

## Brazil no longer FIFA's best

AFP, Paris

World and European champions France have dethroned Brazil atop the FIFA world ranking, a position held by the South Americans since the 1994 World Cup finals.

The French are only the fourth side to top the world ranking since its inception in 1993 following Germany, Italy and Brazil. Roger Lemerre's side have a narrow two point lead, 796-794 over Brazil with Argentina third on 763.

Inspired by midfield maestro Zinedine Zidane, the French have been slowly closing the gap on Brazil, starting with their 3-0 win over them in the final of the 1998 World Cup in Paris.

They then went on to lift the European crown in Rotterdam last summer defeating Italy in the final with a golden goal in extra time and since then they have been in sparkling form in friendly matches in the build up to the defence of their world title in Japan and South Korea next year.

At the same time, Brazil have been in a slump, struggling in their South American zone World Cup qualifiers and sacking their manager Wanderley Luxemburgo.

### FIFA Top 20

1. France	796 pts
2. Brazil	794 pts
3. Argentina	763 pts
4. Italy	748 pts
5. Portugal	732 pts
6. Spain	724 pts
7. Czech Republic	722 pts
8. Netherlands	715 pts
9. Germany	711 pts
10. Paraguay	703 pts
11. Yugoslavia	689 pts
12. Romania	683 pts
13. Mexico	680 pts
14. England	673 pts
15. United States	666 pts
16. Colombia	665 pts
17. Norway	663 pts
18. Russia	652 pts
19. Croatia	650 pts
20. Denmark	645 pts

## Ronaldinho close to PSG transfer

AFP, Paris

Brazilian striker Ronaldinho could finally complete his transfer to Paris St Germain if a compensation settlement with his former club is reached on Friday.

Ronaldinho, 21, who did some training with PSG last week is on a five-year deal. But the move cannot be completed until a Brazilian court rules on the amount of compensation PSG have to pay his old club Gremio of Porto Alegre.

"I'll know much more on May 18 when the court issues its ruling," Ronaldinho said at the PSG training camp. "But my mind has been made up for a long time. I want to play with Paris next season."

The Brazilian club originally asked for compensation of 280 million French francs ( dollars 38.4

million) and brushed aside PSG's offer of 15 million French francs ( dollars 2.0 million), based on FIFA criteria.

Ronaldinho, who is returning to Brazil for a month, said: "I am looking for a house to rent around here. I feel comfortable with my team mates and I'm keen to resume playing and score goals."

"I hope I will be allowed to play when I come back in June," he added. "This is where I want to be."

## Morientes surgery successful

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes has undergone a successful operation on a persistent groin injury, the club said on Tuesday.

Club doctors described Monday's operation as "a complete success".

Morientes is expected to be out of action for between two and three months, which means he will miss the world club championship at the end of July.

"Our aim is making sure that he is ready to take part in pre-season training alongside the rest of his team mates," said Alfonso del Corral, chief of the club's medical staff.

Morientes had decided two weeks ago against an operation in a bid to help his team's run-in to the end of the season but broke down after just 29 minutes of Sunday's 2-2 draw against Espanyol.

With Real out of the Champions League and enjoying a six-point lead in the Spanish Liga with four matches to play, Morientes' presence in the team was no longer thought to be vital.

"Perhaps we should have operated a little earlier but given the demands of the competition we tried to avoid it," Del Corral.

"We used up all the options available to us and the only course open to us was surgery."

## Premiership Gunners confirm second place

AFP, London

Beaten Cup-finalists Arsenal drew 0-0 at Newcastle on Tuesday gaining the point they needed to assure second spot in the Premiership - for the third year running - and automatic entry into the first round proper of the Champions League.

The third spot - which obliges that team to play in the qualifying round - will be fought out between Arsenal's FA Cup conquerors Liverpool, Champions League semi-finalists Leeds United and new boys Ipswich Town on the last day of the season on Saturday.

Under pressure Newcastle boss Bobby Robson, who had labelled himself a saviour on Monday for rescuing the team from certain relegation last season, had called for his players to give the fans something to cheer about after a dire season but this dull draw will hardly have fans singing on the way home.

Arsenal carved out a good opening within five minutes when Thierry Henry produced a clever flick from Dennis Bergkamp's pass to provide Robert Pires scooped his effort high over the bar.

The pace and movement of

French pair Robert Pires and Henry in particular was causing the home side all kinds of problems, but some last-ditch defending by Nikos Dabizas and Aaron Hughes kept them in the game as Arsenal increased the tempo.

Newcastle almost went in front on 24 minutes after Stephen Glass laid off Welsh international Gary Speed's pass to Stephen Hughes, and his inviting cross allowed Carl Cort to send a diving header just wide with David Seaman scrambling across his goal.

The home side went close again two minutes later when Nolberto Solano, called up to the Peru squad Tuesday, rounded the keeper only to find the angle was too tight and his cross was hacked

clear by Lee Dixon.

The Gunners imposed themselves once again as the half drew to a close, and Warren Barton got to an invaluable block five minutes from the break after Tony Adams span on Patrick Vieira's knockdown from a Pires corner.

Newcastle almost took the lead within seconds of the restart when, with Ashley Cole lying injured close to halfway, Solano sped down the right to supply Speed, who volleyed over.

Ray Parlour went closest for the visitors 11 minutes from time to produce a fine save from Shay Given, but Newcastle, who also had chances through Cort and Kevin Gallacher, were good value for their point.

## Premiership's top six

After Tuesday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Manchester United	37	24	8	5	78	28	80
Arsenal	37	20	10	7	61	35	70
Liverpool	37	19	9	9	67	39	66
Leeds	37	19	8	10	61	42	65
Ipswich	37	20	5	12	56	41	65
Chelsea	37	16	10	11	66	44	58

\*Manchester United champions, Arsenal qualify for Champions League, Bradford, Coventry and Manchester City relegated

## Serie A preview

# Milan giants under focus

AFP, Rome

Parma host a humiliated Inter Milan Thursday night in a match that will have a big bearing on who will finish fourth in the Italian First Division this year and win a ticket to the Champions League.

And on the same night Fiorentina travel to the San Siro to tackle a buoyant AC Milan side who are also well in contention for a passport to re-enter the competition they have won five times, second only to Spain's eight-time winners Real Madrid.

These two fixtures have been brought forward because of the Italian Cup Final between Parma and Fiorentina - the first leg is played next Thursday (May 24).

And for once the three-way title fight between AS Roma, Lazio and Juventus is overshadowed as the two Milan giants look to overhaul Parma, currently in possession of the fourth place that guarantees a place in the preliminary round of Europe's premier club competition next year.

Parma on Tuesday confirmed Renzo Ulivieri as coach for next season in apparent recognition for the fact that he has put them in pole position in the race for that last Champions League berth.

When Ulivieri in February succeeded Arrigo Sacchi who had quit because of stress after 22 days since succeeding the sacked Alberto Malesani things looked bleak for Parma.

But he has led them to within sight of a Champions League spot.

However, last week's shock 2-0 defeat at Reggina combined with AC's historic 6-0 thrashing of Inter at the San Siro in the Milan derby has seen AC close to within three points of Parma.

Inter's entire squad went to the Milan flat of club president Massimo Moratti on Tuesday to apologise for that abject performance which has raised renewed questions as to whether Marco Tardelli will survive as coach until next season.

If Inter's wounded pride does stimulate them into winning at Parma it will see them move within three points of them.

But that could equally play into the hands of Milan who would then draw level on points with Parma if they beat Fiorentina.

Milan certainly have a score to settle with Fiorentina after their 4-0 reverse at the hands of the 'violet' in Florence earlier this season.

And on Tuesday club vice-president Adriano Galliani confirmed that Fiorentina's coach on that night Fatih Terim, who has since quit and returned to Turkey, remained their target as coach for next season should they decide not to confirm interim bosses Cesare Maldini and Mauro Tassotti.

With four games remaining Parma lead fifth-placed Milan by three points and sixth-placed Inter by six.

### FIXTURES

Thursday: Parma v Inter Milan, AC Milan v Fiorentina (both 18:30 GMT)

Sunday: Atalanta v Reggina, Bari v AS Roma, Bologna v Juventus, Lazio v Udinese (played at Florence), Napoli v Verona, Perugia v Brescia, Vicenza v Lecce

## Matthaeus wants to help Inter

REUTERS, Milan

Former Germany captain Lothar Matthaeus says Inter Milan "lack a leader" and has offered to help his old club after their 6-0 defeat by AC Milan.

Matthaeus, a key member of the last Inter team to win the Serie A title in 1989, is perplexed by Inter's poor showing this season.

"If I look at the names on those shirts I cannot understand how Inter have ended up so bad. There

are so many champions, maybe what is missing is the team element," Matthaeus told Gazzetta dello Sport on Tuesday.

"This team lacks a leader, a player who can act as the coach on the field - an inspiring individual who can unify the team."

"The great names are there but that is not enough. Even myself and Maradona couldn't win on our own - in our time we needed a strong group behind us," said Matthaeus who retired this season after a brief spell in the United States.

"I am really sorry for this situation and my heart still beats for Inter - I am ready to help in any way," said the former libero. Gazzetta said Matthaeus is currently studying to become a coach.

Inter's derby humiliation on Friday was the latest blow in a deeply disappointing season which saw them eliminated from the Champions League at the qualifying stage and then struggle in the UEFA Cup before losing to eventual finalists Alaves.

## Edgar fails second sample

AFP, Rome

Juventus and Holland midfielder Edgar Davids has returned another positive finding Wednesday after his second urine sample was analysed, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) confirmed.

The result, confirming the finding of the first test which revealed traces of banned steroid nandrolone in the midfielder's sample, means that the player has a case to answer and that now the matter will be subject to disciplinary procedure.

In previous cases of this nature a player has been suspended pending resolution of the matter.

Davids, who has denied taking any banned substance, tested positive after the match with Udinese in the Italian First Division on March 4.

