



Maldini blasts Blatter

Football

INTERNET, undated

Milan and Italy legend Paolo Maldini has launched a sensational attack on FIFA President Joseph Blatter.

The defender has taken issue with Blatter's comportment after the Azzurri beat France on penalties to win the World Cup this summer.

Blatter opted to not be a part of the award ceremony when the side was handed the trophy, a snub which Maldini finds hard to digest.

"The way FIFA treated us in Berlin was scandalous," the former Azzurri captain said in an interview to magazine Panorama.

"Blatter refused to hand over the trophy to us and this is a scandal

that our Federation did not react to," he added.

"I had never seen anything like this and what is worse, Blatter keeps expressing very harsh comments on Italian football."

"Now I understand why we never won as much as we deserved in the past."

"I think I know why everyone shows so little consideration for Italy, it's mainly a political issue, but I think the FIGC must now behave like a Federation of world champions and make themselves heard."

The veteran added that he may consider becoming some kind of football ambassador once he quits the game, even if he's unsure of what his future holds.

"I have thought about this, but I don't know what I will do," he added before also criticising another important figure in the game.

"Let's take Michel Platini's example, he was always considered a very outspoken person, but now his statements always depend on what people think about him. I don't really like what he says."

Maldini was also asked for an opinion on former Milan boss Fabio Capello who was blasted by Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero last week.

"I fought with Capello in the past and that is no secret," he added. "Discussions with him are always very heated, but one of his qualities is that he forgets the past very quickly."

"However, I must admit that I believe Barcelona are stronger than his Real Madrid side this season."

Scottish masseur England's secret

AFP, Skopje



England's revival under new manager Steve McClaren is being boosted by the unlikely acquisition of a Scottish masseur who has become the squad's official joke teller and mascot.

McClaren has made a big impact since taking over from Sven-Goran Eriksson, including dropping David Beckham and appointing John Terry as captain in his place.

He has also restored Steven Gerrard to the right of midfield, with instant rewards, and seen his team beat Greece 4-0 and Andorra 5-0 in his opening two matches.

But as England prepare for their first major test under their new coach, a Euro 2008 qualifier in Macedonia, it is the impact of an unheard-of backroom staff member that is making the headlines.

Chelsea masseur Billy McCulloch has been persuaded to leave his post with his native Scotland to join the England party and, it seems, has made a remarkable impact on morale!

"We poached him," said Terry, speaking at a press conference

here. "And I'm glad we did."

"He's a genius with his hands. There's time when you are going to be tense or feel stressed about a game and he just completely relaxes you."

"He comes to your room and massages you and basically sends you to sleep. If you need him at two or three in the morning he'll do that, he wants to win."

"But more than that he's a funny man and never short of a joke. He has us in fits of laughter every day."

"The other night we went to a comedy club and the comedians there were quite overwhelmed by what was going on. He got them off stage and did a 25-minute slot of doing his jokes and the lads were in stitches!"

"To be fair he only had a handful of jokes when he came to Chelsea but then he realised he's got a little job in this. He's been out and bought joke books - in fact he's got one in his room now! He goes through it and tells us a different joke every time. He tells us three or four every day."

"The lads love him. The Liverpool and Man United boys want to buy him off Chelsea now they've seen him. You think I'm joking! But we've told them the transfer deadline has gone."

McCulloch, of course, will have no impact on the pitch but his inclusion on the team bus emphasises the changes new manager McClaren has made since replacing predecessor Eriksson in August.

He has called for Terry to help reproduce a club atmosphere in the England squad and is rapidly winning favour with players who enjoy his new approach.

Terry said: "It's loads of little things that have changed. He comes to us all the time and says 'we're happy with this' or 'is there anything we'd like to change'."

"It's down to small things, like the lads travelling in tracksuits feeling comfortable instead of in suits. Small things like that can make a big difference."

"Also we are doing more things together. In days gone by with England I would eat dinner and go back to my room but that's certainly not the case now."

Everyone is spending a lot more time with each other and we're really getting to know each other not only on the pitch but off it as well. It can only help us."

Basile defends Riquelme

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Alfio Basile defended Juan Roman Riquelme after the playmaker was widely criticised for a lacklustre performance in the 3-0 defeat by Brazil.

"I like Riquelme," Basile told reporters at Buenos Aires airport on Tuesday. "It's my problem. I like him even if you don't."

The gravel-voiced coach, who replaced Jose Pekerman following the World Cup, played down Sunday's result in his first game in charge.

"The result doesn't interest me and it wouldn't have interested me if we had won either. It was simply that the other team took their chances and we didn't."

"The important thing was to get to know the lads and to spend some time with them."

Argentina Football Association (AFA) president Julio Grondona voiced his support for Basile.

"This squad has some very good lads such as (Lionel) Messi, (Sergio) Aguero and (Carlos) Tevez," he told Argentine media.

"I have complete confidence in them and in Basile. They're going to bring us many happy moments. 'We have to wait for the new coach to develop his style. Basile knows his stuff, he picks the right players and he knows the national team."

Gibraltar close to UEFA

AFP, Geneva

Europe's 52 internationally-recognised football associations will make a decision on Gibraltar's controversial seven-year bid to join UEFA at the European governing body's Congress in January, a spokesman said Wednesday.

UEFA spokesman William Gaillard told AFP that the international Court of Arbitration of Sport had recently ruled that the Gibraltar Football Association's application must run through the full decision-making process.

"CAS required the UEFA Congress to take a decision on Gibraltar. Membership will have to be approved by Congress at its meeting in January in Duesseldorf," Gaillard said.

The Lausanne-based CAS confirmed that a panel had made a ruling recently following an appeal by the GFA against UEFA, but said it was confidential and declined to make the details public.

"It's not yet over," explained Matthieu Reeb, secretary general of world sport's top court. "We have had a first decision that was made but I cannot give you the contents," he added.

UEFA's executive board had previously rejected the application first made in 1999.

Under current rules, which were first implemented at global level by world football's governing body FIFA years after Gibraltar's initial bid, only independent states may join UEFA.



South Korea's Park Ji-Sung (C) fights for the ball with Taiwan's Lin Che-Min (L) during their 2007 Asian Cup qualifying match in Suwon, south of Seoul, yesterday. South Korea thrashed Taiwan 8-0.

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

S Korea blank Taiwan

Football

AFP, Suwon

South Korea found itself on the brink of securing a place at the 2007 Asian Cup on Wednesday after an 8-0 thrashing of Taiwan at Suwon World Cup Stadium.

As expected, the hosts -- fielding a strong line-up including Premier League stars Park Ji-sung, Lee Young-pyo and Seol Ki-hyeon -- had too much game for the visitors, who are pointless at the bottom of qualifying Group B.

After South Korea scored twice in the opening four minutes, the game was no longer about which team would prevail, but how many goals South Korea would score.

Jung Jo-gook scored a hat-trick,

second goal two minutes before the break, the Reading winger heading home a Kim Do-heon free kick.

Just a minute later, Kim Do-heon's corner found Jung's head to put the hosts ahead 4-0 at half-time.

After a series of near misses, Cho got in the action with a simple tap-in after 64 minutes following good work by Seol.

With 12 minutes remaining, Kim Do-heon scored a spectacular half-volley from 25 yards.

Cho grabbed his second and his team's seventh from the spot after 83 minutes. Jung got his hat-trick with two minutes left in the game to make it a miserable night for the visitors.

Next summer's competition will be co-hosted by Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Brazil striker Vagner Love (C) runs with the ball past a Wales defender during an international friendly match at White Hart Lane in London on Tuesday. Love scored the second in Brazil's 2-0 win.

Brazil too strong for Wales

Football

AFP, London

Brazil coach Dunga maintained his unbeaten record as goals from Marcelo and Vagner Love clinched a 2-0 friendly international win against Wales in London.

Dunga was taking charge of his third match since succeeding Carlos Alberto Parreira in July and the signs are that he has banished the hangover from Brazil's disappointing World Cup campaign.

The then World Cup holders were dumped out by France in the quarterfinals in Germany, but since Dunga took over he has overseen a draw against Norway, a draw against

England and a 2-0 win against Wales.

The five-times world champions

were quickly into their stride and should have taken the lead in the third minute.

Wales goalkeeper Paul Jones bravely blocked Alex's close-range effort from Ronaldinho's corner, but Edmilson wastefully stabbed wide with the goal at his mercy.

Ronaldinho returned from a back injury and AC Milan midfielder Kaka was recalled after he came off the bench on Sunday to score a superb solo goal.

Brazil had been breathtaking at times against Argentina and Dunga's men did not seem affected by the kick-off here being delayed for 15 minutes as a result of crowd congestion.

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