

2.4m dollars for WC final ball

AFP, Doha

The ball used in this year's World Cup final between Italy and France has sold at auction for a staggering 2.4 million dollars.

Signed by the Italian team which beat France on penalties, it was snapped up by Qatar's emir-in-waiting Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad al-Thani, who will display it at the ASPIRE Academy here during the Asian Games next month, the Asiad website said.

"I was at the World Cup final myself so it has sentimental value for me. I have supported Italy since I was young," he was quoted as saying by local media.

The ball was donated by Asian Football Confederation president Mohammed bin Hammam, who is himself a Qatari.

The money will be donated to the Reach Out To Asia charity initiative which raises funds for the disadvantaged and underprivileged across the region. It was founded by Sheikh Mohamed bin Hamad al-Thani.

Guests at the celebrity charity function in Doha over the weekend included former England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson, Australian singer Natalie Imbruglia, fashion icon Pierre Cardin and supermodel Adriana Karembeu.

Qatar has spent 2.8 billion dollars preparing for the Asian Games which run from December 1-15, with athletes from 45 countries and regions taking part.

Amauri considering Italy switch

AFP, Rome

Palermo's in-form striker Amauri would consider playing for Italy if he is overlooked by Brazil.

The 26-year-old forward, whose four goals this season have helped propel Palermo to the top of Serie A, was born in Brazil but will soon be taking Italian citizenship, enabling him to represent Italy.

"I am Brazilian and my dream is to wear the shirt of the national team, but seven years ago Italy opened its doors to me and allowed me to become the player I am today," Amauri, whose full name is Carvalho De Oliveira Amauri, told the Gazzetta dello Sport's website on Tuesday.

"If Brazil don't value me, just as they didn't value me when I was younger, I would have strong thoughts about playing for Italy."

Asked why he was such a late developer, Amauri replied: "Up until I was 18 years old I didn't play a lot in Brazil, I only played for fun."

Amauri, who joined Palermo from Verona club Chievo for the start of the season, has been one of the outstanding strikers in Serie A so far this season.

Diouf arrested for beating wife

REUTERS, London

Bolton Wanderers's Senegal striker El-Hadji Diouf has been arrested following an alleged assault on his wife Valerie at the weekend.

The 25-year-old forward was later released on bail.

A Greater Manchester Police statement said: "At 6.45am on Sunday 5th November, police were called to an address in Bolton following reports of an assault.

"Officers attended and a 25-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of a Section 47 (Actual Bodily Harm) assault.

"He has since been bailed until Wednesday 8th November pending further enquiries."

Diouf, a former African Footballer of the Year, has been at the Premier League club for more than two years after initially joining on loan in 2004 from Liverpool.

Serie A attendance nosedive

AFP, Rome

Italy may well be world champions, but football fans are staying away from Serie A matches in their droves.

After 10 matches this season, the average attendance of a top flight game has fallen to 19,361 - its lowest figure for 40 years, the La Repubblica newspaper has reported.

The paper also said that Serie A crowds are down by 10,000 compared to figures over the same 10-game period a decade ago.

The slump in gates could be put down to several factors: television, high ticket prices, poor stadium facilities and hooliganism.

The Italian match-fixing scandal - which involves five Italian clubs and resulted in the relegation of Juventus - may have also left fans disillusioned.

Italy's deputy Sports Minister Giovanni Lollini said the government were extremely concerned by the alarming drop in attendances.

"We are working on an extensive project to radically change the situation," he told La Repubblica.



PHOTO: AFP

Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero does a somersault after scoring against Serie B rivals Naples at San Paolo Stadium on Monday.

Juve held at Napoli

INTERNET, undated

Napoli denied Juventus a ninth consecutive League victory when they came from behind to grab a 1-1 draw in the Monday night Second Division clash. Alessandro Del Piero fired his side into the lead with a set-piece magic, before Mariano Bogliacino netted an equaliser just six minutes later.

