



Francisco Fonseca of Mexico (C) shoots to score the second goal against Democratic Republic of Congo between Lubanzadio Mayasisila (L) and Kinkela Fuanda during a friendly match in Mexico City on Friday.

Mexico down Congo

Francisco "Kikin" Fonseca scored twice as Mexico defeated Congo 2-1 in a friendly match on Friday. Fonseca opened scoring three minutes into the match, when he headed in a pass. He followed up at the 41st minute, twisting to knock in a corner shot. But five minutes into the second half, Congo striker Mbokani staged an impressive run from midfield and out manoeuvred goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez to score. Mexico is scheduled to leave for Europe on May 20 to participate in the World Cup, and is set to announce its final players list on Saturday.

Chelsea in lieu of Torpedo?

Chelsea's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich tried to acquire Russian club Torpedo Moscow before he bought the English Premier League side, according to his close friend and former business partner German Tkachenko. "Roman wanted to buy Torpedo even before he bought Chelsea," Tkachenko, former president of Russian Premier League club Krylya Sovietov Samara, told Saturday's Russian daily Sport-Express. Abramovich has invested more than 400 million pounds (754.4 million dollars) since buying the west London club for 60 million pounds in July 2003 and wiping out 80 million pounds of debt. He has since pumped in more than 250 million pounds for players alone. Tkachenko said that the Russian oil tycoon had wanted to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the Moscow club but Torpedo owner Vladimir Alyoshin turned down his offer. "Alyoshin twice had a chance to sell Torpedo," said Tkachenko, who was involved in negotiations. Torpedo, a dominant force in the former Soviet Union alongside Moscow sides Spartak and Dynamo, have struggled to regain credibility in recent years, while Chelsea have become the envy of Europe, winning the Premier League two years running.

Buffon fearful of losing place

Juventus and Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon pleaded his innocence on Saturday after Italian media reports linked him with suspected illegal betting on Serie A matches last season. In an attempt to clear his name and ensure that his place at the World Cup is not at risk, Buffon visited a Turin prosecutor of his own accord to give his version of events. Buffon admitted to betting on matches in the past before stopping last year when the Italian football federation (FIGC) prohibited all kinds of gambling. "I'm clean and I want to go to the World Cup," he said after leaving the magistrates' office. "I've always respected the rules," he said. "I've bet on international football because here in Italy it's not possible to do so. "But when players weren't allowed to bet, I stopped immediately. That was in the autumn of 2005." It has long been forbidden for any player in Italy to bet on matches in their own championship, but last year the FIGC extended that ban to include any form of gambling. If found guilty of breaking FIGC's rules on gambling, Buffon could face a ban from between three months to three years.

On Friday the Gazzetta dello Sport reported that Buffon and three former Juventus players were being investigated. The Gazzetta said that prosecutors were studying telephone conversations recorded over a three-month period involving the quartet. The paper said movements of large amounts of money in seven different bank accounts were also being investigated and that one player was believed to have gambled 600,000 euros in one year.

Alexander also denied Shinji Ono from close range after the Japan midfielder went past two defenders just before half-time. Japan received a setback in the second half when Yuji Nakazawa went off with a cut forehead, but Ogasawara drew two more saves from Alexander. At the other end, Gavin Rae went close and Glasgow Rangers striker Kris Boyd, who scored twice on debut against Bulgaria, put a free-kick over the bar on 75 minutes. Japan ended the tournament with one loss and a draw after being beaten 2-1 by Bulgaria in their opening match.

Germany's Bayern Munich will play an exhibition game against Major League Soccer's New York Red Bulls on May 27 at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford. Bayern Munich, which finishes its Bundesliga schedule this week-end, will be missing several top stars who will be with their national teams preparing for the World Cup, including goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and midfielder Michael Ballack. The Red Bulls also play an exhibition game against Spanish champion Barcelona on Aug. 12.

Ronnie keen on Henry move

Football GUARDIANONLINE

As followers of English football read their tea-leaves in an attempt to predict Thierry Henry's future, Ronaldinho has dropped another hint that Barcelona will steal the Arsenal striker. Until Henry signs a contract extension to keep him at Arsenal beyond next summer, speculation will linger that the three-times Premiership footballer of the year's career will end at Nou Camp after a cut-price transfer. The fears will not diminish after Barcelona's Ballon d'Or winner revealed the news every Arsenal fan dreads: he is in regular contact with their captain. "I speak with Henry on the phone quite often, but I haven't spoken to him this week," said Ronaldinho ahead of Wednesday's Champions League final between the two clubs. "This week we have swapped a few text messages. He is a fantastic player, one of the best in the world. "Henry is a player who has a lot of quality. He could go to any team in the world and make it better. He is so good technically, has great pace and a lot of strength. He has the characteristics of a player that could adapt to any team in the world." If the pair's conversation ever turns to Henry's future, Ronaldinho will not dissuade the Frenchman from joining his club. The Brazil international can speak from a position of experience since he also had the chance to join the Premiership with Manchester United before he chose to quit Paris St-Germain for Catalonia in an £18m deal in 2003. It is not a decision he regrets. "When I had to decide whether to join Barcelona I had two or three

other teams interested in me," said the 26-year-old. "I had to decide which team would be the best for me and which team I could benefit the most. I had to think about where I could adapt most quickly and what would be best for my career as a footballer. It's fantastic living here. When you're winning titles there's nothing better than enjoying this Wednesday's overwhelming favourites, than it is for their opponents at the Stade de France. "When I came here I only had one objective and that is to win the most important titles like the Primera Liga title, which we have, and the Champions League. "This is a great club and it has always had a very good side. We



RONALDINHO AND HENRY feeling we've got right now." Though Arsenal had never even contested a European Cup semifinal until this season, the desire to win is no less for Barcelona, have only won the European Cup once. We will give everything to change that. There is no other trophy that we want to win more."

SERIE A From scandal to Scudetto

Football REUTERS, Milan

After a week dominated by a scandal surrounding tapped telephone conversations, Juventus turn their focus back to the pitch on Sunday and the securing of their 29th title on the final day of the season. The entire board of the defending champions resigned on Thursday as investigations and accusations mounted up against Juve general manager Luciano Moggi and CEO Antonio Giraudo but on Sunday the club will be hoping for a break from the scandal. Fabio Capello's Juventus have a three-point lead over AC Milan and anything but a defeat by Reggina will secure a second successive 'scudetto'. Milan can win the title only if they defeat AS Roma at the San Siro and Juventus lose to Reggina. Juve's fixture is an 'away' game but is being played at the neutral venue of Bari after sanctions were imposed on Reggina after crowd trouble. Should the two teams finish level on points the title would go to Milan who have the better of the head-to-head record against Juventus. The two games between the clubs ended in a 0-0 draw and a 3-1 victory for Milan. Normally, in the event of a tie for top spot the clubs would play off over two legs. With the World Cup starting in June, the Football League ruled at the start of the season that there would be no play-offs this season. Few expected the title race would go down to the wire given that Juve led Milan by 14 points at one stage and had a 10-point lead in March before a run of five straight draws. But Capello's side have won their last two games and given they are unbeaten in their last 27 league outings it is hard to imagine them stumbling in Bari. French midfielder Patrick Vieira is suspended and his compatriot, fullback Jonathan Zebina, is struggling for fitness. Federico Balzaretti could step in at right back with Giuliano Giannichedda taking Vieira's slot in the centre of midfield. Juve's preparations have been overshadowed by the scandal surrounding their general manager Moggi and on Thursday the entire board of the club resigned en masse. Milan are without Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko who has a knee injury so Alberto Gilardino will partner Filippo Inzaghi against Roma who could feature Francesco Totti. Totti made his return to action, after almost three months out with a broken ankle, when he came on as a substitute in Roma's Italian Cup final defeat to Inter Milan on Thursday. Milan's Brazilian defender Cafu, who won the title with Roma and Totti five years ago, believes there is a chance of an upset on the final day. "We still believe we can do it because anything can happen in

Football. Nothing is decided yet and we have to believe in ourselves until the end. "It will be a tough game for us -- we have to win it and then hope for good news from Reggina," he said. Unlike Reggina, Roma have plenty to play for on the final day because they can still catch Fiorentina and take fourth place which brings a spot in the qualifying round for next season's Champions League. Fiorentina, who are away to Chievo, have a two-point lead over Roma. All three of the relegation spots have been decided with Lecce, Treviso and Messina going down.

FIXTURES SUNDAY (all 1300 GMT kick-off) AC Milan v Roma, Cagliari v Inter Milan, Chievo v Fiorentina, Empoli v Ascoli, Lazio v Parma, Palermo v Messina, Reggina v Juventus (to be played at Bari), Sampdoria v Lecce, Siena v Livorno, Treviso v Udinese

new forward is his top priority. "Either you find young players with great potential or you point towards world-class players like Ballack," added Mourinho. "Ballack should sign. We are looking for a forward and it's normal that Shevchenko and Eto's names are mentioned. We will see what happens." Mourinho also admitted he would like to manage in Italy at some point in the future. The Portuguese tactician still has four years to run on his current contract and he insists he has no plans to leave Chelsea in the near future. "I've never changed my mind. After Chelsea I want to coach in Italy," said Mourinho. "But I have no intention to leave tomorrow. I am under contract with Chelsea until June 2010."

Pires close to Arsenal exit

AFP, London Arsenal's French international Robert Pires could quit the Champions League finalists if the London club does not offer him a new two-year deal. The 33-year-old, who will be out of contract in the summer after six years with the Gunners, admitted the one-year offer on the table is still short of what he wants. Pires admitted that other clubs have shown an interest but he denied reports that he had signed a pre-contract agreement with Villarreal. "The situation is quite simple at the moment, we have got the final coming up and we are going to focus on that and afterwards I'll decide whether I am going to stay or leave," said Pires who has attempted to play down transfer talk ahead of the Champions League final against Barcelona next week. "At the moment I don't know what I am going to do. Arsenal has been a fantastic club to me at every level but I need to think whether I'm going to stay here or go to another country. "Arsenal's offer was a one-year contract -- the same thing they offered Dennis Bergkamp. "But I'd like a firm offer of two years. I need to think about the offer that Arsenal and Arsene Wenger have made. I will sit down after the Champions League final and do that. "It is said that I'd signed for Villarreal, but I can't guarantee this is true. I've received offers, but it's possible I could still stay with Arsenal." Pires does not know whether he will be included in Wenger's starting line-up for the final in Paris even though he has played in all but one of their home games in Europe this season. "The final is very important for all the players. Arsene Wenger has to make his decision and I have to respect his choice," said the Frenchman. "But in Europe this season I've played all the home games except the Real Madrid match. I played against Juventus and Villarreal. These were massive games and I was pleased to play in them. We will have to see." Arsenal will be considered as the underdogs against Barcelona but Pires says that will suit them.

Barthez to leave Marseille

Football REUTERS, Paris

France goalkeeper Fabien Barthez will leave Olympique Marseille at the end of the season, club chairman Pape Diouf was quoted as saying on Saturday. "Fabien will leave at the end of the season. He confirmed to us he was leaving for personal reasons, which have nothing to do with money, the sport or relationships with others at the club," Diouf said in the French sports daily L'Equipe. Diouf indicated that Cedric Carasso, who deputised for Barthez when he was handed a five-month ban last season for spitting at a referee in a friendly against Wydad Casablanca, would take over as first choice. "It's logical," he said. Barthez will play his last game for the Provence side on Saturday at second-placed Girondins Bordeaux, where they have not won since 1977. Fourth-placed Marseille are battling with Lille for the last Champions League qualifying place. It remains unclear what Barthez, 34, will do next season. He may call it a day, sign for a foreign club or return to Toulouse, where he started his professional career in 1990 under the guidance of Elie Baup. "Fabien is like a young brother to me," the departing St Etienne coach, linked with a move to TFC, told L'Equipe. Former Manchester United keeper Barthez won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 but is battling with Olympique Lyon's Gregory Coupet to be number one at this year's World Cup in Germany. He first joined Marseille in 1992, denying AC Milan striker Marco Van Basten twice in his side's 1-0 victory in the 1993 Champions League final in Munich. Barthez then left for Monaco in 1995 before spending three seasons at United from 2000 to 2003. He returned to OM in January 2004.



FABIEN BARTHEZ

Totti demands tough action

Football AFP, Rome

Roma captain Francesco Totti has demanded stiff sanctions for those found guilty in the ever-widening Italian football scandal that has tarnished the country's favourite game. "Those found guilty must pay," said Italy international Totti, who was sent home from the 2004 European championships in Portugal after spitting at a Danish defender. "When I've made mistakes I personally have had to suffer the consequences." Asked if he was surprised by the scandal, Totti replied: "The only thing that surprises me is that all of

Scotland lift Kirin Cup

AFP, Saitama Scotland sealed victory in the Kirin Cup mini-tournament on Saturday with a 0-0 draw with World Cup hopefuls Japan. Scotland, who thrashed Bulgaria 5-1 on Thursday, looked threatening early on with Lee McCulloch going close in the 16th minute. Japan, playing their last home warm-up before the World Cup, found their feet midway through the first half and defender Akira Kaji hit the post before Scottish keeper Neil Alexander saved twice from Mitsuo Ogasawara. Alexander also denied Shinji Ono from close range after the Japan midfielder went past two defenders just before half-time. Japan received a setback in the second half when Yuji Nakazawa went off with a cut forehead, but Ogasawara drew two more saves from Alexander. At the other end, Gavin Rae went close and Glasgow Rangers striker Kris Boyd, who scored twice on debut against Bulgaria, put a free-kick over the bar on 75 minutes. Japan ended the tournament with one loss and a draw after being beaten 2-1 by Bulgaria in their opening match.

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C Ron hits back at media

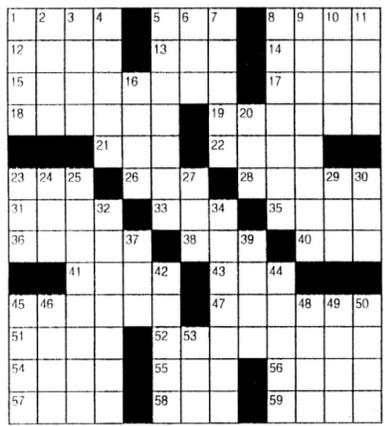
Football AFP, Lisbon

Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo has slated media coverage of his life, particularly during the difficult period that followed the death of his father in September. "It was front page news for four straight days. That hurt me and my family. We needed silence and they made an uproar," the 21-year-old said in an interview published Saturday in daily Portuguese newspaper Diario de Noticias. "Regarding the rape story, everyone published the news that I was going to be accused on their front page, but when I was rehabilitated the news was buried inside the newspapers, in small letters," he said. "It is obvious that the death of my father influenced everything. Suddenly I found myself doing unjust things. Sometimes I just felt like saying: 'Leave me alone for a bit! Don't force me to be a good little boy right now!'," he said. "I knew that the pain would pass and for that to happen the most important thing was for me to continue my work. But it was a difficult phase in my life."

One month after his father's death, Ronaldo was questioned by British police following allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman at a London hotel. The player did not face charges due to insufficient evidence. Then in February Europe's football governing body UEFA slapped the player with a one-match ban for making an obscene gesture with his finger during a Champions League game in Lisbon against Benfica in December where he was jeered by Portuguese fans throughout the match. "Regarding the rape story, everyone published the news that I was going to be accused on their front page, but when I was rehabilitated the news was buried inside the newspapers, in small letters," he said. "It is obvious that the death of my father influenced everything. Suddenly I found myself doing unjust things. Sometimes I just felt like saying: 'Leave me alone for a bit! Don't force me to be a good little boy right now!'," he said. "I knew that the pain would pass and for that to happen the most important thing was for me to continue my work. But it was a difficult phase in my life."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Uses a straw 5 Chignon 8 News-paper page 12 Help a hood 13 40 (k) alternative 15 "The Incredible Hulk" portrayer 17 Organic compound 18 Stretch 19 Sea-related 21 Inactive 23 Fond du... 26 A Bobbin twin 28 Play amorously 31 Needing liniment 33 Theme entries' first name 35 Entreaty 36 Bush 38 "CSI" evidence 40 Pick a target 41 On the rocks 43 Pie ingredient? 45 Crazy 47 Liqueur flavors 51 Catcher's need 52 Half a comedy team 54 Largest of the seven 55 Deluge refuge 56 Capricorn 57 Carriage 58 "Of course" Solution time: 21 mins. DOWN 1 Vault 2 Mountain beast 3 Saucy 4 Scatter 5 "Who cares?" 6 Coffee-shop vessel 7 Actress Watts 8 Cover partially 9 Recent Devil Flays manager 10 Black, in verse 11 Take out of context? 16 Aware of 20 Put together 23 Part of UNLV 24 Essen expelitive 25 "Lightnin' Strikes" singer 27 Silent assent 29 Floral wreath 30 Sweet potato 32 Mexican peninsula 34 Exposes 37 Stiller or Stein 39 "Charley's..." 42 Rot 44 San... 45 Mosque VIP 46 Barring unforeseen circumstances, in law 48 Largo 49 Vivacity 50 Drunkards 53 Raw rock



CRYPTOQUIP X M M B G X P X J G L E X I X N J O M B G A X O G A X R R U R X E G N I X O Y F G Y T M B G F Y L H F G G O T Y N A G O M U H M P B G N . Yesterday's Cryptiquip: WHILE CHASING CHIMPUNKS, IT'S POSSIBLE A NEAR-SIGHTED DOG MIGHT BARK UP THE WRONG TREE. Today's Cryptiquip Clue: B equals H The Cryptiquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words with an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.