

'Maicon off market'

Football
AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti ended weeks of speculation on Monday by stating that Brazilian full-back Maicon will not be following former coach Jose Mourinho to Real Madrid.

The 29-year-old had been coveted by the Spanish giants all summer but the two sides had failed to come to an agreement on the player's value.

And having earlier in the day suggested he didn't know what was going on, Moratti was more decisive in the afternoon.

"Maicon is staying at Inter," he told reporters. "He was wanted by other clubs, as were other players."

"They consider him good, so good that, perhaps, I was convinced to not sell him. I've taken Maicon off the market."

Moratti's comments were in stark contrast to what he said during the morning when he told reporters: "I know less than you do."

Maicon's agent Antonio Caliendo had also added fuel to the uncertainty when he told Italian news agency Ansa: "I can't make any comment, we'll talk (on Monday)."

But it seems that Maicon's commitment to the club jersey, with which he and Inter won the

treble last season, played a significant role in keeping him in Milan.

Maicon has been excellent in pre-season and has shown no signs of hankering after a move away.

"The most important role was the Brazilian full-back's behaviour during these weeks," added Moratti.

"Also for his character, the behaviour he's shown during this period, all these things were fundamental."

The move is believed to have stumbled over money with Real rumoured to have offered 24 million euros and Inter wanting 30 million euros.

New Inter coach Rafael Benitez was keen to keep the former Monaco player on his books.

"Maicon is without a doubt a good player who made a difference in many matches last season," said Benitez.

"He's an important player for us, we know Real Madrid are interested in him but, I repeat, he's important for us."

"He's here and right now we think that he wants to win, as the whole team does, together."

Inter's evergreen club captain Javier Zanetti, also pleaded with his South American teammate to stay with the club.

"We hope Maicon will stay with us, he's the best full-back we have and also in the world. If he stays it will be very important for us."

Bayern won't release Ribery for probe

Football
AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich will not release their French star Franck Ribery to appear before a French Football Federation (FFF) disciplinary commission later this month to explain his national team's training ground strike at the World Cup, the German team said on Monday.

Ribery is among five France internationals ordered to appear before the FFF on August 17 to answer questions on the team's strike after Nicolas Anelka was sent home from the World Cup for insulting coach Raymond Domenech.

"This invitation or summons was not fixed in agreement with Bayern Munich," club president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said in a statement.

"According to FIFA's statutes clubs are not obliged to free their players apart from dates fixed in the international calendar.

"That is not the case here. For this reason Bayern Munich will not let Franck Ribery go to this hearing."

Rummenigge said the team had not appreciated hearing about the summons in the press.

"The French Federation does not have the right to arbitrarily remove Franck Ribery from his commitments to Bayern," he continued.

"Preparations for the next Bundesliga season go before the resolution of conflicts generated in the World Cup by the French Federation."

Bayern are due to play a German Cup tie on August 16 and the next day will begin preparations for their August 20 Bundesliga opener against Wolfsburg.

Five French players have been targeted by the FFF because they were deemed to have had key roles in the strike.

Patrice Evra as the captain, Ribery as vice-captain, Anelka for insulting Domenech, Eric Abidal for his refusal to play France's final World Cup match against South Africa, and Jeremy Toulalan for writing the statement issued by the players announcing their intention to strike.

As a result of their behaviour in South Africa all members of the French World Cup squad were left out of Laurent Blanc's squad for his first game in charge, a friendly against Norway in Oslo on August 11.

Ribery is also facing trouble on another front after being charged with having sex with an under-age prostitute.

The Bayern Munich player, who faces up to three years in prison if convicted, has admitted paying for sex with Zahia Dehar but denies knowing the call girl was under 18 at the time.

Mario set for debut

Football
AFP, Rome

New Italy coach Cesare Prandelli said on Monday he will likely start Manchester City target Mario Balotelli in Tuesday's friendly in London against Ivory Coast.

Prandelli will be taking charge of his first match with the national team having replaced Marcello Lippi following the 2006 world champions' disastrous defence of their title in South Africa.

Balotelli, who will turn 20 two days after the match, is a controversial figure in Italian football.

Born to Ghanaian immigrant parents but brought up in an Italian foster family, Balotelli is regarded by many as Italy's brightest young talent.

But despite breaking into the Inter Milan team at just 17, he struggled to command a regular place under Jose Mourinho over the last two years.

He has suffered racial abuse from the stands while his temperament has been regularly brought into question with Inter willing to let him leave and join former boss Roberto Mancini at Manchester City.

But while Lippi never called him up, Prandelli has announced his intention to spark a new attacking, young generation in the Italy shirt and said the troubled teenager will probably start.

"Nine of the 11 places are already decided. I have two doubts, the goalkeeper and the left winger," said Prandelli.

"Although I believe I'll start Mario in this position.

"The idea of starting Balotelli is born from the desire to immediately exploit all the attacking potential at my disposal, which is huge."

"I want him to give me everything, then when he's run out of gas, I'll substitute him."

"However, I'll only be sure tomorrow morning (of who

he picks)."

Prandelli's choices and indeed his feeling regarding the players at his disposal is in stark contrast to that of predecessor Lippi.

Lippi often complained of having few attacking options and no superstars in his squad.

But he left Balotelli, Antonio Cassano and Brazilian-born Amauri behind, and all three are expected to start for Prandelli.

Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci with team-mate Marco Motta at right-back and former Juve left-back Christian Molinaro completing the back four.

The goalkeeper position is to be decided between uncapped pair, Palermo's Salvatore Sirigu and Bologna's Emiliano Viviano.

If that is indeed the team and Balotelli starts, it would mean five players making their international debuts and Prandelli is banking on



Italy forward Antonio Cassano (L) controls the ball during a training session at the Italian Football Federation technical centre of Coverciano in Florence yesterday ahead of their international friendly against Ivory Coast.

The former Fiorentina boss is believed to be favouring a 4-2-3-1 formation with Amauri as the lone forward and Cassano behind him, flanked by Simone Pepe on the right and either Balotelli or Napoli's Fabio Quagliarella on the left.

AS Roma's Daniele De Rossi should line up alongside Sampdoria's Angelo Palombo as two defensive midfielders.

The centre-backs are likely to be Juventus pair Giorgio



Bordeaux midfielder Yoann Gourcuff (R) tries to beat Montpellier defender Mapou Yangambiwa during their Ligue One encounter at the Mosson Stadium on Sunday.

Evra keen to play again

REUTERS, Paris

French defender Patrice Evra, facing sanctions for leading a player revolt at the World Cup, does not understand why he should be punished and wants to wear his country's colours again.

Evra was captain of the team that boycotted a training session in South Africa in support of striker Nicolas Anelka, who was banished from the squad for insulting coach Raymond Domenech.

The Manchester United defender was one of five players summoned by the French Football Federation (FFF) to face a disciplinary hearing scheduled for later this month.

World Cup-winning full-back and now FFF official Lilian Thuram believes Evra should never play for France again but the player himself would prefer not to dwell on the events in South Africa.

"I am surprised because I had the impression everybody wanted to turn the World Cup page," Evra told French daily Le Figaro in an interview released on Monday.

"We need to think about the future. Why sanction us (the five players summoned) more than others?"

"I can't see my future without the France team," he told Le Figaro.

The 29-year-old also said there was no dialogue between the players and the coach at the World Cup and the decision to expel Anelka was unfair.

The five summoned by the FFF are Evra, Anelka, Eric Abidal, Franck Ribery and Jeremy Toulalan.

Brown follows Robinson

AFP, London

Manchester United defender Wes Brown became the second England player on Sunday to retire from international football, dealing another worrying snub to coach Fabio Capello.

Just hours after Blackburn goalkeeper Paul Robinson said he was quitting, Brown, who was left out of the squad to face Hungary at Wembley on Wednesday, also called time on his international career.

"After a lot of thought and with a very heavy heart, I have decided the time is right for me to retire from international football," said Brown in a statement.

"At the age of 30 I feel it is right for me to stand aside and let younger players come through, which allows me to concentrate on my club career."

Brown won 23 caps in an international career which began against Hungary in 1999.

He was part of Sven-Goran Eriksson's 2002 World Cup squad in Japan and South Korea, but did not play a game.

Bocaly stuns Bordeaux

AFP, Paris



Bordeaux, having lost coach Laurent Blanc to the France national job, had high hopes of a strong start under former French star Tigana after finishing sixth last time out.

But they suffered their first loss in a season opener in six years as they failed to find their way past a side which had not beaten them at home for 13 years.

Montpellier, still smarting after their Europa League elimination midweek to Hugarian side Győr, made most of the early running with striker Olivier Giroud missing a chance after four minutes when his header flew over the bar.

It was then the turn of new recruit Marco Estrada, with the Chilean international seeing a 35-metre drive saved by

goalkeeper Kevin Olimpia.

But back after the break Bocaly made no mistake and found the net with a header after finishing off an Estrada freekick from the penalty area.

Three minutes later Bordeaux had a freekick chance which Wendel took only for Montpellier 'keeper Geoffrey Jourden to receive an acrobatic kick in the face from Yoann Gourcuff as he moved out to catch the ball.

That led to a scuffle between a dozen players from both teams.

French champions Marseille also slumped to a shock defeat on Saturday as they fell to promoted Caen as Paris Saint Germain got off to a flying start to sit top.

Marseille landed their first title since 1992 last term but Didier Deschamps' side were reeling after falling 2-1 at home to the Normandy side.

Nicolas Seube gave Caen the lead after 53 minutes at the Stade Velodrome.

Deschamps made two quick substitutions with Mamadou Samassa coming on for Andre Ayew and Hatem Ben Arfa replacing Mathieu Valbuena, and the strategy initially paid off with Samassa

Ancelotti stays positive

AFP, London

Carlo Ancelotti insists Chelsea's poor form in pre-season won't have any effect on their defence of the Premier League title.

Ancelotti's side go into Saturday's Premier League opener against West Bromwich Albion on the back of four successive defeats after the champions were beaten 3-1 by Manchester United in the Community Shield at Wembley on Sunday.

Since winning their first pre-season match against Crystal Palace, the Blues have been beaten by Ajax, Eintracht Frankfurt, Hamburg and now United.

Although some of those defeats didn't feature the Chelsea players who were in action at the World Cup, Ancelotti was able to send out a virtually full-strength team against United and they still came unstuck.

The Italian saw his side trail to goals from Antonio Valencia and Javier Hernandez and although Salomon Kalou reduced the deficit late on there was still

time for Dimitar Berbatov to add a third for United.

Ancelotti is aware there are areas of Chelsea's play that must improve, but he is confident they will be up to full speed once his World Cup players, including the likes of Didier Drogba, Ashley Cole and Frank Lampard, reach full fitness after their late return to training.

"It was not a good pre-season for results. We lost four games. We had bad results but our training was good," Ancelotti said.

"We need the players who have just come back to have more time to train. We knew it would be a difficult pre-season. In two weeks the players who came back from the World Cup will be 100 per cent."

"We have to look forward with optimism and trust for the next game and the start of the Premier League. We will be at the top in the Premier League."

Ancelotti's hopes of making a flying start to the new season have been boosted by the news that goalkeeper Petr Cech and defender Alex are both set to return to training this week and should be fit to face

Appiah joins Cesena

AFP, Rome

Ghana midfielder Stephen Appiah has signed a one year deal with Cesena, the Serie A new-boys revealed.

The 29-year-old was part of the Ghana squad's memorable World Cup run to the quarterfinals in South Africa.

He spent last season at Bologna but played only two games and has played only a handful of club matches over the last three seasons.

But the Black Stars captain, who nonetheless was used only as a substitute in South Africa, has a wealth of experience in Italy where he has also donned the jerseys of Juventus, Parma, Udinese and Brescia since arriving in the country in 2000.

Following two years with Juve from 2003-05, he spent three seasons with Fenerbahce in Turkey.



French legend Zinedine Zidane (R) dribbles the ball during a charity match, to raise funds for victims of severe flooding, at the La Beaujoire Stadium in Nantes on Sunday.