



Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn (foreground) holds aloft the German League Cup after beating Schalke in the final at the Zentralstadion in Leipzig on Saturday.

Reyes set for Atletico

INTERNET, undated

Jose Antonio Reyes is set for a move to Atletico Madrid, according to reports in Spain.

Spanish daily Marca reports that Arsenal and Atletico have agreed a fee of 12 million Euros (around £8 million), and the move will be wrapped up at the start of the week.

Reyes spent last season on loan at Atletico's rivals Real, where he won the Primera Liga and reportedly hoped to stay permanently.

However, Real seem keen on other targets to strengthen their left side, with Marca reporting on Saturday that they are set to tie up deals for both Chelsea's Arjen Robben and Feyenoord's sought-after Royston Drenth.

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has made it clear that Reyes is not in his

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Bonus for Iraqis

AFP, Jakarta

The Iraq football team has been given an extra 50,000 dollars for reaching the Asian Cup final with the Asian Football Confederation suggesting prize money will soon be introduced to the tournament.

Currently there are no cash rewards although the AFC gave 40,000 dollars to each team this year to help with travel expenses with the competition co-hosted by four countries.

In addition it decided Sunday to hand war-torn Iraq another 50,000 dollars.

"We decided to provide each

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Ronaldo raring to go

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan striker Ronaldo acknowledges a good start will be crucial to his side's hopes of clinching the Serie A title this season.

The Rossoneri began last term with an eight-point deficit on arch rivals Internazionale - who went on to retain the Scudetto - following the match-fixing scandal.

The 30-year-old Brazilian is pleased to be starting on level terms this campaign and is expecting "many good things" from the Champions League winners.

"Let's hope we start well," he told Milan's TV channel in an interview published on www.acmilan.com.

"This year everyone starts with the same amount of points. We are satisfied with this start.

"(But) we still have to improve. We have to work hard in these weeks and then on the pitch we will see the results."

Ronaldo endured an injury-plagued first six months at the San Siro but is now raring to go.

"I'd say I'm doing well," he said. "It's tough for everyone: it's been a very tough week, and so will the next one be, but we need to keep our engines running throughout the season.

"I can't wait to start the various competitions because we know the importance of these weeks of hard work. It's physical but I don't think anyone likes doing only athletic work."

Bayern's title warning

Football

AFP, Munich

Miroslav Klose struck for Bayern Munich as the Bavarian giants won the German League Cup with a 1-0 win over Schalke 04 on Saturday.

This was the sixth time Bayern have lifted the trophy since it was created in 1997 and Klose's early goal was enough to give the 20-times German champions victory.

It now means Bayern have already beaten all three teams - including VfB Stuttgart and Werder Bremen - who finished above them in last year's Bundesliga.

Bayern splshed out a reported 69 million euros during the summer to build their own dream team in a bid to cancel out last season - their worst for 11 years - and showed their intentions to win next season's Bundesliga.

"That was a victory of the will," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

"It was important for us to begin this season with a title after last

season's poor results.

"We do not want to over estimate the League Cup win, but we wanted to send out a clear message and we have now beaten the three teams who finished above us last season."

Bayern captain Oliver Kahn was delighted to pick up the impressive six-team trophy and is looking forward to the new season.

"This victory is good for our self-confidence," said Kahn.

"We are in the middle of our preparations for the new season, we won't be getting too carried away with the win, but it's a good start."

Having cost Bayern 12 million euros from Bundesliga rivals Werder Bremen, Klose saved the cup final at Leipzig's sold-out Zentralstadion to score his first competitive goal for his new club.

Bayern were too strong despite missing influential new signing French midfielder Franck Ribery, who scored three goals in the quarter and semifinal wins, but succumbed to a knee injury he picked up in Wednesday's 2-0 win over VfB Stuttgart.

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Qatar wins 2011 rights

Football

AFP, Jakarta

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Mohamed bin Hammam vowed improvements to the Asian Cup as Qatar was officially confirmed Sunday as host country for the next tournament in 2011.

"The executive committee has decided that the 2011 Asian Cup will be hosted in Qatar," said bin Hammam, himself a Qatari, who said the organisers gave an "outstanding presentation".

The gas-rich Gulf state was the only country in the running after India and Iran pulled out last month.

The tournament will be held in January with the only other official FIFA window available, in July, too hot in the Gulf region, meaning European-based players will be asked to leave their clubs mid-season for three weeks to take part.

But bin Hammam doesn't see any club versus country conflicts given January is a designated FIFA time to hold such competitions.

"July is the hot season in Qatar and the organisation of the tournament cannot happen then so it will be January and we are protected by the international calendar," he said.

Qatar, which successfully held the Asian Games in Doha last December, has played host to the Asian Cup in 1988 when it was won by Saudi Arabia.

A key concern is whether the small country can drum up enough fans to fill stadium after the Asian Games experience where most grounds were empty.

Bin Hammam said it was an area that will have AFC focus.

"Yes, it is a concern but Qatar, although small, is surrounded by its neighbours from the Gulf where there is a huge population," he said.

"To reach Doha is not a problem. You can reach it by road, there are hundreds of flights every day.

"It is a concern but we will work hard to overcome it."

The current tournament co-hosted by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam presented the AFC with a host of logistical and infrastructure-related problems, but Bin Hammam is not expecting the

same issues to arise in Qatar.

"I will promise you now that the Asian Cup in the future will be different to what you have seen in the past, in terms of organisation, popularity and standards," he said.

"This is my promise to you because this is what I am devoting my time to and what I have been elected to do.

"This tournament ... we have spent a lot of time and efforts on infrastructure problems in the venues. We have not given enough attention to the promotion of the competition which is very important.

"Qatar's infrastructure is already excellent so I don't think we will have any problems there. We are only going to focus on how to promote the competition and how to make the organisation more professional."

Despite early problems of co-hosting a tournament in four countries, bin Hammam said the Asian Cup 2007 had been a big success,

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Ronaldinho dazzles Hearts

Football

AFP, Edinburgh

Ronaldinho scored twice as Barcelona beat Hearts 3-1 in a pre-season friendly watched by 57,857 people at Murrayfield on Saturday.

The Spanish giants had squeezed past Dundee United 1-0 at Tannadice on Thursday thanks to a last-gasp goal by Thierry Henry, but they were far more impressive on Saturday.

Two first-half goals by Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho, sandwiched either side of a Juho Makela equaliser, gave Barcelona an interval lead.

Half-time substitute Giovanni Dos Santos scored the third five minutes into the second half.

Samuel Eto'o should have opened the scoring in the 16th minute but from only eight yards out, the Cameroonian striker headed Andres Iniesta's mis-hit shot over the bar.

Hearts had FBK Kaunas' Audrius Ksanavicius playing as a trialist but the Lithuanian midfielder failed to impress five minutes later when he conceded a penalty for tripping Gianluca Zambrotta.

Ronaldinho coolly sent Craig Gordon the wrong way but Barca's lead was short-lived.

In the 23rd minute, Hearts were level when playmaker Laryea Kingston's free-kick to the back post was headed back across goal by Lee Wallace. Amid a crowd of players, Makela reacted first to turn and knock the ball into the corner of the net from just six

yards.

Six minutes from the interval Barcelona restored their lead rather easily when Sylvinho's pinpoint cross from wide on the left gave Ronaldinho the easiest of tasks, heading past Gordon.

Both line-ups made changes at the break with Barca bringing on seven substitutes and Hearts, six.

Two Barca substitutes, however, combined to give the Catalans their third goal six minutes after the restart, Henry cutting the ball back for Dos Santos to fire into the empty net.

That goal deflated the dis-jointed Jambos and in the 68th minute they nearly lost a fourth when Henry drove 16-year-old Bojan Krkic's clever reverse pass off the outside of the post.

Contador wins tainted tour

AFP, Paris

Spaniard Alberto Contador won the drug-tainted Tour de France here on Sunday when he held on to his 23sec lead overnight lead on Australia's Cadel Evans to secure the race's fabled yellow jersey.

