

Boca's the best

Football

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Boca Juniors, Argentina's most popular club, won the South American Libertadores Cup for the third time in four years by beating Brazilian champions Santos 3-1 in the second leg of the final on Wednesday.

Nineteen-year-old striker Carlos Tevez effectively killed off the tie when he gave visitors Boca, who won the first leg 2-0, a 21st-minute lead.

Pele's former club equalised with a long-range shot by defender Alex in the 75th minute but their fightback ended nine minutes later after a brilliantly taken goal by Marcelo Delgado, his ninth of the championship.

Rolando Schiavi added a penalty in the fifth minute of injury time.

Santos players furiously protested the decision, awarded for a vicious, double-footed challenge

by goalkeeper Fabio Costa, and in the confusion, captain Paulo Almeida grabbed Uruguayan referee Jorge Larrionda's yellow card and showed it to him.

Boca coach Carlos Bianchi, who led the team to the title in 2000 and 2001 and Velez Sarsfield in 1994, became the first coach to win the trophy four times.

Santos, needing to win by two goals to send the final to penalties, made a lively start but missed two good early chances.

The game could have veered in a different direction if a seventh-minute header by Alex had gone in. Instead, the ball was cleared off the line by Javier Villareal with goalkeeper Roberto Abbondancieri beaten.

Santos striker Robinho then had a clear header but missed the target. Diego also had a penalty appeal rejected after he appeared to be pushed.

Boca, who had already come close with a Delgado shot, struck a hammer blow in the 21st minute when Tevez scored with a first-time shot after a quick exchange of

passes with Sebastian Battaglia.

Santos, who never reproduced the flowing football which took them through to the final, threatened a fightback when Alex scored with a 30-metre drive which went in off the post.

But they were left exposed as they threw themselves onto the attack and Delgado took full advantage, breaking clear to score from nearly 40 metres after Fabio Costa rushed off his line.

Schiavi finished off the job in the 95th minute after more rash behaviour by the huge Santos goalkeeper.

TEAMS

Santos: Fabio Costa, Wellington (Nene 29), Andre Luiz, Alex, Leo, Paulo Almeida, Renato, Fabiano, Diego, Robinho, Ricardo Oliveira (Douglas 67)

Boca Juniors: Abbondancieri, Ibarra, Schiavi, Burdisso, Rodriguez, Cagna, Battaglia, Cascini, Villareal (Jerez 88), Tevez, Delgado

Referee: U. Larrionda (URU)



ON TOP OF SOUTH AMERICA: Hugo Ibarra (R) of Boca Juniors of Argentina celebrates with the Copa Libertadores trophy along with his teammates after climbing over the goal post after the final against Santos of Brazil at the Morumbi Stadium in Sao Paulo yesterday.

Diego delighted

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona, a lifelong Boca Juniors supporter, is delighted his beloved team have won another Libertadores Cup but upset he missed Wednesday's game.

Maradona, who played for Boca early in his career, is living in Cuba, where he is undergoing drug rehabilitation, and was unable to get to the second leg of the final in Sao Paulo.

Boca won 3-1 to record a 5-1 aggregate victory and secure the South American equivalent of the European Champions League for the fifth time.

"I'm very happy for 'Boquita' (Little Boca), champions of America again, but I'm very unhappy because I couldn't see the game," he said in a radio interview from Havana. "I hope they can send me a video quickly."

"I just couldn't get to Brazil for the final. It all got too complicated and we preferred not to try."



THE LATEST FASHION! A fan looks at the last two David Beckham shirts left in a shop after they went on sale at the official Real Madrid club shop on July 2.

A shirty landmark

Football

AFP, London

England captain David Beckham broke all records for replica shirts sales on his first day as a Real Madrid player, the club told reporters here Thursday.

Club officials said its main souvenir shop alongside the Santiago Bernabeu stadium sold 8,000 shirts with the No 23 that Beckham will wear in little more than the seven hours on Wednesday.

Two hundred were sold in the first hour after Beckham had formally been presented with his new jersey by Real Madrid's honorary president and legendary striker Alfredo Di Stefano.

But then the numbers started to rocket once news spread around the Spanish capital that Beckham's shirt was in stock.

Real said that by the close of trading on Wednesday, the shop had exhausted its initial supply of Beckham's shirt.

To put Beckham on your back is not cheap.

Real Madrid's replica shirts are the most expensive of any club in the Spanish first division and cost 78 euros each, which is 54 pounds for any English visitor.

Beckham's first day sales put all the other recent big signings in the shade.

Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo sold 2,000 shirts on the first day after he joined Real Madrid from Inter Milan last summer.

Club comes first for Kadhafi

Football

AFP, Rome

Perugia's new signing Saadi Kadhafi has ruled himself out of Libya's African Cup qualifier against Swaziland in Tripoli this weekend, his spokesman Gianluca Di Carlo said Thursday.

Di Carlo said that Saadi, son of Libyan leader Muammar, has decided to stay at Perugia's summer training camp as they prepare for their forthcoming InterToto Cup match.

In 2001, only 300 shirts with Zinedine Zidane's name and number were sold on the first day after the Frenchman's world record transfer from Juventus was formally completed.

Not a single Luis Figo shirt was sold in July 2000 on the first day after the Portuguese international moved from bitter rivals Barcelona owing to the fact that they were none in stock after problems with the delivery from the manufacturers.

Beckham's shirt sales will please Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, who has always admitted that he signed the former Manchester United player as much for his commercial pulling-power as his ability with the ball at his feet.

Perez hopes that part of Beckham's 35 million euros transfer fee will be paid off by replica shirt sales in the Asian market, where Beckham is even more of a fashion and sporting icon than he is in Europe.

Counterfeit shirt manufacturers were also quick off the mark.

Shirts with Beckham's name and number were already on sale by Wednesday evening in tourist traps such as Madrid's Puerta Del Sol, where street traders - usually illegal immigrants - display their wares on blankets strewn across the pavement.

One street trader was prepared to sell AFP - after some haggling - a slightly flawed pirate copy of Beckham's replica shirt for 18 euros, less than a quarter of the price of the official version.

A spokesman for the LSE said: "We do not comment on specific cases but we look at the circumstances around any share price movement and if we saw cause for concern we would refer it to the relevant authority, which in the case of market abuse would be the FSA."

The takeover was finalised late Tuesday after talks with long-time club chairman Ken Bates who bought the club in 1982 for just one pound, while taking on debts of 1.5 million pounds.

Bates, 71, stands to walk away with 18 million pounds from the sale.

Chelsea's stadium is in one of the most fashionable and lucrative

'I lead a normal life'

Football

AFP, Madrid

England captain David Beckham looked ahead to his future as a Real Madrid player here on Wednesday in his only interview during his two days in the Spanish capital.

"At the start of last season I would never have imagined that I would be now pulling on a Real Madrid jersey but my future is here now," said Beckham on Real Madrid TV, the club's own television station.

He also wanted to assure Real Madrid fans that he intends keeping his eye on the ball off the pitch as well as on it, especially given his status as a fashion icon.

"I've no problem with that side of my life. Sure, things get a bit crazy in Asia but I have a strong and supportive family and every day I return home and lead a normal life."

"I even go to the supermarket. Some people are surprised to see me buying fruit but I like doing these sort of things. Will I go to a supermarket in Madrid? Of course. I like doing normal things so Real Madrid fans can relax, coming here will not affect my play," Beckham assured his new followers.

The midfielder also refuted suggestions that he had been planning to leave Manchester United for several months.

Beckham had played for the English Premiership champions for his entire professional career - apart from five games on loan at lower division Preston North End - until Monday night when he signed the legal documents that made his a Real Madrid player.

"Six or seven months ago, I started to hear rumours about my future. Up until then everything had been going fine, but it became clear that I was going to leave United was only two or three weeks ago," commented Beckham.

"When I started to look at things, it became clear that if I was to leave Manchester then it would be for Real Madrid," added the 28-year-old player.

Beckham tried to bury the hatchet with Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, whose deteriorating relationship with the player was well-known to be Beckham's main motivation for leaving Old Trafford.

"You have ups-and-downs with your boss, just like at any work. He gave me the opportunity to start my career and play many years at Manchester United and that was fundamental to my sporting career. He was something like a father-figure and for that I will always be grateful."

"However, great clubs always carry on and my life is here now."

Beckham joins the Spanish champions, and nine times kings of Europe, on a four-year contract worth an estimated six million euros a year before bonuses.

Real will pay Manchester United up to 35 million euros, the exact figure depends on the Spanish team's progress in the Champions League in the next four years, for the midfielder.

He was presented with a Real Madrid No 23 shirt by the club's honorary president and legendary striker Alfredo Di Stefano.

