

Boro's best offer

Football

REUTERS, Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough have made their best offer to Juninho in a bid to entice the Brazilian World Cup winner back for a third spell with the English premier league club.

"We have made our best offer and now we wait -- that's all we can do," said Middlesbrough's assistant manager Bill Beswick on the club's official website.

"The ball is in his court. He has our offer and we won't wait forever."

The deal looked to be off last week when Juninho's father, Oswaldo Giroldo, indicated they had failed to agree personal terms. But earlier this week Boro said the move could be back on after they made the player a revised offer.

"The transfer window closes at the end of August and that transfer window applies to players as well as to the clubs of course," said Beswick.

"If they don't move by then they're stuck where they are. I personally don't think Juninho's present situation is a happy one for him but he has many happy memories of his time with Middlesbrough."

Boro officials have already agreed an undisclosed fee with Juninho's club, Atletico Madrid.

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

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

"Middlesbrough have made him a very good offer, the best that we can. If it gets down to a football

JFA confirms Zico

Football

REUTERS, Tokyo

Former Brazil international Zico has been formally named as the new coach of Japan by the Japan Football Association (JFA).

New JFA President Saburo Kawabuchi confirmed that Zico would sign an 11-month contract on Tuesday and accepted responsibility for hiring the 49-year-old Brazilian, who will be taking full charge of a team for the first time.

"It was my decision to appoint Zico as coach and I accept the responsibility that goes with it. It is my job to select the right coach for the Japan team, so the buck should stop with me," Kawabuchi told reporters.

Zico, who has been at J-League champions Kashima Antlers in either a playing or a coaching capacity since 1991, takes over from Philippe Troussier after the Frenchman guided co-hosts Japan to the second round of the World Cup last month.

Asked if he would fall on his sword if Zico failed to produce results, Kawabuchi snapped: "I am not going to resign if Zico fails. It is not normal policy for the president to resign, is it? Zico said he expects to be fired if he is not successful."

Kawabuchi, who took over from Shunichiro Okano as JFA president earlier this month after more than a decade as chairman of the J-League, urged Japanese clubs to co-operate with Zico for the good of the national team.

"Zico has to be able to have a close relationship with all the J-League clubs in order to build a better Japan team," he said. "Zico knows the system, so we think the ties between the J-League and the JFA will strengthen further."



Brazilian football legend Zico arrives at New Tokyo International Airport in Narita yesterday.

that he had been worried about getting Zico to accept the offer from the JFA. "I didn't think Zico would be interested, so it was a surprise when we found out he really wanted the job," he said.

Zico, who had initially wanted only a co-ordinating role, confessed last week that the JFA's interest had caught him off guard.

"I haven't got much experience as a coach, so it was a big surprise. I always said the last thing I wanted to be was a football coach but in life you can never say never," he said.

Zico, who is scheduled to arrive in Japan from Brazil on Sunday, was part of arguably the best team not to win the World Cup when Brazil went out 3-2 to a Paolo Rossi hat-trick for Italy in 1982.

He played alongside another former Japan coach, Falcao, in the Brazilian midfield at the Spain finals. Zico officially takes over as Japan coach on August 1 and will get his first taste of international management when the Asian champions take on China in Beijing on August 22.

The JFA were also thought to be interested in Aime Jacquet, who masterminded France's World Cup triumph in 1998, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger and Bora Milutinovic, available after taking China to their first World Cup.

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Leeds set deadline

Football

REUTERS, Leeds

Leeds United have set Manchester United a deadline of noon on Sunday to complete the transfer of England defender Rio Ferdinand.

Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale told Sky Sports News that the deal would be off if Manchester United did not make an acceptable offer for

Alex Ferguson is reported to have told Ferdinand that if he undertook the 10-day trip his transfer to Old Trafford would be off.

"Rio has told us that he feels the recent intense transfer speculation has left him mentally fatigued and unable to play football," Ridsdale said.

"He has asked to be omitted from the Leeds United tour of the Far East and Australia."

Leeds have rejected two bids for Ferdinand who they signed from



RIO FERDINAND

the 23-year-old player before the deadline at noon local time (1100 GMT).

Leeds rejected a bid reportedly worth 29 million pounds from their English premier league rivals on Friday but Ferdinand did not fly out with the Leeds squad on Saturday for a pre-season tour of the Far East.

Manchester United manager West Ham United in November 2000. He has been valued at 30 million pounds after making a good impression at the World Cup last month.

Ridsdale has admitted that the Elland Road club would have no choice but to accept "a substantial bid" for Ferdinand, who has four years of his Leeds contract to run.

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SHORT PASSES

Football

BBC, undated

Former Leeds boss David O'Leary is being lined up as an assistant coach with Serie A champions Juventus, according to British newspapers.

The Daily Mail and The Independent report that veteran Juve boss Marcello Lippi has singled out O'Leary as one of the brightest young coaching talents in the game.

It is understood that the deal would only be for one year, as Lippi's contract expires at the end of the 2002-03 season but the lure of working with some of Europe's top players, such as David Trezeguet and Alessandro del Piero, could prove irresistible to O'Leary.

The papers report that the Irishman has been approached by the Turin club and is currently considering whether to move his family away from Yorkshire.

O'Leary's coaching reputation in Italy is high, following Leeds' run to the Champions League semi-finals two seasons ago.

LOTHAR TIPPED AS HUNGARY COACH

Reports that former Germany skipper Lothar Matthaus has been lined up to take over as Hungarian national coach have been dismissed as "a hoax" by Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ) secretary general Sandor Berzi on Friday.

"MLSZ leaders have conducted no talks with either Lothar Matthaus or anybody else over the job," said Berzi.

"The position of current national coach Imre Gellei is safe. He has our full confidence," Berzi added.

Gellei was appointed last October and his term is due to

cover the period of the European 2004 qualifiers until the end of 2003, said Berzi.

Matthaus was quoted in Friday's edition of German newspaper Bild as saying that he had met with Hungarian football officials.

"Yes, we have met three times. I know the feelings of the Hungarians but I haven't decided. There are other offers to consider," the ex-Bayern Munich star said.

MU IN UNICEF FRIENDLY

Manchester United face Argentine giants Boca Juniors at Old Trafford on August 10 in a friendly to raise money for the United Nations' children's charity UNICEF.

"The game against Boca will be the climax of our summer," said United manager Alex Ferguson on Friday.

"With the help of our fans we hope to raise as much money as possible in order to help the most vulnerable children."

Ferguson said there was also a serious edge to the fixture, as it falls just days short of the start of United's Champions' League campaign.

THURAM STILL JUVENTUS' FRENCH INTERNATIONAL

Lilian Thuram is keeping faith with Italian champions' Juventus this coming season, local press reported on Friday.

Juventus' director general Luciano Moggi told Gazzetta dello sport: "Juve is now complete - Thuram and (Edgar) Davids are remaining with us until the end of next season. Here we have the team that won the last championship."

The 30-year-old Thuram had been linked at one stage with a possible move to Manchester United.

Reception for Roy

Football

REUTERS, Dublin

Former Ireland captain Roy Keane is set to receive a rousing reception in Dublin this weekend when he leads out Manchester United for a friendly against Irish side Shelbourne.

Keane was sensationally axed from Ireland's World Cup squad in May after a bust-up with manager Mick McCarthy and the midfielder's refusal to apologise for the outburst angered many Irish soccer fans.

Saturday's friendly against the Dublin side will be the first time Keane has played at home since the World Cup debacle.

But Eddie Gibbons, secretary of the Ireland branch of the United Supporters' Club, said fears of a hostile reception were unfounded.

"I think Roy will get a very good reception. No doubt some of the Shelbourne lads will be die-hard Ireland supporters, and might give him a bit of a rollicking, but there will be a lot of United fans there as well," Gibbons told the Evening Herald.

Fellow Manchester United supporter Dave Meehan said the Football Association of Ireland's (FAI) decision to sell the television rights of home internationals to Sky TV would also improve Keane's standing at home.

"Maybe now more people are saying Keane was actually right when he had a go at the FAI, and it could be about 60-40 in his favour," he said.

Keane had criticised the FAI's travel arrangements for the World Cup tournament before his bust-up with McCarthy and the Association

was slammed for its failure to mediate between the pair.

The FAI has launched an independent inquiry into the way it handled the World Cup campaign.

Ireland were knocked out of the World Cup in the second round by Spain, losing 3-2 on penalties following a 1-1 draw after extra time.



ROY KEANE

WC lifts Asia



The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said Friday the success of last month's World Cup had boosted the self-confidence of Asian footballers.

AFC general secretary Peter

Velappan in a statement said Asians were "walking tall today" after the superb co-hosting by Japan and South Korea and the two countries' surprise performances in the tournament.

"Last October, we launched our new slogan for the new millennium which stated that the future is Asia. The slogan seemed to be a rather far-fetched notion to many at that time but the World Cup in Korea and Japan showed the world that Asia was indeed the future," he said.

South Korea became the first Asian team to reach the World Cup semifinals, catapulting it from 40th to 22nd in the latest rankings of the international football governing body FIFA.

Japan notched up their first World Cup victory by reaching the last 16 for the first time, pushing it from 32nd to 24th place in FIFA rankings.

Velappan, who was also coordi-

nation director for the World Cup, said no other co-hosted tournament would be able to match standards set by the two Asian nations.

"Clearly this World Cup scored more goals outside the field of play. Besides the excellent hospitality, we also witnessed a hooligan free, smoke free and crime free tournament," he said.

He said the Korean and Japanese fans added colour of their own to the month-long tournament, with streets packed by millions of cheering and celebrating fans.

"Such an outpouring of joy has left an indelible mark in the minds of Asians and lifted their sense of self confidence to unprecedented levels," he said.

"For Asia and Asian football, the future beckons with a promise of greater achievements. We will strive to ride the crest of this wave of World Cup success."

Rivaldo rumours grow

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Rivaldo, who scored five goals in the World Cup, is out of contract in June 2003 -- when he could leave on a free transfer -- and the Catalan club are considering their options.

Rivaldo had a row with coach Louis van Gaal during the Dutchman's first spell in charge, and Barcelona newspapers claimed on Saturday that the club are ready to let him walk away now, saving estimated salary costs of 7.5 million euros.

That would also solve a problem over the number of non-European Union players in their squad. Clubs in Spain are allowed to register four "foreigners" and with Rivaldo, Barcelona have five.

Real Madrid's sporting director

Jorge Valdano laughed off reports that his club are about to bid for the player, just as they signed Luis Figo from their arch-rivals two years ago.

"There is no Rivaldo situation as far as we're concerned," Valdano said. "Rivaldo is a Barcelona player and this is all just newspaper speculation."

"If Rivaldo were to become free that could interest us, though. We're always interested in the world's best players."

Rivaldo's team mates at Barcelona are keen for him to stay, although there seems to be a growing feeling that he could be about to leave.

"He's one of the best players in the world," Argentine forward Javier Saviola said on Saturday. "If he leaves we'll just have to try and see that someone takes his place."

Tigana in a fix

Football

REUTERS, London

Frenchman Jean Tigana says he is uncertain about his future as manager of English Premier League club Fulham.

"I don't know (about my future) because this coming season is the last year of my contract," said Tigana at a news conference presenting the club's new loan signing, Japanese World Cup midfielder Junichi Inamoto.

Tigana took over at Fulham in July 2000 and last year steered the London club back into the top flight of English football for the first time in 33 years.

"I don't know if the chairman (Mohamed Al Fayed) wants to keep me. I don't know if I want to stay," said Tigana.

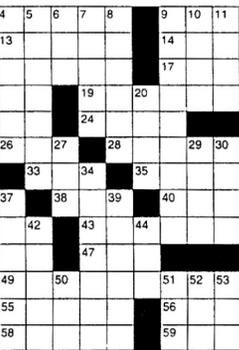
Asked if he wanted to remain with Fulham, the Frenchman said: "It's difficult because I don't know what is happening inside the club. I need a meeting with my chairman about that."

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 "Golly!" acronym 4 South-western terrain 9 High-arc shot 12 The whole enchilada 13 Jellied entree 14 -- Got a Secret? 15 Typical way of existence 17 Adipose 18 Environmentally friendly 19 Marx collaborator 21 Visit 24 Bell noise 25 Parisian pal 26 Reason to keep playing 28 Bring about 31 Hay there! 33 Model actress Carol 35 Humpty's perch 36 Releases 38 Tool set

DOWN 1 Cowboy's significant other 2 Inventor do 3 Subordinate 4 One could be a game bird 5 Its capital is Tallinn 6 OOT, e.g. providers 7 Wasn't up 8 Panoramic 9 "Bay-watch" persona 10 Squashed gut feeling 11 Puts on the line 12 Actor 13 Program-ming language 14 Use a caulking gun 15 Vagrant 16 Enjoyment 17 Pledge 18 Ram's ma'am 19 Wine-list section



CRYPTIQUIP

SGWNFJ TXV WOSWMAXJ FAQA JNZANF WQNJAV S QAWNMX FA ZSHOP YA ATPSXHQNNJPYAAG Saturday's Cryptiquip: WHEN A SCIENTIST GETS A DOG ASSISTANT, AN OBVIOUS CHOICE WOULD BE A LAB RETRIEVER. Today's Cryptiquip Clue: W equals C

Baros fires Liverpool

Football

BBC, undated

Liverpool striker Milan Baros opened his account for the Reds with the only goal of Friday night's friendly win against Le Havre.

The 20-year-old Czech scored with a shot on the turn after the French team failed to clear a ball into the penalty area by Steven Gerrard in the 26th minute.

Liverpool gave a run out to 22 players in all, with several sum-

mer signings pulling on the famous red jersey for the first time.

French midfielder Alou Diarra was the only new face to start the match but £10m Senegalese forward El Hadji Diouf and French midfielder Bruno Cheyrou both came off the bench.

German defender Markus Babbel also made his first appearance for Liverpool in almost a year after a long battle with illness.

Teenage strikers Florent Sinama Pongolle and Anthony Le

Tallac impressed for Le Havre and both came close to beating Jerzy Dudek in the Liverpool goal.

The French youngsters are Liverpool-bound and are expected to move to Anfield at the beginning of next season.

Reds boss Gerard Houllier said of the performance: "You have to start somewhere and it was a very good run out for us."

"Everybody saw some action and the attitude was right."



PHOTO: AFP

Fulham manager Jean Tigana (R), welcoming new Japanese signing Junichi Inamoto to the club, says he is uncertain about his future with the Premier League team.