



PHOTO: AFP

Espanyol's Luis Garcia (R) has his penalty saved by Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop in the UEFA Cup final at Hampden Park in Glasgow on Wednesday.

Sheffield in legal battle over Tevez issue

AFP, London

Sheffield United on Wednesday launched a legal challenge against the Premier League in a bid to overturn the decision not to deduct points from West Ham over the signing of Carlos Tevez.

The Blades' lawyers say they have instituted "arbitration proceedings" against the Premier League, and want a three-man tribunal set up to rule on the dispute.

The Premier League have confirmed receipt of the claim but it is understood they are not obliged to agree to enter into the process. "We are considering the request," said a spokesman.

An independent commission fined West Ham 5.5 million pounds (10.8 million dollars) for breaching Premier League rules over the signing of Tevez and Javier Mascherano last year, but several clubs felt they were let off lightly.

Argentine striker Tevez played a key role in West Ham's escaping the drop as he scored seven goals in the club's last 10 games, while Sheffield United were relegated.

And the Blades' lawyers are challenging the legality of the independent commission's decision.

A statement from Sheffield United read: "We are challenging the legality of the League commission's decision to hand West Ham a fine rather than (as had been universally expected) docking West Ham points and cancelling the registration of Mr Tevez."

Ramos wants a treble

AFP, Glasgow



Sevilla coach Juande Ramos celebrated his side's second straight UEFA Cup triumph by declaring that it had increased the chances of them going on to complete a treble before the end of this season.

Sevilla will face Getafe in the final of Spain's knockout competition, the King's Cup, next month and are still in with a chance of finishing on top of La Liga.

And Ramos believes the penalty shoot-out win over Espanyol at Hampden Park on Wednesday means his players can attack both objectives without any fear of

failure.

"We are at ease," he said after watching his side win the shoot-out 3-1 after Espanyol had scored a late extra-time equaliser to leave the two sides tied at 2-2, despite playing for almost an hour with ten men.

"Our season has already been successful thanks to this victory. We can tackle the league and the King's Cup in high spirits and we will see what happens."

Ruande added: "Having won it last season, we knew how tough it is to win this trophy and we have to enjoy it. For the rest, we will see."

Espanyol ensured it was a very close run thing and, before they had midfielder Moises Hurtado sent off with just over 20 minutes of regulation time remaining, looked the more likely winners.

But Ruande insisted his side had done enough to earn the trophy. "We were never behind and we had

good chances, we just could not kill the match. Even with ten men, Espanyol were extremely tough and penalties are always a lottery."

"The tension is such anything can happen. But our players played a final last season, they have this experience and that helped us."

Ernesto Valverde described his side's defeat as "really cruel, especially when you think it has happened to this club before."

"There was a moment before the sending off when when I thought we were going to win. We had so many chances."

"But after that we had to take off (striker Raul) Tamudo and reorganise. It is very difficult to play against Sevilla, even eleven against eleven."

"We fought with a big heart and we walk away with our heads held high. To lose on penalties again is hard, but if I had to choose a way to lose, this would be the way to lose."

Kitten, lies and irritation

INTERNET, Milan



Gennaro Gattuso responded to Steven Gerrard's description of him as "a kitten" and lambasted Liverpool for their "lies" and "irritating" style of play.

The Italian midfielder was part of the side that was leading Liverpool 3-0 in 2005 before capitalizing on penalties and will face the Reds again in Athens on May 23.

"I hope that those memories will give us the right boost to beat them. It's not easy to forget that night, but it can give us all something extra to win it," he said.

"The final is an important match and my mind keeps drifting towards

it. Do you want to know if I sleep? I sleep, but I also feel the tension. I cannot wait for the kick-off to arrive."

One of the big stories after that comeback from 3-0 down was suggestions that the Rossoneri had been heard celebrating at halftime.

"It's a shame that such lies were spread about us," replied Gattuso. "That is the thing that hurt more than anything. A club and a squad like Milan do not do these things. Compliments to Liverpool for winning the trophy, which at halftime was indeed in our Via Turati headquarters, but it's a real pity they lied about what happened in the break."

"Also, I don't know how many other sides in the world would have come out from that night and returned to the semifinal and Final in successive seasons. We have to give credit to the club environment for allowing the players to recover and continue to work without excessive pressure."

Ahead of their midfield duel on the pitch, Gattuso and Gerrard have been battling it out in the newspapers with the Liverpool man calling his rival "as scary as a kitten".

"I'm certainly as furry as a kitten," smiled the bearded Italian. "I don't want to answer this sort of thing, as I am sure that the media blew those comments out of proportion. If Gerrard really does think that, then I don't know what to do about it."

"I believe he is a great player who always gives 100 per cent. I can also say I don't feel like a kitten, but rather a man who never gives in."

