

Editor's Note

Player ratings are unique to soccer.

To be sure, some newspapers will grade football teams by position, but nothing like soccer, where every player gets a grade.

In some countries, even the coaches and refs get grades.

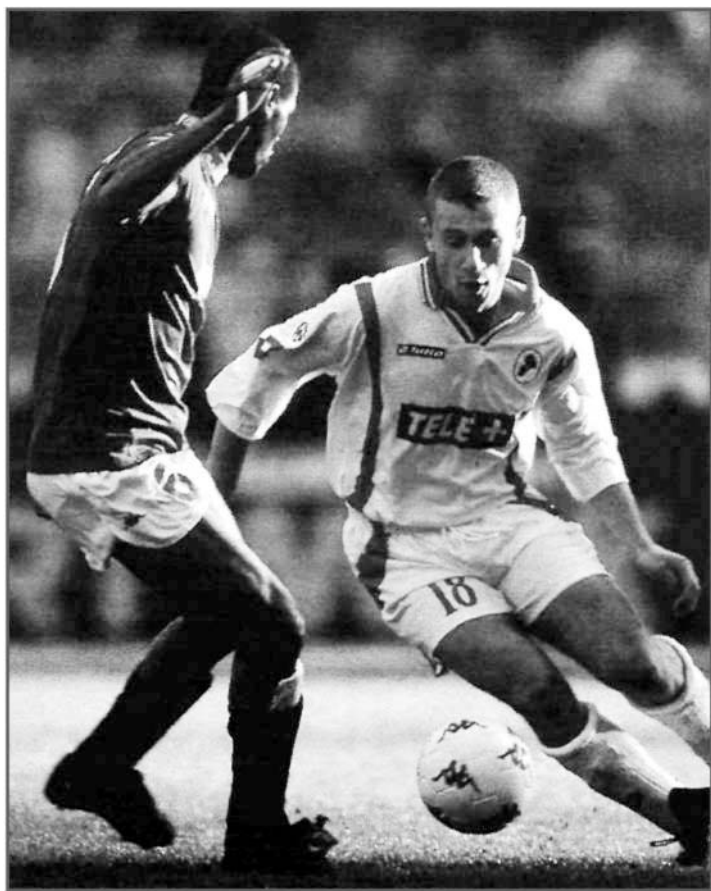
Each publication has its own ranking system. France Football goes 0-6 (0=red card; 6=high). Germany's Kicker is the reverse: 1-6 (1=high; 6=low). The Spanish daily As hands out aces, naturally.

Soccer America follows the most common ranking: 1-10 (1=low; 10=high).

Check out our ratings for USA-Mexico (Page 11) and USA-Brazil (Page 13) to see how they compare with your ratings.

Paul

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PAOLO COCCO/REUTERS

TRANSFER SYSTEM

Agreement will have widespread implications

The protracted negotiations between FIFA/UEFA and the European Commission on the future of the international transfer system was primarily a battle over European Union law.

But FIFA's agreement to overhaul soccer's system of transfers in return for the EC's settlement of its action against FIFA has international implications.

Here are some key parts of the agreement:

- Future of big-money transfers. Transfers between teams will still be possible with important exceptions.

A player under 18 can't move abroad unless there are guarantees about his living and working conditions. The rule is intended to protect young South American and African players from abuse.

Clubs that develop a player will receive compensation in all player moves until the player reaches 23.

A player can break his contract, sit out the first four months of the new season and be free to join a new team.

- Future of player salaries. If transfer fees will go down, player salaries will go up.

The ability of a player to move more freely will give him greater leverage in renegotiating his contract.



edited by
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Upfront

- Coverage. The agreement covers transfers between countries, although leagues are expected to adopt the FIFA terms for domestic moves as well, much as EU countries did after the Bosman decision in 1995.

The FIFA system will cover all countries — including the United States.

- Transfer season. FIFA will set two transfer windows each year — a two-month window in the summer and a shorter window in mid-winter. Left to be determined is what to do about leagues such as MLS, which doesn't play the traditional fall-spring season.

- Arbitration. Compensation for player development and sanctions for breach of contract will be determined by complicated formulae.

Disputes will be heard by arbitration panels FIFA sets up.

The complicated nature of these issues will be a huge boon to lawyers specializing in this field.

CANADIAN REVIVAL

Success of U-20s offers promise

These haven't been happy times for Canadian soccer.

Six months after winning the 2000 Gold Cup title, Canada was unceremoniously eliminated from 2002 World Cup qualifying, during which it went 580 minutes without a goal.

Canadian Tomasz Radzinski has been on a tear with Belgian club Anderlecht but did not return for World Cup duty.

Calgary product Owen Hargreaves, a midfielder with Bayern

Munich, chose to play for England's U-21s instead of Canada.

No one, it seemed, wanted to represent Canada.

Now comes good news for Canadian fans from Victoria, British Columbia, where Canada won its World Youth Championship qualifying group in advance to this summer's under-20 championship in Argentina.

Canada beat Mexico (1-0) and Honduras (1-0) and tied Jamaica (0-0) to reach the under-20 finals for the fifth time.

In a major upset, Jamaica edged Mexico for second place and claimed the other berth in the World Youth Championship from Group A.

The United States competes in CONCACAF's Group B March 18-22 in Trinidad & Tobago.

Without a Division I pro league, Canadian players have had few options until recently. They could play college ball in the United States or join one of three Canadian teams in the A-League.

Increasingly, young Canadians are heading to Europe.

The Canadian U-20 star is 17-year-old striker Iain Hume.

Hume, who was born in Scotland and raised in Brampton, Ontario, became the youngest player to play for English First Division club Tranmere Rovers, breaking the legendary Dixie Dean's record, when he came on as a substitute last season.

Dubbed the Canadian Michael Owen, Hume has been part of the Tranmere team that has reached the quarterfinals of the English FA Cup.

Hume played up front with Cameroon-born Ali Ngou, recently



A universal image: youngsters at play at sunset, even in Fiji, where rugby is king.

drafted by MLS's Miami Fusion from the A-League's Montreal Impact.

Julian DeGuzman, who scored Canada's goals against Honduras and Mexico, is with Saarbruecken of the German Third Division.

Midfielder Tam Nsaliwa recently debuted with Nuremberg, the leader of the German Second Division.

Former NASL player Paul James left college coaching to take the U-20 job.

"I'm just ecstatic," said James. "The players were tremendous."

Following up on its qualification for the Under-17 World Cup two years ago, Jamaica qualified for the World Youth Championship for the first time.

Shavar Thomas, the Reggae Boyz's starting sweeper during the semifinal stage of 2002 World Cup qualifying, was voted MVP of the under-20 qualifying tournament. He was Connecticut's top high school player two years ago.

The big surprise was Mexico's elimination.

Mexico easily has the best record of any CONCACAF team in the World Youth Championship, having reached the quarterfinals five times.

But a 1-1 tie with Jamaica in its opening game and the 1-0 loss to Canada put the Mexicans in a deep hole.

A 2-0 win over Honduras in its final game proved meaningless when Jamaica tied Canada, 0-0.

ITALIAN PHENOM

Roma wins battle for Cassano

Italian clubs increasingly rely on foreign players, so the arrival of a major young Italian talent is big news.

Roma has signed Bari's Antonio Cassano, the most promising teenager in Italian soccer, for 60 billion lire (\$28.85 million), the eighth-highest transfer fee in history.

Cassano, 18, signed a five-year contract and will earn more than \$3 million a season, making him one of the highest-paid teenagers in the world.

Roma, one of only two publicly traded Italian clubs, also acquired Cassano's marketing rights and vowed to turn him into "a symbol of the AS Roma brand."

The Italian press has built Cassano up as the leading example of young homegrown talent in a country swamped with foreign players.

Much has been made of the coincidence that he was born on July 12, 1982 — the day Italy won the World Cup.

Cassano plays just behind the strikers and has been compared to one of his idols and new teammates — Roma captain Francesco Totti.

Earlier this season, Cassano was linked with Juventus, AC Milan and Manchester United.