

# Santini would love it

Football

AFP, Lyon

Jacques Santini, one of the favourites to take over as French coach, has made public for the first time his interest in the job.

Santini, who as coach led Lyon to their first ever French first division title last season, told AFP he was able to go public now Roger Lemerre had been sacked following the 1998 world champions humiliating first round exit at last month's World Cup finals.

"I don't have anything to say on Roger Lemerre's departure, but now it's official and now that my name is frequently being mentioned as a possible replacement I have to say that I am interested in it," Santini said.

Santini's remarks came 24 hours after 61-year-old Lemerre was

ushered aside by the French Football Federation (FFF) in the first step on the road to recovery for the ailing 1998 world champions.

The 50-year-old Santini was part of the all-conquering Saint Etienne side which captured four championship titles between 1969-1981, finishing his playing days at Montpellier in 1983.

Then turning to management he started out life in the third division with Lisieux, moving to first division Toulouse (1985-89) before stints with Lille (1989-92), Saint Etienne (1992-94) and Sochaux (1994-95).

He then took a two year sabbatical from club management, helping the French league's national technical directorate (DTN).

Returning to the front line as Lyon's technical director he took over as coach in 2000, winning the 2001-02 championship, before handing over the reins to Paul Le Guen and resuming his duties as technical director.

"I'm still employed by Lyon and remain at the disposal of my club. If my name is to be put forward the situation will have to be discussed with Jean-Michel Aulas," he insisted.

Santini added that he was "flattered" that football personalities like French great Michel Platini had mentioned him in connection with the post.

Other names in the frame are former French international midfielder Alain Giresse, French Under-21 handler Raymond Domenech and ex Japan manager Philippe Troussier.



JACQUES SANTINI

# Metsu Emirates bound

Football

AFP, Dubai

Frenchman Bruno Metsu, who guided Senegal to the quarter-finals of the World Cup, is due in the United Arab Emirates this week for talks to coach Al-Ain, the Emirati club's general secretary said Monday.

Metsu was due to arrive in the UAE on Wednesday, and later give a press conference in Al-Ain, which lies in the south of the Emirates on the border with Oman, Sulaim Suroor al-Shamsi said, quoted by

Gulf News.

Shamsi said the supervisor of the club's senior team, Hamad bin Nikhairat al-Amri, had just returned from one week of talks with Metsu in Paris.

Since leading Senegal into the last eight on their maiden appearance in the World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea, Metsu has also been linked with the coaching job at Turkish club Gaziantep.

Al-Ain was coached last season by Bosnian Jamal Hajji, who took over from Romanian Angel Iordanescu.

# Barca roping in Riquelme

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona are on the brink of closing a deal to sign Boca Juniors midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme, Spanish papers have reported.

They said that the Catalan club would pay 13 million euros for the highly-rated 24-year-old Argentine who would then sign a five-year deal with his new side and be presented on Tuesday.

Barcelona president Joan Gaspart said in an interview he was interested in the playmaker but urged caution.

"He is an excellent player and we have been following him for some time," Gaspart was quoted as saying by Barcelona-based sports daily Mundo Deportivo on Monday.

But he added: "We don't want to talk too much about players that we

want until they actually sign for the club."

Riquelme, who missed out on selection for Argentina's World Cup squad, has been the subject of a protracted on-off transfer saga with Barcelona that has lasted the best part of the last two years.

Seen as the long-term replacement for Rivaldo, he was on the brink of joining the Catalan club last year, but Barcelona's interest appeared to cool as the season wore on.

But after a proposed move to Atletico Madrid fell through last week, Barcelona's interest in the player was rekindled and officials from the two clubs met at the weekend.

"All we have to do is to put on paper what we have already agreed verbally," Boca vice-president Pedro Pompillo told Mundo Deportivo. "There shouldn't be any problems now."



JUAN ROMAN RIQUELME



PHOTO: INTERNET

PAIN, SWEAT and GLORY: (L-R) Rivaldo, Emerson, Ronaldo and Roque Junior doing some strength training during a practice session before the World Cup.

# Champions of fitness



INTERNET

After Turkey had been beaten in the World Cup semi-final, Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari was sufficiently relaxed to let his guard down.

For the first time, he went into detail on the reasons behind the exclusion of the star striker who is the darling of the Brazilian media.

"Romario no longer has the physical condition to carry out the role that Ronaldo is playing," he said.

"He can't work back and harry the opposing centre backs. Time and the results have shown that I was right."

And then Brazil's first goal in the final on Sunday rammed home the point.

Ronaldo lost the ball as he tried to cut in from the left and break through the German line. But losing possession did not bring Brazil's attacking possibilities to an end.

Ronaldo had the power to tackle back and win the ball against Liverpool strong-man Dieter Hamann. The ball ran away to the feet of Rivaldo, and as he was preparing to shoot Ronaldo was

already on his feet and bursting into position to slide home the rebound.

It was a goal that vindicated Scolari, crowned Ronaldo's comeback and put Brazil on the path to their fifth world title.

The last time the men in yellow won the World Cup with a 100% record, the England manager was none too impressed.

"We have nothing to learn from the Brazilians," was Sir Alf Ramsey's response to Mexico 1970.

At that time the population of Brazil was around 90 million. It has since almost doubled.

Perhaps the main lesson the class of 2002 can teach is that, if you want to win World Cups, it is advisable to be a nation of more than 170 million where football is the only mass sport.

It certainly increases the chances of unearthing someone like Ronaldo, whose return has transformed the Brazil team from water to wine.

There is a terrifying aspect to Brazil's third consecutive World Cup final appearance: they still have enormous room for improvement.

Domestic Brazilian football is operating way below its potential. Chaos and corruption are rife. Terrace culture is horribly stagnant. Attendances are often low, and stadia and facilities are outdated.

There is much that Brazilian football can learn from the rest of the world, but its glorious tradition is based on overcoming problems with improvised solutions.

And, in one way, they have been able to reap benefit from the things which hold them back.

There is universal agreement that Brazilian football needs to sort out its calendar. At present there are a plethora of competitions and hundreds of games to be played.

A few years ago, Juninho played two games on the same night for Sao Paulo. It is not unheard of for teams to play four games in a week.

In order to deal with the insane workload, physical preparation in Brazil has been raised to an art form.

So many of the 2002 favourites crashed out complaining of tiredness at the end of a long season. Brazil made no such complaints.

Rather than lose players, they gained Ronaldo, who got through seven games in magnificent style after all his injury problems.

This was probably the biggest, strongest, fittest team to have represented Brazil in a World Cup. And, when strength and lung-power are added to the odd flash of genius, the World Cup ends up in worthy hands.



PHOTO: AFP

Guus Hiddink (L) and PSV Eindhoven president Harry van Raaij head for a media conference in Eindhoven yesterday.

# Hiddink-PSV deal done

Football

REUTERS, Eindhoven

Guus Hiddink, who took South Korea to the World Cup semi-finals, is to return as coach to Dutch first division side PSV Eindhoven.

"Guus Hiddink has given a definitive answer and will coach the club's first team for the next two seasons," PSV Eindhoven said in a statement on Monday.

Hiddink, 55, coached South Korea for 18 months. They beat Poland, Portugal, Italy and Spain and finished fourth in the best World Cup showing by an Asian team in the tournament's 72-year history.

PSV Eindhoven is the club that gave Hiddink his start as an assistant coach in 1983. He had played there and went on to become head coach, leading them to the Dutch League championship three times and to the European Cup in 1988.

"It's good to be back and to work with a warm and ambitious club. Those were the most important reasons for me to come back," Hiddink told a news conference. "I'm a happy coach."

Hiddink coached Fenerbahce in Turkey and Spain's Valencia before taking over the Dutch national team in 1995. He then coached in Spain at Real Madrid and Real Betis before taking the South Korea job in December 2000.

Hiddink, whose coaching contract with South Korea ended after the Asian side's third place play-off defeat by Turkey, confirmed that he would maintain ties by serving as an adviser to South Korea as they prepare for the next finals.

Asked if he would return to train Korea after his PSV stint, he replied: "A lot can happen in soccer in two years."

PSV President Harry van Raaij expressed delight at the return of Hiddink, who will begin his new job on August 1 after taking a holiday.

"You see before you a particularly proud PSV president because we have managed to get Guus Hiddink back to where he started his very successful career," Van Raaij told reporters.

Hiddink's T-shirts throughout the World Cup and roared every time his face flashed across stadium screens.

His success prompted a book on his management style, something pundits urged the government and companies to emulate and captured in a simple play on his name: 'He think'.

# Gazzayev replaces Romantsev

REUTERS, Moscow

CSKA Moscow coach Valery Gazzayev has replaced Oleg Romantsev as Russia coach following the country's poor showing at the World Cup.

Gazzayev, 48 next month, was Russia's under-21 coach last year before joining CSKA and leading them to the Russian Cup in May.

Gazzayev said the decision to appoint him had been unanimous. "I'm really happy with this honour," he said.

Russia failed to progress from what was regarded as one of the easiest first-round groups in the World Cup, prompting Romantsev's resignation.

# Terry time in Leeds

Football

AFP, London

Former England manager Terry Venables was confirmed Monday as the new manager of Premiership side Leeds United, signing a two-year deal, the club said in a statement to the Stock Exchange.

Venables, 59, takes over from David O'Leary, who was sacked 11 days ago.

The club said in a statement: "Leeds United Plc announces the appointment of Terry Venables to the position of manager with immediate effect."

"He has today signed an initial two-year contract."

It recalled his "almost unrivalled" experience in management, ranging from spells in charge of fellow Premiership club Tottenham Hotspur, Spanish giants Barcelona and the national teams of England and Australia.

Venables was able to accept the offer after being released from a lucrative television contract commenting on Champions League games.

His last managerial role was at Middlesbrough, where he took over as coach under Bryan Robson in December 2000 for six months and steered the Teessiders to safety.

Leeds had initially favoured Celtic boss Martin O'Neill to replace O'Leary, only to be told he intended seeing out the remaining year of his contract with the Scottish champions.

Middlesbrough manager Steve McLaren became the next first choice, according to newspaper reports, but he either ruled himself out through loyalty to the club or was ruled out because of his still close links with Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson.

O'Leary was dismissed by Leeds on June 27 after failing to bring silverware to the Yorkshire club in his four years in charge.

Four days ago Leeds announced on their official website that the club had not spoken to Venables about the position.

But Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale insisted he wanted to have

O'Leary's successor in place within two weeks of the Irishman's dismissal on June 27.

Venables will be a popular choice and comes with massive experience having had spells in club football at Barcelona, Tottenham, QPR, Portsmouth and Crystal Palace.

Gary Mabbutt, who played under Venables at Tottenham, believes that he has taken the job to prove he is capable of winning the English Premiership.

Venables won the FA Cup with Spurs in 1991 but has never led a club in England to a league title, although he did achieve the feat with Barcelona in Spain.

Mabbutt, Venables' captain during his tenure at White Hart Lane, said: "Terry still wants to prove himself as a manager that can win championships."

"He won the FA Cup at

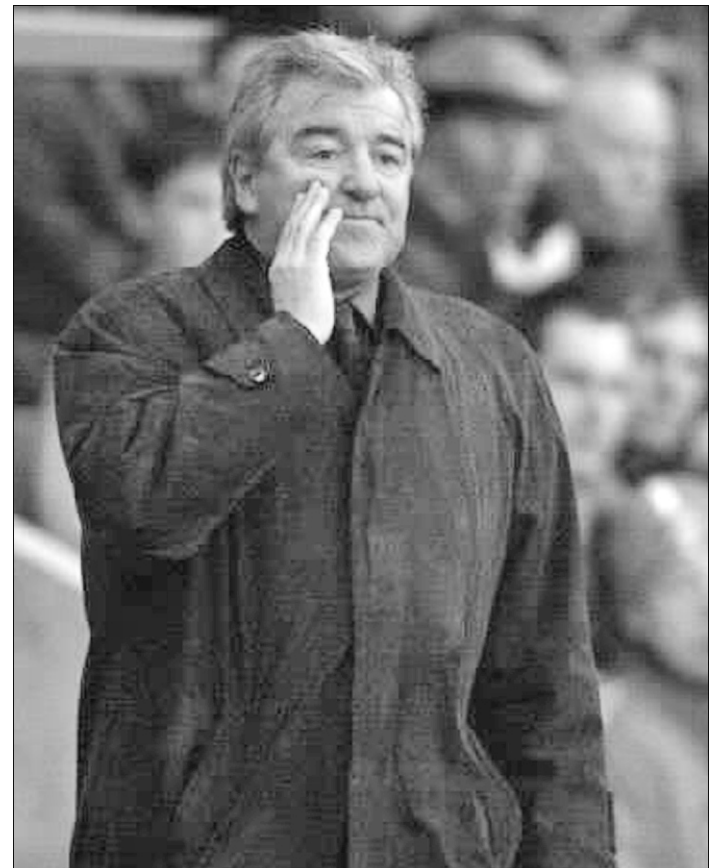
Tottenham but that's all he's achieved in his time in English football and I'm sure he wants to build on that and what an opportunity this will be for him."

Leeds United Supporters' Club chairman Ray Fell said Venables would prove to be a worthy successor to O'Leary.

"We know we have got a man with charisma and ability and a track record that we are looking for," he said.

"He (Venables) has had a good coaching record both in this country and abroad, particularly the job he did with England - he nearly pulled it off at Euro 96 - and his record speaks for itself and he will do a job for Leeds."

Venables is expected to be publicly unveiled at a press conference at Elland Road on Wednesday.



TERRY VENABLES

# Leeds tracking Ayala

INTERNET, Valencia

Argentina captain Roberto Ayala has fuelled speculation that Rio Ferdinand is set to quit Leeds United by admitting he has received an offer to join the Yorkshire club.

"I know that Leeds have made an offer for me and I would very much like to play in England," said the Valencia centre-half.

Ayala, 29, insisted that while he is not in a hurry to leave the Mestalla, he understands that the Valencia board may be keen to cash in on him before his contract expires next summer.

"I am very comfortable in Valencia," he explained. "But it is up to the board members to decide if they want to keep me. If they want to release me then I'd be happy to go, but if not then I would be equally happy to stay."

Ayala was strongly linked with Manchester United at the end of last season, but the Old Trafford club now appear to have turned their attention towards Leeds captain Ferdinand, who starred for England in the World Cup.

The Red Devils are understood to have offered 25 million pounds for Ferdinand, while Leeds United plc, who have already admitted that the club will have to sell this summer, are thought to be holding out for an offer in the region of 35 million pounds.

Ayala was valued by the Valencia president Jaime Orti at 22 million pounds last season.

# Ronaldo not amused

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Brazilian World Cup hero Ronaldo has hit out at reports in Italy that he is unhappy at his club Inter Milan and would like to move to Real Madrid.

Ronaldo scored both Brazil's goals in their 2-0 win over Germany in Sunday's World Cup final in Yokohama, Japan and was top scorer in the tournament with eight goals.

But Italian media reports have suggested the striker's failure to thank Inter for their support during his three injury-plagued seasons was a sign that he was ready to leave the club.

"Just as I did not answer questions about Brazil when I was playing with Inter, my concern in recent months has been with the World Cup," Ronaldo said on his official website.

"That is why there was no need for me to talk about other things - I will do so at the right moment," he added.

Ronaldo was reported to have declined to send a 'message' to his Inter team mates after the World Cup final.

The last time Ronaldo came in for criticism in Italy was after he returned to Brazil in February, during the Rio carnival, to work on his fitness.

But he said that although he had proved his critics wrong there were still some in Italy who appeared determined to question him.

"For the umpteenth time, just as happened during my stay in Rio in February that has been shown to be fundamental to my recovery, they are trying to portray me in a bad light and inventing lies about me," said Ronaldo.

The Brazilian, who is now the joint third-highest scorer in World Cup history alongside compatriot Pele, said he just wanted some peace and quiet.

"Now I want and above all I need to rest, together with my family and far from people who don't even merit professional respect," said the striker.

Ronaldo had earlier dismissed the reports that he wanted to leave Inter by telling the club's website that he was looking forward to returning to Milan for the coming season.

"Now I am going on holiday but I am delighted that I will be back soon ready to start a great season with Inter," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (R) talking with Japan's outgoing French coach Philippe Troussier (L) during a presentation ceremony of a 'letter of appreciation' from the Prime Minister to the coach at Tokyo yesterday.