



PHOTO: AFP

The Brazil team (L) take part in a special training session while the Argentines (R) take a light jog around the park on Friday, as both teams gear up for the all-important final of the Copa America to be played on Sunday.

ARGENTINA - BRAZIL

El Finale

INTERNET, undated



Argentine defender Roberto Perfumo played for clubs in both Argentina and Brazil in the 1970s and he knows both countries well enough that his opinions are worth listening to.

After the 2002 World Cup Perfumo had this to say about the way both countries played football: 'We use (the ball) to achieve an objective, they use it for their personal pleasure,' Perfumo said. 'And that has to do with the way of seeing life. For us, football is tragic, but for them it isn't.'

That's the way it has always been. Brazil were the ball players, Argentina the ball winners. Brazil played for the fun of it. Argentina played to win, any way they could. As the old cliché goes, it was happy, dancing samba against weary, melancholic tango.

Today, however, after almost three weeks of what can justifiably be considered the most entertaining international football tournament in recent memory, the tables have been turned.

Argentina are the ones playing the fast-paced, silky soccer that has the crowd on their feet; Brazil are dour, defensive and at times even cynical. When the two old rivals line up in Maracaibo on Sunday in the final of the Copa America, the smart money will be on the men in blue and white. Even the Brazilians know it.

'For years we've always been the favourites and we know it is not easy,' said centre half Juan. 'But I think that they have a slight advantage in the final. It will be very tight.'

The Brazil-Argentina decider is the one everyone wants to see and it is a fitting finale to the world's oldest international tournament.

The Copa America has provided 79 goals in just 24 games, more than any World Cup since

Sweden almost 50 years ago. The final brings together the tournament's two highest scoring teams and no one would bet against the average climbing further.

The odds, clearly, are on Argentina to provide them. And Brazil's former Arsenal midfielder Julio Baptista explained why.

'They've shown that because they have been playing together longer they have their formation set and you could even say they are playing better than us,' Baptista said in the team's five-star hotel. 'But in terms of rivalry, Brazil against Argentina is going to be a match up of equals.'

'I think it's a game that either team can win,' he went on. 'I don't think either team will be afraid of the other. We are very calm and confident with what we've done so far. In some ways, they could be considered favourites but Brazil has quality and I guarantee that if you ask the Argentine players they will say they are not favourites at

all. Favouritism you prove on the pitch. When you can win, you say I am the favourite.'

Baptista will be hoping to start the match and put together his longest run yet in the national side. The burly midfielder was brought in to the team midway through Brazil's second match against Chile and has held down his place in the three games since. Whether he plays or not - and the odds are that Dunga will prefer his physical presence both to ruffle the Argentine back four and harry Javier Mascherano when he has the ball - he knows what Brazil need to do to win the match. In short, he said, they have to stop Juan Roman Riquelme.

The Boca Juniors midfielder has not only been the fulcrum of Argentina's attacks but he has also scored five goals to make him the tournament's second highest scorer behind Brazil's Robinho.

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Fergie fires back at Jose

TIMES ONLINE

Sir Alex Ferguson claims that José Mourinho's dig at Manchester United's summer spending spree proves his great rival is feeling the heat at Chelsea.

The champions have spent more than 50 million pounds on Owen Hargreaves, Anderson and Nani since the end of last season, and that will rise should Carlos Tévez, the West Ham United striker, move to Old Trafford on a two-year loan deal thought likely to cost United about 6 million pounds.

Mourinho, the Chelsea manager, has said that United's transfer activity will heap more pressure on them to deliver silverware, but Ferguson has hit back by claiming that the only man feeling the pressure is Mourinho.

'It was an amazing statement, actually I don't think he knows I've been here for 20 years,' Ferguson said. 'It's great. Maybe he's trying to transfer some pressure because of the fact that he is under pressure himself. I don't know, but I thought it was quite funny.'

United have left their rivals way behind with their heavy invest

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Milan loan out Oliveira

AFP, Rome

European champions AC Milan have sent Brazilian striker Ricardo Oliveira on a season-long loan to Spanish side Real Zaragoza, the Serie A club confirmed on Saturday.

Milan bought Oliveira from Real Betis last summer for a fee of 17 million euros plus Swiss midfielder Johann Vogel, but the 27-year-old forward has failed to secure a regular place in the first team.

Oliveira was a Spanish league winner with Valencia in 2003 and moved to Real Betis the following year.

He also helped Brazil win the Copa America in 2004 and the Confederations Cup in 2005, but was not included in last year's World Cup squad.

Galaxy unveil Beckham

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham's bid to bring football in from the fringes of American sport began amid a burst of confetti and booming rock music Friday as he took his first bow for the Los Angeles Galaxy.

'Soccer can be as big here as it is everywhere around the world, and I'm very proud to be a part of that over the next few years, and maybe a few more years after that,' Beckham promised several thousand fans at the Home Depot Center, where the Galaxy rolled out the red carpet for their new star.

That is just what the Galaxy and Major League Soccer were banking on when they engineered the acquisition of Beckham back in January, when Spanish club Real Madrid and England had become disenchanted with the midfielder.

At the time, the deal that could be worth as much as 250 million dollars including endorsements and merchandising was seen as a move to a football backwater by a player entering the twilight of his career.

Not so, insists Beckham, who has since been recalled to England and helped Real to the Spanish League title.

'I don't see this as a winding down of my career,' he said. 'I may not be 22 years old anymore, but I am as fit as I was at 22. I am as

Teammates happy with Becks

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham was officially introduced to his LA Galaxy teammates Friday and it wasn't long before they were sharing a joke.

'It's just like the first day of school,' Beckham said of meeting his new colleagues.

'You are taken out of your comfort zone and into another changing room with players you never met before.'

'I have been through it before. It was a different time when I signed with Manchester United and a different time when I signed with Real Madrid. This is a new experience, and I am really looking forward to it.'

The former England captain was given a red carpet reception at his first news conference as a Galaxy

player less than 24 hours after arriving at Los Angeles International Airport with his pop star wife Victoria and their three children.

Galaxy coach Frank Yallop helped break the ice for Beckham, who seemed to blend in just fine.

'I just want to be part of the team,' Beckham said. 'I always try to handle things the right way.'

'I just came from the changing room. Frank gave a speech and said it was going to be 'madness for a couple of weeks'. Everyone laughed and then Frank said 'well, maybe for a couple of months.'

About 5,000 season ticket holders, and an estimated 700 journalists from around the world, were on hand at the Home Depot Center for the lavish outdoor ceremony, which was held in the southwest

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Bremen sign Carlos Alberto

AFP, Bremen

Werder Bremen on Friday said they had finally secured the transfer of Brazilian midfielder Carlos Alberto from Corinthians.

Financial details were not revealed but reports in the German press suggested that the four-year deal was worth 8.5 million euros.

The 22-year-old's move to Germany had been on the cards for some weeks but had been delayed by the ongoing legal wrangle involving Corinthians owner Kia Joorabchian.

Carlos Alberto began his career with Fluminense in Brazil in 2000 before moving to Portugal where he played in Porto's 2004 Champions League winning team.

Becks debut on schedule

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham says with proper treatment on a swollen ankle, he will go ahead as planned and make his Los Angeles Galaxy debut against England's Chelsea in a friendly on July 21.

'It is still swollen,' said Beckham, during his official unveiling as a member of the Galaxy here on Friday. 'I ran on it three days ago in London and it felt unstable.'

'There is still a bit of work to do to get it ready. I will get some more treatment, some massages and it should be right for the first game against Chelsea.'

The 32-year-old iconic midfielder hurt his left ankle while playing last month for England in Euro 2008 qualifying. He reinjured it a week later in a match with Real Madrid.

The former England captain said Friday that he looks forward to sharing duties between the Galaxy and England's national side.

'They (the Galaxy) made it clear they are proud of me being part of England's team and they will do everything possible for me to play for England,' he said.

Beckham, who said staying fit is one of the keys to his success, admits being the wealthiest player in Major League Soccer could attract some added attention on the field.

'I have always been target for players I played against,' Beckham said. 'If I am a target, hopefully my teammates like me enough to stick up for me.'

MU could face charges

THE INDEPENDENT



Manchester United could be charged with 'tapping up' Carlos Tevez if they continue to push for the striker's 35m pounds transfer without the agreement of the Premier League.

So far the Premiership champions have done nothing wrong in their attempts to sign the 23-year-old Argentine despite the controversy surrounding the complicated saga. But if Tevez flies into Manchester next week for a medical, which his adviser Kia Joorabchian said will take place on Wednesday, United could risk the wrath of the Premier League.

The organisation argue that United should be dealing directly with West Ham United, Tevez's

current club and the holders of his registration, and not Joorabchian. Yesterday a Premier League source warned that failure to do so could be a breach of their rules and therefore a case of approaching a contracted player without the permission of his employer. The punishments for the offence range from a fine to a ban on transfer activity for up to two transfer windows.

That stance appears perplexing because Joorabchian received an email four weeks ago from West Ham informing him that they would not be taking up the 40m pound option to buy Tevez. Since then, however, the Premier League have insisted that it is West Ham who have to do the deal and the club maintains it has had no contact with United and that no offer has been made to them.

At the same time Joorabchian

and United admit that they have negotiated a deal with Sir Alex Ferguson declaring he believes Tevez will end up at Old Trafford.

Joorabchian also claims that West Ham have agreed to the deal taking place but the club deny this, declaring that the businessman's actions are 'irresponsible', even if, at the same time, club sources have hinted that a breakthrough may come at the beginning of next week.

An impasse was reached after the Premier League declared it would not sanction the transfer unless West Ham kept the largest portion of the transfer fee. This is because the club, after pleading guilty at a disciplinary hearing, gave undertakings that Tevez is solely their player when it tore up the agreement it had with Joorabchian.

The Premier League are

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PHOTO: AFP

Yellow jersey holder Switzerland's Fabian Cancellara (C) of the CSC team rides with other competitors during the seventh stage of the Tour de France between Bourg-en-Bresse and Le-Grand-Bornand on Saturday.

Nakamura blames weather

AFP, Hanoi

The scorching tropical weather is to blame for Australia's lacklustre showing in their Asian Cup debut, Japan and Celtic star Shunsuke Nakamura believes.

'Even Australia are suffering in this tournament,' Nakamura said after Japan beat the United Arab Emirates 3-1 while Australia crashed to Iraq by the same score on Friday.

'There must be some impact of the heat when a country, which reached the World Cup knockout tournament, are left with one loss and one draw.'

'This may be typical of the Asian Cup and it is tough.'

Australia's players, many of them European-based, have struggled to get to grips with the sapping conditions in Bangkok and have looked a shadow of the team that beat Japan during the World Cup in Germany last year.

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PHOTO: AFP

David Beckham holds his new Los Angeles Galaxy jersey during his presentation at the Home Depot Centre in Carson, California on Friday.