

## Ronaldinho out, Adriano in

AFP, Sao Paulo

Barcelona superstar Ronaldinho was again ignored by Brazil coach Dunga when the squad for the next round of 2010 World Cup qualifiers was announced on Thursday.

Instead, Inter Milan's Adriano, who is currently at Sao Paulo on loan, was the only new addition to the 25-man squad for the games against Paraguay and Argentina in June.

Ronaldinho, who has been sidelined at Barcelona since April 4 with a hamstring injury, also missed out on selection for the last two qualifiers against Peru and Uruguay in November 2007.

Brazil play Paraguay on June 15 in Asuncion before facing bitter rivals Argentina on June 18 at Belo Horizonte.

Before that, Dunga's team will tackle Canada in a friendly in Seattle on May 31 and Venezuela on June 6 in Boston.

Paraguay lead the South American zone standings for the 2010 World Cup with 10 points from four matches with Argentina on nine points while Brazil are a point further back.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Julio Cesar (Inter Milan/ITA), Diego Alves (Almeria/ESP), Doni (AS Roma/ITA)

**Defenders:** Alex (Chelsea/ENG), Juan (AS Roma/ITA), Lucio (Bayern Munich/GER), Luisao (Benfica/POR), Daniel Alves (Sevilla/ESP), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Gilberto (Hertha Berlin/GER), Kleber (Santos), Maicon (Inter Milan/ITA)

**Midfielders:** Anderson (Man United/ENG), Diego (Werder Bremen/GER), Elano (Man City/ENG), Gilberto Silva (Arsenal/ENG), Josue (Wolfsburg/GER), Julio Baptista (Real Madrid/ESP), Kaka (AC Milan/ITA), Mineiro (Hertha Berlin/GER)

**Attackers:** Adriano (Sao Paulo), Paton (AC Milan/ITA), Luis Fabiano (Sevilla/ESP), Robinho (Real Madrid/ESP), Rafael Sobis (Real Betis/ESP).

## Zidane to play in Sydney

AFP, Sydney

French football legend Zinedine Zidane will play an exhibition match in Sydney next month alongside a number of teammates from his 1998 World Cup winning side, the promoter said Friday.

The three-time world footballer of the year will line up with French teammates Marcel Desailly and Robert Pires at the Sydney Football Stadium on June 1, said promoter Alain Barataud.

He will play a team drawn from players from the Australian side, which narrowly failed to qualify for the 1998 World Cup.

Australia and Everton midfielder Tim Cahill, who is recuperating in Sydney after foot surgery, said bringing Zidane to Australia was a coup.

"Zizou is one of the biggest players in the world, he is poetry in motion, and he is so passionate about football," Cahill told reporters. "What a special opportunity this is for Australian kids to see him."

Zidane will also conduct a coaching clinic for youngsters at the stadium on June 2.

"Once he found out it was for kids, he said OK, no problem, and he is donating his services for free," Barataud said.

Zidane, regarded as one of the game's greats, was famously sent off in the 2006 World Cup final for headbutting Italian defender Marco Materazzi, an incident that preceded France losing the final in a penalty shoot-out.

He retired from professional football after the tournament.

## Deco quitting Barcelona

AFP, Madrid

Portuguese international midfielder Deco handed Spanish giants Barcelona another bombshell on Thursday by announcing he will not be with the club next season, Spanish media reported.

Deco, under contract at the Nou Camp until 2010, claimed that Barca chiefs had given him the green light to find another club.

"I will go to an English or an Italian club. But not Spain because the only club at the same level as Barcelona is Real Madrid and I will never go to Real," said Deco.

Barcelona have endured a troubled season where they will finish third in La Liga at best behind champions Real and Villarreal following the final round of matches this weekend.

Coach Frank Rijkaard has called it quits to be replaced by former player Josep Guardiola while players Ronaldinho, Edmilson, Lillian Thuram and Gianluca Zambrotta have all been tipped to be heading for the exit door this summer.

# Del Piero's last chance

AFP, Rome



Veteran striker Alessandro Del Piero has one last chance to convince Italy coach Roberto Donadoni to pick him for the Euro 2008 squad, which will be announced on Tuesday.

Del Piero began this season on the Juventus bench and out of the Italy squad.

But his form since breaking back into the Juve team has been nothing short of sensational and one of the main reasons his club have secured an unlikely third place finish, one season after being promoted from Serie B.

Ahead of Saturday's Serie A trip to Sampdoria, who have qualified for the UEFA Cup next season, Del

Piero will be hoping to clinch the top scorers berth in this season's Scudetto.

He currently leads the way with teammate David Trezeguet and Genoa's Marco Borriello with 19, two shy of his record for Juve.

The clamour for his inclusion in the squad for Juve's showpiece event has been growing and another match-winning performance could secure his ticket to

FIXTURES	
<b>Saturday</b>	Sampdoria v Juventus
<b>Sunday</b>	AC Milan v Udinese, Atalanta v Genoa, Cagliari v Reggina, Catania v Roma, Empoli v Livorno, Lazio v Napoli, Parma v Inter Milan, Siena v Palermo, Torino v Fiorentina

Austria and Switzerland.

For Juve, thoughts have already turned to next season and their twin challenge in the league and the Champions League.

Earlier this week they re-signed veteran Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved for another season.

He said it was the desire to have his son watch him in Europe's premier competition that motivated him to delay retirement for another year.

"This year I've watched with interest the Champions League from afar and perhaps the fact that he (his son) would like to watch me play in Europe made up my mind," said Nedved.

"I had the opportunity to go elsewhere but after earning a Champions League place I only thought about Juve."

# Chelsea are underdogs



AFP, London

Joe Cole admits Chelsea will go in the Champions League final against Manchester United in the unusual position of being underdogs.

There are not many occasions when the Stamford Bridge billionaires have to play second fiddle to their opponents, but Cole believes United's Premier League title success means they are favourites to win in Moscow on May 21.

However the England winger's downbeat verdict came laced with a warning for Sir Alex Ferguson's side.

Although Chelsea were piped to the English crown on the last day of the season, Avram Grant's team have been in fine form and Cole insists it would be foolish to underestimate the Blues.

"We will be going in as underdogs, of course, because they have got the championship. But also the people at United will be looking at Chelsea and thinking with all the injury problems and turmoil which the club has had to deal with this year, we finished just two points behind them," Cole said.

"The Champions League final is the top of the mountain, the benchmark for any club. To win it is a massive achievement and we're determined to do it."

"We are not too interested in plaudits - you want trophies. We

fought United all the way and we are disappointed not to have won, but credit has to go to the whole squad and everyone around the place who have kept it going, shown real steel and determination."

Chelsea's first Champions League final appearance offers the perfect chance to avenge United's title triumph and salvage a season that could be their first without a trophy since 2004.

But Cole is adamant the campaign will have been a success regardless of the result in Russia and he expects to return to any even stronger squad next season.

"There are people who will say if you win one game you are a god, and if you lose one game then you are the biggest duffer to have ever played football," Cole said.

"If you look back at it, with all that has happened, you have to say the club is going in the right direction whatever happens in Moscow."

"If we were to win Wednesday night, then we would be going full speed ahead again."

"The owner and his money have given us the opportunity to be in this position together. We appreciate that and just want to get the job done for all the fans and for everyone around us at the club."

While Cole can afford to be relatively sanguine about Chelsea's future, boss Grant must be slightly more concerned about the repercussions of returning home empty-handed.

The club's chairman Bruce Buck

and chief executive Peter Kenyon both recently passed up the chance to guarantee Grant will still be in charge next season, giving the impression that a defeat could be the signal for a more high-profile manager to take his place.

Cole insists Grant can cope with the strain. He said: "It is part and parcel of being a manager or a footballer. There is always someone ready to have a pop at you."

"I don't pay any attention to what those people think of me, and I am sure Avram doesn't either. He has got broad shoulders."

"We all want to win it for our own reasons, but mainly for the club with everyone pulling in the right way."

"The people in charge are doing a great job and we are going in the right direction."

Whatever the result in Russia, Cole suspects Chelsea could be back in the final soon as Premier League clubs continue to dominate the competition.

Although this is the first all-English final, it is also the fourth year in a row there has been representation from England in Europe's biggest club match.

"I think it does show how strong the Premier League is and has been so far for the past five years," he said. "If you look at how the English teams have done in Europe, it has been phenomenal really."

Now our players and clubs are getting that experience, I can see us dominating for a long time."

## Germany spring Marin surprise

AFP, Berlin

Uncapped teenage winger Marko Marin, from second-division Borussia Moenchengladbach, is the shock inclusion in Germany's extended 26-man squad for next month's Euro 2008 tournament.

The 19-year-old, who has starred for Germany's Under-21 side, has been included in the preliminary senior squad by head coach Joachim Loew for next month's tournament in Austria and Switzerland from June 7 to 29.

And there was also a surprise call-up for Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper Rene Adler at the expense of Germany's reserve 'keeper Valencia's Timo Hildebrand.

Striker Patrick Helmes has also made the squad after his second-division side Cologne won promotion back into the Bundesliga.

Loew will take his squad to Spain on Monday for a training camp and will cut his squad to 23 when the Euro 2008 squad is finalised on May 28.

Germany are in Group B and play Poland on June 8, Croatia on June 12 and co-hosts Austria on June 16.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Jens Lehmann (Arsenal/ENG), Robert Enke (Hanover 96), Rene Adler (Bayer Leverkusen)

**Defenders:** Christoph Metzelder (Real Madrid/ESP), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich), Arne Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Marcell Jansen (Bayern Munich), Clemens Fritz (Werder Bremen), Heiko Westermann (Schalke 04)

**Midfielders:** Michael Ballack (Chelsea/ENG), Thomas Hitzlsperger (VfB Stuttgart), Simon Rolfes (Bayer Leverkusen), Torsten Frings (Werder Bremen), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Piotr Trochowski (Hamburg), Tim Borowski (Werder Bremen), Jermaine Jones (Schalke 04), David Odonkor (Real Betis/ESP), Marko Marin (Borussia Moenchengladbach)

**Forwards:** Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich), Lukas Podolski (Bayern Munich), Mario Gomez (VfB Stuttgart), Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke 04), Patrick Helmes (Cologne), Oliver Neuville (Borussia Moenchengladbach)

## Man City gifted UEFA Cup spot

AFP, London

Manchester City have been awarded a 'Fair Play' place in next season's UEFA Cup, the English Premier League announced on Friday.

England received an extra berth in the competition for topping the Europe-wide Fair Play league and although City only finished sixth in the domestic version, all the sides above them had already qualified for European competition in the 2008-09 campaign. City were left sweating over the spot after captain Richard Dunne was sent off in their final league game of the season, a humiliating 8-1 defeat by Middlesbrough.

But once the final count had been done it was revealed that they had held off Fulham and they will now enter the competition at the first qualifying round stage in July.

Ironically, City's failure to qualify for Europe through the normal avenues is one of the reasons that club owner Thaksin Shinawatra is expected to sack manager Sven-Goran Eriksson once he has lined up a suitable replacement.

## Laudrup packs bags at Getafe

AFP, Madrid

Dane Michael Laudrup said Friday he was quitting as coach of Spanish side Getafe after just one season.

"I have chosen the time to go - I have not been sacked," said the former Danish international who succeeded Bernd Schuster when the latter last summer took over at Real Madrid, steering them to retain the league title.

"Getafe gave me a huge experience," said Laudrup, who led Getafe to the Spanish Cup final while they stand 13th in the table with two games to go.

In addition, he helped them to the UEFA Cup quarterfinals, where they bowed to Bayern Munich after two thrilling encounters.

"Now, even Franz Beckenbauer knows Getafe," Laudrup joked, in allusion to some disparaging comments that the "Kaiser" had made ahead of the tie.

Laudrup has not indicated what he will now do but his name had been mentioned as a potential successor to Frank Rijkaard at Barcelona, who finally plumped for their reserve coach and former player Josep Guardiola.

"It's not my style to say where I am going to go," said the Dane, said rumours of interest from Sevilla and Turkey's Galatasaray.



Photo: AFP

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (L) and Anatoly Tymoshchuk (R) of Ukraine, captain of Zenit St. Petersburg, hold the UEFA Cup during their meeting in Moscow's Kremlin on Friday.

# A final for romantics

REUTERS, London



Portsmouth meet Cardiff City at Wembley on Saturday (1400 GMT) in a final the FA Cup has been crying out for even if the absence of familiar names may prove the competition's lack of appeal for the big clubs.

It is the first time since 1991 that none of the current 'big four' have contested the final (add Everton and Tottenham Hotspur and you have to go back to 1975) and for both combatants it has been a long time coming.

Cardiff manager Dave Jones said he hoped the achievement of his Championship (second division) side in reaching the final would "stop people going on and on about 1927".

That was the year Cardiff became the only non-English club to win the Cup in what was their

last appearance in the final until this season.

"We want to make our own history," said Jones. "Maybe, over the last few years, the FA Cup has lost that little bit of magic because it has been the same teams (in the final)."

"Portsmouth and ourselves have broken the mould this season and I don't think that will happen again for a long, long time."

Portsmouth must go back to 1939 for their only success and for manager Harry Redknapp, who has been trying to get to a Wembley final as a coach and player for more than 40 years, it is an overdue reward for a lifetime's dedication to the game.

"It's great for everyone at the club," he said. "I look at where we were two years ago (almost relegated from the Premier League), or five years ago when we were near the bottom of the Championship and now we are in the Cup final."

Saturday's showpiece is a fitting end to a wonderful season for the FA Cup and neutrals around the world will surely tune in with much more interest than had it been, for

example, a 21st meeting between Chelsea and Liverpool in four years.

Both those teams fell victim to Barnsley in memorable upsets before the Yorkshire club lost to Cardiff in the semifinals.

Like Cardiff, who beat Middlesbrough in the sixth round, Portsmouth have only had to play one top flight club en route to the final but it was Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Cynics, or perhaps realists, might argue that instead of celebrating the season of upsets and the unlikely final it has produced, English football should be mourning the debasement of what was once the jewel in its crown.

For half a century the FA Cup final was the only domestic game available live on TV and for generations of fans it held a magical place in the calendar.

Endless live soccer has undermined that legacy but Saturday's match feels like a throwback to the 1970s when the final was always dramatic and the sun always shone.

# Van Basten trims squad

AFP, Hague



Dutch coach Marco Van Basten has whittled down his list of Euro 2008 hopefuls to 26, ahead of shedding another three players for his final squad, the Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) said Friday.

Four definitely not making the cut are Ajax defender Urby Emanuelson, AZ Alkmaar's Kew Jaliens, Valencia midfielder Hedwiges Maduro and PSV Eindhoven striker Danny Koevermans. Van Basten will by May 28 have to reduce his list to a final 23.

AC Milan veteran midfielder Clarence Seedorf, who said earlier in the week he would not be looking to make the squad in the belief Van Basten does not rate him sufficiently highly, has been replaced numerically by Sevilla defender Khalid Boulahrouz.

Van Basten admitted to being stunned by Seedorf's announcement not to make himself available.

Despite not being selected for last month's friendly with co-hosts Austria, Liverpool striker Dirk Kuyt is in the 26, as are Real Madrid pair Arjen Robben and Ruud Van Nistelrooy despite recent injury worries.

The Dutch, champions in 1988 when Van Basten was their attacking fulcrum, will meet up for pre-tournament preparations Tuesday in the northwestern city of Noordwijk ahead of a May 24 friendly with Ukraine in Rotterdam.

In the finals, the Dutch are in the Group of Death - Group C - meeting world champions Italy on June 9, France four days later and then final opening phase rivals Romania on June 17.

### SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Sander Boschker (FC Twente), Edwin van der Sar (Man-

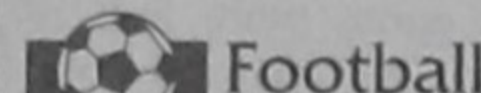
chester United/ENG), Maarten Stekelenburg (Ajax), Henk Timmer (Feyenoord)

**Defenders:** Wilfred Bouma (Aston Villa/ENG), Tim de Cler (Feyenoord), John Heitinga (Ajax), Joris Mathijsen (SV Hamburg/GER), Mario Melchior (Wigan Athletic/ENG), Andre Ooijer (Blackburn Rovers/ENG), Khalid Boulahrouz (Sevilla/ESP)

**Midfielders:** Ibrahim Afellay (PSV Eindhoven), Giovanni van Bronckhorst (Feyenoord), Orlando Engelaar (FC Twente), Nigel de Jong (SV Hamburg/GER), Denny Landzaat (Feyenoord), Wesley Sneijder (Real Madrid/ESP), Rafael van der Vaart (SV Hamburg), Demy de Zeeuw (AZ Alkmaar)

**Strikers:** Ryan Babel (Liverpool/ENG), Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Ajax), Dirk Kuyt (Liverpool/ENG), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid/ESP), Robin van Persie (Arsenal/ENG), Arjen Robben (Real Madrid/ESP), Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink (Celtic/SCO).

# C'Ron stokes Real fires



AFP, London

Manchester United forward Cristiano Ronaldo has dropped a potential bombshell on the club by telling Spanish television he could consider his future following the Champions League final on May 21.

Ronaldo is expected to be one of the most influential players on the park in Moscow next Wednesday, when United face Premier League rivals Chelsea for European club football's biggest prize.

However the Portuguese international has given Sir Alex Ferguson an unwanted dilemma by stating in an interview with a Madrid-based television channel

that he would not rule out a move to Spain.

Despite having four years left on a five-year contract at Old Trafford that is worth 120,000 pounds (233,000 dollars) a week, Spanish giants Real Madrid have been repeatedly linked to the Portuguese live wire.

According to Spanish media reports, Ronaldo would be ready to leave Old Trafford because of a financial disagreement with the club.

And Ronaldo appears to have stoked those fires by telling Spanish television during a media open day for the Champions League final: "I am happy here but let's see what happens after the Champions League final."

"I'm feeling calm here, I'm

happy here but in the future I don't know."

Asked whether that specifically meant a move to Spain, he added: "I have said millions of times that I would love to play in Spain, but it's one thing to dream and another thing for it to be reality."

"I don't know the club (Real) but I know they like my game. I know that other teams in Spain like me as well. It's good to know they like my game, but I am happy here."

United, who successfully defended their English Premier League crown last week, have recently stated that Ronaldo is not for sale at any price.

Days before United bid to win European club football's biggest prize for only the third time, Ronaldo's comments are untimely at the very least.

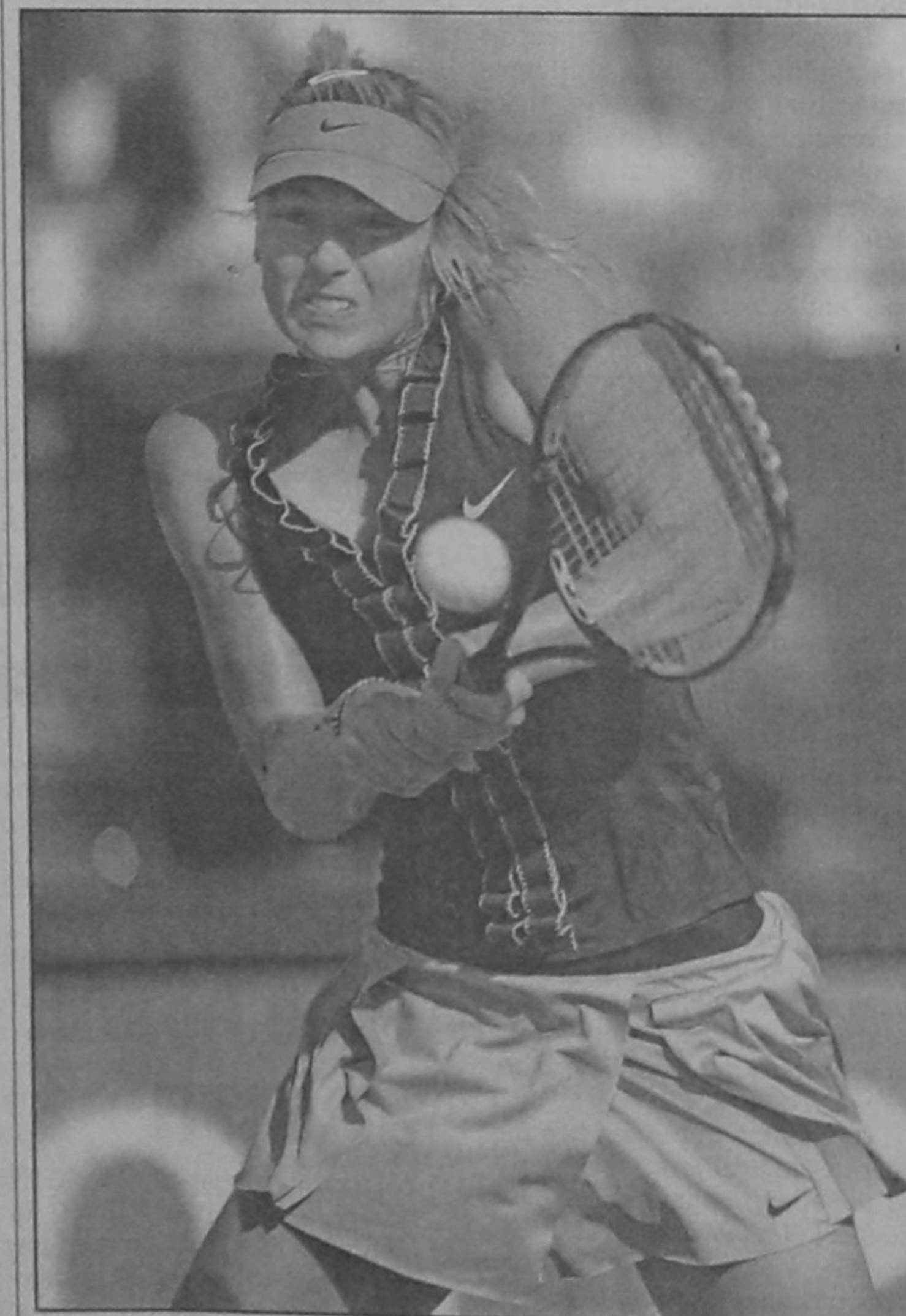


PHOTO: AFP

Russian star Maria Sharapova makes a backhand return against Danish opponent Caroline Wozniacki during their Rome Open encounter on Thursday.