

Real end Asian adventure

Football

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's national side turned in a strong performance against Real Madrid Sunday, narrowly beaten 2-1 as the Spanish superstars wrapped up their four-nation tour of Asia.

The result was the narrowest losing margin of the tour, which included a 4-2 victory against a Hong Kong XI on Friday, a 3-0 romp against J-League first division club FC Tokyo and a 4-0 trouncing of a Chinese XI in Beijing.

Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium was bursting with a 55,000 capacity crowd which included Latin pop heart throb Ricky Martin as well as Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thailand came out fighting, the same strategy it employed in its friendly against British glamour side Liverpool here last month, and created several opportunities to score.

But the Thai players failed to convert the chances into a goal, and soon Madrid took control of the game with the first of three free kicks being awarded in the 19th minute.

New signing David Beckham took the kick but failed to score, and Javier Portillo finally put Real on the scoreboard in the 32nd minute, unleashing an energetic counter-

attack from Thailand as it attempted to equalise.

Five minutes before the half-time whistle Thai keeper Kittisak Rawangpa made a super save from the world's most expensive player Zinedine Zidane just eight yards from the goal.

In the second half, more of Real's top players, except World Footballer of the Year Ronaldo and Portuguese superstar Luis Figo were unleashed on the pitch, including Spanish striker Raul and Brazil's Roberto Carlos who narrowly missed scoring from a free kick 40 yards from the penalty box.

Thai striker Sarayut Chaikamdee equalised for the hosts in the 61st minute, earning himself a 100,000 baht (2,400 dollar) bounty offered by the sponsors for every Thai goal.

But it was not long before Spanish striker Fernando Morientes pushed Real into a 2-1 lead in the 64th minute.

After the goal the two teams fought for control, with Thailand creating two chances to equalise only to have the ball hit the upper bar on both occasions.

After the final whistle, the Real Madrid players joined the Thais and the giant crowd in a candlelight ceremony to mark the birthday this week of Thailand's Queen Sirikit.



Real Madrid superstar David Beckham (R) leaves Thailand's Choktawee Prommarat (bottom-L) in his wake in Bangkok yesterday.

England mourn Davis' death

Football

AFP, England

The kick-off to the 2003/04 English football season on Saturday was overshadowed by the tragic death of 21-year-old player Jimmy Davis on his way to his first match for Watford.

Davis, a Manchester United reserve striker, had been due to begin a one-year loan spell at Watford in the first division match against Coventry.

The match was postponed less than two hours before kick-off after Davis was killed in a car accident on his way to Vicarage Road.

The young striker was a former England youth international who had been sent to Watford to gain first-team experience.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said: "You could not meet a nicer and more bubbly character than Jimmy Davis. He was a player with real potential, that's why we had sent him to Watford. At 21 he had great promise. We are all really sad. It is terrible news."

Bromsgrove-born Davis signed trainee forms with United on 6 July 1999, before turning professional the next month. He came through the ranks at Old Trafford, and had been preparing to spend the season on loan at Watford with his good friend Danny Webber.

Willie Carson, former top jockey and now chairman of English Second Division side Swindon Town, was devastated by the news after having Davis on loan last term.

"He was a smashing kid, a little guy like me (only five foot five inches) and I am sure like me, everybody at Swindon will be dev-

astated," said a tearful Carson, who was at Ascot for the Rest of the World against Britain and Ireland jockeys challenge. "We wanted him back this season but United thought so much of him that they told him to move up a division.

"I always recollect going down to the bench after the first-half of a match last season when he had to go off injured and there he was hitting the side of the dugout frustrated at not being able to help out his team-mates.

"It is so sad he was such a young



JIMMY DAVIS

guy," Carson told the BBC.

He was a regular for the United Reserve team having risen through the Under-19 team at Old Trafford. His senior United debut came on 5 November 2001, away to Arsenal in a Worthington Cup tie.

Earlier Saturday it was announced that former Blackburn manager Ray Harford had died at the age of 58 after losing his battle against cancer.

Kaka in for dream move

Football

REUTERS, Milan

Brazil midfielder Kaka says he is hopeful a move to European champions AC Milan will be completed soon allowing him to team up with World Cup winners Rivaldo and Cafu at the Italian club.

Milan have been linked with Kaka throughout the close season and on Saturday the daily Gazzetta dello Sport reported that the Italians had reached a verbal agreement on a nine million euro (\$10.19 million) deal with the 21-year-old's Brazilian club San Paolo.

The Serie A club were not immediately available to comment but Kaka said he was confident the deal would go through soon.

"Until there are the signatures on the contract I don't want to say anything but I hope that it is only a question of days now," Kaka told Gazzetta in comments also reported by Milan's website.

"I'm waiting on the decision of the



KAKA

San Paolo and Milan directors and I am confident. I hope the deal will come off because it would be a great step forward in my career," said the attacking midfielder.

Gazzetta said Milan vice-president, former Brazilian international Leonardo, was expected to conclude the deal in Brazil on Monday.

Kaka was part of the Brazil squad who won the World Cup last year but

made only a brief appearance against Costa Rica.

He is a key member of the under-23 side who will feature in next year's Olympic Games and a tall and powerful presence in midfield. Kaka is rated as one of the brightest young players in Brazil and has been closely monitored by a number of top European clubs.

Should the move come off, Kaka will join a large Brazilian contingent at Milan including Brazil captain Cafu, former Barcelona star Rivaldo, defender Roque Junior, winger Serginho and goalkeeper Dida.

"There are some fantastic players at Milan....it would be an honour to play with them and of course there are Brazil's world champions at the club like Rivaldo. It would be fantastic to wear the Milan shirt," Kaka said.

Cafu has been the only signing Milan have made since winning the Champions League in May with a victory on penalties over fellow Italians Juventus. The Serie A league season begins on August 31.

Best selling his best!

AFP, London

Former Manchester United football great George Best is to sell two of his most treasured trophies -- to pay for a holiday home in Greece for his family.

The ex-Northern Ireland international, now 57, will auction off his European and British footballer of the year awards in October, auctioneers Bonhams announced.

The trophies are expected to fetch more than 150,000 pounds (215,000 euros, 245,000 dollars) each, Bonhams said.

Best will use the proceeds to buy a holiday home on the Greek island of Corfu, he said, while admitting he would "shed a tear" to see the possessions go.

The sale was nothing to do with money, insisted Best, who now works as a football pundit and has fought a highly public battle with alcoholism for decades.

"I certainly don't have to sell them," Best said.

"But I am sure my family would much rather have a nice retreat abroad where we can all relax, and they can enjoy it when I'm gone, than have two trophies that have to be kept locked away for security."

Best is widely considered one of the most naturally talented footballers ever to have played the game, despite a career severely curtailed by his off-field activities, principally drinking.

He won the two top-player titles in 1968 after helping Manchester United to the European Cup, scoring a goal in their 4-1 win over Benfica in the final.

However shortly after that Best, only in his mid-20s, saw his talents wane and he saw out much of his later career with a series of smaller clubs.

Preparing for life after Eriksson

AFP, London

The English Football Association disclosed Friday it had already started to put out feelers to find the next England manager when the present incumbent Sven-Goran Eriksson finally stands down.

The FA's chief executive Mark Palios stressed that he expects Eriksson to fulfil his contract to the Euro 2004 finals and beyond, but at the same time he said it was only "commonsense" to make contingency plans if the Swede were to resign.

Eriksson has been linked to a future move to Chelsea, speculation that he has strongly denied.

"I am not involved with Chelsea in any way. My attentions are fully focused on England and our qualification campaign to reach Portugal in 2004," he told the FA's website last month.

"Of course, we'll have a contingency in place with regard to Sven's eventual departure, just as we would have for all major business risks," Palios said.

"We will be talking to people to find out who is valued and respected in the game, who the players and managers like. That would include the England players.

Middlesbrough boss Steve McClaren is one of the front runners to replace Eriksson when the time comes, although Palios evidently wants to ensure that England players, including captain David Beckham, and other figures have their say.

Chelsea rope in Mutu

Football

AFP, London

English big-spenders Chelsea confirmed Saturday they had agreed a fee with Parma for Romanian striker Adrian Mutu.

In a statement, London club Chelsea also said: "Discussions will now take place between Chelsea and the player over the proposed transfer."

According to press reports in Italy, Chelsea were set to pay Parma 22.5 million euros (15.8 million pounds) for Mutu.

That would take English Premiership outfit Chelsea's spend-

ing under new owner Roman Abramovich over the 75 million pounds mark since the Russian businessman bought the Stamford Bridge club on July 1.

Under Abramovich, Chelsea have already signed new players such as Juan Sebastian Veron, Joe Cole, Wayne Bridge, Damien Duff, Geremi and Glen Johnson.

Mutu, 24, scored 17 goals for Parma in Italy's Serie A last season as well as four in the UEFA Cup.

But he was left out of Parma's trip to England this weekend where they are taking part in a pre-season tournament, sparking speculation over his future.



ADRIAN MUTU

Bundesliga Hargreaves saves Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

Champions Bayern Munich needed a last gasp free-kick from Owen Hargreaves to cap a fine comeback and secure a 3-3 draw with Hannover at the AWD-Arena on Saturday, a repeat of last season's scoreline at the Olympic Stadium.

First half goals from Nebojsa Krupnikovic (9) and Jiri Stajner (26) sent the capacity 22,500 home crowd into a state of delirium as the Hannover fans sensed victory over the champions.

German international Michael Ballack reduced the arrears on 39 minutes with his right footed shot beating Gerhard Tremmel, who should have done better.

However, Thomas Christiansen, top-scorer in the Bundesliga last season with VfL Bochum, restored Hannover's lead firing past Kahn from close range.

