

Ronaldo not partying

Football

REUTERS/AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti on Tuesday played down any suggestions Ronaldo was partying away his time in Rio instead of fighting to get fit.

Moratti was speaking after a photograph of Ronaldo was published in Italy showing the Brazilian star at the Rio carnival - in the company of hell-raising Brazilian international Edmundo.

Ronaldo, who has been out of action for the best part of two years with a series of injuries, has been given permission by Inter to continue his recovery in Brazil.

The player has said that despite the photo, he is totally focused on his training and is not taking a break in the sun.

Ronaldo, who is focused on getting picked to play for Brazil in the upcoming World Cup after his stop-start road back from injury, is being treated in Rio de Janeiro by the Brazil national team's doctor, Jose Luiz Runco.

The striker told local press: "First I'm going to ask Felipe (Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari) to pick me, then I'm going to ask the same for Romario."

Scolari has so far refused to recall the veteran Romario, despite his high-scoring form for his Brazilian club Vasco da Gama.

In Italy meanwhile Moratti, probably fearing Ronaldo might be kept under wraps by the Brazilian Football Federation to ensure his fitness for South Korea and Japan, has asked to be kept informed of all



Superstar Ronaldo during an afternoon practice at Professor Nilton Petrone's clinic in Rio de Janeiro on February 12.

their plans regarding the former world footballer of the year.

Moratti however played down any problems on Tuesday.

"I know that Ronaldo works every day, twice a day. I have seen the picture but it's just a moment of relaxation," he was quoted as saying in Tuesday's Corriere Dello Sport.

"It is important that we maintain a good relationship with the Brazilian Federation and our medical staff will

say about me in Italy," he said.

"My fans know about my reliability as a player. I have been in Italy for almost five years and I have shown to be a professional, always respecting the agreements with my club.

"Since my arrival in Brazil, I practice twice a day for five or six hours, in order to come back stronger than ever, because that is my biggest desire.

"If I am not playing, it's not my fault. I have followed the rehab program given to me by Inter's medical staff and fitness trainer."

Ronaldo was due back in Milan on Sunday but Inter officials have extended his leave and it is not yet clear when the Brazilian will return to training with the Serie A club.

The striker, whose return this season after two knee operations has been dogged by muscle problems has not made it clear when he will return.

On Saturday afternoon Inter coach Hector Cuper had insisted that the Brazilian would be back in Milan on Sunday ready to start training this week.

But on Sunday third-placed Inter said on their official Web site that they had given Ronaldo permission to continue his recovery in Brazil since it offered "an excellent environment, both climatic and psychological, which is particularly favourable to his specific recovery needs."

Three years ago Brazilian Edmundo, then with Fiorentina, caused a storm in Italy when he returned to Rio to take part in carnival celebrations while his club were struggling to maintain their lead in Serie A. It was one of many controversies that surrounded the forward.

"I am not worried about what they

FIFA world rankings

AFP, Paris

Latest FIFA world rankings released here Wednesday:

Table with 2 columns: TEAMS, POINTS. Lists top 19 teams including France, Argentina, Brazil, Portugal, Colombia, Italy, Spain, Holland, Mexico, England, Yugoslavia, Germany, United States, Paraguay, Czech Republic, Romania, Sweden, Cameroon, Denmark, and Republic of Ireland.

Djorkaeff now Bolton's

AFP, Kaiserslautern, Germany

French international striker Youri Djorkaeff has moved from Kaiserslautern to English Premier side Bolton on a three-month contract, the German club said on Tuesday.

Kaiserslautern president Jurgen Friedrich revealed the move during a press conference.

The 33-year-old Djorkaeff's initial contract had been due to run till the end of the season but it has now been rescinded.

Djorkaeff, who joined Kaiserslautern from Inter Milan in the 2000/01 pre-season but is considered surplus to requirements by coach Andreas Brehme, said: "I think I've found the best solution for me, and Kaiserslautern.

"I can put behind me the difficult times here, as I was no longer playing."

Djorkaeff, who has notched 29 goals in 79 international appearances, hopes that by moving to Bolton it will help his chances of regaining his place in the French international squad and revive his chances of going to the World Cup.

The transfer fee for the move to the northern English club, currently 17th in the Premiership and fighting relegation, was not immediately revealed.

Djorkaeff, who had an uneasy relationship with the Kaiserslautern coach, added: "On the subject of Brehme I don't want to talk about him anymore."

He had promised threatened to blow the lid on what he had had to put up with since Brehme took command.

