

Juninho set to leave

AFP, Lyon

Former Brazilian international midfielder Juninho will certainly play his last match for seven-time French champions this weekend ending a spectacularly successful spell there, club president Jean-Michel Aulas announced on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old has been the inspiration behind Lyon's seven titles, including last year's domestic double, since joining from Vasco da Gama in 2001.

He notched up his 100th goal for the club - including 44 from freekicks - last weekend.

However, Aulas has reluctantly agreed that perhaps the greatest player in the club's history can leave prematurely.

"Juninho is going to leave us," Aulas told a press conference.

"We are going to allow him to terminate his contract early as there is still a year to go on it. He can go where he wants."

Aulas, who will endure a trophyless season for the first time in eight seasons, said that the strong emotions swirling round the club reflected the ties the 44-times capped Brazilian had established in his time there.

"Everything that Juninho has brought to Lyon whether it be to do with the tactics, or his passion and professionalism, is reflected this evening by the highly charged atmosphere here," commented Aulas.

"Because we are coming to the end of a superb relationship which was shared equally by the club and the supporters with Juninho.

"It's the end of an era, of a story and it is hard to swallow." Juninho, who reached three Champions League quarterfinals with Lyon and is their leading scorer in the competition with 18 goals, was so moved by the occasion that he left the press conference without saying a word.

Moyes receives perfect boost

AFP, London

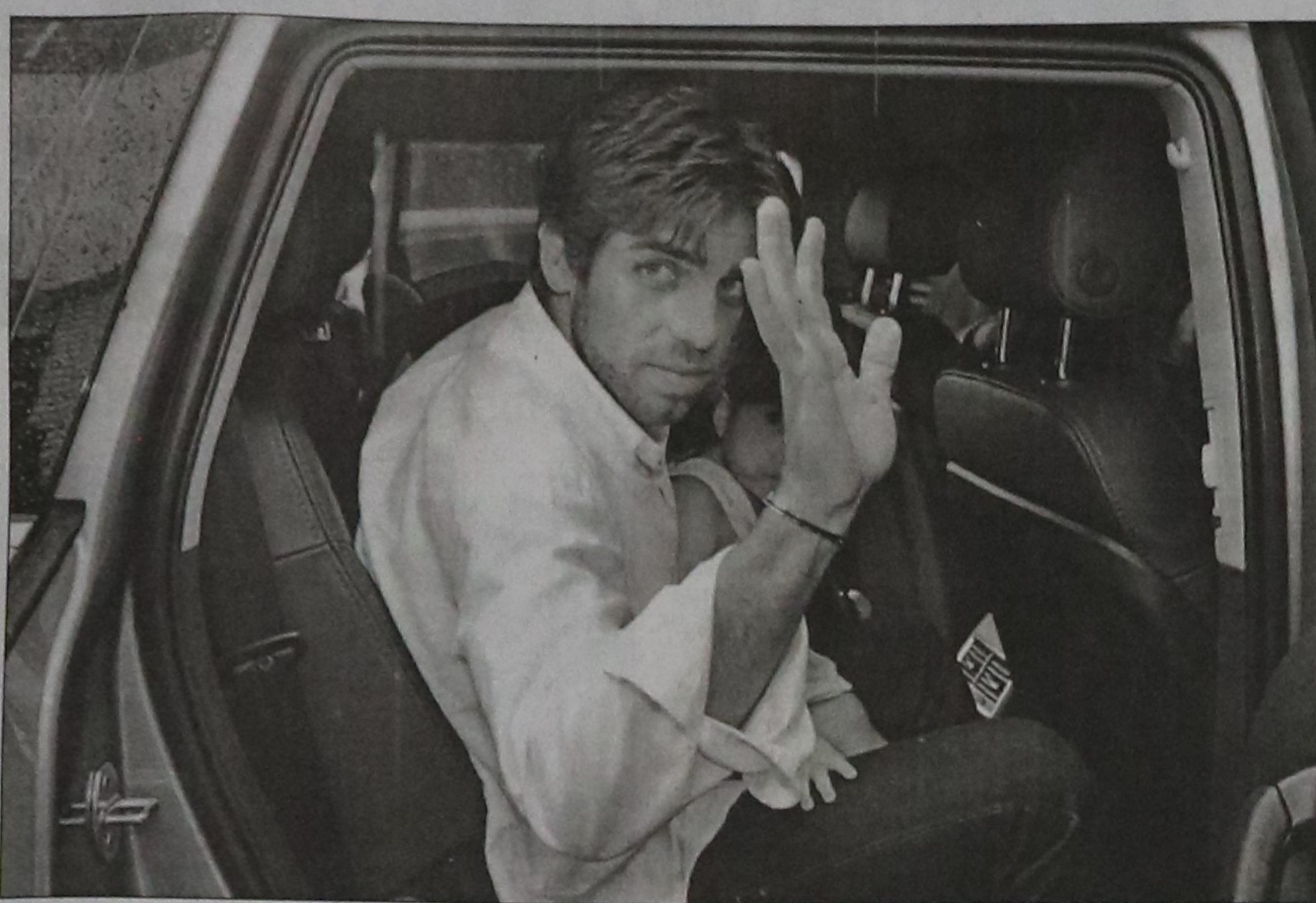
Everton manager David Moyes received the perfect boost ahead of Saturday's FA Cup final with Chelsea when he was awarded the League Managers' Association's (LMA) manager of the Year award on Tuesday for a record third time. The 46-year-old Scotsman has worked wonders on a relatively limited budget to take Everton not only to the FA Cup final but also to fifth place in the Premier League and a place in the new Europa Cup next season.

"Since joining Everton, David has not only transformed the club's fortunes, he has also created a huge fan base, including many of his fellow managers," said LMA chairman Howard Wilkinson.

"With only modest financial backing he has shown what can be achieved through discipline, dedication and an innate ability to get the best out of every player."

Moyes, who made his name as a manager at Preston North End before leaving for Everton in 2002, won the award previously in 2003 and 2005.

Manchester United manager and fellow Scot Sir Alex Ferguson won the LMA Special Merit Award for his success this season which has seen him guide United to the Premier League title and the League Cup.



Olympique Lyon captain Juninho leaves a press conference after announcing his departure from his club in Lyon on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Six of the best finals

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

Six of the best European Champions League (European Cup) finals from the tournament's history:

1960 GLASGOW Real Madrid (ESP) 7 Eintracht Frankfurt (GER) 3 Real's fifth consecutive victory in the competition, the 1960 final also saw more goals than any other final. The 135,000 fans crammed into Hampden Park saw Eintracht go ahead only for the Germans to be overwhelmed by the combined magic of Alfredo Di Stefano, who scored three, and Ferenc Puskas (four).

1967 LISBON Celtic (SCO) 2 Inter Milan (ITA) 1 Celtic became the first British winners of the European Cup when Steve Chalmers scored a late winner to down the

cautions Italians, who had taken the lead through Alessandro Mazzola before Tommy Gemmill's equaliser.

1968 LONDON Manchester United (ENG) 4 Benfica (POR) 1 (aet) Ten years after the horrors of Munich, when Manchester United's 'Busby Babes' were decimated in a plane crash, the English champions finally delivered an emotion-fuelled victory at Wembley. Bobby Charlton scored two of United's goals, with George Best and Brian Kidd adding the others.

1972 ROTTERDAM Ajax (NED) 2 Inter Milan (ITA) 0 A match often described as the defining moment in the history of 'total football'. Ajax, with two goals from Johan Cruyff, scored the second of three consecutive European Cup wins after overwhelming a negative Inter Milan employing the 'catenaccio' system.

1999 BARCELONA Manchester United (ENG) 2 Bayern Munich (GER) 1 A forgettable final made unforgettable by the most thrilling finish in Champions League history. Trailing 1-0, United looked beaten as the match headed into injury time. But an equaliser from Teddy Sheringham (90+1) was followed by a winner from Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (90+3). The victory earned United a remarkable treble.

2005 ISTANBUL Liverpool (ENG) 3 AC Milan (ITA) 3 (aet; Liverpool 3-2 on penalties) A match that has become known simply as the Miracle of Istanbul. Trailing 3-0 at half-time, Liverpool looked to be heading for a humiliating defeat to the Italians. But goals from Steven Gerrard, Vladimir Smicer and Xabi Alonso drew the English team level before Jerzy Dudek's heroics in the shoot-out.

Ronaldo gets 1-match ban

AFP, Sao Paulo

Double World Cup winner Ronaldo has been hit with a one-match ban for pulling the hair of an opponent at the weekend.

The 32-year-old Brazilian striker tugged the locks of Botafogo midfielder Fabel, who had been pulling at his shirt.

The ban comes with the 1994 and 2002 World Cup winner and two-time European footballer of the year out of action with a calf injury.

Ronaldo, who missed almost a year of action because of a serious knee injury, has made a triumphant return to Brazil, having scored 10 goals in 14 games for the Sao Paulo-based Corinthians club.

Crespo going to Genoa

AFP, Rome

Genoa president Enrico Preziosi on Tuesday claimed his club were close to tying up a deal to sign Inter Milan pair Hernan Crespo and Ricardo Quaresma.

Inter are themselves close to finalising a deal for Genoa stars Diego Milito and Thiago Motta and now it seems Crespo and Quaresma will travel in the opposite direction in a direct swap.

"I'm meeting (Fernando) Hidalgo (Crespo's agent) on Wednesday to finalise the Crespo deal," Preziosi told Radio Radio TV.

"We're (also) interested in Quaresma, there's a deal in place with Inter on the basis of 10 million euros and now we just have to come to an agreement with the player."

Quaresma only joined Inter at the beginning of the season but was a complete flop and was loaned out to Chelsea in January.

However, he couldn't force his way into their team either and has hardly played this season since joining from Porto for 19 million euros last August.

It is the second time a move to a big club has gone sour for the Portugal winger after he also struggled at Barcelona in 2003-04.

Police seize fake labels

INTERNET, Rome

Italy's anti-fraud police say they have seized 15,000 fake labels with Manchester United and Barcelona logos on the eve of the Champions League final.

Police said that the labels were shipped from China and were seized at Rome's Ciampino airport.

An official said the labels were going to be used to sell "official-looking" T-shirts and other merchandise at the game on Wednesday. He said three Italians were being investigated.

Authorities are beefing up security in Rome, setting up patrols in the area around Olympic Stadium and in the city center as well as at airports and subway stations.

Some 67,000 fans are expected for the game, including 30,000 from England and 20,000 from Spain.

Maldini furious

AFP, Rome



AC Milan legend Paolo Maldini has hit out at the club over their failure to

condemn fans who chanted against him following his last ever match at the San Siro on Sunday.

The clash against AS Roma was supposed to be a celebration of the 40-year-old defender's 24 years as a player for the club.

But firstly the visitors inflicted a 3-2 defeat on Maldini and his teammates and then a section of fans jeered him and unfurled derogatory banners criticising him.

In Wednesday's Gazzetta dello Sport Maldini lashed out at club officials who had failed to back him over the unsavoury incident.

"I'm disappointed with the club's silence. I'm not happy that they didn't take a stance," he said.

"There hasn't even been

one single statement, no official has spoken out ... I think a team like Milan should disassociate itself from certain incidents."

Maldini played in his 901st game for Milan against Roma and after the match he went on a lap of honour around the stadium.

But while the vast majority of fans applauded him, some chanted the name of former captain and Maldini predecessor Franco Baresi.

There were also banners unfurled criticising Maldini over an incident in 2005 when the defender hit out at a section of fans who had jeered his team when they failed to hold onto a 3-0 lead against Liverpool in the Champions League final in Istanbul, eventually losing it on penalties.

And Maldini admitted his San Siro swansong left him bruised.

"I was hurt. 70,000 people cheered me, 500 wanted to ruin the party," he added.

The party could turn even more sour if Milan lose their

final match of the season -- and the last of Maldini's career -- on Sunday at Fiorentina as they would risk missing out on a top three finish and would then face the ignominy of needing to negotiate two qualifying rounds to reach next season's Champions League group stages.

Milan, however, were quick to respond with vice-president Adriano Galliani immediately publishing an open letter on the club's website.

"I've read your interview and I understand your bitterness," he said. "As you know I had to be escorted (by the police) two years ago due to the behaviour of those same people who chanted against you."

"I was the one who decided to stay silent, not just because I was advised to but mostly because I believed and still do that silence is the most efficient weapon to not giving any more publicity to the behaviour of Sunday."

Ajax appoint Jol

Football

AFP, Amsterdam

Martin Jol was handed the task of reviving the fortunes of ailing Dutch giants Ajax on Tuesday when he was named their new coach according to a statement on the side's website.

The 53-year-old Dutchman had guided Bundesliga side Hamburg to fifth place - and to semifinals in both the German and UEFA Cups - in the championship and was under contract to them till June 2010.

However, the former Spurs manager is to sign a three-and-a-half-year contract with the four-time European champions, whose previous coach Marco van Basten resigned at the beginning of the month after a disappointing campaign which saw them finish third and fail to gain a Champions League place for next season.

Ajax, who won the last of their record 29 league titles in 2004, have handed Jol full powers in not only the head coaching role but also in terms of transfers and the youth programme.

"Ajax have offered me a fantastic opportunity to develop a long term plan and also handed me responsibility in all fields," said Jol.

"I am delighted to come home after several years abroad."

Rik van den Boog, the club's managing director, said that Ajax had pulled off a remarkable coup in persuading Jol to take the post.

"Martin is experienced. He has all the qualities required for our club," said van den Boog.

"He is a coach that gives young players their opportunity to shine at this level and

that is number one for Ajax." Ajax had already been rebuffed in their search for a coach by Co Adriaanse, Frank Rijkaard and Danish duo Michael Laudrup and Morten Olsen.



MARTIN JOL

US tycoon takes over Black Cats

AFP, Sunderland



American tycoon Ellis Short is to secure 100 per cent control of

English Premiership club Sunderland.

The club's majority shareholder, who bankrolled their summer spending spree last year, will complete his buy-out of the Drumaville consortium put together by chairman Niall Quinn three years ago.

Quinn told the club's official website, www.safc.com: "This is fantastic news for the club. Ellis has already shown tremendous commitment to date, but today's announcement opens the door for a new era at the Stadium of Light."

Short, who had previously kept a low profile since becoming involved with the club, has recently become a more public figure, appearing beside Quinn in the directors' box at Portsmouth last Monday and then again at the Stadium of Light at the weekend.

He was on hand to witness the wild celebrations as the Black Cats secured their Barclays Premier League status despite a 3-2 defeat by Chelsea as arch-rivals Newcastle slipped into the

Coca-Cola Championship. However, amid suggestions he could pump up to a further 20 million pounds into the club, Quinn revealed Short has already played a major role in its recent development.

"Even before today, he has personally invested more in Sunderland than all previous chairmen, directors and owners combined in the club's history."

"Late last summer, he injected tens of millions of pounds to fund our new signings and the resultant increased wage bill."

"In going forward, as long as we invest the funds wisely, he will continue to provide what has been the missing ingredient in Sunderland's make-up, namely the financial muscle necessary to compete at the highest level."

"And Ellis's involvement to date also enabled us to turn down a club record bid of up to 20 million pounds for Kenyon Jones from Tottenham Hotspur in the January transfer window."

News of Short's takeover came as the club launched its search for a new manager, although amid suggestions they have gone some of the way towards appointing Wigan's Steve Bruce, Quinn insisted they would take their time.

He said: "It goes without saying that the search for a

new manager has started, and we will take what ever time is necessary to make this important appointment."

"It is imperative that we find somebody who will raise the bar and introduce a whole new mentality to our dressing room."

English fan stabbed in Rome

AFP, Rome

An English fan was slightly injured after being stabbed in Rome on Wednesday ahead of the Champions League final between Barcelona and Manchester United, local police told AFP.

"At about three o'clock in the morning (0100 GMT), an English supporter was slightly injured in the thigh by a blow from a knife," said a police spokesman.

"We don't yet know the exact nature of this incident but it was possibly related to a fight although we cannot confirm that it had anything to do with tonight's match."

The spokesman confirmed that two English fans had also been arrested at known trouble-spot Campo de Fiori for being drunk and bothering passers-by.



Policemen hold jerseys of Barcelona (C) and Manchester United (R) with counterfeit logos (on table) seized at Rome's Ciampino Airport on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP