



World XI's Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o (L) and Brazilian legend Pelé run together as a testimonial of the FIFA antiracism campaign before the kick-off of the match to celebrate the 89th birthday of Nelson Mandela at Newlands, Cape Town on Wednesday.

Stars pay tribute to Mandela

Football

AFP, Cape Town

Technique won over youth and agility when football legends past and present played a celebrity match in Cape Town Wednesday to mark statesman Nelson Mandela's 89th birthday.

A celebrity World XI drew three all with an equally high-profile African team at the Newlands Stadium, with players' ages ranging from the mid-20s to just touching on 50.

There was much panting among some of the greying and rather more weighty players in a slower-paced though good-natured contest that yielded its share of excitement, with four goals scored in the first 45 minutes -- two apiece.

The "Rest of the World" team scored the first goal through Chilean Ivan Zamorano, 40, in the sixth minute, with Ghanaian Abedi Pele, three years his senior, equalising for the Africans three minutes later.

The Pele goal was scored after several missed goal attempts from his team-mates which left one,

forty-something South African Doctor Khumalo, flat on his back and laughing.

Egypt's Hossam Hassan, 41, scored the Africans' second goal in the 30th minute, matched in the 44th minute with a levelling goal by retired Dutch striker Ruud Gullit, 45.

The two second-half goals were scored by Hassan, in the 50th minute, and by Spain's Julen Guerrero in the 72nd.

Cameroonian star Samuel Eto'o, the youngster of the bunch at 24, had a difficult match with retired Spanish goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta, a man nearly twice his age, beating all his goal attempts.

The stars travelled from all over the world to display their somewhat ageing but technically enviable skills in a match to celebrate the life of Mandela, South Africa's first black president and Nobel peace prize laureate.

The match theme was "Say no to racism", key among Mandela's causes, as the African team wore white and their opponents black.

The celebrity group included Brazilian football legend Pele, 66, who took to the field briefly ahead of

the match, 30 years after retiring from the sport.

He spent only a few minutes on the pitch in a light-coloured safari suit, jogging around the centre circle alongside Eto'o before ceremoniously kicking off for the World XI team.

Pele was applauded enthusiastically by some 35,000 soccer fans who had turned out for the match, particularly when he displayed some fancy footwork with a ball that crossed his path as he was making his way off the field.

Earlier in the day, the Brazilian told a press conference he was honoured to take part in proceedings, saying he had learnt many life lessons from Mandela.

"We must continue to fight in honour of Mr Mandela against racism and discrimination," he said.

In the morning, players old and new gathered for another special ceremony at the former South African prison colony that housed Mandela for 18 of his 27 years in jail for defying the whites-only apartheid regime.

"It is a match to celebrate the life of a great person," he said. "I would like to come back to play more matches for the greatest person ever."

Mandela, known fondly in South Africa by his clan name Madiba, watched the game at home, and sent the players his best wishes.

South Africa is to host the 2010 football World Cup, a first for the continent.

on Robben Island off the Cape coast to kick a symbolic 89 goals against racism.

"I am a son of Mandela. He has inspired me and fought for our continent. He inspired millions all over the world," said Liberian George Weah, a former world player of the year also known for his failed bid to become the president of Liberia.

Gullit, a former European player of the year and manager of Chelsea, said the lesson from Mandela's life was that "there is always hope."

"If you believe in yourself and fight hard for the right thing, you will succeed," he said.

Eto'o told a press conference this would be the best match he had ever played.

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Sania sails into Cincinnati quarters

AFP, Cincinnati

Third-seed Sania Mirza of India led the way into the quarterfinals of the 175,000-dollar WTA harcourt tournament here Wednesday with a straight set win over Varvara Lepchenko.

Mirza downed her opponent from Uzbekistan 6-2, 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals here for the third straight year.

Mirza has been working her way back into shape after missing two and a half months earlier this season due to knee surgery.

Wednesday's victory marked the first time she has put together back-to-back victories since February.

Mirza now awaits the winner of the second-round match between ninth-seeded Jill Craybas of the United States and Olga Govortsova of Belarus.

Top-seeded Russian Anna Chakvetadze also reached the

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Heinze not for sale

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson on Thursday ruled out the possibility of letting defender Gabriel Heinze join Premier League rivals Liverpool.

Anfield boss Rafael Benitez made a six-million-pound (12 million dollar) bid for the 29-year-old Argentine on Monday but it was rejected by United. Heinze has also been linked to Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

But Ferguson has made it clear he would not allow Heinze to head to Merseyside, a route travelled only once since the War, when Phil Chisnall joined United's bitter rivals in 1962.

"I can assure you Liverpool will not be getting Gabriel Heinze," said Ferguson. "We have had a couple of offers for him and we have turned them down."

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remains to be seen if he can fit into a forward line already comprising Samuel Eto'o, Lionel Messi and Ronaldinho.

Also coming in is French defender Eric Abidal from Lyon for some 15 million euros and Ivory Coast youngster Yaya Toure.

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Vieri signs for Viola

INTERNET, undated

Ex-Inter veteran Christian Vieri is on his way to Fiorentina after signing a one-year deal with the Gigliati.

Reports had been suggesting that the 34-year-old's agent Sergio Berti was in talks regarding the possibility of Bobo plying his trade at the Stadio Artemio Franchi.

Wednesday night, a statement from Fiorentina confirmed that Vieri was set to join, with reports claiming he will receive £1m for the 2007-08 campaign with a bonus for appearances and goals.

