

## Grosso moving to Juventus

AFP, Rome

Juventus have come to agreement over the three-million-euro transfer of Italy full-back Fabio Grosso from Lyon, according to Italian press reports on Monday.

The 32-year-old, a World Cup winner with Italy in 2006, will sign a two-year deal with the Turin club.

The news contradicted an earlier claim from Grosso's agent Beppe Bozzo that a miracle would be needed to complete the switch before the end of Monday's transfer deadline.

"Juve have made an offer that Lyon believe is too low. As the hours pass and the end of the window approaches, it gets harder to reach a deal," Bozzo told Rai.

"Grosso wants to return to Italy but it's down to Lyon. I'm not optimistic, it would need a miracle for this transfer to be completed today."

Grosso won a French league title and a cup during his two-year stint in the Rhone-Alps region but was pushed out of the first team by the arrival of Frenchman Aly Cissokho from Porto.

Grosso began his career in the lower divisions with Chieti before moving to Perugia and then on to Palermo.

He spent the 2006/07 season with Inter Milan, winning the Serie A title but was sold to Lyon as he was not first choice at the San Siro.

## Bojan out for three weeks

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona striker Bojan Krkic will be out of action for two to three weeks due to a thigh muscle injury, the Spanish and European champions said Tuesday.

The 19-year-old picked up the injury during Barcelona's 3-0 win over Sporting Gijon at home on Monday in their opening match of the new Spanish season in which he scored the first goal.

Krkic, who celebrated his birthday on Friday, limped off the pitch with 10 minutes left in the match.

"I hope we get him back as soon as possible, because we need him. I have a lot of confidence in him," Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola said after the match.

The injury means Krkic will miss Barcelona's upcoming Spanish league matches against Getafe and Atletico Madrid as well as the club's opening Champions League group match against Italian champions Inter Milan.

## Transfers cost Spanish 477m euros

AFP, Madrid

Top Spanish clubs splashed out 477 million euros on new players during the summer transfer window, more than half of which was spent by Real Madrid, according to tally by a Spanish newspaper Tuesday.

But the total is still less than the 504 million shelled out by English Premier League sides, El Mundo said, one day after the official close of the transfer season.

Real and rivals Barcelona accounted for more than 75 per cent of the transfer fees in Spain's Primera Liga, the paper said.

Real paid Manchester United a world record 94 million euros for Cristiano Ronaldo, part of a record 250 million it spent on new players, including Kaka, Karim Benzema and Xabi Alonso.

It also sold a number of players -- notably Dutchmen Wesley Sneijder, Arjen Robben and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar -- for a combined fee of 93 million, sports newspapers AS and Marcas said.

Spanish and European champions Barcelona forked out 110 million euros.

Barca chairman Joan Laporta claims the club spent 80 million but Spanish media said the real amount is 110 million as Samuel Eto'o left for Inter Milan in part exchange for Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Both Real and Barca have announced record budgets of more than 400 million euros for the 2009-10 season.

In Europe, the only English club in the same league was Manchester City, which spent 140 million euros, El Mundo said.

After the English and Spanish leagues came Italy's Serie A, where clubs paid 422 million euros for new players this summer, the French first division (245 million) and the German Bundesliga (220 million).



Barcelona striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic scores the third goal from a diving header during their Primera Liga match against Sporting Gijon at Nou Camp on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Ibra scores on debut

AFP, Barcelona



Club record signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored a late debut goal as Barcelona began their title defence with a convincing 3-0 home win over Sporting Gijon on Monday.

Birthday boy Bojan Krkic, who turned 19 three days ago, and Seydou Keita had put Barca 2-0 up at the interval before Ibrahimovic, a 69-million-euro capture from Inter Milan, netted his first goal for the club on 82 minutes.

It was a largely disappointing debut from Ibrahimovic, who was upstaged by brilliant teenager Bojan, but the goal will certainly lift some of the immense pressure to prove he is the equal of departed hero Samuel Eto'o.

Last season Barcelona lost 1-0 to Numancia on the opening day of the season but there was no slip-up this time around in a convincing win.

After a marvellous pre-season in which they won the Spanish Super Cup and European Super Cup to make it five trophies in a year, Barcelona went into their first game on a high but missing some big names.

Andres Iniesta failed to recover from injury and Lionel Messi was away on international duty with Argentina so several fringe players were given a chance to stake their claim.

European Super Cup hero Pedro Rodriguez, the latest off the club's infamous youth production line, started the match in Messi's right wing slot while Bojan played on the left of central striker Ibrahimovic.

With just five minutes gone the tall Swede

had a great chance to score a debut goal but fluffed his lines, scuffing his shot wide of the target.

At the other end Sporting almost took a shock 10th minute lead with Brazilian debutant Maxwell, recruited from Inter Milan, preventing a certain goal with a last-ditch tackle.

It is the type of quality defending Barca will expect from their new 25 million euro Ukrainian centre-half Dmytro Chygrynskiy who watched on from the stands.

With 17 minutes gone the hosts opened the scoring from a corner with Keita's header falling to Bojan to convert at the back post.

Bojan, a real menace throughout, showed quick feet to create a chance for himself on 40 minutes but his shot was deflected for a corner.

But Gijon could not hold out and two minutes before the break Dani Alves curled in a brilliant cross for Mali international Keita to head home.

In the opening stages of the second half Barca coach Pep Guardiola was forced to make a change with the injured Maxwell coming off for Eric Abidal.

The reorganising defence were almost caught cold and Barca goalkeeper Victor Valdes had to pull off a reflex save to deny Mate Bilic.

Sporting, who had the worst defence in the league last season, were looking vulnerable at every corner and Keita hit the post with a 68th minute header.

Bojan's evening was ruined in the 80th minute when he had to be subbed off injured and Guardiola will hope that the injuries to him and Maxwell are not serious.

With eight minutes left Ibrahimovic got his debut goal smashing in after a cross from Alves to complete the scoring.

### IN BRIEF

#### Rooney loves Man Utd

AFP, Manchester

Wayne Rooney insists there is no chance he would ever walk out on Manchester United.

England striker Rooney saw Cristiano Ronaldo quit Old Trafford to join Real Madrid in a world-record 80 million pounds (129 million dollars) deal during the close-season.

The 23-year-old is United's main attacking threat now Ronaldo has gone and he has responded with a superb start to the season.

Rooney said in The Sun: "I've always said I love this club and, as long as I'm wanted here, I'll play here."

"It's as simple as that. I can't see one reason why I should want to move."

"I've everything I want. My family are just 30 minutes away, I'm settled and I honestly can't see me going anywhere else unless I'm told otherwise by the manager."

#### German trio sits out training

AFP, Cologne

Germany captain Michael Ballack, striker Lukas Podolski and midfielder Mesut Ozil sat out training on Tuesday as the national side prepare to face South Africa this weekend in a friendly.

Germany take on the World Cup 2010 hosts in Leverkusen on Saturday, but Chelsea star Ballack missed training here on Tuesday with a groin strain, while Werder Bremen's Ozil has a knee injury.

Both are expected to be back in training with the national squad by Wednesday at the latest, while Cologne's Podolski has a calf injury and is not expected to train until at least Thursday.

# Real keep VDV



#### Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have decided to keep midfielder Rafael van der Vaart, the player himself has announced, despite reports he was set to join the Dutch exodus at the club.

Real Madrid "assured me that they believe in my qualities, and they want me to stay in the club," van der Vaart said on his official website late Monday, the last day of the official summer transfer window.

The 26-year-old has reportedly been among a number of players on the transfer list as new club president Florentino Perez sought to recoup some of the more than 250 million euros he has splashed out on the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Karim Benzema and Xabi Alonso.

Three Dutch players --

Wesley Sneijder, Arjen Robben and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar -- have already left Real in the close season.

Spanish news reports said last week that van der Vaart rejected a lucrative offer from Turkish champions Besiktas and was insisting that, if he had to move, it should be to the English Premiership.

The reports said Real also had a plan to offer him to Bayern Munich as part of a deal in which the German club's French midfielder Franck Ribery would move the other way.

The sports newspaper Marca said Tuesday that Real's failure to sign Ribery had worked in van der Vaart's favour.

"Real Madrid told me it was never a question about my qualifications as a player, but only a matter of the many new players," the Dutchman said on his website.

"They like my attitude

## Modric injury angers Croatian FA chief

AFP, London

Croatian FA chief Vlatko Markovic is concerned that his country's Premier League-based stars have been targeted for rough treatment after Luka Modric suffered a broken leg playing for Tottenham.

Modric will miss Croatia's crucial World Cup qualifier against England at Wembley on September 9 after suffering the injury in a challenge with Birmingham's Lee Bowyer on Saturday.

Markovic was furious when he heard Modric would be out for two months as it brought back memories of the broken leg suffered by Arsenal striker Eduardo -- also against Birmingham -- in February 2008, which meant he was unavailable when Croatia faced England in Zagreb last September.

Markovic told The Sun: "First Eduardo, now Luka Modric. This is horrible. I can only ask myself if it was really an accident."

"I'm close to thinking it was done to us deliberately before the England match. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw what happened to Luka. He is irreplaceable."

towards wanting to play, and told me very clearly in a meeting Monday 31st of August, that they need me, and they see me as an important part of the team."

He said he will be keeping the number 23 jersey previously worn by David Beckham.

He added that his wife, Sylvie, a well-known model and television personality, is particularly relieved that the family is staying in the Spanish capital, where she is undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

Real signed van der Vaart from Bundesliga side Hamburg last year in a deal reportedly worth 13 million euros.

He is now one of three Dutch survivors of the summer overhaul at Real, the others being midfielder Royston Drenthe and striker Ruud van Nistelrooy.

# Spalletti quits Roma

AFP, Rome



AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti has announced his resignation from the Italian Serie A side, the Ansa news agency reported on Tuesday.

"I submitted my resignation and the club accepted it," said Spalletti after a 30-minute meeting with club president Rosella Sensi.

Roma lost 3-1 at home to likely title contenders Juventus on Sunday to leave them bottom of the Serie A table, having lost their opening game of the season 3-2 at Genoa.

Spalletti, 50, joined the

'Giallorossi' in 2005 from Udinese. His contract was due to expire in 2011.

He initially enjoyed success at the Stadio Olimpico, taking the side to second-placed league finishes in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and back-to-back triumphs in the Italian Cup in 2007 and 2008.

Roma also made it to the quarterfinals of the Champions League in 2007 and 2008, but they never recovered from a terrible start to last season and finished the campaign in a disappointing sixth place.

Spalletti had previously expressed his frustration at Roma's lack of activity during the summer transfer window.

Young striker Fabio

Zamblera, veteran Romanian goalkeeper Bogdan Lobont and Argentine defender Nicolas Burdisso, a loan signing from Inter Milan, were the only arrivals, while homegrown midfielder Alberto Aquilani was allowed to join Liverpool.

Spalletti was also rumoured to have fallen out with Roma's iconic captain Francesco Totti, who has been at the club since 1989.

Spalletti is the first coach or manager to quit or be sacked from Italy's top flight this season.

The Italian media have identified Claudio Ranieri as Spalletti's potential successor. The 57-year-old was sacked as coach of Juventus prior to the end of last season.

# Snub disappoints Viera



#### Football

AFP, Paris

Veteran midfielder Patrick Vieira said Monday that he had been massively disappointed when France coach Raymond Domenech snubbed him for upcoming crucial World Cup qualifiers against Romania and Serbia.

The Inter Milan star, who was part of France's World Cup-winning squad in 1998, has not played in the French national side since a poor showing in a June friendly with Nigeria which brought the 33-year-old a 107th cap. He missed the 1-0 away win over the Faroe Islands on August 12.

"Yes, it was a massive disappointment because it's true that physically and mentally I had prepared myself for these two matches," Vieira said.

"It's been a disappointment but one that can be understood: compared to some players, I am perhaps less in form."

"I thought that with my experience I would have been part of this squad for these two matches, I felt as if I could have been able to bring something. But unfortunately the coach thought I wasn't suitable for the two games, even if we didn't speak about it."

Vieira said there had been "no call, no explanation. I received a missed call but unfortunately I was at training."

Domenech instead left a text message on Vieira's mobile telephone, the midfielder told former France team-mate Bixente Lizarazu on RTL radio.

"Unfortunately, I couldn't call him back because the squad list was announced afterwards, at 2pm."

Vieira insisted, however, that playing at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa remained a goal.

"My objective really is the World Cup," he said. "These are two important matches, a stage

## Ribery prefers Hitzfeld

AFP, Paris

France international midfielder Franck Ribery said Tuesday he has yet to forge any kind of personal relationship with new Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal.

Ribery, a transfer target for several top clubs in the close season including Real Madrid, said he much preferred former Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"It's the first time that I haven't really felt close to a coach. There's not much feeling between us at all," Ribery said in an interview in L'Equipe sports daily Tuesday.

He added in France football: "Our relationship is professional. It was totally different with Ottmar Hitzfeld, for example. He was a real joy to work with and the best coach I've known at Bayern."

Hitzfeld departed Bayern, whom he led to Champions League triumph in 2001, in May 2008 after helping the Bavarian side to the league and Cup double.

He was replaced by Jurgen Klinsmann, who left the club after Bayern finished second in the Bundesliga in 2009 behind winners Wolfsburg.

Van Gaal was brought in but after four matches in the 2010 campaign Bayern sit eighth in the German league table, with only five points, five less than leaders Hamburg and second-placed Bayer Leverkusen.

we have to get over and I'm convinced that the squad will succeed without me, but my goal remains the World Cup.

"It's difficult. I didn't make the simplest choice by staying at Milan but I believe in myself. The season still has a long way to go and I'm convinced I'll play."

Vieira added that calling a halt to his illustrious career at season's end was a "possibility."

"It's something I'm thinking about. What's certain in football is that you never know what's going to happen."

"If at the end of my contract I have an attractive offer from a club in Europe with a tempting challenge that could be interesting for me."

"But what I want to do today is to stop at the end of the season and go and try a new experience: why not the United States?"

"I also think that I maybe no longer want to play at the highest level. What interests me could really be a life experience, and to go and discover football in the United States - if I was to continue playing."

But Vieira promised one more season at the highest level: "I hope to make the World Cup and after we'll see how it pans out. What's certain is that if tomorrow you receive a phone call from Barcelona, you no longer ask yourself the same questions."

Domenech did not completely close the door on Vieira when he unveiled his squad for the games against Romania and Serbia.

"I always have hope - he is not finished, he is on the way back, but a little short of (match) fitness at the moment. However, I hope he will be back soon," Domenech said Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

Italian striker Antonio Di Natale (front) kicks the ball to score past goalkeeper Andrea Marchetti during a training session at the national technical center of Coverciano in Florence on Tuesday. Italy will face Georgia in a 2010 World Cup qualifier on Saturday.