

Trapattoni demands answers from FIFA

AFP, Rome



Giovanni Trapattoni has launched a furious tirade against FIFA president Sepp Blatter and referee Martin Hansson following his Republic of Ireland team's controversial World Cup elimination at the hands of France.

The French won thanks to a goal from William Gallas after a clear double-handball from Thierry Henry, who set-up his international colleague.

It was not the first time that a team coached by Trapattoni has been eliminated after controversial refereeing as his Italy team lost 2-1 after extra-time to South Korea at the 2002 World Cup, having had two strikes disallowed in normal time.

Speaking to the Gazzetta dello Sport, 'Trap' let fly.

"I would like to know what bad I've done to Blatter. If someone could explain that to me at

least I'd be calm," he said.

"Often at schools I hear talk of fairplay. Maybe I'm a dreamer. FIFA violated its own rules by making the top seeded teams play in the play-offs.

"It's treachery. I think even (UEFA president Michel) Platini was against this revolution.

"Now there's this double handball from Henry on Gallas's goal. On top of that (Sebastien) Squillaci was offside. It's murder.

"Even a blind person would have seen Henry's double handball. The linesman, as the pictures showed, was in line with it and had a perfect view.

"I'm sure that Mr Hansson spoke to the fourth official and with whoever sees the slow motion replays.

"Why then, knowing that he had made a mistake, did he not change his decision?

"I think the time has come for slow motion replays on the field in extreme cases. In 30 seconds you could avoid colossal injustices."

Ireland appealed to FIFA to have the game replayed but the world football governing body rejected their case.

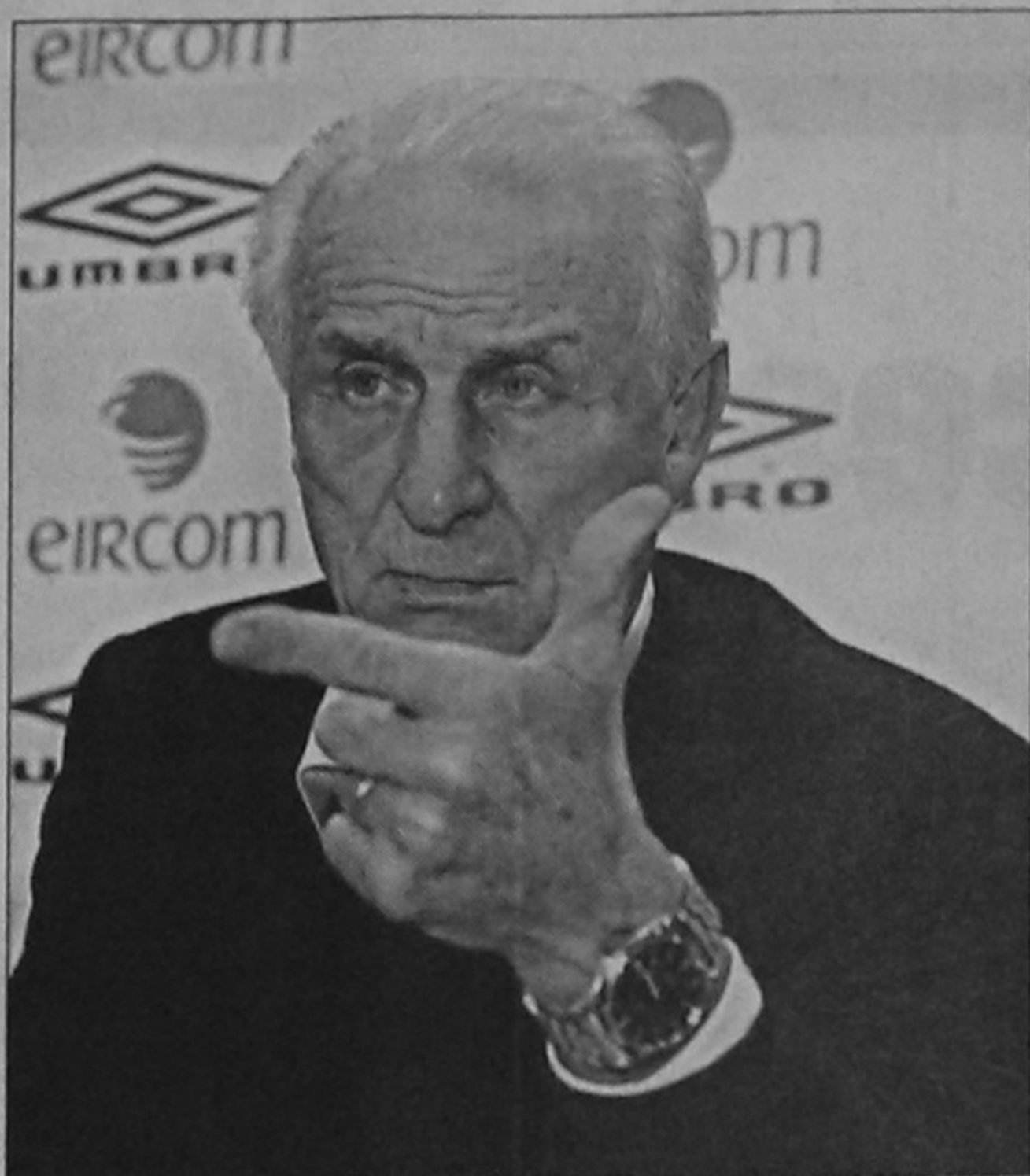


PHOTO: AFP

Ireland coach Giovanni Trapattoni gestures during a press conference at the FAI (Football Association of Ireland) Headquarters in Dublin on Thursday.

Liverpool's City test

AFP, London



Liverpool's ability to resurrect a campaign that is in danger of collapsing around them goes under the microscope when Manchester City visit Anfield on Saturday.

The pick of this weekend's Premier League encounters will provide a significant gauge of Rafael Benitez's side's prospects of hauling themselves back into the top four and ensuring they avoid the financially grave consequences of missing out on next season's Champions League.

Leaders Chelsea will expect to consolidate the advantage they gained with a controversial win over Manchester United before the international break by accounting for struggling Wolves at Stamford Bridge.

United, who now trail their London rivals by five points, have a tougher-looking assignment at home to Everton, while Arsenal will be without leading goalscorer Robin van Persie for their trip to Sunderland.

Newly-rich City are - along with Tottenham and Aston Villa - one of the teams threatening to deny Liverpool their customary place at European football's top table and, after five league defeats already this season, Benitez's men badly need to start acquiring some momentum.

The return of Steven Gerrard to the starting line-up should help with the club captain having benefited from a two-week rest over the international break.

Glen Johnson and Daniel Agger also return from injury but star striker Fernando Torres is ruled out by a calf injury and Benitez appears reluctant to risk 20-million-

pound signing Alberto Aquilani.

The Italy midfielder has yet to start for his new club and is keen to put six months of injury frustration behind him.

"He is very positive and wants to help the team now but we will not take any risks at this stage," Benitez said.

The midfielder, bought to plug the gap created by Xabi Alonso's departure for Real Madrid, looks set to be on the bench on Saturday.

City, who have slipped out of the top four after drawing their last five league matches, will hope Robinho will be able to play some part at Anfield.

The Brazilian star is nearing full fitness after two months out with an ankle injury.

Manchester United will welcome Nemanja Vidic back for the meeting with Everton after he played for 70 minutes of Serbia's 1-0 win over South Korea in midweek. Fellow centreback Rio Ferdinand remains sidelined by a calf problem.

Tottenham are the only club in the top four not in action on Saturday, with Wigan visiting White Hart Lane 24 hours later.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated):

Saturday
Birmingham v Fulham, Burnley v Aston Villa, Chelsea v Wolves, Hull City v West Ham, Liverpool v Manchester City (1245 GMT), Manchester Utd v Everton (1730 GMT), Sunderland v Arsenal
Sunday
Bolton v Blackburn (1330 GMT), Stoke City v Portsmouth (1600 GMT), Tottenham v Wigan

Casillas shifts Barca focus

AFP, Madrid



Fresh from winning his 100th Spain cap, goalkeeper Iker Casillas returns to club duty with Real Madrid insisting they mustn't start thinking about the 'Clasico' against Barcelona in 10 days' time.

Real sit a point behind champions Barcelona going into Saturday's home match against Racing Santander and Casillas believes Real can't start getting ahead of themselves.

"The president (Florentino Perez) has made a great effort for this season and we have to keep looking forward, not to the Champions League final at the Bernabeu (Real's home ground) or the game against Barcelona, but the next game against Racing Santander," said Casillas, who reached the 100-cap mark in last weekend's friendly against Argentina.

Despite heavy summer investment, Real won't be matching Barcelona's treble of last season after they were

knocked out of the King's Cup by third-division Alcorcon in new coach Manuel Pellegrini's first major setback.

Pellegrini has had a public row with 33-year-old veteran Guti - who could be on his way out of the club after 14 years of service - but insists he has a good rapport with his players.

"It is a great group and I have a good relationship with the players. I know what I am doing," said the Chilean coach.

Racing hope the appointment of new coach Miguel Angel Portugal can lift the players for the Real trip after the club parted company with Juan Carlos Mandia.

Cristiano Ronaldo has said he is ready to return against Racing following an ankle injury but Pellegrini is likely to choose to give the Portuguese star more time with the game at Barcelona on the horizon.

Barcelona are unbeaten in the league this season, with eight wins and two draws from their first ten games, but have a tough trip to San Mames to face Athletic Bilbao on Saturday night.

"It is vital we win in San Mames and gain more confidence," said Barca goalkeeper

Victor Valdes.

"It's important to retain the lead not just over Real Madrid but any team."

Bilbao were well beaten by Barcelona in the King's Cup final and then the Spanish Super Cup final.

Barcelona striker Thierry Henry has only just returned from injury but has been the talk of the game after his controversial role in France's World Cup qualifying play-off

FIXTURES

Saturday

(1700 GMT unless otherwise stated)

Deportivo La Coruna v Atletico Madrid, Tenerife v Sevilla, Real Madrid v Racing Santander (1900 GMT), Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona (2100 GMT)
Sunday
(1600 GMT unless otherwise stated)

Villarreal v Valladolid, Xerez v Sporting Gijon, Espanyol v Getafe, Real Mallorca v Almeria, Malaga v Real Zaragoza (1800 GMT), Osasuna v Valencia (2000 GMT)

draw with Ireland on Wednesday.

Sevilla are the only team who look capable of keeping pace with the top two, lying four points behind pace-setters Barcelona ahead of Saturday's trip to Tenerife.

"The squad we had two seasons ago was good and won titles (UEFA Cups in 2006 and 2007) but I think the current squad has even more quality," said Sevilla striker Frederic Kanoute.

In other matches, Atletico Madrid and Villarreal both need to start collecting wins if they are to mount a challenge for a Champions League spot this season.

Atletico languish fourth from bottom - 14 points off the top four - and have a difficult trip to fifth-placed Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday, while Villarreal are two points better off and host Valladolid on Sunday.

With two Champions League hopefuls floundering, Valencia have taken full advantage to climb up to fourth after going 11 games unbeaten in all competitions. They travel to Pamplona to face Osasuna on Sunday.

Inter, Juve clash looms

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan and Juventus, the top two teams in Serie A, are desperately trying to avoid talking up their looming table-topping clash.

Leaders Inter have a five-point gap to second-placed Juventus but already thoughts in both Milan and Turin are turning to the 'Derby of Italy', which should be an early 'title decider' in two weeks' time.

First things first, though, both teams have relatively straight-forward matches to negotiate, as well as European commitments before that game comes around.

Champions Inter travel to Bologna on Saturday while Juve host Udinese and both will be more than aware of the dangers of looking too far ahead.

Last time out Inter were held to a 1-1 draw at home to struggling AS Roma, just a few days after earning a crucial

come-from-behind 2-1 victory in Ukraine against Dynamo Kiev in the Champions League.

Juve too have suffered before and after big European games this season - their first defeat, 2-0 at Palermo, came after a trip to Bayern Munich and their second, 3-2 at home to Napoli, was ahead of a trip to Maccabi Haifa.

But Italy captain and Juve centre-back Fabio Cannavaro insists talk of Inter is premature.

"I've heard that many people are already talking about the match against Inter, personally I have decided not to touch it for another two weeks," he said.

"I'm interested in the games against Udinese and Bordeaux. The first should let us know that we can't let up in the league and the second should book us our place in the Champions League knock-out rounds.

"Fortunately after the international break we will welcome back important players such as (Alessandro) Del Piero, which is a good thing for us given that

we need everyone."

Juve can't afford too many more slip-ups given they have also been held at home by Bologna and drew away to both Fiorentina and Genoa.

While they did win their last match 5-2 away to Atalanta, they have rarely been convincing this season and if anything have been flattered by many of their results.

Despite their draw at home to Roma, Inter are in rude health, their only defeat this season coming away to Sampdoria, while they sit not only top of Serie A but also their Champions League group

FIXTURES

Saturday

Bologna v Inter Milan, Fiorentina v Parma

Sunday

AC Milan v Cagliari, Juventus v Udinese, Livorno v Genoa, Napoli v Lazio, Palermo v Catania, AS Roma v Bari, Sampdoria v Chievo, Siena v Atalanta

containing holders Barcelona.

But Bologna come into the game off the back of an impressive 3-1 win over Palermo and few of their players will have been on international duty so they will be less fatigued than the champions.

The third team in the title race, AC Milan host Cagliari hoping to continue their recent improvement that has seen them win five of their last seven games and close the gap on Inter to seven points.

But full-back Gianluca Zambrotta insists Cagliari will be no push-over having won their last four matches.

"Cagliari are in great form and we know that Sunday's game won't be easy," he said. "We still have some time to study them and to prepare the best we can."

"Either way we've had a good week of training behind us and we're in the best possible condition for Sunday afternoon."

"We're playing in a way that allows us to create many opportunities, we're attacking with many bodies."

IN BRIEF

Spain replace Brazil

AFP, Paris

European champions Spain replaced Brazil as the world number one team in FIFA's world rankings, published Friday.

Spain moved up one place while Brazil dropped down to second, although the biggest movers among the top ten were Portugal, who moved up five places to fifth following two playoff wins over Bosnia.

FIFA world rankings:

1. Spain (+1 place)
2. Brazil (-1)
3. Netherlands
4. Italy
5. Portugal (+5)
6. Germany (-1)
7. France (+2)
8. Argentina (-2)
9. England (-2)
10. Croatia (-2)

Barca suffer Ibra blow

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic has been ruled out of Saturday's clash with Athletic Bilbao and could also miss Tuesday's crucial Champions League tie against Inter Milan.

Ibrahimovic, 28, has an injured right leg and is crucial to the defending European champions' hopes of making the second round of this year's competition.

200 matches implicated in fixing scandal

AFP, Berlin

Around 200 football matches in nine countries including at least three Champions League games are implicated in a new match-fixing scandal, German prosecutors said on Friday.

The suspect matches took place in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Croatia, Slovenia, Turkey, Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Austria, netting criminals several million euros (dollars) in betting profits, prosecutors said.

"It is not a matter of asking every player and

Who's saying what

AFP, Paris



Who's saying what about Thierry Henry's handball, which helped send France to the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa at the expense of the Republic of Ireland.

"Yes, there was a hand, but I'm not the referee. Of course, I kept playing. The referee didn't whistle for handball. I was behind two Irish players, the ball bounced and it hit my hand."

- Henry on the controversial moment at the Stade de France on Wednesday, in which he handled the ball before setting up William Gallas for the winning goal

"You could see the referee hesitate and look at Henry. He could have asked him what he thought. If the referee had asked Henry, he would have said: 'Yes, it was handball'."

- Ireland coach Giovanni Trapattoni

"He (Henry) told us we deserved to win. How is that supposed to make me feel? It makes me feel worse. He's admitted he cheated. We should have won. He just said, 'That's it'. He just said he handled it, he didn't mean it."

- Ireland defender Richard Dunne

"We got robbed, you can tell by the boys' reaction, it hit his hand blatantly. We feel cheated - we were the better team over the two legs, every fan in the stadium will say we were the better team tonight."

- Ireland defender Sean St Ledger

"This isn't just a league match, it wasn't just a game of 36 matches over a season. This was a defining game that the whole world was watching. If FIFA believe in fair play and integrity... this is their opportunity to step forward. Thierry Henry's a wonderful footballer, but does he want to

remembered like Maradona was in 1986, does he want his legacy to be this handball?"

- Football Association of Ireland chief executive John Delaney

"Neither the French government nor the Irish government should interfere in the functioning of the international federation."

- French PM Francois Fillon

"Football is the real loser. It's a victory without glory for France."

- Former Ireland coach Mick McCarthy

"We were robbed."

- Irish Star newspaper

"Le Cheat"

- Irish Mirror

"Hand of the Frog"

- Irish Sun

"The hand of God"

- French sport daily L'Equipe

"The worst refereeing mistake in 20 years - Martin Hansson robbed Ireland of a place in the World Cup."

- Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet

Duo calls for video tech

Football

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger joined forces Friday to call for video technology to be used in football to avoid controversies like the one that has marred France's qualification for the World Cup.

The issue over whether football should embrace the technology available was reignited on Wednesday night when France's Thierry Henry used his hand to control the ball before crossing for William Gallas to score the goal that ended Ireland's chances of going to South Africa.

Ferguson supports change but the Scot fears that all discussion on the issue is futile because world football's governing body, FIFA, are simply not interested in revolutionising the role of the referee.

He said: "The stance is that they prefer human decision-making rather than technology decision-making and until they change their mind there is nothing you can do about it - you have to convince them, nobody else."

"It is not a matter of asking every player and

manager in the world their opinion because they will all share the same one, as I do myself, that technology can play a part and can help referees in a situation like the other night."

Ferguson's call for the introduction of technological support for match officials was backed by Arsenal boss Wenger, who argued that mistakes like the Henry one could no longer be accepted given the stakes involved.

"Football accepts that a billion people see it, one guy doesn't see it and it is the one who prevails. It cannot work," Wenger said.

"We cannot accept that an obvious decision is wrong because we do not want to give ourselves all the needed help we can have in the modern game."

"Being at the game, I saw the referee giving a goal knowing that something was wrong and that is really sad. He didn't see it, I can understand, the linesman didn't see it, but they couldn't get any help."

"In the end, he gave a goal, already knowing that it wasn't a goal. We cannot accept that, in our sport and you have to do something about it."

Wenger said the referee should be able to consult video footage in such cases.

"We cannot sort out all the cases but we have to sort out as many cases as we can."

Hanover ready for Schalke

AFP, Berlin



Hanover 96 return to German league action on Saturday having bid farewell to Robert Enke who committed suicide last week, but with memories of their tragic goalkeeper still fresh in their minds.

The 32-year-old, who had been set to travel with Germany to the World Cup in South Africa next June, flung himself under a train after a long battle with depression and a memorial service was held for him on Sunday.

Many of his team-mates were in tears as they carried out Enke's coffin and less than a week later they will be wearing a special-edition shirt at Schalke's Veltins Arena on Saturday in their first match since the tragedy.

"The team has been impressive this week and I believe we

will put in a good performance against Schalke," said Hanover coach Andreas Bergmann, whose side are tenth in the table with Schalke fourth.

"Of course, Robert will remain in our thoughts, but we have to make sure he is not all we think about."

Bergmann said the Hanover team asked to play the game after concerns they would not be fit to face Schalke.

"The team always based itself around Robert and he helped lift spirits," said club boss Martin Kind. "He was our most prominent player on the German stage."

Dutch midfielder Arnold Bruggink will take over as Hanover captain while reserve goalkeeper Florian Fromlowitz now finds himself first-choice.

"Everything is different and will remain so," said Fromlowitz. "Robert will be always in my heart and I know that he watches from above."

Schalke will be without Gerald Asamoah, who is sick with flu, while fellow forward Jefferson Frahan has bronchitis.

The showcase game of the weekend is German giants Bayern Munich hosting league leaders Leverkusen at the Allianz Arena on Sunday and with the home side eighth in the Bundesliga, goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt says they must win.

"There can be no more excuses," said the 35-year-old with Bayern six points behind Leverkusen.

"Leverkusen are a direct rival, we're at home - so we have to win, that's all there is to it."

Having stormed out on the team during their 1-1 draw at home to Schalke after being substituted, striker Luca Toni can expect to start on the bench with Germany striker Miroslav Klose partnering Mario Gomez up front.

Having moved up to fifth in the table, defending champions Wolfsburg are at home to struggling Nuremberg with star striker Edin Dzeko eyeing up a possible move to Italian giants AC Milan next summer.

With Bremen three points behind leaders Leverkusen, Thomas Schaaf's side are at Freiburg and having been beaten just once all season, they have a new star in midfielder Aaron Hunt who won his first cap in Germany's draw with the Ivory Coast.

Likewise, third-placed Hamburg are still just three points from leaders Leverkusen and need to pick up their seventh win of the season against second-from-bottom Bochum on Sunday.

FIXTURES

Saturday

VfL Wolfsburg v Nuremberg, VfB Stuttgart v Hertha Berlin, Schalke 04 v Hanover 96, Cologne v Hoffenheim, Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia M'Gladbach, Freiburg v Werder Bremen, Borussia Dortmund v Mainz 05

Sunday

Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen, Hamburg v VfL Bochum



PHOTO: AFP

Algerian players wave national flags from a bus roof as they are welcomed by their fans at the Houari Boumediene International airport on Thursday after their World Cup qualifying victory over Egypt a day before.