

## 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), Jossue (Wolfsburg/GER), Julio Baptista (Real Madrid/ESP), Kaka (AC Milan/ITA), Mineiro (Hertha Berlin/GER).

Attackers: Adriano (Sao Paulo), Pato (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.

"Zidane 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 doing his services for free," Barataud said.

Zidane, regarded as one of the game's greats, was infamously 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.

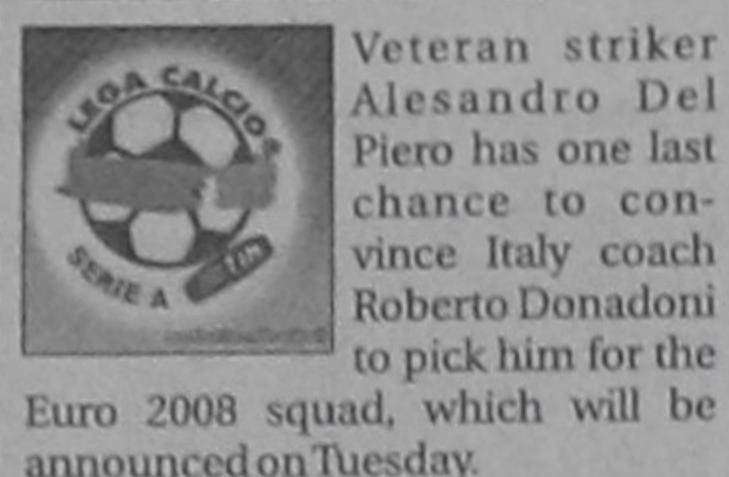
"I will go to an English or an Italian club. But not Spain because the only club at the same level as Barcelona is Real Madrid and I will never go to Real," said Deco.

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, Edmison, Lilian Thuram and Gianluca Zambrotta have all been tipped to be heading for the exit door this summer.

## Del Piero's last chance

AFP, Rome



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 June's showpiece event has been growing and another match-winning performance could secure his ticket to

## FIXTURES

Saturday

Sunday

Sampdoria v Juventus  
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

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

## Chelsea are underdogs



AFF, 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 with a warning for Sir Alex Ferguson's side.

Although Chelsea were pipped 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 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.

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

The club's chairman Bruce Buck

## Maria battles through



AFF, Rome

New world number one Maria Sharapova was made to battle all the way before reaching the Rome International quarterfinals with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki on Thursday.

Despite being kept on court by a stubborn Dominika Cibulkova for almost three hours until late on Wednesday, the Russian still came out with all her fighting spirit under the sun in the Italy capital on Thursday.

She edged a combative first set and then needed to dig deep to come back from 5-1 and two breaks of serve down in the second to win five straight games.

However, when needing to serve for the match and despite leading 30-15, mistakes crept into her game and she handed the Dane a break with a double fault.

But she knuckled down to see out the tie-break, sealing it with a forehand winner down the line.

"Taking away what she was doing on her side of the net, from my point of view I thought there were just a lot of rollercoaster rides," said the second seed.

"I'd put two or three good points together and then the level sort of dropped, but that's all right."

"The good thing is I got a win and can play another match tomorrow."

It was a determined display with plenty of powerful, deep hitting that at times had been lacking against Cibulkova.

It was the second piece of good

news for Sharapova on the day as it was also confirmed that she would be the new world number one following Justine Henin's retirement when the WTA rankings are released next week.

She next plays Swiss ninth seed Patty Schnyder, who beat eighth-seeded Frenchwoman Marion Bartoli 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) in a marathon battle.

Third seed and last year's runner-up Svetlana Kuznetsova was the big casualty of the day as she lost to French qualifier Alize Cornet.

It was a stunning victory for the 18-year-old who dominated her more illustrious opponent from start to finish in a 6-2, 6-4 success and will now play former world number one Serena Williams.

The American upset Italian hopes as she moved into the quarterfinals at the expense of home favourite Sara Errani.

The former Wimbledon champion won 6-4, 6-3 in a typically dominant performance.

And she said things are looking good for her ahead of the French Open, which starts later this month.

"I'm definitely feeling much fitter than last year or the year before," she said.

"It's a good feeling, I've had enough match play and I'm feeling good."

Serena is looking to earn her second title here having lifted the trophy in 2002, beating Henin in the final.

Her sister Venus, the seventh seed, played in the late match and beat Russia's 10th seed Vera Zvonareva 7-5, 6-2.

She will next play fourth seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic, who made short work of Russian Maria Kirilenko, giving up just two games in a 6-1, 6-1 win.

Despite her seemingly easy victory, Jankovic said she had been off colour recently.

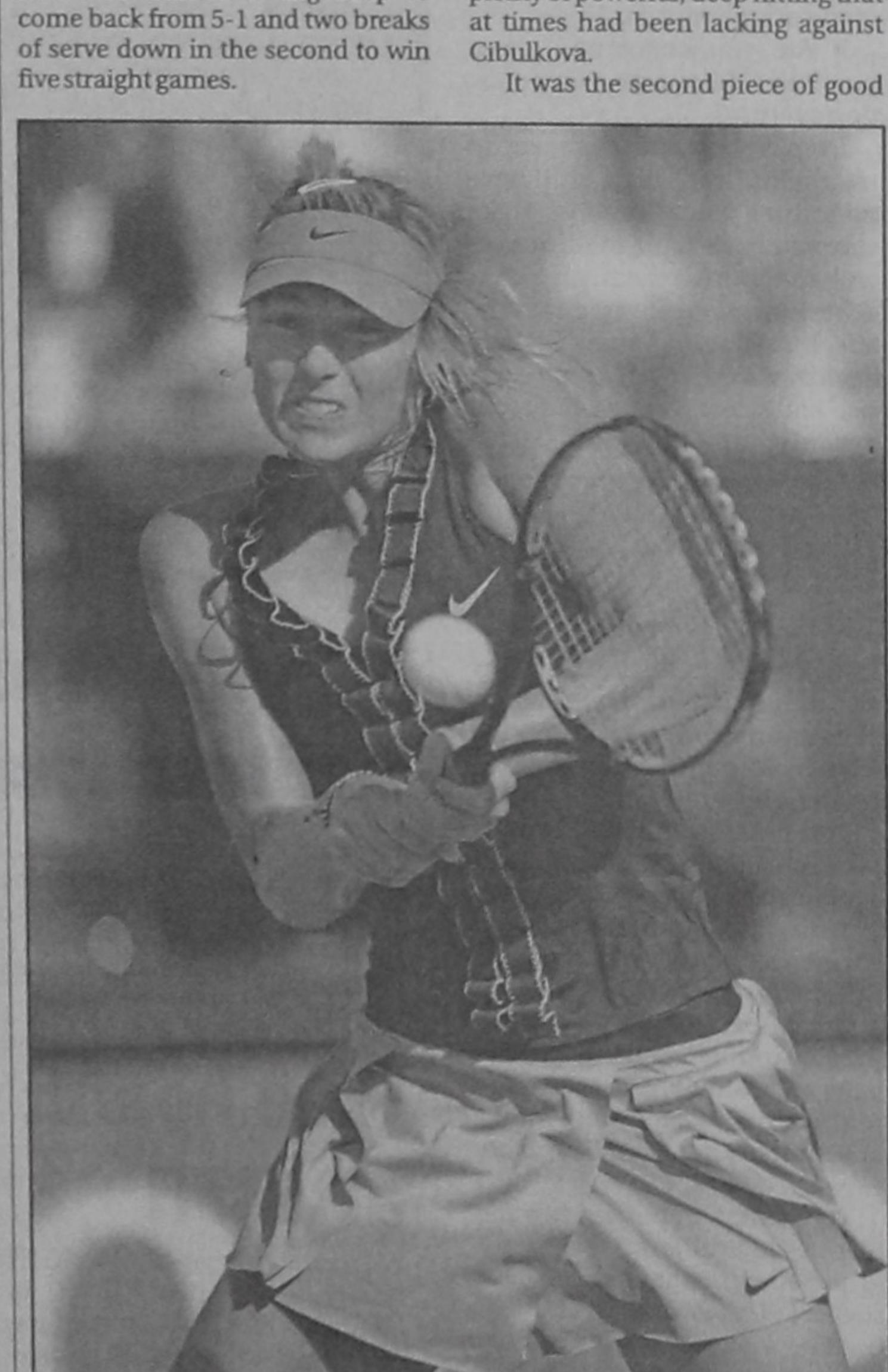
"I've been sick for a week now and I've been struggling a little bit," said the defending champion.

"I have problems breathing. I'm still on antibiotics and trying to recover and get healthy."

Cornet put her victory over Kuznetsova down as her best ever.

"My best performance until now was against (Agnes) Szavay who was ranked 13th. Now it's against Kuznetsova who is number five (in the world). It's crazy, I'm really happy," said the teenager, who will play Serena on Friday.

"After beating Svetlana, why not. Serena," said the slender French girl.



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

## Germany spring Marin surprise

AFF, Berlin

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.

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 to 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), 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)

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.

England received an extra berth in the competition for toppling 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 about 1927.

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.

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".

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

## C'Ron stokes Real fires



AFF, 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.

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 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