



AS Roma players celebrate a strike by Uruguayan midfielder David Pizarro against AC Milan in their Coppa Italia semifinal second leg match at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

## Beckham mourns cancer patient

AFP, Hamilton

David Beckham was mourning the death of a Canadian teen cancer patient whom he bolstered last week with a surprise telephone call, his agent told the Hamilton Spectator.

Rebecca Johnstone's brief conversation with her football idol provided joy in the midst of a difficult battle with melanoma that ended with her death here Monday at age 19.

"His thoughts are with the family at this time," Beckham spokesman Simon Oliveira told the newspaper.

Oliveira said Beckham had been made aware of her death shortly after her passing.

In the days since Beckham's call, Johnstone's tale had inspired worldwide interest. Calls and e-mails on how to donate to her cause came from Scotland, New Zealand, the Netherlands and other lands.

"I think it's understandable that there would be a lot of interest," said Bill Johnstone, her cousin. "But the amount of interest was unbelievable."

"It was something that was a lot

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## COPPA ITALIA Roma book final ticket

Football

INTERNET, undated

Roma have reached another Italian Cup final after an impressive 3-1 victory over Milan. Goals from Amantino Mancini, Simone Perrotta and David Pizarro were enough for the capital club to complete a memorable 5-3 aggregate triumph.

Roma kicked off in front of the 40,000 at the Olimpico on Wednesday night in the driving seat, given the outcome of the first leg last week, and the Giallorossi wasted no time in underlining their advantage.

After Max Tonetto hit the side netting, the home boys took the lead in the eighth minute. A misplaced Billy Costacurta backpass caught out Nelson Dida and it was playground stuff for Mancini to make it 1-0.

Milan's Massimo Ambrosini and Francesco Totti of Roma exchanged efforts before the away side got back into the tie.

Marek Jankulovski, after a fine solo run, supplied a pass for Alberto Gilardino and the Italian unexpected-

edly toe-poked the ball past Gianluca Curci to equalise on the night.

A lively Roma reacted well to that setback and they took advantage of how shaky Milan -- and especially Costacurta -- were looking at the back.

They capitalised soon after by making it 2-1 through Perrotta. Christian Panucci's cross found an ignored Totti, his close range shot was parried by Dida's foot which then fell into the path of Perrotta. He couldn't miss from less than a yard out.

Milan looked for another equaliser with a 25-year low Kaka drive which Curci stopped before Panucci cleared, while Cristian Chivu tried his luck for the capital side. His 34th minute free-kick cleared the wall but didn't trouble Dida.

Carlo Ancelotti opted for a change at the break by bringing on Massimo Oddo for Costacurta, with Dario Simic moving into the centre of the defence as a result. It didn't make any immediate difference though as Roma scored again...

Pizarro did the damage with a rasping low shot from outside of the area. That wonder goal was as a

direct consequence of some wonderful give-and-go football between the Chilean and Totti.

Roma were visibly enjoying themselves against a static Milan and were unfortunate to not make it 4-1 through Daniele De Rossi. His long ranger dipped wickedly, but Dida saved in style.

The Eternal city outfit should have extended their lead in minute 63. They were awarded a penalty for a quite ludicrous Marcos Cafu challenge on Mancini, but Totti's powerful spot-kick was blocked by Dida.

Jankulovski and substitute Pippo Inzaghi worried Roman hearts only for the home side to threaten again. Panucci rattled the bar in minute 78 with an athletic volley that had Dida beaten. It would have been a beauty!

As the clock ticked down Milan resigned themselves to defeat, especially when they were left with 10 men because of an injury to Inzaghi in the last 10 minutes.

Should Inter (3-0 up already) see off Sampdoria on Thursday, the Nerazzurri and Roma will meet in the Coppa Italia Final for the third season running. The northern giants won both of the previous encounters.

## 'Ronaldo exit a mistake'

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid have made a mistake in selling Ronaldo to AC Milan, according to former coach Vicente del Bosque.

"Real need Ronaldo at the moment and it would have been better to have integrated him into the squad because the team hasn't got that many strikers," Del Bosque was quoted as saying in sports daily Marca on Thursday.

"He unites the dressing room more than he divides it and as a player he has all the natural instincts of a striker."

Real sold the three-times World Player of the Year to Milan for 7.5 million euros (9.76 million dollars) on Tuesday after coach Fabio Capello made it clear he did not want the Brazilian in the squad.

Real, who are in third place in La Liga, have scored just three goals in their last seven games in all competitions with current first choice strikers Ruud van Nistelrooy and Gonzalo Higuain struggling to find the net.

Del Bosque guided Real to two European Cups and two league titles while he was coach.

The club has not won a major trophy since he was discarded by then president Florentino Perez after winning the league in 2003.

## Hitzfeld back at Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

German giants Bayern Munich sacked manager Felix Magath on Wednesday after the 20-time champions slipped to fourth in the Bundesliga.

Bayern said Magath would be replaced until the end of the season by former coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who guided the club to the Champions League crown in 2001.

"We regret this decision," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"But in our role as managers of the club we have to see real development and take action."

Rummenigge said the club's board was concerned that Bayern were currently out of the qualification spots for next season's Champions League.

The split comes 24 hours after Bayern were held to an embarrassing goalless draw by newly promoted VfL Bochum which left them five points adrift of Bundesliga leaders Werder Bremen.

They could find themselves lagging eight points off the leaders if Werder beat Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday.

Tuesday's result left Magath's position decidedly shaky given that in three weeks time Bayern face Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16 at the Bernabeu.

The alarms bells began ringing at

Bayern before Christmas but the writing was on the wall for Magath when their opening game since the winter break resulted in a 3-2 loss to Borussia Dortmund on Friday.

The team has struggled to shake off the departure of playmaker Michael Ballack to Premiership champions at the end of last season and a broken leg for England international Owen Hargreaves left the midfield further depleted.

my contract could come to an end one day."

Hitzfeld, 58, led Bayern to four German championships and a Champions League title in his first spell as manager between 1999 and 2004, when Magath moved to Bavaria from VfB Stuttgart.

As well as his honours with Bayern, Hitzfeld also guided Borussia Dortmund to two German titles and a Champions League crown.

Hitzfeld, an arch disciplinarian, handed out 300,000 euros (390,000) worth of fines to players in five years at the club, according to Bild newspaper.

He turned a team once nicknamed FC Hollywood -- because the players gave coaches such a torrid time -- into a formidable unit, led by marauding midfielder Stefan Effenberg.

Once mentioned as a successor to Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, Hitzfeld instead pursued a media career after leaving Bayern.

But his return to Bayern is expected to be temporary and it is rumoured that current Lyon manager and former Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier is being lined up to take the reins at the Allianz Arena next season.

Magath was the second Bundesliga coach to part company with his club on Wednesday after former German international Jupp Heynckes quit as coach of relegation-threatened Borussia Monchengladbach.



OTTMAR HITZFELD

Magath, 53, said he was proud of leading Bayern to consecutive league and Cup doubles in two and a half years at the club.

"Obviously this isn't the best news because I'm proud of the two great years touched with success that I've had here."

"But it's always been clear that

## Liverpool secure late signings

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool were the most significant players on deadline day for the January transfer window with Rafael Benitez scoring a hat-trick of new signings.

Deportivo La Coruna defender Alvaro Arbeloa, 24, and promising Malaga youngster Francisco Manuel Duran, 18, both wrapped up moves to Anfield within hours of the window closing at midnight on Tuesday.

Liverpool also secured the registration of Argentina midfielder Javier Mascherano after FIFA ruled that he could sign for his third club in less than a year.

Mascherano joined West Ham from Brazilian side Corinthians on the last deadline day at the end of August.

The World Cup star's ability to play for Liverpool however remains subject to final approval from the English Premier League, who have asked for more time to examine the deal.

Arbeloa, who cost Liverpool 2.6 million pounds, admitted the move had taken him by surprise.

"Until yesterday I wasn't sure whether I was going to leave or not," he said. "My agent told me the deal was very advanced and I was then told that the deal had been reached between both clubs."

"For me this is a beautiful challenge and I hope everything goes well. It's a huge leap for me."

Duran only made his first team debut for Malaga earlier this season and has secured a first professional contract with his move to Merseyside.

"It's a unique opportunity and I couldn't let it go by," the teenager said. "I have spoken with Rafa Benitez, and I believe that this is the best option for me."

The highest value deal on deadline day saw England defender Matthew Upson move from Birmingham to West Ham for a fee of six million pounds that could rise to 7.5 million depending on appearance.

Promotion-chasing Birmingham had tried hard to hang on to the 27-year-old former Arsenal

centreback, but his determination to move on ensured that the deal went through with just hours left until the expiry of the January transfer window.

Upson has agreed a four-and-a-half year contract at Upton Park and will go straight into the squad for the Hammers' Premiership clash at Aston Villa on Saturday.

The east London club are in deep trouble in the Premiership after winning just one of their seven league matches since manager Alan Pardew took over from Alan

Parsons in December.

Arsenal paid Luton two million pounds to sign him in 1997 but the

defender never convinced Arsene Wenger that he was worth a regular first team place. He moved to Birmingham in January 2003 and won the first of his seven England caps five months later.

Birmingham's loss of Upson was partly offset by the acquisition of midfielder Sebastian Larsson, whose loan deal from Arsenal was made permanent at a cost of one million pounds (1.95 million dollars).

Aston Villa won the prize for going closest to the deadline with the one million pound signing of Celtic's Shaun Maloney being completed at just five minutes to midnight.

Manchester City signed former England left-back Michael Ball from Dutch side PSV Eindhoven.

The 27-year-old has signed a short-term contract until the end of the season. He becomes manager Stuart Pearce's second signing of the transfer window, following Djamel Abdoun's move from French club Ajaccio.

Watford signed 25-year-old Scotland midfielder Gareth Williams from Leicester for an undisclosed fee.

Stoke captain Michael Duberry, the former Leeds and Chelsea defender, completed an 800,000-pound move to Reading.

Bolton signed midfielder David Thompson from Portsmouth for a nominal fee, making him the third

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## MU turn on the style

AFP, Manchester



Cristiano Ronaldo inspired Manchester United's four-goal rout of bottom club Watford to maintain Sir Alex Ferguson's side's six-point advantage over Chelsea at the head of the Premiership table.

Refreshed after a week's holiday in Dubai, the Portuguese winger chose the final day of the transfer window to demonstrate why United have reacted so angrily to reported interest in him from Real Madrid.

From the moment he set United on their way with the 20th minute opener, Ronaldo proved to be simply unstoppable and rounded off a superb individual display by setting up Wayne Rooney for the fourth goal after a Lloyd Doyley own-goal and Henrik Larsson strike had given Ferguson's side an impregnable lead.

With Chelsea beating Blackburn Rovers, it was vital United won to maintain their six-point gap over the London club after squandering a chance to extend that advantage to nine points when they lost at Arsenal in their last league outing.

United skipper Gary Neville said last week that Ferguson's side were already looking ahead to the weekend visit to Tottenham Hotspur as the next

decisive fixture in their bid to claim the Premiership crown for the first time in four years.

That view looked short-sighted as United initially struggled to click into gear but once Ronaldo had fired the home side into a 20th minute lead with a typically swaggering penalty, there was never any doubt this would be a routine victory for the league leaders.

Watford had only themselves to blame for the opening goal with centre-back Jay DeMerit conceding the spot-kick by impeding Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as the Norwegian attempted to reach Wayne Rooney's knockdown on the edge of the six-yard box.

Lifted by his 14th goal of the season, the Portuguese began to demonstrate his full repertoire of tricks but United struggled to build on the lead with centre back Nemanja Vidic twice sending powerful free headers over the bar.

Against a better side those misses might have proved wasteful but Watford offered precious little as an attacking force although United keeper Tomasz Kuszczak, deputising once again for the rested Edwin van der Sar, was fortunate to see Chris Powell's sliced cross deflect to safety off the far post in the 36th minute.

That, though, was to be the visitors last real opportunity and

after the break Ferguson's side turned the game into little more than a training work-out.

They were helped on their way once again when DeMerit's central defensive partner Doyley headed Kieran Richardson's left wing cross past his own goalkeeper for United's second on the hour.

But United needed no further assistance as they completed the victory with two goals that epitomised the confidence that is running through Ferguson's side at the moment.

First Larsson carved open the visiting defence with an exhilarating exchange of passes that resulted in the Swede being sent clear on Watford keeper Richard Lee before side-footing home to claim his second goal for the club just five minutes after appearing as a 65th-minute substitute.

Then sixty seconds later Rooney raced onto Ronaldo's elegant chip to loop the ball over the advancing Lee and take his personal tally to four goals in three games with a strike reminiscent of his superb match-winner in the weekend FA Cup victory over Portsmouth.

Ronaldo almost added to the rout when he struck the post late on but by then Ferguson's side had already got their title bid well and truly back on course.



Manchester United striker Cristiano Ronaldo (L) scores from the penalty spot against Watford during their Premiership match at Old Trafford, Manchester on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP