FIFA world rankings France sink

Former World champions France

have slipped to fourth in the latest

edition of FIFA's world ranking, while

the United States have broken into

The rankings are the second set

since the World Cup and though few

European or South American teams

have been in action, there has been

widespread activity in the rest of the

world with nearly 50 matches taking

Placings have also been affected by

the loss of historical ranking points.

France slipped from top spot to joint-

second after their first round World

Brazil remain top, ahead of

Argentina and Spain, up one place

Germany are fifth, followed by

Mexico, with England and Portugal -

who meet in a friendly next month --

Italy and the United States are jointninth, the first time that the U.S. have

Colombia, who failed to qualify for

the World Cup, have slipped from

The biggest movers were New

Zealand, who leapt 41 places to 47th

on the back of their victory over

Australia in the recent Oceania

733

714

714

707

693

Cup exit and are now fourth.

ioint-seventh.

Nations Cup

TOP 20

TEAM

1. Brazil

6. Mexico

9=. Italy

9=. USA

11. Turkey

12.Denmark

14. Holland

15=. Colombia

15=. Yugoslavia

17. Cameroon

18. Belgium

20. Sweden

AFP, Seoul

19. Paraguay

13. Republic of Ireland

2. Argentina

made the top 10.

the top 10 for the first time.

further

REUTERS, Zurich

Sepp Blatter (L), the FIFA president, presents a plaque to AFC's General Secretary Peter Velappan (C) for his contribution to the World Cup 2002, during the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Congress Meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday., Mohammed bin Hamam of Qatar, AFC's president in waiting, looks on.

Blatter cautious about Asia

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

FIFA chief Sepp Blatter on Wednesday said Asia would have to fight hard for the right to a fifth automatic berth in the 2006 World

Cup.
"It is an absolutely legitimate demand and request from the AFC," he told a news conference after the Asian Football Confederation annual congress, but made it clear that Asia would face stiff competition.

Blatter noted that there would be one slot available because the winner of the 2002 games Brazil would not automatically qualify for the next finals in Munich.

"But this free slot, in my opinion and those in FIFA, should go to the confederation that has never had a direct entry in FIFA's World Cup, which is Oceania." he said.

A trade-off for the AFC would be another "half" position which Oceania currently has, leaving the Asian countries with a play-off to obtain another World Cup slot.

The AFC would have to "work hard" to reach its objective of five seats, he said, adding that the continent's performance in the 2002 Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea was a "good step

"I can only express my sympa-

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

has been picked by God.

knocking in the goals

championship

Brazil's veteran striker Romario,

who was forced to watch his coun-

already a leading candidate to

finish as the competition's top

scorer for the second year run-

at me and said: 'That's the guy.',

he told reporters. "Then he

pointed at me and said: 'Go and

score another goal.' And so I did."

scored 843 goals in his career,

said he wanted to keep playing

until he reached 1,000 and that

winning the 1994 World Cup made

up for other disappointments in his

mass of people chanting my

name. I love football and it would

be difficult for me to stop," he said.

two World Cups and another two

Olympic Games but I can't com-

plain because I'm a world cham-

pion and I'm happy.'

part in the competition

"What motivates me is that

"I could have played another

Romario, ruled out on the eve

He was overlooked for 2002

of the 1998 World Cup with a

nagging muscular problem, has

always said he could have taken

ing which even included President

people to the Maracana, some-

Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

Romario, who claims to have

"When I was born, God pointed

thy to this approach. The decision will be made on December 17 or 18 in Madrid at the FIFA executive committee meeting.

The AFC's new president, Mohamed bin Hammam, earlier told the congress that the region would support Oceania's automatic entry into the 2006 Cup but urged FIFA to give Asia "more opportunities to show our talents".

"It is my priority to see five Asian teams in 2006 in Germany. Regardless of whether we deserve it technically or not, I think it is our right," he told AFP.

"We have shown to the world at the recent World Cup in Asia that we can compete at the top level."

