

## Troussier invited to N. Korea

AFP, Tokyo

Former Japan coach Philippe Troussier said Thursday he had been invited to visit North Korea, while a press report said he had been contacted for a possible job offer there.

"Some weeks ago, I was invited to go to Pyongyang but the trip has been postponed several times," the Frenchman, who led Japan to the last 16 in the 2002 World Cup on home turf, told AFP.

He said a planned trip to Pyongyang next Sunday was also called off.

"So far, we cannot say that I have received a proposal from North Korea," said the 54-year-old, now the general manager of Japan's third division side FC Ryukyu.

The Nikkei Sports daily reported Thursday that Troussier had been contacted by North Korea.

"Everything is unofficial," Troussier was quoted as saying by the daily. "They (the North Koreans) made contact with me. But I cannot comment on it because nothing has been completed yet."

North Korea, the quarter-finalists in the 1966 World Cup in England, booked a place in the finals for the first time in 44 years under the wing of current coach Kim Jong-Hun.

But they were drawn with powerhouses Brazil, Portugal and the Ivory Coast in the group stage.

The Nikkei Sports said Troussier's trip has been delayed because of his visa being processed late.

"I'm open to the challenges Asian countries face in football," he told the daily. "Besides, I have experience in Asia. I can bring that experience to the team. It will be a wonderful adventure if I can join the 2010 World Cup as a coach."

Troussier was once nicknamed the "White Witch Doctor" for his success with African teams, leading underdogs Burkina Faso to the semifinals at the 1998 African Cup soon after he was appointed.

## Donovan inks new deal

AFP, Los Angeles

Los Angeles Galaxy forward Landon Donovan signed a four-year contract extension Wednesday with the Major League Soccer club, paving the way for a loan to Everton of the English Premiership.

Donovan, this year's Most Valuable Player of the US league, is set to stay with the Galaxy through 2013 after scoring a team-high 12 goals this season and together with England's David Beckham leading the team to the MLS Cup finals.

The Galaxy announced their captain would be allowed to pursue overseas loan deals provided he returns for the start of the 2010 MLS season on March 27. Donovan said he would not have signed a deal without that provision.

"I am excited to be able to pledge my future to the Galaxy by signing this new contract," Donovan said. "This is a great day for me both personally and professionally."

Galaxy coach Bruce Arena said that while no loan deal has been completed, one likely would be done with Everton from January to mid-March. Everton already features a top US talent, goalkeeper Tim Howard.

That would allow Donovan to get a first-hand look for at least 10 weeks at the talent he and his US teammates will face June 12 in their World Cup opener against England, while at the same time giving English talent a better look at the American playmaker whom Beckham knows well.

Beckham is on a loan deal to AC Milan that does not require his return until after the World Cup.

Donovan, 27, is not available for transfer, Arena said.

"He is our captain, our leader and the league's MVP and we believe that Landon signing this new contract is a key aspect to bringing the Galaxy further success both on and off the field," Arena said.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Nicolas Anelka scores the opening goal against Portsmouth during their Premier League encounter at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

## Zamora fires Fulham

AFP, Paris



Fulham marched into the Europa League last 32 after Bobby Zamora's double inspired the Premier League side to a 3-2 win at FC Basel on Wednesday.

Also adding their names to the knockout round mix were Hertha Berlin, Panathinaikos, FC Bruges and FC Copenhagen, with the final four places up for grabs in Thursday's final throw of the group round dice.

Fulham shrugged off the falling snow to record a memorable victory over the Swiss and become the third English club to make it to the knockout stages, the Londoners joining Everton and Champions League refugees Liverpool.

Fulham had travelled to Switzerland one point behind Basel in third, with AS Roma already having secured top place, in Group E.

And with Zamora once again silencing those critics who had begun to question his scoring record, Fulham did the business in style to finish the first round on ten points, one behind the Italians, who beat CSKA Sofia 3-0 in Bulgaria.

Zamora had a goal disallowed for offside after 16 minutes but three minutes from the break he had Fulham in front when he steered home Bjorn Helge Riise's cross with his left foot.

Two minutes later Riise acted as provider again with Zamora this time finishing with his head for his fourth goal in three games.

Basel were back in the game after the hour mark when Alexander Frei's spotkick, awarded for Chris Smalling's handball, beat Fulham's Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer.

On 77 minutes Zoltan Gera settled Hodgson's nerves, sidefooting the ball in from Stephen Kelly's pullback.

Marco Streller's header from a corner into the far post three minutes from time stirred the home fans but Fulham held on to keep their European adventure firmly alive.

Alessandro Cerci struck twice with substitute Filippo Scardina adding another as Roma secured top spot at CSKA Sofia with the reward a seeding in Friday's draw.

In Group D, the German first division's bottom side Hertha Berlin qualified as runners-up with a 1-0 win over table-toppers Sporting Lisbon.

Group F's final round of matches saw Greek side Panathinaikos join already qualified Galatasaray in the next round after grabbing second place with a 3-0 victory over Dinamo Bucharest.

Later Belgian outfit FC Bruges grabbed the only goal in injury time for a 1-0 win over Toulouse which saw them through as runners-up of Group J behind Shakhtar Donetsk.

In Group K Copenhagen continued their European adventure with a rousing 3-0 win at Sparta Prague.

The Danes finished on 10 points, four behind table winners PSV Eindhoven.

Group L was already decided with Werder Bremen and Athletic Bilbao already assured of their places in the knockout round.



PHOTO: AFP

Inter Milan midfielder Wesley Sneijder celebrates his all-important goal against Livorno during their Coppa Italia clash at San Siro on Wednesday.

## COPPA ITALIA

## Inter reach last 8

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan eased into the Coppa Italia quarterfinals with a controlled and disciplined 1-0 win against Livorno at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Wesley Sneijder's free-kick on the hour mark settled the affair in front of hoards of empty seats.

The hosts deserved their victory having dominated throughout and twice hit the wood-work in the first period.

Inter coach Jose Mourinho resisted the temptation to make too many changes for a match his side were always likely to win, although he did hand a debut to right-back Giulio Danilo from the club's youth team.

Mourinho, who has been under fire these last few days in the Italian press after insulting a journalist, said his team were worthy of the result.

"I think we deserved to win. We played a serious match, we were compact, had no problems and defensively we were in control," he said.

"We had some early chances and then after

the break we had more chances to make this match a little calmer."

With captain Javier Zanetti, Ivan Cordoba and Marco Materazzi injured and Walter Samuel also injured, Inter were left a little short at the back and Mourinho selected Muntari Sulley in an unfamiliar left-back role.

There were also rare starts for Patrick Vieira, David Suazo and goalkeeper Francesco Toldo as the likes of Samuel Eto'o, Diego Milito and Esteban Cambiasso were rested.

Dejan Stankovic came closest to opening the scoring as he struck a shot from 20 yards against the upright.

Sneijder was then denied from a free-kick by Livorno goalkeeper Francesco Benussi, who tipped the ball onto the post.

But on the hour the Dutch international scored the only goal of the game as Benussi turned from hero to villain, stepping the wrong way as Sneijder took another shot from a dead ball and leaving himself rooted to the spot as the ball sailed into the top corner of his net.

Suazo then wasted a couple of chances to stake a claim on a regular first team spot before he was replaced by Milito, who proved equally profligate.

The remaining last 16 ties will all be played in mid-January.

## IN BRIEF

### Loew to remain in charge till 2012

APP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew is set to sign a two-year extension to his current contract which will keep him in charge of the national side until 2012, it was revealed on Wednesday.

The 49-year-old will sign the extension in January and German Football Federation (DFB) president Theo Zwanziger confirmed to German sports agency SID a deal has already been agreed upon.

