

Ancelotti looks to Liga future

INTERNET, undated

Carlo Ancelotti is looking at his future after Milan and puts Spain – where he could replace Fabio Capello – firmly ahead of the Premiership.

"I like Spanish football more than English," explained the tactician who has won the Scudetto, Champions League, Coppa Italia and European Super Cup.

"If I really have to imagine myself in a place other than Milan, then I think of La Liga before the Premiership."

These statements do not come as much of a surprise, as Ancelotti has already been repeatedly linked with Real Madrid and Valencia.

He is one of the favourite options to replace another Italian ex-pat, as Capello is struggling badly at the Bernabeu following three defeats in his last four Liga games.

According to newspaper 'Tuttosport,' the move would also be a method of buttering up their real target from Milan – Kaka.

Real Madrid were reported to FIFA after what the Rossoneri claimed was an illegal approach towards the Brazilian this summer, but that hasn't stopped them from giving interviews reiterating their intention of poaching the player.

Valencia are another option for Ancelotti, where he'd follow in the footsteps of another Italian Coach, Claudio Ranieri.

Padelli to join Liverpool

INTERNET, undated

Italian Under-21 goalkeeper Daniele Padelli will join Liverpool on a six-month loan, confirmed the player's agent on Wednesday.

The Azzurro, who is currently owned by Sampdoria, had moved to Serie B side Crotone on a loan deal this summer but has failed to displace veteran Salvatore Soviero.

"Padelli will travel to Liverpool this afternoon to undergo a medical," explained agent Silvano Martina.

"The clubs have agreed on a six-month loan deal and the player is excited at the prospect of playing for Liverpool."

"This is a dream for me," he said. "I think that the call-up with the U-21 squad was a decisive factor in this issue. Now I look forward to making my debut in the Premiership."

Brawling duo banned

REUTERS, Madrid

Sevilla striker Luis Fabiano and Real Zaragoza defender Carlos Diogo have been suspended for five matches each by the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) after a fight at the end of Saturday's Primera Liga match.

RFEF spokesman Alfredo Flores said on the Sevilla Web site: "The players' apologies were not taken into account as they were made a day after the incident at press conferences and cannot be considered spontaneous."

Zaragoza, who won the game 2-1, and Sevilla have both said they will appeal.

Brazilian Fabiano and Uruguayan Diogo came to blows after Diogo appeared to stand on Fabiano's hand when he was on the ground. Both were sent off.

Partizan Belgrade name new coach

AFP, Belgrade

Crisis-hit Partizan Belgrade on Tuesday named Miroslav Djukic as its new manager in the hope that the Serbian under-21 coach can revive the club's flagging season.

Djukic, 40, was appointed Partizan's head coach after the club sacked Miodrag Jasic earlier this month following a string of poor results in Serbia's Superliga and European cup competitions.

"I'm aware that I've come to a champion club with championship ambitions, at which only titles are sought," Djukic said at a press conference to announce his appointment.

"I'm not afraid of that challenge, I believe in myself and my coaching team," he was quoted as saying in a report by the Beta news agency.

Partizan chairman Nenad Popovic, quoted by the Tanjug agency, told journalists that Djukic had been selected because of his familiarity with many of the club's young players, whom he coached at the under-21 level.

As well as trailing league leaders Red Star Belgrade by 15 points in the Serbian league, Partizan have failed to qualify for the European Champions League and languished at the bottom of their UEFA Cup group with just one point.

The club has also had a troubled season off the pitch amid claims of corruption by its directors.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Inter Milan players Luis Figo (L) and Adriano (C) congratulate defender Ivan Cordoba (Number 2) after the Colombian scored in their Italian Cup match against Empoli on Tuesday.

COPPA ITALIA

Adriano marches on Empoli

Football

INTERNET, undated

Adriano and Ivan Cordoba found the target in Inter's 2-0 victory at Empoli, all but securing their Coppa Italia semifinal ticket.

The Nerazzurri were hoping to maintain their run of 13 consecutive victories in Italian football – and take steps to defending their Coppa title for a third successive year – when they visited the Stadio Castellani. Empoli rested many of their squad ahead of the Serie A relegation dogfight with Parma, but still managed to make a good impression.

Mirco Gasparetto wasted a

good opportunity on the counter-attack, while the visitors had a Luis Figo goal disallowed because he curled in straight from an indirect free kick and 20-year-old Davide Bassi parried a Zlatan Ibrahimovic effort.

Milan-owned defender Lino Marzoratti's goal-line clearance denied a Patrick Vieira header before the break, but once again Empoli were in the running with Francesco Mariani and Davide Matteini going close.

Adriano's confidence was badly shaken by a nine-month goal drought, although L'Imperatore seems to be back on his throne. After wasting a great chance set up by Ibra, the Brazilian made the most of another Swedish assist on

70 minutes, his strike going in off the inside of the upright.

Figo and Vieira were also denied by the talented Bassi, but Adriano fired wide twice with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Teenage substitute Simone Iacoponi ran at the Inter defence and forced Nicolas Andre Burdisso into a last-ditch foul to avoid a more dangerous situation.

Bassi tipped an Adriano header on to the woodwork, but could do nothing on new entry Ivan Cordoba's powerful close-range nodded finish from a Figo corner kick.

That goal has all but put Inter into the final four, as Empoli would need a 3-0 victory at San Siro to qualify now.

Wenger stands by youth policy

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Arsene Wenger insists he would keep faith with his young Arsenal stars for the League Cup semifinal against local rivals Tottenham after Julio Baptista's four goals helped the Gunners seal a stunning 6-3 win at Liverpool.

Brazilian striker Baptista, on a season-long loan from Real Madrid, also missed a penalty as Arsenal became the first visiting team to score six at Anfield since Sunderland won 6-0 in 1930.

The performance of youngsters such as Theo Walcott, Denilson, Alexandre Song, Johan Djourou and Jeremie Aliadiere proved too much for Liverpool and Wenger insists he has no fears about using the kids against Spurs in the two-legged semifinal.

He said: "I am highly tempted to play the youngsters against Spurs in the semi-final. They have beaten Liverpool, they won at Everton and they also beat West Brom, so they have earned the right.

"I always believed that we had the chance to win this game, but I did not expect to score six goals. But

I was very pleased with the way we attacked, the fluency of our play and the way we kept our calm at 1-1. They just continued to go forward."

Further goals from Aliadiere and Song completed Arsenal's scoring, with Liverpool finding the net through Robbie Fowler, Steven Gerrard and Sam Hyslop.

Wenger has consistently claimed that he will not add to his squad during the January transfer window and he claims the young talent at his disposal justifies his reluctance to bring in new blood.

He said: "There are people inside the club that have worked very hard, day and night, and the future of the club is very promising if we can keep the players together."

"We have 20-22 players of top quality, so it is good for me because I can't make a mistake when I pick my team as they are all so good."

"When you are a manager, you sometimes have to give the players a chance and they are why I don't need to add to my squad in the transfer window."

Baptista's goals were his first domestic strikes since arriving from Madrid last summer, but Wenger insists he has never doubted the 25-year-old's ability.

He added: "We have always

believed that Julio can deliver because I have been impressed by his mental strength and contribution as a team player."

"He scored four goals, but I also thought that Aliadiere was absolutely outstanding and the pair of them were excellent up front together."

Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez, who lost Mark Gonzalez (shin) and Luis Garcia (knee) to potentially serious injuries, admitted that the defeat was one of the worst of his career.

The Spaniard admitted: "It's a bad result, but when you are a manager you get these upsets. You just have to try to forget as them as soon as possible."

"We win together and we lose together and attack together as a team and defend as a team. We tried to do our best, but the only thing we can do now is say sorry to our fans because they were the best in the game."

