



Sevilla defender Javi Navarro (2ndR) holds the trophy next to coach Juande Ramos (R) after their triumph in the UEFA Cup final against Espanyol on penalties at Hampden Park in Glasgow on Wednesday.

# From Pele to Becks

**Football**

AP, New York

Pele arrived on American soil in 1975 to give North American soccer life. David Beckham's arrival three decades later is meant to give it a lift.

The Brazilian soccer hero said Wednesday that Beckham's highly anticipated debut later this summer with the Los Angeles Galaxy is not unlike his own.

There's the same fevered excitement, reflected in the number of people inquiring about tickets. Both international icons found their way to cities comfortable in the spotlight. And passionate fans and curious observers alike are eager to see what Beckham will bring to the Galaxy.

And to soccer in America.

"It's almost the same," said Pele, appearing untouched by age. "The game wasn't as popular (in the US) when we came. The first year was rough. The league was a new league."

After a brilliant international career, Pele joined the New York Cosmos of the North American Soccer League. His first game was played at Downing Stadium on New York City's Randall's Island, a mud pitch painted green.

## Maldini gearing up for grand finale

AFP, Milan

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini said Wednesday he expected to be fit to face Liverpool in next week's Champions League final in Athens.

The 38-year-old defender, who has struggled all season with a left knee injury, also revealed that he was set to extend his contract beyond this summer and play on for another year.

"I'm hopeful of making the final," Maldini said at a press conference.

"The knee was swollen, but it has responded well to treatment."

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said he was confident Maldini would lead out the team in Athens next Wednesday.

"I think he'll make it," Ancelotti said.

"He has done some specific work on his knee and his condition is improving all the time."

With regards to his contract, Maldini said he was close to finalising a new deal.

"I haven't yet signed a contract, but I have spoken to (AC Milan vice-president) Adriano Galliani and I don't think there will be a problem."

"I think I will need an operation at the end of the season, and after that I should be ready for another season. But that will definitely be my last."

Maldini, who has spent his entire career at Milan, has won seven Italian league titles and four European Cups.

His team was made up of players just out of college. Few had professional experience, much less time with international clubs.

"I remember when we played at San Jose, we lost 2 to 1," Pele recalled. "I said, 'My God, what am I going to do here?'"

Pele primed the pump, though, and many European stars soon came to the United States. Germany's Franz Beckenbauer and Brazilian Carlos Alberto turned the Cosmos into the Yankees of professional soccer. The game took off, the Cosmos drawing a sellout crowd of nearly 78,000 to the new Giants Stadium in August 1977.

But the league struggled financially and by 1984 it had folded. It wasn't until the United States drew the World Cup in 1990 -- its first trip in 40 years -- that the sport again attracted a following.

The 1994 World Cup, played in stadiums across the United States, drew a record 3.6 million spectators, and helped ensure the successful launch of Major League Soccer two years later.

Now the MLS is hoping Beckham will provide another shot of momentum.

"The thing with Beckham, they've got everything set up already," said Pele, who was in New York for a promotional event for GolfTV, an English language soccer network in the United States. "The league is OK. The team is established. They have done a lot to get everything down."

Forget the muddy field in the middle of the East River. Beckham signed a five-year deal and will play in the dazzling Home Depot Center, one of many soccer-specific stadiums built for MLS teams in recent years. He will also

be joining a team that won league titles in 2002 and 2005.

"In this moment, the MLS is more prepared than it was then," said Enzo Francescoli, who led the Uruguayan national team in two World Cups and now is chief executive of GolTV.

"Ten, 12 years the MLS has in this project," Francescoli said. "Finally coming here are the best players. Maybe it starts with Beckham and (Colombian forward Juan Pablo) Angel, and maybe in the future more players."

There is a rumour that Zinedine Zidane -- the French star known as much for head butting Italy's Marco Materazzi in the 2006 World Cup final as for his illustrious career -- is considering following

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## Brazil squad for friendlies

INTERNET, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil yesterday named Ronaldinho in the squad to play international friendlies against England in London on June 1 and Turkey in Dortmund on June 5 despite the Barcelona player's request to rest him after a tiring season.

The team included Roma goalkeeper Doni who conceded seven goals in their quarterfinal against Manchester United.

THE TEAM

Goalkeepers: Doni (AS Roma), Helton (Porto); dfenders: Alex Rodrigo (PSV Eindhoven), Daniel Alves (Sevilla), Gilberto (Hertha Berlin), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen), Maicon (Inter Milan), Marcelo (Real Madrid), Naldo (Werder Bremen), Alex Silva (Sao Paulo); mdfielders: Diego (Werder Bremen), Edmilson (Barcelona), Kaka (AC Milan), Elano (Shakhtar Donetsk), Gilberto Silva (Arsenal), Josue (Sao Paulo), Mineiro (Hertha Berlin); forwards: Afonso Alves (Heerenveen), Jo (CSKA Moscow), Robinho (Real Madrid), Ronaldinho (Barcelona), Vagner Love (CSKA Moscow).

