

Real shopping soon

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid sporting director Jorge Valdano has said that the Spanish club are aiming to add another world-class player to their squad before the start of next season.

The reigning Spanish champions have broken the world transfer record twice in the last two years to bring first Luis Figo and then Zinedine Zidane to the Santiago Bernabeu.

"Another great player will come who is capable of meeting the needs of the team," the former Argentine international told Spanish sports daily Marca on Saturday.

"There aren't that many great stars on offer at the moment...but there will be another star signing for next season."

There has been speculation in the Spanish media that Real are targeting Arsenal's French midfielder Patrick Vieira, who said recently that he has not yet decided whether he would remain at the premier league club next season.

European Footballer of the Year Michael Owen, AC Milan striker Andriy Shevchenko and Lazio defender Alessandro Nesta are also believed to feature on the Spanish club's wish-list.

Bayern won't be Opel-driven

AFP, Munich

The long-standing sponsorship contract between European and German league champions Bayern Munich and car-makers Opel is to end, a club spokesman said on Friday.

The deal, which has been in place since 1989 and is worth 13.5 million dollars to Bayern, will not be renewed when it comes to an end in June 2003.

"The contract will not be renewed as the two parties want to seek out different strategies for the future," Markus Hoerwick said.

Guardiola helps Brescia

AFP, Barcelona

Josep Guardiola, who is facing a possible ban from football after failing a drugs test, took time out from his troubles to help a Catalan team beat Chile 1-0 at the Nou Camp on Friday.

The former Barcelona midfielder, who plays for Brescia in Italy, twice tested positive for the anabolic steroid derivative nandrolone on November 4 after the Lazio v Brescia match and on October 21 after the Piacenza v Brescia game.

Guardiola, who joined Brescia this autumn after leaving Barcelona in the summer, has denied knowingly taking any banned substance.

On Friday, he received special permission from lawyers to take part in the representative match against the South Americans which was watched by 56,000 spectators.

Guardiola played for 51 minutes of the match before he was replaced by Xavi, but he was given an emotional salute by the Spanish fans who have fond memories of his career with Barcelona.

Last week, Italian prosecutor Giacomo Aiello recommended a 10-month ban and 89,000-dollar fine for Guardiola.

A final decision on the matter will be made by the Italian football federation (FIGC) next month.



Former Italian national football coach Cesare Maldini (R) is congratulated by a Paraguayan fan on arrival at Asuncion's airport on December 27. Maldini is set to coach Paraguay during the 2002 World Cup finals.

Sinisa moving to Fiore

Football

AFP, Florence

Lazio's Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic has agreed to join crisis-hit Serie A opponents Fiorentina, the Florence club announced Friday.

The deal will be formalised on January 2 when the month-long transfer window opens and Mihajlovic has agreed a deal to take him to Florence until the end of the season for a knockdown fee of around 500,000 dollars.

The 32-year-old Mihajlovic thus ends a stay at Lazio where he won the Scudetto but where he at times courted controversy.

Mihajlovic once admitted he had racially abused Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira during a Champions League match.

He also faced allegations that he had encouraged Lazio fans to unfurl a banner in praise of murdered Serbian warlord Arkan, who was indicted for war crimes at the time of his death.

Mihajlovic had previously played for AS Roma and Sampdoria in Italy after springing to prominence as a member of the Red Star Belgrade team that won the 1991 European Cup and Intercontinental Cup.

Also in the pipeline for Fiorentina, who are facing massive debts, is a deal for Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Adriano.

Adriano is expected to arrive on a season-long free loan deal after being pushed down the pecking order by the return to action of Ronaldo, Christian Vieri and Alvaro Recoba, and the fine form of Mohamed Kallon and Nicola Ventola.

Dutch midfielder Esajas Harvey Delano will also spend a week on trial at Fiorentina in January could earn a deal if he impresses.

South Korea has finished

Asian dream is safe



AFP, Seoul

It's five months and counting to the World Cup finals and Japan and South Korea are determined that their multi-million dollar investment will not let them down.

However, despite the confident noises coming out of Seoul and Tokyo, it is the question of security, which is dominating hearts and minds.

South Korea is still marking the 50th anniversary of the 1950-53 Korean War against the communist North and is acutely aware of the need for security after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

A list of more than 1,000 terrorist suspects has been distributed to airports and ports for them to be detained - alongside a list of known European hooligans.

Korea has planned special forces to patrol stadiums and potential risk targets near them and will order no-fly zones over the stadiums for the matches.

Furthermore, the country's riot police have started special training and are collecting anti-hooligan intelligence from European colleagues.

South Korea has finished

spending two billion dollars on 10 brand new stadiums for the finals and is preparing a lavish welcome for teams and fans.

Most FIFA officials reckon that South Korea did not need to build the new stadia. But the country has decided that everything it organises has to be better than the Japanese co-hosts, who are refurbishing most of their grounds.

So Asia's biggest football-only stadium (capacity 64,677) in Seoul will host the opening match and soccer outposts such as the semi-tropical island of Cheju now has its own stadium where Brazil and China will play in the first round. The only problem is Cheju has no professional team to play there after the tournament.

If the event is deemed a success then the question remains - who should claim the credit?

The Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KOWOC) has scrambled to defuse a year-end feud between its co-chairmen, FIFA vice president Chung Mong-Joon and Lee Yun-Taek that threatened to tarnish the run-in to the gala opening of the finals on May 31.

Chung grabbed most of the limelight when the draw for the finals was held on December 1 in Pusan, and the Korea Football Association, which he controls, pushed for a single chairman to be named. Lee, a government appointee who played a key role in

the 1988 Seoul Olympics, was not happy.

Now that most of the big work has been done, KOWOC headed off the crisis by taking day-to-day control over preparations for the world's biggest sporting event away from both men.

Co-hosts Japan are also putting security on top of the agenda.

Last month, the country's parliament passed a bill to tighten up immigration laws to bar all overseas hooligans from the World Cup finals.

Under the revised legislation, all those sentenced to jail terms of less than a year for rioting or violent protests would now be barred entry. Currently only those who have spent more than a year in jail can be refused entry to Japan.

"It is important to keep them at bay. It is an effective law," said Yasuhiko Endoh, general secretary of JAWOC, the organising committee.

The September 11 terror has also prodded JAWOC to boost security spending by one quarter to 2.77 billion yen (22 million dollars), hiring more private guardsmen and improving surveillance equipment.

Despite the need for tight cross-border checks, however, South Korea and Japan agreed on December 21 to waive visas for visitors from each other's country during the finals.

The Japanese government has

estimated that 365,000 foreign fans will visit Japan - of those, 69,000 will move between the two countries.

If players and officials are included, the total will be 430,000 with 129,000 moving between the two countries, according to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport.

It also estimated that 770,000 people will move by air and 1.5 million people by rail during 32 World Cup matches to be played at 10 venues in Japan. A total of 2.51 million beds will be needed.

Clouding the build-up, however, is the spectre of the historical animosity between the co-hosts.

South Korean soccer supremo Chung Mong-Joon said last month he wished Japan's Emperor Akihito and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung attend the opening ceremony and the final together.

No Japanese emperor has visited the Korean peninsula since it was divided under superpower trusteeships at the end of World War II following Japan's brutal colonial rule for 35 years.

A senior Japanese foreign ministry official told Kyodo News that it would be difficult to have a "smooth visit" to South Korea by the emperor, citing potential repercussions from South Korea's opposition parties and the public and differences in interpretations of their histories.

Ginola's Villa days over

AFP, London

Aston Villa manager John Gregory has confirmed the club will not renew David Ginola's contract at the end of the current season.

Former French international Ginola has not started an English Premiership game this season, and Gregory told Saturday's edition of the Daily Star newspaper: "We will not be taking up the option on David's services and the player has been informed of our decision."

Ginola, who is 35 next month, joined Villa in a three-million-pound (4.35 million dollar) switch from Tottenham in July 2000.

Marcos to manage Nantes

AFP, Nantes

Former player Angel Marcos was appointed manager of French strugglers Nantes on Friday replacing ousted Raynald Denoueix, the club announced.

The 58-year-old Argentinian, who has been in charge of fellow strugglers Lorient for only a few months, signed a two-and-a-half-year contract, said club president Jean-Luc Gripond.

He will be responsible for reversing the fortunes of "The Canaries" who have slumped in the space of a few months from winning the French title to the depths of the first division.

The Atlantic Coast side have spent most of the season anchored to the foot of the table and only moved off it by winning their last match 1-0 against Troyes on Saturday.

Ironically, the team replacing them in the basement was Brittany outfit Lorient, who were promoted at the end of last season.

Marcos did not dither in his appraisal of the situation. While paying homage to his predecessor he said his first job is to save Nantes from relegation.

"We're going to have to find the words that can alter the direction Nantes have been going in," said

international with 33 caps under his belt, added: "But one thing that is not to be blamed is the work put in by Raynald (Denoueix). In the current situation there was only one solution, and that was to change coach - even though I believe it's an inhuman thing to do."

Despite their abysmal league form, Nantes have been doing well in the lucrative European

Champions League, making it through to the second phase.

That fact alone could give Denoueix an option abroad since many teams have taken note of the Canaries' impressive flight in Europe this season.

However, they have lost their first two matches in Group A and are bottom of a tough group which also includes Bayern Munich, Manchester United and Boavista.

Nantes president Jean-Luc Gripond paid tribute to Denoueix's efforts over his four years in charge.

"I have a lot of respect for Raynald, for his work and for his moral values. This has not been a witch-hunt, it's simply an effort to look at things from a new perspective with Angel."

Marcos started his playing career with Ferro Carril Oeste in Argentina before playing at Nantes from 1971-75, including a French league title in 1973.

He was subsequently player-manager at Toulouse from 1975-78 and then had spells in Gabon, Egypt, and United Arab Emirates before returning to French club football with Niort in 1999. He took over at Lorient in August of this year.

Lorient were quick to name a replacement for Marcos, luring 39-year-old Yvon Pouliquen from the coaching staff at second division Strasbourg

The Parisian hooligan scene has seen since the start of the season a renewal of its elements, who are younger and more determined," he reported said.

"Led by older Parisian hooligans and by former fans banned from attending matches, those delinquents indulge in organised acts of violence following a new method," the report added.

The police said that instead of acting in small dispersed groups, hooligans now confronted police forces in compact groups of about a hundred fans.

MU confirm Cole talk

AFP, London

Manchester United have revealed Friday the club is negotiating the possible transfer to Blackburn Rovers of England striker Andy Cole.

Blackburn Rovers manager Graeme Souness said earlier he would consider making a move for Cole if he went on the transfer list.

United have denied the 30-year-old, who is currently out of favour at Old Trafford, is on their transfer list but chief executive Peter Kenyon confirmed they are currently talking to Rovers.

"We have had approaches from several clubs in England and held initial discussions with Blackburn Rovers," Kenyon was quoted by the Press Association as saying.

Cole, who insists he wants to stay at United, is faced with a dilemma.

He could either play first team football and possibly gain a place in the England squad for next year's World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea.

Failing that he could stay at United, where he is playing second fiddle to in-form Dutch international Ruud van Nistelrooy, and hope his situation in the United pecking order improves.

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson believes Ruud van Nistelrooy and Ryan Giggs could hold the key to Premiership success this season.

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Ryan, Ruud the right men

AFP, London

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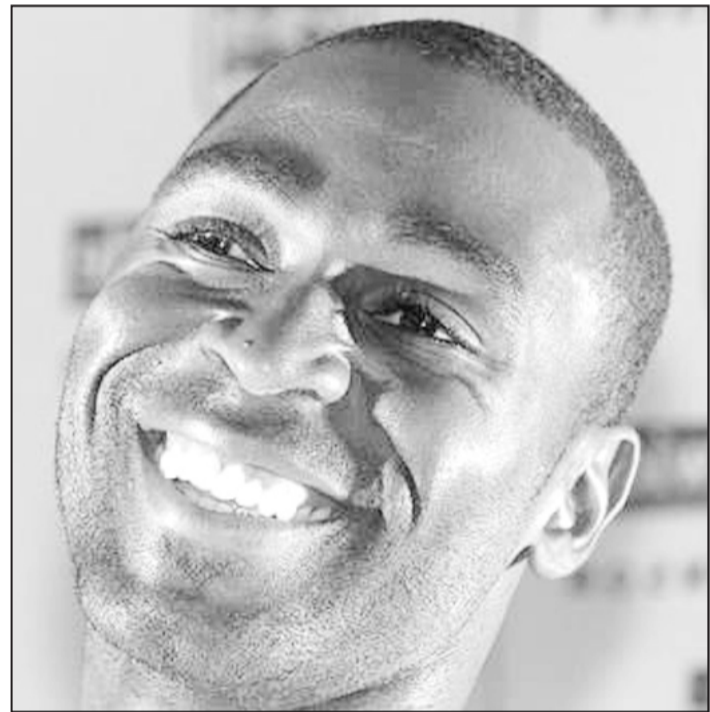
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ANDY COLE

However Cole was again left out against Everton on Wednesday.

Speaking to the Manchester Evening News, Kenyon hinted United and Rovers still have plenty of talking to do before arriving at an

agreement. "These kind of things can either go off the boil or they can accelerate dramatically. We don't know how this will progress," he added.

Remarkable to say the least

Football

INTERNET, undated

Despite enduring injuries and a rough stretch late in qualification, the United States national team had a sufficiently strong start this year to advance to the 2002 World Cup in South Korea-Japan.

After advancing to the finals only twice before 1990, the U.S. earned a fourth consecutive World Cup berth. It will look to improve its poor performance from four years ago in France, where it lost all three group matches and finished last in the 32-team field.

The Americans' group draw includes European power Portugal, co-host South Korea and a resurrected Poland side. While Euro 2000 semifinalist Portugal -- led by 2001 FIFA World Player of the Year Luis Figo -- is considered a virtual lock to make the round of 16, second place is up for grabs.

South Korea will be taking part in its fifth straight World Cup, although it has yet to win a match at the sport's highest level (0-10-4). Poland will be competing in its first finals since 1986, the last of its run of four in a row.

However, every host nation has advanced past the opening round in the World Cup's 16 previous editions. If that history lesson had not been absorbed by the U.S. national team, then South Korea drove it home on December 9, when it won 1-0 in a friendly at Jeju Stadium.

The countries meet again on January 19 in the Gold Cup at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California before squaring off in the World Cup on June 10 at Daegu, South Korea.

Traditionally, World Cup entrants schedule friendlies against opponents other than their first-round foes to prepare for the world's biggest sporting event. But the Americans and the Koreans had scheduled their first two matches prior to the draw on December 1.

Besides, does it really matter whether you face an opponent beforehand or not?

"I don't know," U.S. coach Bruce Arena said after the draw was announced. "We won't know until June 10 whether it's an advantage. We will know them much better than we do now, that's for sure."

The U.S. began the final round of North American (CONCACAF) World Cup qualifying with three straight victories and appeared to be on cruise control.

But season-ending injuries to

Clint Mathis and Josh Wolff drastically changed the Americans' fortunes. Following a tie and another win, the U.S. lost three straight, jeopardizing the team's chances.

The Americans recovered with a key triumph against Jamaica and managed to hold on and join Costa Rica and Mexico as the representatives for the CONCACAF region.

Almost all other major footballing nations are accounted for in the tournament. Some advanced easily, while others struggled.

Defending champions France received an automatic bid -- the final nation to be granted that privilege. Italy, England and Spain predictably advanced from Europe, while Argentina dominated the South American group from start to finish. The 1978 and 1986 winners lost only once in 18 matches.

Argentina enter the tournament as the bookmakers' favourite to win it all, despite being drawn into the "Group of Death" with England, Sweden and Nigeria.

Three former World Cup finalists and arguably Africa's most-talented nation make Group F one of the more thorny groupings since 1982, when former winners Argentina, Italy and Brazil found each other in the same second-round set in

Meanwhile, Germany and Brazil struggled in their respective campaigns.

Germany were humiliated at home by rival England, 5-1, courtesy of a hat-trick by 2001 European

ball for the 2002 World Cup finals. It will be the first time a non-white ball will be used since England won the trophy in 1966.

