

Inzaghi gets Italy recall

Football

APP, Rome

AC Milan forward Filippo Inzaghi has been recalled to the Italian side after scoring two goals in the Champions League final against Liverpool last week.

Italy manager Roberto Donadoni included the striker in his squad announced Monday for the Euro 2008 qualifiers against the Faroe Islands and Lithuania.

Inzaghi, who was part of the World Cup winning team last year in Germany, has been injured for much of this season. He was left out of the squad that faced Scotland in March.

Four members of last year's World Cup team are not available due to injury. Mid-fielder Mauro Camoranesi along with attackers Luca Toni, Alberto Gilardino and Vincenzo Iaquinta will all miss out.

Donadoni has had to call up two new strikers who made an impact in the final stages of the Italian league season.

Livorno captain Cristiano Lucarelli and Fabio Quagliarella of Sampdoria will appear in the side having scored 20 and 13 goals respectively this season.

AC Milan defender Alessandro Nesta has not been named after agreeing with Donadoni at the beginning of the month that he would not put himself forward for selection.

Italy face the Faroe Islands on Saturday and Lithuania four days later.

After five matches, Italy are lying fourth in Group B, two points behind leaders Scotland, Ukraine and France.

SQUAD

Totti shoes in for Golden Boot

INTERNET, undated

Francesco Totti is leading the race for the European Golden Boot and only Ruud Van Nistelrooy could still rain on his parade.

The award -- also sometimes called the Golden Shoe -- is given to the player who has scored the most goals in the continent's League football.

Not simply a list, it is decided on points awarded considering the difficulty of getting goals in a particular Division.

With his brace in the 4-3 win over Messina this afternoon, Totti has notched up 26 goals and 52 points.

That puts him above previous leader Afonso Alves, who finished the Dutch Eredivisie with 34 goals for Heerenveen, classed as 51 points.

The only League still going is in Spain and so Real Madrid striker Van Nistelrooy has the opportunity to catch Totti.

So far the Dutchman has scored 23 goals, which are worth 46 points in the Golden Boot standings, and there are two games left to play.

If Totti wins, he will become only the second Italian ever to take this trophy. The first was Luca Toni, who bagged 31 goals for Fiorentina last season.



PHOTO: STAR
Indian leg-spinner Anil Kumble carries his sleeping son while boarding the bus during their departure yesterday morning.

Sevilla still in the hunt



APP, Madrid

Sevilla kept their dreams of a first Liga title in 61 years alive on Sunday with a 3-1 win over Real Zaragoza. Luis Baiano and Alek sandr Kerzhakov and Freddy Kanoute.

Kerzhakov turned up trumps with his fifth goal of the season after nine minutes from time and Kanoute added a last-gasp clincher after Andres D'Alessandro had scored from a corner deflected home by Dani Alves midway through the second half to level Baiano's 26th-minute opener.

Earlier, the focus had been on the relegation dogfight, with Celta Vigo and Athletic Bilbao managing precious wins.

Bilbao, from the Basque country, have never been relegated but have struggled badly in recent seasons and remain on the edge of the drop zone despite beating Mallorca 1-0 in a cacophonous San Mames stadium.

Ismail Urzaiz scored from the penalty spot midway through the second half to take Athletic to 37 points from 36 games after their ninth win of another tough campaign to give Bilbao coach Jose Manuel Esnal a little relief.

"This win is a boost to us but we still need another one. The final furlong produces surprises with the legs heavy," Esnal told reporters.

Celta Vigo from the northwest, who were regular participants in Europe only a few years ago but have since lost their way, also bagged a vital three points, winning 2-1 at home to fellow strugglers Real Betis.

Zaragoza ended the game with ten men after Carlos Diogo was dismissed in the closing stages just before Kerzhakov fed Kanoute for the hosts' third goal.

Earlier, the focus had been on the relegation dogfight, with Celta Vigo and Athletic Bilbao managing precious wins.

They, like Vigo, have 33 points and are four from safety with six to play for.

In contrast, Osasuna fans breathed a sigh of relief after a result that makes them mathematically safe.

Levante are all but home on 39 points after a 3-2 win at Racing Santander which saw Ivory Coast star Felix Etien and Dutchman Riga Mustapha, twice, find the target.

Rock bottom Gimnastic Tarragona saw relegation confirmed even before a goalless draw against Atletico Madrid sides still reeling from last week's six-goal hiding at the hands of Barcelona.

Explaning its decision FIFA said: "For medical reasons and so to better protect the players the executive committee has decided that from now international games at over 2500m altitude will be banned."

