

Vialli tipped to take Trap's place

AFP, Rome

Lazio coach Roberto Mancini said on Friday he would like to see Gianluca Vialli take over as Italy coach if under-fire Giovanni Trapattoni is sacked.

Trapattoni is under intense pressure after Italy lost 2-1 to Wales on Wednesday, rocking their hopes of qualifying for Euro 2004.

"I think the coach should carry on because I think he is capable of getting out of this crisis, but I think that if the federation decides one day to have a change Gianluca Vialli would be the ideal candidate," said Mancini.

"Gianluca could easily succeed, he has a strong charisma, is well-liked by his players and has innovative ideas."

Vialli, 36, was one of the finest Italian strikers of the 1990s and played with Mancini at Sampdoria.

He began his coaching career at English Premiership club Chelsea but was surprisingly sacked in September 2000.

He took over at English First Division club Watford in 2001 but they parted company in June this year.



Liverpool's Senegal international Salif Diao heads past Leeds United goalkeeper Paul Robinson during their Premiership match at Elland Road yesterday. Liverpool won 1-0.

Premiership Salif sinks Leeds

Football

REUTERS, London

Liverpool took advantage of an early kick-off to overtake Arsenal at the top of the English Premier League with a 1-0 win at Leeds United on Saturday.

Senegal midfielder Salif Diao scored the goal in the 66th minute as Gerard Houllier's side won their fifth consecutive league match to edge one point ahead of Arsenal, who faced Everton later in the day.

Germany midfielder Dietmar Hamann created the breakthrough when his through-ball split the Leeds defence, releasing El Hadji Diouf whose low cross from the left was stabbed in by Diao at the near post.

Leeds missed a golden chance to equalise five minutes from time when Harry Kewell blazed over the cross bar from 10 yards out.

Liverpool remain unbeaten in the league after their seventh league victory of the campaign, while Leeds have taken just one point from a possible 12 since beating Manchester United in mid-September.

Liverpool, who left striker

Ruiz named MLS MVP

AFP, New York

Forward Carlos Ruiz, who has helped the Los Angeles Galaxy into the Major League Soccer Cup final, was named the league's Most Valuable Player on Thursday.

The Guatemalan striker led the MLS with 24 goals this season, including nine game-winners. His performance in 2002 was the main reason Los Angeles earned the Supporter Shield as the top team during the regular season.

"This award is something that fills me with pride, given its importance," he said. "I am sure that this achievement will also be a source of pride for the Guatemalan people."

The 23-year-old Ruiz replaced Jason Kreis of the Dallas Burn as the youngest player ever to win the MVP award. Kreis took the honors in 1999.

Playing in just his first MLS season, Ruiz scored six times in the Galaxy's first four games. He finished with 49 points on 24 goals and one assist, just four points behind New England's Taylor Twellman for the scoring crown.

The rugged striker also had seven multi-goal games, including a hat trick on August 31 that helped clinch the Galaxy's seventh consecutive trip to the MLS Cup playoffs.

Ruiz beat out Twellman and Mark Chung of Colorado for the award, which was selected by voting from MLS coaching staffs, general managers and players, along with members of the Professional Soccer Reporters Association.

On Wednesday, New England's Steve Nicol was named Coach of the Year, Columbus Crew midfielder Kyle Martino earned MLS Rookie of the Year honors and Kevin Terry took the Referee of the Year award.

Man City not too Keane

AFP, London

Manchester City chairman David Bernstein said Friday that he does not want the Roy Keane affair to sour relations between his club and Manchester United.

He made his comments as City consider whether or not to sue Keane for his tackle on their midfielder Alfie Haaland, which a Football Association disciplinary panel decided on Tuesday was 'improperly motivated by revenge'.

The FA banned Keane for five matches and fined him 150,000 pounds.

"We have an issue here that no one wanted," Bernstein told the club's official website, www.mfc.co.uk

"It is there and has to be dealt with because we have to look after our club and our players and do the right thing."

"I am encouraged that the FA have taken the view they have, but we will only act and move forward if we think we have a case that we will win."

"The last thing in the world we want to do is inflame any passions."

"There is a healthy competition and passion between the clubs and that is the way we want to keep it."

"Relations have improved over the last few years and we want to have two very strong clubs in Manchester which I would like to become the Milan of England."

J-League Urawa recover

AFP, Tokyo

Urawa Red Diamonds on Saturday left it late to come behind for a 2-1 win over Nagoya Grampus Eight and to maintain their position at the top of the J-League.