"Liverpool are a side that make you play badly and pack men behind the ball, so we have to do well not to get too irritated. However it ends, praise has to be given to both Milan and Liverpool for being back in the Final after two years. Back in January Rafa Benitez predicted this, but we never thought we'd be here so soon."

Milan can be particularly proud to have reached their third Final in five years, as they were originally excluded from the Champions League due to Calciopoli and went through via the preliminary round. Inter midfielder Patrick Vieira accused the club, saying he could not understand why they were in the competition at all.

"After everything we proved in the World Cup about how good Italian football is, what more do they want, for us to fly to the Moon?"

"Unfortunately scandals emerge more or less everywhere, as with so much money in the sport there is bound to be someone who wants to be sneaky. Italian football has done some great things on the field in recent years and so enough of doing us down."

"Rino" was a key figure in Italy's 2006 World Cup triumph and disagrees with Francesco Totti, who said before Roma's Champions League quarterfinal with Manchester United that for him this was more important than that night in Berlin.

Brazil, England in same group

AFP, Seoul

Favourites Brazil were pitted with England and North Korea Thursday when the draw for the U-17 World Cup finals was made here.

The Brazilians, who qualified for the tournament in South Korea -- from August 18 to September 9 -- in impressive fashion, have been finalists in five of the last six editions of the competition, winning three times.

They lost to Mexico -- who failed to qualify this year -- in the final in Peru two years ago.

New Zealand are the fourth team in the group.

Two-time winners Nigeria were drawn with France, Japan and Haiti, while the United States will face Belgium, Tunisia and Tajikistan.

Spain, looking for a title that has so far proved elusive, are alongside Honduras, Argentina and minnows Syria.

Hosts South Korea take on Peru, Costa Rica and Togo.

The final group comprises Ghana, who have won twice before, Colombia, Germany and Trinidad and Tobago.

Argentina, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, the US and South Korea were the seeded teams.

Barcelona to tour Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Spanish giants Barcelona, spearheaded by Ronaldinho, will play a pre-season match against the Yokohama F. Marinos, an official at the Japanese side said Thursday.

The clubs will face off on August 7 in Yokohama, the metropolis just outside Tokyo, he said.

It will be a third match between the two teams, which played to a draw in the past two games.

The match is part of an Asian tour of the European champions who are also reportedly planning to play in Hong Kong and Beijing in early August.

The Marinos are now a mediocre eighth in this season's J-League standings, with five wins, five losses and one draw.

Fruity goalie!

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine second division match in Buenos Aires was held up for several minutes so a goalkeeper could take a comfort break.

The referee agreed to a request from Defensores de Belgrano goalie Maximiliano Kadijevic to leave the field so he could relieve himself during a game against Sarmiento de Junin on Tuesday night.

"Something was troubling me, maybe a fruit juice," said Kadijevic after the game.

The light relief did not help his side, however, as they lost 2-0.

Chinese coach under fire

AFP, Beijing

Chinese national men's soccer coach Zhu Guanghu came under renewed pressure on Thursday after his team lost to Thailand for the first time in 14 years in a friendly tune-up for the Asian Cup.

"There is only one conclusion from the match: It would be extremely inappropriate for Zhu Guanghu to remain in his position," said a commentary in the Beijing Morning Post.

Thailand edged the visitors 1-0 in Bangkok on a 40th-minute goal from striker Pipat Thonkanya.

It was Thailand's first victory against China since the 1993 Emperor's Cup in Thailand, according to state media.

Chinese newspapers criticised the coach's reliance on an aerial long-ball attack, noting that the Thai players took advantage of the spread-open field to use short, sharp passes to penetrate China's defence.

"Ultimately, China's defence was basically paralysed," The First News-papers said.

"If Thailand is in the top three teams in Asia, as has been said, then China is at the bottom."

Zhu himself ripped into his players after the game.

"All of you told me there was no problem with your fitness. But in fact, you couldn't run and had no attacking power. Is this how you perform?" he was quoted by the Beijing Morning Post as telling his players.

But the invective directed at Zhu by soccer fans on major websites was even more fierce.

"Zhu Guanghu, if you are a real man, please resign. For the country and for soccer fans," said one post on the popular portal sina.com.

Another sina.com post used the Chinese character for "pig", which sounds like Zhu's family name, in referring to the embattled coach.

"We strongly demand that the national coach leave! Go back home and raise some pigs!" it said.

Zhu took over the national team in March 2005 after their failure to qualify for last year's World Cup under his predecessor Arie Haan. However, a string of disappointing performances has kept him under the gun since.

Similar problems in the country's women's team led to the March replacement of coach Ma Liangxing with former Swedish national coach Marika Domanski-Lyfors.

Kewell makes Riise happy

AFP, Liverpool



John Arne Riise has welcomed the timely return of Harry Kewell ahead of Liverpool's Champions League final but

believes the Australian might have to settle for a bit-part role in Athens.

