



PHOTO: AFP

PRACTISING SAMBA ROUTINES? Barcelona forwards Thierry Henry (L) and Ronaldinho undertake balanced stretching exercises during their first training session at the Nou Camp stadium in Barcelona on Saturday.

# Osim's 'near death'

AFP, Hanoi



Ivica Osim says he had a brush with death when Japan beat Australia at the Asian Cup, a joke that perked up his first anniversary as coach of a side fighting back from a World Cup disaster.

But despite their penalty-shootout victory over a side that humiliated them 3-1 at the World Cup last year, Osim warned Japan still faces a tough task to win a third straight continental title.

He retreated to the changing room after extra-time and refused to watch Japan win 4-3 on penalties after a 1-1 tie in the quarter-finals on Saturday.

"I didn't see it because it was bad for my heart," said the 66-year-old Bosnian, famous for his gruff remarks.

"I don't want to die while I coach Japan's national team. I want to die in my home town, Sarajevo," he quipped.

"When I learned about the victory, I

jumped for joy and almost bumped my head against the ceiling," added Osim, who led the former Yugoslavia to the 1990 World Cup quarter-finals and brought success to clubs at home and in Greece, Austria and Japan.

Japan now face either three-time champions Saudi Arabia or Uzbekistan in the semifinals here on Wednesday.

Osim said: "I believe so," when asked if the next game would be more difficult.

He also insisted he would not be content with making the semifinals because "if a coach is satisfied with results, it will stop further progress."

"But I don't mind if you write in your stories that I am satisfied," he added.

After taking over from Brazilian great Zico after Japan's winless exit from the 2006 World Cup in Germany, Osim has made his charges run hard and play flexibly to overcome their physical shortcomings with "mobility and agility."

Those tactics were evident on Saturday with the entire Japanese team working hard.

John Aloisi made the breakthrough for Australia in the 69th

minute only for Frankfurt striker Naohiro Takahara to level three minutes later.

Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi proved to be the hero, blocking the Socceroos first two spot kicks from Harry Kewell and Lucas Neill, with Yuji Nakazawa scoring the winner.

"Could we have done anything better in this game?" said Osim. "It would have been much nicer if we could have finished the game without playing the shootout.

"But even if we wanted, Australia didn't let us do that."

The quarterfinal victory was "significant" as it came a year after Japan were beaten at the World Cup by Australia and Osim signed a contract as Japan coach, said Kozo Tashima, secretary general of the Japan Football Association.

But, like Osim, he did not want to see it as revenge.

"We did not see it as revenge. We will fight many times against South Korea and China as well in the future," he said.

## Wiltord moves to Rennes

AFP, Paris

Following a troubled final season at French champions Lyon, former Arsenal striker Sylvain Wiltord wants to put his career back on track at Rennes, the club where his professional career began ten years ago.

The 33-year-old French international, who left Lyon after three years, is keen to prove he still has what it takes to compete at the highest level.

A decade after leaving Rennes, who finished fourth last season, Wiltord returns to his roots where he will hope to guide his new club through the UEFA Cup and also to a French League title.

The Frenchman, who has also played for Bordeaux and Arsenal, takes with him an impressive resume which includes a European Championship title and a World Cup runners-up medal.

Wiltord has also won the French League championship on four occasions, once with Bordeaux and three times with Lyon, and the English Premiership twice, as well as the FA Cup twice and the FA Community Shield.

The Frenchman struggled last season with a string of injuries which left the 1999 French league top scorer (22 goals) with just five to his name.

Wiltord also had trouble off the pitch.

Towards the end of the season he was temporarily axed from the squad by former Lyon coach Gerard Houllier after he was accused of unsettling the balance and concentration of the team.

"I don't exactly know what people are blaming me for. I have a private life, I like to have fun, but I work hard," he said.

Wiltord's troubles followed him to pre-season training when he was questioned by police over a road-traffic violation.

