

Carlos states his terms

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Real Madrid's Brazil defender Roberto Carlos confirmed his wish to sign a new four-year contract and not the two-year deal currently on the table, O Globo newspaper reported.

Roberto Carlos is in Rio de Janeiro preparing for Brazil's South American 2006 World Cup qualifier against Argentina in Belo Horizonte on Wednesday.

"They'll say 'We'll see how he plays the next two years and then we have the option of giving him two more years at the club,'" he said.

"But I'm 31 and my career path will not allow me to accept this kind of thing."

"What I want is to sign a contract for another four years here," Roberto Carlos had told Spanish radio station Onda Cero on May 11.

He added in O Globo that he had received an offer from Chelsea but that it was not his wish to go there. "I promised myself I would finish my career at Real Madrid," he said.

Brazil, Argentina clash Thursday

AFP, Montevideo

The eyes of the footballing world will be very firmly trained on Belo Horizonte on Wednesday when Brazil host Argentina in one of the great international fixtures of world football.

The teams have won the World Cup seven times between them and have produced icons of the footballing world such as Diego Maradona and Pele.

Geographically they are neighbours and have a great deal in common economically, culturally and socially but they are the fiercest of rivals when it comes to football.

Argentina lead the 10-team table with 11 points from five matches and Brazil are third with nine points and the top four qualify for the finals in Germany.

The fifth-placed side has a chance to go through via a play-off.

During a week of fixtures which run Tuesday to Sunday, it is the Mineirao stadium clash between the two giants of South America which is capturing the attention of football lovers worldwide.

Whatever the competition, all be it on the club scene in the Libertadores Cup, or in international competitions, the intense rivalry between these two countries is extraordinary.

It is perhaps Argentina who have the most riding on this match having been in the shadow of Brazil since their fifth world title in the Far East two years ago. At that tournament, Argentina, considered one of the favourites, went out in the first round.

Coach Marcelo Bielsa has problems however. Andres D'Alessandro, Juan Roman Riquelme and Esteban Cambiasso all have injuries and central defender Robert Ayala of Valencia is suspended.

Bielsa will be relying on players such as Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez to do their best if



they want to earn a prestigious victory.

Bielsa on Sunday named the final three players to his 21-man squad for the match.

Boca Juniors goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri was joined

by his team-mate, defender Nicolas Burdisso while another home-based player, Luis Gonzalez of River Plate, was called up to join the midfield. Argentina fly to Brazil on Monday.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has seen his side run into form following friendlies against France (0-0), a Catalonia selection (5-2) and Hungary (4-1).

The Brazilians however are not taking anything for granted. Real Madrid striker Ronaldo said: "We value the high standard of our opponents and this is Brazil's most important match of the year."

"We will have to remove the benefit of the doubt over our form by leaving the pitch with a good result."

Inter Milan striker Adriano said: "Argentina are always great rivals, great opponents and for that reason we no we are going to have difficulty in getting a good result."

"But the team is playing well, we

have good spirit, and I think it will be a great match in the Mineirao."

Bolivia and Paraguay open the week of qualifiers literally on a highpoint at 3,600m above sea level at La Paz on Tuesday. Paraguay, coached by Anibal 'Mano' Ruiz of Uruguay, have been acclimatising in Sucre at 2,700m.

Bolivians and Paraguayans have played five times in La Paz in the history of World Cup qualifiers with a win for each team and three draws.

Also Tuesday in the border city of San Cristobal, surprise package Venezuela, so long a minor player on the continent but now in fourth spot, host Chile.

It was Venezuela who cost the job of Uruguay coach Juan Ramon Carrasco when they won 3-0 in Montevideo back in March. Carrasco was criticised for his attacking yet disorganised team and now Jorge Fossati makes his debut as the new coach at home to Peru, also on Tuesday.

Fossati will have at his disposal such talents as Alvaro Recoba, Alexander Lembo, Walter Pandiani and Javier Chevanton.

Ecuador and Colombia face up to each other in Quito on Wednesday with the visitors in particular having problems. Colombia had to leave out both Aston Villa striker Juan Pablo Angel from their plans because of knee problems and midfielder Freddy 'Totonio' Grisale because of a groin injury.

Lecce midfielder Jorge Bolano is also out injured and Galatasaray keeper Farid Mondragon was not available with a right shoulder injury.

The busy period continues at the weekend with another round of matches. Ecuador host Bolivia on Saturday, and then four fixtures are on Sunday - Argentina versus Paraguay, Peru versus Venezuela, Colombia versus Uruguay and Chile versus Brazil.

Owen backs Rooney

REUTERS, London

England's Michael Owen reckons his teenage strike partner Wayne Rooney could make the same impact on Euro 2004 as he did on the 1998 World Cup.

