



Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba (L) traps the ball as he shields a Gabonese defender during their African Nations Cup qualifier in Abidjan on Sunday.

## Irish president hails Cyprus

AFP, Nicosia

Irish President Mary McAleese praised Cyprus's historic five-goal thumping of Ireland during an official visit Monday aimed at strengthening relations between the two countries.

The first ever visit by an Irish president to Cyprus has been engulfed in football fever after Saturday's shock 5-2 win, regarded as Cyprus's best ever result and Ireland's most embarrassing defeat.

Following official talks between McAleese and Cyprus President Tassos Papadopoulos, top of the agenda at the news conference was the result that shook European football.

"I thought you were brilliant. I thought Cyprus were absolutely stunning... it was very historic," McAleese told reporters.

"I think I'm right in saying, not in living memory have we been defeated so comprehensively... It's really good to be here for an epoch-making night," she added.

The Irish president kicked off her official Cyprus tour with the game at Nicosia's GSP stadium which McAleese attended along with Papadopoulos. They were among an 8,000 crowd in which the majority were travelling Irish fans.

Asked what she thought of the Irish performance, McAleese answered diplomatically: "It wasn't great was it now?"

"We were outclassed on the night, you were two-and-a-half times better than us."

However, McAleese voiced hope that Ireland could learn from the Cyprus experience and pick themselves up for the crucial home tie against Czech Republic on Wednesday.

## Milan eye Di Natale swoop

INTERNET, undated

Milan are ready to buy themselves something nice for Christmas in the shape of Antonio Di Natale.

The Rossoneri are considering boosting their attacking options for 2007 and the Udinese man is a possibility.

After losing Andriy Shevchenko to Chelsea in the summer, Milan brought in Ricardo Oliveira from Real Betis.

However, the Brazilian is taking his time to settle while there are also concerns over the form of Pippo Inzaghi and Alberto Gilardino.

As a result, boss Carlo Ancelotti is keen on adding a new dimension to his offensive options and Di Natale the Italian word for Christmas is the perfect addition in theory.

The former Empoli hitman would add pace to the Rossoneri attack and his ability to play on the flanks may be of use to vary tactics during games.

The Italian international, who delightfully assisted Luca Toni's goal against the Ukraine on Saturday, also comes with an added bonus.

## ERRATUM

The caption of Brazil-Al Kuwait match photo on page 19 of yesterday's Star Sport issue was mistakenly printed as that of Formula 1 driver Fernando Alonso. Actually the caption should have read Brazil's mercurial striker Ronaldinho (L) is in control against Adel Oqla of Al-Kuwait during their friendly match in Kuwait City on Saturday. We regret the slip.

--Sports Editor

## Football

AFP, Cairo

Nigeria edged lowly Lesotho 1-0 in Maseru Sunday to maintain a perfect record in the 2008 African Nations Cup qualifiers.

After surviving a first-half onslaught from Likoen (The Crocodiles), the Super Eagles snatched the winner when Middlesbrough striker Yakubu Aiyegbeni finished a Christian Obodo cross.

Everton defender and Nigeria captain Joseph Yobo was outstanding as the home team fought to cause an upset while Niger were held 0-0 by Uganda in the other Group 3 second-round encounter.

Former champions Nigeria have six points, Uganda four, Niger one and Lesotho none with the next series of fixtures scheduled for March. Only group winners are guaranteed places at the 16-nation tournament in Ghana.

Angola are another country boasting two wins from two outings after beating Group 6 strugglers Kenya 3-1 in Luanda through goals from Jose Kalanga, Mateus Costa and Flavio Amado.

Boniface Ambani pulled one goal back in the closing stages for the Harambee Stars, who were abandoned by French coach Bernard Lama after a shock home loss to Eritrean last month.

It was much more one sided in

Eritrea failed to build on that bright start, only drawing 0-0 with fellow minnows Swaziland in Asmara where the goalkeepers were outstanding in a lively first half before the standard of football deteriorated.

Angola, shock qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup at the expense of Nigeria, top the table with six points, Eritrea have four, Swaziland one and pointless Kenya appear out of the reckoning.

Congo are the surprise pacesetters in Group 11 after outclassing Chad 3-0 in Brazzaville with two early goals inside six minutes followed by another just after half-time.

The Red Devils lead on goal difference from resurgent South Africa, who won in Zambia for the first time with captain Aaron Mokoena scoring the only goal after 28 minutes when he headed home a Delron Buckley free kick.

With just one point separating Zambia from the joint leaders, the stage is set for a thrilling three-way struggle to finish first while Chad appear out of their depth.

Another country unaccustomed to top spot are Tanzania, who are one point ahead of Senegal and Burkina Faso in Group 7 after forcing a 0-0 draw with Mozambique in Maputo.

Narcisse Yameogo converted a second-half penalty to give Burkina Faso a 1-0 home victory over Senegal in a west African showdown marred by the sending off of visiting player Papa Diakate.

It was much more one sided in

## No favours for Poles: C' Ron

### Football

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal will be going out to make it two Euro 2008 qualifying wins out of two against Poland on Wednesday, said Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo.

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe

Scolari said last week he would be pleased with a win and a draw from their first two matches, against Azerbaijan and Poland.

However Ronaldo said the players will not be satisfied with a share of the points.

"Me and the team are going out there to win," said Ronaldo, who scored twice during Portugal's 3-0 victory at home over Azerbaijan on Saturday.

"What Scolari meant was that if we aren't able to win, we should get at least one point.

"It's obvious that we are going to play to win, even if we know beforehand that Poland has a great team. The probabilities of a win are 50 percent for each side."

Poland has earned only four points from three qualifying matches so far, but Ronaldo believes they remain a tough side.

Ronaldo added: "Poland has more experienced and stronger players, athletes who play in more competitive leagues. We're going to have to work hard to achieve a victory."

Portugal, who finished fourth at the 2006 World Cup in Germany, climbed to third place in the group following their win over Azerbaijan while Poland occupy fifth place.

Poland's 1-0 away win over Kazakhstan on Saturday followed a 3-1 home defeat to Finland and a 1-1 draw with Serbia.

Group A also features Armenia, Belgium, and Serbia, who top the group with two wins and a draw ahead of Finland.

## Poldi to play against Slovakia

AFP, Frankfurt

Germany international striker Lukas Podolski has been hit with a two-match friendly ban after lashing out at Blackburn Rovers' Georgian defender Zurab Khizanishvili.

A sports tribunal at the German football federation (DFB) on Monday banned Podolski for two games after he kicked Khizanishvili during the friendly against Georgia, which Germany won 2-0.

Since the incident - which led to Podolski being sent off - occurred in a friendly, the ban does not rule the Bayern Munich striker out of Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier against Slovakia.

## Rio looking at Croatia return

AFP, Manchester

England defender Rio Ferdinand hopes to be fit for Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier in Croatia despite the back problem which forced him to miss Saturday's 0-0 draw with Macedonia.

The 27-year-old Manchester United player will rejoin Steve McClaren and his squad and will then be assessed by the England medical team before a decision is taken on whether or not he can train on Monday.

Steven Gerrard will miss the game in Zagreb through suspension. He will serve a one-match ban after collecting his second yellow card of the campaign against Macedonia.

## Socceroos look beyond Bahrain

AFP, Sydney

Australia, rebuilding after the World Cup, is looking beyond Wednesday's qualifier here with Bahrain and towards winning next year's Asian Cup.

The Socceroos were the first team to qualify for Asia's football showpiece and hope to finish top of their Group D to be seeded in December's draw for next year's finals in Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia.

Brett Emerton, one of Australia's stars at the World Cup in Germany in June, believes the Australians can win the Asian Cup at their first attempt next July if they perform to their potential.

"I think we've got a good enough team on paper to do that, obviously we have to go there and perform so it's totally up to us," said Emerton at a welcome for the World Cup squad here Monday.

"South Korea and Japan are our main competition, but as we showed in the World Cup we can compete with them."

"On paper we've got a good squad, so hopefully we can go there and do the job."

Ranked 38 after reaching the last 16 of the World Cup, Australia is the highest-placed Asian nation on FIFA's standings.

The Socceroos overwhelmed Japan 3-1 at the World Cup and was the only Asian nation to advance to the second round in Germany.

Australia received a shock when they crashed 2-0 in Kuwait in their last Asian Cup group match and striker John Aloisi says it is vital Australia learns its lesson and prepare better for overseas Asian matches.

"The (logistical) dangers we'll face (at the Asian Cup) are like we had in Kuwait - the heat and getting there just a couple of days before the game is difficult," Aloisi said.



MASSIMO ODDO

## Oddo hits the spot

INTERNET, undated

Massimo Oddo explains why he decided to take the crucial penalty against the Ukraine Saturday night, continuing his remarkable record.

"When the referee blew the whistle, I looked around me. I think Alessandro Del Piero would've been first choice, but he'd already been substituted. So I took the ball and nobody said anything."

The Lazio defender had never previously scored in 22 Azzurri appearances, but took the opportunity to break his duck in front of his home fans at the Stadio Olimpico.

"My teammates saw that I felt ready for this and put their faith in me. Thankfully, I didn't betray that trust. It was one of the best days of my life," continued the right-back.

Oddo has not missed a penalty kick in five years, hitting the back of the net in his last 14 consecutive attempts, so it wasn't too much of a risk.

"Don't remind me of that record, or I'll get nervous and miss the next one!" he jokingly told journalists.

## Vinnie catching the eye

### Football

AFP, Sydney

Vince Grella has developed into one of Australia's key players in the transition period after this year's World Cup, coach Graham Arnold said Monday.

The tenacious Parma midfielder, playing in Italy's Serie A, has become one of the first players picked and his influence was evident in Australia's 1-1 draw with Paraguay in Brisbane last Saturday.

With the retirement of senior players, Tony Popovic, Stan Lazaridis, Tony Vidmar and Zeljko Kalac, more now is expected from Grella.

