

# Fans welcome Ronaldinho

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Around 30,000 fans crowded into the Nou Camp to get their first glimpse of Ronaldinho wearing Barcelona's burgundy and blue strip.

The Brazilian was unveiled as a Barca player after completing a move from Paris St Germain for an initial transfer fee of 25 million euros (15 million pounds) that could rise as high as 30 million euros (21 million pounds).

The 23-year-old, who will inherit the number 10 shirt from the departing Argentine Juan Roman Riquelme, was given a hero's welcome by Barca fans packing two sides of the ground.

They were able to see the presentation on giant video screens before watching their new idol run through a range of tricks and flicks on the Nou Camp pitch.

"This is one of the most emotional days in my life," Ronaldinho told the crowd.

"I'll do everything to give the fans reason to cheer."

Ronaldinho's decision to join Barcelona in preference to Manchester United or Real Madrid was based in part on the recent experiences of Romario, Ronaldo and Rivaldo -- three Brazilians who all triumphed during their time at the Nou Camp.

"I want to follow in their footsteps," said Ronaldinho.

"They are all great players, world champions, and in part they're the reason why I'm here."

"Ever since I was a child I've dreamed of joining Barcelona and now the opportunity has arrived."

Barcelona president Joan Laporta, who promised during the election campaign to sign at least one world class player with a media profile to match, said the arrival of Ronaldinho would help the club recoup their reputation as one of the world game's biggest players.

"Barcelona already has great world renown but Ronaldinho will help project the club's image around the globe," Laporta said.



Barcelona's new Brazilian signing Ronaldinho shows off his skills during his official presentation at the Nou Camp stadium in Barcelona on July 21.

# Asia suffers fresh Real setback

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Real Madrid's Asian tour will not take in Malaysia as planned, officials said Tuesday, with media reports saying the Spanish giant's demand for a 2.9-million-dollar appearance fee was proving too expensive.

Real Madrid had been scheduled to play the Malaysian national team on August 10 at the National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur, and regional television stations had already advertised the game.

But Football Association of Malaysia assistant general secretary Yap Nyim Keong said the game had been cancelled.

"The terms were not acceptable," he said, without elaborating.

The New Straits Times said Real Madrid had wanted 11 million ringgit (2.9 million dollars) to play in Kuala Lumpur, while the total cost of staging the match would have reached 18 million ringgit.

"While sponsors can help defray some of the costs, ticket sales are the major revenue earner but even a capacity crowd of 80,000 at the National Stadium won't help meet the costs," the paper said.

Real Madrid, keen to cash in on Asia's love of soccer, are due to showcase David Beckham, Ronaldo, Raul and all their other

stars in a series of exhibition matches across the region next month.

Beckham is regarded as the hottest soccer property in Asia and Real Madrid intended to particularly showcase him after his transfer from Manchester United.

Real are due to land in the southern Chinese city of Kunming on Friday before playing a game against an invitational Chinese team in Beijing next week. They are then due to play in Tokyo and Hong Kong.

However Chinese officials said last week that the match between Real Madrid and the Chinese national side scheduled for August 8 in Hong Kong was also under a cloud because the Spanish giants were asking for too much money.

The Guangzhou-based Nanfang Sports News said Real Madrid had priced themselves out of the market with a demand for an appearance fee of two million euros (2.26 million dollars), plus travel and accommodation expenses.

Hong Kong officials have said the match is definitely going ahead however.

Singapore's Straits Times newspaper said the city-state had also rejected Real's overtures for a game to be played there because of the Spanish team's excessive demands for money.

# Ranieri raring to go

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri expressed delight here Tuesday over the signings of Irish winger Damien Duff and Southampton defender Wayne Bridge, saying the high-profile recruits will help lift the team into the English Premier League's elite.

Ranieri, addressing the media hours after receiving confirmation that Duff had signed a five-year deal worth 17 million pounds (27.2 million dollars), said his sights were now set on knocking off competition heavyweights Manchester United and Arsenal. "At the end of the league I'm sure we will be very close to these big teams," he said.

Ranieri said Duff and Bridge were expected to fly out to Kuala Lumpur to join their new teammates for this week's pre-season Premier League Asia Cup after completing medical tests in England.

The transfers of Duff and Bridge, a member of the 2002 England World Cup squad who moved to Chelsea in a seven million pound deal, were announced on Monday.

They bring the total amount Chelsea has spent on new signings since Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich bought the club on July 2 to nearly 37 million pounds.

Real Madrid midfielder Geremi, on loan at Middlesbrough last season, arrived first for 6.9 million pounds followed by West Ham teenage sensation Glen Johnson for six million pounds.

Chelsea captain John Terry told the press in Kuala Lumpur that the addition of the quartet had not created any ill-feeling or fear of losing game time among the existing players at the club.

"It's an exciting time at

Chelsea," Terry said when asked about any grumblings from the current crop of players, some of whom had expressed discontent last season with Ranieri's rotation policy.

"We have made some great signings so far and it's going to be a great season for Chelsea."

Ranieri said his top priority was to ensure Chelsea, which finished fourth in the Premier League last season, continued to gel as a team and was not dominated by individuals.

"The more important thing is the squad. Football is a team game and it's important to have a very strong team. I have a strong team, now it's important to blend the other champions," he said.

And if Ranieri was feeling the

pressure that his career at Stamford Bridge could be terminated unless Chelsea quickly becomes one of the world's most powerful teams, he wasn't showing it.

"I am an ambitious coach. I have ambitious players. I like the pressure," he said.

Chelsea will take on the Malaysian national team on Friday evening in the second match of the Asian Cup.

Fellow Premiership teams Newcastle United and Birmingham City will play against each other on Thursday.

The winners of the two matches play off in the final on Sunday.



Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri (R) smiles during a press conference on Monday in Kuala Lumpur while acting team captain John Terry looks on. Newcastle United, Birmingham City and Chelsea will play here in the FA Premier League Asia Cup which begins tomorrow.

# Liverpool play Thailand tomorrow

Football

AFP, Bangkok

English Premier League giants Liverpool arrived here Tuesday for the start of a whistlestop Asian tour, which will see them play friendlies against Thailand and Hong Kong.

Manager Gerrard Houllier told a news conference that the team was excited to be back in Thailand for the first time in two years.

"We had a tough game with Thailand then and we will do our best to have a good game," he said ahead of Thursday's match against the Thai national team at Bangkok's Rajamangala stadium.

About a hundred fans decked out in Liverpool's trademark red gave a warm welcome to the side, seeking their autographs as they arrived at their hotel.

But it was a subdued turnout compared to 2001, when hundreds of near-hysterical fans mobbed the popular team on their arrival in the Thai capital.

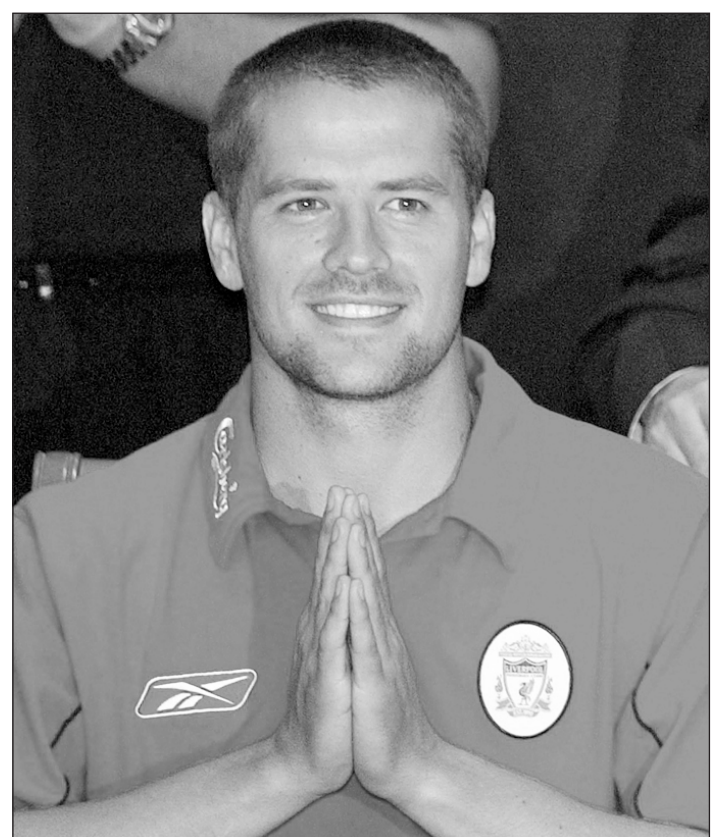
Houllier said that while rivals Chelsea was improving their team by spending up big on new players in a bid to win the next Premiership title, Liverpool had spent modestly and was focusing on improving the side it had.