With his side set to face Australia, Ghana and Serbia in Group D at next June's World Cup in South Africa, the extension means Loew will be in charge of Germany for Euro 2012 which will be held in the Ukraine and Poland.

"We have come to an agreement to extend this successful collaboration until after the World Cup," said Zwanziger.

Group L was already decided with Werder Bremen and Athletic Bilbao already assured of their places in the knockout round.

## Blues back winning Gunners stumble

APP, London

Chelsea reclaimed their three-point lead at the top of the Premier League table after a hard-earned 2-1 win over bottom side Portsmouth on Wednesday.

Nicolas Anelka's first-half strike and a second-half penalty from Frank Lampard secured the first win in five matches for Carlo Ancelotti's side and ensured it was an unhappy return to Stamford Bridge for former Chelsea boss Avram Grant, now the manager of Portsmouth.

Arsenal's hopes of catching the leaders suffered a setback when they were held to a 1-1 draw at Burnley, but it was a better night for their north London rivals Tottenham, who claimed an emphatic 3-0 win over Manchester City at White Hart Lane.

Liverpool bounced back from their weekend defeat at the hands of Arsenal by defeating Wigan 2-1 at Anfield.

Grant, who was sacked as Chelsea boss after their 2008 Champions League final defeat to Manchester United, saw his new charges completely outclassed in the opening period and it was remarkable that the home side only went in at the interval with a one-goal advantage.

That came courtesy of a 23rd-minute strike from Anelka following good approach work by Brazilian defender Alex.

But within six minutes of the restart, Portsmouth were back on level terms. Frederic Piquionne fired home from ten yards after Jamie O'Hara's free-kick had ricocheted through the wall and into the path of the Pompey striker.

Chelsea did not look like re-establishing their

lead but the league leaders were thrown a lifeline when Mark Wilson pulled down Branislav Ivanovic in the area and Lampard thumped in the penalty with 11 minutes left.

Arsenal had threatened to overtake Burnley in the opening stages at Turf Moor with Andre Arshavin hitting the post after Cesc Fabregas had given the Gunners a 7th-minute lead.

But Burnley got back on level terms just before the half hour mark, Graham Alexander converting a penalty after Andre Bikey was pulled down by Thomas Vermaelen.

Chris Eagles struck a post for Burnley early in the second half and both sides spurned chances to claim all three points.

Croatian midfielder Niko Kranjcar scored twice as Tottenham seriously dented Manchester City's prospects of a top four finish with a win that left their visitors in eighth place in the table.

Kranjcar fired Tottenham into a first-half lead after a Peter Crouch header had been blocked. Jermain Defoe's 14th goal of the season then made the points safe after the interval with the striker running on to a Crouch flick-on and Kranjcar claimed his second of the night in stoppage time.

David Ngog gave Liverpool an early lead against Wigan when he met Fabio Aurelio's 10th-minute cross with a glancing header past former Reds goalkeeper Chris Kirkland.

Ngog should have doubled Liverpool's lead just before the break but fired narrowly wide and it was not until Fernando Torres came off the bench and found the net with 11 minutes left that the points were safe, although Charles N'Zogbia's injury-time effort for Wigan ensured a couple of nervous moments right at the end.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona star Lionel Messi (R) scores past Atlante goalkeeper Federico Vilar during their Club World Cup semifinal in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

## CLUB WORLD CUP

## A Barca masterclass

Football

APP, Abu Dhabi

European champions Barcelona produced a masterclass to beat Mexican side Atlante 3-1 here on Wednesday and book their place in the World Cup final.

The Americans, who open their World Cup adventure June 12 against England, announced Wednesday they had booked a date at Amsterdam ArenA against the third-ranked Dutch squad.

It will be the one chance US coach Bob Bradley has to see top European club talent released from team commitments as well as a full lineup from US Major League Soccer clubs, who will have not yet started their 2010 season.

The Dutch are 3-0 against the Americans, winning 1-0 at Amsterdam in 2004 in their most recent meeting.

### Scotland eye Levein

APP, Glasgow

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