

For friends and future

Football

INTERNET, San Paolo

After keeping his World Cup promise, Brazil superstar Ronaldo is now honouring promises made to friends.

When he was still in Japan, he received a telephone call from Chico Buarque, a close acquaintance, and at the time they decided to set up a practice game on the Politeama pitch in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate the fifth World Cup title.

On Monday, in the company of Chico and many other friends with whom he played before leaving for Japan, the man dubbed 'Fenomeno' played for over an hour and just to be sure, scored many beautiful goals.

Ronaldo, who is now relaxing in Brazil, is also setting new targets.

"I want to win the Italian championship by scoring loads of goals," Ronaldo said when he dedicated a few hours of his holiday to the inauguration of Campus R9, the private faculty of physiotherapy that, in collaboration with Technogym, he has opened in Rio de Janeiro with Nilton Petrone, the physiotherapist that followed him after his injury.

"At the beginning of the year I had two objectives - to show that I had completely recovered from the



WHERE ARE HIS GOLDEN BOOTS? A barefooted superstar Ronaldo (R) enjoys a kick-around on the beach in Rio de Janeiro on July 9.

knee injury and to win the World Cup. Now I have achieved both and I can dedicate myself to other targets - the Italian championship with Inter and lots and lots more goals," said Ronaldo.

"I will remain in Brazil until 5 August, when I return to Inter," added Ronaldo, who has promised not to change his new hairstyle for a while so he doesn't disappoint kids all over the world that have copied him.

Ronaldo did not reveal the amount of his investment in the faculty of physiotherapy, but commented: "I wanted to give a good example by investing in education because it's one of the most important areas, and in physiotherapy because sports medicine has been so important in my life."

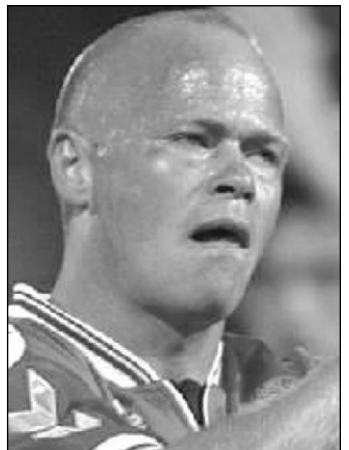
Located at Estácio de Sá University, Campus R9 covers an area of 15,000 square metres on six floors. Among others, courses in physiotherapy, physical education and sports psychology will be given in the 40-room structure. It is the first time an athlete has invested in a structure of its kind in the area of education in Brazil.

The initiative in Brazil is unique, both for the historic moment of the player and the social implications of training and giving qualifications to youngsters.

Tofting facing jail

REUTERS, Copenhagen

Bolton Wanderers and Denmark midfielder Stig Tofting faces months behind bars after being charged with violence following an incident at a restaurant, according to a Danish newspaper.



STIG TOFTING

The incident happened when the 32-year-old Tofting, who received a suspended sentence for violence in 1999, met his Danish team mates for a post World Cup reunion in central Copenhagen last month.

"If he is found guilty I will demand he is sentenced to months of imprisonment," the police prosecutor told daily tabloid Ekstra Bladet on Thursday.

Tofting, nicknamed "the lawnmower" due to his stocky build and stamina, played a key role for Denmark as they topped their group at the World Cup finals before losing to England in the second round.

He will face trial in October.

Mendieta linked with Chelsea

INTERNET

Chelsea are being linked with a shock one-year loan move for Spanish star Gaizka Mendieta, it was reported today.

If the Stamford Bridge club pull off the deal it will be one of the coups of the summer.

Mendieta, whose penalty knocked Ireland out of the World Cup, became one of the world's most expensive players last year when he left Valencia for Lazio for £27 million.

But his move to Serie A has been a disaster, with the man regarded as



GAIZKA MENDIETA

one of the most talented midfielders in Europe hardly playing last season.

Lazio are desperate to cut their wage bill and Chelsea were offered Mendieta as they were negotiating the transfer of Dino Baggio.

According to reports Baggio is due in London today to finalise his move to Stamford Bridge, but it has been claimed that Lazio are so desperate to offload the Spaniard that they are willing to even pay half his £60,000-a-week salary to get him out.

Sensi confident about Cafu

Football

INTERNET, Rome

Roma president Franco Sensi has dismissed speculation that he will lose World Cup star Cafu to the Premiership, but also admitted Edgar Davids is unlikely to be joining the Brazilian at the Stadio Olimpico.

"I'm not at all worried about the interest in Cafu from England," he said.

Roma were expected to reinforce their squad heavily in the close season after just missing out on the title to Juventus.

But the 2001 champions have been wary in this summer's transfer market with Luigi Sartor, Davide Bombardini and Greek defender Traianos Dellas Fabio Capello's only purchases so far.

Sensi said on Thursday, how-

ever, that he was still confident the team could yet again challenge for the title because the key players were staying with the club.

He was particularly unfazed by Cafu's revelation that he wants to play in the England before he



CAFU

retires, and reports of interest in the 32-year-old full back from Manchester United and Chelsea.

"He'll stay with us and sign a contract extension in September," explained Sensi.

Sensi also said that he was confident that goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli would sign a new contract after the player sacked his agent.

Dutch midfielder Davids is another matter, though, with Sensi and Capello struggling to lure him away from Juve.

"At this moment it doesn't look like we will be signing him," said Sensi, while Roma's sport director Fabrizio Lucchessi added: "The Bianconeri's requests are not in touch with this year's transfer market."

It is believed that Roma have offered Juve £7.5 million plus Francisco Lima for Davids, but they want £9.5 million as well as the Brazilian midfielder.

Mark Hughes retires

Football

REUTERS, London

Wales manager Mark Hughes is set to end his playing career and concentrate full-time on guiding his team to the Euro 2004 finals in Portugal, according to newspapers.

The 38-year-old former Manchester United striker was not given a new contract by Blackburn Rovers at the end of the last premier league season.

Hughes, who has been doing the Wales job part-time for three years, was quoted by the Western Mail on Thursday as saying: "The decision to retire has not come easily. I have discussed it with my family."

"I'm lucky in the fact I can retire from the game for all the right reasons."

He had earlier told the South Wales Echo: "I have had offers to play, but I will be speaking to (Welsh FA general secretary) David Collins

in the next day or so with the hope that we can come to an agreement of taking up a full-time position."

"If those talks are not successful, the offers to continue to play will then come back into consideration."

"The decision to even think of retiring has not come easily, but I cannot complain."

"I have had a great career and played with some of the best play-



MARK HUGHES

ers in the world, who have made me look good at times."

Capped more than 70 times by Wales, Hughes's last moment in the spotlight was an impressive mid-field performance in Blackburn's 2-1 League Cup final victory over Tottenham Hotspur last February in Cardiff.

A Manchester United apprentice, he went on to make 345 league appearances, scoring 119 goals, in two spells with the club from the 1983-84 season to 1995 - interspersed with a season each at Barcelona and Bayern Munich from 1986 to 1988.

Though, physical striker, Hughes also spent three years at Chelsea from 1995 to 1998 before ending a career - that brought him an array of league and cup titles - with spells at Southampton, Everton and Blackburn.

Wales are in group nine of the Euro 2004 qualifiers, facing tough competition from Euro 2000 finalists Italy, Finland, Yugoslavia and Azerbaijan.

Lopez feels bad

Football

INTERNET

Lazio striker Claudio Lopez claims he will apologise to Argentina teammate Gabriel Batistuta after his 'off-air' comments criticising the veteran Roma forward were shown on television.

"It was a misunderstanding," he said. "I didn't want to say bad things about anyone, I was talking off the record."

In the television interview earlier this week, Lopez attacked 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 said. But, on Thursday, the Lazio star said his comments were shown out of context. "The team always had great unity," he explained. "I was only saying that we all have to accept the blame for what went on."

"I will apologise to Gabriel Batistuta. There never was any fight between us."

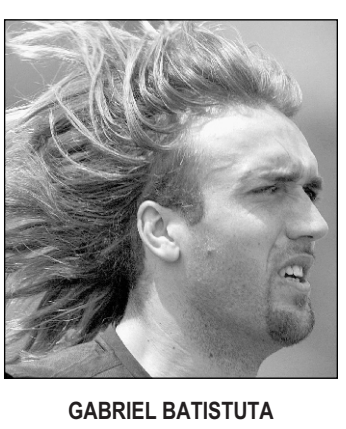
Batistuta was a surprise option in the starting line-up ahead of Lopez's Lazio team-mate Hernan Crespo, and, although he got the only goal of the game against Nigeria, failed to hit the target as

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.

Earlier this week, however, Lopez said: "It's easy to talk. 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,



GABRIEL BATISTUTA

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

Lopez also suggested 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 said. "I cried because I broke my ass for four years to get there."

Beck-mania rules

REUTERS, Tokyo

German keeper Oliver Kahn may have won the Golden Ball award but he couldn't match David Beckham for the platinum ball.

A small slice of a platinum soccer ball signed by the England captain fetched more than three million yen at a Japanese charity auction - some 700,000 yen more than a similar piece autographed by Kahn, organisers said on Thursday.

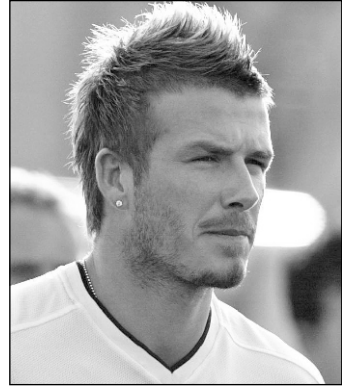
France's Zinedine Zidane drew the third-highest price for his chunk of the 2.5 kg (5.5 lb) ball, which was carved into 32 pieces and signed by some of the World Cup's biggest names.

"It's kind of what I expected," said Seiji Shimada, spokesman for auction sponsor Adidas Japan.

"Beckham's an incredibly popular player, especially with Japanese women."

Beckham put his signature on three pieces of the gleaming white orb modelled after the tournament's official "Fevernova" ball.

They sold for a combined 7.6 million yen after 10 days of anonymous bidding over the Internet.



BECKHAM

Two pieces signed in indelible ink by Kahn, the first goalkeeper to win FIFA's coveted Golden Ball award for the best player of the World Cup, sold for 2.3 million yen and 1.5 million yen respectively.

Zidane's single chunk fetched just 1.5 million yen, perhaps reflecting the defending champions' dismal showing in the June tournament co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.

The 32 pieces - signed by players and celebrities including Italy's Alessandro Del Piero, Argentina's Diego Placente and Japan manager Philippe Troussier - drew a combined 22.8 million yen in bids.

The money will go towards buying soccer balls for children in developing countries, Adidas said.

Platinum traders estimated the market value of the ball at about five million yen or 42,000 dollars.

That means Beckham's most expensive slice fetched a premium of about \$24,000 - a handsome sum, but well short of the 155,000 dollars the superstar is said to earn each week under a new deal with his club Manchester United.

FIFA chops and changes

REUTERS, Zurich

Markus Sieglar, 44, has been named as FIFA's new Director of Communications, taking over from Keith Cooper who was sacked on Tuesday.

Cooper is one of seven people FIFA said on Wednesday they had parted company with over the last two days as part of a "restructuring process."

A spokesman said: "It is across a variety of positions."

Sieglar, who previously served as FIFA president Sepp Blatter's communications manager, has been associated with the world governing body for six-and-a-half years and has also worked for UEFA and as an international football consultant.

The move, although not expected quite so soon after the World Cup, was on the cards as part of Blatter's re-organisation of the administration of world soccer's governing body.

Blatter said he was going to bring "discipline and order" back to FIFA following the fracture at the head of the administration.

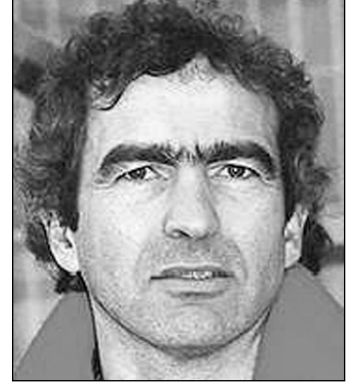
That reached its nadir in May when 11 members of the FIFA executive and the then-FIFA general secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen filed charges with the Zurich prosecutor, alleging corruption against Blatter.

Zen-Ruffinen was sacked by Blatter soon after the 66-year-old Swiss was re-elected president at the FIFA Congress in Seoul with an overwhelming majority two days before the World Cup started. Zen-Ruffinen officially left FIFA six days ago.

Cooper, 55, who had been in charge of communications at FIFA for more than seven years, was given 24 hours to clear his office after being dismissed by acting secretary-general Urs Linsi during a two-minute conversation on Tuesday.

FIFA said on Wednesday Blatter is to present a proposal concerning future structure to the next Executive Committee meeting on September 23-24.

Three in French line



RAYMOND DOMENECH



PHILIPPE TROUSSIER



JACQUES SANTINI

Football

REUTERS, Paris

The battle over the appointment of France's new national coach drags on a month after their World Cup humiliation, but the short list to replace axed Roger Lemerre has come down to three names.

"The odds are on Raymond Domenech, Philippe Troussier and Jacques Santini in that order," a member of the French league (LNF) council, requesting anonymity, said on Wednesday.

The LNF council met on Tuesday with French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet, who is in charge of selecting of the new coach.

The meeting was behind closed doors but LNF sources confirmed that debate centred on the candidacy of three men: France under-21 coach Domenech, Troussier, who guided co-hosts Japan to the last 16 of the World Cup, and Santini, manager of French champions Olympique Lyon.

"We drew a list of good points and bad points for each of them without declaring a clear winner,"

Bleus' blues

Football

AFP, Paris

On July 12, 1998, French football reached its summit at the World Cup final on home soil here at the magnificent Stade de France. Four years on, the picture could not be more different.

On that glorious night in Paris, Zinedine Zidane scored twice and Emmanuel Petit added the third goal in the 3-0 win over Brazil. France were world champions for the first time, one million people thronged the Champs-Elysees in a red, white and blue tidal wave of joy and the team was hailed as a model of racial harmony and sporting brilliance.

Now, the nation is still coming to terms with the humiliating first-round exit of its team in last month's World Cup finals and football in France has descended into civil war.

The French failed to score a single goal in Asia and became the first holders for 36 years to crash out at the first hurdle.

Zidane was injured in a meaningless friendly just before the tournament and played no part in the first two matches. When he stiffly jogged on to the pitch for the crucial match against Denmark he was powerless to help his team-mates avoid a 2-0 defeat and elimination from a tournament they had been expected to win.

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Candela still mourns

INTERNET

France defender Vincent Candela has admitted that the frustration he felt following his side's early exit from the World Cup last month is still with him.

"When you see how no team really stood out, it's even more annoying and leaves us with regrets," he explained. "Brazil were consistent but no more than that."

"The players were just as disappointed as all the French people. It's impossible to take something like that lying down. I've had [Zinedine] Zidane on the phone and I spent three days with [Christophe] Dugarry and it was the same for them."

"I think we had a sort of physical breakdown, we lacked juice. And something happened mentally. We had always been able to be ready for the big day and this time we didn't perform. Maybe we were too sure of ourselves."

The versatile Roma defender admitted that the injury to Zidane was a major blow for Les Bleus, but dismissed suggestions that the absence of the Real Madrid star for two out of the three games

was the sole reason for the disappointment.

"The absence of Zidane accounts for almost 50 per cent of our failure," said Candela. "When he's there, your opponents lose 30 per cent of their means and his team-mates gain 30 per cent in confidence."

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candidate of the national coaching body DTN and has the support of its head, World Cup-winning coach Aimé Jacquet.

But other members of the LNF council were quoted as saying that Troussier, who has forged a successful career as a national team coach with the Ivory Coast, South Africa, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Japan since he left France in 1989, was a "mercenary" and knew nothing about French football.

Other early candidates dropped out of the picture like Jean-Francois Domergue, a former Paris St Germain manager who steered Le Havre to promotion last season, and former international midfielder Alain Giresse, who currently coaches Morocco's FAR Rabat.

Behind all these names the power struggle that is hotting up between the FFF, the LNF and the DTN is so fierce that Simonet has not even been able to set a deadline.

He first mentioned July 26, then said he hoped to settle the problem "between July 14 and July 22" only to concede that the important thing was to appoint the new coach before France's first Euro 2004 qualifying game in Cyprus on September 7.

1999 and Lens played and lost in the semi-finals of the same competition a year later.

But in the elite European Champions League, French clubs have flopped.

It appears that the humiliation of the French national team in Asia has lit the fuse on a powder keg of discontentment at the grassroots of the sport.

In the annual general meeting in Lyon last Saturday, the amateur clubs refused to pass the FFF's budget because they fear they will not see any part of the 62.5 million euros (61.8 million dollars) promised to the professional clubs over the next five years.

The president of the French League, Frederic Thiriez, admitted recently that debts were piling up.

"The level of debt has risen and the economic outlook at the end of the television contracts in 2004 are rather worrying," he said.

Amid the moans, France is considering turning to one of its exiled sons to revive the fortunes of the national team.

The unconventional Philippe Troussier resigned as the coach of Japan after the World Cup finals having fulfilled his aim of leading the co-hosts to the second round.

Just two months ago, Lemerre had seen his contract extended until 2004 and his replacement by Troussier was unthinkable.

Now he, and under-21 coach Raymond Domenech, are considered the front-runners for the job.

adding up, nothing spectacular. Robert Pires wasn't there, Thierry Henry played only one game - all that together was too much."

Candela, who plays left-back for Roma, was called upon to slot in at right-back for France in the World Cup after Frank Leboeuf sustained an injury. And he admits he is hoping that the coach who comes in to replace Roger Lemerre gives him a chance to play on his favoured left side.

"I told [former France coach] Aimé Jacquet a few years back that I didn't feel so good on the right, but it was the World Cup and I was asked to do a job, I couldn't refuse."

"I've been with the French team for six-and-a-half years and I don't want to spend another two or four years on the bench. I'm not demanding a place on the team but, well,

"We'll have to see