

## Tevez apologises for walk-out

AFP, London

Carlos Tevez has apologised to West Ham for leaving Upton Park in response to his substitution during Saturday's 1-0 Premiership victory over Sheffield United.

Argentina striker Tevez was replaced by veteran ex-England international Teddy Sheringham in the 67th minute of the match at West Ham's east London home and reacted by storming down the tunnel and leaving the ground before the final whistle.

Hammers boss Alan Pardew was angered by Tevez's conduct and the player responded Monday by apologising to his manager and his teammates during training. "I would just like to say that I left the ground in anger on Saturday," said Tevez.

"It was a spur-of-the-moment decision, which I regretted almost straightaway. I know I did very wrong in going and I have made it clear to the manager and my teammates that I in no way meant to disrespect them."

Pardew has accepted the apology and will allow Tevez's team-mates to decide on the size of his fine.

"Carlos reported as normal for training this morning and immediately offered his apologies to the players and staff," Pardew said. "He assured me there was no disrespect intended on his behalf to the players, fans or me."

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## Johnson out of United clash

INTERNET, undated

Everton striker Andrew Johnson has been ruled out of his side's trip to face Manchester United on Wednesday night, with a hamstring problem.

The 25-year-old England forward also missed the weekend game at Charlton Athletic, but the Merseyside club's medical staff do not expect the injury to keep him sidelined in the long term.

Manager David Moyes told his club's official website: "He did it in the Bolton game and tried to play on with it."

"We don't think it's too bad, but it doesn't look as if he will play at United."



CANNAV-ORO: Italy's World Cup winning captain Fabio Cannavaro (L) holds aloft his "Ballon d'Or" (Golden Ball) award for European Footballer of the Year trophy as he poses alongside Italian actress Monica Bellucci during the ceremony in Paris on Monday.

## Pearce wants SWP back

INTERNET, undated

Stuart Pearce has admitted he would be interested in bringing Shaun Wright-Phillips back to Manchester City.

The England winger left the Blues for Chelsea in a club record £21million deal 16 months ago but has failed to establish himself at Stamford Bridge.

Wright-Phillips did not even make the bench for Sunday's 1-1 draw with Manchester United and last week, Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon dropped the first hint the Premiership champions would be interested in letting the 25-year-old leave after revealing West Ham had inquired about him.

And Pearce has now confirmed if Chelsea give the green light for Wright-Phillips' departure, he intends to be in the queue to get him.

"If a price was set and Chelsea were prepared to sell him, just think what a big lift it would give everyone here for Shaun to walk back through the door," said Pearce.

"You would have to go some to have a combination of Shaun and Micah (Richards) playing on the same side of the pitch."

"The question is whether Chelsea would want to sell him, after that it is something for our board to decide."

Pearce has twice tried to lure Wright-Phillips back to Eastlands on loan but there has to be a major doubt over whether City could come up with the kind of cash Chelsea would be looking for if they do decide to sell.

In all other aspects though, the deal would be perfect given the admiration City fans still hold for Wright-Phillips, the first member of the Blues academy to make it into the England fold.

And, while his time at Chelsea has been tortuous, culminating in his failure to win a place in Sven-Goran Eriksson's World Cup squad, Pearce is confident he could quickly rediscover the form which got him his move south in the first place.

"I have no doubt about that," he said.

"He is a very level-headed lad. He is the same kid he was when he first broke into the Manchester City team some years ago."

# Cannavaro best in Europe

Football

AFP, Paris

Real Madrid defender Fabio Cannavaro won recognition for his stunning World Cup performance as Italy skipper by winning the prestigious European Footballer of the Year Award (Ballon d'Or) on Monday.

The 33-year-old Neapolitan succeeds Barcelona star Ronaldinho, winner of last year's award, but who placed fourth this time largely as a result of his World Cup performance as Brazil crashed in the quarter-finals to France.

Cannavaro with 173 points took the honour ahead of Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (124) of Italy and Arsenal's French striker Thierry Henry (121).

France's Zinedine Zidane, who retired after reaching the World Cup finals, placed fifth with 71 points.

"I want to thank Real president Raman Calderon and my teammates from Juve and the national team who had an important part to play in my winning this award," said Cannavaro.

"It has a double importance because it's given to the greatest players and as a defender it's rare to have this honour."

"The World Cup in Germany was perfect for a defender. I remember in particular the semi-final against Germany."

Cannavaro said that his personal choice of winner would have been Buffon "because he's a friend and a phenomenon", followed by Henry, who was runner-up in 2003, and Italian midfielder Andrea Pirlo.

