

Ronaldinho can't wait for Becks

SOCCERNET

Ronaldinho has welcomed David Beckham to AC Milan and says he is excited at the prospect of a link-up at the San Siro.

"I am very happy to know that he's coming," Ronaldinho said of Beckham's arrival in Milan in January to Setanta Sports News.

"He's going to help us a lot and I'm looking forward to helping him be the great player he is as well."

"I always like the way he plays. I always admired him and it's very cool to play with important people. It's always very motivating."

With Ronaldinho and Beckham being two of the world's finest free-kick takers, the Brazilian refused to speculate on who will be handed set-piece duties with the Rossoneri.

He added: "That's not a problem, (although) it could be a problem for the team we're playing against. I hope to learn a lot with David Beckham."

Ronaldinho remains focused on success in the future with both club and country. "The main target for me is to win trophies with AC Milan and also titles for myself," he said.

"The Champions League is very important. It's a great competition and everyone wants to be a part of it."

"I hope I can play for many years to come. I don't think about the end of my career."

"I've already played in two World Cups and I feel very fortunate for that. I hope to play at the next two World Cups. Brazil can always win. Brazil are always one of the favourites. I believe we can do it."

Japanese pair in AFC shortlist

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Japanese stars Yasuhiro Endo and Yuji Nakazawa were Thursday named among the five players in contention to be AFC Player of the Year, with Australia and Japan heading the list as top team.

The pair were joined by Uzbekistan's Server Djeparov, Sebastian Soria of Qatar and the UAE's Ismail Matar with the award handed out in a ceremony in Shanghai on November 25.

Endo leads the running after guiding his team Gamba Osaka to the AFC Champions League title on Wednesday with a 2-0 victory over Adelaide United for a 5-0 aggregate win.

The Japanese international was named most valuable player of the championships.

His Gamba manager Akira Nishino is among three men in the hunt for the coach of the year accolade. He is up against Adelaide's Aurelio Vidmar and Hossein Shams, who is in charge of Iran's futsal team.

It could be a night to remember for Gamba who are also in contention to be named club of the year, along with Adelaide, Uzbekistan's Kuruvchi and Japanese outfit Urawa Red Diamonds, who won the Champions League last year.

Pim Verbeek's Socceroos, Japan and Saudi Arabia are the three teams challenging for national team of the year.

List of contenders in main categories:

Player of the Year
Sebastian Soria (Qatar and Qatar SC)
Ismail Matar (UAE and Al Wahda)
Server Djeparov (Uzbekistan and Kuruvchi)

Coach of the Year
Yuji Nakazawa (Japan and Yokohama F Marinos)
Yasuhiro Endo (Japan and Gamba Osaka)

National Team of the Year
Australia
Japan
Saudi Arabia

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)

Club of the Year
Kuruvchi (Uzbekistan)
Adelaide United (Australia)
Gamba Osaka (Japan)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)



Tottenham Hotspurs striker Roman Pavlyuchenko (C) scores his second goal against Liverpool during their Carling Cup encounter at White Hart Lane on Wednesday. Tottenham won 4-2.

Frings left out again

Football

AFP, Berlin

Rebel midfielder Torsten Frings has not been recalled for next week's friendly against England after Germany coach Joachim Loew announced his squad on Thursday.

The 31-year-old - who played in both the 2002 World Cup and Euro 2008 finals - was bitterly disappointed after Loew dropped him for the first time in his career for last month's World Cup qualifiers against Russia and Wales.

Germany captain Michael Ballack and Frings both criticised Loew over the decision and although the pair later apologised in person, Frings' return to the Mannschaft will not be immediate for Wednesday's England match.

The Hoffenheim pair of defender Marvin Compper and midfielder Tobias Weis have been called up for the first time, as has Wolfsburg defender Marcel Schaefer, but there is no place for Frings or injury-victim Ballack.

"I spoke to Jogi Loew on the telephone and he told me I am not

in the squad," said Frings, who met Loew in Berlin 10 days ago to apologise.

"We came to an agreement about it."

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Rene Adler (Bayer Leverkusen), Tim Wiese (Werder Bremen)

Defenders: Marvin Compper (Hoffenheim), Arne Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Andreas Hinkel (Celtic/SCO), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Marcel Schaefer (Wolfsburg), Serdar Tasci (VfB Stuttgart), Heiko Westermann (Schalke 04)

Midfielders: Thomas Hitzlsperger (VfB Stuttgart), Jermaine Jones (Schalke 04), Marko Marin (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Simon Rolfes (Bayer Leverkusen), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Piotr Trochowski (Hamburg), Tobias Weis (Hoffenheim)

Forwards: Mario Gomez (VfB Stuttgart), Patrick Helmes (Bayer Leverkusen), Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich), Lukas Podolski (Bayern Munich)

"During our discussion last week, I said to the coach perhaps it is better I do not come to Berlin, because of the theatre around the last game."

"Now Loew has said he would like to try out some new things against England."

There is no place for Ballack, who has just recovered from a foot operation last month, while defenders Philipp Lahm, Marcell Jansen, Christian Pander and Clemens Fritz also miss out with injury.

"We want to use the last game of the year to try a few things out and to look at some new players," said Loew.

"The three new members of the squad have earned their place through their achievements."

Frings added he will join up with the team in Berlin along with Lahm and Ballack on Monday at the coach's invitation as they are members of Loew's senior players group.

Compper and Weis have made the squad on the back of impressive performances for Hoffenheim, who have led the Bundesliga this season after winning promotion to the top flight for the first time in their history.

Maradona not quitting

SOCCERNET

The Argentinian Football Association have denied that Diego Maradona is set to quit his new job as coach of the national team less than 10 days after his appointment.

Maradona, who was installed as coach on November 4, has reportedly been in dispute with Argentina FA boss Julio Grondona, who does not approve of the choice of Oscar Ruggeri as an assistant coach.

But Argentina FA technical secretary Carlos Bilardo said: "He won't resign."

"I have spoken to Diego and told him he has to go slowly. There are 500 people he can choose to assist him."

"When I coached the national team (between 1983 and 1990) I had to change my whole staff after four or five months of work. But Diego wants them all at once."

Grondona would not reveal the reasons for his dislike of former Argentina defender Ruggeri.

"It's my problem," he said. "I don't want to talk about this."

Udinese squeeze through

AFP, Rome

Udinese survived having two players sent-off to beat Reggina on penalties and progress to the Italian Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Midfielder Luca Togiozzi was the fall guy, missing the 20th penalty in a shoot-out, to give Pasquale Marino's side an 8-7 win.

Equally culpable was Icelandic midfielder Emil Hallfredsson, who hit the post from a penalty one minute from time and then again with a freekick two minutes from the end of extra-time.

Udinese coach Marino will be far from happy though as goalkeeper Emanuele Belardi and striker Fabio Quagliarella were both sent off.

Penalties also played a part in Sampdoria's 2-1 win over Empoli.

Firstly Bruno Fornaroli put Sampdoria 2-0 ahead at halftime, adding to Emiliano Bonazzoli's opener.

Then after Francesco Lodi pulled one back for Empoli in the second half, Reto Ziegler missed a chance to put Sampdoria back in a two-goal lead from 12 yards, but the home side held on to progress.

In the other match played Napoli beat Salernitana 3-1, the result secured when Marek Hamsik fired home a penalty early in the second half.

Former Boca keeper found shot dead

AFP, Buenos Aires

Former Boca Juniors goalkeeper Nestor Manuel Hernandezorena has been found shot dead on Wednesday in Buenos Aires, police said.

Police said the 64-year-old's body had been found with a gunshot wound to the head at his home in the suburb of Tigre and added they were investigating.

Hernandezorena starred for Boca, as well as Tigre, Huracan, Ferrocarril Oeste and Newells All Boys in the 1960s and 70s.

Police found his body after a neighbour tipped them off.

It was believed Hernandezorena had died several days before he was discovered.

Chelsea crash to Burnley

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea suffered another dose of penalty shoot-out misery as Luiz Felipe Scolari's side were dumped out of the League Cup by Championship club Burnley on Wednesday.

The Blues lost a shoot-out in the Champions League final against Manchester United last season and their luck clearly hasn't improved much since as Burnley won 5-4 on penalties to inflict the shock of the season at Stamford Bridge.

Didier Drogba had given Chelsea the lead in the first half but Ade Akinbiyi levelled to send the match into extra-time.

Wade Elliott missed a chance to win the shoot-out for Burnley after Wayne Bridge's effort was saved by Brian Jensen. But the Burnley keeper pushed away John Obi Mikel's sudden death kick to send the Claret into the quarterfinals.

Drogba was back in the starting line-up for the first time since October 1 after a knee injury and the Ivory Coast star didn't take long to mark his return with a fine finish from Frank Lampard's pass in the 27th minute.

It was Drogba's first goal since April but Chelsea couldn't kill off the Claret and Akinbiyi equalised in the 69th minute after Carlo Cudicini had blocked a Chris

Eagles effort.

Chelsea had to play most of extra time with 10 men after Franco Di Santo was forced off with an injury with the Blues having already used all three substitutes.

Both sides squandered chances to win it in the additional 30 minutes before Burnley finished with 10 men as well when Steven Caldwell was dismissed for a foul on Florent Malouda.

That set the stage for Jensen's heroics as Chelsea, fresh from recent defeats to Liverpool and Roma, stumbled to a far more embarrassing defeat.

Tottenham tormented Liverpool again as the League Cup holders stormed into the quarterfinals with a 4-2 win.

Just 11 days after handing Liverpool their first Premier League defeat of the season, Harry Redknapp's team dumped out the Reds thanks to two goals each from Fraizer Campbell and Roman Pavlyuchenko at White Hart Lane.

Redknapp's remarkable start has now extended to five wins in his first six matches in charge. The damage was done in a rush this time as Spurs blitzed Liverpool with three goals in six minutes.

Russia forward Pavlyuchenko got the first in the 38th minute with a clinical finish from Campbell's cross.

Campbell, on loan from Manchester United, increased Tottenham's lead four minutes later when he tapped into the

empty net after a farcical mix-up between Liverpool keeper Diego Cavalieri and teammate Andrea Dossena.

Tottenham were running riot and a third goal arrived just before half-time when Aaron Lennon's cross picked out Campbell, who dived full-length to head past the shell-shocked Cavalieri.

It was the first time Liverpool had conceded three goals this season and, although Damien Plessis reduced the deficit in the 49th minute, there was worse to come as Pavlyuchenko volleyed home three minutes later.

Sami Hyypia headed in Liverpool's second goal after 63 minutes but despite Tottenham goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes being stretchered off in the second half, the hosts cruised through.

Paul Ince got one over his former Manchester United teammate Roy Keane as Blackburn beat Sunderland 2-1 at the Stadium of Light.

Ince made seven changes from the team defeated by Chelsea on Sunday but Blackburn broke the deadlock in the 65th minute when Roque Santa Cruz stabbed in Christopher Samba's flick.

Rovers looked in complete control when Phil Bardsley turned Matt Derbyshire's cross into his own net in the 70th minute, but Kenwyn Jones set up a tense finale when he scored for Sunderland a minute later.

Capello bans chips

Football

INTERNET, undated

Fabio Capello has told England's star players to stay off "ketchup and chips" and follow a Mediterranean diet.

The England boss, who also spelled out his "dream" to coach a Great Britain football team at the London 2012 Olympics, summed up his first year in charge as "very positive".

But he said there was still room for improvement in how the team bonded - and in their diet.

Capello told FIFA Magazine: "I have, for example, impressed upon them the advantages of a Mediterranean diet over ketchup and chips."

"I have also put some rules of conduct in place for when the national team meets up, from eating breakfast together to the use of mobile phones, which must be switched off from time to time."

"The players have been very co-operative, and that is a clear indication of the high level of profession-

alism at their clubs.

"Arsenal's academy, for example, is the perfect example of how young players should be brought along at all European clubs."

Capello admitted he was baffled at how England could have sunk so low before he took over.

"I am eager and determined to help England rediscover the spirit that they once had as the teachers of football," he said.

"I simply cannot understand how England can drop as low as we speak, as 15th in the FIFA world ranking (England rose to 10th in the latest rankings released on Wednesday)."

"We have to rediscover the fighting spirit that English football has always been famous for."

"More importantly though, we have to get over this absurd fear of playing at Wembley, where criticism from the crowd has often paralysed the team in recent years."

"I can remember the 'lion's roar' of Wembley, but recently that roar has turned into boos and moans because of the team's disappointing performances and results."

"Our aim now is to continue on

our run of victories as it will not only restore the players' belief in their own abilities, but also the fans' faith in the team. We will play more attractive football when we have more confidence."

Capello's England contract expires in 2012 and he wants to go out on a high at the London Olympics.

He could face stiff competition, however - London 2012 chairman Sebastian Coe has held informal talks with Sir Alex Ferguson about filling that position.

The Italian said: "I will be 66 by then and I will have reached retirement age. Then I want to travel and visit all of the ancient cultures that fascinate me so much."

"But I would also like to make another of my dreams come true by taking part in the Olympic Games, something that I was denied as a player, and something that still fills me with regret."

"I think it's only fair that Great Britain should have a football team in the Olympics, but it is up to others to decide how, and with which players."

Arshavin keen on Real

Football

AFP, Madrid

Zenit St Petersburg star Andrei Arshavin said he would love to join Real Madrid, which is reportedly keen to sign him, if his club will let him go.

"How could I not want to go to Real Madrid, it's a great team, one of the best," Arshavin told the AS sports newspaper published on Wednesday.

"The only thing that I have said is that I want to leave Zenit next year at all costs" and "I think by the start of 2009 I will definitely be with another team."

"I have not come out in favour of

another club. The most important thing now is not whether Real Madrid wants me or not, but rather if Zenit will let me leave," said the striker, one of the revelations of Euro 2008.

AS said on Tuesday that Real want to sign the Russian on a six-month loan from January.

The Spanish champions would then negotiate the purchase of the striker with Zenit, based on his performance during those six months, it said.

The 27-year-old was linked with a move to English Premier League side Tottenham last summer, but finally remained at Zenit after the Russian club refused to budge on its 30 million euro asking price.

Real is on the lookout for new

strikers after Brazil's Robinho left for Manchester City in September and Dutchman Ruud van Nistelrooy suffered a knee injury which could see him out of action for several weeks.

Real is currently fourth in the Primera Liga, two points behind league leaders Barcelona, with its attack relying largely on the good form of Argentine Gonzalo Higuain.

In the Champions League, Real has suffered two defeats against Juventus, and must beat Zenit next month to be sure of qualifying for the last eight.

Real would be unable to play Arshavin in the Champions League as he has already turned out for Zenit in the competition this season, AS said.

Drogba in hot water

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba is under investigation for an incident during Wednesday night's League Cup loss to Burnley when he threw a coin back at the crowd, police confirmed Thursday.

The incident at Stamford Bridge happened after the Ivory Coast striker had scored the opening goal in the fourth round tie. He also appeared to make an obscene gesture at the away fans.

Drogba was quick to apologise, but a police spokesman said: "I can confirm we are investigating the incident."

"An inquiry is being conducted by the Football Unit at Fulham police station. No-one has been arrested."

A spokesman for the English Football Association added: "We are investigating. That's all I can say until we have had a chance to look into it further."

Drogba, who was shown a yellow card for his actions, said: "This is something I want to make clear."

"I tried to celebrate the goal and I received some things at me."

"The big mistake I did was to throw it back so if someone was hurt, I just want to apologise for it."

"This is not something I should show in a football match and I want to apologise."



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) controls the ball under pressure from Burnley defender Stephen Jordan during their Carling Cup tie at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.



Paris Saint Germain forward Peguy Luyindula (R) celebrates his goal against Nancy during their French League Cup match at the Parc des Princes Stadium on Wednesday.

PSG enter quarterfinal

Football

AFP, Paris

A double by much-travelled French striker Peguy Luyindula saw holders Paris Saint Germain to a 2-0 win over Nancy on Wednesday and a League Cup quarterfinal date with the team they beat in last season's final.

Adding further spice to the last eight clash will be the vitriol that was aimed at a section of PSG fans following the final for bringing in highly abusive banners - aimed at Northern French people where Lennis - to the match.

However, PSG coach Paul Le Guen preferred to look at the match which will be in Lens at the highly-charged Felix Bollaert Stadium, which is famous for having a capacity with more people than live in Lens.

"I am very happy to go back to Lens. I have good memories of Bollaert and I always like to play there," said Le Guen.

"It will be a good match in a red hot atmosphere but it will be above all a good football match."

"Time has passed (since the banner incident) and one can only hope for intelligent behaviour and a good match," added the former Rangers and Lyon handler.

On Tuesday seven times French champions Lyon and former French champions Auxerre were major casualties as they lost 3-1 and 2-0 to Second Division sides Metz and Vannes respectively.

Auxerre - who have won just one of their previous seven matches in all competitions - followed fellow First Division side Valenciennes in becoming scalps for Vannes, who were tasting welcome revenge for two previous French Cup defeats - both by Auxerre.

Vannes - unbeaten at home this season - will now face Metz in the quarterfinals.

Metz, who are fourth in the Second Division, took full advantage of a Lyon side that rested several of their stars including

defenders Jean-Alain Boumsong and Anthony Revellere and French internationals Jeremy Toulalan and Karim Benzema.

Metz opened the scoring in the 21st minute through a header by Victor Mendy from a cross by Sebastien Renouard and then the former returned the favour by setting up the latter before half-time.

Lyon reduced the deficit shortly after the break with a header by Brazilian defender Cris from a Kim Kallstrom corner, but it was game over in the 66th minute as Romain Rocchi took advantage of the hesitation of reserve goalkeeper Remy Vercoutre following a poor back pass by Cameroon international Jean Il Makoun.

The other First Division outfit to lose to lower league opposition on Tuesday were predictably struggling Sochaux, who went down 1-0 to Second Division Lens, for whom defender Ala Eddine Yahia scored the decisive goal with a header in the 109th minute.