



PHOTO: AFP

Los Angeles Galaxy president and general manager Alexi Lalas speaks during a press conference announcing the details of the World Series of Football at the Home Depot Centre on Friday.

Inter Ultras to 'deafen' Ronaldo

INTERNET, undated

Inter supporters have planned 30,000 whistles to heckle Ronaldo throughout the derby, but Gennaro Gattuso assures his teammate is ready for anything.

This will be the first time Il Fenomeno has faced his former club since joining Milan and the fans have prepared a welcome that is not so much warm as incandescent.

The 'Boys' Ultras club have prepared 30,000 whistles to hand out at San Siro so that fans can deafen Ronaldo with the noise every time he touches the ball.

Nonetheless, teammate Gattuso is certain that the unusual situation will not trouble Ronie too much.

"Ronaldo is in good shape, wants to do well and I think he's been dreaming about this match for a very long time," smiled the midfielder.

"It's only normal he'll have an incredible desire to prove he is not finished as a player, regardless of what some might say."

Ringhio has never scored in the Milan derby and is none too confident of his chances on Sunday afternoon either.

"I get the feeling if I hit the back of the net against Inter there would be a lot of heart attacks on the

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Platini backs measures against violence

AFP, Paris

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The former France international told Euronews: "I think we have to create a kind of 'Europool' to help our sport live in a correct manner, by asking help from politicians, councils and European institutions."

The planned Euro pool would consist of sporting governing bodies such as the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the Olympic Committee in order to form a European decision-making body that would monitor all branches of the sport.

Platini, who will meet with the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso on Monday said: "I think that Mr Barroso must place his confidence in us, in me, in other people that organise football and we should regulate this sport which has been the most popular sport, the most beautiful sport in the world."

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Chelsea to face Galaxy

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham is set to face a handful of his former English international teammates as part of a four-team tournament unveiled Friday that will include Chelsea and South Korea's Suwon Bluewings.

Real Madrid star Beckham is set to join the Los Angeles Galaxy of Major League Soccer in July under a groundbreaking 250 million-dollar deal and a July 21 match between the Galaxy and Premiership power Chelsea might mark his debut.

That showdown will be part of the new World Series of Football, which will include the Galaxy, Chelsea, Mexico's Tigres and Korea's Suwon club, whose main

sponsor is also a major backer of Chelsea.

This will mark the fourth year in a row that Chelsea have made a pre-season US tour, but the World Series of Football marks the first venture in a year-old alliance between Chelsea and Galaxy financiers Anschutz Entertainment Group.

Doubleheaders at the Galaxy's home stadium will send Chelsea against the Bluewings and Galaxy against Tigres on July 17 and Chelsea against the Galaxy with the Tigres against Suwon on July 21.

Chelsea also have planned a July 14 tune-up match at another California venue against an unnamed opponent.

Beckham will have a chance to show his skills to current England and Chelsea skipper John Terry as

well as England internationals Ashley Cole, Joe Cole, Frank Lampard, Wayne Bridge and Shaun Wright-Phillips.

Chelsea coach and manager Jose Mourinho sent a video message wishing Beckham the best of luck in his American adventure.

"The fact that David Beckham is there brings something extra to the tournament and to the game," he said.

"This gives me the chance to wish him big success in the US. He will be very important for US soccer and for the relationship between US soccer and European soccer."

Chelsea also plan to take part in future World Series tournaments in 2009 and 2011.

Chelsea and the Galaxy have also established a relationship

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Lille opt against CAS appeal

AFP, Lille

Lille have finally decided to drop their protracted protest against the Champions League last 16 first leg goal scored by Manchester United last month.

Lille on Friday announced that following UEFA's rejection of their latest appeal, they will take it no further, ruling out a challenge at the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Manchester United's Ryan Giggs scored with a quickly taken free-kick at the end of the first leg in northern France, a goal which prompted a furious reaction from Lille.

Straight after the goal, the Lille players stormed off the pitch and ever since the club has been dragging the issue through one appeal after another, despite European football's governing body UEFA confirming there was nothing wrong with the goal.

Lille had been hoping to get UEFA to nullify the original result - a 1-0 victory for Man Utd -- and order a replay of the match.

However despite a series of appeals, Lille found no favour from UEFA who confirmed that the referee was right to allow the goal to stand.

Rijkaard soft on Motta

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona's Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta has been given a few days holiday to sort out personal problems, coach Frank Rijkaard said on Friday.

The 24-year-old missed training without permission on Thursday, and had a meeting with the club's management later in the day. He was left out of the squad to face Real Madrid in the Nou Camp on Saturday.

"It isn't a punishment. I have given him time to rest and recuperate so that he can return in a few days full of energy again," Rijkaard told a news conference.

"He isn't injured or ill. He's going through a difficult moment and is not at ease with himself. This is a move to help one of our players."

Rijkaard gave no explanation as to what Motta's problems were. Motta has been left out of the club's previous three squads.

"It is the type of thing that can happen in any company, and isn't the only time I have done this," Rijkaard added.

"It isn't easy to be a Barcelona player and this decision is for the good of him and the team. He is a good person who I get on well with, and he has always been one of my favourite players. But after a long time here things have become difficult for him."

'No need to panic'

AFP, Port of Spain



South Africa coach Mickey Arthur said there is no need to panic despite watching his world number one side's batting line-up fail to click for the second successive match.

South Africa lost by seven wickets to Pakistan here on Friday in their final World Cup warm-up match on an awful pitch which caused so many concerns that players protested over its match worthiness.

"There is absolutely no panic. This was just a practice match and it didn't go our way," said Arthur after seeing another below-par outing from his batsmen who mustered just 192 against Ireland on Monday.

"I think if the coin had fallen the other way and had we bowled first, it would have been different. Our bowlers had a decent work-out, but the only concern is that the top order still needs some runs."

The game was help up for nearly 10 minutes in the morning session after the players had complained of the track. South Africa were 56-3 at the stage.

"I don't think we gave up. It took us 10 overs to regain the intensity after the break," said Arthur.

"The last thing we wanted was to lose a player like Jacques Kallis

(on an unpredictable pitch) as he is obviously crucial to our preparations. We were five down early and wanted 220, but ended up shorter than that."

The South African coach believed that his team would not encounter such surfaces when the main competition starts.



MICKEY ARTHUR

"I don't think we are going to play on such pitches in the main competition, if my information about the pitches is right," said Arthur.

"I think it's certainly going to be a bowl-first competition, but the toss is not going to be as crucial as it was today (Friday)."

South Africa's hopes of gaining valuable batting practice were dashed when they were put in to bat on a wet pitch as they could manage just 199, a total which

was much below their expectations.

Pakistan batted as if it was the easiest job in the world, surpassing their opponents' total with more than five overs to spare. This was just the boost they needed ahead of their World Cup opener against the West Indies next week.

"It was a tale of two pitches," added Arthur.

"When we batted it was wet and difficult. It dried up later and batting became easier. It was of variable bounce when we started, but awesome to bat on later in the match."

South Africa were restricted to a modest total with only Loots Bosman defying the Pakistani attack with 53. Ashwell Prince (35), Jacques Kallis (29) and Mark Boucher (22) were the other notable scorers.

Pakistani bowlers struck it rich, with seamers Mohammad Sami and Umar Gul, and off-spinners Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib Malik grabbing two wickets apiece.

In contrast, Pakistan's batting flourished as Younis Khan (79), opener Hafeez (49) and Mohammad Yousuf (48 not out) all made merry in better batting conditions.

South Africa are in Group A of the World Cup with defending champions Australia, Scotland and the Netherlands.

The top two sides will advance to the next Super Eight stage.

Why I left Azzurri: Lippi

Football

INTERNET, undated

World Cup winning Coach Marcello Lippi has revealed he left the Italy bench to "protect my son" from the Calciopoli scandal.

The tactician had already decided to quit his post before the tournament kicked off in Germany and handed in his resignation formally after the Final victory over France.

"We won because rather than just pick the best individual players, I chose those capable of creating a solid unit," explained Lippi.

"As for my departure, I left the Nazionale for my son. I was forced to make this decision by the way the media was using him in the wake of the Calciopoli chaos."

His son Davide was a leading

figure with controversial football talent agency GEA World, since shut down.

The company had been accused of pushing players to sign for them if they wanted to be picked for international duty.

The allegations, later proved unfounded, had also led to calls for Lippi to step down from the Azzurri post before Germany 2006.

Speaking at the Bicocca University in Milan, where he was given an honorary Masters degree, the former Inter and Juventus Coach also commented on the upcoming Derby della Madonnina.

"It's a game that escapes any predictions, as there can be no favourites. I am happy to see Ronaldo back in Serie A. It's a shame he wasn't wholly fit when I was in charge of Inter."

"Undoubtedly the Nerazzurri

are an excellent squad who have been able to achieve some great results. Nobody can argue with their leadership. However, it's also true that this championship has been weakened by the absence of Juventus and the penalties inflicted on other clubs."

Inter may be dominating Serie A, but they are out of the Champions League following their defeat on away goals, 2-2 on aggregate, to Valencia.

Milan have reached the quarterfinals against Bayern Munich, while Roma will face Manchester United.

"It is a very balanced competition this year, but I have confidence in the Italian sides," added Lippi. "Perhaps the most difficult one is between Roma and Manchester United."

Henry out for the season

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Thierry Henry will miss the rest of the season after suffering groin and stomach injuries during his side's Champions League exit against PSV Eindhoven.

Henry will be out of action for the next three months of domestic and international football after damaging

muscles in his groin and stomach soon after coming on as a second half substitute at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday.

The France striker was already struggling with foot and hamstring problems, but Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hopes Henry's time on the sidelines will enable him to make a full recovery in time for the start of the 2007-08 campaign.

Wenger told Arsenal's website: "Thierry Henry will be out for a minimum of three months."

Unfortunately this means he will now miss the rest of this season both domestically and internationally, but we are confident that he will be ready for the start of next season."

It also means the forward will miss France's next Euro 2008 qualifier at Lithuania later this month and possibly the home games against Ukraine and Georgia in June.

Henry has started just 16 league games this season and his absence has been crucial to Arsenal's miserable recent run that saw them lose the League Cup final and suffer exits from the FA Cup and Champions League, all within the space of 11 days.

But the news that Henry has to rest will please his surgeon Professor Nicola Maffulli, who had earlier insisted the forward needed at least six weeks rest to cure the injuries that have dogged him this season.

Henry had admitted before the PSV match that he had been fully fit for just a handful of games this season as a result of the sciatic nerve problem he has had since the World Cup.

And Maffulli, who has created a fitness programmes for Henry, believes his hectic schedule in the last year has taken its toll.

He told the London Evening Standard: "The body is like a chain. If one part of the chain doesn't work properly, other parts can be affected."

"If the sciatic nerve is causing a problem to the hamstring, his style of running will be affected and other parts of the body will be stressed which were not stressed before."

"There is always a connection between the back and other parts of the body. The best way to manage it is to make sure the first injury is sorted out."

"It can take at least six weeks for a problem such as this to be sorted out. Otherwise it will come back again."



THIERRY HENRY

Wembley reconstructed

Football

AFP, London

The delayed 800-million-pound (1.2-billion-euro, 1.5-billion-dollar) reconstruction of Wembley Stadium in London has been officially completed, the Football Association said Saturday.

The keys to the new 90,000-seat stadium have been handed over by Australian construction firm Multiplex, the FA said in a statement

on its website.

But the English game's governing body said it could not confirm that the showcase FA Cup final would take place there on May 19 -- the stadium must first host two "ramp up" events to test the facility.

These will be a community day for local residents to see the stadium on March 17 and the England under 21 team's game against Italy on March 24.

Wembley's re-opening has been beset by repeated delays and

financial wrangling which has forced the FA to reschedule England international matches.

Rock band Bon Jovi had been due to open the new stadium last June but they, like veteran rockers the Rolling Stones, Robbie Williams and the reformed Take That, were forced to move venues after building work overrun.

Now singer George Michael is due to play the first concert at the stadium, in northwest London, on June 9.