Struggling to cement his place in the starting eleven at Lyon last season, Wiltord will now find himself playing more regularly at Rennes, despite a string of summer signings at the Brittany club.

And a regular starting place for the veteran striker could give him the impetus needed to impress France coach Raymond Domenech and earn himself a recall to the national team.

Wiltord, who helped France win the Euro 2000 title, needs eight more caps to reach the 100-mark.

## BECKHAM MAKES DEBUT

# Chelsea down Galaxy



Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham kicked off his US football career in low-key fashion here Saturday, making a 12-minute cameo appearance for Los Angeles Galaxy in a 1-0 defeat by English giants Chelsea.

The 32-year-old England star, who has been nursing an injured left ankle, came on as a second-half substitute in the 78th minute to roars and an explosion of flash-bulbs from a 27,000 sell-out crowd at the Home Depot Center.

Beckham, who has not played since helping former club Real Madrid clinch the Spanish title 35 days ago, appeared to be moving gingerly and saw the ball only eight times while on the field.

Yet his every touch was greeted by squeals of delight from fans crammed into the ground to witness the star's first game in a Galaxy jersey, which saw Chelsea win thanks to a 49th-minute John Terry strike.

A relieved Beckham said afterwards he was pleased to have got his first game out of the way after months of hype and anticipation.

"I was pleased to get out there," Beckham said. "I haven't trained since I've been here so it was just nice to get out there, even for 15 minutes."

Beckham, who could earn up to 250 million dollars over the course of his five-year deal, said he was delighted by the rapturous reception he had received from the crowd.

"The crowd was incredible. That's what we want to achieve -- we want to be filling stadiums and seeing the atmosphere like it was today," said Beckham, whose arrival in Los Angeles has already helped boost the profile of football in the United States.

There was a late scare for Beckham fans however when the midfielder was brought down heavily by a clumsy challenge from Chelsea substitute Steve Sidwell, before rising to his feet and shrugging off the pain.

Beckham said afterwards his

ankle still ached.

"It's sore," he said. "It's not going to go away for a week or two. But it's good, I'm happy to be here."

Earlier, Galaxy general manager Alexi Lalas defended the decision to restrict Beckham's

debut to less than 15 minutes.

"It is a long-term process, and we want to make sure David is 100 percent fit," Lalas told ESPN.

"We have games next week, next month and over the next five years. There will be plenty of chances to see David Beckham

play here and across the country."

Despite the fleeting nature of Beckham's appearance, the match was the hottest ticket in town on Saturday, with a bevy of stars from the entertainment world among the audience.

Beckham's pop-star wife Victoria was joined in the VIP section by "Desperate Housewives" star Eva Longoria, along with actress Katie Holmes and California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Tickets for what was being billed as a landmark moment in the history of US soccer were reportedly being sold on the black market for up to 2,000 US dollars beforehand.

But a drab match saw Beckham's successor as England captain Terry prove the difference between the two sides.

Terry swept home a low shot from the edge of the area early in the second half after teammate Joe Cole's shot ricocheted into his path.

Chelsea controlled possession throughout the game and had tested Galaxy goalkeeper Joe Cannon regularly in the first half.

Portuguese international Paulo Ferreira swung an inviting ball to the far post, and Chelsea's new signing Florent Malouda forced Cannon into a fine save, turning around the former Lyon star's side-footed volley.

But despite Chelsea's early dominance their opponents proved difficult to break down, and ironically had the two best chances of the opening 45 minutes.

Midfielder Kyle Martino spurned a glorious opportunity to put the Galaxy into an improbable lead, steering a diving header wide of the post after fine work down the right by US international Cobi Jones on 19 minutes.

Six minutes before half-time Chelsea keeper Petr Cech had to be at his athletic best to turn round Abel Xavier's powerful header from a teasing free-kick by Galaxy skipper Landon Donovan.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea captain John Terry (R) claps England teammate and new Galaxy recruit David Beckham on the back during their friendly game at the sold out Home Depot Centre in California on Saturday.