

Ronaldo challenges Messi

Ronaldo suggests Messi 'maybe needs more' and sends invite to join him in Serie A

● **The Juventus superstar would be open to the idea of a long-running rivalry with a Barcelona talisman being rekindled in the Italian top-flight**

AFP | Milan

Cristiano Ronaldo has urged long-time rival Lionel Messi to be more like him and push his limits by challenging himself in another league than Spain.

"I'd like him to come to Italy one day. I hope he accepts the challenge like me, but if he's happy there then I respect that," Ronaldo told the Italian press yesterday.

The two strikers have been rivals for the past decade winning five Ballon d'Or trophies each before their domination was broken by World Cup runner-up Luka Modric last week.

Asked if he missed the 31-year-old Argentinian, who has spent his entire senior career at Barcelona, Ronaldo replied: "No, maybe it's him who misses me ...

"I've played in England, Spain, Italy, Portugal and for my national team, while he's still in Spain.

"Maybe he needs me more... For me, life is a challenge, I like it and I like to make people happy.

"He's a fantastic player and a good guy, but I don't miss anything here. This is my new life

and I'm happy.

"I left my comfort zone and took on this challenge here in Turin, everything has gone well, I've proven I'm still an incredible player," said Ronaldo.

Ronaldo joined Juventus for 100 million euros (\$114 million) last summer as the Turin giants bid to lift the Champions League trophy after two runners-up finishes in the past four seasons.

To mark his 150 days in Italy he gave interviews yesterday to three leading sports dailies: La Gazzetta dello Sport, Corriere dello Sport and Tuttosport.

"I had different options. I won't say which but I had them. Juventus is a solid club. It has a long history," he said of his decision.

"I knew the atmosphere in the stadium. I'd played several times in Italy. I like the city, the people and the club. I knew it could work.

"I couldn't be 100 percent sure I was joining the best club in the world. After nine years at Real Madrid it was difficult to compare.

"Now I'm 100 percent sure it was the right option."

'Not an obsession'

Ronaldo has scored 11 goals this season, bringing his career total to 584.

Finishing second in Ballon d'Or voting to Modric, said Ronaldo, just motivates him even more.

"Of course I'm disappointed, but life goes on and I will con-

tinue to work hard," said the 33-year-old.

"On the pitch I've done everything to win the Ballon d'Or, numbers do not lie, but I'm no less happy if I do not win, I have wonderful friends and a family, I play in one of the best clubs.

"Congratulations to Modric, who has earned the award, but next year we will meet again and I will do everything to win the prize again.

"Do you think I'm going home and crying?"

Juventus play Young Boys in their final Champions League group game in Switzerland on Wednesday, having already booked their place in the knockout rounds.

And Ronaldo is hoping his experience of winning the trophy five times can serve his new team.

"The Champions League cannot be an obsession, you have to think about it calmly," he warned.



I've played in England, Spain, Italy, Portugal and for my national team, while he's still in Spain. Maybe he needs me more...

CRISTIANO RONALDO



Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi

Former Man Utd star Park offers to quit Korea youth role

AFP | Seoul,

Former Manchester United star midfielder Park Ji-sung has offered to step down from his youth administrative role at South Korea's football association, officials said yesterday.

Park, who also played for Dutch giants PSV Eindhoven, was the biggest name to emerge from South Korean football before Tottenham striker Son Heung-min.

The 37-year-old has pursued a career in football administration since retiring from playing in 2014, and became head of the Korea Football Association's youth strategy department last year.

But he has submitted his resignation, an official told AFP, adding that the offer was being considered.

Benitez says VAR cannot come soon enough

Reuters | London

Newcastle manager Rafa Benitez was furious with two refereeing decisions as his team suffered a stoppage-time home defeat by Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League on Sunday.

Referee Mike Dean ignored an apparent elbow in the face suffered by Ayoze Perez that could have been a penalty and a possible red card.

Earlier he sent off Newcastle's DeAndre Yedlin for preventing a clear goalscoring opportunity but Benitez claimed that Jamaal Lascelles was close enough to have intercepted.

"It was key to the game, the red card and the elbow on Ayoze Perez," Benitez told the BBC.

"We need VAR right now. In this game it would have changed everything. How can you explain those decisions to our fans?"

Struggling Villarreal sack coach Calleja

AFP | Madrid

Javier Calleja has been sacked as coach by struggling Villarreal after winning just three matches this season, the Spanish Liga club announced yesterday.

The 'Yellow Submarine' lost 3-2 at home to Celta Vigo at the weekend and now sit one place and three points above the relegation zone.

However, they are top of their Europa League group and will qualify for the next stage if they draw at home against Spartak Moscow on Thursday.

"Villarreal CF has decided to relieve Javi Calleja of his duties as first-team manager," said a statement on the official website.

Zlatan sticking with LA Galaxy, AC Milan 'evaluate' Fabregas

Zlatan Ibrahimovic

AFP | Milan



Zlatan Ibrahimovic will not be leaving LA Galaxy to return to AC Milan, the Italian club's sporting director Leonardo said on Sunday, although they are studying the possibility of signing Chelsea midfielder Cesc Fabregas.

"Ibrahimovic will not return to Milan," Leonardo told Sky Sport Italia. "He gave his word to the LA Galaxy that he would renew his contract. We thought about his return and he thought about it too, but he's keeping his word and will remain in MLS.

"He always said from the start that if the LA Galaxy satisfied his conditions, then he would remain. They are

doing that and he will stay there.

"It would have been a marvellous story and a strong signal, but it will not be possible."

Ibrahimovic played for AC Milan from 2010 to 2012, winning a Serie A title with the club, before moving to Paris Saint-Germain and then Manchester United.

The 37-year-old joined LA Galaxy this season and has a contract through the 2019 season with the Major League Soccer side.

He was recently named the league's Newcomer of the Year, defeating record England goalscorer Wayne Rooney among others for the award.

Leonardo said Milan were "evaluating the conditions" to sign 31-year-old Spaniard Fabregas, a former Arsenal and Barcelona player.

"Unfortunately, with the Financial Fair Play issue it has become a puzzle and a difficult one to work out.

Lukaku confident he is over post-World Cup slump

AFP | London

Romelu Lukaku believes he has finally emerged from his post-World Cup slump, with the Manchester United striker revealing he had to shed muscle to adapt to the demands of the Premier League.

After a promising first season at Old Trafford the 25-year-old has struggled to make an impact in front of

having ended his 12-match goalless streak for United at Southampton last weekend and netted at Old Trafford for the first time since March in Saturday's 4-1 win against Fulham.

The Belgium striker said he did not allow the external scrutiny to get him down. "I think I just need to keep working hard," he said. "Me and the manager had good conversations in the last couple of days, where really he told me what he wanted from me.

"And I know from my side I have to do better and I just keep looking forward and improving, trying to add into my game and help the team to win."

Lukaku said he had not been playing with enough intensity and aggression and had also cut down on his gym work after bulking up during the summer.

"(I added) a little bit of muscle, yeah," he said. "It was at the World Cup. I just felt great and I think I played great over there, and then when I came back it is a different type of style.

"When you are in the Premier League, I cannot play with the same amount of muscle as international football here in the Prem. That was something that when I came back I knew straightaway 'nah, nah, I cannot play in this style like this'.



Romelu Lukaku

PFA backs Sterling after alleged racist abuse

AFP | London

The Professional Footballers' Association said yesterday it stood "shoulder to shoulder" with Raheem Sterling after the Manchester City player suffered alleged racial abuse during his side's defeat against Chelsea.

Chelsea and the police are investigating the incident at Stamford Bridge on Saturday, which was highlighted on social media.

In an Instagram post on Sunday, Sterling accused British newspapers of helping to "fuel racism" with the way they portray young black footballers.

Simone Pound, PFA head of equality and diversity, said: "Football is a microcosm of society and incidents such as this highlight the current political climate.

"Raheem has made a stand by speaking out and we stand shoulder to shoulder with him against the discrimination of which he speaks."



Raheem Sterling