

Zidane bares

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behaviour but he said he could not regret it.

"I know this is something that one should not do. I want to say that loud and clear because it was watched by two billion people and by millions of kids," Zidane said.

"I want to apologise to them but I can't regret what I did because it would mean that he (Materazzi) was right to say what he said.

"I have taught my kids to respect people and I have taught them that they deserve to be respected in return. I couldn't let something like that be said without any reaction."

Earlier Materazzi had denied making any mention of Zidane's mother.

"I said nothing to him about race, religion or politics I did not talk about his mother either," the defender was quoted as saying in an interview given on Wednesday to sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I lost my mother when I was 15 and it still upsets me to talk about it.

Of course I didn't know that his mother was in hospital. I send her my best wishes.

"Zidane was always my hero. I admire him greatly," Materazzi added.



Did U Know?

Ferenc Szisz from Romania, was the first winner of a Formula One Grand Prix. Driving a Renault, he won the first Grand Prix held at Le Mans, France in 1906.



Juergen Klinsmann
(Former German football coach)
"I quite simply feel burnt out. I want to give myself half a year's holiday."

What to WATCH

ESPN

England v Pakistan
First Test, Day Two
Live at 4:00 pm

Aus worried

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told Fox Sports. "We will have a pre-tour visit with Cricket Australia officials to India and we will also rely on independent advice. If it is deemed safe to go, we will tour. If we are told it is unsafe, we will reconsider our position.

"This reinforces once again that terrorist attacks and loss of life can happen anywhere and you have to take maximum precautions. You can't take shortcuts."

FIFA lifts ban

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the setting up of the new Super League and the election of federation officers.

Earlier on Wednesday the federation said it had given its approval to a revised sports bill that was passed late on Tuesday night by the Greek government.

"In view of this amendment, the FIFA Emergency Committee deemed that the (federation) is now in a position to respect the statutes and regulations of FIFA as well as those of UEFA," FIFA said in a statement.

"As a result, the suspension previously imposed on the Hellenic Football Federation has been lifted as of today."

Vassilis Gagatsis, the head of the federation, greeted the FIFA decision warmly.

"A new page is opening for Greek football and it will need a big effort from all of us to achieve progress for the sport," he said.

"In this effort we need everybody and we should all work together, in unity, and do whatever is humanly possible so that our football is further enhanced and receives international recognition."



China's 110-metre hurdles world record holder Liu Xiang holds a bouquet of flowers upon his arrival in Beijing on Friday.

Liu Xiang the Beckham of China

Athletics

AFP, Beijing

Chinese officials have expressed concern that the media furor surrounding world record hurdler Liu Xiang could harm his career, state media reported Thursday.

They quoted athletics official Yu Welii as calling for more privacy for Liu, who set a new world record in the 110 meter hurdles with a time of 12.88 seconds in Lausanne on Tuesday.

"Liu Xiang cannot escape the fans and the continuous media

coverage," Yu, the deputy head coach of China's track and field team, told Xinhua news agency.

He predicted that "a new wave of Liu frenzy would sweep across China," threatening to affect his training.

Liu was anointed the "Chinese Beckham" after he became the country's first male athlete to win an Olympic sprint gold, tying Colin Jackson's world-best mark of 12.91 seconds in the final at the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

But his performances immediately slumped amid a dizzying array of commercial engagements, which he blamed for not going under 13.05 seconds in 2005.

"Liu Xiang had to handle endless commercial and social activities ... and these disturbances put him in a unfavorable position whenever a race happened in China," said Yu.

He said Liu was mobbed by reporters and photographers wherever he went, severely affecting his training regimen.

"How could you expect Liu Xiang to leave himself any room to rest, to train and to win?"

But the appeal is likely to fall on deaf ears as China celebrates the achievement of Liu, who turned 23 on Thursday and has bolstered local hopes for the upcoming Beijing Olympics.



Italy's World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi waves to a crowd in his hometown of Viareggio where a party was organised to celebrate the Azzurri's fourth World Cup triumph on Wednesday.

Cesc not leaving Gunners



Football

THE GUARDIAN

Cesc Fabregas will sign an improved Arsenal contract later this month confirming his commitment to the Champions League finalists until 2011 and ending Real Madrid's immediate hopes of recruiting the Spain international.

The deal does not represent an extension to the five-year contract he already holds but the 19-year-old will be handed a replacement agreement that will reflect the seniority he now enjoys in Arsenal's first team. Fabregas is currently on holiday in Mauritius following his outstanding performances at the World Cup and is being represented in the contract talks by his agent Joseba Diaz.

Broad agreement has already been reached on the terms and no hitches are envisaged by either party. Fabregas's status in the side will be further enhanced when he takes on the No4 shirt once worn by Patrick Vieira, with the Arsenal

manager Arsene Wenger now willing to build his midfield around the young Catalan in the new Emirates Stadium era.

Fabregas had been a target for the new Real Madrid manager Fabio Capello, with the Bernabeu club contacting Diaz to discuss a transfer. Though talks between those parties reached an advanced stage, with Madrid tabling a salary offer that sources have described as "amazing" and "a galactico wage", the player had no intention of walking out on the Gunners.

Indeed, Wenger yesterday took the unusual step of speaking out to underline Arsenal's desire to retain their teenage midfielder in the face of competition from Madrid. "I would like to make it clear that Cesc Fabregas is not for sale and we will not be listening to any offers for him," he said.

"Since making his first-team debut nearly three years ago Cesc has progressed remarkably well, with his performances rightfully earning him a place in the Spain World Cup squad. At 19 years old Cesc represents the future of Arsenal Football Club and we are looking forward to him being a

major part of our plans for many years to come."

It emerged yesterday that those comments were made at the request of the player himself, who wants to draw a line under the speculation and politely inform Madrid that he is content at Arsenal. Fabregas believes he owes the club that took him from Barcelona as a 15-year-old and helped him to settle in London.

He also feels that Wenger can provide much more value to his development than any other coach, hoping that the Frenchman will add similar qualities to his game as those he fostered in Thierry Henry. Though Fabregas may not see out the entire five-year deal, his desire to remain in London is guaranteed at least for two more seasons, provided Wenger stays at the club.

Wenger's priority after the Premiership season was keeping together the team that reached the Champions League final and celebrated when the captain Henry pledged the remainder of his career to the Emirates Stadium. Though the England defender Sol Campbell

left on Saturday, his departure was by mutual consent and Fabregas's verbal commitment will allow Wenger now to concentrate on external recruitment.

Tomas Rosicky, the Czech Republic international, joined in a 7m-pound deal before the World Cup started and Arsenal might replace Campbell with West Bromwich Albion's 21-year-old centre-half Curtis Davies. They have also been linked with a £12m move for Italy's World Cup-winning goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Although Real Madrid have offered 27m-pound for Franck Ribery, it is believed it would take Arsenal some 10m-pound less to prise the France winger from Marseille, since the Emirates is his favoured destination. Kolo Toure's brother Yaya, a defensive midfielder at Olympiakos, is interesting Wenger, who also considers Javier Saviola a potential bargain at £5m. However, Arsenal have yet to make a firm proposition to Barcelona over the transfer of the Argentinian, who was on loan at Sevilla last season.



The pack rides in the Pyrenees mountains during the 206.5 km eleventh stage of the 93rd Tour de France cycling race from Tarbes to Val d'Aran-Pla-de-Beret, France on Thursday.

Italy search for Lippi's successor

INTERNET, undated

The Italian Football Federation have insisted they have yet to decide on who they want to replace Marcello Lippi with as Italian national Coach.

Lippi, as expected, resigned as boss on Wednesday just days after helping the Azzurri to their fourth world crown.

Former Italy and Milan winger Roberto Donadoni is being heavily associated with the role, but the FIGC are giving little away.

"Nothing has been decided," said FIGC official Demetrio Albertini, winner of 79 caps for Italy. "It is too soon to see who will replace Lippi on the bench.

"We haven't yet approached the subject with FIGC commissioner Guido Rossi. We need a little more time to understand who will be the right choice."

Although Albertini conceded that Donadoni was an option, the former Milan midfielder insisted he wouldn't be the only candidate.

"Donadoni is not excluded and a path that we could go down, but there are also a number of others," he noted.

Donadoni, who appeared for Italy in the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, has limited Serie A experience after his second stint at Livorno resulted in him being sacked last term.

Former Azzurri striker and ex-Chelsea boss Gianluca Vialli is another option along with current Under-21 boss Claudio Gentile, Alberto Zaccheroni and Claudio Ranieri.

Eng revival

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Total (3 wks, 59 overs)				242
Fall: 1-60, 2-60, 3-88.				
To bat: Bell, Jones, Plunkett, Hoggard, Harmison, Panesar.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Sami	12	1	60	0
Gul	13	1	59	1
Razaq	13	1	57	2
Kaneria	16	1	42	0
Afridi	5	0	16	0

Toss: England
Umpires: Steve Bucknor (WIS), Simon Taufel (AUS)

Tour de France Gerrans close to yellow jersey



Cycling

AFP, Pla De Beret

Australian Simon Gerrans took a step closer to the Tour de France's yellow jersey here on Wednesday.

But after the race's first real climbing stage, it was sitting next to AG2R teammate Cyril Dessel that the Tour Down Under champion got a bird's eye view of the race's main prize.

After 190.5km of racing on the first of two high mountain days in the Pyrenees, Dessel finished runner-up to Spaniard Juan Miguel Mercado of Agritubel in a two-man sprint.

However the 31-year-old Frenchman's persistence and guile paid off on a day the race had expected to see a bit more action from the main contenders.

The peloton's lack of ambition left AG2R, who only made the ascension to cycling's elite Pro Tour at the start of the season, with the yellow jersey only days after Sylvain Calzati's superb solo stage win at Lorient.

After a dubious start to the race in which they suspended the de facto team leader Francisco

Mancebo due to his implication in an ongoing doping scandal, most would agree their fortunes have improved.

Mancebo's suspension pending the results of the ongoing investigation means their new team leader, Frenchman Christophe Moreau, has taken on the job of trying to claim a top place finish in Paris.

And the 26-year-old Gerrans - who initially came to cycling thanks to the prompting of the pioneering Phil Anderson - is hoping to play a major part.

"It's fantastic," he told AFP after he ambled in with main bunch just over seven minutes adrift of Mercado and Dessel.

"It's a huge buzz having the yellow jersey. I raced the Tour de France last year and was a bit shy on the results side, but now to have the yellow jersey in the team after Sylvain's win is great.

"It kind of gives you goosebumps."

Given what happened to AG2R with the Mancebo episode, the team would be forgiven for feeling lucky.

But Dessel's possession of the race lead, with a huge climbing stage to come on Thursday, is already in danger.

Gerrans admitted the German T-Mobile of former race leader Serhij Honchar, who still have Australian Mick Rogers and Andreas Kloden well placed in the general classification, had played it cool - but that it could all change.

"There were no massive attacks. The T-Mobile guys were just riding tempo at the front of the bunch all day, but tomorrow could be different.

"The race could be blown to pieces."

The best placed from the current bunch of yellow jersey favourites is American Floyd Landis, who now sits fifth at 4:45 behind Dessel.

Rogers is sixth at 4:53, with his team-mate Kloden is ninth at 5:35.

However on a day that saw Spanish ace Iban Mayo show the first signs of weakness, and a relative lack of ambition from the main yellow jersey hopefuls, it is still too early to say how the race will pan out.

For Gerrans, attacking in search of personal glory - after he narrowly missed out on winning a stage on his debut last year - will have to be a well chosen moment.

Until then, he will be riding to protect the yellow jersey for as long as possible, whether it's for Dessel or Moreau.

ICC hits back

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two years ago his 'doosra' delivery was reported by match referee Chris Broad, the former England opening batsman, a decision that sparked the review which led to the regulation changes.

Pak to split ODI

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Tests, then they are figuring in one-day matches and when they are not playing for Pakistan then some of them are playing for county teams.

"It is simply too much cricket. There is simply no time for proper rest," he said.

Shaharyar said if Pakistan decided against having two teams, then they would certainly implement a strict rotation policy.

"We would rest two or three of our players each time Pakistan play in a Test series or an international tournament. That would give the players an opportunity to avoid any burnout."