

# Fiorentina no more

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Fiorentina are dead - long live Fiorentina - that is the message coming from football fans in Florence after their club effectively disappeared from Italian soccer.

The twice Italian champions, riddled with debts and in administration, were on Thursday refused a place in Serie B for next season and are facing almost certain bankruptcy.

With no position in the league, Fiorentina's players are all up for sale, and the administrator will now have to deal with the cancelling of contracts of all the club's staff.

But while there have been tears at the loss of a historic 76-year-old club, who were playing in the Champions League just three seasons ago, there is hope that Florence will keep a presence in professional football - and that the club will be called Fiorentina.

Florence city council said on Thursday evening that they had formed a new club called Fiorentina 1926 Fiorentina with the city's mayor Leonardo Domenici as the first president.

The hope is that soccer authorities will grant the new club a place in the Third Division (Serie C1) or the fourth level (Serie C2), offering the city the chance of a route back into the top flight.

It is a humbling request for a city whose team were recently beating the likes of AC Milan and Manchester United but it is the only hope.

The new club, backed by the city council and with mayor Leonardo Domenici as the first president, has just a week to find a real private owner and convince the Italian Football League that it has the resources to compete in C1 or C2.

"My role is only to give a guarantee to Florence and the Italian Football Federation. My task is for the new Fiorentina to find strong investors, healthy and honest, who can carry out a re-launch," said Domenici.

For the fans of the club it is clear that any new backer must be free of any links to Fiorentina president Vittorio Cecchi Gori, the film maker who is blamed by most for the club's predicament.

"None of the old faces - none of those compromised during the



PHOTO: AFP

A fan puts flowers and a scarf on the door of the headquarters of Fiorentina in Florence on August 1 after the cash-strapped club was relegated from the Italian top flight and blocked from playing division two football this season. The slogan on the t-shirt is reading "Vittorio is not my President", referring to the club's President Vittorio Cecchi Gori.

Cecchi Gori era," wrote one fans' website.

Italian media reports are suggesting that Enrico Preziosi, currently president of Serie A club Como, is the most likely backer.

But whoever is the new backer they will find that after years of conflict between club and fans the current crisis has at least brought unity among football lovers in Florence.

At meetings across the city on Thursday supporters' clubs prom-

ised that they would back the new club and continue to turn out in numbers even in the lower divisions.

Eugenio Giani, Florence city council's head of sport, and a founder of the new club, believes it is vital that fans be involved closely in the rebirth of Fiorentina.

"It is right that the supporters participate fully in the new club. The new Fiorentina will belong to the whole city - that is what we are working for now," he said.

# Under-strength Real

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Raul, Fernando Hierro and Roberto Carlos will be among six high-profile absentees when Real Madrid take on Liverpool in the opening match of the four-team pre-season tournament at the Bernabeu.

Real's five Spanish World Cup players, plus Brazil's Roberto Carlos, only returned to training on Monday and they will not be risked against the English side, although they may come in against either Bayern Munich or AC Milan on Sunday.

"They won't play," Del Bosque said at a news conference ahead of the game. "I'm absolutely clear

about that.

"We'll try and give one or more of them a few minutes in the final match but at the moment they need more preparation for a match like this."

The other players to miss Friday's game against Liverpool will be goalkeeper Iker Casillas, striker Fernando Morientes and midfielder Ivan Helguera.

French midfielder Claude Makelele is likely to miss out with a back injury but Real will still be able to field the likes of Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane.

AC Milan and Bayern Munich play each other on Saturday in the second match of the tournament, which is being played as part of Real's centenary celebrations.

The final and a match between the two losers will be played on Sunday.

# Gazza's MLS dream over

REUTERS, Washington

Former England midfielder Paul Gascoigne and DC United have broken off contract talks, the Major League Soccer club have said on their website.

"After long and involved discussions and having thoroughly considered all matters regarding a permanent, long-term move to DC United and Major League Soccer, both United head coach Ray Hudson and Paul Gascoigne mutually agreed not to pursue a contractual obligation for the remainder of the 2002 MLS season," said the club's technical director Dave Kasper.

Gascoigne, 35, arrived in Washington on July 24 for contract talks and to train with United, who have the worst record in MLS and have scored the fewest goals.

"Despite the unfortunate and diminishing time schedule, this has been an enjoyable and worthwhile endeavour, but all parties involved are in agreement that the decision not to proceed at this time is the right decision," said Hudson.

"DC United is sincere in its very best wishes to Paul and his future and is indeed grateful to both Paul and (agent) Ian Elliott for their professional manner and social conduct throughout this exchange both on and off the field."

# French League One preview

# Lyon full of confidence

Football

AFP, Paris

It took a long time coming - but having finally tasted a French league title success Lyon are adamant they can manage a repeat in the new campaign which they open Friday at Guingamp.

Lyon pipped Lens to the line in May after beating their rivals on the final day at a packed Stade Gerland

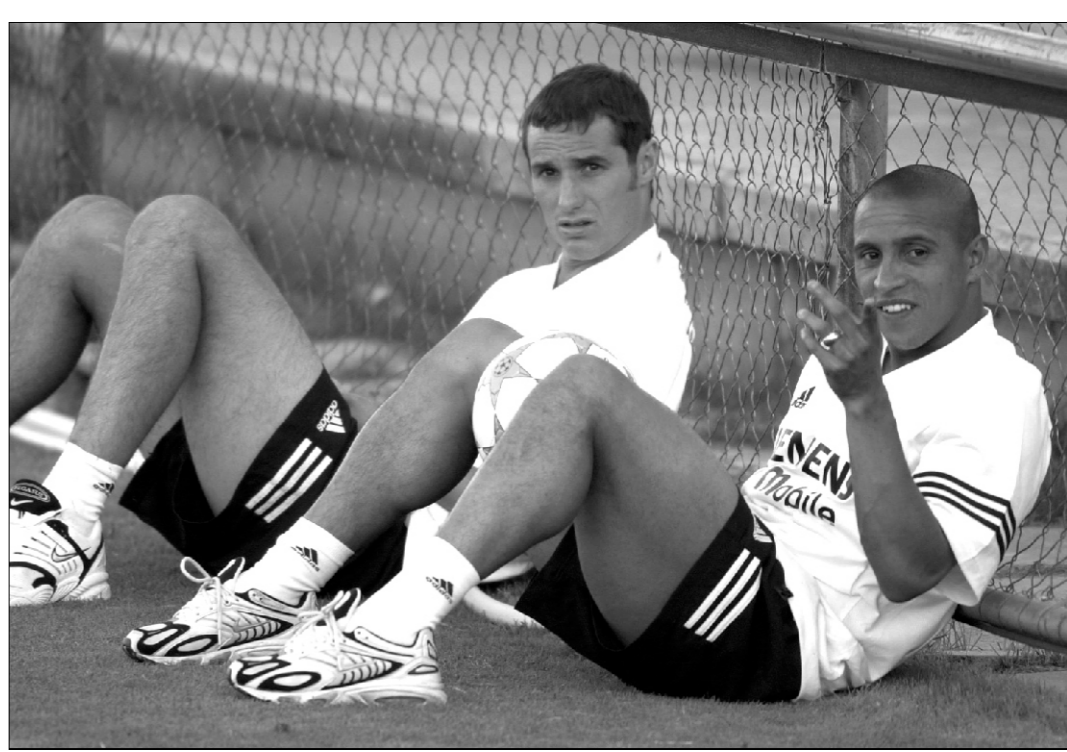


PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's Spanish international Ivan Helguera (L) and Brazilian superstar Roberto Carlos relax during a training session at Real Madrid's Sports City in Madrid on August 1.

Their investment has reaped handsome rewards not just with the title but three years of Champions League action, including a run to the quarter-finals two seasons ago.

Former Paris Saint Germain star and France midfielder Le Guen says a successful title defence is clearly his top priority.

"The priority is to retain the title and do better than we did last year in the Champions League (which saw a first-phase knockout followed by an unsuccessful UEFA Cup campaign).

players.

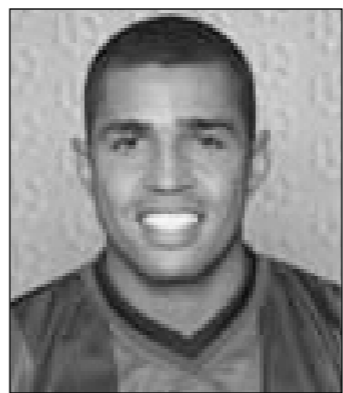
The club have therefore signed Argentine forward Martin Cardetti from River Plate to play alongside Brazilian Jose Aloisio with Ronaldinho playing just behind the pair.

