

## Former player spills beans on Barca

AFP, Madrid

Former defender Fernando Giner and his Valencia teammates received a "substantial" cash incentive from Barcelona to perform well against Deportivo La Coruna in a 1994 Spanish league match.

"Obviously there was a bonus, and a sizeable one, from Barcelona," he revealed in an interview with the press service of Spain's indoor football league which was obtained by AFP.

"I accepted the money but this money had a bitter taste," the 43-year-old added.

The May 14, 1994 match between Valencia and Deportivo resulted in a goalless draw.

Barcelona ended the season with the same number of points as Deportivo but won the Spanish league title because they had scored more goals in the matches involving the two teams.

Giner said he would have preferred to see Deportivo win the title since several of his former Valencia teammates were part of the Galician side at the time.

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## Car accident kills star

AFP, Brussels

FC Bruges' Belgian international Francois Sterchele was killed in a car accident on Wednesday night, Belgian media report Thursday.

The 26-year-old was travelling between Antwerp and Knokke in the north of the country when his Porsche left the road and smashed into a tree.

The car was travelling at "an unsuitable speed" at the time of the crash, a judicial expert told Belgian news agency.

Sterchele was the Belgian league's top scorer last season when he played for Antwerp club Germinal Beerschot, before joining Bruges.

On the six goal mark this term the young striker had made six international appearances.

Marc Brys, his former coach at Germinal Beerschot, gave his reaction to the tragedy, saying: "Unfortunately this is an accident that underlines the fact that Francois lived at 100 miles an hour on and off the pitch."

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# Real humiliate Barca

AFP, Madrid



Three days after wrapping up the title Real Madrid showed Barcelona why they are the new Spanish champions crushing their arch rivals 4-1 in El Clasico at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

An 18th goal of the season for Real captain Raul, another Arjen Robben header and strikes from substitutes Gonzalo Higuain and Ruud van Nistelrooy ensured a historic league double for Real, who won 1-0 at Camp Nou back in December, as they humiliated Barca to cap a fine season.

The loss means Barca must now qualify for the Champions League after losing second place to Villarreal who won 2-0 against Recreativo Huelva and are now seven points clear with two games remaining.

Barca players greeted newly-crowned champions Real in the guard of honour as they ran onto the pitch - a moment for Real to treasure and for Barca to try to wipe from the memory.

After a 6-0 drubbing of Valencia Barca should have been full of confidence but that seeped away when Real got off to the dream start

after just 12 minutes with Raul curling a brilliant left-footed finish past Victor Valdes.

Barca were taunted by 'oles' and a chorus of 'champions' and it got worse when Robben bagged a second.

Robben said he had never scored a header after his vital goal in Sunday's 2-1 win over Osasuna but he repeated the trick taking advantage of some non-existent marking.

Real were far superior and Higuain, the hero against Osasuna, scored a third just after the hour mark before van Nistelrooy converted a penalty.

Thierry Henry struck a late consolation for the visitors after a great pass from Barca's shining light Lionel Messi before Barca lost Xavi for dissent seconds before the end.

When the final whistle blew Real fans applauded their team for a fine season in which they have retained the championship for the first time since 1990.

Barca players trudged off and the Catalan club must rebuild for next season probably starting with a new manager.

Frank Rijkaard is unlikely to be in charge with reserves coach Pep Guardiola emerging as the favourite to succeed the Dutchman.

Earlier Argentine midfielder Fazio was Sevilla's hero scoring twice as the club boosted their chances of a second successive

season in the Champions League with a 3-0 win at rivals Racing Santander.

Fazio scored in both halves as Sevilla leapfrogged Racing into fifth and they are now level on points with fourth-placed Atletico.

"We have two finals now and we will go for it," said Sevilla coach Manolo Jimenez. "One of them is the derby against Real Betis and they won't give us anything for sure."

Racing are two points behind Sevilla as they rued a first half penalty miss from Aldo Duschner with the score at 0-0.

Atletico remain in pole position to take fourth but can not afford to slip up when they travel to Espanyol on Thursday.

Elsewhere Kings Cup winners Valencia are virtually safe after a 1-0 home win over fellow strugglers Real Zaragoza.

A goal from Daniel Silva, who was also sent off, guided Valencia five points from the drop.

Zaragoza stay one point above relegation going into their final two games of a season that started with hopes of European qualification.

Osasuna lost 2-1 at Real Mallorca and stay third from bottom while Recreativo Huelva stay level on 40 points after the Villarreal loss.

Getafe came from two goals down to win 4-2 over Almeria and are now five points clear of the drop.



Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain (L) celebrates with teammate Wesley Sneijder after scoring the third goal against Barcelona during their Primera Liga encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

## ITALIAN CUP

# Inter's 4th final in a row

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Inter Milan reached their fourth consecutive Italian Cup final after second-half goals from Pele and Julio Cruz sealed a 2-0 win at Lazio on Wednesday. The Serie A leaders will go in search of a second league and cup double in three years and a third cup triumph in four attempts after prevailing 2-0 on aggregate following last month's goalless first leg.

Portuguese midfielder Pele, one of several reserve players on show for Inter, netted against the run of play on 52 minutes when he slotted into the top corner from David Suazo's cutback.

Substitute Cruz, lucky not to receive a red card for punching Aleksandar Kolarov, sealed victory

five minutes from time when he took advantage of an error by Lazio's 44-year-old keeper Marco Ballotta following Pele's cross.

Moments earlier, Inter defender Marco Materazzi had been dismissed for a wild tackle while coach Roberto Mancini was sent to the stands for protesting in a bad-tempered game.

Inter, who met Pope Benedict during the day, won despite being second best for much of the game and being more concerned with retaining their Italian title by beating Siena on Sunday.

Lazio, mid-table in Serie A, put out their strongest side in contrast and almost took the lead after two minutes when Cristian Ledesma's free kick struck the post.

Strikers Tommaso Rocchi and Goran Pandev also had decent chances for the hosts, whose only

hope of reaching the UEFA Cup next season has been extinguished.

Lazio fans expressed their disapproval towards club president Claudio Lotito at the end and coach Delio Rossi did not want to discuss his position.

"Lazio have not had a great season...but it is not all negative. I have to speak with the president. I have a contract," he told Rai television.

Holders Roma, 1-0 up from the first leg, visit Catania on Thursday in their semifinal second leg.

If Inter fail to beat Siena, second-placed Roma could still snatch the title so Luciano Spalletti is also expected to rest several players with an eye on Sunday's game with Atalanta.

Roma and Inter have contested the last three finals. This year's showpiece is in Rome on May 24.



Inter Milan striker Julio Cruz (C) shoots to score against Lazio during their Coppa Italia semifinal at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Sagnol may quit Bayern

AFP, Munich

French international defender Willy Sagnol's no show at the Allianz Arena party to celebrate Bayern Munich's league title has fuelled rumours he is set to quit the German giants.

After Bayern beat Arminia Bielefeld 2-0 on Wednesday, the club celebrated with a ceremony to honour the team but Sagnol, who was been with the club since 2000, was the only player absent despite not being selected to play.

"Willy trained with intensity earlier in the day, we decided on this ceremony at the last minute, perhaps he did not know," said coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

Sagnol, whose contract runs till 2010, complained at the start of the

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# Jurgen's need for speed

AFP, Berlin



Jurgen Klinsmann, who is set to take over as coach of Bayern Munich in July, has met with the bosses of the newly-crowned Bundesliga champions to outline his vision to speed up Bayern's game.

Klinsmann, who guided Germany to third in the 2006 World Cup, met with Bayern's chiefs on Monday, the day after they were crowned German champions, with rumours circu-

lating he wants to sign AC Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso.

"Jurgen explained his philosophy in a very convincing way and it was well received by the board of directors," said Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer in German tabloid Bild.

At the three hours meeting on Monday, Klinsmann explained why he wants to see Bayern play a faster brand of football.

He used statistics from England where Premier League players keep the ball for 1.3 seconds on average, compared to 2.4 in the Bundesliga, to explain the need for more speed.

After spending 69 million euros last summer (100 million US dollars) to recruit a team of

stars, there will be not be so many transfers this summer, according to Beckenbauer.

"I do not imagine transfers like we saw with Luca Toni and Franck Ribery," added Beckenbauer.

Italian World Cup winner Gattuso, who is one of the most powerful strikers of the ball in the world, is said to be worth 15 million euros and is believed to be on Klinsmann's wish list.

Gattuso would be signed to replace 34-year-old Brazilian Ze Roberto.

Klinsmann also has to meet with Bayern's Germany defender Philipp Lahm who has so far refused a contract extension.

## Reality show to find next superstar

AFP, Singapore

A new reality television show along the lines of hit singing series American Idol is to be launched to find the next global football superstar.

Titled "SportStar Football," the show will be a worldwide hunt for the next big thing in soccer, organisers said Thursday.

The concept is the brainchild of David Edwards, who was behind "RockStar: INXS," the search for a new lead singer for the Australian band whose former frontman Michael Hutchence committed suicide.

ESPN STAR Sports and Imagine OmniaMedia will work together to develop, produce and broadcast what they tout as the first reality-based football entertainment series in Asia.

"We are committed to serving our fans by providing them unique opportunities to engage with their favourite sports across platforms," said ESPN STAR Sports managing director Manu Sawhney.

"With this interactive and entertaining initiative, football fans will have a lot more to look forward to in days to come."

No details of a launch date, nor how the series would be structured, were announced.

## James fit for Wembley

AFP, London

England goalkeeper David James has declared himself fit to play for Portsmouth in next week's FA Cup final against Championship side Cardiff.

The 37-year-old revealed that a scan on the injured calf which has kept him out of Pompey's last two league games had come back clear and said he was ready to play this weekend in his club's final league match, at home to Fulham.

"I had a scan today and it's clear so I would describe myself as fit," he said. "But we'll see what the gaffers say."

Portsmouth boss Harry Redknapp may be reluctant to risk James against Fulham, despite his first-choice keeper's impatience to get back into action.

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## Sven set for Benfica

AFP, Lisbon

Sven-Goran Eriksson, expected to be ousted as Manchester City manager after just one season in charge, has been offered a three-year contract to manage his former club Benfica, local media reported Thursday.

Benfica president Luis Filipe Vieira travelled to Manchester on Wednesday to hold talks with Eriksson and "formalise" an agreement, the A Bola newspaper said.

But sports daily Record insisted that the deal "had still to be concluded".

On his return to Lisbon on Wednesday night Vieira declined to comment on Eriksson's possible arrival at the club next season, Maisfutebol.com reported.

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## FRENCH CUP

# Juninho keeps dream alive

Football

AFP, Paris

Lyon's Juninho Pernambucano scored the only goal of the game against Sedan at the Gerland stadium on Wednesday to set up a French Cup final against Paris Saint Germain at the Stade de France later this month.

Juninho found the net two minutes before time to keep the league leaders on course for a first-ever league and cup double should they beat Bordeaux to the league title then have a victory over PSG on May 24. Lyon last won the French Cup way back in 1973.

PSG had beaten second-division Amiens by the same score in the other semifinal on Tuesday.

Lyon managed to win with a workmanlike rather than an elegant performance though they left it late when Juninho, who had replaced Kim Kallstrom after 70 minutes, scored from a long-range freekick after a foul by Albert Baniang.

On Tuesday, Paris St Germain took one step towards silver-lining their disastrous league season by beating second division Amiens.

Substitute Yannick Boli scored the tie winner in the 78th minute of an otherwise forgettable encounter whose most exciting

moment until then was a mass walk-off of the players in the 33rd minute.

Organised Sedan had chances through Alexis Allard in the first half but both his shot and header were stopped by Lyon keeper Gregory Coupet, and he had another chance well into the second half.

Lyon had most of the goal opportunities however through Mathieu Bodmer, Kader Keita, Fabio Grosso and Hatem Ben Arfa, though Sedan keeper Patrick Regnault held firm.

Juninho's late goal meant Lyon qualified for their second final in two years after losing to Bordeaux 1-0 in the League Cup final.

# Ferrero stuns Nadal

Tennis

REUTERS, Rome

World number two Rafael Nadal's bid to win the Rome Masters for the fourth successive year was buried on Wednesday when he lost 7-5 6-1 to Juan Carlos Ferrero.

Ferrero, the 2001 champion, got the match-turning break at the end of tough first set.

The unseeded player then broke Nadal again in fourth game of the second and quickly finished off his Spanish compatriot, who had treatment on a foot injury at 4-1 down.

Nadal paid tribute to Ferrero but said the injury had hampered his performance.

"I have this pain in a point at the back of my foot, so it was tough for me," the 21-year-old told a news conference. "I just congratulate Juan Carlos. I think this is an important win for him because he's trying to go to the Olympics."

"I'm happy for him because he's a nice guy and a very good player."

Ferrero, a former world number one, was delighted at handing Nadal only his second defeat on clay in more than 100 matches.

"I had never won a set against him on clay so I'm pretty happy of course," he said.

"It's a very important win for me and I feel special right now. I haven't had this special feeling for a long time."

"I was so strong mentally today. I had things very clear in my mind."

Ferrero will meet Stanislas Wawrinka in the third round after the Swiss beat Britain's Andy Murray 6-2 7-6.

Russian fourth seed Nikolay Davydenko cruised in the third round with an 6-2 6-2 win over Croatian wildcard Mario Ancic, while Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic quelled some early resistance from Belgium's Steve Darcis to prevail 6-4 6-0.

Serbia's Djokovic had to recover an early break in the first set and save two break points in the ninth game before Darcis threw away his final service game of the set to love with a series of

unforced errors.

The Belgian looked dismayed at having contributed to his downfall and the world number three was able to run away with second set to go through the third round.

Nadal was not the only top 10 seed to tumble. Argentine David Nalbandian, the seventh seed, lost an exciting match against Spain's Nicolas Pietrangeli 6-4 7-5.

Nalbandian came off worse in a five-break first set and saved seven match points in two separate games before surrendering his serve at the end of the second.

Spanish fifth seed David Ferrer also suffered an upset, collapsing after taking the first set against Radek Stepanek of the Czech Republic to go down 4-6 6-2 6-1.

However, American James Blake, the eighth seed, laboured to a 7-6 3-6 6-1 win over Italy's Andreas Seppi.

Roger Federer moved into the third round on Tuesday with a 6-3 6-3 victory over Guillermo Canas. The world number one will face Croatia's Ivo Karlovic, who beat Italy's Potito Starace 6-3 6-7 7-6.



Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero makes a forehand return to compatriot Rafael Nadal during their Masters Series match in Rome on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP