



Brazilian defender Evanilsson (C) is challenged by a Japanese player in their warm-up game.

Brazil right on target



REUTERS, Tokyo

Brazil warmed up for the Confederations Cup with a 2-0 win over J-League side Tokyo Verdy on Saturday thanks to second-half goals from Washington and Julio Batista.

Washington opened the scoring

Zidane at any cost



AFP, Madrid

The acquisition of France and Juventus playmaker Zinedine Zidane would be an "excellent investment" and a sound financial move, according to Real Madrid president Florentino Perez.

Perez said he has a simple plan to promote the Real brand on the international stage - recruit the best players that money can buy, and sit

back and wait for the cash to roll in.

"When the (Spanish) league ends I will go over a few things with Valdano (Jorge Valdano, managing director of the Madrid club)," Perez said in an interview with Spanish daily El Pais Saturday.

"Our strategy is clear: the best players have to play at Real Madrid. Why? Because they are the ones who will generate the most money, and not only on the sports front.

"Recruiting a star player means that the club's name will become known all over the world, therefore allowing us to benefit financially,"

Confederations Cup campaign against Cameroon in Kashima on Thursday, struggled to contain a Verdy side missing Japan internationals Yui Nakazawa and Atsuhiko Miura in the first half.

AC Milan keeper Dida was forced to make a smart stop from forward Nobuhiro Takeda as early as the fourth minute, before midfielder Vagner struck the post with a right-foot shot in the 12th minute wich was as close as Brazil came before the break.

Ramon's introduction at the restart added an extra dimension to the Brazilian midfield, but the four-times world champions were still unconvincing against Verdy, the club Brazil manager Emerson Leao coached the early 1990s.

added Perez.

Perez said he is prepared to spend as much on acquiring Zidane as he did on buying Portugal midfielder Luis Fig. Sales of Figo jerseys alone bring in astronomical amounts of cash for the 2000 European champions.

"If I have to, I will do it because I'm sure it will be a sound financial move for Real Madrid," affirmed Perez.

"I'm one of those people who believes that a club should make as much money as possible, and a club's value increases as it buys

"We accomplished most of what we set out to do in today's game. One or two players still have jet-lag and some have never played an Asian team," said Leao when asked why his team could only score twice.

"I was more worried about how we played than scoring four or five goals today. We worked harder for each other and played better in the second half."

Asked to predict how Brazil would do against Cameroon, Canada and co-hosts Japan in Group B of the Confederations Cup, Leao said, "I'll think about that starting from tonight."

bigger stars, who are always money-spinners," Perez said.

"Figo sells hundreds of thousands of shirts, and at 60 euros a shot, that adds up to millions of euros. It's as simple as that. Figo makes good business sense," concluded Perez.

After being elected president of Real in July 2000, Perez scored a real winner by going all out to snatch Figo from bitter rivals Barcelona for a record transfer fee of 60 million euros.

France to miss Henry

AFP, Paris

France and Arsenal forward Thierry Henry will not take part in the upcoming Confederations Cup in Japan and South Korea after he experienced back pains in mid-week, it has been announced.

Henry, an integral part in Roger Lemerre's World and European champions squad, will be replaced by Bastia striker Frederic Nee who finished third-top goalscorer in the French league this term.

Henry will undergo tests to determine the exact cause of the pain but there seems little or no chance of him participating in the May 30 - June 10 tournament.

France debutant Nee scored 16 goals to finish the league's top French goalscorer.

Cameroon booter arrested

AFP, Seoul

A football player from the Cameroonian national squad was arrested here Saturday on charges of theft, police said.

Pensee Bilong Michel, 27, was accused of stealing 7.4 million won (5,745 dollars) in bank checks from his former team, South Korea's Sungnam Ilhwa club, on March 14, the police said.

Michel has since decided to leave Ilhwa and join a Russian team.

"He is in custody here," a detective at Yongsan Police Station in central Seoul told AFP.

He was arrested following a friendly match between his team and the South Korean national side late Friday.

Michel was quoted as telling police he had taken the money as part of his overdue payment from Ilhwa and that he had to leave the team because he had been badly treated by them.

The Cameroon squad left for Japan on Saturday to prepare for the Confederations Cup tournament.

Teddy going to Spurs

AFP, London

Evergreen Manchester United and England striker Teddy Sheringham is expected to sign a two-year deal with his former club Tottenham Hotspur on a free transfer after the London club called a press conference here Saturday.

The 35-year-old winner of both the players and journalists player of the year for the 2000-2001 season would be manager Glenn Hoddle's first signing after he too recently returned to the club where he shot to fame.

Despite scoring 21 goals for the Premiership champions this season Sheringham's chances of first team football at Manchester next season were thrown into doubt by the record signing of Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, taking the number of top strikers at the club to five.

Sheringham was also disappointed that the champions had only offered him a one-year extension to his contract and had been holding out for a two-year deal, he also rejected an approach by Jean Tigana's newly promoted Fulham.

Sheringham, a life-long Tottenham fan, spent five seasons at White Hart Lane where he formed a memorable partnership with German international striker Jurgen Klinsmann, and another on the international stage at Euro 1996 with Alan Shearer, before leaving for Old Trafford in 1997.

The England striker was brought to Old Trafford as Alex Ferguson looked for an inspirational leader to fill the boots of departed French favourite Eric Cantona and while few thought Sheringham was up to the job he proved detractors wrong with his intelligent play.

Nor will United fans ever forget Sheringham's 1999 Champions League final substitute appearance when deep into injury time he scored the equaliser and set up Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's winner in the 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich.

Tottenham finished twelfth in the Premiership this season, 31 points behind Manchester United.

'Soccercide'

AFP, The Hague

NAC Breda midfielder Ferry Van Vliet was killed in a car accident on Friday night while driving with his girlfriend, according to Dutch agency reports here Saturday.

Van Vliet was driving on the motorway when his car collided with the central reservation before rolling several times. Both the player and his girlfriend were killed instantly.

The 20-year-old player was considered one of the Dutch First Division side's big hopes for the future.

NAC Breda and its players, meanwhile, were in shock on hearing the news. The club has asked the Dutch federation to postpone Sunday's match against league rivals De Graafschap.

Ferilli is planning to attend the match.

England run Mexico over



AFP, Derby

England prepared for their vital World Cup qualifier against Greece in Athens on June 6 with a convincing 4-0 friendly win over Mexico here at Pride Park Friday.

First-half goals from Paul Scholes, Robbie Fowler and captain David Beckham put the result beyond doubt before a 74th minute 25-yard curling free-kick from substitute striker Teddy Sheringham, a near carbon copy of United teammate Beckham's goal, put the icing on the cake.

The result means that England have made it four wins out of four under new Swedish coach Sven-Goran Eriksson.

It was a performance thoroughly enjoyed by the Pride Park crowd, many of whom were more used to seeing Derby struggle to retain their Premiership status this season.

They even playfully chanted the ultimate insult, from their point of view, at the Mexicans - "Are you Scotland in disguise?"

Nothing went right for the Latin Americans. Even when England striker Emile Heskey awarded them a second-half penalty following a 65th minute foul, Jose Manuel Abundis slid the spot-kick wide of the right post.

England might have gone even further ahead shortly after half-time when West Ham midfielder Joe Cole, one of eight England substitutes on at the start of the second half, shot straight at advancing goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez.

Then Duilio Davino, one of two Mexican replacements at the break, did well to find space at the near post but his header past the upright was of no concern to England substitute goalkeeper David James.

But the Aston Villa shot-stopper needed to be at his best to tip-over a quickly taken free-kick from Abundis before watching his penalty effort go past his post.

England got off to a sensational start when Manchester United



PHOTO: AFP

England's Paul Scholes (2nd from L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening goal against Mexico.

midfielder Scholes put them ahead in the third minute with a fantastic long range effort.

Midfield colleague Steven Gerrard, the fourth Liverpool member of the starting line-up, passed the ball to Scholes who let fly with a superb strike that arrowed into the top corner past Sanchez's despairing dive.

It was Scholes 12th England goal in his 34th international - a fine strike rate for someone who is not a forward.

Mexico, who travel to Korea on Saturday to defend the Confederation Cup that they won two years ago by beating Brazil 4-3, already looked jet-lagged at the back. Beckham was finding himself in oceans of space on the right.

However, their forwards did get them into the game when England goalkeeper Nigel Martyn held on to a cross shot from Antonio De Nigris.

In the 12th minute the Leeds keeper proved his worth again with a good double save first blocking Victor Ruiz's edge of the box strike and then tipping the ball away from the onrushing Abundis.

But England's Liverpool strike force of Fowler, Heskey and Michael Owen were enjoying themselves and in the 14th minute Fowler doubled England's lead.

Beckham's right touchline pass

found Gerrard and his cross was turned in by Fowler, despite pressure from defender Joaquin Beltran.

The visitors defence was under pressure every time England went into their half and only some good work from goalkeeper Sanchez, turning a Fowler shot round the post and clinging on to an Owen back header, prevented Mexico falling further behind.

Some wasteful England finishing also helped keep the score respectable, Gerrard failing with a close range effort after Fowler rose at the far post to head back a Beckham cross.

However, the England captain, soon took matters into his hands. Owen was brought down 25 yards from goal, a perfect situation for one of Beckham's trademark free kicks.

His curling effort on the half-hour mark gave Sanchez little chance for what was only his third England goal.

The only downside for Eriksson's men was their failure to take all of their chances. In the dying minutes Leeds forward Alan Smith somehow shot straight at Sanchez from inside the six-yard box.

That the keeper was far and away Mexico's best player on the night said much about the performance of Enrique Meza's side.

reached between the three men.

Several papers seized on Vieira's words from an interview between the player and French sports daily L'Equipe last week, hinting the Senegal-born player would be unhappy if Arsenal sold any players this year.

"I am in talks with Arsenal to make a decision about staying or not," he told L'Equipe.

"When you want to be a big team you cannot afford to lose your best players. You cannot release the likes of Emmanuel Petit and Marc Overmars.

"The FA Cup final was the symbol of our season. If we had scored a second goal we would have won, but we didn't. All year we kept losing big matches. I'm not living in the past, but I can say the 1998 team was extraordinary because it had players with character who made a difference."

MU want Vieira



AFP, London

France and Arsenal star Patrick Vieira is being targeted by Manchester United in a bold 20-million-pound (28.4-million-dollar) transfer bid, newspapers reported here Saturday.

The combative midfielder is a key target for Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson, who is known to be an admirer of the 24-year-old Gunners player.

Several newspapers reported Saturday that Manchester United's board were planning to make funds available for an audacious raid on the Gunners prize asset in a show of support for manager Ferguson.

Ferguson has been at loggerheads with United since announcing last week he would sever all ties with

the club when he retires at the end of next season.

The acrimonious nature of that dispute has prompted fears within Old Trafford that Ferguson may seek to leave the club over the summer. An inquiry from Spanish giants Barcelona is already reported to have been rejected.

The Daily Mail on Saturday reported that nearly 30 million pounds has been wiped off the value of the world's richest club since the dispute with Ferguson erupted at the end of last week.

Now directors at Manchester United want to halt the slide in confidence with a major signing - with Vieira the prime target.

The Daily Telegraph reported the move comes after Ferguson met United chief executive Peter Kenyon and the chairman of Manchester United plc Roland Smith on Friday, where the paper said "an uneasy peace" was



REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich hope their dramatic European Cup victory over Valencia will kick-start an era as glorious as the 1970s when the club ruled Europe and won three European Cups in a row.

Bayern, one of the world's richest clubs but also famously parsimonious, are set for a spending spree, tipped to include Sebastian Deisler and Michael Ballack, to help them become as successful as the side that held the European Cup from 1974 to 1976.

"This club is sexier than ever," Bayern's vice-president said Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, a member of that legendary 1970s side, when asked if the club was attractive to top players.

Bayern are banking on Oliver Kahn, Stefan Effenberg, Jens Jeremies, Carsten Jancker and Thomas Linke making their mark in the way Franz Beckenbauer, Sepp Maier, Gerd Mueller, Hans-Georg Schwarzenbeck, Paul Breitner and Uli Hoeness did in the 1970s.

The club's expansion plans include building a new stadium before the 2006 World Cup in Germany and a stock market listing or a lucrative strategic partnership to help fund its ambitions.

Bayern have never spent more than 20 million marks (9 million dollars) on a player and Uli

Hoeness, who has joined teammates from the 1970s side in a management role at the club, had criticised others for spending too much on players and insisted Bayern could happily live without buying a superstar.

But Hoeness appears to have relented and said last month that Bayern could spend as much as 100 million marks (44 million dollars), possibly including 50 million marks for one player though they are staying tight-lipped on who that might be.

The club is unlikely to spend money on the scale seen at Real Madrid or Lazio and pride themselves on the value for money their relatively inexpensive purchases have provided.

But Hertha Berlin's young German midfielder Sebastian Deisler and his fellow international, Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Michael Ballack, are top of the shopping list at the moment and neither player is likely to come cheap.

Bayern are also said to be bidding for Werder Bremen's Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro. Some big names in Germany have already signed up. Croatian internationals Niko and Robert Kovac will join from Hamburg SV and Bayer Leverkusen next season, and Bayern have signed Guinean midfielder Pablo Thiam from Stuttgart on a free transfer.

Keeping existing talent is also something Bayern need to consider, which could mean big wage bills.

Toldo hopes to join Barca

contract.

"I am going to Barcelona but I have not yet signed," Corriere dello Sport reported Toldo as saying. "But everything is done now. I am sorry to be leaving Florence but I can not turn down an offer like this."

The paper claims Fiorentina will reap 22 million dollars for their 'keeper while the player himself will earn 15 million dollars over the next five years with the Catalan outfit.

Toldo, born in Padua in 1971, made a name for himself in Euro 2000 last summer when his brilliant

goalkeeping - notably in the semi-final against Holland in the Amsterdam Arena - took Italy to the final.

But he has since surrendered his first-team spot in the national side to Parma's Gianluigi Buffon, who missed Euro 2000 through injury.

He has also fallen out with Fiorentina. He said the club's board was suffering from mad cow's disease after the events that led to the resignation of the club's Turkish coach Fatih Terim earlier this year.