

## Ngog antics save L'pool

AFP, Liverpool



Steven Gerrard's controversial penalty earned Liverpool a 2-2 Premier League draw with Birmingham City here at Anfield on Monday after the visitors had earlier fought back to take the lead.

Gerrard, who came off the bench following a groin problem, rescued a point from the penalty spot after David Ngog went down under Lee Carseley's challenge in the penalty area, with the furious Blues insisting the striker had dived.

But the Reds remain seventh in the table with manager Rafael Benitez still facing intense pressure.

However, for once, Benitez's position after Liverpool had dropped points at home was not the major post-match talking point with Carseley accusing Ngog, who had opened the scoring, of an "embarrassing case of cheating" in securing the spot-kick.

"I was absolutely nowhere near him," midfielder Carseley, who used to play for Liverpool's city rivals Everton, told ESPN. "It's a joke."

"I'm sure he (Ngog) has got a family, well if I went home having done that I'd be embarrassed."

"You're supposed to be teaching your kids an example and that is just an embarrassing case of cheating."

Blues boss Alex McLeish added: "This is a shame for the game."

"He conned the referee and got his team a penalty. Peter Walton is a good referee but he got that one wrong. If it hadn't been for the penalty, I thought we'd have gone on to win it."

Benitez admitted Ngog had told him that maybe he should not have been awarded a penalty but insisted Liverpool deserved more than a point.

"We had so many chances and plenty of possession, at the end we can talk about the penalty - whether it was or was not - but we deserved to win because we had so many opportunities," said the Spaniard.

"I was talking to him (Ngog) and he said maybe it wasn't a penalty but it was 74 percent

possession again in the first half and it is unbelievable."

"I was really surprised, we had clear chances and we were attacking all the time," Benitez added.

Newly-promoted City had led at the break after goals from Christian Benitez and Cameron Jerome cancelled out Ngog's opener.

The Reds went into the game on the back of six defeats in eight matches but Ngog looked to have set them on their way to victory with his early effort.

But Ecuador international Benitez pulled Birmingham level with a close-range header - his first goal in English football - before Jerome gave the visitors a shock lead with a superb strike.

With Gerrard only being on the bench and Fernando Torres not making the squad, it was City who were the first to threaten with Lee Bowyer's shot flying over the bar.

However, 12 minutes in, and despite two fine Hart saves, Liverpool went ahead.

The on-loan Manchester City man saved from Ngog and Kuyt before Albert Riera lobbed back into the area and Ngog fired in a powerful left-foot volley.

But midway through the first half, Birmingham drew level from a simple free-kick knocked into the area.

James McFadden floated the ball in and Roger Johnson and Scott Dann both won headers before Benitez headed past Jose Reina from close range.

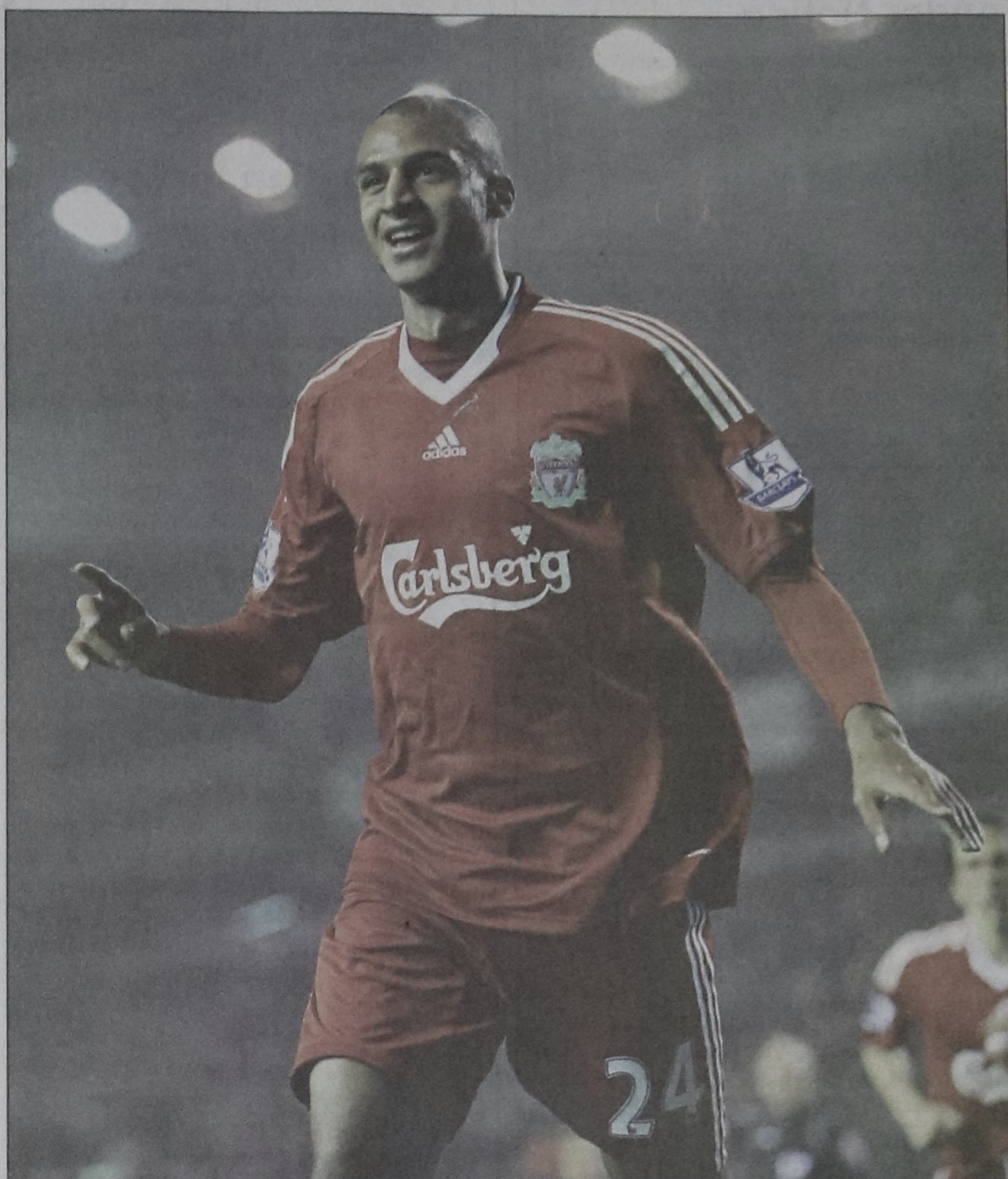
Riera limped off to be replaced by Gerrard in the final stages of the opening period but City still took the lead when Jerome thumped in Birmingham's second from 30 yards.

Just after the hour, Gerrard met Glen Johnson's cross only for his header to glance the outside of the post.

But he made no mistake after Ngog went down under Carseley's challenge which, from where Walton was stood, left the referee with a tricky decision.

Gerrard shrugged off the tension and beat Hart from the spot to equalise for Liverpool.

Ngog almost stole a winner with a near-post effort from Gerrard's cross but failed to hit the target from close range before his captain lobbed over from the edge of the area.



Liverpool forward David N'Gog celebrates after scoring a stunning goal during their English Premiership football match against Birmingham at Anfield on Monday.

## VdV keeping options open

SOCERNET

Out of favour Real Madrid midfielder Rafael van der Vaart has hinted that he could be ready to leave the club in January, but has ruled out a return to Ajax.

The Dutch international opted to stay and fight for his place in the summer amid the new era of galacticos, but he has found it hard to break into the side.

The 26-year-old has started just one game in La Liga this season, with five appearances as a substitute, and has not featured at all in the Champions League.

Van der Vaart knows he must play more regularly if he is to keep his place in Bert van Marwijk's squad for the World Cup finals in South Africa next year.

While the player admitted he may have no choice but to leave the Bernabeu, he insisted a return to the Amsterdam ArenA was not on the agenda at this stage in his career.

"In principle I find it too early (to return) and I say no," Van der Vaart told De Telegraaf newspaper.

"I do not know if I will stay at Real Madrid, but there are other options."

Ajax coach Martin Jol told Sport1 on Monday: "I hope he comes. With him we would have the best midfield in Holland."

## Rooney warned of conduct

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney has been warned about his future conduct following a remark the striker made to television cameras after Manchester United's defeat by Chelsea, the Football Association said on Monday.

Rooney appeared to mouth "12 men" to the cameras following Premier League champions United's 1-0 loss to leaders Chelsea at Stamford Bridge on Sunday, a remark implying referee Martin Atkinson had been biased in favour of the Blues.

An FA spokesman said Monday: "Wayne Rooney has been warned as to his future conduct following remarks made yesterday (Sunday)."

Chelsea's win left them five points clear of second-placed United.

## IN BRIEF

### C'Ron did not go on a bender

AFP, London

Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo won "substantial" libel damages on Monday over a newspaper report saying he went on a drink-fueled "bender" in a Hollywood nightclub.

The Daily Mirror reported in July last year that Ronaldo, who does not drink alcohol, had gone on a drinking binge despite the fact that he was on crutches, recovering from an ankle operation.

Under the headline "Ron the Lash," it said the then Manchester United player had spent 10,000 pounds on champagne and vodka for friends and models, having drunk four glasses of red wine himself earlier in the evening.

"It described how one clubber claimed to have seen him throw his crutches down on the floor and try to dance on his uninjured foot," his lawyer Ronald Thwaites told the court.

But a lawyer for publishers MGN Limited told London's High Court the newspaper "offers its apologies to the claimant for the distress, embarrassment and offence caused by this article."

"The defendant accepts that the allegations are false and ought never to have been published. It is therefore happy to set the record straight and to apologise to the claimant."

Thwaites said that, although Ronaldo was in the nightclub in question, he did not drink any alcohol at all whilst there.

## 'Becks will be a boost'

AFP, London



AC Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf expects David Beckham's return to the club to be a boon for both the Italian giants and the England star.

Beckham last week agreed a second six-month loan spell with the Rossoneri, starting in January, as the free-kick specialist tries to earn a place in England's squad for next year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

A similar short-term deal

last season rejuvenated the international prospects of Beckham, now a United States-based player with the LA Galaxy, under England manager Fabio Capello, the former Milan boss.

Dutch international Seedorf believes former Manchester United midfielder Beckham's desire to play in another World Cup will work to Milan's advantage.

"This is a very positive thing because it means that he's highly motivated and he has to perform to be able to go," Seedorf told Sky Sports on Monday.

"The fact that he's going to play for a team in Europe

doesn't guarantee anything with Fabio Capello so he needs to perform well and that's what he's going to do, as he did when he came here last year.

"I am very pleased for him because I think it will be important for him to play at this level until the World Cup, to be able to enjoy that part of his career I know he would like to participate in."

"I think David is a very good player and he's going to be fitter than he is now in the States, because the level is different and the training level is different. We are going to help him, he's going to help us."

## Lahm says sorry for comments

INTERNET, undated

Philipp Lahm on Monday apologized for critical statements on his club in a meeting with Bayern Munich top officials. Munich said in a statement that Lahm has also accepted a fine and that the case which made plenty of waves on the weekend is closed.

In an interview published on Saturday by the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily, Lahm had criticized Munich's transfers over past years and said that the club lacked a playing philosophy.

Munich said Sunday that Lahm, 25, will have to pay a club record fine, but no figures were given.

On Monday, he met with Bayern's board of Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Uli Hoeness and Karl Hopfner, as well as sports director Christian Nerlinger.

Munich said that "German player Lahm apologized for his statements and the way he chose to present them."

Munich are going through a difficult season, placed a modest eighth in the Bundesliga and facing elimination in the Champions League.

## Bendtner is Denmark's best player

AFP, Copenhagen

Danish international striker Nicklas Bendtner was named Denmark's player of the year on Monday.

The 21-year-old Arsenal forward topped a vote conducted on the internet held between October 26 and November 9.

Bendtner - who is presently injured - was in sparkling form for the Danish national side during their successful run to qualifying for the 2010 World Cup finals, scoring the goal in the 1-1 draw at home to Portugal taking his tally to 10 goals in 31 internationals.

National coach Lars Olsen was named coach of the year.

## Old Firm in England?

Football

AFP, London

Glasgow rivals Celtic and Rangers have won backing for their bid to join the English Premier League from Tottenham coach Harry Redknapp.

The long-standing Old Firm campaign to join the English setup was given a boost last week when both Everton's David Moyes and Aston Villa's Martin O'Neill endorsed Bolton chairman Phil Gartside's plan for them to be included in a new two-tier top flight.

Gartside's proposal is expected to be discussed at a meeting of Premier League clubs this week and Redknapp has become the first English boss to publicly back the concept.

He told the Daily Record: "Absolutely, I would welcome Celtic and Rangers to English football if they wanted to play down here. No doubt about it. I'm sure they would be good for the English game."

"We are talking about two huge football clubs and if they were to join our league you would be looking at great games in great stadiums."

"I was up in Scotland only a couple of months ago to watch Celtic play Arsenal in the

Champions League qualifiers and the atmosphere was out of this world."

"It was incredible and I'd love to see games like that on a more regular basis."

"The one worry I would have is what happens to the rest of Scottish football if the two of them are allowed to leave but only the people up there know the answer to that."

"If you're asking me if it would be good for the English game then the answer is yes."

Former Celtic player Moyes and ex-Parkhead boss O'Neill have emotional ties to their former club but Redknapp is a more dispassionate observer.

And despite acknowledging the Old Firm would eventually become a threat to his own club, he would still welcome them with open arms.

He said: "It's true, with the extra money they would get down here the two of them probably would end up challenging clubs such as ourselves for European places but that's nothing something we should be scared of."

"We are talking here about two great clubs and it would be fantastic to compete against them. It would only make the game in this country stronger if we had two clubs with their tradition operating in our league."

## More layoff for Cole

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea and England left-back Ashley Cole could be out for up to three more weeks with the leg injury that has ruled him out of this Saturday's international friendly against Brazil in Qatar.

