



French goalkeeper Gregory Coupet (L) chats with coach Raymond Domenech at a training session for the Argentina friendly at the Michel Hidalgo Stadium in Saint-Gratien on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

## France up against Argentina

### Football

AFP, Paris

France will be looking for more than just a high-profile exhibition match during Wednesday night's international friendly against Argentina, striker Djibril Cisse warned.

The Marseille striker will be looking to line out at the Stade de France after returning to Raymond Domenech's squad for the first time since suffering an horrific leg injury on the eve of the World Cup. And he insisted that all eyes would be firmly focused on next month's Euro 2008 qualifier against Lithuania rather than the South Americans.

The World Cup finalists are second in Group B for the European championships in two years time, with nine points from four games, after suffering just one loss to leaders Scotland.

After the Lithuania game in March, there will also be a key tie against Italy in September, and a visit to the Ukraine in November.

"Argentina is a choice game,

anyone would love to play this match but the coach is looking towards the Lithuania game," said Cisse.

"Against Argentina we can have an exhibition match or get down to business -- I'm not into beach football myself, it's not my style.

"I see beyond this time towards the qualifiers which will allow me to be there the next time," said Cisse.

It will be the first meeting between the two countries since 1986 when the French won 2-0, though, the Diego Maradona-inspired Argentinians were to capture the greater prize a few months later with the World Cup.

But if meeting Argentina is a new experience for some of the younger players it won't be for David Trezeguet, born in Normandy to Argentinian parents, or Cisse who played in a France-Argentina under-20 game in 2001.

Domenech, looking to rebuild a team post-Zinedine Zidane, is counting on Cisse's promising partnership with France teammate Franck Ribery at Marseille to carry over to les Bleus.

"It's great that the coach has

called on us even if we've only being playing two months together," said Ribery. "With 'Djib' we're often together in training and afterwards. We're getting on better and better."

The 2000 European champions have however an injury crisis in

### WEDNESDAY FRIENDLIES

#### (ALL TIMES IN GMT)

Albania v FYR Macedonia (15.00)  
Algeria v Libya (17.00)  
Andorra v Armenia (19.30)  
Belgium v Czech Republic (19.45)  
China v Kazakhstan (11.00)  
Croatia v Norway (19.15)  
Egypt v Sweden (18.00)  
England v Spain (20.00)  
France v Argentina (20.00)  
Georgia v Turkey (17.00)  
Germany v Switzerland (19.00)  
Netherlands v Russia (19.30)  
Iran v Belarus (13.30)  
Israel v Ukraine (16.30)  
Malta v Austria (17.00)  
Moldova v Romania (15.00)  
Morocco v Tunisia (19.00)  
Slovakia v Poland (19.30)  
Slovenia v Estonia (19.15)  
Venezuela v Chile (23.00)

defence with Philippe Mexes, William Gallas and Jean-Alain Bounsang out injured and Lilian Thuram and Sebastien Squillaci uncertain as they struggle for fitness.

Domenech has called up Marseille's Julien Rodriguez and Arsenal's Mathieu Flamini as a security measure.

Argentina coach Alfio Basile will be without midfielder Pablo Aimar and striker Aldo Duschier, with young Real Madrid midfielder Fernando Gago uncertain for his first call-up with a muscular problems.

But veteran captain Robert Ayala and Javier Zanetti believe that Arsenal captain Thierry Henry will be the man to watch.

"We respect France as a whole. It has players who could cause us problems like Henry, and not forgetting Ribery," said Zanetti.

But Ayala added: "We fear Henry the most.

"We know that he's the man to watch, but France counts on team play. They have an experienced defence, a midfield that gives few opportunities, and very fast players up front."

## 'C'Ron better off at Barca'

AFP, London

Cristiano Ronaldo should leave Manchester United for the good of his playing career and join Barcelona, Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said on Monday.

