

## Ribery ready to step up

AFP, Berlin  
Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery insisted Saturday that his successful first season in Germany has given him the confidence he needs to be a team leader with France during Euro 2008.

"All my successes in Munich have given me confidence, I've progressed on the pitch as in daily life. I'm better than before with the French team, I'm now a leader," he said in an interview with the German daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.

Ribery, 25, has often been compared in the German press to former French legend Zinedine Zidane.

But he insisted: "The truth is that no one can play like Zidane."

The former Marseille player also revealed that France's 2006 World Cup loss to Italy had made him "even hungrier" for success.

"The league, the European championships, the Champions League, I really want to win everything," he said.

And he admitted he had still not come to terms with Bayern's heavy 4-0 loss to Zenit St. Petersburg in the UEFA Cup semifinal, second leg.

"That continues to really bug me even if we achieved the Cup/Bundesliga double," he added.

## Berbatov to bid farewell

AFP, London  
Tottenham star Dimitar Berbatov looks set to play his last game for the club against Liverpool at White Hart Lane on Sunday in what promises to be a farewell fixture for a number of players on both sides.

The Bulgaria striker is expected to be the most high-profile departure from Spurs after manager Juande Ramos admitted that he may be powerless to prevent his prize asset seeking Champions League football at a bigger club.

"It's difficult to say whether it will be his last game. I would obviously like him to stay here but we don't know how future negotiations will go, so it's something I can't guarantee," the Spanish coach said.

"I've spoken to him many times and I know exactly what he wants. But it's a private conversation and I won't say what he told me."

## Giovanni eyes City move

AFP, Mexico  
Barcelona's young Mexican striker Giovanni dos Santos wants to leave Barcelona and join Manchester City, Mexican daily newspaper *Record* reported on Friday.

An unidentified source close to the player quoted in the newspaper said Giovanni, who is 19 on Sunday, is asking for a loan or transfer deal to the English Premiership club.

The source added the player would ideally have liked to have stayed at Barcelona but that because of the change of coach, with Pep Guardiola taking over from Frank Rijkaard later this month, he now wants to leave.

## Doni extends with Roma

AFP, Rome  
Brazilian goalkeeper Doni has signed a contract extension at Italian Cup finalists AS Roma until June 2012.

The goalkeeper will earn 3.8 million euros in his first year, rising year on year to 4.3 million euros in the final year of his contract.

Doni joined Roma in 2005 from Juventus and has been first choice ever since arriving.

## Grant wishes for play-off

AFP, London  
Avram Grant believes Chelsea and Manchester United should decide the destiny of the Premier League title with a winner-takes-all play-off if both teams finish level on points after Sunday's dramatic finale.

United will pip Chelsea to the title on goal difference if the leaders win at Wigan and Grant's side beat Bolton at Stamford Bridge.

But Grant insists that is an unfair way to decide a season's work. He would prefer the system used in Italy, where any tie, relegation or European qualifying issues are decided by a play-off match if the teams are level on points.

The Israeli even joked that Chelsea's Champions League final against United in Moscow on May 21 could serve as a showdown for both trophies.

"I must admit sometimes Manchester United play very good football and score a lot of goals," Grant said. "But I prefer the system in Italy. If you have the same points you play the other team."

"I know I have an interest now to say that, but I like it more than just for that. Sometimes against the weakest teams you score more goals."

"If you have the same points it means you are on the same level so you have to play to see who is better. We could play winners takes

all in Moscow!"

Grant's suggestion has no chance of becoming reality this season, so Chelsea's failure to keep pace with United's goal spree could be costly, leaving him to rue injuries that deprived him of Didier Droghda and Frank Lampard for long periods.

"We played more attractive football but you don't push a button and suddenly score a lot of goals. We won 6-0, 4-0 and 3-0 several times," Grant said. "When you miss so many players the target is just to win games, especially in the beginning."

"When we beat Derby 6-0 I said to one of the big players I didn't like his game because we needed to score more goals."

"He said 'why?'. I said maybe at the end of the season we will need it. He came to me last week and said 'how did you know?' I didn't know but I knew we needed to get more goals."

Grant suffered a blow earlier this week when the Premier League confirmed that Nicolas Anelka wouldn't be able to play against his former club because he initially moved to west London on loan.

Ricardo Carvalho is also a doubt with a back injury following the Portugal defender's awkward fall at Newcastle on Monday.

