

Milan's attacking dilemma

INTERNET, undated



AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti is facing an attacking dilemma ahead of the Champions League final showdown against Liverpool in Athens on Wednesday.

Ancelotti sent out a reserve side in Sunday night's 3-2 home league defeat by Udinese with the intention of having his top stars fit for the repeat with Rafael Benitez's side.

The Rossoneri cannot play Ronaldo, who is cup-tied due to his earlier involvement with Real Madrid, and Brazilian Ricardo Oliveira is out of form, so Ancelotti has to decide who will partner Kaka up front.

Veteran Italy forward Filippo Inzaghi could be the man Ancelotti relies on to fire his side past the Reds, with the 33-year-old having more experience in key games than his fellow World Cup winner Alberto Gilardino.

"I have not made my decision yet on the attacking front," said Ancelotti.

"I will have to evaluate the physical condition of both players. It is probably the most difficult choice to make."

Inzaghi and Gilardino both done their part to merit a place in the final."

Inzaghi missed the epic final against Liverpool two years ago through injury.

Liverpool won in a penalty shoot-out after the Rossoneri had thrown away a 3-0 half-time lead.

This would be the first Champions League final for Gilardino, who joined the Rossoneri from Parma in the summer of 2005.

From a psychological point of view, Inzaghi is favourite because he has more experience in finals than Gilardino, said Ancelotti.

Gilardino is nevertheless very good in the fast counter-attacks and on one-on-ones, while Inzaghi is more of a finisher."

The 33-year-old Inzaghi has scored four goals in Europe this season, more than Gilardino.

Inzaghi played a pivotal role in his team being crowned European champions back in the 2002-03 campaign, scoring 12 goals in 16 appearances.

"I hope my players have the intelligence to understand the choice I have to make," added Ancelotti.

"I think both know the responsibility I have in making this choice."

"One possibility which depends on how the game develops is to start with Gilardino and replace him with Inzaghi during the game, or vice versa."

However, the bulk of the responsibility will rest on the shoulders of 25-year-old Brazil playmaker Kaka.

He is having his best season yet and is the current top scorer in the Champions League this campaign with 10 goals.

It was his goal early in extra time that saw Milan past Celtic in the first knockout stage, while he was instrumental in both legs of the semifinal against Manchester United.

Ancelotti will have to wait until the last minute to find out if captain Paolo Maldini will be fit.

The veteran defender, who made his Milan debut back in 1985, is battling a knee injury.



PHOTO: AFP

A wise man's game

AFP, London



Didier Drogba backed his words with deeds as the Chelsea striker followed his inspirational pre-match speech with a FA Cup winning display.

Chelsea captain John Terry revealed that Drogba's most significant contribution on Saturday came before the final had even kicked off as he delivered an emotional address before going on to score the winner in extra-time.

The Ivory Coast striker called his teammates into a huddle moments before kick-off against Manchester United in an attempt to settle any nerves.

He admitted he was feeling anxious about the 90 minutes ahead but would never stop fighting for the side and called for the same commitment from the rest of the team.

Terry was convinced that was exactly what Chelsea's players needed to hear as they prepared to dredge up one final effort from their weary bodies at the end of a gruelling campaign.

"Didi called everyone together and it was a great speech," Terry said. "He said 'Guys I'm nervous,

we're all nervous but one thing's for sure I'm going to fight and give everything. Not for anyone else but for every player'."

"He looked them in the eye and it touched people. It was very good. We didn't know he was going to do it. He just called everyone together."

"When he said he'd fight no matter what then you can't ask no more than that. He's unbelievable. He's just such a great guy, and on the pitch."

Suitably inspired, Chelsea managed to shake off the draining effects of their failed bid for a quadruple and stole the Cup from United with a 1-0 victory at the newly rebuilt Wembley.

Drogba led by example, producing another Herculean effort as he capped a season that saw him become the first Chelsea player to score 30 goals for 20 years with his second cup final winner in four months.

Drogba had chased Jose Mourinho down the tunnel at full-time as the Chelsea boss disappeared to phone his family because he wanted to thank him for bringing him to England three years ago.

"Jose means a lot to me," Drogba said. "If I can speak to you now it's because of him and Roman Abramovich. They gave me the chance to come here. I have to say thanks to them."

But, after emerging from a lengthy post-match random drugs test, Drogba was keen to play down his Churchillian speech.

"It was just between us," he said. "This is what we have to keep because it's not easy to be a Chelsea player and we know that.

"We are all together and everybody tried to keep working hard. Our spirit has always been there. It's difficult to lose a Champions League semi-final and to come here two weeks after and win the FA Cup final against the champions."

"There were so many emotions when I scored that goal. I don't know what to say. I don't think I realised what we did today."

"For me football is about fun. It can be very important but there are so many things even more important in life. When you win you have to celebrate and enjoy it because tomorrow maybe you will lose."

Drogba had chased Jose Mourinho down the tunnel at full-time as the Chelsea boss disappeared to phone his family because he wanted to thank him for bringing him to England three years ago.

"Owen Hargreaves is going to leave us, it is what he wants and everything is in place," Beckenbauer told German television channel DSF.

The Kaiser was speaking after reports earlier in the day on the website of German magazine Spiegel that a deal was imminent.

Beckenbauer would not confirm how much the deal is worth to the German giants, but when asked about the 25 million euro figure he simply added, "It is in the region of 25 million euros."

Hargreaves, who has won 38 caps for his country, has wanted to join Manchester United since the 2006 World Cup, but was thwarted in his efforts by Bayern who wanted him to fulfil his contract which expires in 2010.

Canadian-born Hargreaves broke into the Bayern side in the 2000-01 season and has made 145 Bundesliga appearances, but was forced to miss most of the season after fracturing his left leg last September.

He enjoyed plenty of success at Bayern, winning three Bundesliga titles (in 2001, 2003 and 2005), two German Cups (2003 and 2005), a Champions League title and the

Romario claims 1,000th goal

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Veteran Brazilian striker Romario claimed the 1,000th goal of his career late Sunday playing for Vasco da Gama against Recife Sport in a league game.

The 41-year-old, who won the World Cup with Brazil in 1994, moved into four figures by converting a 41st minute penalty which helped his side to a 3-1 win.

According to the player's own calculations and that of Vasco da Gama, he reached the 1,000 goal mark after playing in 1,254 games that took him to PSV Eindhoven, Barcelona and Flamengo before joining Vasco da Gama. He scored 56 times for the Brazilian national side.

The goal-scoring statistics, including youth games and testimonials, however, have not been ratified by world governing body FIFA.

BARCA DEMOLISH ATLETICO Carlos keeps Real on course

INTERNET, undated



Roberto Carlos' last-gasp goal gave Real Madrid a dramatic 3-2 win at Recreativo de Huelva to keep them on track for the Liga title.

Real looked to have thrown away two points after they surrendered the lead on 43 minutes when he lobbed the ball over the stranded Atletico goalkeeper Ivan Cuellar.

Cuellar was to blame for Barca's third on the stroke of half-time when he failed to deal with Deco's cross and Eto'o was on hand to poke the ball home from close-range.

Ronalinho got on in the act on 58 minutes when he exchanged passes with Eto'o before slotting home.

Things got worse for Atletico when Fabiano Eller was sent off on 74 minutes for a second bookable offence for hauling down Ronaldinho.

Messi grabbed his second ten

minutes from time with a delicate chip over Cuellar.

Substitute Andres Iniesta completed the rout with Barca's sixth in the final minute when Eto'o unselfishly squared the ball to the midfielder to score.

Gianluca Zambrotta doubled the lead on 43 minutes when he lobbed the ball over the stranded Atletico goalkeeper Ivan Cuellar.

Sevilla kept their treble dreams alive as they came from behind to win 2-1 at Deportivo La Coruna.

Deportivo stunned the UEFA Cup winners with Bodipo firing Deportivo in front on 72 minutes with a clinical volley.

"Every player must make some progress and we are going to keep a close eye on their development."

And after VfB Stuttgart were crowned German champions on Saturday by winning the Bundesliga title, Low believes Germany's third-place finish at last year's World Cup has had a positive impact on their domestic football.

"Many coaches were interested in our physical preparation programs and our tactical approach, they adopted certain number of things which we did during the World Cup," said Low, who was assistant to head coach Juergen Klinsmann during the last World Cup.

Francisco Casquero drew Getafe level just four minutes later and Manu Del Moral gave the visitors the lead three minutes before the break.

Ruben Pulido added a third for

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Loew ready to get tough

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew revealed on Sunday his plans for some tough tactics to make sure his players are in top condition in their bid to make the Euro 2008 finals next year.

Germany take on minnows San Marino and Slovakia early next month as part of their qualifying campaign, but with his side top of Group D Loew is already thinking ahead to the June 2008 European finals in Switzerland and Austria.

"We will be more demanding on the players next season," he said. "We will be increasing the pressure on them and all players likely to figure in the team will have personal fitness goals to attain."

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Berlusconi picks supersub Pippo

INTERNET, undated

Milan President Silvio Berlusconi has suggested starting the Champions League Final with Alberto Gilardino, bringing on Pippo Inzaghi for the late push.

"By Wednesday we will all be in top form. We cannot let the trophy slip through our fingers again," he told Telelombardia.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti has said he is yet to decide which of his two strikers will start in Athens, so Berlusconi made his suggestion.

"If it were up to me, I would start with Gilardino as centre-forward and then bring on Inzaghi when the Liverpool defence is a little more tired."

It is practically certain that the rest of the formation is decided with Kaka and Clarence Seedorf supporting the forward.

The only other doubt is between Paolo Maldini and Kakha Kaladze at centre-back, which depends on the captain's fitness levels.

On Sunday, Milan's reserves lost 3-2 to Udinese, but the day was above all a celebration for Alessandro 'Billy' Costacurta, who is retiring at the age of 41 to become Ancelotti's assistant manager alongside Mauro Tassotti.

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PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian forward Romario kisses the football, which he used to convert his self-proclaimed 1,000th goal in a match on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

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