

Juninho cleared for take-off

REUTERS, Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough have succeeded in securing a work permit for their new Brazilian signing Juninho after his initial application had been turned down.

The government rejected Juninho's initial bid for a permit as he had not played in enough of Brazil's competitive games over the last two years, even though he was a member of their World Cup-winning team in June.

But Middlesbrough manager Steve McClaren and chief executive Keith Lamb attended an appeal hearing in Sheffield on Friday and the tribunal accepted their argument that Juninho's proven quality was sufficient grounds to grant a permit.

"Obviously, we are delighted by the decision and would like to extend our thanks to the Department of Employment for arranging such a swift appeal hearing and to the members of the appeal committee for their sympathetic hearing," said Lamb on the club's official website.

"It is now our intention to arrange for Juninho to travel to England at the earliest opportunity."

The 29-year-old Brazilian playmaker is set to embark on his third spell at the club after sealing a six million pound move from Spanish club Atletico Madrid last week.

Juninho, who has agreed a four-year contract at the Riverside, also played for Middlesbrough from 1995 to 1997 and from 1999 to 2000.

Blatter rules out TV replays

REUTERS, Auckland

Sepp Blatter, president of world soccer's governing body FIFA, says he is opposed to the idea of using television replays to assist match officials.

Speaking after a meeting of the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) had elected Australia's Basil Scarsella as OFC president, Blatter said: "As long as I am president of FIFA, I am totally opposed to artificial help for referees in FIFA-controlled matches."

"Any idea of television replays to sort out offside decisions or the like would take away the spontaneity of the game and destroy the human touch, which makes the game more popular."

Blatter acknowledged mistakes were made during the recent World Cup in South Korea and Japan, and that he had prompted scathing criticism from teams who believed they had been wronged by bad decisions from match officials, but said errors would always be made.

"The human touch is what is important, and while the matches are under the control of humans and not electronics, mistakes will be made," he said in Auckland. "But we must work hard to diminish them."

Wise to appeal

AFP, London

Former England international Dennis Wise is set to appeal following the termination of his contract at First Division Leicester after a violent incident, a radio station reported on Saturday.

Wise was sent home from a pre-season tour of Finland following an incident which left Foxes team-mate Callum Davidson with a double fracture of the cheekbone and then suspended the player who joined the club last year in a 1.6-million-pound move from Chelsea.

Wise has been in contact with the Professional Footballers' Association and deputy chief executive Mick McGuire said he expected the former Wimbledon and Chelsea midfielder to appeal against the club's decision to terminate his contract.

"I think it's likely he will be appealing against the decision of the club," McGuire told Radio Five Live. "I think he was probably not expecting a decision of this severity."

Marcos heading to Old Trafford?

INTERNET, Manchester

Manchester United have moved to sign Brazilian keeper Marcos, according to media reports.

The World Cup winner met United officials on Friday to thrash out a 4.5



MARCOS

million pounds deal. Marcos, who plays for Brazilian club Palmeiras, is said to be keen to play in the Champions League.

Real class

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Goals from Luis Figo and Javier Portillo have earned Real Madrid a comfortable 2-0 win over Liverpool in the opening match of a four-team pre-season tournament at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Figo threaded in a shot from outside the area five minutes before halftime on Friday for the first and substitute striker Portillo settled the game with a neat finish on the hour mark.

Both sides were missing key



PHOTO: INTERNET
Real Madrid striker Javier Portillo begins to celebrate after scoring against Liverpool in the opening match of a four-team pre-season tournament in Madrid on Friday. The European and Spanish champions won 2-0.

players, with Michael Owen and Steven Gerrard absent for Liverpool and Real resting the likes of Raul, Fernando Hierro and Roberto Carlos.

Real were still able to call on Zinedine Zidane and Figo, however, and the past and present world players of the year provided the game's only quality.

Figo provided Zidane with the first chance for Real 20 minutes in, racing down the touchline and pulling the ball back for the French midfielder to send a shot against

the post. Liverpool's Polish keeper Jerzy Dudek pushed another Zidane effort over the bar a few minutes later and also saved long-range shots from Savio and Figo before the latter opened the scoring.

The Portuguese international took the ball in from the right side of midfield and side-footed a shot through the legs of Stephane Henchoz and just inside the far post.

Liverpool improved slightly after the break and Emile Heskey should have got the equaliser as he raced onto a quick Bruno Cheyrou pass only for Cesar to deny him from

close range.

The English side created little else, though, and Portillo made the game safe when he showed a cool head to take a Zidane through ball in his stride and slide a shot past Dudek.

Real, who arranged the tournament as part of their centenary celebrations, will go on to face the winner's of Saturday's match between AC Milan and Bayer Munich in the final on August 11.

Liverpool will take on the losers.

Madrid clarify

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid director Jorge Valdano on Friday formally denied they were negotiating the transfer of Inter Milan's Brazilian star Ronaldo despite the player's wish to leave the Italian side.

Spanish radio had reported that the World Cup winner was on his way to European champions Real after Valdano had called an emergency press conference for Friday evening.

Valdano however dismissed the speculation although he admitted that he had met with the player's agent in the afternoon.

"It's not our policy to deny rumours but before creating false expectations I want to totally clarify the situation - at present neither Inter Milan wants to sell nor do Real want to buy Ronaldo," stressed Valdano.

The Argentine said that he had met Ronaldo's agent in the afternoon and the latter had made the player's desire to leave the Italian club known.

"I then contacted Inter in line with our non-aggression pact. We

clarified the situation - until such a time as Inter indicate their intention to part with the player under no circumstances will Real negotiate with Ronaldo.

"If this was the case we would study the possibility of recruiting him but Ronaldo is not a strategic recruitment event if he is an ace and aces interest us."

Spanish radio had reported that negotiations were "almost concluded" and all that remained was for 25-year-old Ronaldo to make public his desire to leave Italy for Spain for the deal to be sealed.

Inter Milan and Real have a "non-aggression pact" which stipulates that neither club can recruit players under contract with the other unless the player makes known his wish to leave the club.

Real Madrid have not recruited any player inter season.

With Ronaldo, Real president Florentino Perez could have been in line to claim his third European footballer of the year title in three years, after Portugal's Luis Figo and French star Zinedine Zidane.

Ronaldo's two goals in the World Cup final a month ago secured his country a fifth World Cup and he finished tournament top scorer with eight goals making him favourite for the European title.

Romario in crossfire

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Veteran Brazilian striker Romario, who joined Fluminense on Thursday, has immediately found himself in the middle of a storm over wages.

His new teammates, who say they have not been paid for four months, said it was not right that the new arrival would get paid on time while they would have to keep waiting.

Fluminense president David Fischel said he would use the money from a recently-renewed sponsorship deal to pay 36-year-old Romario, one of the biggest earners in Brazilian football.

But other players said the sponsorship money should be used to pay them first.

"We've nothing against him but it doesn't seem right that he will be paid on time and the rest of us won't," said striker Roni, who is likely to partner Romario in attack.

"If the directors don't sort this out, the climate could turn nasty."

Romario, who has often been given privileges at previous clubs, said he wanted the same treatment as his team-mates.

"This is the club's problem, not mine," he told reporters before his first training session.

"But I don't want to jump the queue. My arrival is not going to affect anyone else. I'll demand we all have the same treatment."

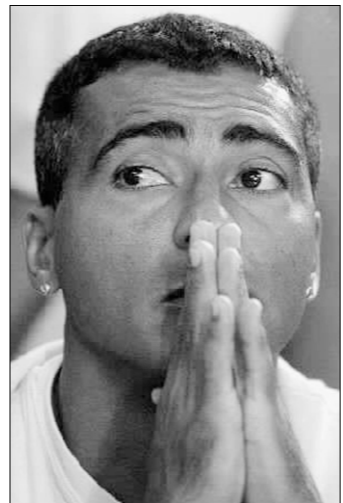
He added: "I feel as if I'm starting my career again."

Romario, who led the attack in Brazil's World Cup-winning team eight years ago, joins Fluminense after three-and-a-half years with Rio de Janeiro rivals Vasco da Gama, during which he enjoyed a prolific scoring record.

He was top scorer in last year's Brazilian championship and has averaged a goal a game in club

football for the last year.

Many wanted him in the Brazil's World Cup squad this year but Romario was forced to watch his country's victorious campaign on television after coach Luiz Felipe Scolari overlooked him for "techni-



ROMARIO

cal and tactical" reasons.

Scolari ignored a wave of popular pressure - including some lobbying from President Fernando Henrique Cardoso - in refusing to pick the charismatic but outspoken striker.

The saga dragged on for over six months and reached its melodramatic height when Romario gave a tearful media conference in which he apologised for "anything I might have done wrong, even unconsciously."

Fluminense are a traditional power in the Brazilian game but have fallen on hard times recently, dropping as low as the third division of the national championship in 1998.

They are attempting to win the Brazilian championship for the first time since 1984.

PSG coach blasts Anelka

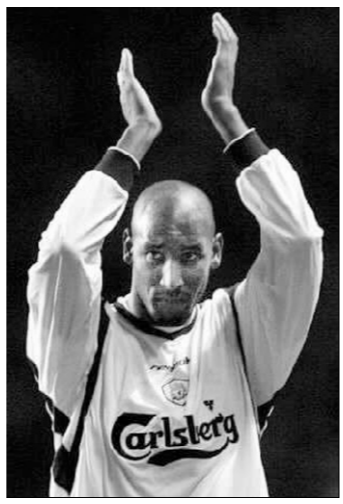
Football

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain coach Luis Fernandez has mocked comments made about him by the French First Division club's former striker Nicolas Anelka.

"I don't have much to say about the comments made by Anelka," Fernandez said on Friday. "But I know that the Minguettes club are interested in having him."

The so-called Minguettes, from a shabby suburb of the city of Lyon, are the amateur club for which Fernandez played when he was a teenager before becoming one of the most respected French midfielders.



NICOLAS ANELKA

Proud of his modest origins, Fernandez often refers to the place where he grew up.

"If he (Anelka) is looking for another club after Manchester City, I just want him to know that the AS Minguettes are interested in signing him," Fernandez said.

"After Arsenal, Real Madrid, Paris St Germain, Liverpool and Manchester City, it seems that the Minguettes could be a good opportunity."

"He has everything to do well there. But he must be careful because it's a good club and he will have to struggle to become a regular first choice," Fernandez told a laughing audience.

Anelka had left Paris St Germain in January for a disappointing six-month spell at premier league club Liverpool before joining Manchester City during the summer break.

The international striker was left out of the French squad for the World Cup finals.

In an interview with English magazine 4-4-2 issued last week, Anelka harshly criticised his former coach Fernandez.

"Luis is the only coach with whom I went into a feud," Anelka said. "When he came in we had a great young side with huge potential. But he has torn it apart by bringing in his own guys."

"It's merely impossible to talk to him. He gets nasty when you try to argue. A lot of players have left because of him. He really is not a smart person."



LET'S SING TOGETHER: Brazilian super-striker Ronaldo joins children in a song at the National Cancer Institute in Rio de Janeiro on August 2. The Golden Boot winner donated 35,000 dollars to fight against child cancer.

Greats respond

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Present and past Brazil heroes Ronaldo and Pele have both retaliated after criticism from World Cup winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari.

In an interview last week, Scolari said that he had repeatedly reprimanded Ronaldo during the World Cup campaign, describing the competition's top scorer as a "spoilt player" who needed to be taught how to play for the team.

Scolari had targeted Pele the week before, claiming he knew nothing about football and saying:

"If you want to win a tournament, you have to listen to what Pele says and then do the opposite."

Ronaldo, speaking during a visit to a Rio de Janeiro cancer hospital with his two-year-old-son Ronald, denied on Friday that he was spoilt.

"I think he's wrong," he said. "My son is spoilt but his father is not. I still think that he had repeatedly reprimanded Ronaldo during the World Cup campaign, describing the competition's top scorer as a

"spoilt player" who needed to be taught how to play for the team.

Earlier on Friday, Pele also took a swipe at Scolari, who was apparently upset because Pele had refused to tip Brazil as World Cup favourites early in the competition.

"I don't understand his position," Pele was quoted as saying by several Brazilian newspapers.

"When I said that Brazil were not favourites, France, Argentina and Italy were really in a better position than us and Brazil really were not in a good state. But I never wanted Brazil not to win."

"I've always given my opinions, the Brazilian people have known me since I was 16. I helped Brazil win three World Cups."

"I don't know what's happened with Felipe. As the media just talk about Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Rivaldo as heroes, he must be jealous."

French First Division Lyon drop points

Football

AFP, Paris

Newly-crowned French champions Lyon paid the price for complacency Friday when they threw away a 3-1 lead to minnows Guingamp who grabbed a late 3-3 draw in the opening match of the season.

Lyon pipped Lens to the line in May after beating their rivals on the final day at a packed Stade Gerland to end a half century of under-

achievement.

But the south-eastern French side failed to get their campaign off to a winning start against gritty Brittany side Guingamp who only remained in the top flight by the skin of their teeth last season.

"To say that I'm annoyed is too weak a word," said Lyon coach Paul Le Guen. "It's like a defeat. It's hard to take. We looked like we had it under control, even if we did leave ourselves open too much for my taste."

Le Guen said that he had been less than impressed with the perfor-

mance of new midfield signing Mahamadou Diarra.

"At 3-1 I brought on Diarra to tighten up the midfield and the reverse happened. It's a paradox. Guingamp are going to make people suffer this season," added the Lyon coach.

Lyon had looked to be coasting after profiting from early errors from the Bretons with Brazilian midfielder Juninho grabbing the first goal after just three minutes by tricking goalkeeper Ronan Le Crom with a deceptive shot from 20 metres.

Midfielder Stephane Carnot grabbed the equaliser for the home side on the 24th minute as the drizzle came down.

Both sides missed chances to break the deadlock with Lyon taking the initiative just before the break thanks to a header from unmarked defender Jean-Marc Chanelet following a pass from Juninho on 38.

Disorganisation in the host's defence put Lyon 3-1 ahead when Ivory Coast international defender Kouassi Koffi blundered gifting the ball to Sonny Anderson who gladly accepted it and struck into the net on 51.

Former Lyon striker Cedric Bardon missed his chance to reduce arrears, hitting straight to goalie Gregory Coupet, but made amends by recuperating the ball for a 3-2 scoreline just one minute from time.

Lyon paid the price for their complacency, lowering their guard as Guingamp made one last desperate push with Ivorian striker Didier Drogba succeeding four minutes into extra time netting between the legs of Coupet to the delight of the 14,000 fans at the Roudourou stadium.



PHOTO: AFP
Guingamp captain Claude Michel (C) is challenged by Lyon's Sydney Govou in their French First Division encounter on August 2. Lyon, the league champions were held 3-3.



PHOTO: AFP
US President George W. Bush poses with his special shirt that was presented by the American football team which called on him at the White House on Friday.