

FLASHBACK 2004: AFRICA

The Mandela effect

Football

AFP, Johannesburg

The ultimate African football dream came true this year with South Africa chosen as hosts of the 2010 World Cup.

It was second time lucky for the Rainbow Nation after being controversially pipped by Germany for the 2006 tournament when Oceania octogenarian Charles Dempsey abstained from the decisive third round of voting.

Last May it took just one round with South Africa winning 14 votes, Morocco 10 and Egypt 0. Tunisia withdrew at the last minute when co-hosting was barred and Libya were disqualified for technical reasons.

Nigeria were the other original contenders only to pull out early in a bidding race that turned ugly as d-day approached with South Africa and Morocco trading verbal blows.

Former superstar Franz Beckenbauer was the German trump card and South Africa owed their success largely to Nelson Mandela, the living legend who worked tirelessly to sway crucial votes.

Ignoring the advice of his medical staff not to travel, the man who led his country to their first democratic elections in 1994 flew to the Caribbean just weeks before the vote and wooed North and Central America delegates.

But it took another meeting with a representative from the region in the Swiss city of Zurich just 48 hours before the vote to win them over and leave Morocco to reflect on a fourth failed bid.

At lunchtime on Saturday May 15 a frail Mandela was escorted into a Zurich conference centre to see world football supremo Sepp Blatter open an envelope and display the result of a bid confined to Africa under a rotational system.

Joy was unconfined. The bitterness endured by a proud nation when losing 12-11 to Germany was forgotten as Mandela, fellow Nobel prize winners FW de Klerk and Desmond Tutu and football officials celebrated wildly.

Bid committee chief executive Danny Jordaan, who had toiled tirelessly for seven years to bring the quadrennial showcase of international football to Africa for the first time, became an instant national hero.

On the field, the Tunisian national team, Enyimba International Football Club of Nigeria and Barcelona and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o were the big winners after another year of frenetic action.

Hosts Tunisia lifted the African Nations Cup for the first time, Ziad Jaziri scoring an early second-half goal to beat Morocco 2-1 in the final featuring teams from the north of the continent.

Frenchman Roger Lemerre created history by becoming the first coach to win two continental titles having guided France to a golden-goal success over Italy in the Euro 2000 climax.

Having suffered a humiliating first-round exit when staging the 1994 finals, Tunisia took nothing for granted and after a comfortable passage through the group phase, grinded out victories over Senegal, Nigeria and Morocco.

Cameroon, seeking a record third consecutive title, surrendered timidly to Jay Jay Okocha-inspired Nigeria in the quarter-finals. Mali were surprise semi-finalists and poor South Africa did not even make the knockout phase.

The Super Eagles of Nigeria ended the year ranked number one in Africa followed by Cameroon, Senegal, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Mali and Zimbabwe.

World Cup and African Nations Cup qualifiers were combined for

sued by Ghana and DR Congo.

Cameroon dreams of a fifth World Cup appearance in a row are all but over with Ivory Coast, guided by Frenchman Henri Michel and boasting a deadly strike force in Didier Drogba and Aruna Dindane, set to qualify for the first time.

Unbeaten and defensively solid Angola lead Nigeria by a point in a two-team race for Group 4 honours but have to visit West Africa while the Group 5 clash between Tunisia and Morocco could decide who travels to Germany.

Eto'o was voted African Footballer of the Year ahead of Okocha and Drogba and they are among the five finalists for the 2004 award with the Nigerian midfield magician favoured.

Enyimba became the first club since TP Englebert of DR Congo in 1968 to successfully defend the Champions League, known as the Champions Cup until prize money was introduced and quarter-finals scrapped in favour of groups seven years ago.

Success came to the club from the south-east Nigeria town of Aba despite going seven matches without a victory before edging Etoile Sahel of Tunisia 2-1 in the second



NELSON MANDELA

the first time to ease fixture congestion that left many national teams constantly clashing with European clubs for the services of stars.

Senegal have climbed to the top of Group 1 halfway through the 10-round programme with surprise packets Togo and resurgent Zambia hot on their heels while Group 2 leaders South Africa are hotly pur-

leg of the final and winning 5-3 on penalties.

The first final of the Confederation Cup, a marriage of the Cup Winners Cup and CAF Cup, was a Ghana affair between Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko and had to be postponed until January as the dates clashed with national elections.

Carlos never wanted a transfer?

INTERNET SOURCE

Brazilian wing-back Roberto Carlos has reacted angrily to the continuous reports that he wants a transfer out of Madrid.

"I don't want to go. It's a lie. I'm very comfortable at Madrid and very happy to be here."

