

Ibra hints at staying

REUTERS, Paris

Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the top marksman in Ligue 1, hinted on Tuesday that he would still be a Paris St Germain player next season.

"It's true that a lot of people are asking me that question, about my future," Ibrahimovic, who scored 27 goals in Ligue 1 this season to help PSG clinch their first French league title since 1994, told the club's website.

"But I still have two years left on my contract here in Paris and the club continues to build and get bigger and bigger. Personally, I feel part of this process.

"I hope the club continues to develop and strive towards its hopes and dreams. I think I will continue to be part of this project."

Ibrahimovic, who joined from AC Milan last summer, also helped PSG reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

Arsenal move to fourth

RESULTS

Arsenal 4 (Podolski 11, 68, Walcott 63, Ramsey 71)
Wigan 1 (Maloney 45)
Reading 0 Manchester City 2 (Aguero 40, Dzeko 88)

REUTERS, London

Wigan Athletic became the first team to be relegated from England's top flight in the same season as winning the FA Cup after they lost 4-1 at Arsenal, with Lukas Podolski scoring twice, in the Premier League on Tuesday.

The victory keeps Arsenal in pole position to claim fourth spot and a place in next year's Champions League. They lead north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur, in fifth spot, by one point with the last round of games to be played on Sunday.

Wigan have narrowly escaped relegation several times in recent seasons but their luck ran out at a rain-sodden Emirates Stadium just three days after they had beaten Manchester City 1-0 at Wembley to win the FA Cup for the first time.

"I never expected this to happen, this group of players don't deserve this," said



Wigan manager Roberto Martinez. "Winning the FA Cup was incredible but this is a tough, tough day for the club."

In Tuesday's other game, Manchester City, who sacked manager Roberto Mancini on Monday, won 2-0 at relegated Reading with forwards Sergio Aguero and Edin Dzeko scoring late in each half.

City, last season's champions, are now guaranteed second place after Brian Kidd took caretaker charge of the team following the departure of Mancini and his number two, David Platt, who left the club earlier on Tuesday.

At the Emirates, Arsenal dominated the first 20 minutes and took the lead in the

11th when Lukas Podolski headed home from six metres after the Wigan defence failed to deal with a corner.

The visitors came back into the game and referee Mike Dean penalised a tackle by midfielder Mikel Arteta on Wigan's Shaun Maloney just outside the Arsenal area shortly before halftime.

Maloney's free kick arced over the wall and just inside Wojciech Szczesny's left-hand post after which Dean was booed off the pitch by the home fans at the break.

The second half was a full-blooded, equally matched contest until Arsenal's England forward Theo Walcott met a cross from the right by Santi Cazorla to steer the ball into the Wigan net at full stretch in the 63rd minute.

Five minutes later, the lead was extended to two goals after Cazorla broke forward, the Wigan backline stopped and Podolski lifted the ball over goalkeeper Joel Robles.

Arsenal went 4-1 up when Aaron Ramsey broke free on the left and ran unchecked into the area before blasting the ball home.

Wigan, who have been in the Premier League since the 2005-6 season, have 35 points with one game remaining, four fewer than Sunderland

in 17th position. Bottom club Queens Park Rangers have already been relegated along with Reading.

Arsenal have qualified for the Champions League in every full season Arsene Wenger has been in charge since he became manager in 1996, and they travel to Newcastle United on Sunday knowing they can guarantee qualification if they win.

Spurs, with 69 points to Arsenal's 70, host Sunderland.

Champions Manchester United and City have already sealed their places in the Champions League group stage.

Third-placed Chelsea have also qualified for the Champions League but Arsenal, who are two points behind the west London club, can overhaul them for the final spot in the group stage. The fourth-placed team go into the Champions league playoffs.

The Premier League's three relegated teams will be replaced by Cardiff City, who won the second-tier Championship title, and Hull City. Crystal Palace and Watford meet in the playoff final on May 27 to decide the third promoted team.

Wigan have conceded the most goals in the Premier League so far this season - 71 in 37 games.

Sabella fears Messi absence

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Coach Alejandro Sabella is counting down the days to a possible test of Argentina's World Cup credentials against their closest rivals in the South American qualifiers without Lionel Messi.

Messi is unlikely to play for Barcelona again this season after aggravating a hamstring injury and although he is should be fit for qualifiers against Colombia and Ecuador next month, Sabella is braced for the loss of his captain.

"There are 26 days to go," Sabella said on Tuesday of the clash with Colombia at the Monumental in Buenos Aires on June 7. Four days later Argentina visit Ecuador in Quito.

"I hope we can count on Lionel. If he's fit, that will be welcome. If not, it's a way of seeing how we play without him," Sabella told reporters on his return from a trip to Europe.



PHOTO: AFP
Arsenal striker Theo Walcott is ecstatic after scoring the second goal during their Premier League match against Wigan Athletic at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday.

Remy in hot water

AFP, London

QPR's France striker Loic Remy has been arrested on suspicion of rape, according to police on Wednesday.

Remy, 26, is being held by Scotland Yard's sex crime squad along with two other men after a 34-year-old woman alleged three men raped her on May 6 in west London.

A spokesman for the Metropolitan Police said: "Officers from Sapphire are investigating an allegation of rape which happened on 6 May in the west London area.

"The allegation was passed on to the Metropolitan Police Service by Kent Police on 8 May after the 34-year-old female victim reported it to them on the previous day, 7 May.

"The victim alleges she was raped by three men.

"On the morning of Wednesday, 15 May three men, aged 26, 23 and 22, were arrested at an address in Fulham on suspicion of rape - they remain in custody at a west London police station."

Remy's arrest is the latest setback in a dismal season for QPR, who were relegated from the Premier League last month.

QPR boss Harry Redknapp signed Remy from French club Marseille for £8 million in January in the hope his goals would lift the team out of the relegation zone.

Banking on youth

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Julio Cesar (Queens Park Rangers/ENG), Diego Cavalieri (Fluminense), Jefferson (Botafogo)

Defenders:
Daniel Alves (FC Barcelona/ESP), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Felipe Luis (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Jean (Fluminense), Thiago Silva (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), David Luiz (Chelsea/ENG), Dante (Bayern Munich/GER), Rever (Atletico Mineiro)

Midfielders:
Paulinho (Corinthians), Luiz Gustavo (Bayern Munich/GER), Fernando (Gremio), Hernanes (Lazio/ITA), Jadson (Sao Paulo), Oscar (Chelsea/ENG), Lucas (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Bernard (Atletico Mineiro)

Strikers:
Neymar (Santos), Fred (Fluminense), Hulk (Zenit St Petersburg/RUS), Leandro Damiao (Internacional)

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari sprang a surprise on Tuesday by leaving experienced duo Ronaldinho and Kaka out of his squad for next month's Confederations Cup.

Just a month before the five-time world champions kick off the tournament on home soil against Japan, 2002 World Cup winner Scolari, called back last November for a second spell in charge of the auriverde, also left out Chelsea midfielder Ramires, preferring Bayern Munich's Luiz Gustavo.

Former Barcelona star Ronaldinho had made a return to the squad for the friendly against England in London three months ago but the 32-year-old, now with Atletico Mineiro, was then discarded for March friendlies against Italy and Russia.

Instead, "Felipao" brought in Ronaldinho's clubmate Bernard, just 20, as Brazil's new "dez" or number 10.

In attack, Scolari has selected two traditional number nines in Fluminense's Fred and Leandro Damiao of Internacional, who will feed off prodigy Neymar with Zenit St Petersburg forward Hulk the other attacking

option.

Scolari explained: "The players I had doubts about I have left out. Those I have no doubts about are on the list."

Regarding the prospect of Bernard making an impression he told reporters: "He is a young player with bags of talent who with this opportunity will surely grasp it with both hands and keep his chance of staying in the squad.

Brazil, who include goalkeeper Julio Cesar, just relegated from the English Premier League with Queens Park Rangers, will face Japan, Mexico and Italy in their pool games with world champions Spain heading up the other group.

Scolari had recently indicated either Ronaldinho or Kaka would get the nod but it was the former who looked the likelier to be included, particularly after a fine showing in last week's Copa Libertadores win over Sao Paulo which followed on from some other strong recent performances.

The 2002 world champion was regarded as a potential, if ageing, ace in the pack for next summer as Brazil look to rebuild under Scolari, brought in place of sacked Mano Menezes on the eve of the Confederations Cup draw last December.

Instead, Scolari hopes Bernard, who only made his international debut last November against Argentina, will live up to expectations, the coach having already insisted on his appointment that winning the trophy is "obligatory" as the Brazilians prepare for a World Cup in 2014 where expectations will be off the scale.

So far, fans have been less than impressed with the Seleccion after an opening loss to England, then draws with the Italians, Russians and then with Chile last month, after which supporters booed the team off.

Scolari's sole win in charge to date was a 4-0 canter against modest Bolivia and he has used more than 40 players to date in sifting what ingredients he has available.

The critics are already sharpening their knives, moreover.

Goetze making good recovery

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp said Wednesday he is optimistic of getting injured midfield star Mario Goetze back in time for the Champions League final against Bayern Munich on May 25.

The 20-year-old Germany international limped out of Dortmund's 2-0 semi-final defeat at Real Madrid on April 30 with a torn hamstring and Klopp says next week will be key in deciding whether Goetze runs out for the Wembley final.

"Right now it looks like Goetze could be ready for the final," Klopp said in Wednesday's press conference.

"His recovery is going according to plan. We will intensify training and the plan is that he will begin to train with the team next week.

"Then I hope everything stays as it is, after that we will decide whether it works or not."

The Wembley finale will be Goetze's last game in a Dortmund shirt after last month's announcement that he has actioned a release clause in his contract to join German champions Bayern on July 1 for 37 million euros (US\$47.7m).

Dortmund reached the Champions League final with a 4-3 aggregate win over Real in the semifinal.

Schaaf quits Bremen



AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen on Wednesday parted company with Thomas Schaaf, one of the longest serving coaches in Bundesliga history, after 14 years in charge with the north German side.

Bremen had only narrowly avoided relegation this season.

Having joined Werder in 1972 as a youth player, Schaaf had spent more than 40 years at Bremen as a defender, then youth team, reserve team and assistant trainer before taking over as head coach in 1999.

In a statement, the club said the 52-year-old has left "by mutual agreement" with immediate effect and while no replacement has been named, Schaaf will not be on the bench for Saturday's final league match of the season against Nuremberg.

Bremen only secured their status in Germany's top-flight last Saturday with a 1-1 draw at home to Eintracht Frankfurt.

"We have looked at things in the last few days and we've come to the conclusion that we want a fresh start," said Bremen's director of sport Thomas Eichin in a statement.

"We want to thank Thomas for everything he has brought to the club after more than 40 years as a player and coach for Werder Bremen."

Under Schaaf, Werder lifted the 2004 Bundesliga title, when his team won the double, and he guided them to other German Cup triumphs in 1999 and 2009.

Murray succumbs to injury

AFP, Rome

Andy Murray pulled out of the Rome Masters on his 26th birthday on Wednesday as the Scot succumbed to back and hip pain during a second-round clash with Marcel Granollers.

Having lost the first set 6-3, the third seed fought back from 4-1 down in the second set to win a tie-break.

But after levelling the match on his second set point, he promptly went to the net to shake hands.

Murray, ranked world number two behind Novak Djokovic, had been seen by the trainer for on-court hip and back treatment after the third game of the second set.

In women's play, former Roland Garros winner and fifth seed Li Na won a battle with Chinese countrywoman Zheng Jie 6-3, 6-1 while Australian ninth seed Samantha Stosur, the 2010 beaten finalist in Paris, beat China's Peng Shuai 7-6 (7/5), 6-0.

Russian 12th seed Maria Kirilenko beat Varvara Lepchenko of the United States 6-3, 6-1. The 13th-seeded Roberta Vinci kept her home public happy as she beat compatriot Natassja Burnett 6-1, 6-4.

Slovak 14th seed Dominika Cibulkova put out US qualifier Melanie Oudin 5-7, 6-1, 6-3.