

Starting from scratch again

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's World Cup-winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari described him as "spoilt," while Inter Milan fans have dubbed him "ungrateful."

Whatever you call him, Ronaldo, whose dream move from Inter to Real Madrid finally materialised on Saturday, has put himself under enormous pressure to prove he was not a one-month wonder at the World Cup and to regain his shrinking popularity.

The Phenomenon's performance in South Korea and Japan, when he bounced back from nearly three years of injury misery to lead Brazil to a fifth World Cup win and scored eight goals to win the golden boot in the process, won him admirers worldwide.

His behaviour since -- turning his back on the club that looked after him as he suffered career-threatening injuries to his right knee -- may have alienated many almost as quickly.

Outside Milan's headquarters on Saturday some 200 angry Inter fans vented their anger towards their former idol as they held up large banners saying "Infame" (disgrace).

Ronaldo was at Inter for five seasons during which he spent most of the last three receiving medical treatment while picking up his reported 4.5 million euro (dollars 4.37 million) salary.

He finally looked back to his best for Brazil at the World Cup earlier this year but, instead of showing his

gratitude by staying at the Italian club and trying to help them win a title, he announced instead that he wanted to leave.

Like a child in a toy shop, he then picked and chose the biggest and the best club for himself to join -- European champions Real Madrid.

Real admitted that one of Ronaldo's agents had contacted them offering his services and after a month of kicking and screaming, the striker finally got his own way on Saturday.

But after joining Europe's top club in a four-year deal for 47 million euros (dollars 46.31 million) -- the sixth most expensive fee in football history -- Ronaldo now has to prove he really is worth the fuss he and his agents have created over him.

His move raises more questions than it answers. Who will make way for him, assuming Real plan to use him in the starting line-up? How will they fit him into the team? Is he really as sharp as he was before his succession of injuries? Will he again get bored after a few months and want to move elsewhere?

Although spectacularly gifted, Ronaldo's career has been built on two golden periods -- the 1996/97 season he spent at Barcelona, when he scored several amazing goals with rampaging runs from the halfway line, and the 2002 World Cup, when his tally included both goals in the final against Germany.

The rest has been a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs.

Instead of building on his season at Barcelona -- which earned him a World Player of the Year award -- Ronaldo then became bogged down in one of the longest transfers

in history before finally joining Inter Milan.

His first season in Italian football was good but not up to the high standards he had set himself at Barcelona -- 34 goals in 47 games and a UEFA Cup title.

But he proved incapable of living up to his billing at the 1998 World Cup, when his four goals were overshadowed by the mystery over what happened to him on the day of the final against France.

Ronaldo played hours after suffering a mysterious illness in the team hotel, looked dazed and lethargic and made a negligible contribution as Brazil lost 3-0.

By that time, Brazilians were already wondering about the player's jet-setting lifestyle.

Many were amazed that he managed to fit in any football at all in between all the travelling and publicity engagements.

He opened a bar in Rio de Janeiro, was photographed wearing a silly hat in Hong Kong and escaped injury when he skidded off the track while test-driving his latest car at the city's racetrack. He also took up golf.

Months later, Ronaldo's injury hell began.

He had two knee operations in less than a year and, when he finally made his Serie A comeback last season, was plagued by a series of muscular injuries.

Inter agreed to let Ronaldo return to Brazil at the start of this year where an eight-strong team of professionals spent one month effectively rebuilding him.

It worked and Ronaldo looked to be himself again at the World Cup.

Unfortunately, the old problems again returned.

He became involved in a slanging match after Scolari admitted that during the World Cup he had worked hard to make Ronaldo play for the team.

"He was -- how can we say it -- a spoilt player," said Scolari.

After the World Cup, Ronaldo got tangled in another transfer saga after saying he wanted to leave Inter.

He would not say why, but most fingers point to the down-to-earth and egalitarian approach by the club's Argentine coach Hector Cuper, who refused to give him superstar status.

When he returned home for Brazil's friendly international against Paraguay, Ronaldo still seemed to be in party mode nearly seven weeks after the World Cup final.

He spent one day in Sao Paulo involved in engagements for his sponsors.

The next day, he jumped into a helicopter and went to visit an island he had bought off the coast near Rio de Janeiro.

Then, when it was time to fly to Fortaleza for the match, he missed his plane after claiming to have been caught up in traffic.

His sad and lethargic performance against the Paraguayans lasted just 33 minutes before he was taken off clearly exhausted. It has been his only game since he claimed the World Cup for Brazil in that historic final on June 30.



Superstar Ronaldo leaving Inter Milan's headquarters on August 31 after his transfer to Real Madrid was sealed.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Media's guarded delight

Football

AFP, Madrid

European champions Real Madrid's signing of Brazilian World Cup hero Ronaldo was hailed as a marketing masterstroke by the press here Sunday though it was tempered with warnings it could provoke unrest in the dressing room.

While Marca's front page had a photo of the 45million euro purchase with the headline 'It is Real (Royal)' it also added it was a bit of a gamble not on the financial front but on the sporting side given his problems since 1998 with a knee injury.

Marca hinted at disquiet within the Madrid camp given the 'cavalier treatment' handed out to Spanish international striker Fernando Morientes, who was set to join bitter rivals Barcelona until the deal

collapsed late Saturday.

This theme was taken up by an editorial in Spain's other sports newspaper 'As' which while flinging Ronaldo's arrival as 'The King is on his way' on the front page made little effort to voice its disgust at the shabby behaviour over Morientes, a member of two of their European Cup winning sides.

"It must be humiliating to be treated like a cheque.

"His (Morientes) treatment is indicative of the darker side of professional sport," he railed.

ABC also predicted problems within the dressingroom.

"The signing of Ronaldo will sew discord within the Real Madrid dressingroom," wrote one correspondent.

Catalan newspaper Vanguardia said the last minute collapse of Morientes transfer -- which Real hoped would help fund part of the fee for Ronaldo -- was simply the continuation of the 'vendetta' by

Barca against the club from the capital.

'El Pais' saw his signing as confirmation Real Madrid were the world's leading club and not even concerns about Ronaldo's knee could take away the fact that the Brazilian star was a 'footballing god'.

'La Razon' took a more earthy view of his arrival declaring that alongside Zinedine Zidane, Raul, Luis Figo and compatriot Roberto Carlos Real Madrid now held the equivalent of five aces in a poker game.

'El Mundo' looked forward to great sporting moments thanks to 'the most spectacular player around'.

"To see Ronaldo, Figo, Zidane, Raul and Roberto Carlos sweeping forward will send shivers down the spine," it preened while adding "above all it has been a marketing masterstroke."

WORLD RECORD TRANSFERS

Ronaldo's transfer from Inter Milan to Real Madrid will be worth around 45 million euros making the move the seventh most expensive in football history.

1. Zinedine Zidane (Fra), from Juventus (Ita) to Real Madrid (Spa), 2001-2002: 75.1m euros
2. Luis Figo (Por), from Barcelona (Spa) to Real Madrid (Spa), 2000-2001: 61.7m euros
3. Hernan Crespo (Arg) from Parma (Ita) to Lazio (Ita), 2000-2001: 56.5m euros
4. Gaizka Mendietia (Spa), from Valencia (Spa) to Lazio (Ita), 2001-2002: 48m euros
5. Rio Ferdinand (Eng), from Leeds (Eng) to Manchester United (Eng), 2002-2003: 46.8m euros
6. Juan Sebastian Veron (Arg), from Lazio (Ita) to Manchester United (Eng), 2001-2002: 46.3m euros
7. Ronaldo (Bra), from Inter Milan (Ita) to Real Madrid (Spa), 2002-2003: 45m euros
8. Rui Costa (Por), from Fiorentina (Ita) to AC Milan (Ita), 2001-2002: 43.7m euros
9. Christian Vieri (Ita), from Lazio (Ita) to Inter Milan (Ita), 1999-2000: 42.6m euros
10. Filippo Inzaghi (Ita), from Juventus (Ita) to AC Milan AC (Ita), 2001-2002: 41.2m euros

*(1.015 euro = 1 dollar)

Premiership Keane grabs headlines

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson quickly jumped to the defence of midfielder Roy Keane, who was sent off for elbowing Jason McAteer in Saturday's 1-1 Premiership draw at Sunderland.

The incident added to the pre-season controversy caused by Keane's autobiography in which he admits to deliberately injuring Alfe Inge Haaland during a Manchester derby two seasons ago.

Ferguson believes Keane, sent home from the World Cup this summer after a blazing row with Ferguson manager Mick McCarthy, was hard done by.

"I do not think he swung an elbow - he put an arm across his face," Ferguson said.

"If the referee deems it a sending-off I do not know what we can do.

"The player (McAteer) went down quickly which is disappointing. We will see what the offence is but my gut feeling it was very soft.

Norway international Tore Andre Flo scored on his debut to earn Sunderland a draw in the match at the Stadium of Light.

Flo, who joined the Black Cats on Friday from Glasgow Rangers, netted from close range after Welshman Ryan Giggs had given United an early lead.

French striker Nicolas Anelka scored a hat-trick as Manchester City beat Everton 3-1 at Maine Road.

The former Arsenal striker rattled in a deflected shot from 30 yards out after Ali Benarbia had played a short free kick to Eyal Berkovic to give City a 14th minute lead.

And two minutes later Anelka doubled his tally, sweeping the ball



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United ace David Beckham (L) climbs on teammate Ryan Giggs after Giggs had scored against Sunderland at the Stadium of Light on August 31.

in at the far post after Steve Howey had headed back a cross from Darren Huckerby.

The game took a dramatic twist in the 28th minute when City's Shaun Wright-Phillips was sent off by referee Barry Knight four bringing down Gary Naysmith in the box.

David Unsworth converted the penalty to put Everton back in the game but Anelka made sure of the three points by grabbing his third goal five minutes from time.

Tottenham's transfer deadline signing Robbie Keane watched his new team-mates snatch a 2-1 win over Southampton at White Hart Lane.

Les Ferdinand gave Spurs a 10th minute lead but they were pegged back when Mauricio Taricco turned Brett Ormerod's cross into his own net.

Teddy Sheringham netted a last-gasp penalty to take all three points and lift Spurs to the top of the table.

Charlton won 2-0 at London rivals West Ham.

Claus Jensen struck from eight

yards to give the visitors a fourth minute lead and Jon Fortune poked through a crowded goalmouth to finish off the Hammers.

Darren Moore scored the only goal of the game in West Brom's 1-0 win at home to Fulham, their first points in the top flight since winning promotion.

At the Riverside Stadium Middlesbrough edged Blackburn 1-0 thanks to Joseph Desire Job's last minute winner.

In the day's early match Birmingham beat Leeds 2-1 at St Andrews, their first win since being promoted to the Premiership.

Damien Johnson's superb curler settled the match in the 68th minute. Birmingham started brightly and took the lead in the 31st minute.

Martin Grainger and Robbie Savage played a one-two after a corner before sending the ball into the path of Paul Devlin from 20 yards out.

His low first-time effort flew past Leeds goalkeeper Paul Robinson and into the corner of the net.

Leeds restored parity five minutes after the break.

Alan Smith and Viduka were involved in the build-up before the ball was threaded through to Lee Bowyer.

The midfielder, tipped to get an England call-up on Monday for the friendly against Portugal next weekend, kept his composure before slotting the ball past Nico Vaessen.

