



PHOTO: AFP

Newly-crowned Wimbledon champion Rafael Nadal of Spain (L) signs an autograph as he arrives at Palma de Mallorca's Airport on Monday.

UEFA Cup to be renamed

REUTERS, Switzerland

European soccer's governing body UEFA is considering changing the name of its second tier UEFA Cup competition to the UEFA Europa League.

The planned rebranding was revealed by Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the acting chairman of the new European Clubs Association, whose organisation was presented with the proposal on Monday.

"The hope is that a refreshment of the name and brand can help achieve better results than we've seen in the UEFA Cup in the past," Rummenigge later told a media conference at UEFA's Swiss headquarters.

"There has been a general impression that it has become a second-class competition and that we should get back to how it was ten or 15 years ago."

A senior UEFA source confirmed to Reuters that UEFA's executive committee would vote on the name change when it meets in Bordeaux in September.

He said the new name was meant to better reflect the new group stage system being used in the competition from the 2009-10 season, in a direct copy of UEFA's much more successful Champions League competition.

UEFA announced in December that it was revamping the UEFA Cup's format, dropping the unpopular five-team groups in which teams play each opponent just once either home or away in favour of a simpler home and away system.

From 2009 UEFA will also be marketing the competition centrally, in another lesson learned from the lucrative Champions League, and hopes that the new name will help distinguish it from the previous UEFA Cup format.

Barca refuse to increase Arshavin bid

AFP, Moscow

Spanish club Barcelona refused to increase their initial 15-million-euro bid for Russian international forward Andrei Arshavin, Saint Petersburg side Zenit official site announced Monday.

"Spanish football club Barcelona refused to improve their original 15-million-euro offer for our striker Arshavin," Zenit general director Maxim Mitrofanov said.

He added that Zenit received no other offers to sign the striker from any other clubs.

"We are not holding any talks with any other clubs concerning the transfer of our forward Arshavin," Mitrofanov said.

His comments came amid rumours that Arshavin is set to fly to London soon to undergo a medical before signing for either Arsenal or Chelsea of the English Premiership.

Earlier Russian reigning champions Zenit said that Arshavin only wanted to play for Barcelona.

"Arshavin wants to move to Barcelona - he doesn't want to play anywhere else," a spokesman for Zenit St Petersburg told BBC Sport.

"Barcelona have made an offer but we are still negotiating with them. I don't know when a decision will be made but I think Arshavin will leave the club," the Zenit spokesman said amid reports that the Russian outfit have put a 39 million dollars fee on his head.

The 27-year-old played a starring role for his country at Euro 2008, helping them reach the semi-finals, where they lost to Spain.

Ronnie in Olympic team

Football

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Out of form Ronaldinho has been included in Brazil's squad for the Olympic Games as an overage player.

Real Madrid striker Robinho, another player over the 23 age limit, was also named in the squad by coach Dunga, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said on its Web site (www.cbf.com.br) on Monday.

Players under the age limit included Liverpool midfielder Lucas, Manchester United

midfielder Anderson, Werder Bremen's Diego, AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato and Manchester City's new signing Jo.

Brazil, five-times world champions, have never won the Olympic gold in soccer and regard it as the one major title missing from their collection.

Ronaldinho, troubled by injury and fitness problems, has not played for Brazil this year and has made only sporadic appearances for Barcelona.

Barcelona's new coach Pep Guardiola has already said that Ronaldinho does not figure in his

plans for next season and AC Milan are reported to be interested in signing him.

Brazil, silver medallists in 1984 and 1988, will face China, Belgium and New Zealand in their first round group.

Dunga, who is also in charge of the senior side, is under increasing pressure after recent poor results and his future in the job is seen as hinging on a good performance in China.

The Olympic tournament, taken more seriously in South America than in Europe, is restricted to under-23 teams with three overage players allowed per team.

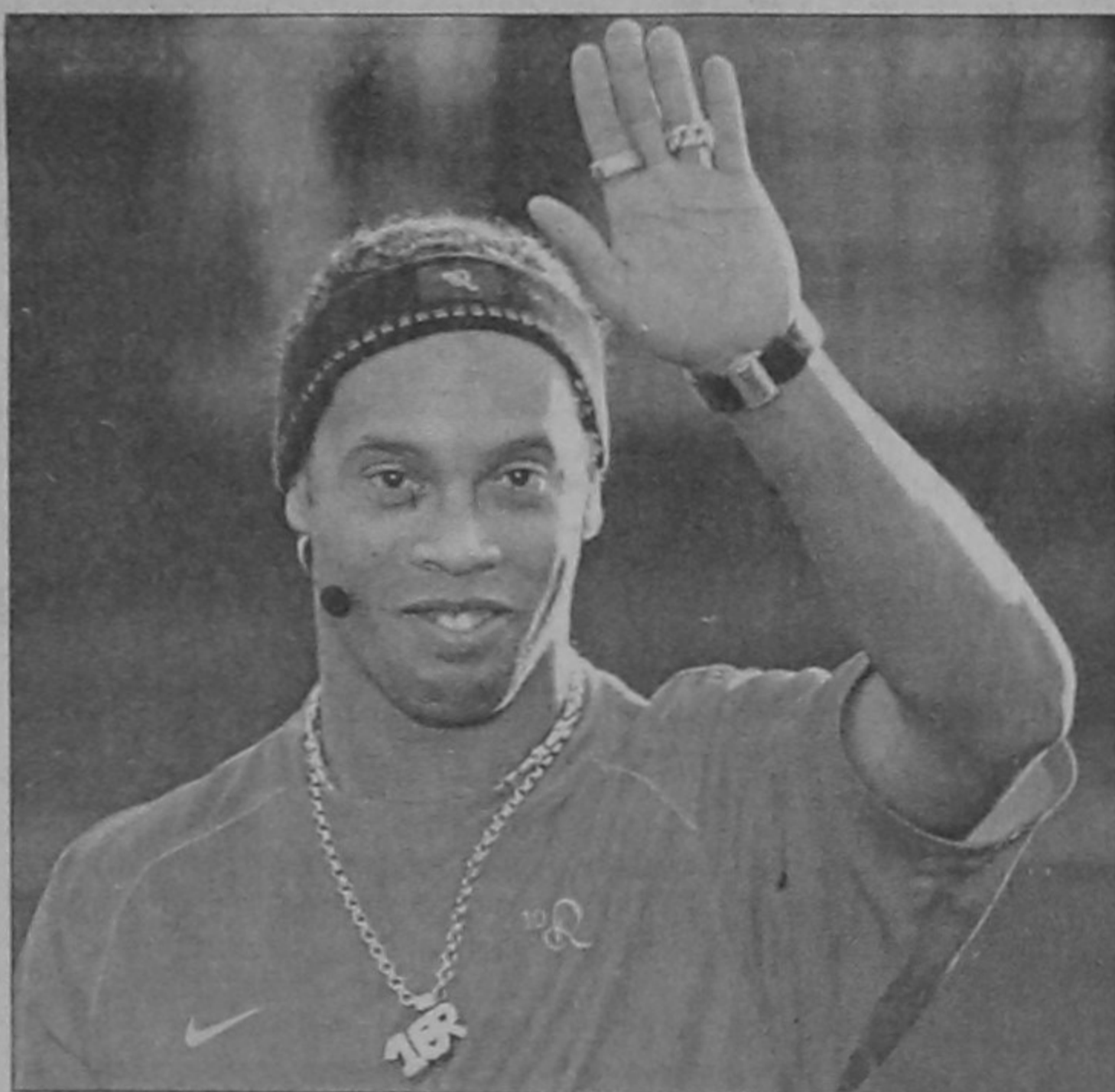
The presence of the over-age players depends on the goodwill of their clubs, who are not obliged to release them.

Brazil had hoped to include World Player of the Year Kaka in their squad but AC Milan said they would not let him go.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Diego (Almeria, ESP), Renan (Internacional), Defenders: Marcelo (Real Madrid, ESP), Ilninho (Shakhtar Donetsk, UKR), Rafinha (Schalke 04, GER), Thiago Silva (Fluminense), Alex Silva (Sao Paulo), Breno (Bayern Munich, GER).

Midfielders: Lucas (Liverpool, ENG), Anderson (Manchester United, ENG), Hernanes (Sao Paulo), Ronaldinho (Barcelona, ESP), Diego (Werder Bremen, GER), Thiago Neves (Fluminense). Strikers: Robinho (Real Madrid, ESP), Alexandre Pato (AC Milan, ITA), Rafael Sobs (Real Betis, ESP), Jo (Manchester City, ENG).



RONALDINHO

Media speculate on C'Ron at Real

AFP, Madrid



winger was operated on his ankle.

"Just in time for La Liga," sports daily Marca said on its front page in an article that said the 23-year-old would regain his fitness before the Spanish league starts on August 31.

Rival sports daily As meanwhile wrote in its front page story that Real Madrid expects Ronaldo will announce his move before July 17, the date when he is supposed to return to work with the English side.

Manchester announced Monday that Ronaldo's operation was successful but the player could miss the start of the new season as he recovers from the surgery. The English Premiership gets underway on August 16.

Marca reported that Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon has told the club's board that Ronaldo had agreed to join the Spanish side.

But on Sunday Calderon told reporters at Wimbledon that the most probable outcome "as of today" is that "Ronaldo will continue to play for Manchester United next year".

"Manchester has to want it. Once they decide to sell him and

communicate this, we can say we are talking about a possible transfer. But as of today that is not happening," he said.

Over the past several weeks Spain's sports press has published daily stories over Ronaldo's alleged impending transfer to Real Madrid.

The player has said he would like to play in Spain and Real is reportedly ready to pay up to 85 million euros (133 million dollars) to sign him on a five year contract and pay the striker an annual salary of nine million euros.

But Ronaldo is under contract with United until 2011 and the club refuses to let him go.

Vaart not moving to Spurs

AFP, London

Holland midfielder Rafael van der Vaart on Monday said he was not in line for a move to English Premiership side Tottenham Hotspur.

The Hamburg playmaker impressed at Euro 2008, but insists he expects to stay put in north Germany.

In an interview with Dutch magazine Sportweek, van der Vaart said: "The interest has been there for some time already, but they are not the club I want to go to. Tottenham are not a club I want to swap Hamburg for."

Exhausted Nadal takes a break

AGENCIES, Stuttgart

Wimbledon champion Rafael Nadal has pulled out of this week's Stuttgart Cup due to a knee injury.

"I haven't stopped playing for the past four to five months," said the world number two, who topped five-time champion Roger Federer 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (8/10), 9-7 on Sunday night.

"My doctors have said I need a couple of days rest. I will now get examined for an exact diagnosis," the Spaniard said in Stuttgart, adding he had a problem with his knee without providing any details.

"My plans for the immediate future are very simple - I just want to rest because I'm completely exhausted," added Nadal, who also won the French Open title by defeating the world number one.

"I only want to return to the court once I am 100 per cent fit," the 22-year-old said.

Nadal, a four-time French Open champion, became the first Spaniard in more than four decades to win the Wimbledon men's singles title after defeating Roger Federer.

"It was amazing for me," said Nadal. "It was a very special victory for me winning against Roger and the most important thing [was] winning Wimbledon."

Asked what the victory meant to him, he said: "Right now I only think about the present."

"Probably when I finish my career, I am going to think about these things."

Scolari did not push C'Ron to quit MU

AFP, Cobham

Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari insists he has never made an attempt to persuade Cristiano Ronaldo to quit Manchester United for Real Madrid.

Scolari would benefit more than most if Ronaldo gets his wish to join the Spanish champions because it would significantly damage Chelsea's main rival for Premier League title before the new campaign has even started.

The former Portugal coach had plenty of time to give Portuguese winger Ronaldo a push towards the Old Trafford exit door when they were together during Euro 2008.

But the Brazilian, speaking at his official unveiling as Chelsea boss at a hotel near the club's training ground on Tuesday, made it clear the Ronaldo transfer saga was none of his business.

"I never advised Cristiano to change clubs. I want to make that clear," Scolari said. "If Ronaldo stays or does not stay it is not my business."

Scolari doesn't believe Chelsea's chances of winning the title will be improved even if Ronaldo does move to Spain because United, Liverpool and Arsenal are all formidable opponents.

