.

The language guardians recommend that Germans use "Torwart" (goal guard) rather than "der Keeper", "Torjaeger" (goal hunter) instead of "der Goalgetter" and "Spielbeobachter" (match observer) rather than "der Scout".

The Erlangen-based quarterly, with a circulation of 80,000, also wants to see "der Referee" replaced with the German term "Schiedsrichter" (judge) and "der Teamsprit" should be Germanised into "Mannschaftsgeist".

"Der Topscorer" should revert to "Torschuetzenkoenig" (goal shooting king) and "der Shootout" has served Germany well in its German original "das Elfmeterschiessen" (11 metre shooting).

## 'Mikel is a disgrace'

AFP, London

Chelsea midfielder John Obi Mikel has been branded a disgrace for his attitude towards the Nigerian national team.

Mikel, 19, missed Nigeria's African Nations Cup qualifier against Lesotho on Saturday due to visa problems, but the Nigerian Football Association (NFA) are furious with the player's lack of commitment to his country.

NFA board member Peter Singabele claims Mikel, who joined English champions Chelsea for 16 million pounds from Norwegian club Lyn Oslo in pre-season, was late informing them of his availability and has no respect for the team.

Singabele told the London Evening Standard: "I have always believed that every young player that wants to make it big in football has to take national assignments seriously."

"He has decided to ignore this, thinking Chelsea would be his last bus stop. The more he continues to shun national calls, the more he loses relevance and respect."

Singabele believes Mikel should follow the example set by the likes of Portsmouth's Nwankwo Kanu and Everton Joseph Yobo, who are both committed to Nigeria despite hectic club schedules.

Singabele added: "Players like Kanu and Yobo, who have seen it all in the English Premiership, were in South Africa with the team."

"That was what I wanted to see Mikel do, but he has chosen the other way which leads to disgrace."



PHOTO: INTERNET

Argentina sensation Lionel Messi (L) slips past the challenge of silky Spain midfielder Xavi during their friendly international in Murcia on Wednesday.

## Spain edge out Argentina

REUTERS, Murcia

After two morale-sapping defeats in Euro 2008 qualifiers, Spain salvaged some measure of pride with an impressive 2-1 win over Argentina in a friendly on Wednesday.

The result will provide some respite for beleaguered coach Luis Aragones, who has come under heavy pressure following his side's recent Euro qualifying losses to Northern Ireland and Sweden.

"I'm happy because we played a

good game, but we also played well against Sweden in the second half," Aragones told Spanish state television.

"It just helps when you get the goals and the result goes your way."

The home side took the lead through a spectacular long-distance drive from midfielder Xavi in the first half but Argentina equalised just over a minute later when substitute Daniel Bilos slotted home from close range after a neat pass from Lionel Messi.

Spain dominated for long periods but did not cash in until striker David Villa converted from the penalty spot after Andres Iniesta had been tripped

in the area by skipper Roberto Ayala, who was making a record-equalling 106th appearance for Argentina.

Coach Alfio Basile has now lost both matches since he took over from Jose Pekerman after the World Cup, his first a 3-0 loss to Brazil in London last month.

Aragones made only minor changes to the team that lost 2-0 to Sweden at the weekend but his side gave a much improved performance, with Barcelona's Andres Iniesta pulling the strings in midfield and creating a host of chances for his forwards.

## Azzurri gather pace

AFP, Tbilisi

Italy's qualification campaign for the 2008 European championships gathered momentum after a far from comfortable 3-1 win over Georgia here on Wednesday.

Daniele De Rossi opened the scoring with a long-range shot, only

for Georgi Shashiashvili to level the score with an equally spectacular strike in a rain-soaked first half.

Shashiashvili hit the post before Georgia had Jaba Kankava sent off in the 60th minute for a second yellow card.

His dismissal proved to be a turning point as Argentina-born midfielder Mauro Camoranesi pounced with a stooping header seconds later, and Simone Perrotta wrapped up the points for the world champions 20 minutes from time.

A second Group B win in five days left Italy with seven points, two behind joint leaders Scotland and France. The Scots lost 2-0 away to Ukraine after three straight qualifying match wins, while France thrashed Faroe Islands 5-0.

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni played down the significance of Scotland's defeat.

"We must only concern ourselves with what we do," he told Italian state broadcaster RAI.

"To come here and get a result may seem easy, but easy it certainly wasn't. In fact there were times when we really suffered."

"We did well to stay patient and win the match, even if the sending-off did give us an advantage."

"I have to congratulate all of my players. They were good enough. As always there are things that we can improve on, but the spirit was right. Now we look forward with confidence."

Italy goalscorer De Rossi admitted Georgia had given them a fright.

"It was difficult. We knew it was going to be and it was," he said.

"I can't imagine what might have happened had they scored rather than hit the post just before half time. But we didn't panic, and obviously the sending-off helped us."

Antonio Di Natale was rewarded for his impressive performance as a second-half substitute in the 2-0 home win against Ukraine last Saturday with a place in Italy's starting line-up in place of Alessandro Del Piero.

Del Piero was part of the squad, but didn't even make the substitutes bench. Luca Toni was employed as a lone striker in a 4-2-3-1 formation.

Italy, who claimed just one point from their first two group matches against Lithuania and France, silenced a raucous home crowd in the 16th minute.

The Georgian defence backed off as De Rossi strode forward, and the Roma midfielder unleashed a swerving, right-footed drive from 30 yards which bounced wickedly in front of keeper Georgi Lomaia before finding the net.

Georgia refused to be intimidated and their boldness paid

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1



PHOTO: INTERNET

Tempestuous Italy midfielder Daniele de Rossi (R) is hugged by defender Alessandro Nesta (C) as captain Fabio Cannavaro looks on after the former scored in their Euro 2008 qualifying match against Georgia in Tbilisi on Wednesday.

## EURO2008 QUALIFYING RESULTS

<b>Group A</b>	Kazakhstan 0 Finland 2 (Litmanen 29, Hyypia 64)	Serbia 3 (Stankovic 54-pen, Lazovic 61, Zigic 92) Armenia 0	Poland 2 (Smolarek 9, 18) Portugal 1 (Gomes 90+2)
<b>Group B</b>	France 5 (Saha 1, Henry 22, Anelka 76, Trezeguet 77, 84) Faroe Islands 0	Ukraine 2 (Kucher 60, Shevchenko 90-pen) Scotland 0	Georgia 1 (Shashiashvili 24) Italy 3 (De Rossi 16, Camoranesi 61, Perrotta 70)
<b>Group C</b>	Malta (Schembri 14, 53) 2 Hungary (Torgbelle 19) 1	Turkey 5 (Sukur 35, 37-pen, 43, 73, Tuncay 68) Moldova 0	Bosnia 0 Greece 4 (Charisteas 9-pen, Patsatzoglou 80, Samaras 84, Vyntra 93)
<b>Group D</b>	Ireland 1 (Kilbane 62) Czech Republic 1 (Koller 64)	Slovakia 1 (Varga 58) Germany 4 (Podolski 13, 72, Ballack 25, Schweinsteiger 36)	Wales 3 (Koumas 33, Earnshaw 39, Bellamy 72) Cyprus 1 (Okkas 83)
<b>Group E</b>	Andorra 0 Macedonia 3 (Pandev 13, Noveski 16, Naumoski 31)	Russia 2 (Pogrebnyak 78, Sychev 90) Estonia 0	Croatia 2 (Eduardo 61, G. Neville-og 69) England 0
<b>Group F</b>	Sweden 2 (Kallstrom 8, Wilhemsson 59) Iceland 1 (Vidarsson 6)	Liechtenstein 0 Denmark 4 (Daniel 29, Jensen 32, Gravgaard 51, Tomasson 64)	Northern Ireland 1 (Healy 35) Latvia 0
<b>Group G</b>	Belarus 4 (Kovba 17, Kornilenko 52, 60, Korytko 85) Slovenia 2 (Cesar 18, Lavric 44)	Luxembourg 0 Bulgaria 1 (Tunchev 26)	Netherlands 2 (van Persie 15, Dede 41-og) Albania 1 (Curri 67)

## Scots grounded in Kiev

AFP, Kiev



Ukraine sank Scotland with a 2-0 victory in Kiev to keep their 2008 European Championship hopes alive in

Group B.

Although the home side had dominated possession throughout the match it took them until the hour mark to break the deadlock through Oleksandr Kucher.

Andriy Shevchenko then scored from the penalty spot on the stroke of full-time to complete the win, shortly after Scotland had been

reduced to 10 men when Steven Pressley was red carded.

Scotland manager Walter Smith was upset his side had lost their 100 percent record in the group but admitted Ukraine probably deserved their victory.

"We are disappointed to lose but we rode our luck a bit when they hit the post and then had another opportunity," said Smith.

"After that I thought we had got over the worst of it but then they scored and we missed our best chance of the match."

"The players cannot be faulted as they again gave everything they had. Sometimes circumstances go for you but tonight they went against us."

In the early stages of the match Ukraine, boosted by the return of Chelsea striker Shevchenko who had recovered from a virus, pushed the Scots back as they looked for an early opener.

However, in the 14th minute Scotland had a chance on the break when Darren Fletcher latched on to Paul Hartley's through pass which put him through on goal.

The Manchester United midfielder had a clear sight at goal but instead opted to pass inside to Celtic striker Kenny Miller who managed only to miss-kick the ball allowing Ukraine's defence to

SEE PAGE 22 COL 2

## Croatia outfox England

REUTERS, Zagreb



A header by Brazilian-born striker Eduardo da Silva and a bizarre own-goal from Gary Neville gave Croatia a deserved 2-0 win over England in their Euro 2008 Group E qualifier on Wednesday.

England keeper Paul Robinson, who almost single-handedly kept Croatia at bay in the first half, was at fault for both goals after misjudging Da Silva's looping header and then completely missing Neville's back pass after it clipped a divot.

Da Silva, who had a quiet first half, broke the deadlock on the hour when he met a deep left-wing cross from Nico Kovac and caught Robinson off his line to delight the

vociferous but well-behaved home crowd.

England fell further behind eight minutes later when Neville's innocuous back-pass bounced awkwardly in front of Robinson, who was attempting to blast it upfield, and trickled into the net past the bewildered keeper who had begun the match hoping to set an England record of seven consecutive clean sheets.

Croatia dominated the match and only a string of good saves by Robinson prevented them going ahead in the first half.

England's 3-5-2 formation with Neville and Ashley Cole playing as wing-backs failed to carve out any clear-cut chances in the first half as a subdued midfield found it difficult to feed strikers Wayne Rooney and Peter Crouch.

Rooney often had to drop into a deeper position to get the ball and his tireless running up and down the pitch was rewarded with a 54th minute chance when he rifled from 15 metres just over the bar. It proved to be England's only serious effort on goal in the match.

Croatia, on the other hand, enjoyed large spells of possession in the opening period and England hung on desperately at times.

Portsmouth midfielder Niko Kranjcar saw three good shots blocked in furious five-minute spell - two by Robinson and one by defender Rio Ferdinand.

Robinson did superbly again straight after the restart to tip over the bar a powerful header from unmarked striker Mladen Petric before his nightmarish eight-minute spell sank the visitors, who had been held to a goalless home draw by Macedonia on Saturday.

Croatia nearly got a third in the 84th minute when defender Josip Simunic headed just over the bar after a good cross from Petric but

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5



PHOTO: AFP

CALAMITY PAUL: England goalkeeper Paul Robinson is absolutely dejected after his gaffe led to a calamitous own goal in their Euro 2008 qualifying match against Croatia in Zagreb on Wednesday.