

Parma appoint Ranieri

AFP, Rome

Claudio Ranieri has been appointed the new coach of Parma, the struggling Serie A club confirmed on Tuesday.

The 55-year-old former Chelsea and Valencia coach replaces Stefano Pioli, who was sacked following Sunday's 3-0 league defeat at Roma which left Parma second from bottom.

Pioli is the seventh Serie A coach to be fired this season.

Ranieri returns to coach in his native Italy after an absence of nearly 10 years.

After spells at Cagliari, Napoli and Fiorentina, he left Italy in 1997 to coach in Spain and spent two years at Valencia and one at Atletico Madrid.

He then moved to England to take charge of Chelsea where he spent four years and took the London club to the semi-finals of the Champions League in the 2003-04 season.

Ranieri was sacked by Chelsea's Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich in May 2004 and was replaced by Jose Mourinho.

A month later Ranieri rejoined Valencia for a second stint, but was sacked the following February after the club were knocked out of the UEFA Cup.

He then returned to Italy to work as a television pundit.

Euro 2008's budget set

AFP, Berlin

The provisional budget of Euro 2008, which will be co-hosted by Switzerland and Austria, is set at 147 million euros, Martin Kallen, head of organisers Euro SA, said Monday.

A total of one million tickets will go on sale from March 1 for the tournament that culminates with the final at Vienna's Ernst-Happel stadium on June 29, 2008, Kallen said in an interview with the German football federation website (www.dfb.de).

"We stand at 147 million euros at the moment," said Kallen, who was director of operations for Euro 2004 in Portugal.

"We will make 18.6 million euros available to each of the eight host cities (Basel, Berne, Geneva, Zurich, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Salzburg, Vienna). Each city will also receive 375,000 euros from UEFA for the cost of setting up fan zones."

Euro SA expects ticket sales to hit 138 million euros.

March will see a first batch of 290,000 tickets go on sale, while each federation will receive 20 percent of tickets for games played by its national team.

Ticket prices will be less than in last summer's World Cup, Kallen said, adding however that there was a problem with stadium capacity - an average of 33,750 per ground.

Euro SA, a 100 percent subsidiary of UEFA, European football's governing body, expects to make a minimum benefit, according to Kallen.

"We would be happy to break even."

Liverpool target 'brand' promotion

AFP, Singapore

Liverpool are expected to play friendlies in Asia this year as new American owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett target the Far East to promote their "brand" and capitalise on their investment.

In an interview with a Canadian newspaper, Gillett laid down his plans to make the most from the 470 million pounds that he and Hicks paid for the Premier League giants, and Asia is on their radar.

"Liverpool is the number one brand in Europe. If you go to the Far East, where Manchester United has historically been the number one brand, Chelsea has recently become quite popular," he told the National Post.

"They have a global branding concept which involves playing a number of games in the Far East."

"In that part of the world, Liverpool is number two and growing. We have had conversations with management in the last several months and I believe you will see Liverpool playing some friendlies in Asia."

"I think you'll see Japan first in this coming year and then others beyond that."

Liverpool have toured Thailand before and were in Japan for the World Club Championship in 2005.

Premier League football is hugely popular across Asia and several clubs have made strides to cash in on the region's untapped potential.

Manchester United, also in American hands, have toured Asia and are expected to be in Kuala Lumpur this summer after signing a sponsorship deal with Tourism Malaysia.

Beckham's MU return

Football

REUTERS, Manchester

David Beckham will play against his former club Manchester United at Old Trafford for the first time since he left them in 2003 in a gala European match next month.

Beckham, who scored on his unexpected comeback for Real Madrid last Saturday, has been confirmed as a member of a European All-Star XI which will play United in a jubilee match being staged to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the European Common Market, the forerunner of the European Union, and United's 50 years of European competition.

Beckham said: "I'm happy to know I'm going to play on March 13th. It will be something special to go back to Old Trafford and I'm really looking forward to it."

The former England captain, 31, played almost 400 games for United before leaving to join Madrid nearly four years ago. Since leaving Manchester United, he has played at Old Trafford for England, but never against United.

Beckham, whose stay at the Bernabeu Stadium will end in the summer when he moves to Major Soccer League club LA Galaxy in America, will be a huge draw for the game.

The European side will be managed by Italian World Cup winning manager Marcello Lippi, who is expected to include several

members of his squad which lifted the trophy in Germany last summer.

Beckham is also guaranteed to have at least two former England team-mates alongside him with the

Liverpool pair of Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher confirmed in the European line-up.

United manager Alex Ferguson has promised to play a full-strength side in the match.



DAVID BECKHAM

QPR assistant suspended

Football

AFP, London

Queen's Park Rangers on Tuesday suspended their assistant manager Richard Hill following his arrest in connection with the brawl that marred last week's match against China's Olympic team.

Hill was arrested on Saturday on suspicion of causing actual bodily harm (ABH), a serious offence which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

The 43-year-old was released on bail but will face further questioning and possible charges following the outcome of the ongoing police investigation.

China player Zheng Tao was knocked unconscious and suffered a broken jaw during the fracas, which resulted in the February 7 match being abandoned.

The incident is still being investigated by English football's governing body, the Football Association, as well as local police.

In a statement on Tuesday, the police said they were "continuing to investigate a number of assaults following a disturbance amongst players at a match between QPR FC and the Chinese Olympic team."

"All parties from both QPR and the Chinese team are assisting police."

Seven members of China's squad were sent home following the clashes, which involved more than 30 players and members of the coaching staff on both sides.

A statement from QPR read: "Following the incident at the training

ground on February 7, and the subsequent police investigation of the matter, Queens Park Rangers Football Club have suspended assistant manager Richard Hill from his duties until further notice."

The club said it would not comment further on the issue pending the outcome of the FA and police inquiries.

The Chinese under-23 squad is in England as guests of Premiership champions Chelsea.

The Chinese FA has vowed to come down hard on players found to have been at fault in the incident, which has been widely condemned

by the Chinese media as an embarrassment for the country in the countdown to next year's Beijing Olympics.

The brawl erupted when striker Gao Lin, one of the seven players to be sent home, lashed out following a tough tackle from a QPR player. Gao apologised for his inability to control himself but insisted he had been a victim of provocation.

China's coach Ratomir Djukovic subsequently revealed that the players had all been warned to keep themselves in check in the wake of violent incidents in two earlier matches on their tour.

Figo's summer goodbye

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese midfielder Luis Figo said Monday that he plans on ending his top level career when his Inter Milan contract runs out at the end of the year.

"My top level career will end in Italy," he told the media. "That was my intention when I arrived in Italy two years ago. It's my decision."

"I decided a long time ago not to come back to play in Portugal."

"I stayed in Italy until the end of the season to win the championship and quit top level football at the level I decided."

"That's why I didn't leave in

January."

Figo is supposedly joining Saudi team Al Ittihad at the end of the season although it had been announced in December that he would join the club during the January transfer window.

However Figo said it is far from a done deal, despite the declarations of Al Ittihad president Mansour al Balwi.

"I'm waiting to see if I go or not. Any decision has to be taken carefully and thoughtfully," he added.

Figo quit international football with 127 caps after Portugal finished fourth at the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

He joined Inter in 2005 having previously worn the colours of Real Madrid, Barcelona and Sporting Lisbon.

'Real move wrong for C'Ron'

AFP, Lisbon

Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo would not be better off if he left the English club for Spanish giants Real Madrid, Manchester United assistant coach Carlos Queiroz has said.

"I already worked at Real Madrid so for this reason I know the club well. He wouldn't find better conditions there than those which he already has," he told reporters in Lisbon later Monday, the Lusa news agency reported.

"Besides, he is part of the Manchester United family and he can become one of the club's symbols," added Queiroz who coached Real Madrid in 2003.

Spanish media have reported that the 22-year-old Portuguese international will be the big summer target for Real Madrid, who were also heavily linked to the player last year.

Ronaldo, whose current contract ties him to Old Trafford until 2010, has said in the past that he would like to leave England for Spain. He signed with Manchester United from Sporting Lisbon in August 2003.

