

El Phenomenon calls time on soccer



"I wanted to continue, but I can't do it any more. I think of an action, but I can't do it the way I want to. It's time. It's the body that's hurting me"

FULL NAME: RONALDO LUIZ NAZARIO DE LIMA

Date of birth: September 22, 1976
Place of birth: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Position: striker
Club career: Cruzeiro (BRA/1993-94), PSV Eindhoven (NED/1994-96), Barcelona (ESP/1996-97), Inter Milan (ITA/1997-2002), Real Madrid (ESP/2002-2007), AC Milan (2007-2008), Corinthians (2008-2011)
International appearances: 97
International goals: 62
First cap: Brazil 2-0 Argentina, March 23, 1994
First international goal: Brazil 3-0 Ireland, May 3, 1994
Last cap: France 1-0 Brazil, July 1, 2006
Last international goal: Brazil 3-0 Ghana, June 27, 2006

INTERNATIONAL HONOURS
World Cup: 1994, 2002; 19 matches, 15 goals
Copa America: 1997, 1999; 13 matches, 10 goals
Confederations Cup: 1997

PERSONAL HONOURS
Golden Ball (best player): 1998 World Cup
Golden Boot (top scorer): 2002 World Cup
Ballon d'Or (European Footballer of the Year): 1997, 2002
FIFA World Player of the Year: 1996, 1997, 2002

World Cup finals tournaments when he scored his 15th goal at the 2006 tournament in Germany.

He was twice named European Footballer of the Year, in 1997 and 2002, and finished his international career with 62 goals in 97 appearances.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time, 'El Fenomeno' (The Phenomenon) won the World Cup with Brazil for the first time in 1994, though on that occasion the 17-year-old was part of the squad and did not play.

In 1998, he was among the losing finalists, beaten 3-0 at Stade de France by a rampant French side that included the inspirational Zinedine Zidane.

Brazil's star striker suffered a convulsive fit on the eve of the match and was removed from the starting line-up.

In a dramatic changing-room reshuffle, he was reinstated just before kick-off but was a shadow of the intimidating forward who had scored four goals in the run-up to the final.

But the 2002 tournament was where he made history.

Shrugging off injury in the tournament, which was hosted by Japan and South Korea, he played a key role in helping Brazil to the trophy, scoring both goals in his country's 2-0 win over Germany in the final in Yokohama.

At the 2006 World Cup in Germany he took his World Cup tally to 15 goals, surpassing the previous record held by Gerd Mueller by one goal.

AFP, Sao Paulo

Three-time FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldo, whose goalscoring genius led Brazil to the 2002 World Cup title, confirmed his retirement on Monday at the age of 34.

The tearful Corinthians striker announced his decision at a press

conference in Sao Paulo.

"I'm stopping my career as a professional footballer," he said, his voice breaking. "It's been a beautiful, emotional, marvellous career.

"These last two years, I've had a long series of injuries, from one side to the other, one leg to the other, one muscle to the other. The pain pushed me to

think about the end of my career."

Ronaldo also revealed that he suffered from a thyroid problem that had made it difficult to control his weight.

"Four years ago, in Milan, I discovered that I suffered from an under-active thyroid that slowed down my metabolism and that to control it, I had to take hormones that weren't

authorised in football as they were considered a form of doping," he said.

"Lots of people must regret having made jokes about my weight. But I feel no anger towards anyone."

Having earlier indicated that he hoped to play on until the end of the year, injuries and Corinthians' early elimination from the Copa

Libertadores prompted him to bring forward his retirement.

During a glittering 14-year spell in Europe, Ronaldo scored goals at a prolific rate for PSV Eindhoven, Barcelona, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and AC Milan, before returning to Brazil in 2009.

He won the World Cup with Brazil in 2002 and became the leading scorer in

Real show real character Juve dent Inter hopes

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid showed real character to close the gap on leaders Barcelona to five points winning 1-0 at Espanyol on Sunday, despite playing virtually the whole match with 10 men after goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas was sent off after just 90 seconds.

