

### The end for Ronaldo?

#### Striker heads for surgery

Football

AFP, Rome

Revisiting his injury-blighted past, Brazilian veteran Ronaldo prepared to fly to Paris for surgery on Thursday after rupturing a tendon in his right knee during AC Milan's

reports said. Ronaldo will almost certainly overnightWednesday. miss the remainder of the season with Gazetta dello Sport reporting faces nine months on the sidelines. back.

Renowned surgeon Professor Gerard Saillant will supervise the

Madrid, arrived at Milan airport heis," Berlusconi said. around 0900 GMT along with his fiancee and club official and compatriot Leonardo, as well as club doctor Massimiliano Sala and physiotherapist Bruno Mazziotti.

Italian media speculated whether, after the catalogue of knee injuries that "Il Fenomeno" has suffered in the past, Ronaldo's latest setback might spell the end of

the world champion's career. five months later, he suffered simi-

lar problems but returned after the best part of two years on the sidelines following surgery by Professor Germany and finishing tourna- Morattihoped.

put his right knee straight eight years 1-1 draw with Livorno, media ago," Jean-Pierre Meersseman, chief of AC Milan's medical staff, revealed

ment top scorer.

AC Milan owner and former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi overnight that the 31-year-old said he believed Ronaldo would be

"I spoke with Ronaldo yesterday (Wednesday) and said he must said. surgery, according to the Ansa believe in himself. He has extraor-Ansa said Ronaldo, who joined think he can be back within Milan in January last year from Real months to being the champion that hospital and Milan's club doctor

> With Ronaldo having suffered the bulk of his previous serious same injury. injuries playing for Inter Milan before heading to Real, his latest another doctor, Walter Pascale, had setback has found sympathy at his old club on the black and blue half of town and Inter chairman Massimo Moratti on Thursday wished him well.

"I hope he gets better soon. But In November 1999 and again speak of a career in danger, as one

1999 and 2000)," Moratti said.

"But Ronaldo is tough mentally and physically and the surgeons Saillant to lift the World Cup with know him, while he knows what to Brazil, scoring in the final win over expect, which should help things,"

Ronaldo was injured just min-"It is Ronaldo who asked to be utes after entering the fray as a operated on in Paris by the team that second-half substitute and was taken to hospital.

> Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti refused overnight to call time on Ronaldo's career.

"We're all very sorry and worried about what happened to Ronaldo, I don't want to say it's the end of his career because only time can decide whether it is or not," he

"From our part all we can do is dinary physical potential and I stand by him and let him recover." Ronaldo underwent an X-ray at Jean-Pierre Messerman later confirmed he had indeed suffered the

> Nonetheless, amid the gloom, some good news for Ronaldo.

"Surgical techniques to repair this kind of injury have improved a lot over the last eight years," he said lateWednesday.

"If things go as they should he clearly one can at the moment should get back to his best. However it's difficult at this time to said previously first time round (in say for how long he will be out."



CRUEL FLASHBACK: AC Milan's talismanic Brazilian forward Ronaldo writhes in pain as he lies on the turf after rupturing a tendon in his left knee during the Serie A clash against Livorno at the San Siro in Milan on Wednesday.

## Big boys sail

#### Werder, Marseille, Everton thru'

REUTERS, London



Werder Bremen Wiese saved two first-half penalties as the Bundesliga side campaign with

Wednesday. 32 of the competition from the Champions League, profited from Braga's wasteful finishing at the Weserstadion to take full command

of the first knockout round tie. Olympique Marseille, PSV Eindhoven and Sporting, also entering the competition after leg wins at home.

Wiese kept out Roland Linz's

Werder's early lead given to them by Brazilian centre-back Naldo, back goalkeeper Tim after missing Sunday's Bundesliga draw with title rivals Bayern Munich through suspension.

> Werder's advantage before Wiese again came to the rescue, keeping out Jorginho's penalty nine minutes before halftime.

Werder's Portuguese striker Hugo Almeida rubbed salt into Braga's wounds in second-half stoppage Werder, parachuted into the last time when he showed his compatriots how to score from the spot.

> "He (Wiese) kept us in the game spectacularly. It was a really special director Klaus Allofs told reporters.

Marseille took 62 minutes to break down Spartak Moscow finishing third in their Champions was quickly followed by goals from equaliser from close range. League groups, also eased to first- Taye Taiwo and Mamadou Niang in Pavel Pogrebnyak's second-half

Timmy Simons and Danko

10th-minute spot kick to maintain Lazovic got the goals as PSV over-

'I heard a

Livorno goalkeeper Marco Amelia

was visibly upset as he gave his

account of Ronaldo's knee injury at

over after he severed a tendon in his

knee while jumping for a ball in the

Livorno box during last night's 1-1

El Fenomeno's career could be

The Brazilian had been on the

pitch for a matter of minutes before

he was stretchered off and Amelia

witnessed the whole thing from

Azzurri custodian said. "I have

never heard anything like it and

because he is such a great player

who has battled back from such

problems in the past and now he

wishes and that goes for all the

other Livorno players as well."

"I want to offer him all my best

Ronaldo's injury was followed

very quickly by Milan's equaliser

from the penalty spot when Jose

Luis Vidigal handled a Massimo

Oddo cross and Amelia concluded

by explaining that the two events

"It was a handball by Vidigal,"

he admitted. "But it was caused by

Ronaldo's injury as Jose was reeling

Inter savagery

Juventus goalkeeper Gigi Buffon

the Calciopoli scandal, Juve are

entitled to revel in some

schadenfreude as the nation's

clear at the top of Serie A, but their

achievement has been overshad-

owed by questionable refereeing

that has aided them in recent

weeks, culminating in controversy

in Catania last weekend when

Esteban Cambiasso's offside goal

Buffon revealed in La Repucclica.

"Inter are in exactly the same situa

ing it is to have question marks put

next to every victory as people ask

whether you won because of some

they are not getting the enjoyment

they deserve, but I'm also very

happy that they are getting these

decisions when it won't do them

any good and in a year when we

aren't really competing with

ing for maximum points to aid their

bid for second place.

Juve take on Roma in a crunch

"I'm loving every minute of it,"

"You don't know how frustrat-

"I feel sorry for Inter because

was allowed to stand.

tion as we were.

sinister reason.

The Nerazzurri are eight points

media turn on their rivals Inter.

were closely connected.

from seeing it.

Buffoon

enjoying

INTERNET, undated

peninsula.

then I heard Ronaldo yell.

must fight another injury.

"I heard a horrible noise," the

"We all feel very close to him

snap'

INTERNET, undated

San Siro last night.

close range.

Anderlecht substitute Mbo

1-1 draw with Getafe.

day for him," Werder sporting looked to have won it for the after 86 minutes but deep into before Benoit Cheyrou's opener Ismael Blanco grabbed an

goal handed Russian champions



admits that he has enjoyed watch ing the Press savage Inter during

league, particularly from armchair

foreign markets, the Premier

League should try to use its high-

profile status as a force for good.

But Bin Hammam said that

"I should say that I respect very

"But they are interfering with

"I appreciate, for example, if the

much the Premier League, I like to

watch the Premier League," he said.

the domestic and local competi-

tions in different national associa-

Premier League want to play in

issue when their executive commit-

advise FIFA president Sepp Blatter, a

close associate, to reject the plans.

initiative," the AFC chief said.

tee meets on March 14 in Zurich.

Darfur, Somalia or East Timor where

The sport's world governing body,

Bin Hammam said he would

"If I have a chance to speak to the

realised.

fans in Asia and the Middle East.

PENALTY KING: Werder Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese (C) makes one of his two penalty saves during their UEFA Cup match against Sporting Braga at the Weser-Stadion in Bremen on Wednesday.

#### Hammam slams EPL

Football

AFP, Singapore

AFC president Mohamed bin Hammam has lashed out at the powerbrokers of the English Premier League for putting "money before responsibility" in their plan to play matches overseas.

The Asian Football Confederation chief is strongly opposed to the proposals and said the Premier League and its chief executive Richard Scudamore should have thought more carefully about the idea before it

became public. "We'll vote strongly against it,"

Bin Hammam told the BBC. "The Premier League are putting money before responsibility and dignity.

"As far as Asia is concerned, I'm not supportive of this initiative.' The Premier League has sug-

gested adding one more round of

fixtures to their schedule, with 10

games to be played at five different

venues outside England from 2011. Asian cities touted as possible venues include Bangkok, Beijing, Hong Kong, Melbourne and instead of trying to cash in on

In an official statement on Tuesday, Bin Hammam said he feared that the popularity of English football was already acting as a barrier to the development of Asia's own leagues and national sides.

He told the BBC there had been no consultation on the plans.

"Friendly matches I'm not tions if they think this idea can be against. I welcome that. But I cannot digest at all that a different league will be played in another

country than its own," he said. "There was no consultation, I just they can act as peace makers." read about it in the newspapers."

Scudamore has said the FIFA, are expected to discuss the matches would help consolidate the popularity of English football around the globe and boost club revenues by increasing the value of broadcasting/new media rights and attracting new sponsors.

FIFA president Mr Sepp Blatter, I will | match this Saturday evening look The sale of overseas broadcasting rights is already the fastesttell him my strong opposition to this growing source of revenue for the

came Helsingborg 2-0 while Sporting midfielder Simon Vukcevic scored twice as the Portuguese beat Basel 2-0.

Daniel Jensen increased Mpenza scored a last-gasp winner just seconds after coming on in stoppage time to hand the Belgians a 2-1 win over Girondins Bordeaux in Brussels.

There was also late drama in Athens where AEK, who dismissed Spanish coach Lorenzo Serra Ferrer on Tuesday after slipping to third in the Greek Super League, salvaged a

Midfielder Ruben de la Red Spanish side with the opening goal added time Argentine striker

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# Frustrating day for Milan

AFP, Rome



disappointing 1-1 home draw against minnows

Livorno at the San Siro on Wednesday night in a game that also saw them lose Brazil striker Ronaldo.

after suffering a leg injury just minutes after coming on as a second-half substitute.

The European champions best chance of the half but failed to Fiorentina into fourth place in the league after dropping two points against their lowly oppo-

A victory would have taken for Milan but found Amelia in Milan up into the last inspired form. Champions League qualifying place but instead they missed Livorno stunned their hosts with a the likes of Kaka and Pato in an goal of sumptuous quality. insipid display that made them look anything but the best team unstoppable left-foot effort from

Ancelotti's biggest concern was over Ronaldo, who had managed only 45 minutes against Siena on Sunday having looked totally out of shape. Ancelotti defended the decision

"Ronaldo has gone for tests; soon AC Milan needed we will know what happened. His previous problems were with his penalty to earn a other leg, if he played it's because he was able to do so, we're not crazy." New teenage star Alberto

Paloschi started from the off but he replaced soon after the restart. Andrea Pirlo had the first

chance with a shot from distance Ronaldo was taken to hospital that Marco Amelia in the Livorno goal did well to tip round the post. Livorno's top goalscorer Francesco Tavano had the visitors

missed the chance to leapfrog hit the target while Milan's Georgia defender Kakha Kaladze header just over the bar from a corner. Massimo Ambrosini had the clearest sight of goal in the first half

Five minutes after the break

Nico Pulzetti curled home an the edge of the area that had But Milan coach Carlo Australian goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac flapping at thin air.

Ancelotti responded by taking off Paloschi and Alberto Gilardino and sending on veteran pair Filippo Inzaghi and Ronaldo in

The lead did not last long as Milan hit back 11 minutes later in controversial circumstances. Jose Vidigal was penalised,

presumably for handball in the area, but he was under pressure from Ronaldo at the time, who fell had an ineffectual game and was awkwardly and had to be stretchered from the field. "I heard a horrible sound, like a

bang, it was a strange sound," said Amelia after the game. Milan vice-president Adriano

Galliani said later he thought the problem was serious.

the tendon in his left knee, it's not the one he has already had operated on but it's a serious prob-

Pirlo sent Amelia the wrong way from the spot but it seemed a soft penalty at best and Vidigal was also harshly booked.

But Ronaldo's injury, his fourth | saying in the Daily Star. this season, deprived Milan of an important attacking threat and they replaced him with his compatriot wing-back Serginho, leaving Inzaghi on his own up front.

With 14 minutes to play Inzaghi had a great chance to win the game but he headed French midfielder Yoann Gourcuff's right-wing cross SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

## Barcelona squad.

INTERNET, undated

Eto'o would

love Drogba

Samuel Eto'o believes Chelsea striker Didier Drogba would be an "excellent" addition to the

Drogba's future at Stamford Bridge remains uncertain following the departure of Jose Mourinho last September, and Barca midfielder Yaya Toure claimed earlier this week that his fellow Ivorian would like to move to the

Nou Camp. Eto'o is keen to play alongside the 29-year-old, and does not "Ronnie has a problem with | believe his arrival would see any of the team's current top names leave the club, despite Ronaldinho, Lionel Messi and Thierry Henry all

vying for starts already. "I am not 100 per cent sure what the intentions of Barcelona are, but Drogba would be an excellent player for the team," he is quoted as

"It would not be a problem if he arrived at the club, but extra help to return this team to where it should be, the best in the world.

"I am a friend of Drogba and I know that he has always been SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

from wife

### Tsonga's flat French return

Tennis

AFP, Marseille

France's surprise Australian Open finalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga suffered a disappointing return to France on Wednesday as he was beaten 7-5, 7the refereeing controversy in the 6 (7/3) in straight sets by Croatian Mario Ancic in the first round of the Having suffered at the centre of Marseille Open.

The 22-year-old seventh seed was never able to settle against Ancic, who has slipped from the top 10 to 135 in the world following a year of injury and suffering from glandular fever.

Tsonga, who was a top junior and broke into the world's top 50 for the first time last year, said he had been powerless in the face of Ancic's all round game.

"He (Ancic) played really well, served really well throughout and was very difficult to break," conceded Tsonga, who among other scalps claimed that of world number two Rafael Nadal in his run to 'the Australian Open final.

"However, I stuck to my game throughout. "That is now two months I have

been giving my all. It was my first tournament in France since the Australian Open and I really wanted to play well." Tsonga did have a great chance to close out the first set when lead-

but the 23-year-old Croat - finalist here in 2006 - powered down a series of stunning serves to save the game. Ancic - semifinalist at Wimbledon in 2004 - then broke Tsonga for good

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Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga is exultant after winning a point against Croatian Mario Ancic during their first round match of the Open 13 tournament in Marseille on Wednesday.

# Pele separates

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazilian football legend Pele separated from his wife of 13 years on Wednesday, it was announced

by his press officer. The 67-year-old - considered by many to be the greatest ever footballer - said that he just did not have enough time due to his busy schedule of engagements to make

the marriage work. According to the Brazilian press the marriage with Gospel singer Assiria Lemos had been in trouble for several months but that happily their 11-year-old twins Celeste and Joshua had already accepted the separation.

#### Aragones confirmed until Euros

AFP, Madrid

Luis Aragones will stay as Spain coach until the end of Euro 2008 in June, the Spanish football federation

(RFEF) announced on Wednesday. The announcement ends speculation that the 69-year-old could quit the post before the European championship.

RFEF president Angel Maria Villar said after meeting with Aragones on Wednesday he had "full confidence and fully supported his coach" and that Aragones was "fully committed to continuing his work until the end

According to Spanish media Aragones had suspected that the federation wanted to pressure him into calling up Real Madrid striket

of the European championship."

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