

**Kaiser confirms Toni interest**

AFP, Rome

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has confirmed the club's interest in signing Italian World Cup-winning striker Luca Toni from Serie A side Fiorentina.

"He's a guarantee to score goals, he has character and always helps the team; he's a special type of player," Beckenbauer was quoted as saying in Friday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I really hope he comes."

Asked if Bayern had already agreed a deal with Fiorentina to sign Toni, Beckenbauer said: "I don't know, I can only say that Bayern needs new blood. All transfers are handled by (Karl-Heinz) Rummenigge and (Uli) Hoenes."

Last weekend German magazine Sport-Bild reported that Toni had already agreed to sign for Bayern at the end of the season in a deal worth 18 million euros.

Having been part of Italy's 2006 World Cup squad, Toni scored two goals in the quarterfinals win over the Ukraine. He also netted both goals in Italy's 2-0 victory against Scotland in last month's Euro 2008 qualifier.

Bayern, currently fourth in the Bundesliga, nine points off the pace with three games left, have had an indifferent season and coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has promised sweeping changes for the next campaign.



Sevilla midfielder Renato is airborne as he gets his leg to a cross to divert it into the back of the net in their UEFA Cup semifinal second leg clash against Osasuna at the Sanchez Pizjuan in Seville on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

**All Spanish finale**

AFP, undated



Sevilla's remarkable season continued on Thursday as Juande Ramos's defending champions reached the final of the UEFA Cup at the expense of Osasuna.

The English missed out on dominating the Champions League final as AC Milan hijacked the party on Wednesday, but the Spanish made no such mistakes in Europe's second competition as Espanyol joined their countrymen in the May 16 final in Glasgow, ousting Werder Bremen.

Sevilla, the holders, will feel confident for the final after overcoming a 1-0 first leg deficit to master their Pamplonian opponents in the return leg.

In fairness there could easily have been more to show for the hosts than two goals from Brazilians Luis Fabiano and Renato.

They controlled the match from start to finish and showed their class in coming through for a second successive final -- they destroyed English side Middlesbrough 4-0 in last season's final.

It means Sevilla's incredible bid to win the UEFA Cup, Spanish league and Spanish Cup is still on.

They trail champions and leaders Barcelona by a single point in the league and in the Cup they hold a 3-0 advantage over Deportivo la Coruna ahead of their semifinal second leg, at home.

Sevilla took the lead in very British fashion when a long punt forward found the chest of Fabiano. His control was impressive but what happened next owed its place more to a Sunday pub league than the European platform.

Fabiano bulldozed his way through three weak tackles from defenders, the ball ricocheting off everything in his path before he coolly slotted home past Lopez Ricardo, formerly of Manchester United, in the Osasuna goal.

That made it 1-0 on the night and 1-1 on aggregate -- the tie finely balanced.

Sevilla really should have had a two-goal lead at the break but French forward Freddie Kanoute headed straight at Ricardo from six yards out after Fabiano's presence caused havoc in the Osasuna box.

Kanoute was presented with a free header but could get no power or direction on it.

After the break Cameroon forward Pierre Webo could have restored parity on the night but he blazed over the bar when well placed from 20 yards out.

That proved a costly miss as Sevilla doubled their advantage as Renato ran unchecked into the Osasuna box to meet a Daniel Alves

cross with an outstretched and supple leg, diverting the ball past an astounded Ricardo, who was left rooted to the spot.

That made it 2-0 on the night and gave Sevilla the lead over two legs but a goal from Osasuna would have been enough to sneak through to the final on the away goals rule.

That so nearly arrived as Webo sent a header against the post just minutes after the second goal but Sevilla were not to be denied a chance at repeating last year's success.

Away in Germany, Bremen, faced with a 3-0 deficit to make up from their first-leg trouncing, got off to a flying start with a goal after just four minutes, but went down to 10-men when Klose was shown two yellow cards in just 18 first-half minutes.

Second-half goals by striker Ferran Corominas and defender Jesus Maria Lacruz killed off Bremen's chances, but their coach, Thomas Schaaf, took the defeat -- their third in three games -- with good grace.

He said: "We have to take the defeat on the chin, because we were already 3-0 down from the first leg."

