

Brazil to grace Hong Kong

World football champions Brazil will play their first ever game in Hong Kong next month, organisers said Thursday.

The five-times World Cup winners will play a local representative side on February 9 at the Hong Kong Stadium, a statement said.

Team officials promised to field a full-strength squad, including superstar Ronaldo. There was no indication whether or not teammate Ronaldinho would play.

Football-mad Hong Kong has hosted a string of big name visiting sides for exhibition matches in recent years, including Real Madrid and European champions AC Milan.

Let off for Mourinho

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho will not face disciplinary action over his claim that Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson had influenced a referee's handling of his club's League Cup semi-final first leg against Chelsea, the Football Association announced Thursday.

Mourinho had made his claim after Wednesday's 0-0 draw at Stamford Bridge and his comments have been condemned as a slur on the integrity of referee Neale Barry.

But the FA did not deem them worthy of further action.

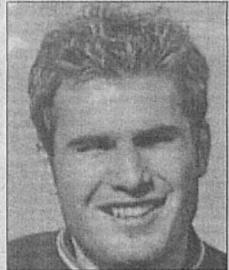
"We can confirm that there will be no disciplinary action taken against Jose Mourinho following his comments after last night's Carling (League) Cup Semi-Final match against Manchester United at Stamford Bridge," the governing body said in a statement.

Mutu signs for Juve

AFP, Turin

Adrian Mutu, sacked by Chelsea for using cocaine, has signed a five year contract with Juventus, the Italian Serie A club confirmed on Wednesday.

The Romanian international striker was released by the



ADRIAN MUTU

Premiership leaders in October after testing positive for the recreational drug.

He was then handed a seven month ban by the English Football Association which means he will not be free to play for his new club until the worldwide suspension ends on May 16.

Mutu could return to action at a potentially crucial time of the season as after that day Juve will still have two Serie A matches left to play. Fabio Capello's side could also be involved in the Champions League should they reach the final, which will be played on May 25.

Mutu, 26, is returning to Italy after stints with Inter Milan and Parma before his unhappy move to the Premiership, which ended with his sacking for gross misconduct by Chelsea.

Since his ban Mutu has been training with another former club, Dinamo Bucharest.

Juventus are top of Serie A and have a four point lead over second-placed AC Milan.

Boca change stripes

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Boca Juniors have raised eyebrows in Argentina by unveiling a new shirt with an almost identical design to arch-rivals River Plate.

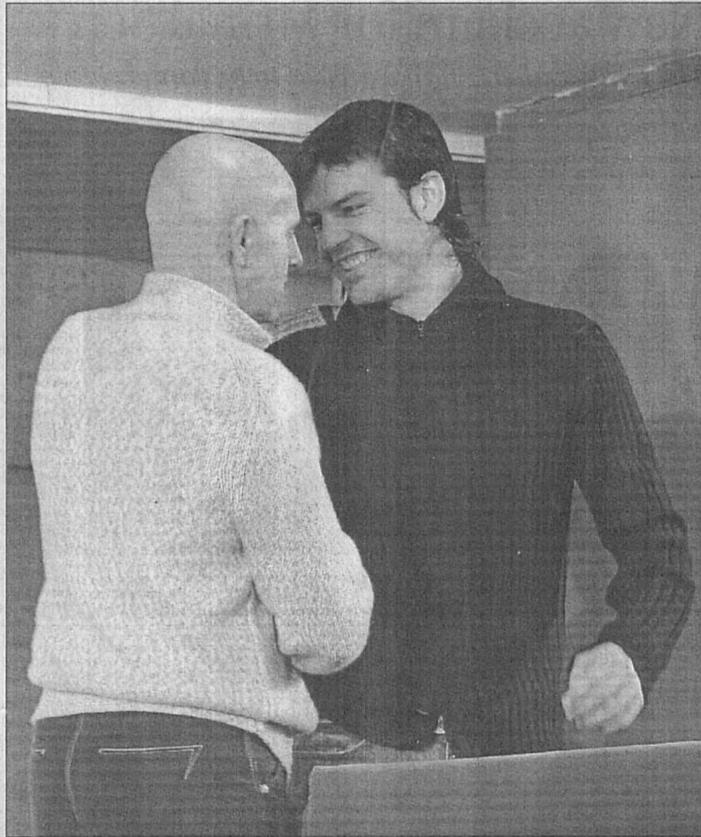
The new kit consists of a yellow diagonal stripe on a blue background instead of the usual horizontal hoop.