"We worked very hard, but each time we conceded a goal it was very difficult to explain. We used a lot of players from the first-team squad and changed a lot of players from the weekend. We tried to have quality and play good football, but it's difficult when you concede so many goals."

Partizan Belgrade name new coach

AFP, Belgrade

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corruption by its directors.



PHOTO: INTERNET

AC Milan midfielder Christian Brochhi jumps over the tackle of Lino Galea of Birkirkara FC of Malta during a friendly match in Valletta on Tuesday.

Coloccini wants Depor stay

INTERNET, undated

Fabrizio Coloccini insists he has no plans to leave Deportivo La Coruna, amid reports Tottenham Hotspur have lodged a bid.

The Argentine international has not started Deportivo's last three Primera Liga games and it has prompted rumours he will be sold in January.

Speculation has strongly suggested that Spurs are readying an offer to try to bring Coloccini to the Premiership.

But the former Milan stopper has moved to quash the doubts about his future by pledging to stay in La Coruna.

"I am happy at Deportivo and I want to stay here," affirmed Coloccini.

"I am not going to change to another team at this moment, it's too soon and if I can stay, better."

"Then after some time has gone by I will analyse everything that could appear."

"On the other hand, I never said I wanted to leave Deportivo. In some moments that had been said because I wanted to play in the World Cup, but I am calm."

Coloccini also refuted claims that he is at odds with Depor coach Kieran Caparros after being dropped from the team.

He added: "I understand that maybe some people could be surprised when I wasn't included in the team by the coach, but he is the one who takes each decision and we have to respect them."

"I don't have any problem with the coach."

FA CUP

Reading, Barnet advance

REUTERS, London

Reading beat second division Burnley 3-2 in a rearranged FA Cup third round tie on Tuesday while Barnet reached the fourth round for the first time with a 2-1 upset home win over second division Colchester United.

Fourth division Barnet will host Plymouth Argyle or Peterborough United in the fourth round after they came from behind to shock promotion-chasing Colchester at Underhill.

Both Tuesday's matches were rescheduled after being rained off at the weekend.

Smith 'arrives' at Murray Park

INTERNET, undated

Walter Smith pitched up at Rangers' Murray Park training facility on Wednesday, according to Sky Sports News, fuelling speculation that he is set to take the reins of the Glasgow giants.

Smith is eager to return to Ibrox following the departure of Paul Le Guen, but the Scottish FA are equally keen for him to honour his contract with the national side.

The interested parties have been locked in discussions for a couple of days and Smith arrived at SFA headquarters on Wednesday morning for a crunch meeting with chief executive David Taylor.

Smith left the meeting after a little over an hour, but refused to make any comment to the media upon his departure.

Milan's net practice

INTERNET, undated

New signing Leandro Grimi impressed in Milan's 5-0 friendly victory in Malta, while Pippo Inzaghi bagged a brace.

The Rossoneri hope to rediscover their form this winter training jaunt in the warmth of the island and have shown signs of recovery.

Maltese champions Birkirkara were thrashed at the Ta Quali stadium in La Valletta in a test ahead of Tuesday's Coppa Italia quarterfinals against Arezzo.

Ricardo Oliveira opened the scoring on Andrea Pirlo's assist, followed after the break by Clarence Seedorf, long-term injury casualty Giuseppe Favalli and two from Inzaghi.

All eyes were on January signing Grimi and the Argentine performed well when he came on for the second half.

He was focused and eager to impress, but it looks as if the South American will need several weeks before he can be match fit and ready for a Serie A debut.

The 21-year-old left-back was playing his first game in a Milan jersey since his switch from Racing Club was completed.

TOUCHLINE

An underwhelming window

Football

NORMAN HUBBARD

It is the last refuge of the desperate, their final source of hope in a frantic

search for a saviour.

And yet, once the hype has subsided, the mobiles have stopped ringing and the agents have retreated to whichever dark place they reside, who will emerge the stronger?