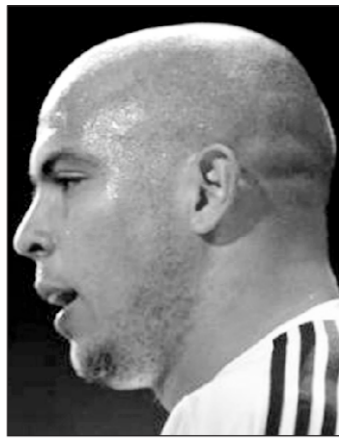




DAVID BECKHAM



JOSE MOURINHO



RONALDO

# Chelsea plot a sensation

## Football

AFP, London

Big-spenders Chelsea were reported to have lined up Porto coach Jose Mourinho as their new manager and were ready to snatch Ronaldo and David Beckham from Real Madrid.

Mourinho was reported to have confirmed he would be taking over from Claudio Ranieri but Chelsea sources said he had yet to close a 4.5 million pound a year deal with club owner Roman Abramovich.

And Porto president Nuno Pinto da Costa warned Abramovich he would go to war over the move.

Porto have accused Chelsea of illegally approaching Mourinho about the prospect of taking over from Ranieri in the summer and da Costa insists he will not sit back and watch his coach leave.

"I want to make it clear that we will go to war with Chelsea over Mourinho. We will bring in UEFA,

FIFA - whoever we need to," he told Daily Star.

"The attitude of the Russian (Abramovich) is the worst I have seen in the football world. He thinks that after buying Chelsea he can do what he wants and skip all the established rules."

Abramovich bought Chelsea for 140 million pounds last July and the Russian oil billionaire splashed out the same amount on new players.

But they have lost out to Arsenal in the English Premiership chase and face a Champions League semi-final exit at the hands of Monaco after losing the first leg 3-1.

But Porto were also reported to be set to offer Real Madrid coach Carlos Queiroz their job as the Portuguese was expected to be sacked by the Spanish giants in the summer after failing to do what Real president Florentino Perez signed him for -- "win things".

They were knocked out of the Champions League by Monaco and trail Valencia in the Spanish league.

And Perez was expected to be

ready to listen to an offer for his Brazil World Cup winner and England captain, whose celebrity lifestyle has taken the club by surprise, to fund another foray into the transfer market with presidential elections due this summer.

"Yes, Chelsea are thinking of Ronaldo and Beckham," admitted Ranieri.

"There is only one person in the world who can try to take them from Florentino Perez and he is called Roman Abramovich."

Ranieri confirmed that it is unlikely he will be at Stamford Bridge when they arrive. His future has been in doubt since the Abramovich take-over and the Italian believes he is on his way out.

Ranieri said: "I've never spoken about it before, because of the respect towards those who pay me. Sure, it's difficult thinking I will stay with Chelsea, so I'm thinking about what I'll be doing next year."

# Rivaldo takes time to think

INTERNET SOURCE, London

Rivaldo jetted home to Brazil yesterday with his English-based agent insisting his transfer to Bolton would still go ahead.

The former world and European player of the year has accepted the club's financial terms but is now consulting family members over his projected switch to England.

And his agent Peter Harrison insisted he remained "positive" that Bolton's biggest-ever transfer coup would go ahead as planned.

Harrison told the Press Association: "Bolton have made him an offer and if he decides to play for Bolton those are the terms he will accept."

"It is not about money. He is just making sure of his decision and everything is looking positive at the moment."

Harrison rejected rumours that rival clubs' attempts to hijack the deal were the reason for the delay in its completion.

Harrison added: "I've heard stories about other clubs but as far as I'm concerned that's not true."

"He just wants to discuss it at home. There is no hurry because he cannot play for Bolton this season."

"Obviously Bolton want it to be sorted out as soon as possible and hopefully that will happen in the next few days."

Earlier, Bolton had reacted cautiously to reports that the player had accepted financial terms.

A spokesman said: "Rivaldo is back in Brazil and he has not signed anything. We are not aware that he has agreed terms as yet."

# Trap keeps everyone guessing



AP, Genoa

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni is not closing the door completely on the prospect of bringing Roberto Baggio to the upcoming European championships, amid widespread fan and media support for such a move.

"The future is in the hands of god," Trapattoni said Tuesday.

Spain on Wednesday, marking his first national team call-up in five years.

At a joint news conference, Trapattoni and Baggio each dribbled carefully around questions regarding Italy's favorite player's future with the national team.

"You never say never in soccer," Trapattoni said. "From here to (June) many things can happen, but certainly not on the base of media pressure."

Baggio said he was already pleased just by the call up for Wednesday's game.

the Luigi Ferraris stadium field for practice.

"That's the most beautiful thing, the affection all the people have shown," Baggio said. "It's an important moment and I want to enjoy it."

A minor thigh injury that Baggio suffered in a league match Sunday did not appear to impede the 36-year-old striker's movement at all.

Trapattoni, who left Baggio at home for the 2002 World Cup amid widespread fan dissent, has often indicated that his team is better off with younger stars Francesco Totti and Alessandro Del Piero, who play

all-time scoring list with 27 goals.

Baggio also has scored 11 times in Serie A this season, placing him among the league leaders.

He reiterated Wednesday that he plans to retire at the end of the current Serie A season with his Brescia club.

"It's not an easy choice for me, but I think it's definitive," Baggio said, adding that he was also ruling out a spot on Italy's Olympic team. "That door is closed for sure. The difference in age between me and those kids is too great. I don't think it would work for many reasons."

The only regret Baggio expressed was his inability to play alongside Totti, the present Italian player considered most similar to him.

"It would have been a pleasure," he said. "I don't think I've ever had the chance to play with him."

Totti was not named to the roster for the Spain game due to a minor leg injury. His absence opens the way for Baggio to assume his regular role directing the attack.

"Baggio will play the position that Totti plays," said Trapattoni, holding both of his hands up with his fingers outstretched to indicate what number Baggio will wear: Totti's No. 10.

Going back to the 2002 World Cup, Trapattoni said he did not rule out Baggio, who was coming back from an injury, until the last minute.

"We spoke 15 days before the World Cup," Trapattoni said. "I do many things behind closed doors that you don't know about. I coached (Baggio) for three years at Juventus and I always played him. I've never had any problem with Roberto."

Trapattoni's comments Tuesday were sure to inspire more debate about Baggio's possible inclusion for the June 12-July 4 tournament in Portugal.

"There's always an opening in every room, I was taught that a long time ago in my little room as a kid," the coach said with a smile.



PHOTO: AFP

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES: Roberto Baggio (C) is lifted by Italian goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi while Christian Vieri (R) has a hearty laugh during a training session in Genoa, northern Italy on April 27.

"Roberto knows this is an old story -- two and a half years, three years -- I've always left the door open. Today here's here and that's significant by itself."

Baggio was called up by Trapattoni for a "farewell" appearance in Italy's friendly here against

"There are many players here who deserve to be at the Euros. For me this is already a great honor," he said. "Something more? I don't know."

About 2,500 fans gave Baggio a rousing round of applause when he became the last player to jog onto

the same playmaker-striker role as Baggio.

Baggio's last match for Italy was a Euro 2000 qualifier against Belarus on March 31, 1999. Since his first game in 1989, he has made 55 appearances for the "Azzurri" in all and stands fourth on the team's

# Inzaghi's Euro worry



REUTERS, Rome

AC Milan's Filippo Inzaghi risks missing Euro 2004 after deciding to go ahead with an operation on a knee injury, his club's official website said on Wednesday.

"I'm very disappointed, but it's the only solution. Together with Milan's doctors we've decided to operate as soon as possible," Inzaghi said.

"My first and only thought is to cure this problem once and for all so that I can return to action without the fear of further problems," he added.

The usually prolific striker has suffered a series of injuries this season that have limited him to just

three goals in 14 league appearances.

In the short term he will miss Milan's showdown with second-placed AS Roma at the San Siro stadium on Sunday, when Milan can wrap up the Serie A title with a win.

More serious, however, is the fact that Inzaghi will face a race against time to challenge for inclusion in Italy's squad for the European championship, which begins June 12.

Milan's doctors said they expect his recovery to take about 20 days.

On May 17 national team coach Giovanni Trapattoni will announce his list of players for the Azzurri's pre-tournament training camp at Coverciano near Florence, a good indicator of the final squad.

Italy's players have their last chance to stake their claim for a place on May 30 when they contest

their final pre-tournament friendly against Tunisia.

Three days later Trapattoni must submit his final list of 22 players to UEFA ahead of Italy's opening Euro 2004 match against Denmark on June 14.

Even if Inzaghi had been fit, he would have faced tough competition for a place in the squad.

After the automatic selections of Roma's Francesco Totti and Inter Milan's Christian Vieri, there is a long list of strikers challenging to spearhead Italy's attack, including Juventus's Alessandro Del Piero, Marco Di Vaio and Fabrizio Miccoli.

Lazio's Bernardo Corradi, Roma's Antonio Cassano and Parma's Alberto Gilardino are also contenders.



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal coach Luis Filipe Scolari gestures during a training session at Coimbra Stadium, central Portugal on April 27.

# Big Phil warns the other Ronaldo



AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has threatened to discard Cristiano Ronaldo for Euro 2004 after the Manchester United winger pulled out of training for Wednesday's friendly against Sweden.

"Cristiano Ronaldo is an unknown for me. I've seen him play more for Manchester United than

here," the 2002 Brazil World Cup coach said.

Ronaldo pulled out of training with a thigh strain.

"I want players who are as keen to play for their country as their club," Scolari said. "If you can play with a knock for your club, you can do it for your country."

The sentiment will probably not endear him to United manager Alex Ferguson.

Scolari said he already had 26 names in his head for a squad of 23 he will announce in mid-May.

# Anti-draw Blatter

## Football

AFP, Berlin

FIFA President Sepp Blatter said Tuesday he wants to change the rules of football so that matches can no longer be drawn.

"Every match should have a winner. We should not have to go home with a draw," the head of football's world governing body said in an interview with German sports agency SID.

"When you play cards, bowls or a board game there is always a winner and a loser."

"In football too we should have the courage to ensure there is a result in every match. That is what I want."

Blatter said that in the event of ties played over two legs - such as in the Champions League quarter-finals - the best solution would be a penalty shootout at the end of the 90 minutes in the second leg.

Under current rules, extra-time is played if scores are level at the end of the second leg match.

"The penalty shootout is always the best solution to get a result," Blatter said.

"It is not right that a tie which is played over two legs must go into extra-time to get a result."

"This means that the home team effectively gets a second home match."

"We cannot continue having draws. People want to win. Pierre de Coubertin said the most important thing was to take part, not to win. But that's wrong."

"We have one goal in life, and in sport we want to win."

However, FIFA vice-president Julio Grondona rejected Blatter's proposal, saying: "Football cannot be any better than it already is."

The Argentinian added that Blatter must have been speaking "in a moment of euphoria".

Blatter's suggestion to do away with tie games also been met with derision by the media.

Germany's top-selling daily Bild put Blatter on Wednesday's front page in its traditional winner/loser section. The FIFA president was the loser of the day.

"What's so wrong about a fair draw?" wrote Bild. "This proposal deserves a red card."

Both Bild and German soccer magazine Kicker asked visitors of their Web Sites to vote for or against the proposal.

On its Web Site Bild listed two other recent Blatter ideas, scrapping summer breaks and increasing the number of teams at World Cups to 36, saying both had been rejected. Bild also mocked Blatter for ruling on such matters as football shirts and goal celebrations.

Britain's Daily Mail said: "Are these the well thought out ideas to revolutionize the world's game or the mutterings of a man who has been in office too long for his -- and football's -- own good?"

The Mail also ridiculed a number of Blatter's previous ideas, such as playing four quarters instead of two halves, having a World Cup every two years and the wearing of sexier attire in

the women's game to attract more television viewers. "Football has been listening to the 68-year-old Blatter -- and his stranger than fiction ideas -- for far too long."

The newspaper said they were theories which, were they ever put into practice, would "turn the Beautiful Game into instant chaos."

In The Times, Blatter's latest idea was seen as a way of pandering to the American market.

"The Americans may have outlawed the draw in their own sports. It doesn't follow that messing up football will make it sexy to America."

England's Football Association

declined to comment on Blatter's suggestion when contacted by Reuters.

In the interview, Blatter also said he opposed using video cameras to help decide contested refereeing decisions, something which is already used in rugby union.

"As long as I am FIFA president, there will be no technological aid. We must live with the uncertainty of sport and the referees' mistakes," the Swiss said.

"I will always refuse to use cameras to decide if there was offside or not, or if the foul was made in the penalty area or not."

