



PHOTO: AFP
DAYS GONE BY: French legend Zinedine Zidane (R) shares a joke with Brazilian superstar Ronaldo during the FIFA World Player ceremony in Zurich on Monday.

Le Monde to publish corrections

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid said on Monday that French newspaper Le Monde would soon be publishing corrections to a report claiming the club were linked with Dr Eufemiano Fuentes, at the centre of an alleged blood-doping scandal.

Le Monde published an article on December 8 which claimed Real Madrid and three other Spanish clubs -- Barcelona, Valencia and Real Betis -- had used the services of Fuentes, who hit the headlines just before the Tour de France earlier this year when about 50 cyclists were linked with him and taken out of the race.

The four clubs denied the claims of the report as did the Spanish doctor.

"Real Madrid found out, through Le Monde, that the correction will be published in the next few days," the club said.

Le Monde, questioned by AFP in Paris, said they had received from Real Madrid, Valencia and Real Betis correspondence asking for a correction to be published before the end of the year.

Barcelona however have already announced they will be suing.

Fulham compound Boro misery

AFP, London

Fulham eased their relegation worries as goals from Heidar Helguson and Brian McBride secured a 2-1 win against struggling Middlesbrough.

Chris Coleman's side climbed away from the bottom three thanks to Helguson's penalty and a fine finish from McBride, but Middlesbrough, who pulled one back through Australian striker Mark Viduka, are sinking into deep trouble after a sixth game without a win.

Fulham had lost four of their last five matches but they are back on track after punishing some woeful defending from Middlesbrough, who are still to win away this season and are above the relegation zone only on goal difference.

Coleman and Middlesbrough boss Gareth Southgate are firm friends after spending several years together as players at Crystal Palace.

But there was no room for sentiment at Craven Cottage as both managers desperately

needed a win to pull clear of the relegation fight.

It was Southgate's team who were more inventive early on and Antti Niemi, playing for the first time since undergoing knee surgery last month, saved well to keep out James Morrison's shot after the young winger sprinted past three defenders.

However Fulham quickly got into their stride and went ahead after 12 minutes as Moritz Volz caused panic in the Middlesbrough defence.

The German midfielder was granted space to burst into the area and he won a penalty as George Boateng clumsily clipped his right ankle.

Helguson stepped up to roll the spot-kick past Mark Schwarzer for his third goal of the season.

Middlesbrough threatened to draw level through Aiyegbeni Yakubu as the Nigerian striker's powerful run ended with a swerving shot that Niemi turned away for a corner.

But Fulham always looked dangerous on the break and they went two goals in front in the 35th minute.

Tomasz Radzinski's pass picked out McBride on the edge of the area and, with Middlesbrough backing off, the American looked up and curled a shot that deflected off Chris Riggott as it flew past Schwarzer.

Middlesbrough, without first-choice centre-backs Jonathan Woodgate and Robert Huth, were unconvincing in defence and McBride flashed a shot just wide as the visitors were caught out again.

Helguson nearly got his second goal in the 64th minute as he looped a header goalwards from Liam Rosenior's cross, but Schwarzer managed to claw it to safety.

Just as Middlesbrough looked to have run out of ideas, they were gifted a goal in the 74th minute as Niemi's goal-kick only reached Yakubu. The forward's header found Viduka and he kept his composure to lift a shot over the Fulham keeper.

Middlesbrough laid siege to Fulham's goal in the closing minutes and Yakubu went close with a header, but the hosts were able to hold on for a crucial win.



PHOTO: INTERNET
Fulham's German right back Moritz Volz (R) gets to the ball ahead of Middlesbrough left winger Stewart Downing during their Premier League encounter at Craven Cottage in London on Monday.

FA charge Wenger

AFP, London

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger was on Monday charged by the Football Association with improper conduct for his behaviour at half-time of their weekend match at home to Portsmouth.

Wenger was sent from the technical area for the second half of Saturday's Premiership match which ended 2-2 after his confrontation with referee Steve Bennett.

Wenger was unhappy about the free-kick which led to Noe Pamarot's opener in first-half stoppage time at the Emirates Stadium and after complaining to the fourth official he continued his argument as he headed down the tunnel.

The French coach was sent to the stands for the rest of the match by Bennett. Wenger's latest charge comes just four days after being fined 10,000 pounds and warned as to his future conduct after his bust-up with former West Ham manager Alan Pardew.

The Arsenal boss has until January 5 to respond to the charge.

Kahn eyeing retirement

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn re-affirmed his intention to retire at the end of the season if the Bundesliga side win the Champions League, added he would definitely quit in 2008 when his contract runs out.

"If we were to win the Champions League this season, it's quite possible I'll retire on the spot," Kahn, 37, told German television.

"I want to try to quit at the top, I want to have the feeling of being at the peak. I definitely don't want to hang on to the point where people are saying: 'Send that old guy home'."

