

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 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



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 is 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-cum-midfielders 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

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.

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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)

Cannavaro shoe in for Golden ball

INTERNET, undated

Italy and Real Madrid stopper Fabio Cannavaro has won the 2006 Golden Ball, reports in Spain are insisting.

The defender was already heavily associated with the honour earlier this week and more stories this evening are suggesting that the World Cup winner has beaten Gigi Buffon to the award.

It's alleged that Cannavaro returned to Madrid following Thursday night's match against Turkey to find a telephone message from the France Football organisers informing him of his victory.

It's understood that a photographer and a journalist from the magazine are already on their way to the Spanish capital to make a start on their annual feature.

Although there will be no official announcement until November 27, it seems that the Napoli-native will become the first Italian since Roberto Baggio in 1993 to net the honour.

The last 12 months have been unforgettable for the former Parma and Inter man-marker given the success he has achieved.

He won the Scudetto with Juventus before it was revoked, he led his country to World Cup glory and then sealed a career changing move to Real Madrid.

"It's been a marvellous year, one full of success and triumph," the 33-year-old has stated. "Winning the Golden Ball would be a dream come true."

Cannavaro would also become only the third defender to be awarded the title after Franz Beckenbauer and Matthias Sammer.

Juve want Sissoko

INTERNET, undated

Liverpool midfielder Mohamed Sissoko is an alleged summer transfer target for Italian giants Juventus.

The Corriere dello Sport reports that the 22-year-old is high on Coach Didier Deschamps' wish list, as the Bianconeri look to strengthen their squad once they complete an expected return to the top flight.

The young Mali international, who will be out of action for a month having injured his shoulder in the League Cup match with Birmingham, is highly rated by boss Rafa Benitez though and is unlikely to be allowed to leave.

However, rumours suggest Juventus could tempt the Anfield outfit to sell by offering David Trezeguet in a sensational swap deal.

Meanwhile, Under-21 international Raffaele Palladino seems set to leave the Old Lady as early as January.

He's struggling to break into the Juve first team, a fact which has attracted the interest of Udinese and Roma.

The 22-year-old was already close to moving to the Friuli-based side in the summer, but the agreement for his co-ownership was not finalised.

"I thought I would play more," said Palladino. "However, we all know that there is a lot of competition at Juve."

"Obviously a young player only wants one thing, that is to play more and more. I only hope that a new chapter will soon start for me at this club."

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.

Sanchez given Mexico reign

AFP, Mexico City

Former Real Madrid striker Hugo Sanchez has been appointed as Mexico's new national coach after Toluca coach Americo Gallego pulled out of the race to succeed Ricardo Lavolpe.

The 48-year-old Sanchez replaces Argentinian Lavolpe, who stepped down to end his four year reign after guiding Mexico to second round of the World Cup. Sanchez will make his debut as coach against the United States in January.

Sanchez, who had been out of the game for over a year after stepping down at Pumas, took over at Aguascalientes-based side Necaxa earlier this month, but had little time to turn results around and they failed to qualify for the national playoffs.

He had guided Pumas to back-to-back championships in 2004 and also took the Mexico City giants to the final of the CONCACAF Champions Cup in 2005, losing narrowly to Costa Rican side Saprissa.

Sanchez won five consecutive league titles with Real Madrid in the 1980s and led Spain's Primera Liga in scoring five times.

Fergie lashes out at Scolari



AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson has leapt to the defence of his Manchester United assistant Carlos Queiroz by launching a stinging attack on Portugal manager Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Brazilian coach Scolari, who rejected the chance to succeed Sven Goran Eriksson as England coach last summer, has enraged Ferguson by suggesting that Queiroz is attempting to secure a job with the Portuguese national team by attending their international matches.

The Mozambique-born Queiroz was in Coimbra in midweek watching United winger Cristiano Ronaldo in action for Portugal against Kazakhstan in a Euro 2008 qualifier.

Ronaldo had been a doubt for the game after suffering an ankle injury against Blackburn last Saturday, but Ferguson is angry at Scolari's criticism of Queiroz over his motives for attending the game.

Ferguson said: "What confuses me is Scolari's comments about Carlos."

"He inferred that Carlos had spoken to him and marked his card that Ronaldo was all right, but then gave a different story to the press to keep the Manchester United fans happy."

"But Carlos never spoke to Scolari at all and I'm confused about that and I don't understand why he is saying it because Carlos is a professional and a fantastic professional at that."

"The other comment Scolari made was that Carlos is hanging around Portugal games looking for a job! That's a crazy thing to say."

"I'm sure Scolari goes to watch Benfica or Porto at some point, but does that mean he is after the guy's job?"

