

Serie A preview

Pumped up Cassano

Football

AFP, Rome

Striker Antonio Cassano is hoping to conjure up a trick or two in Sunday's Rome derby, in which victory comes second only to winning the Scudetto itself for the capital's football-crazy inhabitants.

Nicknamed 'Peter Pan' for producing moments of brilliance on the football field, Cassano has had few opportunities to wave his magic wand since joining AS Roma from Bari in a 30-million-euro deal last year.

But the gifted 20-year-old is hoping to cast a spell on Lazio this weekend, although he may have to start on the substitutes' bench due to the fierce competition for places at the Stadio Olimpico.

"Sunday's headlines are up for grabs," Cassano told Italian sports daily Corriere dello Sport.

"A goal would be nice but I really don't care as long as the team wins. The atmosphere will be intense, but it's something I feed off, it drives me."

Asked what he thought of his new nickname, he replied: "Isn't Peter Pan the one who makes magic? Well, my football is full of fantasy and instinct."

However, Cassano may have to be content with a bit-part role following Friday's news that Marco Delvecchio has declared himself fit after a lengthy lay-off.

Roma coach Fabio Capello received a major boost 24 hours earlier with the news that talismanic captain Francesco Totti has recovered from a knee injury and is available for selection.

The international midfielder missed Italy's last two Euro 2004 qualifiers, as well as Roma's 3-1 win at Empoli last Saturday - the club's third league win in a row.

Lazio skipper Giuseppe Favalli, in charge for a Rome derby for the

very first time following the departure of Alessandro Nesta, believes there is little to choose between the two teams who are both in a rich vein of form.

"I'm not surprised that we have a point more than Roma but that will count for little on Sunday," said Favalli whose side are fourth in the table with 10 points from five matches.

"What is more significant is that we are starting to compete once again," he added, referring to the club's disappointing campaign last season.

Leaders AC Milan, who maintained their 100 per cent record in the Champions League with a 2-1 win over Bayern Munich in mid-week, aim to continue their unbeaten league run at Verona club Chievo on Saturday.

Second take on third at the San Siro on Sunday as Inter Milan host Bologna. Inter, who kept alive their

Champions League qualification hopes with a gritty 3-3 draw against Lyon on Tuesday, have two more points than Francesco Guidolin's surprise package, who like their illustrious rivals are unbeaten.

Fifth-placed Juventus, who lost 1-0 at Newcastle in the Champions League on Wednesday but still top their first phase group, host Udinese at the Stadio Delle Alpi in Saturday's late match.

In other games Atalanta and Parma, both knocked out of the Italian Cup by Serie B clubs this week, meet at the Ennio Tardini stadium while winless Reggina host third-from-bottom Torino.

FIXTURES

Saturday: Chievo v AC Milan, Juventus v Udinese
Sunday: Brescia v Como, Inter Milan v Bologna, Lazio v Roma, Parma v Atalanta, Perugia v Modena, Piacenza v Empoli, Reggina v Torino

Brazil's coach mystery on

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil are due to visit South Korea for a friendly international in November but the five-times world champions are still without a coach.

The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) were expected to name an interim coach last Friday for the match, their second since the World Cup, but the announcement has been postponed to a new date which has not been revealed.

In the meantime, the media continues to speculate about who will take charge for the match and, more importantly, who will be named as the permanent replacement for Luiz Felipe Scolari early next year.

The CBF has already suggested that veteran coach Mario Zagallo, who was sacked after the 1998 World Cup for "only" finishing second, could be brought out of retirement to lead the team in South Korea as a "tribute."

Zagallo, 71, was involved Brazil's first four World Cup victories - as a player in 1958 and 1962, as coach in 1970 and as assistant coach in 1994.

He also coached the team in his own right at two other World Cups, leading them to fourth place in 1974 and the runners-up spot at France 98.

As for the long-term replacement, speculation is beginning to mount that the job could be handed to Vanderlei Luxemburgo, who was sacked in disgrace little more than two years ago.

The sports daily Lance claims that Luxemburgo is negotiating for what would be a hugely controversial return with the CBF and that he is already forming his national team staff.

Luxemburgo's first stint began after the 1998 World Cup and ended in after the Sydney Olympics when his team were humiliatingly eliminated in the quarter-finals by nine-man Cameroon.

Luxemburgo had already been under fire for previous poor results and for using too many players.

The heat was turned up further when a former business associate accused him of taking commissions on the sale of players when he was a club coach earlier in his career.

Shortly after being fired, Luxemburgo became one of the central figures in a Congressional investigation into alleged corruption in Brazilian football.

A commission of inquiry grilled him over his tax returns, told him that his income - more than \$9 million in five years - was not compatible with his profession and said that his explanations had not been satisfactory.

Luxemburgo also admitted that he had used a fake birth certificate, which knocked three years off his real age and changed the spelling of his first name to Wanderley instead of Vanderlei, for most of his career.

He returned to coaching in early 2001 with Corinthians, the team he led to the Brazilian championship title in 1998, and later moved to Palmeiras but this year became bogged down in more controversy.

League One preview

Paris braces for a classic

Football

AFP, Paris

Marseille's visit to Paris Saint Germain gets top billing in the latest round of French league matches this weekend.

Over 2,000 police are due to be deployed at PSG's Parc des Princes stronghold in what has been classified by security forces in the French capital as a high risk fixture.

For the first time the sale and use of alcohol is being banned around the stadium in a bid to take some of the heat out of this traditionally

Football

AFP, London

Former Liverpool captain Jamie Redknapp can expect no favours when he returns to Anfield with Tottenham on Saturday.

Redknapp, who left Liverpool in the summer after a long battle with injury which blighted his career there, is guaranteed a warm reception from the Liverpool fans.

But Reds skipper Sami Hyypia warned there would be no room for sentimentality as Liverpool seek to extend their lead at the top of the Premiership.

Hyypia, who replaced Redknapp as Anfield skipper, said: "We will be forgetting our friendships during the game and we will be more like enemies. But after the match I will shake his hand and be happy to be friends again."

"Jamie was at Liverpool for a long time and I am sure he will get a good reception from the fans because they still love him."

"I am pleased that he is fit again and that he is over his injury problems and can play football."

Liverpool have been increasingly impressive this season and have not conceded a goal in four Premiership matches. Tottenham in contrast faltered last weekend with

defeat at Charlton.

Markus Babel, who has spent a year out of the game after being struck down with the life-threatening Guillain-Barre Syndrome, has been on the Liverpool bench for their last two matches and could feature on Saturday.

Spurs midfielder Steffen Freund, who shared a rehabilitation centre with Babel, is hoping they will be able to meet again on the Anfield pitch.

"It was a shock to see him, a friend, a footballer, in a wheelchair. He was so ill overnight, maybe he could have been finished with football, maybe he could die even, all that to a person so young," Freund recalled.

"Then you know what is important. It is wonderful to play football, wonderful to be part of Tottenham or, for him, Liverpool, but health is most important."

Arsenal, whose season has been derailed by back-to-back defeats by Everton and Auxerre, will attempt to get their show back on the road at home to Blackburn.

Robert Pires is in line for a return to the starting line-up after playing for the last 20 minutes of the Champions League match against Auxerre on Tuesday then coming through a reserves outing 24 hours later.

Pires, who scored for the

reserves, said: "To score was terrific, but the main concern was to get stronger and fitter."

"It was very different playing for the reserves than it was against Auxerre, but I had some strong tackles on me and that is good for my confidence."

Blackburn, who thrashed Newcastle 5-2 last weekend, will travel south without Irish winger Damien Duff, who is ruled out with a hamstring problem.

But manager Graeme Souness will be able to align his strike pair of Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke after Cole recovered from his hamstring injury.

Matt Jensen is also in contention for the first time this season after recovering from injuries incurred in a scooter smash while on holiday in Italy in the summer.

