William Gaillard, advisor to UEFA president Michel Platini, described as a "ridiculous story" claims that the Champions League draw was fixed, saying "cheating is impossi-

A message left on an internet forum at 10.28am on Friday - 90 minutes before the draw took place in Nyon - correctly predicted the quarterfinal line-up.

The chances of making such a match are 104-1.

The message - which appeared on a Liverpool newspaper website claimed bookmakers were no longer willing to accept bets on the draw. Spokesmen for the bookmakers Ladbrokes and Paddy Power said it was normal practice to remove odds on the draw as early as 11am. Neither had taken large sums on the

"It was pure luck," Gaillard said. "That's the only explanation we can

"It's a joke, a ridiculous story. "What's so impressive about someone predicting these matches on an English internet site. There are only four matches. It would have been more impressive had he predicted the Champions League groups which have 32 teams."

Gaillard added the warming of the balls in the draw was impossible. "If we heated the plastic balls, they would melt. We take them out 10 minutes before the draw during which time they would have cooled down. Any cheating is impossible."

#### Demichelis banned by Hitzfield

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said Friday he has indefinitely suspended argumentative Argentine international defender Martin Demichelis.

Hitzfeld said that the Argentine, who usually plays central defence, had refused to play as a defensive midfielder for Saturday's Bundesliga game against Energie Cottbus.

As a result Demichelis will not take part in Saturday's game.

"It's not up to a player to decide where he wants to play," said Hitzfeld, adding that the player will not be fined for the refusal.

"It's not a problem with the club but a problem between Demichelis and me," he added.

The Argentine, who arrived in Bayern in 2003, has already apologized for the incident.

#### Kaiser labels Getafe "Nobodies"

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has labeled the German giants' UEFA Cup opponents Getafe as "nobodies" with the sides set to meet in the quarterfinals next month.

Bayern play the Spanish side at the Allianz Arena in the first-leg on April 3, but double World Cup winner Beckenbauer has already raised the stakes by saying the Spaniards are the underdogs.

"Quite honestly: I don't know anyone from Getafe," Beckenbauer is reported as saying on German agency SID.

"And Michael Landrup is their coach? I didn't know this.'

But Beckenbauer, whose side beat Anderlecht 6-2 on aggregate in their last-16 tie, did praise the midtable La Liga side for their performance in the competition so far having beaten Benfica 3-1 on aggre-

"We have to be on the ball against Getafe."

"Anyone who knocks out Benfica can't be an easy team to beat.

And Beckenbauer revealed he will contact Real Madrid's German coach Bernd Schuster to pick up a few tips on Getafe before the home and away matches.

"I will speak with Bernd," said Beckenbauer.

"He will give us some informa-

### Anelka wants Chelsea finish

AFP, London

France striker Nicolas Anelka wants to finish his career at Chelsea after growing tired of constantly changing clubs.

Anelka, 29, joined Chelsea from Bolton in the January transfer window and already feels comfortable enough at Stamford Bridge that he is keen to spend the rest of his playing days there.

That attitude contrasts with Anelka's wanderlust throughout much of a career that has encompassed nine clubs.

After tasting success as a teenager with Arsenal, Anelka moved to Real Madrid and has also played for the likes of Paris Saint Germain, Liverpool and Fenerbahce.

Now he expects to put down much firmer roots in west London. "When I reflect on my career I

have no regrets," Anelka told the

Daily Mail.

## TUEFA rubbishes fixed allegation Wenger backs Persie



fectly timed to revitalise Arsenal as they close in on Premier League and Champions League

Wenger's squad after recovering from a knee injury which had sidelined him for most of the campaign.

been a huge blow.

in the Premier League recently as they race to the finish line with Manchester United. As if that wasn't enough to keep them occupied, Friday's Champions League quarterfinal draw paired Arsenal with English rivals Liverpool.

end to the season and Wenger is

"We lost Eduardo and he and van Persie scored goals so the pressure was on Adebayor," Wenger said. "To have Robin back releases a little bit of the pressure because he can score as well.

"He can give you the final ball, score free kicks, he's dangerous on corners and he can score.

"At the end of the season, that could make for an interesting total. He can give us the final

Wenger sees a natural dovetailing of contrasting talents in van Persie and Adebayor's partnership. Van Persie's more predatory instincts are an ideal fit with the more powerful and direct Adebayor.

It is a combination Wenger hopes will bring a first trophy since 2005 to the Emirates

"It is a very good partnership.

They have a good understanding. "Robin likes to go to the distribution and finishing. Adebayor is more a target man." Adebayor's impressive form

this season has been a bonus for Wenger, who can still remember the day he first spotted the Togo star's potential.

"Adebayor has got 19 league goals and we did not count on that at the start of the season," Wenger added.

"I first saw him in Monaco in well."

will provide a much-needed the Champions League against Sevilla. That night it struck me he

> had something special. "He has worked hard. He has dedicated his life completely to football and when you are a champion there is only one secret; talent plus work. He took the second part very seriously and

that is why he is successful." If Arsenal are to reclaim the Premier League crown for the first time in four years, Wenger will have to find a way to steady his young team's nerves.

The tension will mount with each game now and it would be easy for a group of players who have never experienced a title battle before to crack.

But after watching the Gunners produced a tour de force to knock AC Milan out of the Champions League in the San Siro, it is not a prospect that Wenger is losing much sleep over.

"At some stage when you fight for the big prizes you get into March and April when every game can change your season from fantastic to super-fantastic to terrible," he said.

"Our belief is very strong. At the moment I am quite indifferent to the Champions League as I want us to do well in the Championship now and take off

"The players are ready. There is a mixture of focus and tension in training. That means everyone is highly focused and wants to do

Hantuchova said. "I definitely

feel like it's my home out there. It

was really windy, but I'm very

glad how I handled the condi-

Safina reached the third round

with a 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 victory over

American Jill Craybas, while

number nine Shahar Peer of

Israel advanced with a 6-1, 6-4

Former world number one

victory over Akgul

Amanmuradova of Uzbekistan.

Eighth-seeded Russian Dinara

### important win

REUTERS, Berlin

Schalke 04 recovered from a goal down to beat lowly MSV Duisburg 2-1 in the Bundesliga on Friday after facing a chorus of boos at halftime.

Germany defender Heiko Westermann got the winner in the 74th minute, firing home from the right with an acrobatic strike after Gerard Asamoah's header came back off the bar.

Germany striker Kevin Kuranyi equalised for Schalke on the hour after getting his knee on a low cross from Ivan Rakitic.

Duisburg had taken the lead against the Champions League quarterfinalists -- who were drawn on Friday against Barcelona - in the 21st minute to stun a sell-out crowd of 61,482.

Bulgaria striker Blagoy Georgiev intercepted the ball in midfield and made a superb solo run down the left before beating goalkeeper Manuel Neuer with a fine shot inside the far post.

"We had a hard time finding the openings," said Schalke coach Mirko Slomka after Duisburg played with 10 men behind the ball for much of the game.

"And after we fell behind our fans weren't amused. But in the second half we threw everything we had at them and were able to turn it around."

Duisburg coach Rudi Bommer blamed second-half mistakes.

"We played very well defensively in the first half and had some good scoring chances as well," he said. "But in the second half we didn't have the courage we had in the first half."

Schalke stay fifth with 41 points, nine behind leaders Bayern Munich who visit bottom club Energie Cottbus on Saturday. Duisburg are a point above Cottbus in 17th place with 18 points.

They have won two league matches in a row after a threegame losing streak nearly cost Slomka his job and are within a point of third place, which brings Champions League qualification.

#### No charges for MU player

AFP, London

Manchester United defender Jonny Evans will not face charges over allegations he raped a girl at the club's Christmas party, officials said on Friday.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said there was "insufficient evidence" to prosecute the 20year-old Northern Ireland international, who was arrested after an incident in an upmarket hotel in Manchester on December 17. A 26-year-old woman claimed

she had been raped as players danced and drank on an evening of allegedly wild partying for the United squad. Witnesses reported around 100

women had been "hand-picked" to attend the event, but the players' wives and girlfriends were not

Police were called to the hotel in the early hours of December 18 and Evans, who was then 19, was arrested and detained. He was Nadal, Djokovic, ninth-seeded released on bail and has not publicly commented.

The CPS said there was no chance of securing a conviction in the case.

Carol Jackson, head of the rape and family abuse team at the Manchester office of the CPS, said: "We take any allegation of rape extremely seriously and all rape cases are reviewed by specialist prosecutors. "After carefully examining the

evidence in this case, we have decided that there is not enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction." United manager Alex Ferguson

was said to be furious and packed Evans off on loan to struggling Premiership side Sunderland in January following the incident.

The promising centre-back had not been a regular in the United side this season, although he had made three appearances, including two in the Champions League.

#### can make Euro: Del Piero

REUTERS, Rome

Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero said on Friday he was convinced he could force his way into Italy coach Roberto Donadoni's Euro 2008 squad.

"Donadoni wants responses on the field and I know I can give them to him," Del Piero, who has scored 11 goals in Serie A this term, told a news conference. "I'm aware of the beautiful

season I've had up to now and I want to finish even better. Then the coach has the freedom to make the choices he feels most appropriate. I must continue as I am. The 33-year-old striker has not

played for Italy since giving a lackluster showing in September's 0-0 draw with France in a Euro 2008 qualifier.



Schalke striker Kevin Kuranyi gives the thumbs up after scoring against Duisburg during their Bundesliga match in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

### Hamilton starts from pole

INTERNET, undated

Hamilton on

Saturday took lap. pole position for the seasonopening Australian Grand Prix. The Briton, who last season finished second in the drivers' standings as a rookie, posted a time of one minute 26.714 seconds for the 5.303 kilometres lap on the Albert

Park course. World champion Kimi Raikkonen, who last year won the Grand Prix in his maiden race for Ferrari, will start the race from 16th place on the grid after being eliminated in the first round of qualifying after his car stopped on the track during the first round of qualifying.

The Finn had posted a time that would have allowed him to drive in the second round of qualifying, but the rules stipulate that a car that fails to finish a lap - irrespective of whether they had earlier posted a time - is not allowed into the next round of qualifying.

Starting alongside Hamilton

will be Robert Kubica, who surprised in his BMW-Sauber with an excellent second place in the qualifying and would have even managed a pole had he not made a small mistake at the end of his fast

Hamilton's team-mate Heikki Kovalainen and Ferrari driver Felipe Massa will be starting from the second row after posting the third and fourth fastest time respectively. Hamilton said that he was not

totally satisfied with his performance. "I can do better. You can always do better. I am happy that I achieved the pole position, but there is room for improvement. Now we will have to see what happens in the race." BMW race director Mario

Theissen, admitted that he had not thought that his side would do so well. "Second and fifth place on the grid is a great achievement. "Robert Kubica could have even been on pole had he not

lap, so there is reason for us to be

made a small mistake during his

established a new qualifying record. The BMW driver, who finished fifth on the day, managed to qualify for the third qualifying round for the 23rd consecutive time, beating two- time world champion Fernando Alonso, who had 22 consecutive top ten qualifying finishes ahead of Saturday's session.

The German, who said that he hoped he would still finish ahead of his team-mate in Sunday's race, will start alongside Jarno Trulli in a Toyota.

Williams' Nick Rosberg had the seventh-fastest time, while David Coulthard in a Red Bull was

German Timo Glock in the second Toyota and his compatriot Sebastian Vettel in a Torro Rossi complete the top ten, but Glock will start from 14th on the grid after undertaking some changes

Local hero Mark Webber in a Red Bull spun out in a corner in the first minute of the second round of qualifying and was also eliminated on the basis of the Germany's Nick Heidfeld samerule.

### Future bleak for Kewell

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Harry Kewell has been told by Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez that he faces an uphill battle to land a new contract at Anfield.

Australia international Kewell, 29, becomes a free agent at the end of the current Premier League season and no talks have yet taken place to discuss new terms that would keep the former Leeds United forward on Merseyside.

made just 93 league appearances for Liverpool since arriving from Leeds in July 2003 for 5 million pounds (10 million US dollars)

and has so far only been able to muster 15 appearances in all competitions this season. His failure to secure a regular

place in Benitez's team has prompted Kewell to seek permission from the Spaniard to link up with Pim Verbeek's Socceroos squad for next week's training camp in Singapore ahead of the World Cup qualifier against China in Kunming on March 26.

And after giving Kewell the green light to jet out to the Far East just days before Liverpool face bitter rivals Manchester United at Old Trafford in the Premier League, Benitez said the The injury-ravaged star has Australian's prospects of earning a new deal at Anfield were not healthy.

> "Harry will go with Australia because he is not playing in the

team at Liverpool at the moment and I have one or two other options for his position," Benitez explained.

"It is better for him that he

goes because sometimes it can be

positive for players to play for

their national team, especially if they have not been playing many "It is more difficult for Harry to get a contract now, but if he plays well when he comes back, then

we can decide at the end of the season. Liverpool, who have been drawn against Premier League leaders Arsenal, whom they trail by 10 points in the table, in the

Champions League quarterfinals,

are at home to relegation-

threatened Reading on Saturday.

### Pele doubtful of Ronaldo return

Football

INTERNET, Sao Paulo

Brazilian football legend Pele said he was pessimistic Friday about the

chances of recovery of Milan striker Ronaldo, who is currently recovering from knee surgery. "It is a shame, but I think he will never again be what he was before," Pele said about Ronaldo in Sao Paulo. As Pele was being presented as



Worldwide chairman of Spanish bank Santander Emilio Botin (L) and Brazilian soccer legend Pele congratulate each other in Sao Paulo on Friday.

an "ambassador" of the prestigious South American tournament Copa Libertadores, he said he had visited Ronaldo, when he suffered a similar injury on his right knee in 2000. "He recovered and played an

excellent World Cup" in Japan/South Korea in 2002, Pele However, he stressed that threetime FIFA Player of the Year

Ronaldo, 31, will have more trouble getting over his physical problems "It is true medicine made progress, but so did Ronaldo's age. I would be delighted for him to

said. The Brazilian football legend also made it clear he does not agree with the widespread enthusiasm generated by Milan's Brazilian

him at the start of his career, but noted Pato is still far from being a

youngster Alexandre Pato.

to improve his headers, which are still not good," Pele said. He further ruled Pato out of the

race to become his successor.

said confidently.

# AGENICES, Paris

AFP, London

believes Robin van Persie's return to full fitness is per-

Van Persie, 24, is finally back in

The Dutch striker has played only a handful of matches since suffering the problem on international duty in October and Wenger concedes the absence of a player who scored seven times in 11 appearances this season has

With Eduardo out for the season and Togo forward Stadium. Emmanuel Adebayor carrying the burden of leading Arsenal's attack, van Persie's reemergence Naturally their football complicouldn't have come at a better ments each other," he said.

The Gunners have spluttered

It promises to be a grueling convinced van Persie's presence

AFP, Indian Wells

Tennis

Australian Open champion Maria Sharapova, bidding to preserve her so-far perfect season, breezed into the third round of the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters Cup match wins. Series tournament on Friday.

Sharapova, the fourth seed,

shrugged off the swirling winds on stadium court, dismissing French qualifier Stephanie Cohen-Aloro 6-1, 6-0 in just 58 minutes. Defending women's champion Daniela Hantuchova was

also untroubled by the blustery

conditions, launching her

defense with a 6-1, 6-2 victory over US wildcard Angela Haynes. Second-seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova, runner-up to Hantuchova here last year, headlined the night session and made quick work of compatriot Elena Makarova, posting a 6-1, 6-

1 win in 53 minutes. All of the 32 men's and women's seeds in the 5.7 milliondollar tournament have firstround byes. That meant men's top seeds, led by number one Roger Federer,

second seeded defending cham-

pion Rafael Nadal and third-

seeded Australian Open champ

Novak Djokovic, remained on the

sidelines on Friday as the men's first round concluded. The women's marquee players swung into action for the first

time and despite the difficult

Seeds breeze through

in the world, went into her tournament opener boasting a perfect 14-0 record in 2008, includ-

to produce in these kind of conditions," she said. "I think against an opponent that didn't give me much rhythm, I think I handled it

granted as the tournament pro-

Sharapova, who next faces Greece's Eleni Daniilidou, a 1-6,

of her three career titles. She was a teenager in 2002 when she upset Martina Hingis in the final to make her first WTA

She didn't win another until her triumph here last year, which

pretty well. Despite her impressive record

it's like I'm starting from scratch," she said. "At the end of the day, numbers are all very "I just have to focus on my next

7-6 (7/1), 6-2 winner over Czech Klara Zakopalova. Hantuchova, ranked eighth in the world and seeded fifth, was delighted to be back in Indian

Sharapova, 20 and ranked fifth

in 2008, Sharapova said she would be taking nothing for

match and next round," added

conditions there were no big was followed by a victory at Linz later in 2007. "It was an incredible feeling to be back on center court,"

"Obviously, you never know

"When I begin a tournament,

Tour title a prestigious tier one

ing her championship run in the Australian Open, a victory in Doha in February and two Fed tions." what kind of tennis you're going

Wells, where she has claimed two

and number seven Nicole Vaidisova of Czech Republic headline women's action on Saturday.

Amelie Mauresmo of France, seeded 17th, opened her campaign with a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Romanian Edina Gallovits. Unseeded Chinese Peng Shuai and Zheng Jie both advanced with victories over seeded players. Peng defeated 23rd-seeded Karin Knapp of Italy 6-1, 6-3, while Zheng defeated 30thseeded Ukrainian Kateryna Bondarenko 6-2, 6-4. Top seed Ana Ivanovic of Serbia, her third-seeded compatriot Jelena Jankovic, sixthseeded Marion Bartoli of France

American James Blake and

Australian Open runner-up Jo-

Wilfried Tsonga of France, the

17th seed, were slated for second-

round play.

Genv

Tennis legends Steffi Graf of Germany (R) and Martina Navratilova of the Czech Republic pose before their exhibition

return 100 per cent, but unfortunately I don't think he will," Pele

Pele admitted that Pato, 18, "has some similar characteristics" to "To be a superstar, he will have

"There will be no new Pele," he

match in Tokyo on Saturday. The two played against each other for the first time since 1994.