



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan's Brazilian forward Adriano (C) is embraced by teammates (From L) Maicon, Ibrahimovic and Stankovic after he scored against Fiorentina during their Serie A encounter at the San Siro on Sunday.

## Moratti plans Cassano raid

INTERNET, undated

Inter chief Massimo Moratti has admitted that he could make a bid for Antonio Cassano this summer.

The Real Madrid striker has been linked with the Nerazzurri after Coach Roberto Mancini declared that he would welcome the addition of the Bari-born player.

"We are not interested in making any new signings and I think that the win over Fiorentina proved that we are fine just as we are," said the President in an interview to Il Corriere dello Sport.

"We are not making any plans for him now, but Cassano is included in a list of 10 players that we are targeting.

"We will keep on following them until June, when we will understand the Coach's needs," added the oil tycoon.

Moratti then commented on the news suggesting that Ronaldo is close to returning to the San Siro with city rivals Milan, a transfer which the chief would consider a betrayal.

"In August we contacted the player, but the move didn't go through. We would not be happy if he joined Milan and he cannot expect us to react differently.

"His transfer to the Rossoneri would be a betrayal, but I prefer to wait until the deal is finalised before making any other comments."

The Nerazzurri then stated that he is not worried about the fact that Mancini has yet to renew his contract.

"I hope there are no doubts left, we are both very serene. We have always had an excellent relationship in the past and I am sure this will continue," concluded Moratti.

Technical director Marco Branca agrees with his President on Ronaldo's probable move to Milan.

"It is against nature," he insisted. "We have lived many intense moments with him and he did a lot for us. This news puzzled us."

## Rossi's debut delight

INTERNET, undated

New arrival Giuseppe Rossi was thrilled after scoring the winning goal on his Parma debut against Torino.

The 19-year-old Italian-American joined the Stadio Tardini outfit earlier this week on loan from Manchester United, a return to the club where he grew up in the youth system before leaving in 2004.

"I am happy I scored, but I am also pleased with the team's performance - we played well and we earned three very important points," explained the striker.

"I am happy with my debut, but I am also aware that I must keep my feet on the ground," added Rossi, whose goal allowed Parma to move to third from the bottom of the table with 15 points.

"When you are young you need to play, that is why I agreed to a loan deal. If you want to be a footballer you have to make sacrifices. I have moved so many times in the past few years."

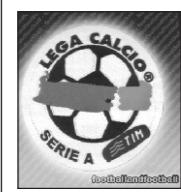
"I must admit that things have been going very well so far and I hope this continues. I came here to play as much as possible and I will give my best to help the team."

Rossi made his debut for the Italy Under-21 side last summer and hopes that his Parma switch means he will once again be called upon by Coach Pierluigi Casiraghi.

"I have played four matches with the Azzurri so far and I hope I will be called-up for the upcoming friendly with Belgium on February 6," admitted the player.

## ROMA LOSE GROUND Inter extend purple patch

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan stretched their lead at the top of Serie A to 11 points on Sunday after they beat Fiorentina 3-1 and second-placed Roma were held to a 1-1 draw at Lazio.

Inter's victory also extended their winning run to a record 13 league matches and leaves them firmly on course to retain the title.

Luca Toni headed Fiorentina into an early lead, but goals from Dejan Stankovic, Adriano and Zlatan Ibrahimovic ensured another three points for the champions.

Inter's win at the San Siro left them on 54 points from their 20 matches played, followed by Roma on 43 points and Palermo - held to a goalless draw at Reggina on Saturday - on 39 points.

Fiorentina, stung by a 15-point penalty for their role in the match-fixing scandal, dropped one place to 15th.

Stankovic said only complacency can prevent Inter from lashing out at the Scudetto.

"We mustn't stop running and fighting, and we can't allow ourselves to become too over-confident," said the 28-year-old midfielder.

"Things can quickly go wrong when you start thinking that the title has already been won."

Cristiano Lucarelli put Livorno ahead against Roma with a penalty-kick before Francesco Totti equalised with his 13th goal of the campaign. Roma captain Totti was then sent off a minute from time for lashing out at Fabio Galante.

Empoli climbed to fourth spot on 28 points after their 2-0 home win against Sampdoria.

