

### 'Mane' new Espanyol coach

AFP, Madrid  
Jose Manuel Esnal, known as "Mane" in Spain, will coach Espanyol until the end of the season, the Spanish first division side said Monday.

He takes over from Bartolome "Tintin" Marquez who was sacked after Espanyol lost at home 1-0 to Sporting Gijon, their fourth consecutive defeat.

The loss pushed the Barcelona-based club down to 17th place in the 20-team Spanish first division standings.

"Mane" will take charge of the side on Wednesday, the club said in a statement posted on their website.

The 58-year-old coached Athletic Bilbao in the 2006/7 season after taking over from Felix Sarriguarte who was sacked. The Basque club ended the season in 17th place.

### Pepe out for a month

AFP, Madrid  
Real Madrid's Brazilian-born Portuguese defender Pepe will be sidelined for up to a month due to the left leg muscle strain which he picked up during a weekend Spanish league match, the club said Monday.

"After having magnetic resonance imaging, the Portuguese defender was diagnosed with a Grade I-II left quadriceps injury that will keep him sidelined between three and four weeks," it said in a statement posted on its website.

The 25-year-old was one of three Real players who were injured during the reigning Spanish champions 3-1 defeat on Saturday to Getafe.

Dutch international midfielder Wesley Sneijder, 24, picked up a hamstring strain while Spanish defender Miguel Torres strained a thigh muscle.

Sneijder will be out for two weeks while Torres will be out for three weeks, the club said.

All three will players will miss Real's Champions League Group H match at home to Zenit St Petersburg on December 10.

### Anorthosis chief steps down

AFP, Nicosia

The ex-president of Cypriot football club Anorthosis, the surprise package of this year's Champions League, was retained in police custody on Tuesday to help a police probe of embezzlement charges.

Andreas Panteli appeared before a Nicosia district court where a judge granted a police request he stay in detention for a further three days on the grounds there was "reasonable suspicion" that a crime had been committed.

Less than 24 hours earlier the Anorthosis president resigned from his post and pledged to return any amount of money found owing to Anorthosis Famagusta following an independent audit.

And although the Anorthosis board has withdrawn its complaints against the 48-year-old Panteli -- citing reasons of public interest -- the police investigation continues.

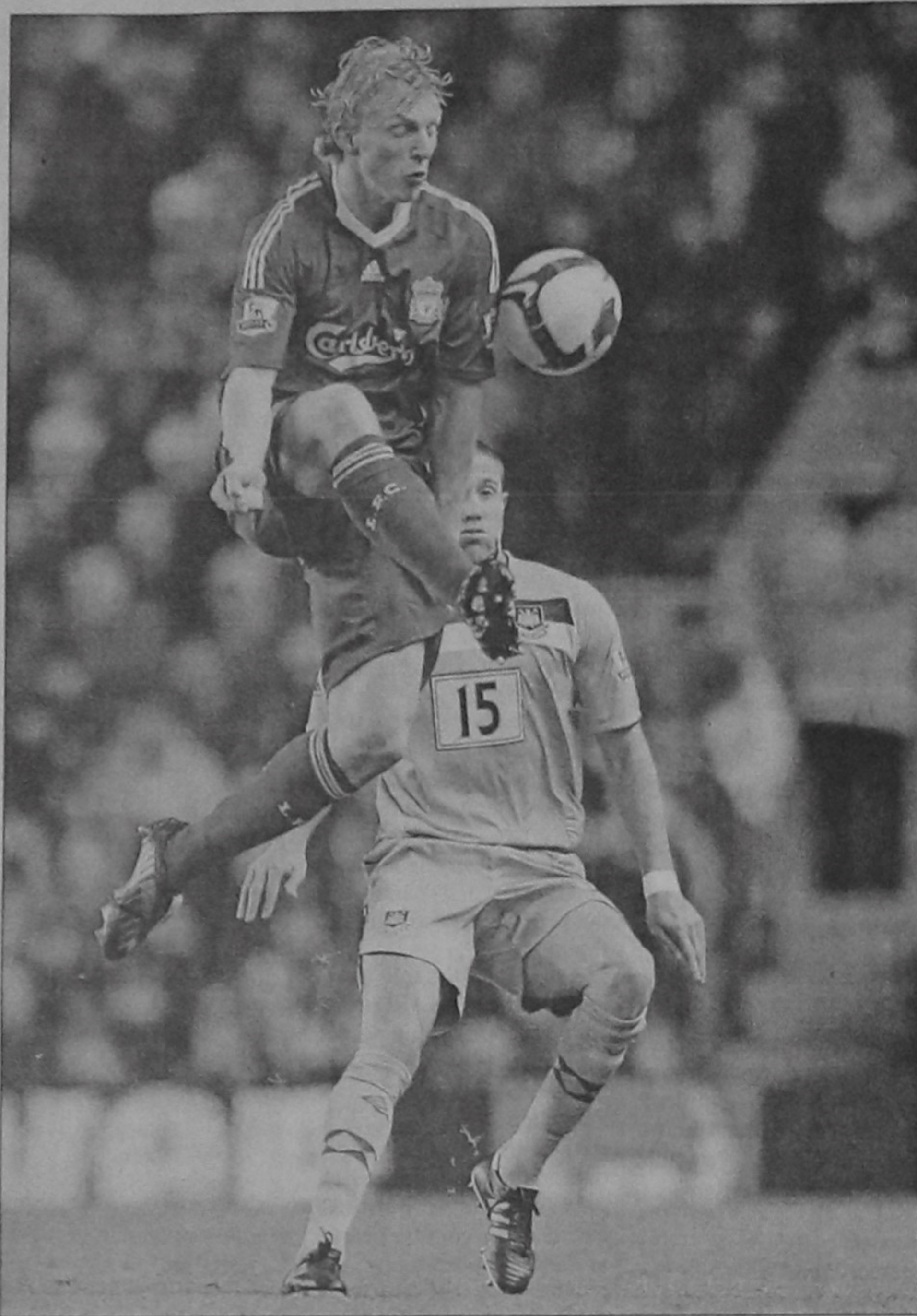
The court also heard that the embezzlement probe will extend to overseas as officers track the money trail and suspect transfer dealings.

Panteli was arrested last Friday, two days after Anorthosis drew 2-2 with Werder Bremen in the Champions League, by police looking into financial mismanagement involving one million euros (1.26 million dollars).

Police are investigating a case of forgery, distribution of forged documents, theft, obtaining money under false pretences and trying to cover it up.

The high-profile figure was accused by fellow executive members of obtaining 418,498 euros under false pretences and of trying to take another 500,000 euros in club assets.

The offences are said to have taken place between August and November. Champions League takings are also thought to be part of the missing money.



Liverpool forward Dirk Kuyt (front) controls the ball in mid-air ahead of West Ham defender Matthew Upson during their Premiership match at Anfield on Monday.

## L'pool at the summit

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool went one point clear at the top of the Premier League table despite suffering a frustrating goalless draw at home to West Ham on Monday.

Rafael Benitez's side replaced Chelsea at the summit yet few fans felt like celebrating after watching their side miss an ideal opportunity to open up a healthy lead on their title rivals.

Liverpool were guilty of wasting a string of chances while Yossi Benayoun was denied by a brilliant save from Robert Green.

But their performance raised more questions than answers as they were held at home by mid-table opposition for the second successive home game.

It is eighteen years since the title was last celebrated at Anfield yet Liverpool fans started the final month of 2008 optimistic about their club's prospects of ending that long wait.

Following Chelsea's 2-1 defeat to London rivals Arsenal the previous day, there was no better incentive for Liverpool to clock up their 11th Premier League win of the campaign.

Benitez's men knew that victory would send them three points clear of Luiz Felipe Scolari's side at the summit and eight ahead of third-placed Manchester United.

Not for the first time Liverpool had to cope without Fernando Torres, once again hampered by hamstring problems, yet their record without the Spaniard suggested that his absence would not hurt them.

Four of the five previous Premier League games with Torres out of the side had ended in victory with the only setback at Tottenham.

His absence at least presented Robbie Keane with a chance to end his stuttering form against a team which had lost on their previous seven league visits to Anfield.