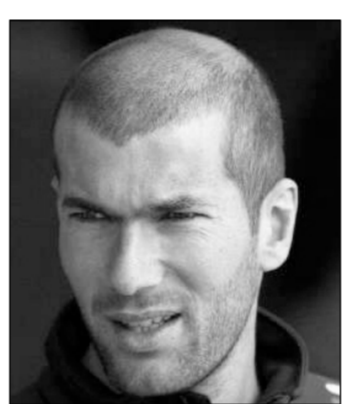
Entering the Real galaxy

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

The addition of Ronaldo to the constellation of stars at the Bernabeu raises the prospect of an all but invincible Real Madrid side gaining a dominance in Europe not seen since the club's golden age in the 1950s.

For Alfredo di Stefano, Ferenc Puskas, Paco Gento and Raymond Kopa, the standard-bearers for the



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

club that won the European Cup from 1956 to 1960, read Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo, Raul and now Ronaldo, who finally completed his move from Inter Milan on Saturday.

After their European hegemony was ended in the 1960-61 season, Real won the top club competition just once more, in 1966, before re-establishing their reputation with three Champions League victories in the last five years.

With the arrival of Ronaldo, fresh from leading Brazil to World Cup glory by top scoring in the competition with eight goals, few would bet against Real lifting the European title again at Old Trafford, Manchester, next May.

Certainly the way they tore through the defences of UEFA Cup holders Feyenoord in a 3-1 European Super Cup win on Friday suggested they will not be easily shifted from the summit.

With Zidane directing traffic from central midfield and Figo looking back close to his best on the right after a season wrecked by an ankle injury, Real overwhelmed their opponents.

The acquisition of Ronaldo to play ahead of the quicksilver Raul in attack, backed by Zidane, Figo and rampaging fullbacks Roberto Carlos and Michel Salgado, will ensure that the team have extraordinary firepower.

If Ronaldo can get up to anything like full fitness after the years plagued by knee trouble, Real will

have a striker certain to convert chances when the team are on song and capable of creating them himself when he needs to.

If he reaches the level he was at before his injuries, Real may well prove to be invincible.

"Even at 70 percent he's the best in the world," Inter coach Hector Cuper said in a recent newspaper interview.

Under hard-nosed club president Florentino Perez, Real appear to have found a formula to serve them well long into the future.

The arrival of Figo, signed from



LUIS FIGO

Barcelona in 2000 for dollars 56 million, was followed a year later by that of Zidane in a dollars 66-million deal from Juventus.

Perez then announced that the club would in future sign only players of the very highest class, otherwise relying on talent from the youth side.

Any new arrivals must not only convince the technical staff of their prowess but also be attractive propositions to the club's marketing department, who are intent on raising ever greater revenues from replica shirt sales and joint deals to exploit players' image rights.

The signings of players such as Zidane and Figo have a knock-on effect, too.

The main attraction in Spain for the game's aristocracy was until recently Barcelona.

Even though Real were by far the more successful side, Barcelona managed to secure the services of a string of world-class players from Johan Cruyff to Diego Maradona, Romario and Rivaldo.

Ronaldo himself had one successful season at Barcelona before joining Inter Milan but it was with Real Madrid that his agent Alexandre Martins opened negotiations after the World Cup.

"What player in the world would not want to play for Real Madrid?" said Martins. "It's the best team in the world."

Ronaldo himself explained why he found Spain such an attractive

proposition.

"My understanding of soccer is Brazilian," he said. "Fun and imaginative, more attacking and less tactical than (Italian football) -- more like the Spanish style than the Italian way of playing."

With Ronaldo, Figo and Zidane on their books, Real can boast five of the last six FIFA World Players of the Year.

They play with a verve no side in Europe can match at present and should any other world-class players opt to change clubs it would be bizarre indeed if they did not eye



RAUL

Real Madrid as a dream destination.

So is there any hope at all for rival European teams now or in the near future?

To stand a chance of stopping Real, opposing teams in the Champions League will have to follow the example set by the side's Spanish first division rivals.

When Real play in Europe, opposing teams tend to have the look of startled rabbits.

Instead of trying to exploit potential weaknesses in the Real defence, teams find themselves playing ultra-defensively before sooner or later succumbing to the intense attacking pressure that Vicente del Bosque's side habitually exert.

In the Spanish league last season that was not the case. Instead of waiting to be taken apart by Real, more adventurous teams such as Real Mallorca, Las Palmas and Deportivo Coruna went toe to toe with the Spanish giants and found themselves perfectly able to compete.

Real top-scored in the Spanish first division with 69 goals but they conceded 44 and, with 10 defeats in 38 games, they finished third in the table.

The problem was in defence.

With Salgado and Roberto Carlos spending so much time in attack, and with no midfield enforcer in the side, the 34-year-old Fernando Hierro and B team recruit Francisco Pavon were often left

exposed and Real paid the price against teams willing to attack them.

Certainly, there have been whispers from the dressing-room over the close season that a move for a top class centre-back might be a more wise investment than the signing of Ronaldo.

When asked about the possible signing of the Brazilian in a recent interview with France Football, Zidane replied: "Ronaldo would be perfect but above all weaknesses have been detected at the back."

If teams do prove willing to play Real at their own game they may still



ROBERTO CARLOS

find themselves overrun but the result could well be a return to the Spanish side's golden age in terms of style as well as success.

In the first six European Cup finals, Real scored 18 goals and conceded eight, culminating in an historic 7-3 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 final at Hampden Park, Glasgow.

With arguably the most destructive attack ever assembled by a club side but manifest problems in defence, that is the sort of scoreline we may be seeing a lot more of over the coming seasons.

Romeo, Beckham's baby

AFP, London

England captain David Beckham's wife Victoria gave birth to their second child here Sunday, a boy called Romeo.

Victoria, popularly known as "Posh" after her name in the 90's top-selling band "The Spice Girls", underwent a two hour caesarean operation before delivering the seven pounds four ounces boy.

Beckham admitted to being nervous but said he wouldn't swap the experience for anything.

"It's always nervous having children but it is the greatest feeling in the world," he told reporters outside the hospital.

Beckham said they had chosen the name Romeo, made world famous by William Shakespeare's play about a tragic love affair "Romeo and Juliet", for the simplest of reasons.

"It's just a name we love," said the 26-year-old.

Beckham added that his first son Brooklyn was doing on his younger brother in the hospital room.

"Brooklyn is in awe of him," he said.

However Beckham said his new-born son did not look unlike his eldest.

"He has Brooklyn's nose and Victoria's chin," he said.

Premiership's top six

English Premiership table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tottenham 10 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 3 | |
| Arsenal | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 7 |
| Liverpool | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 7 |
| Leeds | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 6 |
| Charlton | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 6 |

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Hard-core fans of Serie A side Lazio, angry over the sale of two of the club's best players, wreaked havoc late on Saturday night wrecking offices and burning cars around Rome's main stadium.

Some 300 fans left the Olympic stadium at the start of a friendly match between Lazio and Juventus and broke into some of the nearby national sports associa-

tions' offices smashing computers, photocopiers and desks before setting fire to papers.

On the way to the offices they burnt five cars, three kiosks and knifed two Juventus supporters in their buttocks.

On Saturday financially troubled Lazio sold team captain and international defender Alessandro Nesta to Serie A rivals AC Milan for 30.2 million euros.

Argentine international striker Hernan Crespo was also sold to Inter Milan for 26 million euros plus striker Bernardo Corradi.

Nesta Milan's for sure

AFP, Rome

Lazio on Saturday confirmed the transfer of their star defender Alessandro Nesta to league opponents AC Milan.

The 26-year-old Italian international moves north for a fee of 30.2 million euros (30 million dollars) on a five-year deal which expires in June 2007.

AC Milan had announced the arrival of the talented defender early Saturday only for Lazio's general manager Massimo Cragnotti to express his surprise upon hearing the news.