



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona superstar Ronaldinho (2nd R) plays the drum as his teammates celebrate on an open-top bus to mark their triumph of the UEFA Champions League final in a Barcelona street on Thursday.

Cisse eager for Marseille

AFP, Marseille

France international striker Djibril Cisse is ready to join French giants Marseille from FA Cup winners Liverpool should they launch a new bid he told La Provence newspaper on Friday.

The 24-year-old scored in the epic 3-3 draw with West Ham in the FA Cup final last Saturday, which Liverpool won on penalties, but is believed to be surplus to manager Rafael Benitez's plans for next term.

"I would look seriously at an offer, if Marseille showed renewed interest," said Cisse.

"I have never hidden my interest in playing for Marseille," added Cisse, who has scored 98 goals in 221 matches for Liverpool since joining from Auxerre.

"For me France has two clubs. Auxerre and Marseille who I have always dreamt about. I repeat once again, yes one day I will come and play for Marseille."

Cisse, who has been selected for the French squad for the World Cup finals, revealed that he had come close to signing for Marseille last season but it had been brought to a halt by Liverpool.

"I had very strong contacts with Marseille last summer and winter.

"It was about to come to a positive solution but Liverpool were against me moving. At Marseille they thought it was me who didn't want to come but that was not at all the case."

However Cisse, scorer of nine goals in 23 international appearances, said he would leave his club future aside until the World Cup campaign was over.

"I believe that after the World Cup I will make a decision over my future."

Blanc in frame for Auxerre job

AFP, Auxerre

France World Cup winner and former Manchester United defender Laurent Blanc is in the running to succeed Jacques Santini as manager of Auxerre, the French club's vice-president Gerard Bourgoin announced Thursday.

Auxerre parted company with former France, Lyon and Tottenham manager Santini this week after just over a year in charge.

Blanc, who was present at Auxerre's Stade Abbe-Deschamps Tuesday for the testimonial of legendary boss Guy Roux, played for the team during the 1995-96 season.

He also had spells at Barcelona, Inter Milan and Marseille.

Cicinho robbed

AFP, Sao Paulo

Real Madrid's Brazilian international Cicinho was robbed on his arrival at Guarulhos airport here on Thursday, police reported.

The defender had a bag stolen containing his passport and 200 euros in cash.

Cicinho arrived at Sao Paulo to spend time with his family before linking up with the Brazil squad on Monday for a pre-World Cup training camp in Switzerland.

A heroes welcome



REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona were greeted by hundreds of thousands of fans on Thursday when they paraded through the city on an open-top bus to celebrate winning the Champions League.

On their return to Barcelona from Paris captain Carles Puyol and coach Frank Rijkaard carried the trophy down the steps of the plane before the squad transferred to the city centre.

It was a rare appearance in the limelight by Rijkaard. Puyol had to convince him to come on to the victor's podium when the trophy was presented in the Stade de France,

media reports said.

The Primera Liga champions completed a double with a 2-1 win over 10-man Arsenal in Wednesday's final in Paris, the club's second European Cup success.

Barcelona city council had asked fans to avoid congregating at the airport so the festivities did not get started properly until the team arrived in the city harbour on a barge.

From there the players, all wearing t-shirts with the club's slogan "Mes que un club" (More than a club), boarded a bus to tour through the packed city streets.

Ecstatic fans hailed their side's success and predicted the start of a new era for the club.

"Next year we'll be back to win our third European Cup," one fan told Antena 3 television. Another

said: "This team is going to make history."

For the second time in two weeks the tour finished in the Nou Camp where the players made circuits of the stadium to take the crowd's applause.

City residents and shop owners will be bracing themselves for another potential night of disturbances after the previous night's celebrations turned sour in the early hours of Thursday morning.

The city council said over 100,000 euros of damage was done to shops, phone boxes and traffic lights in the Las Ramblas district, with some fans starting running battles with police as events ran out of control.

According to the police 45 people were detained and over 100 people were injured.

A case of sour grapes



SPORTSILLUSTRATED

Knowing how to win is important if you want to have a trophy room full of silverware. Knowing how to lose, however, is crucial if you don't want your postmatch reaction to overshadow and tarnish your achievements.

Arsene Wenger and Thierry Henry are not only outstanding at their respective day jobs. They are intelligent, passionate, articulate men who are genuinely honest and forthright in their beliefs. The problem is that their beliefs on Wednesday night were infected by their inability to lose gracefully.

Indeed, if at some point they watch a replay of the game, they will understand that their accusations were baseless, unfair and, most of all, ended up hurting their image first and foremost, but also diminishing Barcelona's feat. The game is about results, but it's also about common sense and basic judgment. The best team in a competition doesn't always win, and that's life. But in the 2005-06 season, anyone with even a passing knowledge of the game knows that Barcelona was the best team in Europe.

"It's difficult to accept losing a game anyway, but worse when you have to accept losing it on a wrong decision," Wenger said after the game. "That goal [Barcelona's equaliser] was offside and it was proven on television. At this level, we shouldn't have to accept in the future. We have to do something about it."

Henry went even further. He complained about the offside goal, he whined about Jens Lehmann's ejection, he moaned about the treatment he received at the hands of defenders Carles Puyol and Rafa Marquez and he even implied that there was some kind of plot to favor Barcelona.

"If they don't want us to win it, just say it from the start," Henry said. "[Barcelona is] already a good team, so if they also get help from the referee, they become very difficult to beat. Now I think back and wonder about Andriy Shevchenko's disallowed goal in the semifinal against Barcelona."

This kind of pro-Barca conspiracy is a tempting line of thought.

Barcelona is the darling of the world's media right now, the most beloved and entertaining team to watch (with all the economic implications that carries). Chelsea complained bitterly about the officiating in its second-round clash with Barca, as did AC Milan, after Shevchenko's goal was ruled out for no apparent reason.

Throw in the fact that Spain's Angel Mara Villar Llona is one of UEFA's rising stars and head of the referees' committee at FIFA, mix in the fact that Sevilla, another Spanish team, won the UEFA Cup (in a game in which the other finalist, Middlesbrough, was denied a pretty obvious penalty) and you've got a full-blown conspiracy.

The problem with all this is that it ignores one basic fact: Yes, Norwegian referee Terje Hauge had a bad game, but his decisions arguably hurt Barcelona more than Arsenal.

Regarding Lehmann's red card: Strictly speaking, Hauge was correct, although a better referee would have conceded the advantage to Barcelona (which resulted in Ludovic Giuly's putting the ball in the back of the net). Had he done that, Barca would have been a goal up, Lehmann would probably not have been booked, but at least it would have been 11 vs. 11. And, of course, had Giuly not scored, Hauge could have then gone back and dismissed Lehmann.

In the grand scheme of things, how much did that decision actually penalise Arsenal? Would you really rather be a goal down with 70 minutes to go and Barcelona ready to hit on the break?

As for Samuel Eto'o's goal and whether it was offside, replays are inconclusive at best. If he was offside, it was a question of an inch or two, not the kind of thing for which a linesman should be drawn and quartered.

But even more important was another refereeing decision, one that Henry and Wenger conveniently glossed over. In the 35th minute, Emmanuel Ebou took a blatant dive to win a free-kick. It was very obvious; Hauge simply got it wrong. But had he seen the dive, he would have had to show Ebou a yellow card, which would have meant an ejection, as he had already been booked for a nasty late tackle on Mark van Bommel (one that could have been punished with

a red on its own).

That decision proved crucial, because it was from that free-kick that Sol Campbell soared above the Barca defence to give Arsenal the lead. Had Hauge got the decision right, Campbell would not have scored and Arsenal would have been down to nine men with 54 minutes to play -- and that would not have been a pretty sight.

Beyond that, it's true that Henry was put through the wringer by Barca's back four. And it's also true that the Arsenal striker should not have been booked. But it's equally true that Kolo Toure got away with more than one borderline challenge as well.

The bottom line is that Hauge was poor on the night, but his officiating certainly did not cost Arsenal the game. And in blaming him for the loss, Henry and Wenger are simply making themselves look bad.

Ze Roberto to leave Bayern

AFP, Munich

Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto will leave German champions Bayern Munich after the World Cup following the breakdown of negotiations on a new contract, the club said on Thursday.

"The negotiations with Ze about extending his contract have unfortunately failed to produce a result.

"We wish him a good World Cup and then all the best for the rest of his career," said Bayern's general manager Uli Hoeness.

The news is likely to spark a chase to acquire the services of the muscular 31-year-old who joined Bayern from fellow Bundesliga club Bayer Leverkusen in 2002.

He is the second high-profile departure from Bayern since the end of the season, following Germany captain Michael Ballack's move to English Premiership winners Chelsea this week.

Ze Roberto was named by Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira in his 23-man squad for the World Cup.

Henry staying at Arsenal



AFP, London

Thierry Henry on Friday signed a new four-year contract with Arsenal after revealing that he could not bear to quit "the club I love" in favour of a new challenge with Barcelona.

Two days after Arsenal lost the Champions League final to the Catalan club, the Gunners' inspirational captain said he could not find it in his heart to turn his back on the club, its supporters and the city he now regards as home.

"You all know -- it is not a surprise any more, I'm staying here even longer at the club that I love," Henry told a press conference at Arsenal's London Colney training centre.

Henry, 28, admitted he had thought long and hard about whether to leave in search of a new challenge before finally deciding to stay.

"You all thought I was going to leave," the French striker added. "I won't lie -- at one point that did cross my mind. But I am a guy who thinks with the heart and my heart told me to stay."

Henry's decision is a boost of almost immeasurable proportions for Arsenal as the club prepares to move from their Highbury home to the new 60,000-seat Emirates Stadium in time for the start of next season.

The switch will put the club on a more equal financial footing with rivals Chelsea and Manchester United, but without Henry few would give the Gunners much chance on the pitch.

Jose won't let Drogba leave

REUTERS, London

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho says striker Didier Drogba is not leaving Stamford Bridge while Andriy Shevchenko, a Chelsea target, is unlikely to leave AC Milan.

Ivorian Drogba was quoted in British media on Friday as saying he wanted to leave the English champions.

"The situation is that he (Drogba) has two more years of a contract with Chelsea and he is one of the players we consider not negotiable, so he has no chance to leave," Mourinho told a news conference.

"He has to play for Chelsea and, if he plays with happiness, then fantastic because we get the best of him. If he doesn't play with happiness, he doesn't play. It's his problem."

Mourinho has taken the same hard line with France defender William Gallas who says he wants to leave for a European club.

Shevchenko said last week he was considering leaving Milan after seven years and Mourinho said he would like to buy him.

"We would like to bring him but he is a Milan player. He has a long-term contract with Milan so Milan has the power in their hands like we have the power with Drogba.

"My feeling is that they don't want to sell him and they will keep him. They are a big, big club so can say, 'We don't sell, we want to keep.'

"That is my feeling but yes, I like the player and I would like to have the player here."

Juve appoint new managing director

AFP, Rome

Juventus, whose entire board quit last week over match-fixing allegations, named Carlo Sant'Albano as their acting managing director on Friday.

Albano is the chief executive of IFIL, the holding company which has an estimated 62 per cent stake in the Serie A club.

He will take control of the Italian champions until June 29 when shareholders will decide on a new board.

Shares in Juventus have plummeted in the aftermath of the match-fixing scandal.

If found guilty of sporting fraud, the club could be relegated to the second division.

Zafar's death anniversary today

SPORTS REPORTER

The second death anniversary of the former secretary general of Bangladesh Olympic Association Zafar Imam will be observed today.

Sports organisers and relatives will place floral wreaths at his grave in the Banani graveyard in the morning.

A Milad Mehfil and Quran Khwani will be held at the Mosque next to the Paltan ground after Asr prayer.

The pioneer sport organiser from Rajshahi died of cardiac arrest at the National Heart Institute on May 20, 2004.

Henry, who began his professional career under Arsene Wenger at Monaco, said the Arsenal manager and vice-chairman David Dein had been key figures in his decision.

"Without them I would not have been here talking to you. Without them I would not have come here seven years ago, and I just wanted to carry on writing the story of Arsenal with them."

In seven years at Highbury, Henry has formed a special bond with the club's supporters, a status that was reflected in Wenger's decision to make him captain when Patrick Vieira left last summer.

"For the last season, the love

that the fans showed me was more than amazing," he said. "And after the way we lost on Wednesday, I couldn't let them down.

"And as you know my wife is English and I always refer to London as my home town because people here welcomed me with open arms even before I showed what I could do on the pitch.

"It is difficult to leave a country like England because the passion -- it is just the best. The stadiums are full all the time. Even when we play away, the reception for me is amazing."

Henry went on to say that the achievement of a young Arsenal side in reaching this season's



THIERRY HENRY

Lippi quizzed over Moggi scandal



AFP, Rome

Italy coach Marcello Lippi was questioned by magistrates for three and a half hours here Friday as part of their investigation into the dealings of football agents GEA.

The Rome investigation is part of a nationwide probe into alleged corruption in Italian football.

GEA is run by Alessandro Moggi, the son of former Juventus general director Luciano, the man at the centre of the Italian match-fixing scandal.

Both men are under investigation for sporting fraud.

Lippi is not under investigation, but was quizzed about his relationship with Moggi Senior.

Lippi, who took over as Italy coach in July 2004, features in several intercepted telephone calls in which he talks to Moggi about the national team.

Some of the conversations suggest Moggi tried to influence team selection.

Moggi is suspected of putting pressure on Lippi to leave certain Juventus players out of the team so that they weren't too tired for their club matches.

Lippi, who worked under Moggi for eight years when he was Juventus coach, has refuted these claims.

Lippi had few words to say when he left the magistrates' office.

"Everything's fine, I'm calm," he said.

Last week Lippi insisted his relationship with Moggi was totally above board.

He said: "After eight years working together, is it a surprise that we spoke on the phone?"

"I got calls from all the clubs, not just Juventus. But I was never put under pressure about team selection."

Lippi's son Davide is a consultant for GEA, who have more than 200 professional footballers and coaches on their books and are suspected of abuse of market position.



PHOTO: INTERNET

A Brazilian exotic dancer holds a copy of the new book of Brazilian soccer legend Pele titled "Pele - The Autobiography" during a presentation at a central London bookstore on Thursday. Pele said he was looking forward to seeing some of the world's best strikers in this summer's World Cup finals in Germany.