



Argentina's wizardly striker Lionel Messi manages to win the ball despite being under heavy challenge from Mexico's Fernando Arce during their Copa America semifinal match in Puerto Ordaz yesterday.

England-Russia on plastic pitch

AFP, London

England's potentially decisive Euro 2008 qualifier against Russia in Moscow will be played not on grass but on the artificial pitch at the 84,000-seat Luzhniki Stadium.

England have never played a competitive match on a synthetic surface.

The pitch for the October 17 tie has been authorised by UEFA and FIFA and was used by Spartak Moscow in last season's Champions League, although a grass surface will have been laid by the time next year's Champions League final is held there.

England could get some experiences of playing on an artificial pitch as both the training grounds of Manchester United and Arsenal have non-turf, as well as grass playing areas.

An FA delegation travelled to Moscow earlier this week and we understand the match will be played on an artificial surface," a Football Association spokesman said Wednesday.

"Steve McLaren (England coach) is aware of this and is looking forward to preparing accordingly."

Roux wins right to coach

AFP, Paris

Guy Roux on Wednesday won his fight with the French football authorities who had told him that at the age of 68 he was too old to coach Lens.

The green light to allow the veteran former manager of Auxerre to take up his new post was given by France's National Olympic and Sporting Council (CNSO).

Roux had received support from French president Nicolas Sarkozy who stepped in to the ageism row after the 3-2 vote taken by the French League's legal department against ratifying Roux's three-year contract with Lens.

"The President of the Republic deplores this. He considers it's more the rule rather than Guy Roux

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Fowler in talks with Sydney

AFP, Sydney

Former Liverpool ace Robbie Fowler touched down in Australia Thursday for talks with A-League club Sydney FC, media reports said.

The striker, modestly known as "God" on the red half of Merseyside, is believed to be in Australia until Monday to inspect the Sydney facilities and decide on whether to become the club's marquee signing for the upcoming season.

Fowler, who scored 183 goals in 369 games during his two spells with Liverpool and has 26 England caps, was released by his hometown club at the end of the Premier League season.

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Metsu curses 'bad refereeing'

AFP, Hanoi



Talaat Najim's failure to award his side at least two penalties.

Metsu, who led Senegal to the 2002 World Cup quarterfinals, said he saw the same referee officiating in a 1-1 draw between powerhouses Saudi Arabia and South Korea in Jakarta on Wednesday.

"I remembered the 2002 World Cup when South Korea played at home against Spain and Italy and the referee was very bad," he said.

"A good team may also play against the referee. It was too much for us to play against Vietnam, against the fans and against the referee."

In 2002, South Korea were roared on by home fans to beat Italy in the World Cup last-16 round and Spain in the quarter-finals amid controversy over dubious refereeing decisions against the visitors.

In one incident, AC Roma superstar Francesco Totti was shown a second yellow card by referee Byron Moreno for an alleged dive with video replays suggesting it was a poor decision.

"I must caution the players before the match that the referee might be against you," said Metsu.

He has not been alone in complaining about the officials.

Qatar coach Dzemaludin Musovic was sent off by Australian Matthew Breeze when he loudly protested a red card given to former Manchester City winger Hussain Yaser in their 1-1 draw on Monday.

Musovic was cleared of any wrongdoing by the Asian Football Confederation disciplinary committee on Thursday, a day ahead of

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McLaren charged over spying

Football

INTERNET, undated

McLaren have been charged by Formula One's governing body with breaking the sport's rules, following an investigation by the FIA.

The British team will have to appear in front of the FIA World MotorSports Council on July 26 on charges relating the current spy scandal involving their chief designer Mike Coughlan, namely that they used Ferrari technical secrets on their cars.

An FIA Statement read: "The team representatives have been

called to answer a charge that between March and July 2007, in breach of Article 151c of the International Sporting Code, Vodafone McLaren Mercedes had unauthorised possession of documents and confidential information belonging to Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro, including information that could be used to design, engineer, build, check, test, develop and/or run a 2007 Ferrari Formula One car."

Coughlan, who swore an affidavit to Ferrari in London's High Court on Wednesday, is currently suspended from duty after being found in possession of technical details they claim he obtained from their former technical manager Nigel Stepney.

Qureshi scaling new heights

AFP, Newport

Pakistani qualifier Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi continued to impress Wednesday, booking a quarterfinal berth in the 416,000-dollar Tennis Hall of Fame Championships.

Qureshi, ranked 214th in the world, opened his campaign in the grasscourt tournament with a bang, eliminating top seed Mardy Fish in straight sets.

On Wednesday, he followed up with a 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-4 victory over Nathan Healey of Australia.

Unseeded Dick Norman of Belgium awaits Qureshi in the quarterfinals after ousting eighth-seeded Michael Berrer of Germany 6-2, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (8/6).

This will be the first meeting between the two.

Second-seeded American Vince Spadea bidding to return to the final here after a first-round ouster last year, advanced with a 6-3, 7-5 second-round victory over Chile's Paul Capdeville.

Spadea reached the final here in 2005 before falling to Greg Rusedski of Britain. However, he followed up that effort with a disappointing opening-round exit here last year, losing to fellow American Robert Kendrick in three sets.

Next up for Spadea is South African veteran Wesley Moodie, who beat Roko Karanovic of Croatia 6-4, 4-6, 6-2.

The final match of the first round was also completed Wednesday as fourth-seeded Fabrice Santoro of France defeated Alexander Peya of Austria 6-4, 6-1.

Russia captain obtains Fed Cup visa

AFP, Moscow

Russian Fed Cup team captain Shamil Tarshishchev has obtained a US visa for this weekend's semifinal clash with the United States after initially being refused entry, the US embassy here announced on Thursday.

Tarshishchev, who is also the head of the Russian tennis federation and an IOC member, on Tuesday criticised the lack of communication from the US embassy and the delay in procuring his visa, a delay which the coach believes jeopardised the preparation of his players.

The veteran official also had the support of the Russian foreign office who described the delay "beyond understanding".

The Russian skipper named Nadia Petrova, Anna Chakvetadze, Yelena Vesnina and Alla Kudryavtseva in his squad, which will face the hosts at a specially constructed 3,000-seat venue at Stowe, Vermont in a clash for a place in the final.

Russian stars Maria Sharapova, who won Wimbledon in 2004 and last year's US Open and 2004 Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova were both unavailable due to injury.



Real Madrid's new signings Brazilian Pepe (L) and German Christoph Metzelder (R) pose for the photographers during their official presentation at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Thursday. Pepe joined Real from FC Porto while Metzelder came from Borussia Dortmund.

PHOTOS: AFP

ANOTHER ARGENTINA-BRAZIL FINAL Messi magic muzzles Mexico

INTERNET, undated



Lionel Messi's exquisite goal and an international display from Carlos Tevez helped Argentina set up a mouth-watering Copa America final with Brazil courtesy of a 3-0 win over Mexico on Wednesday.

Messi, Gabriel Heinze and Juan Roman Riquelme all got on the scoresheet as Alfonso Basile's side outgunned the Mexicans to book their place in Sunday's showpiece encounter at the Jose Pachenco Romero Stadium in Maracairo.

"They pressed well, did not let us to play and were better than us at times," Basile said of the Mexicans. "But then Heinze scored. In the second half, Mexico suffered physically. The spaces appeared, and that wore them down them psychologically."

Argentina looked the most threatening in the early stages, but it was Mexico that had the first clear chance when Juan Carlos Cachon took advantage of a defensive mistake but fired over the crossbar.

Javier Zanetti responded for the South Americans, but the Internazionale midfielder shot weakly after creating an opening for himself.

West Ham striker Tevez went close minutes later after escaping the attention of two defenders.

Mexico almost took the lead in the 35th minute, when Andres Guardado hit the right post before Tevez shot straight at goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez after combining well with Riquelme.

Argentina broke the deadlock on the stroke of halftime, however, as Riquelme floated a free-kick into the box and Manchester United defender Gabriel Heinze acrobatically volleyed home at the back post.

Mexico coach Hugo Sanchez brought on Omar Bravo and Alberto Medina during the interval in search of an equaliser, and his team very nearly found it 10 minutes into the second period. But Nery Castillo was unlucky to see his shot come back off the bar.

It took a moment of magic from the masterful Messi on 61 minutes to finally break Mexico's spirit as the Barcelona star collected Tevez's pass on the right side of the area and produced a majestic chip over a floundering Oswaldo Sanchez.

"Only stars can do that kind of thing," Basile said. "It was extraordinary. Everyone was amazed. Messi is following in Maradona's footsteps, but his career has just begun and so he cannot be compared to Diego."

"It was a beautiful goal," Riquelme added. "Lionel is playing superb football and we are trying to help him show all his potential."

It got worse for the Central Americans four minutes later as Rafael Marquez obstructed Tevez in the box and Riquelme produced an audacious chip from the resulting penalty to put the result beyond doubt.

"It leaves a bad taste in the mouth to not get to the final, but we came up against a strong side and have to recognize that they were better," Hugo Sanchez said. "But being among the top four is very important as it enhances our reputation. I'm happy that we have improved Mexico's image."

Substitute Rodrigo Palacio fired over when well placed and Messi saw an effort drift wide of the left post late on as Argentina threatened a fourth goal.

Argentina will now bid for a record 15th title against rivals Brazil. Tevez is anxious to avenge a loss to the Brazilians three years ago.

"I haven't forgotten that they rubbed it in my face," he said. "Today, football has given me an opportunity for revenge. But it's going to be a hard game."

Mexico vie for third place when they take on Uruguay.

Bates buys back Leeds

Football

AFP, Leeds

on Friday after club chairman Bates's attempt to buy back the club was challenged in the High Court by the Inland Revenue, who say they are owed 7.7 million pounds (10.5 million dollars) in unpaid taxes.

Morris and London-based investment firm Redbus Group, headed by Simon Franks, had submitted a joint bid, but Bates resubmitted his offer and it is the former Chelsea chairman who has won out.

The High Court postponed a decision on the Revenue's appeal until September 3 but with the new season starting in five weeks, KPMG put Leeds up for sale.

Bates placed United in administration on May 4 when it was revealed the club had debts of 35 million pounds.

Leeds, one of the dominant teams in English football in the early 1970s, were relegated from the second-tier Championship last season. The forthcoming season

will be the first time it has played outside England's top two divisions in its history.

It is only 15 years since Leeds won English football's top flight title and only six years since they reached the Champions League semi-finals, but under the regime of then-chairman Peter Ridsdale they ran up debts of about 100 million pounds.

Bates told Sky Sports News: "It's a sense of achievement and a challenge."

"Leeds were in a mess when we took over -- the Peter Ridsdale era and the last board were incompetent."

"But now we've got a clean start and a clean sheet of paper."

"It's a big club -- it's not at the moment but it will be -- and we can take it forward."

"And part of the reason why we're going to succeed is because these Leeds fans are absolutely magnificent."



Russian tennis icon Maria Sharapova gleefully holds the award for "International Female Athlete" at the annual ESPY Awards at Kodak Theatre in Hollywood on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP