

Juventus president Giovanni Cobolli Gigli claims Zlatan Ibrahimovic's move to Inter Milan two years ago has led to Alessandro Del Piero's upturn inform.

Juve take on Serie A leaders Inter on Saturday in the Derby of Italy at the San Siro with Ibrahimovic and Del Piero now regarded as the best two strikers in the country.

Zlatan exit

improved

Del Piero

SOCCERNET

SPORT

Veteran Del Piero finished last season as the top scorer in Italy's top flight and has continued that blistering form into the 2008/09 campaign. But Cobolli Gigli believes the 34year-old would struggle to replicate those achievements in tandem with Ibrahimovic.

"I sometimes wonder what would have happened had he (Zlatan) stayed," he said. "Del Piero is proving to be better now than two years ago. It was an impossible attacking duo. I think by being away from each other they give the best of themselves.

"Now we have other strikers like Amauri and Vincenzo Iaquinta in the team and life goes on without regrets."

Ibrahimovic's transfer in August 2006 created waves at the time - the player opting to leave Juve shortly after the Bianconeri were demoted to Serie B for their part in the match-fixing scandal - but Cobolli Gigli believes the Turin club no longer have any issues with the Sweden international.

"Zlatan is a world-class player but in the end his departure has been for the best," Cobolli Gigli added. "It was Ibrahimovic that decided to leave Juve.

"Our club administrator met with his agent for a whole night to try to convince Zlatan to stay. But it was a separation wanted by the player."

Juve, third in the standings, are three points behind Inter going into this weekend's encounter.

Malaysia won't meet AFC demands

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia on Wednesday ruled out meeting "unreasonable demands" made by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in return for keeping its headquarters in the country, a report said.

Malaysia, which has been home to the football governing body since 1965, previously said it will not bid to keep the AFC in Kuala | weeks." Lumpur, blaming "excessive demands" from AFC President Mohamed bin Hammam.

These reportedly include diplomatic status for the AFC chief and its top officers.

"I wish to stress, we will not entertain any unreasonable demands from the AFC like diplomatic status for the AFC president, Mohamed Hammam," Malaysian Sports Minister Ismail Sabri was Bernama news agency.

"If they change their mind and remain here, we accept the decision with an open mind as we have never raised the matter," Ismail reportedly

Bin Hammam has asked AFC's 46 member nations to table bids to host AFC House, and Qatar and United Arab Emirates are said to be keen.

Bin Hammam said Tuesday he had nothing against Malaysia and would be happy to keep the governing body's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur but said there needs to be a more formal relationship between the AFC and the

Beckham in Milan for

Malaysian government.

INTERNET, undated

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani has reiterated David Beckham will only stay at the club for three months before returning to the Los Angeles

Galaxy.

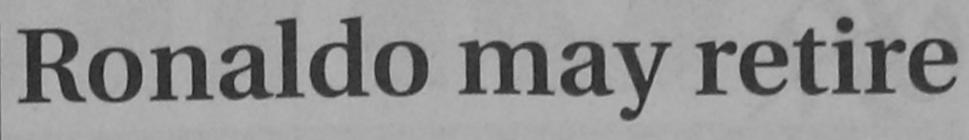
Beckham is to join the Italian outfit on loan on January 7 and Rossoneri fans including the son of club owner Silvio Berlusconi, Pier Silvio - have expressed the

hope that the 33-year-old might remain for a longer But Galliani said: "I want to make clear that the club does

not have any future projects

for him (Beckham). "All we know is that he will come to Dubai (winter break) and then he will return to Galaxy in March, besides that

nothing else.



Football

IHT, Milan

Ronaldo is still unsure whether he will return to professional football, and his 22-minute appearance in a charity match this week hasn't helped him decide.

The three-time FIFA player of the year ruptured a tendon in his left knee in a Serie A game with AC Milan in February the third major knee injury of his career and is still in rehab. After a brief appearance in

the Match Against Poverty, a charity game sponsored by the United Nations on Monday in Fez, Morocco, Ronaldo said he felt "very tired." "I only played 22 minutes

because I had a muscle problem recently," the Brazilian striker said in Wednesday's Gazzetta dello Sport. "I'm down an offer from Siena tired because the rehab work I've done is tough and my legs

RONALDO

but 22 minutes at that pace is

not much more than an exhi-

completely different."

bition. Real professionalism is

president Giovanni Stronati to play in Serie A again. are heavy. Football is my life, don't know what the future holds for me," Ronaldo said. "I don't know whether to continue playing or retire. I haven't taken a decision yet.

> "There's no rush. I want to finish my rehab, and then you know how these things go. I could decide tomorrow or a month from now. I really don't know."

"I thank him, but I really

The Gazzetta speculated that if he retires, Ronaldo could be offered a position by FIFA as a missionary ambassador to developing coun-

Ronaldo is already a goodwill ambassador for the UN Development Program.

"I consider myself a lucky man, and to be able to give back in some way seems the Ronaldo recently turned least I can do," he said.

FA punishes

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson was given a two-match touchline ban and fined 10,000 pounds (15,002 dollars) by a Football Association regulatory commission here Tuesday.

charge of improper conduct in relation to his behaviour towards referee Mike Dean 4-1 up at Old Trafford.

into account Ferguson's admission of the charge and his previous disciplinary

final whistle.

failing to give United's players adequate protection from what he said were over-

In particular, he was angry that Dean did not show a second yellow card to Michael Turner, the Hull defender, for a foul on

His ban comes into effect on December 2, which means

Harry sacks assistant

AFP, London



Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp sacked the club's goalkeeping coach Hans Leitert on Wednesday after a series of costly mistakes by Heurelho Gomes. Brazil keeper Gomes has made several

high-profile errors since his pre-season move from PSV Eindhoven and Saturday's latest gaffe in Tottenham's 2-1 defeat at Fulham proved the final straw for Redknapp.

Leitert, 35, had been working closely with Gomes since the Austrian was hired by Redknapp's predecessor Juande Ramos and paid the price for the keeper's dismal form.

A statement on Tottenham's website confirmed: "We should like to thank him for his contribution and wish him well. An announcement regarding a new appointment will be made in due course."

While Redknapp lost faith with Leitert, he still believes Gomes can put his nightmare start to life at Tottenham behind Redknapp could bring in Spanish veteran Cesar Sanchez or

youngster Ben Alnwick, who has returned from a loan spell at Carlisle, but the Tottenham boss is likely to give Gomes a chance for redemption at home to Blackburn on Sunday. "He's our number one goalkeeper so he's got to do the job

we're relying on him heavily," Redknapp said. "I believe in him and we have to believe in him.

Obviously he is disappointed with the weekend but his record tells you he is a world-class goalkeeper.

"He has to bounce back from that and turn in a terrific performance this weekend. I'm sure he'll do that. He's a strong character. It's up to him now."

Gomes may feature this weekend, but Luka Modric will be missing after Tottenham confirmed the Croatian playmaker is out for two weeks with a groin injury.

Modric suffered the problem at Fulham and was taken off at half-time. "An MRI scan has revealed that Luka Modric has suffered a

partially torn groin muscle," a statement on Tottenham's he won't be pitchside for the website read. "He was forced off with the injury at half-time in Saturday's

match with Fulham and is expected to be sidelined for up to two

Aguero flies back to Spain

Football

claiming football's ultimate prize for a

The little genius who, as a player,

second time as he embarks on an unex-

almost single-handedly guided his coun-

try to glory in Mexico in 1986 now believes

he can repeat that triumph in South Africa

in 2010 with a squad of players that might

not have one individual as outstanding as

himself, but is undeniably packed with

the likes of Liverpool's Javier Mascherano

and Manchester United's Carlos Tevez,

Maradona was brimming with confi-

dence about his prospect of emulating

Franz Beckenbauer's achievement by

"There is no point thinking about a hint of a 'Terry who?' attitude.

pected career as the coach of Argentina.

AFP, Glasgow

world class talent.

World Cup glory.

Cup," Maradona said.

on Wednesday evening.

AFP, Glasgow

Highly-rated Argentinian forward Sergio Aguero flew back to Spain on Tuesday after his girlfriend Giannina Maradona, daughter of legend Diego Maradona, developed problems with her pregnancy.

The Atletico Madrid star, who was set to feature in Maradona's first match as coach of the national side against Scotland on Wednesday, dedicated one of his two goals in the Olympic Games semifinal against Brazil (a 3-0 victory) to the fact that Giannina was pregnant.

Giannina's mother Claudia Villafane confirmed from Madrid to Argentine television that her daughter had gone to hospital as a precaution but that the baby was fine.

Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo also told Spanish radio that both mother and baby were doing

Maradona did not appear to know about his daughter's problem at the time of his Tuesday press conference in Glasgow and a delegation source said Maradona would have later been affected by the news and would have locked himself in his room.

Argentina Football Association (AFA) spokesman Future Andres, commenting on Maradona's mood, said: "It's not good."

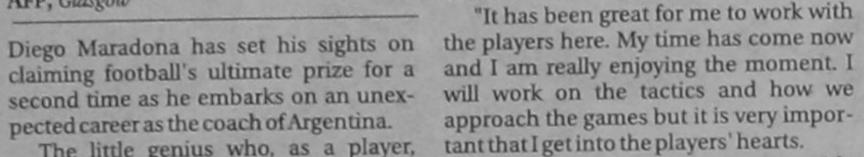
Hull manager fined

AFP, Hull

Hull manager Phil Brown has been fined 1,000 pounds (1,190 euros) and warned over his future conduct by the English Football Association after admitting a charge of improper conduct.

The charge related to Brown's behaviour on the touchline during Hull's' 5-0 Premier League defeat against Wigan at the KC Stadium on August 30.

The 49-year-old reportedly kicked a water bottle in frustration at one point but made his way to the stands before referee Michael Jones had chance to punish him.



Argentina coach Diego Maradona makes a gesture during a press conference in Glasgow on Tuesday.

"I think they need someone to guide them and I can do that. I want to make the players happy and proud to wear the shirt. I hope I will be good for them and

While no-one would ever question the footballing skills that earned him a stand-Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Juan ing ovation on his last visit to Hampden, Maradona has yet to manage at the high-Roman Riquelme were excused internaest level and his appointment has raised tional duty for Maradona's first game in charge, a friendly against Scotland here eyebrows throughout the football world.

> media handled with the kind of deft touch Quizzed about Terry Butcher's asser- the net. tion that he could never forgive him for

captaining then coaching his country to the 'Hand of God' goal that helped knock England out of the 1986 World Cup, "First and foremost, I only have one Argentina's new coach replied with a

making it into the last four. With the players that we have that has to be our goal and that is what I will be striving to

achieve. "It has been great for me to work with fine with me, I'll greet them.

they will be good for me."

But his first steps have been taken

defenders. objective and that is to win the World combination of good grace (he said he would be happy to kiss and make up) with

Maradona eyes World Cup "I don't know why Butcher is taking this attitude," Maradona said of the former England defender who is now assistant manager of Scotland. "If people are

"Let Butcher get on with his life and I'll get on with my life. I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. If Butcher doesn't shake my hand, I'll still be alive tomorrow."

Maradona further thrilled his hosts by taking a swipe at all of his English critics by pointing out that England's 1966 World Cup final victory over the then West Germany came with the help of a Geoff Hurst goal that may not have crossed the goal line.

"England won the World Cup in 1966 with a goal that didn't cross the line so don't think it's fair that anyone should judge me when stuff like that went on," he

The 'Hand of God' goal refers to But after his first training sessions with confidently with questions from the Argentina's first in their 2-1 win in the 1986 quarterfinal, in which Maradona he used to employ to get the better of used his hand to beat England goalkeeper Peter Shilton to the ball and deflect it into

Butcher's lingering bitterness over the match may however be more to do with memories of Argentina's second goal. Butcher twice failed with attempts to stop Maradona as he waltzed past five English players before finally going past Shilton to claim one of the greatest ever goals.



Brazil players Diego (L) and Robinho warm up during a training session in Brasilia on Tuesday ahead of their friendly match against Portugal on Wednesday.

Drogba given 3-match ban

AFP, London



Chelsea striker Didier Drogba was banned for three games by the Football Association (FA) here on Tuesday.

The Ivory Coast international's suspen-BARCLAYS (sion came after he admitted a charge of violent conduct for throwing a coin back into the crowd at Stamford Bridge during last Wednesday's League Cup defeat against Burnley.

Drogba will serve the suspension with immediate effect. That means he will miss the Premier League leaders' match at home to Newcastle this Saturday, the London derby against Arsenal on November 30 and the match away to Bolton on December 6.

An FA statement said: "Drogba admitted a charge of violent conduct. The charge related to Drogba throwing a missile into the away section of the crowd after scoring during the League Cup match against Burnley at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday, November 12.

Drogba, who was shown a yellow card for his actions, said after the match: "There 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. It was an incident in the heat of the moment and I regret it. It was just a mistake and nothing more."

The incident that saw Drogba banned happened after he'd scored the opening goal in the fourth round tie. He also appeared to make an obscene gesture at the away fans. That goal against Burnley was Drogba's first of a season where a knee injury has restricted him to just five league

appearances. Burnley, who play in English football's second-tier Championship, went on to equalise 20 minutes from time and then pulled off a shock win, 5-4 on penalties after extra-time.

Roma warn Real to keep off Vucinic

AFP, Rome

Roma have warned Real Madrid to keep their hands of Mirko Vucinic after reports linked the Spanish side to the

Montenegran striker. Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy will miss the rest of the season with a knee injury and Bernd Schuster's side were hoping that Vucinic would be the man to replace

However, Roma told 3 months Corriere dello Sport that no deal will take place.

"We will not sell our Vucinic neither in January, nor in June," the club said. "Even if Real made an official request, which they haven't done and as far as we know they won't do so."

The 25 year-old is in his third season with Luciano Spalletti's team and has a contract that ends in 2010.

He has struggled to find the net regularly since joining the club in 2006, but this season he has featured more in his preferred centreforward role and was rewarded with two goals against Chelsea in the Champions League.

Having played for Roma in Europe he would be cup-tied for Real Madrid's current Champions League campaign.

FOOTBALL SUPERSTITIONS

INTERNET, undated

A new study has revealed that almost two million adult football fans have pre-match quoted as saying by state rituals designed to bring their teams luck.

> While some fans put themselves through anything to help their heroes, a reassuringly large number of the rituals concern comforting habits such as food, booze... and sex.

In the study, commissioned by bankers MBNA (who are presumably crossing their fingers themselves in the current recession), more than a third of fans say they go for a "lucky" drink before the game, perhaps in a particular pub or even drinking left-handed. If their team loses, it doesn't seem to deter them from

trying it again next week. Many fans have a 'lucky'

item of clothing: 21% wear the Rio Ferdinand pours water same scarves, socks or underfans eat a particular meal everygame. before the match, which may well be from a specific burger van. And one in 11 will ensure they take the same route to

Others have more personal rituals. Of the 2,000 respondents, 3% claim they have sex before the game to bring the team luck. Extrapolated across the 20 million adult football fans in the UK, that's 60,000 fans getting jiggy prematch a figure which presumably rises above 100,000 when you include non-fanatical partners.

It's not just fans who have pre-match superstitions. England captain John Terry has lucky shinpads and listens to a particular CD before the game,



A group of Argentina fans celebrate during a match of the Albiceleste. Football fans, male and female alike suffer from a variety of superstitions that range from lucky clothing to lucky TV channels. It is these quirks that bring fans and players alike as many of the latter group admit to fancying a pair of boot or the same socks for certain games.

Ferguson Manchester United manager

The Scot admitted a

following United's match against Hull City on November 1, which saw the English champions hold on for a 4-3 win against the topflight newcomers after being In reaching its decision, the commission said it took

Ferguson had to be restrained by United captain Gary Neville after a furious rant at Dean shortly after the

He accused the referee of zealous Hull challenges.

Michael Carrick.

League Cup match against Premier League rivals Blackburn Rovers the following day.

From booze to bonking...

down his face in the tunnel, pants that once brought the and David Beckham wears team good fortune. One in 10 some gleaming new boots It's not a new thing, either. Commenting on the survey, Matt Le Tissier explains that he had his own superstition. "Some years ago I was given a pair of Mr Blobby socks for

Christmas," says Le Tiss. "I wore them the next day under my kit socks thinking they might bring me luck and sure enough, I scored! So then I wore the lucky Mr Blobby socks during every match for the next few months. I only stopped wearing them after we lost four games on the trot as I figured they had lost their magical Blobby powers.

"As a player I saw all sorts of things in the dressing room, including people getting really stressed because they had lost their lucky shin pads. The rituals tend to get more intense when it's a big game so I expect there will be a few odd things going on tonight in Munich just before they come on the pitch. It comes from a passion to support the team by any means possi-

Top 10 rituals:

1. Lucky drink before or during the game (35 per cent) 2. Lucky clothing, from scarves to pants (21 per cent) 3. Eating a particular meal or visiting a lucky burger van (10 percent)

4. Taking the same route to every game (9 per cent) 5. Placing a bet before kick-

off (4 percent) 6. Having sex before the game (3 percent) 7. Using the same parking

8. Using a lucky toilet before the game starts (3 per cent)

spot on match day (3 per

9. Praying (3 per cent) 10. Listening to a particular

piece of music (2 per cent)