Ronaldo's brilliant form for United this season has attracted interest from Barca and Real Madrid, but his boss at Old Trafford Sir Alex Ferguson has made it clear the Portugal winger is not for sale.

Despite Ferguson's insistence reports emanating out of Spain suggest the two Spanish giants are set to lock horns in a bid to lure the 22-year-old with a bid in the region of 40 million pounds.

And Scolari has joined in the debate telling Monday's The Sun newspaper that Ronaldo would be better off at the Nou Camp.

"The basic education stage of his career is ending and I know Cristiano is ready for a change of atmosphere," Scolari told the tabloid.

"Barcelona would hugely enjoy having Cristiano in their team because he would complement Ronaldinho perfectly -- they have different characteristics.

"For Cristiano, the Barcelona climate would be important -- most days are sunny and it's hardly ever cold like England.

"That gives a player all the motivation he needs to train and play."

Scolari feels Barca rather than Real Madrid where Ronaldo would be linking up with former United teammate Ruud van Nistelrooy is

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## Luxemburgo's public fury

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Santos coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo has launched an extraordinary public attack on former player Marcelinho Carioca during a television programme.

Luxemburgo lost his temper and repeatedly insulted Marcelinho during the round table programme on the Bandeirantes television channel.

"It's my way of being. I don't have the pleasure of being Marcelinho's friend, nor do I want to be," said the former Brazil and Real Madrid coach before launching into a tirade of insults, which he repeated several times.

Marcelinho sat quietly two seats away as Luxemburgo lashed out to the astonishment of the other participants on the programme.

Marcelinho, nicknamed Angel Foot because of his ability to swerve the ball at free-kicks and corners, played under Luxemburgo at Corinthians in 1998 but left the club after the pair fell out.

## The Hamburg approach

AFP, Hamburg

SV Hamburg are sitting rock bottom of Germany's Bundesliga and sacked coach Thomas Doll last week. Now they may have found the problem -- the goals in their stadium are too small.

The Hamburger Abendblatt newspaper reported on Tuesday that the goals in the Hamburg Arena were 2.39 metres high, five centimetres lower than the regulation height.

"We will obviously be measuring that again," club spokesman Joern Wolf told the SID sports news agency.

"Fortunately no-one hit the crossbar in the match against Energie Cottbus last week," he added, referring to the 1-1 draw which proved to be Doll's final match in charge.

Hamburg have taken just 15 points from 20 games this season. The club have given Dutch coach Huub Stevens the job of dragging them out of the relegation zone.

## Romania reject compensation

INTERNET, undated

The Romanian Football Federation has turned down a compensation offer from their Italian counterparts.

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) made contact with the Romanians today with a compensation bid after the FIGC cancelled Wednesday's international friendly.

However, FRF President Ionit Lupescu has rejected the proposal given the circumstances of the abandonment.

The friendly, which was set to be staged in Siena, was scrapped after the death of a police officer during Friday's Serie A game between Catania and Palermo.

Romania are hoping to now organise a fresh friendly with the Azzurri at some stage during 2008.

# US tycoons to buy Liverpool

### Football

AFP, Liverpool

English Premiership giants Liverpool on Tuesday accepted a 470-million pound takeover offer from American tycoons George Gillett and Tom Hicks.

The two National Hockey league team owners were expected to make a formal announcement to the London Stock Exchange later Tuesday.

Gillett, who owns the NHL's Montreal Canadiens, joined forces with Hicks, owner of the NHL's Dallas Stars and the Texas Rangers baseball team, to trump rival bidders Dubai International Capital last week.

Liverpool chairman David Moores told the club's website: "I believe this is a great step forward for Liverpool, its shareholders and its fans.

"This club is my passion and forms a huge part of my life. After much careful consideration, I have agreed to sell my shares to assist in

securing the investment needed for the new stadium and for the playing squad.

"I urge all my fellow shareholders to do the same and to support the offer. By doing so, I believe you will be backing the successful future of Liverpool Football Club."

Moores has accepted an offer from the new owners to become Honorary Life President.

In a joint statement Gillett and Hicks said: "Liverpool is a fantastic club with a remarkable history and a passionate fanbase.

"We fully acknowledge and appreciate the unique heritage and rich history of Liverpool and intend to respect this heritage in the future. The Hicks family and the Gillett family are extremely excited about continuing the Club's legacy and tradition."

Arrangements over the future of Liverpool's new stadium appear to have clinched the deal.

Not only has Hicks built up a reputation for developing state-of-the-art stadia for his teams, but the duo have now guaranteed that Liverpool's new Stanley Park

ground would not be shared with other teams.

In Gillett's original approach, when he was considering a solo takeover, he had indicated he wanted a ground-share arrangement to cut costs and maximise income.

Hicks and Gillett will split the 470 million cost of taking over the club on a 50-50 basis, with around 255 million going to buy the shareholding and take over the 80 million debt, and a further 215 million on the stadium.

Rick Parry, Liverpool chief executive, commented: "This is great for Liverpool, our supporters and the shareholders -- it is the beginning of a new era for the club."

The takeover means three Premiership sides -- Liverpool, Manchester United and Aston Villa -- are all in American hands.

Malcolm Glazer, owner of American football's (NFL) Tampa Bay Buccaneers, owns United and Randy Lerner, owner of NFL's Cleveland Browns, bought Aston Villalast year.

# Clubs dead against empty stadia

REUTERS, Rome



Italy's government vowed on Tuesday to push ahead with tough security measures including closed-door

matches for all stadiums deemed unsafe, but clubs said they hoped for a compromise so that fans would not be penalised.

The measures were announced on Monday after all play was suspended following the death of a policeman during rioting at a Serie A derby in Sicily between Catania and Palermo on Friday.

"We have a duty to resist the pressures that will come from the world of football. Because human life and the right to public safety are worth much more than economic interests," Interior Minister Giuliano Amato told parliament.

The football league, representing clubs and their financial interests, discussed the new rules on Tuesday and participants said they wanted talks with the government to make sure the public would be admitted at all matches.

"It is not possible to play matches without spectators," said Palermo's president Maurizio Zamparini.

He said the league had agreed that clubs should take on more responsibility in ensuring stadiums conform to safety rules.

Clubs also approved the government's plan to ban the block sale of tickets to visiting fans to avoid large groups of supporters organising trips to away fixtures.

On Monday, Antonio Matarrese, the head of the league, drew criticism for saying "the show must go on" and that matches should resume. Some politicians and soccer officials called for Matarrese to resign, including Infrastructure Minister Antonio Di Pietro, who also said the football season should be halted altogether.

"A few days' suspension are not enough to take far-reaching decisions," Di Pietro said. "Citizens would rightly feel duped."

Sports commentators however said the new rules, which now need to be approved by a special cabinet meeting on Wednesday, paved the way for play to resume this weekend.

"There was a duty to stop last Sunday as a sign of mourning, but it would be practically impossible to hold up everything indefinitely," said Corriere dello Sport on the front page under the banner headline "We're on!"

The head of Italy's football federation has said he will take a decision on whether to lift the suspension by Thursday.

La Gazzetta dello Sport called the measures "a cocktail of hope", but emphasised the need to implement regulations "which even in the

recent past have slipped by the wayside."

The measures include a beefing-up of stadium bans for those found guilty of violence and the possibility for police to arrest fans without a warrant for up to 48 hours.

If play does resume this weekend, it was not clear exactly how many stadiums would be open to the public.

In Serie A, only Rome's Olympic Stadium, Palermo's Barbera Stadium, the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Siena and Turin's Olympic Stadium currently meet regulations introduced in 2005.

The rest needed varying degrees of work to bring them up to scratch. Among those are several famous venues, including Milan's San Siro -- home to AC Milan and Inter Milan -- and Florence's Stadio Franchi.

