

Vieri fuels Sampdoria speculation

AFP, Rome

Monaco striker Christian Vieri has reportedly e-mailed crisis-ridden Italian club Sampdoria expressing his interest in a move to the Serie A side, the club claimed on their website.

Vieri joined Monaco from AC Milan in January in a bid to find regular first team action and boost his chances of a World Cup spot.

But the 32-year-old, who has 49 caps for the national side and played for Italy at the 2002 World Cup, had to sit out this year's tournament after injuring his left knee in French league action last month.

And speculation has been rife in the Italian press this week that Vieri could be bound for the Genoa side next season after Monaco signed Czech striker Jan Koller on a two-year deal this month.

"This morning we received an e-mail from Christian Vieri. The striker expressed his desire to wear our jersey," the club said on their website.

Vieri wrote: "I'm a Sampdoria fan and recently I've been reading a lot of journalistic indiscretions concerning an eventual transfer of the player Christian Vieri to your club. I hope that you succeed in concluding negotiations. Warmest regards. Christian Vieri."

Meanwhile, Italian football federation (FIGC) investigators on Friday interrogated Sampdoria president Riccardo Garrone as the club have been implicated in the country's match-fixing scandal.

Health scare for Nakamura

AFP, Bonn

Japanese playmaker Shunsuke Nakamura gave the Japanese camp a scare on Friday when he went down with a cold two days ahead of the crucial World Cup tie against Croatia.

Nakamura played in an internal practice match Friday after spending two days training by himself due to a pain in his right thigh which he bruised in the Asian champions' 3-1 defeat to Australia in their World Cup opener on Monday.

The left-footed 27-year-old, who has just renewed his contract with Scotland champions Celtic, showed little effects of the injury but returned to the team hotel without talking to reporters.

"He has a bit of a cold with his body temperature reaching 37.2 C (98.9 F). But we think he will be alright for the Croatia match in Nuremberg," team spokesman Ichiro Fukushi said.

He was to travel with the rest of the team to Nuremberg later in the day as scheduled, Fukushi said.

Nakamura, who had been a doubt before the Australia match because of a painful left hamstring, scored Japan's goal in the Australia game with his speculative cross floating over a goalmouth scramble and into the net.

He was earlier hampered by a slight cold and suspected hay fever for several days since the Japan squad arrived for their training camp here late last month.

Both Japan and Croatia, who lost to five-time champions Brazil in their opener, needed to win their second match in order to keep themselves well in contention for a spot in the second round.

Ahn eyes

FROM PAGE 19

"We will need every player to help out in defence - even me," grinned the attacking midfielder. "France are a very strong team but we are confident (going into the game). We have experience of playing against top European teams in the 2002 World Cup and that experience will help us."

"Nobody knows what will happen in football but we can do it. I hope we can win - if we win we can enter the second round."

Spurs wing-back Lee Young-Pyo, who man-marked Luis Figo out of the game in South Korea's win over Portugal four years ago, downplayed suggestions that he might be assigned the role of shackling Arsenal striker Thierry Henry.

"I played well against him (Figo) but against France we will be defending as a unit," he said. "France are very strong and if we play our best we have a chance but we cannot guarantee a win. But the situation is very good for us. We won the first game (against Togo) and even if we lose against France we still have to play Switzerland."

Wolves' winger Seol Ki-Hyeon did not play any part in the first game but said he was confident of doing a job against France if called up by Advocaat.

"I have scored a goal against France in the 3-2 loss ahead of the 2002 World Cup," said the rangy Seol. "If there is a chance (for me to play) I will do my best. I am ready."

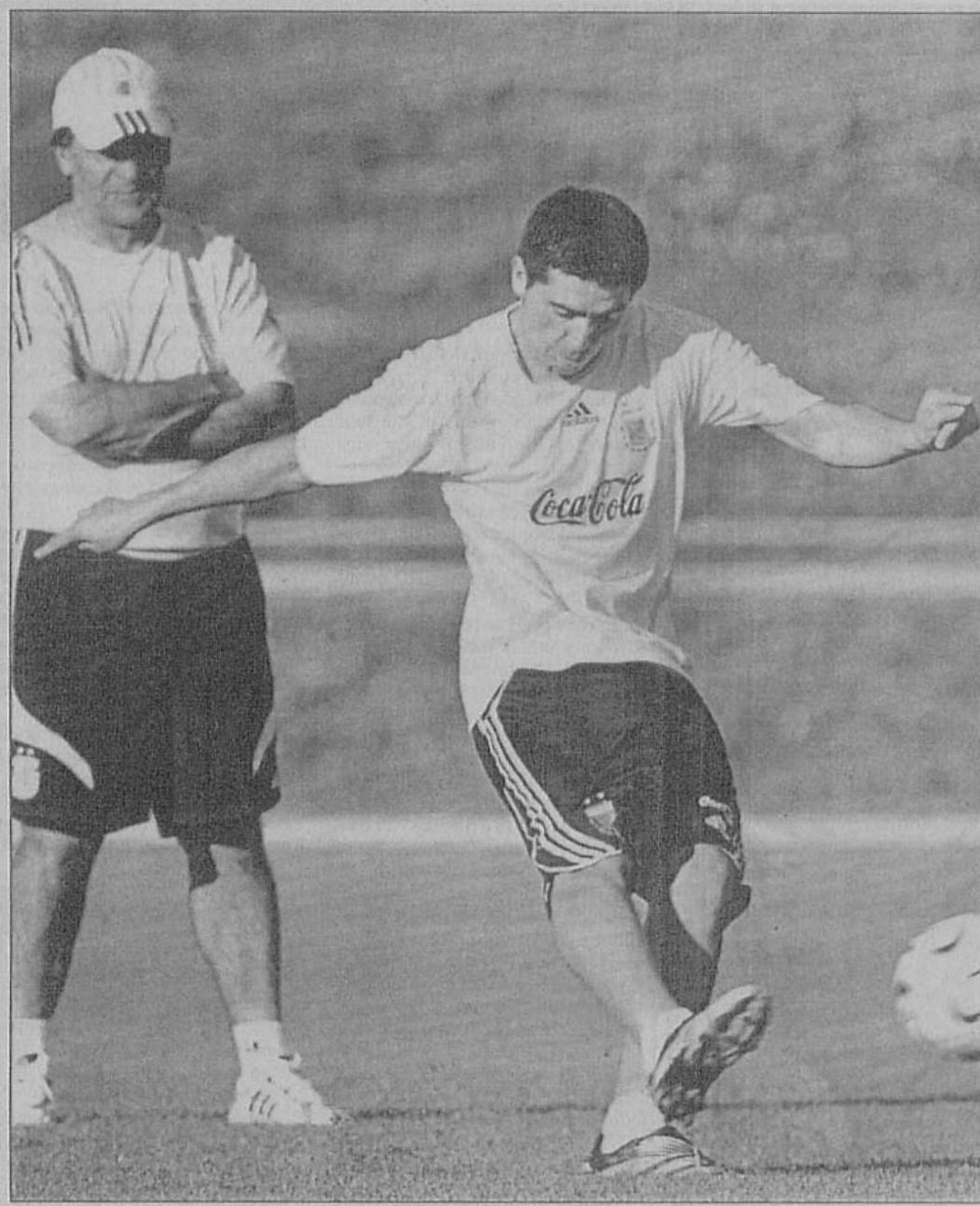


PHOTO: AFP

Argentina's midfield maestro Juan Roman Riquelme (R) shoots the ball in a training session at Adi-Dassler-Sportplatz and training camp in Herzenaurach on Wednesday.

The artiste and architect



AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Argentina's artistic midfielder Juan Riquelme 'seefied' like a discrete presence in the 6-0 drubbing of Serbia-Montenegro but it was enough to earn the Man of the Match award in a game brimming with talent.

"It was not easy to choose the Man of the Match because there were several very good players, but we thought that Riquelme had a tremendous influence for Argentina," FIFA jury member Roy Hodgson explained.

"In an Argentine team that played very well, he always asked for the ball. His ability and passing vision were fundamental factors in the great attacking performance that we were presented with here today," Hodgson added.

While fellow midfielder Maxi Rodriguez scored twice, forward Javier Saviola scurried around the pitch, Hernan Crespo darted around the goalmouth, Carlos Tevez powered past opponents, or Lionel Messi ran rings around defenders, Riquelme just cantered, looked around and passed.

Despite the praise, the quiet

Villareal player said things could get better.

"I just hope that Argentina can go on improving and can go on and do better each time," he said after the match.

"Today we're very happy because of what we've done, but our intention is to keep growing as a team."

Riquelme -- who will turn 28 later this month -- is one of coach Jose Pekerman's favourites. The long-legged player uses his left foot to pass or shoot like an artist creates a painting with strokes of the brush.

He revealed only a glimpse of that inspired playmaking in the opening match against Ivory Coast, but that was enough to be behind most of the few chances that Argentina created.

Riquelme split the "Elephants" defence with a languid, almost casual pass to put Saviola clear to score Argentina's second goal.

Against Serbia Montenegro on Friday, Riquelme fed the Sevilla forward again to set up a fluid cross-field movement from the left that was completed by Esteban Cambiasso.

But the long-legged Riquelme needs space to think and find passing opportunities, and he is vulnerable without defensive cover or attacking alternatives from the rest of Argentina's left-sided players.

He was caught lingering with the ball at least once against Serbia-Montenegro, losing possession and leaving his teammates in an awk-

ward position.

However, Pekerman, a successful former youth team coach, has an eye on the whole team.

He often pairs Riquelme with attacking wing back and clubmate at Villareal in Spain, or the tougher midfielder Javier Mascherano.

In Argentina's 3-1 qualifying victory in the traditional derby against arch-rivals Brazil in Buenos Aires one year ago, Riquelme's parsimonious style shone against the flamboyant Brazilians.

His reading of the game also helped his club through to the semi-finals of the Champions League in May.

But Riquelme can prove to be fragile under pressure.

After his first division debut for trophy-winning Boca Juniors in 1996 he caught Barcelona's eye. But Riquelme struggled with the Spanish club and was loaned to the less prestigious Villarreal, where he eventually stayed.

That fragile nature emerged in the club's elimination from the Champions League, when Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann saved his last-minute penalty.

Argentine observers say that the style has changed little from that of the teenage Riquelme in his neighbourhood team, as a technically gifted midfield playmaker who obstinately refused to be rushed.

WC QUOTES

AFP, undated

"Defeated and humiliated." Headlined in Politika newspaper, after Serbia and Montenegro were thrashed 6-0 by Argentina.

"We were playing six-a-side football."

Argentinian striker Hernan Crespo on making it look easy against the Serbs.

"It's an absolutely terrible result, the worst in our history, and I've got to take responsibility for it."

Serb coach Ilijas Petkovic takes the defeat on the chin.

"Love is in the Herr."

British tabloid The Sun responding to German police praise of England fans' behaviour.

"Who made a World Cup baby last night?"

Germany's Bild newspaper, fascinated by the German players' night off with wives and girlfriends.

"It's more than disappointing. We had a lot of hope going into this tournament."

Ivory Coast coach Henri Michel on crushed ambitions after being eliminated after defeat by the Netherlands.

"Brazil don't ask themselves any questions, they just do it."

Striker David Trezeguet calling for France to throw caution to the wind.

"Anyone can wear whatever they want, but if a company tries to carry out ambush marketing, FIFA must prevent that happening."

FIFA communications director Markus Siegler after hundreds of

over."

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson after Wayne Rooney plays his first World Cup game seven weeks after breaking a bone in his foot.

"I want us to be more adventurous - I want to set the dogs free against Korea."

Struggling Brazil striker Ronaldo after undergoing hospital checks.

"We have confidence in him and we are certain that he'll do all he can to help us beat Australia."

Ronaldo pledging his support for Ronaldo.

"It would be very fair to say that you haven't seen the best of us yet but we hope we have now put ourselves in a good position."

England captain David Beckham after the laboured 2-0 win over Trinidad and Tobago.

"I hope the worst is behind me."

France midfielder Florent Malouda revealing that he had an operation for haemorrhoids shortly after arriving in Germany for the finals.

"We have achieved our goal, and we have already reached the target the country set for us, but we want to reach greater heights."

Ecuador's Colombian coach Luis Suarez after his all-attacking team reached the last 16, proving to be one of the early surprises.

"I think you guys are always not optimistic... so pessimistic."

Midfield star Hidetoshi Nakata calling for reporters to get positive as Japan's World Cup hangs in the balance.

"I'm extremely happy and I'm also relieved that the Rooney saga is

Fast starts are good omens

INTERNET, undated

All five of the teams that have clinched spots in the second round -- Germany, Ecuador, Argentina, Netherlands and England -- won their opening match. All five eliminated teams -- Ivory Coast, Serbia-Montenegro, Poland, Costa Rica and Paraguay -- lost their opener. Of the 23 teams that won their opening match at the 2002 and 1998 World Cups, 20 advanced to the second round. Of the 23 teams that lost their opener, 22 failed to advance. Only Turkey in 2002 managed to lose its opener and reach the second round. The Turks lost to Brazil, tied Costa Rica, then beat China and advanced to the knockout round on goal difference. Once there, they excelled, and ended up finishing third.

Gerrard vows for improvement

AFP, Baden-Baden

England midfielder Steven Gerrard admitted that his side have no chance of winning the World Cup unless they improve quickly.

The 26-year-old Liverpool captain scored England's second goal as they booked a place in the last 16 with a 2-0 win over minnows Trinidad and Tobago in Nuremberg on Thursday.

But Sven Goran Eriksson's side struggled to overcome unfancied Trinidad for long periods before finally scoring twice in the final minutes.

England had made hard work of beating Paraguay 1-0 in their opening match and the lacklustre display against the 'Soca Warriors' fuelled fears they will crash out as soon as they face stronger opposition.

Gerrard, who lifted the FA Cup trophy last month a year after inspiring Liverpool to the Champions League trophy, knows England will not win the tournament on current form and told BBC Sport as such.

"No, I don't think so, our form as a team has got to improve," said Gerrard, who missed the 2002 edition because of injury and had a poor Euro 2004.

"We need to hit top form pretty quickly. There are still a couple of gears to go into it."

"It's pleasing to be in the last 16. It was really difficult out there for an hour and we were finding them really difficult to break down."

Gerrard insisted he wants to play in England's final Group B match against Sweden on Tuesday, even though another booking would rule him out of the second round clash against Germany or Ecuador.

"I think I should," he said.

"I want to play in every game but I would have to be sensible."

"It's a question (if he starts or not) that you would have to ask Sven-Goran Eriksson."

Ambitious

Ambitious