

Ronaldo moving to Palmeiras?

INTERNET, Milan

Officials of Brazilian club Palmeiras announced Inter Milan forward Ronaldo will probably play for Palmeiras after the end of World Cup 2002, reported the EFE agency.

"There is nothing definite yet, but there have been talks with Inter. Without a doubt we're talking about a great opportunity. Ronaldo would be more than welcome," said Palmeiras general manager Sebastiao Lapolla. According to him Palmeiras will loan Ronaldo for still uncertain period of time and during this time the club's sponsor Pirelli will pay him. Pirelli is also the sponsor and a part owner of Inter.

Meanwhile, Ronaldo's agent Rodrigo Paiva revealed that they know nothing of the matter. "Ronaldo knows nothing at all about that. He was never sought out by anyone from Palmeiras and the one who should be speaking on the subject is Inter," indicated Paiva on pele.net.

Fergie exudes confidence

INTERNET, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson tried in one last attempt to overlook his counterpart in Arsenal by stating that the Gunners can win the title if they defeat Tottenham in their London derby today.

"Arsenal will be looking at their game against Tottenham as a championship decider. It's a local derby and if they win that, they'll be expected to go on and win the Premiership title," said Ferguson who is well known for his mind games. As the Gunners will fight in the derby with two points more than United and a game in hand, Ferguson attempts to pile up the pressure on Wenger, especially if Manchester beat Leicester today at Filbert Street.

"At this stage of the season we're looking for a little break, hoping Arsenal make some mistakes to allow us back in. The quicker the better because we're running out of games.

They haven't had a blip yet but the Tottenham game is the one where they could slip up. We're just waiting in the wings if we get the chance to catch them. We thought we'd have that advantage last week. We did our job by beating Leeds and then Arsenal were 3-0 up inside the first half-hour against Sunderland. All we can do is win our remaining games and hope Arsenal and Liverpool slip up. It's as simple as that," explained Ferguson.

Roy Keane and David Beckham sustained injuries in the match against Deportivo La Coruna.

Keane will not play sooner than four weeks from now as he was diagnosed to have a torn hamstring. And Beckham was lucky to have a less severe injury and is supposed to play in the Wednesday's second leg tie against Deportivo.

Ferguson said: "Roy's injury is a straightforward hamstring tear that will take four to six weeks to heal. We hope we can get him back quicker but I think that's a bit optimistic. And David should be fit for the next week. I'm still hopeful we might get Juan Sebastian Veron back in time for Wednesday. He's been having treatment for his heel injury in Rome."

Yet O'Leary hopeful

INTERNET, Leeds

Leeds boss David O'Leary still believes his team can pick a UEFA Cup or Champions League place and avoid the shameful fate of the Intertoto Cup.

The Irishman needs 15 points to pave his way into UEFA Cup in place of their main opponents Chelsea. Leeds needs only victory in tomorrow's game against Sunderland after gaining no points in matches during Easter week.

"We want to take 15 points from our last games and we need five good ones starting against Sunderland. I will take the five games and see where that takes us. There is not long to go now and I will be happy when the season has finished because it has been a tough one for all of us. In general I have been pleased with the last two performances, even though we got no points, but there is no sense of doom and gloom around the place. We said at the start that we want to be in the Champions League, but after all that has happened to us, it would be a great achievement if we get into the UEFA Cup. We are in the Intertoto Cup and that has not done Newcastle any harm but it would be nice to finish as high as we can, the players would deserve credit for that," said O'Leary.

Leeds' skipper Rio Ferdinand will have to miss the Sunderland match as he is out with a knee injury, which has cost him three games already. And it's unclear still about Harry Kewell.

Bluewings' Asian double

Football

AFP, Tehran

Suwon Samsung Bluewings clinched the Asian Club Championship for the second successive year here on Friday when they defeated fellow Korean side Anyang LG Cheetahs in a penalty shootout in the final.

After failing to find a way past a 10-man Anyang side in 120 minutes of scoreless football, Suwon finally prevailed by a 4-2 margin in the shootout.

Brazilian striker Sandro Cardoso slotted in the winning penalty after Suwon goalkeeper Lee Woon-jae had earlier saved a weak effort by Kim Sung-il.

With the heavy pitch at the Azadi Stadium making close control and passing extremely difficult, the game ended up being a close battle between two closely-matched sides who also drew 0-0 in February during a quarter-final round-robin match.

Anyang enjoyed the balance of play for much of the opening half-hour but the best early opportunity fell to Sandro, whose attempted chip was punched away by Anyang goalkeeper Valeri Sarytchev.

Suwon came close to scoring again after 31 minutes when Lee Son-woo cut the ball back from the by-line to Bosnian striker Alen Avdic, who deflected the ball with his right knee onto the Anyang goalpost.

Shortly after, Anyang were reduced to 10 men when Brazilian playmaker Andre Santos hacked down Lee Byoung-keun from behind with a nasty tackle that earned him the red card.

Suwon went close early in the second half when Sandro Cardoso's piledriver from 25 yards was turned aside by Sarytchev at full stretch. Lee Ki-hyung also went close with a volley that flashed narrowly wide of the Anyang left upright after 65 minutes.

Anyang defender Kim Dong-jin even had a chance to snatch the win for Anyang with eight minutes remaining when he got behind the Suwon defence but fired straight at Lee Woon-jae.

Avic nearly ended the contest three minutes into extra time when his diving header forced another good save out of man-of-the-match Sarytchev. At the other end, Ricardo's speculative effort from 35 yards out caught Lee off his line and nearly snuck in at the far post.

Having pulled off a number of



PHOTO: AFP

Joyous Suwon Samsung Bluewings players pose for photographs with the Asian Club Championship trophy in Tehran on Friday.

good saves to preserve the goalless draw. Sarytchev got some help with 10 minutes left in extra time when Kim Doo-hyun's lob from the by-line looped over his head but was cleared off the goaline by Lee Young-pyo.

The game went to penalties and after Park Yo-seb and Suwon's Ko Chang-hyun had put their kicks well over the crossbar, Kim Sung-il stepped up to take his side's third shot.

Unfortunately for the Anyang defender, he put his kick too close to Lee Woon-jae and the Suwon goalkeeper pulled off an easy save.

Suwon's Cho Byung-kuk and Anyang's Lee Young-pyo both scored to leave Sandro Cardoso with the responsibility of clinching

the match for Suwon. The Brazilian, who also scored the winning goal in Suwon's 2001 Asian Club Championship victory over Jubilo Iwata, duly obliged with a low shot into the left hand corner of Sarytchev's net.

Iranian side Esteghlal secured third place in the tournament with a 5-2 trouncing of Uzbekistan's Nasaf Karsi.

A brace by Mohammad Navazi and an own goal by Bottir Karaev gave Esteghlal a 3-1 lead at the break, before Faraz Fatemi and Mahdi Pashazadeh struck in the second half to wrap up a consolation victory for the hosts.

Oybek Usmankhodjaev and Zafar Kholmurodov got goals for the Uzbek side.

Gerrard believes they can do it

INTERNET, Liverpool

Liverpool midfielder Stevan Gerrard is optimistic they will beat Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday in Champions League second leg quarterfinal tie.

If Reds succeed in going into semifinals then they will probably face Manchester United who won over Deportivo La Coruna 0-2 in Spain.

"You can afford to lose certain Premiership games and still win the league. But if you lose a couple of European games on the run then you're out of the competition. You've got to approach those games a little bit differently, especially at Anfield, because the European nights are that extra bit special. You don't need to be motivated. That happens naturally. They're all great games to play in at the moment and hopefully we can go on and add to the silverware that we won last year. We're looking to win every game we play in. It's going to be difficult because we're coming up against some great sides. Of course it's going to be tough but we've got a great squad and we're confident we can go on and win both trophies," said Gerrard on the club's official website. He is going to have his 25th European match on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier wants the French forward Nicolas Anelka to stay at Anfield and renew his loan contract with Merseyside club.

"We would like to keep him with us but we will see -- there is the club, the player, the various interests of everyone. His arrival has been a good thing for us, for him and for the other strikers in the team as well. After Robbie Fowler left I needed a fourth striker. I think this is indispensable for a team which has great ambitions. I had been battling to get him on loan but Paris wanted to keep him. However, one day I heard they wished to part company, so I jumped on the opportunity and we completed the deal in less than half a day," said Houllier.

