

Eccentric Dunga

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) denied on Friday that national team coach Dunga had been asked to tone down his attire on the touchline.

Dunga, whose daughter Gabriela Verri is a fashion student and designs his clothes, raised eyebrows last Tuesday with a garish black and white shirt in the 2-0 defeat by Portugal, his first loss in six games in charge.

A number of foreign publications, including Argentina's sports daily Ole, have poked fun at his dress sense.

In a previous friendly away to Switzerland, Dunga caught the eye with a grey, polar-necked sweater under a grey jacket with a maroon handkerchief tucked into his breast pocket.

On Friday, the Estadio de Sao Paulo newspaper reported that CBF president Ricardo Teixeira had asked him to adopt a more discrete, traditional line.

But the CBF said in a statement: "Ricardo Teixeira has not spoken about the subject of the story to either journalists or members of the technical staff.

"It is therefore not true that he has ordered the use of an ordinary suit or a tracksuit."

Messi back in Barca squad

REUTERS, Madrid

Lionel Messi returned to the Barcelona squad after over three months on the sidelines when coach Frank Rijkaard named the Argentine forward in the 18-strong list for Sunday's match at home to Racing Santander.

The 19-year-old has been out of action since breaking a bone in his left foot during the 3-1 league win over Real Zaragoza in early November.

Leading striker Samuel Eto'o returned to action in the closing minutes of last weekend's 0-0 draw at Osasuna after a four-month lay-off with a knee injury.

With Ronaldinho also in the squad after recovering from a bruised knee, Rijkaard now has his first choice attack at his disposal ready for the Champions League clash with Liverpool later this month.

Iceland striker Eidur Gudjohnsen was left out of the squad as were injured defenders Lillian Thuram and Silvino.

Barca lead the Primera Liga by a point from Sevilla.

Berlusconi slams ban

AFP, Rome

AC Milan owner and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on Friday slammed the government's refusal to allow season ticket holders into behind closed doors matches.

Milan's San Siro stadium is one of 11 of Italy's top two divisions deemed unsafe under strict new security measures introduced by the government following the death of a policeman during crowd trouble at last week's Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo.

Milan are desperately trying to reach a compromise, hoping the government will allow season-ticket holders into their stadium if some of the necessary security work is carried out.

However, ministers have vowed not to bow to pressure from the clubs and for the moment appear to be standing firm.

"I believe it is an infringement of liberty not to allow season ticket holders to watch their team

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Portugal split on Mourinho

AFP, Lisbon

Football fans in Portugal are evenly divided over whether they want Chelsea's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho to take over the national team next year, a poll published Saturday shows.

Support for Mourinho taking over from Brazil's Luiz Felipe Scolari, who is set to leave his present post after Euro 2008, stands at 43.1 per cent with 42.2 opposed, the survey published in Correio da Manha found.

The remaining 14.7 percent did not have an opinion.

Mourinho is under contract with Chelsea until 2010 but there has been widespread speculation in the British media that he may leave earlier because his relationship with the club's owner Roman Abramovich has reportedly been strained.

The 44-year-old, who joined the London club in June 2004 from

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Serie A resumes tonight

AFP, Rome



Serie A leaders Inter Milan face Chievo behind closed doors on Sunday as a professional football resumes in Italy.

All domestic matches were suspended last Friday after a policeman was killed and 100 people injured as fans went on the rampage at the Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo.

Chievo's stadium is one of five deemed unsafe under strict new security measures introduced by the Italian government to combat football violence and fans have been banned for the match in Verona.

Many have criticised the decision to ban supporters, saying there will be no advantage to playing at home for those clubs whose security arrangements are not in line with the law.

But Roma coach Luciano Spalletti, whose club's Olympic stadium is open to the public this

weekend, dismissed suggestions that the championship is now unfair.

"I don't think it's correct to say that the championship is irregular," he said ahead of Sunday's match against Parma.

"It was inevitable the government's decision was not going to prove popular with all the clubs, but they had to do something."

"It doesn't mean to say that everything is fine, and there is still a lot that needs to be done, but it's a positive step."

Palermo's Australian midfielder Mark Bresciano applauded the Italian government for taking swift action.

"Security has to be the priority in our sport," he said.

"Sure, it's not nice to play matches without fans, but I don't think it gives an advantage to those clubs exempt from the ban on fans."

"Last week's events left us in shock. It was a tragic night for French body connected with the sport."

Inter are 11 points clear of second-placed Roma after a record sequence of 14 consecutive Serie A wins -- a run that has prompted

Italy's largest bookmaker to pay out on the 'Nerazzurri' retaining the championship.

In fact, Roberto Mancini's side have not lost for 27 matches in all competitions with their last defeat coming back on September 27 when they lost 2-0 at home to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

AC Milan's new signing Ronaldo could make his debut in front of empty seats with their home against Livorno also being played behind closed doors.

The San Siro stadium, which AC Milan share with Inter, could be closed to the public for the rest of the season unless stadium security is updated.

Around 150 extra turnstiles need to be installed and more closed circuit television cameras are required. The club must also set up a crowd-filtering area.

The works, which will cost an estimated 15 million euros, are not expected to be completed for eight months.



PHOTO: STAR
Marina Lushchina of Russia follows through on a serve during her match against Bronwyn Davidson of South Africa in the ITF World Junior Tennis Championships at the Ramna Complex yesterday.

Indians reach semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Indian boys Karunuday and Abhijeet moved to the semifinals of the Dhaka Bank 21st Bangladesh International Junior Tennis competition at the Ramna Tennis complex yesterday.

Karunuday beat Seo of South Korea 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 while Abhijeet trounced Huang Chung of Chinese Taipei 6-2, 6-3. Hume, who beat Iyer of India 6-3, 0-6, 6-1, will meet Abhijeet while Peng of Chinese Taipei faces Karunuday.

But there was good news for Chinese Taipei too as in the girls' event, Liu beat Nigora Sirojiddinova 7-5, 6-3. Russian Lushchina beat Davidson of South Africa 6-1, 6-4.

Italy confident of hosting Euro 2012

INTERNET, undated

Italy are still confident of being selected to host the 2012 European Championships, despite the recent Serie A violence that halted all football in the country.

Italian football chief Luca Pancalli visited UEFA headquarters in Switzerland on Friday to reassure new boss Michel Platini that a repeat of the problems simply would not happen.

Pancalli said: "I've reassured UEFA about the speed of the measures taken by the Italian government against violence."

"I have also told them about the efforts of Italian football to turn such a sad moment into an occasion to find show the delinquents that caused the problem that they will not ruin the image of our sport."

Football matches at every level were suspended after a policeman was killed during violence at the Palermo versus Catania game last Friday, and will resume this weekend, with only grounds passing new security checks allowed to let

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Lyon in tangle with Platini

Football

AFP, Paris

against it. I am also against it. I don't see why we play football to gain three points on the stock market.

"If this is the way football is going, then we need a special case and (we need) the support of politicians to say that it is not necessarily an obligation to quote clubs on the market."

"We're going to play on Wednesday afternoon and, on the sidelines we're going to see the share price fall and rise in line with the goalscoring."

Despite the controversy, the shares were launched at 24 euros and hit 26 euros before falling back to 24.55 euros in late afternoon trading to show a gain of 2.29 percent.

"It's a new era for Lyon and all French sports clubs," Lyon president and controlling shareholder Jean-

Michel Aulas said at the Lyon stock exchange as the first exchanges flashed upon a giant screen.

Lyon issued 3.6 million shares worth about 88.4 million euros (115 million dollars), the Euronext stock market operator said, valuing the entire group, known under the letters OL, at 312 million euros.

The club, which has dominated French soccer over the past decade winning the last five league titles, plans to use the money to build a new stadium and shopping complex.

The club is the first in France to seize an opportunity opened up by a change in the law, under pressure from the EU, to allow teams to raise funds on the stock market in line with EU open market principles.

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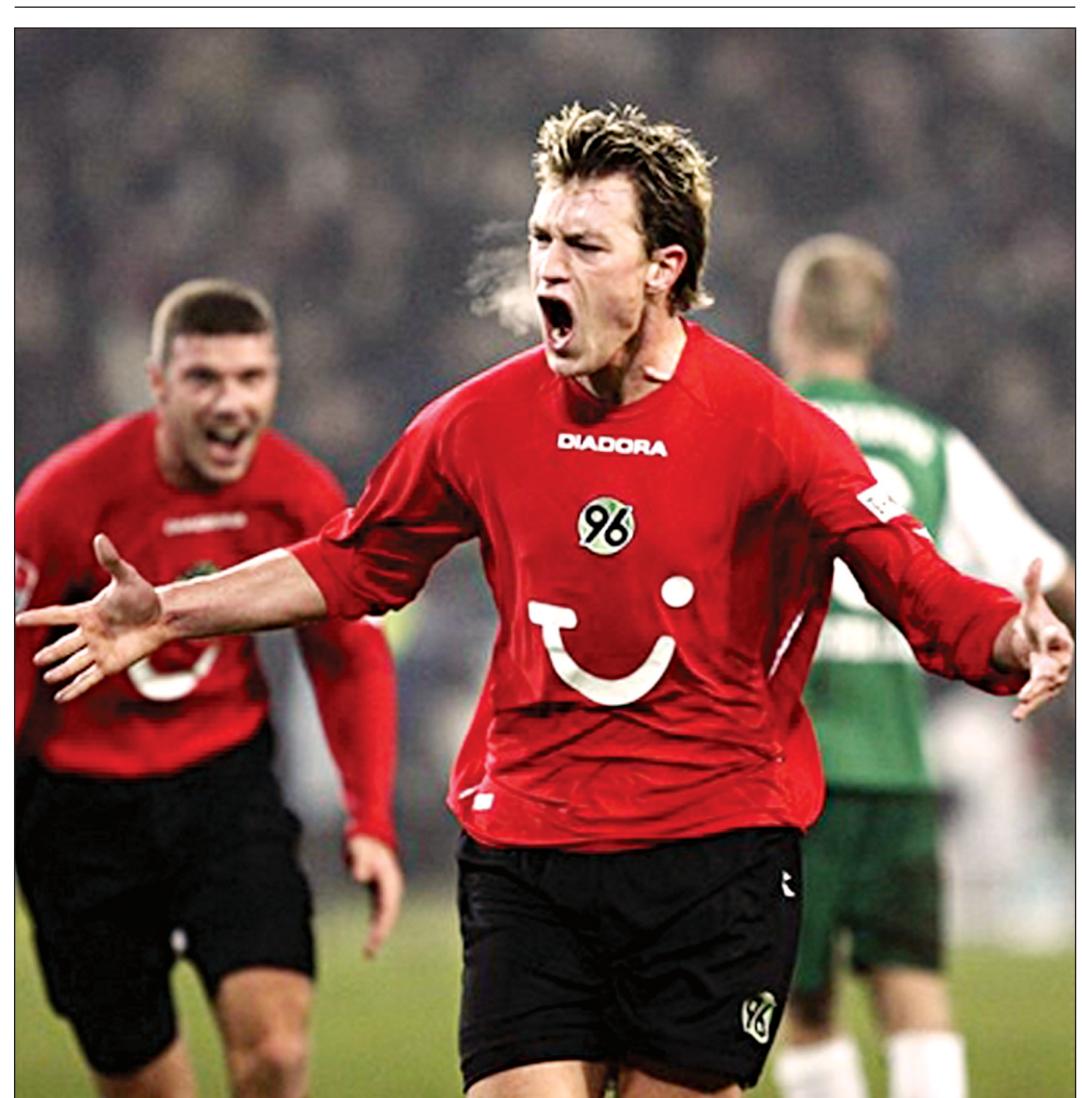


PHOTO: AFP

Hannover 96 wingback Hanno Balitsch is ecstatic after scoring in their Bundesliga clash against VfL Wolfsburg in Hanover on Friday.

San Siro in a hurry

Football

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan said work would continue through the night but at best only season ticket holders would be allowed in the ground, which can hold 87,500 spectators, on Sunday.

"The entire maintenance staff, about 100 people, are inside working on the turnstiles," a stadium security guard said. Provincial inspectors will give their ruling on Sunday on whether any spectator will be admitted.

Frantic work was also being carried out at stadiums in Florence, Brescia and Cesena to get them ready as soon as possible.

AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani, who visited San Siro late on Friday, said he approved the government's measures but would have liked more time to complete the works, which include closed-circuit TV surveillance and numbered seating. No work appeared to be in progress on the metal fence outside the stadium, meant to help

channel people through the gates. The security guard said it was scheduled to be completed in several months and would certainly not be ready for Sunday.

The government has accused clubs of dragging their feet on the restructuring of venues since most of the new safety regulations were originally introduced in 2005.

"I agree with the decree, just not with the sense of urgency," Galliani told Corriere dello Sport.

"I would have preferred being given a bit more time to get the stadiums up to scratch, 60 days at least. We have to get 160 electronic turnstiles installed and construct 900 metres of fencing," he said.

"We and Inter have set aside 20 million euros (26 million dollars). If we had wanted to procrastinate, we would have done."

San Siro, where Ronaldinho is expected to make his return to

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Martins faces rap at home

AFP, Lagos

Newcastle's Nigeria striker Obafemi Martins faces disciplinary action after failing to show up for this week's friendly against Ghana, the Nigeria Football Association announced on Friday.

"The chairman of the NFA, Sani Lulu, is very cross with Obafemi Martins for not joining the team for the match against Ghana even after his club released him for the game," NFA spokesman Robinson Okosun said.

The case has been referred to the NFA's organising and disciplinary committee.

Okosun added: "The NFA chairman considers the player's action as unprofessional and condemned it in its entirety."

"Also, a letter has been sent to the player asking him to explain why he was not available for selection for the match and his club have been copied."

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Becks mania in the States

Football

REUTERS, Pebble Beach

Around 800 hopefuls, lured by the David Beckham factor, will bid to earn a place in the same team as the former England captain during open trials for the Los Angeles Galaxy this weekend.

In a soccer equivalent of American Idol, the Major League Soccer club were flooded with more than 1,000 applications from Galaxy wanna-bees after last month's signing of Beckham from Real Madrid on a lucrative five-year deal.

Hanover, who had scored nine goals in their last two league matches, equalised after 22 minutes when Hanno Balitsch slammed a loose ball into the net from close range.

Brazilian Marcelinho was again involved when Wolfsburg retook the lead three minutes later, squaring the ball into Jacek Krzynowek's path for the Polish midfielder to drive a left-foot shot high into the goal from the edge of the box.

Defender Frank Fahrenhorst made it 2-2 in the 62nd minute, bundling the ball home with his thigh.

Despite sustained pressure on the Wolfsburg goal and a number of clear chances, Hanover were unable to find a winner and remain eighth in the table ahead of the weekend's other matches. Wolfsburg move up one place to 10th.

Champions Bayern Munich face Arminia Bielefeld on Sunday.

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Yallop at the Home Depot Centre in Carson, the trials will start on Saturday with select players advancing to the second round the following day.

"It's obviously all painted with the David Beckham news and therefore the response has been incredible, both domestically and internationally," club president Alexi Lalas told Reuters in a telephone interview.

"It's been phenomenal but it's not surprising. This is something we were planning to do well before the David Beckham situation arose."

Former US international Lalas said he would be happy if only one player from the trials made the grade.

"This is not a situation where somebody that isn't of quality can come through," he said.

"It's simply an opportunity for us to possibly identify one player who,

to

given the time and the right resources, can maybe make it as a good professional. We already have our team assembled with players of world-class calibre."

Asked whether the Galaxy had previously unearthed a notable player through open trials, Lalas replied: "There have been a couple that have made the final roster and have been around but none that have been hugely successful."

The open trials will cost each player 130 dollars, along with travel and accommodation expenses.

Most will come away with a few souvenirs