"He is a fantastic player in any league in the world. But he doesn't play alone," Scolari said. "If he goes or doesn't go, the league is very difficult for Chelsea."

Milan keen on Drogha, Adebayor

AFP, London

AC Milan technical director Brazilian Leonardo admitted Monday the Italian club were running the rule over Chelsea striker Didier Drogha and Arsenal's Emmanuel Adebayor.

"It's no secret we're interested in signing a forward and are studying candidates. Drogha is a fine player and Adebayor is a player I really like. We are waiting for the right time to move," Leonardo told the BBC.

Togo striker Adebayor last week expressed an interest in joining Barcelona but has also said Italy would appeal, hinting he feels it was time to move on.

Milan are after reinforcements after offloading Alberto Gilardino to Fiorentina, while veteran Ronaldo has a serious knee injury.

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani last month said he had made Adebayor his club's "sole transfer target" of the summer, while suggesting the Togolese would prove too expensive with Barca also in the hunt and, unlike the Italians, in the Champions League.

Ivory Coast forward Drogha has meanwhile been linked with AC Milan but also city rivals Inter and Real Madrid and Barcelona.

Leonardo meanwhile insisted that Brazilian playmaker Kaka was not for sale, despite reports Sunday quoting AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani as saying Chelsea have put a big-money offer on the table for him.

"I can only repeat what we keep saying - there is no possibility of Kaka moving away from Milan. We have not received an official bid for him. He is very close to AC Milan and has a very good relationship with the club," Leonardo said.

'Lamps wants to stay'

AFP, London



Luiz Felipe Scolari revealed Tuesday that Frank Lampard has told him he wants to stay at Chelsea but the London club's new boss was unable to offer fans similar reassurance about the future of Didier Drogha.

Inter Milan have made a formal approach for England midfielder Lampard, who has only a year left on his current contract and has reportedly been considering a move to link up with former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho, who is now in charge of the Italian champions.

Chelsea have insisted they have no intention of selling and, speaking at his first press conference

since taking up his new job, Scolari said Lampard had assured him he wants to stay.

"I met Frank Lampard yesterday and I spoke to him," Scolari said. "I like him too much as a player and as a person."

"I asked him if he wants to stay at Chelsea, not only this season but for more time, and he said to me that he wants to stay and play for Chelsea for many years."

"I was at that time very happy because I think Chelsea need Lampard and Lampard likes Chelsea. Now there are some minimal questions to solve and I think Lampard will be with us for more than one year."

Scolari could not offer evidence of a similar commitment from Drogha, although he insisted the Ivory Coast striker was "200 per cent" part of his plans.

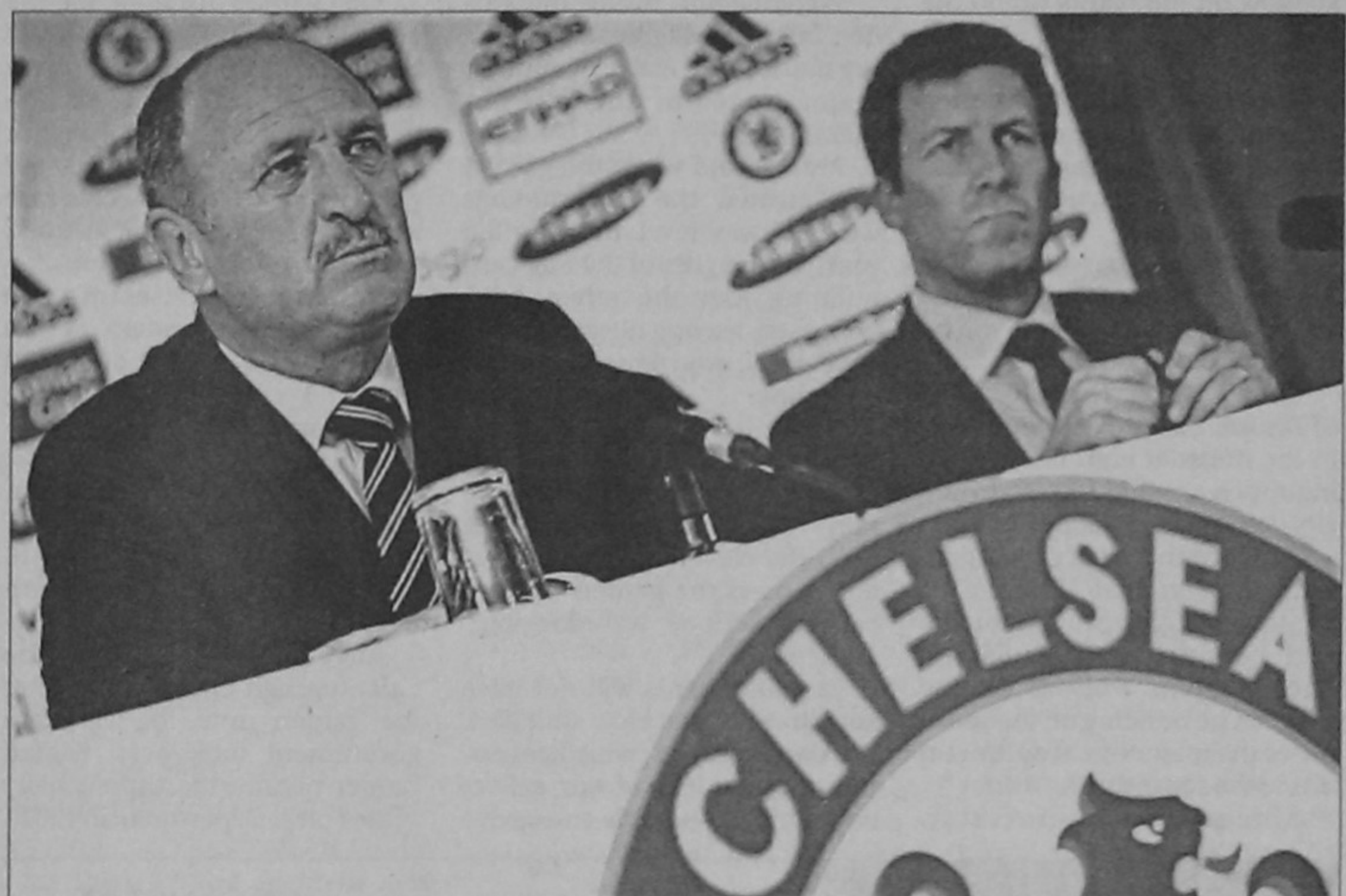


PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari (L) addresses a press conference at the Hilton Cobham hotel in Kent on Tuesday.

There's no magic: Guus

Football

AFP, Seoul

Guus Hiddink, christened the "wizard" by grateful Russian media, said Tuesday there was no magic to his giant-killing exploits as a coach in big international tournaments.

"There's no recipe, there's no secret, there's no magic," he told journalists during a visit to South Korea, the team he took to the 2002 World Cup semifinals against all the odds.

"What we emphasised was to expose (ourselves), as a team, as players, to play fully committed and fully hard," the 62-year-old

said of his latest team Russia, which he led to the Euro 2008 semifinals last month.

The country had not advanced to the knockout stage of a major competition in 20 years.

The Dutchman -- a hero in South Korea -- also took Australia to the second round of the World Cup two years ago.

Hiddink arrived Monday to attend this week's opening of a football pitch named after him for disabled children in the south eastern port city of Pohang.

"You cannot guarantee 100 per cent winning, but what we guaranteed to the public is that we would play in a very attractive style," he said of Russia's Euro 2008 performance.

"You must be very realistic," he said, sitting at a lunch next to current South Korean national coach Huh Jung-Moo. "Let's not forget realistically where Russia is, where Korea is."

South Korea, seeking their seventh ticket to the World Cup, have made it to the final regional qualifying round starting in September. But their performance has been flawed in recent qualifiers.

"You must put the aims and targets, so everyone knows what to do within a team," said Hiddink, quoted by Yonhap news agency.

"(A team) cannot always be top, top, top. But when players play with their heart, there's no big problem."

N Korea target WC

AFP, Hong Kong



It may not please the purists, but North Korea's football team is firmly on course for the 2010 World Cup after reaching the last round of qualifying without losing or even conceding a goal.

If they do make it, it will be the isolated communist state's first World Cup in 44 years and despite a lowly world ranking of 94, below such minnows as Gambia and Suriname.

The endeavor also came at a time when the country, ruled with an iron fist by Kim Jong-Il, is believed to be suffering acute food shortages, reviving memories of a famine in the 1990s which left up to one million people dead.

Better known for its nuclear weapons programme and dubious human rights record, North Korea, who play all in white, have hardly endeared themselves either with their defensive brand of football.

Yet it appears to work. In the previous qualifying group North Korea scored only four goals in their three wins and three draws, but they kept a clean sheet every time thanks to a solid rearguard action that would make Italy look adventurous.

With Brazil sitting uncomfortably in their qualifying group on the other side of the world and other end of the footballing spectrum, it raises the spectre of a World Cup with North Korea but without the five-time champions.

One of the few who play outside North Korea's tightly guarded borders is 24-year-old striker Jong Tae-Se, of Kawasaki Frontale, a mid-table side in Japan's J-League.

Japan-born Jong, dubbed "Asia's Wayne Rooney" by South Korean media, is confident the North can reach South Africa 2010 despite being drawn in the harder of two final Asian qualifying groups.

"I think the players of the Republic have very high individual skills and the team has functioned as a unit with defensive tactics

which allowed individual defensive skills to show. This is a factor in our success," said Jong.

He believes the handful of team members who play in the "outside world" have helped the rest of the squad, most of whom ply their trade in Pyongyang's 12-team central league.

"I think our presence rather than our capability is what matters most. I can feel how much they care about how we, as professionals, playing football in the outside world, prepare ourselves mentally in training and matches."

North Korea are targeting only their second ever World Cup and first since England 1966, when they stunned the football world by becoming the first Asian team to reach the quarterfinals, upsetting Italy 1-0 en route.

Their new-found success under coach Kim Jong-Hoon is a far cry from just a few years ago when they all but vanished from international football after losing to Japan and South Korea in qualifiers for the 1994 tournament.

Football may be the most popular sport in North Korea but that did not stop all-powerful leader Kim Jong-Il, angered by the team's poor fortunes, from banning the team from travelling abroad for 10 years.

They returned to international football at the Bangkok Asian Games in late 1999 but did not compete in qualifying for the 1998 World Cup in France or the 2002 edition.

That fit of pique passed but the North's players are subject to travel restrictions that would be unthinkable for most international footballers, said one seasoned follower of the team.

Ri Gwang-Hong, executive director of the Pyongyang-friendly Korean Football Association in Japan, has watched most of the qualifiers so far.

"The (next) qualifying group has many Middle East countries so it will be difficult for us to schedule our travels. It is not as easy as in Japan when it comes to immigration control. We have to find a way," said Ri.

Immigration and political concerns means "our team plays fewer matches abroad than any other team," he said.

Ri also knows that if the team is to come through a group comprising Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and, again, cross-border rivals South Korea, they will have to do more than just soak up the pressure and play on the break.

"We will aim for a kind of football in which we try not to lose, counting on home advantage and withstanding tough conditions on the road," he said.

North Korea have the first of their eight final qualifiers on September 6 at UAE and face South Korea four days later.

Guiza going to Fenerbahce

AFP, Madrid

Mallorca striker Daniel Guiza, top scorer in Spain last season, is on the verge of joining his former Spain coach Luis Aragones at Turkish giants Fenerbahce, Spanish media reported Tuesday.

The two sides have already reached an agreement and only the details over the payment by the Turkish side of 17.4 million euros (27.3 million dollars) for the player needs to be ironed out, daily newspaper AS reported.

Guiza, 27, will earn an annual salary of around three million euros, it added.

Rival newspaper Marca meanwhile said the player would sign for five seasons. It said Aragones, who took over at the Turkish side last week after leading Spain to victory at Euro 2008, was instrumental in moving the deal forward.

Guiza scored 27 goals for Mallorca last season. He joined the club from Getafe in July 2007.

The player scored twice for Spain at Euro 2008, with Aragones using him as a substitute for first-choice strikers David Villa and Fernando Torres.