

Adebayor too expensive

AFP, Rome

AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani has told La Gazzetta dello Sport that Arsenal's asking price for striker Emmanuel Adebayor remains too expensive to consider an approach.

On Friday Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger let the San Siro club know that he was prepared to discuss the possibility of the Togo striker moving from north London to northern Italy.

However, Galliani feels that the requested fee of 28 million euros remains too high for a club that will not have Champions League income to look forward to in the 2008-09 season.

"We've stopped dealing with Wenger and have to reconfirm that up to now Milan has above all important sacrifices to make in negotiations with its current players, starting with Kaka," he said.

The paper does though suggest that there may be a surprise return to San Siro for Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko, albeit in a loan move.

Ukrainian Shevchenko scored 127 goals in 208 matches for AC Milan between 1999 and 2006, but has failed to settle in southwest London since he moved there following the 2006 World Cup.

He has often been linked with a second spell in the red and black half of Milan throughout his two-year stay in England.

Should he make the move, Shevchenko will not necessarily find life any easier second time around as he will have to battle for a place in the starting line-up with Filippo Inzaghi, Ronaldo and youngsters Alexander Pato and Alberto Paloschi.

Spanish public TV, Mediapro win UCL rights

AFP, Madrid

Spanish public television, a network of local television channels and the media group Mediapro have won the rights to broadcast the European Champions League from 2009 to 2012, UEFA announced on Friday.

Spain's public broadcaster TVE has secured a major package of rights which includes the exclusive broadcast of the Tuesday first choice live match each week on TVE1, the Union of European Football Associations said.

"The Federation of Regional Radio and Television Stations has obtained the exclusive free-to-air rights to the first choice Wednesday live match," it said.

"Mediapro has emerged as the winner of the pay TV rights which include exclusive coverage of the remaining live matches. As a result, the match will be shown every Wednesday on the primary channel of each regional broadcaster which is part of the FORTA network."

The decisions mark a change from last season, when the Antena 3 and Canal + channels shared the first choice matches while the others were broadcast by the Digital + pay television, part of Sogecable, a subsidiary of media giant Prisa.

Mediapro and Sogecable are in the midst of a cutthroat battle over the rights to broadcast football matches.

Mediapro, which owns the terrestrial channel La Sexta, negotiated with the clubs to hold the rights from 2009, to the annoyance of Sogecable which has previously been the leader in broadcasting football in Spain.

Vaart rules out Real move

REUTERS, London

Hamburg SV playmaker Rafael van der Vaart dismissed reports he would move to Real Madrid in a 20 million euro (\$31.54 million) deal and expects to spend the season in the Bundesliga.

"I've checked out these reports and they're all untrue," van der Vaart said upon returning to training in Hamburg on Friday.

"There's been no contact with Real Madrid. At the moment I'm assuming I'll spend another year at HSV."

