

Nicola blasts young players

AFP, Rome

Italy centre-back Nicola Legrottaglie on Wednesday blasted the young players of today for their lack of respect, though without naming any names.

Legrottaglie, who will likely replace suspended captain Fabio Cannavaro in the Italy side that plays Ireland in Dublin on Saturday in a crucial World Cup qualifier, was speaking from Italy's training base near Florence.

He claimed the young players of today don't know how to behave themselves.

"I see players aged 19 or 20 who talk back to their coach, others who behave in a disrespectful manner," said the Juventus defender.

"It's something that annoys me, also because it gets confused with having character."

"You should always be respectful. I remember when I was 17 I used to carry the bags of my team-mates, it was a matter of respect and education."

"Take (Juventus captain Alessandro) Del Piero, he's an example to everyone, he has never in his whole career behaved in anything less than an exemplary way."

Jovetic ignores Utd talk

SOCCERNET

Fiorentina forward Stevan Jovetic, the conqueror of Liverpool in the Champions League, has dismissed reports linking him with a possible move to Manchester United.

Jovetic, 19, demanded European-wide attention when scoring two well-taken goals for the Italian side in their 2-0 home victory over Liverpool on September 29.

His performance led to speculation that Jovetic was a target for both United and Chelsea but Fiorentina will no doubt be highly-resistant to any approaches for the talented Montenegro international.

Now Jovetic, who joined Fiorentina from Partizan Belgrade in the summer of 2008, has signalled his intention to remain in Serie A for the time being.

"I read about the transfer stories around me and am honoured by Manchester United's interest, but I am very happy in Florence," Jovetic told Serbian daily Blic.

"At Fiorentina I have everything I need to grow and improve as a player. I have a contract with the Viola for another five years and I have no intention of leaving."

Marseille fine Ben Arfa

SOCCERNET

Marseille winger Hatem Ben Arfa has reportedly been punished by his club after he missed training on Tuesday.

According to newspaper La Provence, 22-year-old Ben Arfa has been fined 10,000 Euros and was ordered to apologise to his teammates.

Ben Arfa failed to show up on Tuesday afternoon and reports suggest it was because he missed a flight.

"It was an unforeseen delay," said Marseille coach Didier Deschamps. "We're not talking about being a minute late, but missing an entire training session."

Serbia warned of docked points

AFP, Belgrade

Serbia, currently atop Group 7 of European qualifiers for next year's World Cup, could be docked points should there be incidents in its upcoming matches, the country's football federation warned.

Serbia, who lead France by four points, face Romania on Saturday and Lithuania on October 14 in the knowledge that another win would guarantee their passage to the finals.

But the federation said that FIFA's disciplinary commission had stressed that any further "incidents" could lead to drastic sanctions such as the docking of points.

The FIFA warning came as part of a letter that evoked fines that had been handed down on the Serbian federation for incidents during previous qualifying matches against France, Austria and Romania.

"We will continue to undertake the necessary measures to prevent all incidents," federation secretary-general Zoran Lakovic said.