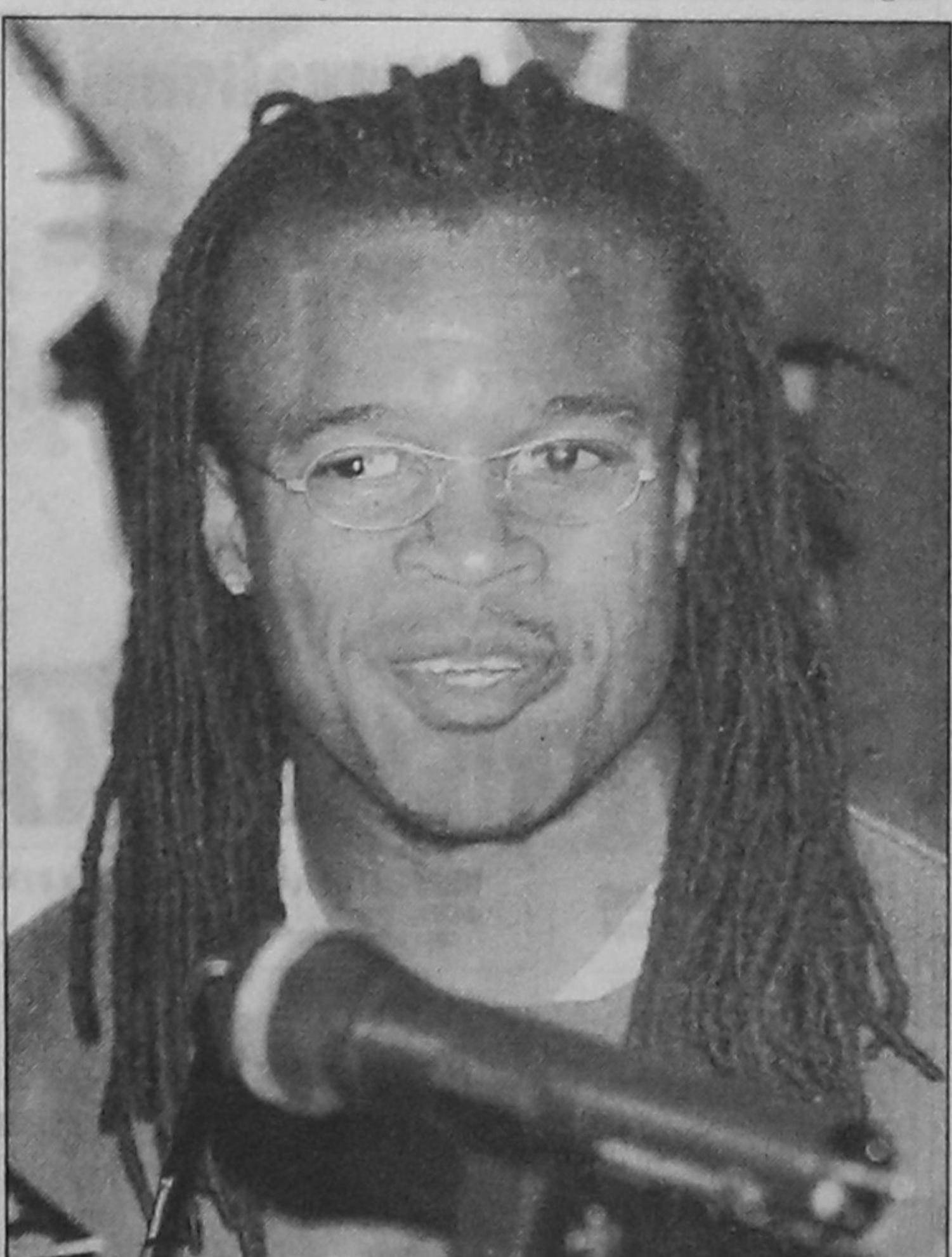
The second sample was originally set to be tested last Tuesday but was postponed when the player won a court ruling in Rome.

However, CONI successfully appealed and the test was re-scheduled for Sunday only to be again shelved because of the Italian general election taking place that day. But finally the test went ahead Monday and the result was announced Wednesday.

Davids is the biggest name so far implicated by the new anti-doping offensive by CONI.

Earlier this week football investigators demanded a 16-month ban on Lazio's Portuguese defender Fernando Couto for an alleged similar offence.

Couto too denies the charges.



EDGAR DAVIDS

## Romario out of Libertadores tie

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil striker Romario will miss Vasco da Gama's second-leg Copa Libertadores tie against Chilean outfit Concepcion Wednesday because of a thigh strain, it was reported here Tuesday.

Vasco pushing to regain the title they last won in 1998 lead 3-1 from the first leg of their South American club championship match and should progress to the quarter-finals following Wednesday's tie.

Coach Joel Santana is expected to field Viola in place of the veteran Romario who captained Brazil to the 1994 World Cup win.

Brazil's Cruzeiro beat Ecuador's El Nacional 2-1 in Quito a week ago, while in the all-Brazilian tie Palmeiras trail Sao Caetano 1-0.

Elsewhere defending champions Boca Juniors won a 3-2 lead at Colombian outfit Junior Barranquilla last week.

Argentina's Rosario Central beat Cobroloa 3-2 in their first leg and Ecuadorean Emelec lead Argentine giants River plate 2-0, while Mexico's Cruz Azul are 2-1 down to Paraguay's Cerro Porteno.

## Leonardo sings for Serginho

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan's former Brazil captain Leonardo believes his club team mate and left winger Serginho deserves an international call-up.

Leonardo, the striker who was part of Brazil's World Cup-winning side in 1994, told Milan's official website: "Sergio is one of the strongest Brazilians in Europe."

"When he came to Milan, nobody knew him and he had some difficulty in acclimatising at the start, as do all foreigners who come to play in Italy. But you could immediately see his true potential."

Serginho has been in stunning form for Milan recently and was outstanding in Friday's 6-0 derby win over Inter Milan in which he set up three goals and scored one.

Leonardo added: "This year, Serginho is showing everybody his technical worth, which, together with his physical power, makes him the great player he has shown himself to be."

"Serginho could fit very well into our national team, even if Roberto Carlos plays on the left and is rightly untouchable."

It's impossible for a player like Sergio not to be in the squad."

Serginho has been a revelation since Milan switched to a flat back four and gave him an orthodox left wing role.

The Brazilian is in his second season at the Italian club and was praised by assistant coach Mauro Tassotti for his form.

Serginho said: "Now I can move freely in the area of the field I prefer. Tassotti has been giving me tips on how to move in an offensive stage of play and this has also helped a lot."

"I don't want to talk about the past because now I feel important and this is what counts."

Fifth-placed Milan face mid-table Fiorentina in Serie A on Thursday.

## Hussain to bat later

REUTERS, London

England captain Nasser Hussain has bowed to the pressure and dropped himself down the batting order for the first Test against Pakistan.

England teammate Graham Thorpe said that Hussain had decided to move from number three to four because he was struggling to cope with the combined demands of captaincy and his batting.

Thorpe, in his exclusive column on the Channel Four cricket website cricket4.com, welcomed the decision.

"Nasser Hussain has made the right decision to drop down the England order because it was becoming obvious to those close to him that he was struggling to handle the burden of batting at three and captaining the side," he wrote.

"Nasser needs to give himself a break from the incessant pressure that has been building up over the past 12 months."

Thorpe said Michael Vaughan would move up to number three for the first Test at Lord's starting on Thursday while he would move from four to five.

Speculation over Hussain's batting came to a head during the tours of Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the turn of the year following a long run of failures.

He seemed to have turned the corner with a century in the second Test against Sri Lanka in March but Thorpe said: "Up until that point he had been saying it was a sign of weakness to drop down the order, but it's as if with that century he had proved to everyone, and himself that he was still capable of scoring runs."

"He asked me if I was willing to bat at five so he could go in at four and I've no problem with that at all."

## Celtic lose game, Murdoch

AFP, Glasgow

Scottish champions Celtic had probably the worst day of a superb

season Tuesday with the death of legend Bobby Murdoch followed by a 2-0 defeat at the hands of English titleholders Manchester United in a testimonial for their defender Tom Boyd.



BOBBY MURDOCH

The partygoers grabbed the win though goals from French international defender Mikael Silvestre and winger Bojan Djordjic.

Murdoch, one of the Lisbon Lions who won the European Cup in 1967, died after suffering a stroke was honoured with a minute's silence by the capacity 57,268 crowd.

For 35-year-old Boyd, who joined from Chelsea 10 years ago and has won over 50 caps for Scotland, the huge turnout was just reward for his loyalty which has seen plenty of lows along the way but has climaxed with a potential treble should Celtic beat Hibernian in the Scottish Cup final on May 26.

However, the goodwill emanating all round gave way when Andy Goram, who played for bitter rivals Rangers during their years of dominance in the 90s, was sent on by United manager Sir Alex Ferguson in the second-half - for Boyd that bitterness from the respective fans is one thing which sadly has not changed in 10 years.

## Rangers rope in Caniggia

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers have agreed to buy Claudio Caniggia from premier league rivals Dundee, but the former Argentina striker will not join the Glasgow club until the close season.

Rangers announced on Tuesday that it had agreed terms with Caniggia, 34, and a transfer fee with Dundee.

However, after Caniggia had passed a medical, Rangers admitted in a statement there were "still one or two loose ends to be tied up".

Caniggia has left Scotland to go on holiday and his registration with Rangers will not be completed until pre-season training begins at the end of June.

"I am grateful to Dundee for giving me the chance to re-establish myself and I enjoyed my

time there," said Caniggia. "The fans were great."

"I am now looking forward to playing with a big club like Rangers and working with (Rangers manager) Dick Advocaat."



CLAUDIO CANIGGIA

"I have heard how much atmosphere the Rangers fans can create and look forward to some really big games at Ibrox."

Rangers did not disclose the former AS Roma and Boca Juniors striker's length of contract or fee.

Media reports suggest he will cost around one million pounds.

Caniggia came to Scotland in October 2000 to join Dundee and his seven goals at Dens Park, and general all-round play, convinced Rangers he could aid their Champions League campaign next season.

The Argentine also believes that playing for such a high-profile club can help his bid to get back into his national team before next year's World Cup finals.

Advocaat said: "Claudio has tremendous experience at the highest level and has shown, both against Rangers and other clubs this season, that he is still very sharp."

## Dunga fancies France

REUTERS, Tokyo

Individual players, they also have a great team, whereas the likes of Spain, Italy and Brazil have good individuals but lack the teamwork."

Dunga, Brazil's captain when they beat Italy on penalties in the 1994 final, feels the World Cup holders' team level of play and understanding gives them the advantage.

"It's very difficult to say who the favourites are, but at this moment France are very strong," said the retired midfielder, who is in Japan helping his former club Jubilo Iwata prepare for the Asian Club Championships.

"Not only do France have good

individual players, they also have a great team, whereas the likes of Spain, Italy and Brazil have good individuals but lack the teamwork."

Dunga, who made 99 league appearances for Jubilo between 1995 and 1998, said Brazil's biggest problem was that their manager Emerson Leao changed the team too much.

"I don't think they have the base for a team anymore, it seems like 11 different players are used in each game the play," he added.

"The coach is also slow to take advantage of the experienced players such as Roberto Carlos, Rivaldo, Cafu and Emerson."

"Brazil have many good players, but the coach must find the best team and keep these players together."

Dunga will travel with Jubilo to South Korea next week for the final stages of the Asian club championship.

He divides his time between working as a consultant for Jubilo and as a football analyst for a TV station in southern Brazil.



DUNGA

## Osaka qtr. ticket in demand

AFP, Tokyo

Tickets for the quarter-final match in Osaka of the 2002 World Cup finals to be co-hosted by Japan and South Korea appeared to be the most in demand with the

Japanese public, organizers said Wednesday.

There had been 291 Japanese applications per available ticket for the quarter-final match at Osaka's Nagai Stadium on June 22, the Japan World Cup Organizing Committee (JAWOC) said.

A total of 15,459,705 applica-

tions were received in the first ticket sales for some 220,000 seats for 32 games to be held in Japan, with an average bid-to-ticket ratio of 73-to-1.

The second-highest ratio was 271 applications per ticket for Japan's match in Osaka on June 14, followed by the final to be held at the Yokohama Stadium near Tokyo on June 30, which reached 247 applications per ticket.

Eight of the 32 games received more than 100 applications per ticket, including Japan's three preliminary matches.

The lowest ratios were two preliminary round matches to be held in Miyagi, about 350 kilometres (225 miles) northeast of Tokyo, which only attracted 15 applications per ticket.

The successful ticket applicants will be decided by mid-June, JAWOC said.

From a total of around 1,350,000 seats in Japan for the entire tournament, 157,000 have been earmarked for regular Japanese football fans, 126,000 for people living near the match stadiums and 45,000 for sponsors.

Around 63,500 tickets each will be available in the second round of sales for the general public and as "prestige tickets," leaving 675,000 to be sold to non-Japanese residents by FIFA.

The organizers did not reveal the exact number of tickets available to the public when the second round of ticket sales starts January next year after the draw for the opening games, to be held in South Korea in December.

## Galliani for Terim

AFP, Milan

Turkish coach Fatih Terim is the only man AC Milan would consider as a replacement for stand-in coaching team Cesare Maldini and Mauro Tassotti at the end of the season, the club's vice-president Adriano Galliani said Tuesday.