



Inter Milan players celebrate after winning the Coppa Italia by beating AS Roma in the two-legged final at the San Siro Stadium in Milan on Thursday.

Entire Juventus board resigns

AFP, Rome

The entire board of Serie A giants Juventus resigned Thursday over the phone tap scandal that has rocked Italian football.

A statement issued by the Turin club said: "The board has handed its mandate to the shareholders and called an ordinary assembly for June 29."

The decision comes after transcripts of telephone conversations involving Juventus board members Luciano Moggi and Antonio Giraudo with high-ranking Italian football federation (FIGC) officials were leaked to the press last week.

In the conversations, part of an inquiry by Turin prosecutors, Moggi tells Pierluigi Pairetto, head of the Italian referees' association and a member of the UEFA's referees' commission, which referees he would like assigned to several of his team's Serie A and Champions League matches.

The scandal prompted an investigation by the Italian football federation (FIGC), but it was later revealed that FIGC president Franco Carraro was given the transcripts back in February and had failed to take action.

Carraro quit his post on Monday. Adriano Galliani, the vice-president of Juve's fierce Serie A rivals AC Milan and president of the Italian football league (Lega Calcio), said the scandal was getting out of hand.

"Every day there are new allegations and we can't tell the real investigations from the false ones," he said.

"I don't know how it's going to end, but like everything, there is a beginning and an end."

"Those guilty will have to be punished and football will have to pick itself up."

"I hope things are not serious, and I have total faith in the judicial system to sort it out."

The influential Agnelli family, owners of Italian car manufacturers FIAT and the major shareholder of Juventus, have been under increasing pressure to repair their tarnished image since the scandal broke.

Last Sunday, after the 2-1 win over Palermo which left Juve needing a point from their final match of the season this Sunday to retain the title, FIAT vice-president John Elkann said: "These events have not left us indifferent. There is a time and a place to act."

On Thursday, Juve's share price fell by 9.3 percent.

Moggi has been at Juve for 12 years, during which time the club has won six league titles.

Alonso boost for Reds

AFP, London

Xabi Alonso appeared to be winning his battle to be fit for Liverpool's FA Cup final meeting with West Ham.

The Spanish midfielder has resumed training after twisting his ankle in Sunday's Premiership match with Portsmouth and, provided there is no reaction to Friday's session, should start in Cardiff.

If Alonso is fit, skipper Steven Gerrard is likely to take a wide right role in midfield.

But if the Spanish international fails to make it, Gerrard will play alongside Mohamed Sissoko with Djibril Cisse possibly landing a start on the flanks, with Harry Kewell on the other wing.

Fernando Morientes is likely to partner Peter Crouch up front but boss Rafael Benitez could opt to play Crouch as a lone striker with five in midfield, allowing Cisse and Kewell onto the flanks and Gerrard in an attacking linking role behind Crouch. Robbie Fowler is cup-tied while Luis Garcia is serving the final match of a three-game suspension.

Inter retain Coppa Italia

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Inter Milan won the Italian Cup on Thursday after a 3-1 second-leg win gave them a 4-2 aggregate win over AS Roma.

First-half goals from Argentines Esteban Cambiasso and Julio Cruz gave Inter a clear advantage before Nigerian Obafemi Martins added the third in the 76th minute. Congolese forward Shabani Nonda pulled a goal back for Roma in the 80th minute.

Inter's fifth Italian Cup win follows their triumph in the competition last season and offers some compensation for another season in which they failed to mount a serious bid for the league title they have not won since 1989.

"I'm glad for the lads, there have been a few disappointments in the last few months and they deserve this," said Inter coach Roberto Mancini, who claimed his 10th Italian Cup as a player and coach.

However Inter's fans did not appear to agree with their coach -- the 'ultras' walked out of their home in the North stand before the end of the game leaving behind a giant slogan declaring: "Half of a little Cup does not restore your dignity".

Roma's consolation came in the return to action of their captain Francesco Totti who had not played since he broke his ankle in a Serie A game against Empoli on Feb. 19.

The Roma forward, a key part of Italy coach's Marcello Lippi's World Cup squad, came on as a 53rd-minute substitute but by that time Roma were already 2-0 down on the night.

"Francesco didn't have a full game in him yet and unfortunately when he came on it was already very difficult for us. He looked sharp though," said Roma coach Luciano Spalletti.

