

Lazio offers more money for Anelka

ROME, July 16 (AP): Trying to end of the longest negotiations ever for the transfer of a soccer player, Lazio of Rome has raised its offer to buy French striker Nicolas Anelka from Arsenal, Italian sports papers said Friday.

The Serie A team owner Sergio Cragnotti has reportedly offered 20 million pounds (\$31.3 million dollars) to the English club, Gazzetta dello Sport reported, plus the player's fee and the agent's commissions.

Under Cragnotti's previous bid, Arsenal was to get 18 million pounds (\$28.2 million dollars).

The new offer reportedly came after Anelka's agents agreed to reduce their demands for commission.

Anelka appears eager to come to Rome.

"I hope I will play with Lazio next season," the 20-year-old player said in a statement released Thursday in Paris.

He was supposed to make a trip to Rome on Friday, but the visit was called off at the last minute.

Anelka confirmed meeting French lawyer Jean-Louis Dupont to discuss the possibility of ending his contract with Arsenal, feeding speculation that he might want to bring action against the Gunners before the European Court of Justice.

Dupont was the lawyer for Jean-Marc Bosman, the Belgian player whose 1995 case revolutionised the world's top leagues by creating what amounts to a "free agency" for players.

Anelka, who moved to Arsenal in 1996-97 from Paris Saint Germain, has repeatedly said he doesn't like living in London. He has refused to go to Juventus, which was also trying to buy him.

"I formally rule out the possibility of making a contract with this team," Anelka said of Juventus. "Negotiations conducted by Arsenal in this respect have no grounds and I invite my employer to end them immediately and for good."

Inter's French fascination

MILAN, July 16: Inter Milan celebrated Bastille Day this week by presenting their eighth French-speaking signing, defender Cyril Domoraud, a record showing in the history of the Serie A, reports AFP.

Not content with that, the club are also negotiating the arrival of another Frenchman, AS Roma's left wing-back Vincent Candela, as coach Marcello Lippi puts together a francophone defence for next season.

Newcomers Domoraud and Laurent Blanc were the central defensive partnership last season at Olympique Marseille, and will join Mickael Sylvestre and Zoumana Camara, who is back from being on loan to Empoli.

Sebastian Frey is the reserve goalkeeper and the club have two more Frenchmen in midfield -- Benoit Cauet and Ousmane Dabo, who is back from loan to Vicenza -- plus World Cup star Youri Djorkaeff, who plans to leave Inter but hasn't yet found a new club.

Domoraud, who plays international football for the Ivory Coast, but who has lived in France since boyhood and holds a French passport, has already had a taste of playing against Italian opposition.

Marseille squeezed past Bologna in last season's UEFA Cup semi-finals, before being demolished by Parma in the final in Moscow.

"Bologna were a good side and really made us sweat," said Domoraud. "Then we came up against Parma, and they were even better."

"After all that, I've realised that every Sunday now is going to be a battle. The best strikers in the world play in the Serie A, but then so do the best defenders," he said.

As for the future, after Inter Milan's season of misery ended without a place even in the UEFA Cup, he told the Gazzetta dello Sport: "The fact that we won't be playing in Europe will be an advantage."

Lara, Chavez shown no mercy

ASUNCION, July 16: The South American Football Confederation (CSF) on Tuesday discarded Mexican arguments that two of their players failed a doping test because they had eaten contaminated food, reports Reuters.

Paulo Cesar Chavez and Raul Lara were banned for the rest of the tournament on Friday after testing positive for mandrolone and testosterone respectively following the 2-1 defeat by Brazil on July 3.

Mexico team doctor Jose Luis Serrano argued that his squad was clean, that the substances could only be administered with a high degree of specialisation and it was likely they had been found after being used in the production of meat eaten by the players.

But his arguments were refuted by Marco Testera, head of the CSF's doping commission, who said that between four and six times the normal limits of the banned substances had been found in the tests.