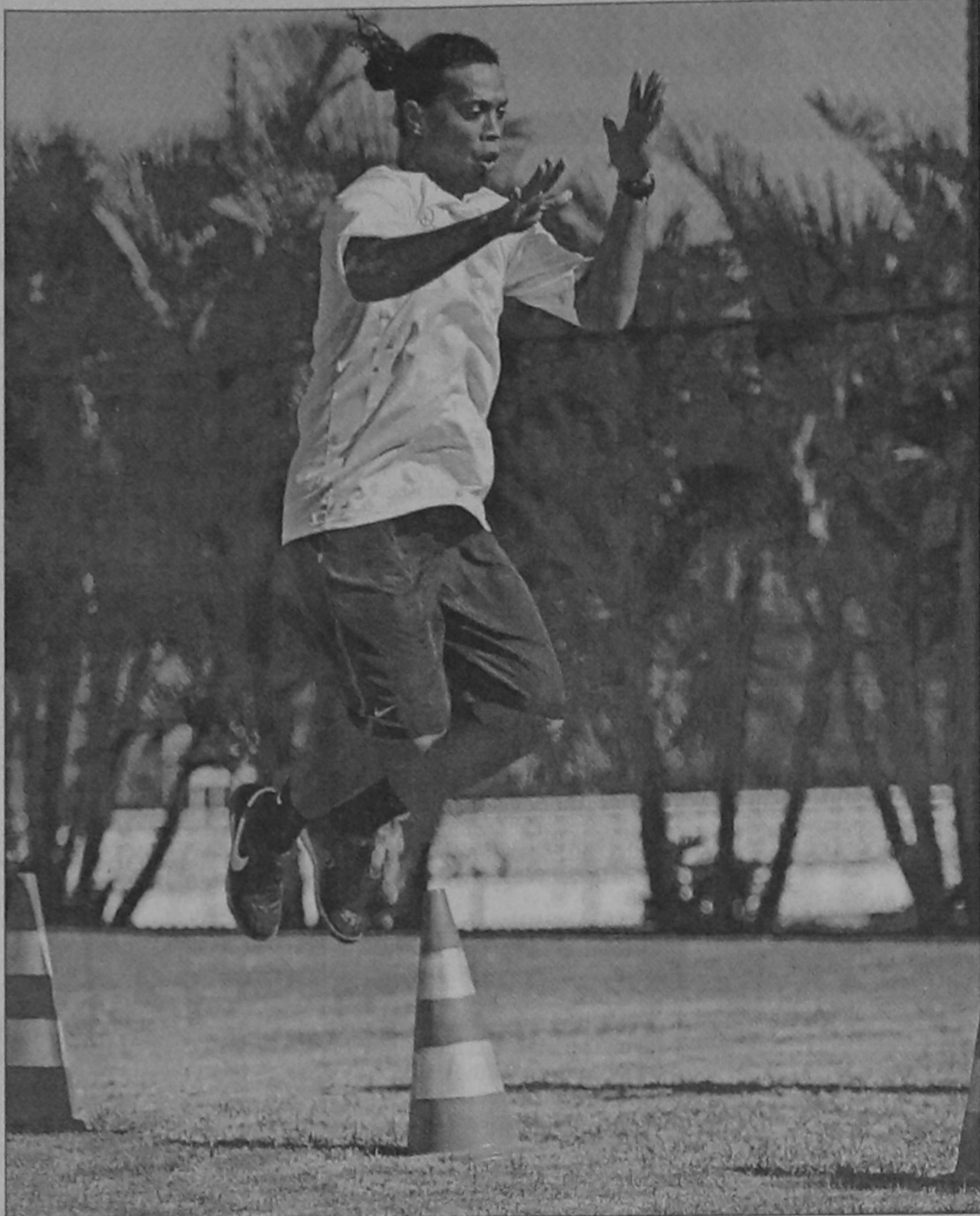
Porto sign Guarin

AFP, Saint Etienne

FC Porto have signed Colombia's Freddy Guarin on a four-year deal from French first division side Saint-Etienne, the selling club's website said Friday, without giving further details.

Midfielder Guarin, 22, failed to make an impression in France, scoring only once since his arrival from Argentina's Boca Juniors in season 2005-6.

Portuguese international starlet Paulo Machado has made a move in the opposite direction, joining the French club on a year-long loan deal.



BACK IN BUSINESS: Brazil star Ronaldinho jumps during a training session in Porto Alegre on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Ronnie going to Milan

AFP, Rome

AC Milan are on the brink of completing their purchase of Barcelona's Brazilian playmaker Ronaldinho, the Italian press reported on Saturday.

According to La Gazzetta dello Sport an agreement has been reached between AC Milan's vice-president Adriano Galliani and Barcelona president Joan Laporta for a fee of 15 million euros, with Ronaldinho set to sign a two-year contract to 2010 worth 6.5 million euros per year.

It will be a major coup for the 2007 European Champions who are still licking their wounds after failing to reach the 2008-09 Champions League and needed a big signing to signal their intent for next season.

The club will also be delighted with the price that they have negotiated for a player they have been tracking for over a year, with the final total 20 million euros lower than Barcelona's initial request of 35 million euros.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti is expected to pair him in an all-Brazilian attacking trident, along with Kaka and their young sensation, Alexander Pato.

The former AC Milan and Roma midfielder will have high hopes for a player who hit 70 goals in 149

Portugal appoint Queiroz

AFP, Lisbon

Carlos Queiroz has given up his job as Sir Alex Ferguson's righthand man at Manchester United to take charge of the Portuguese national team.

Queiroz has signed a four-year deal and replaces Luiz Felipe Scolari who has taken over at Chelsea.

"Carlos Queiroz is the new national coach," said a Portugal Football Federation (FPF) statement released by the Lusa news agency.

"The Portuguese coach has a four-year deal and will be presented on Wednesday."

Portuguese Football Federation President Gilberto Madal said there hadn't really been a debate over who should replace Scolari.

Queiroz for his part said that he was looking forward to the challenge of coaching the Portuguese, who bowed out in the Euro 2008 quarterfinals beaten 3-2 by Germany.

"Since the first time I was contacted I have been very keen to accept this huge challenge," said Queiroz.

"I would like to thank Manchester United for agreeing to let me go."

The 55-year-old Queiroz was in charge of the Portugal Under-20 side which won the world titles in 1989 and 1991 and was dubbed the "golden generation", boasting players of the calibre of Luis Figo, Fernando Couto and Paulo Sousa.

He has also coached Sporting Lisbon between 1993 and 1996 as well as Real Madrid (2003-2004), the UAE (1997-1999) and South Africa (2000-2002).

Nasri propels Hleb exit

INTERNET, undated

The arrival of Arsenal's long-term target Samir Nasri could see the departure of unsettled Belarus winger Alexander Hleb to Barcelona confirmed next week.

The 27-year-old - who said he was "mentally tired" of London life - has claimed "serious negotiations" were already under way with the Spanish club, and a £13million switch close to completion.

Wenger has been keen to keep all of his squad together - including last season's top scorer Emmanuel Adebayor, who remains a target for both Barcelona and AC Milan.

However, the Arsenal manager always has a back-up plan, having already brought in promising Wales teenager Aaron Ramsey to somewhat offset the departure of midfielder Mathieu Flamini.

Nasri revealed he was ready to repay the faith of the renowned French coach.

"Arsene has a great reputation and has proved that he puts a lot of confidence in the young players and he gives them a chance," said the 21-year-old France international.

"It was very important for me to have such a great manager to work with."

Nasri - who has joined the Gunners on what is described as a 'long-term contract' for an undisclosed fee, understood to be around £12million, from Marseille - feels he has all the qualities to fit right in with the culture of "amazing football" at Emirates Stadium.

"I like offensive, technical and quick football - exactly in the style of Arsenal," he declared.

"I hope I will integrate myself quickly in this team and bring everything I can to Arsenal and the fans."

"I can play in the centre or on the wing, behind one or two strikers, on the left or the right."

Nasri added: "Last season I found the Arsenal way of playing football amazing."

"Unfortunately, the team just missed out on winning a trophy, but in my opinion, Arsenal produced the best football in Europe."

"I was a big fan of the team and of its football philosophy, which makes it so great for me to be joining the club."

Wenger can now look forward to shaping his team when they head out to Austria later this month in the build up to the new season, which kicks off with a Champions League qualifier on August 12 or 13.

As well as resolving Hleb's situation, Wenger will also want the future of Adebayor to be confirmed before the Gunners start their pre-season schedule in earnest.

Portugal Under-21 international Amaury Bischoff, who has been released by German side Werder Bremen, is said to be on Wenger's radar, along with Newcastle front man Obafemi Martins and Blackburn's Paraguay striker Roque Santa Cruz, both rated around £13million, while Colombia international Radamel Falcao Garcia would welcome a move to Emirates from River Plate.

Reports in Spain suggest Real Madrid has secured first option on £18million-rated Ajax starlet Klaas Huntelaar, whom Wenger was keen to pair with Arsenal's own Dutch forward Robin van Persie.

Federer, Nadal chase more than gold

AFP, Paris

Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal will be chasing more than gold at the Beijing Olympics with the coveted number one place suddenly at stake following the Spaniard's stunning Wimbledon triumph.

Federer has occupied the top spot in the rankings for 232 weeks while Nadal has had to be content with life in the Swiss star's slipstream for 155 of those.

But the tournament in China could witness the latest dramatic switch in tennis's balance of power which seemed impossible just a few weeks ago.

Ahead of the French Open, where Nadal cruised effortlessly to a fourth successive title, the Mallorcan was too busy looking over his shoulder at the imminent danger posed by Novak Djokovic who was poised to take over his number two slot.

But after becoming the first man since Bjorn Borg in 1980 to complete the elusive Roland Garros-Wimbledon double, Nadal is now poised to knock Federer off his perch if a complicated series of scenarios work in his favour.

The defining moment could come on the north American hardcourts, in Beijing or at the US Open where Federer is the defending champion.

Either way, the 22-year-old Nadal is eager for the Olympics to get underway.

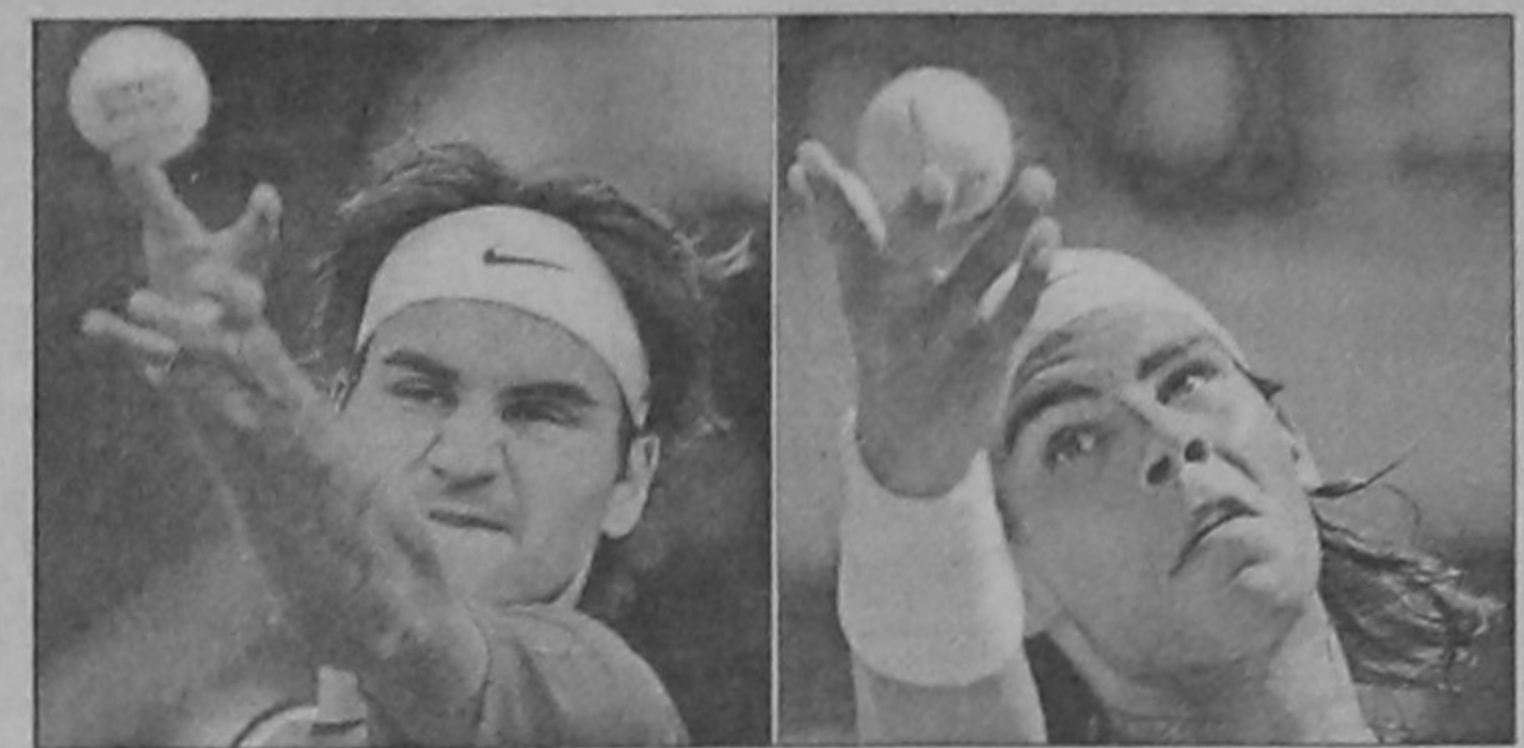
"To play in the Olympics is very special, because when you're very young you always see the Olympic Games on television," said Nadal who'll be making his singles debut in Beijing having played doubles with Carlos Moya at Athens four years ago.

"You represent your country, that's the same as the Davis Cup, but at the same time it's completely different. When I play Davis Cup I always have this big motivation and I think in the Olympics I am going to have the same."

Despite Nadal's triumphs at Wimbledon and at Roland Garros, Federer doesn't take kindly to suggestions that he should be preparing to hand over his number one spot to his Spanish rival.

"You write what you want," he snapped after losing the five-set thriller at the All England Club, his 12th defeat in 18 matches with Nadal.

"I'm going to try and win the Olympics and the US Open and then we can talk again."



ROGER FEDERER

RAFAEL NADAL

one spot to his Spanish rival.

"You're going to be judged on the Grand Slams you win and number ones," Federer says. "The Olympics are a new thing to tennis."

"Maybe in 50 years' time it will also become one of the big tournaments to win. For me it is already, but maybe some players and some fans need more convincing that the Olympics is big for tennis."

Butragueno picks Casillas for Ballon d'Or

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid keeper Iker Casillas, who played a key role in Spain's Euro 2008 victory, should win the Ballon d'Or award as the world footballer of the year, Spanish legend Emilio Butragueno said Friday.

"Tradition dictates that only forwards win the award. But Iker is a special goalkeeper, not just this year, but throughout his career," the former Real Madrid striker and vice-president told the club's website.

"The fact that he's a European champion and the role he played in the quarterfinals make him deserve it more than anyone. He must win the Ballon d'Or," he added.

Casillas, 27, only allowed two regular-time goals in the Euro 2008 tournament, both in the group stage.

The captain became a national hero after he saved two penalty kicks in the quarterfinals as Spain beat Italy 4-2 in a shootout after a 0-0 draw.

The winner of the Ballon d'Or award is selected by a panel of journalists and soccer officials in a vote organized by France Football magazine since 1956.

The prize was restricted to European footballers until last year when France Football changed the qualifications, opening the award up to players from the rest of the world, regardless of nationality.

AC Milan's Brazilian midfielder Kaka won the Ballon d'Or award in 2007.

Russia's Lev Yashin of Dynamo Moscow was the last keeper to win the award in 1963.

Juve after Poulsen

AFP, Rome

Seville's midfielder Christian Poulsen is expected to become Juventus' latest summer signing according to a report in La Gazzetta dello Sport.

Juventus chief executive Jean-Claude Blanc and sporting director Alessio Secco will fly to Spain to conclude a deal worth 10 million euros to the 2005 and 2006 UEFA Cup winners, with Poulsen set to earn three million euros per year.

Poulsen's transfer will also end the Turin club's interest in Liverpool's Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso, who was considered too expensive at 17.5 million euros with a four million euros a year contract.

The Denmark international will provide extra-cover for a midfield that has been in need of greater depth and will provide competition for Cristiano Zannetti and Mohamed Sissoko.

Poulsen is best known in Italy, for being the player Italy striker Francesco Totti spat at during Euro 2004 to earn the Roma captain a three-match international ban.

Another player expected in northwest Italy is Siena's Austrian goalkeeper Alex Manninger.

The ex-Arsenal custodian is wanted to provide experienced cover for Juventus and Italy number one Gianluigi Buffon.

The club will hope they have the same immediate impact as fellow summer signing Amauri, who hit five goals in his first run out in the black and white shirt, albeit against lower-league Mezzocorona.

Totti open to recall

Football

AFP, Rome

Roma captain Francesco Totti has hinted that he may be open to a national team recall following the return of World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi.

Totti won the last of his 58 caps for Italy in the 2006 World Cup final in Berlin before he dithered over whether to officially retire that summer and only did so in 2007.

Lippi recently declared that he will respect Totti's decision to retire and that he has no plans to entice back the man who scored the last-minute penalty that beat Australia in the second round in Germany.

However, Totti told Sky Sports Italia that with Lippi back at the helm he would need to speak to the new coach before he changes his mind and that for the time being his is concentrating on his recovery from knee surgery.

"I have an excellent relationship with him, away from the field as well and we are often in touch with one another."

It is up to him to see and for now I am only thinking about my recovery. I've not yet spoken to Lippi about this, we will have to weigh things up in the future."

With Totti missing the last two months of the 2007-08 season, Mirko Vucinic was Roma's only out and out attacker in the title run in which they finished second to Inter Milan.

Whilst the Stadio Olimpico club has strengthened its squad in the summer months, the 31 year-old is hopeful that another striker will be added and has high hopes that Fiorentina's Romania striker Adrian Mutu will be lining up alongside him when the league kicks off on August 31.

"I hope that we sign a top striker. The important thing is that it is a player who can make a difference. I would take Mutu over everyone else. He would enjoy himself here," Totti said.

"(John Arne) Riise and (Simone) Loria are two excellent buys. Riise is an international player and in his role Loria is one of the strongest players in Italy."

It has been a long summer for Totti, who has been battling back from his knee injury with the Italian Super Cup against Inter on August 24 his target, whilst all the while haggling over a new contract with his current deal set to expire in 2010.

"The target (for his return from injury) is August 24, but the important thing is to return when I'm ready. I miss football, but even when I'm not supposed to, I will have a secret kick about."

"The directors have always said that I will sign for life. My current deal ends in 2010, so this is the last year for renewing it."

Cannavaro to carry on

Football

AFP, Rome

Italy's World Cup winning captain Fabio Cannavaro has declared his intention to still be available to Italy when they make the defence of their world crown in South Africa in 2010.

The Real Madrid defender will be 36 when the tournament kicks off in Africa for the first time ever, but told La Gazzetta dello Sport that he will still have plenty left to offer returning World Cup winning coach Marcello Lippi.

"If the coach wants me, I will be there to retain the World Cup in South Africa. I will always make myself available. Always," he said.

"I will have to work more, as at 35 years of age (he turns 35 on September 13) everything becomes more complicated. But playing for Italy is a pleasure and an honour. It's unique."

Cannavaro, who is recuperating from his pre-Euro 2008 knee injury, doesn't expect Lippi to radically change the Italy line-up, though is aware that a number of Gianluigi Casiraghi's under-21 team will start to establish themselves in the senior squad.

Defender Giorgio Chiellini has led the way, the Juventus defender filling in for Cannavaro in Austria and Switzerland and is likely to be Cannavaro's partner in central defence when he returns to action.

"It's true that my generation are starting to lose little things and that it is time to think about the future," he said.

"Giuseppe, who I see in Spain (for Villarreal), is excellent and there is Aquilani (Alberto). They only need a bit of experience."

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Swiss midfielder Hakan Yakin poses with his new jersey after signing a contract with Qatari League's Al-Gharrafa club in Doha on Friday. PHOTO: AFP