Brazilian striker Emerson fired home an extra-time winner after Masahiro Fukuda equalised on 79 minutes. Urawa had gone behind to a 65th-minute strike from another Brazilian, Uesley.

The Red Diamonds had peppered the opposition goal with 17 shots from their three-pronged attack: Emerson, his compatriot Tuto and Fukuda.

It was Emerson's 15th goal of the season and he has now scored in each of the last three games.

Urawa are now four points ahead of Jubilo Iwata, Gamba Osaka and Verdy Tokyo, although first-stage winners Iwata have a game in hand.

Dudek's new deal

AFP, Liverpool

Poland goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek has signed a one-year extension to his contract at Liverpool, club manager Gerard Houllier said on Friday.

The improved and extended deal is a reward for 29-year-old Dudek's performances since arriving on Merseyside in the summer of 2001.

He initially signed a four-year deal and the new agreement will keep him at Anfield until the end of the 2005-06 season.

"We have always said that this club will reward people who do well for us," Houllier said.

"Jerzy has played a big part in our success. He kept 29 clean sheets last season and is an important part of our team."

Giggs set for 500th

Football

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson is not surprised that winger Ryan Giggs will be rounding off a sensational week by making his 500th appearance for the club at Fulham on Saturday.

Giggs played his usual influential part as Wales experienced one of the greatest results in their history with a 2-1 defeat of Italy in a Euro 2004 qualifier in Cardiff on Wednesday.

Ferguson said the 28-year-old, who broke into the United team in 1990 and has since won seven Premier League titles, a Champions League and three FA Cups, was a credit to his profession.

"I can believe he has reached 500

Nicky Butt is also doubtful with an ankle injury he picked up after coming on as a substitute for England in their 2-2 draw against Macedonia on Wednesday, but David Beckham is fit after recovering from a knock to his ankle.

Ferguson wants his strikeforce to be more clinical in front of goal as they return to league action for the first time since beating Everton 3-0.

"The area we want to do better is finishing teams off," he said. "We created a lot of chances against Everton but we had to wait until the very death before we won the match."

"It is frustrating for the players because we had been doing so well and against an Everton team who showed a lot of enterprise, we deserved to win but it was very late."

"If we can get that early goal in

Police talk to Barthez

AFP, Leeds

Fabien Barthez has been questioned by police investigating an incident in which a Leeds fan was allegedly struck by a plastic water bottle the Manchester United goalkeeper kicked into the crowd.

Barthez, seemingly frustrated by Harry Kewell's winning 66th minute header, was caught on camera picking up the plastic drinks bottle and kicking it into the crowd.

Leeds fan Colin Richmond claims he was hit in the face by the bottle and has complained to police, as well as launching a civil suit against the French international.

Barthez was interviewed at a police station in Leeds on Thursday.

"We can confirm a 31-year-old man attended a Leeds police station yesterday where he was arrested and interviewed in connection with an allegation of an assault on a man on September 14 at Leeds United Football Ground," a spokesman for West Yorkshire police said.

"He has been bailed pending further inquiries."

A spokeswoman for Manchester United said: "We can confirm that Fabien Barthez has been questioned as part of an ongoing investigation and it is in the hands of the police."

Zagreb's divine prayer

AFP, Zagreb

Croatian First Division club Dinamo Zagreb has asked the Catholic church to assign a priest to the club, saying it needed spiritual guidance, Croatian press reported Friday.

"I think it is very positive to include the church in the club's life," Dinamo's coach Miroslav Blazevic told Vecernji List daily newspaper.

"Demons are running through the club and we need to chase them out," added Blazevic, who guided Croatia to third place in the 1998 World Cup finals.

Blazevic, who took up the post in May after he left the Iranian manager's hotseat when they failed to qualify for the World Cup finals, added the priest is to help players with "spiritual exercises, and he would create a family atmosphere among them." Following the club's request Zagreb archdiocese said it has started looking for a candidate among its priests.

Dinamo's vice-president Zdravko Mamic said the initiative came from the club's players.

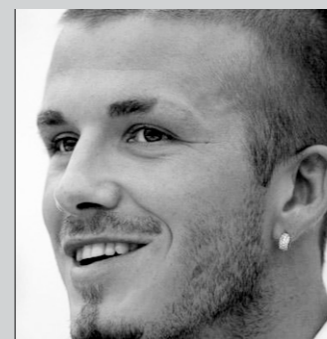
"We were inspired by the examples of the big clubs such as Milan or Bayern that had been practising it for some time," Mamic said.

Croatia has a huge Catholic population making up 88 per cent of the 4.44 million population, according to the 2001 census.

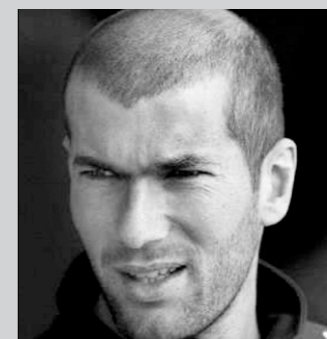
Madrid centre of the football universe



RONALDO



BECKHAM



ZIDANE

Ronaldo, Beckham, Zidane and the rest of the world's footballing elite would do well to keep December 17 free - the date FIFA have chosen for the unveiling of the 2002 Footballer of the Year award. The ceremony will take place in Madrid in honour of Real Madrid's centenary festivities - the Spanish capital side currently feature three recipients of the prize - dual winners Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane and last year's winner Luis Figo. The names of the three players in the hunt for the 2002 edition will be announced by FIFA next month.

Ferguson flays FA

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson claims the club has become a target for 'unfair' treatment by England's Football Association (FA) after the stiff penalty handed down to midfielder Roy Keane.

United midfielder Keane was handed a five-match ban and 150,000 pounds fine (232,000 dollars) by FA bosses for comments in his controversial autobiography in midweek.

The FA ruled that Keane, who describes in the book how he deliberately set out to injure Manchester City player Alf-Inge Haaland in April 2001, had sought to profit financially from the tackle.

However Ferguson, speaking for the first time since the sanctions and citing two cases of elbowing by players from different clubs, said the FA was sending out confusing messages about its punishment policy.

"It's difficult to say when justice is done and what is fair and what is not fair," Ferguson said.

"There were two players up (appearing) on elbow charges at the end of last season who were let off. What's more serious? Writing a book or elbowing a guy in the eyeball."

Ferguson was referring to Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira, who escaped the wrath of the FA for an elbow on Chelsea forward Jimmy Floyd Hasselbank.

Leeds forward Mark Viduka was also cleared of elbowing Arsenal defender Martin Keown, who had



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

served a three-match ban for elbowing the big Australian international in May 2001.

Ferguson said he fully supports Keane's right to "tell the truth" in his autobiography, and claimed that United are simply victims of their own success.

"I think everyone has an opinion, there is always a debate and sometimes you will feel it is unfair and maybe feel victimised at times."

"With the Eric Cantona situation a few years ago what the FA did to us was a disgrace."

Cantona was banned until the end of the season by United when the French forward lost the plot and kicked a Crystal Palace fan during a match in 1995, only for the FA to extend the ban by a further two months into the new season.

He added: "The public exposure of a football club like Manchester United means that we are going to be more severely treated than any other club."

UEFA approves Greek-Turk bid

AFP, Athens

Greece and Turkey's joint bid to stage the 2008 European Championships received a shot in the arm here Friday from UEFA, European football's governing body.

"I don't want to make any promises but I can say that the Greek-Turkish file was almost perfect," UEFA representative Jacob Erel told a press conference in the northern city of Salonika in comments reported by the state news agency ANA.

"The aim of this visit was to check that the reality matches up to what was in the candidate's proposal, and we've found that it does," he added.

The head of the Greek football federation Vassilis Gagatsis was upbeat about their chances.

"I reckon we've managed to convince the UEFA representatives," he predicted.

Competition comes from six quarters - Hungary, Russia, Austria/Switzerland, Bosnia/Croatia, Scotland/Ireland, and Denmark/Finland/Norway/Sweden (known as "Nordic 2008"), with a decision due on December 13.

Greek sports minister Evangelos Venizelos meanwhile called on UEFA to take on board the political importance of a bid from two neighbours traditionally perceived as regional rivals.

Venizelos said the bid "underlines the wish of two countries to use sport to build a bridge of friendship and co-operation".



RYAN GIGGS

appearances," Ferguson told reporters on Friday. "It is incredible. He has had a lot of injuries but he has reached a great landmark. He has lived his life the right way. He is a credit to himself and his family."

Giggs could start in attack on Saturday alongside Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after Ruud van Nistelrooy was ruled out with a hamstring problem.

matches then I would be more confident of getting to the scoring levels we are used to."

Ferguson, who may include Uruguayan forward Diego Forlan after his run of five goals in two reserves games, has warned his players not to underestimate Jean Tigana's side, twice 3-2 losers to United last season.

O'Neill dispels rumour

Football

AFP, London

Celtic manager Martin O'Neill has played down talk of John Hartson leaving the club if he continues to be left on the bench.