The CSF will meet Saturday to consider extending the ban on the two players.

Mexico had reached the semifinals of the tournament and face Brazil today.

Clowd over Asian football



TOKYO, July 16: In 2002, Asia will host its first World Cup. But the way things are going, co-hosts South Korea and Japan may be the only Asian teams there, reports AP.

Outraged by what they see as a snub to the world's most populous region, representatives of Asian soccer have announced they will boycott the qualifying rounds unless they are granted a fifth berth in the finals.

And that has so outraged soccer's governing body that there is speculation they might move the next World Cup out of Asia entirely, perhaps to England, or even the United States.

"We've been working so hard. We just refuse to believe it's going to come to all that," said Suburo Yamamoto, an official of Saitama Prefecture, a state near Tokyo where some of the games are to be played.

The battle over berths is hardly the first problem that has beset the 2002 Cup.

From the start, the preparations have been overshadowed

by the logistical difficulties of coordinating the games in two nations — nations that at times aren't even on very friendly terms.

The birth problem is rooted in the unprecedented co-hosting arrangement as well.

Host nations get automatic berths, so Asia has two guaranteed slots for the next World Cup. But that leaves only two berths for the remaining 43 Asian nations.

UEFA, Europe's governing body, offered half of one its berths to Asia — meaning that the 14th-place team in European qualifying would face the third-place team in Asian qualifying for a spot in the final round.

But that wasn't enough for the Asians who walked out of a July 9 meeting of FIFA, soccer's ruling body, in Los Angeles.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter was infuriated by the walkout. "This shows no respect to the institution called FIFA,"

Japanese soccer officials say they hope FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation will be able to work things out.

"I am going to be so sorry if our Asian colleagues boycott Asia's first World Cup," said Japan Football Association President Shunichiro Okano.

Ryo Nishimura, spokesman for the World Cup organising committee in Tokyo, says the problem is between the AFC and FIFA — and definitely not something the committee wants to get involved with.

Japanese and South Korean officials opted to walk out with the Asian members. But the situation presented quite a dilemma.

"We are host nations. Yet we are also members of AFC. It's extremely delicate," said Japan Football Association

spokesman Hide to Teshima.

South Korean and Japanese soccer officials are careful to play down the prospect that they may lose the tournament.

"We don't take such speculations seriously. In fact, it's so absurd it's not even worth commenting on," Koran Football Association spokesman Song Kil-yong said in Seoul, South Korea.

Soccer fans, however, are genuinely worried.

"It won't be as great an event if the Asian teams don't come," said 25-year-old cafe manager Takeo Kiuchi, who has travelled around the world to see the Japanese team play. "Why would I want to go to England to see the World Cup? I've been dreaming of seeing the World Cup in Japan."

Kunishige Kamamoto, a lawmaker and former soccer player who is the Japan Football Association's vice president, says the berth allocations reflect the fledgling level of Asian soccer.

South Korea has gone to five World Cups but has never won a game. Japan made its World Cup debut only last year.

Before offering half of one of its berths to Asia, Europe had 15 of the World Cup's 32 berths, although France has an automatic berth as defending champion.

Even South America, whose players are among soccer's greatest, has been reduced from five to 4 1/2, requiring a match with the Oceania champion for the fifth berth.

"Asia has 50 years to go, maybe 100 years, before one of its nations can hope to win the World Cup," Kamamoto said. "Asian soccer is simply not up to world level yet."

WPC starts legal action

SYDNEY, July 16: The American company which arranged to supply school marching bands for the Sydney Olympics has started court action against Games organisers SOCOG, reports AP.

World Projects Corporation (WPC) commenced proceedings in the New South Wales Supreme Court on Friday against SOCOG and its president Michael Knight.

The company is claiming a breach of contract after SOCOG dumped the 1,300 students from California and Georgia in the United States, and 200 from Japan, from the opening ceremony following a public backlash in Australia.

A compromise deal has been put to the marching bands but was rejected by Californian members this week.

"SOCOG's objective has always been to negotiate the best solution for all parties," Knight said in a statement Friday.

"This has been expressed to WPC and continues to be our view notwithstanding the provocative nature of their court action. Neither SOCOG

nor I will be intimidated in this way from representing the interests of the Australian community."

He said the compromise for band members to play at locations other than the opening ceremony was still an option.

SOCOG marketing chief John Moore has spent the last few days in California unsuccessfully trying to convince band leaders and members to accept a compromise deal that would have them performing at prominent Sydney sites such as the Opera House.

The legal action took SOCOG by surprise as band leaders seemed satisfied with the compromise after meeting with SOCOG chief executive Sandy Holloway in Sydney last week.

The action was, however, flagged at a meeting of more than 300 parents and students at San Diego's Eastlake High School gym Wednesday night.

"Even if you offer 1 million dollars to each student, I'm not prepared to accept any compromise," said Tushar Shah, father of two San Diego area band members.

"I think a signed contract is a signed contract. It is a legal

document," said parent Carol Jennings. "It should be binding. They shouldn't be able to change their minds and uninvite you and change the rules halfway through the game."

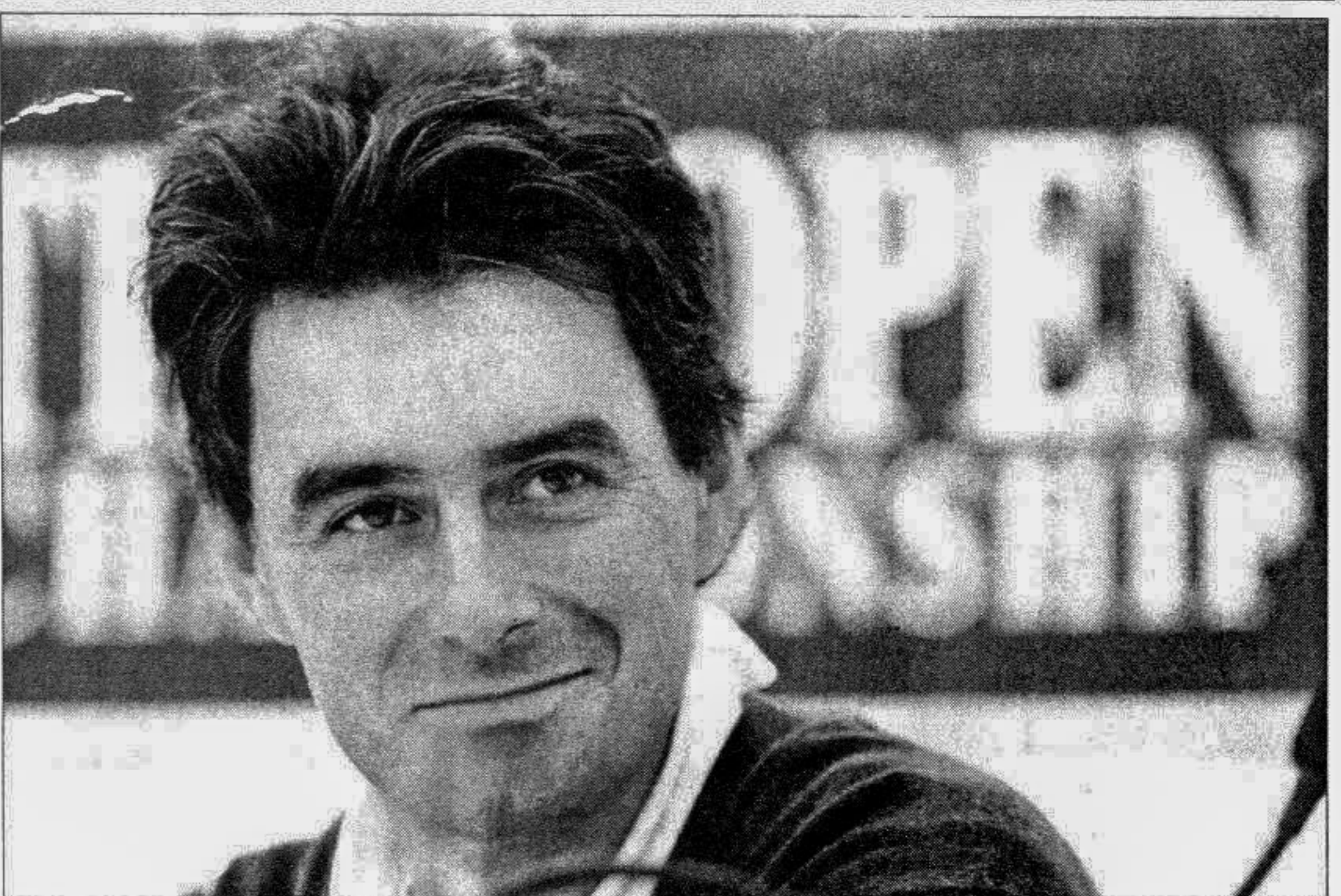
Meanwhile, another report from Melbourne says the Melbourne Cricket Ground surface will be re-laid to avoid controversy at the Olympic Games soccer tournament.

Australian coach Raul Blanco and Manchester United Assistant Steve McClaren were both critical of the surface after United's 2-0 exhibition win.

Players slipped and tripped on the uneven surface and Blanco said Melbourne should forget about using the MCG as an Olympic soccer venue unless there was a vast improvement in the condition of the surface.

Melbourne is set to host eight matches at next year's Olympics.

Victoria state sports minister Tom Reynolds said the pitch would be covered with a superior surface and would be up to Olympic and FIFA standards in time to kick off the Games. He said the plan was in place before Thursday night's match.



Present leader of the British Open Golf Championship Jean Van De Velde smiles during a media conference after his second round at Carnoustie yesterday. —AFP photo

British Open

De Velde leads the pack

CARNOUSTIE, Scotland, July 16: Frenchman Jean Van De Velde put himself on top of the Open Championship leaderboard with a stunning three-under par 68 here on Friday, reports AFP.

Weller put behind bars

KARLSRUHE, Germany, July 16: Former lightweight European boxing champion Rene Weller was jailed for seven years on Friday after a German court found him guilty of selling around seven kilograms of cocaine, reports Reuters.

Weller, 45, was found guilty of selling drugs with a street value of around 70,000 marks (\$36,510 dollars) between 1992 and 1994. He was also found guilty of falsifying documents, handling stolen goods and arms offences.

German champion in 1981, he won the European lightweight title in 1984 and 1988 and made his last professional appearance in 1993, after 53 fights of which he won 50.

And with the wind getting up the 33-year-old is almost certain to be the half-way leader come Friday night.

The nearest to him is Sweden's Jesper Parnevik who is two-over but still with five holes to play over the tough finishing stretch.

Van De Velde has his eyes firmly on the Auld Claret Jug. "It is great to see my name on top of the leaderboard today but it will be even better if it is still there when I walk down the 18th on Sunday," he smiled.

"It would be great for the sport in France if I can win," said the Geneva-based Van De Velde.

The last Frenchman to win the Open was Arnaud Massy in 1907 at Hoylake.

"You could say it was time for another French win," said Van De Velde.

His second-round score over the toughest course in Open history was as near perfection as has been seen here this week.

With only one bogey on his card, Van De Velde thanked his putter for steering him into the lead.

"I hit a lot of good shots but I also sank a lot of good putts. I

was in danger a couple of times but each time the putts fell."

"I have been playing well this year but it hasn't quite gone my way. I am trying to go forward," added Van De Velde, who has only won once on the European Tour — the Rome Masters in 1993.

One shot behind Van De Velde is Argentina's Angel Cabrera with a two-round total of 144.

Two shots back are Tiger Woods and Greg Norman.

