

Rijkaard disagrees with Capello

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard said he did not agree with Fabio Capello's policy of barring David Beckham from playing for Real Madrid after the mid-fielder decided to leave the club for LA Galaxy.

"In theory I wouldn't sideline the player," Rijkaard was reported as saying in daily Sport on Tuesday. "You always have to look to the interests of the team."

"Everyone wants to win things and if a player has a contract he can still keep on working."

Rijkaard was in a similar position to Capello when Swede Henrik Larsson agreed a move to hometown club Helsingborg in February last year.

Despite the striker announcing the move and donning his new team's shirt, Larsson continued to feature regularly at Barcelona and played a decisive role in their victory over Arsenal in the Champions League final.

Rijkaard has used striker Javier Saviola despite the fact the club has been anxious to offload the Argentine on several occasions.

With Beckham, Ronald and Antonio Cassano all sidelined by Capello and Raul, Emerson, Guti, Roberto Carlos and Marcelo injured, the Italian may have to use several reserves for the King's Cup last 16 second leg tie with Real Betis on Thursday.

PSV after Kanu

INTERNET, undated

PSV boss Ronald Koeman is reportedly interested in signing Portsmouth striker Kanu, according to reports in the Netherlands.

Kanu, who started his career at Dutch rivals Ajax, has a one-year deal with Pompey and wants a longer extension if he is to re-sign with the South Coast club -- aware that Kanu is at least 30 -- are only looking to give him a shorter term contract.

PSV have all but given up on Danko Lazovic (Vitess) and Albert Luque (Newcastle) and it seems Kanu is the next option with Koeman understood to have already made preliminary contact with the player.

Salihamidzic Juve-bound

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Bosnian midfielder Hasan Salihamidzic will join Juventus on a free transfer at the end of the season, the German club said on Tuesday.

Salihamidzic, who has been at Bayern since 1998, will sign a four-year contract with the Italian Serie B side, who were demoted from the top flight because of a match-fixing scandal.

"I'm going to Juventus in the summer," the 30-year-old told Kicker, in quotes carried on the Bayern website (www.bayern.de). "It's definite."

Salihamidzic will leave Bayern with an enviable set of medals. During his time at the club he has helped them win the Bundesliga title six times, the German Cup four times and the Champions League once, in 2001.

"It's been a great time in Munich," he said.

Salihamidzic arrived in Germany in 1992, playing for Hamburg SV before making his move south.

At Bayern, he has played as a right back, winger and centre forward. In total he has made 292 Bundesliga appearances, including 15 this season, and scored 47 goals.

He was a regular for Bosnia before calling time on his international career in August 2006.

Deisler retires

AFP, Berlin

Germany international midfielder Sebastian Deisler has retired at the age of 27 after a career blighted by five operations to his right knee and a series of bouts of depression.

Bayern's sporting director Uli Hoeness however left the door open for Deisler saying that his contract, extended in December 2005 till 2009, would be maintained for the moment.

"I no longer have confidence in my knee which has tormented me these last few years," said Deisler in a hastily-arranged press conference in Munich. "I will stick to my decision which has grown within me."

Deisler, who played 36 times for Germany and scored three goals, was for some time considered as the most talented player of his generation but never managed to compete in the finals of a major tournament for his country.



PHOTO: AFP
India's heartthrob Sania Mirza hits a return against Olga Savchuk of Ukraine during their first round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Tuesday.

Sania sizzles in Melbourne



AFP, Melbourne

India's Sania Mirza sizzled under the blazing Melbourne sun Tuesday to book her place in the Australian Open second round but Asian number one Lee Hyung-Taik wilted and slumped out.

Mirza was joined by Japan's Aiko Nakamura, who upset Eleni Daniilidou of Greece, seeded 32, 6-4, 6-0.

The Indian teen is under pressure here after slipping down the rankings and answered her critics

with a 6-3, 7-5 mauling of Ukraine's Olga Savchuk.

She has had a solid build-up to the tournament, playing well at the Hopman Cup mixed team tournament in Perth and then the Hobart International, and is aiming for a decent run here.

"The first match of the first Grand Slam of the year both the players are a little tight going into the match," she said.

"I think I adapted to the conditions better, it was very hot out there, especially in the second set it got hotter."

"But I'm happy that I could come through the first match."

Play was suspended soon after

Mirza, 19, came off court as tem-

peratures climbed to 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

"It felt like she was having a hard time out there, and I don't blame her, it was pretty hot," added Mirza, who is one Asia's top hopes here along with Japan's Ai Sugiyama and China's Li Na.

Sugiyama fought through to the second round on Monday while Li, seeded 19, makes her debut on Wednesday after her match against Elena Bovina of Russia was pushed back due to a pile-up of games from the heat stoppage.

While Mirza, who lives in Hyderabad which also gets burning hot, coped with the heat, South Korea's Lee meekly surrendered.

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Maria struggles, others cruise



AFP, Melbourne

Top seed Maria Sharapova's Australian Open dream almost evaporated in the furnace of Melbourne's centre court Tuesday as Kim Clijsters showed the form that made her a favourite for the title.

Three-time Australian Open

champion Martina Hingis also reinforced her credentials with a crushing win, as the main matches of the tournament's first round concluded in scorching conditions.

US Open holder and world number two Sharapova did not look a champion-in-waiting as she dragged herself around the court to post a 6-3, 4-6, 9-7 win over Frenchwoman Camille Pin.

The tour's 19-year-old glamour drawcard was red-faced, struggling for breath and looked poised to vomit on occasions, admitting

she felt "delusional" in court temperatures, she estimated at 47 Celsius (117 Fahrenheit).

After receiving medical treatment, Sharapova insisted her draining opening round would not affect the rest of her tournament.