Kewell has not started a match for Liverpool for a year since hobbling out of last season's FA Cup final.

But the winger put himself in contention for a place in Rafael Benitez's side for the May 23 showdown with AC Milan after a dazzling substitutes performance against Charlton last Sunday.

Kewell scored a last-gasp equaliser from the penalty spot after being involved in the first goal and hitting the bar as Liverpool ended their Premiership campaign with a 2-2 draw.

Benitez is refusing to rule out the prospect of Kewell starting against the Italians as Liverpool chase a sixth European Cup success.

Riise labelled Kewell's performance against Charlton as 'brilliant' but reckons his team-mate might have to settle for a place on the bench next Wednesday.

"It's definitely a boost to have Harry back," said Norwegian international Riise.

"I see him every morning

when he is doing his work out to get ready for the games and he has been very focused on getting some games in to get his confidence up.

"When he came on against Charlton he was brilliant for the half hour that he played."

"He has got his form right at the right time, maybe it is right that it is too soon to start him."

Riise, who is approaching his sixth anniversary at Anfield, has been one of Liverpool's key performers on the road to Athens.

He used his powerful left foot to score the crucial second goal against Barcelona in the Nou Camp as Benitez's side edged out the Spanish giants on the away goals rule at the last 16 stage - days after an alleged fracas with team-mate Craig Bellamy.

Then the 26-year-old former Monaco player scored in the 3-0 first leg success in Holland against PSV Eindhoven as Liverpool breezed into the semi-finals.

Yet Riise, who set up Steven Gerrard's goal as Benitez's side came from 3-0 behind to win the 2005 final against AC Milan in Istanbul, is not even sure whether he will start next week after Xabi Alonso was forced to settle for a place on the bench against Chelsea in the semi-final second leg.

"With this manager you never know what he is going to do. Even if you play every game all season you never know if he is going to

do something surprising," he added.

"It keeps everybody on their toes. You never know who is going to be rested. I think the eleven that start will deserve to play and all the others will support the team."

"The final cannot come quick enough. Hopefully it will not be the same first half as last time, but we will get the same result. We have a lot of respect for AC Milan and they have got respect for us."

"We know it is going to be tough game. These are two exciting teams."

"They have got a lot of experience in these types of games and we have as well. So we are looking forward to it and we know it is going to be hard."

"The final two years ago was the best night ever for me personally as a football player. To be able to win the European trophy is unbelievable."

"I remember everything from start to finish and the celebration afterwards was just unbelievable. The bus tour was supposed to take an hour and half and it took four and a half hours, but we enjoyed it. I think the whole city did as well."

Riise still has two years left on his current deal but is keen to end his career at Anfield. "If the boss and the new owners want me then I will sign because I am happy here and I want to stay here," he said.

Giggs to make it bigger

AFP, London



Ryan Giggs is poised to extend his record breaking season by becoming the first player of the modern era to collect five FA Cup winners medals.

With regular skipper Gary Neville injured, Giggs will lead out Manchester United this weekend when they face Chelsea in the first final at the newly rebuilt Wembley.

Victory will complete a memorable domestic double for Sir Alex Ferguson's side - the fourth time United have won both league and cup in the veteran manager's 20-year reign at Old Trafford.

For Giggs, though, success against United's closest rivals would wrap up a personal double that will confirm the winger as the most successful player of recent times.

United title success, secured last month with two games of the league programme, ensured Giggs collected an unprecedented ninth Premiership winners medal.

And another FA Cup triumph will nudge Giggs ahead of his former United colleagues Mark Hughes and Roy Keane in the list of all-time cup successes - and make the Welshman the first player since the 1800's to win the trophy for a fifth time.

"It will be great if he does it," Ferguson said. "To get five FA Cup medals is wonderful."

"Ryan will be captain for us and I think it does complete a remarkable season for the lad. Nine championships and the contribution he has made to us has been outstanding."

"It's amazing to think he just seems to carry on at a fantastic course of looking after himself and his fitness is amazing. So hopefully he will have a very successful day at Wembley."

Giggs, now 33, has figured in all of United's successes since he made his debut as a 17-year-old against Everton in 1991 and is on course to overtake Sir Bobby



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United's Ryan Giggs controls the ball as he takes part in a training session at the club's Carrington training ground, Manchester, on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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15 Teddy's cuddle?	42-Across	6 Shaving mishap	33 Shuns	
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19 Peeper's place	58 The Red or the Black	9 Columbus' place	38 Listener	
21 Stylish		10 List of members	40 Injured severely	
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25 Dadaist artist	60 Peruse fame		44 Pair	
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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptquip: THIS PERSON IN PRISON IS SO STRICT AND AUSTERE, YOU COULD SAY HE'S FULL OF CON-STERN-ATION.  
Today's Cryptquip Clue: M equals T