"We need time to develop. Our team does not have much experience, but we've got talent and spirit," he said.

Houllier said Liverpool's poor showing last season would

improve this year following new signings, including Harry Kewell, who has moved from Leeds United.

Liverpool will fly to Hong Kong on Friday for a match on Sunday.



Liverpool superstar Michael Owen greets in traditional Thai style after a press conference in Bangkok yesterday. The English Premier League giants arrived in Thailand at the start of their Far East tour.

# Rebuilding MU's priority

Football

REUTERS, Seattle

Manchester United's quest to strengthen their squad remains a top priority after the collapse of their Ronaldinho bid, chief executive Peter Kenyon said on Monday.

United missed out on the Brazilian forward when he chose to join Barcelona on Saturday, and the English premier league champions then revealed they had no interest in hijacking Damien Duff's move from Blackburn Rovers to Chelsea.

Kenyon and manager Alex Ferguson are trying to devote their energies to the start of United's pre-season tour of the United States, but Kenyon says the 16-day trip will not

interfere with the wider agenda of success in the transfer market.

"Just because you are away from home doesn't mean business stops," he said.

Ferguson covets at least one major signing before the Champions League transfer deadline of August 31, but Kenyon is eager to play down the pressure on his manager.

"We've tried to bring players in for this season -- Ronaldinho didn't work but we have made additions already," he said.

"They will add something to the squad, which we are happy with... it is a strong squad."

United have signed midfielders David Bellion and Eric Djemba-Djemba and goalkeeper Tim Howard, with Brazilian midfielder Kleber set to complete his trans-

fer to Old Trafford once the US tour ends.

Bellion could make his United debut on Tuesday as they face Celtic at Seahawks Stadium in Seattle in their first pre-season game.

British media have often suggested that Celtic manager Martin O'Neill could succeed Ferguson as manager at Old Trafford, but O'Neill diplomatically side-stepped the issue at their pre-match news conference on Monday.

"Following Alex Ferguson will be daunting for anybody," O'Neill said.

"The job has never been offered (to me). I don't see any other top quality managers, like Ottmar Hitzfeld or Fabio Capello, rushing to the job."

"I have the utmost respect for Ferguson. What he has done at United belies belief."

# Milito fails Medical

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid said Monday they were pulling out of a move for Argentine defender Gabriel Milito after medical tests threw up doubts about his right ankle.

A statement from the Spanish champions said medical tests suggested there was "no guarantee" the 22-year-old would stand up to the rigors of life in La Primera Liga.

Milito had been set to sign for four years but Real Madrid's sporting director Jorge Valdano, himself an Argentine, said that "there is a risk factor which means we have to err on the side of prudence. We have to respect (the findings) of our medical staff."

Real added they wished the player well for the future after shelving the 3.5 million dollar move which was scheduled to go through on Friday.

Donato Villani, a member of the Argentine national squad's medical staff, had earlier expressed surprise at Real's hesitancy, noting that Milito "played 50 games last season and was in top form."

# Peace Cup PSV's

AFP, Seoul

Dutch champions PSV Eindhoven overcame atrocious monsoon conditions and the stiff challenge of French champions Lyon to win the final of the eight-nation Peace Cup football tournament here Tuesday.

The Dutch scored the decider in the 23rd minute from the penalty spot after striker Arjen Robben was upended by Lyon defender Eric Deflandre while on a breathtaking run towards goal.

