

Galatasaray, Real in World Club Championship

REUTERS, Geneva

UEFA Cup and European Super Cup winners Galatasaray and European champions Real Madrid will represent Europe at the second World Club Championship from July 29 to August 12 in Spain. FIFA said on Thursday.

Corinthians of Brazil, who beat Vasco da Gama in the final 12 months ago, will not have the chance to defend their title.

THE 12 TEAMS ARE:

Asia Jubilo Iwata (Japan) - Winners Asian Super Cup 1999 Al-Hilal (Saudi Arabia) - Winners Asian Super Cup 2000

Africa Accra Hearts of Oak (Ghana) - Winners CAF Champions League 2000 Zamalek (Egypt) - Winners CAF Cup of Cup Winners 2000 CONCACAF

Los Angeles Galaxy (U.S.) - 2000 CONCACAF Champions Cup winners CD Olimpia (Honduras) - 2000 CONCACAF Champions Cup runners-up

South America Palmeiras (Brazil) - Winners Copa Libertadores 1999 Boca Juniors (Argentina) - Winners Copa Libertadores 2000

Oceania Wollongong Wolves (Australia) - 2001 Oceania Champions Cup winners

Europe Real Madrid (Spain) - Winner of the 2000 Champions League Galatasaray (Turkey) - Winner of the 2000 UEFA Super Cup Spain (host country) Deportivo La Coruna - Spanish champions 1999/2000.

The format will be three groups of four teams with the top team in each group and the best second-placed team qualifying for the semifinals.

The venues are Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu and the Vicente Calderon stadiums as well as the Riazor stadium in La Coruna.

Weekend's Bundesliga schedule

REUTERS, Berlin

Friday: TSV 1860 Munich v Borussia Dortmund (1915)

Saturday (1430 unless stated): VfL Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich, Cologne v SC Freiburg, Energie Cottbus v Schalke 04, VfL Bochum v Hertha Berlin, Werder Bremen v Hamburg SV, VfB Stuttgart v Kaiserslautern (1915)

Sunday: German First Division (1630) SpVgg Unterhaching v Bayer Leverkusen, Hansa Rostock v Eintracht Frankfurt

English League Cup Birmingham's dream realised

AFP, London

Two goals from striker Geoff Horsfield helped earn Birmingham a dream League Cup final place after beating Premiership side Ipswich 4-1 after extra time in their semi-final, second leg tie at St Andrews.

Birmingham, coached by former England international striker Trevor Francis, won the tie 4-2 on aggregate.

The First Division outfit will meet Liverpool at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff - their first appearance in a major final since 1963.

It was a prize richly deserved by Birmingham, who had to cancel out Ipswich's single-goal advantage from the first leg.

Ipswich striker James Scowcroft had struck to take the tie into extra time after Martin Grainger and Horsfield, for whom this is rich compensation after moving from runaway English First Division leaders Fulham, had given the home side a 2-1 aggregate lead.

Athirson awaits FIFA go-ahead

AFP, Turin

Brazilian defender Athirson was unveiled to the press by his Italian giants Juventus here Wednesday despite the fact that his controversial move from Rio de Janeiro side Flamengo has yet to be sanctioned by world governing body FIFA.

Last week Italian authorities said the transfer could be registered on a provisional basis, allowing the 24-year-old left back to train with the club but he will not be able to kick a ball in anger until his deal is rubber stamped.

The player was reluctant to talk about the saga but said: "I think I can be useful to Juventus and we will try and win this Scudetto. The team I have seen has impressed me a lot and we have all the cards to win."

Athirson Mazoli De Oliveira, who will wear the number 28 jersey should the move be approved, played down his tag as the 'new Roberto Carlos' whom he described as 'sacred'.

Serie A preview

Tough task awaits top two

REUTERS, Madrid

Serie A leaders AS Roma and their closest challengers Juventus both face tricky tests away from home as the Italian league hits the halfway stage this weekend.

Roma, three points clear of Juve, travel north to face Parma (Sunday 14:00 GMT), while Juve have possibly an even tougher task away to fourth-placed Atalanta (Saturday 19:30 GMT).

Parma are unbeaten in their last three games but despite those results coach Arrigo Sacchi quit on Thursday and so their third coach of the season, Renzo Ulivieri will take charge against Roma.

Stress is believed to be behind Sacchi's resignation just 23 days after taking over from the sacked Alberto Malessani and it will be interesting to see how the squad react to another change of coach.

Ulivieri will be unable to call on Argentine midfielder Mattias Almeyda but otherwise has a full strength squad available.

Roma boss Fabio Capello will also have all his key players to choose from with Brazilian midfielder Emerson again expected to start on an expensive substitute bench which also features

Italian striker Vincenzo Montella and Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata.

Atalanta have been the surprise package of the season and showed that they are now genuine contenders for a Champions League place with a fine 4-2 win at Udinese on Sunday.

Two of Atalanta's goals came from Dominico Morfeo, brought back to the club on loan from Fiorentina, and he will again play in attacking role behind lone striker Nicola Ventolola with the veteran Maurizio Ganz left on the bench.

Primera Liga preview

Bilbao eyeing repeat act

REUTERS, Madrid

Athletic Bilbao go to Barcelona's Nou Camp stronghold attempting to complete a Spanish First Division double over the Catalan giants on Saturday (kickoff 2000 GMT).

In their previous match in September, the Basque side came from a goal behind to take a 3-1 victory over Barcelona in a bad-tempered encounter at the San Mames stadium.

The result was an ominous one for Barcelona whose inconsistent start to the season has proved a severe handicap to their championship aspirations.

The Catalan side are third in the league, eight points adrift of leaders Real Madrid and one behind Deportivo Coruna.

Despite a 16-match unbeaten run, Barcelona have still failed to play to their potential and have convinced neither fans nor commentators in recent games.

Bilbao, who have not spent a peseta on players since last season, have hit form in the new year and are optimistic that they can take advantage of Barcelona's style of play.

"Barcelona are constantly on the attack and that leaves a lot of spaces at the back that we can make use of on the counter," said midfielder Francisco Yeste.

Burly forward Imael Urzaiz and attacking midfielder Julen Guerrero are sure to make life difficult for the Barcelona defence.

Other matches this weekend (league positions in parentheses, kickoff times 1600 GMT unless stated):

SUNDAY DEPORTIVO CORUNA (2) v RACING SANTANDER (20)

With Djalminha back after his two-match suspension and Mauro Silva looking to have recovered from injury, last year's champions will be optimistic of victory over the bottom club.

Luckless Racing, who have been playing far better than their results may suggest, have been busy in the transfer market and must hope their new recruits will bring a change in fortune.

LAS PALMAS (9) v REAL OVIEDO (13)

Stan Collymore looks set to make an immediate debut for Radomir Antic's Oviedo as they make the trip to the Canary Islands in search of their first away victory of the season.

Las Palmas have reinforced their squad with the addition of Argentine striker Mario Turdo on loan from Stade Rennes. NUMANCIA (17) v VALLADOLID (14)

Like Oviedo, Valladolid have still not won away from home this term, but after good results

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Juve have not lost away since the final game of last season but coach Carlo Ancelotti is without French striker David Trezeguet who is out for a month with a hamstring injury.

In the absence of Trezeguet Ancelotti will have to choose between Alessandro Del Piero and Yugoslav target man Darko Kovacevic as Filippo Inzaghi's partner in attack.

OTHER MATCHES (Kick off times 14:00 GMT unless stated, league positions in parentheses)

SATURDAY PERUGIA (10) v VERONA (14)

After the intense transfer speculation Perugia central defender Marco Materazzi will see out the rest of the season before joining Inter next term.

Materazzi will have his hands full against another player who was tipped to move before the transfer deadline Verona striker Emiliano Bonazzoli.

SUNDAY BARI (18) v BRESCIA (15)

Bottom club Bari could give a debut to striker Paolo Poggi signed on loan from Roma on the transfer deadline.

Struggling Brescia will be without Roberto Baggio again as well as Czech keeper Pavel Srnecik.

BOLOGNA (7) v INTER MILAN (11)

Another chaotic week for Inter whose squad have been embroiled in an internet prostitution scandal while striker Alvaro Recoba's has been under investigation for wrongfully gaining an Italian passport.

Recoba is set to miss Sunday's match as he will have to return to his native Uruguay to renew his Uruguayan passport which has run out.

Bologna have had better news

Saudis offer Santrac two-year deal

REUTERS, Riyadh

Yugoslav coach Slobodan Santrac will sign a two-year contract this weekend to coach the Saudi Arabian national team, the country's football association said on Thursday.

