Frings eyes Euro glory

AFP, Berlin

Germany midfielder Torsten Frings insists his side are capable of winning Euro 2008 in June to be crowned European champions for yard the fourth time.

"We have what it is takes to be champions," said Frings on the German Football League (DFL) website after Germany won the European Championships in 1972, 1980 and 1996.

"But we belong to a group of favourites which includes France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands."

Frings has missed most of the season after suffering three knee injuries and has only played eight matches for Werder Bremen this

His last appearance for the Germany team was in October 2007, but national coach Joachim Loew is set to name him on May 16 when he unveils his 23-man squad for Euro 2008.

Torsten is a player who can raise his game over five, six or seven matches, he is the sort of player you want in a tournament," said Loew. Germany will play Poland, Croatia and co-hosts Austria in group B of Euro 2008.

Klasnic sues doctors

AFP, Berlin

Croatian striker Ivan Klasnic has launched a 1.5 million euros (2.3 million US dollars) lawsuit against two Bremen doctors for "gross mishandling" of his kidney complaint which led to a transplant.

Klasnic, 28, became the first professional footballer to return to international competition after he had a kidney transplant in March

According to German magazine Der Spiegel, the Croat's lawyer has started legal proceedings against sports doctor Goetz Dimanski and cardiologist Manju Guha, who were both working on behalf of Werder Bremen.

Hamburg lawyer Matthias Teichner says the pair failed to recognise signs Klasnic's kidney was failing as early as 2001 when he joined Bremen.

Teichner has collected medical evidence to show the player's kidney was only 67 percent effective when he signed for Bremen from St Pauli in 2001.

Had the problem been identified at the time, surgery could be been delayed by several years, claims Teichner.

After suffering renal failure, Klasnic had a first kidney transplant in January 2007 after his mother donated an organ, but his body later rejected it.

A second kidney donated by his father was transplanted in March and Klasnic missed most of last year, only making his return for Bremen in late November 2007.

He returned to international football in Croatia's draw with Scotland in a friendly last March

Malaysia threatens suspension

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The Malaysian FA has threatened to suspend major domestic and international competitions in the country over a match-fixing scandal that has rocked local football.

The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) deputy president Khairy Jamaluddin said he would have no hesitation in halting June's cases emerge within the next two

Malaysian police and the Anti-Corruption Agency are investigating alleged match-fixing in the Super League and on Thursday detained five current and one former player from the Sarawak

Also under investigation is fellow Super League side Police FA for "poor performances". Sarawak are bottom of the 13-team league

"The nation's image will be players are hauled up by the authorder-23) tournament," Khairy was

"We are declaring all-out war against corruption in football even if it means having to overhaul our entire system.

"If investigations by the authorities indicate that match-fixing is rampant, we do not rule out taking drastic measures, including suspending the Malaysia Cup."

The Intercontinental Cup, Ghana, Ireland, Iraq, Croatia and

Malaysia. This is the third big match-

Inter ready to celebrate

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan could wrap up their third straight title on Sunday if they win at home to lowly Caglairi and stuttering AS

Roma lose at home to Torino. Roma had been closing in on Inter over the last couple of months and piling up the pressure but they ruined their good work last weekend with a dismal 1-1 draw at home to then rock-bottom Livorno.

A day later Inter escaped from Torino with a 1-0 victory that was far from deserved but that opened up a six-point gap at the top with just four matches to play.

If Inter were to win Sunday and Roma lose, the champions would have an unassailable nine-point lead with three matches left, their better head-to-head record in the two matches between the pair coming into play.

Inter's players know they are within touching distance of earning the top prize in domestic foot-

"Everything still depends on us," said Serbian midfielder Dejan Stankovic. "Now we're playing the first championship final at the San Siro against Cagliari, a team that's

doing well, the one which is perhaps in the best form of any team

over the last three months." At the beginning of March Cagliari were deducted three points for a legal irregularity which at the time left them bottom, six points adrift and nine points from safety.

They seemed dead and buried but have rallied since and having successfully challenged their points deduction, they have now risen to 15th and are five points above the drop zone. They have won four and drawn two of their last seven matches, a better record than Inter over the same period.