Chelsea's title battle with Sir Alex Ferguson could easily spoil a 15-year friendship between the managers, but Grant insists he is already planning to share a bottle

## Wawrinka enters final

AFP, Rome  
Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka reached the final of the Rome Masters here on Saturday after sixth seed Andy Roddick could last only three games of their semifinal here.

The American seemingly injured the shoulder on his serving arm early on and could not serve.

He lost the first three games before calling for the trainer but after an injury time-out he played only one point of his next service game before throwing in the towel.

Wawrinka will face either third seed Novak Djokovic or unseeded Czech Radek Stepanek - who put out world number one Roger Federer in the quarterfinals - in Sunday's final.

Wawrinka thus reached his first ever Masters Series final, a day after reaching a semifinal at this level for the first time.

It continues his remarkable run here where he had already put out 16th seed Andy Murray and eighth seed James Blake in previous rounds.

After facing a battle to hold his opening service game, he broke Roddick in the second game and then held serve comfortably in the third.

Roddick pulled up sharply on one point early in the third game and then seemed to be restricted in his movement, making no effort to reach the Swiss's shots throughout the rest of the game.

Following just one attempt to serve in the fourth game, he called it quits and went to the net to explain to his opponent that he could not serve.



Czech Radek Stepanek exults after winning a point against Swiss world number one Roger Federer during their Rome Masters quarterfinals on Friday.

## Stepanek stuns Federer

Tennis  
AFP, Rome  
Roger Federer was the biggest casualty as the seeds tumbled on a day of shocks at the Rome Masters on Friday.

World number one Federer was downed 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (9/7) by Czech Radek Stepanek while eighth seed James Blake fell to Swiss Stanislas Wawrinka 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1.

Federer was out of sorts throughout the match with his backhand particularly misfiring badly.

"You've seen me many times, it happens all the time," he moaned afterwards. "It's something I've been trying to get rid of for 10 years but still not today."

Although he lamented his backhand, he said there was more than just that wrong with his game.

"I don't know if it was just the backhand. I think I missed plenty of opportunities throughout the match," he said. "He's difficult to play. He gives you little rhythm and he always changes his game up a lot."

"I've played against him in the past so it wasn't much of a surprise. I just hoped I could have played a little better."

Stepanek employed an attacking strategy, coming to the net at every opportunity.

That paid off in the first set tie-break when he came in to the net on Federer's serve and earned a mini-break with a stunning drop volley for 5-4. He won his next two service points to claim the first set.

In the second set he broke Federer at the first opportunity but was broken back at 4-2.

However, that was when Federer's backhand went awry and he was broken again, leaving Stepanek to serve for the match. Federer rallied, though, and held

## Gerrard hungry for success

AFP, Liverpool  
Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard believes he will finish his career at Anfield but is desperate for the side to challenge for the Premier League title.

The midfielder has been linked with a move, but the club dismissed reports of a bid from Inter Milan, with a spokesman saying: "The idea is complete rubbish, fantasy, there has been no approach and no bid."

And Gerrard, 27, himself insists he sees his long-term future at Anfield.

"I cannot see myself ever leaving Liverpool now, and what I would dearly love is to lead this club to the next level that I believe we are capable of reaching," he told the club's website.

"I have won trophies here but there is one I am missing and I want that before I finish playing."

"I do not want to look back and say I have never been in a title race. I can see that the team is getting stronger and stronger and I can see that we are going forward. I feel that we are getting closer and I really believe that."

Liverpool's season comes to an end at Tottenham on Sunday, with fourth place and Champions League qualification already assured.

And Gerrard believes Liverpool's summer transfers will be key.

"We always say this every year but it will be an important summer because we need to keep the momentum," he said.

"The manager's (Rafael Benitez) signings will be important as they always are. I have been lucky as a footballer and I've won more

## Figo backs Guardiola

AFP, Madrid  
Inter Milan's midfielder Luis Figo, who played for Barcelona for five seasons, says the Spanish club's newly appointed coach, former team captain Pep Guardiola, has what it takes to manage the team.

"I think Pep is intelligent enough to make decisions, to make choices, to do a good job," the 35-year-old Portuguese international told radio Cadena Ser.

"I know him well and I know how much he is passionate about football, so I am not surprised that he has become Barcelona's coach," he added.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta announced Thursday that Guardiola, who manages the club's reserves, would replace Frank Rijkaard as coach at the end of the season, its second straight season without a major trophy.

The 37-year-old won six league titles in 11 seasons as a midfielder with Barcelona but has never held a senior coaching position.

Barcelona were eliminated in the Champions League semifinal by Manchester United and trail Real Madrid in the Spanish league by 17 points in third place with two games remaining after losing 4-1 to the new champions on Wednesday.

Figo joined Real Madrid in 2000 after five seasons with Barcelona. He signed with current club Inter Milan in 2005.

## Inter just need a win

AFP, Rome  
Inter Milan are hoping to sew up the first leg of a potential domestic double as they face little Siena on Sunday in their penultimate Serie A match of the season.

Victory would give the nerazzurri their third straight Scudetto crown under Roberto Mancini and would give them the edge ahead of the Coppa Italia final later this month.

Second-place Roma need to win their last two matches, starting with Sunday's visit of Atalanta, and hope Inter fail to win either of theirs in order to overturn the three-point gap between the pair.

Just as they managed last season, the two teams are guaranteed to finish in the top two league positions and will contest the cup final.

Last year Inter won the league and Roma the cup. Inter look near certain to repeat their feat with a Siena who have nothing to play for the only thing standing in their way at the moment.

Inter president Massimo Moratti said he was looking forward to the season run-in.

"The duel with Roma in the cup final was obviously going to happen," he said. "This challenge against Roma will be fascinating, it's a real match."

He said the team is calm ahead

## Bilic unveils EURO squad

AFP, undated  
Croatia coach Slaven Bilic has unveiled his 23-man squad for next month's UEFA EURO 2008.

Bilic also called up two additional strikers who will participate in team training between now and the competition's start. The pair - namely Manuel Panic and Anas Sharbini - could be selected to replace a member of the squad up until 24 hours before the first match.

Croatia will face Germany, Austria and Poland in Group B at the continental finals, which are to be held in Austria and Switzerland from 7 to 29 June.

**SQUAD**  
**Goalkeepers:** Stipe Pletikosa (Spartak Moscow/RUS), Vedran Runje (Lens/FRA), Mario Galinovic (Panathinaikos/GRE)  
**Defenders:** Vedran Corluka (Manchester City/ENG), Dario Simic (AC Milan/ITA), Robert Kovac (Borussia Dortmund/GER), Josip Simunic (Hertha Berlin/GER), Dario Knezevic (Livourne/ITA), Hrvoje Vjecic (Tomsch/RUS)  
**Midfielders:** Danijel Pranjinic (Heerenveen/NED), Nikola Pokrivac (Monaco/FRA), Niko Kovac (Salzburg/AUT), Luka Modric (Dinamo Zagreb/CRO), Jerko Leko (Monaco/FRA), Ognjen Vukojevic (Dinamo Zagreb/CRO), Dario Srna (Shakhtar Donetsk/UKR), Niko Kranjcar (Portsmouth/ENG), Ivan Rakitic (Schalke/GER)  
**Strikers:** Miladen Petric (Borussia Dortmund/GER), Ivica Olic (Hamburg/GER), Igor Budan (Parma/ITA), Ivan Klasnic (Werder Bremen/GER), Nikola Kalinic (Hajduk Split/CRO)



An AFP file photo shows Liverpool star Steven Gerrard (R) skipping a sliding tackle from Manchester City midfielder Michael Johnson during their Premiership match at Anfield on May 4, 2008.

## Wenger believes in youth

Football  
AFP, Sunderland  
Arsene Wenger may be forced to spend more than he would ideally like to this summer but the Arsenal boss has reiterated his faith that players already at the club can plug the gaps in his squad.

The lack of depth in Arsenal's first team squad has been blamed for the club's waning in the final months of this season as injuries and fatigue took their toll on a group of players that, at one stage, were five points clear at the top of the Premier League.

The departure of Mathieu Flamini for AC Milan and signs that Alexander Hleb also sees his future in Italy have generated fears that Wenger's squad may be disintegrating.

But the Frenchman, who is set to include a number of young prospects in his squad for the final match of the season against Sunderland on Sunday, is adamant

that is not about to happen.

Much has been made of the fact that Hleb has the option of buying out of the remainder of his contract under FIFA rules that were upheld by the test case brought by Scotland defender Andy Webster over his move from Hearts to Wigan.

But Wenger warned Hleb he would not simply be able to walk away at a time of his choosing. "This 'Webster clause' is not as simple as it looks," he said.

"You can't come in the next day and buy out. There is no rule at all that says what it is about. You have to go to tribunal, to go first to FIFA, and if you don't agree with FIFA you have to go to CAS (the Court of Arbitration for Sport)."

"It takes a lot of months. You (the player) can be banned for the whole period if it is not done in a proper way."

Wenger has identified Abou Diaby and Denilson as candidates to step into the midfield role Flamini has vacated, and played down suggestions that Arsenal's wage ceiling will make it hard to

attract top quality new recruits.

"There are plenty of players who want to join us, don't worry, we have no problem on that front," he said.

"What is unbelievable is I'm sitting here like we have killed all the players and when I go to my office I have 220 calls from players who want to come in."

Wenger added: "What we need next year is two or three players maybe. We need talent."

"I think a huge player is better than a huge name. You have huge names who produce very little at the moment."

"But don't worry, we will have a team to compete for the championship next year."

Among the youngsters who could be blooded at Sunderland are Kieran Gibbs and Mark Randall, who have returned from loan spells at Norwich and Burnley respectively.

"Now they need now to show they are good enough," he said. "They have, like everybody, to fight to play, and if they are good enough they play. It's as simple as that."

Sunderland boss Roy Keane has also turned his attention to reshaping his squad after a mixed first season back in the Premier League.

Keane is determined to take Sunderland to the next level -- challenging for a place in Europe -- and he admits that he will need to display a Wenger-like touch in the transfer market if that is to happen.

"Arsene Wenger would probably be one of the best known in the world for having the best contacts from the people he has met over the years and the clubs he has worked at."

"You can tell that with the players he has brought in for fairly good prices, and you look at the lads he has sold on."

"That would probably be one of his strengths. It is important for a manager, your recruitment. You will be judged a lot on the players you bring into a club."

Several Sunderland players could be playing for their futures at the club after a feeble display in last weekend's 2-0 defeat at Bolton prompted Keane to promise a huge clearout in the close season.

## Sven still wants City stay

AFP, Middlesbrough  
Sven-Goran Eriksson, the beleaguered Manchester City manager, enters what could be his final game in charge of the Premier club at Middlesbrough on Sunday insisting he would still like to remain in the post.

The club's controversial Thai owner, Thaksin Shinawatra, remains silent over whether he will dismiss the former England manager after just one relatively successful season in charge - a season that could yet end with City qualifying for the UEFA Cup through the place awarded to England under UEFA's Fair Play initiative.

Eriksson has largely retained his dignity and silence through the recent, unlikely sequence of events.

But, even though all indications are that he will be dismissed less than 12 months into his reign, the Swede insists he would remain with City if given the opportunity.

"I don't think there's any doubt about that," said Eriksson. "You've been seeing me twice a week more or less and you know from the press conferences we've had there are no doubts about that."

"I like the club, I like the fans I like the players we have, I like the project. It's very important to know one thing - it's a big football club, great players, great staff, great people. That's reason enough to be happy as long as you're in the job."

"I know there's been a lot of speculation but that's speculation and not a problem. The facts we'll know next week. The speculation has gone on more than this week so this week is no different to the week before. The players are working hard and we want to finish with a good game."

City's form has tailed off dramatically in the second half of the season although as recently as March, Thaksin was describing his aim for this campaign as a top ten finish with the owner expecting to qualify for the UEFA Cup next year, a target which Eriksson may have delivered a year ahead of schedule.

"Yes, I think this has been a successful season, I would believe so," said Eriksson. "We came in, bought a lot of new players. I know perfectly that we haven't played brilliant football 37 games but many times we've played very well."

"It's a new team it's a young team and we are at the right side of the table I think. We could be eighth, maybe seventh but probably not."

"As the situation is today it's a possibility this will be my last game, of course it is. That's not a secret for anyone in the world of football today. Let's see. Let's have the last game and have a little bit of patience."

"I will have emotions about it but as the situation is today it's a possibility but nothing is confirmed."

Eriksson's opposite number on Sunday, Gareth Southgate, reflected the general reaction in football to the position in which the veteran manager finds himself.

"Everybody in football's surprised at the situation at City," said Southgate.

"From the outside he appears to have done an excellent job. Every club has a chairman and an owner and they make the decisions. I'm very fortunate here to have the backing of someone who is looking longer term but I don't think anyone would question the job Sven's done this season."