Off the pitch, a high stakes deal was struck between the New York

Yankees -- the world's most famous baseball team -- and Manchester United -- the world's richest soccer club. They joined together in a major cross-marketing pact to promote their brand names on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The sides plan to sell each others' products in individual stores worldwide. YankeeNets LLC is the parent company of the Yankees, New Jersey Nets basketball team and the New Jersey Devils hockey club, as well as a marketing partner of the New York Giants of the NFL.

"Soccer has developed dramatically in the U.S. over the last 10 years, and we believe there is a market for Manchester United content among football fans of all ages," said Peter Kenyon, Manchester United's chief executive. "With the help of the YankeeNets, we intend to pursue

Liverpool lost just one tournament match en route to the final. The Reds knocked off Birmingham City, Arsenal, Manchester United and Bayern Munich to collect their other trophies.

Despite that loss, Bayern Munich already had won the Champions League, Europe's most prestigious club trophy. It was one of three titles captured in the calendar year by the German giants. They also took home a third straight Bundesliga crown and most recently, the World Cup Cup. Bayern won that match, 1-0, in Tokyo last month against Boca Juniors of Argentina, South America's champion.

Only Manchester United enjoyed greater success in one year, capturing four trophies in 1999 -- the Champions League against Bayern, the Premiership, the FA Cup and the World Cup Cup.

In Europe's other major leagues, AS Roma won the Serie A title for the first time since the 1982-83 season; Real Madrid won its 28th Primera League title; and PSV Eindhoven was the champion of the Dutch League for the 14th time since 1950.

In Major League Soccer, the San Jose Earthquakes brought in a new coach, overhauled their roster, acquired a young American star and

changed their miserable fortunes. The Earthquakes completed a remarkable journey from worst to first on October 21, when Canadian international Dwayne DeRosario scored a golden goal six minutes into overtime with a 30-yard blast for a 2-1 victory over the Los Angeles Galaxy in the MLS Cup final at Crew Stadium.

Coach Frank Yallop, a former Canadian national team member, was hired on February 2 to turn around a club that posted a league-worst 7-17-8 record in 2000 and had not been to the playoffs since 1996.

Prior to the Earthquakes' magical playoff run, he guided them to a 13-7-6 regular-season record, including a 12-game unbeaten streak. San Jose also matched the MLS mark for fewest goals allowed in a season with 29.

Landon Donovan, who was allocated to San Jose by MLS on March 29, made his presence recognised at the 2001 All-Star Game, where he scored a record four goals.

The 19-year-old forward also was top scorer in the playoffs with five goals and 12 points. Donovan capped his post-season tally by netting the equaliser in the MLS Cup final.

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Rewind 2001

Footballer of the Year Michael Owen. But the three-time champions managed to recover and overcome a tricky Ukraine team in a two-leg playoff.

Brazil experienced difficulties in the South American region, where it uncharacteristically lost six times before the four-time world champion earned one of four automatic berths. Brazil is the only country to participate in all 16 editions of the World Cup.

Uruguay also advanced after a 3-1 aggregate play-off victory over Australia.

The most notable European absentee are the Netherlands, who were shoved aside by undefeated Portugal and Ireland.

Shortly after the December 1 draw, sports equipment manufacturer adidas launched the 'champagne gold Fevernova,' the official

these and other commercial opportunities in the coming years."

However, Manchester United have struggled this season in the English Premiership, where they dropped as low as eighth in the standings. That is considered disappointing for a team that has won seven of the last nine league titles.

United have achieved remarkable success in the past decade under manager Sir Alex Ferguson, who announced he will step down and take another role with the club after the season.

Although Manchester United won the Premiership in April, Liverpool certainly was the team of the year in England. The Merseysiders collected five pieces of silverware -- the Worthington Cup, FA Cup and Charity Shield at home and the UEFA Cup and European Super Cup on the continent -- to add to the trophy case at Anfield.

Liverpool won the UEFA Cup against little-known Spanish side Alaves, 5-4, in one of the most thrilling European finals in recent memory. It marked the highest-scoring UEFA Cup final since Napoli of Italy defeated VfB Stuttgart of Germany by the identical score in 1989.