

PHOTO: AFP

IT'S SO EMBARRASSING NOT KNOWING ENGLISH! Real Madrid's Brazilian superstar Ronaldo apparently showing fatigue as David Beckham (L) looks on during a press conference in Beijing yesterday.

# Focus firmly on Beckham

## Real take on Chinese XI today

### Football

AFP, Beijing

David Beckham will take the field Saturday for his Real Madrid debut in front of 45,000 fans, a million miles from the glitz and glamour and state-of-the-art stadiums he's used to.

Having waved goodbye to Old Trafford after 12 seasons last month, he will pull on his new number 23 shirt for his first match since his high-profile transfer in Beijing's Workers Stadium, home of A League side Beijing Hyundai.

Not what he envisaged perhaps, but he is sure to receive a warm welcome.

Tickets have been slow to sell, but his larger-than-life image is becoming a familiar one in China, and it is him the fans will be watching when Real's constellation of stars trot out of the tunnel to play a Chinese XI.

While the match is expected to be little more than a kick around, spectators paying as much as an average month's wages to witness the event will demand goals and

some silky skills for their hard-earned cash.

Real coach Carlos Queiroz promised they would get their money's worth.

"We're very happy about our visit to China. We want to give Chinese football fans a chance to see the highest quality of football, and use that as an opportunity to express our thanks," he said Friday.

Striker Raul also pledged the nine-time European champions would put on a show.

"We'll do our best to show our best level and allow Chinese fans to really enjoy the football of Real Madrid," he said amid heavy security at a press conference.

For Beckham, it is his first opportunity to show on the world stage that he is gelling with his new teammates.

Much has been made of his move and the commercial opportunities he has brought with him, but Queiroz is only concerned about how he performs on the football

field.

He has warned his star-packed roster to put their egos aside and put their noses to the grindstone.

"What is important to understand is they serve Real Madrid and not themselves," he said this week.

"As coach, when you don't have good players, that is the nightmare."

While Beckham is undoubtedly a class act, some pundits have speculated that the 28-year-old will find it hard to shine in a team jammed with the some of the world's best players.

And several of Real's stable of multi-millionaire superstars have hinted over the past week that he has still to prove he fits on the football field.

"I have been able to see that his passes are really good and I just hope that we'll be able to understand each other on the field," said striker Ronaldo, who will look to Beckham to provide him with ammunition in front of goal.

Speculation is still rife about where Beckham will play.

He favours the right flank, but so

does Luis Figo, who has occupied the position since he moved to Real from Barcelona.

It appears however that Beckham may have won the battle, assuming the role during a practice match in southwest China earlier in the week.

Figo has conceded that he will play wherever he is needed and Queiroz has suggested that he may move to the left side permanently, given his greater versatility.

Beckham joined the nine-times European champions on July 2 on a four-year contract worth an estimated six million euros a year before bonuses, and he has made clear only one date is fixed in his mind -- and it is not August 2 at the Workers Stadium.

"Since I signed the contract I have wanted to get to know my teammates, and once I get through that, I'm only thinking about the day that I'll be able to wear the shirt in the (Santiago Bernabeu) stadium," he said.

"It's a thought that's constantly on my mind."

The celebrity icon is scheduled to make his home debut on August 27th.

# A lesson in United

### Football

AFP, East Rutherford, New Jersey

Manchester United put on an entertaining show at both ends of the field on Thursday, recording a 4-1 victory over Juventus in an international friendly.

United attacked from the opening whistle, getting goals from four international players - Ryan Giggs (Wales), Paul Scholes (England), Ruud van Nistelrooy (Netherlands) and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (Norway).

A capacity crowd of 79,005 - a record for soccer at Giants Stadium - on both ends of the field, watched United win for the third time in as many matches on their US tour.

The crowd surpassed the 78,972 who showed up to watch the US in the Women's World Cup opener on June 19, 1999.

"I thought it was a fantastic game," United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said. "Both sides played an attacking game."

"I'm sure you saw the two best sides in Europe."

American goalkeeper Tim Howard, who signed with the English Premiership powerhouse only two weeks ago, acquitted himself well in his United debut on the same field where he forged his professional reputation.

Howard, 24, had played for the New York/New Jersey MetroStars in Major League Soccer for four seasons.

"I thought he was excellent," Ferguson said. "He showed the attributes we recognized in the boy before. It was a very good debut for him."

"I was hoping the boy would get a good debut because it was his hometown."

Howard won't start in United's final match of the tour against Barcelona in Philadelphia on Sunday.

"They told me that if I had a stinker tonight it would be only one game," Howard said. "If I played well in the back, it was only one game. You can't read too much into it. It's a good step in the right direction."

Howard's finest moments came midway through the second half with United nursing a 3-0 lead as Juventus brought in several attacking-minded players.

Howard certainly was up to the task, knocking away a pair of point-

blank shots by Italian international Alessandro Del Piero and David Trezeguet only seconds apart in the 71st minute.

The first half featured end-to-end attacking soccer by both teams, although United definitely pushed forward more and placed more pressure on the Juventus goal.

United finally were rewarded for its efforts in the 24th minute after Scholes was fouled 24 yards out on the right side. Giggs then bent the ensuing free kick around the Juventus wall and past goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon into the upper right corner of the net for a 1-0 advantage.

United doubled their lead in the 57th minute converting a short pass from Argentine Juan Sebastian Veron and knocked home a 12-yard shot with his left foot.

Veron, the subject of serious transfer rumors to Chelsea, set up United's third goal in the 60th minute. He sent an audacious clip pass with the outside of his right boot that Van Nistelrooy chested, brought

down and blasted into the short side from eight yards.

"You saw two very special goals tonight -- by Giggs and Van Nistelrooy," said Ferguson, who called Van Nistelrooy "magnificent. When you score with such power, it becomes a feature of his game. ... He's a magnificent player."

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi had seen enough and replaced seven players at once in the 62nd minute. He used several key players he was resting for Sunday's Italian Super Cup against AC Milan here.

Pavel Nedved closed the gap to 3-1 in the 70th minute with Solskjaer connected from eight yards nine minutes later.

Before the match, a moment's of silence was observed before the match in memory of Juventus chairman Vittorio Caisotti di Chiusano, who died earlier Thursday. Chiusano, who was 74, had been chairman of the team since 1990. The Juventus players stood in a line at the edge of center circle in silence.



PHOTO: AFP

SHOWSTOPPER: Juan Sebastian Veron of Manchester United (R) is airborne as he fights for the ball with Antonio Conte of Juventus during their Champions World Series match at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey on July 31.

# Juve president passes away

AFP, Turin

The president of Juventus, Vittorio Caisotti, died here on Thursday at the age of 74, the club announced.

A lawyer by training, di Chiusano was born on August 5, 1928 in Turin. He took over from Gianpiero Boniperti as Juve president in February 2000.

He had been suffering from heart problems and was hospitalised in June.



VITTORIO CHIUSANO

# Fergie sure

### Football

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson insisted midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron was staying put at Old Trafford after dazzling in a 4-1 rout of Juventus.

The Argentine was named man of the match at the Giants Stadium in New York on Thursday. Veron made a statement of intent with a determined performance, laying on stunning assists for goals by Paul Scholes and Ruud van Nistelrooy.

And while rumours persist that the midfielder will be shipped out to Chelsea in a 15 million pound (24 million dollar) move, Ferguson maintained that Veron is staying put.

"People keep seeing him on this tour and people still keep saying he is going," said Ferguson. "Unless he is going to be whisked from right under my nose they are wrong."

"Seba is a marvellous player. He has wonderful imagination, he always wants the ball and has a

great engine. He was outstanding tonight."

Ferguson admitted he thought Veron might have taken the first-half free-kick from which Ryan Giggs curled home his side's opener but after standing aside for the Welshman on that occasion, the 28-year-old was in no mood to relinquish centre stage for the remainder of the evening.

It was his pass which allowed Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to set up Scholes for United's second and it was also Veron who provided the perfectly-weighted pass for van Nistelrooy, which the Dutchman took on his chest before lashing a first time volley into the net.

"It was a magnificent goal," admitted Ferguson. "I have seen him do that many times in training. He hits the ball with such power. It is a real feature of his game."

Pavel Nedved pulled one back for Juve before Solskjaer smacked home a fourth from Diego Forlan's flighted crossfield pass.

# Slow going in Beijing

AFP, Beijing

David Beckham and Real Madrid fever may have gripped other parts of Asia, but organisers of a match involving the Spanish champions in Beijing have had trouble shifting tickets.

The 45,000 available for the match against a Chinese XI at Beijing's Workers Stadium Saturday have now sold out, but it took 15 days.

In Hong Kong, 16,000 tickets sold out in just six hours.

"We have sold all 45,000 tickets. They sold out in 15 days," an organiser of the Beijing game said Friday.

"Most of the tickets were sold to companies or organisations. Individual ticket sales were rare. There haven't been any long lines for tickets."

"The situation in China is completely different to Japan and Hong Kong."

The hefty price of tickets, which cost up to 2,000 yuan (250 dollars), more than a month's salary for the average Beijing resident, was one factor for the slow uptake, he said.

Standard tickets were also available for between 180 to 1,280 yuan but even that proved excessive for most.

The Madrid team, stacked with world class players like Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo, will play a select squad of Chinese players Saturday.

# Don't sack coaches!

AFP, Berlin

Sacking the coach is a popular option with soccer clubs in trouble but, according to a German study, it doesn't help.

Researchers from the University of Muenster have analysed the effects of 206 coach changes in 35 years of the Bundesliga, from 1963 to 1998, and their conclusions are quite clear.

"Three or four games after the change you notice an improvement in performances, but it doesn't last," said one of the two authors of the study, Alexandra Tippenhauer, whose father, Hans-Dieter Tippenhauer, was a Bundesliga coach and was sacked by Arminia Bielefeld in 1980.

Studying the 12 games before the sacking and the following 12 shows that the performances during that wider period do not change significantly, Tippenhauer told German sports news agency SID.

The study, to be presented at a congress of sports scientists in Muenster next month, shows that 70 percent of the clubs who sacked their coaches end the season in the lower third of the table.

Clubs often appoint a new coach in a bid to escape relegation but that does not work either. According to the study, 59.6 percent of the clubs who did that eventually dropped to the second division, while only 37 percent of the troubled clubs who decided not to change coaches were relegated.

Meanwhile, German fans have already started betting on which coach is likely to be the first to lose his job in the new Bundesliga season.

Willi Reimann of promoted Eintracht Frankfurt, whose men visit champions Bayern Munich on Friday, is their favourite.

# Cameroon booter in critical condition

### Football

AFP, Marseille

Cameroon international Valery Mezague has undergone surgery after suffering a fractured skull in a car accident on Wednesday night.

The surgeon who operated on the 19-year-old Montpellier midfielder said he would have to wait for Mezague to come round after the operation in the next 48 hours before giving a prognosis, a

hospital source said Friday.

Mezague, who ended last season as his club's top scorer with six goals, was injured in the accident which took place around midnight on Wednesday on the road between Montpellier and Marseille where he had been visiting his parents.

Mezague played in the final of the Confederations Cup against France on the Cameroon team rostered by the death of Marc-Vivien Foe in the semi-final against Colombia at Lyon.

# Paying the price!

### Football

AFP, London

Manchester United and the English Football Association were among 10 businesses handed a massive 18.6 million pound (26.6 million euro, 29.9 million dollar) fine on Friday for fixing the price of replica football shirts.

Premiership club Manchester United were hit with a fine of 1.6 million pounds and the FA, the English game's governing body, will have to pay 150,000 pounds, British business watchdog the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) said.

The biggest penalty was an 8.4 million pound penalty handed out to retail chain JJB Sports, with sporting goods manufacturer Umbro fined 6.6 million. The other six firms were all retailers.

The OFT found that replica shirts for the England national side, Manchester United and other teams including Chelsea and Celtic were fixed at artificially high prices -- around 40 pounds for an adult top and 30 pounds for junior versions.

These illegal deals applied during key sales periods, such as when a new replica kit was launched, and during the Euro 2000 football championships, the OFT found.

"The fines imposed reflect the seriousness of the price fixing in this case," said OFT chairman John

Vickers.

"Since we launched our investigation the prices of replica football shirts have fallen and consumers can now shop around and get a better price."

Manchester United, generally considered to be the world's richest club with replica shirt sales providing a sizeable chunk of its vast annual revenue, said it was "disappointed" at the ruling.

"Manchester United maintains that it has not participated in price fixing in the market for replica kits," it said in a statement, saying the club was considering an appeal.

JJB, Britain's leading sports shop chain with more than 400 stores, said it would definitely appeal and attacked the OFT verdict as "politically motivated".

In contrast the FA, which saw its fine reduced because it cooperated with the probe, sounded a more contrite note, saying it only had a "limited" role.

"The FA takes its duties to football and the footballing public very seriously. That was why it took steps to widen the availability of the England replica kit -- a kit that is immensely popular with fans," it said.

Football fans -- and especially the long-suffering parents of young supporters -- have long complained that replica kits are overpriced and are updated too frequently, usually every season.

# Hepatitis keeps Basturk out

AFP, Leverkusen

Turkish international Yildiray Basturk is suffering from hepatitis, his club Bayer Leverkusen revealed on Thursday.

"The player will be unavailable for several weeks, maybe months," Leverkusen director Ijja Kaenzig said.

"We assume that he ate oysters in France," he added.

Basturk was part of the Turkey squad which played in the Confederations Cup tournament in France in June.

There is no risk of his teammates catching the illness, confirmed coach Klaus Augenthaler, who said the 24-year-old's absence from the Leverkusen midfield was "a tough blow".

"He's away from the squad and we hope that he'll soon be back," he added.

According to the Bild daily newspaper, Galatasaray are interested in the player whose contract at Leverkusen runs out on July 30, 2004 and with the player no longer a first team regular, the World Cup semi-finalist may be tempted by the Turkish championship runners-up.

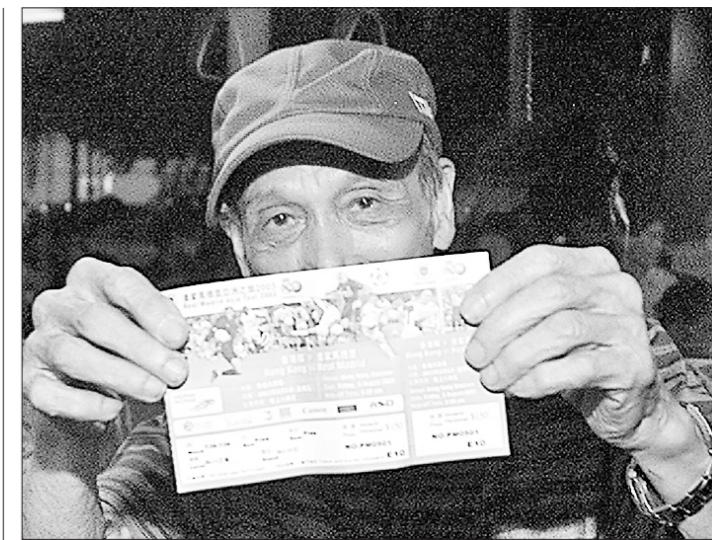


PHOTO: AFP

LUCKY UNCLE! 81-year-old Uncle Chin, a Real Madrid fan who queued for two days, shows the first ticket for the Real-Hong Kong friendly sold in Hong Kong on July 31. Organisers have confirmed paying 36 million Hong Kong dollars (4.6 million US) to bring Real Madrid to the city.

# Hong Kong gone bonkers

### Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Tickets for Real Madrid's exhibition match against Hong Kong were sold out within hours of going on offer as Beckham-mania gripped the city, leaving hundreds of fans bitterly disappointed, an official said Friday.

All 16,000 tickets on sale to the soccer-mad public were sold out within six hours of going on sale late Thursday.

A man named Lu, who was the last lucky fan to snap up a ticket waved his maximum allotted four tickets in delight as he shouted "I'm so happy!"

He told reporters he had queued for about 12 hours. "Of course I'm happy because I was lucky and managed to get a ticket."

Despite early announcements from the police warning people that some stood no chance of getting the coveted tickets, hundreds continued queuing up to the last minute, only to be left disappointed when sales ended.

Fans who forced to return home empty-handed were far from happy, with some pushing over metal barriers

erected by police to control the huge queues that had camped outside the ticket booths days before ticket sales began.

One angry fan said: "I had to queue for ages today in the boiling heat. Then I queued for hours to wait for a ticket before they tell us they are all sold out. It's too bad."

Other fans fiercely criticised the method of selling the tickets, given the huge appeal of the star-studded Spanish giants, who boast newly-signed England captain David Beckham and superstars Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo among their ranks.

However, Football Association chairman Martin Hong insisted it had adopted the fairest method available.

Ticket sales had been pushed forward a day from the scheduled Friday after nearly 3,000 people queued outside the Hong Kong stadium where the tickets were being sold.

The Hong Kong Football Association said Thursday it would pay 36 million Hong Kong dollars (4.6 million US) to bring the Spanish champions to the city.

The figure far exceeds the 20 million dollars that had been widely estimated.