



The Euro 2012 trophy is displayed to the public during a parade through the streets of Kiev on Friday.

PHOTO: ReUTERS

End of an era

Football

AFP, Rome

Filippo Inzaghi, Gennaro Gattuso and Alessandro Nesta will end their AC Milan careers against Novara on Sunday as the end of an era is all but completed at the San Siro.

After those three are gone, only Clarence Seedorf and Massimo Ambrosini will remain from the last great Milan side that lifted the Champions League in 2007.

Inzaghi is particularly loved because he scored a brace in that final in Athens as Milan defeated Liverpool 2-1 to avenge their penalty shoot-out final defeat by the same opponents two years before.

Already, there was a feeling that the side were coming to the end of their powers but certain figures held on.

That is no longer the case, though, with Inzaghi, 38, set for retirement, Nesta, 36, heading probably to the United States, and Gattuso, 34, facing an uncertain future.

Club captain Ambrosini, 34, is staying on for another year but the fate of 36-year-old Seedorf has yet to be confirmed.

It is the departure of iconic figure Inzaghi that will truly drill home the reality that Milan have moved on from that era.

They won the Champions League in 2003 and 2007, while reaching the final in 2005, as well as winning the league title in 2004.

"The reality surpassed our most beautiful dreams," said Inzaghi in a parting note to Milan's fans.

"Two goals against Liverpool, two years after Istanbul (where they lost the final), the seventh Champions League. Destiny gave us something we didn't even dare hope for."

It was one of the great Milan teams but all good things must come to an end.

Already the likes of defenders Cafu and Paolo Maldini, as well as coach Carlo Ancelotti, had gone, while Andrea Pirlo left last summer.

Pirlo had spent 10 years at Milan, the same number as Nesta. Inzaghi has spent one more, while Gattuso has been there for 13 years.

QPR hurdle for City

AFP, London

Manchester City are determined to usher in a new era for English football on Sunday by clinching their first title for 44 years as the curtain comes down on a thrilling Premier League campaign.

Four years after the serial under-achievers from the blue half of Manchester were bought by the Abu Dhabi United Group, the club's fabulously wealthy owners are poised to see the biggest return yet on their substantial investment

Victory over Queens Park Rangers at Eastlands on Sunday will -- barring a miraculous scoreline for Manchester United at Sunderland -- be enough to see Roberto Mancini's side claim the league crown.

Yet City, whose owners have spent nearly £1 billion (\$1.6bn) on the club according to some estimates, are determined to ensure that victory in this year's league campaign is only a stepping stone to greater glory.

Yaya Toure, the Ivory Coast international who has been one of the cornerstones of City's success this season, is convinced that the club can achieve global dominance in the years ahead.

City are already reported to be planning summer transfer moves for Lille winger Eden Hazard, as well as Napoli's highly rated Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani.

"That's why I came here, to help the team, give my experience to the young guys and to help the club go forward and make it bigger than any club in the world," Toure said.

"But now we are at a good step. To make history, we have to win something and follow the example of what we did last year," added Toure, reflecting on the 2011 FA Cup triumph that ended City's long trophy drought.

Bitter cross-town rivals United, meanwhile, are left clinging to the hope that City's historical reputation as

football cannot be discounted, and denying City the title on the last day of the season would be particularly sweet for QPR manager Mark Hughes, who was sacked by City in acrimonious circumstances in December 2009.

Former Manchester United striker Hughes insists, however, that revenge is the last thing on his mind as he attempts to steer Rangers to safety.

"People keep throwing that word (revenge) up but it is not in my mind at all," Hughes said. "From my point of view, I am completely focused on what we have to do, as you would expect."

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has admitted he expects City to seal the deal on Sunday, but could not resist one final attempt to play on his rivals' nerves by warning that failure at Eastlands could leave lasting scars on the club's psyche.

"On the face of it you expect City to win and so do I. But City have got to win. It's an enormous challenge for them because the disappointment of losing the game would be unbelievable," said Ferguson.

