

Ronaldo flying in

Football

INTERNET, Milan

Ronaldo flies back into Milan today with reports suggesting that he will go from the airport to see Internazionale President Massimo Moratti with one simple request: 'sell me to Madrid.'

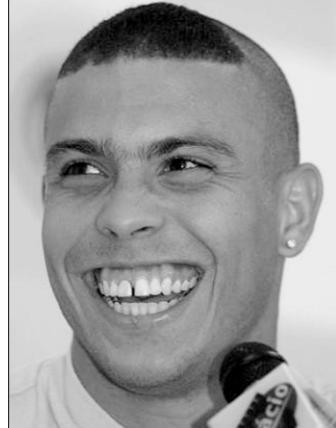
His adviser, Alexandre Martins, revealed: "He does not want to continue at Inter. He wants to rediscover happiness and the best conditions to play football. He's looking for the smile that he lost in Milan but can rediscover in Madrid."

Following his World Cup 2002 exploits - finishing with the Golden Boot and scoring both of Brazil's goals in the Final - Ronaldo once again became a 'phenomenon' in world football, coveted by many, but unlikely to leave the confines of Inter, who had stood by him through his two-year injury nightmare.

However, a return to Spain is looking more and more likely, as the

player's advisers push for a move to Real Madrid.

Football is no place for mis-



RONALDO

placed sentiments, or loyalty for that matter, something that the player's spokesman, Rodrigo Paiva, alluded to: "Leaving Inter is not an act of ungratefulness. He's a professional and he must think of his future. It's true that Inter waited for his recuper-

ation but it is also true that he was injured playing for Inter."

Both clubs have played down the rumours with Real holding an impromptu press conference denying they would make an illegal approach, but would be interested if he was made available by his Italian paymasters, whilst Inter president, Massimo Moratti, has vowed to hang onto his star player: "Inter have no intention of giving in on this. He is not for sale."

Ronaldo is saying nothing, but did disclose on his personal website that his future was in the hands of his agents and that he is "packing up his bags; his holiday in Rio, after the victory of the World Cup, has ended." However, the main headline in the Milan-based sports daily Gazzetta Dello Sport reads: "Ronaldo returns, but does not unpack his suitcase."

In a further twist sources at Lazio last night claimed that Inter had made inquiries over the possible sale of Hernan Crespo. The question is, will it be as Ronaldo's partner or replacement?

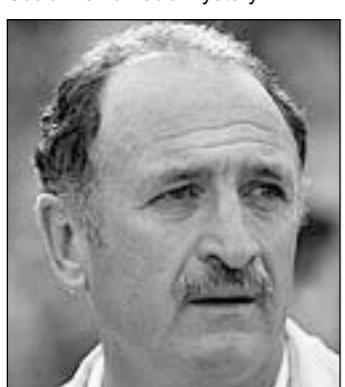
Paraguay friendly

World champs to re-unite

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil have recalled their entire World Cup squad for their friendly against Paraguay later this month but the future of coach Luiz Felipe Scolari remained a mystery.



LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI

The squad that won the World Cup in Japan and South Korea - including Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos - was named for the match in Fortaleza on August 21 while AS Roma midfielder Emerson was added to the list.

Emerson had been due to captain the team at the World Cup until he dislocated his shoulder in a bizarre training incident on the eve of Brazil's opening match against Turkey.

He was ruled out of the competition, his place in the team was taken

by Gilberto Silva and the captaincy handed to full-back Cafu.

The match will be Brazil's first since they beat Germany 2-0 to win their fifth world title in Yokohama on June 30.

Brazil won all seven of their matches at the World Cup and are unbeaten this year, having won 12 and drawn one of the 13 matches

the doldrums and led them to a fifth world cup, has agreed to stay on for the Paraguay game.

Speculation is rife that Scolari's family wants him to quit while the going is good but the CBF would like him to stay on.

"Big Phil" took over in June last year with Brazil in danger of missing out on the World Cup finals for the

SQUAD
Goalkeepers - Marcos (Palmeiras), Dida (AC Milan), Rogério Ceni (Sao Paulo)
Defenders - Cafu (AS Roma), Belotti (Villareal), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid), Junior (Parma), Edmílson (Olympique Lyon), Anderson Polga (Gremio), Roque Junior (AC Milan), Lucio (Bayer Leverkusen)
Midfielders - Vampeta (Corinthians), Gilberto Silva (Arsenal), Emerson (AS Roma), Ronaldinho (Paris St Germain), Juninho Paulista (Middlesbrough), Kaká (Sao Paulo), Kleberson (Atletico Paranaense), Ricardo (Corinthians)
Forwards - Ronaldo (Inter Milan), Rivaldo (AC Milan), Luizão (Hertha Berlin), Denílson (Real Betis), Edilson (Kashiwa Reysol)

they have played.

A media conference in which Scolari had been expected to announce whether he would continue in the job was postponed until Thursday, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said.

The CBF added that Scolari, who in only 13 months lifted Brazil out of

first time.

Brazil lost three of their first five games under Scolari, including a shock defeat to Honduras in the Copa America quarter-finals, but recovered to scramble into the World Cup by beating Venezuela in the last of their 18 qualifying games.

With the pressure lifted and helped by the return to fitness of striker Ronaldo, Scolari was able to take stock, rebuild his team, impose his inimitable style on the squad to lift the team out of its slump.

Emerson

Prizes will also be given for the top goalkeeper, defender, midfielder and coach, taking into account their performances during European competition for the 2001-2002 season.

THE CANDIDATES

Best player: Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Ned) Manchester United/Eng, Raul Gonzalez (Spa) Real Madrid/Spa, Zinedine Zidane (Fra) Real Madrid/Spa
Best goalkeeper: Gianluigi Buffon (Ita) Juventus Turin/Ita, Jerzy Dudek (Pol) Liverpool/Eng, Oliver Kahn (Ger) Bayern Munich/Eng
Best defender: Cafu (Bra) AS Roma/Ita, Sami Hyypia (Fin) Liverpool/Eng, Roberto Carlos (Bra) Real Madrid/Spa
Best midfielder: Michael Ballack (Ger) Bayer Leverkusen/Ger, Roy Keane (Irl) Manchester United/Eng, Patrick Vieira (Fra) Arsenal/Eng
Best striker: Raul Gonzalez (Spa) Real Madrid/Spa, David Trezeguet (Fra) Juventus/Ita, Ruud van Nistelrooy (Ned) Manchester United/Eng
Best coach: Vicente del Bosque (Spa) Real Madrid/Spa, Sir Alex Ferguson (Sco) Manchester United/Eng, Klaus Toppmoller (Ger) Bayer Leverkusen/Ger

Beckham blues?

Football

INTERNET, London

Sir Alex Ferguson is facing an all-too familiar dilemma ahead of the new season - the fear that David Beckham's exploits for his country may ultimately end up costing Manchester United.

It is no secret Ferguson feels Beckham has struggled to reproduce his best form for United since the country's most high-profile player became England captain.

Now Ferguson fears he will be without Beckham for the start of the season because the midfielder was rushed back too early from a broken foot to ensure he started the World Cup.

Beckham

And so the United boss is once again stuck in a quandary. Does he pick Beckham for next week's Champions League qualifier, fearing he is not yet fully fit, or does he hold him back like last season and give him time to recharge his batteries?

Ferguson is loath to leave his best players out but he is well aware that the tactic paid off spectacularly last season and once again showed him to be the master of man-management.

When Beckham almost single-

handedly dragged England to the World Cup finals with a last-minute free-kick against Greece in October, Goldenballs was the toast of the nation.

But Ferguson detected his star midfielder's exploits for his country had all but left his tank empty and took the controversial step of dropping Beckham for nine successive games.

The ploy worked. Beckham, although not entirely happy with the enforced lay-off, came back rejuvenated and recaptured his best form, ending the season with a best-ever tally of 16 goals.

Although Beckham played all but 12 minutes of Sunday's 3-0 win over Parma and showed flashes of brilliance, he was clearly not fully fit and admitted the left foot he broke before the World Cup was still troubling him.

Fergie has options should he choose to leave Beckham on the sidelines once more. Juan Sebastian Veron and Diego Forlan can both play on the right, but with Paul Scholes and Ruud van Nistelrooy currently injured, there is not an abundance of cover in midfield and attack. And, with the European tie against either NK Zagreb of Croatia or Hungarian side Zalaegerszegi a week tomorrow, time is running out.

"When players have just come back from a break, they can have a dip at times," said Fergie.

"But we can't afford a dip in Europe next week. We have to be on our game from the start."

Yet it is the fitness and form of all his England players, not just Beckham, which is causing Ferguson concern as the season looms.

Beckham, Scholes, Nicky Butt and new signing Rio Ferdinand were all given an extra two weeks' rest after the World Cup and did not join the tour of Scandinavia until Thursday.

When Beckham almost single-

than England and I don't think they're as good, player-wise." I can see a winter break happening in England because there's only so many times England want to run into a wall at a World Cup and European Championship.

"Everyone knows full well it's a tortuous season anyway. I wouldn't go on tour in a winter break. I would maybe take our players away somewhere warm to do our training, but I wouldn't play any games."

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When Beckham almost single-

Football League bosses quit

Football

REUTERS, London

Football League chairman Keith Harris and chief executive David Burns both resigned as officials met to discuss their failed legal battle in the wake of ITV Digital's collapse.

Both men had been under pressure after the 72 league clubs outside the Premier League had been left with a 178.5 million pounds shortfall in the wake of ITV Digital's demise.

Burns, in a statement quoted by BBC Online, defended his record, saying: "Throughout my 21 months as chief executive, I have worked tirelessly to improve the League's position commercially and politically, to raise and enhance its public image and to ensure fair media representation.

"A great deal of progress has been made and I leave behind a talented and dynamic executive team capable of taking the League forward well into the future.

"When I joined the League, the ITV Digital contract - the subject of the recent High Court legal action - was already in place, having been finalised by the previous administration.

Harris, who said he had been concerned about the share price of his brokerage firm Seymour Pierce, said criticism of the pair's management had been excessive.

"I said all along I knew that the time would come when I would wake up one morning and know instinctively what the right thing to do is," Harris told Reuters.

"I was worried about the share price in my brokerage company as people feared I would be spending more time with football business, and that has hit the shares quite hard.

"Secondly, I think the personal

attacks that have been made largely at David Burns but by implication also at myself actually transcend the boundaries of decency in such a public manner. These have undermined David's confidence and his ability to do his job."

Looking back at his League duties, Harris added: "The effort you put into this -- and the time -- is certainly disproportionate to the reward."

Football League clubs were stunned by last week's ruling that broadcasters Granada and Carlton were not liable for the millions of pounds owed by their collapsed pay-TV venture ITV Digital under a contract to screen League matches.

The outcome was a massive setback to clubs, many of which will now struggle to meet wage bills after already spending cash owed to them under the digital contract on buying new players.

Tuesday's resignations were welcomed by a number of club chairmen.

"Millions of pounds have gone west. Their record speaks for itself," Crystal Palace chairman Simon Jordan told Sky Sports television. "We need someone with a commercial acumen to revitalise the League."

Soccer officials have said in the past that some 30 clubs in England were under threat of closure after ITV Digital's collapse.

Since the collapse of ITV Digital, the League has awarded the contract to Rupert Murdoch's satellite broadcaster BSkyB, which already has the rights for live coverage of Premier League matches.

The new deal will bring in 95 million pounds over the next four years and provides a lifeline to some clubs. But the BSkyB agreement falls well short of the original ITV Digital contract, which was for 315 million pounds over three years.

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Top-flight players elsewhere may have avoided pay cuts, but many clubs have dramatically reduced their squads. Hansa Rostock have shed 13 players on free transfers.

The plight of Second Division clubs is bleaker. The players of Karlsruhe, Alemannia Aachen and Greuther Fuerth have already agreed to a drop in salaries, while Eintracht Frankfurt narrowly avoided relegation to the lowly regional league due to the poor state of their finances.

The cash crunch seems incredible after the boom of recent seasons. Only two years ago, Kirch paid more than 1.5 billion euros for the

Bundesliga of promise

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany's Bundesliga begins on Friday buoyed by the national team's surprise passage to the World Cup final although a 20 per cent decline in television revenue has already made its mark.

Two clubs, including champions Borussia Dortmund, have considered wage cuts for players and staff and more can be expected to follow

Football clubs in the Bundesliga are failing to recoup its initial outlay through pay TV which has failed to take off.

It could have been far worse had the German national side not surprised almost everyone, including perhaps themselves, by reaching the final of the World Cup.

It is hard to quantify the impact the national side's run has had on the league, but Dortmund coach Matthias Sammer said Germany's

title despite failing to win a trophy last season for the first time since 1995. Their third place finish means they must go through the qualifying round to enter the Champions League.

Since then it has backed up with hard cash, raiding rivals Bayer Leverkusen for Ballack and mercurial Brazilian wing back Ze Roberto.

Bayern will also have Deisler, bought from Hertha Berlin, although the playmaker's right knee may not have recovered before the winter break.

SEBASTIAN DEISLER

before the season is out.

Dortmund also reached the final of the UEFA Cup last season, but that has not shielded the club from the financial impact of the collapse of media giant Kirch and the renegotiated television deal that followed.

Captain Stefan Reuter and World Cup squad member Sebastian Deisler said players would have to accept the new reality and that all employees, including themselves, might have to take a hit.

In the end, the club declared itself solid enough to weather the storm, although it may need a good run in the Champions League to avoid cost savings and much reduced player bonuses.

At VfB Stuttgart, however, the shortfall appears more severe and the club's board has tried to push through salary cuts. Negotiations are continuing.

Top-flight players elsewhere may have avoided pay cuts, but many clubs have dramatically reduced their squads and are looking forward to next season when the capacity of their Westphalia Stadium will reach 83,000.

Schalke have sold all its home

tickets for the first half of the season, while Hertha Berlin passed their previous record of 16,500 season tickets sold by mid-July.

World Cup stars are the chief draw.

Bayern can flaunt German captain and goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, voted best performer at the World Cup, and Michael Ballack, Germany's best outfield player, bought from Bayer Leverkusen.

Leverkusen still have Bernd Schneider and Oliver Neuville as well as Michael Ballack winning defender Lucio.

Borussia Dortmund have added Torsten Frings and a host of Brazilians, while Hertha Berlin may have lost German playmaker Sebastian Deisler, but have gained Brazilian striker Luizao.

Bayern Munich once again start as favourites to win an 18th league

title despite failing to win a trophy last season for the first time since 1995. Their third place finish means they must go through the qualifying round to enter the Champions League.

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