Cole has been diagnosed with a depressed fracture of the tibia after aggravating the injury before Sunday's 1-0 home win over Manchester

United - a victory that left Premier League leaders Chelsea five points in front of the reigning champions.

Full-back Cole missed three games after sustaining the injury in the Blues' 4-0 Champions League win against Atletico Madrid last month at Stamford Bridge.

He came back against Madrid in the return Group D game last week but required an injection in order to play against United.

Cole was left out of the England squad unveiled by

Capello on Sunday, with Stephen Warnock of Aston Villa taking his place.

"He (Cole) has a depressed fracture of the tibia, an injury first picked up in the Atletico Madrid home match last month," a Chelsea spokesman said Monday.

"He aggravated the injury before the match against Manchester United and required an injection to play."

"However, he further injured it during the game and has therefore been ruled out of this week's England squad."

## Smicer hangs up boots

AFP, Prague

Former Czech international star and Slavia Prague veteran Vladimir Smicer said on Monday he was hanging up his boots at the age of 36 after a spate of injury problems.

"I am not able to help Slavia on the field. I can no longer give it 100 percent," explained Smicer, who won the 2005 Champions League with Liverpool.

"My head and my heart want me to carry on but my body says no," added Smicer ruefully after playing the first half of a goalless draw with Viktoria Pilsen.

Smicer scored 27 goals in 81 games for the Czech national side from 1993-2005, featuring for the squad which finished runners up to Germany at Euro 2006.

In 1998 he won the French league title with Lens and after

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## Poyet takes over Albion

AFP, London

Gus Poyet was named Tuesday as the new manager of English lower league strugglers Brighton and Hove Albion.

Poyet has signed a deal with south coast side Brighton, battling to avoid relegation from League One, English football's third tier, until the end of next season.

He will be assisted by former Tottenham teammate Mauricio Tarrico.

Poyet replaces Russell Slade, who left the Seagulls 10 days ago.

"Gus is one of the best up and coming young coaches in this country," said Brighton chairman Tony Bloom. "We are delighted to give him his first opportunity in management."

"His credentials are exceptional and all of the reports we have had on his coaching ability are outstanding."

## Navas in squad

Football

INTERNET, undated

Sevilla winger Jesus Navas was called up to play for Spain as part of a 23-man squad announced on Monday by national manager Vicente del Bosque for upcoming friendlies against Argentina and Austria.

Navas, 23, has been catching the headlines with Sevilla for four years now but is still uncapped because of anxiety attacks that he frequently suffers, particularly at the start of each season.

Last week Navas publicly stated that he was finally ready to play for Spain.

Spain will face Argentina in Madrid on November 14 and Austria in Vienna on November 18.

Missing from the squad are injury victims Marcos Senna, Santi Cazorla and Fernando Torres.

Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes has not been

SQUAD	
<b>Goalkeepers:</b>	Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Jose Reina (Liverpool), Diego Lopez (Villarreal)
<b>Defenders:</b>	Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid), Andoni Iraola (Athletic Bilbao), Joan Capdevila (Villarreal), Carlos Marchena (Valencia), Raul Albiol (Real Madrid), Carles Puyol (Barcelona), Gerard Pique (Barcelona)
<b>Midfielders:</b>	Sergio Busquets (Barcelona), Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid), Xavi (Barcelona), Cesc Fábregas (Barcelona), Andres Iniesta (Barcelona), Jesus Navas (Sevilla), Pablo Hernandez (Valencia)
<b>Forwards:</b>	David Silva (Valencia), Daniel Guiza (Fenerbahce), Alvaro Negredo (Sevilla), Juan Mata (Valencia), David Villa (Valencia)

## Zlatan may quit Sweden

Football

INTERNET, Stockholm

To the "great surprise" of new Sweden coach Erik Hamren, Barcelona forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic has expressed doubts about his future career in the national team. Hamren on Monday evening announced Ibrahimovic's decision when he presented his first squad for an upcoming friendly against Italy.

The squad for the November 18 tie was announced in connection with the annual Swedish football gala, hosted this year in the southern city of Malmo.

Ibrahimovic, who hails from Malmo, was not present at the gala where he won his fourth Golden Ball - an award to the

best Swedish player.

"He wants to carefully consider this," Hamren said, referring to a conversation he had on Sunday with the 28-year-old forward.

Hamren, who until next August is also to continue to coach Norwegian side Rosenborg, told reporters that a "player has to be motivated" to play for the national team.

He was named successor to Lars Lagerback who stepped down last month after Sweden failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa.

Ibrahimovic has scored 22 goals and played 62 internationals for Sweden since 2001. Veteran defender Olof Mellberg, who was selected for the Italy friendly, is another player who said he was not sure if he would continue to play for Sweden next year.