Carlos, who recently renewed his contract until July 2007, has been obliged to constantly defend his position this season, and speculation has reached fever pitch recently with his omission from the galacticos team. Ostensibly, Carlos is out with a muscular injury to his right leg, but the rumours persist.

"Let's clear this up once and for all," Carlos told radio station Onda Madrid.

"Just so that people don't get the wrong idea (about my injury), I am resting and recuperating because I don't want to have to operate. I've been playing with this pain for five months now and it has been bothering me."

"Why would I go? Where can I live better than I do in Spain? I'm playing in the best league in the world, for the best supporters in the world."

Keane keen still

AFP, London

Manchester United skipper Roy Keane is keen to carry on at Old Trafford beyond 2006 when he will be 35.

Keane's contract expires in 18 months' time and a hip injury which has blighted his game over recent seasons had led many to believe he would retire then.

However, he has been back in form recently and is optimistic his Old Trafford career, which began after a move from Nottingham Forest in 1993, could run a little longer.

"I could not be happier at the club and my biggest challenge is to keep going as long as I can," Keane told the Daily Mail.

"I have another year and a half left and I intend to see that out. If I am still able to play on after that, then I hope it will be at United."

"If I feel as good as this physically in a year's time, then I will hopefully try to play on."

But Keane recognises that any decision is in the hands of United manager Alex Ferguson.

"As long as United want me, then I'm happy to stay," he added.

"I don't like looking too far ahead as things can change quickly. But if, please God, I can stay fit and feel strong and doing okay, then it's possible I could stay."

"I hope that there will be some more highlights to come in my career with this club."



PHOTO: AFP

Sevilla's Brazilian Julio Baptista (L) trying to go past Real Madrid's Guti at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on December 22.

Primera Liga

Real's year-end misery

Football

AFP, Madrid

Reigning Spanish champions Valencia extended their unbeaten run to six games as they beat fellow high-flyers Espanyol 3-0 while Sevilla won their first match at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu stadium in 20 years on Wednesday.

Valencia have 32 points from their 17 games and move up to second, one point and one place ahead of Sevilla.

Espanyol slip to fourth and stay on 30 points while Real Madrid fall out of the leading quartet to fifth with 29 points.

However, everybody has a lot of ground to make up on runaway league leaders Barcelona if they are to contemplate grabbing the title from under the Catalans' noses.

Barcelona beat Levante 2-1 on Tuesday, thanks to a Samuel Eto'o winner three minutes from time, to give them a 10 point advantage over Valencia and ensure that they will get the unofficial title of 'winter champions' when the league reaches its halfway point in two games time.

Spanish international midfielder Ruben Baraja opened the scoring for Valencia after 11 minutes with an unstoppable free kick before Espanyol were reduced to nine men in injury time at the end of the first half when Raul Tamudo and Oscar Serrano were both sent off within

the space of 15 seconds.

The two dismissals left the Espanyol coach Miguel Angel Lotina almost speechless.

"Nobody is surprised when this referee does something. Not the players, not the officials, not the media. What he did was sad for football and sad for him," fumed Lotina.

Espanyol packed their defence in the second half but the constant pressure finally wore down the Barcelona-based side and Mista Ferrer added to Valencia's tally twice in the final eight minutes.

"I think we went out for the second half knowing we had lost," added Lotina.

Real went down 1-0 for only their second home defeat of the season when Sevilla's Julio Baptista danced through the Madrid defence after 19 minutes.

Ronaldo, who started the game on the bench but came on after half time for England captain David Beckham, found the net six minutes from the whistle but the potential equaliser was ruled out because Real captain Raul Gonzalez was offside.

"What a good way to end the year. We will be able to relax over the holidays now," grinned Sevilla captain Javi Navarro.

Athletic Bilbao continued their rise up the table with a 4-0 victory over relegation-threatened Real Mallorca, the Basques' third consecutive win.

Francisco Yeste headed Athletic

in front after just six minutes and four minutes later he sent over the freekick that Santiago Ezquerro slotted home from close range.

The hosts nearly had another on the half hour when Pablo Orbaiz hit the post but Carlos Gurpegui did finally get Athletic's third midway through the second half and Yeste got his second goal of the night right on the whistle.

It was a miserable night for Spain's other struggling sides.

Malaga slumped to their worst defeat of the season, going down 5-1 at home to a rampant Real Sociedad.

After being held 1-1 at halftime, Darko Kovacevic put the San Sebastian side in front with his second goal of the night after 51 minutes.

Mikel Labaka and two goals from Nihat Kahveci finished off the demolition of the hapless Costa Del Sol side.