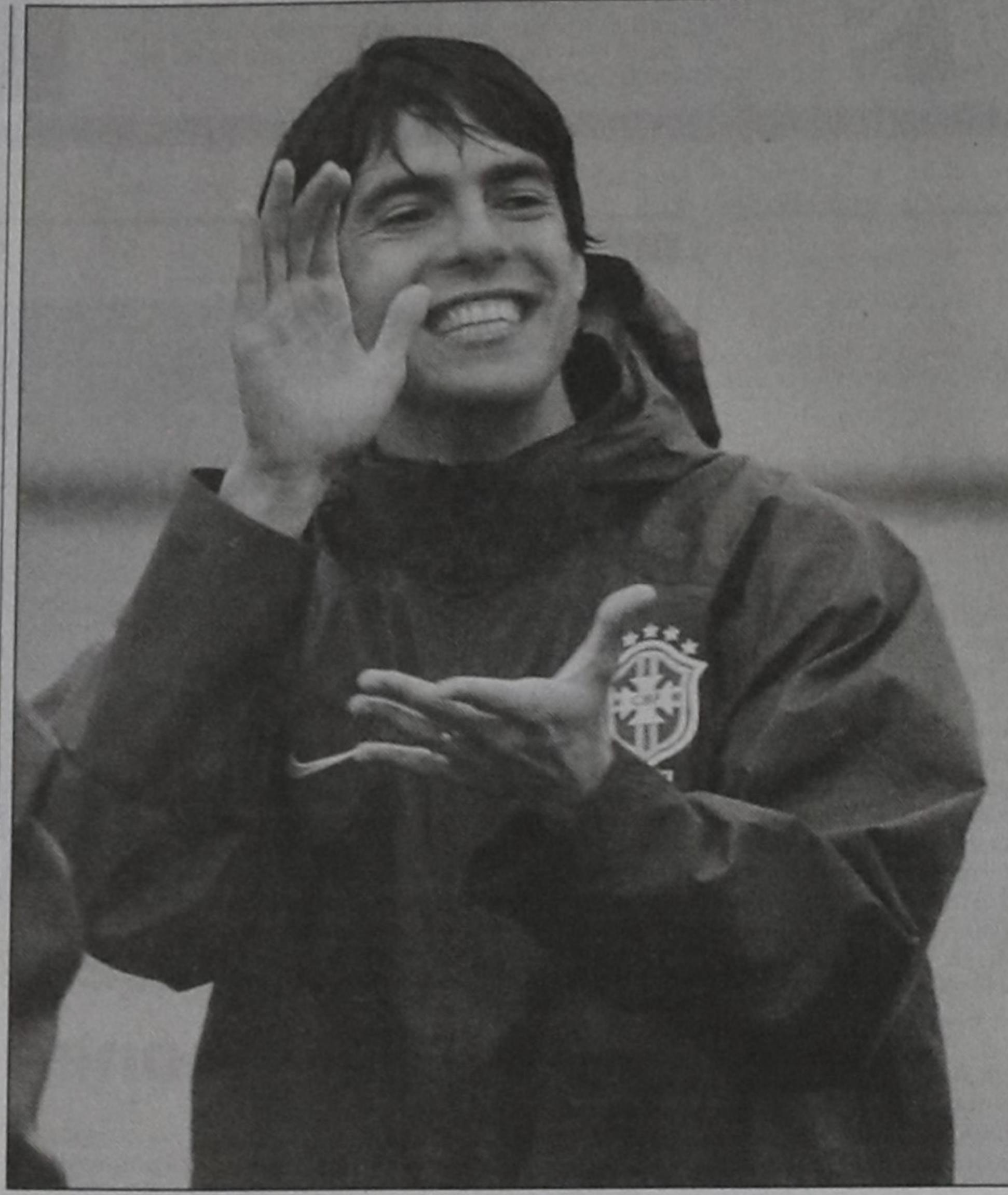


PHOTO: AFP

Brazil star Kaka smiles during a training session in Teresopolis on Wednesday. Brazil play Bolivia in a 2010 World Cup qualifier on Sunday.

US on the brink

AFP, Washington

United States will try to secure a return to the World Cup finals with a victory Saturday at Honduras, where even political turmoil takes a back seat to the quest for a first World Cup trip since 1982.

Mexico will host El Salvador and Costa Rica will entertain already-ousted Trinidad and Tobago in other matches of the penultimate round of North American regional qualifying for next year's global football showdown in South Africa.

But the pivotal match will be at San Pedro Sula, where Honduras is 8-0 in World Cup qualifying but facing a US squad that has won five in a row over Honduras, though none of the matches were in the Central American nation.

"We understand the challenge," US coach Bob Bradley said. "This game means everything to Honduras and its people and atmosphere in the stadium will be loud, passionate, exciting. We've seen that in other places and can draw upon those experiences. I think that will work well for us."

"We're excited about the opportunity we have. The challenge to go there and come away with three points is one we're embracing."

Political turmoil in Honduras has prompted a heightened awareness on the part of US team officials and players and greater contact with authorities but there are no safety worries, Bradley said.

"We're very comfortable with the way our security gets handled, with the information we have. On that end everything seems fine," Bradley said.

"Whenever we travel we always have tremen-

dous security. In this case we have had a little discussion with the team so they are aware of the different factors."

The Americans, seeking a sixth consecutive trip to the World Cup finals, top the table with 16 points off five wins and a draw in eight matches. Mexico is on 15 with Honduras at 13, Costa Rica at 12 and the Salvadorans at eight.

The three top teams after next Wednesday's last qualifying matches will book berths in South Africa. The fourth-place finisher will meet South America's fifth-place finisher to determine another World Cup berth.

Costa Rica will play the Americans at Washington next Wednesday while Mexico will visit Trinidad and Tobago and Honduras plays at El Salvador in the other concluding next week.

"Ideally we can finish up Saturday but there are factors in all of this that are sometimes out of our control. It has been a very tight final round," Bradley said.

"We all understand the responsibility. Now we're excited to finish the job."

The US squad, 10-2 with three drawn all-time against Honduras, will be without injured midfielder Clint Dempsey while Honduras will be without captain Amado Guevara, on a card accumulation suspension.

The yellow card issue is a key consideration for the Americans, who can ill afford more cautions ahead of the Costa Rica match without a win at Honduras.

Strikers Landon Donovan and Jozy Altidore are among eight US players with one caution entering Saturday's match.

The yellow card situation is a challenging one, Bradley said. "We have to find some balance to this one. And finally our discipline is important. We're pleased in the last two games we didn't pick up any yellow cards."

Daniele pans presidents

AFP, Florence

AS Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi on Wednesday hit out at Italian football presidents for being impatient following the sacking of Roberto Donadoni on Tuesday.

De Rossi, who is preparing with the Italy squad for Saturday's crunch World Cup qualifier against Ireland in Dublin, spoke out against the trend in Italian football to fire coaches as soon as things don't go well.

Former Italy coach Donadoni was given the boot only seven matches into the season and after just 18 games in the Napoli hot-seat after beginning this campaign with four defeats and two wins from seven encounters.

He was the second coach to lose his job already in Serie A following Angelo Gregucci whom Atalanta fired only four games into the season, and indeed his career, with the club.

"I'm disappointed about his sacking," De Rossi said of Donadoni. "Our football doesn't know how to wait."

"There's very little patience and I'm not just talking about him. It's not like this in other countries."

"Unfortunately no-one has a magic wand, four weeks isn't enough to judge a coach, you need to give him two or three years."

Donadoni was actually the third change of coach this season as De Rossi's club coach Luciano Spalletti left his job after two straight defeats at the start of the season.

De Rossi also weighed in on the ongoing Antonio Cassano debate, which seems to dominate proceedings at most national team press conferences.

Cassano's Sampdoria are level on points with Inter Milan at the top of the table but the wayward talent has once again been overlooked in coach Marcello Lippi's squad.

Lippi told the press on Tuesday he was fed up with their questions about Cassano but De Rossi was happy to share his thoughts.

"He's the most talented and fun to watch of all the Italian forwards but if you look at goals, those already in the squad score more than he does, as do others who aren't even here," said De Rossi.

Mutu may leave Viola

SOCCERNET

Fiorentina striker Adrian Mutu could leave the Serie A club in January, according to the player's agent.

Mutu is one of La Viola's key players and scored 13 goals in 19 games last season as he and Alberto Gilardino formed one of Serie A's most formidable partnerships.

However, reports suggest several clubs are considering making an offer for the 30-year-old in the January transfer window and agent Giovanni Becali admitted his client could be tempted.

Mutu is happy in Florence, where he has a good contract," Becali told Radio Fiesole. "But an interesting offer arrives in January, for both the player and the club, we will evaluate it together."

"However, now what's important is that he concludes happily the story with the fine and that he plays at the top level."

Mutu, who has also played for Juventus, has had a troubled past few months as he battles

against the 17million euro fine he has been ordered to pay Chelsea.

There is a glimmer of hope for the Romania international after the fine was temporarily suspended by the Swiss Federal Court.

Although delighted at the news, Becali remains cautious.

"Adrian took the news well," he added. "But we are only talking about a suspension - not a decision. "We will see what happens at the end of November, but we are happy for the moment because we weren't expecting it."

Mutu, who cost the Blues £15million in 2003, was sacked a year later after he tested positive for cocaine, and was given a seven-month worldwide football ban.

After being axed by Chelsea and serving his ban, the Romanian joined Juventus in January 2005 before moving to Fiorentina at the end of the following season.

In May last year, Mutu was ordered to pay damages of 17,173,990 euros (£15.8million) to Chelsea by FIFA's dispute resolution chamber, but the player lodged an appeal against the decision with the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

IN BRIEF

Grafite says sorry

AFP, Berlin

Wolfsburg's Brazilian striker Grafite has apologised for criticising his manager Armin Veh for substituting him during last weekend's 1-1 draw with Bochum.

"Grafite came to me to say sorry," Veh told Wolfsburg's internet site.

"For me the problem is resolved and it won't have any bearing on our future relations, there is no punishment," he added.

Grafite was the league's top scorer last season when he scored 28 goals in 25 league games.

But this season the 30-year-old has had to get used to being a second-half substitute.

Already taken off in the second-half of the last three German league games and two Champions League matches, Grafite was left unimpressed after being taken off after 52 minutes of Saturday's 1-1 draw with Bochum.

"I am not a little boy, I have a history at this club," he told Bild last Sunday.

New deal for Storari

SOCCERNET

AC Milan goalkeeper Marco Storari has signed a new two-year contract extension that will keep him at the San Siro until June 2012.

The 32-year-old Italian produced a man-of-the-match performance to save Milan's blushes and secure a 0-0 draw with Bari last week and is very happy to have landed a new contract.

"I am delighted," Storari told the club's official website. "My previous contract was ending and I had high hopes. I always trusted Milan because they have always treated me well."

"This contract means the club continues to trust me and to have the trust of the club, my team-mates and the coach means a lot to me."

Trap seething at seeding

THE GUARDIAN



Giovanni Trapattoni, the Republic of Ireland manager, has urged Fifa to reassess its ranking system or face the "death of football" while his goalkeeper Shay Given has expressed the dismay and frustration felt inside the Republic dressing room at the decision to seed the European World Cup play-off draw, labelling it "disgusting", "crazy" and "totally unfair on the smaller nations".

Trapattoni, whose team face Italy in Dublin on Saturday before concluding their Group Eight campaign at home to Montenegro next Wednesday, said that Ireland would "not be afraid" of whoever they faced, should, as expected, they enter the play-offs. "We can get a big team and we can beat them," he said.

"Four or five years ago, the big clubs wanted a European League but it was dangerous and they gave up on the idea," said Trapattoni. "They thought it would be the death of football. Now, we have a similar situation and it has to change in the future because every country has the right to be the same. This [World Cup] draw must be open. We must give the opportunity to everyone. I thought it was going to be an open draw and in the future, they have to think about the rankings and change the system. But business is business. The big teams command Uefa in the rankings table. At the moment, it is difficult to change but they must."

Carrick states his case

Football

AFP, Watford

When it comes to putting his medals on the table, Michael Carrick can produce a haul that eclipses even the most illustrious members of England's midfield, yet the Manchester United star still remains his country's forgotten man.

Carrick has won more Premier League and Champions League silverware than Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard have managed between them during their careers.

While Lampard has held the Premier League trophy twice, the Chelsea star has yet to taste Champions League success. Liverpool captain Gerrard lifted the European Cup in 2005, but he is still waiting for a first title victory.

Even Gareth Barry is ahead of Carrick in the mid-field pecking order despite failing to win a single major trophy in his career to date.

Carrick has no such absences from his medal collection. Since joining United in 2006, the softly spoken 28-year-old has won three successive Premier League titles and helped United defeat Lampard's Chelsea in the 2008 Champions League final.

The former Tottenham player more than played his part in those triumphs, but starring for one of the world's biggest clubs in Europe's top club competitions has failed to persuade a succession of England managers of his worth.

Carrick has won just 19 caps for his country since making his debut in 2001 and has yet to feature in a competitive fixture under current England coach Fabio Capello.

For a player with such exquisite passing ability and assured reading of the game, it seems

strange that Carrick has been such a bit-part player.

Even the man himself agrees that his international career has never really got started.

"It probably isn't enough caps and I should have more," he said. "But I can't look back on it now, I have to look forward."

"Maybe I can look back on things at the end of my career and say things about my career. I don't think about it now."

"I should have more caps but things happen for a reason and things haven't worked out with England as well as they could have done."

"Things haven't fallen for me, but it's not something I have focused on."

"You have to be performing to be in the team. It's been a while since I started in a qualifier so hopefully the experience I've gained with United in top European games will help me when the chance comes along."

If Carrick wasn't such a shy character, he might have been tempted to question why the likes of Sven Goran Eriksson and Steve McClaren used him so little.

But he insists he does have a fierce competitive streak burning beneath his calm exterior.

"Without blowing my own trumpet, you can't play in and win Champions League finals, win leagues and play for Manchester United without being able to cope with expectations. You have to be a top player," he said.

"I don't feel on the outside. England