The number was vacant last season but club sources told reporters that the number was chosen because it is associated

with the basketball legend Michael Jordan.

After Di Stefano and Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, the first player to welcome Beckham was Luis Figo, who many thought would be displaced by Beckham as both men traditionally play down the right flank.

"His arrival means that we have a stronger team. I only hope he will be happy because that will be better for all of us," said the Portuguese international, who won the 2000 FIFA World Player of the Year award when Beckham finished second.

Figo discounted that possibility that there would be any rivalry between him and Real's new arrival for the role as the right winger in the starting line-up.

"There is always compatibility if people have the same objective. This happens at Madrid because, with or without Beckham, with or without Figo, everyone here has the same objective," added Figo, who knows well the pressure that Beckham will face in the coming months.

In July 2000, Figo not only joined Real from bitter rivals Barcelona but did so for what was then a world record transfer fee of 61.7 million euros.

Beckham is reported to be looking forward to meeting Figo as he is known to be quite friendly with him because of the fact that they have appeared in several of the same advertising campaigns, and also because Figo speaks good English.

Russian invasion probed

Football

AFP, London

The takeover of Chelsea Football Club by a Russian oil billionaire was being probed by the London Stock Exchange on Wednesday after a sharp rise in the pre-takeover share price of the club's parent company.

Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich has agreed to buy out the English Premiership club for 60 million pounds and cover debts estimated at around 80 million pounds in a deal worth 140 million pounds (233 million dollars).

The biggest takeover in British footballing history came out of the blue - and later in the day sources said the deal was being looked at after shares in Chelsea Village, a holding company for a range of leisure businesses centred around Chelsea Football Club, surged from 14 pence in April to 30 pence by the end of June.

The company announced on Wednesday it had agreed to a takeover offer of 35 pence per share from Abramovich.

The share price movement has raised eyebrows at the Stock Exchange, which may refer the case to Britain's financial watchdog, the Financial Services Authority, sources close to the matter told AFP.

A spokesman for the LSE said: "We do not comment on specific cases but we look at the circumstances around any share price movement and if we saw cause for concern we would refer it to the relevant authority, which in the case of market abuse would be the FSA."

The takeover was finalised late Tuesday after talks with long-time club chairman Ken Bates who bought the club in 1982 for just one pound, while taking on debts of 1.5 million pounds.

Bates, 71, stands to walk away with 18 million pounds from the sale.

Chelsea's stadium is in one of the most fashionable and lucrative

parts of London near the King's Road. Bates' dream was to build a complex, the Chelsea Village, of hotels and restaurants that would generate enough income to support the club.

The club has attracted the rich and the famous since the swinging sixties when the club was associated with the pop-star lifestyle but it has won the English championship only once, in 1955.

The 36-year-old Abramovich



MYSTERY MAN: A file photo of Russian businessman Roman Abramovich while he was at Chukotka peninsula, Russia, in the village of Bilibino 300 km west of the Chukotka capital of Anadyr in 2001.

has amassed a fortune of 5.7 billion dollars from oil and aluminium and is a friend of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Abramovich also owns stakes in Russian airline Aeroflot and a

Foe farewell

AFP, Lyon

Last respects were paid to Marc-Vivien Foe here on Wednesday six days after the Cameroon international midfielder collapsed at a Confederations Cup match and died shortly after.

About 100 people including family members, friends, Cameroonian living in France and Lyon supporters bade their final farewell to a great player and a popular character in a sport not known for its warmth.

They filed past an open coffin in a chapel until late afternoon. Foe's body is due to be flown to Cameroon on Friday.

The 28-year-old collapsed and died playing in last Thursday's Confederations Cup semi-final against Colombia in Lyon but an autopsy has still not revealed the cause of death.

Foe won the last two African championships with Cameroon.

He had played for Lyon but played for Manchester City in the English Premiership on loan last season.

Sepp Blatter, the president of football's world governing body FIFA, was expected to attend the mass at the Saint-Jean cathedral on Thursday, FIFA announced.

Another football death

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

A 20-year-old Brazilian player died on Wednesday after feeling unwell during a training session, his club Botafogo-Ribeirao Preto said.

The incident occurred less than one week after Cameroon's Marc-Vivien Foe collapsed and died during a match against Colombia at the Confederations Cup in France.

Botafogo-Ribeirao Preto, who play in the third division of the Brazilian championship, said on their official website that Maximiliano Patrick Ferreira, known as "Max", had died in hospital.

"The athlete felt bad, was immediately given help and taken to hospital but the efforts of the medical team were not enough to revive him," the club said.

The club, based in the provincial city of Ribeirao Preto around 400 kilometres from Sao Paulo, said "Max" joined them as a boy and spent his career with them apart from brief spells on loan to Internacional Limeira and Sertaozinho.

Media reports said the player collapsed to the ground shortly after complaining to a team mate that he was feeling dizzy.

Team doctor Alexandre Vega was quoted as saying that the player had no history of medical problems.

"He always did the exams and nothing was ever found," Vega told the website of the sports daily Lance. "No diabetes, high cholesterol, nothing."

Last Thursday, the soccer world was stunned when 28-year-old Foe died after collapsing during the second half of the semi-final against Colombia.

Kahn too fast!

AFP, Munich

Germany keeper Oliver Kahn, the official best player at the 2002 World Cup finals, has been caught speeding a second time and risks having his driving licence confiscated, Bild newspaper reported on Thursday.

Kahn was driving at 150kmh (93mph) in Munich after coming back from the Faroe Islands following their 2-0 Euro 2004 qualifying victory against the north atlantic island on June 12.

The newspaper claimed: "His licence will definitely be confiscated."

Kahn was also caught speeding at 145km/h in Bavaria in March.

PSG want more

Football

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain president Francis Graille said Thursday he was waiting for an improved bid from Manchester United for Brazil World Cup winner Ronaldinho.

Graille turned down a United bid believed to be 25 million euros for the player on Wednesday and United chief executive Peter Kenyon was reporting back to his board on Thursday before coming back with a new bid.

"We expect a new bid by Friday," a PSG spokesman said.

Graille said a cash injection from major shareholder Canal Plus television meant the club was not desperate to sell Ronaldinho.

"We're not going to sell Ronaldinho to be nice to Manchester," he added.

He claimed Real Madrid president Florentino Perez had made an offer to sign Ronaldinho.

"Manchester United have made us offers, but the deal has not made any progress," said Graille.

"We are also in contact with another club, but for the moment Real Madrid have the advantage. I spoke about it with Perez again on Tuesday."

Despite the signing of David

Beckham, Graille claims Real want to recruit 23-year-old Ronaldinho in a deal worth 35 million euros that would see him stay at PSG for another season before moving to Spain.

Ronaldinho's agent and brother Roberto Assis said he had already agreed personal terms with United.

Assis said they had a verbal agreement with the previous PSG president Laurent Perrier that allowed Ronaldinho to leave the club after two years.

PSG paid Gremio Porto Alegre 6.5 million euros two years ago but they only got the player after he went on a six month strike to persuade his Brazilian club to let him go.

PSG were cleared to recruit by the French league financial watchdog on Wednesday after it explained how it proposes dealing with debts Canal Plus TV puts at 160 million euros.

PSG were cleared to recruit by the French league financial watchdog on Wednesday after it explained how it proposes dealing with debts its major shareholder, Canal Plus TV, puts at 160 million euros.

The French club immediately completed the signing of Greek international Demis Nikolaidis from AEK Athens, providing he passed a medical

Totti the joker!

Football

AFP, Rome

A book of jokes poking fun at AS Roma and Italy striker Francesco Totti has sold more than 150,000 copies in the first two weeks of its release, taking it to number one in the Italian bestsellers chart.

"All the jokes about Totti: my collection" was authorised by the player himself to raise money for the children's charity UNICEF for whom Totti is an ambassador.

Totti is often the target of comedians and impersonators because

of his uneasiness in front of the camera and his monosyllabic answers.

But Roma coach Fabio Capello saluted Totti who he believes will have the last laugh on the wisecrackers.

"Bravo Francesco. The success of his book is wonderful and I'm not surprised that it is outselling the others," he said.

"I've read the book and it has all the ingredients to surpass all the other authors. It is a book for the summer, one to enjoy. Francesco's ability to laugh at himself is going to a good cause."



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN! Superstar Ronaldo, playing for the Luis Figo Foundation team, smiles while he runs away with the ball away from Sergio of the UNICEF team during the Allstars UNICEF fund-raising match in Oporto, northern Portugal on July 2. Ronaldo interrupted his holidays in Rio de Janeiro for a couple of days to take part to the friendly match. The Brazilian striker, ideally tuning with Raúl González, Rui Costa and motorracing ace Michael Schumacher, scored the second goal for his team. The match against the Unicef Team ended 5-5.