"The striker is about to sign. We have come to an agreement with the player's agent," the brief Press release read.

Despite losing star striker Luca Toni to Bayern Munich, the Gigliati have Giampaolo Pazzini and Adrian Mutu, but are short of attacking cover with Bulgarian hitman Valeri Bojinov set to quit the club.

"I'm not disappointed with the summer's transfer campaign, but we need more reinforcements," Mutu admitted.

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Malaysia coach sacked

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia coach Norizan Bakar paid the price for his team's atrocious Asian Cup showing when he was sacked on Wednesday.

Norizan, 46, said he had been given his marching orders before the 2-0 defeat to Iran which followed embarrassing 5-1 and 5-0 routs by China and Uzbekistan.

"I was told by the FAM (Football Association of Malaysia) that my assignment had finished at the Asian Cup," he told reporters.

"To me this is the game. In coaching there is always winning and losing -- football is all about results. If it's that way then I have to take it."

Norizan enjoyed a successful domestic coaching stint with Perlis before being appointed Malaysia coach in 2005.

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Collina in a new role

AFP, Rome

Former football referee Pierluigi Collina has officially been appointed as the man who selects referees for matches in Italy's top two divisions, Serie A and Serie B, the Italian football federation (FIGC) confirmed on Thursday.

It is hoped the 47-year-old, famous for his bald head and bulging eyes and widely considered as one of the best referees of all time, will help clean up the image of Italian football after last summer's match-fixing scandal.

The scandal, known as 'Calciopoli' involved clubs, directors, high-ranked Italian football federation (FIGC) officials and referees.

Earlier this week, the FIGC cleared Collina of any involvement in the furor.

Collina dismissed suggestions that he would be the saviour of refereeing in Italy where the image of officials has been severely tarnished.

"I know that there are great expectations of me and I promise I will do my best," he said.

"It is very gratifying and a great

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Galaxy a pub team!

Football

INTERNET, undated

David Beckham's new side LA Galaxy have been dismissed as a pub team by English reporters who watched their 3-0 loss to Mexican side Tigres in a friendly.

The Sun newspaper on Thursday described them as a shambles and said: "Frankly, Becks' new team resembles a Sunday morning pub side."

"When the ex-England skipper arrived at the Home Depot Centre on a 125 million pounds (\$256.6 million) deal last week he stated his ambition was to take U.S. football to a different level."

"Little did he realise that on the evidence of Galaxy's 3-0 home defeat against Mexican side Tigres, lifting them to a level of rock bottom

will be a major achievement."

The verdict of The Times newspaper was just as damning.

With Beckham unfit for the match with an injured ankle, The Times chief football correspondent Matt Dickinson wrote:

"Beckham spent the match asking polite biographical details about his new colleagues. One question -- 'how on earth do you expect me to improve that lot?' -- would have sufficed."

There were only about 2,000 fans at Tuesday's match and The Times said the occasion was a "cold shower" for Beckham after the razzmatazz of his presentation last week.

The Daily Telegraph also expressed fears for the England mid-fielder.

"When Alexi Lalas (the LA Galaxy president), one of the most ardent champions of soccer in America, describes a display by his

Los Angeles Galaxy side as "miserable and unacceptable" you know it is time for David Beckham to worry.

"The Galaxy are in a tailspin, falling through the League and embarrassing themselves even in a mid-season friendly."

Paul Hayward, the Daily Mail's chief sports writer, summarised the situation saying: "David Beckham is a Beverly Hills star in a skid row team."

"No skyscraper of dollars can protect him from the realisation that he has not just dropped a couple of tiers so much as fallen 20 floors and woken up in the post room."

"In mitigation, there are probably better days to come when hype's carnival has passed. But this week the MLS's 'Beckham comes to America' blockbuster is in danger of ending up in the 'turkey' section of Hollywood DVD shops."



Japan aim to cripple Viduka

AFP, Hanoi

Japan are determined to stop burly danger man Mark Viduka at all costs when the defending champions fight Australia with vengeance in their Asian Cup quarterfinal here on Saturday.

Celtic playmaker Shunsuke Nakamura remembered that the Newcastle United striker was one of the main reasons why Japan crashed to the Socceroos 3-1 on their way to a winless exit from the World Cup last year in Germany.

"Marking him like hogs isn't the only way to pressure him. We will discuss how. For now, I'd rather say, 'Let us not be afraid,'" he said.

Nakamura, the Scottish Player of the Year, said Japan's three backs "held back so deep" against Viduka in their bruising World Cup loss.

"We retreated no matter what

and we were in danger very near the goal. We should have pushed up," said Nakamura, whose left foot boosted Celtic and himself to their second straight Scottish Premier League title.

In the World Cup opener, his cross looped into the Australian net but the Socceroos hit back with three goals in the closing nine minutes through substitutes Tim Cahill and John Aloisi.

"They have the same key players here," said the 29-year-old

and the same mistake."

Despite a conspicuous physical disadvantage, Japan have taken it upon themselves to revenge Australia, who have switched to the cut-throat Asian bloc after they lost to eventual champions Italy in the World Cup last-16 round.

While boasting 15 World Cup veterans including Viduka, Harry Kewell, Cahill and Aloisi, the Socceroos barely made the last



A pack of riders bike through a highway amidst barren fields between Tallard and Marseille during the tenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race on Wednesday.



Argentine international Gabriel Milito shows his skills with the ball during his unveiling at the Nou Camp Stadium as a new Barcelona player on Thursday. The former Zaragoza player signed a four-year contract with the club.

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