

Ronnie wants Lampard

INTERNET, undated

World Player of the Year Ronaldinho has declared that he would love Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard to join him at Barcelona. Lampard has impressed the Catalan giants during their enthralling Champions League clashes over the past three seasons.

The England man scored a wonder goal in the recent 2-2 draw in the Nou Camp, prompting speculation that Barcelona are planning a summer bid for the 28-year-old.

"Frank Lampard is a great player and I am happy to have had the chance to meet him and get to know him on several occasions on and off the pitch," Ronaldinho said in The Sun.

"He is my friend and I love to watch him play and it would be a joy for me to see him at Barcelona."

Lampard, whose partner is from Barcelona, has been learning Spanish for over a year, although he is contracted to Chelsea until the summer of 2009.

Messi unworried

REUTERS, Madrid

Argentine forward Lionel Messi said on Friday he was confident Barcelona could overcome their injury problems as he left hospital after surgery on his foot.

The 19-year-old international broke the fifth metatarsal in his left foot during last weekend's 3-1 win over Real Zaragoza, and joined fellow forwards Javier Saviola and Samuel Eto'o on Barca's expanding injury list.

"The team is very strong and has already proved that. They are keen to make sure they continue doing things well," Messi told reporters.

Messi will be sidelined for three months, doctors said after Tuesday's operation, but the youngster was philosophical about the recovery period.

He said: "I am over the worst of it now after the operation. I'm not in pain any more and hope the time passes quickly. The most important thing is to remain calm and to be patient."

The European and Spanish champions will be without Messi for the remaining two games of Champions League Group A, against Levski Sofia and Werder Bremen, which third-placed Barca need to win if they are to make the next round.

Frank Rijkaard's side, top of the Primera Liga by one point from Sevilla, travel to face Real Mallorca on Sunday.

FIFA rejects Marseille claim

AFP, Marseille

World football's governing body FIFA has rejected requests by Turkish club Galatasaray for 10-million-euros compensation after French international midfielder Franck Ribery left them, his club Marseille said in a statement on Thursday.

In June 2005, Galatasaray requested that Ribery should return, denying he had not been paid for three months by the Istanbul club.

Galatasaray had signed Ribery in January 2005 for three and a half years from French first division club Metz but joined Marseille in June, when he was still just an under-21 international, on a four-year contract.

Marseille said in a statement: "In the litigation concerning Franck Ribery and Marseille with Galatasaray, FIFA have told us today of its ruling in favour of Marseille and totally rejects compensation claims by the Turkish club."

UEFA fines Levski

REUTERS, Sofia

Levski Sofia have been fined 50,000 Swiss francs (39,970 dollars) by UEFA because of crowd trouble during their Champions League match against Chelsea on September 27, the Bulgarian club said on Friday.

UEFA's Disciplinary commission imposed the penalty after torches and fireworks were thrown while a Levski supporter encroached on the pitch during halftime in the match which Chelsea won 3-1.

The Sofia-based club were fined 91,177 euros (116,500 dollars) in total by the European governing body last season because of the improper behaviour of their fans during team's fine run to the the UEFA Cup quarterfinals.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona star Ronaldinho sits on a stool as he poses during the presentation of a new range of clothing by Nike with his signature and shirt number for club and country on Thursday.

Injury list worries Barca

AFP, Madrid



Spanish champions Barcelona regained the league lead last weekend and they are hoping to consolidate pole position, despite being in the midst of an injury crisis, at Real Mallorca on Sunday.

"I don't want to compare now with what we have done in previous seasons. I think we are doing well and we are getting the points and that's what is important," said Barca coach Frank Rijkaard on Wednesday.

The big issue for Rijkaard is whether to start with Icelandic striker Eidur Gudjohnsson, who is still not living up to the reputation he acquired at Chelsea before his summer move, or make Ronaldinho the main target man.

The World Player of the Year is more comfortable taking on defenders down the left flank but Rijkaard is running out of options up front.

Last season's league leading scorer Samuel Eto'o is not expected to be fit until late January at the

earliest and Rijkaard's plight worsened this week when Javier Saviola was ruled out for at least a month with a torn hamstring.

The Argentine international striker added his name to an injury list that also includes his compatriot, the sensational teenage winger Lionel Messi.

The bottom of Barca's barrel is also being scraped at the back with their Brazilian defenders Edmilson and Thiago Motta, respectively, doubtful with injury and suspended for the visit to Mallorca.

One bright note for Rijkaard is that his Spanish international midfield playmaker Xavi Hernandez

FIXTURES

(1600 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday

Real Madrid v Racing Santander (1900)

Sevilla v Valencia (2100)

Sunday

Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao, Levante v

Atletico Madrid, Real Sociedad v Real

Betis, Recreativo Huelva v Osasuna

Villarreal v Getafe, Real Zaragoza v

Gimnastic Tarragona, Real Mallorca v

Barcelona (1800), Deportivo La Coruna v Celta Vigo (2000)

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is expected to return after missing the last three games with left calf problem.

"The injuries to our strikers are taking their toll. I think this is because of the number of games we are having to play and the demands of the calendar," reflected Xavi on Thursday.

Barcelona are still contesting the Champions League and the Spanish Cup while most of their squad are also regular internationals for their countries.

"At least the guys behind the strikers like Deco and (Andres) Iniesta are stepping up and getting a few goals," added Xavi.

Sevilla play host to Valencia, who have not won in their last three La Liga outings and slipped to sixth.

The spotlight will be on Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop who moved to the club two seasons ago after six years at Valencia, where he helped them win two league titles.

This season Palop's performances have propelled last season's UEFA Cup winners into becoming championship contenders as Sevilla chase their first domestic crown since 1946.

Palladino, though, will start in Saturday's match with Albinoleffe given the club's striker crisis as Alex Del Piero, Marcelo Zalayeta and Trezeguet are all out injured.

Huang Jianxiang's departure from China Central Television ends a controversial career marked by frequent outbursts capped by his hysterical cries of "Forza Italia" ("Go Italy!") in their World Cup win against Australia.

During the knockout match, Huang shouted: "Don't give the Australians a chance!" and went

into ecstasy when Italian left back Fabio Grosso earned a penalty late in the game.

A similar outburst followed

midfielder Francesco Totti's

successful penalty kick, which

won it for the Italians.

Xinhua news agency said

Friday, Huang, credited with

pioneering a new and more flamboyant commentator style in staid

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Heavyweights in prime time

REUTERS, London



A rare day in English football occurs this Saturday with the three top sides in the Premier League all kicking off at the same time.

Fans longing for a return to the days before staggered kick-offs will savour the 1500 GMT appointments for leaders Manchester United, champions Chelsea and third-placed Arsenal.

They will also be excited by the prospect of a vintage title race that promises to be coming to the boil nicely by next spring, rather than the Chelsea stroll of the last two years.

United travel across the Pennines to struggling Sheffield United with a three-point cushion over Chelsea who host London rivals West Ham United. Arsenal, 10 points adrift, have the chance to stay in touch at home against a

FIXTURES

(1500GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday

Arsenal v Newcastle, Chelsea v West

Ham, Everton v Bolton, Manchester City v Fulham (1245GMT), Middlesbrough v

Liverpool (1715GMT), Portsmouth v

Watford, Reading v Charlton, Sheffield

Utd v Manchester Utd

Sunday

Blackburn v Tottenham (1600GMT),

Wigan v Aston Villa (1330GMT)

The Blades have spent the intervening years battling to reclaim their top flight status and a 1-0 victory at Newcastle and last week's 2-2 draw with Bolton Wanderers suggest that Neil Warnock's gritty side will not give it up without a fight.

However, Alex Ferguson's United side are on a roll, winning their last four without conceding a goal.

Chelsea's form has been only marginally less impressive, a 2-1 defeat by Tottenham Hotspur their only recent blip as they chase a third consecutive title.

Four of Jose Mourinho's side were in the England starting team for the 1-1 draw with the Netherlands on Wednesday with Joe Cole particularly impressive.

Cole, who missed the start of the season with injury, has been on the fringes at Stamford Bridge since his return, however, and will probably have to content himself with a

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