

UEFA's anti-racism plans

Football

REUTERS, Nyon

European soccer's ruling body issued a 10-point plan on Thursday to tackle racism in the sport following an upsurge in abuse aimed at black players.

UEFA called on every club on the continent to issue a statement condemning racism and to take disciplinary action against any player engaging in racist abuse.

Clubs should also make it a condition for season ticket holders that they did not take part in racist abuse, UEFA said in a statement. Any racist chanting at matches should be condemned by announcements on the clubs' public address systems.

"Racism is a problem for all of us which must be faced," it said. "We hope that all parts of European football can come together to unite

against racism and do all we can to eradicate it from our game both on and off the field."

UEFA's disciplinary body was dealing on Thursday with four allegations of racism aimed at English players in major competitions at Yugoslav, Croatian, Dutch and Spanish clubs. Its judgments are expected on Friday.

"These events serve to remind us all that the problem of racism is a real issue for the European football family and for the image of football in general," UEFA said.

"Of course racism at our games is a sad reflection of society in general but, because of the high-profile nature of football on our continent, we have a particular responsibility to take steps to stamp it out and prevent it occurring in the future."

Newcastle United and England international Kieron Dyer has warned that racist abuse could lead to players boycotting some matches or walking off the pitch.

Wilkinson new Sunderland boss

Football

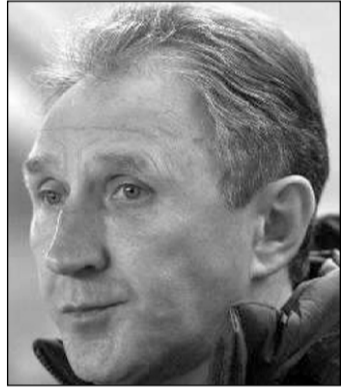
AFP, London

Howard Wilkinson was appointed manager of English Premiership strugglers Sunderland with Steve Cotterill his assistant, the club said on Thursday.

Wilkinson, who was up till this appointment the Football Association's technical director, was previously manager of Leeds and Sheffield Wednesday.

Cotterill resigned as manager of English First Division side Stoke earlier on Thursday in order to take up his new job.

An unconfirmed earlier radio



HOWARD WILKINSON

report had said Steve Cotterill had been named as Sunderland manager with Wilkinson taking over as the club's director of football.

Sunderland, one place above the relegation zone, sacked previous manager Peter Reid on Monday. They have won just two of their nine league games so far this season.

Sunderland chairman Bob Murray said: "I have the utmost respect for Howard Wilkinson and his achievements as a club manager as well as more recently at the Football Association, where his vast experience and technical ability and knowledge of the game is highly regarded."

"I should also like to thank the FA for releasing Howard from the remainder of his contract, which was not due to expire until June 2004."

"As a manager Howard was never relegated and more significantly won the Premier League (Division One, as was in 1992) and managed to secure European football."

"He remains highly respected in the world of football, and I know we couldn't have attracted a manager of his calibre just five years ago at Roker Park."

"The Wilkinson and Cotterill team was a key determinant of our decision to make this appointment."

Saviola on 'obsessive' Van Gaal

Football

INTERNET, Barcelona

Barcelona star Javier Saviola has labelled coach Louis van Gaal as 'obsessive' but has no qualms about his current role in the team.

The Argentine attacker has established himself as a pivotal member of Van Gaal's plans, although he admits he is feeling drained under the Dutchman's regime.

Saviola revealed van Gaal is constantly seeking perfection from his talent-laden squad in his quest to regain La Liga crown.

"It's just a matter of having a look at his notebook to check how demanding and perfectionist he is," revealed Saviola.

"Nevertheless, I feel fine with my new role in the team, though I finish the match more tired."

Saviola also had words of comfort for his young compatriot Juan Roman Riquelme.

The midfielder arrived at Camp Nou during the summer but has

largely been kicking his heels on the substitutes' bench.

But Saviola is confident that providing Riquelme bides his time, he will demonstrate he is worthy of a regular berth in the Catalans' team.

"The Rabbit" added: "He must be patient."

"I have no doubt that within a few months he will have the chance to prove his quality because nobody can deny his talent at all."



JAVIER SAVIOLA

Iraq off limits

Football

AFP, Busan

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has banned all international club matches in Iraq because of growing tension in the region, an official confirmed on Thursday.

AFC general secretary Peter Velappan, who is attending the Asian Games tournament in Busan, said that Iraq had been declared a security zone and planned matches in the AFC Champions League would be re-scheduled.

"We have made the decision because of the current situation in the region," Velappan told AFP. "We have an obligation to protect the safety and security of visiting teams."

The second leg of the AFC Champions League third round clash between Iraq's Al Zawra'a and Al Sadd of Qatar will be the first match to be affected by the new restrictions.

The AFC has asked the Iraq FA to play the game, scheduled for October 22, at a neutral venue. Al Zawra'a drew 1-1 with eight-time Qatar champions Al Sadd in the first leg in Doha on Wednesday night.

Iraq was declared a security zone by the AFC during the 1991 Gulf War and no matches involving overseas teams were played there for several years.

After the war, the AFC relaxed the restrictions and teams were allowed to play in Baghdad "at their own risk." Iraq played the majority of their home matches in the 2002 World Cup qualifiers in Baghdad.



Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo with an enlarged logo of the non-governmental organisation CESAL during a presentation in Madrid on October 9 after the announcement of an agreement between Real and CESAL to build sports schools in Brazil.

Donovan USA's best

Football

AP, Beverly Hills

Landon Donovan was selected Honda Player of the Year on Tuesday after leading the U.S. team to the quarterfinals of the World Cup.

The 20-year-old forward-midfielder received 497 points -- including 74 first-place votes -- in balloting by 277 U.S. journalists who cover soccer.

"I feel bad, like the young guy shouldn't win," Donovan said after the presentation at the Beverly Hilton hotel.

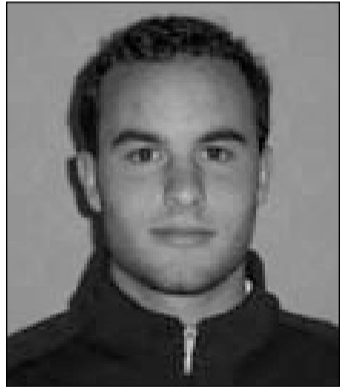
"I'm really astonished," said Donovan, who received a new car and a trophy.

Brad Friedel finished second with 382 points, and Claudio Reyna, who won the award in 2000, was third with 274 points.

Donovan became the youngest winner of the 12-year-old award, which goes to a member of the U.S. national team.

"What are you, 10?" Friedel jokingly asked Donovan. "It's great for such a young player to win an award like this, especially since he plays in the United States where everyone can see him week in and week out."

Donovan plays for Major League Soccer's San Jose Earthquakes and helped lead them to the 2001 MLS



LANDON DONOVAN

championship in his first season with the team.

He scored two goals at the World Cup, which ended for the United States with a 1-0 loss to Germany. Overall, Donovan scored six goals this year for the American team.

"You can make a case for Brad or Claudio or a lot of guys on our team," Donovan said. "I hope I have many years where I can be nominated and I hope they do too, but maybe not, so that's why I feel bad."

Friedel, 31, played every minute of every game in goal during the World Cup. The former UCLA player traveled from England, where he plays in the Premier League, to attend the ceremony.

"Landon is going to have a tremendous career ahead of him," Friedel said.

Reyna, 29, participated by telephone from England, where his wife is about to give birth to their second child. He is a five-time nominee.

Hiddink ready to quit even

AFP, Las Palmas

Former South Korea coach Guus Hiddink is considering quitting PSV Eindhoven after death threats from supporters of rival Dutch teams, the Spanish sports daily AS reported on Wednesday.

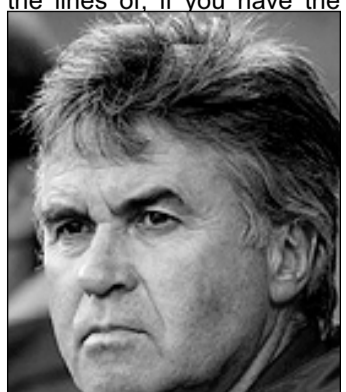
"I am very unhappy because the threats are aimed directly at me and in a serious way ... I can't live with this situation," Hiddink told a press conference on Gran Canaria, where PSV are playing a friendly match against Spanish second division club Las Palmas.

Hiddink returned to his native Netherlands this year after becoming a national hero in South Korea for guiding the World Cup co-hosts to the semi-finals.

The death threats, some accompanied by bullets sent in the post, had started again after a short break, Hiddink added.

Hiddink described the death threats to an English newspaper last month.

"The message was along the lines of, if you have the



GUUS HIDDINK

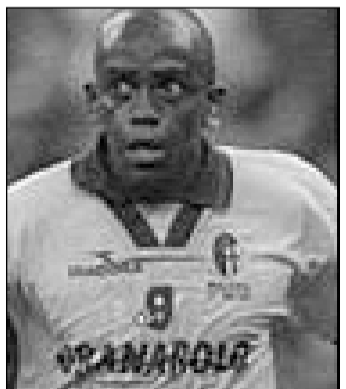
Chievo's Brazilian banned

Football

INTERNET, Verona

FIFA has suspended Chievo's Brazilian winger Luciano, formerly known as Eriberto, after he admitted to playing under a false identity for six years.

Luciano was suspended by Italian soccer authorities earlier this week pending a full inquiry into the affair and Fifa says it will also launch its own probe.



LUCIANO

Germany pull out of Confed. Cup

Football

AP, Frankfurt

World Cup runner-up Germany won't compete in the 2003 Confederations Cup in France.

Germany coach Rudi Voeller cited scheduling problems, and refused to send a replacement team to the biannual tournament.

"We were never obligated to play and we've decided, after

looking at our schedule, not to participate," said Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, the German soccer federation president.

Germany plays two Euro 2004 qualifiers just before the event begins June 28.

The United States, France, Colombia, Cameroon, Japan and New Zealand, along with world champion Brazil, are scheduled to compete.

Germany is scheduled the host of the 2005 Confederations Cup.

Desailly sets the standard

UEFA Euro 2004 PORTUGAL

AFP, Paris

Veteran central defender Marcel Desailly chucks up 100 appearances for France against Slovenia on Saturday to cap a career in which he has had his critics, particularly at the last World Cup where France flopped.

Desailly must also accept that his current club Chelsea struggle to live with the best in the English Premiership but he can point to a sackful of winners medals in a sparkling career which has seen him collect almost every honour in the game.

The venue for Saturday's Euro 2004 qualifier will appropriately enough be the Stade de France where the 34-year-old bagged a 1998 World Cup winner's medal - even if the French triumph was tinged with regret for Desailly's second-half dismissal in the final against Brazil.

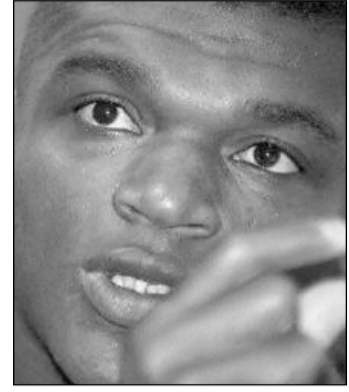
Following France's ignominious first-phase exit this summer in Asia it is easy to forget that Desailly and then central defensive partner Laurent Blanc formed the heart of a defence which conceded a paltry two goals in seven matches in the previous final, an all-time record for the winners.

In those days Desailly was, along with his teammates, at the height of his powers and a Euro 2000 win duty followed.

Fast forward two years, however, and he is not yet minded to be put out to grass the tall and elegant Desailly has lost a yard and France's defence is now perceived to be its weak spot.

In fairness to Desailly, nicknamed "The Rock," that is less down to any failing of his own than a changing of the guard in French ranks, following the retirement of Blanc and also hard-working skipper Didier Deschamps, who provided a comforting presence in front of the back line.

New coach Jacques Santini is



MARCEL DESAILLY

already bleeding a number of new talents but whereas Desailly will complete his 'ton' on Saturday his likely partner - or partners - have yet to make their international bow.

Chelsea clubmate William Gallas is likely to get the nod to start for a first cap at the age of 25 - although Auxerre's 20-year-old starlet Philippe Mexes is equally pressing his claims.

The new boys are in the squad at the expense of Philippe Christanval, who played alongside Desailly in the hard-fought 2-1 win in Cyprus last month but who having been dropped by Barcelona is now a peripheral figure.

Desailly, however, is a constant

presence for Santini, who is resisting the temptation to indulge in a wholesale clearout of the squad which flopped in Asia four months ago, failing to score a single goal.

The Ghanaian-born star is certainly used to forming one half of a whole range of central-defensive pairings.

After 44 matches alongside Blanc he had another former Chelsea teammate in Frank Leboeuf at his side on 28 occasions while he has also partnered Manchester United's Mikael Silvestre five times.

But his own immediate future and target - ensuring that Les Bleus are in Portugal in 2004 to defend their crown - look assured, judging by the praise from his potential teammates on Saturday.

"He's a monument. He has done so much for the French team. You learn so much from being alongside a player such as Marcel," enthuses Mexes, before adding, "Now perhaps is the time to seize my chance, when everyone is having a bit of a go at the defence."

Gallas expresses similar sentiments about the man who was a European champion with Marseille in 1993 and who became the first player to win the European Cup in consecutive years with different clubs when he lifted the trophy 12 months later with AC Milan.

"I have learned so much from being alongside Desailly - he is so powerful and his experience is unmatched," said Gallas.

Filling Desailly's shoes in the not too distant future is the tall order facing the new generation but on Saturday the limelight will belong to the centurion who has set the benchmark.

FA wary of Ulrika

UEFA Euro 2004 PORTUGAL

INTERNET, London

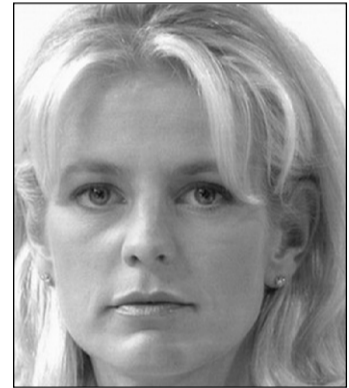
FA bosses are bracing themselves for new revelations by Sven Goran Eriksson's former lover Ulrika Jonsson.

Soho Square chiefs fear fresh scandal from the blonde bombshell could blow England's Euro 2004 qualifying campaign.

The Swedish starlet's autobiography is due out any day now and there are worries the opening extracts could be revealed this weekend - slap bang in the middle of England's first two Group 7 clashes.

Eriksson's troops jet out to Slovakia today for their first showdown in Bratislava on Saturday. Then they go head-to-head with Macedonia at Southampton's St Mary's Stadium on Wednesday.

Officially, no extracts are due



ULRIKA JONSSON

be. However, they are convinced the book is likely to top the best-sellers' list.

On top of that, nearly £750,000 has already been paid for the serialisation rights - and money like that is unlikely to have been shelled out unless the details are particularly juicy.

Former telly weathergirl Jonsson, 35, has not been shy in detailing her love life with Eriksson.

The pair enjoyed a four-month relationship and there have already been details about how Eriksson used to leave his Cuban heels outside the bedroom door while they were together.

One thing the FA can be sure of is the book will not do Eriksson, 54, any favours.

Eriksson's Italian lover Nancy Dell'Olio described the England coach as 'my inspiration' when news broke of the Swede's relationship with Jonsson.

until October 19 - three days after the Macedonia game. But fears of a leak have left FA bigwigs in a sweat.

And even if passages are printed after the games, they could still affect Eriksson's position as national coach.

The FA are currently trying to find out just how damning the tales will

Pele a Fulham scout

REUTERS, London

Fulham owner Mohammed Al Fayed has asked Brazilian great Pele to unearth some South American talent for the English Premier League club.

The Egyptian-born businessman made the request while the FIFA world player of the 20th century was appearing to promote his book at Al Fayed's London department store Harrods.

But the southwest London club



PELE

were quick to point out that there was to be no official role for the Brazilian.

"Fulham Football Club would ... like (to) clarify that Pele will not be joining the club in any official scouting capacity," said a statement on the club's website.

Since Al Fayed bought Fulham he has bankrolled their rise to the top flight in England and often declared his ambition that they become 'the Manchester United of the south'.

"Pele is the greatest of all time -- a true legend. So who better to have scouting for us in Brazil? Al Fayed was quoted as saying in London's Evening Standard.

"It is a very good move for the club and, hopefully, in the future we will see many young players coming here from South America."

Pele said he would like to see more of his countrymen playing in England.

"I am hoping that one day we will have skilful Brazilian players turning out for Fulham ... I think that can happen because my club Santos produces a lot of good young players," he said.

Beckham, Cole return to training

UEFA Euro 2004 PORTUGAL

AFP, London

England captain David Beckham and full back Ashley Cole both returned to training Thursday ahead of this weekend's opening Euro 2004 qualifier away to Slovakia.

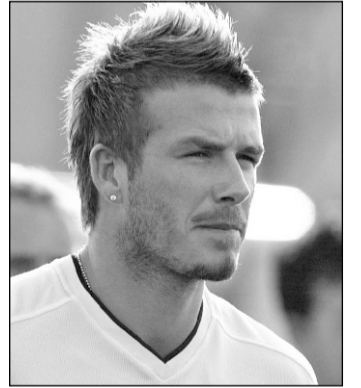
Manchester United midfielder Beckham missed Wednesday's training session. But that was purely a precautionary measure when after United's 3-0 Premiership win over Everton on Monday night he had to apply an ice-pack to his calf.

Cole was also involved in Thursday's session at England's Bisham Abbey training ground.

He too missed Wednesday's practice, in order to recover from a hamstring 'twinge' sustained while playing for Premiership leaders Arsenal in their 3-1 win over

Sunderland last weekend.

The pair's return means that coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has, with the exception of Arsenal centre back Sol Campbell who withdrew Wednesday with gastro-enteritis, a fully-fit squad for Saturday's match.



DAVID BECKHAM

Leonardo back again for Milan

Football

AFP, Rome

Former Brazilian international Leonardo made a shock return to AC Milan on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old attacking midfielder, who was a World Cup winner in 1994, quit the San Siro in the summer of 2001 to return to South America after four seasons in Italy.

Unsuccessful spells at Sao Paulo and Flamengo forced him into early retirement, but the former Paris St Germain star has gone back on his decision and decided to make a comeback.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said he was delighted to see the Brazilian change his mind about

retiring to return to Milan. "I am so pleased he's come back," said Ancelotti on the club's official website, www.acmilan.com.

"I got to know him last summer during a trip to the USA and he's a smashing lad."

"He's also a wonderful player and will bring more quality to the Milan squad."

"He needs time to get match fit but as soon as he's ready he can join the group."

"His best role is playmaker and will offer good cover for Rivaldo."

AC Milan are currently second in the Italian First Division with 10 points from four matches, two less than leaders and local rivals Inter.