Brazilian international left back Marcelo scored the decisive goal on 23

minutes as Real took advantage of Barcelona's 1-1 draw against Sporting Gijon on Sunday to edge closer in the title race - but it took a battling display from Madrid's 'Galacticos'.

Real had collected one point from the last six on the road and got off to the worst possible start at the Cornella-El Prat with captain Casillas red-carded for a rash challenge outside the area.

Barely a minute and a half into the match, the keeper came out to stop Jose Callejon in his tracks on the edge of the box and the referee immediately brandished a red card.

Real coach Jose Mourinho sacrificed Argentine winger Angel di Maria and substitute goalkeeper Antonio Adan, a 23-year-old from the youth academy, came on for an unexpected debut.

Despite the numerical disadvantage, Real looked more dangerous and Sami Khedira tested Carlos Kameni in the fifth minute with a low drive before Marcelo clipped the top of the crossbar minutes later.

Real scored on 23 minutes with Ronaldo feeding Marcelo

on the left and the Brazilian hammered a first time shot past Carlos Kameni, who should have done better, to give the visitors the lead.

Madrid were the stronger side early in the second half although Espanyol were unlucky to have Callejon flagged offside in the 53rd minute when the striker was clear on goal.

The extra man started to tell as Espanyol dominated possession and it was backs to the wall for Real as they absorbed a good 15 minutes of pressure, but debutant Adan was largely untested.

Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor missed two great chances to wrap up the points for Real in the closing stages with Kameni foiling him on both occasions. However, the misses didn't prove costly.

Elsewhere, Villarreal fell two points behind rivals Valencia in the Champions League race as they crashed to their second successive league defeat with a 1-0 loss at Deportivo La Coruna on Sunday.

Defender Alberto Lopo's goal on the hour sealed three vital points for Depor, who move out of the relegation zone, as Villarreal failed to score for the second consecutive game.

A set-piece undid Villarreal, with Ivan Riki heading down a free-kick from the left and centre-back Lopo reacting first to slide in a rare goal.

Villarreal, beaten at home by promoted Levante last time out, should have equalised in the 82nd minute but substitute Marco Ruben headed over from close range.

Depor move out of the relegation zone and are now three points clear of Osasuna, who replace them in the bottom three.

AFP, Rome



Alessandro Matri was the hero as Juventus stunned an out-of-sorts Inter Milan 1-0 in Turin on Sunday to dent the champions' title hopes.

Inter now trail leaders AC Milan by eight points, with a game in hand, after falling to only their second defeat under Leonardo.

The champions produced a limp display against a dogged Juve, who breathed new life into their own Champions League hopes, moving up to sixth.

The previously in-form Inter started in confident fashion and carved Juve open after just two minutes.

However, with the option of two unmarked strikers to aim at, Wesley Sneijder tried to pick out Samuel Eto'o only to hit his pass straight at Frederik Sorensen, the ball spinning up and into the path of his other option, Giampaolo Pazzini, who scuffed his volley well off target.

On 14 minutes Juve almost took a fortuitous lead as Alberto Aquilani's overhit cross almost dropped under the bar.

In a half a few chances it was unsurprisingly am mistake that led to the opener.

Ivan Cordoba mistimed his leap to meet Sorensen's cross from the right, leaving Matri unmarked to head home from seven yards.

Inter fashioned an almost identical chance of their own on 50 minutes with Maicon centering for Pazzini but his header was straight at Gianluigi Buffon, who parried easily.

Despite having struggled throughout this season, Juve were giving as good as they got and Maicon had to be alert to block Matri when pulling the trigger from 10 yards before Giorgio Chiellini headed over from

the resulting corner.

Sneijder had a sight of goal on 66 minutes but his fierce drive hit his own player, substitute Goran Pandev.

Pazzini followed that up with a volley that probably landed closer to the corner flag than the goal.

Inter's best chance came eight minutes from the end as Eto'o played a one-two with Sneijder, took the Dutch playmaker's lofted return but Buffon came out bravely to crowd the Cameroon captain's shot.

Juve almost punished Inter on the counter as Simone Pepe got down the left and crossed for Matri whose shot flashed past the near post.

A minute from time Inter knocked on the door again as Maicon surged forward and crossed from the right only for Eto'o at the back post to blast his shot from five yards onto the bar before moments later swinging at thin air when attempting a volley from an angle.

Earlier, Lazio kept their slim Serie A title hopes alive as they won 2-0 away to Brescia.

Edy Reja's team remain seven points off Milan, who thrashed Parma 4-0 on Saturday, and moved above Inter into third.

Goals from Alvaro Gonzalez on 18 minutes and Libor Kozak just before the hour mark ensured Lazio maintained their grip on a Champions League place.

Udinese are not letting up in their pursuit of a top four finish as they cruised to a 3-0 win at troubled Cesena.

Antonio Di Natale scored another brace, either side of a strike by Gokhan Inler, keeping fifth placed Udinese just two points behind third-placed Lazio.

It wasn't such happy news for Palermo, whose hopes of securing a Champions League finish suffered a blow as they fell to a shock 4-2 defeat at home to Fiorentina.

An air of deja vu

AFP, Paris



There was a distinct air of deja vu about the draw for the Champions League round of 16, with six teams drawn to face sides they encountered during last season's competition.

Real Madrid, seeking a 10th title, will have a chance to avenge their exit at the same stage last season when they face Lyon, while Arsenal are set to resume hostilities with their quarterfinal conquerors Barcelona.

The most emotive reunion, meanwhile, sees Bayern Munich cross swords with Inter Milan, who defeated the Bavarians 2-0 in last season's final in Madrid.

Arsenal have perhaps the most unenviable task against a Barcelona side who have this season raised their standards to even more breath-taking levels.

A 5-0 thrashing of Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid in November was widely heralded as one of the most complete performances in the sport's history and they recently went on a record 16-game winning streak in La Liga.

Lionel Messi, winner of the inaugural FIFA Ballon d'Or award, has already scored 37 goals in all competitions to date and Arsenal know well what a devastatingly effective adversary he is.

The Argentine dribbling maestro netted all four goals in Barca's 4-1 defeat of the Gunners at Camp Nou last year, following a thrilling 2-2 draw in the first leg.

Arsenal tackle Barcelona at the Emirates on Wednesday, with their north London

rivals Tottenham Hotspur set to take centre stage the night before when they travel to seven-time champions AC Milan.

Champions League debutants Spurs illuminated the group phase, losing 4-3 at Inter before beating the defending champions 3-1 at White Hart Lane.

Two-time runners-up Valencia host Schalke on Tuesday, with Roma and last-16 debutants Shakhtar Donetsk sharing the bill with Arsenal and Barcelona on Wednesday.

Real Madrid closed the gap on La Liga leaders Barcelona to five points with a 1-0 win at Espanyol on Sunday but they will be wary of Lyon, whom they have failed to beat in six previous Champions League meetings.

Lyon prevailed 2-1 on aggregate in last season's round-of-16 encounter, after Miralem Pjanic scored a crucial 75th-minute equaliser in the second leg at the Bernabeu.

Real visit Lyon on February 22, when FC Copenhagen -- appearing at this stage of the competition for the first time -- welcome big-spending Premier League giants Chelsea to the Danish capital.

Bayern will hope to put their domestic difficulties to one side when they tackle Inter at the San Siro the following evening.

Louis van Gaal's side are 13 points behind Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga but recently welcomed back star forwards Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben after spells on the sidelines.

Manchester United, who fell to Bayern in last season's quarterfinals, face French champions Marseille in the remaining tie.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

Valencia v Schalke

Live from 1:00am (Wednesday)

TEN Action+

UEFA Champions League

AC Milan v Tottenham



ICC WC Warm-up Match

Bangladesh v Pakistan

Time: 2:30pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National



Juventus forward Alessandro Matri (C) fights for the ball with Inter Milan midfielder Housseine Kharja (L) during their Serie A encounter at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP