

Sport

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 Series 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 revolutionized 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."

Negotiations for the proposed transfer to Lazio have been underway for weeks.

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 an another Frenchman, AS Roma's left-wing-back Vincent Candela, as coach Marcello Lippi puts together a Franco-Italian 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 Youn 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."

"My objective this season, and that of the rest of the team's, is to win the league title," he said. "We'll think about Europe after that."

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 Teixeira, 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 have reached the semifinals of the tournament and face Brazil today.

Cloud over Asian football

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 1 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.

Yo 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 Hideki 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," Korean Football Association spokesman Song Kil-yong said in Seoul.

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 Kuchi, 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."

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 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 merit." 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's 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 Collyer 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.

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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 McLaren 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's 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.

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 Rushan Shah, father of two San Diego area band members.

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

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.

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Chinese feel cheated

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 take 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.