Arnold rates the 27-year-old highly and believes he has much to offer Australian football ahead of next year's Asian Cup and the 2010

World Cup in South Africa.

"Vinnie is different. Vince Grella was my choice as Australian player of the last World Cup," Arnold said Monday.

"Vinnie drops in the middle of the back two to pick up the ball and he's the guy who starts the play. He's such a good passer of the ball."

Grella's link play was at the heart of building the Australian attacks against Paraguay, playing short passes to supports and making himself available for the ball as well as breaking up opposing attacks.

Everton star Tim Cahill says Grella has become an integral part of the Australian lineup.

"Vinnie is a very good player internationally and domestically and he's a massive part in our second line of defence," Cahill said Monday.

"He played very well last weekend and he keeps the ball so well."

"Vinnie Grella will be around for

years to come, along with myself and (Marco) Bresciano and a few others, we're going to be the new era of the Socceroos and fly the flag."

Grella will be playing in his first Asian Cup qualifier against Bahrain here on Wednesday as he picks the matches he can play to fit in with his commitments for Parma.

"If you're playing regularly in Italy, it's not easy to back up after these big flights and then play again," Grella said last week.

"Parma can't do much, it's more in the (Australian) federation's hands and the people running it have to be sensible."

"But they are very smart people at the FFA who understand what how hard it is to hold down the position at your club, you just need a bit of common sense and communication."



VINCE GRELLA

## Roman home for Italy

### Football

REUTERS, Milan

Italian soccer officials are to consider making Rome's Olympic stadium the permanent home for their World Cup-winning team, ending the tradition of playing games around the country.

But the suggestion could cause a political row in Italy, where there are strong regional identities, while Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon has already criticised the luke-warm support for the team in Rome.

Italy beat Ukraine 2-0 in a Euro 2008 qualifier in the capital on Saturday and Gianni Petrucci, head of the Italian Olympic Committee, said he intends to put the idea of making the venue the full-time base of the Azzurri to soccer officials.

"I would like it if the Olympic stadium became the national team's stadium. It will be one of the discussions on the table for the future president of the Football Federation," said Rome-born Petrucci in comments reported by the daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

The man Petrucci appointed to be temporary commissioner of the Federation, Luca Pancelli, gave some support to the idea.

"I can't deny that when I was leaving the stadium I had the same idea. It would be nice to

make Rome the fixed home for the national team, especially given the extraordinary response that the capital has always given to big events," he said.

"But I take into account that there are other cities that would want and would deserve to host the national side and so this is a proposal to weigh up well and approve in a democratic way," added the Federation chief, who was also born in Rome.

Italy, like Germany and Spain, play their home games at different venues with matches in the past few years played as far apart as Palermo in Sicily and Trieste, close to the border with Slovenia.

The Olympic stadium is already home to the two Serie A clubs -- AS Roma and Lazio -- but Italy keeper Buffon, who plays in Turin for Juventus, says the atmosphere for the Ukraine match was far weaker than for club games.

"Against Ukraine the atmosphere was like that of a theatre. I know this stadium and it can feel like an extra man for a team. If the fans want to give you a hand they can do. I pay attention to these things and the first chant for us didn't come until the 28th minute and then I didn't hear anything more," said Buffon.

"I wasn't angered by this but it made me sad," added the keeper, who said that Italy fans across the country needed to

"learn to escape from localism". "There is a more general matter -- there always seems to be a reason not to support Italy," he said.

## China appoint Djukovic

AFP, Beijing

China has appointed Serbian veteran Ratomir Djukovic as coach of the country's Olympic football team, news reports said Monday.

An official at the China Football Association said no decision had been made but state-run newspapers insisted that Djukovic would take over in time for China's friendly match against Japan in Tokyo on October 25.

Association spokesman Dong Hua said the reports were premature.

"We have not decided yet," he said. "We are still working on it."

Djukovic, 60, a former Red Star Belgrade player, coached Ghana to the last 16 of the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

It was the high point of a career in which he had a previous stint as coach in Asia with Myanmar in the 1990s.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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12 Greek vowel	4 Untruthful
13 "Boola Boola" as a henchman venue	5 Lum-moxes
14 "Fuhged-daboudit!"	6 Winter ailments
15 Imaginary	7 — Aviv
17 Silent one	8 Straighten
18 A whole lot	9 Auctioneer's cry
19 Pal	10 "Zounds!"
20 Nasality	11 Michele's high-school
22 No stay-at-home	12 Traffic pylon
24 Firetruck necessity	13 Claims, slangily
25 Forage plants	14 Praise in verse
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## CRYPTOQUIP

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S R L F E B P C Q L S Z R Q L C N .  
M Q S S F P M T U M R N L E H G C N

Z P V Q L P U S R I C E L S P B .  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF NOBODY IS CURRENTLY USING THAT OLD BEACH CHAIR, TAKE IT. IT'S YOURS FOR THE BASKING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals T  
The Cryptoquip 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.