"It's the last game of the season. It's fantastic for the neutral, fantastic for the media but agony for both clubs, although it will be more so for City if they lose it."

Another side keeping a close eye on QPR's match will be third-bottom Bolton Wanderers, who must win at Stoke City and hope Hughes' side are beaten by City if they are to stand any chance of avoiding relegation.

Van Buyten eyes Chelsea clash

AFP, Berlin

Belgium defender Daniel Van Buyten has made his comeback for Bayern Munich's reserves in his bid for a place in next Saturday's Champions League final against Chelsea.

With Bayern trio Holger Badstuber, Luiz Gustavo and David Alaba all suspended for the final at Munich's Allianz Arena, 34-year-old centre-back Van Buyten is back in contention for selection.

After four months out with a foot injury, Van Buyten played 62 minutes of Bayern reserves' 3-0 defeat at home to Ingolstadt reserves on Friday night.

Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes has said he will only think about picking Van Buyten to face Chelsea if the towering centre-back "has played again", as the defender made his last Bundesliga appearance in January.

The Belgian, who has made 66 appearances for his country, travelled to Berlin on Saturday to watch Bayern take on German champions Borussia Dortmund in the German Cup final at the Olympic Stadium.

Final tickets too expensive

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness has hit out at UEFA over ticket prices for the Champions League final that he fears will exclude many of the club's fans.

Tickets for the final between Bayern and Chelsea, to be played at Bayern's Allianz Arena on May 19, will cost between 370 and 3,500 euros (\$480 and \$4,520) according to a policy put in place by European football's ruling body.

Bayern believe that policy will prevent many of their fans from attending and Hoeness said he would be looking to "talk to" UEFA again over the issue.

"We have to speak to UEFA about this again because, at the end of the day, football is a sport that belongs to the people," Hoeness said in the German magazine Focus.

Bayern's most expensive ticket for the home leg of their semifinal against nine-time European champions Real Madrid was 120 euros.

Ronaldinho left out

AP, Sao Paulo



Brazil coach Mano Menezes did not pick Ronaldinho for exhibitions ahead of the London Olympics, limiting the player's chance of making it to the games.

Neymar, Alexandre Pato, Oscar and Paulo Henrique Ganso were among the 23 players summoned for the exhibitions against Denmark on May 26, the United States on May 30, Mexico on June 3 and Argentina on June 9.

The players selected on Friday are expected to form the core of the team that will try to win its first Olympic gold medal, and Menezes hinted that those not on the list likely won't be in London.

"It's correct to affirm that these 23 names are the base of the Olympic team," Menezes said. "It's unlikely we will make any changes. After making evaluations in the last few months, we think these are the names (for London)."

Only six players on the list are older than 23 - David Luiz, Thiago Silva, Jefferson, Daniel Alves, Marcelo and Hulk.

The Olympic tournament is played with under-23 squads, but each team may use three over-23 players.

Two-time world player of the year Ronaldinho had been constantly summoned by Menezes despite poor performances with Brazilian club Flamengo,

but Menezes said it was time try something different.

"If things are not going well, you make a change," Menezes said. "But you have to respect Ronaldinho, he is a world champion. He is they type of player who can rebound and surprise everyone."

The 32-year-old Ronaldinho had been in the list of 52 players pre-selected for the London Games. He played in the 2008 Beijing Games, when Brazil lost the semifinal to Lionel Messi's Argentina and finished with the bronze.

Inter Milan goalkeeper Julio Cesar and Ramires, who helped Chelsea reach the Champions League final, were in that pre-list but also were left out by Menezes on Friday. Real Madrid's Kaka didn't even make the 52-player list.

Alexandre Pato is getting another chance in the team after missing several Brazil matches because of a series of injuries while playing with AC Milan.

The 20-year-old Neymar will be the main player carrying Brazil's hopes in London, but other promising athletes included in the list are playmaker Lucas and forward Oscar, who scored Brazil's three goals in the 3-2 victory over Portugal in the Under-20 World Cup final last year.

The Olympic tournament is the only significant soccer competition Brazil hasn't won. The five-time World Cup champions won the Olympic silver in 1984 and 1988 and the bronze in 1996 and 2008.

Hamilton takes pole

AFP, Barcelona

Briton Lewis Hamilton took his third pole position of the season and the 150th of McLaren's Formula One history with a dazzling lap in the final minute of Saturday's qualifying for the Spanish Grand Prix.

The 27-year-old Hamilton, the 2008 world champion, clocked a best lap of 1min 21.707sec to finish half a second clear of nearest rival, Venezuelan Pastor Maldonado of Williams, at the end of a closely-contested and highly-tactical session.

Hamilton's third pole of the season was the 22nd of his career and stretched his run of front row starts to five in succession. For Williams, it was a great present for team founder Frank Williams, who was celebrating his 70th birthday in the team garage. Spaniard Fernando Alonso delighted his home fans when he claimed third place for Ferrari ahead of Frenchman Romain Grosjean and his Lotus team-mate Finn Kimi Raikkonen.

Mexican Sergio Perez of Sauber was sixth ahead of German Nico Rosberg of Mercedes and, unexpectedly, defending champion and compatriot Sebastian Vettel of Red Bull, who will line up eighth.



PHOTO: AFP

McLaren Mercedes' driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates his pole position during the qualifying session of the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya yesterday.

SpORTS POLL

WEEKLY qUESTION

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Live from 5:45pm

English Premiership

Sunderland v Man United

Live from 8:00pm

TEN Action

Serie A

Juventus v Atalanta

Live from 7:00pm

La Liga

Real Madrid v Mallorca

Live from 12:00am (Monday)

Fight for UCL spot

AFP, Rome



Juventus claimed their 28th league title last weekend and Roma dropped out of the Europa League running, which means there are only two issues left unresolved in Serie A ahead of Sunday's final matches.

The first is who will join Juve and AC Milan in the Champions League next season.

Udinese are in pole position and need only a point from their final game away to Catania on Sunday to ensure they finish third.

If they fail to do so, then one of three teams could catch them.

Napoli have the edge over Udinese in head-to-head meetings but are three points behind.

They would need to beat Siena and hope Udinese lose but they would also be dependent on the real tie-breaker in Rome, where Lazio host Inter Milan.

Lazio are the closest to Udinese, trailing by two points, with Napoli and Inter one point further back.

Lazio have an inferior head-to-head record with Udinese, so they still need the northerners to lose.

Inter are sixth but can still qualify for the Champions League if they win, Udinese lose and Napoli fail to win.

They have the head-to-head edge on Udinese but not Napoli.

The southerners will finish above both Inter and Udinese if they all end level on

points but should Lazio draw, Udinese lose and Napoli win, the situation would become even more complicated.

The three-way head-to-heads would leave them all with five points and a level goal difference, which means actual goal difference would come into play.

On that count, Napoli would win hands down and midfielder Marek Hamsik is convinced there is still hope.

"We're concentrating on Siena because we want to finish the season at home in the best way possible," he said.

"Then we'll wait for the others' results because hope is the last thing to die."

All the calculations will become redundant if Udinese avoid defeat, not that coach Francesco Guidolin is taking anything for granted.

"We're not favourites, we're in the race like everyone else," he insisted.

"The fact that we're competing with teams who represent footballing metropolises, full of footballing history and successes, fills us with pride.

"We'll do what we can to win but the others want it too. I believe it's still all to play for."

Whatever happens, those who miss out will at least be guaranteed a Europa League slot as the Italian Cup final a week later pits Juve against Napoli.

Down at the bottom, Novara and Cesena have already bitten the dust and Lecce are going to need a helping hand to avoid joining them.

FIXTURES

Sunday

(1845GMT unless otherwise stated): Fiorentina v Cagliari, Juventus v Atalanta, AC Milan v Novara (all 1300GMT), Cesena v Roma, Parma v Bologna (both 1600GMT), Catania v Udinese, Chievo v Lecce, Genoa v Palermo, Lazio v Inter Milan, Napoli v Siena