Kahn says he does not know what he will do after quitting.

"I really don't know" said the keeper, who retired from international competition in July after helping Germany beat Portugal with a strong performance in the match for third place at the World Cup finals.

Kahn joined Bayern in 1994 and has since won the Champions League and seven league titles as well as two Germany Player of the Year awards. He also won the FIFA Golden Ball award for most outstanding player at the 2002 World Cup finals.

Bayern have been drawn to play Real Madrid in the first knockout round of the Champions League in February.

Matrix accused of provocation

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan defender Marco Materazzi, who was headbutted in the chest in the World Cup final by Zinedine Zidane, was on Monday accused of provocation by Messina president Pietro Franza.

Franza referred to incidents concerning Materazzi giving a light head butt to Messina defender Marc Zoro and then squaring up to Messina coach Bruno Giordano during Inter's 2-0 win at the weekend.

"Materazzi has been, as usual, very provocative," Franza said. "We have already seen what happened at the World Cup with Zidane. I don't want to put what happened here on the same scale but he really provokes people."

France's Zidane was dismissed in the second period of extra time from the July 9 World Cup final in Berlin for the headbutt on Italy's Materazzi, which stunned millions of fans watching the match live around the world.

Marta is Women's Player of the Year

AFP, Zurich

Brazilian international Marta won the FIFA Women's World Player of the Year award on Monday.

Marta, 20, was making her third consecutive appearance at the award ceremony in Zurich, despite her youth, after helping Brazil win silver at the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004.

The Brazilian striker headed US veteran Kristine Lilly, 35, who passed the 300 national caps mark this year -- a record for any player -- and Germany's midfielder Renate Lingor.

Marta plays for Swedish club Umea, because the game in Brazil has yet to reach professional status for women.

"I play in the national team, but you must take into account that in Brazil you have people who know how to run a team, but there is not much interest in women's football," Marta said shortly before the award ceremony.

"Perhaps the CBF (federation) should speak to the clubs about forming a league in Brazil," she added.

Cannavaro wants Champions League

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Cannavaro has set his sights on winning the Champions League after being named the FIFA World Player of the Year on Monday night.

The Real Madrid and Italy defender capped an impressive year by beating Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldinho to the top honour at the FIFA World Player Gala in Zurich.

Cannavaro adds the trophy to his World Cup winner's medal and Ballon D'Or from this season, but there is still one important honour missing from the 33-year-old's collection -- the Champions League.

"Before hanging up my boots I hope to win that fantastic competition and get my hands on the trophy," he told FIFA.com.

"We've got a very strong team at Real Madrid this term and on our day we can beat anybody. I'm very confident that we're going to win things this year."

Real will play Bayern Munich in

the Champions League last-16 when the tournament resumes in February.

However, even if Real can go all the way, Cannavaro will not be able to top the season he has just had - highlighted by him captaining Italy to World Cup glory in Germany in the summer.

He would have added another Serie A winner's medal to his collection but for the match-fixing scandal which saw Juventus stripped of their title.

"It's been an incredible year," Cannavaro said. "I've won so much this past 12 months that it's going to be a very hard act to follow."

"I think that it's been the most important year of my career so far. Without a doubt, winning the World Cup was the high point, that's the pinnacle for any player."

Italy went into the tournament with several players facing uncertain futures as the scandal raged at home.

But the situation seemed to galvanise the squad, who became determined to do what they could to repair Italian football's reputation

abroad.

"I was totally convinced that we were going to win," Cannavaro said. "When I looked into my team-mates' eyes, I could see they had an extra edge, something different to previous tournaments."

"During qualifying we felt we had a strong side, but on this occasion it was more than that, there was a determination there I'd never seen before."

It was Juve's relegation to Serie B for their role in the match-fixing that prompted Cannavaro's summer move to Madrid, where he was quickly reunited with his coach from Turin, Fabio Capello.

"It was a tough decision (to leave) because I was very happy in Turin," he said.

"I liked the city, the fans adored me and they'd given me their unconditional support. But I also felt that at the age of 33 there were a number of things that I still wanted to achieve in football."

"It would have been great to play for Juve in Serie B, but I wanted to finish my career at a certain level. I also felt ready for a new challenge."

Inter looking to continue run

AFP, Rome

Leaders Inter Milan face a potentially awkward fixture away to fifth-placed Lazio on Wednesday as the reigning champions go in search of their 10th straight Serie A win.

The Italian pace-setters maintained their seven-point lead over closest rivals Roma last Sunday after defeating Messina 2-0 for a club record ninth straight victory. It also left them two wins short of Roma's record of 11 straight Serie A successes that was set last season.

Inter will fancy their chances of setting a new benchmark, but their coach Roberto Mancini cares not for the record books.

"For me it's not important, they're just statistics," said the 42-year-old who helped Lazio win the league title in 2000 and was their coach between 2002 and 2004.