"We gave it our best shot and the team played well. But I didn't understand a few of the referee's decisions."

"We did a lot of planning for this game and we tried everything even with ten men, but we were always fighting the tide."

**Gunners sight Chelsea scalp**

AFP, London



Arsenal will this weekend seek to draw a line under a disappointing season by wrecking Chelsea's last remaining chance of claiming a third straight Premiership title.

If Manchester United can overcome Manchester City in Saturday's lunchtime derby, anything other than a win for Chelsea on their visit to the Emirates Stadium 24 hours later will ensure the trophy is destined for Old Trafford for the first time in four years.

And Gunners boss Arsene Wenger, whose side's best chance of silverware this season dissolved in a stormy League Cup final defeat by their London rivals in February, is determined to lay down a marker for the future as he seeks to prove his young squad have absorbed the lessons from setbacks suffered in this campaign.

"I feel we have shown that we have the quality to be at the top," the Frenchman said. "What we have to show is that we have the mental toughness and determination to beat the top."

"This season we have shown we can beat Man United, we can beat Liverpool, we have drawn at Chelsea and I'm confident we can beat them at home."

Arsenal will not be at full-strength with skipper Thierry Henry out for the rest of the season, Freddie Ljungberg sidelined by hamstring problems and Czech midfielder Tomas Rosicky given only a 50-50 chance of making the match.

But Chelsea's resources are also stretched, notably by the loss of centreback Ricardo Carvalho for the rest of the season, although Jose Mourinho will have the option of starting Arjen Robben for the first time in months.

The Dutch winger made his return from a lay-off enforced by knee surgery as a substitute in Tuesday night's Champions League semifinal against Liverpool, although what should have been a satisfying evening turned sour for him when he had a penalty saved in the shoot-out that denied his side a place in the final.

How well Robben and the rest of Mourinho's squad recover from the mental and physical hangover from two hours of drama at Anfield could determine whether Chelsea

are able to keep the title alive going into Wednesday night's clash with United at Stamford Bridge.

Their rivals, too, face a test of their resilience in the wake of a morale-sapping 3-0 defeat by AC Milan on Wednesday. But, having worked so hard to get to the position they are in now, it seems scarcely credible that Sir Alex Ferguson's squad will produce two successive performances scarred by the sloppiness that consigned them to defeat in the San Siro.

Ferguson has left his players in no doubt about the kind of response he requires, despite them having scarcely 48 hours to recover following their return from Milan

FIXTURES	
(1400GMT kick-off unless stated)	
Saturday	Aston Villa v Sheffield Utd (1615), Everton v Portsmouth, Fulham v Liverpool, Manchester City v Manchester Utd (1145), Newcastle v Blackburn, Reading v Watford, West Ham v Bolton, Wigan v Middlesbrough
Sunday	Arsenal v Chelsea (1500)
Monday	Charlton v Tottenham (2000)

in the early hours of Thursday morning.

"You have to put the disappointment behind you," said the Scot. "That's always been a measure of this club for many years now."

"The players have handled it in the past and I'm sure they'll handle it on Saturday. They know it's a big game and that they can win the title this weekend. That's a big incentive."

United expect to be bolstered by the return of French striker Louis Saha and Rio Ferdinand, and City boss Stuart Pearce is not counting on any help from the fatigue factor.

"I don't buy into that at all," said Pearce, who is obliged to do without his best player, Joey Barton, following his suspension by the club for a training-ground attack on teammate Ousmane Dabo.

"When you are winning matches, fighting on all fronts you don't get tired. Tired is not a physical thing for me, it's a mental thing, always has been."

At the other end of the table, West Ham can take a massive step towards survival by beating Bolton

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**Kaka invites Cristiano**

INTERNET, undated

Milan sensation Kaka has told Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo to come and join him at the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza.

Despite the Portuguese winger's less than impressive display against the Rossoneri in the Champions League semifinal on Wednesday, Kaka is a massive fan of the midfielder.

"Ronaldo should transfer to Milan and then we could play alongside each other," the Brazilian told Sky Sports News. "You never know, it could happen."

Kaka illustrated all of his ability in the two legs over United by scoring three of Milan's five goals in their aggregate win.

They were performances which underlined why Real Madrid are so keen on signing him, even if the former Sao Paulo playmaker insists he would look to the Premiership should he quit Italy.

"I love the competition and the challenge in England," added the 2006 World Cup player.

"There are many big teams. Three English sides made the last four of the Champions League, so the challenge is very appealing."

"If one day I was to leave Milan then I would definitely look at an English team."

**Crespo hoping for Inter stay**

AFP, Rome

Hernan Crespo is hoping to stay on loan at recently-crowned Serie A champions Inter Milan rather than return to Chelsea to serve the final year of his contract with the English Premiership club.

The 31-year-old Argentine striker, who won the league title with Chelsea in the 2005-06 season, joined Inter on a two-season loan last summer but Chelsea have the option to call him back at the end of this month if they so wish.

"If by May 31 they don't exercise their right to bring me back to London, the loan will be automatically extended for another year," Crespo was quoted as saying in Friday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I would like to finish my career here. I know that Chelsea would like me back, but I hope I don't have to leave Milan."

Crespo is in his second spell with Inter having also played for the club in the 2002-03 season.

The Argentina international has also played for Serie A sides Parma, Lazio and AC Milan.

**Lyon eyeing recruits**

AFP, Lyon

French champions Lyon will seek to recruit three top-level players in the off-season, president Jean-Michel Aulas said Friday, confirming that Gerard Houllier would continue to coach the club.

"There could be seven to eight players leaving," Aulas said. "For the moment only Eric Abidal has come to see me with the aim of leaving."

"Otherwise, Gerard Houllier has asked me for three 'big names' and we're working on that. If he's asking that, it's for no other coach than him," Aulas told the Le Progrès newspaper.

**Banana skin for Barca**

AFP, Madrid



Six games to go in the tightest three-way Spanish title race for five years and reigning champions Barcelona have a single point lead over Sevilla with Real Madrid just another point back in third.

Barcelona will be looking to continue their campaign for a third successive title with a win at relegation-threatened Real Sociedad, knowing that their two main rivals must face each other 24 hours later.

"I think everybody is starting to get a little nervous. Now it's just a question of controlling those nerves because the final games will be a little strange," admitted Barca defender Sylvainho.

"But I still think Barcelona are going to come out on top despite the fact that Real Madrid are now playing well and Sevilla have had

an incredible season," added the Brazilian.

One blow for Barca coach Frank Rijkaard will be the absence of his swift Portuguese right winger Deco, who sprained his left ankle in training on Thursday and looks set to be on the sidelines for two weeks.

Deco acquired his injury because of an over-enthusiastic tackle by Ludovic Giuly and, with a curious twist of fate, it is likely to be the French international who replaces his team mate on Saturday.

Real Sociedad, who are second from bottom, have shown in recent weeks that they are not going to down without a fight and have won three of their last five games to give them hope of staying up.

"This game is the most difficult we've had to face recently. They are the best team in the league, the favourites to win again and nobody knows what's going to happen," conceded Sociedad midfielder Gaizka Garitano.

Last season, Barcelona beat the

San Sebastian-based side 2-0 in their Anoeta stadium and Garitano clearly fears that a similar result could be on the cards.

"We are not expecting to lose, we are not going to give anything away but you never know which of their players is going to rise to the occasion. Sometimes it can be Eto'o, sometimes it's Ronaldo, sometimes it can be Messi," added Garitano.

Real Madrid play host to second-placed Sevilla knowing that a win for either team will make them the main contenders to Barcelona down the final straight of the championship.

"We've put in a great effort and if we win the league now, then we'll have deserved it," said Real's Spanish international defender Sergio Ramos.

"In some respects, the match against Sevilla is like a final. Three points in this match could decide who wins the league. Sadly, it (win-)

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**Berlu opens Sheva door**

AFP, Rome

AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi says he would gladly welcome back Andriy Shevchenko if the Ukrainian striker ever decides he wants to leave Chelsea.

Shevchenko left AC Milan to join Chelsea last summer in a 45-million-euro move, but has so far struggled to cope with life in the English Premiership, scoring just four league goals.

"Certainly for him the doors are not just ajar, they're wide open," Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister, was quoted as saying by the Gazzetta dello Sport on Friday.

Shevchenko, 30, missed Tuesday's Champions League semifinal, second leg against Liverpool due to a groin injury. Liverpool won 1-0 to make it 1-1 on aggregate, with the Merseysiders winning the penalty shoot-out.

AC Milan will be Liverpool's opponents in the May 23 final, a repeat of the 2005 final, after they beat Manchester United on Wednesday.

**Gerrard close to mega deal**



AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard is close to signing a new four-deal at the club, believed to be worth 120,000 pounds per week.

Following Liverpool's penalty shoot-out victory over Chelsea in midweek that set them up for a repeat Champions League final against AC Milan, new co-owner Tom Hicks said: "I cannot see Steven Gerrard playing for another club."

Now the 26-year-old has said he wants to commit his long-term future to the club he has been at since his school days.

"Tom Hicks has said he cannot see me playing for another club, and yes, I'm in talks to extend my contract at Liverpool and I've never been happier with my football," Gerrard told the official Liverpool

website.

"I'd love nothing better than to get this contract sorted and signed, so I can understand where he's coming from."

"We need to keep all of our big players here so it's very important we get the contracts sorted out so they can be here for a long time."

Only two years ago Gerrard penned his name to a four-year deal that warded off interest from Chelsea.

But his new deal is set to bring him up to a par with the English Premiership's highest earners.

That means he can concentrate on facing Milan in Athens on May 23, with his future secure.

"I'm confident we can go to Athens and bring the cup back home."

"But Milan are a fantastic team and we know it's going to be really difficult, so we need to be right at the top of four game."

"I was really surprised actually that they won their semifinal because I had confidence that Manchester United would get the result they required."

"I thought it was going to be a Liverpool-Manchester United final, but credit to Milan because they were excellent on the night and deserved to win the game."

Two years ago Liverpool came back from 3-0 down at half-time to eventually beat Milan on penalties to lift the Champions League for the fifth time -- Milan have six victories in the competition.

In Italy, all the talk is of gaining revenge for that disappointment.

"Now I am sure Milan will want to make amends for 2005 because I'm sure Istanbul hurt them," said Gerrard. "They have a chance for revenge now but me and the boys are going to be ready for that and we're looking forward to it."

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PHOTO: AFP

400 days before Euro 2008, seven thousand children combine to form the logo of Wien, a host city of the competition at the Ernst Happel stadium in Vienna.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid players David Beckham (L) and Roberto Carlos (2nd from L) share a light moment as Robinho (2nd from R) and Cicinho (R) join in the fun during a training session in Madrid on Friday.

**Dogfight for Flying Donkeys**

AFP, Rome



Chievo, whose six-year stay in Serie A has been nothing short of remarkable given the humble club's limited resources, face a must-win clash at home to relegation rivals Parma on Sunday.

Based in the suburbs of Verona and run by the cakemaking Campedelli family, Chievo are third from bottom on 32 points, three behind Parma with just four games left.

Not since their promotion to Serie A for the first time in 2001 has Chievo's place in the top flight come under threat.

But they now face the very real prospect of returning to Serie B if

they suffer defeat at the weekend against a Parma side buoyant after three successive victories.

"Our season starts now," said Chievo coach Luigi Del Neri, who rejoined the club in October last year after unsuccessful spells at Roma and Palermo.

"We showed great spirit last week against Fiorentina, but ended up with nothing."

"However I saw many signs of

encouragement, and if we show the same determination and are more clinical when chances come our way, we can beat Parma."

Chievo are known as the 'Flying Donkeys' after fans of city rivals Verona said that 'donkeys would fly if Chievo ever made it into Serie A' before they were made to eat their words.

In their first season in the top flight, Chievo finished fifth and qualified for the UEFA Cup.

They finished seventh last season but were elevated to fourth place after various points penalties were handed to those clubs involved in the Italian match-fixing scandal.

That meant a place in the third qualifying round of the Champions

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**FIXTURES**

(All 1300GMT kick-off)	
Sunday	AC Milan v Fiorentina, Atalanta v Siena, Cagliari v Udinese, Chievo v Parma, Empoli v Catania, Lazio v Livorno, Messina v Inter Milan, Palermo v Roma, Sampdoria v Reggina, Torino v Ascoli