Hartson's reported unhappiness has led to speculation that he has had "showdown talks" with the Irishman, and issued an ultimatum, in a bid to find out when he will receive a fair crack on a more regular basis.

However although O'Neill admits that Hartson is frustrated at playing second fiddle to Swedish striker Henrik Larsson and Chris Sutton, he affirmed that the big Welsh international has no intention on running out the door.

"He wants to play," admitted O'Neill. "But he's not rushing in to see me and has not been asking

for showdown talks. "John Hartson didn't come in and ask to go away. He wants to play here which is really commendable. There's absolutely no problem."

"You will never be able to keep all players happy," admitted the Celtic boss. "You can't do that."

"There are one or two players in the game who don't mind sitting out and missing games."

"We haven't got too many at the club who want to do that and John Hartson is no exception."

"I was the same as a player myself. Every single weekend that you miss you think that has gone from your life."

O'Neill gave the former Arsenal, West Ham and Coventry City striker a vote of confidence when he said he is one of the best goalscorers around - but said he had to be patient.

"John is a top-quality player," explained O'Neill. "He didn't need to

go to Wales and play very well to prove that."

"He's proved it to the people up here that he is a top-quality player."

"He scored a load of goals last season and I wouldn't have spent so much money for him and taken the risk when he was reported to have failed a medical beforehand if I didn't think he could do a job."

"I have been very pleased with him. He wants to play and would like to play every week if body and soul would allow it."

"Chris Sutton and Henrik have done very well since Chris has arrived and maybe they got a head start."

"But just look at John's goal record. He can score goals and he is as good a goalscorer as there is."

"Ironically Hartson could be ruled out for Celtic's match against Hearts on Sunday after he picked up an injury niggle against Italy in midweek."

Greek strike nears

AFP, Athens

The crisis in Greek football deepened further Friday after players in the top three leagues were ordered to take a 20 per cent salary cut to help bail out cash-strapped clubs.

Players were told to help out with their pockets by the Greek professional football clubs' union (EPAE) after a mammoth seven-hour executive council session.

But Greece's Panhellenic professional football players' association (PSAP) said that it would hold an emergency meeting Monday to discuss the matter but indications were that they would urge their members to strike.

EPAE president Thanasis Kanelopoulos warned that players who do not accept the pay cut would be "automatically discharged from the team and there is a gentleman's agreement that no other team accept them."

Hughes' secret formula



AFP, London

Welsh manager Mark Hughes said Saturday one of the main reasons behind the national side's revival was down to him making sure the squad were treated like a Premiership side when they got together.

The former Welsh international striker, scorer of 16 goals in his 72 appearances, told the BBC he had acted immediately when he took over the reins as he had noticed how different standards were for the players when he joined up with the national squad from Manchester United.

"I hope I've just given them the right environment to prosper," said Hughes, whose side pulled off a superb 2-1 home win over Italy in their Euro 2004 qualifier on

Wednesday to extend their

Dyer warning

AFP, London

Racism could provoke players into retaliating against fans who hurl insults while some might even snap to the extent they launch Eric Cantona-style attacks, Newcastle and England star Kieron Dyer warned Friday.

The midfielder has called for FIFA and UEFA to punish racial abuse more severely fearing abuse could result in a player attacking a fan, as happened in 1995 when Cantona aimed a kung-fu kick at a Crystal Palace supporter.

Dyer told the Newcastle Journal: "The situation needs to be sorted out."

unbeaten run to seven matches.

"Mainly in the area away from the game itself regarding travel arrangements and food."

"I was always conscious when I joined up with the squad as a player how different the standards were compared to the ones at my club whether it be Barcelona or Manchester United," he added.

Hughes warned though that the Welsh fans shouldn't get too carried away despite Wales topping their group with two wins from two matches, they lead Yugoslavia and Italy by two points, though the Italians have played a match more.

"We're very conscious of our good start," he said.

"However we don't want to get carried away as it's early days."

"I wasn't able to get to a major championship when I was a player so it would be great to do it as a coach," he added.

Hughes said it was also great to have seen the excellent pre-World

Cup finals friendly results shown to be no flukes.

Nesta given Ancelotti vote

AFP, Rome

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti gave Alessandro Nesta a huge vote of confidence Saturday despite the central defender's poor performances for Italy in their recent Euro 2004 qualifiers.

Nesta was to blame for Yugoslavia's opening goal in the dismal 1-1 draw in Naples last Saturday after missing a vital tackle on scorer Predrag Mijatovic.

And the former Lazio star was outperformed by Craig Bellamy who punished the Italian by scoring the winner in Wales' shock 2-1 win in Cardiff on Wednesday.