



UPSIDE DOWN! Real Madrid players stretch during practice at the Hongta sports centre in China's south-western city of Kunming yesterday. The nine-time European champions will end their training camp in the city on July 31 and then face a Chinese XI on August 2 in Beijing before departing for Hong Kong, Tokyo and Bangkok.

PHOTO: AFP

## Mexico CONCACAF kings



AFP, Mexico City

Daniel Osorno struck gold in the seventh minute of extra time Sunday, his golden goal giving Mexico the CONCACAF Gold Cup crown with a 1-0 victory over Brazil.

Osorno slipped past two defenders and then hit a drive from just inside the penalty area, beating Brazilian keeper Gomes and sending the crowd of 65,000 at Azteca Stadium into a frenzy.

"This was a miraculous win. We had suffered so much criticism that it is rewarding today," goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez said.

Mexico won the right to represent the CONCACAF region at the 2005 Confederations Cup, although that tournament's status is in jeopardy due to concerns over the crowded world soccer schedule.

Mexico showed some of their finest football of the past two years.

They attacked from the kickoff, taking advantage of a young Brazilian side who looked exhausted.

Luis Perez had the first scoring chance in the 12th minute with a shot which forced Gomes to make a fine save.

A poor clearance gave both Jared Borgetti and Perez additional chances in front of the net.

Mexico's Jesus Arellano then rattled a shot off the crossbar, and Brazilian defender Alex came to his side's rescue when he cleared

Perez's kick off the line in the 34th minute.

Borgetti almost capitalized in the 89th minute when he pounced on a poor clearance in the Brazilian penalty area but was unable to take his chance.

For all that work, Mexico couldn't make the breakthrough and drew boos from the impatient crowd.

Brazil's only significant attack came in the first half when Kaka sent a ball across Sanchez's goalmouth that just missed catching the far post.

Brazil played with an uncharacteristic seven men in defence, a concession to a demanding schedule that had seen them edge the United States 2-1 in extra time on Wednesday in Miami, Florida.

The United States took third place on Saturday with a 3-2 victory over Costa Rica.

Mexico claimed their fourth Gold Cup crown, after victories in 1993, 1996 and 1998.

## Veron off to Chelsea?



### Football

AFP, London

Manchester United's Argentina international midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron has changed his mind and is set to join Chelsea.

Media reports Monday said the 28-year-old had done a U-turn after telling United manager Alex Ferguson he wanted to stay at Old Trafford.

Chelsea were now expected to clinch the player in an 18 million pound (29 million dollar) deal this week.

He has had a love-hate relationship with Ferguson since United paid Italian side Lazio 28 million pounds (45 million dollars) two years ago and has made 82 appearances, scoring just 11 goals.

Veron has cost 120 million

dollars in moves to Italian sides Sampdoria, Parma and Lazio and United since 1996.

Chelsea have so far paid out 36.9 million pounds (41.9 million dollars) on four players this month.

Their biggest signing has been Irish winger Damien Duff from Blackburn Rovers for 17 million pounds.

They also lured Cameroon midfielder Geremi from Real Madrid for 6.9 million pounds, England defender Wayne Bridge from Southampton for seven million pounds and teenage full-back Glen Johnson from West Ham for six million pounds.

The spending spree started when Russian oil billionaire Roman Abramovich took control of Chelsea after agreeing to buy out the London club for 86 million euros (97.5 million dollars) and cover debts estimated at around 115 million euros.

## MU light up LA



### Football

AFP, Los Angeles

Reigning English Premiership champions Manchester United put on an entertaining show in a 3-1 win Sunday over Club of America of Mexico before a crowd of 57,365 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

In another proof that the Red Devils really boast a worldwide following, they were cheered louder than their rivals in the pre-game introductions - at a venue where cheers for Mexican teams usually drown out those for their US opponents.

Despite light training before flying to the United States, Sir Alex Ferguson's players are looking sharp three weeks before the August 16 start of the 2003-2004 season.

Five days after thrashing Celtic 4-0 in Seattle, they were never in danger against a good but limited Mexican side.

After dominating most of the first half, United put the game away right after the break on goals by Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy - a fantastic 47th minute strike - and by Uruguayan midfielder Diego Forlan on a superb close-range header in the 49th.

Named Man of the Match after the game, Forlan scored the third United goal in the 79th minute while Christian Patino saved the day for Club America with a goal in the 87th.

"In the first half it was a little difficult to get into gear, maybe the heat had something to do with it," said Manchester's long time coach Ferguson after the game. "At the half, I asked the team to speed the game up," added Ferguson, advice that, apparently, was heard loud and clear by his players.

"Manchester United is a Formula One team, quicker and faster," said Club America's Dutch coach Leo Beenhakker, hired by the Mexico City based team just a

month ago.

"Sir Alex has been working with his team for many years whereas we only have been together for four weeks," he added.

"These types of games are good for us since we don't have much contact with European teams. But, realistically, there is no chance that, one day, a Mexican team can be as good as Manchester United," concluded the former Ajax, Feyenoord and Real Madrid coach.

Traveling without French internationals Fabien Barthez and Mickael Silvestre and without new signing Eric Djemba-Djemba of Cameroon, three players who took part in the Confederation Cup, Manchester will play Italian champions Juventus on Thursday in New Jersey and in their US Tour versus Spanish team Barcelona in Philadelphia on August 3.

## Rooney out for a month

AFP, Liverpool

Wayne Rooney will miss the start of the English Premiership season and at least one England international after being ruled out for a month with an ankle ligament injury.

The 17-year-old Everton striker was stretched off after 36 minutes of a pre-season friendly against Rangers in Glasgow on Saturday.

Everton physio Mick Rathbone told the club's website on Sunday that a scan had revealed ligament damage.

The news means Rooney will miss Everton's Premiership season opener at Arsenal on August 16, their first home match against Fulham and England's friendly with Croatia on August 20.

He must also now be doubtful for England's trip to Macedonia for a crucial Euro 2004 qualifier on September 6.

# A PR fiasco?



### Football

AFP, Kunming

Real Madrid may be trying to win fans in China as they look to latch onto commercial opportunities, but so far their maiden visit has come dangerously close to a public relations disaster.

In the three days since the team touched down in the southwestern city of Kunming, the Spanish League champions have managed to offend just about everyone involved in this first leg of their sweep through Asia.

They got off on the wrong foot when the players astounded Chinese officials by snubbing the ancient Chinese rite of passage for first-time guests, leaving a meticulously prepared banquet in their honour a mere 15 minutes after its start.

"It was chaos. They had a quick drink and left without eating," said a Kunming official present at the dinner.

"Everyone was shocked. I was shocked," he said.

Real later explained that the team was under a strict dietary regime.

Fans were next to get a taste of life, Real Madrid-style.

Hundreds of eager ticket-

holding spectators awaiting the arrival of David Beckham, Luis Figo, Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and the rest of the superstar squad for their first official practice session Saturday were left stranded when the team failed to show.

Real blamed that debacle on a misunderstanding on the part of local organisers, saying they had never intended to practice that morning.

Then Sunday, the nine-time champions of Europe decided to practice on a neighbouring field that offered no view to ticket-holding Chinese fans sitting in the stands of the original pitch.

Real said the field was rain-soaked and chewed up through use, which proved little consolation for those who had braved pouring rain for an hour to see their heroes.

The club went some way to patching things up Monday, treating cheering fans to a fast-paced 40-minute workout.

"Wow, compared to the Chinese football teams their speed and ball control is incredible," said one satisfied punter.

But confusion about scheduling and strict regulations including no access to Real's newest superstar David Beckham, has not found favour with the Chinese media.

"All the Chinese media are dissatisfied because there is so little to write about," said Henry

Yu, a reporter from Beijing.

One Real Madrid official defended the club, saying: "We haven't received any complaints so far."

He may not be aware that it is also part of Chinese custom to 'give face' by not criticising guests' cultural gaffes or rude behaviour.

Despite the simmering discontent, city officials said there were no plans to call off a ceremony Monday evening to anoint the team as honorary citizens of Kunming.

Real Madrid are on a three-week promotional stint through Asia that includes Beijing, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Bangkok.

Marketing officials have said the club will pocket eight million euros (9.1 million dollars) from the jaunt.

Last week, Asian Football Confederation chief Peter Velappan described Real Madrid as "bloodsuckers" and "mercenaries," accusing them of demanding three times more than other clubs in appearance fees.

Real said they were disappointed in the comments and defended their actions.

"We know what we are, we know what we are doing, we have nothing to hide," said Stephan Attia, chief executive of Asia Sports Development, Real's Asia marketing group.



### Football

AFP, Kunming

Real Madrid's Luis Figo insists there is no rivalry between himself and David Beckham, and says he will play wherever the coach wants him to.

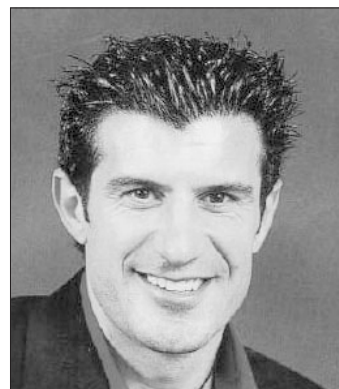
"I don't think (a rivalry) exists because we play in the same team and we have the same objective," Figo said after a training session here Monday.

"I think everyone wants his integration into the team to be as smooth and fast as possible."

The England's captain's 40 million-dollar transfer from Manchester United has sparked speculation that the two would be forced to fight it out for the right to play in right midfield -- both player's favoured position.

Figo said he would play wherever he was needed.

"During my career I've had to



LUIS FIGO

## Ronaldinho debuts



### Football

AFP, Foxboro, Massachusetts

Ronaldinho made his first appearance for Barcelona Sunday, coming on in the second half of a friendly against Italian giants Juventus that Barcelona won in a penalty shoot-out.

The 23-year-old Brazilian left Paris Saint-Germain in a 30-million-euro deal earlier this month, Barcelona winning out over English Premiership club Manchester United in the drawn-out transfer saga.

Sunday's match, part of the ChampionsWorld series of club friendlies being staged across the United States, finished 2-2 after 90 minutes.

Javier Saviola of Argentina scored twice in the first half for Barcelona, in the 28th and 41st, while Marco De Valo struck in the 86th and Fabrizio Miccoli in the 87th for Juventus to force the shoot-out.

Defender Carlos Puyol delivered the deciding penalty in the shoot-out.

Ronaldinho came on in the 46th minute, and converted his attempt in the penalty shoot-out with a right-footed shot past Juventus keeper Buffon.

"I'm very happy to play my first match, score my first goal and help earn a victory," he said, adding that just putting on a Barcelona jersey for his first official game had given him the shivers.

"He has something special every time he touches the ball," Frank Rijkaard, himself making his debut as manager of Barcelona, said of the Brazilian.

"And it's clear that he is always happy on the field. This is something wonderful for our team, something that we need. Playing professional football is serious business, but it should also be fun."

In the first match of the "Rijkaard Era," played before 30,912 at Gillette Stadium, Barcelona displayed a fluid, attacking style.

The 40-year-old replaced Serbian coach Radomir Antic last month and follows Johan Cruyff and Louis van Gaal to become Barcelona's third Dutch coach in the last decade.

Rijkaard coached the Dutch national team from 1998 to 2000 and Sparta Rotterdam from 2001 to 2002.

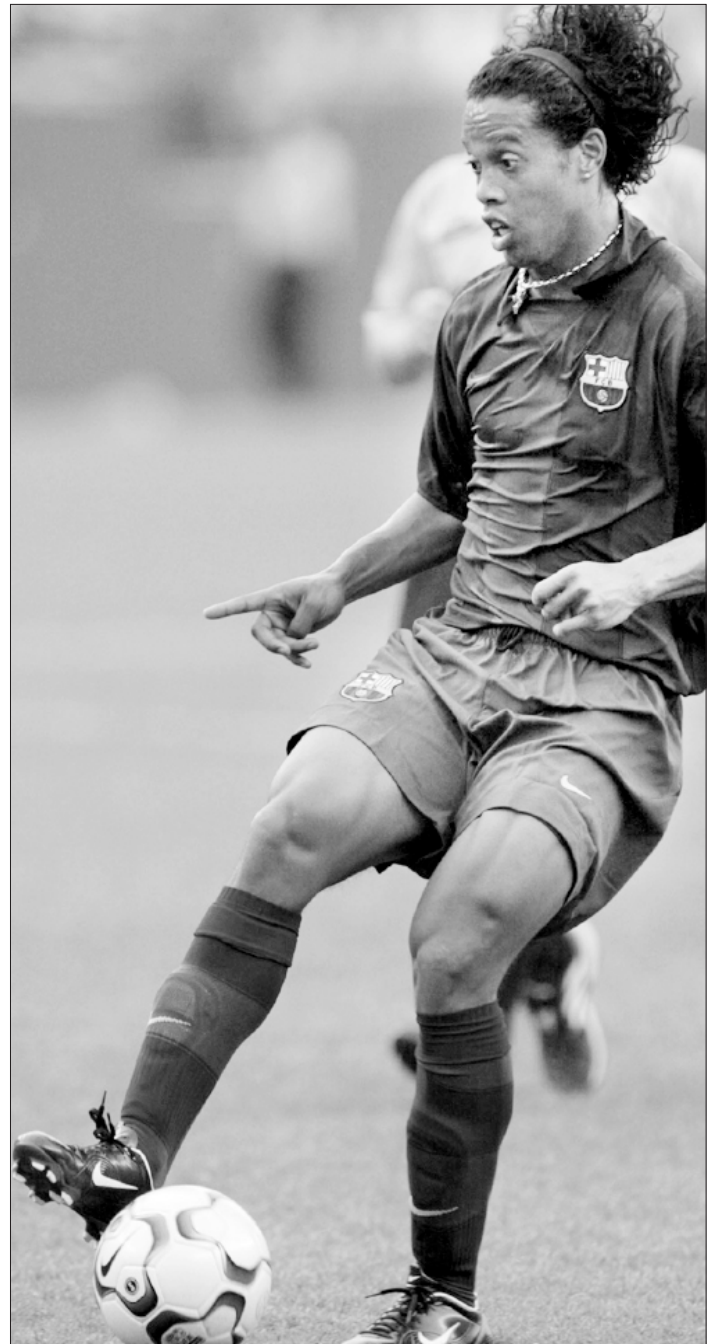


PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldinho, Barcelona's Brazilian superstar, contemplates a move during a friendly match against Italian giants Juventus at the Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts on July 27.



PHOTO: AP

GOLDEN GOAL! Mexico's Daniel Osorno (L) watches his shot entering the goal defying Brazil's Alex (C) and Luisao at the Azteca stadium in Mexico City on July 27.

## Robson aghast



AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A furious Sir Bobby Robson hit out at Jermaine Jenas here on Sunday after the rising young English star cost Newcastle United the Premier League Asia Cup with an outrageous penalty miss.

The Magpies coach told reporters after the match that Jenas' attempt to lob the ball from the spot over Blues keeper Carlo Cudicini, which went high and wide, was unprofessional.

Jenas' shot was in a sudden

death situation, with Newcastle down 4-5 in the penalty shoot-out against Chelsea after the 90 minutes of regular time finished without a goal being scored.

"This press conference is not about JJ," Robson, who had clearly yet to calm down, said when asked about the shoot-out 30 minutes after the game had finished.

"We missed three penalties, not one. I never really complain about penalties... I always have a bit of sympathy for the players who have to take them.

"(But) I just felt in his case it was an outrageous way to try and take a penalty. He's young and for some

reason he's gone against all his education, all his practice to do something different and he has come unstuck because of that.

"He's a young player and he has to learn from being unprofessional in that sense.

"I've never seen him do that. If I knew he was going to take the penalty like that, he would have been last."

Chelsea's title in the inaugural pre-season Asia Cup at Malaysia's National Stadium is the first silverware for the Blues following Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich's takeover of the club this month.