



Chelsea forward Salomon Kalou (R) falls over after tapping the ball in for the opening goal during their Champions League encounter against Atletico Madrid at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Maradona launches charm offensive

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Diego Maradona launched a charm offensive Wednesday as he faced a group of journalists on Argentine public television a week after a foul-mouthed rant at journalists caused uproar.

Maradona, known for his former party lifestyle as well as his footballing talents, claimed he had not taken drugs or frequented nightclubs in the past five years.

However he said he and the Argentine football federation president, Julio Grondona, had been victims of a media plot.

Maradona came under fire from supporters, the wider public and the football authorities last week after he used foul language to insult journalists after Argentina's last-minute qualification for the World Cup.

The football legend is known to have used cocaine in the past, and in 2004 had a brush with death following a heart problem.

But he claimed he is now only devoted only to the Argentine football cause.

"Thanks to God, it's been five years since I have not taken drugs or gone to nightclubs. My

life is now focused on the Argentina national team," said Maradona.

"I give everything for the squad, I gave it as a player and I give it as a coach."

Maradona faced few hostile questions during the interview, in which he appeared to try and settle a score by claiming that Argentina's director of football Carlos Bilardo had tried to unhinge Grondona, president of the Argentine Football Association (AFA) and a vice president of FIFA.

Maradona alleged Bilardo had been plotting with Daniel Vila, an influential name in the Argentine media, in a bid to bring down Grondona. Vila had earlier called on Grondona to sack Maradona.

"Vila and Bilardo want to bring down Grondona," insisted Maradona.

Argentina's qualifying campaign for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa was an agonising experience for a country more used to seeing the 'Albiceleste' vie for top honours with South American rivals Brazil.

Only a last-gasp 1-0 win over Uruguay in their final qualifier allowed Argentina to finish fourth in the South American zone qualifying, thus avoiding a play-off and gaining automatic entry to the finals.

Maradona admitted that if Argentina failed to qualify he "would have taken myself off to Haiti".

Ribery out of WC play-offs

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Frank Ribery will miss the next four weeks -- including France's World Cup play-offs against Ireland -- to help recover from his persistent knee injury, it was revealed Thursday.

The 26-year-old has struggled all season and Bayern coach Louis van Gaal insists the French play-maker needs an extended break to put the injury behind him.

"We have made the decision that we want to allow him time for the injury to heal properly," said the Dutchman.

Ribery is set to miss France's two-legged play-off qualifiers against Ireland on November 14 and 18.

And he also looks set to miss Bayern's forthcoming important Bundesliga games including trips to Stuttgart and home to Schalke as well as Leverkusen.

The knee tendon injury, which hindered Ribery's pre-season preparations, flared up again on October 3 in the 0-0 draw with Cologne and the Frenchman has not played since.

Van Gaal admitted they missed the midfielder during Wednesday night's 2-1 Champions League defeat in Bordeaux.

"Without Ribery we have lost our creativity," he said.

France's deputy national coach Alain Boghossian sounded resigned to losing Ribery for the World Cup qualifiers.

"Bayern does want him to have an operation. They are mulling it over ... but for me, Frank is all but out for the play-offs," Boghossian said in Bordeaux.

Vieri calls time

AFP, Milan

Christian Vieri on Thursday officially announced the end of his glittering football career during a court case in Milan.

The former Italy striker last played for Atalanta but left before the end of last season by mutual consent after he tired of abuse from fans expecting more from him than two goals in nine league appearances.

In July he was linked with a move to Blackburn but nothing came of that and now he says it's time to hang up his boots.

"I don't want to play football any more and I'm not even tempted with a move abroad," he said during an espionage case he has brought against his former employer Inter Milan and Telecom.

Vieri's lawyer Danilo Buongiorno claims the two companies' actions limited Vieri's rights and the former player is suing for 21 million euros.

Vieri left Inter in 2005 after six seasons with the 'nerazzurri', the longest time he spent with any one single club.

He played 49 times for Italy and won the Serie A title with Juventus in 1997, the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup with Lazio in 1999 and the Italian Cup with Inter in 2005.

He was twice named Italian player of the Year and finished top scorer in Serie A in 2003.

Carlo targets first place

AFP, London



Champions League rout of Atletico Madrid.

Ancelotti's side moved within touching distance of a place in the last 16 thanks to their clinical display against the woeful Spaniards at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

But, more importantly for Ancelotti, the Blues are top of Group D at the half-way stage and he wants them to stay there as it guarantees a home second leg against one of the group runners-up in the first knockout round.

"We are in control of the group now. Our aim is to arrive in first place because it is important for the rest of the Champions League," Ancelotti said.

"That is not certain yet and we need more points. It has not been easy without Didier Drogba but all the players have done well in this competition."

Chelsea travel to Atletico and then Porto in their next two matches before finishing at home to Apollon Nicosia and two wins from those three games would guarantee top spot.

Ancelotti will have Drogba back as the

Ivory Coast striker has now served his three-match European suspension.

But even without the powerful targetman, Chelsea were far too strong for Atletico.

Kalou made amends for a bad miss when he opened the scoring with a cool finish from Ashley Cole's cross in the 41st minute.

He added a second soon after half-time with a header from a corner by Lampard, who notched the third himself with a fine low strike for his first goal from open play this season.

Luis Perea's headed own goal in stoppage time completed a miserable experience for struggling Atletico.

Although Kalou has generally been consigned to the bench when Drogba and Anelka are fit, Ancelotti believes the erratic forward can play an important role in Chelsea's push for honours.

"Kalou is an important player for us, especially when (Didier) Drogba is out," he said.

"He started the game badly and made a big mistake but that gave him a good motivation to play well. For him it is very important to score. He played a good match."

Ancelotti was also full of praise for Lampard, who ended a 10-game drought to score his 133rd Chelsea goal - taking him past Jimmy Greaves into fifth place in the club's all-time scorers' list.

"I am happy for him for sure. Lampard

is not just important for goals, he is important because he is working for 90 minutes for the team," Ancelotti added.

"He is a generous, unselfish player. If he scores it is better, but I want to speak about Lampard for his work."

Ancelotti could also take heart from Chelsea's improved defending at set-pieces after they conceded two goals from corners in Saturday's defeat at Aston Villa.

The Blues are yet to concede a goal in Europe this season and Ancelotti said: "I think we defended better on the set-pieces and we also scored two goals from them."

"It means we have good jumpers and possibilities to score from set-pieces. For us this is important."

While Ancelotti can look forward to a sustained challenge in Europe, Atletico coach Abel Resino could be facing the sack after his side's latest humiliation.

Atletico have just one point from three games and are also struggling in La Liga, but Resino has no intention of quitting.

"It's not for me to say who is to blame. My job is to find solutions," he said.

"The thing to do is keep calm, not panic and work hard to prepare for the next game."

"I am a fighter. I never give up. I am not going to throw the towel in. With one result the confidence will begin to change. There have not been many games when we haven't created chances."

Heinze lifts Marseille

AFP, Zurich



Champions League campaign, the Argentine lifting the French side to a 1-0 win at FC Zurich on Wednesday.

Heinze's second half contribution gave Didier Deschamps' team an outside shot of progressing to the knockout stages, the win lifting them up into contention at least for a ticket out of Group C and into the Europa League.

After defeats to AC Milan and Real Madrid Heinze could not have picked a better time to score with Marseille breaking down the Zurich defence in the 69th minute.

It was his Argentine compatriot Lucho's cross which found the former Real Madrid, Paris Saint Germain and Manchester United defender unmarked at the far post with his sharply angled shot zipping past Zurich keeper Johnny Leoni and into the far corner.

In truth Marseille should have gone into the break in front.

On 42 minutes Brazilian back Hilton, one of four changes from the side beaten 3-0 by Real Madrid, headed over.

Then his compatriot Brandao, in for veteran Spaniard Fernando Morientes, was foiled by a point blank reflex save by Leoni.

Zurich had gone into this fixture lying second in the table after their shock win over AC Milan, but this reality

check has left them facing a dogfight with Marseille with three group games remaining.

The only blip on an otherwise profitable night's work for Marseille was the red card for a second yellow handed out to defender Laurent Bonnart in the 90th minute.

Deschamps reflected: "It wasn't a great match, there were lots of mistakes, perhaps due to our rivals who played with great physical presence and impact."

"We had difficulty in getting going. It's good sometimes to win when you're suffering, but we can do better."

Looking at the overall picture in Group C where Marseille are still bottom on goal difference with Zurich Deschamps added: "AC Milan beating Real Madrid isn't necessarily a good thing, so to maintain hope of going through to the next stage we have to beat Zurich (at home) in a fortnight."



Olympique Marseille defender Gabriel Heinze gives the thumbs up after scoring the all-important goal against FC Zurich during their Champions League clash in Zurich on Wednesday.

'C'Ron fee indecent'

Football

AFP, Madrid

UEFA president Michel Platini on Wednesday stood by his view that the record 94 million euros which Real Madrid paid to sign Cristiano Ronaldo was "indecent" during a visit to the Spanish giants' stadium.

"The amount seems indecent to me," he told a news conference at the Santiago Bernabeu ahead of Real's Champions League clash against AC Milan.

"But that does not bother me in the case that the club has the money to do it. And there is no problem with Real Madrid because they have the money to do it," added Platini who was sitting beside Real president Florentino Perez.

The two men went out of their way to show that there was no bad blood between Real, which spent 250 million euros on new signings in the pre-season, and UEFA, which is seeking to curb splurges by clubs.

"Ties between UEFA and Real Madrid, and between the president of UEFA and the president of Real Madrid, are, and will always be,

excellent," said Perez.

Real was heavily criticized for the amount it paid to sign Ronaldo from Manchester United as well as the 65 million euros it dished out to sign Brazil's Kaka from AC Milan.

At the time Platini called the transfers "a serious challenge to the idea of fairplay" while Vatican newspaper Osservatore Romano said Real's spending spree runs the risk of pushing football clubs towards bankruptcy by inflating transfer fees.

Perez, who brought stars Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane to Real during his first term as the club's president between 2000 and 2006, said Wednesday that the club has a record budget of 422 million euros in the 2009-10 season.

Platini also predicted that Argentine striker Lionel Messi - who plays for Real's arch-rivals Barcelona - would sweep the awards this year for best player.

"I think that the player I like best at the moment is an Argentine who plays for Barcelona. I like Messi very much and I think he will win all the trophies for best player at the end of the year. He deserves it," he added.

Last year Ronaldo won the Ballon d'Or for the best player in Europe and the World Player of the Year crown.

Bordeaux edge Bayern

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux fought back from a catastrophic start and survived a nerve-wracking second half to beat nine-man Bayern Munich 2-1 to go top of their Champions League Group A on Wednesday.

Bordeaux defender Michael Ciani opened the scoring, for Bayern, with an own goal in the fifth minute before making amends with an equaliser just before the half hour mark.

Marc Planus claimed Bordeaux's second before the interval, however as Bayern striker Luca Toni missed a great late chance to equalise, the hosts went on to spectacularly miss two second half penalties.

Bayern came to the Chaban Delmas stadium without injured forwards Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery and in the hope that playmaker Thomas Muller could live up to his reputation as a future Bayern star.

Muller, however, was one of two Bayern players to be cautioned in the first half and the 20-year-old was sent off just after the half hour mark after a shocking tackle on Mathieu Chalmé.

After just five minutes Ciani somehow bundled the ball past his 'keeper Cedric Carrasso following a corner.

However as an ill-at-ease Bayern saw yellow cards going to Muller then Holger Badstuber, Laurent Blanc's side dug in to lay the foundations for a well-deserved equaliser.

Marouane Chamakh saw his left-foot drive go wide of Hans-Joerg Butt's post and a Wendel freekick from the right 10 minutes later forced the Bayern keeper into a crazy forearm save after he was duped by the

bounce.

The hosts' pressure paid off when they won a corner just before the half hour, and Ciani, made amends in style by side-flicking the ball past Butt with his right heel.

Muller's red card barely a minute later saw Bordeaux then move up a gear and Wendel rose well to meet a cross from the right only for his poor header to sail wide.

Yoann Gourcuff then took a pass from the other side of midfield, turned and unleashed a superb drive from 25 yards that a beaten Butt did well to tip over the crossbar.

Two minutes later Bordeaux went ahead after a pacy freekick from the right caused mayhem for Bayern's defence. Planus claimed the goal although Hamit Altintop looked to have played a major role.

Bayern coach Louis van Gaal made no changes for the start of the second half but was given hope of an equaliser on several occasions as Bordeaux wasted the chance to seal the win.

On 52 minutes Chamakh was cautioned for simulation, and at the other end a deep cross almost caught out Carrasso as the keeper began his run out to collect the ball.

Miroslav Klose finally broke out of his slumber to challenge the hosts' defence, but Planus did well to get back and block the shot.

Minutes later Chamakh won a dubious penalty for Bordeaux after a foul by Butt, but Gourcuff's cheeky chip - telegraphed by the short run-up - was parried by the big keeper's hand and kept out the net.

After Chamakh just failed to get on the end of a superb Wendel cross from the left, Toni, at the other end, missed a golden chance to equalise after his header at the back post had Carrasso beaten but bounced back off the upright.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	43 Slay	2 Foundation	25 Decree
1 Letter-	44 Scoundrel	26 Body powder	
man's network	46 Youngsters	27 Last year's frosh	
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15 "Born in the -"	59 Harvard's rival	38 Rotational force	
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18 Ledger entry	61 Barbie's companion	42 Greek cross	
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32 Italian farewell		50 Pippin	
33 Work with		51 "Eureka!"	
34 Movie cowboy		52 Scale member	
Lash		53 Additionally	
36 Matter-horn, for one		54 Mongrel	
37 Venetian blind part			
39 Li'l Abner's home			
41 Serf			

DOWN

1 Gunk

Solution time: 21 mins.

DEER	WASP	COR
OGLE	ICER	OB
COMMITTEE	MOP	
ANTIS	LAMES	
LACER	COMMONER	
ISM	MANES	CLA
COMPUTER	PERI	
APPO	LADEN	
FUNGI	OXEN	
AND	COMMUNITY	
IDO	AREA	ERIE
LOS	LENS	DENS

CRYPTOQUIP

E I W Q C N I U D F O S V F F W T
Z I Q O O D O P X I N B I Q Z P K H
A P U I V P I W I N , P Z I W X F K T I
U C N A E I Q B Q A W T S F H

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DURING YESTERDAY'S THUNDERSTORM IN ATHENS, MANY PEOPLE WERE WATCHING THE GREECE LIGHTNING.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals E