

Kaisers hold Man Utd

REUTERS, Cape Town

Manchester United came from behind to force a 1-1 draw with the Kaiser Chiefs in the first match of an exhibition series on Saturday.

The Chiefs took the lead when central defender Jonathan Quartey scored from the penalty spot nine minutes before halftime after Nemanja Vidic cut down left winger Siphiwe Tshabalala with an untidy tackle.

The European and English champions levelled just before the hour mark when Tevez surged down the right and crossed to the far post where Chris Eagles rose to head the ball into the net off Chiefs captain Jimmy Tau.

Chiefs goalkeeper Itumeleng Khune was prominent throughout the match and did well to marshall his defenders as the home team hung on for a draw.

During United's last visit to South Africa in 2006, they won the first match 1-0 but lost that year's final 4-3 on penalties.

United travel to Durban to face the Orlando Pirates on Tuesday before playing the winner of the Soweto derby between the Chiefs and Pirates on July 26 in Pretoria.

Drogba not touring Asia

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea have left for their pre-season tour of Asia without striker Didier Drogba.

The 30-year-old, who scored eight times in the Barclays Premier League last season, has been linked with a transfer away from Stamford Bridge this summer although the Blues claim his absence from the trip is due to the need to recover from a knee injury.

Drogba's omission seems certain to raise further questions about his future, however, with a virtually full-strength squad travelling to play games in China and Malaysia before returning to Europe for the Railways Cup in Moscow.

Another player rumoured to be on his way from the Londoners, Inter Milan target Frank Lampard, is included in the party.

New boys Deco and Jose Bosingwa are in Luiz Felipe Scolari's squad, while Michael Ballack will link up with them in China after finishing a post-Euro 2008 holiday.

Scolari will take charge of his first match as Chelsea manager on Wednesday against Guangzhou Pharmaceutical.

"The players are not ready yet totally, but we are starting to build a new team and a new philosophy," the Brazilian told www.chelseafc.com.

This is just the beginning, and I expect after these five games that I will have a general idea about all the players and a system."

Villa move for Zigic

INTERNET, undated

Aston Villa have made a move for giant Serbian striker Nikola Zigic, according to Valencia.

Zigic looks set to be on his way out of Valencia with the club prepared to offload the 6ft 7in hit-man.

The Serbian international has been informed he does not figure in new Valencia coach Unai Emery's plans after failing to establish himself at La Mestalla.

Zigic has been linked with a move to England for some time and now Villa are reported to have made a firm offer for the former Racing Santander star.

Valencia sporting director Juan Sanchez claims Villa have made an offer for Zigic and that the player will make a decision on his future in the next few days.

"The player and his agent know about the offer and we expect them to make a decision in the coming days," Sanchez is quoted as saying in the Sunday Mirror.

Cesc loves Barca: Hleb

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona new boy Alexander Hleb is ready to incur the wrath of old club Arsenal by hinting Cesc Fabregas could join him at Camp Nou.

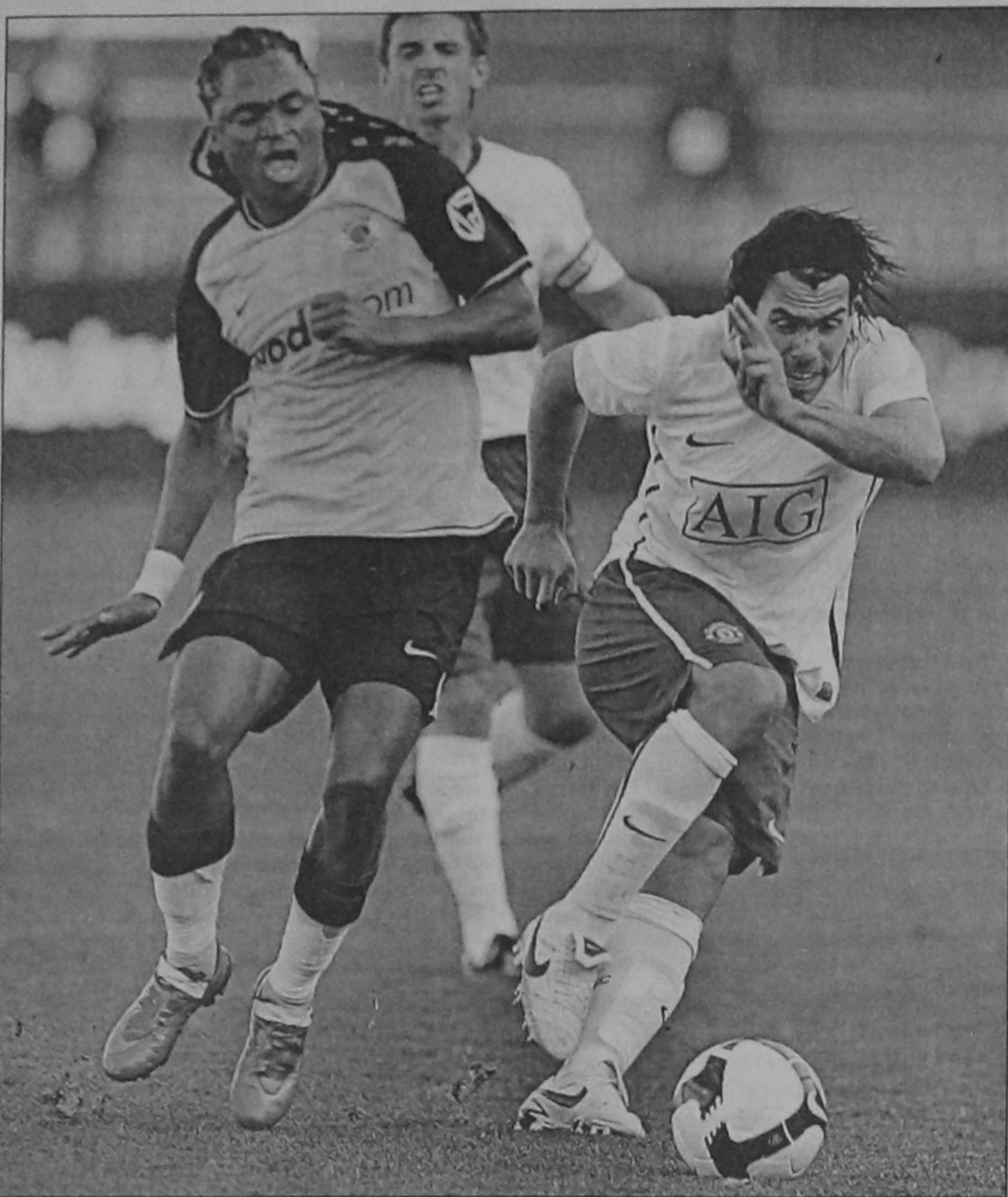
Hleb secured his move to Barcelona earlier this week after deciding to leave Arsenal for a new challenge.

The Belarus international says former Gunners team-mate Fabregas has told him a lot about Barca having come through the youth ranks at the Catalan outfit before making the move to Arsenal.

Hleb claims Fabregas is still a big fan of Barcelona and he believes there is a possibility the pair could be reunited at Camp Nou.

Information "He [Fabregas] told me lots of things [about Barcelona], his time in the academy with players like Pique, Messi and so on," Hleb told Barcelona's official website.

"He loves this club, and though he's at Arsenal, who knows, maybe one day he'll come back here."



Manchester United forward Carlos Tevez accelerates away from Kaiser Chiefs' Gerald Sibeko during their pre-season match at Newlands in Cape Town on Saturday.

Blues hot on Robinho trail

Football

INTERNET, undated

Robinho's agent claims Chelsea have made a "firm offer" of £31.75million to Real Madrid for the Brazilian's services.

However, Wagner Ribeiro admits it would be difficult to secure a move to Stamford Bridge or Barcelona, whom he also claims are interested in his client, despite the Catalan club's strenuous denial of any contact.

Speculation has been rife that the Real Madrid forward is on his way to the Premier League, with Manchester United and Chelsea favourites for his signature.

On Thursday reports suggested Madrid's bitter rivals Barcelona were preparing to table a bid for the player - something the Nou Camp outfit dismissed outright.

While Wagner Ribeiro believes his client will be staying at the Bernabeu, he still claims to have

been contacted by Barca scout Pepe Costa.

"I don't have an offer from Barca," he told Catalan radio station Onda FM. "But a director from the club called me to see how things are going with the player. I told him that there was a firm offer from Chelsea for 40million euros (£31.75million) but that (Madrid president) Ramon Calderon didn't want to transfer him."

"I am a man and I don't lie and the director who called me is Pepe Costa."

"I think it is difficult for Robinho to move to Chelsea and even more so to Barcelona because of the rivalry that exists between the two clubs."

"I told (Madrid sporting director) Pedja Mijatovic that Barca called me but it's as if Real Madrid wanted to sign Leo Messi."

Earlier in the day Barcelona board member Rafael Yuste rubbished suggestions his club could be set for a shock swoop for Robinho.

"I don't know anything about Barca having talked with Robinho," he told Sport newspaper.

"Moreover, we have a pact of no aggression between the two clubs so no-one could have done so and we will continue respecting it."

The few players that have been brave enough to move between the arch rivals have felt the full wrath of their former fans on their return to their old home.

One of Barca's favourite sons, Luis Figo, caused such a stir when he moved to Madrid that he was welcomed back to the Nou Camp by being pelted with items such as bottles, coins, bricks and even a pig's head.

Current Barca reserve team coach Luis Enrique was one of the few players to ever move in the opposite direction when after five seasons at Madrid he moved to the Catalan club in 1996, remaining there until his retirement eight years later.

Totti calls for strengthening

INTERNET, undated

Francesco Totti has warned Roma they must buy at least two more star players to hope of competing for the top three places.

"John Arne Riise and Simone Loria are two excellent reinforcements, but now I expect another two signings of great quality," he told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"If we want to compete with Inter, Milan and Juventus, we need at least two more important players. At the moment, we are the fourth strongest side in Serie A."

While those two have been brought in from Liverpool and Siena respectively, Roma have also sold Amantino Mancini, Ludovic Giuly and Matteo Ferrari.

It is particularly galling to lose Mancini to rivals Inter just a year after Cristian Chivu made the same journey.

"Inter are trying to strengthen their side by weakening ours. They have the capabilities to cherry-pick from other clubs, while it is more difficult for us."

Transfer gossip has them very close to capturing Brazilian hitman Julio Baptista from Real Madrid, although there are also rumours that Jose Antonio Reyes is on his way from Atletico Madrid.

"I like Baptista and hope he does come to Roma, but we need another reinforcement after that."

The transfer market could make a sharp turn for the Giallorossi after it was announced this morning that Italtipetoli the Sensi family's company that owns Roma have agreed to extend the terms of their loan with UniCredit.

This means more cash is freed up in the short-term to spend on new players.

"We will try to repeat our past success and aim for something more important than the Coppa Italia," said the captain.

"The fact the Champions League Final will be played in Rome is an event that for my generation won't return again. It is our objective, even more so than the Scudetto."

The last time this match was hosted by the Italian capital was in 1984, when Liverpool and Bruce Grobbelaar's 'spaghetti legs' saw off the Giallorossi in a shoot-out.

"I was eight years old. I watched it on television with my whole family. I remember Roberto Pruzzo's goal and the silence during the penalties. Rome was mute."

Follow Rooney model: Lippi

REUTERS, Rome

Italy coach Marcello Lippi says he wants his players to copy the selfless style of Manchester United's England forward Wayne Rooney.

"What counts more than the formation is the philosophy, the desire of great players to put themselves at the service of the team when the opposition have the ball. Like Rooney does at Manchester," Lippi told Sunday's La Gazzetta dello Sport.

The 2006 World Cup-winning coach, who returned to the Azzurri dugout in place of Roberto Donadoni after Italy's unsuccessful Euro 2008 campaign, said self-belief will be crucial if his side are to triumph again in South Africa in two years' time.

"The first time there is the metaphor of the great hunger. Now we have to find new motivation," he said.

"The team must feel strong. The important thing is that self-confidence does not become presumption, but there's no risk of that."

He also called on Brazilian-born striker Amauri to make up his mind, after Juventus's new signing gave mixed signals about whether he wants to play for Italy when his application for an Italian passport is processed, or wait for a Brazil call-up.

"I don't like it that a player dances between one national team and another for a month," Lippi said.

"I'd like a strong, decisive choice. I'm not asking for anything from anyone. If he legally becomes Italian and chooses Italy, I would not be displeased."

Lippi's first match is a friendly against Austria in Nice on August 20. Italy then start their World Cup qualifying campaign in Cyprus on Sept. 6 and at home to Georgia on Sept. 10.

Door open for Raul

AFP, Madrid

Spain's new coach Vicente del Bosque insisted Sunday that the door is not closed on out-of-favour international Raul.

The 30-year-old Real Madrid striker, the leading all-time scorer for the national side with 44 goals, was sidelined under previous coach Luis Aragones and has not played since September 2006.

"I don't see Raul as a problem. He isn't one of my proteges nor is he plague-ridden," said former Real Madrid coach del Bosque.

"He could perfectly be called up. If he deserves it, he will be."

Del Bosque is expected to announce his squad for a friendly against Denmark on August 20, before the first qualifying matches for the 2010 World Cup against Bosnia and Estonia in September.

"We can aspire to be world champions, we have a generation of winners," del Bosque added of the team that were recently crowned European champions.

Fabiano staying at Sevilla

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla's Brazilian-born striker Luis Fabiano, the Primera Liga's second top scorer with 24 goals last season, has extended his contract with the club until June 2011, the Spanish side said Saturday.

The new contract includes a termination clause of 25 million euros (40 million dollars) and an undisclosed raise which the club said will make him one of its best-paid players along with fellow striker Frederic Kanoute and centre back Sebastian Squilaci. The 27-year-old joined Sevilla in 2005 from Portuguese giants FC Porto and helped them to win the 2006 and 2007 UEFA Cups, plus the Spanish King's Cup in 2007.

Last week Fabiano, who reportedly was being chased by other clubs including Real Madrid, obtained Spanish citizenship, meaning he no longer takes up one of the squad's places for a player from outside the European Union.

Inter snap up D'Alessandro

INTERNET, Buenos Aires

Argentina playmaker Andres D'Alessandro is set to join Brazilian outfit Internacional, according to the player's agent.

The 26-year-old most recently plied his trade with San Lorenzo in his homeland, following spells with Real Zaragoza, Wolfsburg and River Plate earlier in his career.

And Porte-Alegre based Internacional appear to be the latest team to add D'Alessandro to their ranks.

"Everything is all right and the transfer is done," his agent Gustavo Mascardi told radio station, La Red. D'Alessandro is flying to Buenos Aires to head to Brazil later. There are only some papers outstanding to close the deal.

'Only God knows' C'Ron still coy on future

Football

INTERNET, Los Angeles

Cristiano Ronaldo is continuing to remain coy over his future despite Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson's optimism the forward will remain at Old Trafford.

Ferguson met Real Madrid target Ronaldo for clear-the-air talks on Monday and insisted he was confident the player would still be at Old Trafford next season.

But Ronaldo - who is on holiday in America as he recovers from ankle surgery - has still to make a firm decision on his future.

