

Lopez bashes Batigol

Football

INTERNET, Rome

Lazio striker Claudio Lopez has launched an astonishing attack on international teammate Gabriel Batistuta for his refusal to accept criticism for Argentina's poor showing at the World Cup. "The ones who should score goals have to take responsibility, and he was the main striker," he raged.

Batistuta was a surprise option in the starting line-up ahead of Lopez's Lazio team-mate Hernan Crespo, and, although he got the only goal of the game against Nigeria, failed to hit the target as Argentina lost to England and drew with Sweden to crash out of the tournament.

The Roma striker then retired from international football, insisting he was not to blame for Argentina's failure. "I gave everything I could in this shirt and can find no reasons for receiving criticism," he said.

But that attitude has infuriated Lopez. "It's easy to talk," he said. "The forwards have to take responsibility, and he always had the goal in front of him, while I was coming from the left side."

"It was easier for him, and if he thinks anything different, he should give the number nine shirt to me, and he should play on the left side,



CLAUDIO LOPEZ

running behind the number four of the other team, getting the ball, running back to opponents' box and sending in balls for the striker.

"I don't want to say the blame lies with one person or another. We all have to take the blame."

And Lopez believes the press have gone easy on Batistuta because of his reputation and a

sparkling past that saw him hit 57 goals in 77 internationals.

"The criticism has always been for other players and not for him," Lopez went on. "Now we are all in the mud, and it's not fair that he's the only one who doesn't receive criticism."

"He is Argentina's top-scorer of all time, and he's always played for the national team, so that's why the press will never touch him."

"He has to accept this situation and do what Diego Maradona always did and defend everybody."

"It's nice to be treated well and let everybody else take the blame. I would also like to do that, but it doesn't work like that. All of us were there, and I accept the responsibility."

Lopez was pictured weeping on the pitch after the draw against Sweden, and he believes that summed up just how frustrated he felt.

"Do you think I cried so everybody could see me?" he demanded. "I cried because I broke my ass for four years to get there."

"I did what I had to do. I played there after four years of hope and hard work, and then we were all in the mud. He shouldn't try to save himself - we were all in the same position."

Beautiful Brazil in the USA?

Football

AP, Hackensack, New Jersey

World champion Brazil might be coming to the Giants Stadium for a game against the U.S. National Team.

A Superior Court judge on Tuesday cleared the way for the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority to promote a match next month between the World Cup champions and the United States.

The New York-New Jersey MetroStars asked Judge Marguerite Simon for an injunction to prevent the authority from promoting soccer games at the stadium on Aug. 8 and 21. The MetroStars maintained their contract with the authority, the stadium's landlord, gave the MLS team exclusive rights to promote games there.

MetroStars general manager Nick Sakiewicz said the team plans to appeal the ruling.

Sports Authority president George Zoffinger hopes to finalize plans shortly for exhibition games next month between Real Madrid and AS Roma, and another between Brazil and the United States.

Sakiewicz said the MetroStars have nothing against a game between Brazil and the United States, but the team is the only one

with the legal right to promote the match.

"If we're involved, the sports authority makes less money," Sakiewicz said. "This is a tactic on their part to make more money by violating our lease."

Sakiewicz also expressed doubt the U.S. Soccer Federation would approve a match between Brazil and the United States.

"U.S.-Brazil is not going to happen," Sakiewicz said. "They are going to look like dummies."

Zoffinger said the authority only looked into promoting more games after the MetroStars refused to let them promote a charity game between Celtic of Scotland and AC Milan in May.

"We're really excited about the prospect of some of these international games," Zoffinger said. "At the same time, the MLS and the MetroStars remain an important presence at Giants Stadium. We feel this international presence will help them."

Sakiewicz said the MetroStars have been working hard to promote other unspecified exhibitions on those dates.

"Unfortunately, we'll have to move forward and try to bring them to another stadium, much like we already have to do with our playoff games," Sakiewicz said.

Rustu snubs MU

Football

INTERNET, Ankara

Turkey goalkeeper Rustu Recber has confirmed he will stay at Fenerbahce for another season, despite a host of bids from top clubs.

"Before the World Cup, I told the fans that I would still be at Fenerbahce next season," he explained.

"I received offers before the tournament began and have received more since it finished, which is not a surprise as I put in some good performances over

there. "Manchester United and teams



RUSTU RECBER

of similar stature have made offers, but the fact remains that I made a promise to the fans. Maybe I'll live to regret the decision, but life goes on."

Rustu, 29, has just a year left on his Fener contract and admitted that it could be a different story for him next summer. "We will see what happens. Maybe then it will be time to move on," he said.

The former Antalyaspor No 1 was one of the stars of the World Cup as he inspired Turkey to semi-finals. English sides Arsenal, Aston Villa and Manchester United were thought to be frontrunners in the race for his signature.

Boro bid for Juninho

Football

REUTERS, London

Middlesbrough have opened talks with Juninho as they step up their bid to lure the Brazilian World Cup-winner to the club for a third time.

The English Premier League side have already agreed a fee with Juninho's Spanish club Atletico Madrid but need to settle personal terms.

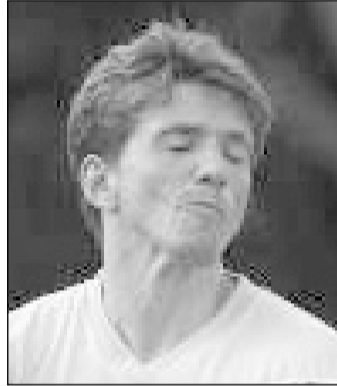
"We're speaking with Juninho and an announcement will be made in due course," chief executive Keith Lamb told Middlesbrough's website on Tuesday.

"Juninho has enjoyed his time here, he was very comfortable here and on both occasions he's expressed a love for the club."

"Hopefully his affection for Middlesbrough, in terms of the club and fans, is as strong as ever."

"I'm hopeful we will be able to persuade him to come back."

The 29-year-old playmaker first joined Middlesbrough in 1995 and immediately became a fans' favourite before leaving for Atletico two



JUNINHO

years later. He returned on loan to the Teesside club in September 1999, before joining Brazilian sides Vasco da Gama and Flamengo on loan.

Juninho featured in five of Brazil's matches at the World Cup in South Korea and Japan last month, including a late substitute appearance in the 2-0 victory over Germany in the final.

Middlesbrough, who did not disclose the agreed fee with Atletico, announced a club record 8.15-million-pound purchase of Empoli striker Massimo Maccarone last week.

"When (manager) Steve (McClaren) decided Juninho would be the right player for us, I made contact with my old friends at Atletico Madrid, and we quickly agreed a fee," Lamb said, adding that Juninho's World Cup-winning celebrations could delay matters.

"They have won the World Cup and I do know they know how to celebrate in Brazil."

"Naturally it has taken Juninho time to come down after his World Cup exploits, but now we're ready to take things forward and speak to him."

Wembley project under fire

Football

REUTERS, London

A British parliamentary select committee has called for the return of 120 million pounds in National Lottery money if the latest project to rebuild Wembley stadium does not go ahead.

The old Wembley stadium, venue of England's 4-2 win over West Germany in the 1966 World Cup final, staged its last match in October, 2000.

Since then plans for building a new stadium in north London with the help of lottery money have consistently foundered with the estimated total cost trebling to more than 700 million pounds.

A report from the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee released on Wednesday noted that work was finally to begin before the end of the year.

"The lottery grant must be returned if the project does not go ahead," the report said. "We believe that the arrangements for the protection of the 120 million pound

lottery grant to Wembley are deeply unsatisfactory."

The report from the all-party committee, chaired by the ruling Labour Party's Gerald Kaufman, was also highly critical of the role played by the national sports governing body Sport England.

"Sport England's performance in monitoring the progress of the project has been slack, slovenly and supine," it said.

"We repeat that Sport England's protection of the 120 million pound, the largest single grant ever awarded to a sporting body, entirely fails to meet the standards to be expected of such a public body."

"We believe that Sport England's performance has been deficient to the point of dereliction."

The Football Association (FA) signed a preliminary deal with German bank Westdeutsche Landesbank in May to fund the latest project for a national soccer stadium.

Original plans for the stadium envisaged a national venue to form the centre of an England bid for the 2006 World Cup and, possibly, the Olympic Games.

Riquelme twist

INTERNET, Milan

New Barcelona signing, Juan Roman Riquelme could be loaned out to Udinese.

Just a few hours after the Argentine midfielder signed for Barcelona, president Joan Gaspart announced that it's possible that he could be transferred to Udinese on a one season loan, considering that the player has not been welcomed by coach Luis Van Gaal.

But Udinese are also doing negotiations for a foreign forward, because Italian ones demand transfer fees that are simply too high for the club. Managers from the Italian club have enquired with Bayern Munich about Carsten Jancker, an interest confirmed by Bayern vice-president Karl Heinz Rummenigge.

Barcelona and Boca Juniors agreed a transfer fee of 5.9 million dollars for Riquelme on Tuesday. The 24-year-old Argentinean international will earn three million dollars a year for five years, with the Catalan club holding the option to extend for a sixth season.



EDILSON

Edilson goes to Kashiwa

REUTERS, Tokyo

Brazil striker Edilson will return to the country where he helped his nation lift the World Cup after joining Japanese First Division club Kashiwa Reysol, the club said.

Edilson, who played in four of Brazil's World Cup matches signed for Kashiwa from Brazilian club Cruzeiro on a short-term contract running from July 1 through to January 1 next year.

The 31-year-old played for Kashiwa in the 1996 and 1997 seasons, scoring 44 goals in 54 league matches, but he has a reputation for indiscipline and was eclipsed at the recent World Cup by top-scoring team mate Ronaldo who got eight goals during the tournament.

L'pool grab Diarra

REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool have signed French midfielder Alou Diarra on a free transfer from Bayern Munich.

Diarra has signed a five-year deal and is set to be joined at Anfield by compatriot Bruno Cheyrou in the next few days, according to a report on the club's website on Tuesday.

Boss Gerard Houllier agreed a deal with Cheyrou's French club, Lille, in May.

Cheyrou is expected to officially complete his move on a three-year contract worth around 6.5 million pounds, according to Lille.

Diarra, 21, is a former France under-20 international and arrived at Bayern two years ago.

Liverpool are also waiting to confirm the captures of Senegal's World Cup pair Salif Diao and El-Hadji Diouf before the start of the new English season.

Diao, the midfielder who scored in Senegal's 1-1 draw with Denmark at last month's World Cup before being sent off in the same match, is set to join from French side Sedan on a five-year deal but is unlikely to arrive at Anfield until December.

Striker Diouf, who moves to Liverpool from Lens, was named in FIFA's official World Cup All-Star team after helping Senegal to a place in the quarterfinals.

Houllier targeted the duo before the start of the World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan.

Cisse dismisses black magic

Football

INTERNET, Birmingham

Birmingham's new £4.5million signing Aliou Cisse has rubbished claims that voodoo was responsible for Senegal's superb World Cup.

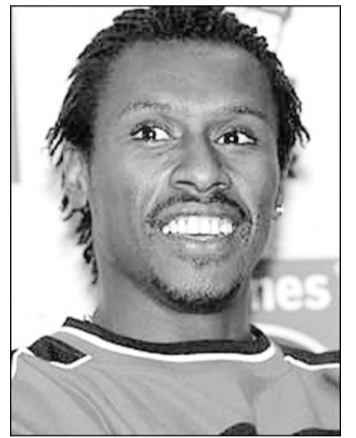
Cisse, 26, helped shut out Patrick Vieira in the shock 1-0 win over World Cup holders France in the opening game of the tournament last month.

But the midfield hardman insisted their results in reaching the quarter-finals was down to hard work and not black magic.

Cisse said: "It is crazy what people say about Senegal. Of course there is tradition in every country and that should be respected."

"But to say we used voodoo is madness. If we had done that we would be world champions and our players abroad would be winning every European competition."

"There is this misconception about the game in Africa. People still think we are slaughtering chickens every evening. But it is about time these opinions stopped."



ALIOU CISSE

"By playing well in the World Cup, we have done something about that and we have made great progress."

"People thought we were like a French B team because all our players are with French teams but we showed what we are capable of."

Cisse has been given a break by Blues manager Steve Bruce after completing the deal to recuperate from his summer exertions in Japan and South Korea.

Rio backs Terry

Football

REUTERS, Leeds

England defender Rio Ferdinand says the appointment of Terry Venables at Leeds United to replace sacked manager David O'Leary is good news for the Premier League club.

After an impressive World Cup the 23-year-old Londoner has been linked with a 35 million pound move to Manchester United, but Ferdinand said he had not been told of any plans to sell him.

Leeds fans will be hoping the arrival of former England, Barcelona and Tottenham Hotspur coach Venables may persuade him to stay at the club.

"It's great news for the club," Ferdinand told the Sun newspaper on Wednesday. "I am looking forward to meeting Mr Venables and hearing his plans."

"His record speaks for itself. He has a proven track record and although I was sorry to see David O'Leary go, if you have to get a replacement then Terry Venables is the man."

"My position has never changed in all this. People have said a deal has been done to sell me, but it hasn't as far as I know."

"I spoke to the chairman before I went to Las Vegas on my holiday and we agreed to talk when I got back to training."

"I won't go into details about

what was said, but I am still a Leeds player and I haven't asked for transfer."

When Venables was England manager, from 1994-96, he included the young Ferdinand in his



RIO FERDINAND

squad training sessions, something which the central defender has never forgotten.

"Terry Venables was brilliant to me and I learned quickly about his man-management skills," he told the paper.

"You would see him coming along the corridor and he would just stop and have a word, saying 'Well played today, son, keep it going' or something like that."

"He was always encouraging you and made you feel like you were one of the lads. You walked away from conversations with him feeling fantastic and that you could do anything."

But Leeds have said they need to sell players before the start of the season and a big money move for Ferdinand would go a long way to clearing a transfer deficit of 60 million pounds incurred during O'Leary's three and a half years in charge.

"I really don't know how many players the club needs to sell or how much they need to raise but we all understand that money doesn't grow on trees," said Ferdinand.

"I may be only 23 but I feel like time's moving on and I'm not getting any younger. It's a relatively short career and when you finish you want to look back on what you've achieved."

"The clearest way of assessing it is to look at your medals - and I don't have any."

The Londoner also had some words for O'Leary, who paid 18 million pounds for Ferdinand two years ago, a move that was seen by many as a massive gamble on an unproven talent.

"I hope I repaid him and I will always be grateful to him. I haven't rung him yet but I will do because there were no problems between us," he told the paper.

"I've never asked to leave and the club haven't told me they are selling me. But the change has happened now and we have to move on."

"With Mr Venables in charge, I'm sure Leeds can look forward to an exciting future."

Hardly a boon



REUTERS, Tokyo

The World Cup boosted some parts of Japan's economy but the overall effect was probably negligible, Economics Minister Heizo Takenaka has said.

The soccer extravaganza bolstered sales of television sets, particularly high-end models, but many shops and restaurants complained of fewer customers on the streets during match hours, Takenaka said at a Lower House financial committee meeting.

"I don't think the overall impact

was negative, but for Japan's 500 trillion yen economy it was probably negligible," Takenaka said on Wednesday.

Earlier this week, the Cabinet Office's monthly "economic watchers' survey of close-to-the-street workers such as sales clerks and taxi drivers suggested the World Cup did not live up to expectations as far as their business was concerned.

Still, Takenaka added that the better-than-expected performance of the Japanese squad, which logged its first World Cup match win and advanced to the second round, had cheered sentiment in Japan, which has been beset by a decade of economic stagnation and near-record jobless rate

Future is Flamengo?

Football

INTERNET, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil superstar Ronaldo, the leading scorer at the World Cup finals, has said he would like eventually to return to play for a Brazilian club side.

"I plan to play in Brazil when Brazilian soccer is doing a little better and is a bit more organized," said the Inter Milan player at the opening of a school of physiotherapy and rehabilitation in Rio de Janeiro.

"Preferably that would be in Rio de Janeiro and at Flamengo," he added.

Ronaldo, who battled back from a serious knee injury to become the top scorer at the World Cup finals with eight goals - including both in the final against Germany - said that any move back home would only happen after helping Inter win the Italian title.

"I want to rest for 30 days then return to Italy," he said. "My future is the Italian league and I expect to



RONALDO

win the Italian championship and be top scorer."

Ronaldo, the third highest scorer in World Cup history alongside compatriot Pele, last week denied reports that he wanted to leave Inter Milan for Real Madrid.

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

Ronaldo was reduced to tears in May when Inter lost to Lazio on the final day of the season, handing the championship to Juventus.

Lazio-Manfredini deal off

Football

INTERNET

Cash-strapped Lazio have pulled out of the deal to sign Chievo Verona's Christian Manfredini following the collapse of Alessandro Nesta's move to Inter Milan on Tuesday.

Lazio had agreed a £7million fee for left-winger Manfredini and unhappy Chievo have now placed the matter in the hands of their lawyers while Lega Calcio investigate the affair.

Last season's unlikely Serie A leaders announced at the end of June that the transfer was complete and are now fuming that the lucrative deal has collapsed.

Chievo president Luca

Campedelli said: 'This is an unbelievable decision. The contract has been signed. This is a poor reflection on Italian football.'



CHRISTIAN MANFREDINI

Manfredini, 27, helped newly promoted Chievo make an early

challenge for last term's Scudetto and now looks set to help the Verona club in this season's UEFA Cup campaign.

Lazio were trying to off-load Nesta, their most expensive star, to Internazionale to raise some much-needed cash and reduce the club's wage bill.

Juventus were also rumoured to be interested in the central defender but on Wednesday Bianconeri director Antonio Giraudo denied his club's interest.

"You really need to talk to my colleague Luciano Moggi but Nesta is not in line with our project," he told journalists. "We already have a competitive squad and we are adding to it by inserting talented youngsters of real value."

Premiership side Manchester United are also interested in the Italian international.

Football

REUTERS, Zurich

Keith Cooper has become the first high profile casualty of Sepp Blatter's re-organisation of FIFA after he was sacked as director of communications.

Cooper, 55, said: "I have been sacked without a reason being given today. I have known Sepp Blatter for 30 years but was told that I was being dismissed by Urs Linsi, the acting General Secretary."

"No reason was given, which under Swiss law FIFA have the right to do," he said.

"However, this is something of a surprise coming less than two weeks after the end of a World Cup in which the media organisation was regarded as one of the best of its

kind - especially bearing in mind the problems created by having the World Cup in two countries."

Blatter, who was elected president with a hugely increased overall majority just before the start of the World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan, sacked General Secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen within two days of his election victory at the Congress - and has now sacked the man who was known the world over as the moustache of FIFA.

Two days before the end of the World Cup on June 30 Blatter said he wanted 100 days to re-organise the administration of world soccer's governing body and is clearly wasting no time in his attempt to do that.

Cooper was due to take his annual leave in the United States beginning on Wednesday, but will not be returning to FIFA House in Zurich.