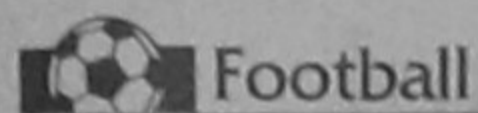


## ITALIAN CUP

## Roma complete formality



AFP, Rome

AS Roma and Inter Milan will battle each other for silverware on two fronts after the capital-based club reached the Coppa Italia final on Thursday.

Roma held on for a 1-1 draw against Sicilians Catania to go through 2-1 on aggregate following their 1-0 victory in the home leg of their semifinal last month.

The visitors took the lead on 27 minutes after Macedonia forward Mirko Vucinic was tripped in the area by a stupid lunge from Argentine midfielder Mariano Izo.

Vucinic was heading away from goal at the time and the challenge was totally unnecessary but Alberto Aquilani gleefully buried the spot-kick from 12 yards.

The lead lasted only two minutes, though, as Cristian Silvestri rose unchallenged to head home Giuseppe Mascara's free-kick for

the hosts.

Roma came closest to scoring in the second half when Simone Perrotta clipped the top of the bar with a half-volley from inside the area.

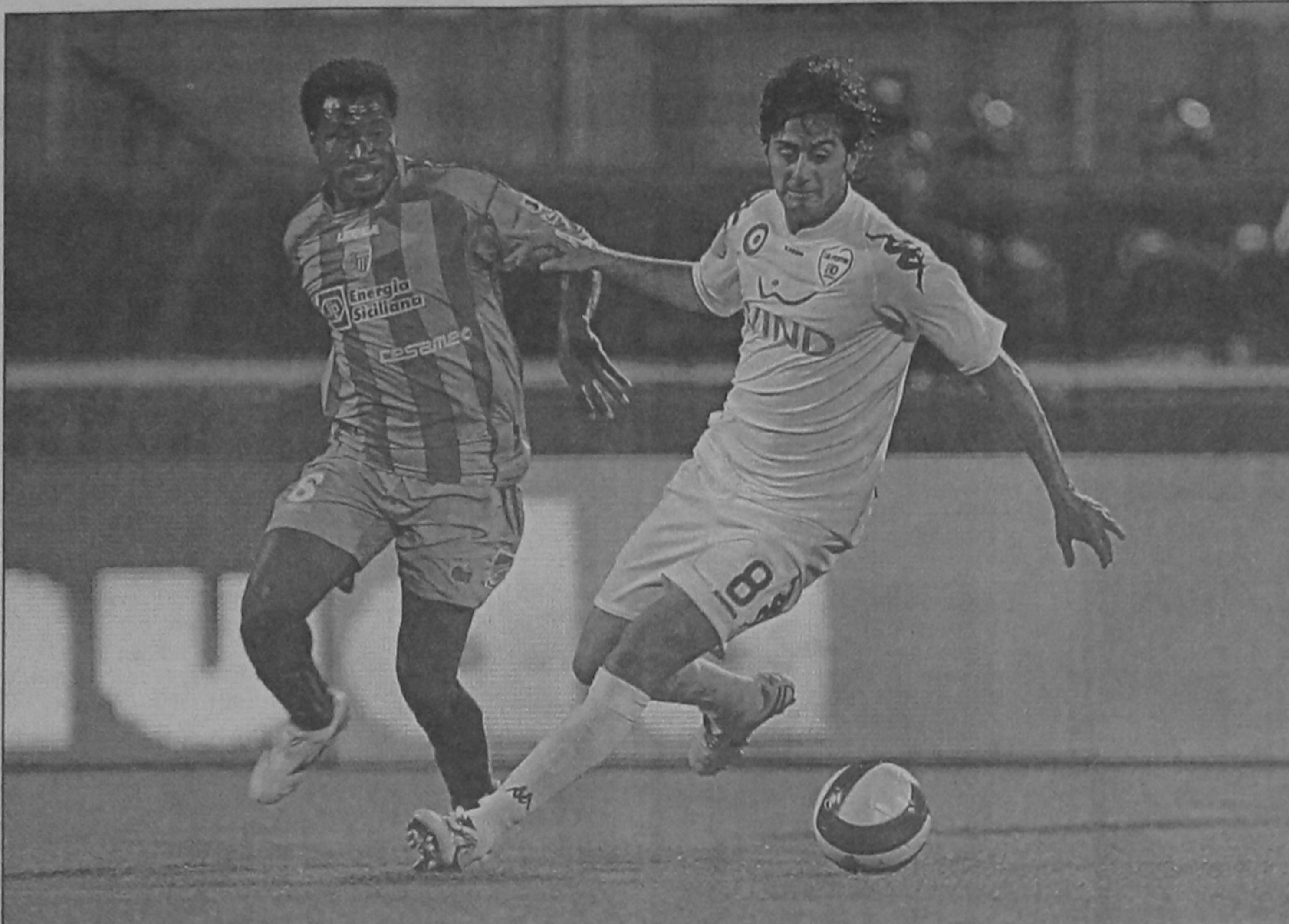
It's the fourth successive Italian Cup final that Roma have qualified for, a source of pride for coach Luciano Spalletti, especially as this year the final will be played as a one-off match at Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

"It's a great satisfaction to play in front of our public," he said. "It's a tribute to how the lads have worked."

With Inter also reaching the final following a 2-0 aggregate victory over Lazio, the top two in the league will play a repeat of last year's final, which Roma won.

The title could be decided this weekend if Inter beat Siena at home or if Roma lose against Atalanta. But Spalletti has not given up hope.

"We have to do what we have to do and try to win against Atalanta," he added. "We'll try but Inter have to drop points."



Roma midfielder Alberto Aquilani (R) squirms away from Catania midfielder Mark Edusei during their Coppa Italia semifinal at the Massimino Stadium on Thursday.

## High stakes derby for Sevilla

AFP, Madrid



Champions League football still within their grasp.

Sevilla are three points behind fourth-placed Atletico Madrid with two games left but although their season is over Betis will be fired up to ruin Sevilla's hopes of reaching the Champions League.

"Betis can rescue their season by beating us," said Sevilla midfielder Fazio. "We have to win to try and get into the Champions League and it will be a special derby."

Sevilla beat Racing Santander 3-0 to keep up their hopes of a top-four finish but Atletico can clinch fourth with victory against Deportivo La Coruna on Sunday as they have a superior head-to-head record to Sevilla.

Whoever finishes fourth will have to join Barcelona in qualifying for the Champions League after Frank Rijkaard's team lost out on

second spot to Villarreal.

A 4-1 mauling by newly-crowned champions Real Madrid in El Clasico on Wednesday prompted Barca to announce Rijkaard's departure at the end of the season with reserve team coach Pep Guardiola taking his place.

Guardiola, 37, is a former Barca captain making over 250 appearances for the club between 1990 and 2001 winning six league titles and the 1992 Champions League in the process.

Rijkaard will hand over the reins soon and his penultimate game is at home to Real Mallorca on Sunday.

After sealing second spot the pressure is off Villarreal who have achieved their best ever league finish going into Sunday's match against Espanyol.

## FIXTURES

**Sunday (all 2000 GMT)**  
Athletic Bilbao v Racing Santander, Atletico Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna, Barcelona v Mallorca, Real Betis v Sevilla, Valladolid v Getafe, Real Zaragoza v Real Madrid, Almeria v Recreativo Huelva, Levante v Valencia, Osasuna v Real Murcia, Villarreal v Espanyol

## MU get Rooney boost

## Title race reaches thrilling climax

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney is set to hand Manchester United a massive boost by returning to their squad for this week-end's dramatic finale to the Premier League title battle.

Rooney has been sidelined since suffering a recurrence of a hip injury in last month's defeat at Chelsea and there had been fears he would miss both the final day of the domestic campaign and the Champions League final against the Londoners in Moscow on May 21.

But United boss Sir Alex Ferguson confirmed Rooney is close to a full recovery and is likely to be on the bench at Wigan on Sunday with centreback Nemanja Vidic ready to return to the starting line-up.

"I'm hoping to have Wayne as a sub on Sunday but he will certainly be fit for the Champions League final," Ferguson said.

For the first time in 40 years, the top two sides in England's top flight go into the final day of the season on the same total of points.

But United's huge goal difference advantage over Chelsea

means Rooney and co. will be crowned champions provided they overcome a Wigan side with only pride left to play for after securing their own Premiership status.

United go into the final round of matches with a 17-goal advantage over Chelsea in terms of goal difference.

"I've made the point over the last few seasons that to have a good goal difference gives you that extra edge on everyone and in most seasons we've had the best goal difference," Ferguson said.

"I've no fears on the fitness side, I've no fears on the confidence side, no fears on the form. We're going into it in the right form."

After displaying remarkable tenacity in clinging on to United in the last two months, Chelsea's hopes of a third title in four seasons hinge on them beating Bolton at home while hoping that Wigan put up more resistance than West Ham, who surrendered meekly at Old Trafford last weekend.

Steve Bruce's side are unbeaten in their last five matches and have conceded only once in their last seven home games. Club owner Dave Whelan vowed that Bruce's men would not roll over.

"The dressing room has been buzzing all week and the players

are determined to unsettle United," Whelan said.

United however have won all five of the league meetings between the two clubs since Wigan arrived in the top flight and England midfielder Owen Hargreaves is confident there will be no shock stumble at the last hurdle.

"We've worked so hard all season," Hargreaves said. "We'll go out on the pitch on Sunday and give everything we have for 90 minutes."

"At the start of the season if somebody had offered us one game, just 90 minutes, to win the league, we would have jumped at that. We're in a good position."

Chelsea leftback Ashley Cole has warned his teammates they must not become distracted by events at the JJB Stadium.

## FIXTURES

**Sunday (1400 GMT kick-offs)**  
Birmingham v Blackburn, Chelsea v Bolton, Derby v Reading, Everton v Newcastle, Middlesbrough v Manchester City, Portsmouth v Fulham, Sunderland v Arsenal, Tottenham v Liverpool, West Ham v Aston Villa, Wigan v Manchester Utd

"It would be a killer if we drop points and they only drew, it would hurt us more," Cole said. "Anything can happen in football. Wigan got a draw at our place but first we have to win our game because it won't be worth anything if we don't."

With Arsenal and Liverpool already assured of third and fourth places in the table, Everton need a point at home to Newcastle to secure fifth spot and direct entry to next season's UEFA Cup.

A defeat would give Aston Villa the opportunity to snatch that prize provided Martin O'Neill's side beat West Ham at Upton Park.

At the bottom, two teams from the trio of Fulham, Reading and Birmingham will join Derby in the Championship next season.

After back-to-back wins, Fulham are the best-placed to survive but have arguably the toughest last-day fixture, away to FA Cup finalists Portsmouth, who are expected to rest fit-again goalkeeper David James rather than risk him ahead of next week's Wembley appointment.

In contrast, Birmingham, who are at home to Blackburn, and Reading, who visit Derby, will both believe they can pull off wins that might just be enough to ensure they can do it all again next season.

## Rosicky out of Euro '08

AFP, Prague

The Czech Republic's injured captain Tomas Rosicky announced Friday that he will not be taking part in next month's European Championships due to a recurring knee injury.

"I'm not capable of starting the European Championships. My injury requires an operation. I will go (for it) at the start of next week," Rosicky told a special news conference.

"I'm maybe enduring the worst period in my career. I lost out on most of the season with Arsenal. I was really looking forward to the championships," he added.

The announcement comes a month after local football chiefs raised the alarm over the Arsenal midfielder star's Euro chances because of a painful knee injury which has stopped him playing since the end of January.

Speculation has mounted locally that manager Karel Bruckner would be forced to try and tempt Juventus midfielder Pavel Nedved to return to the national team after his international retirement declared soon after the 2006 World Cup.

"The ball is now with Pavel," commented Czech and Moravian Football Federation spokesman Lukas Tucek. "He must decide if he wants to return."

Reading's Marek Matejovsky, Jaroslav Plasil, of Spanish side Osasuna, or Hamburg's David Jarolim are other options for the key playmaker role for the tournament from June 7-29.

Rosicky, 27, was cleared by Arsenal to recover in his homeland in mid-April and he had declared an improvement in his health at the end of the month.

The Czechs face co-hosts Switzerland, Portugal and Turkey.

## Viduka faces long lay-off

INTERNET, undated

Australian striker Mark Viduka will be sidelined for between three and six months with an achilles tendon injury.

In a fresh blow to Socceroos coach Pim Verbeek's hopes of calling on the 32-year-old, albeit sparingly, Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan said he would know in the next fortnight whether Viduka would be fit to start next season.

"Mark Viduka could be out for three to six months," Keegan said at a press conference to preview the Magpies' final game of the English Premier League season at Everton on Sunday.

"That's a blow for us but we'll see."

"We'll know more in two weeks and will inform you then. Mark's done great for us so that's a blow."

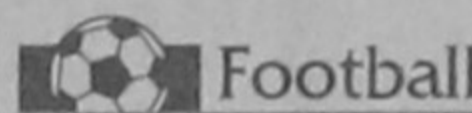
Viduka, along with fellow strikers Michael Owen and Obafemi Martins, was key to the club's recent good form.

Keegan conceded on Monday that Viduka's English season was over after he failed to return for the second half of the Magpies' 2-0 defeat to Chelsea.

The Australian also suffered hamstring, calf and ankle injuries this season.

Verbeek has left the door ajar for Viduka to join Australia's 2010 World Cup campaign, but was already planning for qualifying games against China and Qatar and two against Iran in June without the striker leading the attack.

## Hleb set to leave Gunners



AFP, London

Alexander Hleb, the Belarus midfielder who has been one of Arsenal's outstanding players this season, is set to follow Mathieu Flamini out of the Emirates Stadium, according to his agent.

Hleb, 27, has the option of buying himself out of the remainder of his Gunners contract at the end of the season and his agent, Nikolai Shpilevski, has confirmed that is what he intends to do.

Alexander is preparing to make one of the most important moves of his life," Shpilevski said in comments made to the Belarus newspaper Pressball and picked up by British media.

"He is leaving Arsenal even though they want to offer him a new long-term contract and better conditions. Only time will tell if leaving is the right decision, but there's no way back now. Everything will be cleared up in the next two weeks."

Hleb is expected to move to Internazionale, who have been accused by Gunners boss Arsene Wenger of "tapping up" Hleb, a charge the Italian club deny.

Reacting to the latest reports,

Wenger insisted Friday there had been no approach for Hleb and that he expected the player to still be at Arsenal next season.

"You cannot stop people talking but at the moment there is nothing (to discuss)," he told Arsenal TV. "I believe that usually all the players want to stay, and I expect this team to say 'let's make a pact together, come back next year and win'."

"That's what I expect them to do and my priority is to keep the team together, add what I think can help us to even be better and then see from there."

Hleb joined Arsenal from Stuttgart in July 2005 for 11.2 million pounds. His first season was marred by injury problems but he has been a first-team regular in the last two campaigns and his dribbling and deft passing have become key components of Arsenal's ability to open up opposing defences.

The apparently inevitable loss of Hleb will increase the pressure on Wenger to spend big in the transfer market this summer.

Arsenal's French manager has already lost the services of Mathieu Flamini, who departed for AC Milan on a free contract earlier this week, and there must be concern that the exodus will affect the

thinking of more valuable assets such as Cesc Fabregas and Emmanuel Adebayor, both of whom are coveted by some of Europe's biggest clubs.

Wenger said there was nothing more the club could have done to retain Flamini, who turned down a new contract at Arsenal.

"We put him in the bracket of where we could go (financially), and we made him that offer, but unfortunately it wasn't enough," Wenger said.

"We have to accept that because Mathieu was a good servant of the club for four years and he came without costing any transfer fee and left without costing any transfer fee, so he was free to go."

Wenger said Denilson, Abou Diaby and Alex Song were all capable of taking over from Flamini as the holding player in Arsenal's midfield, and he is optimistic of persuading the previous occupant of the role, Gilberto, to stay at the club.

The Brazil captain has grown unsettled as a result of his lack of first-team action and Wenger added: "I personally would like him to stay but he has to make a decision on that - I want him to feel comfortable."

"I like Gilberto and since he has been playing again he has shown how good he is as a player, but we will see."

## Crouch will cost 15m

AFP, London

Liverpool have slapped a 15-million-pound (30-million-dollar) price tag on unsettled England striker Peter Crouch while Tottenham have indicated that they are resigned to losing Dimitar Berbatov at the end of this season.

Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez accepts that Crouch has grown frustrated with playing second fiddle to Fernando Torres at Anfield, but made it clear it would take a significant offer for him to release a player he regards as a valuable squad member.

"Crouch wants to play every week but knows he must fight it out with Fernando Torres," Benitez said. "We keep seeing Portsmouth linked with the player but we have had no offer as yet. A 15 million pound price tag would not be unreasonable."

Benitez, who confirmed that out-of-contract winger Harry Kewell will leave the club at the end of the season, is hoping to bring England midfielder Gareth Barry to Anfield.

"I have spoken to (Villa boss) Martin O'Neill, he knows my ideas," the Spaniard said. "But we agreed to wait until the end of the season for any more discussions."

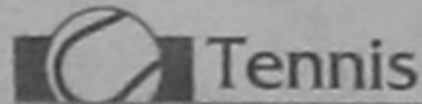
Tottenham boss Juande Ramos said Berbatov had made his mind up on his future, which will not be at White Hart Lane if a Champions League club comes in with a sufficiently large offer.

"I've spoken to him many times and know exactly what he wants," Ramos said. "I understand perfectly well that big clubs want to sign him."

Spurs have been looking at possible replacements for Berbatov, including Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o.

Ramos said: "Obviously we have to cover our backs in case the player decides to leave and we have to have options to replace him."

## Federer reaches quarters



AFP, Rome

Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic remained on track for a dream semifinal match-up with hard-fought victories at the Rome Masters on Thursday.

World number one Federer defeated giant Croatian Ivo Karlovic 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 in his third round clash while Djokovic overcame Russian Igor Andreev 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 to reach the quarterfinals.

Federer managed to fashion six break points against the six foot 10 inch (2.09m) Karlovic in the first set but each one was saved by booming serves.

Yet in the first set tie-break the Fed-Express made the breakthrough at 5-4 with a brilliant forehand return pass before a netted backhand from Karlovic handed him the set.

In the second set an increasingly dejected Karlovic's serve was not so potent and Federer twice earned 40-0 leads to break twice. Federer was pleased to have overcome this large hurdle.

"It's difficult to judge against Ivo, he has an unbelievable serve, the best in the game," said Federer. "You don't play much on the baseline and you're always under pressure but I'm playing well and feeling good."

Federer faces Czech Radek Stepanek next after he ousted Peruvian qualifier Luis Horna in three sets 6-4, 1-6, 6-3.

Australian Open champion Djokovic survived a marathon battle against Andreev, winning 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in 2hr 42min and the Serbian third seed will now face Spaniard Nicolas Almagro.

Almagro received a bye after Chilean 12th seed Fernando

Gonzalez pulled out of the tournament with a leg injury.

Djokovic did not have things entirely his own way under the Italian sun, quite unlike the stroll he enjoyed in Wednesday's second round against Belgian Steve Barcis.

He took the first set but was broken early in the second and struggled to hold his own serve as his form deserted him.

But Djokovic, who leads the Champions race after his first Grand Slam success at the beginning of the year, found something extra in the decider and scraped through.

Andreev's biggest problem was his failure to take break point chances. He managed to convert only two of 11 opportunities compared to Djokovic's three from five. Djokovic acknowledged he had found it tough against the Russian.

"He plays his best tennis on clay so I'm very happy," said the Serb. Djokovic and Federer are still scheduled to meet in the semifinals but the third seed didn't want to look that far ahead.

"I don't know, Almagro is a good player. I've played one more match than him but physically I hope to recover for tomorrow," he said.

It was a good day for American pair James Blake and Andy Roddick who both progressed to the quarterfinals and could yet meet in the semis.

Blake had a tough start against young Spaniard Fernando Verdasco, dropping the first set 7-5 but the eighth seed rallied and took the next by the same score before roping away with the decider 6-2.

Roddick broke the hearts of home fans as he ousted the last remaining Italian from the draw.

Simone Bolelli started well and broke early in the match but the sixth seed broke back soon afterwards and the first set went to a tie-

break with a Bolelli error handing Roddick the set 7-5.

The second was not so close as Roddick's greater experience showed and he took it 6-3. He said the idea of two Americans progressing into the latter stages at a clay court event should not be too much of a surprise.

"I guess we landed on the moon so we can figure out how to get to the quarterfinals of a clay court tournament."

## Bayern offer Gattuso 6m euros

AFP, Berlin

German champions Bayern Munich are reported to have offered Italian World Cup winner Gennaro Gattuso a contract worth six million euros (nine million US dollars) per year to leave AC Milan, it was reported here on Thursday.

German tabloid Bild say Bayern have offered the midfielder, who has one of the most powerful shots in the world, a four-year deal.

Gattuso has been at AC for nine years and is under contract until 2011, but new Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann, who takes over from Ottmar Hitzfeld on July 1, is said to have the Italian on his wish list.

"I like Gattuso a lot," Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer was quoted as saying in Bild.

"He could become an important element of Bayern's team in the Champions League next season, it would be perfect."

Bayern were crowned Bundesliga champions last Sunday and are looking to strengthen their squad ahead of next season's Champions League campaign.



An AFP file photo shows Pep Guardiola sitting in Barcelona on December 16, 2007. Barcelona president Joan Laporta announced on Thursday that the club's reserve team coach Pep Guardiola, a former player, will take over from Frank Rijkaard at the end of the season.

team including youngsters such as Lionel Messi and Bojan Krkic but there are sure to be summer exits as Guardiola looks to stamp his mark on the team.