Even so, Stankovic is convinced that Inter can no longer be stopped.

"No-one can get in our way. There are another four matches and after Sunday we'll be able to say a little more about the destination of the scudetto," he added.

Sunday (all 1400GMT)

Fiorentina v Sampdoria, Genoa v Empoli, Inter Milan v Cagliari, Juventus v Lazio, Livorno v AC Milan, Napoli v Siena, Palermo v Atalanta, Reggina v Parma, Roma v Torino, Udinese v Catania

What's been particularly impressive from Inter is that they have managed to stay at the top over the last few matches despite top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic being out injured.

SPORT

Players such as Julio Cruz, Hernan Crespo, David Suazo and even young Italian Mario Balotelli have slipped seamlessly into the first team to keep the nerazzurri on track.

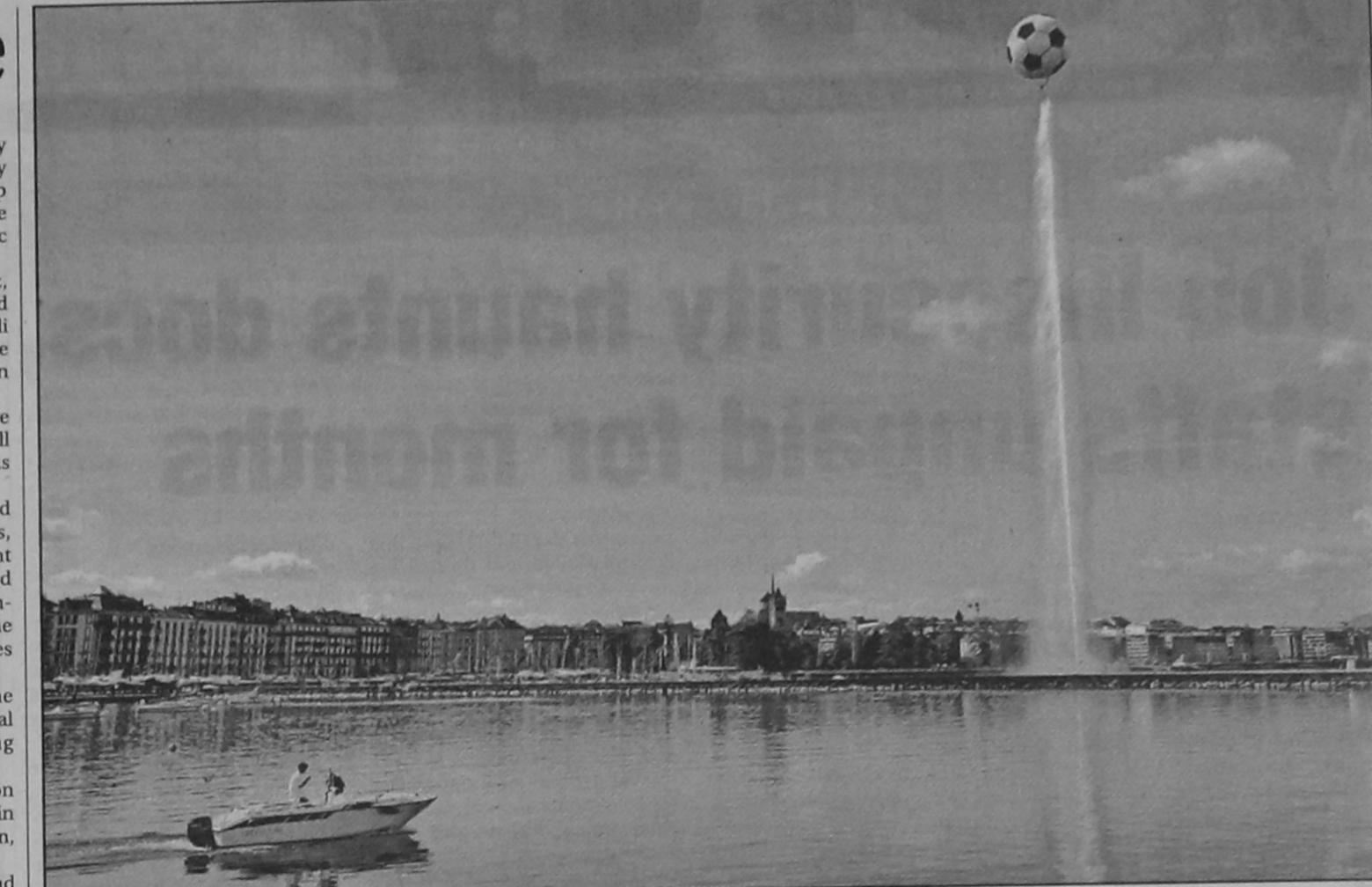
Roma know their chances have almost disappeared and they will likely finish up as bridesmaids, as they did a year ago.

To do so they will have to hold off the fast-finishing Juventus, although they have a five-point lead over the Old Lady of Turin and that should be enough to guarantee they move straight into the Champions League group stages next season.

The other race involves the quest for fourth spot and the final Champions League qualifying

Fiorentina are in pole position and host one of their direct rivals in Sampdoria. Should La Viola win, Samp's chances will be over.

Fiorentina hold a four point lead over Samp and AC Milan, who travel to Livorno, knowing three wins from their final four matches will see them through.



A giant football is seen floating above Geneva's fountain on Friday. The helium inflated balloon will twirl around ten meters above the city's famous 150 meters high landmark until the end of the Euro 2008.

Modric joins Spurs

Football

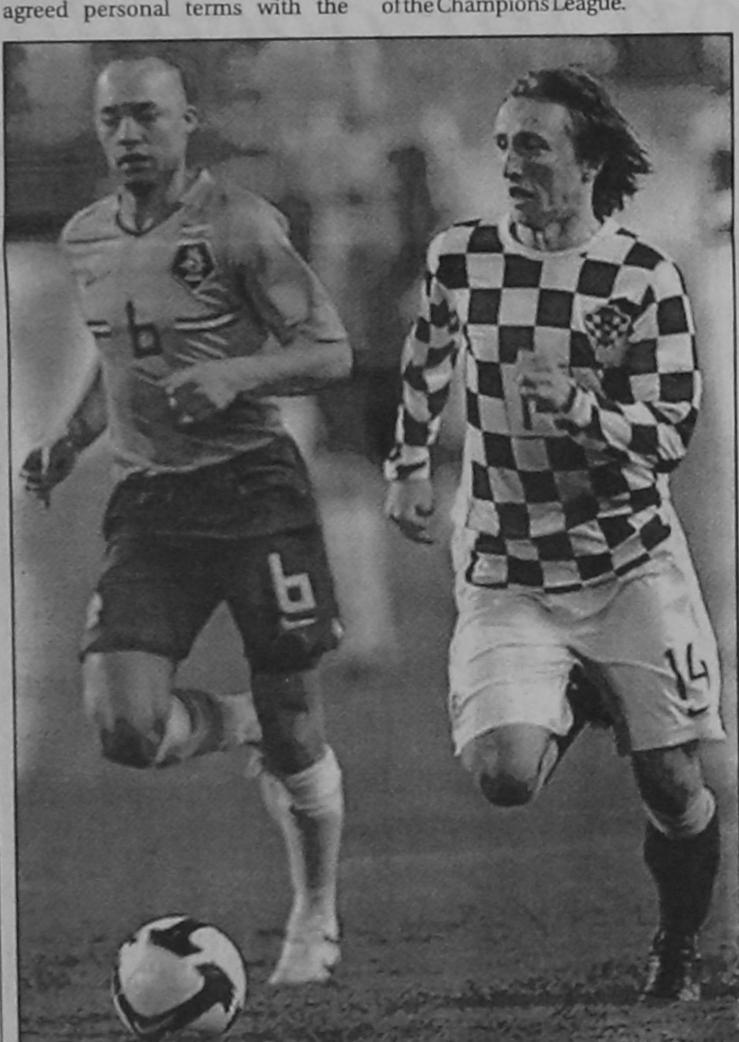
AFP, London

Dinamo Zagreb's Croatia midfield star Luka Modric is heading for Tottenham next season after agreeing a five-year-old deal with the Premier League side, both clubs confirmed on Saturday.

The League Cup winners have agreed personal terms with the player and he will arrive in the summer, subject to passing a medical. Modric must also obtain a work

permit but that should be a formality as he is a regular in the Croatia national team. "I'm happy to be joining such a

big club," Modric told a press conference in Zagreb. "It will be a real pleasure to play in the English league which is the best in Europe, with three English clubs in the semifinals of the Champions League."



An AFP file photo shows Croatia midfielder Luka Modric (R) in action during an international friendly against Netherlands in Split, Croatia on February 6, 2008.

Dinamo Zagreb sporting director Zoran Mamic added: "Tottenham's president came to Zagreb. We signed the agreement and everything is in order.

"We're very happy. Luka is leaving for an environment where he's going to progress, while Dinamo showed that we know how to do good deals." Croatian daily newspaper

Jutarnji List reported the deal was worth 26 million euros (40m dollars), a record for a Croatian player. Reports in the British press put the sum at 15.8 million pounds (20m euros, 31.3m dollars).

Jutarnji List said Modric would be presented before the public at White Hart Lane on Saturday ahead of their match against Bolton.

The 22-year-old, who was reportedly targeted by many of Europe's top sides, made his name in the Bosnian league as a teenager before moving to Croatian club Inter Zapresic followed by Dinamo in 2005. He made his debut for Croatia a

year later and has gone on to win | year has been magnificent and by more than 20 caps for Slaven Bilic's side - including the home and away victories over England that cost them their place at Euro 2008. He had been linked with possi-

ble transfers to the likes of Manchester City, Chelsea, Arsenal and, most recently, Newcastle. Spurs manager Juande Ramos

will be hoping that the signing will set the tone for his intentions next season after a hugely frustrating campaign for the north London club. Spurs were widely tipped to

break the stranglehold of the big four before the current season began but under former boss Martin Jol they made a disastrous start to fall way off the pace for even a UEFA Cup spot. Since his arrival in October,

Ramos has overseen a major improvement in fortunes, including a League Cup triumph which has guaranteed European football for next season.

'C'Ron needs a trophy'

Cristiano Ronaldo is the "best player in the Premier League" but needs to win a trophy in order to be crowned player of the year, fellow Portuguese Jose Mourinho said Saturday. The Manchester United winger

is favourite to win the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) award on Sunday after a stunning season which has seen him score 38 goals. The 23-year-old has played

key role in United's campaign which sees them in the running for both the Premier League and Champions League. Former Chelsea boss Mourinho

believes Ronaldo has been "magnificent" but thinks it is too soon to be crowned. Mourinho told BBC Radio Five Live: "I think the player of the year

must be the best of the year but also

a winner of the year. I don't think it can be a player without a big tro-"Clearly, what Ronaldo did this some distance he has been the best

player in the Premier League. "For me the best is always winner because football is a collec-

tive sport. "So, if Manchester United does something important by winning

the Premier League or Champions League, I and not just me but the whole football world, would give him the Golden Boot."

Wenger furious with Inter

REUTERS, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger warned Inter Milan on Friday the Italian side will be reported to FIFA if they publicly express interest in signing Belarus midfielder Alexander Hleb.

Wenger was furious with media reports quoting Inter coach Roberto Mancini as saying the Serie A leaders were interested in signing Hleb in the close-season, even though he is under contract to Arsenal until 2010.

"I find all the talk about the players completely disrespectful. When it comes directly from the club, enough is enough, we shall report them directly to (world soccer's ruling body) FIFA from now on," Wenger told reporters. But Mancini later issued a state-

ment on Inter's Web site (www.inter.it) denying he had discussed Hleb. "I have never talked about Hleb

or other players contracted to other clubs," Mancini said, adding that reporters asked him about the transfer market but he had declined to answer. Away from the dispute, Wenger

is refusing to close the door on a move for Thierry Henry after the France striker said Arsenal were the only English club he would consider playing for. Henry ended an eight-year association with Arsenal by joining

Barcelona last year but the prolific

best form in the Primera Liga this season. "In our situation you can never say never. He only left last year and I think Thierry is disappointed because things haven't gone as well as he would have liked them to go,"

"I still feel he is a world-class player and I think he will prove in Barcelona he is one of their better players."

added Wenger.

Austrians least bothered While teams from the host Germany's widely-praised 2006 World Cup as a benchmark after it

REUTERS, Vienna



Vienna's town hall tells passers-by there are only 43 days to go until EURO2008 Euro 2008 but Austria-Switzerland many Austrians could not care less.

The countdown

clock outside

The three-week tournament, this year's biggest soccer event, is expected to bring millions of tourists and euros to joint hosts Austria and Switzerland. Some Austrians, though, say

there is little interest in the country, especially with fears that the national team will prove an embar-"I'm no football fan and I don't really care that the tournament is

happening here," said 27-year-old

doctor Thomas Jasik, sitting by a hotdog stand in the capital. "It doesn't help that the (Austrian) team is not very good. Austrians are great at skiing but when it comes to football -- forget it!" he said, laughing

and shaking his head. A quarter of Austrians do not care that Euro 2008 is being held in their country, according to a recent survey of 1,000 people by marketing group Makam, although a majority said it was positive that Austria was a host.

countries automatically qualify, a petition started last year by the son of former national player Werner Kriess pleaded with Austria not to take part because they were not good enough. It has collected more than 10,000 signatures online.

Austria is not known for its footballing prowess. Apart from captain Andreas Ivanschitz, its top players barely register outside the Its most feted footballer Hans

Krankl hung up his boots some 20 years ago and was unable to repeat his success as a player during a four-year stint as coach that ended with his sacking in 2005. Austrians still turn misty-eyed

with memories of the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, where Krankl helped them to beat West Germany 3-2, eliminating the defending world champions.

But that brief moment of glory was 30 years ago. In attempting to qualify for the last European Championship, Austria were beaten by Moldova, a result Austrian media called "a huge

Even though the national team leave something to be desired, Euro 2008 could still boost Austria's image internationally if the country can at least stage a successful event. Euro 2008 organisers have set

Austrian lawyer and football fan Ulla Weinke, 32, thinks the stakes are too high. "Germany had the World Cup, we've got Euro 2008, you just can't compare the two. Germany is always going to be on a

set off a wave of feel-good patrio-

tism and was dubbed a "summer

"Publicity for it has been very slow but hopefully the momentum will pick up and we will be able to enjoy ourselves". In many parts of the quiet

bigger scale than us," she said.

Austrian capital there is little sign of impending football fever with only a few understated posters and Euro 2008 promotions in shops.

Even in a bar advertising Champions League football, excitement about Euro 2008 is muted.

"It might have a good effect on Austria's image I suppose," said tradesman Alexander Unterhumer, standing at the bar. "But I don't really like football myself, I just find it too brutal."

A newsagent displaying football magazines in her shop window summed up perhaps the most dismissive attitude.

Asked if she was looking forward to Euro 2008, she simply replied: "I don't have time for such silly sub-

Briatore, Real hold talks

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Renault team chief Flavio Briatore and his fellow-director of English soccer club Queens Park Rangers, Bernie Ecclestone, the ring-master of Formula One, held two hours of talks with Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon late Friday.

The trio, all friends and fans of twice Formula One drivers world champion Fernando Alonso and major investors in modern European sport, were locked in the upstairs office of the Renault F1 team motor home at the Spanish Grand Prix.

Sources close to the Renault team said the three men are believed to have discussed possible cooperation between Real Madrid and Queens Park Rangers, an English league club, relating to the loan of players and exchange of technical information and possibly coaching staff.

Briatore and Ecclestone took

over as owners of QPR three

months ago and after clearing the club's debts declared an ambition to gain promotion to the English Premier League and qualify for the UEFA Champions League by 2012. Calderon's Real Madrid are the most successful club in the history of the European Cup and not only

have a huge squad of international

players, but are also very influential in Spanish soccer. A tie-up between the two clubs in which they help each other with player loans - young Madrid players being loaned to QPR and devel-

force their way into the starstudded Real first team - is widely expected.

Briatore, one of the richest men in Formula One, has operated as the chairman of QPR since their takeover along with Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal. The director general of QPR is Alejandro Agag, a close friend of Alonso who is a football fan and a life-long supporter of Real Madrid.

Calderon stayed at the Renault motor home and then joined Briatore in the Renault garage for most of the practice sessions while multi-billionaire Ecclestone busied himself with his 'day job' in the paddock at the Circuit de

Catalunya. "We had a nice meeting," was the only comment Briatore would oped in London in readiness to



Participants pose for pictures before a walkathon in Beijing to celebrate in advance the final 100 days before the start of the Olympics on Saturday.

Malaysia Cup and an Under-23 international tournament next month should more match-fixing weeks, The Star newspaper reported on Saturday.

while Police are 11th. tarnished if any of the national ities during this international (un-

quoted by The Star as saying.

scheduled for Kuala Lumpur between May 15-25, is set to feature the Olympic teams of Argentina, Australia and Nigeria, along with

fixing scandal to hit Southeast Asia in April.

impressed with Ferdinand's reac-Football tion, both on and off the pitch, to being appointed for the friendly at Stade de France in Paris, despite THE GUARDIAN England's 1-0 defeat. The centre-half said this week: "You don't set out in Rio Ferdinand has emerged as your career or at the start of every Fabio Capello's preferred choice as season for personal accolades; you England captain after impressing set out to achieve things as a team. If the national head coach with his personal accolades come after that, form for club and country since the

Italian took up the reins at Soho

defender wore the armband for the

friendly defeat in France and,

although Capello is likely to con-

tinue with his policy of experiment-

ing with various captains during the

summer internationals against the

United States and Trinidad &

Tobago, he is leaning towards

appointing Ferdinand on a long-

term basis when qualifying begins

this year for the 2010 World Cup

controversial choice to take on the

leadership role against the French

given his occasionally chequered

past, not least the eight-month ban

for missing a routine drugs test

which he served some four years

ago and which cost him a place at

Euro 2004. However, Capello

believes the 29-year-old's form at

club level has reached new levels -

United have conceded only 19

Premier League goals to date this

season, with Ferdinand outstand-

ing alongside Nemanja Vidic - and

now considers him one of the best

The coach was similarly

defenders in the world.

The Manchester United

Square in the autumn.

or during it, then great, but that is not top of my agenda. "I want to be a successful player and I want to win more and more trophies. I am greedy. I want to win the Premiership every year, I want the European Cup every year and I want to win things with England.

Rio is Capello's choice

"Being captain for England the once so far was great. Likewise, being skipper at United is absolutely fantastic. Whenever I pull that armband on it is a proud moment for me and my family, because of the long line of illustri-Ferdinand was a somewhat ous people who have worn it before me. But all that is diminished if we aren't successful in that time. Success as a team is paramount. Winning the league and then to win the Champions League is what I want to round off the season."

The choice of Ferdinand would disappoint both Liverpool's Steven Gerrard, who led out Capello's first side for the friendly against Switzerland in February, and in particular John Terry, Steve McClaren's regular incumbent. However, the new head coach is still assessing just how integral a role the Chelsea centre-half will play in his setup. Terry may yet be handed the

armband for one of the two summer internationals, and Capello is also keen to assess Owen Hargreaves and, potentially, the Aston Villa midfielder Gareth Barry in the role. However, Ferdinand is expected to lead the side out against the Czech Republic on August 20 at the start of next season. "For that game I plan to have my

permanent England captain in place," Capello said yesterday. "As I say, a captain needs to set an example on the pitch, be a leader, help the rest of the team. But at the same time he needs to be a model outside the pitch and outside football as well."

It seems likely that David Beckham will have a considerable role to play in the qualifying campaign for 2010, with Capello suggesting yesterday that he could play on until the tournament, scheduled for South Africa. Yet that promise was issued on the proviso that the Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder's fitness is maintained while playing in Major League Soccer.

Asked whether Beckham's

England career was close to being over after he gained his 100th cap in the France game, Capello replied: "It's still open. He played in the last game, he did well against France, and I sometimes go to see him in Los Angeles. It all depends. There are players who at 33 or 34 take good care of themselves. They understand that the body is not as it was and they take more care. It depends a lot or that."

AFP, London