The Yugoslavia World Cup coach will arrive in Dammam to finalise the deal and is expected to take over at the end of February.

A Saudi FA spokesman said Santrac will watch Saudi Arabia's first round of World Cup qualifying next week, when they take on Bangladesh, Vietnam and Mongolia.

The Saudis will be guided through the first phase, which they are expected to negotiate easily, by Nassr Al Johar who took them to the final of October's Asian Cup in Lebanon.

Al Johar, a former international, was named as interim coach after the sacking of Czech Republic's Milan Macala, fired after losing 4-1 to Japan in their opening game in Lebanon.

Santrac had previously worked in China, leading unfancied Shandong Luneng to their first-ever league title in 1999 but left the club at the end of last season.

MU gesture for Indian quake victims

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United are supporting an appeal fund for victims of the Gujarat earthquake in India.

Manager Alex Ferguson joined David Beckham and Andy Cole in urging supporters of the English champions to donate money to the UNICEF-run appeal.

"On behalf of the club I would like to offer our condolences to everybody who has been affected by the earthquake," he said on the club's website.

"Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones."

Up to 100,000 people are feared dead and many more left homeless after the quake in west India.

"Thousands of children have died, thousands more have been left homeless. Please help UNICEF to support these children at this desperate time," said Beckham.

"Even a small donation will go a long way," said Cole.

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An AFP file photo of Arrigo Sacchi who resigned as the coach of Serie A side Parma on January 1.

Sacchi quits Parma

REUTERS, Rome

Former Italy manager Arrigo Sacchi resigned as coach of Parma on Monday just three weeks after making his unexpected return to Serie A.

The club said on their official website that Sacchi had stepped down for personal reasons and would be replaced by former Bologna and Napoli boss Renzo Ulivieri.

They said Sacchi would hold a news conference at the club's Tardini stadium on Friday before Ulivieri was officially presented as the club's third coach this season.

Sacchi was not on the bench for Parma's 2-1 Italian Cup semi-final first leg defeat at Udinese earlier on Thursday.

The club said he was suffering a slight illness and Italian media reported the former AC Milan coach, who took over from Alberto Malessani at Parma on January 9, was suffering stress.

Sacchi returned to Serie A almost two years after he quit as coach of Atletico Madrid saying he was tired of the profession and needed a change.

Since then he has worked as a television pundit, his outspoken views on Italian football keeping him in the public eye.

Premiership preview

Can Everton do it?

REUTERS, London

Everton will try to hand runaway Premier League leaders Manchester United a second successive defeat at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Alex Ferguson's side, who lost 1-0 at home to West Ham United in the FA Cup last Sunday, opened a 15-point lead at the top of the table with their 1-0 win at Sunderland on Wednesday.

One British bookmaker is already paying out on them retaining their title, even though there is still a third of the season left.

Andy Cole faces a three-match ban after being sent off against Sunderland but he will be available on Saturday.

Everton, who are 15th, dug in for a 2-2 draw against Middlesbrough on Wednesday and will gladly settle for another point on Saturday.

Earlier this season United romped to an embarrassingly easy 3-1 win at Goodison Park and they won the corresponding fixture at Old Trafford 5-1 last season, with Norwegian Ole Gunnar Solskjaer scoring four times.

Manager Walter Smith has eight senior players unavailable through injury.

Other matches this weekend (kick-off 1500 GMT unless stated, league position in parentheses):

SATURDAY BRADFORD CITY (20) v ASTON VILLA (14)

Rock-bottom Bradford, five points adrift, are without a win in four matches, having scored just two goals this year and this is a match Jim Jefferies' side have to win. Villa are on a run of three consecutive defeats, with just one victory in their last eight matches and are in danger of getting sucked into the relegation zone.

COVENTRY CITY (19) v ARSENAL (2)

Four successive defeats for Gordon Strachan's side has seen them plummet into the bottom three, and they face second-placed Arsenal having failed to win at home since the beginning of December.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has seen his team score eight times in their last two matches but face a Champions League place is their only realistic target.

DERBY COUNTY (17) v SUNDERLAND (3)

Derby goalkeeper Mart Poom (shoulder) should be fit. Jim Smith's side have failed to win in four matches. Sunderland slipped to third after an ill-tempered defeat to Manchester United on Wednesday, but the reverse was only their second in 10 matches.