Roma were without Brazilian forward Rodrigo Taddei and midfielder Simone Perotta, who were suspended, and were also missing several players through injury.

Cambiasso opened the scoring in spectacular fashion in the sixth minute with a thundering volley from the edge of the area after he had been picked out by compatriot Javier Zanetti.

Just before the break, Cruz made it 2-0 with a fine solo goal, dribbling into the area and rounding Roma's Brazilian keeper Doni before slotting into the unguarded goal.

Totti's return almost brought a goal when the Italy international drove just wide in the 68th minute but Inter extended their advantage when, after some confusion in the Roma defence, Cruz set up substitute Martins who slotted past Doni.

Nonda's headed goal was far too late to prompt a genuine revival and Roma now have to focus on the final game of the season, back at the San Siro, where they need to beat AC Milan and hope Fiorentina lose at Chievo if they are to get fourth place and a spot in the qualifying round of the Champions League.

'Sheva wants England move'

Football

INTERNET, undated

Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi has conceded that Andrei Shevchenko wants to go to England.

After constant denials that the Ukrainian is on his way to Chelsea to link up with Blues president Roman Abramovich, a blockbuster deal has moved a step closer with the first revelation from the Rossoneri that their leading marksman could depart.

Berlusconi is quoted by Ansa as telling a young fan: "Do you know he [Shevchenko] wants to leave?"

"He wants to go to England."

Italian press reports claim Milan will only allow the former Dynamo Kiev striker to leave if they can sign



ANDREI SHEVCHENKO

Arsenal's Thierry Henry or Barcelona star Samuel Eto'o as a replacement.

A likelier option would appear to be a San Siro return for Chelsea forward Hernan Crespo, who spent a season on loan with Milan and helped them reach the UEFA Champions League final last year, when they were defeated by Liverpool on penalties.

Shevchenko is battling to be fit in time to represent Ukraine in this summer's World Cup finals although he is fully expected to take some part in Germany.

Chelsea have promised three new signings this summer with Michael Ballack one of the players on Jose Mourinho's hit-list and due to seal his lucrative Bosman move from Bayern Munich.

Queiroz staying at United

AFP, Lisbon

Manchester United's assistant coach Carlos Queiroz, who has been cited as a likely candidate to take the helm of Benfica, said Thursday he was staying put at the English club.

"Don't even go there. My future lies with Manchester United," he told Lisbon-based news radio TSF when asked about the Portuguese media reports linking him to a move to Benfica.

Benfica are looking for a new coach since Dutchman Ronald Koeman resigned Monday to join PSV Eindhoven on a two-year contract after leading the defending Portuguese champions to a third place finish in the domestic league.

Outgoing England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson, was at Benfica between 1982 and 1984, and Fernando Santos, who has left AEK Athens, are among the other he national teams of Portugal, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, joined Manchester United for the first time in June 2002.

He was appointed coach of Real Madrid one year later but returned to Old Trafford shortly after he was sacked by the Spanish giants in May 2004.

Warne to deliver FA Cup final ball

REUTERS, London

Australian cricketer Shane Warne will deliver the FA Cup final ball to referee Alan Wiley on Saturday in Cardiff.

Warne will travel by helicopter from London to Cardiff before handing over the ball in the centre circle of the Millennium Stadium before the match between Liverpool and West Ham United.

"I'm told I'm the first Aussie in history to deliver the ball and being the 125th FA Cup it makes it even more special," Warne said in a statement from sports good manufacturers Mitre.

Leg-spinner Warne, the most successful wicket-taker in the history of test cricket, is playing county cricket for Hampshire during the English summer.

Ballack's mind on Chelsea

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany captain Michael Ballack has "no doubts" that he will move to Chelsea after finishing his fourth season at Bayern Munich on Saturday.

"I think my decision should be accepted and I shouldn't be kicked around anymore about it," Ballack, 29, said in an interview with Premiere, Germany's pay-TV network. "That has actually been annoying me."

Ballack has been jeered by Bayern fans in recent weeks. He declined to sign a contract extension with the champions that would have made him the best-paid Bundesliga player ever.

"I'm glad that Bayern are angry if I go," he said. "That shows I did a good job and that I'm an important player. That is also reflected in the offer that they made to keep me."

Playmaker Ballack is expected to announce his move to English champions Chelsea after Bayern's last match on Saturday against Borussia Dortmund. He has long wanted to play abroad and recalled how Bayern commercial manager Uli Hoeness lured him to Munich four years ago from Bayer Leverkusen.

"It's simply the chance now to do what I've always wanted to do," he said. "I can remember when Uli Hoeness said 'Come here, we're a top club. When you're 29 you can go abroad'."

"That time has come now," Ballack said.

Asked if there were any lingering doubts about whether he would move to Chelsea, Ballack said: "No, no doubts." He added: "Nothing has been signed yet."

Shearer ends with a goal

AFP, Newcastle

Alan Shearer brought the curtain down on his playing career on Thursday by doing what he has always done -- scoring a goal.

The 35-year-old scored a penalty with the final kick of the game as Newcastle beat Celtic 3-2 in his testimonial match at St James' Park.

A knee injury suffered three weeks ago prevented him playing a proper role, but he kicked the first and last balls of the match.

A crowd of 52,275 swelled the ground and generated about around one million pounds for charity.

It was the final appearance of a Newcastle career which began when Shearer joined for a then world record 15 million pounds from Blackburn in July 1996 and included a club-record 206 goals.

Juve to bring back Platini

INTERNET, undated

Juventus legend Michel Platini will have a part to play in the future of the club, according to reports in Italy.

The Italian giants are on the verge of starting a new era after the whole board of directors resigned on Thursday in the aftermath of the telephone interception saga which has rocked the Italian game.

As a result, the Old Lady are looking for a replacement for chief operating officer Antonio Giraudo and director general Luciano Moggi.

Jean Claude Blanc and Carlo Sant'Albano are in contention to step in for Giraudo, but there are concerns that their lack of experience in the football world could be a handicap.

Yet John Elkann, an Agnelli whose family hold a controlling share in the outfit, wants Platini to be of assistance.

Although the Frenchman can't be handed a full-time position as he is in the race for the top FIFA job, Elkann reportedly wants Platini to act as an advisor.

It's unclear at this stage whether the Frenchman would accept such an option even if the close relationship he had with Gianni Agnelli, Elkann's grandfather, could be a decisive factor.

PRIMERA LIGA

Sevilla target Champs League

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

UEFA Cup winners Sevilla have their eyes on a place in next season's Champions League when they host champions Barcelona on Saturday, in their rescheduled Primera Liga match from last month.

The Andalusians, fifth on 62 points, claimed their first European trophy on Wednesday with a comprehensive 4-0 win over Middlesbrough and can draw level with fourth-placed Osasuna with a victory in the Sanchez Pizjuan.

The original fixture was abandoned on April 23 due to a water-logged pitch leaving Sevilla with a game in hand over Osasuna.

Spain's fourth place in Europe's top competition will be decided on Tuesday when Sevilla play their last game against Real Madrid and Osasuna host Valencia.

As his side celebrated their UEFA Cup victory, Sevilla president Jose Maria del Nido signalled the club's ambition.

"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.

Barcelona wrapped up their second consecutive league title last week and are likely to be more concerned about avoiding injuries ahead of next Wednesday's Champions League final against Arsenal in Paris.

At the other end of the table, the third team to join already-relegated Cadiz and Malaga in the second division next year will be decided on Saturday.

Alaves occupy 18th place with 36 points, and are at home to Deportivo Coruna, while 17th-placed Espanyol on 38 points, host Real Sociedad.

King's Cup winners Espanyol have a theoretical advantage as 14th-placed Sociedad secured their place in the top-flight last weekend and have nothing left to play for.

"We are 90 minutes away from completing a historical season," Espanyol coach Miguel Lotina said. "I hope the players concentrate on the success that awaits rather than on the possibility of relegation."

Lotina's side have their destiny in their own hands and need a win to

be safe, but they have managed only one in their last 11 league outings.

Alaves must win and hope Espanyol draw or lose. But they take on a Depor side who are in pole position, in seventh place, to make the Intertoto Cup next season.

The Basque side, who were promoted last year, have one win from their last eight games and will be without suspended first-choice goalkeeper Franco Costanzo.

FIXTURES

(2000 GMT kick-off unless stated)

SATURDAY

Atletico Madrid v Real Betis (1800), Cadiz v Malaga (1800), Celta Vigo v Getafe (1800), Alaves v Deportivo La Coruna (2000), Espanyol v Real Sociedad (2000), Real Mallorca v Real Zaragoza (2000), Sevilla v Barcelona (2000), Villarreal v Racing Santander (2000)

Tuesday

Sevilla v Real Madrid (1900), Osasuna v Valencia (1900)

Gerrard seeks Cup tonic

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Steven Gerrard claims lifting the FA Cup for Liverpool on Saturday will give him the perfect platform for the World Cup after his marathon season at Anfield.

Gerrard, 25, will play the 59th game of his campaign when favourites Liverpool face Alan Pardew's West Ham United at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.

The England midfielder played his first game of the season way back on July 13 when Liverpool faced Welsh club TNS in a Champions League first round qualifier.

Fears over his ability to survive such a gruelling campaign in World Cup year have proved unfounded, however, and Gerrard admits he has even surprised himself by playing so many games.

Gerrard said: "Maybe I am surprised that I am going so well after so many games because people were concerned at the beginning of the season about how many games I would be playing."

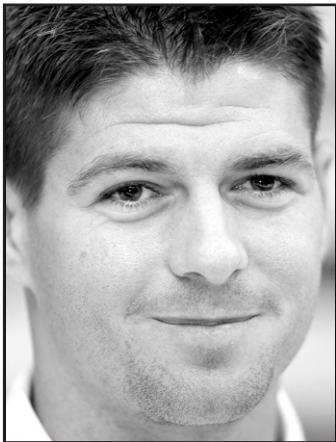
"But I always knew that if I got my body right, and everyone knows how many injuries I have had in my career, I would be fine. It has surprised me a little, but I have been looking after myself on and off the pitch and I can't wait for the final."

"If we get a good result against West Ham it will get me in the right

frame of mind for the World Cup. But I would not be doing my job if I was thinking about the World Cup this weekend and I just have to give 100 percent in the cup final and then I can turn to what I hope will be an exciting summer."

Gerrard played in the 2001 Liverpool team that beat Arsenal in the first FA Cup Final staged at the Millennium Stadium.

But after lifting the Champions



STEVEN GERRARD

League trophy last May, he knows how special it is to captain a winning side in a major final.

He said: "The Cup final means a lot to me. A few people have tried to discredit the competition, but I am not one of them."

"I know what it feels like to win an



PHOTO: AFP

Yasse Saeed Al Qahtani (C) of Saudi Arabia vies for the ball with Belgium's Anthony Vaden Borre (L) during their friendly match at Sittard in the Netherlands on Thursday.

This Cup needs a refill

Football

SPORTSILLUSTRATED

Useless Cup? That's what many think of the UEFA Cup, particularly the bigger nations in Europe. It's hard to come to any other conclusion when you see managers fielding teams packed with reserves, kids and scrubs (last season Parma seemed to actively try to get knocked out and actually appeared annoyed to advance all the way to the semifinals), as they rest starters to focus on their domestic leagues.

There is no question that the UEFA Cup has fallen victim to the Champions League. You could argue that in the past it was even tougher to win the UEFA Cup than it was to conquer the European Cup, if only because there were more good teams in it. It used to feature teams that finished between second and fourth place in most nations and was

a top-notch competition. Now those teams play in Champions League, which means UEFA Cup sides are drawn from further down the food chain.

It's not surprising, then, that the only teams that get excited for it are those who have never won European silverware and for whom their domestic leagues offer little chance for glory (or even a Champions League spot).

That said, it was great to see Sevilla and Middlesbrough in Eindhoven, Netherlands, battle in the final on Wednesday night. Both clubs have passionate and long-suffering fans, both took the competition seriously and both gave the match a true sense of occasion. Sevilla dominated and won convincingly 4-0, but it was good to see that both teams honoured the competition.

Yet the problem remains: UEFA has already fiddled with the format of the competition (introducing the

rather bizarre group stage), albeit without success. Perhaps the solution is to drop the pretences and admit that it is what it is: a second-tier competition for second-tier teams. And there is no shame in that.

Give the winner an automatic spot in Champions League the following season. Don't allow teams to drop into the UEFA Cup from Champions League (which always smacks of a letdown anyway). And celebrate the fact that the sport is not just about the big boys, the Barcelonas and the Manchester Uniteds, but also about excellent second-tier teams that compete at the level that their budget and fan base allows.

Be proud of what you are, UEFA Cup, and reclaim some of that dignity. Most of us would rather see a passionate Sevilla or Middlesbrough than a disinterested AC Milan or Real Madrid anyway.