

Primera Liga
Bravo Valencia

Valencia were crowned Spanish champions for the second time in three years, and the sixth time in their 75-year history, when they beat Sevilla 2-0.



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS! Valencia fans celebrate after watching their side defeat Sevilla 2-0 on May 9 to clinch the Primera Liga title.

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez, who guided his team to their second Spanish title in three years on Sunday, cracked a rare smile after Valencia beat Sevilla to clinch the championship crown.

both went close but Valencia hung on, despite their nerves. Valencia were finally able to crack open the champagne after Baraja got a second goal for the visitors seconds before the whistle, after dancing past several Sevilla defenders.

TOP SIX Spanish league table after all of Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points): Valencia 36 23 8 5 70 24 77

VINNERS' LIS

A list of the last 10 winners of the Spanish league after Valencia clinched the 2003-2004 championship on Sunday: 2004: Valencia 2003: Real Madrid 2002: Valencia 2001: Real Madrid 2000: Deportivo La Coruna 1999: Barcelona 1998: Barcelona 1997: Real Madrid 1996: Atletico Madrid 1995: Real Madrid

AC Milan to play in HK

Italian champions AC Milan will head to Asia later this month for an exhibition match in Hong Kong, organisers announced Monday. Milan, who clinched back-to-back Serie A titles on May 2, will field a strong side in a May 30 match against Hong Kong outfit Kitchee.

Part of the proceeds from the match will go towards building a hospital extension for the United Christian Medical Service.

Atletico's Gil suffers stroke

Atletico Madrid owner and former club president Jesus Gil was in a stable but serious condition after suffering a stroke on Sunday. "I hope his life is not in danger but his situation is serious," hospital spokesman Mariano Malillos of the Clinica Centro told radio station Onda Cero.



JESUS GIL

24 hours. "Given his history of heart problems we just hope that he evolves favourably." The flamboyant and outspoken property magnate was admitted to hospital in the Spanish city of Talavera de la Reina at 1pm local time and was later transferred to the Clinica Centro in Madrid.

Less glamour please!

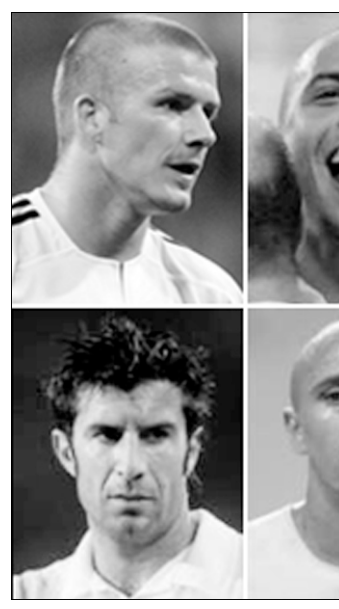
Football

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez is an expert businessman. He still has a lot to learn about football.

With David Beckham, Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo in their ranks, Real are the most glamorous team in the world and clearly second best in Spain.

Valencia are league champions and in the UEFA Cup final. Real are a distant second in the league and

not modern enough in his coaching methods. They chose to replace the club servant who had steered Real to two European Cups and two league titles with the media-friendly former Manchester United assistant.



THE 'GALACTICOS': (Clockwise from top L) David Beckham, Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Raul, Roberto Carlos and Luis Figo.

looking more than a little foolish. Coach Carlos Queiroz is likely to become the scapegoat for this disappointing season but much of the blame has to be laid at the door of Perez and his right-hand man Jorge Valdano.

Real's only recruit was Beckham who started the season well enough as he raced around in the centre of midfield and proved there was a fine footballer behind the marketing phenomenon.

However, his form began to wane as the season progressed, prompting fellow midfielder Ivan Helguera to say: "Beckham works very hard and is clearly a good player, but he's not Makelele and can't do the same job for the team that he did."

Ajax Dutch masters

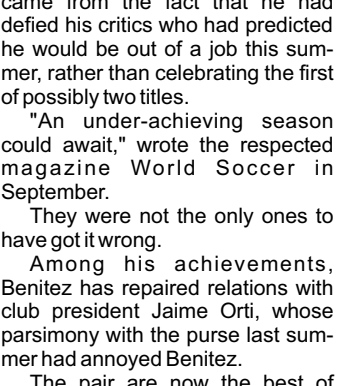
Ajax Amsterdam clinched their 29th Dutch title after beating NAC Breda 2-0 on Sunday to leave last season's champions PSV Eindhoven six points adrift with only one match remaining.

Benitez a survivor

Football

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez, who guided his team to their second Spanish title in three years on Sunday, cracked a rare smile after Valencia beat Sevilla to clinch the championship crown.

Gothenburg on May 19 to see their team play French side Olympique Marseille. Last season, the Valencia faithful were crying out for Benitez's sacking, after Valencia could only finish fifth in the league, but in recent matches have been chanting his names.



RAFA BENITEZ

have too many friends outside his own close circle but his professionalism has won the respect of everyone in the game.

Benitez went through the Real youth system as a player before a brief career with other clubs in the Spanish third and fourth divisions. He also cut his teeth on the sidelines with the Real junior teams before moving onto his first senior job with second division Extramadura in 1997, who he then guided to promotion into the top-flight of Spanish soccer.

Ligue 1 Giuly inspires Monaco

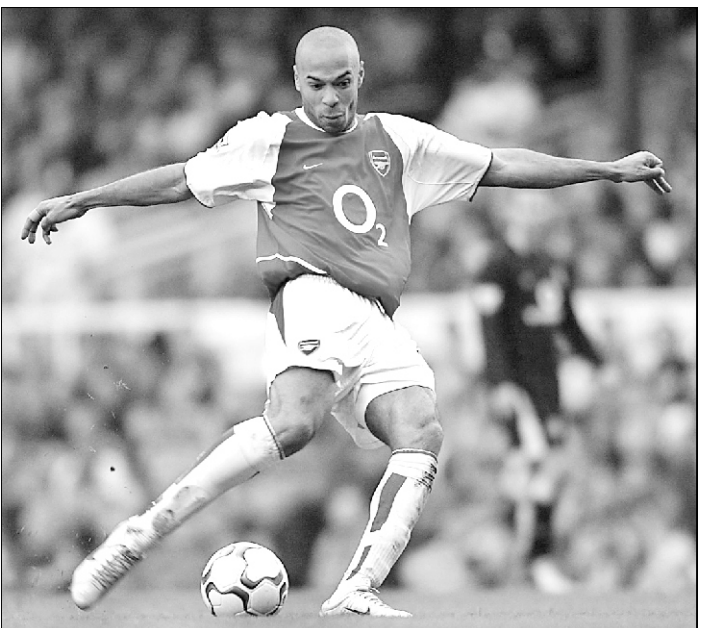
Monaco captain Ludovic Giuly scored a last-gasp goal to hand Olympique Marseille a 1-0 defeat and keep the principality team's Ligue 1 title hopes alive on Sunday.

Henry again hits

Football

Thierry Henry has become the first player to win the footballer-of-the-year award in successive seasons after he swept almost 90 per cent of the votes cast in the annual poll.

England midfielder Frank Lampard and Arsenal and France team mate Patrick Vieira to win the award from the English Football Writers' Association.



THIERRY HENRY

Henry joined that select band and made history of his own just two weeks after he was voted players' player-of-the-year for the second successive season by his peers. The striker has scored 37 goals this season, including 29 in the premier league, and has created countless others to inspire Arsenal to the title.

Premiership Gunners a step closer

Football

Arsenal are one game away from a place in the history books after a 1-0 defeat of London rivals Fulham.

captain Alan Shearer having a late penalty saved by Wolves goalkeeper Paul Jones. Since clinching the title with four games to spare, Arsenal have failed to reproduce the kind of form that has made them so difficult to beat.

Wenger said he did not believe his players fully realised what a momentous achievement it would be to finish the season unbeaten. But he was confident they would not stumble at the final hurdle.

Against relegated Leicester at Highbury on Saturday they will become the first side to go through an entire league campaign unbeaten since Preston North End's 'Invincibles' achieved the feat in a 12-team top flight in 1888-89.

The significance of the result is simple: Newcastle must beat Southampton on Wednesday and Liverpool at Anfield on Saturday to claim fourth place and the final qualifying spot for next season's Champions League.

backpass, the Dutch international inexplicably attempted to dribble the ball past Jose Antonio Reyes right in front of his own goal.

Things could not have been more different at St James' Park where Newcastle must have thought the three points were in the bag when a Paul Ince push on Gary Speed gave them an 83rd-minute penalty.

THIERRY HENRY

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points): Arsenal 37 25 12 0 71 25 87