



HATTRICK HERO: Arsenal striker Emmanuel Adebayor (C) scores past Derby County goalkeeper Roy Carroll (R) during their Premiership match at Pride Park in Derby on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

## Del Piero gets Euro boost

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni said in an interview published in La Repubblica on Tuesday that as things stand he will take Alessandro Del Piero to Euro 2008.

Del Piero, who started the season on the Juventus bench, has been in fine form since the turn of the year and the clamour for his return to the national team set-up has been growing.

The veteran striker has been left out of Donadoni's recent squads but his 18 goals in Serie A this season seem to have forced the coach into a re-think.

Asked if he would call up Del Piero for the tournament in Austria and Switzerland in June, Donadoni said: "Ten months ago no but now yes."

The facts speak for themselves but I'll only talk about my squad when the time is right.

"It seems that many people want to create problems for me. There's one thing I'm already certain about, with players such as Del Piero and others, whatever choices I make, they won't cause a fuss."

Donadoni has other problems to contend with as he will be out of contract after the finals and has turned down a conditional extension offer from the Italian Federation.

"I would have lost my dignity if I had accepted the proposal they put to me," he said.

"But in Austria and Switzerland we'll be going there to win. We're going there aiming high, that's for sure."

"If after that our paths separate, we'll leave on friendly terms."

## Bayern after records

AFP, Berlin

With a 12-point lead, Bayern Munich have virtually won this season's Bundesliga title, but are still chasing records for the largest winning margin and the lowest number of goals conceded in a league season.

After their 4-1 win over defending champions VfB Stuttgart last Sunday, Bayern now have a 12-point lead over rivals Schalke 04 and Werder Bremen with four games remaining.

Only a miracle can stop them being crowned German champions for the 21st time.

But Bayern, who have led the Bundesliga from the first weekend of the season, need four more points if they are to match their own record from 2002/03 when they won the league by 16 points.

And with goalkeeper and captain Oliver Kahn set to retire at the end of the season after 14 years at Bayern, Munich are also closing in on Werder Bremen's record of 22 for the fewest number of goals conceded in a Bundesliga season.

The Munich defence has only leaked 18 goals all season with four games left.

Bayern are also chasing the first treble by a German side.

Having won the German Cup and with the Bundesliga title virtually guaranteed, they will be the first side in Germany to collect the three main trophies in a season if they win the UEFA Cup.

Having drawn the first leg of their UEFA Cup semi-final 1-1 with Zenit St Petersburg last Thursday at the Allianz Arena, Bayern travel to Russia on Thursday for the return leg.

The final is in Manchester, England, on May 14.

## Gunners thrash Derby

AFP, Derby

Emmanuel Adebayor came off the bench to score a hat-trick as Arsenal thrashed already-relegated Premier League basement side Derby County 6-2 at Pride Park here Monday.

It was the second time this season the Gunners had inflicted a heavy defeat upon the Rams after their 5-0 win at the Emirates Stadium in September.

Arsenal were only 2-1 ahead at half time after goals from Nicklas Bendtner and Robin van Persie sandwiched one from Derby's Jay McEveley.

But the second-half revolved around top striker Adebayor who took his tally for the season to 30.

Rams striker Rob Earnshaw

scored his first Derby goal and Theo Walcott netted for Arsenal, although this threatened to be something of a hollow win for the north Londoners.

The result left the Gunners in third place, four points behind the top two of Manchester United and Chelsea with two games left this season.

Mathematically, they can still win the title although it would take

English Premier League table after Monday's match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):							
Man Utd	36	25	6	5	74	21	81
Chelsea	36	24	9	3	62	25	81
Arsenal	36	22	11	3	72	31	77
Liverpool	36	19	13	4	64	28	70
Everton	36	18	8	10	32	31	62
Aston Villa	36	16	11	9	69	47	59

an extraordinary set of results for Arsene Wenger's side to leapfrog their rivals.

Nevertheless, Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas refused to give up hope. "Nothing is impossible," he told Setanta Sports.

"We have to win the last two games and then we'll see. We are not the favourites, but you never know."

Adebayor, who also scored a hat-trick against in the home game against Derby praised his teammates for the way they set up his goals.

"It was an important game for us and we want to finish as strongly as possible," he said. "Every time I have a good ball to finish, I'm very happy but the most important thing is for the team to win."

## 40m euros for Ronaldinho

REUTERS, Rome

Barcelona will not sell Ronaldinho for less than 40 million euros, club President Joan Laporta said.

Barcelona had received several bids for the twice former World Player of the Year, including from Premier League sides, but AC Milan had shown the strongest interest, he said in an interview published in Tuesday's La Gazzetta dello Sport.

Milan said earlier this month they had agreed personal terms with the Brazil forward but his move to the San Siro stalled over the Spanish club's asking price.

"I only say that Ronaldinho is worth more than 40 million euros (\$62.5 million)," Laporta said.

He added that the player might stay on at the Camp Nou. "He has never created the slightest problem and I'm sure he will return to how he was before, as soon as he is well."

"He just needs to find new motivation, but it's no foregone conclusion that he has to leave because he can find this with us, given that his contract runs until 2010."

Barcelona, the only non-English side left in the last four of the Champions League, visit Manchester United on Tuesday after last week's goalless draw in the first leg.

Laporta was also certain that France striker Thierry Henry would soon rediscover the form of his days at Arsenal.

"I'm convinced that he'll give us the (European) Cup, in part because he knows the English teams better than the other players."

## FIFA wants Spain to bid for 2018 WC

REUTERS, Madrid

Sepp Blatter, president of soccer's governing body FIFA, has said it was about time Spain hosted another World Cup.

"I remember the World Cup in 1982," Blatter was quoted as saying in Spanish media on Tuesday. "It broke a number of records, the first with 24 countries, 17 stadiums and 14 cities something which has never been repeated."

"It is time for Spain to organise another (World Cup)... For this reason I hope they present their candidacy for 2018."

Blatter, was speaking at a meeting for Spanish football representatives in Zurich. He also praised the standard of the Primera Liga.

"No other league can match the quality of the football played in Spain. It is the only five-star league," he said.

"The football you see in Spain you don't see anywhere else. It is a football country and for this reason I would like them to organise another World Cup."

The Spanish Football Federation's president Angel Maria Villar was cautious about the likelihood of Spain presenting a bid.

"It is something we will consider in the future. We need to take our time and look at it carefully," he said.

Spain hosted the 1982 World Cup when Italy beat West Germany 3-1 in the final at the Bernabeu.

FIFA intends to decide on the 2018 hosts in 2011.

Several countries have expressed their interest in staging the finals in 10 years' time, including Australia, Japan, England and a joint Benelux bid centred on the Netherlands and Belgium.

## Veterans given hope

AFP, Berlin

German national coach Joachim Loew admitted on Monday that he would be prepared to extend his preliminary squad for Euro 2008 to more than

the obligatory 23 so as to give veterans Bernd Schneider and Christoph Metzelder time to prove their fitness.

Schneider and Metzelder - both members of the team that reached the 2002 World Cup final where they lost to Brazil - have been struck down with a herniated disc and left foot injuries respectively.

Schneider, 34 and capped 81 times, was operated on last Friday while 39-times capped Metzelder has not played for Spanish league

leaders Real Madrid since undergoing an operation two months ago.

However, both are considered by Loew integral members of the squad hence why he is prepared to consider enlarging the squad prior to the championships, which are being co-hosted by Switzerland and Austria and run from June 7 to 29.

"Because of the present situation, we are going to discuss the possibility of extending the squad to more than 23," said Loew, who was assistant to Jurgen Klinsmann at the 2006 World Cup when they finished third.

"There is also the possibility of selecting players after depositing the official squad list."

Loew, who replaced Klinsmann after he stepped down following the World Cup success, had originally planned to select his 23 man

squad on May 10 and announce it officially on May 16, some 10 days ahead of the deadline for naming them.

However the situation regarding Schneider and Metzelder has forced a rethink.

"Quite apart from Schneider, the Metzelder situation is worrying me," said Loew.

"We will decide on both cases on May 10 after discussing their predicaments with the medical staff."

Loew, though, said he was praying that no other indispensable member of the squad would be injured in the closing days of the season.

"It is imperative that no other international is seriously injured in the next few weeks," said Loew.

Germany are in Group B with Austria, Croatia and debutants Poland.

## Football making Britain rude

AFP, London

Britain, which long prided itself on a reputation for good manners, is becoming increasingly rude, according to a poll out Monday.

Highly-paid footballers and celebrities are setting a bad example, according to the survey, which listed spitting and swearing as the most offensive forms of behaviour.

Almost nine out of 10 people - 86.2 per cent - think Britons have become ruder than a decade ago, found the poll for the ITV1 Tonight television programme.

"I suppose it's part of the breakdown in society, the fact that we stopped having respect for figures in authority, partly because those in authority didn't command it," said Diana Mather, an etiquette coach.

Britons traditionally liked to think of themselves as superior to foreigners at things like queuing and giving up their seats on public transport to disabled people or pregnant women.

But the rise of football culture - and football hooligans creating mayhem - has long dented this image abroad, and now Britons themselves acknowledge that they have a major problem.

More than half of those asked - 56.5 per cent - thought bad manners were the biggest problem in

## 'Not enough good players'

AFP, Rome

Italy World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi sympathised with England manager Fabio Capello on Monday, claiming he doesn't have enough good players to choose from.

While English clubs supplied three of the four Champions League semifinalists this season, the national team failed to qualify for the Euro 2008 finals in Austria and Switzerland in June.

England finished below Croatia and Russia in their group, losing three of their four matches against those two principal rivals.

"The problems for a coach happens when he doesn't have many good players at his disposal," said Lippi at a coaching conference in Florence.

"Capello for example has more problems fielding a strong English national team because only 38 per cent of Premier League players are British."

Lippi has been out of work since guiding Italy, then in disarray due to the Serie A match-fixing scandal, to their fourth World Cup triumph in Germany in 2006.

He is rumoured to be looking for a return to top level football, although he claimed he has no concrete propositions.

## Chelsea start favourites



REUTERS, London

Chelsea hold the aces going into the second leg of their Champions League semifinal at home to Liverpool on Wednesday.

Liverpool may have the tradition and five European Cups to their name but John Arne Riise's own goal deep into stoppage time in the first leg at Anfield last Tuesday handed Chelsea a price-less away goal and a 1-1 draw.

Chelsea start as favourites to reach the final for the first time and as long as Avram Grant's men stop Liverpool from finding the net they will face Manchester United or Barcelona in the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on May 21.

Liverpool and Chelsea, meeting in their third Champions League semifinal in four seasons, will be facing each other for the 20th time in all competitions in that period.

The Anfield club won both previous semis in 2005 and 2007 but Chelsea will be in good spirits after their battling 2-1 win over

Manchester United in the Premier League on Saturday kept alive their hopes of a double.

Chelsea also have an excellent recent record over Liverpool, who have not scored in eight visits to Stamford Bridge since Rafa Benitez took charge at Anfield in 2004.

The Londoners have turned Stamford Bridge into a fortress, having not lost a domestic match since February 2004 and any game since losing 2-1 to Barcelona in the first leg of the Champions League first knockout round in February 2006.

Chelsea are also likely to have Frank Lampard back in the squad after the England midfielder missed the United match following the death of his mother two days previously.

Lampard resumed training on Sunday, according to media reports, but even if he declares himself ready to return, Grant might be tempted to retain the midfielders who performed so well against United, led by two-goal German Michael Ballack.

Liverpool are a tougher proposition in Europe than in domestic

matches and Benitez will take a rested squad to London, having made nine changes from the side that played Chelsea last week for Saturday's 2-2 Premier League draw at Birmingham City.

Fernando Torres, who has scored 30 goals in 43 matches since joining Liverpool at the start of the season, poses the biggest danger while Steven Gerrard will look to add to the 21 he has netted from midfield.

But as long as the hosts do not concede a goal Chelsea will be bound for Moscow, a thought to delight their billionaire Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

### PROBABLE TEAMS

Chelsea: 1-Petr Cech; 5-Michael Essien, 6-Ricardo Carvalho, 26-John Terry, 3-Ashley Cole; 4-Claude Makelele, 13-Michael Ballack, 8-Frank Lampard; 10-Joe Cole, 11-Didier Drogba, 21-Salomon Kalou  
Liverpool: 25-Pepe Reina; 17-Alvaro Arbeloa, 23-Jamie Carragher, 37-Martin Skrtel, 6-John Arne Riise; 18-Dirk Kuyt, 20-Javier Mascherano, 14-Xabi Alonso, 8-Steven Gerrard, 19-Ryan Babel; 9-Fernando Torres

## Police question Ronaldo



AP, Sao Paulo

Soccer star Ronaldo was questioned by police early Monday after a run-in with Brazilian transvestites in a Rio de Janeiro motel.

Ronaldo accused one of the transvestites of trying to extort him, police inspector Carlos Augusto Nogueira said Monday night.

Nogueira said the altercation began when Ronaldo found out he was dealing with transvestites instead of women. The inspector said Ronaldo admitted he knew they were prostitutes when they met earlier Sunday night, but did not real-

ize they were transvestites until they got to the motel.

"He admitted to everything, he wanted to have fun," Nogueira said. "But he committed no crime at all, it was immoral at best."

Prostitution is not illegal in Brazil.

The AC Milan striker told police he offered to pay the transvestites anyway, but before he left one of them allegedly asked for \$30,000 to hide the story from the media.

Nogueira said he believed Ronaldo's version because the transvestite decided to leave the police station even before being fully questioned by authorities.

The transvestite also accused Ronaldo of asking him to buy drugs.

In a statement to TV Globo, Ronaldo reiterated he was a victim of extortion and denied he has ever used drugs.

Ronaldo and the transvestites were only questioned by police and voluntarily went to the police station.

Ronaldo is in Rio de Janeiro recovering from surgery on his left knee. He said Sunday he could be back in action in six months if his recovery continues to go as planned.

Ronaldo has won two World Cups with Brazil, including the 2002 title in which he scored eight goals, including two in the final against Germany.

A message to Ronaldo's spokesman was not immediately answered Monday.

## Rafa wary of Drogba antics



REUTERS, Liverpool

Rafael Benitez wants referee Roberto Rosetti to take a strong line with Chelsea forward Didier Drogba as Liverpool attempt to reach the Champions League final for the third time in four years on Wednesday.

The Liverpool manager believes Drogba has a penchant for going to ground very easily under challenges and does not want the Italian official to be fooled into awarding fouls.

"I'm convinced that he'll give us the (European) Cup, in part because he knows the English teams better than the other players."

The result has set up an intriguing semifinal second leg at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge.

"He (Drogba) is very, very strong but he falls down. He slips a lot, Benitez told reporters on Tuesday.

"Everybody can see this every game, it is very clear and hopefully the Italian referee, who has some experience in Europe will see it as well."

A bigger concern for the Liverpool manager, however, is finding a way to score at Stamford Bridge, something that has eluded the Spaniard in eight games since he took charge at Anfield in 2004.

"It is a statistic but they can be changed very quickly," he added.

"We need to score so we will try to score."

"We don't have any problem with Stamford Bridge. They haven't lost for one hundred games or something like that in the Premier

League and that means they are very strong at home."

"But we will try to score our goal. We don't need to win, just to draw 2-2 will be enough."

Liverpool won the two semifinal confrontations between the sides in 2005 and 2007 but were helped by playing the second leg at Anfield.

Chelsea also lost to Monaco at the same stage in 2004.

Benitez believes his side hold a psychological advantage as Chelsea fear a fourth exit at the penultimate stage in five seasons.

"I think they want to win clearly and all their supporters will push and try to support the team," he added.

"The players know it's an important game for them. They will be a little bit under pressure... we will be under pressure too because we want to win a trophy this year."



Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal presents his new website www.rafaelnadal.com in Barcelona on Monday. PHOTO: AFP