Manchester United are hoping injured duo Ruud van Nistelrooy and Nicky Butt, both missing from the Champions League win at Olympiakos in midweek, will be fit in time for the visit to Old Trafford of struggling Aston Villa.

The match could not come at a worse time for Villa manager Graham Taylor, who was booted off the pitch after the defeat by Southampton on Monday.

Villa's slide has been mirrored by that of Manchester City, who must try and turn things around at

Two-game ban on Vieira

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira was banned for two matches and fined 25,000 pounds Thursday after being found guilty of insulting a referee after being sent off against Chelsea on September 1.

French international Vieira was cleared by the Football Association of a more serious charge of using abusive language against referee Andy D'Urso in the English Premiership clash.

Vieira has already served a one-match ban for the red card, which was shrouded in controversy.

Video replays showed that Vieira did not make any contact with Gianfranco Zola in the incident which earned him his first yellow card and Chelsea winger Jesper Gronkjaer admitted he had been at fault in the collision which earned Vieira the red card.

In D'Urso's report to the Football Association (FA), however, he said Vieira used foul and abusive language when shown the red card.

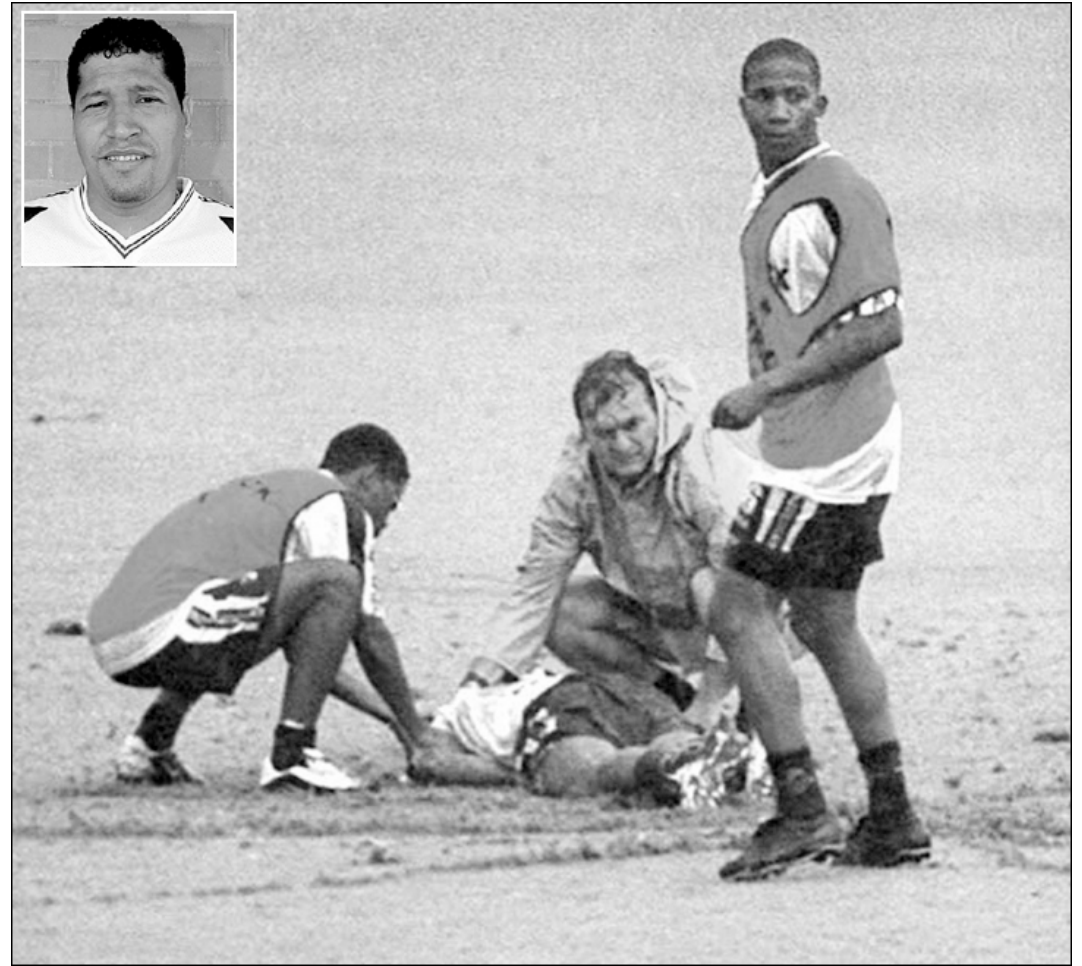


PHOTO: AFP

Deportivo Cali players surround their teammate Herman Gaviria (inset) after he was struck by lightning on October 24 during a practice session in Cali, Colombia. Gaviria, who played for the national team in the 1994 USA World Cup, died from the injuries caused in the incident.

Colombian World Cupper killed by lightning

Football

AFP, Bogota

Lightning killed former Colombia international Herman Gaviria and injured four other players, leaving one in a critical condition, during training with top flight side Deportivo Cali.

It was a tragedy for the Colombian league leaders and the 44-million-strong population of a country which is passionate about football.

During a storm on Thursday afternoon when the team were

training in a stadium in Pance, to the south of the Cali, Gaviria, Giovanni Cordoba, Carlos Alvarez, Giovanni Hernandez and Julian Mauricio Espinoza were struck by lightning.

The five players were taken to hospital in Cali, 470km south west of capital Bogota, but 33-year-old attacking midfielder Gaviria died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Cordoba was in intensive care in a critical condition but the other three players were described as stable, according to a hospital statement at 7:15pm local time on Thursday (0015 GMT on Friday).

During the 1994 World Cup finals in the USA, Gaviria scored the first

goal against Switzerland in a 2-0 first round victory though Colombia, among the favourites before the finals started, did not advance in the tournament.

Espinoza, speaking to radio station RCN from hospital, said: "Training had been going for five minutes in the rain when lightning started to streak across the sky. Lightning struck Gaviria on the head and, shortly afterwards, I was also hit."

"I fell down and from then on, I couldn't remember anything." Five years ago, a young player of America de Cali Manuel Bonilla was also killed by lightning.

Bundesliga preview

No room for comfort

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich will have no hiding place on Saturday as they attempt to reconcile themselves with impending Champions League elimination.

Wednesday's defeat in Milan - their third in four matches - should have sent the Bavarians out into the premature cold winter night looking back at the lucrative feast which threatens to pass them by.

Instead, Deportivo La Coruna's loss in Lens means Bayern are still mathematically in with a chance of making the last 16 - but it looks a forlorn hope as in ten years of the Champions League no side has managed to progress after taking just one point from four games.

Their fans will therefore make stronger domestic demands - most immediately for three points at home to promoted Hanover 96 which would preserve their five-point lead over unbeaten reigning champions Borussia Dortmund.

But Bayern will go in search of a win to strengthen their hand at the top of the Bundesliga without keeper Oliver Kahn, who has a thigh injury picked up in the 2-1 reverse at Milan.

Kahn's target for a return is Tuesday's Champions League crunch match at Deportivo.

Already Bayern are counting the cost of probable elimination having only just invested in the likes of Michael Ballack, Ze Roberto and the currently injured Sebastian Deisler for what they termed their "best ever" squad at the start of the campaign.

Former coach and club emi-

nence grise Franz Beckenbauer says seeing off the likes of Hanover would scarcely compensate for an early European exit, with all the financial consequences engendered by the loss of a potential extra 11 matches and a guaranteed minimum of six.

"Next season the money wouldn't be there to strengthen the team. And it hurts if you have to watch the rest of the Champions League in front of the TV," Beckenbauer tersely told Bild.

Bild itself was not slow to sound the alarm, with domestic success these days coming a poor second to continental glory.

"At the World Cup we waved them goodbye one by one: England, Italy, Spain and disgraced world champions France."

"But in the Champions League we're suddenly right down the European pecking order - everyone else is leaving us standing," the mass daily lamented.

Meanwhile, Bayern's fellow Euro travellers Bayer Leverkusen, likewise still just hanging on after their midweek win over Maccabi Haifa, have denied they are about to sign German international Paul Freier from Bochum.

If Bayern can console themselves with a likely league title on the horizon regardless of their European form, Leverkusen have been on the slide since losing the final of the Champions League and German Cup and letting Dortmund steal the league title from under their noses last May.

Leverkusen have spent the season in the lower reaches of the table and badly need a win at Hertha Berlin, themselves going well in fourth spot.

Berlin will hope to profit from the match which pits third-placed Werder Bremen against Dortmund with the loser likely to slip down to fourth - or even lower if Berlin take full points and fifth-placed Schalke see off Nuremberg.

Schalke will be without Polish international Tomasz Waldoch, who has damaged his fibula and faces surgery.

Back down at the bottom Kaiserslautern, champions as recently as 1998, must beat Bochum on Sunday to liven the bloom.

The cash-strapped side have won just once all season but on Wednesday received a boost when a consortium of banks agreed to lend the club 20 million euros to cancel out a 17.8m overdraft.

The club also hope German international striker Miroslav Klose will help to rescue them, despite a poor season to date, after he scored in Germany's narrow Euro 2004 qualifying win last week against the Faroe Islands.

FIXTURES

Saturday: VfB Stuttgart v Energie Cottbus, Bayern Munich v Hanover 96, Borussia Monchengladbach v 1860 Munich, Schalke 04 v FC Nuremberg, Werder Bremen v Borussia Dortmund, Arminia Bielefeld v SV Hamburg, Hertha Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
Sunday: Kaiserslautern v VfL Bochum, VfL Wolfsburg v Hansa Rostock

FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off GMT): Recreativo Huelva v Real Betis (1600), Real Madrid v Villarreal (1700), Rayo Vallecano v Deportivo La Coruna (1800), Valencia v Athletic Bilbao (1800), Barcelona v Alaves (1900), Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid (1930)

Sunday: Malaga v Espanyol (1700), Real Mallorca v Osasuna (1700), Sevilla v Valladolid (1700), Real Sociedad v Racing Santander (1930)

FIXTURES

Friday: Bordeaux v Monaco
Saturday: Paris Saint Germain v Marseille, Nice v Lens, Auxerre v Rennes, Ajaccio v Lyon, Lille v Sochaux, Strasbourg v Bastia, Le Havre v Nantes, Guingamp v Sedan, Montpellier v Troyes

Football

REUTERS, Paris

French playmaker Zinedine Zidane could end his career when his contract with Spanish giants Real Madrid comes to an end in 2005.

"I'm signed to Real until 2005 and I think I will honour my contract," the 1998 World Cup winner was quoted as saying in the French daily Le Parisien.

"Afterwards, at 33-34, I think it will be a good time to put an end to my career."

Although the 30-year-old admitted he had not made any firm decisions yet, he ruled out returning to

his native country.

"I've played in the biggest clubs so it would be a little difficult."

"To return to France would be a decision from the heart. And I don't want my career to be ruled by my heart but by reason. I want to finish at the top," he said.

The top for Zidane -- who supports his hometown team Olympique Marseille and Girondins Bordeaux, the club in which he made his first real impression -- is to play in the Spanish Liga.

"The best league is here in Spain. It's bubbling football, all out attack. It's much better than the locked play you have in Italy," he said.

Looking back on France's disas-

trous World Cup, Zidane, who had a knee injury and missed France's first two games, said it had been a very hard time.

"I was not feeling part of the squad, not because of them but because of my injury."

"When they were training, I was receiving treatment."

"It was a hard period to live," he said.

But he insisted France, who had an ideal start to their Euro 2004 campaign with three wins in three games, would fight hard to retain the European crown.

"We're working to be competitive and to be European champions once again," he warned.