Owen was a relatively unknown 18-year-old when he scored one of the goals of the 1998 tournament in England's second round defeat by Argentina after a surging run from midfield.

Now he believes 18-year-old Rooney, who hit the headlines with a superb premier league match-winner for Everton against Arsenal aged only 16, could emulate that feat in his first tournament.

"Let's hope so," Owen told reporters at England's pre-Euro 2004 training base in Sardinia. "We all hope he's the sort of player who does things like that."

"Some players are just lucky, or whatever, and they do rise to the occasion. It's an unknown with Wayne because we've never seen him play outside the premiership, apart from a few qualifiers for England."

Italy tune up

Football

REUTERS, Tunis

Italy completed a confident 4-0 victory over African champions Tunisia on Sunday in their final warm-up game before Euro 2004.

After an own goal from Riadh Bouazizi in the 15th minute three Italians scored their debut goals for the national side.

A header from Fabio Cannavaro in the 27th minute gave the Italians a 2-0 lead at the break.

Coach Giovanni Trapattoni made six changes at halftime but his team maintained their dominance against a weakened Tunisia with two late goals ensuring a convincing scoreline.

A brilliant curling free kick from Andrea Pirlo in the 86th minute and then a last minute strike from Gianluca Zambrotta ensured a confidence-boosting victory for

the Azzurri.

Italy have a habit of struggling in pre-tournament friendlies, having lost their last three such matches but they never looked in danger of failing at a sparsely attended November 4 stadium.

Right from the outset Trapattoni's side looked confident and determined although it took a stroke of good fortune to break the deadlock.

Francesco Totti produced a superb turn and launched the ball towards Christian Vieri and Bouazizi's headed intervention was directed past his keeper Ali Boumnijel.

Italy are investing high hopes in the Totti-Vieri partnership and it almost delivered a second minute later when a brilliant pass from Totti put in his strike partner whose shot whistled just over the bar.

Poor defending assisted Italy's second when an unmarked

Cannavaro rose to head in a Totti corner.

After a couple of good chances it was not until the close of the game that the Italians made their dominance really count.

Pirlo's magnificent free kick from over 20 metres out capped an excellent display from the second half substitute and then Zambrotta did well from close range after Bernardo Corradi had caused havoc in the penalty area with a towering header.

"We showed we are in excellent shape and have the right mentality. The scoreline might give the impression of an easy match but the first half was tough and the lads really pleased me with this performance", Trapattoni told RAI television.

Italy have been drawn in group C at the European Championship finals where they will face Denmark, Sweden and Bulgaria.

90 years later they meet again!

REUTERS, London

A Brazil team has dusted off their boots for a unique rematch against lowly Exeter City -- 90 years after the sides first faced each other.

The Brazilians, featuring players who captured the 1994 World Cup, beat Exeter 1-0 in front of a sell-out crowd of 8,000 delighted fans, many beating samba drums.

Exeter, now a minor league side who almost went bankrupt last year, were the first professional team in the world to play Brazil when they toured South America in 1914.

The sides drew 3-3 in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil were happy to honour Exeter's centenary celebrations with a belated return leg on English soil.

Careca scored from the penalty spot just before halftime to win the match for Brazil, who also boasted such as Dunga and Mazinho, but Exeter also found reason to celebrate as the game generated much-needed cash.

"It is a fantastic atmosphere here," said commercial director Andy Gillard. "It is a great opportunity and we would love to return the compliment and go to Brazil to play, but we have bills to pay."

Sagnol to decide after Euro 2004

REUTERS, Paris

France international Willy Sagnol says he will make a final decision about his future at Bundesliga club Bayern Munich after Euro 2004, which ends in Portugal on July 4.

"I want to leave Bayern, that is a clear fact. I've said this to the club's officials six months ago," Sagnol told French public television on Sunday.

"But right now, I'm preparing for Euro 2004 and I will decide after the tournament," he added.

Sagnol, whose contract runs until 2006, said earlier this month he wanted to leave Munich with former coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.



PHOTO: AFP

Italy's defender Fabio Cannavaro (C) heads with Tunisian goalkeeper Ali Boumnijel (L) stranded during their friendly international in Tunis on May 30.

Chapuisat still has the hunger

Football

REUTERS, Geneva

Striker Stephane Chapuisat will be the centre of attention at Basel's St Jakob Park on Wednesday when he is expected to earn his landmark 100th cap for Switzerland.

If the 34-year-old forward plays in Switzerland's friendly against Germany, as is expected, he will reach three figures and be only 12 caps short of Alain Geiger's Swiss record.

Having made his debut for Switzerland as a fresh-faced 19-year-old in 1989, Chapuisat has scored 21 goals in his 99 appearances.

But he is not letting the prospect of earning his 100th cap

cloud his focus on next month's Euro 2004 in Portugal, where he will attempt to go out of international soccer with a bang.

"I believe that Euro 2004 will be interesting for Switzerland," said Chapuisat, looking ahead to his farewell to the international stage. "Only great performances will allow us to reach the quarter-finals, but we will try."

"I want to make a big contribution in Portugal before putting an end to my international career at the end of Euro 2004. That is my focus."

Switzerland will be the underdogs in Group B at the European Championship, starting on June 12, where they face France, England and Croatia.

Chapuisat is the longest-serving Swiss player and repre-

sented his country in the World Cup finals in the United States in 1994 as well as in Euro 96 in England.

He has waited eight years for another opportunity to play on the highest stage.

In 2001, his international career was seemingly over when he announced his retirement after being left on the bench by coach Koebi Kuhn for a World Cup qualifier against Yugoslavia.

But the two men made up and Chapuisat missed just 22 minutes of the eight group games as he helped to book a place in the finals of Euro 2004. His partnership with Alexander Frei proved crucial to the Swiss success.

A former Champions League winner with Borussia Dortmund in 1997, Chapuisat had intended

to call time on his career altogether after Euro 2004.

But having helped Young Boys to qualify for the Champions League with second place in the Swiss league, he has agreed to put his ageing limbs through one final domestic season.

"I want to be there when we play in the Champions League qualification," Chapuisat said. "I never thought we could achieve that with Young Boys. Now it is an enormous challenge."

"I'm glad I've decided to play for another year. In June 2005, I will take on a new role with Young Boys, which is yet to be decided, but before that I want to make a success of my final year."

"Nothing will be easy but I want to enjoy an excellent season."



PHOTO: AFP

Bulgarian and Lille player Vladimir Manchev poses with his bride after they got married in Sofia on May 30.



PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan's Andrei Shevchenko brushes off a challenge by two players of Hong Kong side Kitchee in their exhibition game at the Hong Kong Stadium on May 30.

Milan suffer HK surprise

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Italian Serie A champions AC Milan were dealt a humiliating blow when they lost 2-1 to unheralded Hong Kong club Kitchee in an exhibition match on Sunday.

Although missing most of their star players who were either on international duty or were unavailable for the match, AC Milan were left red-faced against a local side, who finished runners-up in the local league.

Indonesian striker Rochi Putiray did the damage to the Italian side, finding the net in the 67th and 80th minutes as Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti's men put up a lacklustre performance before a

crowd of disbelieving 17,000 spectators.

Ancelotti maintained a brave face despite the shock result.

"It's never pleasant to lose. The most important thing was to give the spectators a good game and I think we have achieved this objective. There are always surprises in football," said Ancelotti.

The 33-year-old Putiray was overjoyed by his team's unexpected win, which ranks among the club's finest.

"I really didn't expect this kind of result. It's a total dream to have scored two goals against a side like AC Milan. I am really happy that I was given the chance to play against this side. I have to thank my coach Ricky Cheng for believing in me."

Kitchee, who were strength-

ened by guest players Luis Boa Morte from Fulham and ex-Real Madrid defender Predrag Mijatovic among others, put up a lion's performance against their more heralded opponents, who toiled in the heat.

"Certainly the heat affected us, especially towards the end of the match," Ancelotti said.

The local side's mainland goalkeeper Xiao Guojin had an outstanding game as he pulled off a string of saves in the first half.

He came to his side's rescue in the 32nd minute when he kept out Cristian Brocchi's powerful 15-metre shot before being called into action again two minutes before the break, stopping Marco Borriello's close-range effort.

But Xiao's best save came at the stroke of half-time when he

stopped a venomous Shevchenko 18-metre drive.

Shevchenko finally overcame Kitchee's stubborn defence when he opened the scoring three minutes in to the second half when he headed home Serginho's cross.

The 27-year-old Ukrainian, who recently signed an extended contract that will keep him with the Serie A champions until 2009, was always a danger, but the Italian giants were unable to breach Kitchee's defence again.

Putiray found the equaliser in the 67th minute, sliding home Luis Boa Morte's right-wing cross before striking again 10 minutes before the final whistle after prodding home the ball from a Cheung Kin-fung left-wing cross to complete a famous victory for the local side.



PHOTO: AFP

ALREADY AHEAD OF HIS PAPA? Spanish player Raul Gonzalez plays with his son Jorge after a practice session at Las Rozas Stadium, near Madrid on May 30.

Dortmund release Sammer

REUTERS, Berlin

Bundesliga club Borussia Dortmund and coach Matthias Sammer agreed to part company ahead of time on Sunday, the club's official website reported.

Dortmund said Sammer, who started as coach in July 2000, will cease working for the club on June 30, two years before his contract was due to run out.

"Together we came to the decision that a separation is the best solution at this point in time, even if it is hard to take for all concerned," the site quoted club president Gerd Niebaum as saying.