

'Ronnie' day by day

Football

AFP, Paris

Chronology of the Brazilian midfielder Ronaldinho's last season at Paris Saint Germain before joining Barcelona, which was revealed on Saturday:

July 21 2002: Ronaldinho, World Cup winner with Brazil in June, returns to the French capital. He confirms he will stay with the French first division club.

August 17: First appearance at Parc des Princes, for the PSG-Ajaccio match, the third game of the season.

September 11: Ronaldinho starts in the 2-1 defeat to Lille in the sixth game of the season and hits his first goal.

September 27: "Leave us alone!", PSG boss Luis Fernandez snaps at the press. "Ronaldinho is staying in Paris, we're not selling him straight away to Real Madrid, Inter or Milan."

December 8-19: PSG rack up two disappointing setbacks. The club are knocked out of the UEFA Cup and the League Cup, with Ronaldinho missing two crucial penalties, first in the 2-3 defeat to Nantes December 8, then at Bordeaux (1-1) on December 19.

January 2 2003: Ronaldinho comes back from Brazil nearly a week late, for "dental reasons". He is hit with a fine and is not warmly welcomed back by his teammates.

"Ronaldinho will leave at the end of the season," a close friend of the player reveals. "I want him to devote himself 100 per cent to PSG," counters Fernandez. The Brazilian is

left out of the first team until February 16.

February 22: PSG lose 3-2 to Guingamp, but Ronaldinho opens the scoring with a strike later voted goal of the season.

March 9: PSG beat Marseille 3-0 for the third time in the season. Ronaldinho scores one and lays on another.

April 19: Substituted during the 1-1 draw at Nantes, Ronaldinho gives the coaching staff an earful in the dugout.

April 27: Hitting both goals against Bordeaux (2-0), Ronaldinho puts PSG into the final of the French Cup.

April 30: Francis Graille, named as Perpere's replacement in the president's chair at the end of the season, states his wish to keep 'Ronnie' on the books.

May 20: "As for Ronaldinho, it's Vahid who will decide," Vahid Halilhodzic says after the 0-0 draw with Rennes at the Parc des Princes. During the match, Ronaldinho is subbed on and shakes the hand of the future PSG coach before taking to the field.

May 31: PSG are beaten 2-1 by Auxerre in the French Cup final. Just days later, negotiations begin between Graille and Roberto Assis, the Brazilian's brother and agent.

June: Manchester United, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Chelsea throw their hats in the ring in the race for the player's signature. Brazil are in France for the Confederations Cup.

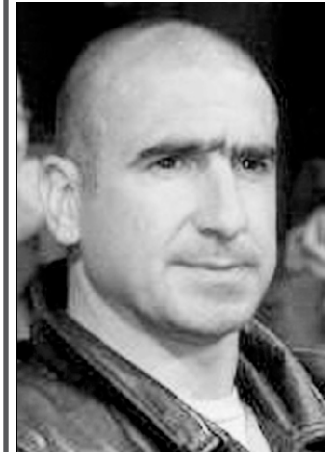
July 15-18: United and Barca stay in the hunt to sign 'Ronnie'. Negotiations drag on.

July 19: Ronaldinho joins Barcelona after Manchester United's final offer is thrown out by PSG.



RONALDINHO

As naughty as ever!



AFP, Oslo

Former French footballer Eric Cantona, known for his unruly escapades on the pitch, created a scandal during a flight to Norway this week when he refused to cool his libido despite passengers' requests, Norwegian radio reported.

The former Manchester United bad boy had apparently decided to pass the time in the air by covering his girlfriend with kisses and did not take kindly to another passenger's request to "pull himself together", public broadcaster NRK said.

Cantona was "very busy" when a "grumpy old man" asked him to moderate his behaviour for the sake of the children sitting nearby, said Maria Voktor Borgen, a young Norwegian also seated near the couple.

"It wasn't bothering me," she said, adding that a steward ultimately intervened to settle the situation.

Cantona is to take part in a beach football tournament on Saturday in Stavanger, on Norway's western coast.

Lazio shoot Chelsea down

Football

AFP, Rome

Big spenders Chelsea lost 2-0 to Lazio here at the Flaminio stadium on Friday in a friendly marred by the racial abuse aimed at the Premiership club's black players by large sections of the Italian crowd.

Chelsea's Dutch striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink suffered the worst treatment with nearly every one of his touches greeted by a chorus of monkey chants from the home supporters in a hostile first 45 minutes.

Many Lazio fans even taunted their only black player, Fabio Liverani, who understandably lacked confidence in possession and was withdrawn by coach Roberto Mancini for the second half.

Lazio have been in trouble before because of their fans' behaviour towards black players and the Rome-based club were heavily fined two seasons ago when supporters unfurled banners insulting Jewish fans of city rivals AS Roma.

Simone Inzaghi's 30th minute scissor-kick gave Lazio a deserved lead before Dejan Stankovic's downward header secured a comfortable win for the Serie A side at the stadium which usually hosts Italy's international rugby matches.

Lazio and Chelsea, who finished fourth in their respective leagues, have both qualified for the Champions League but must overcome a two-legged third round qualifying match to claim a place in the group stages.

Mancini was upset by the way the home fans turned on Liverani and booed Chelsea's black players.

"I'm very sorry, it's not pleasant," he said. "It spoils what was otherwise an enjoyable evening."

Asked if there was a way of stopping the racists he replied: "There has to be. We have to keep trying."

Mancini said he was delighted

with the condition of his players but refused to go overboard about the result.

"To beat a top team like Chelsea is always pleasing but let's not forget it was just a friendly," he said.

"We are all working towards getting into the Champions League and we have a lot of work to do in the next four weeks."

Playing under the watchful eye of new Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, who bought the club two weeks ago and paid off its debts for an estimated total of 200 million euros (225 million dollars), Chelsea nearly conceded twice in the opening five minutes.

midfielder Sinisa Mihajlovic's looping free-kick hit the crossbar.

Apart from a half chance which was headed woefully wide by Mario Stanic, Chelsea rarely threatened and they were punished for their adventurous approach on the half hour.

Lazio wing-back Massimo Oddo found yards of space wide on the right after a Chelsea attack broke down and his waist-high cross was acrobatically diverted past Chelsea goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini by Inzaghi.

The English visitors fell further behind six minutes after the break when Claudio Lopez's inswinging free-kick was met by Stankovic



PHOTO: REUTERS

Lazio's Dejan Stankovic (R) is congratulated by teammate Bernardo Corradi after scoring against Chelsea in their friendly match at Rome's Flaminio Stadium on July 18.

Only a last-ditch tackle by new signing Glen Johnson prevented Jaap Stam's goalbound effort from crossing the line before Serbian

who headed powerfully wide of Cudicini at the back post.

Duff not to blame

AFP, Paris

Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff is not delaying his move to Chelsea in the hope of a last-minute bid from Manchester United, the player's agent said.

Chelsea have already had two days of talks with Duff in a bid to lure the Blackburn player for 17 million pounds (27 million dollars).

United's failure to conclude the signing of Paris St Germain striker Ronaldinho has led to speculation that they could target Duff.

However Duff's representative Pat Devlin told The Sun: "At this point in time, there is only one decision to be made by Damien -- whether to move to Chelsea or stay with Blackburn."

He added: "Blackburn have had an offer from only one club -- Chelsea. There has been no offer or contact from anyone else and, at this stage, the likelihood is that it is not going to happen."

"It is silly for people to be saying Damien should go to Manchester United because that has not been presented to him as an option. Chelsea is the option on offer and we are forging on with that."

Meanwhile Southampton full-back Wayne Bridge has been granted his wish to speak to Chelsea about a seven-million-pound move to Stamford Bridge to further his England career.

Saints chairman Rupert Lowe announced: "I regret to inform our supporters that we have given Wayne Bridge permission to speak to Chelsea Football Club with a view to signing for them."

"Wayne has quickly achieved great footballing success in his time with our club and has served us well."

"He has, however, made it known to both Gordon Strachan and me that he believes a move to Chelsea to be a career progression and an opportunity he cannot turn down."

RONALDINHO AT A GLANCE

AFP, Paris

Ronaldinho transfer summary following his move to Barcelona from Paris Saint Germain revealed by a source close to the negotiations on Saturday:

Surname: De Assis Moreira

First name: Ronaldo

Nickname: Ronaldinho (Ronaldinho Gaucho in Brazil)

Date of Birth: 21/03/1980

Place of birth: Porto Alegre (BRA)

Nationality: Brazilian

Height: 1.80m (5ft 11in)

Weight: 76kg (168lbs)

Position: midfielder or striker

Clubs: Gremio Porto Alegre (BRA/1986-2001), Paris Saint-Germain (FRA/July 2001-July 2003), Barcelona (SPA/since July 2003)

BRAZILIAN TEAM

Appearances: 39

Goals scored: 17

First appearance: 26/06/1999, Brazil-Latvia (3-0)

First goal: 30/06/1999, Brazil-Venezuela (7-0)

ACHIEVEMENTS

World Cup winner 2002 (Brazil)

Copa America winner 1999 (Brazil)

Under-17 World Championships winner 1997 (Brazil)

Finalist in the Confederations Cup 1999 (Brazil)

Finalist in the French Cup 2003 (PSG)

Rally behind Ferguson

AFP, London

Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy has called on the English Premiership champions' fans to back the judgement of manager Alex Ferguson.

The Scot sold England captain and United fans' favourite David Beckham to Spanish giants Real Madrid.

But his attempts to replace him with Ronaldinho have been caught up in a row between United and the Brazil star's current club Paris St Germain.

However Dutch international van Nistelrooy, who scored 41 goals last season, said: "The manager has been in this business for such a long time and everybody knows he makes the right decisions."

He also told United's television station MUTV: "It was great to play with David. I will miss him and I



RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

wish him all the best. I am sure he will do very well over there.

"But as players we have our own jobs to do. Some new players have joined the team already and maybe there will be a few more yet."

United also hope to sign Ronaldinho's international teammate Kleberson from Brazilian club Atletico Paranaense. Stadium on August 10.

Ronaldo on Becks

AFP, Guatemala City

World Footballer of the Year Ronaldo has warned his new Real Madrid teammate David Beckham that his performances on the field must live up to the hype he generates offit.

The Brazilian striker wished Beckham as much success with the Spanish giants as the England captain experienced at Manchester United, but his wishes came with a warning for the player who is well known for his fashion sense and his popstar wife, Victoria.

"I hope he shows as much on the field as all the noise that has been made around him," said Ronaldo, who is on a promotional tour of Guatemala.

Same old philosophy

Football

AFP, Rome

Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri has insisted the club's philosophy will not change despite being presented with a blank cheque book by new owner Roman Abramovich.

"Our aim remains the same. We are trying to reduce the age of the squad and we will make a few changes by bringing in new players," said the Italian after watching his side lose 2-0 to Lazio in a friendly here at the Flaminio stadium on Friday.

"Now we are building a team. We can't expect to be number one immediately and we have to be patient. This is an incredible opportunity for me and everyone at the club. These are exciting times."

"But you have to remember that we finished fourth last season before Mr Abramovich arrived and we already have a lot of talent in the

squad. Now we have the chance to take things forward."

Chelsea have been linked with a number of star players since oil tycoon Abramovich took control,

including Arsenal duo Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira, Manchester United's Juan Sebastian Veron, Inter Milan striker Christian Vieri and

Juventus' Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids.

But so far the London club have signed 18-year-old right-back Glen Johnson from West Ham and Real Madrid's Cameroon midfielder Geremi, who spent last season on loan at Middlesbrough.

Chelsea have also agreed fees for Blackburn's Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff and Southampton's England full-back Wayne Bridge, both currently discussing personal terms.

Carlo Cudicini, Chelsea's goalkeeper, said the players have found the media circus surrounding their potential transfer targets highly amusing.

"Nearly every star is on his way to Chelsea according to the newspapers but most of these reports are a joke," said the Italian, who started his career in the lower leagues before moving to England.

"We already have a good group here and not a lot has to change. We will see what presents the new owner brings."

Chelsea's Dutch midfielder

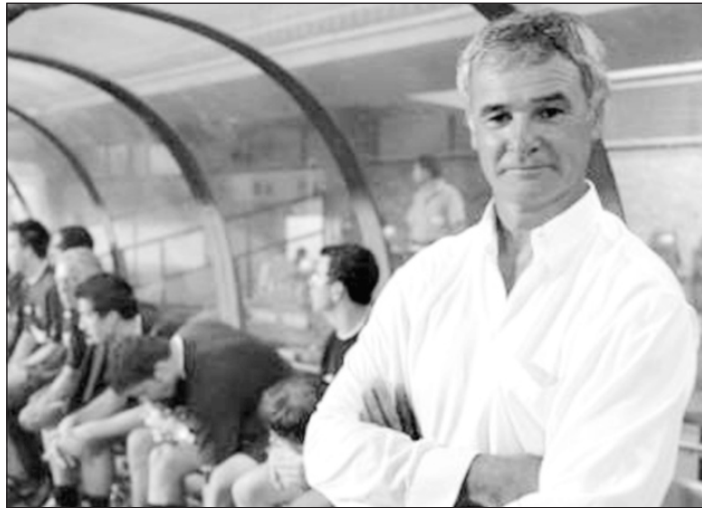
Boudewijn Zenden said the squad, who have spent the last week in Italy at their summer training camp, were not being distracted by the continual press speculation over the club's potential buys.

"Everyone is just focusing on the season ahead," said Zenden, who since joining from Barcelona has been in and out of the side with niggling injuries.

"The new owner is out there looking for the best players he can get and trying to build a team that can win trophies. Competition for places will be tough but that is the same at any club."

Ranieri said the spending spree would continue before the new season gets underway.

"We will bring in two or three more, but that may change if Duff and Bridge sign," said the former Fiorentina, Valencia and Atletico Madrid coach.



CLAUDIO RANIERI