"All of my coaches and scouts have been around Europe watching games this week and I'm sure they are all still working for me!"

Ferguson, who takes his team to Sheffield United on Saturday aiming to hold onto their three-point lead ahead of Chelsea at the top of the table, insisted that he had no

concerns over Ronaldo's fitness for the Kazakhstan clash.

The United boss had upset Scolari after being reported as claiming that Portugal could beat the group minnows without the youngster.

However, Ferguson claims that United were always content for the Portuguese to judge Ronaldo's fitness.

He said: "I didn't know about the state of Ronaldo's injury after the Blackburn game last week because by the time I got back to the dressing room after an interview, he had left to catch a private plane."

"So we didn't know the condition he was in. He was taken off with a knock and normally you would wait until the following day to assess it, but there was no way of telling with Ronaldo because he was away."

"We said we were happy for the Portuguese medical staff to deal with it because that's their job. It was a European Championship qualifier, a big game, so we were happy for Ronaldo to play."

"The big issue is the friendly games, but that has always been an issue and that won't change."

Magath up against his old boys

AFP, Berlin



Felix Magath must mastermind the downfall of his old club VfB Stuttgart on Saturday as Bayern Munich go head-to-head with the surprise league leaders.

Stuttgart, ninth last season, have amassed 24 points from their first 12 matches to lead the standings for the first time since October 2004 but their resolve will be put to the test with a trip to reigning champions Bayern.

Coach Armin Veh has urged supporters not to start dreaming of a first title since 1992.

"We can not make the mistake of getting distracted by targets," Veh explained. "Our aim to play football with passion and the team are doing that well."

Magath was a hero after guiding Stuttgart into the Champions League with second place in 2003 but he left for Bayern the following season and is now the villain.

Bayern trail Stuttgart by four points in the league so Magath will hope to get one over on his old club although the wily coach believes Werder Bremen are the biggest title threat.

"It looked like we could be nine points behind Bremen at one stage and now we are just three," Magath said.

"We knew it would be a difficult season and it really has been. Now we just need to try and be at the top going into the winter break."

Four defeats have left Bayern off the pace but the they have five games to secure top spot before the six-week winter break.

Bremen, one point behind leaders Stuttgart, suffered a major setback with a 3-1 defeat against Borussia Dortmund last time out and hope to get back on track in Saturday's away match at Alemannia Aachen.

"We lost against Dortmund but what should we do -- get out our handkerchieves and start crying?" said Bremen midfielder Torsten Frings. "We are a good team and need to show that again."

While Bayern and Bremen

have the additional burden of the Champions League and the cup, title hopefuls Schalke 04 just have the league to concentrate on and have crept into third one point behind Stuttgart.

Schalke crushed Mainz 05 4-0 in their last outing and are full of confidence heading into Saturday's match at promoted Energie Cottbus.

Elsewhere fourth from bottom SV Hamburg travel to Mainz with manager Thomas Doll's job again on the line.

Hamburg boss Doll has won just one of his 12 matches this season and a loss against bottom side Mainz would crank up the pressure.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Bayern Munich v VfB Stuttgart, Borussia Dortmund v Hertha Berlin, FC Nuremberg v Bayer Leverkusen, Mainz 05 v SV Hamburg, Alemannia Aachen v Werder Bremen, Energie Cottbus v Schalke 04
Sunday
Borussia Monchengladbach v Hannover, Arminia Bielefeld v VfL Wolfsburg

Price of partisanship



AFP, Beijing

China's best-known soccer announcer, who earned widespread scorn for his unabashedly pro-Italy comments in the 2006 World Cup, is now jobless after "offending" his colleagues, state media said Friday.

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 China, "has gained everything he wants from CCTV while offending almost all of his colleagues."

CCTV managers who had long tolerated his innovative style because he drew large audiences finally soured on Huang, Xinhua said.

The 38-year-old confirmed his departure with an uncharacteristically terse statement posted on

his own blog, entitled "Yes, it's true".

"Now I am an unemployed middle-aged person. Don't ask why," he entry said.

Huang, who debuted as a CCTV commentator for the 1995 Copa America, was suspended from his post for several months in 2001 for outrageous commentary during China's qualifying match against Qatar, Xinhua said.

Huang was also last year the subject of intense media coverage of his relationship with pop star Zhang Liangying, amid speculation that led to his divorce.

He also drew criticism for pouring scorn on another well-known CCTV presenter during a talk-show appearance.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Mexico legend Hugo Sanchez waves to photographers after being appointed the new coach of the Mexico national team at a press conference in Pachuca, Hidalgo State, Mexico on Thursday.