The biggest game of the Serie B season kicked-off with Napoli looking for their first League win over the Old Lady since Diego Maradona scored twice in a 3-1 win back in 1989-90. The Azzurri started the game with Sam Dalla Bona and Roberto De Zerbi on the bench, while the away side arrived without a host of first team players such as Jean-Alain Boumsong, Robert Kovac, Pavel Nedved, Marco Marchionni and David Trezeguet.

The first half was a relatively even affair with the home side struggling to live up to the expectations of the packed San Paolo, while

Juve themselves only offered a limited threat. Cristiano Zanetti was the first man to try his luck, but his fourth minute drive sailed over the bar.

The Azzurri started the game in energetic fashion yet Del Piero was showing the odd moment of class in attack for the Bianconeri. On 29 minutes he tried his luck with a lob, yet lezzo was alert. The latter was later beaten by a corner, but Mauro Camoranesi failed to take advantage by firing his header over the bar. Claudio Marchisio, arguably the first half's star man, had the last realistic opportunity of the opening period but lezzo blocked his 37th minute effort.

Napoli used the interval to replace a disappointing Cristian Bucchi with Roberto 'Pampa' Sosa. The Argentine, after two early efforts from Del Piero and Matteo Paro, made an instant impression with a header only to see Gigi Buffon deny him. Grava then threatened for Napoli, against a Juve side who had to replace the injured Nicola Legrottaglie with youth team player Paolo De Ceglie, but he failed to connect with a Sosa cross.

It was Juventus who took the lead with a Del Piero classic. The No 10 scored his 203rd Juve goal by floating his free-kick over the wall and into the back of the net. With the Turin giants taking the lead, it wasn't game over. No way as that goal sparked Napoli into life. Buffon had already denied Caliaio and substitute De Zerbi, before the San Paolo erupted with joy. Bogliacino was the catalyst as he netted a 73rd minute equaliser to become the first man to score past Buffon in the League since Week 2.

With Juventus struggling without any recognised central defenders, Napoli could smell victory and Buffon had to be alert on a number of occasions before Caliaio and Del Piero swapped scissor-kick efforts which both finished wide of goal. Marcelo Zalayeta wasted the last opportunity of the game which fairly ended in a draw.

Juventus move on to 17 points, three behind leaders Genoa, while Napoli are just a point shy of the Bianconeri on 16.

Ronaldinho retains FifPro award

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldinho has been confirmed as the FifPro Player of the Year for the second campaign running.

The Barcelona ace, who won the Liga and the Champions League with Barca last season, polled the highest figures from the 43,000 players who were allowed to vote.

Meanwhile, four of Italy's World Cup winning side - Gigi Buffon, Fabio Cannavaro, Gianluca Zambrotta, Andrea Pirlo and Serie A star Kaka were named in the FifPro World XI line-up.

The former Juventus trio of Lilian Thuram, Zinedine Zidane and Thierry Henry were also included in



RONALDINHO

the side. In the other awards on offer, the FifPro Young Player title went to Barcelona and Argentine sensation Leo Messi.

Manchester United's controversial winger Cristiano Ronaldo won the Young Player Fan prize after his World Cup performances. **World XI side:** Buffon (Italy/Juventus); Thuram (France/Barcelona); Cannavaro (Italy/Real Madrid); Terry (England/Chelsea); Zambrotta (Italy/Barcelona); Pirlo (Italy/Milan); Zidane (retired); Kaka (Brazil/Milan); Eto'o (Cameroon/Barcelona); Henry (France/Arsenal); Ronaldinho (Brazil/Barcelona).

Galaxy keen on Becks

AFP, London

The president of American club Los Angeles Galaxy has confirmed interest in former England captain David Beckham of Real Madrid, the BBC reported on Monday.

The 31-year-old Beckham, discarded by England following the summer's World Cup, has expressed his frustration at being on the bench at Real Madrid. On Sunday he came on for just 25 minutes in the 2-1 home defeat to Celta Vigo.

"There are thousands of clubs out there that would love to have a player of his calibre," Galaxy boss Alexi Lalas said. "And the Los Angeles

Galaxy is certainly one of them." Beckham said back in April he was interested in the idea of ending his career in the United States however that preceded his current ousting by England and sidelining by Madrid.