"I've had hundreds of questions about Manchester United and Real Madrid," he told ESPN. "What do you want me to say? That I'm going or I'm staying?"

"I don't know about the future, only God knows it. I can't say any more."

"Great players are always hounded by great clubs. It's a normal situation. There are other great players who are in the market who are good and who other clubs want."

"I have always been hounded, not only this year. It's not strange for me, to see what happens."

Madrid are reportedly ready to offer Ronaldo an astronomical pay packet, while United chief executive David Gill is adamant he will not receive a pay rise should he stay at United.

"He only entered into the previous contract 18 months before and in terms of where he's at in our wage hierarchy he's doing pretty well," he said.

When asked if the player's behaviour was partly to get a higher salary from United, Gill said: "Possibly, but not necessarily, and if the figures banded around that Real Madrid are talking about are true, we wouldn't go anywhere near that. That would be lunacy."

Instead, Gill called on the player to show "commitment and loyalty". "The player is under contract so the strength and the rights are with Manchester United," added Gill.

"I think we've been pretty clear all along that Ronaldo has got a contract until 2012, he's a valuable member of the team and that's the situation."

"Obviously there's some issues"

there, but that's for Alex and is why Alex had the meeting, to discuss things and put our point of view."

"I'm sure Cristiano put his point of view and hopefully we can move forward."

"All we were doing, effectively, is saying we clearly have a player who is one of the best in the world."

"He entered into a new contract, his third with us, only 18 months after his previous one."

"With that, we believe, go some responsibilities and obligations."

"There was an increased salary and we clearly felt there has to be some commitment and loyalty and he can't just say, 'I've entered into it, but I'll leave a year down the line', especially after the season we've just had."

"It's a two-way street and contracts are entered into with a view to getting that kind of commitment."

But Ronaldo, who signed a new deal at Old Trafford 18 months ago, claims any decision on his future will not be based on money.

"I want to be happy regardless of where I play," he added. "I can be happy everywhere, if I am with people I like, if I am motivated, motivated."

"Am I motivated to continue at United? I am always motivated."

"I am ambitious and I want to always improve. I don't know the future, but I will be motivated."

Ronaldo will be out for three months as he recovers from the operation.

And the winger claimed he just wants to concentrate on getting back to full fitness as quickly as possible. "I'm not anxious about the future, I'm feeling normal," continued Ronaldo. "Normal is resting my head, my body, having a good recovery and the future belongs to God, not to me."



CRISTIANO RONALDO

Pato wants to win all

Football

INTERNET, undated

Alexandre Pato trusts with Ronaldinho by his side he can win the Olympics, Scudetto and UEFA Cup.

The Milan starlet will be in Beijing with his new club team-mate next month for Brazil's Olympic squad and believes it'll be the start of a beautiful partnership.

"With this team, we can win it all. Kaka and Ronaldinho are both very important for Milan, but they play different roles," he told the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Ronaldinho tends to spread out wide more and if Kaka does too, then they'll both give me the

ball in the centre to score. Easy, eh?"

The Selecao trio has sparked a wave of enthusiasm with more than 10,000 season tickets sold since Ronaldinho's £18m move from Barcelona was confirmed.

"I am ready to train up as a centre-forward. If Carlo Ancelotti sees me in this role, then that is not a problem for me," continued Pato.

"I am young and want to learn many things, the secrets of the sport. I scored nine goals in half a Serie A season, but I know I can do more. Much more."

It will be his first full campaign with the Rossoneri, as due to age restrictions he could not sign the contract until he had turned 18.

"The most difficult thing to face was tactical, as in Brazil I was

accustomed to running forward and waiting for the long ball from a teammate."

"Ancelotti asked for a different movement, as I have to go towards the ball and then run into space. It took me a while, but I've got it now."

"I am happy the way my first Italian season went, but Milan were unable to qualify for the Champions League and that made me very angry. Now I want to help my team get back into the competition."

Now Pato will have the support of Kaka and Ronaldinho, he pledges to bring a Selecao sensation to San Siro.

"I haven't changed, but I have grown up and learned what it means to play football in Italy. I can guarantee I'll improve. You haven't seen the real Pato yet."

Culture shock for Jose

THE TELEGRAPH



After his first week of training at Inter Milan, Jose Mourinho has admitted that he is suffering from culture shock.

Football fans in Italy, he says, are far more intense than their English counterparts.

"This week, more than 3,000 turned up at Inter's training ground to watch the Special One's first advertisement session in charge of the Nerazzurri. The extent of the fans' passion made their mark on Mourinho."

"Italian fans are different from English fans," he said. "In England, the support lasts 90 minutes. Here in Italy, you experience it every single day."

As if to illustrate his point, across the city on the same day around 40,000 fans piled in to the San Siro to greet AC Milan's newest signing, Ronaldinho.

The Brazilian's arrival at their local rivals, which Mourinho described as a "positive move" for Italian football, has whet the collective appetite of the Inter fans - they now want another big purchase of their own after the arrival of Amantino Mancini from Roma and Luis Jimenez, who is co-owned by Ternana.

"Mourinho, bring us Lampard," they chanted at the training ground. However, having failed in a move for Marek Hamsik, Napoli's Inter's main alternative midfield target, club president Massimo Moratti has said he will pursue other options should negotiations

with Chelsea fall through.

For the time being, Mourinho is preferring to focus on the challenges that lie ahead on the pitch. At the launch of Inter's new kit yesterday, the Portuguese was as bullish as ever.

"The kit is beautiful, but it will only be beautiful if it's a winner," he said. "It's up to us now. We have made a strong start to our work, and we will continue to do so in Bruno in the coming days."

"We play our first two friendlies there, but I don't like the term friendlies very much. These are two matches we want to win to build a successful season."

As for the Mourinho-mania that has swept through the blue-and-black half of Milan, it's not just the fans who have been impressed by the new 'Mister'.

"He has made an excellent impression on us from the day he presented himself to the staff," Jimenez said. "We are happy because he uses the ball a lot in training. It's all new, but it's all very enjoyable."

Club captain Javier Zanetti has also been quick to praise the Portuguese. "Mourinho is a manager who works very hard on the pitch, and is really in tune with us all," he said. "He always explains everything to us, and we're working with calm and commitment so as to try to do everything he asks of us."

Significantly, at a club where advisers and backroom staff wield immense power, Mourinho has earned honeyed words from Franco Combi, the Inter doctor whose acrimonious relationship with former coach Roberto Mancini

played a key role in his departure. "He is a serious and intelligent person, a great worker and a great professional," Combi said of Mourinho.

The fact that, under Mancini, Inter finally emerged from the suffocating shadow of the great side of the 1960s is also in Mourinho's favour.

"Inter have a very good side at the moment, so they should not be afraid of the comparisons," said Luis Suarez, a member of that 'Grande Inter' team that swept all before them. "In fact, now the comparisons should spur this team to go on and create their own history."

And, according to Suarez, Mourinho will not be fazed by the fans' weight of expectation. "In Italy it is always that way - there is a great passion for the game," he said. "But Mourinho has seen it all before. He has the experience, the personality and the charisma. That is why people are expecting great things from him."

Suarez is certainly right about the charisma. When reminded this week about Carlo Ancelotti's comments on Mourinho's failure as a player, Mourinho was ready with one of his typically colourful metaphors. "Maybe he's forgotten that it was under Arrigo Sacchi that Milan played the best football in their history. And Sacchi, like me, was never a top player. I have a great dentist, even though I have never had toothache."

Difficult club. Different country. Same old 'Special One'.



Stuttgart defender Matthieu Delpierre (R) slides in to challenge Saturn's Marko Topic during their Intertoto Cup match in Ramenskoye, Moscow on Saturday. Saturn won 1-0.