Bayern could have done with the services of new 18.75-million-euro capture Roy Makaay, but the Dutchman was not available, and it was Claudio Pizarro who netted his second goal of the season on 49 minutes to give Bayern hope.

Ten-man Hannover, who had Mohammadou Idrissou sent off on 84 minutes for violent conduct, looked to have snatched the spoils until England international Hargreaves curled a pinpoint free-kick into the top corner deep into stoppage time.

Ottmar Hitzfeld felt the 3-3 result was fair overall and saluted the performances of his troops in the second period.

"Despite the difficult conditions we saw a game played at a high level," said Hitzfeld.

"There were two very different halves. I was happy with the performance of my team after the break."

Borussia Dortmund moved to the Bundesliga summit with their first victory of the 2003/04 campaign, a 4-0 thrashing of VfL Wolfsburg in front of 72,000 fans at the Westfalen Stadium.

Playmaker Tomas Rosicky, who had been a doubt before the game with a hamstring complaint, grabbed two goals (25, 51) with compatriot Jan Koller (87) and Brazilian Amoroso (74) completing the rout.

Dortmund now lead the 18-strong championship on goal difference from Hannover, who missed out on top spot because of Hargreaves' late intervention.

Japanese World Cup star Naohiro Takahara helped SV Hamburg to a point in a 1-1 draw with VfL Bochum.

Takahara netted his first Bundesliga goal of the season on 19 minutes with a clever lob over Rein van Duijnhoven.

Schalke 04 boss Jupp Heynckes

is still waiting for his first victory in the Bundesliga after his team drew 1-1 with 1860 Munich at the Olympic Stadium.

Markus Schroth put the hosts ahead on 19 minutes but Uruguayan international Dario Rodriguez levelled for Schalke on 56 minutes.

Steffen Freund made a triumphant debut helping ten-man Kaiserslautern to a 2-1 win over newcomers FC Cologne.

Goals from Miroslav Klose (39) and Dimitrios Grammozis (76) helped ten-man Kaiserslautern to three points that erase their three-point deficit due to under-the-counter payments.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich's England international Owen Hargreaves (L) feels the presence of Hannover 96's Jiri Stajner at Hannover on August 9.

Scottish Premiership Rangers' first day fireworks

Football

AFP, Glasgow

Rangers took first blood in the 2003/04 Scottish Premier League race on Saturday with a four-goal demolition of ten-man Kilmarnock at Ibrox Park.

After pipping Celtic on goal difference to claim their 50th Scottish title on the final day of last season, Alex McLeish's side claimed an early two-point advantage in the new campaign as their arch rivals, minus injured Swedish striker Henrik Larsson, were held to a goalless draw at Dunfermline.

It was the first time Celtic had failed to score in 59 league outings. Danish winger Peter Lovrenkrands opened Rangers'

account and after Killie defender Chris Innes was sent off, Michael Mols and Mikel Arteta got on the scoresheet, the latter adding a second half strike to his penalty just before the break.

Killie goalkeeper Colin Meldrum gifted Rangers their opener after fumbling a Fernando Ricksen cross into Lovrenkrands' path.

Innes was sent off ten minutes from the break when his umpteenth foul on Mols earned him a second yellow card.

The Dutch forward capitalised three minutes later by latching on to Craig Moore's flick-on from a corner to fire home from close range.

Rangers skipper Barry Ferguson, back in action after pelvic surgery at the end of last season, was brought down by Sean Hessey two minutes before the break and Arteta coolly slotted the spot-kick

away. The Spanish midfielder added a second 18 minutes before full time.

In the day's other matches, Marcio Maximo Barcellos, the first Brazilian to manage any British team, saw his new charges at Livingston emerge with a draw from their clash with Partick Thistle.

Hearts, third last season, got off to a winning start with Mark de Vries and Andy Kirk scoring in a 2-0 win over Aberdeen.

Two late goals helped Hibernian beat Dundee United 2-1.

Terry Butcher's Motherwell, who only escaped relegation last season because first division champions Falkirk's ground does not meet SPL standards, look set for another season of struggle after losing their opener 3-0 at home to Dundee.

He has also had stints with Argentine outfit Velez Sarsfield and Atletico Bucaramanga.

Year's ban for Castillo

AFP, Asuncion

A Colombian international who attacked a linesman during a Libertadores Cup match in June has been banned for a year.

Winger Jairo Castillo was sanctioned after taking a swipe at a Paraguayan touch judge, Epifanio Gonzalez, in the Libertadores Cup first leg semi-final between his club America Cali and Boca Juniors.

The suspension was handed down by the South American football federation on Saturday.

Castillo, who had been linked to Aston Villa at the start of the year, joined America Cali from United Arab Emirates side Al Wahda.

He has also had stints with Argentine outfit Velez Sarsfield and Atletico Bucaramanga.