"I've one year left at Real, and maybe two more after that, but things can change in football and the American league does interest me," Beckham has said.

"I want to be part of a country that is passionate about sport. And I've got my academy in LA, which is important to me because that is my life after the game."

Celtic and Spurs had reportedly also been interested in signing Beckham however those clubs have not confirmed the speculation.

"For many people the Los

Angeles Galaxy are looked upon as the jewel of MLS," Lalas added.

"We play in the best stadium, we have had incredible success over the history of the league and we have had great individual players and great teams. This is a tradition of excellence.

"All of this leads to this race to become the first 'MLS super club', if you will.

"That is something we aspire to and in order to do that you have to have quality players, a direction and passion, a good coach and credibility domestically and internationally.

"Signing players of (Beckham's) stature would be a wonderful step in the right direction, not just for the Galaxy but for soccer in America."

Russia drop Smertin

INTERNET, undated

Russia coach Guus Hiddink has dropped long-time national team captain Alexei Smertin for next week's Euro 2008 qualifier away to Macedonia.

The Dutchman also axed Zenit St Petersburg striker Alexander Kerzhakov from the 23-man squad he named on Tuesday for the Group E match in Skopje on November 15.

Smertin has struggled to regain his top form this season after joining Dynamo Moscow from English champions Chelsea on a four-year deal in March.

Kerzhakov, who was top scorer in Russia's premier league just two years ago, has spent much of his time on the Zenit bench this season.

Hiddink also dropped experienced Lokomotiv Moscow playmaker Dmitry Loskov and included newcomers CSKA Moscow full back Ivan Taranov, midfielders Dmitry Torbinsky, Alexei Rebko and defender Roman Shishkin of Spartak Moscow.

The Russians are missing injured Zenit defender Alexander Anyukov while CSKA skipper Sergei Ignashevich is doubtful after hurting his ankle in last Sunday's league match against Zenit.

Russia are in fifth place in Group E behind England, Israel, Croatia and Macedonia with five points from three matches.

Life ban on coach

REUTERS, Moscow

A former coach of Russian third division club Metallurg Lipetsk has been given a life ban from the game after inciting a vicious attack on his players.

A disciplinary committee of the Russian FA on Tuesday suspended Stanislav Bernikov for his role in hiring a gang of thugs who attacked three Metallurg players at the club's training ground on Sept. 16.

Metallurg captain Alexei Morochko suffered the most serious injuries in the attack, spending several weeks in hospital with a broken nose, concussion and a bullet wound in one arm.

A goalkeeper and a defender also suffered minor injuries when four or five thugs attacked them after training.

"After a thorough review of the incident and interviewing several witnesses in the case, it was decided to forbid Stanislav Bernikov from taking part in any activity involving professional football for life," the Russian FA said in a statement on its Web site.

An investigation revealed that the coach and the players had argued about allegations of match-rigging and bribe-taking in Lipetsk, an industrial city about 500 km southeast of Moscow. The gang arrived shortly afterwards.

Given back for Ireland

AFP, Dublin

Newcastle goalkeeper Shay Given is back in the Ireland squad for next week's Euro 2008 qualifier against San Marino following his recovery from a "car crash" stomach injury.

Given missed last month's back-to-back fixtures against Cyprus and the Czech Republic after suffering a small tear in his bowel after colliding with West Ham striker Marlon Harewood in a Premiership match. Doctors likened the injury to one suffered by victims of serious traffic accidents.

Given's Newcastle teammate Stephen Carr and Manchester City defender Richard Dunne are also back in the fold, along with five other players who missed the 1-1 draw against the Czech Republic - Andy O'Brien (Portsmouth), Aiden McGeady (Celtic), Stephen Ireland (Manchester City), Kevin Doyle (Reading) and Stephen Elliott (Sunderland).

Ireland boss Steve Staunton said: "It is good to have so many of the players who missed the game against the Czech Republic back but the young players who played so well that night have ensured that I will have serious choices to make when it comes to selecting the team."

The match against San Marino on November 15 will be Ireland's final game at Lansdowne Road before the old stadium is demolished and rebuilt.

Staunton said: "This will be a special game for us. I know our fans will generate the same fantastic atmosphere and superb support that they delivered in the last game so it should be a night to remember."

Ireland are currently second from bottom of their Euro 2008 qualifying group having taken just one point from their opening three matches. The Czechs top the group by one point from Germany, who have won their opening three matches.

Chelsea face fresh rap

AFP, London



Chelsea could face another dose of disciplinary action over an onslaught on referee Graham

Poll that has been seen as an attack on the official's integrity.

Defender Ashley Cole was widely quoted on Tuesday as claiming that Poll's handling of their defeat by Tottenham on Sunday had been influenced by a preconception that Chelsea were a team with disciplinary problems.

His remarks follow a scathing attack by manager Jose Mourinho, who claimed Poll, who sent off Chelsea skipper John Terry and booked six of his teammates, had been determined to be the "star" of the show at White Hart Lane.

Cole quoted Poll as having told his teammate Frank Lampard: "You need to get in check - and you need discipline."

But referees chief Keith Hackett cast doubt on whether Poll would have made comments that implied he was determined to "teach Chelsea a lesson."

Hackett said: "I have very serious doubts that one of our most experienced and world-class refs would

make that kind of comment.

"It is disappointing. It puts doubt in the public's mind about the integrity of one of my referees but it will be investigated."

Chelsea's allegations will almost certainly lead to disciplinary action by the Football Association if it is shown that Poll did not make any comments about the lines suggested by their players.

Hackett warned: "The player who has made the comments should be aware that the referee, along with his assistant referees, were all wearing microphones.

"My assessor can hear from before kick-off to the end what is being said. If anything untoward was said I will be able to discuss it with Graham's colleagues on the day.

"Already having spoken to one of his colleagues, who was listening, it has been flatly denied.

"I have told Graham not to comment on this matter because it may be investigated by the football authorities."

Cole had been particularly infuriated with a yellow card he received for not retreating quickly enough at a Spurs free-kick.

"With my booking, I said to him, 'I'm more than 10 yards. Why should I go back if I am more than 10 yards?' "And he said, 'Because I said so.' I

said, 'But I'm more than 10 yards,' and that was it. Yellow card. No warning or explanation.

"I'm not moaning, I'm really not, but we really shouldn't lose a game like that.

"Once again we scored a goal that was fine. I've seen it on TV and once again the referee has robbed us again because if we had gone 2-0 then the game would have been dead."

Cole believes that Chelsea, like his previous club Arsenal, are now being singled out by referees because of their success.

"Poll said to Lamps, 'You need to get it in check - and you need discipline.' If you're going to have a ref like that then you know it's not worth playing because you know you're going to get a hard time. The referee watched the Barcelona game and he's had an opinion and I think he's just taken it on himself to prove a point to everyone.

"When I was at Arsenal and we started to win things, the referees started to question our discipline and give us yellow cards. I have come to Chelsea and it's exactly the same.

"It's definitely to do with the team that's winning most. Chelsea are not a dirty team. It's crazy. We have to stick together, put this game behind us, look forward to the next one and win it."

Domenech keen on Higuain

Football

AFP, Paris

France coach Raymond Domenech, who preselected Franco-Argentinian Gonzalo Higuain of River Plate for a friendly against Greece, said he wants to see the midfielder as soon as possible.

However the player himself, speaking to TPS Star television in an interview screened on Sunday, said he had still not decided whether to play for Argentina, as he qualifies for both countries.

"I am French, but I have still not decided what to do," midfielder Higuain told the television station. "I'm only 18 and when I have decided I will make it known. I just want to be sure I make the right choice."

However Domenech, speaking to Eurosport television station in an interview screened on Monday, said: "Yes, I want Gonzalo Higuain, I want to see him. I'm not going to

miss the opportunity to see him as soon as possible."

Higuain last week received a pre-selection from the French Football Federation and Blues coach Raymond Domenech is due to announce the squad for the November 15, Stade de France friendly against Greece on Thursday.

