



ROBERTO BAGGIO

Baggio to get last call

Football

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni is to invite 37-year-old Roberto Baggio to play for the national team for a final time to honour the former international.

Baggio, who has said he will retire at the end of the current season, has not played for Italy since making the last of his 55 international appearances against Belarus on March 31, 1999.

"I've read that he (Baggio) has decided to quit at the end of the season and I have thought about it seriously," Trapattoni told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Now I will speak to him. I will say to him it would be a pleasure for him to come and join us and that I would like to call him up for a match. One of the next ones, maybe against Spain on April 28.

"I would like to give him an award, a present for a wonderful career."

Baggio scored 27 goals for Italy, but despite a glittering career he is perhaps best remembered for missing the penalty in the 1994 World Cup final shoot-out which handed Brazil the trophy in Pasadena.

On Sunday, Baggio became only the fifth player in Serie A history to score 200 goals when he netted Brescia's equaliser in a 2-2 draw at Parma.

Known as 'The Divine Ponytail' because of his hairstyle and his Buddhist beliefs, Baggio has had a stop-start season at Brescia with several knee operations and a back strain limiting his number of appearances.

Baggio enjoyed UEFA Cup success with Juventus in 1993 and was named FIFA's World Player of the Year the same year. He won two Serie A league titles, with Juventus in 1995 and with AC Milan the following year.

He also enjoyed spells at Bologna and Inter Milan before signing for Brescia in September 2000.

Italy play Spain in an international friendly in Genoa on April 28.

Lazio in hot waters

AFP, Rome

Italian first division club Lazio's survival was thrown into doubt Wednesday when the Milan stock exchange suspended indefinitely trading in the company's shares.

Borsa Italiana said that after reviewing Lazio's statement, shares in the club would be suspended until further notice.

Lazio, currently fourth in the league, said Monday its second-half 2003 net losses worsened to 68.1 million euros (84 million dollars) from 47.2 million in the same period of 2002.

Sergio Cragnotti, the former owner of the Serie A club, was arrested last month on charges of false bankruptcy.

He is being investigated following the financial crisis that struck Lazio's former majority shareholder Cirio, the Italian canned food company of which Cragnotti was the former chairman.

Cirio was declared insolvent in November 2002 and Cragnotti stepped down as Lazio president three months later.

Munich reminded of World War II

REUTERS, Munich

Two unexploded World War Two-era bombs were found at the construction site for Munich's new soccer stadium on Tuesday and detonated in a controlled explosion, police said.

The grenade-style explosives were unearthed outside the stadium, where the opening match of the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany will be held. Police halted traffic on a nearby motorway for about 90 minutes as explosive experts removed the obstacle.

The Allianz Arena has been wracked by controversy in recent weeks. Last week prosecutors arrested two Munich soccer officials on suspicion of taking a 2.8-million-euro (\$3.45 million) bribe from the construction company to win the contract to build the 280-million-euro stadium.

Dozens of unexploded World War Two bombs are found in Germany each year, buried beneath the ground or under buildings. Most are defused without incident.

In 1998, a huge 1,000-pound (450 kg) bomb was found unexploded one metre below the half-way line at Borussia Dortmund's stadium during reconstruction work there and in 2002 a 500-pound bomb was found beneath a section of Berlin's Olympic Stadium during remodeling work and defused.

Ferdinand's anxious wait

Football

AFP, London

Rio Ferdinand will walk a disciplinary high wire without any safety net when his appeal against an eight-month ban for missing a doping test gets underway on Thursday.

Ferdinand's club, Manchester United, are guardedly optimistic that they will be able to persuade a three-man appeal panel to reduce the sentence, possibly even clearing the defender to play for England in this summer's Euro 2004 championships in Portugal.

But the panel, made up of two Football Association councillors and an independent lawyer, could conclude their two-day hearing with a decision to increase the ban which Ferdinand began serving on January 20.

Under guidelines from FIFA, world football's governing body, Ferdinand's failure to provide a urine sample for doping control officers at Manchester United's training ground on September 23, 2003 warrants a year-long ban.

Despite that, United manager

Sir Alex Ferguson, who has seen his side's Premiership and Champions League campaigns collapse in the absence of the star defender, is hopeful of getting the ban reduced.

"We're hoping the people



RIO FERDINAND

sitting on this panel look at it realistically, and far more fairly than they did previously," Ferguson said.

United have kept just one clean sheet in 10 games since Ferdinand, 25, began serving his ban.

He could have played on pending the outcome of the appeal but the club judged they would have a

better chance of success if Ferdinand was seen to accept that some punishment was merited.

Many observers believe the player could have escaped with a much shorter ban had he and United acknowledged the gravity of Ferdinand's actions as soon as it emerged that he had missed the test.

According to media reports, United's appeal will include the results of a hair test which backs up Ferdinand's claim never to have taken any recreational or performance enhancing drugs.

But this is unlikely to have a significant bearing on the outcome. The charges against Ferdinand relate to skipping the test rather than whether or not he had any traces of drugs in his system. Hair tests can rule out the use of recreational drugs but are inconclusive in the case of performance-enhancing drugs.

England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson has offered Ferdinand his support as a character witness and hopes the player will be available for Euro 2004.

"If he could have a lesser punishment, I should be happy," the Swede said. "If that's fair or not, I will leave for the other people to decide."

G-14 on collision course

Football

AP, Valencia

Escalating their rocky relationship with FIFA, Europe's biggest soccer clubs said they would boycott next year's World Club Championships and test the legality of FIFA's rules to release players for national team duty.

World soccer's governing body intends to resurrect the competition between clubs from six continents, but the G-14 said at a meeting on Tuesday its members already had enough matches to play.

"We're satisfied with the current competitions and have no wish to fill the schedules even more," Bayern Munich's president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was quoted as saying by Efe agency.

"No club from the G-14 will participate in this FIFA competition. We refuse to play the World Championship and our decision is final," Rummenigge said.

FIFA first held the World Club Championship in 2000 when it was won by Brazilian club Corinthians on its home turf. The second tournament was scheduled for Spain the following year

but was canceled following the collapse of FIFA's marketing partner, ISL.

FIFA said in February the reorganized tournament would be a six-team competition. The champions of Africa, Asia, CONCACAF and Oceania would play in a first-round knockout, with the two winners then meeting the top European and South American clubs. The new tournament could swallow up the long established Intercontinental Cup between the European and South American champions.

European clubs have said adding another tournament runs counter to FIFA complaints that soccer stars already play too many games. FIFA wants to cut down on national and continental league matches, but has not reduced its own international calendar.

"It is inconsistent to complain on the one hand about the burden of the overloaded international calendar and at the same time propose additional matches," G-14 general manager Thomas Kurth said on Tuesday.

The G-14 also said it had unanimously agreed to press ahead with its demand for financial compensation from FIFA and UEFA for releasing players for national team duty.

To increase pressure, the association said in a statement it wants to test whether current rules "under which the clubs must release their players to the national teams, for no payment and at conditions unilaterally imposed by FIFA, is an infringement of law with regards to fair trading."

Kurth said clubs were planning to launch a challenge before Swiss competition authorities in "a matter of weeks."

FIFA chief Sepp Blatter recently said he wouldn't negotiate with the G-14 as it has no official standing within soccer institutions.

The G-14 association, which was formed in 1998 as a loose grouping, became an association in 2001.

It originally consisted of 14 clubs -- Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool, Juventus, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Marseille, Paris St. Germain, Ajax, PSV Eindhoven and FC Porto. Last year, it expanded to 18 by adding Valencia, Arsenal, Bayer Leverkusen and Olympique Lyon.

Valencia president Jaime Orti said the next G-14 meeting would be held in Brussels on June 2.

Leicester trio booed

AFP, London

The three Leicester players charged with sexual assault during the Premiership club's training week in Spain played in their first match since being released on bail on Tuesday.

Defender Frank Sinclair, winger Keith Gillespie and striker Paul Dickov all turned out at Leicester's reserves away against Southampton in a match which the hosts won 3-1.

The Leicester trio were loudly booed throughout by a Saints crowd of almost 3,000.

The players spent seven nights in a Spanish jail after being accused of breaking into the hotel room of two women from Kenya and one from Malawi, who now live in Germany, and sexually assaulting them at the La Manga complex.

Dede ready to give up Qatar dream

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund's Brazilian defender Dede insists he is willing to snub a lucrative chance to play for oil-rich Qatar because he does not want to upset his club.

Qatar want Dede, 25, to help fire them to the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany but Dortmund have not taken kindly to the idea and Dede insists he will give up on his dream of playing in a World Cup.

"The Qatar matter is 90 percent over," explained Dede to German television channel DSF. "I do not want any trouble with Borussia Dortmund."

"There have been a conflict of interests with the whole Qatar issue."

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer claimed players just wanted to line their pockets by representing the Gulf state but Dede insists that was never his intention.

"Money was never the main reason," vowed Dede. "It was my dream to go to the World Cup and that is why I was interested."

Dede has been long overlooked by current world champions Brazil.

Werder Bremen's striker Ailton is another star Qatar have on their wish list and the Brazilian is willing to defy the complaints of his future club Schalke 04, who he will join at the end of the season, and play for Qatar.

Football's governing body FIFA are ready to step in to stop Ailton, 30, playing for the Gulf state and bring in regulation to stop similar incidents in the future.

FIFA are set to announce on Wednesday measures to prevent such moves including an insistence that players live in their adopted nation for two years before taking part in an international.



PHOTO: AP

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira faces the media in Rio de Janeiro on March 16 while announcing the 22-man squad for the next World Cup qualifier against Paraguay on March 31.

Brazil hope for Ronaldo



AP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil wants soccer star Ronaldo to face Paraguay in a World Cup qualifier this month. Whether he's able to play by then is another matter.

The Real Madrid striker, under treatment for a leg injury, was the big question mark on the list of 22 players announced Tuesday by coach Carlos Alberto Parreira. His status still isn't certain.

The high scorer on Brazil's 2002 World Cup champions in 2002, Ronaldo injured his left thigh in a game for Real Madrid and has been idle for nearly two weeks.

"I'll play only when I'm totally recovered," he said in an interview Tuesday with the sports daily Lance. "First, I have to play for Real to show I'm in condition to defend Brazil."

Ronaldo is expected to return to the lineup when Madrid faces Sevilla on March 28 -- just three days before the match with Paraguay.

If Ronaldo can't play against Paraguay, Parreira can choose a replacement from reserve strikers Adriano, of Italy's Inter Milan, and Luis Fabiano, of Sao Paulo.

Another absence is Rivaldo, Ronaldo's teammate on the last World Cup squad. The striker quit Cruzeiro in solidarity with released coach Wanderley Luxemburgo last month and hasn't joined another team.

"Rivaldo isn't even training, he's not with a club, he's not in physical or technical condition for the game," Parreira said.

Parreira drew heavily from the '02 champion squad. Twelve of the 22 were with the Brazilian team that won a record fifth World Cup in Yokohama, Japan.

The World champions, who lost the corresponding fixture 2-1 in the qualifiers for the 2002 World Cup, will need all the firepower they can muster against notoriously difficult and determined opponents.

Paraguay have won their last three qualifiers while Brazil were held to draws with Peru and Uruguay in their last two competitive outings and played out a goalless stalemate with Ireland in a friendly in February after a sterling start in the qualifiers, with wins over Colombia and Ecuador.

"This is an important game, it's the game of the moment," Parreira said. "This is not the time for experiments."

Only four of the players are from Brazilian clubs, while the rest are from Europe. Italy's AC Milan gave up three players, while Real Madrid, Siena, Lyon and Bayer Leverkusen ceded two each.

Brazil, with eight points, is third in the race for one of four slots for the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Paraguay leads with nine points and Argentina is second with eight.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Dida (AC Milan/ITA), Marcos (Palmeiras)
Defenders: Cafu (Roma/ITA), Belletti (Villarreal/SPA), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid/SPA), Junior (Siena/ITA), Lucio (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Edmilson (Lyon/FRA), Roque Junior (Siena/ITA)
Midfielders: Gilberto Silva (Arsenal/ENG), Juninho Pernambucano (Lyon/FRA), Ze Roberto (Bayern Munich/GER), Kaka (AC Milan/ITA), Alex (Cruzeiro), Kleberson (Manchester United/ENG), Julio Baptista (Sevilla/SPA), Renato (Santos)
Strikers: Ronaldo (Real Madrid/SPA), Ronaldinho Gaucho (Barcelona/SPA), Adriano (Inter Milan/ITA), Luis Fabiano (Sao Paulo)



PHOTO: INTERNET SOURCE

Ronaldo hobbling off the pitch after injuring his thigh on March 6 during the Primera Liga match against Racing de Santander.

German Cup Bremen in final

Football

AFP, Bremen

Bundesliga leaders Werder Bremen needed to show all their steel to reach the German Cup final with two late strikes from Brazilian Ailton and Paraguayan Nelson Haedo Valdez sinking second division VfB Lubeck 3-2 in extra-time.

The win keeps Bremen, who last won the competition in 1999, on course for a league and cup double with second-placed Bayern Munich trailing Werder by nine points in the Bundesliga.

"We let Lubeck play too much but showed we will fight to the end," said an emotional Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf.

Bremen needed to show all their resilience in front of the 41,000 fans at the Weserstadion twice coming from behind against lowly Lubeck.

In the 11th minute Lubeck shocked the hosts with a curling corner from the right flicked into his own net by Serbia and

Montenegro international Milad Krstajic.

Brazilian marksman Ailton could not find his magic touch - his moment was to come later - throughout the 90 minutes seeing two shots scream wide and an effort cleared off the line.

Johan Micoud restored parity on 54 minutes with a glancing header but plucky Lubeck took the game to extra-time and Iranian Zandi put them in front three minutes in with the ball deflecting off Krstajic.

Bremen looked set for a cup humiliation but two goals in three minutes saved their skin.

In the 111th minute Ailton turned on a sixpence and curled a beautiful effort into the bottom corner to level at 2-2.

Substitute Valdez then powered a volley to send Bremen into the lead for the first time with time running out.

"It was great to score the winning goal and I think we deserved it over all," beamed Valdez.

Bremen will face either Borussia Monchengladbach or Alemannia Aachen, who tussle on Wednesday, in the Berlin final on May 29.



PHOTO: AFP

DON'T GET SO UPSET! Werder Bremen's Brazilian striker Ailton (R) tries to avoid collision with a tumbling VfB Lubeck's goalkeeper Maik Wilde during their German Cup semi-final in Bremen on March 16.