## Bradley status now official

AFP, New York

Bob Bradley, interim coach of the US national football team for the past five months, was officially given the job through the 2010 World Cup here Wednesday.

The four-year deal brings the Americans stability as they prepare for two upcoming major international tournaments, the Gold Cup next month among North American foes and the subsequent Copa America with South American foes.

"I'm very pleased," Bradley said. "The work the past six months has gone very well. The focus in that time has been in doing what makes sense for the team and the future. I'm pleased to continue that work."

Bradley's appointment ends a 10-month search to replace

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## Gremio shocked, Cucuta win

AP, Bogota

Blas Perez scored in the final minute to put Colombia's Cucuta Deportivo ahead of Nacional of Uruguay 2-0 on Tuesday and in a strong position for a Copa Libertadores semifinals berth.

Brazilian clubs had poor outings as Uruguayan rank outsiders Defensor blanked Gremio 2-0 while Santos drew goalless against Mexican side America.

While Nacional seemed to start strongly, it quickly turned sour for the visitors and Jose Ignacio Pallas was expelled in the 30th minute for a nasty foul.

Macnelly Torres scored in the 74th minute to send the 42,000 Colombian fans at General Santander stadium wild with excitement, and Blas Perez found the net with a header in the 88th minute to seal the win.

# Sevilla retain cup

AFP, Glasgow



Brazilian substitute Jonas levelled the match at 2-2 at the end of extra-time, the script appeared to have been written for Barcelona's lesser-known club to clinch their first European trophy after playing for almost an hour with ten men.

But it was not to be, Sevilla winning an edgy shoot-out 3-1.

The outcome was hard on the Catalans, who had defied the odds to equalise for a second time with five minutes of extra-time to play.

After the 90 minutes had finished with the sides tied at 1-1, Fredi Kanoute's strike appeared to have killed the contest.

But the Andalusians were left stunned when Jonas let fly from 25 yards and found the bottom

corner to send the match to penalties.

It was a goal from nowhere, but no more than Espanyol deserved on a night when they had looked to be on track for victory until they had midfielder Moises Hurtado sent off with just over 20 minutes of regulation time remaining.

Up until then, Espanyol had looked the more likely winners, despite requiring a 28th-minute strike from Albert Riera to cancel out a stunning opening goal by Sevilla's Brazilian midfielder Adriano.

Sevilla's status as short odds favourites to overcome opponents struggling in the bottom half of La Liga was justified by an opening in which Enzo Maresca fired narrowly over the angle of bar and post and Freddie Kanoute went close with a near post header.

Espanyol soon provided a reminder of the dangers of complacency however, after Hurtado was allowed to advance unchecked from midfield to inside 30 yards of goal. The midfielder's drive skidded treacherously off the sodden Hampden turf and Andres Palop did well to gather it low to his right.

With Raul Tamudo jinking to

the byline immediately afterwards, Espanyol suddenly looked the more dangerous of the two sides, but their momentum was about to be halted in exhilarating fashion by Adriano.

The corner that Tamudo had won was gathered cleanly by Palop, who immediately sent Adriano racing clear down the left with a huge throw of immaculate accuracy.

The Brazilian's gear changes were too much for a short-staffed Catalan back four and he was unchallenged as he cut into the box and placed a right-foot finish beyond the hopelessly-exposed Gorka Iraizoz and into the far corner.

The brutal simplicity of the goal appeared to underline the perceived gulf in class between the two sides.

Yet within ten minutes, Riera had put Espanyol back on level terms, albeit with the help of a deflection off the boot of Liverpool target Daniel Alves.

Riera had gone past the centreback with ease, cutting in from the left flank, but his hesitation allowed the defender to

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# Take it as it comes

**Football**

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho insists nothing in football will ever bother him again after the trauma of being arrested for trying to protect his family's dog.

Mourinho's preparations for Saturday's FA Cup Final showdown against Manchester United were disrupted when he was cautioned and then released without charge on Tuesday night for obstructing police who wanted to take a Yorkshire terrier from the Chelsea manager's London home.

Officers believed the dog did not

have the required inoculations but Mourinho claimed it had all the necessary jabs and was taken to Belgravia police station after arguing his case too vehemently.

The bizarre incident could hardly have come at a worse time for Mourinho, with the Wembley clash just days away, and caps a tumultuous season for the Portuguese coach.

The prospect of losing a final to United so soon after surrendering the Premiership title to Sir Alex Ferguson's side would rub salt into Mourinho's wounds.

But he claimed any blow that comes his way in football will be irrelevant compared to the anxiety of seeing his wife Tami and his two young children distressed on

Tuesday.

"Since what has happened yesterday to my family, nothing hurts me, especially in football," he said.

"Nothing hurts me in football because it is impossible to compare that to my family. What hurts me is what happened yesterday to my family, not to me."

