

Inzaghi Milan's until 2008

AFP, Rome

AC Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi has signed a two-year contract extension that will keep him at the Italian first division club until June 2008.

"It's deeply satisfying and demonstrates the club's faith in me," said the 29-year-old Italy international.

"Everyone knows how much I want to wear this Milan shirt and I am very happy because I've spent here two wonderful seasons and now I can end my career here."

"It was my dream, it took me just five minutes to sign the new contract. I put my signature on a blank contract, I trust in the club, I will never have problems with them."

Inzaghi, who scored 30 goals in all competitions last season, said winning the Champions League in May was the highlight of his Milan career so far.

"It was a unique and unforgettable season for Milan and me. You can always do better and we will try to do it. I think last season was the best in my career."

Sunderland defend Bellion transfer

AFP, Sunderland

Sunderland were adamant Monday they had not made a costly mistake over David Bellion's transfer to Premiership champions Manchester United.

The Frenchman left for Old Trafford on a free transfer after his contract at the Stadium of Light expired. Normally the Black Cats would be entitled to compensation due to the 20-year-old's age.

But reports over the weekend claimed that Sunderland had not offered the forward a new written contract by a May deadline and therefore lost their entitlement to a cash settlement.

Sunderland, relegated from the Premiership last season, insist they have proof they made Bellion an offer in January which was turned down.

Sunderland were a Premiership club at the time the matter arose and are therefore governed by Premier League rules, which state they had to make a formal written offer to the player within the final year of his contract to be eligible for compensation.

They are adamant they made such an offer and it was rejected and are determined to press ahead with their claim.

With debts of around 30 million pounds (47.7 million dollars) and finance chiefs desperately trying to cut costs by offloading high earners, the Black Cats will be keen to reach a quick settlement.

Toldo in Inter Trouble

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's technical director Marco Branca said Monday that goalkeeper Francesco Toldo will be punished for criticising the way the Italian club was run.

Toldo said Sunday Inter should model themselves on champions Juventus and slammed directors for telling the players on the eve of their Champions League semi-final that the club were proposing to cut salaries.

Inter lost their clash against city rivals AC Milan, who went on to win the trophy.

"I'm surprised by the untimeliness of certain words which have come out unexpectedly at this stage of the season," Branca said.

"There were rules last year and there are rules now. It's consequently worth reminding our players that they must not express opinions on the club, seeing as this matter is not their responsibility."



The Manchester United squad jog in front of a massive promotional poster at the Nike Training Facility in Portland, Oregon on July 20.

PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldinho was too scared

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United have accused Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho of not having the nerve to play in the English Premiership.

United chased Ronaldinho for nearly a year but the Brazilian finally left Paris St Germain in a 30-million-euro (33.6-million-dollar) move to Barcelona over the weekend.

Ronaldinho was the second player in a month to turn down a move to Old Trafford, after Australian Harry Kewell's decision to join Liverpool.

United chief executive Peter Kenyon questioned whether either player had the nerve to take up the task of playing for United.

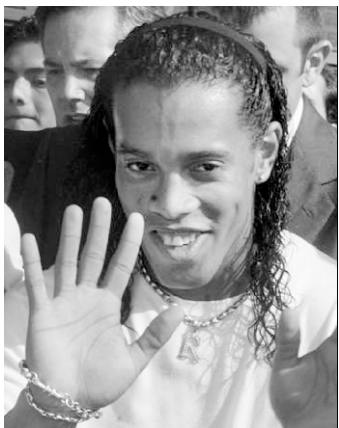
"You have got to be a special player to play for Manchester United," he told the British press from the United States where United are on tour.

"We offer a major stage, Champions League opportunities, a huge success factor in terms of picking up medals and financial

guarantees.

"The regime is strict but it produces what most players want - a winning formula. Mentally you have to be tough enough to stand it."

"Players have to balance that against what is on offer at other places. You have to ask the ques-



RONALDINHO

tion why they want to go somewhere else and you can take that how you want."

United manager Sir Alex

Ferguson said the Brazilian's snub would not affect the club.

"I am disappointed but not overly so," Ferguson said.

"I didn't know what the boy was thinking because we only had one discussion and he doesn't speak very good English."

"We got to the point where we wondered if he wanted to play for us or not and we have proved when we missed players in the past that it never stops us."

Kenyon also responded to comments by Paris St Germain president Francis Graille, who was highly critical of United's negotiations in their attempts to sign Ronaldinho from the French club.

Graille claimed that goalkeeper Fabien Barthez was offered as part of the deal and that United had been "too sure of themselves".

"I am highly disappointed at the comments, particularly as they come from a fellow member of G14," said Kenyon.

"We are not arrogant and I am amazed at the insinuation that the Fabien Barthez was offered in any deal because that is not the way we do them."

Wayne arriving at the Bridge

AFP, London

England defender Wayne Bridge should complete his move from Southampton to Chelsea on Monday.

The left-back's agent Jonathan Barnett revealed the 22-year-old has passed his medical and the formalities of his switch from St Mary's to Stamford Bridge are close to being tied up.

"Hopefully the deal will be done later today," said Barnett. "He has passed his medical, there are still one or two things to finalise but the deal should be concluded today."

The transfer fee for 12 times capped Bridge is believed to be around seven million pounds (11 million dollars) as Chelsea's new owner Roman Abramovich continues to build a team good enough to win the Premiership and challenge for the Champions League. The Blues have already recruited West Ham right-back Glen Johnson for six million pounds (9.5 million dollars), Cameroon midfielder Geremi for seven million pounds from Real Madrid and are also close to wrapping up a 17 million-pound (27 million-dollar) move for Blackburn's Ireland winger Damien Duff.

Bridge handed in a transfer request when Chelsea came in with a third bid which Southampton could not turn down.

Saints chairman Rupert Lowe said in a statement at the weekend: "Wayne has made it clear that he wants to play Champions League football, which he believes will give him a better chance of making his first choice for England."

"He will enjoy greater financial rewards at Chelsea and the club is geographically well placed for him to visit his family regularly."

"In the past we have rejected offers for Wayne Bridge from clubs to which he was not attracted."

"He has now handed us a transfer request thereby making it difficult for us to retain him despite the fact that he still has three years remaining on his contract."

Seaman may carry on

Football

AFP, Manchester

Veteran goalkeeper David Seaman said he could stay on at his new club Manchester City beyond his current one-year deal.

"The move has not been difficult as it is my job," the 39-year-old said.

"As a player if you are not wanted at a club then you move on."

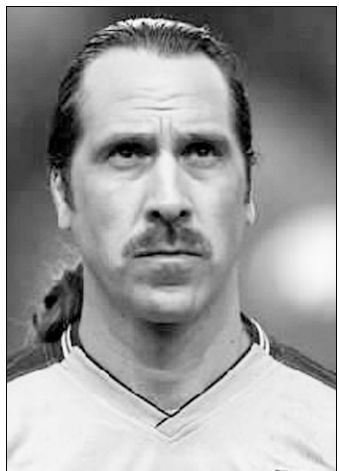
"I felt that I still have at least one year left in my playing career at a high standard. (Arsenal manager) Arsene Wenger didn't agree with that and so it was an easy choice for me."

"I have been on year-long contracts for the last three years and then decided at the end of each season whether I wanted to carry on or not."

"I didn't want to sign a three-year deal knowing that I couldn't

fulfil that deal. I want to take it a year at a time and see how I feel at the end of the season."

"But you shouldn't rule out another year," he revealed.



DAVID SEAMAN

"I still see how I feel. If my game is still good, I am playing well and Manchester City are doing well, then who knows?"

Seaman, 40 in September, signed for Kevin Keegan's side after 13 years at Arsenal which saw him pick up three League titles, four FA Cups, one League Cup and one European Cup-Winners Cup.

