

## Kaka wins Ballon d'Or

### Football

AFP, Paris

AC Milan's Brazilian midfielder Kaka was named on Sunday as France Football's Player of the Year winning the prestigious Ballon d'Or award.

Born under the name of Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite, he succeeds Italy's World Cup winning captain and defender Fabio Cannavaro and comes two years after the last Brazilian winner of the trophy, Barcelona's Ronaldinho.

The 25-year-old Kaka notably played a starring role in AC Milan's triumphant Champions League campaign scoring 10 goals and setting up the winner for Filippo Inzaghi in the final against Liverpool.

He received 444 points in the France Football vote, easily ahead of Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo who had 277 with Barcelona's Argentinian midfielder Lionel Messi placing third with 255 points.

"This is very special for me - it culminates an astonishing year for me," Kaka said.

"It's the top prize around and the only way to win something like this is to play for a team like AC Milan. It's great to be part of a team that wins."

Kaka's brother Digao was in Paris for the award ceremony and paid tribute to his brother.

"It's very emotional for me to be here, to see my brother receive this trophy, and to know that he is the best makes me proud," he said.

Kaka's wife Caroline and mother Cristina were also amongst

the guests.

"It's a great honour as the wife of Kaka to be at this ceremony. I know how important it was for my husband to win this trophy," said Caroline.

"This is a great achievement. Ever since he was young I saw our

son dedicate himself," added Cristina.

Born in the capital Brasilia, Kaka started off with Sao Paulo before moving to Europe with AC Milan in 2003. He has been capped 54 times for his country and scored 19 goals.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

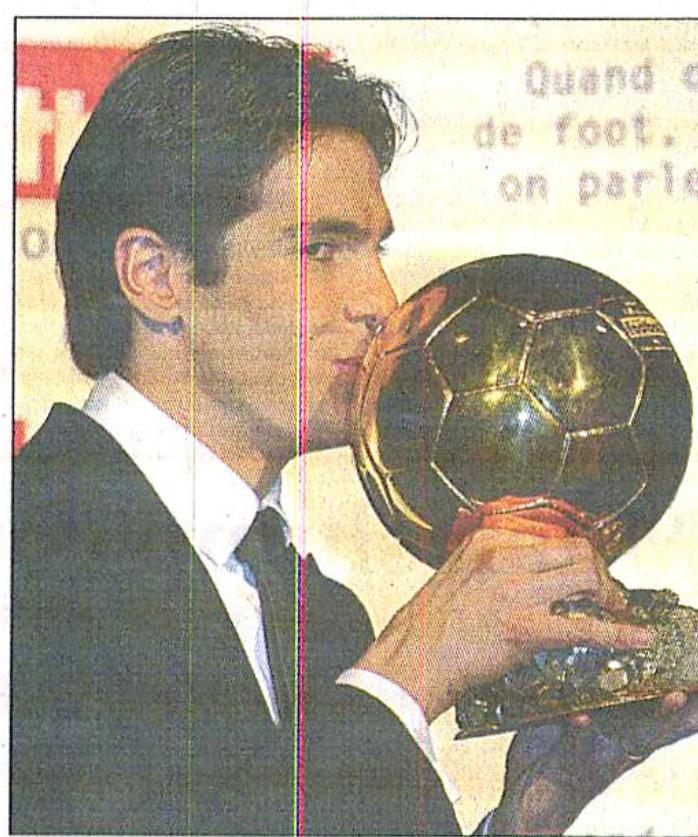


PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian midfielder Kaka kisses the trophy after winning the prestigious Ballon d'Or award in Boulogne-Billancourt outside Paris on Sunday.

### PAST WINNERS

AFP, Paris

Last ten Ballon d'Or, Footballer of the Year winners:

2007: Kaka (BRA/AC Milan)  
2006: Fabio Cannavaro (ITA/Juventus then Real Madrid)  
2005: Ronaldinho (BRA/FC Barcelona)  
2004: Andrei Shevchenko (UKR/AC Milan)  
2003: Pavel Nedved (CZE/Juventus)  
2002: Ronaldo (BRA/Inter Milan then Real Madrid)  
2001: Michael Owen (ENG/Liverpool)  
2000: Luis Figo (POR/Real Madrid)  
1999: Rivaldo (BRA/FC Barcelona)  
1998: Zinedine Zidane (FRA/Juventus)

### FACTFILE

APP, Paris

Factfile of newly crowned Ballon d'Or winner Kaka:  
Full name: Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite

Date of birth: April 22, 1982

Place of birth: Brasilia, Brazil

Nationality: Brazilian

Height: 1m 86cm (6ft 2in)

Weight: 76kg

Brazil caps: 54

Brazil goals: 19

Brazil debut: January 31, 2002 (6-0 win v Bolivia)

Clubs: Sao Paulo (200-2003), AC Milan (2003-present)

Appearances/goals: Sao Paulo 59/23, AC Milan 203/63

Club honours: World Cup 2002, Confederations Cup 2005, Champions League 2007, Serie A 2004, European Super Cup 2003 and 2007, Italian Super Cup 2004

Individual honours: Ballon d'Or 2007, UEFA Club Footballer of the Year 2007, FIFPro World Player of the Year 2007, Champions League top goalscorer 2006-07, Serie A Footballer of the Year 2004, Serie A Foreign Footballer of the Year 2004 and 2006.

## USA lift Davis Cup

AFP, Portland

The United States captured the Davis Cup on Saturday, dethroning defending champions Russia to end a 12-year drought in the international tennis competition.

A doubles victory by Bob and Mike Bryan gave the Americans an unbeatable 3-0 lead over Russia in the best-of-five match World Group final.

The outcome had seemed all but inevitable after Andy Roddick and James Blake posted singles victories on Friday.

Although the United States boast the most Davis Cup titles of any nation - a tally that now stands at 32 - their last victory had come in 1995 when a Pete Sampras-led team defeated Russia in the final.

While the triumph ended a national dry spell, it also marked the end of a passionate personal journey for this particular Davis Cup squad, captained by Patrick McEnroe.

"I couldn't be happier for these guys because they've been through it all together. It feels absolutely awesome," said McEnroe, who took over the captaincy in 2001.

Roddick began his Davis Cup career the same year and has missed just one tie since, that because of injury. Blake, too, made his Davis Cup debut in 2001, but missed 2004 because of injury and illness.

"It has been a long road," Roddick said. "To be here and bring the Cup back to the United States is amazing. I feel like we really deserve it. We've been the ultimate team."

The Bryan twins, who finished 2007 as the No. 1 doubles team in the world for the third straight year, delivered the third point with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, 6-2 victory over Nikolay Davydenko and Igor Andreev.

The pair, who

clashed in last year's World Cup final and again in qualifying for next year's European championships, were joined by the Netherlands and Romania in Group C, inevitably handed the tag of the dreaded group of death.

France manager Raymond Domenech's face dropped when Italy's name was drawn while Italian manager Roberto Donadon sported a resigned smile.

The Italians, who failed to make it past the group stages at Euro 2004, open their campaign against the Dutch in Bern on June 9, with the French waiting for them in Zurich four days later.

France and Italy have proved virtually inseparable recently, the pair's paths crossing in Berlin in June 2006 with the World Cup final which the Azzurri won on penalties after Zinedine Zidane's sending off.

Then again in Euro 2008 qualifying where the pair edged through their group at the main expense of Scotland.

The top seeds in the group



PHOTO: AFP

German legend Juergen Klinsmann (C) is all smiles as he holds Italy's ballot paper next to Didier Deschamps (L) of France and Peter Schmeichel of Denmark during the Euro 2008 final draw in Lucerne on Sunday.

## Dutch death for Italy, France

AFP, Lucerne

World champions Italy were pitted against old foes France in the draw for the Euro 2008 finals made on Sunday.

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France. At least we know what we are up against."

Sunday's draw was preceded by a ceremony featuring the Vienna Boys Choir and Jose Carrera but for Romania, having the three European superpowers as company was hardly music to their ears.

Quarterfinalists in 2000 they will not thank UEFA's balls for pitting them against three teams that have

won four European titles between them.

There was a Christmas mood in this Swiss lakeside city outside and the festive spirit spilled into the conference hall where the draw was staged, at least as far as Germany were concerned.

Joachim Loew's side avoided all the big guns and the Mannschaft

Germany's general manager Oliver Bierhoff said that he was happy with the draw.

"They are three good teams and they have won the right to play in the finals," he told German television. "It will be tough for us to play the hosts Austria but we are happy because we have avoided the group of death."

"Our opening game against Poland will be tough. We played against them in the 2006 World Cup and we must not underestimate them. But it is Croatia who are the biggest threat to us."

The opening match in Basel sees Switzerland face former winners the Czech Republic.

Holders Greece will come up against Spain, Russia and Sweden with their manager, Otto Rehhagel, saying: "All these teams are first class; they've all proved their strength in qualifying."

Luis Aragones, Spain's veteran coach, was playing his cards close to his chest, simply saying: "There's nothing for it but to compete."

The June 7-29 competition is co-hosted in Austria and Switzerland with matches being staged in eight cities - Basle, Zurich, Berne and Geneva, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, and Vienna's Ernst-Happel stadium where the final will be played.

The official motto for Euro 2008 is 'Expect Emotions' - and after Sunday's draw that now looks guaranteed.

will be hardly quaking in their boots at the prospect of facing debutants Poland and Austria, the co-hosts who are rated below Haiti in FIFA's world rankings.

Croatia though, the fourth members of Group B, will demand respect after their impressive showing in qualifying as their group leaders, knocking out England in the process.

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## Bremen trump Hamburg

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen beat close rivals Hamburg 2-1 to jump to the top of the German league table on Saturday.

Speaking to Sky Sport television cameras ahead of the crunch Serie A clash against Juventus, Galliani insisted that Tuesday's Champions League match against Celtic would come too soon for Ronaldo but that he could play on December 13 in the global tournament semifinal.

Ronaldo's long awaited comeback from a thigh injury lasted only a single game after he played against Cagliari last weekend only to get injured in midweek.

"I report what the doctors tell me: for Ronaldo the problem is a pull... not a tear. It's a small thing," said Galliani.

"Next week Ronaldo would have to be in a position to train and to be ready to play. I wouldn't say he will be on Tuesday in the Champions League, but for Japan, yes."

Bremen will surely be relishing

their night of celebration though. Against a Hamburg side who are serious title challengers, Bremen held on with a winner from Finnish defender Petri Pasanen midway

through the second half.

Ivory Coast's Boubacar Sanogo put Bremen ahead on the quarter-hour after good work by Jurica Vranjes though Hamburg's Rafael van der Vaart equalised on 61 minutes with a superb 25-metre lob.

Then came Pasanen's winner though it was helped into the net by Hamburg's Belgian defender Vincent Kompany, meaning Werder took top spot for the first time this season.

Bremen continued their good form from mid September, leaving them unbeaten in their last 10 league outings, even though they were without key players Torsten Frings and Tim Borowski.

Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf said afterwards: "We have managed to get through a difficult week very well," adding his team had been top of their game for several weeks now.

Hamburg coach Huub Stevens

also congratulated Bremen. "The best team won -- the freshest team physically too," said Stevens, whose team beat French side Rennes in the UEFA Cup 48 hours earlier.

Bayern meanwhile have not been at their best recently and could only manage a 1-1 draw against Portuguese side Braga in the UEFA Cup on Thursday.

Captain and keeper Oliver Kahn said he regretted a "lack of passion" shown by his teammates.

However Bayer Leverkusen have been gaining victory after victory lately and are approaching the leading trio. Leverkusen beat Hertha Berlin 3-0, leaving them six points behind the leaders.

At the other end of the table, Energie Cottbus won for only the second time this season, beating Karlsruhe 2-0, leaving Duisburg -- who host another relegation candidate Nuremberg on Sunday -- in bottom spot.

over the long run. "For sure in the years to come they will become a great squad and certainly now they are a dangerous one."

"The championship? When you have a lot of young players, sometimes you lack a bit of consistency. However, if they stay together for many years, they have the nucleus to be very strong."

Mancini also admitted that he feared Fiorentina's veteran former Inter forward Christian Vieri.

"He seems to be stronger physically now," said Mancini of the injury-plagued former Italy front-man.

"Maybe against Inter he will want to give something extra but he has always been someone who gives everything on the pitch."

## Rio backs Jose

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand has backed Jose Mourinho to be the next England manager.

The Football Association are currently consulting senior figures in the domestic and international game over who should succeed Steve McClaren as national team boss following the failure to qualify for Euro 2008.

The FA insist no individual has yet been approached with a view to being offered the job, but former Chelsea boss Mourinho has been touted as one of the front-runners.

Asked for his thoughts on Mourinho as England manager, Ferdinand told the Daily Star

weekend's action, the Viola could be second and only a point off top spot, if results go their way.

Mancini has been impressed with Fiorentina this season but ahead of the pair's clash in Florence on Sunday, he doesn't believe that Fiorentina pose a realistic threat to his own team's title chances, just yet.

"It will be a very difficult match. We'll need to play really well and if we overcome this obstacle, something which won't be easy, it would be very important in terms of the difficult challenges that lie ahead of us," said Mancini.

"I don't know if they are ready to be competitive right now, playing in the championship and the cup can be difficult and get very tiring

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weekend's action, the Viola could be second and only a point off top spot, if results go their way.

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