



Sevilla players jubilate with the UEFA Cup trophy after defeating Middlesbrough in the final at the PSV Stadium in Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Magath sees life after Ballack

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich manager Felix Magath believes Michael Ballack's summer transfer to English champions Chelsea could actually help his team to play better football next season.

German international captain Ballack seems certain to move to Chelsea in one of the worst kept secrets of the summer and Magath believes it will force his team to be less reliant on providing crosses to feed Ballack's aerial threat.

"I had two great years with him and wish him all the best at Chelsea," Magath said in an interview with Bild daily.

"But I have to say I am looking forward to a Bayern without Ballack. It is a challenge to form a team without him."

"Michael's departure will have consequences. His aerial ability will be gone but I think we can now fulfil more of our potential."

"We will play more on the ground. Next season the fans should see more attractive football."

Despite winning a league and cup double Bayern have been accused of playing dour football at times this season and are set for a busy summer in the transfer market.

"We have a good team at the moment that harbours international ambitions. We can replace Michael Ballack and there could be two or three new players arriving," revealed Magath.

Bayern have already had a six million euro bid for Schalke's Brazilian playmaker Lincoln turned down but are set to sign German international attacker Lukas Podolski from FC Cologne for a similar fee.

The German champions have also registered their interest in SV Hamburg's Belgian international defender Daniel van Buyten.

Spurs' request turned down

AP, London

The Premier League turned down Tottenham's request that its season-ending loss to West Ham to be replayed because of a suspected food-poisoning outbreak that affected 10 of its players.

Sunday's 2-1 loss left Arsenal -- which beat Wigan 4-2 -- overtake Tottenham for fourth place and clinch a spot in the Champions League qualifying rounds.

The players became ill hours before the game, and the club asked Premier League officials for a postponement shortly before kick-off.

The league would only sanction a four-hour delay and the game went ahead on time with several players clearly sick.

Faced with a place in the less prestigious UEFA Cup rather than the more lucrative Champions League, Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy wrote an open letter to the Premier League to ask for a replay.

After the hearing, Levy declined to comment on what, if any, action Tottenham would take.

"The Premier League will be sending out a letter, we will have a meeting with our board and decide what our next course of action is," he said. "Let's wait and see what happens."

Pearce wields the axe

REUTERS, London

Manchester City manager Stuart Pearce announced a clearout of 10 players including several major international signings on Thursday.

The released men, including French defender David Sommeil, a 3.4 million pound (6.35 million dollars) signing from Girondins Bordeaux in 2003, were told their contracts are not to be renewed.

Pearce's plans were confirmed by the club website which reported that he met each player individually earlier this week to explain his decisions.

The departing men also include on-loan Dutch forward Kiki Muisampa, from Atletico Madrid, and Spanish midfielder Albert Riera, from Espanyol.

Pearce has also released Dutch reserve goalkeeper Geert de Vlieger, Danish defender Mikkel Bischoff and Finnish midfielder Tuomas Haapala.

He said last week that he was looking to recruit "four top-line players" and bolster his squad in other ways. This may mean promoting some of the promising youngsters who helped City reach the FA Youth Cup final.

City finished 15th in the Premier League.

Sevilla savour Euro success

UEFA CUP

REUTERS, Eindhoven

trophy in the year of our centenary," Pep Marti told Spanish TV. "For the fans and at least half of the city of Sevilla this will be a great day of celebration."

McClaren could not inspire another comeback reminiscent of Boro's rollercoaster ride to the final as the English side failed to spark in their first appearance at such a level.

Not even the halftime introduction of Italian striker Massimo Maccarone, hero from the astonishing four-goal comeback victories in the quarter and semifinal victories could lift a side playing their 64th game of a long and demanding season.

"We could have played better but credit to them they were a class side and deserved it," Boro captain Gareth Southgate told ITV.

In a bright opening Brazilian rightback Daniel sent a shot fizzing past Mark Schwarzer's far post early on.

It was Sevilla who settled the better, Adriano and Luis Fabiano giving Boro some early scares. In quick succession they were allowed to get in crosses from the byline requiring last-ditch clearances as Javier Saviola lurked.

The Argentine, who has flourished at Sevilla during a season-long loan from Barcelona, was then

allowed too much time on the edge of the box to fire a well-struck shot which cannoned into Gareth Southgate.

Sevilla were rewarded for their early dominance with the opening goal on 26 minutes. Daniel planted a perfect cross on to the head of Fabiano who gave Schwarzer, wearing a protective mask, after fracturing a cheekbone less than three weeks ago, no chance with a well-placed downward header into the corner.

With Boro rattled, Adriano then ran at the heart of the retreating defence and thumped his shot over the bar.

Sevilla replaced Saviola with Kanoute at halftime and the Spaniards threatened again soon after the restart with Adriano curling in after Schwarzer could only parry Kanoute's shot from a Jesus Navas cross.

Maresca added a third six minutes later with a left foot shot from the edge of the box and Kanoute pounced at the death to score.

"We have achieved something very important," Maresca told Spanish TV. "It was a perfect day. I think we deserve it and so do the fans. It is important that they enjoy this moment."

"There was a lot of tension and a lot of pressure, but the suffering was all worth it to bring some joy to our fans," said coach Juande Ramos.

Viduka said: "If I'd put that chance away it could have been a different story at 1-1."

"I thought we could go all the way tonight, the way we played in the last two games, but today it just wasn't meant to be."

Kewell out to make amends

Football

REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool have agreed to replace around 1,000 FA Cup final tickets that were stolen last week after Millennium Stadium officials refused to issue replacements on security grounds.

Liverpool will replace the tickets from a stock that were to be released after a ballot of members of the club's fan card scheme.

Chief executive Rick Parry said: "We are confident the vast majority of supporters affected will be offered replacement tickets for the final."

"Obviously, those supporters who had applied for inclusion in the ballot will be disappointed, but we feel this is the best way to deal with a very difficult situation."

The missing tickets were stolen in a raid on a Royal Mail van.

Liverpool will face West Ham in Saturday's FA Cup final in Cardiff.

UEFA wins court battle

AP, London

European soccer's governing body won a court case against Web site operators who illegally pirated highlights of Champions League matches for broadcast on the Internet.

In upholding UEFA's claim of copyright infringement, the High Court in London issued an injunction preventing the use of match footage except on authorized Web sites.

The court also ordered the confiscation of all equipment used by the pirate operators and ordered them to pay "substantial costs," UEFA said in a statement Thursday.

The amount of damages has yet to be decided.

Another Italian official quits

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Italian Football Federation vice-president Innocenzo Mazzini has resigned as the scandal surrounding published telephone conversations continues to make waves through the game.

In a resignation letter distributed by the Federation, Mazzini said that he felt "extreme discomfort" and the need to resign in order to "put aside any misunderstandings".

The Federation is being led by Giancarlo Abete ahead of a federal council meeting on Tuesday which is set to discuss Carraro's resignation.

On Wednesday, Juventus CEO Antonio Giraudo was put under investigation for false accounting.

Judicial sources in Turin said that a magistrates' investigation into Giraudo, related to Juve's transfer dealings, had been

underway for some time.

Juventus are already under the spotlight of two magistrates' investigations looking into Mazzini's business operations. He is being investigated by magistrates in Naples and Rome in probes into football gambling and the operation of a management company owned by his son Alessandro.

The GEA management firm has nearly 200 players and coaches on its books and Rome magistrates have put them under investigation for "illegal competition with use of threats and violence".

Juventus, whose owners have declined to give any public backing to Mazzini and Giraudo, were due to hold a board meeting later on Thursday.

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on refereeing appointments.

Mazzini has not been put under investigation by any of the probes now looking into Italian football and the role of Mazzini in the game.

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Ronaldo happy at Madrid

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazil striker Ronaldo looked to rebuild bridges with Real Madrid on Wednesday when he said he would be happy to stay at the Primera Liga club.

"At the moment there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the club after a difficult year," Ronaldo told a news conference.

"But I have a contract with Real (until 2008) so when I return from (next month's) World Cup, if the new president wants me I would be delighted to stay."

The striker appeared to be on his way out in February when, after being whistled by a section of fans, he said he would consider his future at the end of the season.

Florentino Perez then quit as club president to be replaced by Fernando Martin, who in turn was ousted by the board last month.

A presidential election is due to be held at the end of the season although the result is not expected

"Many times the responsibility if things go wrong seems to fall on one or two players, and one bad event affects the atmosphere and the team's performance."

"I hope things are put right soon so that everyone can be a little calmer and we can all look forward to a great season next year."

Ronaldo is likely to miss Real's last game of the season against Sevilla on Tuesday because of injury but is looking ahead to the World Cup in Germany in positive mood.

"It has been a difficult year for me with injuries but I have got over them and the important thing now is to prepare properly for the World Cup," he said.

"I am not aiming to be the top scorer, I just want to win the Cup and if I can score three or more goals I will be happy."

Ronaldo joined Real from Inter Milan in 2002 for 35 million euros (41.79 million dollars).

RONALDO

Spain eye Euro double

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

double in 1958, 1960 and 1966 when the UEFA Cup was known as the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. In each of those three years, Real Madrid won the European Cup and Barcelona lifted the old Fairs Cup.

Already assured of a UEFA Cup place next season, Sevilla, who are celebrating their centenary, can still qualify for the Champions League final.

With Barcelona taking on Arsenal in the Champions League final in Paris on May 17, Spain could achieve a fourth European double after Sevilla's victory in Eindhoven on Wednesday.

"Sevilla, their fans and Spanish football deserve this victory. Now is the moment to complete a double in European competitions," Spain's sports minister Jaime Lissavetzky told reporters.

Spanish clubs previously did

all the players highlighted the part played by their passionate supporters, while sports daily Marca on Thursday summed up the reaction of the fans with the headline: "Sevilla laugh and cry in ecstasy."

Goalkeeper Andres Palop said: "We give the fans ten out of ten for their support. They have been behind us from the very start of the campaign. A large part of the victory is down to them."

The UEFA Cup is Sevilla's first European trophy and their first major success since winning the King's Cup in 1948, but club president Jose Maria del Nido hopes they do not have to wait so long again.

"The best is yet to come. We must continue working hard so that this is not just a one-off, and to see if we can improve on what we have achieved this year," he said.

Maresca 'snubs' Italy call

Football

INTERNET, undated

Enzo Maresca has dodged any questions of a possible World Cup call-up after leading Sevilla to UEFA Cup victory on Wednesday night.

The Italian was the Spaniard's star man in Holland on Wednesday as his brace helped his side demolish Middlesbrough 4-0.

That performance gave credibility to those who believe that Italy boss Marcello Lippi should select him for Germany 2006, but the midfielder just wanted to bask in his glory.

"The World Cup is not on my mind," stated the former Under-21 international, who has never won full honours.

"I just want to enjoy the moment. Sevilla have always believed in me and trusted in me, and it is only right to enjoy this with the team."

The 26-year-old joined the Liga outfit last summer after he finally brought his Juventus career to an end after spending previous seasons on loan at clubs such as Piacenza, Bologna and Fiorentina.

He's instantly settled with Sevilla and his eight goals in 28 games have made him the club's top scorer.

"It is very difficult to explain what happened tonight," he said after his outfit's convincing win at the PSV Stadion.

"It is virtually impossible to imagine. We won the Cup and I scored twice. It's the best day of my life. As you can imagine, I'm really happy."

Maresca, who has performed in England with West Bromwich Albion,

"We are very grateful to the fans

for coming all this way with us," he continued. "They have been very important for us."

PHOTO: AFP

Maresca celebrating his second strike against Middlesbrough on Wednesday night.

also wanted to thank the travelling Sevilla public whom he sent into delirium as his strikes made the game safe.

"We are very grateful to the fans

CROSSWORD