Montella stays at Roma

AFP, Rome

Italian international striker Vincenzo Montella has signed a new contract to stay with league champions AS Roma until June 2006, club president Franco Sensi said on Friday.

Montella's current deal is until 2004, but Roma were keen to put an end to rumours that the 28-year-old could leave because he believed that coach Fabio Capello favoured Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta.

Guard dies after doing his duty

INTERNET, Buenos Aires

The Argentine Soccer Association (AFA) security guard Osvaldo Moro died on Friday of a heart attack after preventing two thieves from robbing the association's safe at the Buenos Aires headquarters, the EFE news agency reported.

The two thieves managed to open the safe and were about to escape with 170,000 pesos (60,700 dollars) when 64-year-old Moro noticed them. Then a shoot-out started as all the guards were alerted. The criminals were arrested at the bottom of the building's stairwell and one of the thieves was shot in the hand. Unfortunately, Moro died at the hospital where he was taken after the exchange of fire.

This is the second criminal incident connected with Argentinean football this week.

On Thursday Cristian Riquelme - the brother of Boca Juniors midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme, was released after being kidnapped and held hostage for more than 30 hours.

According to sources close to the Riquelme family, they have given ransom of 160,000 dollars for Cristian's release.

Larsson treble gives Celtic title

REUTERS, Glasgow

Celtic crushed Livingston 5-1 on Saturday to clinch their 38th Scottish league title as Swedish striker Henrik Larsson grabbed a hat-trick.

John Hartson also scored twice as Celtic moved 16 points ahead of their Glasgow rivals Rangers, who have five matches remaining.

Larsson put Martin O'Neill's side ahead after only three minutes when he converted from close range.

Hartson doubled the lead on 19 minutes and the big Welshman headed his second soon afterwards.

The Swede notched his second before the interval and completed his hat-trick on the hour, sparking wild celebrations at Parkhead.

Barry Wilson claimed a late consolation for the visitors.

CUP CORNER



AFP, Beijing

China will announce a 23-member squad for the 2002 World Cup finals on May 20, a senior official said Friday.

Zhu Heyuan, director of the national team bureau of the Chinese Football Association, said the team will start training on April 15 at their camp in Kunming in Yunnan province. The Xinhua news agency said.

China will play a series of warm-up matches in April and May -- against South Korea on April 27, Uruguay on May 16, Dutch club Eintracht on May 19, Ecuador on May 22 and Portugal on May 25.

The national team will fly to South Korea for the World Cup finals on May 26.

They play their first-ever World Cup game on June 4, taking on Costa Rica in South Korea, which is co-hosting the football extravaganza with Japan.

URUGUAY, MEXICO TO PLAY AGAINST JAPAN CLUBS

INTERNET, Tokyo

Uruguay national team is expected to play a friendly match against Nabisco Cup winners Yokohama F Marinos in Susono on May 25, reported The Japan Times.

Two-time World Cup winners Uruguay will stay at the foot of Mt. Fuji ahead of the World Cup tournament and will play at Susono Athletics Stadium Yokohama which is currently trained by Brazil's 1990 World Cup manager Sebastiao Lazaroni.

And Mexico will play against Tokyo Verdy on May 26 at Fukui Technoport.

TICKET TROUBLE GOES ON

INTERNET, Tokyo

As the number of World Cup tickets allocated to national football associations is less than the number of fans wishing to see it live, scalpers in Japan and South Korea don't spend an hour without thinking about profitable sales, reported Daily Yomiuri.

Information sources indicate that about 560,000 seats have been sold during the first and

second round of ticket sales in Japan. And any football association the team of which is to play in the World Cup finals has the right to buy no more than 8 per cent of all the tickets available for their team matches.

At the same time, some ties attract more fans than others and that creates certain difficulties for supporters and definite opportunities for ticket scalpers. For example, the government of Hiratsuka, where the Nigerian national team's training camp is located, had a phone conversation with a foreign man who claimed he was the agent of the Nigerian team and offered the government to buy 400 tickets for the first round matches. The government would accept the offer if that wouldn't violate FIFA's regulations. Similarly, the Shimizu government received an offer by a Russian whose identity wasn't specified.

If the tickets allotted to football associations are not sold after the end of the third round of sales, then, under the regulations, FIFA will get them, but logically, scalpers will try to sell them right in Japan rather than returning it to football's governing body.

Keegan: as good as ever

Football

REUTERS, London

Emotional, unpredictable but boasting the common touch, two better suited bed-fellows than Manchester City and manager Kevin Keegan would be hard to imagine.

After sealing their promotion to the premier league on Friday, City fans can look forward to Keegan's attacking brand of football lighting up the top flight next season.

Keegan has rejuvenated City after taking over from Joe Royle last May, just as he did in turning Newcastle United from second division strugglers to premier league runners-up in the 1990s.

The last five years have seen City relegated to division two, then promoted to the premier league in successive seasons before dropping like a stone back into division one last May. But the City fans love it. Season tickets are renewed, come what may.

They know they cannot compete with their local rivals United in the trophy room, but they can in emotion, and that is why Keegan is perfect for City.

It almost seems that winning is not important at Maine Road, as long as there is drama. And Keegan the manager doesn't win trophies; that's not his strength. Keegan is a purveyor of drama.

The former European footballer of the year guided Newcastle from 20th place in the second division through to two premier league runners-up spots before unexpectedly resigning in 1997.

But it was the heart-on-sleeve nature of Keegan's reign at Newcastle that makes him so ideal for City -- a club able to attract 34,000 spectators for matches against the likes of Crewe, Barnsley

and Stockport. Few forget Keegan's outburst on Sky television as Newcastle blew a 10-point lead to Alex Ferguson's Manchester United in April 1996. It was the beginning of the end for Keegan on Tyneside.

"I could have been more eloquent but...the problem in this country is that if you show passion, people think there's something wrong with you," Keegan said later.

Others said he couldn't take the



KEVIN KEEGAN

pressure, both at this time and later when he resigned.

But therein lies the crux. At City success is secondary to passion. At Newcastle it was not.

The City board may disagree. Keegan would too, but the culture of Manchester City is one of drama, not of pressure to obtain results. And culture is often more influential than policy.

Keegan had money to burn at the Toon, twice breaking the club's transfer record, spending 1.75 million pounds on Andy Cole in March 1993 and a world record 15 million pounds on Alan Shearer in 1996.

At City, he will not have that luxury.

Which will suit him, since the money spent at Newcastle came

back to haunt him. He was never happy with the complications of satisfying a PLC's demands at St James' Park, citing that as a factor in his departure.

City is a more uncomplicated world, as was Fulham, his next port of call after the North East. At Fulham Mohamed Al Fayed's money gave him an advantage over rival clubs as he took them out of the lower divisions.

But, lured into the England role -- as the fans' choice, it must not be forgotten -- the myriad demands of the highest profile job in English football dragged him down and, as at Newcastle, he quit.

To his credit, Keegan recognised his short-comings as national coach, admitting tactical ineptitude and one crucial failing -- a lack of victories.

"It's a massive job. Lots of the parts of the job I was adequate with and some parts I did very well, but not in the part of getting players to win football matches," he said.

Keegan's football world is a simple one: entertain, attack, hope the defence stands up, and if it doesn't then bounce back. Drama guaranteed.

City's world is the same. Maybe not intentionally, but habitually for sure. Keegan and City appear perfect partners.

But what does the future hold for the odd couple? When the club moves to its new 50,000-seater stadium in 2003, income should increase, transfer funds too, leading to a rise in fans' and the board's expectations.

Which means that dreaded word 'pressure' will start infesting Keegan's mind again, and, if it does, it's not hard to predict what will happen next.

Scare in Bundesliga

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany has been left fearing for its beloved Bundesliga as the likely collapse of media giant Kirch looks set to spell the end of a golden era for German professional football.

With the money from broadcast rights flowing in, salaries and costs have spiralled out of control over the past few years, but now a source of income that is precious to the top clubs and vital to the smaller ones might dry up.

The Kirch group, which owns the rights to Bundesliga games until 2004, looks set to file for bankruptcy as it struggles under 6.5 billion euros of debt.

Under the deal, the 18 clubs from the first division expected to receive a total 286.32 million euros this season, a sum representing about 60 percent of their revenue.

While the big names, like Borussia Dortmund or Bayern Munich, receive huge income from sponsorship, merchandising and ticketing, others need the television money to survive.

Hamburg club St Pauli, who are second from bottom in the first division standings, rely on the rights for an estimated 69 percent of their modest turnover.

The Kirch group is due to make two payments of 100 million euros each to the league in May and August and experts predicted some of the smaller clubs could go bust without the cash.

Alfred Tacke, junior economics minister and a close Gerhard Schroeder aide, summed up how serious the problem was when he said on Friday that the chancellor had been on the phone to him.

"He called me up and said: 'There's a problem in the Bundesliga, do something about

it,'" Tacke said.

The issue indeed became a German election theme as Schroeder's conservative challenger, Edmund Stoiber, slammed the chancellor's proposal for state guarantees for loans to prop up clubs threatened by the Kirch group crisis.

Schroeder defended his idea, saying the guarantees were not intended to secure the salaries of wealthy football players but to help floundering clubs, particularly in the lower divisions.

"It's not at all about giving taxpayers' money to millionaire footballers," Schroeder said on Friday. "That would be quite wrong and has nothing to do with me."

Tacke, who is aware that many fans are shocked by the kind of money their heroes make, said the clubs would have to address the issue.

"The clubs have some cleaning up to do and that will naturally affect the players' salaries," Tacke told weekly Der Spiegel in an interview to be published on Monday.

Hertha Berlin captain Michael Preetz, a vice-president of professional players' union VdV, said it was only normal that soccer had jumped on to the political stage.

"Football in this country has an enormous social and cultural impact," he said. "In that respect I welcome the fact that our politicians are worried about this."

Kirch also holds the rights to the World Cup finals for 2002 and 2006 which the group bought for 2.8 billion Swiss francs from FIFA, world soccer's ruling body. The company said last December it had already recouped the money for 2006, when the finals will be held in Germany.

Leo Kirch is head of the troubled group and at the heart of his problems are the staggering debts weighing on the pay-television channel he controls, Premiere.

Kirch hoped to emulate the

success in Britain of Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB channel when he launched it, but Premiere, which offers coded access to the full Bundesliga weekend programme, never took off.

The Germans love their free guarantees for loans to prop up clubs threatened by the Kirch group crisis.

SAT-1, ironically also a member of the Kirch family, offers a programme with extensive highlights every Saturday night shortly after the games and it is much more popular with the fans than the live action on Premiere.

Bayern Munich commercial manager Uli Hoernes echoed the general feeling by saying that public broadcasters ARD and ZDF should buy the rights if Kirch went bankrupt.

"ARD and ZDF must step in," Hoernes told top-selling daily Bild. "They have enough money from license revenue. They must save the Bundesliga."

While ZDF said it was not interested, ARD spokesman Ruediger Oppers described the rights as expensive but "tempting" and said his channel was "ready to discuss."

3 French sides in Intertoto Cup

INTERNET, Paris

French football will be represented by three clubs in the Intertoto Cup starting next season, the French daily L'Equipe reported.

The French sides were allocated one of the vacant spots in the competition, consequently, their chances to land another UEFA Cup spot have increased.

The Intertoto Cup serves to determine three teams to qualify for the first round of the UEFA Cup.

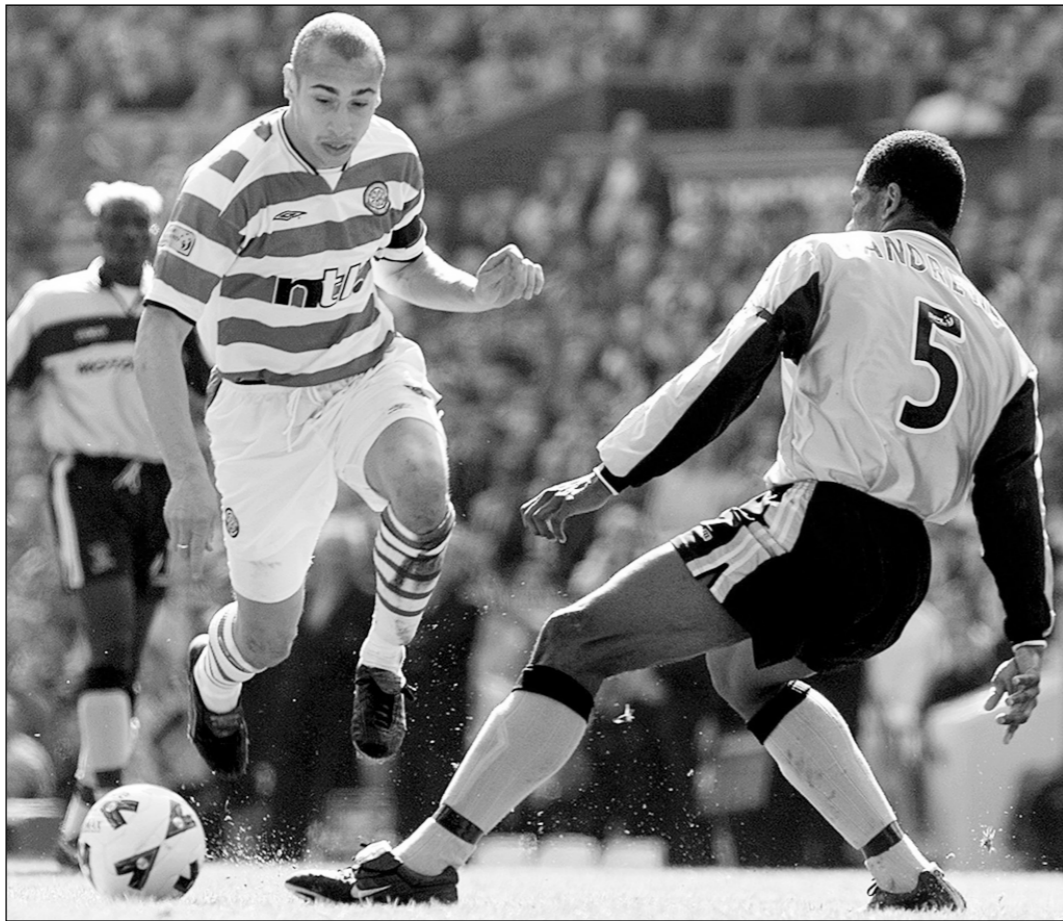


PHOTO: AFP

Celtic's hattrick hero Henrik Larsson (L) hops to avoid a tackle by Livingston defender Marvin Andrews during their Scottish Premiership encounter at Glasgow on Saturday.

MU might be without Roy



AFP, London

Manchester United skipper Roy Keane is battling to be fit for the Champions League final should the English side make it that far.

It was confirmed on Friday that the Republic of Ireland and United midfielder is suffering from a torn hamstring and will be out for between four to six weeks.

That rules Keane out of both legs of the Champions League semifinal, which United are well placed to reach, at the end of the month.

The midfielder, injured in United's 2-0 quarterfinal win against Deportivo on Tuesday, could also be struggling to recover in time for the final at Hampden Park in Glasgow on May 15.

Keane who will also miss United's run-in to the domestic season, would be devastated to miss out on a second Champions

League final after being suspended in 1999 against Bayern Munich.

United manager Alex Ferguson claimed that contrary to speculation Keane had not damaged his knee ligaments again.

"It's a straight forward torn hamstring and he will be out for four to six weeks," he told BBC Radio.

"Roy's injury is a blow, particularly with the semi-finals looming. It's disappointing for him, bearing in mind that he missed the final in '99."

"So I think the players owe him a final and hopefully we will get there."

Ferguson reported better news on the injuries to David Beckham and Juan Sebastian Veron.

Beckham has escaped with nothing worse than bruising and a couple of cuts to his left ankle from Diego Tristan's late lunge and should be back for the quarter-final return against Deportivo on Wednesday at Old Trafford.

Veron, who has Achilles trouble, was due back from Rome where he has been seeing a specialist this weekend and Ferguson hopes to

rush him back for Wednesday.

"David should be all right for Wednesday," he said.

"He will miss tomorrow, though, and there's a lot of bruising there."

"Diego Tristan has apologised. He knows it was a rash tackle by him and so that's the end of it really."

United must do without all three midfielders against Leicester on Saturday at Filbert Street.

They still, though, have different