

Divided press

REUTERS, Rome

Italy's sports press have given a mixed reception to Brazilian striker Ronaldo after he completed his transfer from Real Madrid to AC Milan.

Milan-based sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport* applauded the signing of the three-times FIFA World Player of the Year, who began angling for a transfer after failing out with Real coach Fabio Capello.

Ronaldo, who is ineligible to play for the club in Europe this season, would add momentum to Milan's drive for a fourth-place finish in Serie A and qualification for next season's Champions League, the paper said.

"Ronaldo has enough charisma for both the dressing room and the sponsors. If he is fit, he remains the best finisher around."

"His presence means that Milan's other strikers can be rested ready for the Champions League, and the club can concentrate on finishing fourth, which is their big target."

Corriere dello Sport, however, was less enthusiastic.

Milan's decision to pay Real 7.5 million euros for the 30-year-old Brazilian was not in line with "its declared intention to invest in young players," argued the paper.

"He is one of the greats of world football -- that is beyond discussion," it said.

"It is reasonable to ask oneself, however, in what condition has he arrived from Spain, how much of the great Ronaldo remains after his long and not particularly fortunate experience in Madrid, and how long we will have to wait before seeing him back to his best."

Milan have not announced when they plan to hold their first news conference with Ronaldo but,

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Real's word of gratitude

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid on Tuesday thanked Brazil international Ronaldo for the memories as they sold him off to AC Milan on an 18-month contract.

"This afternoon Real Madrid completed the transfer of Ronaldo Luis Nazario de Lima to AC Milan," the club said in a statement after the 30-year-old striker completed the deal to take him back to Italy, where he played for Inter Milan for five years before coming to Spain in 2002.

"Real Madrid want to pass on their recognition of this singular footballer for what he has achieved over this time through providing moments of great football which 'madridistas' will never forget," the club added on their official website.

"One hundred and four goals in the white shirt and his trophy record perfectly describe one of the best players to have worn our number nine shirt."

"Now, with the time having come to say goodbye, Real Madrid want to reiterate their thanks to Ronaldo and to wish him all the best sporting success and, above all, maximum personal happiness," the club said in parting with the three-time FIFA World Player of the Year.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo waves to fans as he leaves Milanello, the AC Milan training centre in Carnago on Wednesday. The 30-year-old striker signed an 18-month contract with the Italian giants for a fee believed to be 7.5 million euros (9.7 million dollars).

Ronaldo relishing Milan challenge

Football

AFP, Milan

Brazilian megastar Ronaldo said he hoped he could fulfil the dreams of AC Milan fans after leaving Real Madrid to join the six-time European champions on Tuesday.

After two weeks of negotiations between the two clubs, the 30-year-old striker finally signed an 18-month contract with the Italian giants for a fee believed to be 7.5 million euros (9.7 million dollars).

The transfer brings Ronaldo back to northern Italy after a near five-year absence having played for Milan's city rivals Inter for five years before signing for Real in

2002. "I hope I can fulfil the dreams of the AC Milan fans," Ronaldo said on his arrival at Milan's Linate airport.

"It's all a bit overwhelming, but I am happy to be here and glad that the transfer has finally gone through. It's a great feeling to be back in Milan."

Earlier Ronaldo had expressed his sadness at leaving Real before jumping on the plane from Madrid.

"It's sad to say goodbye after four-and-a-half years, but now I have an important challenge ahead of me," said the Brazil international.

"It hurts me to leave, it breaks my heart, but that's life."

Ronaldo, the highest scorer in World Cup history with 15 goals,

had fallen out of favour with Real coach Fabio Capello and was becoming increasingly frustrated at his lack of first-team football.

And he couldn't resist taking a final swipe at Capello before saying 'adios' to the Spanish capital.