"Gigi (Buffon) is in the goalkeepers category but also apart in that he's in a class of his own," said the Real Madrid defender.

"A player like Thierry Henry has incredible qualities. He's been in the running for so many years. This year people said 'that's it, this time he'll have it' but he didn't. I'm sorry but it's not my fault, I'm not the one who votes."

Cannavaro added that his performance with Juventus played a big part in his success.

"Many people analysed my season with Juve in 2005 for this vote. In that season I played 37 matches and scored four crucial goals."

As well as winning the World

Cup, Cannavaro won the Serie A with Juventus in 2004/05 and 2005/06 before they were stripped of those titles and demoted to the second division after being found guilty of match fixing.

He is the fifth Italian to win the Ballon d'Or after Omar Sivori (1961), Gianni Rivera (1969), Paolo Rossi (1982) and Roberto Baggio (1993).

The last defender to win the award was Germany's Matthias Sammer in 1996.

Capped 105 times for Italy, Cannavaro becomes the fifth Real Madrid player to win the award after Hispano-Argentine Alfredo Di Stefano (1957, 1959), Portugal's Luis Figo (2000) and Brazilian Ronaldo (2002).

The 51st Ballon d'Or, organised by French football magazine, France Football, was decided after votes from European football's leading journalists.

But not everyone thought the award had gone to the right recipient.

When Raymond Domenech was asked for his opinion on Canal + television the France manager shrugged: "Fabio Cannavaro is a

good player...but he's not the Ballon d'Or. Thierry Henry was much more decisive throughout the season. I don't understand it."

"For me the true Ballon d'Or is elected on December 18 by FIFA and for me it's evidently Thierry Henry. He's above everyone."

## FACTFILE

**Name:** Fabio Cannavaro  
**Nationality:** Italian  
**Date of birth:** 13 September 1973  
**Place of birth:** Naples  
**Height:** 1.76 m  
**Weight:** 75 kg  
**Position:** Defender  
**Clubs:** Naples (ITA/1991-1995), Parma (ITA/1995-2002), Inter Milan (ITA/2002-2004), Juventus (ITA/2004-2006), Real Madrid (ESP/since July 2006)  
**National caps:** 105  
**Goals scored for Italy:** 1  
**First cap:** 22 January 1997, Italy v Northern Ireland (2-0)  
**Awards**  
 World Cup 2006  
 UEFA Cup 1999  
 Italian Cup 1999

## PAST WINNERS

- List of Ballon d'Or winners
- 1986 - Igor Belanov (Soviet Union)
  - 1987 - Ruud Gullit (Netherlands)
  - 1988 - Marco van Basten (Netherlands)
  - 1989 - Marco van Basten (Netherlands)
  - 1990 - Lothar Matthaus (Germany)
  - 1991 - Jean-Pierre Papin (France)
  - 1992 - Marco van Basten (Netherlands)
  - 1993 - Roberto Baggio (Italy)
  - 1994 - Hristo Stoichkov (Bulgaria)
  - 1995 - George Weah (Liberia)
  - 1996 - Matthias Sammer (Germany)
  - 1997 - Ronaldo (Brazil)
  - 1998 - Zinedine Zidane (France)
  - 1999 - Rivaldo (Brazil)
  - 2000 - Luis Figo (Portugal)
  - 2001 - Michael Owen (England)
  - 2002 - Ronaldo (Brazil)
  - 2003 - Pavel Nedved (Czech Republic)
  - 2004 - Andriy Shevchenko (Ukraine)
  - 2005 - Ronaldinho (Brazil)
  - 2006 - Fabio Cannavaro (Italy)

## CLASSIFICATION 2006

- Classification for 2006 Ballon d'Or
- 1. Fabio Cannavaro (Juventus, Real Madrid) 173 points
  - 2. Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus) 124 pts
  - 3. Thierry Henry (Arsenal) 121 pts
  - 4. Ronaldinho (FC Barcelona) 73 pts
  - 5. Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid) 71 pts
  - 6. Samuel Eto'o (FC Barcelona) 67 pts
  - 7. Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen) 29 pts
  - 8. Didier Drogba (Chelsea) 25 pts
  - 9. Andrea Pirlo (Milan AC) 17 pts
  - 10. Jens Lehmann (Arsenal) 13 pts

# The golden defender

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Italy's World Cup-winning captain Fabio Cannavaro gained individual recognition for his performances in this year's tournament in Germany when he was named European Footballer of the Year on Monday.

The Naples-born central defender moved from Juventus to Real Madrid following the Azzurri's success in July and he finds himself in the unusual position of winning the 'golden ball' in a year when his club side was relegated.

Cannavaro helped Juventus to a second straight Serie A title last season but the Turin club were

stripped of those honours and demoted to Serie B by a sports tribunal which investigated claims of match-fixing.

Italy's success was achieved against the backdrop of that investigation and Cannavaro went into the tournament facing particular criticism after he defended former Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi, who was at the centre of the allegations.

It was unusual for Cannavaro to find himself under fire from the media and public opinion.

Throughout his career his positive demeanour, Mediterranean good-looks and engaging smile have ensured he became one of Serie A's most popular players.

There have been moments where

his clean-cut image has been threatened though -- a television documentary showing him using a drip on the eve of the 1999 UEFA Cup final, when Parma played Olympique Marseille, revealed nothing illegal but was hardly ideal behaviour for a role-model.

In his position as captain of Italy at the World Cup, Cannavaro's behaviour was exemplary. He was firm in the dressing room, intensely loyal to coach Marcello Lippi and not afraid to speak frankly in public about the team's approach.

"We have to start to be the cynical Italians. The secret to going a long way in the tournament is to rediscover some of the typical defensive approach found in Italian football

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## Adu told to snub United

INTERNET, undated

Freddy Adu has been warned off a move to Manchester United by his club coach in the United States.

DC United coach Peter Nowak believes the Ghana-born 17-year-old, who is currently on trial with the Red Devils, could struggle in the rough and tumble of the Premiership and believes he should look to a different club for his first move in Europe.

"He's a young kid and he needs matches," Nowak told The Guardian.

"I think he should go to PSV (Eindhoven) or Ajax or somewhere where they have a tradition of raising young players."

"At a place like Ajax the young kids come through together and they grow up together; the team is shaped around them. In the biggest environment at the club with the biggest budget it will be hard for them to wait for him to develop."

"I still feel he needs the minutes and the experience."



MARCELLO LIPPI

# Lippi believes award deserved

Football

INTERNET, undated

Italy's World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi believes Fabio Cannavaro deserved to pick up the Ballon d'Or.

Lippi was delighted with the news the Italy captain and Real Madrid central defender had been named European Footballer of the Year on Monday, with Azzurri goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon runner-up.

"To have Cannavaro win the award and Buffon finish second is just the cherry on the cake in what has been an exceptional year for us," said Lippi.

"It is as though Cannavaro has collected the award on behalf of all the players that won the World Cup."

Cannavaro became the first defender to win France Football magazine's prestigious award since Matthias Sammer in 1996, edging Buffon and Arsenal and France

striker Thierry Henry, who came in third.

"I am not surprised that the award has been given to a defender," said Lippi. "The award is given to a player who has proved outstanding in a team, regardless of the role he plays."

Juventus keeper Buffon was gracious in defeat for the prestigious accolade, which is voted for by a selection of European football journalists.

"Fabio has won because he was simply the best," he said. "He gave more superior performances than anyone else."

"I really didn't expect to get so close, although I did want to finish in the top three."

The Italy goalkeeper has not given up hope of taking home the award in the future.

"I see no reason why this couldn't happen to me in the future," he added. "I will try, sooner or later it will happen."

# George Best banknotes a hit

Football

AFP, Belfast

One million banknotes bearing the image of George Best went into circulation in Northern Ireland on Monday, the latest in a line of tributes to the late football legend.

People queued from before dawn outside banks, hoping to get their hands on the notes which are already proving a hit on the Internet where some have sold for more than 150 pounds.

The commemorative five-pound (7.4 euros, 9.7 dollars) notes, each

with a unique serial number, are issued by Ulster Bank, one of four banks that issue banknotes in the British-ruled province.

They are timed to coincide with the first anniversary of the death of the province's favourite son.

Former Manchester United and Northern Ireland winger Best died on November 25 last year following a long struggle with alcoholism. Tens of thousands of fans lined the Belfast streets for his quasi-state funeral.

The public clamour for the notes is "almost hysterical", Ulster Bank spokeswoman Joris Minne told AFP.

"People have quickly grabbed all those which were available to order

on the Internet. The rest are available at bank counters."

The "fivers" with the most prestigious serial numbers are already out of circulation. Dickie Best, the footballer's father, has received note number 1000000 while 0000001 has been given to the star's sister Barbara McNarry, secretary of the George Best Foundation charity, which has received a large donation from Ulster Bank.

"We are used to seeing kings and queens on our banknotes but this is the first time we will see a sportsman," McNarry told AFP.

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A handout photo shows a newly printed five pound note bearing images of Northern Irish footballer George Best who died last year in London.

PHOTO: AFP