



Sevilla players parade the Kings Cup trophy during a photocall in the city on Sunday. Sevilla beat Getafe in the final.

## Cream of the crop (part III)

Here is the top 20 of the fifty players that journalist **Gabriel Marcotti** picked as his best in the planet. They are the real cream of the crop.

### Football

#### 20. Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)

Already a legend, and he only turned 26 last month. He's an agile, fearless shot-stopper who, if Raul ever retires, will captain Real for years to come.

#### 19. Daniel Alves (Seville)

Rarely does a single man dominate an entire flank the way he does. He combines the skills of a winger with the grit of an old-style hard man. His mere presence on the pitch forces the opposing side to readjust everything defensively.

#### 18. Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal)

If you could open his skull, you'd find the brain of a 30-year-old. Few players are so mature and so aware at such a young age, while also being totally undaunted by the task in front of them.

#### 17. Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)

Admittedly, he's one of the more volatile heads on this list. But creativity and vision like his rarely come in 6ft 5in packages, which makes him one of the most difficult players to defend against in the game.

#### 16. Frank Lampard (Chelsea)

Let's let the numbers do the talking, shall we? He has missed five league games in the past six seasons at Chelsea, while hitting double figures in league goals in each of the past four. Plus, he never slows down and is genuinely adored by his teammates. What more do you want?

#### 15. Ruud van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid)

And to think some numpties thought he was finished. He and Thierry Henry are the only strikers to have scored 20 or more goals in a major European league in five of the past six seasons. Put the ball anywhere near him, and he'll score. Simple as that.

#### 14. Petr Cech (Chelsea)

Go ask Jose Mourinho and he'll tell you that, had it not been for Steven Hunt's boot, Chelsea would have won the treble this year. That's how important Cech is. With a guy like him, you can just stick him in goal, and he'll do the rest.

#### 13. Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)

Another who had a mediocre season (by his standards). You notice how important he is when he is not there. His workrate and ability are hard to replace and he is quickly becoming indispensable, both for club and country.

#### 10. Francesco Totti (Roma)

His job is to create, not finish, and yet he won the European Golden Boot this season with 26 league goals: a total made all the more remarkable when you throw in the fact that he uncharacteristically missed six penalties along the way. (At least he made the ones that mattered in the World Cup.) That alone should get him on the list - his vision and phenomenal range of passing are bonuses.

#### 9. Leo Messi (Barcelona)

Leave Maradona out of it for a minute. Focus instead on that when the ball is at his feet, unless you're Nostradamus, you have absolutely no idea what will happen next. There is no legislating for unpredictability in football and Messi has bags of it. Plus, his 14 Liga goals last year show that he's added a healthy scoring dimension to his game.

#### 3. Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)

The top four are incredibly tight, but he just edges it for one simple reason: he combines Brazilian flair with European directness like nobody else. He truly is a product of two footballing cultures, a man who has all the virtues and none of the vices of either. Speaking of vices, he really, really doesn't have any. A committed Christian, he announced proudly that he was a virgin on his wedding night. He likes to parade around in his favourite T-shirt, the one that reads "I belong to Jesus" (thereby opening a whole can of worms regarding third-party ownership). And that's another reason he tops the list - with Kaka in your team, odds are, the big fella upstairs will be on your side as well...

#### 8. Carlos Tevez (West Ham)

A single-minded winner, who has carried whole clubs on his back in Argentina, Brazil and England. Tevez's contribution isn't measured in just goals and assists, but in self-sacrifice and heroism. With a season of European football under his belt, there is no telling how much better he's going to be next year.

#### 7. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool)

Speaking of heroics, he's done it so many times, it's easy to lose track. If Gerrard were a few inches taller and a few pounds more slight, we would marvel at his pure technical ability. Instead, we focus on his bruising workrate and other more obvious qualities. Don't worry about fitting him into your side. Just do what Rafa does. Line up your nine other outfield players and let Gerrard do whatever he likes.

#### 6. Gigi Buffon (Juventus)

Simply put, he's a freak of nature. No man his size should be so athletic. His agility belies the laws of physics and he is about as unflappable as they come. Having a guy like him in your side means that defeats turn into draws and draws into victories. That alone is worth an extra ten to 15 points at the end of a season.

#### 5. Michael Essien (Chelsea)

A one-man wrecking crew. Is there anything he can't do? You could probably let the rest of the team go off for a fog-bath in the middle of the game and let him man the fort in midfield. Terrifyingly gifted already and, if given more responsibility, likely to get even better.

#### 4. Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)

He's tired of playing second fiddle to Ronaldinho and with good reason. If he were anywhere else, people would be writing odes and sonnets to him. Eto'o is freakishly quick, an outstanding finisher, with a supernatural eye for goal. Plus, he's happy to do the dirty work when the other side have possession. Just make sure you continue to massage his ego.

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## Branding it like Beckham

### Football

#### AP, New York

It's already time to brand it like Beckham.

Adidas is launching an advertising campaign this week featuring English soccer star David Beckham and New Orleans Saints running back Reggie Bush swapping sports during practice in "Futbol vs. Football."

"There's very few people whose names transcend their own sports. People know the name of David Beckham, whether they follow soccer or not," said Stephen Pierpoint, vice president of brand marketing for Adidas America.

Sponsors are counting on Beckham to reach out beyond the soccer field in a way the United States hasn't seen since Pele was with the Cosmos from 1975-77.

"It's almost the same," Pele said. "There are a lot of similarities."

Ahead of last year's World Cup, Nike erected a 70 1/2-foot high billboard near New York's Madison Square Garden and a nearly identical 40-foot high ad in San Francisco featuring Landon Donovan, DaMarcus Beasley and Eddie Johnson. And yes, Adidas has a relationship with Claudio Reyna, the U.S. captain at the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, but he had little buzz outside the soccer crowd.

The 32-year-old midfielder, who has had as many hairstyles as goals, is to join up with the Galaxy next month and be a halftime guest on the telecast of the MLS All-Star game in Denver on July 19, perhaps making a cameo appearance in the match. His first game in the Galaxy's

redesigned uniform figures to be a July 21 exhibition against England's Chelsea at Carson, Calif. -- where Beckham already has a youth soccer academy. After that, his likely MLS debut would be Aug. 5 at Toronto.

That all will be accompanied with a lot of advertising.

"It will be a coordinated blitz, if you will," Galaxy president Alexi Lalas said. "We want to make sure that we're not duplicating efforts. So there will be obviously stuff from Adidas, the Galaxy, ESPN and a bunch of other ones."

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European and Latin American

stars only go so far in America's

mainstream market.

To mark Beckham's arrival,

Victoria Adams, the former Posh Spice, is friends with Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. Galaxy games could be a big celeb ticket, much like the Lakers.

European Web sites track his hairstyles. Paparazzi tail Becks and Posh, the most celebrated of England's WAGS (wives and girlfriends).

And the corporate world wants to cash in.

"As wonderful as this is, we don't want to saturate and we don't want to duplicate when it's not necessary," Lalas said. "So there is a specific Los Angeles-based platform, there's the regional, there's the national and then there's the international. And it's a combination of the Galaxy, the league -- MLS -- Adidas, ESPN. All of those different entities are targeting different areas."

Until now, Adidas' biggest sales of licensed soccer merchandise in the United States have involved Mexico's national team, which it regained from Nike last October, and Real Madrid. With Beckham, selling MLS has taken a new twist.

"We've enjoyed some success of AC Milan and Real Madrid jerseys in America," Pierpoint said. "Now, for the first time, we see global demand for the LA Galaxy jersey."

## Iran, India miss bid deadline

#### AFP, Singapore

Iran has missed the deadline to submit its bid to host the 2011 Asian Cup and India has pulled out of the race, leaving Qatar as the only candidate left.

Qatar handed in its bid on June 19, two days before the deadline, but India and Iran failed to follow suit, the Asian Football Confederation said Monday.

The All India Football Federation said it would not be able to meet the huge and stringent infrastructural requirements necessary to host Asia's premier football event, but there was no reason given for Iran failing to submit a bid.

All three countries had expressed a desire to host the event.

A decision will be rubberstamped on July 29, the day of the final of the 2007 Asian Cup in Jakarta. This year's event is being co-hosted by Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia, with Japan the defending champions.

Qatar, which successfully held the Asian Games in Doha in December last year, has played host to the Asian Cup once before, in 1988 when it was won by Saudi Arabia.

### CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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14	vaudeville	4	medium	46	Refuge	29
15	46	45	5	Seethe	50	Traffic
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18	with con-	51	8	"Lassie"	month	month
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20	others..."	55	9	With	35	—
21	53	Start	10	10-Down,	36	Play-
22	somewhat	55	56	Book-	37	ground
23	over	56	Platter	keeper	38	game
24	Can	57	57	(Abbr.)	39	10
25	material	57	Book-	10	See	Down
26	17	58	keeper	9	10	9-Down
27	Birds'	59	59	Dr. Jekyll	10	9-Down
28	home	60	and Mr.	42	See	comment
29	(Abbr.)	60	Hyde"	42	42	comment
30	18	60	60	42	43	comment
31	Necklace	60	Do some	43	43	comment
32	carving	60	Oscar	44	44	comment
33	20	60	winner	45	45	comment
34	Earring	60	Sweet	46	46	comment
35	site	60	tasting	47	47	comment
36	22	60	accessory	48	48	comment
37	Chips	60	tailoring	49	49	comment
38	24	60				