

# Priority one: Euro 2004

## Football

AFP, Paris

Jacques Santini has been appointed coach of the French soccer team with the aim of ensuring a successful defence of their European title, French football federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet announced Friday.

Santini, 50, who as manager guided Lyon to their first French league title last year succeeds Roger Lemerre who was sacked earlier this month following the defending champion's first round elimination from the World Cup.

Simonet said that the length of the contract would be finalised next week, but that the objective was for the next two years.

"The goal is qualification for Euro 2004. Non-qualification for Euro 2004 could call into question the completion of the contract."

Simonet said that he was won over by the experience of Simonet, who was one of four candidates for the job - which included Lemerre's assistant Rene Girard, France's under-21 coach Raymond Domenech, and ex-Japan manager Philippe Troussier.

A former professional footballer Santini also coached French sides Toulouse, Lille, Saint-Etienne and Sochaux.

Santini took over at Lyon in 2000 and led them to the 2001 League Cup title and the 2002 French league title.

"I was won over by Santini's willingness to get involved with the national team, his results on the pitch, where he was champion with Lyon, his past as a footballer and coach, with 450 matches in the top flight, his education and participation in training in both the federation and in life," said Simonet.



PHOTO: AFP

"WHEN DO I START?" Jacques Santini learns of his nomination as coach of the French team in Lyon yesterday.

Santini also received the backing of former French star Michel Platini during a meeting of the FFF federal council.

"I'm thinking of all those whom I'm going to contact in the immediate future," said Santini.

"The strategy of a new coach is to respect what has already been done. The first two people I'm going to contact will be Aime Jacquet and Roger Lemerre because they managed the French group well despite the burn note of the last few weeks at the World Cup.

"We need to rely on men of experience and I think that Aime and Roger are among these."

Santini said that he would also be hoping to persuade several key members of the team to continue for the next two years.

"The main aim is to qualify for Euro 2004," said Santini.

"Time is short and some internationalists who were in Korea have indicated that they want to stop. Even these players I will try to contact them. To attack the qualifiers of a European championship, experience is important and these players have a lot of this."

France are in the same group as Slovenia, Israel, Cyprus and Malta.

Their next match will be a friendly against Tunisia in Tunis on August

21, and the 'Bleus' will then begin the qualifications for the Euro 2004 with a match in Cyprus on September 7.

Simonet added that Domenech's position as coach of the French under-21 squad had been renewed. "Raymond Domenech, whom I have renewed his contract with the under-21s, has also an important mission to accomplish - qualify this youth team for the Olympic Games (2004 Athens).

"I would have needed a new coach. Domenech has still a long career ahead of him at the Federation," added Simonet.

# MU will make him better

## Football

REUTERS, London

Rio Ferdinand wants to leave Leeds United to further his career, the England defender has said.

Ferdinand is wanted by rivals Manchester United, who are expected to make a fresh bid for the 23-year-old later on Friday.

"I just feel I need Champions League football to help my career," he told The Sun.

"I played in it once with Leeds and it was brilliant and I feel I need more of it now to make me a better player. "A footballer has a short career and you have to make the most of your opportunities."

The Old Trafford club, English champions seven times in the last 10 years, face a European Champions League qualifying third round tie next month.

Ferdinand has seen his official transfer request turned down by Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale this week, but the pair met on Thursday and Ridsdale indicated he was ready to admit defeat in his attempts to keep the former West Ham United player.

"I have told Mr Ridsdale why I feel I have to leave and I think he understands," said Ferdinand.

"He told me if an acceptable offer came in for me, he would consider it. "There is no animosity on either

side. The meeting with the chairman was perfectly amicable. He made his points, I made mine.

"The chance to get back in the Champions League is too good to miss. It is a natural progression in a footballer's career to want to play at the top in Europe."

United manager Alex Ferguson will have to persuade the Old Trafford board to bid up to 30 million pounds to land Ferdinand, who is due to join his Leeds team mates on a pre-season tour of the Far East on Saturday.

Leeds fans have been angered by Ferdinand's stance and his agent's statement on Wednesday that his charge wanted to join a "bigger and better club".

But Ferdinand, who impressed for England at this year's World Cup, said: "I really hope if I do leave, it's on the best terms possible. I appreciate what the club has done for me and the fans have been first class.

"I've thought long and hard about them every day since I made this decision because I owe them a lot. It was not an easy decision to make.

"It is not like I have done it without thinking but this is what I believe will benefit me as a player.

"I can appreciate why the Leeds fans want me to stay. I just hope deep down they understand my reasons for putting myself on the list."



PHOTO: AFP

E.T. HAS LANDED! Italy's world famous referee Pierluigi Collina wears an outfit created by Italian designer Laura Biagiotti on Spanish Steps, in downtown Rome, during the 9th edition of 'Donna sotto le stelle' (Woman under the stars) fashion event on July 17.

# Ronaldinho only PSG's

## Football

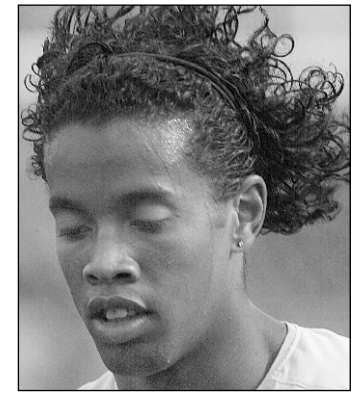
INTERNET, Paris

Ronaldinho has insisted his future lies with Paris Saint-Germain, despite rumours the French club were about to cash in on their star asset.

The World Cup-winning Brazilian has been strongly linked with a move to host of Europe's top clubs, including Manchester United, Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

But the former Gremio star, still back in Brazil celebrating his country's World Cup victory, stated: "Everything that I have heard on a possible exit from Paris comes from the press. I have four years left of my contract in France and I must fulfill them. My future is with PSG."

PSG are certainly struggling for cash, and although club backers Canal+ (the French TV station) have not insisted that coach Luis Fernandez sell his star player, they



RONALDINHO

will be unable to reject any big-money offers.

Ronaldinho has impressed this summer as part of Brazil's famous "three Rs" strikeforce, alongside Ronaldo and Rivaldo. Ronaldinho scored two goals in Brazil's winning run, one of which involved famously out-witting England's David Seaman with a 35-yard lob.

# A step back in time

INTERNET, Milan

Yesterday's decision by the Federal Council of Italian Soccer to block the entrance of players from outside the EU, brings echoes of what happened in 1966, when a complete halt was called on foreign players after the bad defeat suffered by the Italian National Team in that World Cup against North Korea.

And it can be said that once again Korea were partly responsible in the decision. Italian teams can only sign one player from outside the EU until the 31st of August, that's to say the last day of the summer transfer market, but the block will be complete after this date and probably for the whole 2002/2003 season.

The decision was reached during a very delicate time in Italian soccer, a soccer that is in the midst of a huge economic and technical crisis.

In 1966, the Italian Federation decided to block the arrival of foreigners after a period in which teams presented a large number of them in addition to the so-called "oriundi", that's to say foreigners with Italian extraction.

It was claimed that this provoked the fall of Italian soccer and its players, culminating in the humiliating elimination at the hands of North Korea. That block (as year-books report) was programmed for 5 years, but it ended in 1980, when the Italian Federation slowly re-opened the doors to foreigners, and each team was simply allowed to enrol one of them. In response to the 1982 World Cup win, the number of foreigners grew to 2, and then a few years afterwards to three and so on...

The large foreign presence in Italian soccer has often been considered to be one of the reasons to explain the problems and failures of Italian soccer at both national and club level.

The decision by the Italian Federal Council has already provoked the first reactions from the soccer world: many teams in fact were having negotiations with a number of non-EU players and will now have to make a choice, also because the decision has arrived so suddenly and unexpected.

The only positive thing is that a few club presidents agree with this solution, considered to be one of the methods to re-launch Italian soccer.

# Roque for Flavio?

AFP, Madrid

Italian giants AC Milan have offered central defender Roque Junior in exchange for Real Madrid midfielder and fellow Brazilian Flavio Conceicao, AS newspaper reported on Thursday.

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani has arrived in Madrid to try and broker the swap deal with the European Champions League winners, the paper added.

Galliani was quoted as saying: "We know Real Madrid are looking for a central defender and Roque Junior could be the best option for them."

Conceicao is said to have agreed to the proposed deal, having recently turned down a move to Turkish club Besiktas. Roque Junior was a member of last month's World Cup winning team.

# Back in a pressure-cooker

## Football

REUTERS, Paris

When coach Jacques Santini went to see Olympique Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas three days after steering the club to their first French championship he did not ask for a salary increase.

He said he wanted to be relieved of his duties and to become technical director because he had grown tired of the pressure of professional coaching.

Aulas agreed but two months later the pressure is back on Santini and at a higher level after he was appointed France's national team coach on Friday.

Seeking refuge at management level, a purely financial and organisational job in French soccer, was a brief respite in the busy life of the withdrawn and aloof 50-year-old Santini.

He was 17 when he joined St Etienne as a defender and went on to become the anchorman of the best French club side of the 1970s.

Both the player and the team won four first division titles, including three in a row from 1974 to 1976.

They also lifted the French Cup twice in 1975 and 1977 and Santini captained Les Verts when they reached the European Cup final in

1976 only to lose 1-0 to Bayern Munich in Glasgow.

Santini never had the honour of an international cap but he was regarded as one of the hardest-working and most intelligent players in French football.

"As a player, I was rather slow but I was never outpaced because I knew my opponents by heart," he was quoted as saying.

His scouting talents were recognised by former St Etienne coach Robert Herbin, who used to send him abroad to watch rival teams when Santini was still a player.

Santini joined Montpellier and ended his playing career in 1983 before making his coaching debut at Toulouse in 1985. He saved Toulouse from relegation and guided them to third in the first division in 1987.

The next season, Toulouse achieved their first and only notable European success when they defeated Diego Maradona's Napoli in the UEFA Cup first round.

Santini then took over at Lille in 1989 before returning to the club of his heart, St Etienne. But they had lost power and confidence and Santini never had the human and financial means to fulfil his ambitions.

He was sacked in 1995 and spent two years in professional limbo before Lyon manager Bernard Lacombe, a close friend

since their playing days, brought him back to France's third biggest city.

In 1997, Santini was appointed Lyon's technical director and three years later he became coach after Guy Stephan left and Luis Fernandez turned down the job to go to Paris St Germain instead.

By then, Lyon were one of the most ambitious teams in the first division and club president Aulas set Santini the challenge of steering them into the European Champions League.

But Santini did even better. Last year, Lyon won their first honour in 28 years by clinching the French League Cup and, 12 months later, he steered them to the league title, the first in the club's history.

Santini had become one of France's most respected coaches and players and colleagues have been unanimous in their praise.

"Of the 16 coaches I have worked under in my career, he is the one I respect most because he has a loyalty that's very rare in the game," said former Lille player and coach Francois Brisson.

For Lyon defender Jean-Marc Chanelet, Santini's greatest asset is his knowledge of international soccer and players.

"He is meticulous and also has a lot of instinct. He has a feeling for players," he said.

## Football

AFP, London

Manchester United winger Ryan Giggs said Friday that he believes Rio Ferdinand is one of only a handful of players in the world who can improve the Old Trafford side.

England and Leeds centre-back Ferdinand is a 30 million pound (47.4 million dollar) target for Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, and is expected to make the move before the start of the season.

"Rio is an excellent defender. There are probably only a handful of players in the world who can strengthen Manchester United - and he is one of them," Giggs told The Sun newspaper.

"He will come in and improve this side. He will fit in at United perfectly. No disrespect to West Ham but he has improved so much since his move to Leeds.

"He has been playing in the Champions League and in high-profile matches. They really improve your game, as will the experience he gained from the World Cup.

"What has always struck me when I have played against him is how quick and strong he is. Since he has been made Leeds captain, he has become a leader as well."

Meanwhile Ferdinand revealed that he had asked Leeds to allow him to leave for the good of his career.

"I have told Mr Ridsdale why I feel I have to leave and I think he understands. He told me if an



RYAN GIGGS

acceptable offer came in for me, he would consider it.

"There is no animosity on either side. I just feel I need Champions League football to help my career."

"I played in it once with Leeds and it was brilliant and I feel I need more of it now to make me a better player.

"A footballer has a short career and you have to make the most of your opportunities. I want to play against the best all the time, that's what I'm striving for. It's important to me," added Ferdinand.

Although no new offer has been received from Old Trafford, Leeds Chairman Peter Ridsdale has indicated that the matter of Ferdinand's position at the club could be resolved by Friday night.

That is made even more likely by the fact Leeds are due to fly to the Far East on Saturday for a pre-season tour. Ferguson will be keen to move fast to ensure Ferdinand is not among the tour party.

# Ridsdale snaps holiday

## Football

INTERNET, Leeds

Leeds United chairman Peter Ridsdale cut short his holiday in France Thursday to hold emergency talks with star defender Rio Ferdinand over his wish to leave the club.

While Ridsdale has rejected the 23-year-old English international's transfer request and a reported 20million pound (30million dollars) bid by arch-rivals Manchester United he has conceded a higher bid might well force them to sell.

"We received an offer some weeks ago but that was rejected out of hand as we felt it to be derisory," Ridsdale told PA Sport.

"But we are a public company, I am merely an employee and I have a duty to shareholders to maximise the value of our assets.

"If we receive any reasonable offers for any of our players, including Rio, we will consider it and debate it but that is not the position at the moment.

"He has asked to be put on the transfer list at a time when there has not been an acceptable offer and that has been rejected."

Ferdinand, who cost 18million pounds when he was signed in November 2000 from West Ham and has four years left on his con-

tract, did train with the squad on Thursday prior to going in for talks with Ridsdale.

Ridsdale remained confident that Ferdinand would be with the squad when they left for their pre-season tour of the Far East on Saturday.

"There is no reason why that should change at this moment in time," he said.

"I have spoken to Rio. He has asked for a transfer, we have answered the question frankly and expect him to honour his contract."

"I've no doubts he will go on the tour. He is still a Leeds player."

However despite Ridsdale's brave words, Ferdinand's move to Leeds' deadly rivals appears imminent.

A senior source at Leeds plc confirmed that Schroders, the investment giants who are the major shareholders in the club's parent company, would not stand in the way of a sale.

The only upside to his leaving would be new manager Terry Venables would have all of his massive fee to spend on new players as the probable sales of Frenchman Oliver Dacourt to Juventus and Lee Bowyer to Liverpool would be enough to accrue the 15million pounds demanded by the board to balance the books.

# Barca can move for Mendieta

## Football

REUTERS, Valencia

Barcelona have been given the green light to make a renewed bid for Lazio midfielder Gaizka Mendieta after Valencia agreed to reduce a penalty clause in the deal that took the player to Italy last year.

Mendieta had been close to sealing a move to Barcelona in June but the deal broke down over a clause in his contract stating that a 12 million euros penalty would have to be paid if he moved back to Spain before 2003.

Lazio paid \$41 million to sign the Basque midfielder last year but he failed to find the sort of form that made him one of the most respected playmakers in Europe and he spent much of the season on the sidelines.

The Italian club are keen to cut their playing staff and president Sergio Cragnotti travelled to Valencia on Thursday for a meeting with his counterpart Jaime Orti to look for a solution to the contract problem.

"We've reached an agreement with Lazio and they can now negotiate with Barcelona," Orti told reporters after the meeting.

Orti declined to give details of the



GAIZKA MENDIETA

agreement but Spanish newspapers claimed Valencia would receive up to three million euros if Mendieta signs a loan deal or 10 percent of the transfer fee if the move is permanent.

Mendieta showed only brief flashes of his best form in the recent World Cup but Barcelona coach Luis van Gaal confirmed Barcelona's interest in him in an interview with Sport newspaper this week.

"Mendieta has the quality we're looking for but the problem has been the price," van Gaal told the Barcelona-based daily Sport.

"I will say, though, that the chances of signing him are now better than they were a week ago."

# Albertini wants to win with Madrid

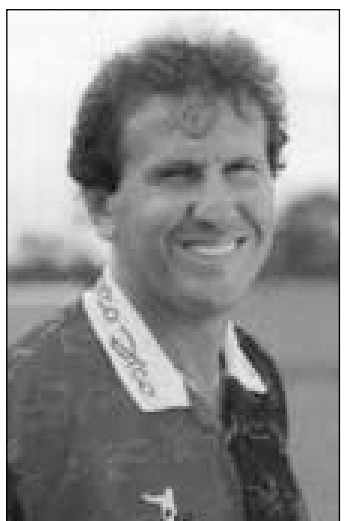
## Football

INTERNET, Milan

Demetrio Albertini had his first contact with the Spanish media on Tuesday, after his move from AC Milan to Atletico Madrid.

The former Italian National team midfielder explained why after 20 years in the red and black jersey he decided to leave: "I'm coming from a team where I won many things, and I

would like to continue winning here. When you know the taste of winning, you understand what it means to win something important. And here in Madrid I want to win. I don't want to merely have an experience: I'm 30 years old and I want to show my capabilities. At this moment I'm full of enthusiasm, but I'm conscious that there will be plenty of news, even if I have made many friends at Atletico."



ZICO

Zico, the former Flamengo and Brazil superstar, the epitome of a Brazilian No. 10, knows just which buttons need pressing, too. When he was named as a candidate to replace Phillip Troussier as