



Real Madrid striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy (L) and winger Jose Antonio Reyes share a joke during a training session in Madrid on Wednesday. Real can tie up a record 30th Primera Liga triumph if they beat Mallorca in their final day tie at the Santiago Bernabeu.

## France up to second

AFP, Paris

Former World Cup winners France have moved up two places in the FIFA rankings, released by world football's ruling body on Wednesday.

World Cup champions Italy remain top on 1653 points, with France - thanks mainly to two consecutive wins in the Euro 2008 qualifying campaign - moving up to second at the expense of Brazil, who moved one place down to third.

Germany moved one place up to fourth - their best FIFA ranking in four years - at the expense of Argentina, who drop two places to fifth.

### RANKINGS

1. Italy 1653 pts
2. France 1585 (+2 places)
3. Brazil 1484 (-1)
4. Germany 1467 (+1)
5. Argentina 1373 (-2)
6. Portugal 1323 (+1)
7. Spain 1273 (+2)
8. England 1240
9. Netherlands 1220 (-3)
10. Czech Republic 1096

## Robinho misses decider

INTERNET, undated

Brazil and Real Madrid have been unable to arrive at an agreement that would have seen Robinho play a part in Sunday's La Liga decider.

The Brazilian Federation (CBF) have reiterated that they will not authorize Robinho to play with Real Madrid on Sunday, and have announced that they await his arrival in Brazil for the training camp later today.

Wagner Ribiero, Robinho's agent, had travelled to Spain on Monday, but has been unable to solve the situation.

It was understood that the forward could have been allowed back if he had willingly reported for training in the Camp, but Real Madrid do not want him to leave.

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## McLaren teammates on collision course

TIMES ONLINE



Lewis Hamilton's brilliant victory in the Canadian Grand Prix has split the McLaren Mercedes team wide open. Days after the young Briton recorded his maiden win in Formula One, Fernando Alonso, the world champion, has said that he has never been comfortable with his new teammate.

Alonso endured a dreadful race in Montreal, during which he went off four times, once in an attempt to pass Hamilton on pole position, and finished seventh. Up until now the 25-year-old Spaniard, the sport's youngest back-to-back world champion, has denied paddock rumours

that he is unhappy at McLaren and speculation that his advisers have been convinced for some time that the team's heart is with their young British superstar.

In an interview with Spanish radio, Alonso said that he had never felt 100 per cent comfortable at McLaren but claimed that he had expected this to be the case as soon as he knew, last December, that Hamilton, 22, was going to be his teammate. "Well, right from the start I've never felt totally comfortable," he told Cadena Ser radio station.

Then, addressing the question of where the main effort at the team is going, he said: "I have a British team-mate in a British team and he's doing a great job and we know that all the support and help is going to him and I understand that from the case.

Ron Dennis, the team principal, is the man in the middle trying to balance the ambitions of the experienced Spaniard, who is struggling to find his rhythm in a new team

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## Bung payments can't be checked

AFP, Madrid



Spain's football federation said Tuesday that it could do little to stop so-called "motivational payments" allegedly paid by one club to another to beat certain opponents, which are illegal.

Allegations that the payments are dished out - usually to teams which no longer have anything to play for that are facing a well-placed squad still in the race for a title - have swirled around Spanish football for years.

But with the approach of the end

of an especially tight La Liga championship season this weekend, Spain's sports media have in recent days thrown the spotlight on the practice.

"We know this exists but as long as no complaint is filed, we can't do anything," a spokesman for the Spanish football federation told AFP.

"Several inquiries have been opened in recent years following complaints but we have never managed to prove that these payments were made so no penalty has ever been handed out," he added.

Sports daily Marca has reported that Real Mallorca have been promised two million euros (2.7 million US dollars) if they defeat or draw against Real Madrid on Sunday.

Real Madrid, which is tied with

arch rivals Barcelona on 73 points with one round left, need to beat Real Mallorca to win La Liga for a record 30th time.

The newspaper said each Real Zaragoza player received 50,000 euros following their side's 2-2 draw against Real Madrid on Saturday.

The players would have received double that amount had they defeated Real Madrid, it added.

"Everyone talks about bonuses but nobody sees them. Our dream is only to win the title, for us and our fans," Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas told a news conference Tuesday when asked about the reports.

"The most important bonus is winning La Liga," he added.

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## Mittal eyeing Birmingham?

THE INDEPENDENT

A Russian set the trend, numerous Americans followed and yesterday an Indian emerged as the latest billionaire to show an interest in taking over a Premiership club when Lakshmi Mittal - the world's fifth-richest man - became a contender to buy newly promoted Birmingham City.

The steel magnate, who is worth £19.25bn, has made an inquiry about the possibility of taking over the club from David Sullivan and David and Ralph Gold, and with that sort of wealth behind them Birmingham could contemplate a season aiming for Europe rather than fighting relegation.

Mittal, who is based in Great Britain, has not so far followed up his initial interest in the club, who

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