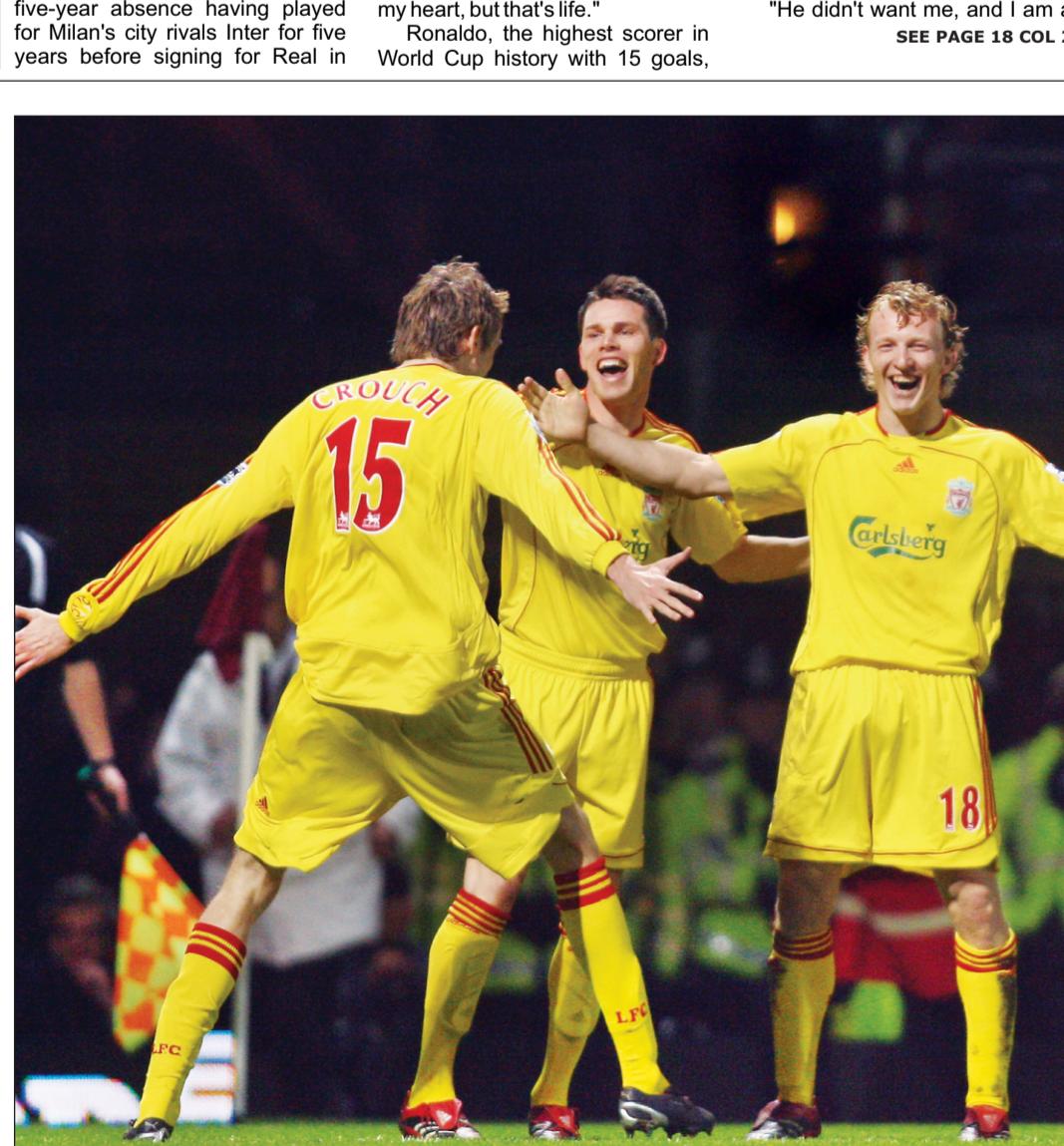
"I want to thank the fans and all the coaches that I've worked with -- except one," said the three-time FIFA World Player of the Year.

Ronaldo then softened up, saying his relationship with Capello was not as bad as reported in the press.

"Lots of things have been said, but I've never had the slightest problem with the coach," he said.

"He didn't want me, and I am a

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Magath gets Bayern axe

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Three-times World Player of the Year Ronaldo was given a muted send-off by the Spanish media on Wednesday after his 7.5 million-euro (\$9.72 million) move from Real to AC Milan.

The normally Real Madrid-obsessed sports daily *Marca* practically ignored the player on its front pages, preferring instead to concentrate on Formula One world champion Fernando Alonso and his pre-season testing sessions in Valencia.

The regular papers limited their coverage to brief information pieces, while sports daily *AS* was the only one to devote significant space to the departure of the 30-year-old Brazilian.

AS focused on Ronaldo's thinly veiled criticisms of Real coach Fabio Capello who effectively forced the striker to leave the Bernabeu and went on to examine the end of the Galactico era at the club.

"Madrid has impoverished its squad, the shining brilliance of the Galacticos has gone, but that is not the worst thing," said editor Alfredo Relano.

"The worst thing is that the galaxy has been killed off because of the indecisions and brutishness of Capello who hasn't lived up to expectations in any respect."

Fans appeared to be evenly divided as to whether the decision to sell Ronaldo was a wise one, with 54 percent of the nearly 25,000 fans polled by *Marca* saying Real had made a mistake and 46 percent agreeing with the club's decision.

Rival players and coaches, however, were unanimous in their belief that Ronaldo's departure would be a major loss for a domestic competition that has become

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Tiger wishes Becks success

AFP, Dubai

David Beckham's quest for superstardom in the United States has drawn support from current top draw Tiger Woods.

The wealthiest and best recognised sportsman in the world said that the former England skipper knows what he is doing in moving from Spanish powerhouses Real Madrid to the footballing backwaters of the LA Galaxy.

"I think in Los Angeles, we've lost basically two football teams, the Rams and the Raiders moved out," he said.

"Now we're looking for something else and I think with David's star power there, I think it will bring another notch and another thing for all of us in southern California to come out and watch and observe."

Woods though made it known that star-quality or not, he would not be changing his schedule to follow Beckham's progress.

Asked if he was a Galaxy fan or if he followed any team's results, he made it clear that when it came to sport he was traditional American through and through.

"Yeah, I like to watch, but as far as me following soccer religiously like people over here do, no," he said. "I'm more of a basketball/baseball/football kind of guy."

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich have sacked coach Felix Magath and plan to replace him with former boss Ottmar Hitzfeld, according to a report by *Bild* newspaper on Wednesday.

A club spokesman said that he could not confirm the report, which said the 20-times German champions would appoint Hitzfeld until the end of the season.

Magath replaced Hitzfeld in July 2004 and guided the club to

league and cup doubles in each of his first two seasons in charge.

their league matches on Wednesday night.

In fact, Magath wrote off the side's chances of making up the distance in the wake of Tuesday's home draw with Bochum.

"We don't need to talk about the title any more," Magath told reporters. "We have to make sure of getting second or third."

Bayern are also out of the German Cup after losing to modest Alemannia Aachen in December.

They do remain in with a chance of winning the European Cup -- a competition they last won under Hitzfeld in 2001 -- with a second round Champions League tie to come against Real Madrid.

PSG keep Cup hopes alive

Football

AFP, Paris

Yaya Toure had to come off with a torn ankle muscle.

First division Sedan overcame the banana skin presented by their second division opponents Libourne-Saint-Seurin, but only after a fightback.

Libourne took the lead one minute from the interval with Yahia Kebe's close range goal but they will have been kicking themselves for



Paris Saint Germain's David Rozehnal (R) and Valenciennes' Thomas Dossevi are in a tangle during their French Cup match at the Parc des Princes in Paris on Tuesday.

Reds compound Hammers woes

AFP, London

Liverpool gave West Ham a lesson in finishing at Upton Park as two brilliant goals from Dirk Kuyt and Peter Crouch decided this Premiership encounter 2-1 in the visitors' favour.

Kuyt's long distance drive opened the scoring just after half-time, and seven minutes later Crouch tucked the ball beyond Roy Carroll after a well-worked move.

A debut goal for substitute Kepa Blanco gave West Ham hope on 77 minutes, but the defeat means that Alan Curbishley has now won just one of his eight league games as their manager.

Victory moves Liverpool within two points of second placed Chelsea, while West Ham are left in the bottom three.

In a bid to stop the rot, Curbishley made three changes from the side which lost to Watford in the FA Cup at the weekend, including Marlon Harewood in favour of Bobby Zamora.

Sami Hyypia and Craig Bellamy returned to Ra

into the net. It was a wonderful strike, and marked Kuyt's ninth Premiership goal of the term.

George McCartney made a great stop on six minutes to deny Crouch, and then Jamie Carragher blazed over the bar following a well-worked free-kick.

Kabi Alonso came close for Liverpool on 31 minutes, but it was just after that miss West Ham sparked into life.

A great turn and shot by captain Nigel Reo-Coker brought the home supporters to their feet, and then on 34 minutes Harewood came even closer to breaking the deadlock.

His superb 25-yard drilled shot was heading for the far corner of Pepe Reina's goal, but the Spanish goalkeeper managed to tip the ball wide at full stretch to send the sides in on even terms at half-time.

Whatever it was that Benitez said in the 15 minute interval worked wonders, as it took just 12 seconds of the second half for his side to find the net.

Straight from kick off Steven Gerrard picked out Crouch, who in turn found strike partner Kuyt.

The Dutchman hit a first time effort from 25 yards which flew straight over Carroll, off the underside of the crossbar, and



PHOTO: AFP

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Liverpool's Dutch striker Dirk Kuyt (2nd from R) celebrates the opening goal against West Ham during their Premiership match at Upton Park in London on Tuesday.