Jurgen Friedrich, the German club's president, said the move was prompted by his want-away player.

"It's Djorkaeff who took the first step. We took into consideration his wish for a move before the end of his contract to bring to an end this long quarrel."

Ecuador surprise Turkey

AFP, Breda, Netherlands

World Cup finals debutants Ecuador pulled off a highly creditable 1-0 win over fellow finalists Turkey here on Tuesday in a friendly international.

A header from substitute Carlos Tenorio in the 65th minute saw the South Americans to a welcome win after their poor form in the recent Gold Cup tournament when they failed to make the last eight largely thanks to a 2-0 defeat by minnows Haiti.

Both sides had to make do without their two leading strikers Hakan Sukur and Ecuador's Southampton forward Agustin Delgado, the two of them pulling out just before the match with injuries.

The match, watched by around 5,000 spectators in the unlikely setting of Breda, started at a brisk pace with the South Americans getting off the opening shot with a smart volley by Ivan Kaviedes in the 13th minute.

The Turks replied nine minutes later, Ilhan goy closed with a low shot.

Ecuador thought they had taken the lead in the 29th minute when Delgado's Southampton team-mate Kleber Chala netted but he was ruled offside.

This produced a frenetic five minute offensive by the Turks with Ecuador's goalkeeper Jose Cavallos saving first from a shot by Hakan Unsal and then a freekick by Nihat.

While Turkish coach Senol Gunes made four changes at the break, his Ecuador counterpart Hernan Gomez kept faith with his starting 11 until an hour was up.

Gomez' changes proved to be more deadly as Tenorio rose to head past Rustu from Chala's pinpoint cross and the Ecuador defence held out admirably to give them a deserved and prestigious win.

Veron assures MU

Football

AFP, Cardiff

Argentinian playmaker Juan Sebastian Veron looked to have ended speculation about returning to former club Lazio on Tuesday as he announced he would be staying at English Premiership champions Manchester United.

The 26-year-old, who cost United a British record of 28.1 million pounds (40 million dollars) in the summer, had been linked with a move back to Italy with several reports indicating he was dissatisfied with English football and several below-par performances also accelerated the rumour mill.

However Veron, who sprang to prominence in the 1998 World Cup finals, said while he adopted the policy of 'never say never' he was happy enough at United.

"I never close the door to any-

body but I have no plans to leave United," he said.

"I had a few problems in Italy, especially regarding my passport, but everything was solved in the end.

"However, I have signed a



SEBASTIAN VERON

contract with Manchester United and I feel fine there. I have never thought of going back to Lazio.

"I've enjoyed myself at Manchester United. It's a different experience - different football, a different country and a different culture. One always aims to play for a team of that size."

Veron, who became a hero with Lazio when under present England coach Sven Goran Eriksson they won the title in 2000, said that playing in England was a lot easier for the players.

"English football is more relaxing than Italy and I like that.

"The matches are open, it's not such a drama if teams lose and it's a nice environment."

Veron's rediscovered enthusiasm for the red shirt of United spurred him on to urge England captain David Beckham to stop hesitating and sign a new contract.

"It's wonderful to play with world-class players and David Beckham is definitely one of them," he said.

"It's my desire, and that of other people, for him to stay but it's his own decision that counts."

Baggio starts recuperating

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Brescia forward Roberto Baggio has started his recuperation just a week after undergoing surgery to reconstruct his knee.

Baggio injured his ligaments two weeks ago and there were fears that he would quit the game after missing out on his dream of appearing in a fourth World Cup.

According to Italian news agency ANSA, Baggio had two hours of physiotherapy in Bologna. "I am well and finally starting to work," Baggio said on Tuesday.

He was accompanied by his brother Giorgio and manager Vittorio Petrone. He is expected

back in action in six months, should he have no complications.

Baggio injured his ligaments two weeks ago in his club's Coppa Italia



ROBERTO BAGGIO

2-0 defeat at Parma and there were fears that he would quit the game after missing out on his dream of appearing in a fourth World Cup.

The 34-year-old attacker's agent had said that Baggio planned to retire from the game following his injury though he later said his statement had been misinterpreted and the player planned to carry on.

Baggio, formerly of Juventus, AC Milan and Internazionale had been touted as an outside bet to make Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni's squad for Korea/Japan this summer after a series of inspirational displays for Brescia this season.

Despite being his country's finest player during the 1994 USA World Cup, Baggio's domestic popularity plummeted after he missed the deciding penalty in the final, so handing the trophy to Brazil.

Lunar New Year tournament Hong Kong blow for China

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

China's Lunar New Year got off to the worst possible start Tuesday with a shock defeat by minnows Hong Kong while fellow World Cup debutants Slovenia were trounced 5-1 by Honduras.

The Year of the Horse galloped into action for the Hong Kong League XI with a 4-3 penalty shoot-out victory after they restricted China to a 1-1 draw at the Lunar New Year tournament here.

The result meant Honduras will face Hong Kong in Friday's final while the two World Cup debutants will battle it out for third place.

The Chinese, who were without inspirational coach Bora Milutinovic as he recovers from a bout of pneumonia, looked to have done enough when they took the lead against the run of play 25 minutes from the end of a hard-fought match. Yu Gen Wei firing home from close range after Li Yi's header came back off the bar.

But a header from Brazilian striker Filho put the home side back on level terms within five minutes and forced the tie to penalties.

After both sides missed their fourth attempts, goalkeeper Chan Ka-ki gave Hong Kong their chance by saving Li Yi's fifth for China and Filho calmly clinched the victory.

Striker Saul Martinez was the star for Honduras, grabbing four goals in a display of pace and power that Slovenia's defence could not cope with.

Slovenia went into the match as slight favourites after emerging as one of the surprise qualifiers from the tough European zone qualifying for this summer's World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

But with Honduras dominating the opening exchanges, it came as no surprise when Martinez put them ahead five minutes before half-time after calmly rounding goalkeeper

Marko Simeunovic.

Playmaker Zlatko Zahovic got Slovenia back on level terms from the penalty spot eight minutes after the break after Limber Perez pulled down Amir Karic.

But the respite proved brief and Martinez soon restored the Central Americans' advantage with the best goal of the afternoon after 58 minutes.

Picking the ball up 35 yards out, he turned and rode two tackles before placing his shot into the top corner from just outside the area.

Nine minutes later, Martinez again outpaced his markers and slotted home from just inside the box.

Martinez rounded off a fine afternoon's work in the 73rd minute when he managed to get his outstretched boot to a low cross from Honduras skipper Amado Guevara.

The star striker then made way for name-sake Cristian Martinez, who rounded off the rout with a powerful run and blast right on the stroke of full-time.

The closest Slovenia went to scoring in open play was in the 7th minute when Milenko Acimovic saw his glancing header from a Zahovic free kick bounce clear off the post.

Slovenia coach Srecko Katanec played down the significance of a drubbing that does not augur well for the rest of his squad's World Cup preparations.

"We were without six key players, two of our team only arrived this morning after 20-hour flights, so I don't think you can make too much of this.

"Honduras played well but we were at less than 50 percent of what we will be in the World Cup."

Slovenia face Spain, South Africa and Paraguay in their opening round group in the World Cup. China will be up against Brazil, Turkey and Costa Rica.



Italy's Alessandro Del Piero trains at the Cibali stadium in Catania, Sicily on February 12 ahead of the friendly game against the United States.

Del Piero is not special!

2002 FIFA WORLD CUP KOREA JAPAN

AFP, Catania, Italy

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni on Tuesday delivered a thinly veiled warning to Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero to keep his thoughts to himself or risk missing the World Cup.

Trapattoni surprised many by picking Parma's Marco Di Vaio to play alongside Christian Vieri instead of Del Piero for Wednesday's friendly international with the United States here in Sicily.

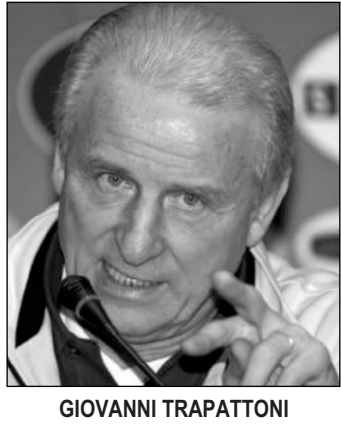
Del Piero had publicly complained that his coach at Juventus, Marcello Lippi, had substituted him during Sunday's 0-0 draw with AS Roma and Trapattoni advised the 27-year-old not to comment on this latest snub.

"Anyone who considers himself irreplaceable cannot be part of a group of players that wants to win the World Cup," said Trapattoni.

Trapattoni gives Torino midfielder Antonino Asta a debut cap on the right side of midfield, a move that might be perceived as diplomatic with the 31-year-old a native of Sicily.

Francesco Coco of Barcelona, the other Sicilian in the team and who hails from Paterno just 10km from Catania, also gets the nod although Inter Milan's midfielder Cristiano Zanetti will make his first starting appearance after playing as a substitute during the 1-1 draw with Japan in Italy's last international.

Di Vaio's selection, his second after playing in the 1-0 friendly win over Morocco at Piacenza last year, is reward for the goalscoring form that has taken him to the top of the Serie A goalscoring charts with 15 goals - a record matched only by Piacenza's Dario Hubner.



GIOVANNI TRAPATTONI

Only when Keane is ready

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United captain Roy Keane insisted on Tuesday he would sign his new contract with the club when he was ready rather than immediately fall in behind manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

After changing his mind about retirement, Ferguson is this week expected to put pen to paper on a new three-year deal which will keep him at Old Trafford until 2005.

And with the Scot putting the finishing touches to his contract, talks with David Beckham continue over a lucrative extension to his current United deal, although there remains the stumbling block regarding image rights.

For United skipper Keane, whose present agreement like that of Beckham expires in 2003, there is no guarantee he will resolve his terms even before the World Cup finals.

Keane is currently the club's - and one of Britain's - most highly-paid players on a net salary of 52,000 pounds (74,500 dollars) per week, a figure set to be eclipsed by Beckham if he stays at the club.

Although delighted Ferguson is staying on, Ireland international Keane is in no rush to follow suit.

He said: "Alex signing doesn't make a difference to me. It's not an



ROY KEANE

issue.

"I'm just concentrating on playing football and talks are ongoing. It's as simple as that. That's the reason why I employ a solicitor Michael Kennedy to sort things out like this."

"But as far as Alex goes, it was an important decision for the club to make. There was a lot of speculation, but then when you play for United you get used to stuff like that."

"I think we're all glad it's sorted out now and hopefully the contract will be signed in the next few days, and then we can all concentrate on the most important thing and that's playing."

Kadhafi's son trains with Juve

AFP, Turin

El Saadi Kadhafi, son of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi, trained with Italian First Division side Juventus on Tuesday.

Kadhafi, who on behalf of the Libyan ruling family's Lafico trust, recently took a 5.31 percent stake in the club, is himself an accomplished player who is part of his country's national team squad.

After meeting Juve honorary president Gianni Agnelli and the club's managing director Antonio Giraudo for breakfast Kadhafi sought and obtained the green light to play with the first-team squad although many players are absent on international duty.

After training was over Kadhafi shook hands with all present including coach Marcello Lippi before departing.

Another Magpie in trouble

AFP, London

Jamie McClen, who has played in English Premiership title contender Newcastle's last four games, has been cautioned by police for being drunk and disorderly.

The 22-year-old was arrested along with his brother Steven in Newcastle city centre early on Tuesday morning, the Press Association reported.

His arrest comes one week after teammate Craig Bellamy was handed a caution for common assault following an incident with a female student during a night out.

Both incidents occurred in the city's Quayside district.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 27 mins and a solution key at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a key: Y N J W F A J S N J C R Q H R T X H V Y G B Z Y R Q Z Y X C T Y B A K H E A J A V H Z G Y G B . R Q J V S J A E K Q F W H S A .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: MY GRANDMA ENJOYS CRACKING JOKES WHILE DARNING SOCKS. SHE'S A REAL KNIT WIT. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals R. The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Effenberg linked with Atletico

Football

AFP, Madrid

There were mixed signals coming from the Atletico Madrid boardroom over the prospects of the fallen Spanish giants buying the Bayern Munich captain Stefan Effenberg.

The 1996 Spanish League and Cup winners, currently at the top of division two, have expressed interest in securing the services of the former German international to help them survive after their expected promotion back to the top flight next season.

But Atletico's sporting director, Paolo Futre, appeared to dismiss an Effenberg move, which he told a local radio station on Monday night was "now totally off the agenda".

This directly contradicted Miguel Angel Gil, the club's director gen-

eral, who had told the same programme that Effenberg had visited Atletico and his transfer had been recommended by Futre himself.

Yet Futre, a former Portuguese international, claimed: "I didn't know Effenberg had been here."

He added that he had dispatched a colleague to Germany to put together a report on the Bayern midfielder.

"After that, for reasons I don't want to go into, the Effenberg deal was called off," he declared.

Effenberg, 33, was asking for a salary of 5.4 million euros (4.7 million dollars) a year, according to the Spanish sports daily Marca.

Atletico are sitting pretty as they strive for promotion back to their old sparring partners Real Madrid, Celta Vigo and the others, with a seven point lead in their second season in division two.