Graf not quitting yet?

BERLIN, July 16: Germany's former world number one Steffi Graf has denied she is ready to retire at the end of the season, the DPA news agency reported here on Wednesday.

"Until now I've just said that I will not play at Paris (French Open) and at Wimbledon," said 30-year-old Graf.

Breaking the sex barrier

LONDON, July 16: A 15-year-old schoolgirl is on the verge of making history by breaking into England's under-15 boys' cricket team, reports AP.

It was only last year that the Marylebone Cricket Club, the game's last bastion of male exclusivity and cricket's former world governing body, voted to admit women as members for the first time.

But now Laura Harper, a spin bowler from Cornwall, is poised to become the first girl to play at the under-15 boys' level.

She's already reached the penultimate selection phase after being named in the West of England boys team, and England coach Paul Farbrace is, by all reports, a huge fan.

England Cricket Board spokeswoman Cath Harris said there were no rules preventing Harper from being selected for an England boys team.

"She's a very talented off-spinner and the rules allow for it at age 15 for her to play for the England team," Harris said. "And she's a good chance on merits." Paul Farbrace thinks, "She's got a lot of potential."

Harper took up the sport at age eight when her mother suggested she go to a local club to find something to occupy her time. And she played the bulk of her cricket with the boys ever since.

She's already achieved representative honours in the women's game, earning a berth in the England under-17 squad.

On Saturday she's scheduled to fly out with the England A squad for the European Cup in Denmark.

Harris said England had a "good crop of young female cricketers coming through."

Charlotte Edwards, 19, scored a maiden test century for England in the one-off test against India on Thursday, while 18-year-old Sarah Colley is also in the English lineup.

"There's more chances for girls to play cricket these days, even in the primary schools with Kwik Cricket, and girls like Laura are showing how talented the girls can be," Harris said.

Matthaeus to regain German captaincy

BERLIN, July 16: Football legend Lothar Matthaeus, who has a world record 136 international caps, is set to regain the German captaincy, Berlin newspaper Tagesspiegel reported on Thursday, reports AFP.

German coach Erich Ribbeck was quoted as saying he would probably give the captain's armband to Matthaeus in the absence of striker Oliver Bierhoff at the Confederations Cup in Mexico which begins later this month.

The 38-year-old has already captained Germany 67 times up to December 1994 and then temporarily replaced Bierhoff for their trip to the USA in February.

"Lothar is completely oriented towards the social side of being a captain," Ribbeck said. "He knows how to help the young players, not out of vested interests, but from an attitude of good team spirit."

Ribbeck also virtually assured the Bayern Munich defender a place in the Euro 2000 finals in Belgium and Holland even if he goes to play for New York before then.

Matthaeus holds the record of playing in 25 matches spread over five World Cup finals from 1982 to 1998, including a win as skipper in 1990 in Italy.

Matthaeus also told German football magazine Kicker he could envisage becoming national coach one day. "If Erich Ribbeck steps in four to six years, I could imagine it," Matthaeus said.

France bank on Pioline

PAU, France, July 16: France are relying on first round hero Cedric Pioline to see them through their Davis Cup quarterfinal against Brazil, which begins here on Friday, reports AFP.

Pioline's efforts saw France through against Holland in Nimes in April but he has suffered from inconsistency since.

He won the Nottingham tournament on the run-up to Wimbledon, where he was a quarterfinalist, but lost in the first round at Gstaad last week in results which sum up his up-and-down season.

Sebastien Grosjean plays the first singles against Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten followed by Pioline against French Open semifinalist Fernando Meligeni.

Del Piero set to return

CHATILLON, Italy, July 16: Italy striker Alessandro Del Piero is expected to make his comeback for Juventus on Monday after being sidelined for eight months with a knee injury, reports AFP.

Italian media said Del Piero would play in a friendly against a local side at the Turin side's summer training camp in the Alps.

Del Piero has not played since he tore ligaments in his left knee during a league match on November 8.

