Napoli's noble gesture

AFP, Rome

Serie A club Napoli will donate the proceeds from their next home match against Atalanta on Saturday to the victims of the L'Aquila earthquake.

Catania and Siena followed up that announcement by saying they would do likewise following their next home matches on April 19 against Sampdoria and Chievo respectively.

The latest death toll stands at 179 people while thousands have been left homeless after their houses collapsed during the earthquake in the Abruzzo region which struck in the early hours of Monday morning and measured 6.2 on the Richter scale.

"President Aurelio De Laurentiis, who has been profoundly touched by the human tragedy, has decided, as an act of solidarity, to give the takings from the Napoli-Atalanta match to the families of victims of the earthquake in Abruzzo," said a brief statement from Napoli.

The Italian Football Federation (Figc) announced that all players in the top two divisions would wear black armbands and observe a minute's silence during this weekend's matches.

They also called off all amateur football in the Abruzzo region this week and suspended the tour of the World Cup trophy, which was • due to arrive soon in Abruzzo.

"This is a tragedy that has hit the whole country. The football world is a popular one which must bow it's head as a mark of respect," said Figo president Giancarlo Abete.

"We share the pain of the families of the victims, Italian football won't fail to show its solidarity with the population affected by this tragedy."

A minute's silence will be observed and black armbands worn for Udinese's UEFA Cup clash against Werder Bremen on Thursday as well.

Serie A team Fiorentina, who have an official supporters' club in L'Aquila, have also vowed to help those affected | draw at the Dragao Stadium by the earthquake.

Their defender Luciano Zauri said he would organise some kind of benefit for the victims but said he needed more time to iron out the details before giving away any more than that.

Long lay-off beckons for Gallas

AFP, Paris

Veteran French international defender William Gallas faces a long lay-off after suffering a medial ligament injury during Arsenal's 1-1 away draw with Villarreal on Tuesday according to Gunners manager ArseneWenger.

Gallas had to come off during the first-half and is definitely out of next week's second leg match in London as is Arsenal's Spanish goalkeeper Manuel Almunia, who also came off in the first-half with a twisted ankle.

"Gallas has a medial ligament injury," Wenger told Canal Plus.

"The initial diagnosis doesn't appear to be very positive, but it will be clearer on Wednesday.

"As for Almunia it is the second time he has twisted his right ankle, and generally that means a three week lay-off," added Wenger.

Berlin lose Freidrich

AFP, Berlin

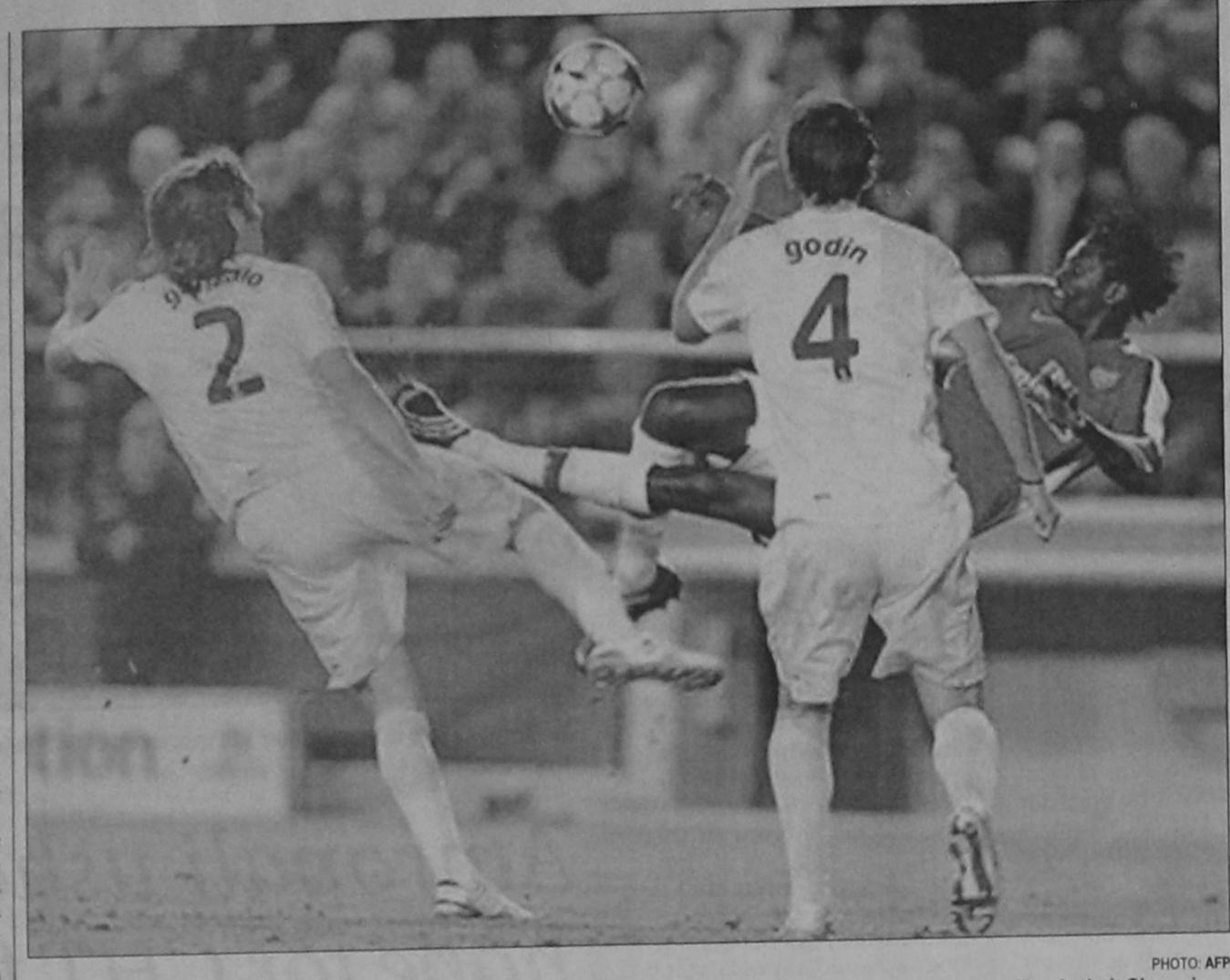
Germany defender Arne Friedrich will miss most of his club's remaining Bundesliga matches in the title race after the Hertha Berlin captain had a knee operation on Wednesday and now faces six weeks out.

The centre back had a successful operation on his left knee in Potsdam, near Berlin, on Wednesday morning and the 29-year-old is now expected to be out for four to sixweeks.

Friedrich, who has won 64 caps for his country, is expected back for Hertha's games against Schalke on May 16 and Karlsruhe on May 23.

Berlin were knocked from top spot to third in the league when they lost to Borussia Dortmund last Saturday.

His place on Germany's Far East tour between May 26 and June 3 is in question when the national team will play China in Shanghai on May 29 and Saudi Arabia in Dubai on June 2.



Arsenal striker Emanuel Adebayor (R) executes a perfect scissor-kick from the edge of the box to score the equaliser in their Champions League quarterfinal against Villarreal at the El Madrigal on Tuesday. Adebayor's fabulous strike meant that Arsenal got a crucial away goal in Spain.

Fergie calls for a rally

CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson has challenged Manchester United to keep their Champions League title defence alive by becoming the first English team to win in Porto.

Ferguson's holders face an uphill struggle to reach the semifinals after being held to a 2-2 draw by the Portuguese champions in Tuesday's last eight first leg clash at Old Trafford. Porto's two away goals

mean United need to win or earn an unlikely high-scoring next Wednesday to stay in the competition. Ferguson admits it is a

daunting prospect, especially given the woeful record of Premier League teams in

Dragao this season, while United have failed to return from Porto with a win twice under Ferguson and Liverpool recent weeks, United looked

Football

Czech football was left reeling

on Wednesday after the sack-

ing not only of under-

but also six senior players for

allegedly cavorting with pros-

titutes after a World Cup quali-

in company with several girls

which Rada fell out of favour

a replacement for the 50-year-

replacing Karel Bruckner after

Barcelona's Argentina for-

dello Sport newspaper, Laporta

claimed his Barcelona star will

the team," he said. "But Messi

is definitely already the best

player in the world because

"It depends on the results of

his team wins something.

two out of eight games since media.

with both media and fans.

were published in two Czech

performing coach Petr Rada Sverkos.

the loss to the Slovaks, after scandal.

Photographs of the players on their nomination in the

tabloids after the Czech injured Arsenal midfielder

Republic's 2-1 home loss to Tomas Rosicky as the Czech

The scandal added to an reappear after he said late on

upset caused by a lacklustre 0- Tuesday he would end his

0 away draw with Slovenia and international career over the

The association, which the CTK news agency: "I give

fired the entire national team up playing for the national

management, has not named team based on the current

old Rada, who has won only Association and in Czech

It said it might know more matches," said Ujfalusi, who

The sacked players are and appeared at the 2004 and ball.

AFP, Prague

fierlast week.

Slovakia on April 1.

Euro 2008.

AFP, Rome

Joan Laporta.

he's a genius.

and Chelsea have also been frustrated there.

"It's a difficult job now because no British team has won in Porto," Ferguson said. "We have to win the game. We've been good at firsts at this club so this is an occasion when we can be first again. We have a job to do."

United looked to have earned a barely deserved victory when Carlos Tevez stabbed United into the lead with five minutes to play at Old Trafford. But Porto substitute

Mariano equalised four minutes later to give the visitors just reward for an impressive display and leave United almost certainly needing to become the first English side to win at Porto's stadium next week.

Jesualdo Ferreira's side had gone ahead early in the first half through Cristian Rodriguez and could have been further in front before a Bruno Alves set up Wayne attacks.

Rooney's equaliser. Not for the first time in

Heads roll for Czech's

Tomas Ujfalusi, Galatasaray

striker Milan Baros, West Ham

defender Radoslav Kovac,

Frankfurt striker Martin

Fenin, Reading midfielder

Marek Matejovsky and

Sochaux striker Vaclav

necessarily mean a lifetime

ban for the players -- it will be

up to the new coach to decide

future, the association said.

The decision does not

But Ujfalusi, who replaced

Republic captain, is unlikely to

The 31-year-old said in a

statement from his agent on

situation in the Czech Football

"It is the result of the situa-

tion after the latest qualifying

after the next meeting on April scored two goals in 78 was also contemplating

Atletico Madrid defender 2008 European champion-

nervous in defence and short of urgency in attack. Now they face a testing trip to the Dragao Stadium next Wednesday knowing only a victory or an extremely highscoring draw will keep alive their hopes of retaining the

"The result was about right. First half they were the better side but second half we improved and got more possession," Ferguson said.

Champions League trophy.

"But getting the (second) goal the way they did - we should really have defended that. It was a bad goal to lose.

"It's been a hard two days for them but they were lacking in concentration. "You get a 2-I lead with four

or five minutes left, you really should see it out. It's a difficult game now in Porto, no question of that." Ferreira added: "In the first

half we were the team that attacked more and had more corners. In the second half we Arsenal lost 2-0 at the calamitous mistake from were able to keep out United's

"We had a good reaction to United's second goal. It is a joy to see my team play like this."

ships and at the 2006 World

all but doused Czech hopes of

topping Group Three of the

2010 World Cup qualification.

group and trailing leaders

Northern Ireland by five

points and Slovakia by four, is

next facing Slovakia in

Bratislava on September 5 in

meeting on Wednesday,

former Manchester United,

Benfica and Lazio winger

Karel Poborsky stepped down

as the team's technical direc-

He told journalists he was

"enraged by the (players')

decision to end his interna-

tional career is unfortunate,"

AC Milan defender Marek

Jankulovski, enraged by being

mentioned as one of the

players at the party which

then proved untrue, said he

Early into the association

the qualification.

party as well."

Poborsky added.

matches for the national team quitting international foot-

Last week's loss to Slovakia

The team, fourth in its

Moscow still haunts Terry

AFP, Liverpool

Chelsea captain John Terry, has revealed he is still haunted by his penalty miss in last season's Champions League final and is unsure whether he will ever truly get over the experience.

The England defender has been in excellent form as Guus Hiddink's team chase domestic and European success this

But Terry said he was still hurting inside after his miss from the spot helped Manchester United be crowned champions of Europe last May in Moscow.

Ahead of the first leg of Chelsea's all-England Champions League quarterfinal with Liverpool at Anfield on Wednesday, Terry said: "I'm very determined to go the extra step this year and win the tro-

"That burning (disappointment) I suffered last year will live with me forever. The one way I can make that pain ease a little bit is to win this trophy," Terry also told reporters at Anfield here on Tuesday.

"I can do that with the manager we have in charge this year. It's not just about me. It's a team game. Everybody has felt the pain I've felt.

"My personal memories will never go away, but it's about the team. We, as a squad, can go on and do great things in the competition."

This is the fifth successive season that Liverpool and Chelsea, who are second and third in the Premier League table respectively, have met in "And captain Ujfalusi's Europe.

England gain ground

AFP, Paris

England's World Cup qualifier win over Ukraine has pushed Fabio Capello's side up two places into seventh in FIFA's latest world rankings released on Wednesday.

World champions Italy slipped one spot down to fifth while 1998 World Cup winners France broke into the top ten after their backto-back wins over Lithuania. FIFA rankings

1. Spain

2. Germany 3. Netherlands

4. Brazil (+1) 5. Italy (-1)

7. England (+2) 8. Croatia (-1)

9. Russia (-1) 10. France (+2)

6. Argentina

Ade's acrobatics

CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Villarreal

A brilliant acrobatic equaliser by Emmanuel Adebayor earned Arsenal a 1-1 draw and a crucial away goal in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal against Villarreal here on Tuesday.

Spain's Euro 2008 victor Marcos Senna had put Villarreal into a 10th minute lead with an unstoppable swerving shot but Adebayor levelled on 65 minutes with his fourth Champions League goal and it was one to remem- second leg.

The Togo striker controlled a superb pass from Cesc Fabregas on his chest before volleying home with an acrobatic scissors kick.

The away goal makes Arsenal slight favourites for momentum." the tie going into the return leg at their Emirates Stadium on April 15. However, the joy at getting

the away goal will have been tempered by the news that first choice goalkeeper veryhappy. Manuel Almunia faces perhaps three weeks out with an

ankle injury and France international defender William Gallas faces a lengthy absence after suffering a

medial ligament injury. Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger was impressed by the quality of both sides and acknowledged that his side were not over the line yet as he bids to land the trophy for the first time.

"I am pleased with the quality we have shown added to the mental strength and desire we have shown.

"But we know Villarreal are a good team as well, so we will have to be on our toes in the "The team has shown the Arsenal."

whole season they are mentally very strong and when they have their backs to the wall, these young players always find the answer.

"I believe we have created Adebayor was delighted to

have made an impact after returning from injury. "I wanted to do something

good," he said. "I am very pleased and

"I don't really know how l scored. We are delighted.

"Of course the injuries in the first half (to Almunia and Gallas) didn't help our rhythm but Villarreal played really well, especially Senna and we came back well in the

second-half." Senna said that despite conceding the away goal Villarreal had far from given

up hope. "They are the favourites now because they have the away goal and home advantage for the next game," said

"However, we won't be throwing in the towel and believe we can win at

Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini said his side deserved to win and that Arsenal were only slight favourites to progress.

"I think overall we did more than Arsenal. They had a good period of 20 minutes in the second half but we were superior in the first half and in the closing stages of the match," said Pellegrini.

"In theory they have a slight advantage but I still think the tie is 50-50."

City face stern test

CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

Manchester City defender Nedum Onuoha says medals and not money will tempt new recruits to the big-spending club, ahead of their UEFA Cup quarterfinal first leg at Hamburg.

City's take-over by the hugely wealthy Abu Dhabi United Group in September thrust the club into the spotlight and after an indifferent start they are now beginning to climb the Premier League table.

Such is the club's financial strength that rumours are already beginning to circulate about who they will sign in the summer, but England Under-21 captain Onuoha feels the UEFA Cup trophy is more likely to lure big names than the promise of a juicy contract.

"That would definitely mean more than the money, Onuoha said.

"There is so much potential here now and the chance to be able to afford better players. But they will come because they see the club is moving in the right direction."

City's form has been patchy all season - they have managed consecutive league victories on just two occasions - and much has been made of the performances of 32.5million-pound record signing Robinho, who hasn't scored since the end of December.

The Brazilian has been playing with a sexual assault charge hanging over his head, but after that was dropped on Monday and City skipper Richard Dunne backed the fleet-footed winger to rediscover his best form.

"It was an awful thing to be accused of and it would affect any man in that situation, Dunne said.

"He's got a young family and they are his main concern so hopefully that has lifted a bit of weight off his shoulders and he can start playing with a smile on his face again and showing what he can do." City coach Mark Hughes

has injury concerns over leftback Wayne Bridge, former Hamburg utility man Gelson Fernandes and star midfielder Steven Ireland, and he will be mindful that Hamburg are in top form after a 1-0 victory over Hoffenheim on Saturday sent them up to second place in the Bundesliga.

The winners of the tie will face either Hamburg's German counterparts Werder Bremen who knocked out favourites AC Milan in the round of 32 - or Udinese, the only Italian side left in European competition.

On-loan Chelsea striker Claudio Pizarro netted a hattrick as Bremen trounced Hannover 4-1 in the league on Sunday, while Udinese will be without talismanic captain Antonio di Natale after he suffered a serious knee injury while on international duty with Italy.

The other two last-eight ties feature four of the biggest names from France and Ukraine. Ukrainian champions

Shakhtar Donetsk face

Marseille, whose fierce rivals Paris St-Germain take on runaway Ukrainian league leaders Dynamo Kiev. With a 15-point advantage over Shakhtar, Dynamo are well-placed to secure the national championship, but Marseille and PSG are both

firmly still in the French title race, one point and four points offleaders Lyon respectively. Both sides won at the weekend to stay in the domestic title hunt and their fans are now dreaming of a semifinal show-

down in the UEFA Cup. "I'd really like to play Paris in the next round," said Marseille winger Hatem Ben

"It would be a great match and a great season if we managed to beat them again. That would prove that we are better

FIXTURES

(1845GMT unless otherwise stated) Thursday

Hamburg (GER) v Manchester City (ENG) Paris St-Germain (FRA) v

Dynamo Kiev (UKR) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) v Marseille (FRA) (1630GMT) Werder Bremen (GER) v Udinese



PHOTO: AFP

Olympique Marseille striker Mamadou Samassa signs an autograph for a fan as the team arrives at Donetsk airport late on Tuesday.

Adriano goes AWOL

Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Inter Milan striker Adriano has taken refuge in his home favela in a state of depression after a painful break-up with his girlfriend, his former companion claimed here Tuesday.

Adriano's whereabouts and wellbeing have been the subject of intense speculation since he went off the radar after appearing for Brazil in a World Cup qualifier last week.

"It's in Vila Cruzeiro that Inter have had no contact Adriano feels comfortable. He with the troubled 27-year-old likes to fly kites, walk in whose absence has led to rumours of kidnapping or problems with drugs. His Brazilian agent, Gilmar

barefeet. There he doesn't play the role of The Emperor (Adriano's nickname)," the 28-

is totally lost, but I no longer edge in the local press that have the strength to deal with Adriano had a "serious" problem which he wanted to resolve him. before returning to Milan. meet drug traffickers whom he had known since he was a child

Rinaldi, has denied those year-old told the paper.

His ex-girlfriend, Joana Machado, lifted some of the mystery surrounding the star in an interview with Tuesday's O Dianewspaper.

theories but he did acknowl-

She said the player had stated. spent the last few days with his friends in the favela Vila Cruzeiro - one of the most violent districts in Rio, where he was born and grew up.

he was a user.

from time to time." Machado said she had split up with Adriano because of his excessive jealousy.

Machado added: "Adriano

She added that Adriano did

but categorically denied that

"His only drug is beer," she

"But who doesn't like a beer

Such is the concern over the player that the Brazil Football Confederation were moved to issue a statement saying that Adriano was at home with relatives."

Messi is world's best' "Players like him only come year before that it was Italy's Football around once every 30 years."

dazzling Spanish audiences

and tormenting La Liga

defences for several years, he

has yet to be named the best ward Lionel Messi is already player on the planet. the best player in the world, according to his club president

that for a player to win such an Speaking to the Gazzetta award, his team must also be in Europe. win the Ballon d'Or as soon as

United's Cristiano Ronaldo finished top in both the World Player of the Year and Ballon d'Or polls and the year before it was AC Milan's Kaka -- in both cases their team had won the Champions League while the hesaid.

World Cup-winning captain Although Messi has been Fabio Cannavaro who scooped the top awards. It is not only Messi who has

supposedly been prejudiced by his team's failure to win things: in Italy many think Inter The consensus opinion is Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic would win if his team did better

> rumours. "I'm not going to talk about that out of respect for (Inter president Massimo) Moratti,'

Ibrahimovic is a reported Last year Manchester transfer target for Barcelona this summer and Laporta did nothing to dispell those