

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 Azzurrino, 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 Saviero.

"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."

Padelli, who appeared for Italy in the 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship, is thrilled with the opportunity of an England switch.

"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 Jesic 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 in Empoli on Tuesday.

COPPA ITALIA

Adriano marches on Empoli



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 goalline clearance denied a Patrick Vieira header before the break, but once again Empoli were in the running with Francesco Marianini 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.

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 Argentina 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 Joaquin 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.

Premier League Reading played a second-string team but goals from Leroy Lita, Shane Long -- a superb shot from a narrow angle -- and Sam Sodje earned them a visit to Birmingham City or Newcastle United, who replay next week.

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 in 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



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?

For much of the past four months, the transfer window has been the place where dreams are invested, providing the opportunity to determine the next four months and the chance to emulate Harry Redknapp, whose January signings last year, particularly Pedro Mendes, secured survival in unexpected fashion.

While Redknapp's recruitment drive then featured a sprinkling of mavericks and a fondness for unlikely moves, there is a sense that, 12 months on, the same targets are being pursued and familiar faces will re-emerge in slightly different surroundings.

It is most apparent at West Ham and Charlton. Having completed a part-exchange of managers, the swapped Alans could trade players.

For Alan Curbishley, a change of attitude may be more significant than a change of personnel. Hence the introduction of the snarl of Luis Boa Morte, the costliest signing of the window to date and rumours that he will break up his brat pack by finding new destinations for Nigel Reo-Coker, Bobby Zamora and Anton Ferdinand.

Alan Pardew, within a fortnight of making Darren Bent captain, was willing to countenance selling him, seemingly oblivious to what a weak bargaining position he is in. The difficulty of getting the optimum fee and finding a suitable replacement is multiplied for a club like Charlton, whose likely destination is the Championship.

Not deterred, he reportedly offered Chelsea the injured Bent for £25 million, surely the silliest

suggestion of the transfer window to date (despite stiff competition).

And with a quarter of the transfer window gone, Charlton's squad is identical. Nor have many other moves made a significant impact. Neil Warnock has begun his clear-out of his aged and blunted Blades by disposing of Ade Akinbiyi and David Unsworth, but the impact on his team has been minimal.

Wigan, meanwhile, have replaced a central defender who is yet to convince in the Premiership - Andy Webster, loaned to Rangers - with one, in Unsworth, who has not done so for several years.

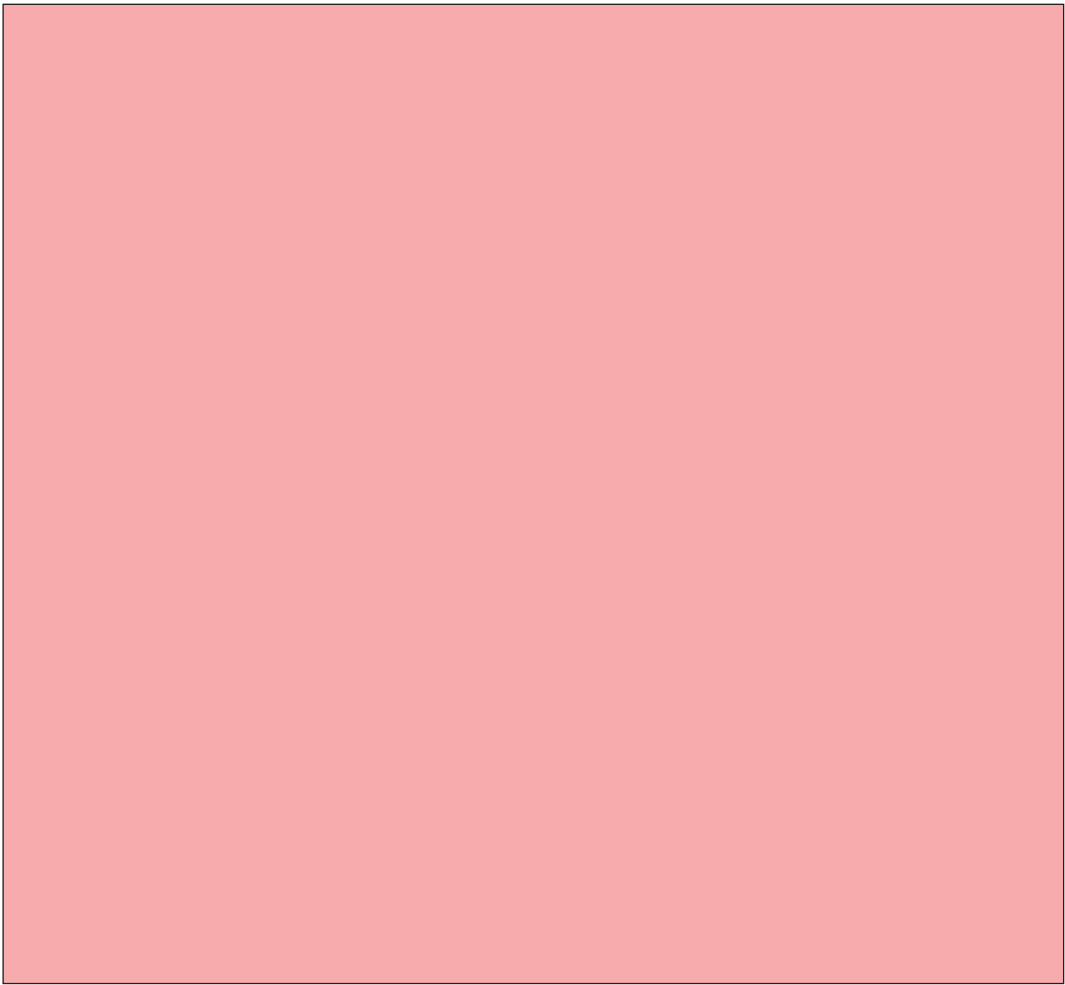
There is an inevitability that the busiest clubs are battling against the drop. If the identity of previous relegation Red Adairs has been unlikely, several, such as Christophe Dugarry and Kieran Richardson, have struggled to replicate that impact in subsequent seasons.

Not that there has been much evidence of such leftfield signings this time.

Shaun Wright-Phillips, Matthew Upson, David Nugent, Ashley Young, Curtis Davies and Gareth Bale can consider themselves popular though, when demand exceeds supply to such an extent, it is always a recipe for inflated fees.

Lucas Neill, meanwhile, appears to top a number of defensive shortlists, a product of his versatility and a price dictated by a contract that will expire in the summer; Tal Ben Haim and Sylvain Distin, between them linked with the majority of Premiership clubs, are in a similar position.

For the majority, however, their availability is either the product of potential or an admission of failure. Wright-Phillips has consistently underachieved at Chelsea (how will Jose Mourinho find a player ineffective enough to be a like-for-like replacement?). West Ham, meanwhile, have ignored Javier Mascherano to the extent that his departure seems the only option.



CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

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51 Candle
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53 Picnic
54 Take a
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48 Chow

Solution time: 21 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

Z R J S W H U V H J T C I D H G M H

D U H B I Z P H B I G M H Z P V H J .

Z X W I T T J S W ' L I X S M H

T M H P C H G C S R U I H L Z P X .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I'D LIKE TO SEE THE ZOOLOGICAL BOOK ABOUT AFRICAN LIZARDS TITLED "GHANA IGUANA FAUNA."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals V

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.