Meanwhile Domenech told Czech press in Prague on Monday he was against the idea of prequalification for European championships and World Cups to cut down the number of matches opposing strong and weak countries.

"Football is about all nations coming together," said Domenech, rejecting the creation of a "second division" of nations to cut down fixtures.

"At the moment, clubs and national teams are clashing but I don't think it is the amount of matches for national teams which is causing problems, it is the amount of club matches."

Come and get me: Lippi

AFP, Prague

Italy's former World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi said Monday he would like to reignite his career in football in the 2007/2008 season.

Lippi quit his post as Italy coach three days after leading the side to victory over France in the World Cup final.

But after a season out in which he has so far rejected more than a handful of offers from Europe and America the 58-year-old is now looking at getting back to the touchline.

"Next year, or more precisely the next season of competition," replied Lippi, when asked on a possible return here at a conference organised by the body which represents football coaches working in Europe.

"I've already received seven or eight offers from Europe and America, but none from Italy, where the season has just begun," he added.

"For the moment I've got no preferences. It could also be that the clubs who have contacted me no longer need me in the next 10 months."

Lippi was replaced as Italy coach by Roberto Donadoni.

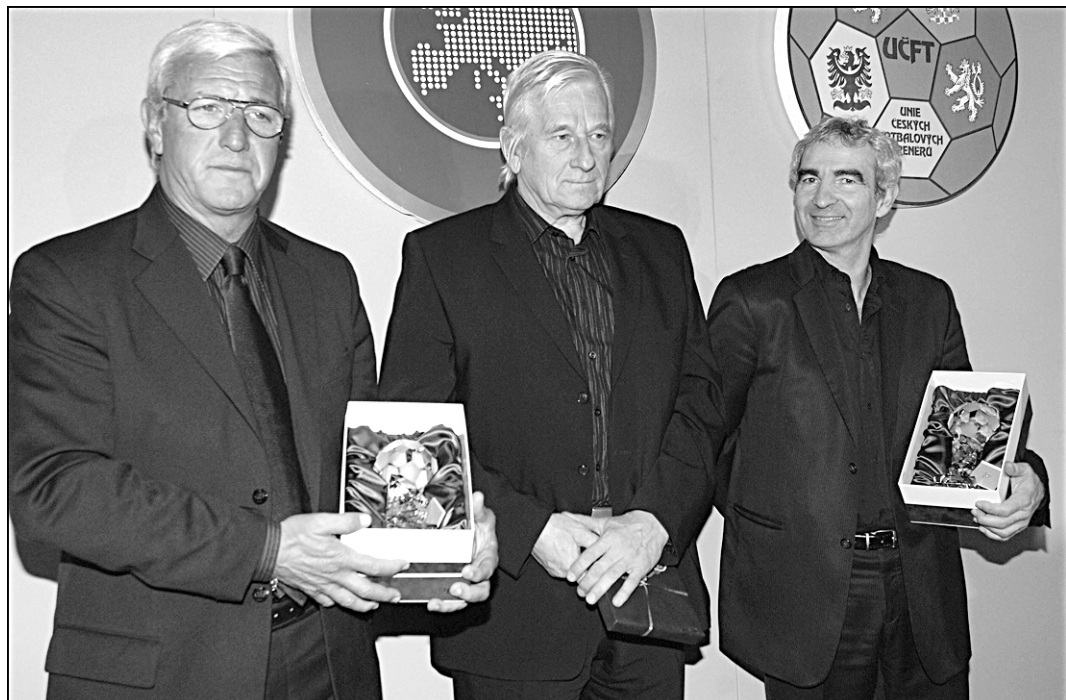


PHOTO: AFP

Former Italy coach Marcello Lippi (L), Czech coach Karel Bruckner and French coach Raymond Domenech (R) pose during the 27th Symposium of the Union of the European Football trainers in Prague on Monday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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LOIT-AFTCRY NITQLR.
 Yesterday's Cryptquip: NO INDIVIDUAL COULD EVER MAKE THE MOUNTAIN REACH ITS PINNACLE. IT PEAKS FOR ITSELF.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: T 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.