Hammam, who took over the AFC presidency at its congress here, said the launch of the AFC Champions League on Tuesday strengthened Asia's bid for five berths, adding that he saw a "50-50 chance" for the region's longrunning quest.

Opponents of giving Asia extra berths have long argued that the allocation for the world's most populous continent should only be ncreased on merit.

Asia had four teams at the 2002 finals, including co-hosts South Korea and Japan. The success of South Korea in reaching the semifinals, the best performance of an Asian side in World Cup history, as well as Japan's qualification for the last 16 have boosted arguments for

missions were to unite the Asian football family and to develop the sport to narrow the gap for AFC's more backward members.

Under a new development plan. the Qatari said the continent would be divided into four zones with an official appointed to guide the growth of the sport in each zone.

"If we leave the countries without guidance, they are going to lose money, they are going to lose (out) in their efforts. We want these countries to concentrate on youth development so that maybe they can do something in 2010.

Hammam said the AFC and FIFA would also work out programs to boost development in India and

"There is a lot of potential in these two countries. We have to explore the possibility of increasing the development capability of these two countries, maybe to edge them to work towards professionalism."

Earlier at the AFC congress, Japan's Junji Ogura and Thailand's Worawi Makudi were elected to represent Asia on the FIFA executive committee. East Timor was admitted as an

associate member and will undergo a two-year probation before it can become a full AFC member.

The AFC congress also welcomed Afghanistan, which was one of 12 founding members in 1954, back into the fold after its participation was affected by years of war.

The match will be held on September 7 at the new Seoul God's favourite striker! stadium built for this year's World Cup.
Their last matches were in 1990

Two Koreas to

meet on Sept.

The two Koreas will play a football

international against each for the

first time in more than a decade in

Seoul next month, organisers said

in Seoul and Pyongyang when the rival states had embarked on ar earlier attempt to improve relations through sport.
"The North Korean football team

will visit here from September 6 to 8 and will have a friendly match at the Sang-Am World Cup stadium on September 7," the Europe-Korea Foundation said in a statement.

The foundation has organised the match and a four-member delegation will go to the North for more talks

North Korea boycotted the World Cup staged in South Korea and Japan in June and would not answer an offer to stage matches.
It first agreed to send a team to

Seoul when a leading South Korean

lawmaker, Park Keun-Hye, visited Pyongyang in May. Park is the daughter of former South Korean president, Park Chung-Hee, whose 18 years of authoritarian rule were marked by

spectacular industrial growth. North Korea has also agreed to send athletes to the Asian Games to be held in South Korea from September 29.

Amid lingering Cold War antagonism, the communist state has never taken part in an international sporting event in the capitalist South

Choe Song-Ik, a North Korean delegate to high-level talks being held in Seoul, said on Monday that the North would send more than 600 people to Asia biggest sporting event including athletes, officials and

He also said the North would notify the Busan Asian Games Organizing Committee how many events it would take part in when they have talks in North Korea from

"We will send a large number of a delegation... more than 600," he told

Ahn Sang-Young, mayor of the host

Trezeguet to miss opener

REUTERS, Milan

Juventus striker David Trezeguet

season with a knee injury A statement on the club's official website said the France international, who was joint top scorer in the Italian league last season with 24 goals, would need to rest for 20

will miss the start of the Serie A

The injury rules him out of the defending champions' September 1 season opener against Piacenza. Trezeguet picked up the knee injury in a friendly on July 31 and suffered further pain in the back of

his right knee during training on

More oil for the rumour mill

Football

INTERNET, Milan

There is a new page to the Ronaldo saga. In fact his personal spokesman, Rodrigo Paiva, from Brazil denied that the Brazilian phenomenon made an interview with Italian daily "II Gazzettino" which was quoted by all the media.

Paiva stated that Ronie wants to underline that he never spoke to any journalist in the last few days. "Ronaldo only heard the reports about the content of that interview after the training and immediately called me to deny that fact.