## Real on Huntelaar trail

AFP, London

INTERNET, undated

Football

What should a great club do when it is immersed in a massive injury crisis and has slipped down to fourth in its domestic league?

Answer: sign a top-class forward to revitalize the attack - and to cheer up the frustrated fans.

This is exactly what troubled Real Madrid intend to do now, by signing Klaas Jan Huntelaar from Dutch giants Ajax.

Embattled Real president Ramon Calderon hinted on Monday evening that he was about to buy "a top-class striker" and the Spanish media are sure that he was referring to Huntelaar.

The imminent signing of Huntelaar is front-page news on Tuesday in Madrid sports papers AS and Marca.

AS carries the headline "Imminent Signing", while Marca insists that the Ajax forward is "The Chosen One".

The two papers agree that

Calderon will have to pay Ajax more than 20 million euros (25.33 million dollars) for the 25-year-old Netherlands international.

Huntelaar, currently out with knee ligament trouble, would not be able to play in La Liga until the January transfer "window" opens, but would be able to play for Real in the Champions League since Ajax have been absent from that tournament this season.

The signing of Huntelaar would swell Real's Dutch colony to six, since they already have Royston Drenthe, Wesley Sneijder, Rafael Van der Vaart, Arjen Robben and Ruud Van Nistelrooy on their books.

Ironically, their rivals Barcelona have traditionally been Spain's "Dutch team", while Real have generally preferred South American and German imports.

Ajax have apparently asked for a couple of days in which to consider Real's offer. AS claims that the Amsterdam club might be tempted to try to get a higher price for their star striker,

now that Calderon has made his intentions clear. Calderon also hinted at buying a new winger in January, to replace Robinho, who angrily decamped to Manchester City at the end of August, irritated at Calderon's obsession with buying Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United.

The truth is that the much-vaunted Real squad is patchy rather thin and lacking right now.

The only summer signing, in the end, was Van der Vaart from Hamburg.

Real are undergoing the worst injury crisis in their recent history, with Miguel Torres, Fabio Cannavaro, Pepe, Gabriel Heinze, Mahamadou Diarra, Sneijder, Gonzalo Higuain, Robben and Van Nistelrooy all out of action.

### Riquelme in hot water

SOCCERNET

Argentina playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme could face charges of inciting disorder after an angry goal celebration in Boca Juniors' 2-1 win over Racing Club.

Public prosecutor Luis Cevasco told the TN cable news channel he was studying Sunday's incident when Riquelme ran 50 metres to point his finger at a supporter.

"In principle he has violated two rules," Cevasco said on Monday. "One which concerns affecting the progress of the match and another which concerns inciting disorder."

"We have to verify the motive and the gestures," he said, adding the offences could yield fines or up to 10 days in custody.

Early in the second half Riquelme appeared to be involved in an altercation with the supporter who was sitting only metres from the touch-line in Boca's tightly-packed Bombonera stadium.

After volleying the winner on the hour the player ran half the length of the pitch and pointed at the fan who was then pushed by several other supporters, leading to a scuffle.

"I didn't do anything bad," Riquelme said in a television interview. "I just shouted when my team scored a goal. There are people who pay to get in and think they can insult us for two hours."

"So many things go on in this country and I think it's daft to talk about this matter."

### Juve won't be shopping

SOCCERNET

Juventus will not be making any signings in the January transfer window, according to club president Giovanni Cobolli Gigli.

The Turin giants are second in the Serie A standings, level on 27 points with AC Milan, but see no reason to strengthen for a second-half push.

"We will not be making any moves," said Cobolli Gigli. "What we will do is look around to see if there are free agents that could be useful to us for next season."

"Juve is a strong team as it is. We will be even stronger when we recover our injured players."

The Bianconeri, who have already qualified for the Champions League knock-out phase, will welcome back goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon as well as forward David Trezeguet in the new year.

Both players have been sidelined for several months but are set to return to play after the winter break.

Juve go into Sunday's game at Lecce looking to reduce the six-point deficit to Serie A leaders Inter Milan, who travel to Lazio on Saturday.

### Blues settle Mikel deal

AFP, London

Chelsea have reached an out-of-court settlement with Norwegian club FC Lyn Oslo over the transfer of Nigerian midfielder John Mikel Obi.

The English Premier League side had launched High Court proceedings in October aimed at recovering all of the 16 million pounds they paid for the player because of alleged fraudulent misrepresentation by officials of the Norwegian club.

In a statement issued on Monday, the club said it had "resolved all matters between the two clubs with regard to John Mikel Obi," while stressing the terms of the agreement would remain confidential.

Obi Mikel joined Chelsea in June 2006 with the London club paying four million pounds to Lyn Oslo and a further 12 million to Manchester United, who had a prior agreement to sign the player.

Chelsea had claimed all of the money back from Lyn and their former chief executive Morgan Andersen on the basis of their subsequent discovery that the player was not under contract to the Norwegian club at the time of the transfer.

The claim was based on details that emerged in a court case which resulted in Andersen being convicted for fraud.

## Curse of Ballon d'Or

Football

INTERNET, undated

Cristiano Ronaldo has pledged to get "even better" after winning the Ballon d'Or, but history suggests that may not be easy.

No player has won the award twice since the Brazilian Ronaldo (1997 and 2002), and few winners over the last 10 years have thrived afterwards.

Eurosport-Yahoo! investigates whether Cristiano Ronaldo could be about to experience the curse of the Ballon d'Or.

2007 - Kaka  
The mercurial Brazilian is still one of the best players in the world, but dropped to eighth in the voting after a disastrous season with Milan, who failed to qualify for the Champions League. Has started diving. Curse rating: 5/10

2006 - Fabio Cannavaro  
Cannavaro was chosen after a magnificent World Cup, but is now in terminal decline. Moved to Real Madrid after Juventus' enforced relegation and, despite winning La Liga, has committed a number of

uncharacteristic blunders. Curse rating: 7/10  
2005 - Ronaldinho  
Not so long ago, Ronaldinho was universally acknowledged as the best player in the world. This year he didn't even make the top 30. Form, fitness and motivation deserted him at Barcelona and he is trying to get back on track with Milan. Curse rating: 10/10

2004 - Andriy Shevchenko  
Once the deadliest striker in the world, Shevchenko's career nosedived after moving to Chelsea in 2006. Roman Abramovich's £30m playing score just 16 league goals in two seasons, found himself dropped and has been loaned back to Milan. Curse rating: 8/10

2003 - Pavel Nedved  
Although Juventus' 2002/03 season Champions League-winning season proved the pinnacle of his career, the Czech is still a consistent performer aged 36. Suffered the indignity of a season in Serie B with Juve but stayed loyal. Curse rating: 2/10

2002 - Ronaldo  
Ronaldo was already on his third or fourth comeback when he won his second

Ballon d'Or in 2002. His career has imploded spectacularly since, although he had two more good seasons with Real Madrid before it all went pear-shaped. Curse rating: 6/10

2001 - Michael Owen  
A sorry catalogue of injuries ensured Owen has never come close to replicating his 2000/01 season, when he helped Liverpool to a Cup treble and scored a hat-trick against Germany. Now a pale shadow of his former self. Curse rating: 1/10

2000 - Luis Figo  
Was crowned in the year of his sensational move from Barcelona to Real Madrid, and his sensational play continued among the Galacticos. Won two Liga titles, one Champions League and captained Portugal to the Euro 2004 final. Curse rating: 1/10

1999 - Rivaldo  
Another Brazilian. Rivaldo's career experienced a slow decline rather than a sudden halt, and he still managed to win the 2002 World Cup. Thereafter it all went wrong with an abortive move to Uzbekistan.

## Klinski predicts credit crunch

INTERNET, undated



Bayern Munich coach Juergen Klinsmann predicts the worldwide financial crisis will have repercussions for football and could lead to a fall in transfer fees and players' wages.

In an interview with Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa, the former Germany coach meanwhile predicted Hoffenheim - the season's surprise team in the Bundesliga - could establish themselves as a long-term rival to the German champi-

ons and make a mark on European football.

Promoted Hoffenheim could be the sort of club Bayer Leverkusen have come in German football over the years, Klinsmann said. Whereas Bayer Leverkusen are supported by the Bayer AG chemical and pharmaceutical giant, Hoffenheim is benefiting from the backing of billionaire investor Dietmar Hopp.

"There is nothing negative about this. He used to play for the club, is a football person through and through and has helped the club on its feet. That's great," he said.

"Because they are working with a long-term concept they have the potential to establish themselves right at the top of

German football and perhaps even next year be playing European football."

Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim visit second-placed Bayern Munich on Friday evening in a top-of-the-table game. Hoffenheim have a three-point lead over Klinsmann's side, who are unbeaten in nine league games after an indifferent start to the season.

Klinsmann predicted the worldwide financial crisis would "really hit" football in the coming months.

"The first signs are in England where there are big question marks over owners and investors. If thousand of jobs are threatened in Italy at Fiat then it will affect Juventus at some point," he said.

## Del Piero eyes 300 goals

Football

AFP, Rome

Evergreen Alessandro Del Piero struck his 250th goal in Juventus colours at the weekend, bagging a penalty in a 4-0 rout of woeful Reggina.

It was the latest episode in a glittering career that began back in 1993 as a substitute for Fabrizio Ravanelli and has now seen the 34-year-old take third place in the all-time list of goalscorers at a single Italian club.

Only Giuseppe Meazza, who hit 282 for Inter Milan, and Angelo Schiavio, with 253 goals for Bologna, have managed more goals for one team.

But it surely won't be long before Del Piero takes second place in that list and he may even claim top spot, if Juventus keep faith with him for long enough.

His chances of reaching this landmark seemed slim at the beginning of last season as he lost his place in the Juve line-up to the pairing of David Trezeguet and Vincenzo Iaquinta.

However, Del Piero gradually forced his way back into the starting XI with some glittering displays and his determination was rewarded as he finished the season as the Serie A top scorer and with a place in the Italy squad for Euro 2008.

This season it seems to have become a case of Del Piero plus one in the Juve forward line and despite his advancing years, the striker is dreaming of going on for longer.

"I'm happy but this objective is not the finishing line, it's just one stage," he said.

"When will I get to 300? That depends on me and on Juve. I'm not thinking much about the record but moreover at new objectives."

"Two years ago I was at 200 and maybe I didn't expect to add another 50 so quickly."

It's a long time since Del Piero scored his first goal in a Juve shirt, having been snapped up from Padova after just one goal in 14 Serie B games for them as a teenager.

It was on his debut and just one minute after entering the fray against Reggina on September 19, 1993, that he smashed home his first successful strike for the club.

Ever since it has been onwards and upwards.

Juve won their first title in eight seasons during his first campaign at the club and since then he has gone on to win five Serie A titles, although that would have been seven had the Old Lady of Turin not been stricken of their 2005 and 2006 crowns for match-fixing.

He also won the Champions League in 1996 and the Italian Cup the year before that while with Italy he was part of the World Cup winning squad in Germany in 2006 and the team that lost to France in the Euro 2000 final.

He has played 590 club games during his career as well as appearing for Italy 91 times and he shows no sign of letting up.

His current club boss Claudio Ranieri is understandably impressed.

"Del Piero is amazing. He is at the heart of the new Juve," said the former Chelsea and Valencia boss. "He's the flag bearer for the club's resurrection."

What has kept Del Piero so dear in the hearts of Juve fans is that when they were relegated in 2006 for match-fixing, and many stars such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Patrick Vieira and Fabio Cannavaro jumped ship, Del Piero stayed and battled through a season in Serie B, helping Juve to win the title and return to Serie A at the first attempt.

And while many have been expecting him to give up playing for Italy to prolong his club career, Del Piero remains as eager as ever to be a part of Marcello Lippi's setup.

"I think he deserves to be selected, but who knows him better than Lippi (an ex-Juventus coach) who was his mentor," added Ranieri.

"Lippi also has to consider young talents but when he believes the moment is right, he'll call him (Del Piero) up again."



ALESSANDRO DEL PIERO