"We are out to do better than last year," was all Fernandez would say when asked if this was the year PSG would add to titles gained in 1986 and 1994.

Marseille, the only French side to win the European Cup, open their season against Nantes but will play

**FIXTURES**

**Friday:** Guingamp v Lyon, Bordeaux, Marseille v Nantes, Montpellier v Rennes, Nice v Le Havre, Paris Saint Germain v Auxerre, Sedan v Sochaux, Strasbourg v Ajaccio



SONNY ANDERSON

to end a half century of underachievement.

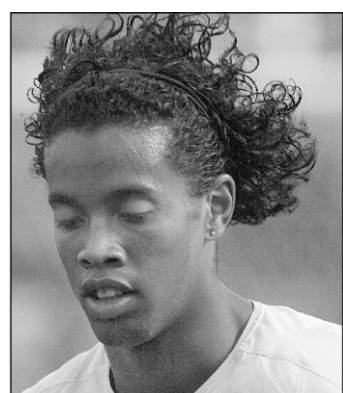
Their efforts will be keenly watched by a French footballing public anxious to see what state the domestic game is in following their national side's execrable World Cup showing which resulted in a goalless first-round exit, the worst record ever by a returning world champion.

According to striker Sonny Anderson and new coach Paul Le Guen, who has replaced new France coach Jacques Santini at the helm, Lyon are ready to cement their newfound status as the team to fear in France.

"We are right up there now. Lyon are now one of the big clubs in France and we have to live up to that billing this season," explained Anderson.

"We have every chance of doing so - and we also are capable of making much progress in the Champions League," insists the 31-year-old Brazilian, who previously won the title with Monaco before a two-year-spell with Barcelona which preceded his move to Lyon.

The club are backed financially by regional businessmen after a campaign by president Jean-Michel Aulas to increase Lyon's standing in their home area and also by cinema and communications group Pathe.



RONALDINHO

the match at Lyon following a suspension for their Stade Velodrome.

The club have struggled to stay afloat in recent seasons and spent last year in midtable but new president Christophe Bouchet says better times are around the corner under former Troyes coach Alain Perrin.

"We have a squad which is good enough to finish in the top five," insisted Bouchet.

Monaco coach Didier Deschamps goes into his second season as a manager with a visit to Troyes having only just avoided the indignity of the drop last May.

The principality side proved the greatest under-achievers of all in the French league as smaller outfits such as Lyon and Auxerre jostled with Lyon for the title.

This time, says Deschamps, "we will get results - with vigour and hard work."

This season, apparently in a bid to increase gate receipts, the top flight has been expanded from 18 to 20 teams with Ajaccio, Paraguay goalkeeper Jose-Luis Chilavert's Strasbourg and Nice the newcomers.

Strasbourg and Ajaccio meet on Saturday.

# Big boys in Amsterdam

Football

INTERNET, Amsterdam

Returning Barcelona manager, Louis van Gaal has asserted that the reason for Rivaldo's departure was because he is not a team player.

Speaking at a press-conference on the eve of the prestigious friendly Amsterdam tournament, the former Dutch manager was in a relaxed mood after just becoming a grandfather.

Joined at a table by Ronald Koeman (Ajax), Sir Alex Ferguson (Manchester United) and Cesare Prandelli (Parma), Van Gaal had no trouble answering whether he thought that Koeman would be a good successor to him in the Nou Camp hot-seat.

Van Gaal replied to a Spanish reporter, "he can be the next Barcelona trainer. He was my assistant at Barca. He has not only won the championship here but also the cup. He can do a lot of things and has developed a team with great talent. They are a team who want to play like a team, and we want to play like a team as well. That is the best path to success."

Barcelona, who like United reached the Champions League semifinals last season, will rest some internationals who took part in the World Cup.

"The World Cup players are still building up their form. They will play

30 minutes at most," Van Gaal said. A smiling Ferguson said asserted with a firm "no" that Paolo di Canio will not become the fourth Old Trafford striker.

But Ferguson did suggest that he will still buy a fourth striker, concluding that Rio Ferdinand's massive transfer fee was, "never an issue".

Ferguson said, "I have always worked on the basis of having four

van Nistelrooy is also in the United squad.

"I am pleased at the form and commitment of the players," Ferguson said. "The fitness is good. Hopefully, this [tournament] will give the edge to our game which is needed for the [English] league."

Ferguson admitted that this tournament is a far better preparation for the new season than his club's trip to the Far East last year. He said, "without question. The Far East has to be done for our fan base and our sponsors. This tournament pits us against good teams and is no comparison".