FIFA's altitude ban

APP, Zurich

FIFA on Sunday announced a ban on international matches at stadium situated at over 2500m altitude.

The new ruling means the final whistle for games at La Paz (3600m) in Bolivia, Bogota (2600m) in Colombia and Quito (2800m) in Ecuador.

But another Basque side, Real Sociedad, are perilously close to the trapdoor after going down 2-0 at home to Celta Vigo.

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"Christoph Metzelder will go to Real Madrid next season and we are looking for another defender to replace him," Doll told German television channel DSK.

The move has yet to be confirmed by the Spanish side, but an announcement is expected by Real after La Liga finishes on Sunday.

Tevez proud of Chelsea link

INTERNET, undated

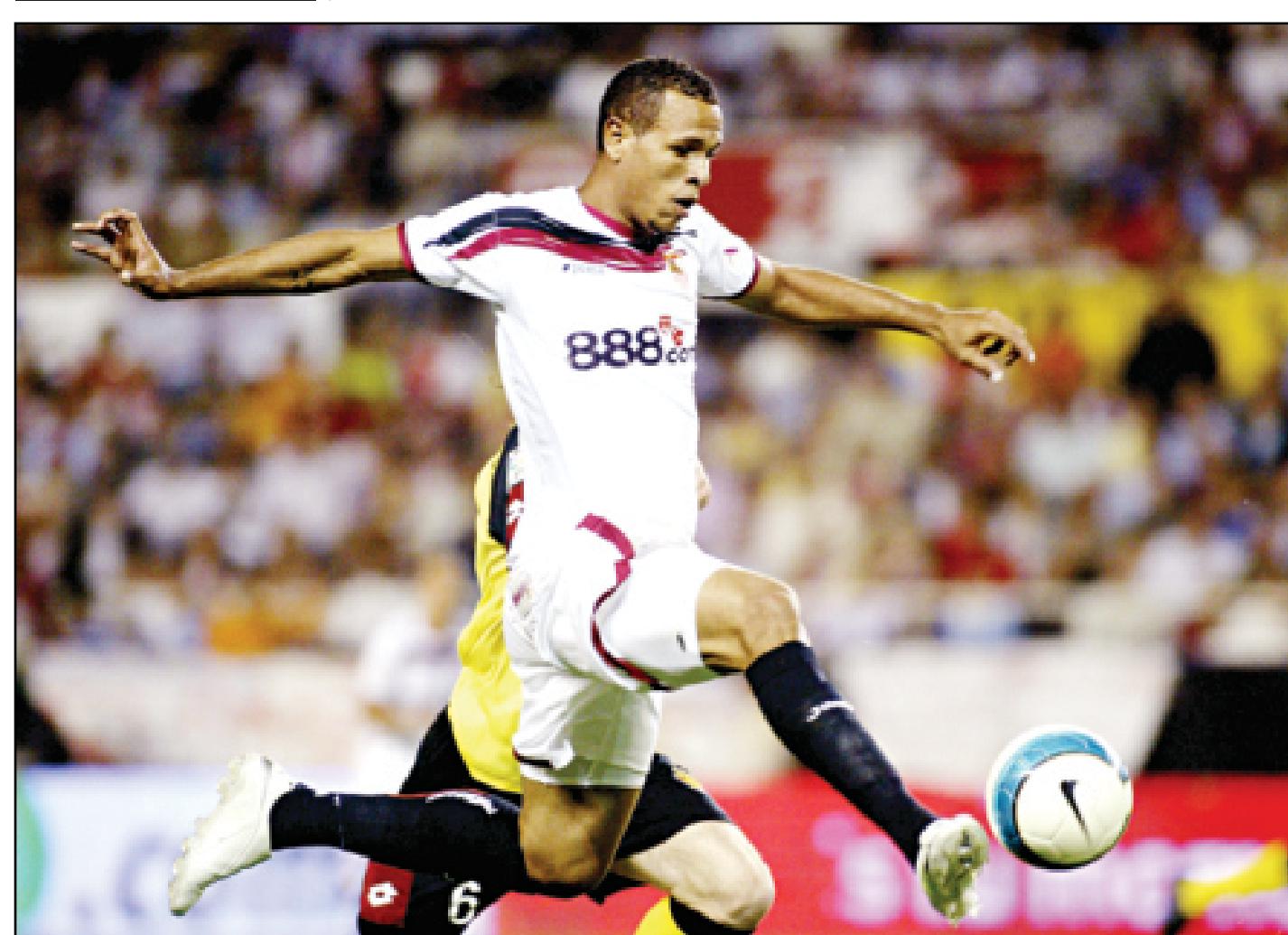
Carlos Tevez says he's proud to be linked with Chelsea, and would be happy to stay in England.

The Argentine striker seems set to leave Upton Park this summer after helping to keep the Hammers in the top flight and a host of top European clubs are reportedly lining up moves for the 23-year-old.

Spanish giants Real Madrid have been strongly linked with Tevez, while Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez is an admirer of the forward, who reportedly has a 40 million pound buyout clause in his contract with businessman Kia Joorabchian.

However, Chelsea have emerged as the frontrunners for his signature after Tevez revealed he felt "proud" to have been linked with the Stamford Bridge outfit and

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Sevilla striker Luis Fabiano in control of the ball against an opponent player during their Primera Liga match against Real Zaragoza at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium in Seville on Sunday.

Deschamps explains Juve decision

Football

INTERNET, undated

Former Juventus Coach Didier Deschamps has broken his silence to explain why he resigned on the same day as winning the Serie B title.

"I have had a very difficult season despite the excellent results achieved with my players and staff," he told 'Radio Monte Carlo.'

"Then I analysed the situation and decided to hand in my resignation on Wednesday evening."

The reports of his decision to quit emerged late Friday night and Juventus had released a statement denying there had been a formal resignation on Saturday.

However, on Saturday evening the club announced it had terminated his contract by mutual con-

sent.

"The problem was not that I wanted to decide on everything, it was a number of different factors," added DD.

"It is true that I had difficulty this year and wanted to know how we were going to be organised next season which, I am convinced, will be very tough."

"There are now reports that Deschamps walked away so that he could replace Gerard Houllier at Lyon."

"I did not want to talk to other clubs while I was still under contract. It was a matter of respect," explained the Frenchman.

"My ambition is to lead a top side next season. Now I am available again, we will see over the next few days and weeks what proposals arrive."

"I want a squad that plays to win, but I do not wish to negotiate with clubs that already have a coach."

Other options suggested by the media include Marseille, Chelsea and Arsenal.

Pires transforms Villarreal

APP, Madrid



Robert Pires missed the first seven months of the season with a knee injury after joining Spanish outfit Villarreal from Arsenal last summer.

But since returning to the fray, the veteran midfielder, who was a member of France's 1998 World Cup-winning side, has helped Villarreal to shoot up the table on the back of six wins, including at home to defending champions Barcelona and away to high-riding Valencia.

The run has taken the "yellow submarine," sinking without him in the side, to the brink of a UEFA Cup place in barely six weeks.

Villarreal had been suffering after Argentine playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme, a star of last year's march to the Champions League semis where they lost to Arsenal, went off in a huff on loan to

Boca Juniors. And after defeats at Getafe and at home to Atletico Madrid they were 12 points off the European pace in April.

Pires had just come back in March and then a month later scored against Barcelona in a 2-0 win with Diego Forlan applying the coup de grace.

The latter has since struck up a fine understanding with the former Marseille star and bagged two goals in Saturday's success.

The win at Valencia put the club in the top six and Pires, now 33 and who said recently he was thinking about going back to first club Metz to end his career, is enjoying himself again after his spell on the sidelines.

"I neither consider myself the (club's) saviour nor the replacement of Riquelme," he explained.

"I am a team player. I am not afraid of taking on responsibilities but a player is nothing without his teammates."

He says the way the club plays helps.

"I feel at ease playing well forward, in front of the two defensive midfielders and behind Forlan," says the man who won a welter of titles with Arsenal.

Pires did not make the French World Cup squad last year as Les Bleus reached the final only to bow to Italy under coach Raymond Domenech.

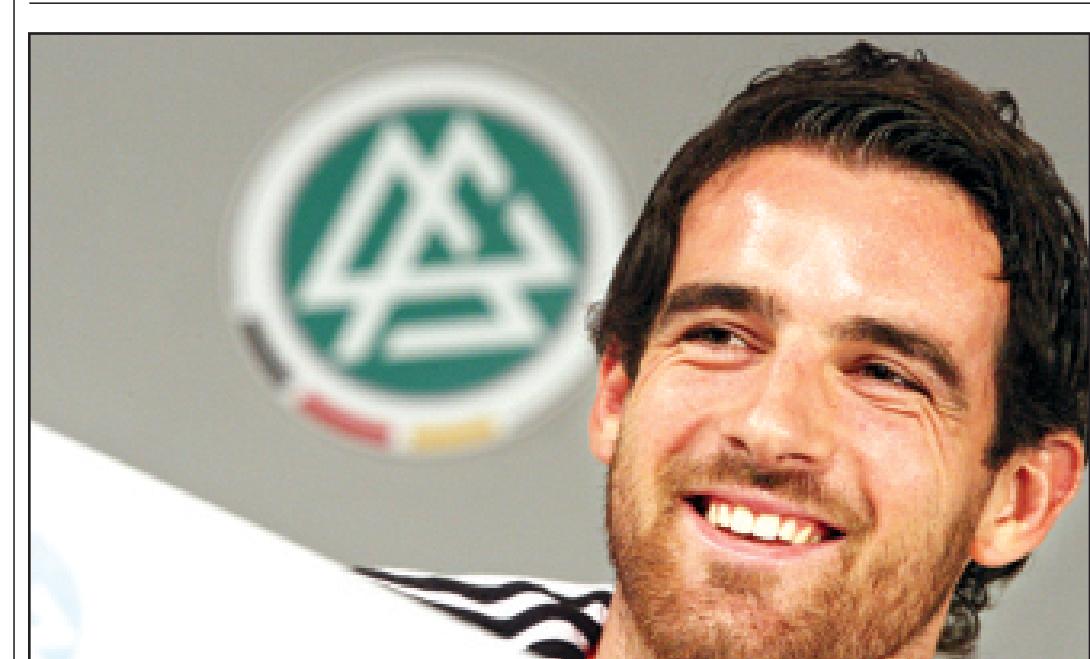
But he is blossoming again and thanks Villarreal coach Fernando Roig for the chance to do that in La Liga.

"I owe him a lot as I went through a very tough time when I was injured and even asked myself if I could carry on playing," says Pires, who suffered similar injury heartache when a knee injury forced him out of France's disastrous World Cup defence in 2002.

"My family and (Fernando Roig) convinced me to carry on this time."

"He said he has confidence in me. I owe him and want to pay him back."

Preferably in the form of a place in Europe.



CHRISTOPHE METZELDER

Henin, Serena sail thru' in rain

APP, Paris



Triple champion Henin and Serena Williams, the 2002 winner, reached the French Open second round on Sunday as Roland Garros shivered in rain and biting cold.

In an opening day programme decimated by a six-hour rain delay, Belgian top seed Henin, bidding for a third successive title here and fourth in all, saw off Russian 20-year-old Elena Vesnina 6-4, 6-3.

Henin wrapped up victory in 89 minutes and will face Austrian 16-year-old Tamira Paszek, who took a set off her in Dubai in February, for a place in the third round.

Vesnina, the world number 65, squandered her best chance of creating a shock when she had two points to lead 4-1 in the second set.

But once the Belgian had rediscovered her composure, the result was never in doubt.

"It was a hard, tough day and the weather will be like this for the rest of the week," said Henin, playing her first Grand Slam event since the break-up of her marriage.

"But winning today is all that counts. It was tough but I controlled the match at the end."

Williams, reinvigorated by her

surprise Australian Open triumph in January, which gave the American her eighth career Grand Slam title, had a much tougher time in her first round clash.

The eighth seed won 12 of the last 13 games as she was forced to battle back from a set down to beat Bulgaria's Tsvetana Pironkova 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 and book a match-up with either Virginie Razzano of France or Milagros Sequera of Venezuela.

"The rain slowed down the balls and I wasn't sliding as well as I can in the first set," said Williams.

"But I'm always fighting and if was going to lose, I was going to go down kicking and screaming. I also knew that if she won, there was a 99.9-percent chance that she wouldn't win the next round."

Williams struggled in the opening set on the Suzanne Lenglen court in cold, damp conditions.

She fought off set points in the seventh and ninth games and was more than happy to walk off court for the marathon rain suspension.

However, Pironkova, playing in her third match at Roland Garros, kept her nerve when the players returned to serve out a love game to take the set 7-5.

The slender 19-year-old Bulgarian then broke to lead 1-0 in the second set before Williams turned up the heat to clinch nine

games in a row on her way to grabbing the second set and nipping 3-0 ahead in the decider.

Twenty-four matches had been scheduled for the opening day of the 2007 championship, but with torrential rain falling for most of Sunday, organisers were forced to cancel 17 matches of the planned programme.

Former world number one Marat Safin of Russia eased past Spanish qualifier Fernando Vicente 6-1, 6-3, 6-1 in just 84 minutes to ensure his second round spot before the rains arrived.

Safin, a former US and Australian Open winner, struggled to write off his chances of winning a French Open title despite the likely domination of the tournament by defending champion Rafael Nadal and world number one Roger Federer.

"This is still my favourite surface. The courts here are great, the bounce is good. It's my place. If I can get through a few rounds I can be dangerous."