

Montella returns to Sampdoria

AFP, Rome

Veteran striker Vincenzo Montella left AS Roma on Friday to return to Sampdoria where he spent three seasons in the 1990s.

The 33-year-old, who has tussled with Francesco Totti for a regular starting place in the Roma line-up, was loaned out to English side Fulham last season where he scored twice in 10 matches.

Montella moved to Roma in 1999 and helped the club to the title in 2001.

He scored three goals in 20 internationals for Italy and has hit 132 goals in 263 matches in Serie since 1996.

Montella played for Sampdoria from 1996 to 1999 scoring 54 goals in 83 games.

He has also played for Empoli (1990-1995) and Genoa (1995-1996).



PHOTO: AFP

Saudi Arab captain Yasser Al Qahtani (R) makes a powerful header to score against Indonesia during their Asian Cup group D match at the Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta on Saturday. Saudis won the match 2-1.

Socceroos at loggerheads

AFP, Bangkok



Under-siege coach Graham Arnold backedtracked Saturday on his attack on the attitude of his misfiring team, saying he made the comments to spark them for their crucial Asian Cup clash with Thailand.

Arnold startled the players when he claimed that some of his European stars found it too hard and their attitude wasn't right after they crashed to a self-inflicted 3-1 defeat to Iraq here Friday.

But after sleeping on it, Arnold said he was only trying to set his under-performing stars a challenge as they chase victory Monday over the co-hosts which could squeeze them into the quarterfinals.

Arnold also went back on his post-match declarations that he planned to make wholesale team changes for the Thailand crunch game.

"If there are going to be changes it won't be down to that, it will be down to fatigue and injuries and maybe get some fresh legs on the field because it's only a short turnaround in their recovery," Arnold said at the team hotel.

Leading stars Mark Viduka, Mark Schwarzer and Harry Kewell were at odds with Arnold's criticisms after Friday's match, but Arnold weakened his hard-line stance Saturday.

"They have to step up, I've given them the challenge and the challenge is we have to throw everything at Thailand and we have a great chance because we are mentally stronger than Thailand," Arnold said.

"We're back in the position

where Australians love to be and that's underdogs, with our backs to the wall, all Australian sportsmen love a dog-fight.

"This time there might be a full stadium and the pressure will be on Thailand.

"I said that out of honesty but also I'm trying to get an extra spark out of them and trying to give them the challenge.

"You can continually say things behind closed doors but sometimes they read it and it might have a shock effect."

One position Arnold will have to replace is West Ham central defender Lucas Neill, who was needlessly sent off in stoppage time against Iraq.

"The loss of Lucas has left a hole and we might have to tinker with the system," Arnold said.

"Lucas has apologised to the

whole group for getting sent off."

Arnold's position as coach is under massive pressure after a disastrous Asian campaign amid criticism of him back home in the press and from fans.

"It's the final opportunity in a tournament of three games at the moment and that we've still got that opportunity," he said.

"We only have to beat Thailand, whether it's 1-0, 2-0 as long as Iraq get the right result and we may have to get 2 or 3-0 to make sure our goal difference is better than Oman if they win (beat Iraq).

"These guys have come in and have played two games in the last week and there's only 48 hours to recover so when I say wholesale changes it will be down to how they come up recovery-wise after playing in these difficult conditions."

Malouda gives Mourinho options



Football

THE INDEPENDENT

Even now Jose Mourinho admits that the best football any Chelsea team have played under his management was when Arjen Robben and Damien Duff - two left-wingers - were in the same side. It was not a guarantee that the Dutchman will play alongside the new left-winger Florent Malouda but is a hint that Chelsea may return to the wing play that was so conspicuously absent last season.

At 27, Malouda has had to wait for his chance of a move to the Premiership but around 14m pounds paid to Lyons this month meant that he finally joined up with his friend and former teammate Didier Drogba who he played alongside at the French side Guingamp. Certainly Mourinho seemed very sure of the man for whom he has paid Chelsea's only transfer fee thus far this summer.

"Florent can adapt quickly to the needs of English football and he is a player with ambition - to come from a very good club like Lyons, he wants to change his life," Mourinho said. "I don't think it's a question of one more pound or one less pound in his bank account, it's just that he is ambitious. He played with Didier, Michael Essien and with Claude Makelele in the French national team - we know a lot about him, we have inside information."

Malouda is from Cayenne in French Guyana and came on his own to France at the age of 15 to sign as a trainee for the side Chateauroux before progressing to Guingamp and then on to Lyons in 2003. The first French Guyanan in the Premiership since Bernard Lama, he presented himself as an

assured but serious soul at his first Chelsea press conference on Thursday with a reasonable grasp of the English language.

Malouda could have been forgiven for feeling a touch nervous because, as with all new Chelsea signings, he was obliged to sing a song in front of his new teammates that night. Something from the oeuvre of Shabba Ranks was on the cards and the pressure was on.

Shaun Wright-Phillips' singing was apparently so bad two years ago that some at the club think it set the tone for his performances on the pitch.

Malouda said that Chelsea were always his first choice after he came to England to watch Drogba play at Stamford Bridge. "Liverpool

were the first English club to contact me - several times. [Rafa Benitez] was a very good man but we didn't find a way to make me join Liverpool," he said.

"So when Chelsea come, my choice was very simple. There were a lot of players I have already played with. I know the team very well because a lot of friends of mine play there and I used to support Chelsea in the Champions League when Lyons went out. The first match I saw in England was at Stamford Bridge, when Didi came to the club. I support them, my kids have the Chelsea shirts, and I want to be in London.

"Didier told me that with the players, he's [Mourinho] a good trainer, and if you deserve to play

you will. It doesn't matter what your name is or what you did before. You have to win your place on the pitch, in the training sessions, and prove yourself during the matches. This is the only thing important to me. That's what I want to do in pre-season, win my place."

There have been no promises that Mourinho will use wingers more often this season although Malouda will have earned himself some credit with the manager when he said: "I prefer to be boring and win." He is an attacking player by reputation and certainly looks like he would have the potential to add another dimension to Chelsea - his manager's formation permitting.

A New life for the Beckhams



Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham was wowed the first time he set eyes on his new 22 million dollar California home, which he says will make putting down roots in Los Angeles that much easier.

Beckham and his pop star wife, Victoria, officially switched continents Friday, trading in his Madrid digs for a 90210 zip code in Beverly Hills.

"We had three and a half weeks holidays and we were thinking on the flight over that we just wanted to get here and get settled and get in the house and try to relax," Beckham said Friday at his first news conference as the newest member of the LA Galaxy.

"We got a few hours sleep last night and the jet lag has not kicked in quite yet."

It has been a whirlwind visit so far for the Beckham's and their three children since their plane touched down at Los Angeles International Airport on Thursday night.

As part of their extravagant lifestyle, Beckham and Victoria purchased a lavish home in Beverly Hills.

"We arrived at the house last night for the first time," Beckham said. "I had not seen the house, so I was pretty excited and my wife was pretty nervous. It is a great house, very private and the kids are very happy there."

The Beckham's already have a small support group of friends, including Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise and his wife, Katie Holmes.

"I am good friends with him," he said of Cruise. "It is nice knowing someone like that when you come in. When we moved to Madrid we didn't know anybody, so it is nice to have Tom and Katie here already."

Beckham insisted he has no immediate aspirations of joining the Hollywood scene or trying to break into acting.

"People talk about me going into Hollywood, and that is not what I am here for," Beckham said. "I have friends in that side of the business but that's all."

"The main reason for us to be here is my soccer career, and obviously wherever I go my family comes with me."

"It is important for us to make sure the kids are happy in their school."