

## Top soccer player turns entrepreneur extraordinaire

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By Mark Meadows

MILAN (Reuters Life!) - If you thought soccer players just had brains in their feet, think again. AC Milan defender Kakha Kaladze, who already owns a famous restaurant in the Italian city, is now launching a number of commercial initiatives in his native Georgia.

His holding company Kala Capital plans to start up a bank, build a new town outside the capital Tbilisi

and look into hydro and wind power as well as oil exploration.

Such is Kaladze's fame in Georgia, he has even recruited former prime minister Zurab Nougaideli to serve as Kala Capital's president.

"I am very proud to have such a man as president," Kaladze, 30, told a news conference in a swanky hotel in Milan's fashion district on Monday.

Leading soccer players earn millions each season for kicking a small ball around a field.

Stories of sports personalities giving some of that money back to society are rare, with newspapers filling their pages with tales of debauchery and excess.

England and LA Galaxy midfielder David Beckham wears a newly bought pair of underpants everyday, according to several papers.

The world's most recognizable player has of course launched a number of soccer schools but so has national team captain Kaladze, Georgia's very own Beckham.

Milan team mate and former Italy captain Paolo Maldini, who would make most people's greatest ever soccer XI, was in the audience for the launch of Kala Capital.

"With respect to Maldini, Kaladze is more important to us in Georgia than Maldini is for Italy," Nougaideli said.

Kaladze was asked if other soccer players might become involved in his project.

"We are looking for investors, like in the UK and United States. Maybe this presentation will help," he said, nodding towards Maldini and fellow team mates Andrea Pirlo and Alessandro Nesta.

Nervous laughter then broke out.

Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf was conspicuous by his absence, perhaps because he was busy with his own business empire.

The Dutch international runs a successful charity and a restaurant while he has set up a sports management company called On International, with himself as the first client.

Multi-millionaire soccer players are not always what they seem.

Maldini left the hotel driving a \$13,000 two-seater Smart car, one of the cheapest on the market.

(Editing by Paul Casciato)