Are there balanced declarations? It's ok, but the fact is that Ronie never gave them. Just think about a telephone interview, when the whole world is asking him for one. Ronie wants it to be clear that he'll only speak when he considers it the right moment", concluded

But while Paiva absolutely denies any type of interview, the "II Gazzettino" iournalist also came with an official announcement. stating that yesterday evening he spoke with Ronaldo to clear the situation. and to understand the reasons for this denial made by Paiva, who is in Brazil. Ronaldo allegedly told Venice's

paper, "Il Gazzettino" on Monday, "I understand Mr (Massimo)Moratti's and the supporter's bitterness, but then again a player also has to evaluate other things.

'My problem isn't really Moratti: if it were for him, who I still consider as a second father to me. I'd surely stay with Inter for life. But at the moment there are other reasons and motivations to choose, which are really more technical and professional. It isn't a money problem... I'm waiting to meet the president, because having a face-to-face is different than a telephone call of a few min-'On that occasion we'll evaluate

decided anything: this week will be important. I don't know if I'll leave Milan... probably soon, I could be more precise. But let's wait for the meeting with Moratti: meanwhile I'm continuing to have my own training at Inter's headquarter in Appiano Gentile."

Ronaldo allegedly said that if Moratti tells him that he must respect his contract he'll "try to score and to do everything for the good of Inter. My problem is that I want clearness. I'd also like a face-



RONALDO

to face with Cuper to know what the coach wants from me, evaluating from this way if his idea of soccer is the same as mine. I have an idea of soccer that is the Brazilian one: with enthusiasm and fantasy, built on attack and less tactical than yours. Something like the Spanish one: Spain is a country with different rhythms of life, less frantic and really more happy-go-lucky, contrary to Italy and Milan".

The interview with "Gazzettino" is claimed to have ended with a clear question: Q "Ronaldo what is your current club?", A: "Inter, for the moment". Meanwhile, Inter president

Massimo Moratti returned to speaking about Ronaldo on Tuesday. In a long interview published by daily

"Gazzetta dello Sport", in which he underlined how the Ronaldo situation is absolutely clear.

"If he wants to stay with us, and we want this, we'll reach an agreement, he'll play with Inter and I'm sure he'll do so in a good way. However, if situations arise where Real Madrid or other clubs make offers which are impossible to refuse, he'll go to another club."

President Moratti continued: "I'm only sorry because there is a voluntary opposition to Hector Cuper and the technical staff, something that the coach does not have towards

MASSIMO MORATTI

him. But frequently when you have

an idea, it's difficult changing it. I

think this year Ronaldo could be

very useful for us in winning the

and capability of winning the World

Cup and for us it was a really big joy.

He has to understand that after this

behaviour a disappointing situation

has been created. I think he can

overcome this situation, because

confirmed that the declarations

posted by the papers weren't

wrong... but at the same time I have

the impression that Ronaldo's future

'When I spoke with him, he

he's a very intelligent boy.

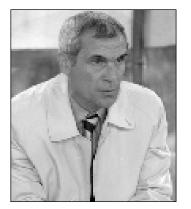
will not be so clear."

'Ronie also had the great fortune

scudetto.

Gazzetta: "I had a telephone call with him 4 days ago, and I don't have problems understanding him as he doesn't have problems understanding me. We'll meet..."

But Inter's official website aired a different sounding Moratti who brushed aside any prospect of a showdown with Ronaldo. At the end of Tuesday night's training session of Inter's Champions League squad, Moratti joined them in the Portuguese capital Lisbon and was concise in replying to questions



HECTOR CUPER

"There hasn't been and there won't be a meeting, also because the footballer will return to Brazil for national team duties. However there is absolutely no incompatibility between us," said Moratti.

A question for coach Cuper about Ronaldo, who was not included in the 20-man roster for the match against Sporting Lisbon next week was inevitable during yesterday"s press conference.

Cuper said: "I haven't broken off any relationship with Ronaldo, I don't have any problems, perhaps it's him who's not in accordance with me. During our meeting we spoke about training sessions and preparations only."

About the upcoming face-to-face

Pires can't

Ballack Germany's best

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich midfielder Michael Ballack was named Germany's Footballer of the Year after topping an annual poll of the country's sports writers by Kicker magazine.

Ballack, who helped Bayer Leverkusen to the Champions League final last season and his country to the World Cup final in July, got 433 votes. That was enough to beat his club

and international team mate Oliver Kahn, who was second with 345 votes. Goalkeeper Kahn was the winner in 2000 and 2001. It was the first time the

Japanese international Shinji Ono

made one magical contribution on

Tuesday to help push UEFA Cup

holders Feyenoord a little closer to

the money-spinning European

Ono struck the only goal of the

game as the Dutchmen defeated

Fenerbahce of Turkey 1-0 at home

to give them a slender advantage

ahead of their qualifying round

The midfielder, who played a

crucial role as the Dutchmen lifted

the UEFA Cup last season, played a

smart one-two with Pierre van

Hooijdonk and hit a powerful drive

the year

Football

Champions League.

second leg next week.

into the corner of the net.

old Ballack had claimed the honour, which has been awarded each year



Ono delight for Feyenoord

be Fenerbahce who will fancy their

chances of making it through to the

Champions League group stages in

first half and it was a surprise that, in

such a tight match, the talents of

Argentine World Cup player Ariel

Ortega were not introduced by the

Turks until the later stages.

Five players were booked in the

the return match.

Ballack, a tall and graceful midfielder with an uncanny ability to score in clutch situations, netted 17 goals for Leverkusen in the Bundesliga last season.

Other players receiving votes in the poll were Kaiserslautern striker Miroslav Klose with 35 votes. Bernd Schneider of Leverkusen with 21 votes and Marco Bode of Werder Bremen with seven votes.

Leverkusen coach Klaus Toppmoeller was voted Coach of the Year with 396 votes ahead of Borussia Dortmund's Matthias Sammer, who got 163 votes. Dortmund won the Bundesliga title and reached the finals of the UEFA

Germany coach Rudi Voeller

In the night's other qualifying

round first leg ties, French World

Cup striker Djibril Cisse scored the

only goal of the game in the 71st

minute to give Auxerre a crucial 1-0

win at Boavista although the home

side believed they should have had

a penalty for handball in the last few

back from a goal down to beat Apoel

Nicosia in Cyprus 3-2. Themistoklis

Nikolaidis scored the winner three

minutes into injury time just a few

moments after the home side had

pulled back to 2-2 thanks to a pen-

play their match against Sturm Graz

of Austria in the Bulgarian capital of

Sofia because of security fears but

that didn't affect their preparations

too much as they won 2-0 thanks to

two goals from Nigerian interna-

half goals for a 2-0 win against

Sparta Prague of the Czech

Vienna after

Genk of Belgium scored two first

Israeli side Maccabi Haifa had to

alty from Costakis Malekkos

Greek side AEK Athens fought

minutes.

stand it

REUTERS, London

Arsenal's Robert Pires will not be at the club's training centre this week because he would find it too frustrating to watch his team mates prepare for the season, the injured French midfielder has said.

Pires. who has been recovering from a knee injury in the south of France, returned for the club's annual pre-season photocall on Tuesday and took part in some light

The Frenchman had originally planned to return to Arsenal's training centre outside London to work

on his own until the end of the month "I have now decided against coming back this week -- it would

have been too painful for me," Pires

Diouf vows to change!

INTERNET, Liverpool

El Hadji Diouf has promised to curb his party lifestyle and repay Gerard Houllier for bringing him to England. The World Cup striker thought

nothing of boozing until the early hours with Senegal boss Bruno Metsu. But, after his £10million summer switch to Liverpool from French

side Lens, Diouf knows his nights on the razzle are all but over. Diouf, 21, said: "I am well aware I won't be able to go for a drink with Gerard Houllier at 4am in the morn-

ing - as happened with Bruno Metsu, the Senegal coach. "If I do go out a bit, I will not hide though I will take care. There is no question of my concealing anything

because the boss is no gendarme. "But I believe there is great confidence between me and Gerard Houllier. I truly hope to show

him as soon as possible that he was right to believe in me." The African Player of the Year marked his first taste of English football with an action-packed

display in Sunday's 1-0 Community Shield defeat by Arsenal. Now he is desperate to settle down to his new life in Liverpool and has bet Houllier he will be

speaking fluent English in three months Diouf added: "I could not take

the mickey when I met the players on account of the language. What I did understand is they were all pleased - especially the Englishmen - that Senegal beat France at the World Cup.

"Phil Thompson, Emile Heskey and Steven Gerrard even came to say thank you to me. Apparently, they do not like the French too much.

"Now I am in a hurry to understand everything because I need to have fun with my team-mates. That's how I function best. "Michael Owen has already

nicknamed me Dioufy. It happened quite naturally one day at training. "They all called me El Hadji at

first until Michael gave me my nickname. Everyone stopped and

try's World Cup win on television after being shunned by coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, has bounced back into the limelight, claiming that he The irrepressible 36-year-old, who had been expected to retire after failing to make the World Cup, has instead joined the sixth club of his career and is already He scored twice on his debut for Fluminense as they hammered Cruzeiro 5-1 at the weekend and his presence drew a 67,000 crowd to the Maracana stadium -- by far the biggest attendance on the opening weekend of the Brazilian The player known as 'Shortie' is

Veteran Brazilian striker Romario in his new team Fluminese's jersey.

he is capable of doing," wrote Juca Kfouri in the sports daily Lance.

Romario's return came as the Brazilian championship kicked off with an average of three goals a game, a promising start to a competition which has suffered from the continuing exodus of the country's top players to European

despite enormous popular back-Although Brazil's World Cup win has boosted public interest, "He brought nearly 70,000 critics say that Brazilian domestic football remains as chaotic as ever, with clubs still signing new thing which, despite his age, only

players after the tournament had got under way.

There was already talk of coaching casualties only four days after the first ball had been kicked.

Internacional's Guto Ferreria was favourite to be first for the chop after his team lost 3-1 at home to Flamengo in their first Cruzeiro are still searching for a

coach after Marco Aurelio walked out on Friday and four candidates then turned them down over the

The 64th minute goal broke down a well-organised Turkish defence but the home side strug-Juninho out for

Football

INTERNET, Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough have been told the devastating news that Juninho will not play again this year after tearing his cruciate knee ligament.

The Brazilian midfielder underwent a scan on Monday morning to assess the full extent of the damage and the verdict is that he will be out for at least five months. The cruciate ligament is torn,

although not completely ruptured, and requires surgery which Juninho will undergo this week. That diagnosis comes as no

surprise to Boro, who feared the 29-year-old had done himself even more damage in Saturday's abundance. 45-minute friendly against Italian

But it is still a hammer blow to

side Modena

manager Steve McClaren's hopes of launching a bid for a top-six finish and European qualification this season, having only sealed the midfielder's Riverside return earlier this month However, the Boro boss

refuses to be too downcast and he commented recently: "It's a huge blow not only for the club and the supporters but for the little man "But we've got a strong squad

that is good enough to do well this season and Juninho's misfortune could be an opportunity for some-"With Szilard Nemeth, Alen

Boksic, Joseph Job and Noel Whelan, I believe we've got cover

Effenberg REUTERS, Vienna

tional Yakubu Ayegbeni.

Austria Vienna are interested in former German internaand Bayern Munich playmaker Stefan Effenberg, the club's sport director said. Peter Svetits met the 34-year-old

Austrian premier league club

player, who said last week he would end his career if he failed to find a new club by Wednesday, ir Duesseldorf on Tuesday.

Bayern Munich have not

enewed their contract with him. "We both put forward our ideas on what we expect from the other it was all very positive," Svetits said on Austria Vienna's website.

"Stefan appears to be in top physical form," Svetits said, adding that a definite commitment with Effenberg would be decided upon on Thursday Effenberg told RTL TV: "It looks

very hopeful that I will move to Austria. The club has high hopes and is hungry for success. It would be good if it came to something.'