

Mexico condemns racist insult

REUTERS, Mexico City

The Mexican football federation condemned the racist insults aimed at a black player in a first division match at the weekend but said it was too early to announce any punishment.

Monterrey's Panamanian international defender Felipe Baloy was greeted with monkey chants when he touched the ball during his side's match at Santos Laguna in Torreon on Saturday.

Baloy scored Monterrey's first goal in a 2-2 draw.

"There's no room for racism in Mexican football," the federation's general secretary Decio de Maria said on Tuesday.

"This sort of situation should not happen in football, nor in any other part of society," he was quoted as saying on the federation's official website.

"What happened in Santos is shameful but we will have to wait for an analysis and to hear those involved before making a decision."

Baloy's team mate Jesus Arellano added that his team and their fans always got a hostile reception in Torreon.

"It's something that they must not be allowed to get away with," he told the Notimex news agency.

"When the Monterrey people go there, they are badly treated, the police even hit and tear-gas the supporters of our team," he said.

"On the other hand, they come here without any problems because the Monterrey people are not aggressive."

Arellano said players were used to being insulted by rival fans.

"But when they do what they did to Felipe, it's wrong," he said.

J Cole injury fears ease

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea coach Steve Clarke has confirmed that Joe Cole looks set for a rapid recovery from his knee injury.

Cole limped out of Saturday's pre-season friendly against the MLS All-Star in Chicago after twisting his right knee.

Boss Jose Mourinho feared the worst but there is thought to be no serious ligament damage and assistant manager Clarke says the England midfielder is already making good progress.

Clarke said: 'Joe is okay. He has got the brace off his leg. He is moving around on his own.'

'He still feels a little pain which is normal but we are hopeful he will progress very, very quickly.'

Cole will miss the start of the season and England's friendly against Greece, next week, but could be back before the end of the month.

The Blues, who beat Feyenoord 1-0 in Rotterdam yesterday, play their second friendly in successive days today when they take on Celtic.

Mourinho used 17 players in Holland and will rotate the same squad to face the Scottish champions at Stamford Bridge.

Mourinho has said he will start with Shaun Wright-Phillips and Didier Drogba - both second-half subs in Rotterdam - plus one other striker in a three-man attack.

Chelsea's big summer signings - Andriy Shevchenko and Michael Ballack and Salomon Kalou - will appear before the home fans for the first time.

Captain John Terry said: 'I am looking forward to getting back in front of the home fans and against Celtic as well.'

'They have proved a good side over recent years and have great support who follow them everywhere.'

Newcastle monitor Kyut, Martins

INTERNET, undated

Newcastle boss Glenn Roeder is refusing to rule out a swoop for £10million-rated Feyenoord striker Dirk Kyut after watching the player in action in Amsterdam on Sunday.

Kyut was unimpressive in his side's 2-0 LG Tournament win over Middlesbrough - but Roeder believes the Dutch international is well worth another look.

Roeder said: 'I would have no reason to remove him, or a couple of other targets, from my list. We will be studying him again at the weekend as we are two or three other strikers.'

'He played well and I did not see any reason why we should not go and watch him again. But that does not mean we are going to be bidding for him, or that he is coming here,' Roeder told Newcastle's official website.

Roeder is certainly likely to be put off by Feyenoord's prohibitive valuation of the player and with time running out before the start of the new season, is also turning his attention elsewhere.

Chief on his list of alternatives is Obafemi Martins, who has handed in a transfer request at Inter Milan. Roeder admitted: 'Martins is a good player. He is different - very quick and strong.'



PHOTO: AFP

IN ENEMY TERRITORY: Watford's Marlon King is surrounded and tackled by Inter Milan defenders during their friendly match in Watford on Tuesday.

Watford tie Inter

Football

INTERNET, undated

Adrian Boothroyd's Watford held Italian champions Inter Milan to a decent draw at Vicarage Road to fill the Hornets with hope for the new Premiership season.

Marlon King, the top scorer in the Coca-Cola Championship last season, gave the home side the lead after an hour's play, but substitute Marco Andreoli drew Inter level with 15 minutes remaining.

In their penultimate pre-season friendly, Watford coped well with the obvious threat of the Serie A giants.

Inter fielded a strong starting XI, which included Brazil World Cup

striker Adriano, and Obafemi Martins, who is reportedly a target of several English clubs.

Watford gave a debut to newly-recruited defender Danny Shittu, who signed from QPR on Sunday.

The first good chance to come Inter's way arrived just before the half-hour mark when Dejan Stankovic and Brazilian midfielder Maicon combined to good effect.

Maicon's shot was pushed out and Stankovic's follow-up was firmly struck but wayward.

Watford had already caused the Inter defence some concern, with King and Ashley Young looking threatening.

Adriano saw an effort from Santiago Solari's cross well stopped by Richard Lee before the break,

while Martins also threatened to break the deadlock.

Inter made several changes at the break - taking off Adriano, Olivier Dacourt and Julio Cesar - and they continued to substitute players during the second half. Of their starting XI, only Stankovic finished the match.

Watford went in front when King beat Walter Samuel and then fired past Francesco Toldo.

However Inter had a riposte and Andreoli converted David Pizarro's cross to earn the visitors a draw.

Martins came close to a winner for Roberto Mancini's side before he too was taken off in the closing stages.

Lamps special seals win

REUTERS, Rotterdam

Frank Lampard put his England woes behind him to score Chelsea's winner in a 1-0 pre-season victory over Feyenoord on Tuesday.

The midfielder, who suffered poor form at the World Cup, profited from a moment of brilliance from Andriy Shevchenko after 52 minutes to clinch victory for the English champions.

Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho started with virtually a full-strength side, barring goalkeeper Petr Cech who was not in the squad and defender John Terry who was a substitute.

Michael Ballack, Shevchenko and Didier Drogba all missed good chances for Chelsea, who play the Community Shield against Cup winners Liverpool on Sunday in Cardiff.

Lampard made no mistake, however, flicking the ball into the net after a great pass from Shevchenko.

Feyenoord's best chance came in the final minute when a free kick from Pierre van Hooijdonk hit the post with goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini beaten.

"It was a very good training session for us and for them," Mourinho told reporters.

"It was a serious match and I am happy with it. We are now training for 10 days and there is a revolution going on in my team."

"At this moment we are only short at the back and are looking for one more player."

Asked if Chelsea were any nearer to signing Arsenal's England left back Ashley Cole, Mourinho said: "Arsenal received an offer from Chelsea for Ashley Cole and now we have to wait for their decision, that is all we can do."

Auxerre fall at Belgrade

AFP, Paris

French side Auxerre were left with work to do to make it into the knockout stages of the UEFA Cup after losing 1-0 to Serbian side OFK Belgrade on Tuesday.

In Tuesday's other second preliminary round first leg fixture Omonia of Cyprus held Litex Lovech to a goalless draw after the Bulgarian visitors had a goal disallowed.

The only goal of the night in Serbia came from OFK captain Milo Bajalica whose 12 metre header off an Aleksandar Kolarov free-kick hit the cross bar with the ball then bouncing over Fabien Cool's line on 20 minutes.

Auxerre had a fine chance to grab a precious away goal after just six minutes only for Lionel Mathis to miss from close range off a corner.

And the French kept up the pressure after the break with second half substitute Luigi Pieroni forcing Nenad Ilic into action in the 53rd minute.

But the young home side held firm to give themselves a narrow advantage going into the August 24 second leg.

Auxerre coach Jean Fernandez said: "We were pretty tired after the league game against Valenciennes and perhaps that was to blame for our poor start."

"Belgrade scored on the only opening they created. "Our chances of qualifying are 50-50."

His opposite number, Slobodan Krcmaravic, said: "I agree that the chances of going through our 50-50. We played well, I'm satisfied with my players. If they play like that in Auxerre we can be optimistic."

On a sweltering night in Nicosia the tie between Omonia and Litex Lovech ended all square after Litex striker Milivoje Novakovic's header was ruled offside in the 76th minute.

Dutch clubs cleared of fixing

AFP, The Hague

Three first division clubs have been cleared after an investigation into alleged match-fixing in Dutch football, the ANP news agency reported Wednesday.

A court in The Hague found no evidence of match-fixing against the sides - ADO The Hague, FC Utrecht and Willem II Tilburg.

The inquiry was sparked after the former partner of a player alleged cases of match-fixing.

Investigators examined the lifestyles of certain players whose lavish spending seemed incompatible with their take home pay.

Some players for average clubs from the Dutch first and second divisions were reported to have splashed out on villas for cash and drove luxury cars while their income was relatively low.

But ANP reported that there was no proof that they players had been bribed or had been approached to influence the result of matches.

The Dutch authorities estimate that at least five illegal gambling syndicates generating some 40 million euros a year were in operation in the Netherlands.

Toni decides for Fiorentina

INTERNET, undated



PHOTO: AFP

Luca Toni will not leave Fiorentina, confirmed Viola chief Diego Della Valle after a crisis meeting with the player on Tuesday.

The industrialist attended a Press conference with Toni himself and sporting director Pantaleo Corvino, seemingly putting an end to a lengthy saga and dismissing once and for all rumours about the player's imminent move to Inter.

"Luca understood our reasons and will stay, he is a great player and will continue to be an asset for Fiorentina," said Della Valle.

"The player knows that he is essential for our future projects, I appreciate his understanding," he added.

"It only took us five minutes to clarify all the previous misunderstandings, with no need to speak

about any economical aspects," added the patron.

"It isn't common to see a player give more importance to the affection for the shirt he wears than to the money, these things happen very rarely."

Toni also wished to clarify the reasons of this decision, totally

unexpected after his last statements when he reiterated that he preferred to leave in order to complete his dream of fighting for the Scudetto and the Champions League.

"I had a chat with the President and that was enough, now I only want to play and try to achieve important results with Fiorentina," said last year's Serie A top scorer.

"I am totally convinced of my decision to stay here and am eager to start training with my teammates," noted Toni as he shattered Inter's hopes of netting him.

Toni returned from his vacation on Monday and immediately joined his Viola teammates in San Piero a Sieve, where he held his first training session of the season before leaving for the clarification meeting with Della Valle.

Inter are now expected to pursue their interest in the Juventus duo of Zlatan Ibrahimovic and David Trezeguet.



LUCA TONI

Cesc starts brightly

AFP, Zagreb



PHOTO: AFP

Cesc Fabregas gave Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger plenty of reasons to be cheerful after a sparkling two-goal performance in the Gunners 3-0 Champions League romp over Dinamo Zagreb.

As Wenger contemplates the imminent departure of Ashley Cole and possible transfer of Jose-Antonio Reyes, he can console himself that his best young prospect -- Fabregas -- is happy in London.

Fabregas has attracted admiring

glances from Real Madrid after an impressive World Cup, but the 19-year-old has gone on record as saying that he wants to stay with Arsenal for the foreseeable future.

Tuesday's match was Fabregas' 100th senior appearance for the Gunners, and he marked it with two sublimely taken goals that indicates he is ready to start weighing in with important goals from midfield as well as steel and guile.

And Fabregas revealed that he feels physically stronger than ever before as the Premiership season approaches.

"Every season you try to get better and better," Fabregas said. "I feel physically stronger than last year."

"If you feel stronger then you can go forward and you can defend. My target is to try to play the same way as last season and defend better."

Fabregas struck in the 63rd and 79th minutes, his goals coming either side of a 65th minute effort from Robin van Persie.

"It was very difficult, they made it very hard," Fabregas said. "I think we did very well in the second half."

Only a miraculous performance from Dinamo in the second leg of the final qualifying tie match at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in a fortnight will deny Wenger's men a place in the group stage.

Negativity irks Bayern

REUTERS, Berlin



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich coach Felix Magath said he would like his team to play a more open, attacking style than in the past but feared it would not be possible because so many other teams are committed to spoiling tactics.

"We want to play a more attractive style -- the players, the coach and the board all want that," Magath said in an interview published on Wednesday in the Passauer Neue Presse newspaper.

"The wish for a more attractive style

is justified but it cannot be achieved because we play against teams that pack their defence and because the pitch conditions, for instance in January and February, do not allow it.

"No reasonable person can expect Bayern Munich to play a great match under such conditions."

Pressure in Germany for more attacking football has grown since the national team advanced to the semi-final of the World Cup with a positive approach and as one of the few leading teams to play with two strikers. Bayern Munich have won the last two Bundesliga championships but solid defence rather than frontline sparkle has been their trademark.

Magath also said Bayern have not given up their goal of winning the

Champions League even though club executives appear to have lowered sights after early exits the last two seasons.

"I'll say it again: we too can win the Champions League," he said. "But everything has to fit together perfectly because the performance of the top teams are so close to each other."

"That means you can't have a (unjust) penalty called against you, as happened to us against AC Milan (in the 1-1 quarter-final match on Feb. 21). We've seen Chelsea invest huge sums but still not succeed in winning the title."

Benitez backs Gerrard

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez is backing Steven Gerrard to succeed David Beckham as England captain ahead of new national boss Steve McClaren's announcement expected later this week.

McClaren is due to choose between front runners Gerrard and Chelsea defender John Terry when he unveils his first squad since taking over from Sven-Goran Eriksson on Friday.

The England manager spent Monday at Liverpool's Melwood training ground, meeting Benitez and watching the club's English players train for this Wednesday's Champions

League qualifier against Maccabi Haifa.

"Steve and me talked about the future for England, the team, it was a good conversation between two friends about football," Benitez said.

"What was interesting was that he had a clear idea, a plan, and he knows what he wants to do. He is clever and knows how to handle this."

"I asked him who would be the next England captain, but was told nothing, he just smiled at me."

"But it would be good for Steven Gerrard even if it is more work for him, we will have to wait for a decision."

"He thrives on responsibility, he is more mature and understands how important it is to be captain and he must be an example for the rest of the players."

Gerrard is already Liverpool captain and is renowned for pushing his club side to famous victories almost single-handedly, most notably in the 2005 Champions League final and last season's FA Cup final.

"I think Steven would do it well, it would be very good for him but at the moment he must think about the next game and it's importance to us," Benitez said.

"He can certainly do the England job, but in the end it is not our decision and he should just be focused on what Liverpool are doing."

"But for me the most important thing is to see Steve concentrating on our next game because it is so important to us."

Ronaldo shows character

Football

AFP, London

Cristiano Ronaldo shrugged off jeers from rival fans to star in Manchester United's 4-1 win over Oxford United in a pre-season friendly on Tuesday.

The Portugal international was made public enemy number one for his perceived role in getting

United teammate Wayne Rooney sent off in the World Cup quarter-final against England last month.

And the Oxford United fans ensured the winger was given a rowdy reception on his first game back on English soil, but he brushed it off with aplomb, swerving home a brilliant 14th minute volley.

Much had been made of Ronaldo's return, 38 days since he helped get Rooney sent off and

fired home the penalty which knocked England out of the World Cup.

But the security concerns expressed over the former Sporting Lisbon star appeared to have been greatly exaggerated.

There were no police inside the stadium at all and, while the number of safety officers present had been beefed up, it was only in response to the arrival of a United side containing nine internationals rather than the reserve team which had originally been expected when the fixture was agreed a couple of months ago.

Even the boos were more routine than venomous and the 21-year-old felt relaxed enough to offer team-mate Kieran Richardson a broad grin as he ran out for the second half.

The contest was only six minutes old when Ronaldo made his first imprint on the game, touching a pass to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer inside the Oxford box which allowed the veteran striker to blast a shot into the roof of the net.

Ronaldo's opener followed not that long afterwards. It was Louis Saha, also making his first appearance since heartbreakingly missing the World Cup final through suspension, who provided the cushioned lay-off to Phil Bardsley's cross.

The right-foot finish was exquisite, starting off wide of Turley's far post before curling in.

Darren Fletcher added another two minutes later and while Robert Duffy powered home a far-post header before the break, Ronaldo quickly restored United's three-goal lead after half-time.

Yet again, the finish was right-footed, curling a shot into the bottom corner this time after David Jones had fed him with a short pass.

There was to be no hat-trick, even though Ronaldo was pushed into a more orthodox striker's role until he was replaced by Giuseppe Rossi.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo rides a tackle from an Oxford United player during a friendly match at Kassam Stadium in Oxford on Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

German international defender Per Mertesacker poses with the jersey of his new team Werder Bremen alongside coach Thomas Schaaf (L) and general manager Klaus Allofs (R) during a press conference at Bremen's stadium on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a key: Z W S I N U P I J Y P Y U J U P E Y E

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals E. The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.