Wembley welcomes back the FA Cup final for the first time since 2000, when Chelsea beat Aston Villa, and the prospect of leading his team out at the newly rebuilt England national stadium should raise Mourinho from his despondency.

The significance of the show

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# Ticket fever grips Athens

AFP, Athens



A week before Liverpool and AC Milan meet in the Champions League final in Athens on May 23 to decide continental supremacy, a battle is already raging on the Internet among fans desperate for tickets to

the game.

And despite warnings from Europe's governing body UEFA for football fans to be wary of sellers charging exorbitant fees and failing to deliver, the demand has already increased ticket prices tenfold.

Apart from the 17,000 tickets given to each of the clubs, 20,000 tickets were allocated to the "UEFA family" -- UEFA and national federation officials, sponsors and

guests -- and a further 9,000 went into a ballot that ended in February.

The asking price for a pair of seats to the final at the Olympic Stadium has skyrocketed from an official price of 80 to 200 euros (108-270 dollars) to between 830 and 1,900 euros (1,125-2,600 dollars) with even online sellers across the Atlantic joining in the bonanza.

"Yes, I know that the price is a bit crazy, but that was the cheapest I could find at the time and I was very excited to go as I'm a huge Liverpool fan," wrote US-based eBay seller "ranndino", who is asking over 2,600 dollars for his ticket.

"Now that I can't go I'd like to simply recoup my money...I'm not some money hungry shark. I simply bought the ticket from an internet resale site and that was the price I paid for it."

UEFA spokesman William Gaillard told the Liverpool Echo last week: "If we built a stadium with a million seats, the match would still sell out and supporters would not be able to see the pitch".

"It's impossible more will be released in the coming weeks - 17,000 (for each club) is the final figure."

One seller from Salonika, northern Greece, paid 410 euros (555 dollars) for two prime seats and now stands to make 2,600 dollars for the pair.

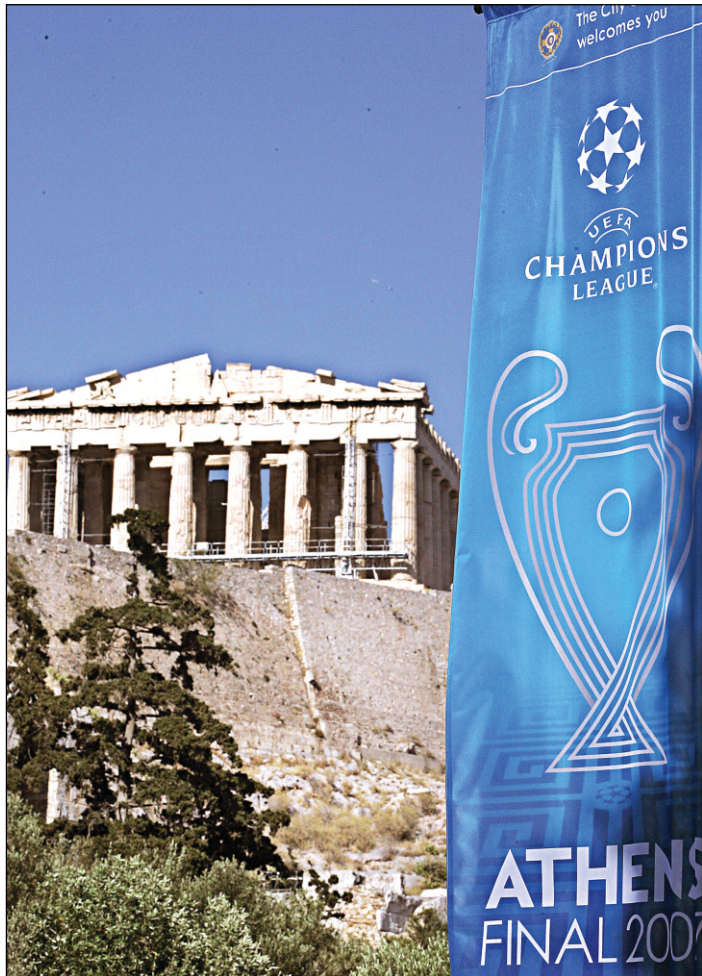
Another Greek seller, arisexpress, tries to entice potential buyers a bonus gift of six bottles of ouzo, metro tickets and guides to Athens.

But not all ticketholders are making money this year. French seller Michael, 25, has had trouble unloading 200-euro tickets he bought for 2,000 euros.

"Last year I bought two tickets for 1,300 euros and sold them for 4,300," he told AFP. "This year, I think the game is not that hot because it's the same matchup as two years ago."

The same two teams fought out

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A banner, announcing the Champions League final between Liverpool and AC Milan, hangs near the ancient Acropolis temple in Athens on Wednesday.



A supporter of Brazilian club Santos cheers and dances during their Libertadores Cup quarterfinal against Mexican side America in Mexico City on Wednesday