Nantes sack Eo

AFP, Nantes

Nantes have parted company with coach Georges Eo and replaced him with his assistant Michel Der Zakarian and sports director Japhet Ndoram, club president Rudi Roussillon said Monday.

Nantes were the last French club to win the title in 2000/01 before Lyon embarked on their record five championships in a row.

But they have struggled this season and are firmly rooted in the relegation zone and lost 5-2 at home to Valenciennes at the weekend.

"We are in 19th position and that's very worrying," Roussillon said.

"After the Valenciennes match, I said we needed time for thought. I decided after a day of talks to implement some changes."

"I asked George Eo to step down but remain at the club's disposition."

"I have asked two people to combine their efforts, to work side-by-side every day, to redress the situation and to try to do everything so the club is not relegated at the end of the season. They are Der Zakarian and Ndoram."

Eo had taken over from Serge Le Dizet on September 20 and had been an assistant coach at the club since 1987.

Referee attacked in Italy

AFP, Rome

A football referee at a youth tournament in the Italian seaside town of Viareggio was attacked by Argentine players after sending off five of their team.

Monday's match between Italian side Genoa and Real Arroyo Seco was suspended with 23 minutes left as Real no longer had the minimum number of players required to continue.

When the match was abandoned, the referee was kicked and punched by several of the Real Arroyo team and police had to intervene.

The ugly incident comes at a time when Italy is desperately trying to clean up the image of football in its country following the crowd violence at Catania earlier this month in which a policeman was killed.

Redknapp charged by FA

AFP, London

Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp was charged Monday with using abusive and/or insulting words towards a match official following his side's win against Manchester City at the weekend.

Redknapp was sent to the stands during Saturday's 2-1 victory at Pompey's Fratton Park ground.

He was furious with a tackle on Pedro Mendes, the scorer of Pompey's first goal, by England midfielder Joey Barton which saw the Portuguese playmaker carried off with what appeared to be an Achilles injury.

So incensed was the Pompey boss he was sent to the stands for foul and abusive language after protesting to referee Mike Dean at half-time in a row that was reported to have ended with police being called in to restore order.

Redknapp has until February 27 to respond to the charge by the Football Association.

Pompey are seventh in the Premiership and in the hunt for a place in next season's UEFA Cup.

Brown pledges WC bid support

Football

AFP, London

The British government will back any potential bid by the English Football Association (FA) to host the 2018 World Cup, Finance Minister Gordon Brown has said.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, favourite to be the country's next prime minister by the end of the year, said that because London will host the 2012 Olympics, there is an opportunity to make the next decade the greatest in Britain's sporting history.

In a 42-page feasibility study also published on Monday, his department named England as the "pre-eminent European candidate" to host the event.

"Everything is in place and we now have to go out and sell it and show that the enthusiasm of the young people is such that, if we win, this will be the greatest sporting decade for our country," Brown, speaking Monday at the new Wembley Stadium - the centrepiece of any England bid - said.

"We (would) have the Olympics in 2012, the World Cup in 2018 and I think we would be the greatest sporting nation in the world because so many young people will want to be sports men and women of the future."

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, who was accompanying Brown, added: "If the Football Association decides to bid the government will back them all the way."

Bids to host the 2018 World Cup do not have to be submitted until 2010, and FIFA, football's global governing body, will make a decision in the (northern) autumn of 2011.

Brian Barwick, the FA chief executive, said in a statement earlier Monday: "Government backing is a central part of any successful World Cup bid and this study underlines this government's commitment to bringing the world's biggest sports events to these shores."

He added: "FIFA have not yet announced which continent will be awarded the 2018 World Cup but if it does come to Europe, then the FA will give very serious consideration to a bid."

England lost out to Germany in the race to host last year's World Cup finals because there was a widespread belief among many European football associations that the FA were going back on a 'gentleman's agreement' made by former chairman Bert Millichip with German officials.

This saw England back Germany's 2006 bid in return for German support of England's hosting of the 1996 European Championships.

But last month German football great Franz Beckenbauer, president of the Germany 2006 organising committee and a member of FIFA's executive committee, said England was "the only country with an obvious chance" of hosting the 2018 World Cup.

The finance ministry's study says

England already has much of the necessary stadium infrastructure to host the tournament, compared to Germany, which had to build three brand-new stadiums in the run-up to last year's event.

Six stadiums in England already meet all of FIFA's requirements in terms of seating, capacity and pitch size, while five others meet all the requirements except pitch size, the report said.

South Africa will host the next World Cup in 2010, and the 2014 tournament is due to be hosted in South America, with 2018 seemingly the next opportunity for a European country to stage the event.

Brown's political opponents in Britain have said the Scot's support for an England bid is motivated primarily by his desire to court popularity with English voters.

Hugh Robertson, the spokesman on sport for Britain's main opposition Conservative Party, said of Brown's Wembley visit: "Given that no decision on the 2018 World Cup is due until 2011 and that this should have been done on a cross-party basis, this can only be seen as a very silly publicity stunt."

The only time England have previously staged the tournament, in 1966, was also the only occasion they have won the World Cup, a team captained by the late Bobby Moore defeating the then West Germany 4-2 after extra-time in a Wembley final.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Serbian-American businessman Milan Mandaric is pictured at the Walkers Stadium during his takeover of the once Premiership team Leicester City during a press conference on Tuesday.

Clubs slow on the uptake

AFP, Rome



Six Serie A clubs have yet to start work to bring their stadium security in line with government regulations, according

matches behind closed doors.

But the required work has not yet begun at Ascoli, Catania, Chievo, Livorno, Parma and Udinese, the Gazzetta reported.

Work has started at Atalanta, Empoli, Fiorentina, and Reggina while Messina, whose security is up to scratch, are just waiting for a safety certificate.

Even clubs who have not yet started the necessary work are hoping to reach a compromise with the government whereby they can open their gates to fans but with a reduced capacity, just as AC Milan did at the weekend.

AC Milan season-ticket holders were allowed into last Sunday's match against Livorno

after the club installed extra turnstiles to speed up the flow of people going into the San Siro.

Catania, where the riot took place, need more turnstiles, a crowd-filtering zone and closed circuit television cameras but work cannot begin at the Massimino stadium as it has been sequestered by police.

The clubs whose stadiums are deemed safe are Lazio/Roma (who share the Olympic stadium), Palermo, Torino, Sampdoria, Cagliari and Siena.

The San Siro, which AC Milan share with city rivals Inter, still has work to do but in the meantime will be allowed to open its gates with restrictions on capacity.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Lovers' quarrel 5 Pinnacle 9 Bloom-closet item 12 Yellowfin, e.g. 13 Anything but that 14 Right angle 15 Uncontrollable 16 Office part-timer 17 "Flying Down to —" 18 Anathema 19 E.T.'s transport 20 Acknowledge 21 Grass brittle 23 Pouch 25 Man of La Mancha 28 Missing the boat? 32 Put on a pedestal 33 Greenhorns 34 Mocha resident 36 Like a duck's feet 37 Ninny 38 Mess up 39 Elvis' genre 42 Have a bug 44 Bridge position 48 Listener 49 Hart's mate 50 Egyptian cross 51 "Eureka!" 52 Secure site 53 Dangling 54 Fix the sound-track 55 Explorer Heyerdahl 56 React with boredom 60 Like Billy Ray's heart DOWN 1 Impale 2 Cougar 3 Any day now 4 Have coffee, maybe 5 Synchronize 27 Off-tattooed word 29 Sphere 30 Caviar, essentially 31 Bk. of the Apocrypha 35 Prophet of Judah 36 One who carries a torch? 39 Peruse 40 Honolulu's isle 41 Grouch 43 Data 45 King of Siam's friend 46 Distort 47 Subsequently 49 White House monogram



CRYPTOQUIP

R G J M N X I C T Z U E W A R G Z C F

J M N K R Z S E K S R Z C - G W M K C X R V A

B S X R T Z Q E T U W E V Z , R ' F

B E W W R Z I N F F J S M W W J .

Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHEN A CARPENTER IS VERY PLEASED WITH HIS VISE, YOU COULD CALL HIM A HAPPY CLAMPER.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: J equals Y



PHOTO: INTERNET

Didier Drogba (L) says that Chelsea can take whatever the fans throw at them.