IPSWICH TOWN (5) v LEEDS UNITED (10)

Ipswich will be glad to return to Portman Road because their 4-1 League Cup semifinal defeat at First Division Birmingham City was their fifth defeat in six away matches. They have won their last three successive games on home territory.

David O'Leary's side are without Gary Kelly, who requires another hernia operation, and will be looking to avenge a home defeat by Ipswich earlier this season.

LEICESTER CITY (8) v CHELSEA (6)

Leicester are without a win in five league games after defeat at the Dell on Wednesday while Chelsea will be aiming to make to make it four wins on the trot.

French defender Frank Leboeuf is available after his proposed move to Monaco broke down this week.

LIVERPOOL (4) v WEST HAM UNITED (13)

Liverpool, unbeaten in six matches, can leapfrog Sunderland into third place with a win over

West Ham, who have not won away in the league since last November. A groin strain may keep striker Frederic Kanoute out of the clash, which will reunite West Ham's Finn Hannu Tihinen with international team mates Jari Litmanen and Sami Hyypia.

MIDDLESBROUGH (16) v MANCHESTER CITY (18)

Middlesbrough are unbeaten in their last nine games under Terry Venables but face a real relegation battle against City after pulling clear of the drop zone. Andrei Kanchelskis could start for Joe Royle's side after impressing as a substitute in the 1-1 midweek draw with Liverpool, but defender Andy Morrison is doubtful with a hamstring strain.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR (11) v CHARLTON (9)

Loan signing Andy Booth will be looking for his first goal for Spurs after seeing an effort ruled out against West Ham in midweek, to break a run of three consecutive goalless draws for George Graham's side.

Goalkeeper Ian Walker has said he will demand a loan move if he is overlooked for the game, having kept back-to-back clean sheets in the absence of Neil Sullivan, available again after suspension. Charlton are still without captain Mark Kinsella (knee) and top scorer Jonathan Johansson (toe).

SUNDAY NEWCASTLE UNITED (7) v SOUTHAMPTON (12) 1600 GMT

Thumped 3-1 at Chelsea on Wednesday, Newcastle will use the 5-0 victory over Southampton in the corresponding fixture last year as inspiration on Sunday. Striker Kevin Gallacher (virus) and midfielder Rob Lee (groin) should be fit. Southampton have six wins in their last eight home games but have been less successful away from home. Matt Le Tissier returned to training this week but is unlikely to play.

Neville fears life sans Fergie

REUTERS, Manchester

England defender Gary Neville fears Manchester United's trophy-winning team will break up when manager Alex Ferguson retires in 2002.

Neville said the club's official CD-Rom magazine on Thursday.

"Some of the lads have been at the club since they were 13 or 14 and don't know any different. When the manager leaves, it may be that five or six of his side will leave. And before you know it, you are trying to create another team."

"Look what happened to Liverpool. They are a massive club, but have not won anything for years."

Neville said the only way United could avoid slipping from their perch as the premier league's top side when Ferguson left was to continue to follow the Scot's work ethic.

But he said he would prefer to see Ferguson change his mind and stay on in charge at Old Trafford.

"All I know is that our success has been achieved through hard work and that can't afford to stop," he said.

"I don't know what will happen when he retires. You keep thinking it won't come round, that it's 18 months away."

"Before you know it, we'll have a new boss. I would like to see him stay. And if you ask every player, they would say the same. He has an influence on the team and, from the moment you break into it, he sets out what is needed."

"Now it comes from within, we know what we have to do. He has instilled that in us and very rarely does he have to spell it out. It would be nice to play under the one manager for the rest of my career."

"It will be a difficult time for everyone at the club. The players will have to answer to someone else, listen to and take instructions from someone else."

"There will also be the problem of comparing whoever comes in with Alex Ferguson, thinking our manager would not have done things like that. Whoever takes charge has a really difficult task."

Weekend's French First Division fixtures

REUTERS, Paris

Saturday (1900 GMT unless stated): Nantes v Paris St Germain (1615 GMT), Olympique Marseille v AJ Auxerre, Ev Auxant Guingamp v Olympique Lyon, St Etienne v Strasbourg, Monaco v Metz, Troyes v Stade Rennes, Toulouse v Girondins Bordeaux, Bastia v Sedan

Sunday: RC Lens v Lille (1945 GMT)



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger arriving at an FA tribunal to learn if he would be able to coach his side from the touchline during this weekend's Premiership game against Coventry in London yesterday. Wenger is currently under a 12-match touchline ban.