River use a red diagonal stripe on white background, a design which they say is unchanged since 1901.

Boca president Mauricio Macri said the diagonal stripe, based on a design dating back to 1907, would only be used in this month's pre-season tournaments.

"Now, everyone's going to know about other shirts in the club's history, their changes and evolutions," he said. "We have to accept it because we are remembering our history."

River Plate director Mario Israel retorted: "They know what's good for them at Boca. River would never use a shirt with a horizontal stripe."



THANK YOU FOR NOTHING! Spanish striker Fernando Morientes (R) shakes hand with Real Madrid's director Italian Arrigo Sacchi (L) after announcing during a news conference in Las Rozas on January 12 that he was leaving Real for the English Premiership giants Liverpool.

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP SEMIFINAL 1ST LEG

United deny Chelsea

AFP, London

Manchester United held out under intense second half pressure from Chelsea to emerge from their League Cup semi-final with the narrowest of advantages after an entertaining first-leg goalless draw at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

It took a late goalless clearance to prevent Chelsea's most recent signing, Jiri Jarosik, from claiming a late winner from the home side but United will claim they deserved the draw after enjoying the better of the first half.

What had been an even-tempered affair was marred in the final minutes when Didier Drogba and Cristiano Ronaldo tangled on the touchline, sparking a melee that resulted in both players being booked.

When the two sides had last met, on the opening day of the Premiership season, a solitary goal from Eidur Gudjohnsen was enough to settle a drab affair in Chelsea's favour.

But this 0-0 stalemate will mean United start as favourites for the second leg at Old Trafford on January 26.

"It was a good performance from us, we battled hard and limited them to just a couple of chances," said United defender Phil Neville who said his team were keen to eradicate the memory of Saturday's dismal 0-0 FA Cup third round draw against Exeter.

"That was a blip and we were keen to bounce back. The manager picked a team to do well and with a bit more quality we could have won it."

"The draw was a fair result. We are favourites to win now but there isn't

much to choose between the teams." Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho said it was one of the best performances he had seen all season by his team.

"It was a great game and I think we played one of our best matches at home this season," said Mourinho.

"We had the best chances. We deserved to win but I can accept the result." United boss Alex Ferguson said he was happy to have striker Louis Saha back in the line-up after a two-month injury lay-off.

"The great thing was to have Louis back," said the Scot. "With this match behind him he will be a great addition to the team with his pace."

Joe Cole set the tone of the match inside the first ten minutes with an airshot as he attempted to volley Mikael Silvestre's misdirected header towards goal.

The Chelsea midfielder made amends for that fluffed effort with a sublime flick for Damien Duff, who went on to strike a 25-yard shot that flew narrowly over the angle of post and bar.

French striker Saha had an early penalty appeal waved away as he tried to squeeze between Paulo Ferreira and Tiago in the Chelsea box. Ronaldo was equally unsuccessful in convincing referee Neale Barry that he had been felled by John Terry but United soon carved out the best chance of the opening period.

Unchallenged as he rose to meet Wayne Rooney's corner inside the six yard box, Saha failed to make a clean contact with his head and the ball bounced wide of the target.

As the half hour mark approached, Frank Lampard went close with a glancing header that skidded beyond the far post and Eidur Gudjohnsen found the net only to have his close-range effort ruled

out for offside. At the other end, Rooney fired one effort into the side netting and was only fractionally off target with an improvised volley with his back to goal.

For all the chances, it was not until ten minutes before the break that either goalkeeper had a save to make, Carlo Cudicini diving to his left to keep out Rooney's header, cleverly directed towards the near post from Darren Fletcher's cross.

United could claim to have shaded the opening period but they found themselves on the rack immediately after the break, during which Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho took the opportunity to replace Gudjohnsen with Didier Drogba.

A mishit clearance from Tim Howard gave Cole an opportunity to try his luck from 35 yards, his aim not quite matching the speed of his reactions, and it took a goal-line clearance from Gabriel Heinze to deny Lampard after he had surged into the box and round John O'Shea.

The box's first involvement saw him hacked down by Heinze, a foul that earned the Argentine defender a booking. His second was to draw a good save from Howard after Lampard had found him on the edge of the area from the resulting free-kick.

Another long-range effort from Lampard whistled a foot wide and Chelsea's growing dominance was underlined by Chelsea's introduction of an extra striker, Mateja Kezman at the expense of midfielder Tiago.

Mourinho also put on Jarosik, and the Czech midfielder nearly sealed victory with eight minutes left after a Duff corner found him unmarked beyond the back post, his shot bouncing off Tim Howard's legs and over the bar.

Robinho in no hurry

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's 20-year-old forward Robinho has repeated that he is staying at Santos for the time being and is not moving to Real Madrid.

"I'm not interested in what people are saying," he told reporters. "I want to stay at Santos. When the time comes to leave, everyone is going to know about it."

Speculation began over a possible move after Robinho's mother spent six weeks in captivity after being kidnapped late last year.

The rumours increased after former Santos coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo took over at Real and it was thought logical that he would try to take Robinho with him.

"The move was good for Vanderlei and I'm very happy for him," said Robinho. "But I want to help Santos in the Libertadores Cup (the South American equivalent of the Champions League)."

Robinho, whose cheeky skills make him one of Brazil's most exciting players, has already won the Brazilian championship twice with Santos and helped them reach the final of the 2003 Libertadores.

Always the odd man out

Football

INTERNET SOURCE

When Brazilian great Ronaldo signed with Real Madrid a few years ago, one of Spain's most heralded and beloved strikers, Fernando Morientes, lost playing time.

Limited to only two starts and 16 appearances off the bench for Real Madrid, he was clearly labeled a substitute for the Galacticos.

What's a player to do? Real Madrid then loaned Morientes to Monaco in France without knowing they would end up facing him in the Champions League knockout stages.

Morientes would remarkably lead Monaco to victory over Real Madrid, scoring in both legs of the home-and-home series. Ultimately Monaco would lose in the Champions League final to Porto, but the message was sent, as Morientes scored nine times in Champions League play.

Knocking the team that loaned you out, you would think would be enough to convince the coaching staff and management that you deserved a spot in the starting lineup.

Think again. During this summer's transfer period, Real Madrid amazingly purchased another big-name striker in Liverpool's Michael

Owen. Their stable of strikers going into this season included Ronaldo, Raul, Owen and Morientes.

Sure, with league and cup play you need more than two strikers these days, but few clubs have the resources to buy names of this stature.

Didn't Morientes do enough to earn a starting spot after his loan to Monaco?

Didn't he prove enough, winning three European Cups and two Spanish League titles with Real?

Apparently not to new Brazilian coach Wanderley Luxemburgo.

Morientes is now expected to head to Liverpool the club that, ironically, Owen was purchased from and both Liverpool head coach Rafael Benitez and Morientes are hoping he will be available to start against Manchester United this weekend at Anfield, in Liverpool.

All is contingent upon agreeing to final terms and passing a medical.

"I am going to Liverpool, and it was not a decision that I took in a second," said Morientes, speaking at a news conference at Real Madrid's training site.

"I told the club (Real Madrid) that I wanted to play, I had various offers, but I thought the most interesting one was Liverpool."

"Now all I can do is hope that the medical goes well and I am registered to play in time on Saturday."

If, in fact, the 28-year-old Morientes is cleared to play Saturday, this game may be the most intriguing one of the weekend in English Premier League play.

"You can't ask for more than a debut against Manchester United. It would be a great debut for me and even better if the team wins," said Morientes.

Don't be surprised, if Morientes does get his debut, to see him hit the score sheet.

On his debut for Spain in 1998, he scored twice in five minutes against Sweden.

Morientes has said he is already looking through the English dictionary and clearly there is the desire to play for Benitez, who has already signed four Spaniards at the legendary English club, including Luis Garcia, Josemi, Xabi Alonso and Antonio Nunez. Morientes will also supply relief in the striker position due to an injury to Djibril Cisse.

Liverpool strikers Milan Baros, Florent Sinama-Pongolle and substitute Neil Mellor have not been consistent, making the signing of Morientes even more valuable. With his power and strength in the air, plus ability to strike a ball with both feet, Morientes soon could have the goals flowing for Liverpool.

And Baros is thrilled that Morientes is set to seal his move.

"The deal is great news" Baros told www.liverpoolfc.tv.

Fernando is world-class and I'm delighted he is coming to Anfield.

"I'm looking forward to establishing our partnership on the pitch. Fernando is terrific in the air, just like Jan Koller."

"Jan and I have been superb for the Czechs and I believe Fernando and I can prove just as successful in English football."

"He is so strong and so talented that I'm certain he will help us climb towards the very top of the Premiership."

"Obviously, the timing of the deal is very important too. Cisse is out with a long-term injury and I've had my difficulties with injuries recently as well."

Morientes said: "I want to play and I had several offers, but I think the best for me and my family was Liverpool's."

"I am happy for that reason, but sad because it has been eight years here at Madrid and I will never forget them. This is a new stage in my life and I am excited about it."

"I am grateful the club (Madrid) have accepted my wishes to go to Liverpool rather than other better offers they could have had. All I can say is thanks to all the clubs who were interested."

"One of them was Lyon, but when their offer came in I had given my word to Liverpool. The Lyon offer came later and I had made my decision. I wanted to go to England."

ITALIAN CUP

No problems for Milan giants

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan and Inter Milan reached the quarter-finals of the Italian Cup with minimum fuss on Wednesday.

AC Milan beat Palermo 2-0 at home to seal a 4-1 aggregate win, while their city neighbours and co-tenants Inter Milan came from behind to win 3-1 at Bologna and clinch a 6-2 aggregate win.

At the San Siro, Christian Brocchi opened the scoring for AC Milan with a fierce shot in the 19th minute and Jon Dahl Tomasson grabbed the second, converting the penalty after he had been brought down in the box by Christian Terlizzi 13 minutes from time.

Sampdoria reached the last

eight despite suffering a 2-1 home defeat to second division side Torino, the 2-0 first leg victory for the Genoa side proving enough.

Fiorentina advanced after comfortably winning 3-0 away to Parma.

Three second half goals gave the Florence club a resounding victory in Emilia Romagna to complete an emphatic 5-0 aggregate win.

Enrico Fantini put Fiorentina ahead from close range after his first effort was blocked by Parma keeper Gianluca Berli and Enzo Maresca's delicate chip doubled the visitors' advantage. Christian Maggio completed the scoring 10 minutes from time with a side-footed finish.

The winners of the competition are rewarded with a place in the UEFA Cup.

Refs World Cup already on

AFP, Zurich

Referees earmarked for the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany will start their build-up to the tournament 16 months before the big kick-off, FIFA said on Wednesday.

A total of 46 international referees will attend the first workshop in Frankfurt between Feb 12-16 where they will be subjected to a medical check-up and theoretical and practical training sessions. They will also work on their physical fitness.

The final list of World Cup referees will be announced in the first quarter of 2006.

"Top quality is the goal," said FIFA resident Sepp Blatter.

"This unique programme will help us identify, train and prepare match officials for the 2006 World Cup so that we have nothing but the best referees on the pitch."

Advertisement for Bangladesh Open University (BOU) featuring a list of courses and fees. The text is in Bengali and includes details about various diploma and certificate programs.