

Trap's Italy get to business

Baggio chapter closed



AFP, Coveriano, Italy

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni on Monday definitively closed the book on the Roberto Baggio debate as the 'Azzurri' began their preparation for the World Cup here at the National Technical Centre near Florence.

Trapattoni, giving his first major press conference since announcing his 23-man squad, got his retaliation in first as he made a statement before taking questions, saying that from Tuesday he would answer no more questions about the Brescia striker he omitted from the line-up.

"Today I hope to close the debate on Baggio," announced the 63-year-old coach. "I will take questions today but from tomorrow I will never speak about it again out of respect to the boys here today and also to him."

"We have pre-fixed an objective and that must occupy all our attention."

Inevitably most of the questions that followed were about Baggio.

"He did not have time to get back in condition again after his injury," said Trap who ignored a vast media campaign to pick the veteran of three World Cups. "I was thinking of him back in October and November."

"I feel for him but I also feel for (Massimo) Ambrosini, (Marco) Di Vaio and the Roma goalkeeper (Francesco Antonioli). I wanted to keep the group of players who helped us qualify together."

"A few years ago he was an emblematic figure - like Ronaldo for Brazil."

"It displeases me having to make decisions like that but it is the job of the coach."

Trapatttoni admitted the world had changed since he sampled the pre-World Cup atmosphere as a player in 1962 although he never played in Chile after being injured in

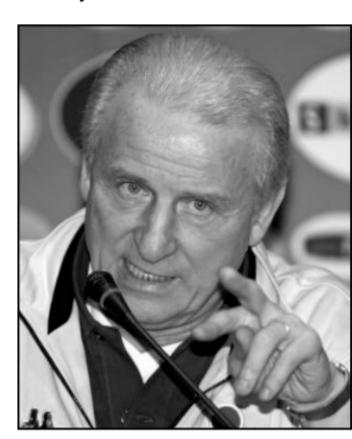
a warm-up match with Belgium.

"That's such an intelligent question that I can't answer it in just a few words," he told AFP.

"There are technological changes and also that applies in football."

"It was a very long time ago. Now we have countries like France who have become world-beaters and Ecuador (competing in their first World Cup)."

"I have to fear all the teams, there are no bad teams. There are different systems - 4-4-2, 3-4-1-2, 4-3-3. There are no surprises in football anymore."



GIOVANNI TRAPATTONI

"It's like comparing a contemporary poet to one 40 years ago. Why am I talking about poetry?"

Trapatttoni would not make predictions about the World Cup.

"There will be surprises. Nothing is certain," he said. "Everyone will be tough to beat and we have to respect each team."

Trapatttoni, due to hold a closed training session later Monday, had earlier grouped his players together at 11:00am in the centre of the practice pitch.

Players from Juventus and Parma were absent, having been given an extra 24 hours to get to Coveriano after competing in Friday's Italian Cup Final. They should arrive Monday evening.

Hope Dyer's only comfort

May sue tackler



Reuters, London

England midfielder Kieron Dyer is clinging to the hope of playing in the World Cup despite inuring a knee over the weekend, his agent Jonathan Barnett has said.

The Newcastle player left Southampton on crutches after a red-carded challenge by Moroccan defender Taher El Khalej on Saturday and was widely written off for the World Cup by British newspapers.

But Barnett told Sky Sports on Monday that Dyer was undergoing intensive treatment, adding: "He said it's a little bit better than yesterday, he's going to have some intensive training and put his whole heart and soul into it, and if anybody can do it, he can."

"Seven has given Kieron until the end of this week, and I'm sure Kieron will do his utmost to go to the World Cup but he won't if he's not 100 per cent certain he will be fit to play."

Barnett told the Monday's Daily Express he and Dyer were considering suing El Khalej and Southampton over the incident.

"We have considered legal

action, certainly against the player and possibly his club," he told the paper.

"We would like to take some action, but we shall have to be advised by the lawyers on how to quantify the damage."

"There is no doubt a player of Kieron's standing would lose out on sponsorship endorsements that might not be realised for another four years."

"A successful World Cup might have inspired a big bid from a top European club."

Earlier, El Khalej apologised for his tackle on Dyer and said he had sent a letter to the player.

He told Sky Sports News: "I am sorry for him and that he's not going to the World Cup. I played in the World Cup in 1994 and 1998 so I know what he is feeling."

"All players like to play in the World Cup. I've sent him a letter because I'm sad for him, he is a good player and helped England to reach the World Cup."

He added: "I just went to take the ball but I got there too late and his knee stayed behind the ball and maybe the tackle was very strong."

England play their first World Cup finals match against Sweden on June 2.

England's World Cup hopes were dealt a further blow Monday after midfielder Walter Baseggio was ruled unfit for the finals in two weeks by the Belgian Football Federation.

The news comes a day after striker Emile Mpenza ruled himself out of the trip to the Far East from May 31 to June 30 with a muscle injury and brings to five the number of players out of the squad.

The Belgium team doctor explained that 23-year-old

Baseggio, who plays for first division Anderlecht, was suffering from a recurring knee friction problem, which prevented him from training Monday.

The injury means Belgian coach Robert Waseige will have to juggle his striking resources in friendlies against Algeria on Tuesday and France next Saturday.

Waseige has already seen his World Cup plans hit by injury to key defender Joos Valgaeren with a hernia, along with striker Bob Peeters (left foot) and defender Philippe Clement (left thigh).

Belgium are in Group H in the

finals, which start on May 31, along with Japan, Russia and Tunisia.

Cantona blasts MU

Football

INTERNET, London

Former Manchester United hero Eric Cantona has launched an astonishing attack on United over his shock exit from Old Trafford in 1997.

The Frenchman claimed he was "betrayed" by the United board, where people were only interested in making money, the Mirror reported.

Cantona said: "I signed a contract

and they did not respect anything. At that time they thought that merchandising was more important than the team and players."

"When the business is more important than the football I just give up, rather than be treated like a pair of socks or a shirt."

"The manager (Ferguson) agreed with me at the time," said Cantona, whose shock revelations are made in The Ferguson Factor, a documentary to be screened tonight on BBC1.

The Uruguay forward was denied a second goal 15 minutes from time, when the Guatemalan referee ruled him offside.

Beckhams' stellar party



AFP, London

England's present international soccer players Teddy Sheringham, Joe Cole and Danny Mills.

Former England star turned television presenter Gary Lineker

also attended, as did snooker player Jimmy White.

Singer Elton John, a close friend of Victoria, was also present along with fashion designer Vivienne Westwood and British tennis player David Beckham.

The couple organised the lavish

day for family and friends at their home in Hertfordshire, north of London.

Around 300 fans of the Beckhams, many wearing England shirts and Manchester United tops, who lined the entrance to the home to get a glimpse of the guests, were kept back by metal barriers and more than a dozen police.

Among the first to arrive was Geoff Hurst - hero of the 1966 World Cup squad.

He was soon joined by some of

Prosinecki to quit after finals



Reuters, Zagreb

Croatia's veteran playmaker Robert Prosinecki will retire from international football after the World Cup finals starting at the end of the month.

"It is time to start building a new team, so I plan to play my last international game in Japan or South Korea," the 33-year-old former Real Madrid, Barcelona and Sevilla player told the Vecernji List newspaper on Monday.

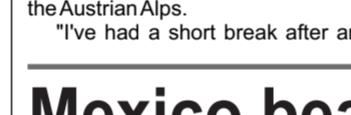
"I hope Croatia will make a memorable result there, with which I would retire my old international shirt."

Prosinecki told the daily

newspaper that he had left for a week of training in the Austrian Alps.

"I've had a short break after an

Mexico beat Colombia



AFP, Mexico

Mexico beat Colombia 2-1 in a World Cup warm-up at the Azteca stadium here on Sunday, just 19 days before the finals begin in Korea and Japan.

Mexico's goals came from

Spain, Portugal name squads

INTERNET

Portuguese and Spanish final 23 member squads for the FIFA World Cup 2002 announced yesterday:

PORTUGAL SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Nelson Pereira (Sporting Lisbon), Ricardo Pereira (Boavista Porto), Vitor Baia (FC Porto).

Defenders: Abel Xavier (Liverpool/England), Roberto Severo "Beto" (Sporting Lisbon), Marco Caneira (Benfica), Fernando Couto (Lazio/Ita), Nuno Frechaut (Boavista Porto), Jorge Andrade (FC Porto), Jorge Costa (Charlton/Eng), Rui Jorge Oliveira (Sporting Portugal).

Midfielders: Nuno Rocha "Capucho" (FC Porto), Luis Figo (Real Madrid/Spa), Paulo Bento (Sporting Portugal), Paulo Sousa (Espanyol/Spa), Pedro Barbosa (Sporting Lisbon), Armando Teixeira "Petit" (Boavista), Rui Costa (Milan/Ita), Sergio Conceicao (Inter Milan/Ita), Daniel Kenedy (Maritimo Funchal).

Forwards: Joao Pinto (Sporting Lisbon), Nuno Ribeiro "Gomes" (Fiorentina/Ita), Pedro Resendes "Pauleta" (Bordeaux/Fra).

SPAIN SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Santiago Canizares (Valencia), Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Ricardo Lopez (Valladolid).

Defenders: Curro Torres (Valencia), Fernando Hierro (Real Madrid), Miguel Angel Nadal (Real Mallorca), Carles Puyol (Barcelona), Juanfran Garcia (Celta Vigo), Enrique Romero (Deportivo La Coruna).

Midfielders: David Albelda (Valencia), Ruben Baraja (Valencia), Ivan Helguera (Real Madrid), Luis Enrique Martinez (Barcelona), Gaizka Mendieta (Lazio/Ita), Sergio Gonzalez (Deportivo La Coruna), Juan Carlos Valeron (Deportivo La Coruna), Xavi Hernandez (Barcelona).

Strikers: Francisco De Pedro (Real Sociedad), Alberto Luque (Real Mallorca), Fernando Morientes (Real Madrid), Raul Gonzalez (Real Madrid), Joaquin Sanchez (Real Betis), Diego Tristan (Deportivo La Coruna).

ARMAS OUT OF WORLD CUP

Armas, the feisty and irreplacable workhorse of the midfield, tore the anterior cruciate ligament of his right knee in the match at Washington's RFK Stadium, when he apparently took a mis-step as he was tracking down Uruguay's Fabian O'Neill along the right wing.

Armas played another eight minutes before being replaced by Pablo Mastroeni, and was then taken to the hospital, where an MRI revealed the tear.

"I'm extremely disappointed for Chris," said US coach Bruce Arena.

"Chris has been an outstanding performer with our team and a fine professional. We are indebted to his service to the US national team. He will certainly serve as an inspiration to his teammates this summer."

A decision on a replacement is

expected to take place in the next

Ajax bag double

AFF, Rotterdam

Ajax claimed the Dutch double on Sunday when they enjoyed a 3-2 cup final win against FC Utrecht 3-2.

It was the club's 15th cup triumph and sixth double and it was achieved in dramatic circumstances coming in extra time after they had been 2-1 down in normal time.

Egypt's Mido Hossam gave them a 21st minute lead but Igor Gluscevic then gave Utrecht a scent of victory with an equaliser in the 56th minute and a 76th minute penalty.

But Brazilian Wamberto equalised in the second minute of injury time for Ajax before Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored the winner three minutes into extra time.

Despite the defeat Utrecht will play in the UEFA Cup next season as Ajax, as league champions, will be in the Champions League.

Bayer Neverkusen?



REUTERS, Berlin

ing home with nothing at all.

Coach Klaus Toppmoeller, who has won praise for his side's brilliant run, tried his best to put on a brave face after Saturday's defeat.

"We have one chance left and we will give everything we have to take it," he said.

"If there is justice, we will win it."

The problem for Toppmoeller is Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo, Raul and a handful of other top players are in the way.

Leverkusen have inspirational

earlier in the campaign.

Toppmoeller will be without suspended Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto and captain Jens Nowotny, who is sidelined with a knee injury that has ruled him out of the World Cup.

Still, a burst of pride is possible and Leverkusen might emulate arch-rivals Bayern, who beat another Spanish club, Valencia, in last year's final in Milan.

Fans throughout soccer-mad Germany feel Leverkusen, who have not put their hands on any silverware since winning the German Cup for the first and only time in 1993, deserve a happy ending to their sad story.

"We have had a superb season and we have won sympathy like never before," said Calmund. "Maybe that's more important than winning a title."

Much will depend on which side Leverkusen field at Hampden Park, the giant killers who have made Europe take notice or the perpetual runners-up who always lose their nerve when it matters.

If the latter turn up, Leverkusen could share the fate of the last German team who faced Real in a European Cup final in Glasgow. It was Eintracht Frankfurt in 1960 and the Germans were humbled 7-3 in one of the finest matches ever played.

"Real had great men like Alfredo Di Stefano and Ferenc Puskas," remembered the 49-year-old Toppmoeller, who was a little boy already obsessed with football at the time.

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