His injury came just as he appeared to be returning to form after shaking off an adductor muscle injury which wrecked his World Cup finals in France.

Chinese feel cheated



BEIJING, July 16 (AP): Three slightly blurred photos have left China with a sense that it may have been robbed of possible victory in the Women's World Cup.

The photos show US goalkeeper Briana Scurry moving forward to save a penalty by Chinas Liu Ying in the nail-biting shootout that decided the championship match after 120 minutes of goalless play. Scurry's lunging save opened the door for her team to win the shootout 5-4 for the cup.

Even before the match, Chinese media wondered whether calls would be fair in the final seen by some fans as a grudge match. A victory, they felt, might help avenge NATO's May 7 bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia.

The frame-by-frame images of Scurry taking a few steps forward before Liu kicked her penalty made the loss that much harder to swallow.

America's goalkeeper broke the rules," screamed the Beijing Morning Post in a headline above the photos.

Soccer rules forbid 'keepers from moving off the line before a penalty is taken. The referee's failure to blow the whistle on Scurry and allow Liu to retake the penalty "caused the Chinese team to 'wrongly' occupy second place," it claimed.

Adding to the perceived injustice was Scurry's admission to the Los Angeles Times, like the photos widely published by Chinese state-run media, that she knew she was breaking the rules.

But Chinese soccer authorities have decided to let the matter rest.

"The referee's decisions are final. An appeal could not alter the result," state media quoted Wang Junsheng, a vice chairman of China's Soccer Association, as saying.

Wang was also forgiving about a chance China had to clinch the game in extra time. Fan Yunjie drove a header toward the goal that American midfielder Kristine Lilly cleared off the line.

Chinese newspapers, citing a CNN replay, said the ball crossed the line and should have made China the victor. The Shanghai News published a sketch of Lilly with her head and the ball behind the line as she knocked it out.

But Wang, the soccer official,

said the shot was hard for the referee to call and likened the incident to Diego Maradona's "hand of God," when the Argentine star got away with fisting a goal into England's net to advance to the 1986 World Cup semifinals.

Maradona's infamous goal showed that "when the referee has ruled there can be no change," the Beijing Morning Post quoted Wang as saying.

Despite losing the final, the Chinese stars were feted as national heroines on returning home. Hundreds of fans beating drums and cymbals greeted them Monday at Beijing's airport and Communist Party leaders including President Jiang Zemin honoured the team with a reception at the capital's Great Hall of the People.

State-run television has produced a rock song for the team, complete with ripping electric guitar solos and a video showing clips of them playing. "Daughters of China, daughters of China, the motherland's pride, the motherland's pride," goes the song.

A Hong Kong tycoon and legislator, Timothy Fok, on Thursday offered the team 3 million yuan (\$362,000 dollars) to reward their efforts. The China Daily reported Friday.

English transfers



LONDON, July 16 (AP): Costa Rican striker Paulo Wanchop wrapped up a deal with West Ham and German midfielder Dietmar Hamann was expected to switch from Newcastle to Liverpool as Premier League transfer activity intensified Friday.

Wanchop is expected to transfer from Derby to Upton Park in a 5.5 million dollar deal, according to Hammers' officials.

The 22-year-old forward has already agreed personal terms and has only to pass a routine medical to complete the deal and get a new British work permit to switch clubs.

West Ham secretary Graham Mackrell said Hammers' manager Harry Redknapp could end his search for a quality striker and concentrate on Saturday's InterToto match against Finnish team Jokerit at Upton Park.

"He's still just 22 and he's only going to get better," said Mackrell.

Wanchop joined Derby from Herediano for 1.1 million dollars two seasons ago, making a big impact in his opening games but fading last year before he was placed on the transfer list.

The Rams are expected to replace Wanchop with Argentinian striker Esteban Furler from Argentine club Colon de Santa Fe in a 3.2 million dollar deal.

Derby manager Jim Smith reportedly made the deal during the Rams' training camp in the United States this week.

The 26-year-old Furler finished second in the scorers' standings in Argentina last season. He is a member of the national squad but hasn't won a full international cap.

"We have been looking for a top striker and I believe that we have got one," Smith said. "He was a proven goalscorer in Argentina and that is a very tough league."

Meanwhile, Liverpool and Newcastle have agreed on a price for Hamann, who only has to agree terms with Res manager Gerard Houllin to complete a move to Anfield.

The German international, who last season said he wanted to join Arsenal because his family hadn't adjusted to life on the Tyneside, was described as a "mercenary" by Newcastle supporters.

Newcastle United Independent Supporters Association chairman Frank Gilmore said Hamann, who still has four years remaining on his contract at St. James' Park, was also likely to demand a quick exit from Anfield if he got a better offer.

"In my opinion, he is a mercenary," Gilmore said. "That is basically the feeling on Tyneside."

While Hamann is expected to link with Liverpool the man he is set to replace, outgoing skipper Paul Ince, could be joining Paul Gascoigne at Middlesbrough.

The 31-year-old England international was last month told there's no place for him at Anfield and was reportedly put on P-transfer list for 1.58 million dollars.

Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson said if Ince was available at such a discounted price, he'd be welcomed at Riverside.

"We have spoken to Liverpool," Robson said. "It is now up to Liverpool and Paul."

"He (Ince) is a top international... there could be good news for the fans in the next few days."

Robson hasn't made any signings in the close season but Middlesbrough spokesman Dave Allan said the club was in negotiations with several players.

"Paul is the sort of quality player we would be looking for but we are looking at several different players at this time and we are hopeful of making progress."

HK to tighten security for MU match

HONG KONG, July 16: After fans swarmed the soccer field and injured several players during a recent Olympics qualifier, organisers will build two extra fences to avoid similar violence at an upcoming Manchester United exhibition match, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AP.

The Hong Kong Football Association, the organiser for both matches, also has hired six teams of security guards to protect the players, staff members and officials, the South China Morning Post reported.

Security guards will also man all three layers of fencing at the sellout game between Manchester United and Hong Kong's South China on July 24 at the Hong Kong Stadium, the newspaper said.

Officials did not immediately return phone calls for The Associated Press seeking confirmation.

On June 20, three Malaysian players and their coach were injured during the qualifier between Nepal and Malaysia, when Nepalese fans climbed the fence and swarmed onto the pitch. The match had to be halted before the end of regulation play, although officials have said the 1-1 tie will stand as a final score.

FIFA, the sport's ruling body, fined the Hong Kong association 15,000 US dollars.



MADRID, July 16 (Reuters/Internet): Real Madrid coach John Toshack says he still needs to make three new signings if his club are to make a serious challenge on domestic and European fronts.

An early assault on the transfer market has already seen Real secure six new players for the coming season, among them former Liverpool midfielder Steve McManaman, Bosnian forward Elvir Balic and Spanish internationals Michel Salgado and Ivan Helguera.

But Toshack, who returned from his summer holiday on Thursday to start work with his new look squad, is hoping for more new arrivals before the season starts on August 22.

"We absolutely have to strengthen the squad," Toshack insisted. "If you look at a club like Chelsea they have something like 19 foreign players on their books — something unheard of in English football. You need that kind of squad these days."

"We definitely need to strengthen the forward line," added the Welshman. "With (Fernando) Morientes and Balic



JOHN TOSHACK
I'll sleep well at nights but we have to be prepared for every eventuality.

"We're also looking for a central defender and there's the possibility of a new goalkeeper — which could become a necessity."

Real are looking at Olympique Marseille striker Florian Maurice as a possible addition to the forward line, with Valladolid's Brazilian centre back Julio Cesar the latest target for the defence.



Juventus' superstar Alessandro Del Piero (R) training with his team at their summer camp of Chatillon in the Italian Alps on July 15. —Internet photo