TOP SIX

Spanish football league standings after Wednesday's late match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Barcelona	17	13	3	1	35	11	42
Valencia	17	9	5	3	27	12	32
Sevilla	17	9	4	4	21	18	31
Espanyol	17	9	3	5	18	12	30
Real	16	9	2	5	24	12	29
Betis	17	7	6	4	22	20	27

FLASHBACK 2004: PREMIERSHIP

Along came Mourinho

Football

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger could never be accused of being a lucky manager.

Having finally gained the upper hand in his long simmering duel with Manchester United's Sir Alex Ferguson, Arsenal's professorial Frenchman might reasonably have anticipated being able to revel in the ascendancy for a little while.

Instead, barely a month after leading FC Porto to the most unlikely of Champions League triumphs, Jose Mourinho had taken up residency on the other side of London and set about transforming Chelsea into an outfit that looks distinctly capable of preventing the Gunners from retaining the title, an achievement that has eluded them since Wenger arrived at Highbury in 1996.

Now, for the first time since the Premiership was launched a little over a decade ago, the English title race is a genuine three-horse affair and one that, as the year draws to a close, Chelsea are leading by a length.

An intriguing 2005 beckons. But posterity will nevertheless record 2004 as Arsenal's year. Not since the end of the 19th century had any side gone through an entire season in the English top flight unbeaten.

The physical and psychological demands of the modern game had supposedly rendered a repeat of the achievement of Preston North End's 'Invincibles' impossible.

Yet Wenger's cosmopolitan squad not only did it, they did it without sacrificing the style that has become the trademark of a club whose own fans once revelled in the capacity of their beloved "Boring, Boring Arsenal" to grind out 1-0 wins with monotonous regularity.

Such was their desire to erase the memory of their collapse in the final run-in of the previous season, few doubted the Premiership trophy was destined for Highbury.

And the way Wenger's men picked up where they left off at the start of the current season suggested it would be staying there.

But the unbeaten run finally came to an end after 49 matches with a bruising 2-0 defeat by Manchester United at the end of October which concluded with Ferguson being showered with soup and pizza thrown from the Arsenal dressing room.

However, that victory at Old Trafford, like the FA Cup semi-final defeat of Arsenal six months earlier, represented slender consolation for United fans.

Winning the FA Cup ensured silverware and the satisfaction of denying Arsenal the double many

felt was inevitable.

But United never seriously threatened to block the Gunners' in the Premiership and a second round exit from the Champions League, at the hands of Mourinho's Porto, added to the frustration.

Despite their recent win over Arsenal, United have remained some way off the pace and Chelsea, in just three months under Mourinho have climbed to the top, no doubt bolstered by their manager's self-confidence.

Mourinho, who labled himself "the special one," told reporters days after arriving at Heathrow Airport: "If I wanted to have an easy job I'd have stayed at Porto."

Beautiful blue chair, the Champions League trophy, God, and after God, me."

So, no shortage of self-belief there then. And Mourinho has continued in similar vein ever since, ensuring almost as much entertainment off the field as his team have provided on it.

Frustrated after watching Bolton relentlessly pump high balls towards Kevin Davies in a 2-2 draw in November, Mourinho demanded: "What do you want us to do - shoot the ball?"

Spurs defending in numbers in a goalless draw at Stamford Bridge got equally short shrift. "As we say in my country, they brought the bus and parked it in front of goal."

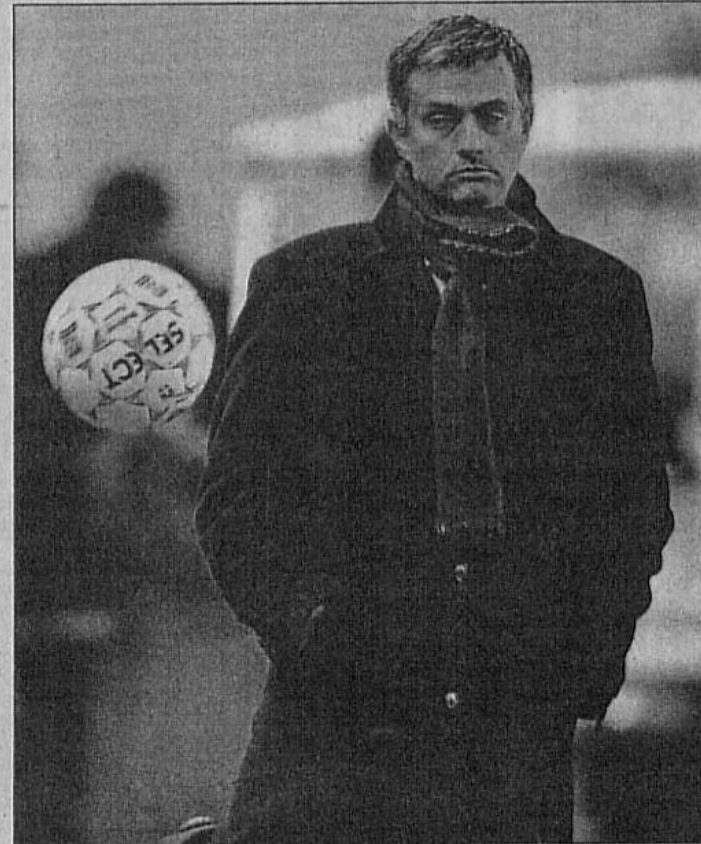
But while Mourinho has revived Chelsea, the gap between the Premiership's elite clubs and the rest of the division has continued to widen.

