

Arbeloa surprised

REUTERS, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo's sadness has come as a surprise to his Real Madrid team mates, defender Alvaro Arbeloa said as he joined up with the Spain squad on Tuesday

Portugal forward Ronaldo hit the sports headlines after Sunday's win over Granada, when he failed to celebrate the two goals he scored.

"I don't know what's up with Cristiano. It was a surprise for us as much as for you, we found out after the game," Real full back Arbeloa told reporters.

"At Madrid, we are a family and we will support him in any way he needs, just as we would do with Mesut Ozil, Michael Essien or whoever."

Local newspapers and radio stations have been full of speculation about the reasons behind the 27-year-old Ronaldo's apparently calculated outburst.

He was reported to have had a meeting with club president Florentino Perez on Saturday to say he did not feel he had the support of the dressing room, was unhappy and wanted to leave.

Ronaldo himself rejected the idea that he was downcast at losing out to Andres Iniesta for the Best Player in Europe award on Thursday.

Arbeloa dismissed suggestions that Ronaldo, who is one of the world's best-paid players earning some 11 million euros a year, was seeking an improved contract.

"It's true that Cristiano, like most of us, doesn't have the problems that many Spaniards have, but he will have his reasons for not being at his best and this is reasonable," Arbeloa said.

"I have never heard him talk about money, a longer deal, or wanting to go. I think he'll be here for many years.

"There has been too much made of his words. Maybe he needs more affection from everyone, I don't know, but if that is it, he will receive it from us."



France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris makes a save during a training session in Clairefontaine on Monday, four days ahead of their 2014 World Cup qualifying tie against Finland.

PHOTO:
AFP

'Bullying unacceptable'

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew has branded the bullying of Cologne's Kevin Pezzoni by fans as "unacceptable" after the defender was forced to quit the second division club after being threatened.

"It is unacceptable that this could happen," Loew said ahead of Germany's opening World Cup qualifier against the Faroe Islands on Friday in Hanover.

"We have to seriously consider how to avoid such things happening in the future."

Nearly three years after Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke committed suicide after suffering from depression, there deep concern here after Pezzoni, 23, quit Cologne having been confronted by menacing fans at his home last week.

A group of supporters targeted him by leaving a note on his car, threatening him with violence, then aggressively

confronted him at home after organising themselves using the Internet.

Having joined Cologne in 2008 from Blackburn Rovers, Pezzoni, who had his nose broken by a fan in February while celebrating in the city, told club coach Holger Stanislawski he no longer felt safe playing for the team.

Cologne have agreed to Pezzoni's request to have his contract terminated.

Germany's team manager Oliver Bierhoff, who spent a decade playing in the Italian league between 1991 and 2001, said he had witnessed similar things and called for them to be stamped out of football.

"I personally know of situations like this from my time in Italy," said the 44-year-old.

"These aren't fans, they are criminals who have to be watched and pushed out of the sport.

"It is not an easy thing to do, but we should not trivialise the issue and we have to work together to address it.

"Such a thing we don't want to see in

the sport, it has nothing to do with football."

Germany midfielder Andre Schuerrle said Pezzoni's desperation to leave Cologne shows things had got out of hand.

"If someone is pushed so far to take such emergency measures, it is certainly a crazy situation," said the Leverkusen star.

Ulf Baranowsky, managing director of Germany's professional footballers union, said he was following the Pezzoni case with "horror".

"If this continues, we will soon have conditions like in Mexico, where players have already been hunted to death. There have also been cases like this in South Africa," he told German daily Bild.

"These aren't isolated incidents.

"Cars are scratched, a player has had his leg broken, another suffered a broken nose in a disco. In Dresden, 11 graves were dug as a threat.

"The inhibition threshold (of fans) seems to be lowering, while the hysteria grows."



Italy players warm up during a training session at the Italian Football Federation Technical Centre in Coverciano on Monday, ahead of their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Bulgaria in Sofia on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Why all the fuss about Ronaldo?

PAUL PARKER



I was disappointed to read Cristiano Ronaldo's attention-grabbing comments about being unhappy at Real Madrid this week, but for me the whole saga demonstrates why he is inferior to Lionel Messi both as a

player and as a person.

After refusing to celebrate a goal against Granada Ronaldo told the press he was "sad" due to "professional issues", but then refused to elaborate further and left the juicy issue hanging in the air for the world's media to pounce on. It was a transparent ploy to court attention and pretty pathetic in my opinion.

I think it is all about ego and it is disappointing because Ronaldo is obviously a fantastic footballer - he doesn't need to do this. It is very weak from a player who is trying to become recognised as the best in the world.

Perhaps his frustration stems from the fact that he is clearly not the world's best. Statistics prove that it is his great rival Messi who is the best player on the globe - and the way the Barcelona forward conducts himself is also exemplary.

He is extraordinarily humble and never speaks out of turn. Messi is the ultimate example of a player who lets his football do the talking, and his football speaks louder than Ronaldo ever could with his comments to the press this week.

So why all the fuss? Ronaldo says that Madrid president Florentino Perez knows why he is unhappy. If that is the case then Perez should come out and enlighten us all. Otherwise this whirlwind of speculation will just run and run.

Is it because people agree that Messi is the best player in the world? Is it because Andres Iniesta won the Best Player in Europe award ahead of him? Is it because the focus is on Real Madrid rather than Ronaldo? Is he unhappy that Mourinho is the star of the show? Or is it because he has

contract negotiations on the horizon and wants to make a power play?

It is impossible to know. There are more questions than answers at the moment. What is certain is that it's another footballer who is at the top of the game and wants to capitalise on that by grabbing even more attention.

It is a hell of a scenario to get involved in just days after the close of the transfer window, and Madrid don't need this sort of circus around them. They want to win La Liga in the right way, a humble way, and I think they felt they didn't get enough respect for the manner in which they beat Barcelona to the title last season. Behaviour like this from Ronaldo won't help.

The Madrid officials and the fans want to celebrate great football and great achievements, like Ronaldo's success in scoring 150 goals in 149 games. But can they really enjoy such milestones when the player brings so much negative attention onto the club? It's unlikely he will leave but, if he does, in theory there are only two clubs who could afford to sign him: PSG and Manchester City. He isn't going to go to France because the profile of French football is not big enough for him, and equally I don't think City would give him the profile he desires.

The only club in England he could come and play for is Manchester United, and there is no way they could afford the transfer fee or wages, which would likely exceed £300,000 a week.

I would like to see him back in England if he behaves himself, but he last thing the Premier League needs is another circus act.

(Paul Parker enjoyed a distinguished career for club and country. The versatile defender won 19 England caps and played the 1990 World Cup semifinal against West Germany. After spells at Fulham and QPR, Paul joined Manchester United in 1991, where he helped the club claim their first league title for 26 years, and won the Double twice. During six seasons at Old Trafford, he played with legends such as Eric Cantona, Roy Keane and David Beckham).

Fenerbahce sign Meireles

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkish club Fenerbahce have signed midfielder Raul Meireles from Chelsea, the Premier League club said on their website on Monday.

Turkish media reports said Meireles had signed a four-year contract. Fenerbahce earlier said they had started negotiations to buy him in a statement to the Istanbul Stock Exchange.

The 29-year-old, who has played more than 60 times for Portugal, was signed by Chelsea on a four-year contract from Premier League rivals Liverpool in 2011.

The Istanbul club, runners-up to Galatasaray last season in Turkey's Super League, have been looking to bolster their midfield after Emre Belozoglu left for Atletico Madrid on a free transfer earlier this year.

Turkey's transfer window

C'Ron, Pepe to skip training

AFP, Lisbon

Real Madrid duo Cristiano Ronaldo and Pepe joined up with their Portuguese national team colleagues on Monday, but neither is expected to train until Wednesday due to minor injuries.

Portugal captain Ronaldo has a knock to the left thigh, while Pepe is struggling with a sprained left ankle, according to a statement released by the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) on Monday.

"The two players are following specific treatment programmes for the next two days (Monday and Tuesday) and are due to return to training on Wednesday," added the FPF statement.

The duo teamed up with Paulo Bento's squad at their base in the town of Obidos in central Portugal ahead of their opening 2014 World Cup qualifying Group F fixtures in Luxembourg on Friday and at home to Azerbaijan in Braga next Tuesday.

Ronaldo was substituted in the second half of Madrid's 3-0 win against Granada in La Liga on Sunday evening.

He later created a media storm in Spain after telling reporters that he was "a bit sad" at the Santiago Bernabeu for "professional reasons."

However, he refused to speak to journalists gathered



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal striker Helder Postiga tries a trick during training in Praia Del Rey on Monday, ahead of their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Luxembourg on Friday.

What to Watch

STAR Cricket
England v South Africa
Fifth ODI
Live from 7:00pm

TEN Sports
US Open
Men's & Women's Quarterfinals
Live from 9:00pm

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Cricket
Australia v Pakistan
First T20I

Zenit seal Hulk swoop

Football

AFP, Moscow

Zenit St Petersburg stunned football by signing Brazilian star Hulk hours before the Champions League eligibility deadline, in a sign the Russian champions' ambitions go well beyond the domestic game.

In the highest-spending moves in the history of Russian football, Zenit grabbed not only Hulk from Porto but also Belgian midfielder Axel Witsel from fellow Portuguese side Benfica in deals worth a reported total of 100 million euros.

While the Russian game has seen an influx of ageing foreign superstars as well as decent African and Latin American players, capturing a player of the quality of 26-year-old marks-

man Hulk shows a new level of ambition.

Once the poor relation of the big Moscow sides, Zenit's fortunes have been transformed by funding from state gas giant Gazprom. Signing players like Hulk show it will no longer be content only with success in the Russian league.

Adding the two new stars to a squad that already includes Portuguese internationals Bruno Alves and Danny as well as Italian Domenico Criscito, Zenit will be looking to make a major impact in the Champions' League.

They should be helped by a relatively weak group with Anderlecht, Malaga and AC Milan. While Zenit were the 2008 Uefa Cup winners, no Russian or Soviet side has ever won the Champions' League or its predecessor the European Cup.