

Mittal tops
Brit rich list

THE GUARDIAN

QPR shareholder Lakshmi Mittal is the richest man in British football, according to new research.

The London-based Indian steel magnate, who owns a 20% stake in the Loftus Road club, is worth an estimated £18.4 billion, according to the 2009 FourFourTwo.com Rich List.

The annually published list ranks Mittal above last year's leader, Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan, who has a fortune of £17bn.

Mittal has largely taken a back seat to owners Flavio Briatore and Bernie Ecclestone since investing in QPR in December 2007 but he would appear the real financial power at the club. Formula One supremo Ecclestone, however, is ranked eighth in the list with £1.46bn.

Third is Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich with £7.8bn, an increase of £800m on his position last year. That rise is more than the Russian's total outlay at Stamford Bridge since his takeover in 2003.

Arsenal shareholders Stan Kroenke (£2.709bn) and Alisher Usmanov (£1.3bn) are fifth and ninth respectively. The Glazer family, owners of Manchester United, are seventh with £1.75bn.

David Beckham is in a league of his own in terms of player value, with a fortune of £125m. The England and Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder is well clear of Manchester United pair Michael Owen (£38m) and Wayne Rooney (£37m).

Two more United players, Rio Ferdinand (£30m) and Ryan Giggs (£24m), make up the top five.

England boss Fabio Capello is the richest manager with £30m ahead of Roy Keane (Ipswich) and Sir Alex Ferguson (Manchester United) with £27m and £22m respectively.

Ireland trio
to miss
Italy clash

AFP, Dublin

Ireland will have to do without star winger Damien Duff for their crucial World Cup qualifier against Italy, head coach Giovanni Trapattoni conceded on Tuesday.

Duff, who has been in fine form for his club Fulham but missed Sunday's match at West Ham, is sidelined by a calf injury.

Manchester United youngster Darren Gibson, who has a groin injury, and Blackburn midfielder Steven Reid (Achilles) were also ruled out of Saturday's match at Croke Park, for which Wigan striker Caleb Folan had already been declared unavailable due to a hamstring injury.

Unbeaten Ireland take on the group eight leaders knowing a victory would move them to within one point of top spot with one round of matches remaining.

Ireland entertain Montenegro next Wednesday while Italy, who will secure their place in next year's finals if they avoid defeat in Dublin, have a final match against Cyprus in Parma.

Loew's job
safe

AFP, Berlin

German coach Joachim Loew need not fear for his job even if Germany fail to qualify for the World Cup in South Africa, federation chairman Theo Zwanziger has said.

The vote of confidence came ahead of Saturday's crucial qualifier against Russia.

"We have been on a road lined with success with him since 2004 and I know that we should not question the strategies put in place because of a single defeat," Zwanziger told Wednesday's Bild newspaper.

"Let me say very clearly: I see no one better than him, for the job."

Loew's contract runs out in 2010 and while the federation would like to extend the deal, the 49-year-old has refused to open talks during the qualifiers.

Germany lead their qualifying group and could book their ticket to the finals if they win on Saturday. Even a draw would be enough if they beat Finland in their last match next Wednesday.

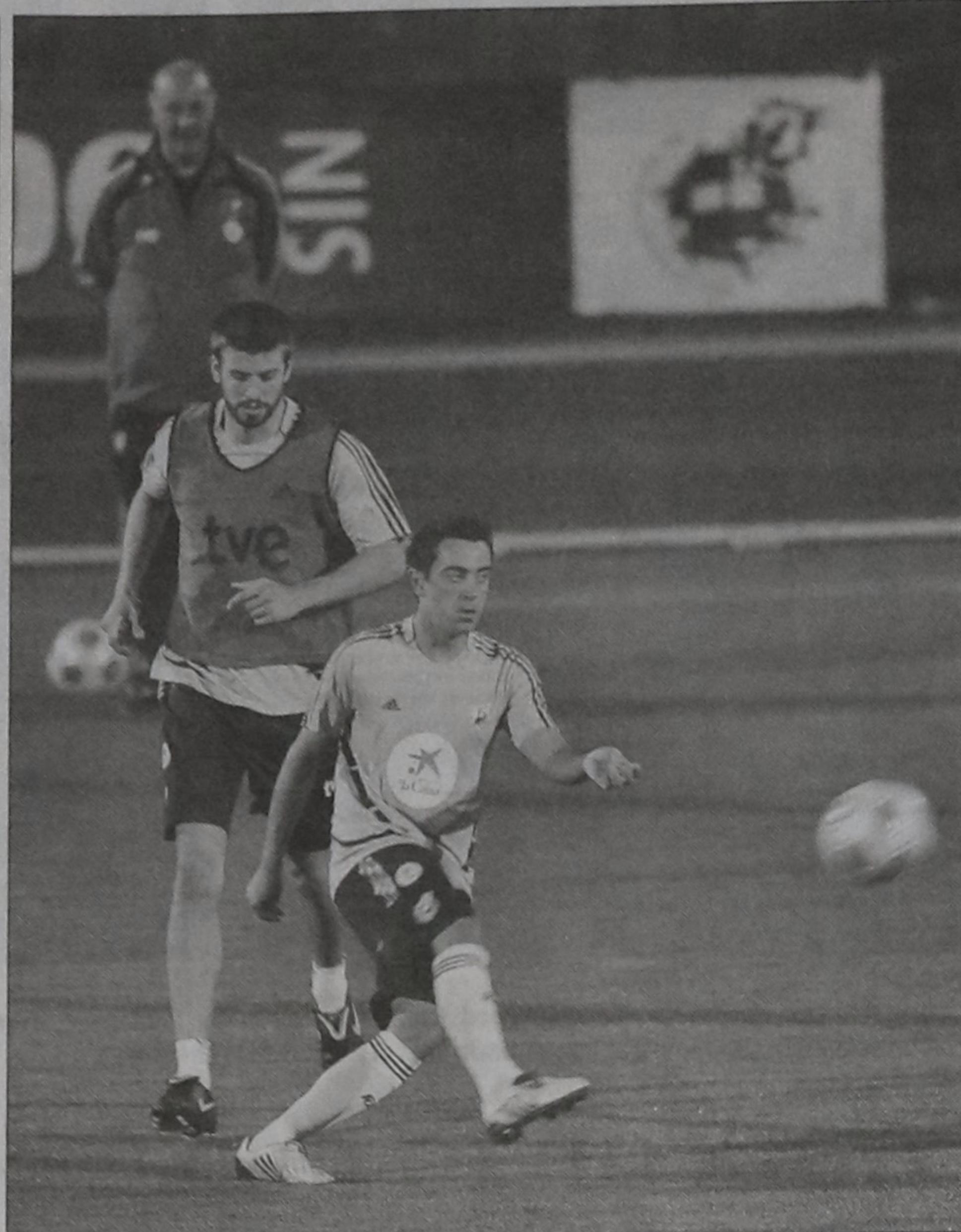


PHOTO: AFP
Spain midfielder Xavi Hernandez (R) kicks the ball during a training session in Las Rozas on Tuesday. Spain face Armenia in a 2010 World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

C'Ron at the centre
of Sorcerers' battle

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo is at the centre of a sorid battle between sorcerers with one trying to ruin him on behalf of a spurned lover and another to save him, reports said Wednesday.

"A rich foreign woman who was betrayed" has paid a Spaniard nicknamed Pepe to "end Ronaldo's career," Correio da Manha daily said.

Ronaldo, who is often photographed with a beautiful young woman on his arm, is currently carrying an ankle injury, and the sorcerer Pepe is claiming credit for it.

Pepe was pictured holding a black wax doll and a photo of the Real Madrid forward with his name scrawled across it.

The sorcerer has refused to identify the scorned woman he claims has already paid him 15,000 euros, Correio da Manha said.

"She paid me to end Cristiano Ronaldo's career and I'm doing that," Pepe was quoted as saying.

"It's a job, I have nothing against him personally, but I'll see it through," he added.

The daily 24 Horas, which carried the same story, said another "fetishist" called Fernando Nogueira, known as the "sorcerer Fafe" was contacted on Tuesday by "someone very close" to Ronaldo "to counter the black magic of this so-called Spanish sorcerer."

Fafe, while casting doubt on the powers of his rival, told the paper he had "burnt candles next to a photo of Ronaldo to put an end to what is being done, if it is true."

The player has since Monday been with the Portugal squad ahead of Saturday's must-win World Cup qualifier against Hungary.

Ronaldo has said he expects to shake off the ankle injury.

He was due to undergo tests either Wednesday or Thursday, according to the team doctor.

Coach Carlos Queiroz expressed confidence on Tuesday that Ronaldo would be fit for the key World Cup qualifiers against Hungary and Malta on October 10 and 14 respectively.

Portugal, who are third in Group One with 13 points, need to win both matches and for second-placed Sweden to slip up in Denmark, to book their ticket to the finals in South Africa next year.

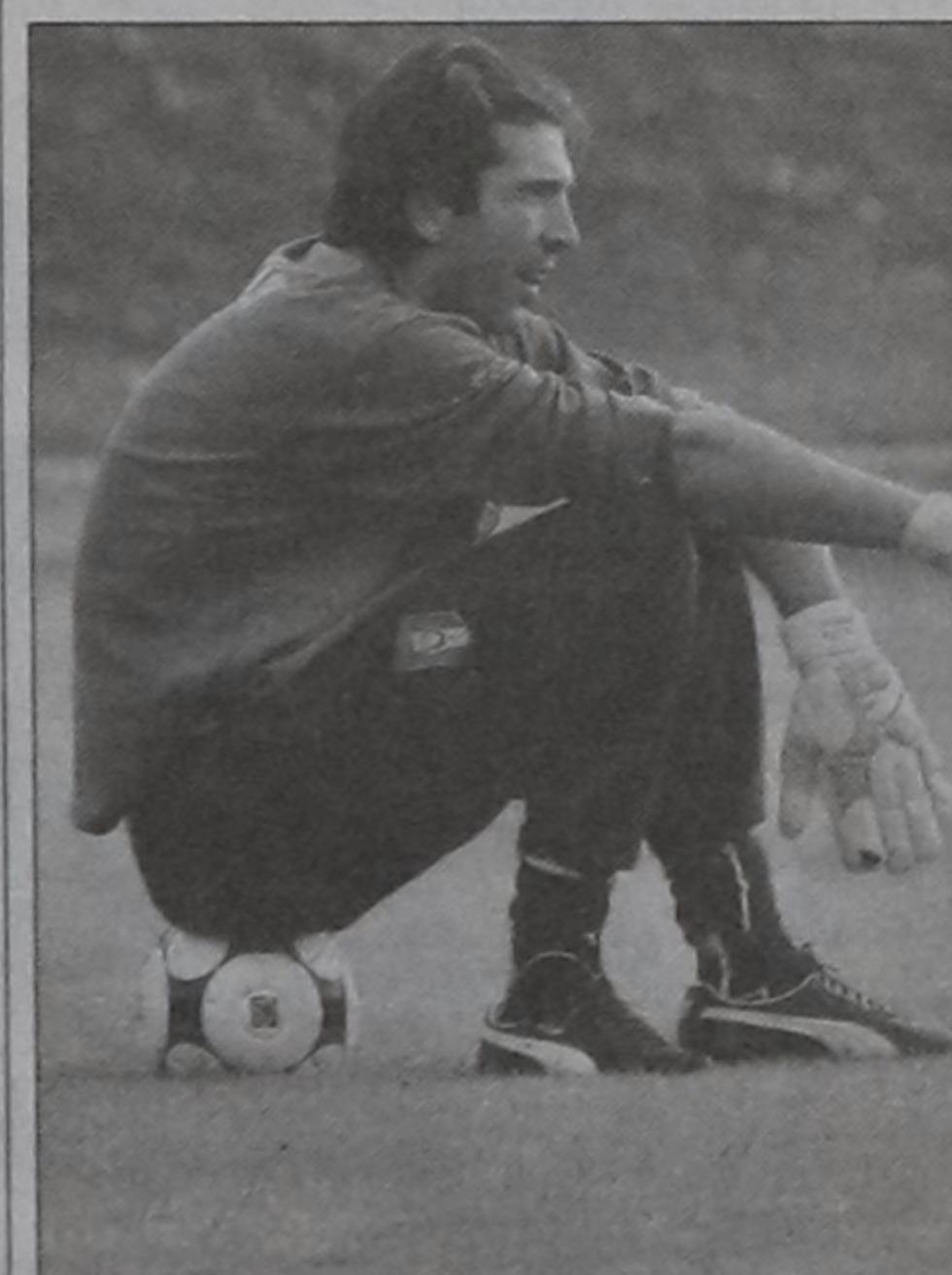


PHOTO: AFP
Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon takes a rest during a training session in Florence on Wednesday. Italy take on Ireland in a 2010 World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

Beyoncé for WC?

THE GUARDIAN



As part of an attempt to banish memories of Diana Ross fluffing a penalty and flag-waving parades, Fifa has contracted Kevin Wall, the man behind live music spectacles for Madonna, Jay-Z and Michael Jackson, to produce a Live 8-style event on the eve of the next World Cup.

The concert, due to be unveiled today at the Mipcom TV market in Cannes, will take place at the newly renovated Orlando Stadium in Soweto and feature collaborations between "major international superstars" and popular African artists, as

well as appearances from "past and present football legends". Beyoncé, Jay-Z and the Black Eyed Peas are among those who could be approached.

It will be the first time that a Fifa-sanctioned event has taken place on the eve of the World Cup finals and is being seen as part of a bid to stir up excitement among fans, sponsors and broadcasters in the countdown to the opening game.

Wall said: "We believe sports and music transcend cultural, language and geographic barriers, and through this international event, Control Room will present the sights and sounds of unity and celebration for an unforgettable experience of which all will want to be a part." Ambitiously billed as the

"greatest entertainment event to date on the African continent", all proceeds will go towards Fifa's "20 Centres for 2010" campaign.

On the most famous occasion music and football mixed at a World Cup opening ceremony, it was with humiliating results as Ross ballooned her shot at goal in front of hundreds of millions of television viewers at USA 94.

Danny Jordaan, chief executive of the 2010 Fifa World Cup organising committee, said: "There are few things in life that can kindle such widespread passion as football, but music is without doubt one of them. With this celebratory kick-off event, football fans are in for a huge treat."

Toni airs his frustration

THE GUARDIAN

Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni has again aired his frustration at failing to make even the subs bench for Bayern Munich.

"I'm feeling very angry and very sad," the big forward told Wednesday's Bild newspaper.

"I would like to help Bayern and be available for selection for the 2010 World Cup," he said.

"I'm suffering enormously sitting in the stands. I've not played for three or four months and that's never happened in my career before."

New Bayern coach Louis van Gaal has given the Italian just 29 minutes of game-time since the start of the season and says the 32-year-old is "not on form."

Toni however insisted he feels fine "just like my first season in Munich," when he scored 39 goals in 46 games.

The striker said he wants to see out his contract which runs to 2011 but added: "If I don't feel more confidence in the professional people around me, we will have to sit down and find a solution."

Toni, who struggled with an achilles tendon injury and missed pre-season training, is fighting for a place against Bayern's rising star Thomas Mueller, Croatia's Ivica Olic and Germany strikers Miroslav Klose and Mario Gomez.

Local media said Maradona, whose team are in danger of failing to qualify for the 2010 finals in South Africa, was unhappy that technical

Maradona might quit

THE GUARDIAN



Diego Maradona, unhappy with interference in his job as Argentina coach, says he will review his position after their final World Cup qualifier away to Uruguay in Montevideo next week.

Maradona said his

director Carlos Bilardo had taken decisions without consulting him. Bilardo, coach when Argentina won the World Cup in 1986, reportedly publicised a squad list of home-based players for a friendly against Ghana last week without consulting Maradona.

Maradona returned from a 10-day break in Italy and told reporters he was in sole charge and "no one imposes players on me".

He has been under pressure since his team faltered in the qualifiers, going down to three successive defeats against Ecuador, Brazil and Paraguay. Argentina face Peru in Buenos Aires on Saturday and Uruguay away next Wednesday with qualification for the 2010 finals hanging in the balance.

Maradona has been criticised for a lack of team strategy and selection consistency. But in a typically dramatic

remark, he said he had inherited a team "with lots of yellows [cards] and we filled up with more yellows because we were playing for our lives."

Maradona's anger came to the surface when asked about a muscle injury to Manchester City defender Pablo Zabaleta, who arrived in Buenos Aires on Tuesday morning with striker Carlos Tevez after they played in a Premier League match on Monday. He had wanted the pair not to play the match against Aston Villa to avoid injuries.

"We missed the boat. Someone should have travelled [to England] to bring them. We have two very important matches and it hurts me a lot, but we have to live with it," Maradona said.

Argentina are fifth in the South American group, a position valid for a playoff with the team finishing fourth in the Concacaf region. Only the top four qualify automatically.

Terry stays resolute

THE GUARDIAN



England captain John Terry believes he will be kept by a sense of failure until the end of his days if he doesn't win either the Champions League trophy or the World Cup before he stops playing.

With Chelsea going well in Europe under Carlo Ancelotti and England currently regarded as third favourites for next year's World Cup in South Africa, Terry knows that, at 28, this season could be the one that defines his career.

"This is my biggest season ahead of me and it's important to stay fit and keep playing well for Chelsea," Terry said ahead of England's trip to the Ukraine for Saturday's penultimate qualifier.

"I want to thank you in the name of the citizens of Spain for the courage you display in defence of the colours of Spain. Beyond the results obtained, the 'Roja' has always conquered our hearts," he added, using the nickname for Spain's national team.

Gabriel Jorge Sosa, 93, and Alfredo di Stefano, 83, were amongst the oldest former players at the event which was attended by 400 current and ex-Spanish internationals.

Also in attendance were Real Madrid captain Raul and Barcelona's Bojan Krkic, who at 19 was the youngest footballer at the event.

"It is not every day that we celebrate 100 years of a sport that sparks healthy rivalries and the attention of millions of citizens," said Zapatero.

During the event the prime minister, a Barcelona fan, scored a penalty goal against the captain of the Spanish national team, Real keeper Iker Casillas.

Spain joined the Netherlands and England as the first European countries to qualify for the 2010 World Cup following their 3-0 win over Estonia last month that gave them an insurmountable eight-point lead in their group.

Spain face Armenia on Saturday and Bosnia four days later.

England manager Fabio Capello (2nd from L) talks to his squad during a training session in London Colney on Tuesday. England will play Ukraine in a 2010 World Cup qualifier on Saturday.



PHOTO: AFP

Aquilani far from return

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Alberto Aquilani is unlikely to be fit for the critical week Liverpool face after the international break despite Rafael Benitez issuing an upbeat assessment of the midfielder's recovery from ankle surgery.

Aquilani has not appeared for Liverpool since arriving from Roma in August as a replacement for Xabi Alonso, having undergone an operation on his right ankle in May. The importance of the £20m attacking midfielder has been highlighted in successive defeats away at Fiorentina and at Chelsea on Sunday, when Benitez's team suffered their third league reverse of the season.

Liverpool enter "a massive week", in the words of Jamie Carragher, after this latest round of international fixtures, comprising a game at Sunderland, a Champions League tie with the Group E leaders, Lyon, and the visit of Manchester United to Anfield on 25 October. The optimistic two-week wait for Aquilani's debut would see the Italy international return against

Lyon but he is more likely to play in the Carling Cup on 28 October or at Fulham the following Saturday.

Despite that schedule and Benitez's admission that he expects Aquilani to be available in "two to three weeks", the Spaniard will not force the 25-year-old's return to competitive action, already more than six months after his last competitive game. "I have been speaking to the doctors and things are going well with him," the Liverpool manager said. "Alberto is progressing all the time. It could be two to three weeks before he is back. But we need to use caution."

"If it is two weeks everyone will say 'that is fantastic' but if it is three, everyone will say it is not a problem. We will take it one step at a time and we have the international break to look forward to now. That will be good for him, as he will have some more time."

Benitez added: "He is running and swimming and I think he will have the record in the swimming pool by the end of his programme and he is working in the gym. He is doing almost everything and he is doing some things with the team. The only thing he is not doing is kicking a ball, not yet anyway."

Spain call up Negredo

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla's Alvaro Negredo was Wednesday to join the Spanish squad, replacing Valencia's injured striker David Villa.

Spain, who have already qualified for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa, face Armenia on October 10 and Bosnia four days later.

Villa tore a thigh muscle in a weekend league match and will be out for about three weeks.

Carlos offers to play for Real for free

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian veteran Roberto Carlos has offered to return to Real Madrid and play for nothing, if the Spanish giants want him.

"I would be prepared to play for six months at Real Madrid without being paid," Carlos told Turkish sports daily As.

"From January to June, perhaps a year