



SPORTING LISBON'S (L-R) MARCO CANIERA, JOAO MOUTINHO, RICARDO PEREIRA AND CUSTODIO JUBILATE OVER THEIR PORTUGUESE CUP TRIUMPH AT ESTADIO NACIONAL IN OERIAS ON SUNDAY. SPORTING BEAT BELENENSES 1-0 TO WIN THE CUP.

I'm staying: Crouch

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has assured towering striker Peter Crouch that he has a future at the club according to the player.

The Spaniard is set to enter the transfer market in a big way this summer following the defeat to AC Milan in last week's Champions League final meaning that several players will be shown the door.

But Crouch, who has been linked with a possible move to Newcastle, insists he is not one of those about to depart Anfield.

"He's (Benitez) told me I'm part of his plans and that's good enough for me," Crouch told Sky Sports News.

"At a club like Liverpool there's going to be competition for places, especially as the manager likes to chop and change."

Last season Crouch battled for a starting place up front with Dirk Kuyt, Craig Bellamy and Robbie Fowler.

Fowler has not been offered a new deal and Bellamy has been strongly linked with a move away from Anfield.

But Benitez is bound to bring in replacements so it seems likely that Crouch will face a renewed threat to his place next season.

Roman drops bombshell

INTERNET, undated

Roman Abramovich has reportedly told Chelsea he will no longer spend his billions on the club.

The Russian owner has, according to The Sun, decided that he no longer wants to be a key decision maker and believes the club should operate as a proper business -- meaning they will have to generate their own transfer budget like most other clubs.

That throws into doubt the future of stars Frank Lampard and John Terry who are both negotiating new deals.

Abramovich, who revealed his plans at a meeting last Monday, has imposed a wage cap and with both England internationals unwilling to settle for less than they feel they are worth, Chelsea may decide to cash in this summer as both players have two years left on their current contracts.

The club are hoping to bring in three new players in the summer, but won't splash the cash on transfer fees as they have in the past.

Steve Sidwell has already joined on a free transfer from Reading with Claudio Pizarro of Bayern Munich set to do likewise, while Brazilian defender Alex will join from PSV in July for a fee of one dollar.

Gourcuff wants Milan stay

INTERNET, undated

Yoann Gourcuff has declared that he wants to remain with newly crowned European Champions Milan.

The France Under-21 international has barely featured in the Rossoneri first-team since joining from Rennes last summer, and Serie A runners-up Roma have been linked with a move for the son of Lorient coach Christian Gourcuff.

"If the situation doesn't move too much, I will still play for Milan next season," Gourcuff told Radio Monte Carlo.

"I feel great here."

The 20-year-old burst onto the Milan scene with a goal on his Champions League debut in the 3-0 Group stage win over AEK, but has only started nine Serie A matches this season, scoring once.

Lyon set to appoint Perrin

Football

AFP, Paris

French champions Lyon are set to name former Portsmouth coach Alain Perrin as their new manager replacing Gerard Houllier, L'Equipe sports daily reported on Monday.

The paper said that Lyon chairman Jean-Michel Aulas would meet with 50-year-old Perrin on Monday and that an announcement was expected.

"We have already spoken about how we could proceed but I don't know exactly what will be discussed in the meeting."

"There is nothing to stop me from thinking that Mr. Aulas does not have two or three meetings of the same nature during the day," he told L'Equipe.

The Lyon job became available on Friday when former Liverpool

coach Houllier resigned saying that his decision to leave has "nothing to do with people or my health."

"I'm in top form and Lyon has even rejuvenated me. I just need to take stock and I will not be going to other clubs," explained Houllier.

Houllier led Lyon to a record-breaking sixth straight league title this season, but success in the Champions League remained out of reach as they crashed out in the last 16 to AS Roma.

Perrin was coach at Marseille from 2002 to 2004 before heading to Portsmouth where he lasted only eight months before being sacked over poor results.

He returned to France with unfashionable Sochaux at the start of this season and enjoyed success earlier this month as the side from eastern France won the French Cup defeating Marseille in the final.

He says he is now ready to face a new challenge.

"Before going to Marseille, I didn't know if I was up to being in charge of such a high pressure club. Today, I feel I am ready for the challenge."

Perrin's current boss and chairman of Sochaux, Jean-Claude Plessis will not stop him joining Lyon, despite the fact that he still has a year left on his contract.

"Whenever a coach leaves here they end up in Marseille, Paris or Lyon. Surely that will give someone else a desire to work here?" said Plessis referring to past coaches Jean Fernandez and Guy Lacombe.

If the L'Equipe report is correct, Perrin would become the eighth Lyon coach under current manager Jean-Michel Aulas in a bid to win the club's seventh consecutive French title next season.

Reggina's amazing escape

AFP, Rome



Reggina executed a remarkable escape act on Sunday, their 2-0 win over Champions League winners AC Milan helping them avoid relegation on the final day of the Serie A season.

Reggina were one of a quintet of clubs all embroiled in a battle to avoid filling the last remaining relegation place, with that dubious honour eventually falling to Chievo.

The Verona side went down 2-0 at fellow strugglers Catania to join already demoted Ascoli and Messina in Serie B next season.

Given the high stakes attached

to this encounter the game was played on neutral territory at Bologna's ground.

Chievo's fortunes have fallen sharply this term as at the start of the season they were in the Champions League qualifying round where they were knocked out by Levski Sofia.

Siena ensured their continued existence in the topflight with a 2-1 defeat of third-placed Lazio.

Reggina's exploits were all the more remarkable considering they were knocked 15 points at the start of the season for their part in the match-fixing scandal.

Up at the top end already crowned champions Inter Milan rounded off their campaign on the right note with a 3-0 win over Torino for their 30th success of the season.

Marco Materazzi opened the

scoring for Inter with a 12th minute penalty, with Maicon doubling up on the hour mark before Luis Figo converted another penalty for his last goal for the club before leaving to join Al Ittihad in Saudi Arabia.

Inter are joined in the Champions League group stages by second placed Roma, who came out on top in a seven goal thriller against Messina 4-3, with Lazio into the third round qualifier stage.

Roma captain Francesco Totti bagged a double to cement his title as the season's top scorer with 26 goals.

AC Milan finished fourth but qualify automatically as holders of the trophy while the three UEFA Cup places have been claimed by Fiorentina, Palermo and Empoli.

Nakamura injured

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Japan midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura, who helped Celtic complete a Scottish league and cup double, has injured his right foot ahead of Japan's campaign to win a third straight Asian Cup in July.

The left-footed deadball specialist said he feared missing a warm-up friendly at home against Montenegro on Friday and, in the worst case, another against Colombia on June 5.

Nakamura was one of the three Europe-based players who were called up by Japan coach Ivica Osim on Sunday for the friendlies.

The others were Eintracht Frankfurt striker Naohiro Takahara and Basel's defensive midfielder Koji Nakata.

"It hurts when I swing my leg and it's pretty tough," Nakamura told Kyodo News as he arrived at Tokyo's Narita airport Monday.

The 28-year-old was injured in Celtic's 1-0 win over Dunfermline in the Scottish Cup final on

Saturday.

He twisted his right ankle when he tried to avoid a sliding tackle in the 70th minute. He kept on playing until Gordon Strachan's team lifted their Cup through Jean-Joel Perrier Doumbé's 84th-minute goal.

Nakamura was due to undergo medical check-ups after returning here.

"It will be no good if I force myself to play and suffer from the consequences," Nakamura, who has been voted both the Scottish Player of the Year and Scottish Football Writers' Player of the Year, told Japanese reporters in Glasgow before leaving for home.

He also admitted he would need a lot of time to train together with J-League players who have dominated Osim's national team since he took over from Brazilian legend Zico after Japan's winless exit from the World Cup finals last year.

"It is not yet clear who will play what. You can't match a strong side unless you can play with your eyes closed," he said.

Osim, the gruff Bosnian strategist, did not use overseas-based

players in his first seven matches as Japan coach. He called up Nakamura and Takahara in Japan's last international match in which they beat Peru 2-0 at home in March.

"I played briefly last time. But it is going to last long this time," Nakamura said in Narita. "I want to absorb the style of football by this national side."

The 27-strong squad for the upcoming friendlies did not include Galatasaray midfielder Junichi Inamoto who was reportedly looking for a new club in Europe and also considering undergoing surgery to remove screws from his left leg during the close season.

But he was seen likely to be called up for the Asian Cup finals in which Japan are booked in the same group as 2006 Asian Games gold medalists Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

Osim said in a statement, "I have selected players who have played well for a relatively long period of time, not those players who have gone up and down in J-League matches."

Heinze set for Real?

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United defender Gabriel Heinze is reportedly close to joining Spanish giants Real Madrid.

According to The Sun, the Argentina World Cup star flew to the Spanish capital on Saturday to discuss the move.

And Real chiefs are convinced they will make him one of their summer signings.

They want him to replace Roberto Carlos, who is being released after 10 years at the Bernabeu.

Heinze said: "I am convinced that if a good offer arrives then Manchester United will let me go."

Heinze has also been a target for Italian giants Juventus but the departure of coach Didier Deschamps from the Turin club could scupper that possibility.

The 29-year-old struggled to nail down a regular starting berth during United's recent title-winning season, often playing second fiddle to Frenchman Patrice Evra.

That came after he missed much of the 2005-2006 season after injuring his cruciate ligament in a Champions League game at Villarreal.

Heinze joined United for 6.9 million pounds from PSG in the summer of 2004, and enjoyed a hugely impressive first season at Old Trafford.

Inamoto quits Galatasaray

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese midfielder Junichi Inamoto has decided to leave Turkish club Galatasaray and is looking for a new club, preferably in Europe, a press report said Monday.

His move followed a decision by the Turkish first division side not to exercise the option to retain the veteran of two World Cups after a one-year contract due to end in September, Kyodo News said.

Saburo Kawabuchi, head of the Japan Football Association, told Kyodo that Inamoto was left out of Japan's friendlies against Montenegro and Colombia on Friday and June 5 due partly to his need to look for a new club.

The 27-year-old Inamoto is also considering undergoing surgery to remove screws from his injured left leg during the off season, the JFA chief added.

He signed with the Istanbul side after failing to secure a regular place in the line-up in his third year with West Bromwich Albion, who were relegated from the English Premier League at the end of the 2005-2006 season.

From 65 caps for his country Inamoto has scored four goals, including two in the 2002 World Cup in which co-host Japan reached the second round. But he played only a peripheral role at last summer's finals in Germany.

The former Gamba Osaka player quit Japan in 2001 to join Arsenal, but never played in the league in his solitary season in North London before leaving for Fulham.

Giants in Peace Cup

AFP, Seoul

English Premier League clubs Bolton and Reading will join French champions Lyon and Argentine giants River Plate in contesting the Peace Cup in South Korea in July.

The eight-team pre-season tournament, won by Tottenham Hotspur two years ago, starts on July 12 and runs for nine days.

The other teams confirmed include South Korea's Sungnam Ilhwa, Japan's Shimizu S-Pulse, Udinese of Italy, and Chivas Guadalajara of Mexico, Yonhap news agency reported.

The draw will be made on Tuesday.

The tournament began in 2003 "to overcome ideological differences among nations and bridge race and religions" and "help realise world peace through football". It is run by the Sun Moon Peace Football Foundation.

Reading go into the tournament after a hugely successful Premier League season that saw them narrowly miss out on a place in Europe, finishing eighth, one point behind Bolton Wanderers.

Wanderers, with Sammy Lee at the helm after Sam Allardyce's shock departure to Newcastle, had an equally impressive campaign, qualifying for Europe for only the second time in their 133-year history.

Lyon will head to Korea as French champions once again but without coach Gerard Houllier who announced on Friday that he was leaving to take a sabbatical from football.

The former Lens, Paris Saint Germain and Liverpool manager led Lyon to two French league wins and to last year's quarterfinals of the Champions League.

Venables heading for rift

Football

INTERNET, undated

Terry Venables has agreed to stay on as Steve McClaren's assistant with the England team despite his opposition to the reinstatement of David Beckham in the squad -- but there are no guarantees that he will stay for the whole Euro 2008 campaign. Venables was bluntly overruled by McClaren in the decision to bring Beckham back.

As the debate over the merits of Beckham's return rumbled on yesterday, details emerged of the decision-making process which saw the 32-year-old brought back into the fold. While McClaren had previously discussed major issues with Venables and the rest of his inner circle -- such as the decision to drop Beckham in August -- he made this latest call unilaterally and presented it to his staff as a done deal.

The England manager was aware that Venables was opposed to Beckham coming back because his assistant had fully backed his plan to cast the player out after the World Cup finals last summer and had counselled against bringing him back for the games against Israel and Andorra in March.

When the Beckham issue finally came up for consideration ahead of selecting the current squad, opinions were sought by McClaren but his staff were made well aware that nothing would change his mind.

Bill Beswick, the sports psychologist whom McClaren brought from Middlesbrough, does not have much say in team selection but he is understood to have fallen in behind the England manager on the Beckham issue. Steve Round, the young coach who also previously worked at Middlesbrough, has also supported McClaren. While Venables has not publicly stated his opposition to the decision, the way in which his opinion has been ignored has given him reason to consider his future.

With his back against the wall, and nothing short of a victory against Estonia in the Euro 2008 qualifier next week enough to keep his job,

McClaren has decided to go it alone. He has been left dazed by the criticism he has received after the Croatia, Israel and Andorra games and, it is understood, came to one conclusion: as it was him alone taking the stick, it may as well be him alone who makes the decisions. While McClaren leant on the experience of Venables in his early months in the job, they reached a critical point when the 3-5-2 system that the older man had championed failed so badly in the 2-0 defeat in Croatia in October. Since then McClaren has relied less upon Venables and made more decisions independently, albeit with mixed results.

Venables, now 64, has enjoyed his involvement with the England team and remains a very popular coach, but the principles of the team that he and McClaren agreed upon last August has now been changed fundamentally by Beckham's comeback. Venables was not only opposed to the former England captain's involvement from a football point of view but he also believed that the player's huge global fame and all the attendant pressures that brought were unnecessary.

Whether Venables stays or goes will be rendered irrelevant if England fail to win in Tallinn on 6 June because McClaren -- and in all likelihood his backroom staff, too -- are certain to be sacked. At the moment, the atmosphere between the two men is said to be cordial but the long-term future of the partnership is in doubt.

In his News of the World column yesterday, Venables pointedly avoided the question of whether Beckham should have been in the squad or not. The only faint support he could give McClaren over the decision was to say: "Whether you think he is right or wrong, at least credit him with making the call." It hardly amounted to an endorsement of McClaren's latest change of heart.

McClaren said on Saturday that the decision to pick Beckham had been made "to help me win the game -- end of story". The Real Madrid man is almost certain to start on the right side of midfield against Brazil on Friday and then against Estonia a

week on Wednesday, especially since the withdrawal of Aaron Lennon with a twisted knee. In fact, McClaren could pick exactly the same midfield preferred by Sven Goran Eriksson which failed badly at the last World Cup finals.

The England manager has already said that he expects Steven Gerrard to play in the middle and Joe Cole on the left. Now he faces a decision between Frank Lampard and Michael Carrick for the second central place. While Lampard is the more established of the two, he was dropped for the Andorra game in March in favour of Owen Hargreaves, now injured, a decision that was badly fudged at the time by McClaren.

While McClaren then protested that Lampard's broken wrist ruled him out -- an injury that did not prevent him missing a single Chelsea game -- that was a convenient way of avoiding telling him he was dropped. With McClaren now committed to playing Gerrard alongside a holding midfielder in the style of Hargreaves, Carrick fits that role much better than Lampard.

Another major factor in McClaren's decision to pick Beckham were the reports he received of how Fabio Capello's new fitness regime at Real Madrid had transformed the player. Massimo Neri, the fitness coach who has worked previously with Capello, is credited with helping to turn around the fortunes of the Real team, who are now two games from winning La Liga.

Nevertheless, McClaren admitted that he had made the decision to bring back Beckham without ever watching him play in person. "Opinion will be divided," the England manager said. "People will think it is brave or stupid but it is my decision."

England will train today at Arsenal's Hertfordshire training ground and the Football Association has no plans to give Beckham a public platform before the Brazil match. McClaren is eager that the return of the most famous player of his generation does not overshadow the week -- although that is likely to be extremely wishful thinking.

Figo mum on future

INTERNET, undated

Luis Figo has declared that he will decide his future this week, although it seems likely that he will leave Inter in June.

The Portuguese winger was given a standing ovation on Sunday when he was replaced by Santiago Solari in Inter's 3-0 win over Torino at the San Siro, when the Nerazzurri were presented with the Scudetto trophy.

The former Sporting star seems set to leave Serie A and is expected to move to the Middle East to see out his career with Arabian outfit Al-Ittihad.

"This adventure began two years ago and they have been two fantastic years. It's always difficult to say I'm leaving, because of the affection the fans have always had for me," said Figo during the Scudetto celebrations following the match, in which he also converted a penalty.

"However I don't want to talk about the future now because we are celebrating a title that the club has deserved to win," added the 34-year-old.

"Inter will always be in my heart, whether I am here or not. They will always be favourites to win in Italy and Europe. Will I stay here? It's hard to make a decision. The affection of the fans counts a lot, but it's not the only thing."

"I joined Inter to help the team and do my best on the pitch and the first few months of this year weren't easy. However, now I feel good and this is very important when playing at a high level. We will see what happens. This week I will decide what to do with my family," concluded Figo.



LUIS FIGO

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS									
1	Kinsman,	39	Meredith	61	Super	21	U.K.		
4	Prepare	40	who	62	Bowl	22	fliers		
7	for battle	41	played	63	Rocky's	23	Small		
11	Trainer	42	trainer	64	Die	24	barrel		
13	image	43	Slapstick	65	1 Mediocre	25	Toothpaste		
14	maker	44	missile	66	2 Take	26	dispenser		
17	drafter	45	the	67	it from	27	name		
20	area	46	tool	68	top	28	Loch --		
24	Grazing	47	Attack	69	3 Finished	29	Monster		
28	exploding	48	dog's	70	4 Every last	30	Near		
31	star	49	sound	71	5 Paper	31	treasure		
34	explode	50	50 Deserve	72	6 Paper	32	the		
37	14	51	53 Lingerie	73	quantity	33	briny		
41	15	52	item	74	6 Showy	34	Clenched		
44	16	53	55 Florentine	75	parrot	35	hand		
47	17	54	farewell	76	7 Smarts	36	Replace-		
50	18	55	56 United	77	8 Intimidate	37	ment		
53	19	56	nations	78	9 Future	38	Dine		
56	20	57	Onesley	79	10 Aves	39	Gratuity		
59	21	58	comet	80	11 Aye	40	Oil-		
	22	59	Tend text	81	canceler	41	drilling		
	23	60	59 Chomp	82	12 Apathy	42	equipment		
	24		60 Bill's	83	19 Flight	43	sailing		
			partner		angle	44	ship		
			writer			45	Therefore		
						46	Verdi		
						47	opera		
						48	Incursion		
						49	A great		
						50	deal		
						51	Recede		
						52	The		
						53	Greatest		
						54	"Poppy-		
						55	cock"		
						56	Past		