



Italy defensive trio (From L-R) Fabio Cannavaro, Gennaro Gattuso and Marco Materazzi take part in a training session at the National Technical Center in Florence on Wednesday.

Klasnic set for second transplant

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen striker Ivan Klasnic spoke of his relief on Wednesday having been told he is set for a second kidney transplant after a new donor was discovered. The 27-year-old was diagnosed with kidney failure during the Bundesliga's winter break and has not played a game for Bremen since last December. But in January, the Croatian's body rejected a kidney from his mother leading to fears his career could be over. But now a new kidney has been found with a transplant scheduled for after Easter which doctors believe should be accepted by Klasnic's body. "I feel a huge weight has been lifted," he said. "I hope it works out this time and things start looking up. I am hoping to be back to full form by next season."

With the 27-year-old out of contract by the end of the season, Bremen have offered him a year's extension and the holder of 29 Croatian caps will make a decision based on the operation's success. "The club have been good to me and talked about my contract, but we will talk about it again in the next few weeks and see how things go after the operation," he said.

Boring Chelsea: Rosicky

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal midfielder Tomas Rosicky has criticised London rivals Chelsea for being boring. The Czech Republic midfielder was asked about the form of German international Michael Ballack, but the former Borussia Dortmund stay explained he could not comment as he doesn't watch the Blues due to their lack of entertainment. "I don't know [regarding Ballack's form], I have not been watching Chelsea. They are boring," Rosicky told Idnes. "Do you enjoy their football?" Chelsea beat Arsenal in last months Carling Cup final and look sure to finish comfortably ahead of the Gunners in the Premiership, but Rosicky, who is set to face Ballack in Saturday's Euro 2008 qualifier, believes his side are the best team to watch.

Romario still on 998

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Former Brazil striker Romario failed to add to his career tally of 998 goals as Vasco da Gama were held 2-2 at second division Gama in a Copa Brasil tie on Wednesday. Romario, 41, came on as a second-half substitute and hit the crossbar in the move which led to Vasco's first goal in the second round, first-leg match. "I didn't have any luck today, I'll try again on Sunday," Romario, who openly admits that his total includes goals scored in youth and testimonial games as well as club friendlies, told reporters. His next attempt to emulate Pele and reach the 1,000-goal milestone will be against arch-rivals Flamengo at the Maracana stadium, his favourite stage, on Sunday. Brazil's 1994 World Cup winner was given a rousing reception when he came on in the 57th minute with his team 1-0 down.

Ex-coach slams Totti

Football

AFP, Rome

Enzo Bearzot, who was Italy's coach in their triumphant 1982 World Cup campaign, has slammed Francesco Totti for snubbing the national team. Totti has not played for Italy since last year's World Cup final victory over France and is only willing to return in September. The 30-year-old Roma captain fears further problems with the ankle he broke three months before the World Cup and nearly ruled him out of the tournament, and also wants to concentrate on his club commitments. Totti's decision was accepted by the Italian football federation (FIGC), but Bearzot believes Totti is being disrespectful to his country. "It seems very strange to me, completely illogical," Bearzot was quoted as saying in Thursday's

Gazzetta dello Sport. "If he can play for Roma, he can play for the national team. "It's a shame because he should be happy and proud to play for Italy. "He is the best player in the country and a symbol of our football. "I could understand if he had said he'd had enough and wanted to retire from international football altogether. "But there's still this uncertainty and it sets a bad precedent. Others might do the same in the future." Current Italy coach Roberto Donadoni clearly seems unhappy with Totti's sabatinal, and on Tuesday insisted there was no guarantee the Roma striker would be considered for selection in September. "When Totti makes himself available again and recovers from his physical problems, it will be up to me to decide whether he's in the squad," Donadoni said as he prepared the world champions for their crunch Euro 2008 qualifier against

Scotland next week. "I'm getting tired of all these questions about Totti. At the moment I have other things on my mind. Last week Totti, a born and bred Roman who has spent his entire career with his hometown club, said he would choose Roma over Italy every time. "Between Roma and my country I choose Roma, of that there is no doubt," he told television channel TG1. "The most important thing for me is wearing the Roma shirt." Roma are through to the quarterfinals of the Champions League, where they will meet English Premiership leaders Manchester United. They currently lie second in Serie A and are through to the Italian Cup final. Italy are third in their Euro 2008 qualifying group on seven points, two behind Scotland and France, after four matches.

Carra keeping perspective

Football

AFP, Tel Aviv

A defender who has proved he can keep Ronaldinho and Samuel Eto'o on a tight leash—as Jamie Carragher did in Liverpool's Champions League win over Barcelona—would expect to walk into any team in the world. But the lynchpin of Liverpool's back four has no complaints about his current status as third or fourth fiddle in England's central defensive pecking order. With Rio Ferdinand and John Terry apparently untouchable, Carragher is reliant on injuries for opportunities to add to his 32 caps, and it seems likely that he will be turning out at right back against Israel on Saturday in the berth normally reserved for Gary Neville, who is outinjured. "Of course, I'd love to play centre-half," Carragher admitted. "But John Terry and Rio Ferdinand were probably two of our best players in the World Cup. "You can't really argue with that. For me, John Terry is the best centre-back in the world. Over the last three or four years, I wouldn't have anyone ahead of him. "Rio was as good as anyone at the

World Cup, a 30-million-pound defender, so I am in no position to complain about that, either. You are talking about world class players. Hopefully I can learn off them. You are always trying to improve." It has been the 29-year-old's misfortune to have been born in an era when England are rich in top quality centre-backs - with Jonathan Woodgate also available, not to mention Sol Campbell, Wes Brown and Michael Dawson. "It is just one of those things," he said. "I've got 30-odd caps and hopefully I can get a few more before my England career finishes. "Playing for England, you are always going to have competition because we have got some of the best players in the world. It's just unfortunate they are all centre-backs!" Carragher's experience of the pressure involved in Champions League knockout clashes should stand him in good stead when England run out for a match they can ill afford to lose on Saturday. And he believes that Liverpool's performance in overcoming Barcelona over two legs earlier this month can serve as inspiration for England as they seek to get their qualifying campaign

back on track. "We all know how big the game is," Carragher said. "When the draw was made, Israel away was always going to be a tough game and we'd have liked to have got a few more points on the board before we went there. So that's what probably makes it a bit bigger game than it was at the start of the group. "They are going to put us under pressure and maybe there will be a hostile crowd. But that is something the players who have played in Europe are used to. "The atmosphere shouldn't faze you. In fact it works the other way - it gives you a buzz and a boost. "It's great to play in these places and that's what the game is about. The atmosphere adds a bit of pressure but as England players, and myself, you prefer to play in those types of atmosphere. "For instance at Liverpool we went to Barcelona, went a goal down, and people were saying 'Liverpool's season could be over.' "But it's those type of games (that) you are in the game for. Barcelona have some of the best players in the world - but we beat them. We prepared very well, and I'm sure we will do the same with England."



Brazil legend Romario holds his daughter in his arms during an event to commemorate World Down's Syndrome Day at the National Congress in Brasilia on Wednesday.

Sheva savours stunning strike

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea's Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko rates the outstanding goal he scored against Spurs in Monday's FA Cup Quarter-Final replay as one of the best of his career. It was the opening goal in Chelsea's victory over their North London rivals, and another shortly afterwards by Shaun Wright-Phillips eased the Blues through to the last four of the only domestic trophy Chelsea have not won since Jose Mourinho became their manager. Shevchenko became a Chelsea player in the summer after having amassed 267 goals for his previous clubs, Dynamo Kiev and AC Milan. But he regards the 13th goal of his Chelsea career as among the best of the lot. Shevchenko said: "I think it is one of the best I have scored in my career. I feel very much better now. It was a very good game and in the second half, the team played very well. "For my career, it is important to win trophies like this. The Cup in England is very important and different from Italy. "I played in the old Wembley. It was a special stadium with a great atmosphere. I played two times, one with Dynamo Kiev against Arsenal and the other with the national team. "To be in the first final in the new stadium would be a special moment."

Ronaldinho not worth it: Moratti

INTERNET, undated

Inter supreme Massimo Moratti believes that AC Milan can do much better than spend all their money on Barcelona ace Ronaldinho. "Ronaldinho to Milan? Bah," exclaimed Moratti. "I would save all that money and spend it on other players. "We [Inter] are now at a stage where we do not need to spend. We won't spend for the sake of it. "Ronaldinho must have a serious attitude. I have a strong team and sometimes dreams must remain as such." He then proceeded to speak of his own Catalan shopping list, showing clearly that he rated Lionel Messi (not surprisingly another Argentine) over the Brazilian. "Lionel Messi is one of the many dreams we have, but Barcelona do not want to be deprived of him and they do not need the money. So I suspect he will stay with Barcelona."

Gerrard honoured by Queen

AFP, London

England and Liverpool football star Steven Gerrard added an honour from Queen Elizabeth II to his collection of sporting medals on Wednesday when he picked up an award at Buckingham Palace in London. The 26-year-old was made an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) - and said meeting the queen was a more important event than the biggest cup final match. "I've played in special games with special people but I've never experienced anything like this," he said. "It's completely different nerves to football. In football, I know what I'm going to do but today is a big day and a proud day for me." The Liverpool captain, who has won two English FA Cups and a Champions League winners' medal, added: "I've achieved a lot but I'm still only 26 and it's early in my career. I'm hungry for more." Gerrard, who is also England's vice-captain, was joined at the palace by his girlfriend Alex Curran.

Brazil call up teenage goalie

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil have called up uncapped 19-year-old goalkeeper Cassio for their friendlies against Chile and Ghana in Sweden, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said Wednesday. Cassio, who had an outstanding tournament helping Brazil win the South American under-20 championship in Paraguay in January, replaced Porto's Helton who withdrew due to injury. "To be honest, I can't believe it," said Cassio, who is still reserve goalkeeper at his club Gremio. "I think it will only become reality when I meet the players and coaching staff." Brazil face Chile in Gothenburg on Saturday and Ghana in Stockholm three days later.

Keane lashes at Ireland

Football

AFP, Sunderland

Former Republic of Ireland captain and now Sunderland manager Roy Keane launched a second broadside at his former team-mates on Wednesday just days ahead of their Euro 2008 qualifier with Wales. Only a week ago Keane criticised how two of his Irish players at Sunderland - veteran striker David Connolly and midfielder Liam Miller - had not been selected for the squad by coach Steve Staunton. However on Wednesday it was the turn of senior members of the side to be criticised by Keane - some of whom would have been members of the squad that he so infamously walked out on at the 2002 World Cup finals over a disagreement with then coach Mick McCarthy. "Once you keep playing them on the reputation they've built up through the media or because they do lots of interviews, then it's wrong," said Keane, who staged a brief and contrite

return to the international squad in what turned out to be a fruitless bid to qualify for the 2006 World Cup finals. "There's a fine line between loyalty and stupidity." Keane - whose behaviour at the 2002 World Cup training camp and sulking exit was heavily criticised by fellow squad member Staunton - claimed that it was virtually pointless trying to inspire the senior players to perform well for their country. "Come Saturday against Wales the senior players - four or five of them - have to step up to the plate. But they've been asked before," said Keane, who has placed himself in a good spot on form alone to replace the embattled Staunton on account of the way he has galvanised Sunderland into a return to the Premiership. "That's why I don't get bogged down by saying we've got world-class players with Ireland. "You look at some of our lads at the bigger clubs...none of these players at this moment in time are setting the world alight at their respective clubs." However, his latest outburst may blow any chance of replacing

Staunton given his fractious relationship with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI). "The FAI, the football, can learn a lot from the rugby lads (who won their third Triple Crown Six Nations title in four years last campaign), even the cricket lads (who stunned former world champions Pakistan by beating them last weekend in the World Cup). "If you go into something believing you're going to get there, then there's a good chance you'll get there. "If you think you're not going to get there I guarantee you won't get there. And that definitely comes from the top, the FAI." The Republic have outside chances of reaching next year's Euro 2008 finals - being jointly-hosted by Austria and Switzerland - as they presently lie in third place in Group D, three points behind Germany and the Czech Republic, though both have a game in hand.

England look to Hargreaves

Football

AFP, Tel Aviv

It is indicative of how far Owen Hargreaves's international stock has risen over the last year that he knows he will walk straight back into the England side for their Euro 2008 qualifier against Israel here on Saturday. The Bayern Munich midfielder, once ridiculed by sections of the England support, was, along with Joe Cole, arguably one of only two English players to emerge from last summer's World Cup with his reputation enhanced. And events in the aftermath of what was a disappointing campaign in Germany have only served to consolidate his recently-acquired status as an automatic choice at the base of England's midfield diamond. While Hargreaves was sidelined by the broken leg he suffered playing for his club in a Bundesliga defeat at Arminia Bielefeld in September, England were busy making life unnecessarily difficult for themselves in group E. As scrappy goalless draw at home to Macedonia was followed by a tactical shambles in Croatia that resulted in a 2-0 defeat which has left Steve McClaren's squad in third place in the group, knowing a setback in the Ramat Gan stadium here on Saturday night could be fatal to their chances of reaching next year's finals in Austria and Switzerland. But Hargreaves, whose return to

action for Bayern helped his club eliminate Real Madrid from the Champions League earlier this month, has no qualms about re-entering the fray at a time when England are really feeling the heat. "This is the next step, to be back with England and I feel I am ready," the 26-year-old declared. "I played against Real Madrid after only one game in the league, so this is just the next step." The qualities Hargreaves showcased at the World Cup - apparently unspappable energy, bite in the tackle and a growing tactical maturity - have made him Manchester United's number one target and it seems likely a deal will be done with Bayern at the end of this season. They have also established him as McClaren's preferred option as the anchorman in a midfield in which Frank Lampard will be given the freedom to roam forward with Steven Gerrard operating from the right and, in the absence of long-term injury victim Joe Cole, Aaron Lennon on the left. That Hargreaves could enjoy such status would have been difficult to predict even as recently as the start of the last year, when the Canadian-born midfielder was still having to deal with regular doses of abuse from England fans unconvinced that he belonged on the international stage. That particular debate has long since fallen off the agenda, and Hargreaves insists he always believed that the fans would be won over once he got beyond the brief end-of-match cameos which characterised his early international career. "The most important thing for me

was always that the manager picks me and that he thinks I can do a job to help the team win," he reflected. "I don't need any more show of faith than that. Obviously, it makes the job easier when the fans are behind you and chanting your name. But either way, whether they're booing you or cheering you, you still have to go out and do the job. "The most faith I've been shown is from (Sven-Goran) Eriksson and McClaren in the sense that they've always played me - even in times when possibly other people were doubting me. They showed a lot of support for me and my team mates did as well. Those are the things I look for." Now Hargreaves will seek to reward some of that faith by helping to calm the nerves of those who think England could be set to miss out on a major tournament for the first time since the 1994 World Cup in the United States. A feeble display against Spain in a friendly last month did nothing to bolster morale, but Hargreaves is optimistic that England can rediscover the knack they enjoyed under Eriksson of winning the qualifying games that count. "If you're playing for Bayern Munich, Manchester United or Liverpool every game is a must-win," he said. "That's the way it's been ever since I came through, especially the England games. Definitely, with the position we're in, we need the three points."



New England call-up David Nugent (2nd L) and Steven Gerrard (2nd R) jog during a training routine at the new Wembley Stadium in London on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 — Baba

4 Some statuaty

9 Horner Simpson's "Drat!"

12 Lair

13 Phantom's balliwick

14 "— Got a Secret"

15 Were of two minds

17 Vast expanse

18 Mai — (cocktail)

19 British king who abdicated

21 Apple drinks

24 Thick chunk

25 Kyoto cummerbund

26 Afternoon social

28 Burst forth

31 Fail to hit

33 Pinch

35 Birthright barrierer

DOWN

36 Honshu port

38 Happy companion?

40 Screw up

41 Type-writer

43 Turn blue?

45 Musical about

47 Numerical prefix

48 Praise in verse

49 Repudiation

54 Meadow

55 Mirror's offering

56 Wall climber

57 Rowing need

58 Frolic

59 Born

DOWN

1 Put together with

2 Floral neckwear

3 Office holders

4 "Maltese Falcon" star

5 Out of bed

6 Catch a glimpse of

7 Kilmer classic

8 Bareback lack

9 Free from error

10 Finished

11 Be the leader

16 Consumed

20 Piece of merchandise

21 "Catch a Falling Star"

22 Wading bird

23 Vanish

27 Help

29 Rid of rind

30 Sverve

32 Leave out

34 Stamps

37 Tart

39 George Washington

42 The inner self

44 God (Italian)

45 Horse play?

46 Notion

50 Potential

51 Victory

52 "Hall, Caesar!"

53 Caustic solution

Solution time: 24 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Saturday's Cryptquip: WHEN A MAGAZINE BIGWIG IS TRYING TO HIT A BASEBALL, COULD YOU ANALYZE HIS EDITORIAL STANCE?

Today's Cryptquip Clue: G equals U