Despite Everton's heroic start to the season, there seems little prospect of any club outside the big three claiming the title in the foreseeable future.

For teams like Newcastle and Liverpool, fourth - and the access it provides to the riches of the Champions League - has become the new first, while as far as the rest of the Premiership is concerned, survival is all and anything else a bonus.

There are signs that this situation is beginning to breed disenchantment among fans. After a decade of sustained growth, attendances began to fall slightly this season, leading some to suggest football's 'bubble' may be about to burst.

Yet international interest in English football is higher than ever and it is also arguable that the dip in spectator numbers is simply a reflection of the success of smaller, well-run clubs like Bolton and Charlton in establishing themselves as part of the Premiership furniture while potentially much bigger outfits like Sunderland and Leeds languish outside the top flight.



JOSE MOURINHO

A 'fantastic' offer needed for Morientes

INTERNET SOURCE

Real Madrid have admitted that a "fantastic offer" could persuade the club to part with striker Fernando Morientes.

Morientes has been strongly linked with Liverpool, and also suggested as a possible target of Monaco and Newcastle in recent days.

He has spoken of his desire to quit the Bernabeu in search of regular football.

New vice-president Emilio Butragueno admitted he understood Morientes' frustration but insisted any deal had to also benefit Madrid.

He told Spanish newspaper Marca: "If there is a fantastic offer then we will consider it."

"Morientes is a very good player and we are not going to stand in anyone's way, not least Fernando because he has always behaved in a professional manner, but we also have to look at the interests of the club."

"It is clear that Fernando is upset at not playing very much but I also have to say that the season is very long."

"I remember two years ago when we played Juventus in the Champions League and we had Javier Portillo and Morientes in attack."

"I understand Fernando and he understands our position."

It's a men's world

Football

AP, Mexico City

A female soccer player banned from league games with a men's team also was excluded Tuesday from an upcoming exhibition match.

The Mexican second-division team Celaya signed Maribel Dominguez, star of the women's national team, to a two-year deal. But soccer's world governing body, FIFA, rejected the proposal Sunday,

insisting regulations require a clear separation between men's and women's teams.

Celaya said Monday it would not appeal the decision and indicated that Dominguez would have a chance to face men in an exhibition match between Celaya and Atlante on Sunday.

But the Mexican Soccer Federation issued a statement on its Web site Tuesday saying she could not play in the exhibition game either. It said that also would violate FIFA rules.

That's very naughty!

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City midfielder Joey Barton is set to face disciplinary action after he allegedly poked a burning cigar into the eye of a teammate at the club's Christmas party.

According to reports, Barton, 22, had been stubbing the cigar onto players' arms but went even further after youngster James Tandy crept up behind him and tried to set his

shirt alight, turning round and putting the cigar into the 18-year-old's eye.

Tandy's friends are said to have rounded on Barton and he was hit on the head with a bottle.

City spokesman Paul Tyrrell said: "An immediate investigation led by deputy chairman, Bryan Bodek has been completed and the matter is being dealt with internally."

"A disciplinary process will be conducted appropriately and promptly."



LUIS FERNANDO MONTOYA

Top Latin American coach fighting for life

AFP, Bogota

Luis Fernando Montoya, coach of Copa Libertadores champions Once Caldas, was in a critical condition in hospital after being shot by burglars at his home in Medellin.

The 47-year-old, whose side were beaten by European champions FC Porto in this month's Intercontinental Cup, came under fire from intruders attempting to steal money off a woman member of his family.

"He was taken to hospital with two gunshot wounds to his neck and his condition is critical," hospital manager Jorge Rojo reported on Wednesday.

"He will recover from his injuries, but the after effects could be serious enough," Rojo added.

He said Montoya, who has since been transferred to a nearby clinic, had to be revived after suffering a heart attack and losing consciousness after the intruders turned their guns on him.