Midfielder Mark van Bommel blasted the spot kick into the top of the net beyond the reach of goalkeeper Gregory Coupet.

The Dutch, coached by former South Korean World Cup head coach Guss Hiddink and with two Korean World Cup stars in their team, were the crowd favourites.

But their task was not easy as Lyon's determined players used speed and guile to probe the Dutch defence.

Midfielder Sidney Govou was a constant torment and staged the first serious attack of the match which ended with his header skidding just wide of the goal.

Michael Essien gave PSV goalkeeper Ron Waterreus an even stiffer test with a 32nd minute blast from his right foot from 30 metres that he managed to parry away.

# Keane's mission

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United captain Roy Keane, who underwent hip and knee surgery last season, insisted Monday that he still had three years of top-flight football left in his battle-hardened legs.

The former Republic of Ireland midfielder did concede his form had dipped but he said the situation was not as bad as some commentators were suggesting.

"I've been a professional for 13 years and had a lot of pats on the back but this is the worst criticism I have had in my career," he said.

"You have to try not to get too carried away with the success and try not to get too down with all the negative stuff. Please God, I have three years left at Manchester United but if not I still think I will be playing at the top level somewhere."

The county Cork-born star has made no secret of his intention to take up managerial duties when he does retire, and his boss at Old Trafford Alex Ferguson believes he has what it takes to make the transition from front line soldier to backroom general.

Ferguson has said: "If he wants to do it he'll be an absolutely brilliant manager."

Keane has already started making inquiries about it.

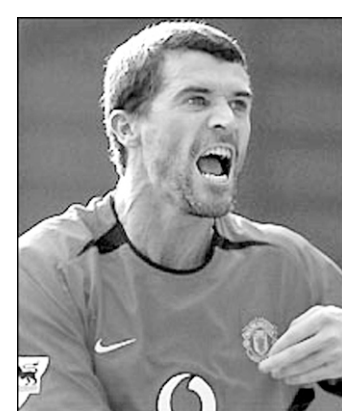
"Being 32 in August you start to think of these things. If you had asked me two years ago about

management, I would have told you it wasn't even on my mind.

"Now as I have got a bit older, I have spoken to Steve McClaren (former United assistant) and one or two other people and started to think along those lines about getting my coaching badges and being a manager some day."

"It is a road I think I would like to go down but again it is dangerous thinking too far ahead."

But he added that for the moment playing is the foremost thing on his mind.



ROY KEANE

"I am doing everything to make sure I can carry on as long as I can at United. Not a day goes by when I am not looking to do something that could prolong my career."

# Duff Chelsea's

Football

AFP, London

Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff signed a five-year deal with English Premiership big spenders Chelsea on Monday after agreeing a 17 million pound (27.2 million dollar) move from Blackburn.

Duff is the fourth major signing since Russian oil tycoon Roman Abramovich took over the London-based club on July 2.

After completing his transfer 24-year-old Duff told Chelsea TV: "This was probably the biggest decision of my life and I didn't want to rush it."

Duff asked for the weekend to think over the move, though he had met and been impressed by Chelsea coach Claudio Ranieri, agreed a salary and the clubs had settled on the fee.

But Manchester United denied on Sunday they were in the race to sign him, and the player, who is believed to have been reluctant to leave his home in northwest England, claimed he had just needed time.

"It was just a matter of thinking everything through," he said.

"I had seven great years at Blackburn and there was no big reason to move but in the end I decided a big new challenge was necessary."

"I'm really looking forward to playing for my new club. It looks as though great things are going to happen at Chelsea."

Duff becomes the most expensive player in Chelsea's history, surpassing the 15 million pounds paid for striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink.

Duff had a clause in his Blackburn contract allowing him to leave if a club came in with an offer of 17 million pounds.

# Juve prefer Pires

Football

AFP, London

Italian champions Juventus were reported Tuesday to have stepped up attempts to sign Arsenal's French playmaker Robert Pires.

Juventus president Luciano Moggi has instructed agents to make a four million pound bid which he believes Arsenal may be tempted to accept because of their financial problems, the Daily Mirror reports.

Arsenal are 40 million pounds (64 million dollars) in debt and the board, trying to raise around 400 million pounds (640 million dollars) for a new stadium, have demanded the wage bill is cut.

But French international Pires is one player manager Arsene Wenger he would hate to lose.

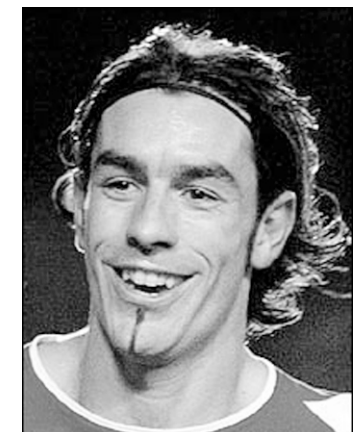
Pires, 29, who has two years left on his contract, had a disappointing period last term as he recovered from his cruciate knee ligament operation and struggled to recapture his superb form of their Double-winning season.

Wenger is determined to hang on to his top stars but is under strict orders that he must sell before he can buy this summer.

He is also under pressure from Chelsea's new owner Roman Abramovich who has tabled bids for Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira.

Vieira's current deal only has one year left and Arsenal know that unless he signs they will lose their prize asset on a Bosman free transfer. The alternative is to sell him now.

Pires arrived at Highbury in a six million pound (9.6 million dollar) move from French club Marseille three years ago and soon became a key member of the team.



ROBERT PIRES

# Lazio get Albertini

Football

AFP, Rome

Lazio on Tuesday completed the signing of AC Milan's former Italy international Demetrio Albertini on a two-year contract.

In exchange Milan receive defender Giuseppe Pancaro on a two-year loan.

Albertini spent last season on loan with Atletico Madrid and was looking forward to returning to the club with whom he had spent 14 seasons.

But the 31-year-old midfielder was told he was surplus to require-

ments by coach Carlo Ancelotti on his return from Spain and placed on the transfer list.

"I came back from Madrid convinced I could end my career at Milan but I was told there was no space for me," said Albertini.

Albertini made his debut for Lazio in 1988 and won three European Cups, three European Super Cups, two World Cup cups and six Serie A league titles during his time at the San Siro.

He played for Italy 79 times but missed last summer's World Cup finals because of an Achilles injury.

Pancaro, 32 next month, is also a former Italy international, winning 13 caps for the Azzurri.

# Fadiga 'unfit'

Football

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan's consultant heart specialist believes new signing Khalilou Fadiga is 'unfit' to play and will not pass the club's medical.

According to Bruno Caru, a member of the team that carried out preliminary medical tests on the Senegal international last week, Fadiga has a life-threatening heart problem.

Fadiga, who joined Inter from Auxerre for three million euros (3.4 million dollars) on July 9, was due to undergo further medical tests in Milan on Monday but instead flew to Paris to consult other doctors for a second opinion.

Caru is adamant the player's health concerns will force Inter to cancel the deal.

"For us, the player is unfit," Caru was quoted as saying in Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I thought he would be there for the meeting (yesterday) but he didn't come. He preferred to go to Paris to consult other specialists. He is a boy with character who does not give up."

"But for us these examinations have no value and besides, we have

not seen them. The only thing we have had is a report which is unreliable."

"We were unable to sign the medical certificate saying he was suitable because he has an abnormal heartbeat which is most definitely not compatible with athletic activity."

Capped by Senegal 32 times, Fadiga was a member of the side that reached the quarterfinals of last year's World Cup finals.

The 28-year-old midfielder was involved in controversy before the tournament started when he was charged with stealing a gold necklace from jewelers in the Korean city of Daegu.

Fadiga, who holds a Belgian passport after spending six years there where he won the Belgian title with FC Bruges, had a successful season with Auxerre following the World Cup, playing in more than 50 matches.

He finished the campaign on a high note when his side lifted the French Cup after they beat Paris St Germain.

The revelation about Fadiga's condition came just weeks after the death of Cameroon midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe, who died of heart failure after collapsing during a Confederations Cup match in France.