The most powerful man in football said he believed Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer was a strong candidate to succeed Lennart Johansson as the president of the European governing body UEFA.

"His work as president of the World Cup Organising Committee in Germany will be over in 2006 and elections for the UEFA presidency follow that."

"I can see him becoming president, even if Michel Platini has the same ambitions."



SEPP BLATTER

# Eto set to become Africa's best

## Football

AFP, Johannesburg

The performances of Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o in last year's Confederations Cup tournament in France are expected to be enough to see him named as the 2003 African Footballer of the Year.

The Spanish-based forward is one of three candidates for the award to be handed over as the highpoint of Friday's African soccer awards in Yaounde, Cameroon.

Ivorian striker Didier Drogba and Nigerian captain Austin "Jay-Jay" Okocha are the other two finalists.

Eto'o, 23, scored a brilliant individual goal against Brazil in Paris and helped Cameroon to last June's final of the eight-nation Confederations Cup tournament, which was overshadowed by the death of compatriot Marc-Vivien Foe.

During the tournament, he also rushed back to Spain to score twice in the King's Cup final when his club Real Mallorca beat Recreativo Huelva 3-0.

Drogba is being lauded for his goalscoring record in the French league last season, first for En Avant Guingamp and then at Olympique Marseille after his transfer in the off-season.

The 26-year-old forward, whose national team failed to reach the African Nations Cup finals, scored 17 goals last season for Guingamp and nine before the end of 2003 for Marseille.

Okocha, who plays in England for Bolton, is on for an honours double after winning player of the tournament at this year's African Nations Cup.

The vote in Yaounde is made by members of the Confederation of African Football's media and technical committees and is one of 12 awards to be made at a gala ceremony.

Cameroon are also expected to win the team of the year award after their Confederations Cup performance where they lost 1-0 to a golden goal by France in the final.

# Dutch forward for Gunners

AFP, London

Arsenal have signed Dutch winger Robin van Persie from Feyenoord for an undisclosed fee, the Premiership champions said.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said the 20-year-old, who can play up front or on the wing, is seen as a long-term replacement for fellow Dutchman Dennis Bergkamp.

Van Persie, who will undergo a medical at Highbury, had been linked to a number of clubs around Europe, including PSV Eindhoven, Bundesliga leaders Werder Bremen and Spanish side Sevilla.

"Robin is a great young talent and a fantastic signing for the club," Wenger said.

"He has shown great potential at both club and under-21 international level and will help strengthen our squad considerably."

"He has a great left foot and is a great passer of the ball with excellent vision. He is a versatile player and is comfortable playing as a striker or on the wing."

"We are all looking forward to Robin joining us for pre-season in July."

The Gunners made a bid for van Persie in the January transfer window, but Feyenoord turned them down and Wenger brought in Sevilla's Jose Reyes instead.

# Gerard for Keane?

## Football

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson was reported Wednesday to be considering a 20 million pound bid for Liverpool's Steven Gerrard to replace captain Roy Keane.

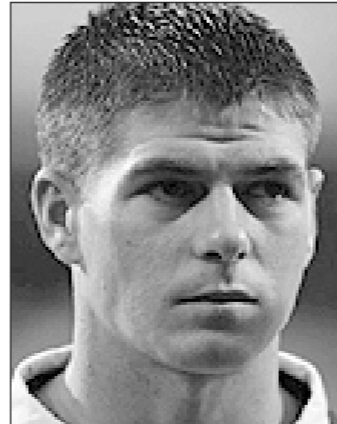
Keane has admitted he is unsure about whether he will see out the remaining two years of his contract at Manchester.

"You can't look too far ahead in football," said the 32-year-old Irishman who was believed to have infuriated Ferguson with his decision to come out of international retirement.

"I think as a player, you can't be looking too far ahead," Keane added.

"And in football, I think you should always expect the unexpected. I'm sitting here saying: 'I've got two years left on my contract'; many players have said that and before you know it, they're off."

And The Sun reported Ferguson wanted Gerrard, 23, to become Keane's long-term



STEVEN GERRARD

replacement.

Gerrard would be damned forever by Anfield fans if he left the club he skips.

And Ferguson might face a battle with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger who said he was looking for a "real gem" to bolster his league winners.

"If I can find a real gem I will make an effort," Wenger said.