

Real lose Marcelo

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will be without Brazilian new signing Marcelo for six weeks after he suffered an ankle injury in training, the club said Wednesday.

The 18-year-old, dubbed the new Roberto Carlos, was brought in from Rio de Janeiro's Fluminense in November and only made his debut in last week's loss to Deportivo La Coruna.

But he injured himself in Tuesday training.

Attacking midfielder Guti will also be out for ten days after he picked up an ankle strain against Depor.

Liverpool sign Leto

AFP, Buenos Aires

Liverpool have swooped to sign Argentine midfielder Sebastian Leto from Buenos Aires team Lanus, the Argentine club's vice-president Nicholas Russo confirmed Wednesday.

Liverpool, who already boast a huge contingent of Spanish and South American players and coaching staff, have paid 3.6 million dollars for the 20-year-old.

Leto is a midfield playmaker who scored six goals in 34 appearances for Lanus last season.

"I am going to a team with a lot of history that won the Champions League two years ago," said Leto.

"I still can't believe it. I have seen Manchester (United) matches on television and now I could end up facing them.

"It will be difficult. I don't know what awaits me but I want to play soon. It is possible that I will have only a few chances and I must prove that I am ready.

"I am fast and there (England) the counter attack is vital."

Leto will join compatriot Gabriel Paletta at Anfield but will hope to make a greater impression.

Centre-back Paletta has made only one start for Liverpool since signing from Atletico Banfield in July 2006, and that in Tuesday's humiliating 6-3 League Cup defeat by Arsenal, whose Brazilian forward Julio Baptista gave him the run-around all evening.

Minister rejects soccer panel

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan Sports Minister Maina Kamanda on Wednesday rejected the country's football governing body ahead of next week's planned meeting with FIFA to resolve the problems facing the sport.

Kamanda said he had not recognised the Kenya Football Federation (KFF), which he had dissolved in November but was then reinstated by a court order 17 days later.

The minister added that he did not recognise KFF top officials Titus Kasuve and Mohammed Hatimy as the legitimate leaders of the embattled panel that is struggling to convince FIFA to lift a ban on Kenyan participation in international competitions. "When was even Hatimy and Kasuve elected to be in charge of football in this country. There is no KFF, according to me I dissolved it," Kamanda told a press conference in Nairobi.

Kamanda said he was not interested in being part of a Kenyan delegation travelling to Zurich for January 15 talks with FIFA on the possible reinstatement of Kenya into international football.

"I am not prepared to go to Zurich," he said.

On October 24 FIFA indefinitely suspended the KFF, citing its failure to implement key reforms and stop government interference.

Casablanca sign Latinos

AFP, Casablanca

Wydad Casablanca of Morocco have signed two Argentinians ahead of their 2007 African Champions League debut this month.

Midfielder Claudio Ortiz and striker Christian Jeandet joined the Moroccan title holders from Argentine second division side Sarmiento, a club official confirmed.

Wydad, who defeated Al-Hilal of Sudan in the 1992 African Champions League final, have been drawn against ASC Maurit of Mauritania in the first qualifying round for the 3.5-million-dollar competition.

The first leg will be staged in Casablanca between January 26-28 with the return match in Nouakchott two weeks later.



PHOTO: AFP

Lazio winger Tommaso Berni (R) tries to hold off Benfica midfielder Rui Costa during their final match of the Dubai Cup in Dubai on Wednesday.

Ronaldo next in line?



INTERNET, undated

Ronaldo's Real Madrid career could well be drawing to an end, with the possibility he will leave the Spanish giants before the transfer window closes.

Plagued by injury and criticised for being overweight, Ronaldo has been a shadow of his former self this season and has netted just four times since returning to action at the end of September.

And it could be that he will be the first high-profile casualty of Monday's emergency meeting between Real coach Fabio Capello, sporting director Predrag Mijatovic, president Ramon Calderon and technical secretary Franco Baldini.

The meeting was called to

discuss Real's poor form, which has seen the team lose three of their last four league matches culminating in Sunday's 2-0 defeat at Deportivo La Coruna.

Although the specifics of that conference have not been made public, Mijatovic claimed afterwards they highlighted the problem areas and had implemented measures to deal with them.

One of those measures may well be to allow the 30-year-old Ronaldo, a £29million from Internazionale in 2002, to leave.

Coach Capello has not openly criticised Ronaldo, but the Brazilian was omitted from the Real squad for tonight's Copa del Rey clash with Real Betis.

Also missing from the squad for technical reasons were David Beckham, Antonio Cassano, Michel Salgado, Francisco Pavon and Alvaro Mejia - all senior players

who have struggled to make an impact this season.

When asked directly yesterday if he had a problem with Ronaldo, Capello said: 'I don't like to single anybody out. Win or lose, it's a team affair and I head the entire project.'

Regardless of that, Spanish media believe Ronaldo is living on borrowed time at the Bernabeu.

Marca claim he has two offers on the table from interested clubs, one from Saudi Arabian side Al-Ittihad and another from a European side.

Ronaldo's contract with Real runs out in 2008 but, with the Spanish side already building for the future by bringing in new blood such as former River Plate striker Gonzalo Higuain, the three-time FIFA World Player of the Year could decide to cut his losses at the Bernabeu long before then.

Benfica lift Dubai Cup

INTERNET, undated

Lazio defender Massimo Oddo was sent off as Benfica beat Lazio on penalties to win the Dubai Cup on Wednesday.

The Biancocelesti reached the last stage of this mini-tournament after defeating Marseille 3-1 on Monday.

Stephen Makinwa was thrown on for the Italian side following an uninspired first half, combining with Tommaso Rocchi for a strike that thumped the woodwork.

Oddo, who is at the centre of transfer negotiations with Lazio and Milan, blotted his copybook with a second yellow card for a late tackle on Paulo Jorge six minutes from time.

Champions League entrants Benfica also shook the frame of the goal with Mantorras in stoppages, but the tie had to be decided on penalties.

Pasquale Foggia, Emilson Sanchez Cribari, Christian Manfredini and Cristian Ledesma were on target, but Igli Tare, Massimo Bonetto and goalkeeper Marco Ballotta failed to hit the spot.

Benfica's winning penalties were scored by Luisao, Katsouranis, Paulo Jorge, Ferreira and Pedro Correia, while Mantorras and Leo missed.

Nonetheless, Lazio emerge from the Dubai Cup with a \$200,000 prize for coming second.

Bayern Munich took third place, fighting back from 3-1 to beat Marseille 4-3 in the closing five minutes.

Fans outraged at Smith exit

AFP, Glasgow

Shell-shocked Scotland bosses on Wednesday launched a search for a new manager as the nation's 'Tartan Army' of fans rounded on Walter Smith for turning his back on the national side to rejoin Rangers.

The Scottish Football Association (SFA) said it planned to take legal action against Smith for breach of contract, although it is likely that a financial compensation deal will be reached before the dispute gets near court.

"We are looking for fair recompense for the disruption to us and the national team's cause," said SFA Chief Executive David Taylor.

"That is why, regrettably, we have to take legal action. It is a straightforward breach of contract."

Taylor said Smith's departure was a serious setback for Scotland, who currently top a Euro 2008 qualifying group that includes France and Italy and are hoping to reach their first major finals since the 1998 World Cup.

"Walter has done an excellent job for us and the Scottish national team," Taylor admitted.

"But we are very disappointed that he has chosen to leave us at this critical time in our Euro 2008 qualification campaign."

John Daly, a Tartan Army footsoldier from Houston, near Glasgow, said he was dismayed that Smith, who has transformed Scotland's fortunes since taking over from Bertie Vogts in 2004, had quit two months before a crucial qualifier against Italy.

"Walter Smith came in after Bertie's departure and steadied what was a very rocky and leaky ship," Daly said.

"We started to have faith in ourselves, started to play well, and started to get results."

"But my opinion of the manager as a man has diminished. He is not a man of honour. He is nothing more than a mercenary."

Scotland goalkeeper Craig Gordon voiced confidence that whoever replaces Smith would be able to keep the Euro 2008 qualifying campaign on track.

Garcia out for the season

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's hopes of emulating their 2005 Champions League triumph were dealt a major blow Wednesday when influential midfielder Luis Garcia was ruled out for the rest of the season.

The Spaniard was stretchered off during Liverpool's humiliating 6-3 English League Cup quarter-final loss against Arsenal at Anfield here Tuesday and now faces a protracted spell on the sidelines after a scan confirmed he'd ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee.

"Unfortunately we expect to be without Luis for six months," said Liverpool spokesman Ian Cotton.

Garcia has been Liverpool's most consistent performer in Europe this season and was widely regarded as being crucial to the club's hopes of beating reigning champions Barcelona in next month's second round tie.

Meanwhile Liverpool's Chilean midfielder Mark Gonzalez faces up to three weeks out with a shin injury he sustained against the Gunners. A scan revealed no fracture but severe tissue and bone bruising on his right shin.

TOUCHLINE The Beckham conundrum



Football

STEPHEN HUGHES

When David Beckham, the most hyped soccer player on the planet, was reported to be available for transfer Wednesday, there was no Klondike rush to sign him.

An official of Real Madrid, which has not won a trophy since signing Beckham from Manchester United in 2003, was quoted as stating on Sky Italia television that his contract, due to end in June, was not being renewed.

"Will Beckham's contract be renewed?" the interviewer asked.

"No. No," responded Predrag Mijatovic, the club's sporting director, in the phone interview. "Beckham's contract was not renewed."

Some reports suggested that Mijatovic had said on air that Beckham would leave and would not be offered fresh terms. The transcripts did not bear that out, and within an hour Beckham's agent put out a reiteration that the player and the club would discuss on Thursday the two-year extension offered him before Christmas.

This might have been the point of Mijatovic's making the announcement in the way that he did. Beckham's advisers were stalling on signing a new deal, assuming that they had time to play the market and see who might buy their man. Mijatovic made it plain that Real Madrid is in an urgent rebuilding phase, not the least because Ramon Calderon, the club president, faces a court case aimed at removing him because of alleged irregular postal votes in his election last year.

Madrid's conundrum is this: Beckham still has global appeal, especially to teenage girls, and especially in Asia where most leading soccer clubs seek to improve their merchandising power. But as a player, he never was a great mover or a decisive match winner. He has one great trick, his ability to strike a pass or a free kick through 30 or more meters.

For that, the club's marketing men want to cling onto him. The team's coach, Fabio Capello, however, had seldom started Beckham in the important matches, and after losing three of the last four he dropped Beckham and five other players, including Ronaldo

from the squad that face Real Betis in the King's Cup on Thursday.

There lies the dichotomy of David Beckham. He is famous for being famous, but seldom a winner. His pragmatic coach is charged with arresting the decline of a team that has the most lucrative television contract in world sports, but has been trophyless with Beckham.

One by one the stars of Madrid, the Galacticos, have been in eclipse. Luis Figo is gone, Zinedine Zidane retired, and now Beckham is fading on the field if not on the

sooner certain players go, the better. Beckham has started in only seven of 25 matches under Capello, and won only two.

He is on Capello's list of players to move out. So is Ronaldo, a truly inspirational scorer until injuries and lack of motivation scarred his performance level. Others dropped for Thursday are Michel Salgado, Antonio Cassano, Francisco Pavon and Alvaro Mejia.

Whether the sporting director intended to bring Beckham's minders to the negotiating table pronto



DAVID BECKHAM

celebrity circuit.

The statement Wednesday from Mijatovic followed a crisis meeting between the club president, the coaching staff and the secretariat after another defeat Sunday.

The club has just spent millions to acquire three young talents from South America - Marcelo, Gonzalo Higuain and Fernando Gago. The effort to sweep out the old and renew the team's enthusiasm was spelled out by Capello who said: "What has annoyed me most is that we have lost character and desire. I said when I arrived last summer, players had to fight for the shirt. I have not seen this. We have analyzed what measures we must take to resolve this."

Those measures reputedly include the coach's insistence that

or to hasten his exit, remains to be seen. Beckham's income from Madrid, around \$8 million a year, is barely a third of his earnings from advertising and sponsorship, and there is the separate company, Moody Productions, owned by his wife, Victoria, the former Spice Girl.

Mr. and Mrs. Beckham, or Lord and Lady Beckham as the publicists have it, say they are settled with their young sons in Madrid.

However, he is big news in the Far East, she would like to enter showbiz in Hollywood and among his suitors is reputed to be the Los Angeles Galaxy, where Beckham already has an "academy" to teach his skills to kids.

(Stephen Hughes writes for the Herald Tribune)



PHOTO: AFP

Hamburg SV players celebrate amongst a sea of confetti on the podium after winning the Challenge Cup 2007 in Dubai on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD

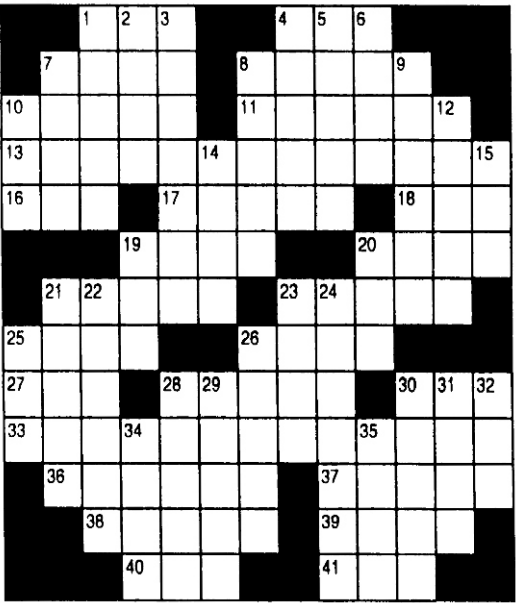
By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS									
1	Spring mo.	36	"Jeopardy!" fodder	4	Wash in the tub	19	Tie up the phone	20	Morse code
4	Clear the tables	37	Bishop's head-dress	5	Theater employee	7	Revlon gazer	21	Take a photo
7	Lotion additive	38	Hunter constellation	6	Crystal	8	Terra follower	22	Play-school's parent company
8	Examined, pre-burglary	40	Still, in verse	7	Revlon rival	9	Cattle rancher, at times	23	Detail, for short
10	Sidestep	41	Bread variety	10	Sternward	12	Canonized one	24	Mountainous region of India
13	Motorist's decision	DOWN		1	Watchful	14	Egyptian river	25	Blond shade
16	Stick with a kick	2	— and beans	3	Of an eye	15	Rotation duration	26	"Desperately Seeking —"
17	Sallpeter	3	Of an eye	4	Wash in the tub	16	Stick with a kick	27	Flick
18	Through	5	Theater employee	6	Crystal	17	Sallpeter	28	Gibson garnish
19	Big bash	7	Revlon gazer	8	Terra follower	18	Through	29	Marquee datum
20	Say it isn't so	9	Cattle rancher, at times	10	Sternward	19	Tie up the phone	30	Bumps off
21	Layered rock	11	Not us	11	Not us	20	Morse code	31	Apiece
23	Narrowly evade	12	Canonized one	12	Canonized one	21	Take a photo	32	Paddock
25	Moby's pursuer	13	Motorist's decision	13	Motorist's decision	22	Play-school's parent company	33	Uncutious
26	Quarrel	14	Egyptian river	14	Egyptian river	23	Detail, for short		
27	"Help!"	15	Rotation duration	15	Rotation duration	24	Mountainous region of India		
28	Grimaces					25	Blond shade		
30	Graciously					26	"Desperately Seeking —"		
33	No real option					27	Flick		

Solution time: 21 mins.

EPIC	FAB	TICK
LIWO	ALT	ETUI
BEAU	LOVENESE	
ARMWREST	VAMPS	
PANEL	SEE	TEN
EGG	JOE	WOO
GARFEST	SEEDY	
RAM	MUD	
LILAC	MAEWEST	
ICECHEST	AREA	
ROSA	AGE	RITAL
ANTS	TRY	DESK

Yesterday's answer 11-22



CRYPTOQUIP

U Y Z W J F Y Z K T W W G Q A

O Y W H D G Q T G J U A W W S L

O T N - Y O O K Y Z L G N F T N A T D

G Q A F Y H A W N A D S J A L G D ? Yesterday's Cryptokuip: IF YOU ALWAYS DEPART A PLACE IN A CERTAIN WAY, I GUESS YOU'VE GOT A STANDARD OF LEAVING.

Today's Cryptokuip Clue: F equals Y The Cryptokuip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.