AC Milan had goalkeeper Nelson Dida to thank for a string of fine saves in their 0-0 draw at Lazio.

Cagliari ended Catania's unbeaten home record with a 1-0 victory over the Sicilians and Udinese beat Messina by the same score to give newly-appointed coach Alberto Malesani a winning start.

Parma boosted their survival hopes with a priceless 1-0 home victory against Torino, while Siena came from behind to defeat struggling Chievo 2-1.

Inter were dealt a blow before kick-off when first-choice goalkeeper Julio Cesar pulled out with back pain.

The Brazilian's withdrawal meant a place for 35-year-old Francesco Toldo whose first job was to pick the ball out of the net in the fifth minute.

Fabio Liverani delivered a free-kick into the six-yard box and Toni got in front of Brazilian defender Sisendeno Maicon to head home his 10th goal of the season.

Inter drew level in the 19th minute.

Adriano dribbled into the box and rolled a square ball into the path of Stankovic whose left-footed strike found the top corner.

The goal injected Inter with a confidence that was lacking in the opening quarter, and they gained the lead five minutes later.

Stankovic tapped a free-kick short to Adriano and his low drive flashed past Sebastian Frey.

Ibrahimovic made it 3-1 despite doubts that his close-range strike had actually crossed the line.

Ascoli remained anchored to the bottom of the table after their 3-1 defeat at home to Atalanta on Saturday.

## Injury boost for Johnson

AFP, Liverpool

Fears that Andy Johnson would be ruled out for the season with a suspected broken ankle suffered during Everton's 2-0 Premiership win at Wigan appeared to be receding Sunday.

Everton's physiotherapist said there was "no obvious fracture".

England attacker Johnson, an 8.6-million-pound (17 million dollars) pre-season signing from Crystal Palace, was stretchered off midway through the second half after colliding with Wigan goalkeeper Chris Kirkland.

And although two goals from Mikel Arteta secured a rare away win for Everton, manager David Moyes left the JJB Stadium more concerned by Johnson's injury.

But following a hospital scan, Everton physiotherapist Mick Rathbone told the club's official website: "Andy was taken off after injuring his left ankle. He was taken to the casualty department at Wigan Infirmary where a series of X-rays were done. "There is no obvious fracture but we will be undertaking a few more specific investigations tomorrow (Monday)."

Earlier, a concerned Moyes said: "We are hoping for the best and it may not be as bad as it looked at first. He would clearly be a massive loss for us as he has been a terrific player this season."

Arteta's double consigned Wigan to their seventh successive league defeat and left the Latics just two points above the bottom three.

Having seen them miss a series of first-half chances, manager Paul Jewell admitted his Wigan team sparked their own downfall by conceding a penalty when ex-Everton defender David Unsworth fouled Victor Anichebe in the 64th minute.

"I thought the game had 0-0 all over it - and I would have taken that - but we gave away a crazy penalty," Jewell said.

"It was a definite penalty, but another cheap goal to concede. We keep making mistakes. The only good thing is that we don't play next week (Wigan are out of the FA Cup), so at least we won't get beaten!"

Everton's victory boosted their hopes of a place in Europe, but Moyes admitted that his team were forced to work hard for their win.

"Nobody will come to Wigan and get it easy, but we got there in the end. We had to be dogged and determined to get the win because Wigan made it very hard, just as we knew they would."

"We haven't won enough games on our travels this season, but any victory away from home in the Premiership is hard to come by, so this is a tremendous result."

"The first job is to make sure that you have enough points to stay in the Premiership, but we are now looking up to try to catch the teams above us."

## Boro agree Lee deal

AFP, London

English Premiership club Middlesbrough said Sunday they had agreed a deal to sign South Korean striker Lee Dong-Gook, subject to the player being granted a work permit.

Lee, 27, has not played in the required 75 percent of his country's games over the last year to qualify automatically for a permit under rules drawn up by the Home Office, Britain's interior ministry.

But a number of those matches were missed due to injury and Boro are confident of securing the former Werder Bremen player's services from Pohang Steelers when their case is submitted early next week.

Lee, nicknamed 'The Lion King' by South Korea fans, played for his country at the 1998 World Cup finals in France as a 19-year-old but was left out of the squad when his nation co-hosted the 2002 tournament with Japan by Dutch coach Guus Hiddink.

He was expected to play in last year's finals in Germany but was ruled out with a cruciate knee-ligament injury sustained playing for the Steelers in the K-League, where he has been the top scorer for the past two seasons.

His record led Boro manager Gareth Southgate to offer him a three-week trial with the north-east club.

Lee's previous spell in Europe saw him manage just a few games in the Bundesliga with Werder Bremen and no goals during his time in Germany.

But Boro defender Andrew Davies was impressed with Lee during practice and said last week: "In training, he has been doing excellently. He is an excellent finisher and he is good at holding the ball up, he is quick and he is strong."

"He would be a good addition for the squad and hopefully he can push for a place," Davies added.

Boro were left 11th in the table after thrashing Bolton Wanderers 5-1 at the Riverside on Saturday.

## Tempestuous Totti under spotlight

INTERNET, undated



Francesco Totti's maturity has been called into question again after he was sent off and shoved personal trainer Vito Scala to the ground.

The Roma captain reacted angrily to a clash with Fabio Galante in the final moments of Sunday's 1-1 draw at Livorno.

The referee looked set to book both players, but when he repeatedly called Totti over to receive the yellow and he refused to move, the card was switched to red.

Furious at the situation, the World Cup winner continued to argue and as he was led away by personal trainer Scala, pushed the older man to the ground.

"Has he apologised? What for?" said Scala after the final whistle. "My friendship with Francesco is not in the balance due to this incident, nor have there ever been any problems between us. We have always had a great rapport."

The fitness Coach has long been Totti's right hand man and he always insists on having him with him, even with the Italy squad.

"In moments of need, that is when your friends have to stay close, otherwise it's too easy. Our relationship goes beyond mere work. He has had a tough week as a cousin is in hospital in a serious condition, we've been through bad and good times together. Scala also attempted to suggest it was his fault he fell after Totti twice shoved him in the chest.

"I slipped, as there was a patch of synthetic grass on the sidelines. The respect and rapport between

us are by no means compromised. How can he make up for it? By scoring two goals in the next game."

Quite when that will be depends on the referee's report and the Disciplinary Commission, as if Totti receives more than the regulation one-match ban, he could miss the Week 22 Scudetto showdown at Inter.

Coach Luciano Spalletti was more critical of his captain after his ninth sending off - the most red-carded player in Roma's Serie A history.

"Scala is the person he feels closest to in the world other than his mother, so it was an ugly gesture," said the tactician.

"His reaction was an angry one and he could've avoided this dismissal. However, if Totti was carded for that incident when Galante he should've gone too."

## Neill explains choice

AFF, Sydney



Australian defender Lucas Neill on Sunday denied he chose Premiership

strugglers West Ham over European contenders Liverpool because there was more cash on offer at Upton Park.

Neill confirmed to Sydney's Daily Telegraph that he was switching from Blackburn to West Ham after almost a year of speculation he was headed to Anfield.

He will reportedly receive 60,000 pound (78,000 US) a week at the Hammers, approximately double the amount Liverpool was prepared to pay.

"People who have raised their eyebrows at me for making this decision are in for a surprise because West Ham have a shopping list of players which almost blew me away."

"People have said I put money before medals and how could I make a sideways move like this and not go to a club like Liverpool, who are always in the hunt for trophies

and have so much prestige.

"It was an extremely hard decision but I know it's the right one."

"West Ham moved heaven and earth to sign me, while Liverpool gave me the impression that I might not even get a game if I went there."

Neill said he expected criticism for rejecting a move to a club he says followed.

"I supported them as a kid and I know people are going to give me stick for not choosing them," he said.

However, he admitted he had a get-out clause in his contract if West Ham are relegated to the second-tier Championship.

"It's a calculated gamble," he said. "It won't be a glamorous three months but once we secure safety, people won't question my motives any more."

"I believe I will have the last laugh. People will soon be talking about West Ham in a very different way."



Barcelona striker Javier Saviola (R) runs in joy as teammate Ronaldinho follows him after his strike against Primera Liga rivals Gimnastic Tarragona at Nou Camp on Sunday.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12			13				14			
15			16				17			