In lower divisions the situation is even worse. Only two clubs in Serie B play in stadiums that meet regulations.

"Many stadiums not only don't come close to the norms set out by my predecessor ... but it seems clear that many clubs purposefully try to avoid the regulations," said Amato.

## Pizarro lured by Juve

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich's Claudio Pizarro has admitted that he would be tempted by a summer move to Juventus.

The Peruvian has been associated with a switch to Turin in recent times and he's ready to consider a transfer if an offer was made.

"I know that Juventus are interested in me and I would like to play my football in Italy," the striker has stated.

"However, I've had no official contact with them.

"My agent has received a host of different offers and we will pick the best one which will suit my career plans."

The Old Lady of Italian football are keen on the attacker given that he is presently available on a free transfer.

However, Pizarro -- who former Juve player Andreas Moller has recommended -- has failed to rule out signing a new deal with Bayern once his present one expires in June.

"If Bayern offer me a new deal then it must be in line with what I'm expecting," he added. "Otherwise I will be free to look for a new club."

Pizarro could be netted as an alternative for David Trezeguet who may quit the Bianconeri at the end of the season.

# Ballack shrugs off criticism

AFP, Berlin



Germany captain Michael Ballack hit back on Monday at criticism of his form at English Premiership champions Chelsea, saying manager Jose Mourinho was happy with his performances.

"As far as I am concerned, I have integrated well into the team," Ballack said in an interview with the SID sports news agency.

"I feel very happy, I've found my role in the team and I have had plenty of confirmation of that, above all from my coach, Jose Mourinho, with whom I talk a lot," the midfielder said.

Ballack, whose reported weekly salary of 130,000 pounds (255,000 dollars) is thought to make him the world's highest-paid player, dismissed the criticism of his lacklustre form in the English press.

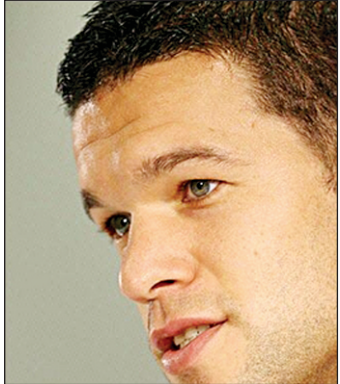
"There are a load of tabloid newspapers in England, which always need something to write and it doesn't particularly bother me."

He did however accept that it was taking him time to adapt to his role in the star-studded Chelsea line-up.

"Naturally, in a team like Chelsea it takes time to perfect your game and play an outstanding role,"

Ballack said.

The latest criticism of Ballack came not from England, but closer to home, from Bayern Munich president Frank Beckenbauer, who said he should have opted for Chelsea when he left Bayern last year because his teammate,



MICHAEL BALLACK

England midfielder Frank Lampard, was "stronger and takes his position."

Ballack dismissed the suggestion that he and Lampard were struggling to form an effective partnership.

"He plays his game, I play mine.

We have a good understanding.

"Chelsea have been champions for the last two seasons and so expectations are high.

"We are lagging behind a little in the title race and so this (the criticism) is something we have to live with, especially the new signings."

Ballack said Chelsea knew they could not afford any more "slip-ups" if they are to make up the six-point gap on United at the top of the Premiership.

"It'll be tough because United are so consistent. But we are still have a home match against them to come."

Ballack also said he believed that Mourinho would be staying at the club, despite speculation that he has fallen out with billionaire owner Roman Abramovich and could be eyeing a move to Real Madrid.

"Our coach is confronted by new rumours every day. I am sure as my teammates are that he is going to stay at Stamford Bridge."

Ballack is expected to line up for Germany in a friendly against Switzerland in Dusseldorf on Wednesday.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Czech Republic midfielder Tomas Rosicky holds the trophy for Czech Footballer of the Year for the third time as his girlfriend Radka Kocurova smiles in Prague on Monday.