The pony-tailed stopper has 75 caps to his name but lost his England place to West Ham's David James after the disappointing 2-2 draw with Macedonia last November.

Seaman made his first appearance for City, conceding one, when he played 45 minutes in the 2-1 defeat at third division Mansfield Town on Saturday.

Keegan told the club's website: "I was really happy with David and he showed all the authority behind the defence that Peter Schmeichel did. Mind you, we will have to learn to cope with him playing as sweeper."

Vieira could sign new Arsenal deal

Football

AFP, London

French midfielder Patrick Vieira is on the verge of penning a new deal to stay at FA Cup winners Arsenal, reports said Monday.

Moneybags city rivals Chelsea were rumoured to be interested, but Highbury boss Arsene Wenger is confident he can persuade his captain to commit his future to the Gunners.

"I believe Patrick is very close to signing. I am very optimistic," Wenger told the Daily Mail newspaper.

The Highbury boss also reported Vieira's fellow European Championship winner Robert Pires is also staying put.

"Rumours that we have had offers for Robert are not true," said Wenger.

"He is about to agree an extension to his contract."

Wenger's quest for a long-term replacement for David Seaman remains ongoing - but the manager has confirmed Valencia's Spanish international Santiago



PATRICK VIEIRA

Mexico reach semis



AFP, Mexico City

Mexico routed short-handed Jamaica 5-0 on Sunday in a CONCACAF Gold Cup quarterfinal at Azteca Stadium, gaining a home berth for the semifinals.

Mexico became the third country to score five goals in its quarterfinal win and second to post a shutout.

The United States trounced Cuba by the same score Saturday.

Jamaica came in without top striker Onandi Lowe, who was suspended due to a red card.

It also received more bad news when MLS star Andy Williams was forced to leave in the third minute with a hamstring injury. Both players had scored against Guatemala in the last match.

Jesus Arelleno set up Omar Bravo for the opening goal in the 37th minute.

Bravo delivered a fine header to the near post that gave Jamaican goalkeeper Donovan Ricketts little chance.

Rafael Garcia doubled the advantage five minutes later off a free kick just outside of the penalty area.

The midfielder curled the ball around the wall to the far corner, and Ricketts was unable to stop it.

Daniel Osorno struck in the 54th minute.

Salvador Carmona drew Ricketts off his line, allowing Osorno a clean shot at an open net.

The first semifinal is Wednesday, when the United States meet Brazil in Miami.

Magpies, B'ham in Asia

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The English Premier League stepped up its claim for the lucrative Asian fan base on Monday when Newcastle United and Birmingham City arrived in Kuala Lumpur for the first tournament sanctioned by the Football Association outside England.

The bleary-eyed managers and captains of both teams fronted the media hours after landing in the Malaysian capital following long flights from Europe and professed their commitment to the four-day Asia Cup that begins on Thursday.

"It's something new for us. It's an experience and it's certainly one we are looking forward to," Newcastle captain Alan Shearer said.

"The knowledge of football out here is fantastic. They probably see more live games on television than we do. The reception people have given us here has just been fantastic."

Magpies manager Sir Bobby Robson said he had brought a full-strength team with him to Kuala Lumpur, including close-season signing Lee Bowyer, midfielder Kieron Dyer, Nigerian Shola Ameobi and Welsh stars Craig Bellamy and Gary Speed.

Similarly Birmingham manager and former Manchester United defender Steve Bruce said all his

stars would be on show in Kuala Lumpur, promising new signing David Dunn and French star Christophe Dugary will play.

"We are absolutely delighted to be here," Bruce said, rejecting suggestions the brief foray into the heat and humidity of Southeast Asia would be more of a hindrance than a help in his team's pre-season preparations.

Birmingham and Newcastle's first training sessions in Kuala Lumpur were in wet and heavy conditions after a fierce rain storm enveloped the city on Monday morning.

The teams will play each other on Thursday evening, followed by the newly rich Chelsea against the Malaysian national team on Friday.

The losers of the two matches will play Saturday, with the two winners playing in the final on Sunday in what sports television channel and tournament co-organiser ESPN expects to be a ratings boom in Asia.

All the matches will be televised live across Asia and in England.

But although the Asia Cup organisers claim the tournament has added significance because it is the first outside England to be sanctioned by the Football Association, the clashes are expected to be no more than competitive practice matches.

"We see the matches as part of our pre-season work," Robson said.

"We are here in order to participate but also to ensure we get off to the best start for our season, which is just three weeks after we get back."

Clubs throughout Europe are increasingly trying to capture Asia's fanatical and fast growing football fan base, with David Beckham's move from Manchester United to Real Madrid partly attributed to the Spanish giant wanting to capitalise on his popularity in the region.

At Monday's press conferences, Robson spoke positively about the upcoming season, saying Shearer had fully recovered from a fractured ankle sustained towards the end of last season and that Bowyer would be a valuable addition to the team.

However he warned Magpies fans it would be extremely hard to emulate or better their third-placed finish in last season's Premier League.

Robson said Manchester United and Arsenal were still the two teams to beat, while he expected Liverpool to improve and Chelsea to benefit from the high-profile signings under new owner Roman Abramovich.

"We are not frightened of the situation... we will challenge it," he said.

Chelsea is due to land in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday morning and have their first training run later in the day.



Newcastle captain Alan Shearer (L) looks on while manager Sir Bobby Robson speaks during a press conference after arriving in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

WORLD BRIEFS

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United have ruled out making a bid for Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff after the English Premiership champions lost out in the race to sign Ronaldinho.

United chief executive is said to be fuming at the Brazilian's decision to join Barcelona and was angered by criticism from Paris Saint Germain's president Francis Graille that the English club were arrogant in their negotiations to sign the player.

But with Duff deep in talks with Chelsea, Kenyon insisted United were not interested in the Blackburn player.

"Let's kill the Damien Duff story straightaway," Kenyon told the Press Association. "We are not in for him. There has been no approach to the club and no approach to the player and there won't be. He is due to sign for Chelsea."

conference when asked whether Dyer had talked with Manchester United management.

"As far I'm concerned there's not an inkling of truth in it. It's a fabricated story. That's my feeling about it."

BAYERN WANT FRIEDRICH

AFP, Munich

German champions Bayern Munich have revealed their interest in bringing Hertha Berlin's Germany international Arne Friedrich to the Olympic Stadium.

Bayern tried to sign Friedrich in July 2002, when he was on the books of Arminia Bielefeld, but the player opted for the German capi-

tal. However, Bayern have reopened the door for the defensive stalwart with general manager Uli Hoessens inviting Friedrich to join the double-winners.

"If he (Friedrich) wants to come to Munich we will take him," Hoessens told German newspaper Die Welt.

The 24-year-old's contract with Hertha runs to June 2005 - despite the club's efforts to sign him until 2010.

Friedrich has played only 33 Bundesliga matches, after spending his early days in the lower leagues, but his performances have catapulted him into the German national side and he already has 10 caps for the World Cup runners-up.

ROBSON DENIES DYER TALKS

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Newcastle midfielder Kieron Dyer has not had any talks with Manchester United and will remain a Magpie, team manager Sir Bobby Robson said here on Monday.

Robson emphatically denied a report that Dyer, who has travelled with the team to Kuala Lumpur for the pre-season Premier League Asia Cup, had entertained any interest from the Red Devils.

"I know absolutely nothing about that," Robson told a press

Ehigu escapes Surgery

AFP, Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough's England defender Ugo Ehigu has been told he does not require surgery on his injured knee.

The 30-year-old feared he had snapped his posterior cruciate ligament but was delighted to find out the injury was not that serious.

Centreback Ehigu flew out to the USA last week to see a surgeon who helped Brazilian teammate Juninho with his injury problems. But he will be able to return to the Riverside stadium this week following his good news.