"I'll be ready," she said of her second round clash with fellow Russian Anastasia Rodionova.

Fourth seed Clijsters swept aside Russian Vasilisa Bardina 6-0, 6-0, saying she felt "in the zone" and in similar form to when she claimed the 2005 US Open, her sole Grand Slam title.

The 23-year-old, who will retire at the end of the year to start a family, was unfazed at being installed the bookies' favourite for the tournament just two months into a comeback from injury.

"It's nice. I mean people say it because they think I'm playing good tennis," she said, but said it was too early to speculate on whether she could win the championship.

"It's a bit too early to even talk about anything like that or talk about second weeks or anything," said Clijsters, who next faces either Akiko Morigami of Japan or Bulgaria's Tsvetana Pironkova.

Sixth seed Hingis demolished France's Nathalie Dechy 6-0, 6-2 in under an hour, saying she felt mentally prepared for the tournament after returning here in 2006 after a three-year lay-off and making a surprise run to the quarterfinals.

Hingis said her past success in the Australian Open, including victories in 1997, 98 and 99, meant she felt confident in the Rod Laver Arena.

"Having all those great memories definitely helps," she said. "Going out there, being in the finals three times, have won it three

Johansson slams FIFA chief

AFP, Paris

UEFA boss Lennart Johansson hit back Monday at comments made by FIFA counterpart Joseph Blatter expressing his sympathy for the Swede's rival for the presidency of European football's governing body.

French football legend Michel Platini, 51, will be up against sitting president Johansson, 77, at the January 26 vote in Dusseldorf, Germany.

But Johansson has been infuriated by comments made by FIFA president Blatter on Friday, stating that his "sympathy" lay with Platini.

"Let's say I feel more of a footballer than a manager," said Blatter.

And in a statement issued by the Swedish Football Federation, Johansson said: "I was a bit surprised by comments made by Mr Blatter."

"The FIFA president pushed me to go for another term in office and offered me his support at the time. I respect the FIFA president and I'm sure that his (earlier) words still hold."

Johansson said he did not want to be drawn into "character assassination".

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MOYA BOWS OUT

Nadal shows the way



AFP, Melbourne

The jostle for pole position in the bottom half of the men's draw got into full swing on a baking second day of the Australian Open here Tuesday.

Second seed Rafael Nadal, drawn to face world number one Roger Federer in this year's final, didn't concede a break point as he put away 90th-ranked American Robert Kendrick 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 6-2 in 2hr 7min.

They played with the centre court stadium roof closed because of the enforcement of the tournament's extreme heat rule.

Nadal was taken to five sets in his only previous meeting with Kendrick in the second round on grass at last year's Wimbledon, but the Spanish left-hander had no problems this time.

"Yeah, (the court) is a little bit

slower, so that's a little bit easier for me because with the serve I have more chances always on the return," he said.

"But I didn't play my best match. I played a serious match today, so that's enough."

American James Blake and Argentina's David Nalbandian won their mental battles against their opponents and the fierce elements to advance to the second round.

Fifth seed Blake overcame former Australian finalist Carlos Moya for the second time in four days for a big psychological victory.

Blake followed up his Sydney International title win over the experienced Spaniard last Saturday with a 7-6 (10/8), 6-2, 6-4 win in 1hr 50 minutes in the enclosed Vodafone Arena.

Blake rated the 41st-ranked Moya the dangerous unseeded floater in the men's draw, but he had few problems breaking his serve three times and fighting off one break point against him for a comprehensive win.

"I don't want to see him across

the net. He's a great player. It's tough. I really wish that would have been a second-week match because he's playing well enough," Blake said.

"Definitely he's one of the toughest if not the toughest floater in the draw."

Blake, who has yet to progress past the fourth round in five previous attempts at the Australian Open, will now face either Australian Peter Luczak or American Alex Kuznetsov.

Eighth seed Nalbandian said he disguised how he was feeling from his hitting Serbian opponent Jank Tipsarevic before fighting back from two sets and a break down to lead 6-7 (5/7) 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-0, 2-1 at the time of Tipsarevic's heat-induced retirement.

"You just try to keep energy. That's the most important thing. Then after it's more like a mind game."

"I mean, it's everything in the mind. I was very tired as well, but I didn't show to him how I feel it."

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Calderon launches Becks broadside



AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid chairman Ramon Calderon said Monday that Los Angeles-bound David Beckham had effectively misled the Spanish club as he claimed the former England star agreed his lucrative deal with Los Angeles Galaxy before the winter transfer window opened.

"When the 47-year-old former Udinese boss joined Roma at the start of the 2005-06 season, the team was emerging from one of the most turbulent 12 months in its recent history.

In the previous season four coaches, including ex-Germany coach Rudi Voeller, had failed to reimpose order on a squad shaken by the departure of Fabio Capello for Juventus.

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Ronaldo surplus at Real

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazilian striker Ronaldo is surplus to requirements at Real Madrid, club president Ramon Calderon said on Monday.

Coach Fabio Capello has already said David Beckham, who is leaving at the end of the season to join Los Angeles Galaxy, and Italian striker Antonio Cassano do not feature in his plans for the rest of this campaign.

"The situation with Ronaldo is different to that of David Beckham as he still has another year left after this one," Calderon told radio station Onda Madrid.

"But he is going to be inactive because the coach has made it clear he doesn't count on him, and it would surely be better for the club and him if he went if there are offers. If not, he will stay with us."

"We have to find an exit that's good for him. I know sporting director Predrag Mijatovic has had conversations with some clubs, and that the player also has offers. But we'll have to wait and see

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PHOTO: AFP
OUTCASTS: Real Madrid's outgoing midfielder David Beckham (R) and out-of-favour striker Ronaldo at a training session in Madrid on Monday.



SEBASTIAN DEISLER

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