

Cannavaro keen on Real

AFP, Madrid
Real Madrid's Italian international defender Fabio Cannavaro said Friday he was keen to extend his contract with the Spanish champions beyond its 2009 deadline.
"Of course without any problem," the 35-year-old World Cup-winning captain said in an interview with El Mundo.
Cannavaro's agent said recently that 2008-2009 would be the former Napoli, Parma, Inter Milan and Juventus player's final season at Madrid.
But Cannavaro said: "Before talking to another team we will talk to Real."
"Here before matches there is laughter, music and joy," he said, comparing Spanish football to Italian where "if you smile you run the risk of being accused of not being ready for the match."
But Cannavaro admitted that he would find it hard to give up his international career.
"It would cost me a lot to say no."

Mexes survives robbery ordeal

AFP, Rome
AS Roma's French defender Philippe Mexes suffered a terrifying attack by armed robbers late on Thursday night before seeing the bandits drive off in his car with his two-year-old daughter still inside.
The vehicle was later abandoned with two-year-old Eva still inside.
Mexes and his partner Carla had just arrived back at their luxury home in the Axa-Casal Palocco district between Rome and the ancient port city of Ostia just before midnight when they were confronted by two armed men, according to Gazzetta dello Sport.
Mexes, who has been in Roma since 2004, had a gun pointed to his head and a scuffle broke out before the armed men made off with his SUV Mercedes.
Eva, however, was still inside the car, although Carla and son Enzo, 4, had both run into the house.
The police and carabinieri were called and immediately went on the hunt for the stolen vehicle.
But only a quarter of an hour later, the car had been dumped in a small piazza nearby, possibly due to the presence of Eva, and left with its doors open.
On seeing the scene, a passerby called police and Mexes was soon reunited with his daughter, who was calmly sleeping.
The robbers are believed to have been foreigners, according to Ansa.

Hamburg reject VDV offer

AFP, Berlin
Bundesliga side Hamburg have rejected Real Madrid's seven million euros (11 million dollars) offer for their Dutch captain Rafael van der Vaart, the German club announced on Friday.
Real's German coach Bernd Schuster has long been a fan of the 25-year-old midfielder, but Hamburg are in no mood to let their chief playmaker leave as they continue their quest for a Champions League berth.
"The offer was absolutely out of the question," Hamburg boss Dietmar Beiersdorfer told German agency SID as Real then withdrew the offer.
Van der Vaart's contract runs until 2010, but there is a clause which allows him to leave for a fixed price of 1.5 million euros (2.3 million dollars) in the year before his contract expires.
The Dutchman has made no secret of his desire to play for a major European club to get some Champions League experience and was photographed with a Valencia shirt last August which earned him a heavy fine from Hamburg.

Muntari close to Inter move

AFP, Portsmouth
Ghana midfielder Sulley Muntari is close to joining Inter Milan after admitting he couldn't turn down the Italian champions.
Muntari is due to fly to Milan for a medical this week after Portsmouth accepted Inter's offer of around 12 million pounds (15 million euros).
The 23-year-old, who is expected to agree a four-year contract with Inter, knows it will be a wrench to leave Fratton Park just a year after signing from Udinese.
He has struck up a close relationship with manager Harry Redknapp, but the chance to play for one of the world's biggest clubs was too tempting to reject.
"There are teams when they come to you, you need to listen to them," Muntari told skysports.com. "Harry has developed my game, he has been a father figure to me."
"I love him, and also the Portsmouth fans, but when Inter call you need to listen."

All-Stars beat Hammers

AFP, Toronto

David Beckham was a winner in his first Major League Soccer All-Star Game here Thursday, the English midfielder helping the MLS All-Stars defeat England's West Ham United 3-2.
Dwayne De Rosario netted a penalty kick goal in the 69th minute for the winner as the MLS select lineup improved to 5-0 against international foes since the format began in 2003.
Christian Gomez and Cuauhtemoc Blanco scored first-half goals for the MLS squad while Dean Ashton netted both goals for West Ham United before a sellout crowd of 20,844.
Beckham, who contributed an assist with a stellar set-up pass, said the MLS lineup was motivated despite the match being only a mid-season exhibition and players more accustomed to going against one another rather than teamwork.
"Every player out there was committed to winning the game. We were going to take it seriously and we wanted to win the game, and we did that," Beckham said.
"We also wanted to put in a good team performance because we are

a bunch of players that play against each other every week and haven't played with each other. But we proved that we can come together. We played as a team, worked as a team and we won as a team so overall, it was a very good performance."
Beckham boosted the league's global profile when he jumped to the Los Angeles Galaxy last year after playing out his Real Madrid contract, a landmark 250 million-dollar deal that has only a 5.5 million-dollar salary base for playing matches this season with sales and incentives a major part of the deal.
MLS teams have defeated Mexico's Chivas of Guadalajara, England's Fulham and Chelsea and Celtic of Scotland in prior all-star matchups.
The Hammers used the match as a tuneup for the upcoming English season.
"I think for everyone concerned, it has been a success," West Ham manager Alan Curbishley said. "There were goals scored, some chances created. There could have been a bit more of a score line, but I think everybody came away with something."
"We needed the fitness work, and we certainly got it tonight. The MLS players scored two terrific goals, and it was a good evening.

Everybody can be well-pleased with their efforts."
The Hammers opened the scoring in the 26th minute when Ashton ran onto a through ball from Carlton Cole and blasted a right-footed shot into the net.
But West Ham's lead lasted less than a minute, with Beckham playing the ball to Blanco, who back-heeled it to Gomez, who blasted the ball past goalkeeper Robert Green.
Beckham had his first free-kick chance in the 39th minute from 30 meters when Blanco was fouled, but the ball was cleared by Hammers captain Lucas Neil after curling around the wall.
Mexico's Blanco lifted the MLS lineup to a 2-1 half-time lead with a goal in the 44th minute, zipping a right-footed shot through a jumble of players and inside the far post.
West Ham drew level in the 67th minute when Ashton blasted in a shot off a defender's head.
Again the North American side answered, Houston midfielder De Rosario being brought down in the box by Neil in the 70th minute. De Rosario booted the ball in off the crossbar for the decider.
Former Aston Villa striker Juan Pablo Angel found the net seconds later but an offside call wiped out the tally.



Barcelona midfielder Alexander Hleb (C) controls the ball during a friendly against Hibernian at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh on Thursday. Barca won 6-0.

Adriano happy to be back

AFP, Rome
Brazil forward Adriano said he was delighted to be back in the Inter Milan shirt after a year in which alcoholism and depression threatened to derail his career.
Adriano played at the head of a three-pronged attack in the first half of Inter's 1-0 friendly victory over Saudi Al Hilal on Thursday as coach Jose Mourinho remained loyal to the system he favoured at Chelsea.
It was the 26-year-old's first assignment for Inter since October last year as in November he was sent to Sao Paulo in his native Brazil

in a bid to rediscover his shape and form.
"That was a success as he scored 16 goals in 25 matches, despite a troubled beginning with the club in which he was dismissed against Santos for a head-butt."
But now he is reaping the rewards.
"I've rediscovered my best condition in little time," he told the official Inter website. "I feel good and I'm delighted to be back in the team."
"I'll try to come back even stronger than before. It's great to play with three forwards because there's more movement and my fellow forwards are closer together, that encourages you to play quicker which the coach has asked us to do.

"We will be able to score many goals this way, Mourinho? He has a philosophy which is to play those who train with the most commitment and in the best condition."
Adriano had become one of the most sought-after forwards in football after scoring 28 goals in 42 matches for Inter in 2004/05 following loan spells at Fiorentina and Parma.
But in the 2006/07 season he started to lose his way as injuries and a lack of discipline took their toll.
He was often photographed coming out of nightclubs in the early hours, calling into question his commitment to the cause.
But if he can reproduce his form of old, Adriano's return will be like a new signing for Mourinho.

Barca stand firm on Messi

AFP, Madrid
Barcelona reaffirmed Thursday that it is not obligated to release Lionel Messi so that the Argentine striker can represent his national team at the Olympics next month as demanded by world football governing body FIFA.
In a statement posted on its website, the Spanish club said "current FIFA regulations do not oblige clubs to release their players."
"Moreover, the club has reiterated its proposal to come to a consensus, which was rejected at the time by the Argentinian Football Association," it added.
Spanish media have reported that the proposed compromise would see the 21-year-old playmaker take part in one of Barcelona's early Champions League matches and before joining the Argentine squad in Beijing.
FIFA president Sepp Blatter said Wednesday that clubs must release their eligible Under-23 players for the Olympic football tournament.
Messi was the star of Barcelona's 6-0 exhibition win over Scottish side Hibernian on Thursday night in Edinburgh.
He scored in the 11th minute after cutting to the front and shooting past keeper Andrew McNeil and sent the ball into the back of the net again in the 38th minute but the referee ruled he was offside.
Before the match Barcelona captain Carles Puyol said he hoped Messi will be playing for the team in its Champions League qualifying round next month and not travel with Argentina to the Beijing Olympics.
"He is a very important player for us, one of the best in the world," Puyol was quoted as saying on the club's website. "I hope that this will be sorted out and that he will remain with us."

'I'm not Jose Mourinho'

AFP, Macau
New Chelsea coach Luiz Felipe Scolari hit back at comparisons with his flamboyant predecessor Jose Mourinho and also resisted pressure for more attacking play.
Scolari has appeared jovial and friendly in his appearances as Chelsea boss but showed flashes of his famous temper as he snapped back at the latest mention of the "Special One."
"My name is Luiz Felipe Scolari. I'm not Jose Mourinho. I have my own personality. I follow my way, not another way," Scolari said.
"I don't know if Mourinho says yes or no and I say different or not. To my players and the fans, I say what all coaches say: we need to win. Only this."
The Brazilian also ducked questions about whether he would live up to Chelsea's defensive style as

reportedly demanded by billionaire owner Roman Abramovich.
"I don't know. I'll answer in June 2009 (after next season)," he said, stressing that his only priority was winning matches.
"My way in Chelsea is the same as my way in my life. I want the same as I wanted in the clubs and national teams I worked with before: winning."
"This is my way. I follow this way, only this."
Coach Avram Grant, whose footballing style won few admirers, was given his marching orders in May despite only narrowly missing out on both the Champions League and Premiership titles.
And Chengdu Blades midfielder Li Tie took a dig ahead of Saturday's friendly here when he said he preferred arch-rival Manchester United's attacking play.
"I prefer the style of Manchester United. I prefer teams that attack more and I think Manchester United play that style more than

Chelsea," said the former Everton and Sheffield United man.
Scolari has regularly been compared with Mourinho, the self-styled "Special One" who left last September as Chelsea's most decorated coach.
At his inaugural press conference, Scolari joked he was only "special for my friends, my family and my country, not more."
"As a manager, (I'm) so-so."
The relaxed style has been at odds with his fearsome reputation, highlighted when the export Portugal boss punched Serbia's Ivica Dragutinovic after a touchline clash in a Euro 2008 qualifier.
Scolari also led Portugal for the infamous 2006 World Cup clash with the Netherlands, when both teams ended with nine men and 16 yellow cards were issued.
"I'm used to playing in South America. Especially against Argentinian teams, it's war," he shrugged at the time.

Jo promises goals

AFP, Singapore
Brazilian striker Jo has vowed to repay Mark Hughes' faith and score a hatful of goals for his new club Manchester City next season.
The 21-year-old was Hughes' first major signing at Eastlands since he replaced Sven-Goran Eriksson as manager when he inked a four-year contract this month in a 38-million-dollar move from CSKA Moscow.
"I know it's not easy to play in England, but I can score a lot of goals," he told the New Paper here

where Brazil are training ahead of the Beijing Olympics.
Asked if he could better the 32 goals that Fernando Torres scored for Liverpool last season, he replied: "I can't say that I'm better than him, but my job is the same as his -- to score lots of goals."
Jo, whose full name is Joao Alves de Assis Silva, is a left-footed forward who joined several fellow Brazilians at CSKA in 2006 when he moved from Corinthians.
During his time with CSKA, he won the Russian league and cup double in 2006 and also made numerous Champions League

appearances, scoring 44 goals in 77 matches.
"I decided to come to Manchester City because it is one of the clubs that showed more interest in me, although I had offers from other clubs," he said.
"After I spoke to the manager I was very pleased. I was told Manchester City are a club going forward. We can go places, that is our objective."
Last season City finished ninth in the Premier League but that wasn't good enough for club chairman Thaksin Shinawatra, the former Thai premier, who fired Eriksson and replaced him with Hughes.

Deco ready to learn

AFP, Macau
New Chelsea playmaker Deco brushed off Alex Ferguson's jibes about the team's age as he insisted he still had room to develop at the age of 30.
Deco, who looked immediately at ease in his team debut, said Chelsea represented a fresh challenge after glittering spells at Porto and Barcelona.
"I've got a lot of new things to learn," he said. "I consider coming to Chelsea as a challenge."
"Overall I think Chelsea has a very strong team and there are definitely still things to learn, despite being 30."
Deco is one of several players aged 30 or more in Chelsea's first-team squad, prompting remarks from Manchester United's Alex Ferguson that they were too old to improve.
New Chelsea coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has refused to rise to the bait, repeatedly stonewalling questions on the subject.
"No comment, no comment," he told journalists.
The Brazilian-born Deco, who also played under Scolari with Portugal, lasted 62 minutes as Chelsea romped to a 4-0 win over Guangzhou Pharmaceutical on Wednesday.
But he said there was much to work on as Chelsea chase the Premiership and Champions League titles which narrowly eluded them last term.
"I thought Chelsea played well, seeing as it was the first game in Asia, but we didn't think we played our best," he said.
"So we're looking forward to the next match and hope we play to our capability."
Chelsea face Chengdu Blades in Macau on Saturday before heading to Malaysia and then Russia for the Railways Cup.

Lehmann not retiring

AFP, Stuttgart
Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has left his future involvement with the Mannschaft open and says he has no plans to retire just yet from international football.
The 38-year-old veteran ex-Arsenal shot-stopper has signed a one-year contract with VfB Stuttgart and won the last of his 61 caps in the Euro 2008 final defeat to Spain in Vienna last month.
But a decision on Lehmann's

international future needs to be made soon - Germany have a friendly against Belgium in Nuremberg on August 20 and begin their World Cup 2010 qualifying campaign against Lichtenstein on September 6.
"I didn't give it any thought during the holiday after Euro 2008 and I will see what happens," said Lehmann who added he will speak with national coach Joachim Loew before making any decision.
Lehmann is under no pressure from the other goalkeepers in the Germany squad and played all six games at Euro 2008.

Robert Enke, from Hanover, and Rene Adler, from Bayer Leverkusen, have just one cap between them, Valencia's Timo Hildebrand was left at home for Euro 2008, while Schalke 04's uncapped Manuel Neuer is an outside bet.
"Jens is now 38 years and we have young goalkeepers such as Rene and Manuel coming through who have shown their quality," said Loew.
Lehmann will be up against his former club when Arsenal play Stuttgart in a pre-season friendly on Wednesday July 30.

United may play in India

AFP, Johannesburg
Manchester United are considering offers to play a friendly game in India, with the English Premier League and European champions keen to tap into the growing demand for football on the subcontinent.
Sir Alex Ferguson and his United squad are currently preparing for the upcoming English season with a four-game tour of South Africa and Nigeria.
But with plans to return to Asia in July 2009, after a hugely successful four-stop tour of Tokyo, Seoul, Macau and Guangzhou 12 months ago, United chief executive David Gill has admitted that India could be the next destination for the club's globetrotting stars.
Gill said: "India is interesting. We have been approached to go there and we are looking at some soccer school opportunities there."
"I know Chelsea have done something and I think Barcelona have. We would not rule out going there."
Although India has no great history as an international football nation, the size of its population and



England star Steven Gerrard (L) poses with his wife Alex Curran after receiving his honorary fellowship from the John Moores University during a ceremony at the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool on Friday.

Muntari close to Inter move

AFP, Portsmouth
Ghana midfielder Sulley Muntari is close to joining Inter Milan after admitting he couldn't turn down the Italian champions.
Muntari is due to fly to Milan for a medical this week after Portsmouth accepted Inter's offer of around 12 million pounds (15 million euros).
The 23-year-old, who is expected to agree a four-year contract with Inter, knows it will be a wrench to leave Fratton Park just a year after signing from Udinese.
He has struck up a close relationship with manager Harry Redknapp, but the chance to play for one of the world's biggest clubs was too tempting to reject.
"There are teams when they come to you, you need to listen to them," Muntari told skysports.com. "Harry has developed my game, he has been a father figure to me."
"I love him, and also the Portsmouth fans, but when Inter call you need to listen."



PRANKSTER: Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery (2nd from R) points his crutch towards teammate Luca Toni (L) during a photo session in Munich on Friday.

United may play in India

AFP, Johannesburg
Manchester United are considering offers to play a friendly game in India, with the English Premier League and European champions keen to tap into the growing demand for football on the subcontinent.
Sir Alex Ferguson and his United squad are currently preparing for the upcoming English season with a four-game tour of South Africa and Nigeria.
But with plans to return to Asia in July 2009, after a hugely successful four-stop tour of Tokyo, Seoul, Macau and Guangzhou 12 months ago, United chief executive David Gill has admitted that India could be the next destination for the club's globetrotting stars.
Gill said: "India is interesting. We have been approached to go there and we are looking at some soccer school opportunities there."
"I know Chelsea have done something and I think Barcelona have. We would not rule out going there."
Although India has no great history as an international football nation, the size of its population and

the associated commercial potential has long seen it regarded as one of the great untapped markets for the sport.
In cricket, India has, for several years now, been the global financial powerhouse of the game - a position strengthened by the recent advent of the Indian Premier League (IPL), whose impact has also been noticed well beyond the sport's traditional confines.
"They (India) do have ambitions and they have a key goal to make it to the World Cup," said Gill. "Whether they can make it or not, I do not know, but it's a huge, huge country."
"Just look at the IPL. That has shown that it is a very wealthy country and it is definitely worth looking at. Other clubs will look at it and so will we."
Some commentators have suggested that interest in football in its established nations, such as England may have reached saturation point, and that the room left for further global expansion is limited.
United may be one of world football's best-known 'brands', but Gill was adamant there were still fresh markets waiting to be conquered by the Old Trafford club.
"The interest in football around

the world is increasing," he said. "It is not saturated."
"We have worked on our global position for many years, but it would be wrong to think that we are impregnable. If we did that, then we would get knocked off our perch."
Bruckner new Austria coach
AFP, Vienna
Former Czech Republic boss Karel Bruckner is to take over as coach of Austria, the APA news agency reported on Friday.
Bruckner, 68, quit his post with the Czech Republic after their first round exit from last month's European championships.
He takes over from Austrian Josef Hickersberger, who also stepped aside after his side fell in the first round of Euro 2008.
The Austrian football federation (OFB) are set to officially unveil Bruckner at press conference later Friday.
Bruckner will take charge of his first game on August 20 when Austria play a friendly against Italy in Nice, France.