

# Hadji hurts Eagles



AFP, Tunis

South Africa and Morocco, two nations battling to host the 2010 World Cup, both came out on top in their African Nations Cup openers on Tuesday with 2-0 and 1-0 wins over Benin and Nigeria respectively.

Siyabonga Nomvete grabbed both of South Africa's goals in the second half in Sousse while super sub Youssef Hadji scored the only goal of the game to defeat former double champions Nigeria in Monastir in the other Group D encounter.

Udinese striker Nomvete was a relieved man after having missed a penalty and squandered two other easy, close-range chances in the first half.

Nomvete opened the scoring in the 58th minute when he found the target with a glancing header from a free-kick by 38-year-old John 'Shoes' Moshoeu and then made it 2-0 in the 76th minute when he chased down a long, through ball and scored with a fine right-foot drive.

The goals came as a huge relief for Nomvete after a miserable opening period in which he missed a penalty.

The 45th minute spotkick was awarded when Benin defender Damien Chrysostome was harshly adjudged by referee Komlan Koulibaly of Mali to have brought down Sibusiso Zuma despite the defender making contact with the ball.

But justice was done when Nomvete sent his right-foot penalty creeping past goalkeeper's Rachad Chitou's right-hand post.

South Africa, champions in 1996, had gone into the match in a state of turmoil having sacked coach Shakes Mashaba on the eve of the tournament and replaced him with April 'Styles' Phumo.

They recalled veteran midfielder Moshoeu to add some experience to a side missing the likes of Quinton Fortune, Mark Fish, Benni McCarthy and Shaun Bartlett who all had preferred to stay with their European clubs instead of playing in the tournament.

In Monastir, Hadji struck a late goal to give 1976 champions Morocco a 1-0 win over Nigeria.

Hadji's stunning goal came

after 76 minutes when he blasted past goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama from inside the box.

Morocco coach Badou Ezaki praised his team especially the defence, saying they proved right from the qualifying series that they will be a team to reckon with.

"We played a good match against a good Nigerian side featuring several players playing in Europe," said Ezaki.

"But right from the qualifying rounds we have proved that we have a balanced side with the defence outstanding. We hope to continue to prove this point in Tunisia."

His Nigerian counterpart, Christian Chukwu, said the Super Eagles underrated their younger opponents.

"My team underrated the Moroccans. We were too relaxed especially in the first half but by the time we tried to get back into the game in the second half, it was a lot more difficult for us."

On Wednesday, hosts Tunisia can make sure of a quarter-final place if they defeat Democratic Republic of Congo while Guinea could also go into the last eight with a win over Rwanda in Bizerte.



Nomvete Siyabongo (L) of South Africa putting the ball into the net beyond Benin goalkeeper Rachad Chitou (C) at Sfax on January 27.

PHOTO: AFP

# Rio money for Leeds

AFP, London

Leeds United, hunting for 5 million pounds (9 million dollars) to survive to the end of the season, have received 1.5 million pounds from Manchester United as the final settlement on Rio Ferdinand's transfer to Old Trafford.

The England defender joined United in July 2002 for an initial 15 million pounds, while a further payment of 14.3 million was paid a year later. However United still owed further instalments on the deal - dependent on results - which could have seen it total over 32.5 million.

But crisis club Leeds, who have until 5pm on Friday to raise 5 million pounds which would satisfy creditors until the end of the season, have accepted a reduced amount instead of the 3.25 million still outstanding.

It means Leeds chief executive Trevor Birch is a step closer to helping the Elland Road club avoid administration.

Birch was in discussion with a group of Leeds businessmen hoping to put together a bid to buy the club for 20 million pounds.

Manchester also paid a levy of 75,000 pounds to the Premier League, the club said in a statement to the Stock Exchange.

# Gunners break bank for Reyes

## Football

AFP, London

Arsenal have smashed the club's transfer record with the capture of exciting young Spaniard Jose Antonio Reyes from Sevilla in a deal worth up to 20 million pounds (30 million euros).

Arsenal confirmed the deal had gone through hours after Reyes announced that he had signed for the north London giants in a statement on his official website.

"I am the saddest and happiest player in the world because I am leaving the best club in Spain for the best club in England," Reyes said.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger said the left-sided forward would be a valuable asset to the club.

"We have a game based on movement, technique and pace, and he has all of that. He is a good investment as he's 20 and he's already an international.

"He can play everywhere, up front, on the left or even on the right, like any good offensive player. He can be adaptable and replace everybody, so we'll use him wherever we feel that we need him."

Reyes is expected to undergo a medical at Highbury on Wednesday. Provided there are no hiccups on that score, he is expected to sign a five-year contract worth 40,000 pounds a week before the transfer window closes on Sunday.

Arsenal had an eight million pound (11.5 million euro) offer for the 20-year-old rejected by the Andalusian side last July.

Highbury vice-chairman David Dein travelled to Seville last week to reopen talks and apparently finalised a deal that would make Reyes the most expensive signing in Arsenal's history.

Arsenal would not disclose the value of the deal but it is under-

stood to be worth a maximum of 20 million pounds provided that Reyes makes the anticipated progress at Highbury.

Arsenal's previous record transfer deal was the 13 million pounds paid for France international Sylvain Wiltord in August 2000.

The capture of Reyes marks the end of an 18-month period of austerity for the north London club in which manager Arsene Wenger has been barred from making any major signings because of the financial constraints imposed by the club's need to raise financing for their 400-million-pound new

stadium.

With the cash for that project now virtually in place, Wenger was last month given a green light to enter the transfer market and he had made no secret of his desire to sign a new forward as back-up for Thierry Henry.

A bid to secure the services of Robin van Persie from Feyenoord floundered earlier this month after the Dutch club rejected Arsenal's offer as too low.

Wenger then turned his attention to Reyes and his arrival at Highbury is likely to hasten the departure of Wiltord, the Nigerian

international Nwankwo Kanu and 34-year-old Dennis Bergkamp, all of whom are out of contract in the summer.

In the shorter term, Reyes will represent a significant boost for Arsenal's Champions League campaign with the Spaniard free to represent his new club in the knockout stages of the competition, which begin at the end of next month.

The Gunners are also still in the hunt for a clean sweep of England's domestic silverware. They currently sit top of the Premiership and have reached the fifth round of the FA Cup and the semi-finals of the League Cup.

Reyes is regarded as one of the brightest young prospects in Spanish football. A Sevilla trainee, he made his debut for the club on January 30, 2000 at the age of 17. He has scored 21 goals in 85 matches in La Liga.

He was part of the Spanish side that won the European under-19 championships in 2002 and has since graduated to the full national team, making his debut in the 3-0 win over Portugal on September 6 last year.

He has scored twice in four international appearances and is set to be part of Spain's squad for Euro 2004.

While there is no doubt about Reyes's ability, there may be a question mark about how well he will adapt to the pressures and distractions of London life.

But he himself insisted he had no qualms about moving on from Seville.

"I have no doubt this is a turning point in my career but I won't forget I am leaving a club which I adore with all my heart. Everything has happened so quickly I have the impression I am acting in a film."

"Thanks to God, everything has happened like I said it would if I was to leave, it would mean Sevilla would gain a large sum of money and that personally, it would be a spectacular career move."

# Veron out for three months

AFP, Buenos Aires

Chelsea midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron has undergone surgery for a herniated disc and will be out of action for three months, it was reported here Wednesday.

Veron finally decided on surgery to cure his long-running back injury, which has restricted him to just 11 appearances since his 15-million-pound transfer from Manchester United last summer, after seeing a consultant surgeon.

He was operated on at La Plata, 60km from Buenos Aires.

Argentina team doctors detected the problem when he reported for a World Cup qualifying match against Colombia last November.

# English League Cup Bolton in final

AFP, Birmingham

Bolton Wanderers booked their place in this season's League Cup final despite a 2-0 defeat against Aston Villa here Tuesday.

Although defeated on the night, Bolton's 5-2 semi-final first leg win last week meant Sam Allardyce's side went through 5-4 on aggregate against their Premiership rivals, though the visitors clearly missed the artistic skills of Nigerian playmaker Jay Jay Okocha away on African Nations Cup duty.

Thomas Hitzlsperger's 10th minute free-kick gave Villa hope but their chance of overturning a three-goal deficit was made even harder when Gavin McCann was sent-off seven minutes before half-time.

But Illoyd Samuel set up a grandstand finish at Villa Park when he pulled another goal back to make it 2-0 with two minutes remaining.

