

## Fiorentina sign Lupoli

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina have signed Italy under-21 international Arturo Lupoli from English Premiership side Arsenal on a five-year contract, the Serie A club confirmed on Monday.

The 19-year-old striker is currently on loan from Arsenal to Championship promotion hopefuls Derby County and will remain there for the remainder of the season before returning to Italy in the summer.

Lupoli joined Arsenal from Serie A side Parma in 2004, earning a contract with the north London club through a scholarship.

He made his Arsenal debut in a League Cup match against Manchester City in October 2004, and scored his first goals for the club against Everton in the same competition, netting twice in a 3-1 victory.

Lupoli scored on his debut for Italy's under-21 team against Luxembourg in December 2006.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho (2nd R) enters the field to help stop a fight between his players and Arsenal's during the English League Cup final at The Millennium Stadium in Cardiff on Sunday.

## Santa Cruz wants out

AFP, BERLIN

Bayern Munich striker Roque Santa Cruz has pleaded for a club in England or Spain to rescue him from the frustration of sitting on the German champions' substitutes bench.

The 25-year-old Paraguayan's contract does not expire until 2009, but said Tuesday he has had enough of being paid to not play football.

"Spain or England would suit me best," said Santa Cruz, who in recent seasons has struggled to nail down a first team place.

"I want to play. I miss it and I want to know what it feels like to be a footballer again."

He added that if Bayern turn a deaf ear to his plea, "I will respect the decision, but I don't want to be paid for sitting on the subs bench."

After joining Bayern in 1999, Santa Cruz played 28 games in the 1999/2000 season scoring five goals.

Since then he was a regular feature of the first team until the 2005/2006 season when he also played a number of games for the club's second team.

## Bentley signs Rovers deal

AFP, London

David Bentley has been rewarded for his outstanding form for Blackburn this season with a new contract that ties him to the club until 2011.

Bentley, 22, has missed only one first-team game this season and scored six goals as Blackburn have attempted to develop a more attacking style under manager Mark Hughes.

"David has really blossomed this season to produce a consistently high level of performance," Hughes said after the new deal was announced. "He is a great talent with a big future and we are delighted to have signed him up for the long term."

Bentley, a former captain of England's under-18s and an under-21 international, started his career at Arsenal but moved to Blackburn in January last year after growing frustrated at his lack of first team opportunities in north London.

Rovers chairman John Williams said the Bentley deal was a sign of Blackburn's ambition.

"David is widely regarded as one of the best young footballers in the country and this represents a very significant deal for the club, underpinning our determination to continue to move forward with ambition."

## Party-pooper Roman

INTERNET, undated

Roman Abramovich blanked Chelsea's Carling Cup celebrations on Sunday, according to reports in Tuesday's national newspapers.

According to The Sun, the Blues' owner's snub left the players fuming, and it makes manager Jose Mourinho's exit this summer even more likely.

The paper says the Russian billionaire first failed to visit the Blues' dressing room to congratulate the team, manager and coaches after the 2-1 win over Arsenal at the Millennium Stadium.

And then he avoided the victory party held at London's Aura nightclub on Sunday night.

It's the first time Abramovich has not gone to the dressing room when Chelsea have won a trophy.

And his behaviour is in stark contrast to the last time they won the tournament in 2005.

Abramovich then paid for a lavish party at La Famiglia restaurant in Chelsea following the win over Liverpool.

## FA charges Chelsea, Arsenal

### Football

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea and Arsenal have been charged by the Football Association with failing to control their players following a mass brawl in Sunday's Carling Cup final at the Millennium Stadium.

Gunners defender Emmanuel Eboue has been charged with violent conduct for striking Chelsea's Wayne Bridge. He has until 6pm on Wednesday to respond, and the case will be heard by a disciplinary commission on Thursday on the basis of documents and video evidence.

"His team-mate Emmanuel Adebayor has been charged with reacting aggressively and failing to leave the field of play immediately after being sent off. He has until 6pm on Wednesday to respond to the charge and his case will be heard by a disciplinary commission on Tuesday, March 6. As this charge is outside the jurisdiction of the match officials (he had already been sent off), he has the right to a personal hearing."

The melee at the Millennium Stadium was sparked following a confrontation between Jon Obi Mikel and Kolo Toure, with players and coaches from both sides becoming involved.

Adebayor protested his innocence, and while he may have a case for mistaken identity given the actions of full-back Eboue in his clash with Bridge, the Togo striker now looks set to face further sanctions for the way in which he both confronted referee Webb and refused to immediately leave

"Arsenal's Emmanuel Eboue has been charged with violent conduct for striking Chelsea's Wayne Bridge. He has until 6pm on Wednesday to respond, and the case will be heard by a disciplinary commission on Thursday on the basis of documents and video evidence.

"When the referee showed me a red card I could not believe it. I remember straight away [Arsenal physio] Gary Lewin came to me to say, 'Come on Manu, let's go,' but I said, 'Just leave me to me ask one question - why did he give me a red card?'

"A lot of people thought I was going to hit him, but I was not."

Adebayor, 21, added: "I think it is very important for me [to appeal] because I did not do anything wrong."

"I did not hit anybody, but he gave me a red card."

The brawl, which saw as many players dismissed in one minute as in the 46 previous finals altogether, completely overshadowed a pulsating contest, which also featured Chelsea skipper John Terry being stretchered off after being kicked in the head by Abou Diaby as the Blues prevailed 2-1.

"The charge alleges that the clubs failed to ensure that their players and/or officials conducted themselves in an orderly fashion and/or refrained from provocative and/or violent behaviour."

"The clubs have until March 14 to respond. There are no individual charges against officials from either Arsenal or Chelsea."

## Jol singing Berbatov praises

### Football

THE GUARDIAN

It says much about the impact Dimitar Berbatov has made at White Hart Lane that, after an afternoon when Tottenham Hotspur demolished Bolton Wanderers 4-1 and Arsenal were beaten in the Carling Cup final by Chelsea, the most deafening ovation of all was reserved for the Bulgarian centre-forward.

So keen is Martin Jol to have his side viewed as a collective rather than a collection, he reluctantly speaks about Tottenham players on an individual basis. But such was Berbatov's exceptional class against one of the Premiership's meanest defences, the Spurs manager was willing to let down his guard. "I told Berbatov that was probably the best performance I have seen from a striker on his own against any team," said Jol. He was not alone in that belief - the majority of the 35,747 in attendance waited behind to serenade their latest hero as he begrudgingly left the arena that for 90 minutes he

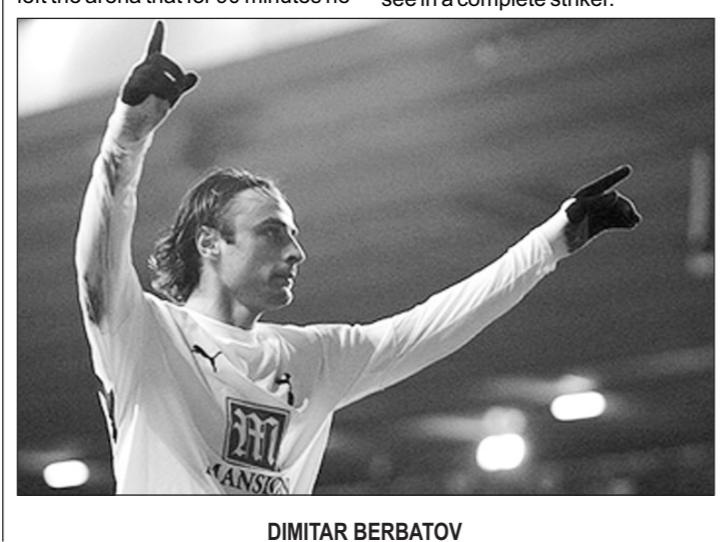
had bedazzled. "Bill Nicholson used to buy one very special player every year and Berbatov looks like a Bill Nicholson type of buy," said Steve Perryman, who captained Tottenham under Nicholson's management for five years. "He's making a name for himself and the Tottenham supporters have responded to him."

Berbatov's combination of speed, strength, positional awareness and composure, as well as natural instincts in front of goal, have seen him find the target 15 times in his first Premiership season and, following his 10.9 million pound move from Bayer Leverkusen last summer, he has also provided the division's fifth most assists.

"There are few words that can adequately describe the level of his performance on Sunday," said the former Tottenham forward, Ronnie Rosenthal. "For me at this moment in time he is not too far behind Thierry Henry. But the player he resembles most is Marco Van Basten. He is a big striker but he is quick and very intelligent. He has all the attributes you want to see in a complete striker."

Berbatov's European experience - he was part of the Leverkusen side that lost to Real Madrid in the 2002 Champions League final - has helped Tottenham reach the quarter-finals of this season's UEFA Cup and, while their League Cup campaign was ended by Arsenal in the semi-finals, he will be leading the attack as Spurs bid to overcome Chelsea in the FA Cup quarter-finals on March 10.

Criticisms of his away form - "For a player with his type of languid style that's a very easy accusation to put at him," said Perryman - were banished when he swept in Tottenham's opener at Everton last Wednesday. On such form, the devil is set to give West Ham more nightmares this coming Sunday.



DIMITAR BERBATOV

## Kachkar close to OM purchase

AFP, Marseille

Jack Kachkar's bid to buy French footballing giants Marseille is in the process of being finalised, a spokesman for the Canadian businessman confirmed on Monday.

"An agreement is being finalised. A certain number of technical details should be sorted in the coming days," the spokesman said.

The announcement comes after a long meeting Monday between lawyers acting for Kachkar, 43, and current owner Robert Louis-Dreyfus.

Kachkar, president of pharmaceutical firm Inyx which employs more than 575 people in North America and Europe, has agreed to pay 115 million euro (151,000 million dollar) for the club.

Club management had set February 26 as the deadline for the purchase to be concluded, but Kachkar's spokesman insisted that the operation was following its normal course and should be sorted by the end of the month.

Marseille had an inconsistent season, dropping three places to eighth in the French league after suffering a 3-0 drubbing at Toulouse on Saturday.

## Nakamura breaks hand

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic's Shunsuke Nakamura has broken a bone in his left hand, the club's official website said Monday.

The Japan mid-fielder sustained the injury during the Hoops dramatic 2-1 Scottish Cup quarter-final win away to Inverness on Sunday, where two late goals booked the Glasgow giants' place in the last four.

Celtic are set to issue an update on Nakamura's fitness later in the week.

The reigning Scottish champions and current leaders have a home league fixture against Dunfermline at Parkhead on Saturday before heading to Italy for the second leg of their Champions League tie against AC Milan on Wednesday, March 7.

## Own goal propels Juve

AFP, Rome

Juventus remain on course for a swift return to Serie A after winning 1-0 Modena on Monday.

Modena had defended most of the match but looked set to take a point, until Matteo Centurioni headed Valeri Bojinov's right-wing cross into his own net four minutes from time.

Victory for Didier Deschamps' side took them two points clear at the top of Serie B, Italy's second division.

Juventus have 46 points, two more than Napoli and five clear of third-placed Piacenza.

Juventus coach Deschamps said he felt his team deserved the win.

"It would have been a shame had we not won as I thought we dominated the match," the Frenchman told SKY Italia.

"We created lots of chances in the first half. Then our performance dipped in the first 15 minutes of the second half, but then we picked up the tempo again and I thought we were worthy of the three points."

Juventus were demoted from Serie A and given a nine-point penalty for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

## Spurs appeal Keane card

AFP, London

Tottenham appealed to the Football Association on Monday against the red card issued to Robbie Keane in their 4-1 Premiership win over Bolton at White Hart Lane.

Keane was sent off for deliberate handball in Sunday's match when he blocked Ivan Camargo's goal-bound header on the line.

The ball appeared to strike the chest of the Republic of Ireland international before seeming to hit his arm as it dropped.

Referee Graham Poll issued a straight red card for denying a goalscoring opportunity and Keane, who'd already scored two goals and set up another for Jermaine Jenas.

Spurs have told the FA they will appeal, and they have until later Monday to submit their case in full.

Bolton's Gary Speed scored from the resulting penalty, Tottenham made light of their disadvantage and went on to complete a win that effectively ended their opponents' hopes of a place in next season's Champions League.

Stand-in captain Keane would be suspended for this coming Sunday's Premiership match against West Ham if the ban was upheld.

"It's always easy in hindsight," said Spurs boss Martin Jol after the win. "If you win games it's not a problem. He (Keane) said he cheated it."

## Gunners face Rovers test

AFP, Blackburn

Arsene Wenger admits Arsenal face a huge challenge as they try to avoid their second Cup upset in a week.

"There is a danger when making changes, but I can say as well that I made eight or nine at Bolton in the last round and it worked. It's the mystery of management but I still don't know enough about it," the Frenchman added.

Wenger takes his side to face Blackburn Rovers in the FA Cup fifth round replay just three days after a dramatic League Cup final loss to Chelsea.

With defender Kolo Toure and striker Emmanuel Adebayor collecting red cards in the closing seconds of that Millennium Stadium clash, the fall-out from the controversial 2-1 defeat at the hands of their London rivals has yet to settle.

And the prospect of facing Blackburn in another highly charged Cup tie couldn't have come at a worse time for Wenger's team.

The first meeting of the two sides ended in acrimony following a scoreless draw at the Emirates Stadium with Gunners midfielder Cesc Fabregas clashing with Blackburn manager Mark Hughes over Rovers' physical style of play.

And having stuck by his policy of playing his younger squad members in the domestic cup competitions, Wenger admits he is now

unsure of how to approach Wednesday's match at Ewood Park.

"I cannot say now what team I will field at Blackburn," the Arsenal manager said. "I just wish we did not have to do it because it is certainly not a dream place for us to go."

"There is a danger when making changes, but I can say as well that I made eight or nine at Bolton in the last round and it worked. It's the mystery of management but I still don't know enough about it," the Frenchman added.

"You never can predict how human beings are and what kind of wave the team is on."

"Whatever happens I know we will adapt. We have the squad to cope with it, but you never know how human beings will react."

Spanish playmaker Fabregas insists there were plenty of positives to come out of the defeat in Cardiff when Arsenal's youngsters almost overcame a full-strength Chelsea side.

"If I was in another team, I would be scared if you could see all the young players who are coming from this Arsenal team," he said.

"You can see that if we keep playing for three more years together, then we could do something really big for the club."

"We have shown great talent here. I am also young and just try to do my best for the team."

Hughes, meanwhile, is hoping his decision to rest Benni McCarthy last weekend will help fire Blackburn into the FA Cup quarter-finals.

The Rovers boss opted to keep his 15-goal leading scorer back on the substitutes bench for the weekend 3-0 victory over Portsmouth, allowing stand-in Shabani Nonda to take centre-stage with a two-goal display.

And Hughes admitted that a heavy fixture list had taken its toll on McCarthy and that the South Africa striker had lost his edge in recent weeks.

The manager, though, will almost certainly recall the forward for the Arsenal tie and said: "Benni needed a break. The onus goalscoring-wise has fallen at his feet and he has produced, but he is probably the only guy in the team we haven't been able to give a rest.