"Our target is to win the title and

that's the only thing that interests me. I don't care how we do it."

Inter, who after tackling Lazio host Atalanta in their last match before the winter break, are unbeaten in Serie A for 18 matches, their last defeat coming away to Empoli last season on April 30.

Lazio, who were deducted three points for their role in the Italian match-fixing scandal, have lost just once at home this season and have let in just three goals in their seven matches played at their Olympic stadium.

Roma, who thrashed third-placed Palermo 4-0 last weekend, visit a rejuvenated Torino whose recent good form has lifted them out of the relegation zone and into

contention for a European place.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti believes his side are still in with a shout for the championship, despite being seven points off the pace.

"Inter will eventually hit a bad patch and we must make sure that we are not far behind them so that we can take full advantage of the situation," he said.

"Against Palermo we were almost perfect. The players fought for everything and it's that kind of determination that I want to see from them every week."

"If we can show that kind of character every week, then there's no reason why we can't catch Inter."

AC Milan, weighed down by an eight-point penalty for their match-fixing crimes, play at home to fourth-placed Catania, the dark horses from Sicily who are unbeaten at home but have won just two of their eight away games.

Down at the bottom, Reggina, handicapped by an 11-point match-fixing penalty, visit Chievo for a relegation scrap.

FIXTURES	
(all 1930 GMT kick-off)	
AC Milan v Catania, Atalanta v Udinese, Cagliari v Fiorentina, Chievo v Reggina, Empoli v Siena, Lazio v Inter Milan, Messina v Parma, Palermo v Ascoli, Sampdoria v Livorno, Torino v Roma	



PHOTO: INTERNET
FIFA women's World Player of the Year Brazilian Marta (R), second placed Renate Lingor from Germany and third placed Kristine Lilly from USA (L) with their trophies during the FIFA World Player Gala in Zurich on Monday.

Headbutt leaves wrong image

Football

INTERNET, undated

It was the Shot Seen 'Round The World.

In the world's biggest game, on its biggest stage, Zinedine Zidane of France provided a moment that will reverberate throughout sports history.

Considering that the dazzling Frenchman is arguably the finest player of his generation, a three-time FIFA World Player of the Year and a man who guided his country to the World Cup in 1998, it came as no surprise that Zidane emerged as the most unforgettable figure of the 2006 event.

That his actions cast a pall over what had been a brilliantly staged tournament - and occurred before a worldwide viewing audience estimated at over 1 billion, - brought out emotions ranging from disheartening to disbelief to downright shock.

With France locked in a tense 1-1 duel with Italy and the teams just 10 minutes from penalty kicks to decide sport's most coveted trophy, Zidane did the unthinkable.

Walking upfield, he suddenly turned, took three steps and, in a surreal moment, delivered a crushing head-butt to the chest of Marco Materazzi, sending the Italian defender sprawling to the pitch.

Zidane, who already announced his retirement prior to the World Cup, earned a red card and an automatic ejection from the final international match of his life.

It was a stunning act, rarely seen at any level of sport, and one that made the soccer world stand still.

Tony DiCiccio, the coach of the United States women's team that captured 1999 World Cup, could not believe what he had seen.

"I was amazed," DiCiccio said. "That he let words... that he lost his composure in the biggest game played every four years - bigger than the Olympics - it was unfortunate. It couldn't have come at a worse time."

"I don't know what was said, but you have to contain yourself."

Therein lies the most perplexing aspect of the incident - what could possibly provoke such an action by a man of Zidane's stature at such a critical juncture of a game where the stakes could not be any higher?

There is little precedent for such an egregious error. One can barely comprehend the ramifications if a superstar in another sport committed a similar transgression.

Think Michael Jordan slapping an opposing player in overtime of Game Seven of the NBA Finals. Derek Jeter charging the mound in Game Seven of the World Series. Terrell Owens ... never mind, bad example.

Simply unimaginable.

And as DiCiccio pointed out, it was not as if Materazzi viciously slapped or kicked Zidane, which may have prompted - although not necessarily warranted - an immediate response.

Zidane had taken at least three steps past the Italian before walking back and delivering the most lethal head-butt by a Frenchman since Andre The Giant floored Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania III in 1987.

"In a word, unprofessional," DiCiccio said. "To lose his focus and professionalism at a critical time of the game... Everyone has their breaking point and their trigger point."

What was said? Zidane claimed Materazzi insulted his mother and sister, which the Italian initially denied. Two months later, Materazzi admitted he had made a taunting remark about Zidane's sister, unaware that he even had a sibling.

In the frenzied aftermath of the incident, television stations hired lip readers to study the tape, making it the most scrutinized blow to the chest since Janet Jackson's infamous "wardrobe malfunction" during halftime of Super Bowl XXXVIII.

The biggest question: Did

PHOTO: INTERNET

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