

Kanoute
angry at FIFA

AFP, Madrid

Mali striker Frederic Kanoute claimed FIFA have caved in to pressure from Spanish giants Real Madrid by forcing him to turn his back on international duty this weekend.

Kanoute, who plays for Sevilla and Madrid midfielder Mahamadou Diarra, had been expecting to feature in Mali's crucial African Nations Cup clash with Sierra Leone.

But both men have been told by FIFA they must turn out for their clubs on Sunday in what will be the final day of the Spanish League season where Real and Barcelona are locked in a nail-biting push for the title.

"It is not normal what they have done with my country," Kanoute told the Sevilla website.

"They changed the rules and discredit my country because it is African and not European. It is revolting what FIFA has done. They couldn't resist the pressure from Real Madrid."

Despite his anger, Kanoute, Sevilla's top scorer this season, insisted he will still give 100-percent on Sunday when his club face Villarreal.

Sevilla are third in the table, two points behind the leaders and still have a chance of snatching a first championship since 1946.

Real face Mallorca in their last match while second-placed Barcelona are at relegated Gimnastic Tarragona.

Argentine
starlet in
mega move

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina youth international Mauro Zarate has landed a near 20 million dollar contract with Qatar champions Al Sadd.

"I'm going to be leaving for Qatar at the beginning of next week and all that's left to be done is sign the contract," the 20-year-old Velez Sarsfield striker disclosed to the press here on Saturday.

His agent said the two-year deal "was not ideal in footballing terms but it will give him and his family financial security."

The young attacker has been picked to play for his country at the FIFA Under-20 World Cup in Canada from June 30.



PHOTO: AFP

Panama's Felipe Baloy (L) falls over while trying to control the ball ahead of USA's Clint Dempsey during the Gold Cup quarterfinal at the Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts on Saturday.

Canada, US in Gold Cup semis



Football

AFP, Boston

Landon Donovan scored on a penalty kick in the 59th minute and Carlos Bocanegra headed in a goal as the US advanced to the semis of the CONCACAF Gold Cup with a 2-1 win over Panama.

The Americans, who allowed their first goal of the tournament when Panama's Blas Perez scored in the 83rd minute, advanced on Saturday to their eighth semifinal in nine Gold Cups.

For Donovan, it was his second goal of the tournament - both com-

ing on penalty kicks.

It was also the American forward's 32nd all-time goal in international play, putting him just two shy of Eric Wynalda.

In Saturday's first quarterfinal, Canada defeated Guatemala 3-0.

The United States will play Canada on Thursday in Chicago.

Donovan has been a nemesis for Panama. He has four goals and two assists in five matches against the Panamanians.

In the 61st minute, Bocanegra headed in a beautiful cross from midfielder DaMarcus Beasley, which stood up as the winner.

Ali Gerba scored twice in the first half as Canada advanced to the

semifinals.

It is the first semifinal appearance for Canada since 2002, when it lost to the United States.

Gerba also had a hand in the first goal for Canada, setting up Dwayne De Rosario's tally in the 17th minute.

Off a great buildup following some gritty work in the offensive end, Canada extended the advantage to 2-0 in the 33rd minute as Gerba tapped the ball past goalkeeper Carlos Trigueno.

Just before the half, Gerba struck again. This time, Gerba had a pass from Julian De Guzman deflect off his heel and past Trigueno.

A Hollywood finale

TIMES ONLINE



A Spanish television station is billing its football coverage with the tagline "Vive La Liga Loca", which David Beckham must feel is underselling it.

His final, traumatic season at Real Madrid has coincided with his "most difficult time" in public prominence, but after receiving assurances that his England place is once more secure, a title shimmers in front of him. Crazy does not do it justice.

Banished by Steve McClaren, ignored by Fabio Capello and then ostracised by his club when stalled contract negotiations led to him agreeing to uproot his family to California, Beckham responded as he always has. "Whenever criticism gets thrown at me, I find a way to come back stronger," he said yesterday; informed in January that he would never play for "los

meringues" again, he has been integral to their renaissance.

The same applies to England unbeaten in the two matches since his return and providing his standards do not waver, there is no longer any reason why his move to the Los Angeles Galaxy should entail his international ambitions dissolving in a Hollywood sunset.

He is determined to play on. "Without a doubt," he said. "The manager has already made me aware that as long as my fitness is right and I'm playing like I have done over the last few months I can stay in the squad and in the team. I think my fitness will be the same, if not better."

The 32-year-old must have permitted himself a wry chuckle this week when Ramón Calderón spoke fancifully of exploiting a get-out clause in his \$250 million (about £127 million) deal with the Galaxy. After all, it was not too long ago that the Real president dismissed Beckham as "an average cinema actor". There will be no volte-face.

"The contract was signed a few months back, there is no clause in the contract saying it can be

changed, so it will be my last game on Sunday," Beckham said. "I have played here for four years, I've had an incredible time and I hope it will have the best possible ending in a championship, but this is it."

Barcelona and Seville may have a say in that, though a Real victory in their home game against Mallorca will confirm them as champions regardless of their rivals' results.

His fitness has been suspect since suffering a recurrence of his ankle injury in the 2-2 draw away to Real Zaragoza last Saturday and Beckham yesterday jogged gingerly alongside José Luis San Martín, Madrid's recovery expert, at their training ground in Valdebebas. It would take more to threaten his participation against Mallorca, which also represents Roberto Carlos's swansong.

"I'm sad to be leaving and I didn't expect it hindsight is a strange thing and I thought I would finish my career here but everybody knows what happened," Beckham said. "The 1998 World Cup was tough [after his dismissal against Argentina], but this has been the

most difficult time in my career. I wasn't involved in training and matches and things were said about me that weren't true."

He leaves with most Madrid fans wanting more. "Some people think I'm going into semi-retirement, others that I can keep playing at the top," Beckham said. "But it's important to go to America and be an ambassador there when I can still perform. In some ways it's painful, because I've had 15 years playing top-flight football for Manchester United and Madrid and the level of football is different in America."

"I've had such an amazing time at two of the biggest clubs in the world. I'm moving on to a new challenge, where I can help to take football to a new level. Maybe I can't change people's opinions, but I can try in the way I play on the pitch. That's the only thing that interests me."

Contract
deadlock
for Robben

INTERNET, undated

Arjen Robben is locked in transfer deadlock with Chelsea after rejecting two contract offers in the space of a week.

The Dutch international, who becomes a free agent in 2009, is reportedly looking for a massive 120,000 pounds-a-week deal, while the Stamford Bridge club are refusing to place him among the highest bracket of earners at the club.

When fit and on form, the 23-year-old is one of the most devastating players in the Premiership, but manager Jose Mourinho is known to be frustrated with his proneness to injury.

However, a Chelsea insider told the News of the World that they would not consider selling Robben, who is on the transfer wish list of Real Madrid.

"There's no chance he will be given permission to speak to Madrid," said the source. "He has two more years of contract to run and is going nowhere."

Basler predicts Klose struggle

AFP, Halle



Former Bayern Munich and Werder Bremen midfielder Mario Basler insisted on Saturday German international striker Miroslav Klose will struggle if he joins Bayern this summer.

Klose, 29, the Bremen striker who was top-scorer at last year's World Cup, has been linked with a multi-million euro transfer to Bayern this summer as the German giants re-build their squad after their worst season for eleven years.

The 20-times German champions have signed Italian World Cup winning striker Luca Toni from Fiorentina and Klose will also be competing with Bayern's top scorer Dutchman Roy Makaay and his international teammate Lukas Podolski, voted the best young player at last year's World Cup, for his place up front.

And Basler, who spent three years at both Bremen and Bayern in the 90s, told German on-line maga-

zine Sport-Bild he predicts a tough 12 months for Klose - who ever he plays for.

"Klose will have problems at Bayern," insisted Basler, 38, who was the Bundesliga's top-scorer in 1995 at Bremen and was capped 30 times for Germany.

"In his current form, Klose will have big problems to assert himself in the team with Toni signed and with Lukas Podolski fighting for his place."

Klose is in a precarious position at Bremen - with his contract set to expire in 2008, he has already pledged his future to Bayern from July next year when he will join on a free transfer.

But Bayern are keen to sign him sooner and Klose was forced to apologise to both his club and fans in April when it was revealed he had a "secret" meeting with Bayern bosses to discuss a possible switch.

And Basler was quick to point out the mistakes Klose - who scored five goals at last year's World Cup - has made this season on and off the pitch, having failed to score a goal since April.

After Klose told reporters after Germany's recent Euro 2008 qualifier win over Slovakia that he would switch to Bayern in 2008 at the latest, Basler said he can expect a hard time from the Bremen fans if he stays.

"Klose isn't playing well this season and has made many mistakes," said Basler.

"He hasn't done himself many favours with the things he has said and he will have big problems with the fans at Bremen - if he stays."

Bayern president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has said he wants to sign Klose this summer and is reported to have offered ten million euros.

Werder want at least 15 million, but which ever shirt he wears next season, Basler thinks it will be a tough campaign.

He said: "All the same, where ever Klose plays, it will be a tough season for him. With every bad game he has he makes himself more vulnerable."