

Guti happy with squad

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid playmaker Guti believes the Spanish champions do not need to make any more additions to their squad this summer.

Although a host of players have left the Bernabeu this summer, Madrid have also been busy drafting fresh blood in, with Pepe, Javier Saviola, Jerzy Dudek and Christoph Metzelder all new arrivals.

Roberto Soldado and Julio Baptista have also returned from their loan spells, but despite those reinforcements Real are still being linked with further signings, such as Arjen Robben, Jose Antonio Reyes, Kaka and Roysten Drenthe.

Guti, one of Real's three club captains last season, insists he would still welcome any new players into the fold, but feels that Real now have enough strength in depth without needing to make any extra signings.

"The team has a good squad and there are some players who aren't here with us (at Real's training camp in Austria) that have a lot to give, such as Julio Baptista," he said.

"There are many players in the squad and we will all enjoy several minutes of playing time this season. Nevertheless, I will welcome any new signings, even if they are for my position, but I personally feel we have enough players as it is.

"We are a strong team with players capable of playing for many minutes during one game.

"The important thing is that the club is signing players we need as opposed to signing stars. This is what we need in order to be strong challengers for every title," added the 30-year-old, who insists he is not concerned about Real being linked with new signings who play a similar role to him.

"If they come it would mean the team has more chances of using a rotation system. I have no problems with this because I believe I can bring a lot to the team and I will make things difficult for any newcomer," he said.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Real Madrid players Raul (L) and Guti engage in a specialized drill during a training session in Irding, Austria on Monday.

Osim's battle of wits

AFP, Hanoi



Japan coach Ivica Osim's on-going battle of wits with media at the Asian Cup continued apace Tuesday as he declared, with tongue in cheek, he was in a no-win situation against them.

Responding to six questions at a news conference on the eve of the defending champions semifinal with long-time rivals Saudi Arabia, the gruff 66-year-old Bosnian jabbed at all the journalists who asked them.

Asked how Japan will deal with the Saudis after struggling past a physically stronger Australia in the quarterfinals, Osim sniped back: "Shall I substitute all my players because our opponents have changed?"

He said the coach would be responsible if he uses the same players, who are tired, and his side loses.

"If we lose with substituted players, it is the coach who is wrong for making the decision to substitute," he said.

"If we lose tomorrow, who is to blame? You don't have to look around because he'll be sitting here. It's the coach who takes all the responsibility."

Japan and Saudi Arabia are both aiming for a record fourth Asian Cup. The Blue Samurai, chasing a third straight title, beat the Gulf side in the final in 1992 and 2000.

Has the historical record anything to do with the morale of the players, Osim was asked?

"You'd better ask about the future, particularly tomorrow's match, rather than history," said Osim, who led the former Yugoslavia to the 1990 World Cup quarterfinals despite difficulty in holding together a multiracial side.

Then, asked about the next game, he snapped back: "But when we talk about the future, we should not forget the past."

Osim also criticised another journalist for asking which side he preferred to meet in the final -- Iraq or South Korea. He said such a question was "regrettable" at a time when Japan were focused on the imminent match.

In earlier exchanges with media, he openly called some questions "not good." "Don't go looking for an unborn rabbit in the woods," he said when asked if Japan wanted to finish at the top of their group so that they could avoid travelling to other venues in the tournament.

But his often pithy remarks have won the hearts of many Japanese since he arrived in Japan in 2003 to coach a hopeless J-League side into title contention.

A collection of his quotations, entitled "The Words of Osim," has been on the bestseller list in Japan since he became national coach after the World Cup last year.

Reading sign Korean trio

AFP, Reading

English Premiership club Reading have agreed a deal with the Korean Football Association to sign three of the country's best young players.

The trio of South Korean youth internationals, strikers Nam Taehee and Ji Dongwon and midfielder Kim Wonsik, will join the Royals Academy for a season as part of Korea's youth development programme.

South Korea winger Seol Ki-Hyeon is already one of Reading's star players and the club, who are keen to strengthen their links with Asian football, also played in the Peace Cup in Korea earlier this month.

Reading Academy chief Eamonn Dolan said: "The arrival of Seol and our participation in the Peace Cup has given Reading a strong presence in South Korea."

Korean FA youth chief Jin Kook Kim believes the teenagers have the talent to develop into Premiership stars. "They have great potential, their skills are very good," he said.

Bremen sign Sanogo

AFP, Bremen

Ivory Coast international Boubacar Sanogo has waved goodbye to Hamburg's boo boys and signed a four-year contract at Werder Bremen, the club announced on Tuesday.

The 24-year-old striker endured a torrid year at Hamburg, where he was booed by his own fans, and was courted by both Bremen and Bundesliga champions VfB Stuttgart before he finally signed for Werder in a deal believed to be worth four million euros.

After agreeing terms on Monday, Sanogo trained with his new club on Tuesday and is expected to play in the friendly against Paderborn the same night.

Sanogo was bought to replace Miroslav Klose, the top-scorer at last year's World Cup, who was sold to Bayern Munich for a reported figure of 12 million euros this summer.

This is Sanogo's third Bundesliga side having spent a year at both Kaiserslautern, where he scored 10 goals in 24 games, and Hamburg, four goals in 31 games, before signing for Bremen.

The move away from Hamburg will be a relief for Sanogo who suffered at the hands of his own fans for most of last season and admitted the jeers damaged his confidence at the time.

Bosses deny Asian cash dash



Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Premier League coaches have shrugged off claims they only visit Asia for the money as wildly popular pre-season regional tours get into full swing.

Fulham boss Lawrie Sanchez, here for the Asia Trophy tournament along with Liverpool and Portsmouth, admitted such visits were lucrative but said clubs were also "doing their bit."

"We're going out to schools, we're doing community stuff, we're making ourselves visible within the community while we're out here," he said.

"Asia is a massive market and there's a big interest in seeing teams like Fulham, Portsmouth and Liverpool.

"We're doing a very high-profile job -- and a very well-paid job at the same time, but that's the Premiership."

Liverpool's Rafael Benitez conceded the trip was a "little bit disruptive" with the new season kicking off on August 11 but said he wasn't thinking about the money.

"I don't know how much money we're going to get," Benitez said.

"For me it's only about the sport. I just think about the two games we're going to play."

Liverpool's star midfielder Steven Gerrard spoke of his pride at seeing the hundreds of fans who mobbed the team at the airport and hung banners outside their hotel.

"It's a really proud feeling to come over here and play in front of all our supporters," Gerrard said.

"I must admit it's a difficult trip to make and adjust in a short period of time but when you see the support we've got I think it's important we take the time to play over here and give something back."

The subject has been hugely controversial with regional football chiefs calling for a continent-wide ban on tours by European clubs during the next Asian Cup in 2011.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) was involved in a furious row with Asian Cup co-hosts Malaysia over attempts to organise a Manchester United visit during the ongoing tournament.

"It is disrespectful. This is not the solidarity we expect from the football family," AFC president Mohamed bin Hammam said in May.

Limp displays during the last regional tours in 2005 -- another non-World Cup or European Cup

year -- sparked criticism that big clubs like Real Madrid and Manchester United were "money-grabbing."

But as the region's top teams battle it out for the Asian Cup in front of half-full stadiums, foreign clubs are again playing meaningless exhibition matches to packed houses.

The Asia Trophy final is a sell-out while there are just a few thousand tickets left for the opening matches later on Tuesday.

Just a short ferry ride away, Manchester United thrashed Shenzhen 6-0 in Macau late on Monday in a match that sold out in a matter of hours.

Spanish giants Barcelona will also visit Hong Kong next month while Reading and Bolton Wanderers joined a host of foreign teams at the Peace Cup in South Korea.

The Premier League is riding a wave of foreign TV income worth 1.2 billion dollars over the next three years, including 200 million dollars from Hong Kong alone.

Commercial considerations were underlined on Monday when Hong Kong's South China Morning Post gave over its main sports page to a full-page ad by Asia Trophy sponsors Barclays.

Barclays is ramping up its presence in China, which is buying in to the British bank in what is described as its biggest foreign investment.

Portsmouth play Fulham in the Asia Trophy's opening match later on Tuesday before Liverpool take on Hong Kong FA Cup holders South China.

City going Thai?

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City owner Thaksin Shinawatra expects Sven Goran Eriksson to sign at least two Thailand stars as he continues rebuilding the Premiership team.

Former Thai prime-minister Shinawatra took total control of City on Monday after purchasing 75 percent of the club's shares and immediately looked towards home for an influx of new talent.

Eriksson has a lengthy shopping list including Olympiakos's Mexico striker Nery Castillo and Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini, but there will be some arrivals from Thailand as well according to Shinawatra.

"The next step is to recruit or to buy new players from several national teams such as Italy, Sweden, Brazil and Thailand," he said. "We expect to select at least two Thai players from our national team to join Manchester City."

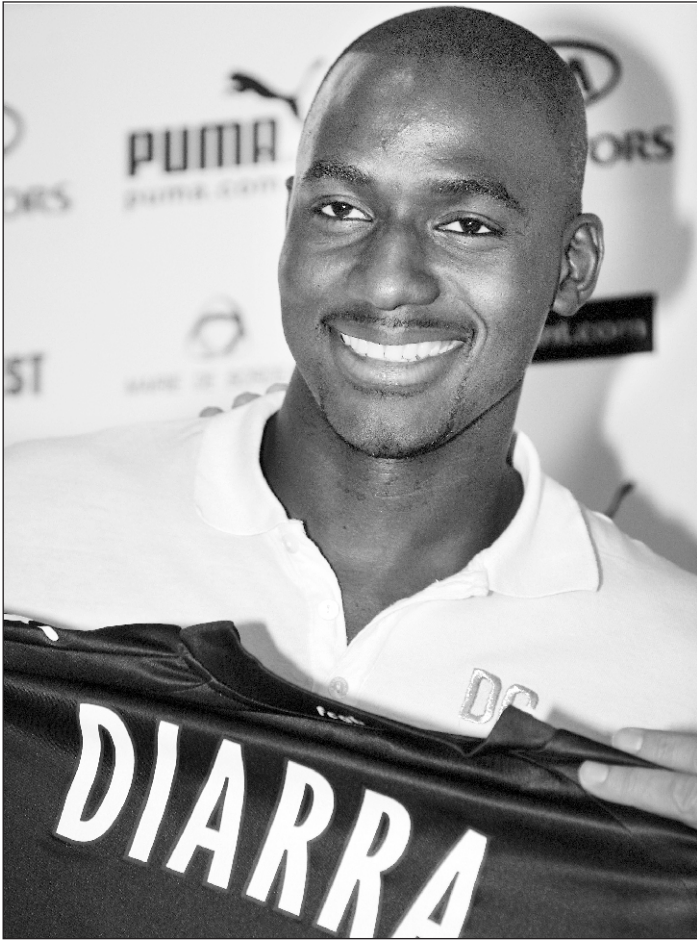


PHOTO: AFP

Bordeaux's new midfield recruit Alou Diarra poses with his jersey during a press conference in Bordeaux on Monday.