Materazzi admits insulting Zidane
Italian defender denies calling French hero 'terrorist'

MILAN, Italy (AP) -- Marco Materazzi admits he insulted Zinedine Zidane before the France captain head-butted him in the World Cup final. Materazzi denies calling him a "terrorist."

"I did insult him, it's true," Materazzi said in Tuesday's Gazzetta dello Sport. "But I categorically did not call him a terrorist. I'm not cultured and I don't even know what an Islamic terrorist is."

Zidane and Materazzi exchanged words after Italy broke up a French attack in extra-time of Sunday's final in Berlin. Seconds later, Zidane lowered his head and rammed Materazzi in the chest, knocking him to the ground.

Zidane was sent off, reducing France to 10 men. Italy won the game in a penalty shootout.

"I held his shirt for a few seconds only, then he turned round and spoke to me, sneering," the Italian defender said. "He looked me up and down, arrogantly and said: 'If you really want my shirt, I'll give it to you afterwards."

The 32-year-old Inter Milan player did not elaborate exactly on what he said to Zidane.

"It was one of those insults you're told..."
Materazzi is no stranger to controversy. He was suspended for two months for punching Siena defender Bruno Cirillo after a Serie A game in February 2004, and earned condemnation following a brutal tackle on Sweden and Juventus striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic in October 2005.

Materazzi was also sent off three times while playing for Everton in the 1998-99 season.

One Italian senator even suggested that Materazzi -- also sent off three times while playing for Everton in the 1998-99 season -- didn't merit selection for the Italian team because of his physical style.

Zidane also is known for having a temper. He was sent off for stomping on a Saudi Arabian opponent at the 1998 World Cup, while at Germany 2006 he was banned for France's group match against Togo.

Five years ago with Juventus, Zidane head-butted an opponent in a Champions League match against Hamburger SV after being tackled from behind.

Meanwhile, Rome Mayor Walter Veltroni accused FIFA of double standards, noting that soccer's governing body named Zidane as the tournament's best player after his head-butt, while Italy forward Francesco Totti was kicked out of the 2004 European Championship for spitting in an opponent's face.

"I notice a difference in the way in which Totti was treated after the spit and the way in which Zinedine Zidane has been lauded as a champion of soccer, even though he is held responsible for such a violent blow that it could even have had devastating effects," Veltroni said.

FIFA announced Tuesday it will open a disciplinary investigation into Zidane's conduct.

FIFA also said that the ballot box for the tournament's top player -- voted by journalists -- was open until after the final had ended, making it impossible to know how many ballots were cast before the match and during it.

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