

Toure signs for Monaco

AFP, London

French first division strugglers Monaco announced on Tuesday they had signed Ivory Coast international full-back Yaya Toure.

The 23-year-old Toure last season played in Greece with Olympiakos winning the league title and cup double, following two seasons with Metallurg Donetsk in Ukraine.

He began his career with ASEC Abidjan before joining Beveren in Belgium. Toure played in all three of his country's games in the World Cup finals in Germany.

Monaco have made a poor start to the French league season losing their first two games and are currently joint bottom.

Prosecutors demand penalties

AFP, Rome

Italian football federation (FIGC) prosecutors are demanding that AC Milan be fined 10,000 euros (13,000 dollars) and Serie A side Reggina and second division outfit Avellino be relegated as part of the second part of the match-fixing scandal in Italian football.

The case against the three clubs had been adjourned after being brought before the courts at the beginning of the month.

FIGC prosecutor Stefano Palazzi demanded that AC Milan be fined and one of the Milanese club's former directors Leonardo Meani be suspended for three months for allegedly turning a blind eye to irregularities during a second division match between Arezzo and Salernitana during the 2004-05 season.

As part of the same inquiry AC Milan has already been deducted eight points for next season and demoted from second to third place for the 2005-06 season, and Meani suspended for five months.

Palazzi also demanded that Arezzo be relegated to the third division, and given a three-point penalty, as well as a five-year suspension for linesman Stefano Titanianio and Gennaro Mazzei, a former FIGC official in charge of choosing linesmen, who is charged with conditioning matches.

Palazzi is also demanding that Reggina be demoted to the Serie B and given a 15-point penalty.

Ballack winning fitness race

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack is winning his fitness battle ahead of Sunday's Barclays Premiership opener against Manchester City.

Ballack took a bang on the hip early in the 2-1 Community Shield defeat by Liverpool and is receiving treatment for the injury.

Ballack will not play any part in Germany's international friendly with Sweden on Wednesday night, increasing his chances of facing City.

"The injury is a painful bruise and there is some swelling around the hip," Ballack told the club's website, www.chelseafc.com.

"I have to wait and see what happens in the next few days, but I'm hoping it'll be okay for the Manchester City game."



Pavel Nedved, seen here in Hamburg at the end of Czech Republic's World Cup campaign following their loss to Italy, is to play his final match for his country today.

Nedved's last hurrah

Football

REUTERS, Prague

Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved said on Tuesday that he will end his national team career after Wednesday's international friendly against Serbia.

"It isn't easy for me, I don't have any health problems that are forcing this. It is because of a lot of other reasons, and I would like to give other younger players a chance.

Wednesday's match will be my last for the national team," he told reporters.

The 2003 European Footballer of the Year suffered a knee injury in the Euro 2004 semifinal with Greece and retired afterwards saying he no longer wanted to play for his country because of the toll it was taking on his body.

But the Juventus player was coaxed back to help the Czechs qualify for the World Cup finals, returning for the two-legged playoffs against Norway in November.

The comeback ended bitterly as the Czechs failed to progress from the group stage in Germany and Nedved, who turns 34 at the end of this month, has been mulling his future ever since.

"I will be 34 and I want to be with my family and play only for Juventus. It would be very difficult to prepare for tough international matches while playing in Italy's second division," Nedved added.

Wednesday's match will be Nedved's 91st for the national team. He has scored 17 goals.

Reyes closer to Real

Football

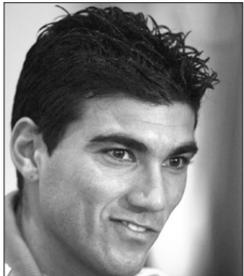
AFP, London

Jose Antonio Reyes' dream of joining Real Madrid has moved a significant step closer to becoming reality with both clubs keen for a deal to be reached over the unsettled winger.

Real are anxious to sign the Spanish international with club president Ramon Calderon saying: "He wants to be with us and we are looking for the best solution to resolve this problem."

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger paved the way for the switch when he left Reyes out of last week's Champions League qualifier against Dinamo Zagreb. If he had played he would have been ineligible to turn out for Real in Europe's

top club competition. Reyes, who is on duty for Spain in a friendly against Iceland later Tuesday, was optimistic that his arrival at the Bernabeu was very much on the cards and he paid



JOSE ANTONIO REYES tribute to Wenger's support

"If I'd played in Zagreb it would have been very complicated. The boss was good," he told Tuesday's edition of The Sun.

"If Arsenal want to sell and Real Madrid buy it was what he had to do. "Wenger has acted exactly like he is - a gentleman. I want to thank him publicly for everything he has done for me."

Arsenal have stuck a 16 million pound price tag on Reyes who joined the Premiership side on a nine million pound deal from Seville in January 2004.

The player added: "I've told Wenger and the chairman the offer from Madrid is irresistible for me."

"It is a dream that I want to fulfil and now the only thing that is lacking is an offer which is also good for Arsenal."

Buffon staying at Juve

AFP, Rome

Italian international goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon has said he intends to stay with Juventus despite the club being relegated to the second division for involvement in match fixing.

Buffon told Turin's La Stampa newspaper that he had no intention of following other top names such as Fabio Cannavaro, Gianluca Zambrotta, Lilian Thuram, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Patrick Vieira, all of whom have joined other clubs.

"This club made a winner out of me and if today I am a world champion, it is all thanks to Juve," he said.

"At least it will be a new challenge -- to win the second division title."

Buffon who kept goal for Italy in the World Cup final win over France last month, said that had Juventus stayed in the first division he would probably have left.

"I have been with Juve for five years and to be honest I was keen to try something different," he said. "It could have been with AC Milan, Inter Milan or even Arsenal. I think more than likely it would have been AC Milan."

Juventus were relegated to the Italian second division and given a 17 points handicap for the new season after they were found guilty of being heavily involved in the match-fixing scandal that rocked football in the country.

Gunners trio in line for awards

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal stars Thierry Henry, Emmanuel Eboué and Jens Lehmann have all received nominations for the UEFA club football awards.

The Emirates Stadium trio have each been nominated for awards in their respective positions and are also automatically shortlisted for title of UEFA club footballer of the year 2006.

Jens Lehmann faces competition from Juventus stopper Gianluigi Buffon and Lyon's Gregory Coupet for the goalkeeping honours, whilst Eboué is shortlisted alongside Juve's Fabio Cannavaro and Barcelona's Carles Puyol in the defender of the year category.

Henry faces stiff competition in the forward of the year group, in the form of Barcelona's Ronaldo and Samuel Eto'o.

Nominees for club midfielder are Juan Roman Riquelme of Villarreal, Juninho of Lyon and Barcelona's Deco.

A new voting procedure gives the coaches of all 16 teams that reached the knockout stage of last year's competition the chance to cast their verdicts, alongside members of the UEFA technical study group.

The title of club footballer of the year is decided upon solely by the 16 coaches.

The awards are to be presented during the draw for the UEFA Champions League group stage, on August 24 in Monaco.

The most valuable player of the UEFA Cup 2005-06 award will be presented the following day during the draw for the UEFA Cup.

Middlesbrough striker Mark Viduka is shortlisted alongside Sevilla trio Daniel Alves, Enzo Maresca and Javier Saviola.

Spotlight on Loew

Football

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

German football begins a new era on Wednesday when Joachim Loew makes his debut as national coach in a friendly with Sweden in Gelsenkirchen.

Just five weeks ago Germany were celebrating a successful World Cup -- with the hosts finishing a creditable third -- but since then coach Jurgen Klinsmann has departed leaving his former assistant Loew to continue his work.

For Loew, a former coach at VfB Stuttgart and Austria Vienna, the Sweden friendly represents the only chance to bed himself into the job before the Euro 2008 qualifiers begin.

The Republic of Ireland are Germany's first Euro 2008 hurdle in Stuttgart on September 2.

Germany failed to win a single match at Euro 2000 and Euro 2004 but that has not stopped Loew thinking positive for the 2008 edition in Austria and Switzerland.

"We failed in our goal to win the World Cup so we want to bring the Euro 2008 title back to Germany," said Loew.

"We can't bask in the World Cup euphoria forever but we can take confidence from the fact that we can compete with the top teams."

As well as trying to step out of Klinsmann's shadow, Loew must deal with a spate of injuries that have denied him the chance to field a full strength team against Sweden.

Captain Michael Ballack is sidelined with a hip injury sustained in Chelsea's 2-1 Community Shield defeat to Liverpool on Sunday.

Loew now just hopes his skipper is back fit in time for the Ireland match, declaring: "We hope Ballack is back as soon as possible and perhaps he can play again at the weekend."

Borussia Dortmund duo Christoph Metzelder and Sebastian Kehl also miss out with knee injuries.

But Loew can call upon the strike partnership of Lukas Podolski and World Cup golden boot winner Miroslav Klose for the Sweden match.

Sweden should need no firing up for the match with their 2-0 defeat to Germany in the last 16 of the World Cup still fresh in their memory.

Like Germany they are also warming up for the Euro 2008 qualifiers with their first match against Latvia on September 2.

Basten looking beyond

Football

AFP, Dublin

Dutch manager Marco van Basten will look to rebound from a disappointing World Cup as he looks some new faces in place of the older brigade who failed to deliver when he faces Ireland in a friendly here on Wednesday.

With Phillip Cocu having retired and two more of the established stars Ruud van Nistelrooy and Mark van Bommel being axed by van Basten it gives a chance to young tyros striker Jan Huntelaar and midfielder Stijn Schaars to prove their worth in their places.

While van Basten has had the luxury of dropping players his Ireland counterpart Steve Staunton has been hit by a raft of injuries, particularly to mercurial skipper Robbie Keane, and has laid waste to the squad.

Staunton hardly had the ideal preparation for the clash either

when he was held up outside the team hotel on Monday -- though fortunately he escaped unscathed.

Van Bommel's exclusion despite Phillip Cocu's retirement indicates Schaars is being groomed to take on the playmaker role, while van Nistelrooy's absence clears the way for Huntelaar who scored 33 goals in 34 league games last season.

The 22-year-old, who joined Ajax for a Dutch record fee of 6.5 million pounds in the middle of last season, has continued his hot streak this season scoring two in the Champions League qualifier against FC Copenhagen last week.

Van Basten's reason for preferring younger talent to their more illustrious counterparts was blunt.

"At the moment we think these players are better," said the former Dutch footballing great, whose side crashed out of the World Cup in the second round to Portugal.

His attacking options also include in-demand Dirk Kuyt, Jan Venegoor of Hesselink and

Premiership wide men Robin van Persie and Arjen Robben.

Coping with such firepower will be all the more daunting for the Irish because of the absence through injury of defensive lynchpin Richard Dunne and the retirement of Gary Breen.

Adding to Irish woes are injuries to left back Ian Harte and Newcastle United goalkeeper Shay Given.

But the Newcastle connection may provide a ray of light for Staunton.

Right back Steve Carr has come out of retirement while Damien Duff's close season move from Chelsea to the Geordie club could restore the natural ebullience that dimmed under the muscular approach of Jose Mourinho.

One of Ireland's brightest prospects Stephen Ireland is also out and Staunton has not concealed his concern at the damage done to his preparations for the daunting task of travelling to World Cup semi-finalists Germany next month for his first competitive match in charge in the Euro 2008 qualifier.

"It's far from ideal to lose so many of the squad through injury," said Staunton.

"We are without some of our leading players, and with this being the final opportunity to test ourselves prior to the start of Euro 2008 qualifying campaign, that's very disappointing."

So van Basten holds all the aces going into Wednesday's match but with that comes added pressure. Despite his good record since succeeding Dick Advocaat two years ago, his tenure has been the subject of public criticism domestically.

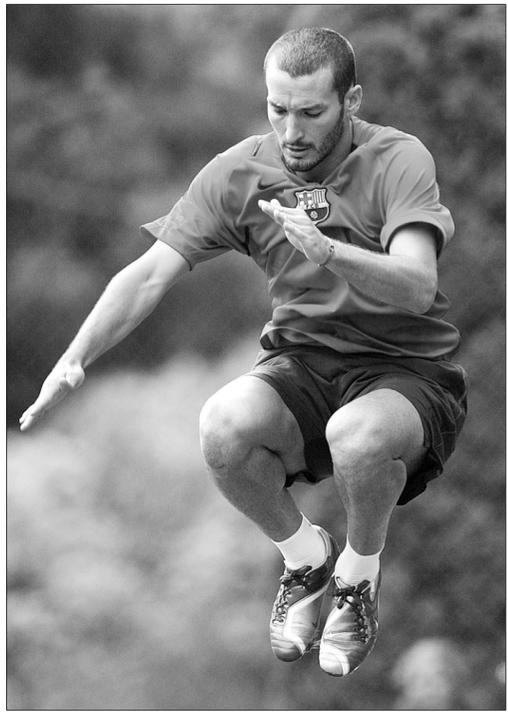
His team's modest performance in the World Cup gave credence to the concerns and this game will be the first test of his plans to restore the Netherlands status as one of the aristocrats of European football.

The expectation level for Staunton is lower but he too must restore the hallmark qualities that make for a successful Irish team: passion and stubbornness.

After a spectacular start to his stewardship -- a 3-0 win against Sweden -- his team fell to ground with a bump second time out, in a torpid 1-0 defeat to Chile.

While van Basten is looking to mould a team around two new players, he has plenty of young established players to provide a platform to greater things.

Staunton, on the other hand is on a hiding to nothing. And avoiding a hiding may be the best he can hope for.



Barcelona's new recruit Gianluca Zambrotta jumps during a training session in Barcelona on Tuesday.

Staunton in gun incident

Football

INTERNET, undated

Republic of Ireland manager Steve Staunton has been involved in a serious incident outside the team hotel in Portmarnock.

It is understood a man in his 30s approached Staunton holding a gun, at which point Staunton, 37, promptly turned and fled.

Staunton informed hotel staff of the situation, who in turn contacted local gardai. The assailant was eventually caught on a nearby beach.

Although no weapon has yet been found, the man, who is believed to have a history of psychiatric problems, was arrested and taken to a nearby station in Malahide.

A statement from the Football Association of Ireland read: "The FAI can confirm an incident took place outside the Republic of Ireland team hotel in Portmarnock earlier this evening."

"The matter is now being dealt with by the gardai."

"The Republic of Ireland manager Stephen Staunton is absolutely fine and looking forward to training tomorrow."

A spokesperson for the gardai confirmed: "We have one man in custody in relation to an incident that happened in Portmarnock shortly before 8pm."

"He was arrested in the vicinity under section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act."

"Gardai are continuing to search the area for the weapon."

Staunton is currently preparing for Ireland's friendly with Holland at Lansdowne Road on Wednesday.

The former Liverpool, Aston Villa and Coventry defender has only been in charge of Ireland's national team since January.

The clash with the Dutch will be his third game in charge following a 3-0 win over Sweden in March, followed by a 1-0 defeat to Chile at the end of May.

For Ireland's most-capped player with 102 appearances to his name, this latest fixture has been blighted by problems.

Ten days ago Staunton's right-hand man in former England manager Sir Bobby Robson was taken ill before Ipswich's opening Championship game of the season, a 2-1 defeat to Crystal Palace at Portman Road.

Ireland's international football consultant then spent two nights at Ipswich Hospital under observation following a series of tests prior to being released.

Robson, however, will not be in attendance for the game with Holland, along with seven players who have been forced to withdraw over the past few days through injury.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP RE V Y R Y J R Z V J F K T F P Q U T K S Q K Q S I T N Q J V N R B V U Q S F J V I U R Z , R I U P V U E T K N R Z V E T K N R Z V P ? Yesterday's Cryptogram: FILM DRAMA ABOUT HEISTED RAIL CARS CARRYING PURPLE FRUIT: "THE GRAPE TRAIN ROBBERY." Today's Cryptogram Clue: E equals F The Cryptogram 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 using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.