Bolton will now face either Arsenal or Middlesbrough, who play the second leg of their semi-final on Wednesday, in the February 29 final at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.

# Fergie under pressure

## Football

AFP, London

Manchester United fans have promised a rebellion if it happens but fears that a feud with the club's biggest shareholders could cost Sir Alex Ferguson his job are mounting.

Pressure from John Magnier and JP McManus, the Irish investors who own just over a quarter of the club, has already resulted in United shelving plans to reward Ferguson for more than 16 glorious years of service with a new four-year contract.

Instead, the 62-year-old Scot looks set to be forced to settle for a new rolling contract worth four million pounds a year.

Ferguson has put a positive gloss on the situation, indicating he is happy to go along with a deal that will keep him as fiercely keen to keep proving himself as ever.

But it is hard to dress it up as anything other than an insult to a surprisingly sensitive manager who has been instrumental in United's transformation from a giant slumbering in Liverpool's shadow to a globe-straddling corporate colossus.

No matter how embarrassed they are about it, the Old Trafford board has little option but to bow to the pressure applied by their biggest shareholders.

Already, the Irish duo have forced the club to announce an

internal investigation into Ferguson's transfer dealings and the large amounts paid to agents associated with most purchases.

On Tuesday it emerged that they have demanded to know why Rio Ferdinand is still being paid by the club despite starting an eight-month ban for missing a doping test.

The latest moves follow reports that Magnier had hired security consultants Kroll Associates to investigate Ferguson and the Irishman is widely seen as being behind a recent spate of stories in the press about United transfers in which Ferguson's son Jason, an agent, has been involved.

Behind such extraordinary intrigue lies a dispute over the rights to the champion racehorse Rock of Gibraltar. Magnier gave Ferguson joint ownership of the horse in 2001 but the two men disagree over whether the gift covered future stud fees which could be worth up to 200 million pounds.

The dispute has ruined what was once a close friendship and, with neither man showing any sign of backing down, is now headed for a Dublin court.

Until recently it was presumed that Magnier and McManus's simply regarded United shares as a good punt but had no interest in taking over the club.

The row with Ferguson however has transformed perceptions of their likely intentions and the implications for the manager's future.

Henk Potts, an equity strategist for Barclays Stockbrokers, believes a bid for the club is inevitable.

"I would suggest their holding is very much strategic rather than investment and the base for them to come in and make a full bid for Manchester United," Potts said.

"We are going away from plc's and taking back to rich businessmen taking over football once again. I can see them taking control and running the club in a different way."

"When that happens they will remember who their friends were and who exactly didn't help them out. The board members and Sir Alex Ferguson may find their job prospects limited."

Given his record, Ferguson is not likely to be out of work for long and the prospect of the likes of Liverpool or Chelsea being able to snap him up is one that is already causing anxiety among the Old Trafford faithful.

The pro-Ferguson chants at Sunday's FA Cup match against Northampton made clear whose side the fans are on and Magnier and McManus have been warned that they may find themselves drinking from a poisoned chalice if they do try to take over the club.

"We might only be supporters but, as Rupert Murdoch found out when he tried to buy our club, we will not be messed about with either," said Jules Spencer, chairman of the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association.

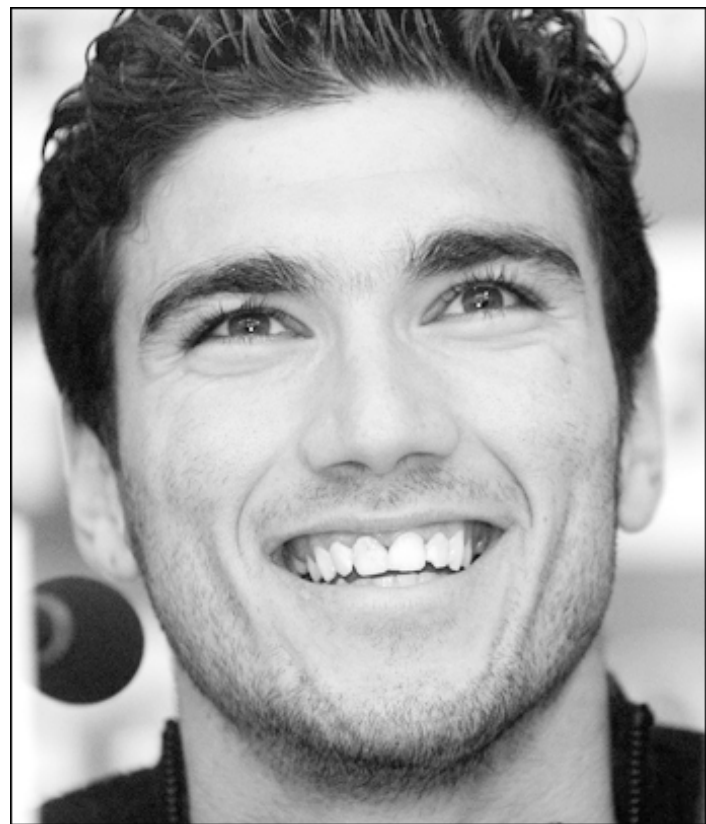


PHOTO: AFP

Spanish prodigy Jose Antonio Reyes smiles during a press conference in Seville on January 27.

# Feher's mausoleum

## Football

AFP, Lisbon

Benfica's new stadium in Lisbon has turned into a temporary shrine to Miklos Feher, as a steady stream of fans brave rainy weather to pay their respects to the coffin of the Hungarian striker who died while playing for the team on Sunday.

The 24-year-old collapsed in the final minutes of Benfica's televised away game against Vitoria Guimaraes just after being sanctioned for wasting time.

As his team-mates looked on, many of them weeping or praying, doctors struggled to revive an apparently unconscious Feher before an ambulance arrived to take him to hospital where he was declared dead some 90 minutes later.

Doctors treated Feher for a heart attack but preliminary results from an autopsy completed on Monday were inconclusive and an inquiry into his death is now likely.

Once the autopsy was completed, Feher's body was transported to Lisbon where six of his team-mates, including star striker Nuno Gomes and forward Simao Sabrosa, carried his coffin into the main entrance of Benfica's Stadium of Light.

The entire Benfica team, including coach Jose Antonio Camacho, then locked arms and surrounded the coffin, which was placed before a huge statue of an eagle which is the symbol of the club.

Most players burst into tears before saying a prayer for Feher.

supported club, is keeping the stadium open until midnight so fans can pay tribute to Feher before his coffin is taken back to his native Hungary on Wednesday for his funeral.

People of all ages have left flowers, candles, and scarves from various football teams around the coffin as well as outside the gates to the stadium, which will host the final match of the European football championship on July 4.

"I am a Sporting fan and I am here! Show this!" one man yelled before a bank of television crews gathered at the stadium.

At one point on Monday the line of people waiting to enter the stadium extended for over 300 metres (1,000 feet).

Once inside, mourners signed one of 10 condolence books set up by Benfica before filling slowly past the coffin, which is draped in Benfica's red and yellow flag.

One young man in his early 20s, wearing a Benfica scarf, stopped by the coffin and made the sign of the cross before being quietly ushered on by security guards.

He was followed by a group of six friends, each one of them wearing a different team scarf, who held hands as they stopped briefly before the coffin.

Among the other people waiting nearby to get into the stadium were a pregnant woman, a man on crutches who came alone and two cleaning ladies who were on their lunch hour.

"May God protect you," said one card left on the ground outside the stadium.

A number of people have become overwhelmed with emotion at the sight of the coffin and have fainted, Portuguese media reported.

For many older fans the events of the last few days have brought back memories of the death in 1973 of another top football player on a Portuguese pitch.

That year, in the 13th minute of the 13th game of the season, Porto's Fernando Pascoal das Neves collapsed and died during a league match.

"This is a monstrosity, it is much worse than when Pacoal das Neves died because everyone saw it on television this time," 68-year-old Carlos Costa told AFP, before breaking into tears, as he

waited outside of the stadium to leave flowers by Feher's coffin.

Portuguese television has repeatedly shown footage of Feher, who has lived in Portugal since he was 18, smiling at the referee who carded him, before suddenly leaning over with his hands on his thighs and then slumping backwards on the muddy pitch.



PHOTO: AFP

FEHER'S SHRINE: A Benfica fan leaving after visiting the funeral chapel of Benfica's Hungarian international Miklos Feher at the Luz Stadium in Lisbon on January 27.