With just a few days left before his club's Champions League qualifier against Zalaegerszegi or NK Zagreb Ferguson said, "it's a tournament of this nature that's always a challenge. I had to take a gamble with some players who had taken part in the World Cup, because you have to have a team in mind".

Dutch champions Ajax are relishing the chance of taking on European giants United, Barcelona and Parma.

After last season's disappointing Champions League qualifying round exit, coach Koeman believes the experience of playing Europe's top sides will help his team do better this time round.

"Ajax is back in Europe but we have to realize we are still small in Europe. In this case it is very good for us to play in this tournament,"

Koeman said at a news conference on the eve of the competition at the Amsterdam Arena.

"We've the opportunity to play very big teams. We have to learn a lot to be on the level of the teams we are playing," the former Dutch international said.

Ajax, four times European champions, also suffered a humiliating exit from the UEFA Cup last season. Koeman replaced Co Adriaanse as coach in December after a string of poor results.

Ajax have struggled like other Dutch clubs to retain top players lured abroad by richer teams.

The Amsterdam tournament re-started in 1999 and has since grown out to be one of the biggest sporting events in Holland. The tournament kicks off tonight with Barcelona v Parma followed by Ajax v Manchester United.

Sunday night will see Manchester United take on Parma and defending champions, Ajax face Barcelona. The organisers expect some 500 million viewers world wide, while all 100,000 tickets have been sold-out for the event.

Parma manager, Prandelli said, "this year we have a young team and for us to play difficult matches against big teams is very important. Only then can we understand the character of our players. We will put 100% maybe even 110% into playing these games".

# German League Cup Marcelinho brings Hertha title

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Brazilian midfielder Marcelinho has struck twice as Hertha Berlin warmed up for the Bundesliga campaign with a 4-1 win over Schalke 04 in the German League Cup final.

The result was a special triumph for Hertha's Dutch coach Huub Stevens who joined Hertha from Schalke at the end of last season.

Hertha beat the same opponents by the same score in last season's final of the traditional prelude to the new season.

The Berlin club received 1.7 million euros in prize money for their victory in the tournament featuring the top six teams from last season's German league standings.

Marcelinho put Hertha on 32 minutes with a strike from outside the area before fellow Brazilian Alex Alves doubled the advantage from close range a minute later.

Nigerian striker Victor Agali hit back for Schalke in the 61st minute but Marcelinho struck from the penalty spot for his second goal six minutes from time before substitute Roberto Pinto completed the demolition with a minute to go.

Hertha, who beat Bayern Munich and Dortmund on their way to the final, finished fourth in the Bundesliga standings last season, one place above Schalke. Both teams will play in this season's UEFA Cup.

Thursday's result was also a timely confidence boost for Hertha ahead of their visit to champions Borussia Dortmund in the opening Bundesliga match on August 9.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Hertha Berlin's Brazilian striker Marcelinho (R) is being congratulated by ecstatic team-mate Zecke Neundorff after a goal against Schalke 04 during their League Cup final in Bochum on August 1.

# Piacenza first up for Juve

REUTERS, Milan

Italian champions Juventus will begin their title defence at Piacenza when the Serie A season starts on September 1.

Fixtures for the opening day announced by the Italian Football League also handed promoted Como a tough trip to AS Roma.

Inter Milan, without a title win since 1989 and pipped to the 'scudetto' by Juventus on the final day of last season, start their campaign with a home game against promoted Empoli.

The first clash of top teams comes in the fourth week of the season when on September 29 Lazio face AC Milan.

Inter Milan will host Juventus on October 20, while the first Rome derby sees Lazio face Roma on October 27.

The first Milan derby, which could see Brazilian World Cup winners Ronaldo of Inter and Rivaldo of AC Milan come face to face, is scheduled for November 24.

Exact dates for the games could be changed once the television schedule has been agreed.

# Work permit in Juninho's way

AFP, London

Middlesbrough manager Steve McClaren is set to lead a delegation Friday to appeal against a decision to refuse Brazil World Cup winner Juninho a British work permit which has prevented the English Premiership side from re-signing the 29-year-old.

As a non-European player, Juninho must secure a work permit from the British Government's department of employment (DoE) before he can play in the Premiership.

However, his initial application has been rejected because he falls short of the requirement that he should have played in 75 percent of his country's competitive fixtures over the last two years.

McClaren will be a member of a Middlesbrough delegation that travels to Sheffield, northern England, Thursday, arguing the club's case at an appeal hearing.

If they succeed Middlesbrough are all set to go ahead with a six million pounds deal to bring Juninho to the Riverside from Spanish side Atletico Madrid.

Although Juninho does not pass the appearance test, exceptions can be made for players of sufficiently high quality.

As he has just been a member of a World Cup-winning side, Middlesbrough are optimistic that they will eventually get the

# Impressive Silva debut

Football

INTERNET

Arsene Wenger last night predicted big things for new signing Gilberto Silva after the Brazilian midfielder won more silverware on his debut for the Gunners.

World Cup winner Silva starred as Arsenal won both their 45-minute matches against Panathinaikos and AS Roma to win this pre-season tournament in Austria.

The Gunners beat the Greek side 1-0 and followed up with a 2-1 success over the Italians.

Wenger was impressed by the midfielder's displays, just a few days after linking up with his new team-mates following a £5m move from Atletico Mineiro.

"I think he has shown he is a very good player and what I liked was the fact that he kept things simple," said the Frenchman.

"He showed that he had good vision and it was a very interesting start for him. I think he can play all across the midfield, but the holding role just in front of the defence is what he does best."

Silva, 25, played the whole 45 minutes as the Gunners cruised to victory against Panathinaikos.

There was no place in the squad, though, for goalkeeper Fabian Carini following his recent move on loan from Juventus.

The Uruguayan international

watched his new team-mates from the touchline. Also absent from the Arsenal squad were England quartet David Seaman, Martin Keown, Sol Campbell and Ashley Cole who continue to rest after their exploits at the World Cup.

Arsenal secured their opening victory with an excellent goal from striker Sylvain Wiltord after 28 minutes.

The French international rose superbly to power a header into the top corner from Graham Barrett's left-wing cross.

Jeremie Aladiere turned in another impressive performance. The young French striker forced goalkeeper Antonis Nikopolidis to make a superb save from a spectacular overhead kick and he also hit the post as Arsenal dominated.

Silva re-appeared for Arsenal's second match of the tournament against Roma and helped his new team to another win.

Patrick Vieira and Thierry Henry also made an appearance in a strong Gunners line-up in a game which determined the overall winners after the Italians had earlier beaten Panathinaikos 1-0.

And Henry bounced back from his disappointing World Cup with a goal inside four minutes to put Wenger's side ahead.

The French hot-shot found the net with a far post header after a pinpoint cross from Wiltord, who gained possession following a powerful Silva tackle.

Roma looked to have salvaged a draw when Argentinian superstar Gabriel Batistuta fired in from close

range after 35 minutes.

But Arsenal grabbed a late winner when Henry turned provider for teenage sensation Aladiere to tap into an empty net with the Italian defence wrong-footed. Meanwhile, Arsenal's stars have been told: Qualify for the Champions League if you want to earn your win bonus!

The club are changing players' contracts, with big bonuses no longer paid just for winning games. Extra payments will be earned only for finishing in the top two of the Premiership or winning a trophy.

But Vieira and Arsenal are being tipped for Champions League glory this season - by the man who unearthed Vieira's all-conquering talent.

Guy Lacombe was in London this week to lead his Sochaux team into InterToto Cup battle against Fulham.

But it was as boss of the youth team at French side Cannes that he recorded one of his biggest successes - discovering a 17-year-old Vieira who would go on to become one of the most coveted midfielders in Europe. Lacombe - who also discovered Real Madrid star Zinedine Zidane - believes Vieira can give Gunners boss Wenger his proudest moment yet this season.

He said: "I would love to see Vieira with the big trophies with Arsenal this season."

"I believe he will help them win trophies in England again and in Europe."



JUNINHO

midfielder back on board. "I am confident," Middlesbrough chief executive Keith Lamb told the club's official website, www.mfc.co.uk.

"Juninho has won 42 caps for Brazil and has played in the World Cup final. I'm sure that he's of sufficient quality."

"There are only two Brazilian players who would automatically qualify for a work permit under the current regulations, and they are Roberto Carlos and Rivaldo."

"That's because Brazil have a habit of alternating their players and playing different sides in different competitions."

"What is relevant is that Juninho played in the World Cup finals and is a regular member of their best team."

Juninho was granted a work permit on appeal two seasons ago when he returned to the club on loan.