Contador, who rides for the Discovery Channel team, becomes the first Spaniard to win the three-week race since Miguel Indurain, the first ever five-time consecutive winner, in 1991-1995.

The 24-year-old Contador, who hails from Madrid, virtually secured his first ever yellow jersey -- on only his second ride in the race -- after a fifth place finish in the penultimate stage time trial in Angoulême on Saturday.

He finished 2min 18secs behind American teammate Levi Leipheimer after the 55.5km race against the clock, but was forced to dig deep to prevent the ever-present Evans from causing a major upset.

The 30-year-old Australian, a former Commonwealth Games time trial champion, started the 19th stage with a deficit of 1min 50sec on Contador but kept the Spaniard on his toes by finishing just 51secs behind Leipheimer to close the gap significantly. In the end Contador held on to keep Evans off the top step of the podium, while the race's final stage on Sunday finished in a bunch sprint that was dominated by Italian Daniele Bennati of the Lampre team.

Kaiser boost for England

AFP, London

England's hopes of staging the 2018 World Cup received a major boost on Sunday from Franz Beckenbauer who insisted there was "only one serious candidate".

Beckenbauer, a member of the FIFA executive that will decide the hosts for 2018, believes the governing body must end their continental rotation and bring the World Cup back to Europe.

England are expected to launch an official bid to stage the tournament early next year with the government already indicating its support and appointing former sports minister Richard Caborn as World Cup ambassador.

And former World Cup winner Beckenbauer told BBC Radio Five Live: "There is no better country in Europe to host the World Cup in 2018. The Premier League at the moment is the best league in Europe and the stadiums are outstanding.

"I think the most important thing is to have an end of the rotation and bring the World Cup back to Europe. And there is no question that for 2018 England is the favourite.

"In my opinion there is only one very serious candidate and it is England. I think there is not really a problem to pick a host of the 2018 World Cup."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said this week that Europe had no divine right to expect to host the 2018 competition, but his controversial rotation experiment is set to end.

It is expected the governing body will instead approve a format which only precludes the continents which held the previous two

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C'Ron United's weapon

AFP, Manchester



United last season.

Derided and despised by English supporters for his part in the World Cup sending off of United teammate Wayne Rooney during Portugal's quarterfinal penalty shoot-out victory in Gelsenkirchen, Ronaldo could quite easily have packed his bags and jettied off to Real Madrid or Barcelona, the two Spanish giants who desperately fought for his signature.

The persuasive powers of United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, who jettied out to Portugal to convince Ronaldo to stay at Old Trafford, were enough to keep the Madeira-born forward in the Premiership.

And Ferguson's mercy dash proved crucial with Ronaldo scooping both domestic Footballer of the Year awards last season as he inspired United to their first Premiership title since 2003.

This time around, United start the campaign as favourites to

retain their title having splashed out more than 50million pounds on new signings Owen Hargreaves, Nani and Anderson.

But even if United add to that shopping list by landing West Ham's Carlos Tevez before the August 31 transfer deadline, Ronaldo is certain to be the key man again.

His goalscoring feats last season, when he bagged over 20 goals from a wide position, proved crucial for United and he has already displayed matchwinning form on the club's pre-season tour of the Far East.

Wayne Rooney, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes will all be major figures again, but even Ronaldo's United teammates acknowledge that the 22-year-old has become their pivotal player.

Defender Wes Brown said: "Ronaldo is looking sharp again and he can get even better. Mentally, he has got it and he's the sort of player who always wants to do better the next season.

"I know he's young, but in the first few games of pre-season, he has shown he is ready and firing for the new season. He's a very hungry

player and he wants to win things.

"He knows that last season was a great achievement for us to win the League back but he wants more and I'm sure he wants to win other things like the FA Cup and the Champions League, so he will definitely be trying his hardest again this season."

United launch the defence of their title when they face Reading at Old Trafford on August 12 and manager Ferguson admits he expects the toughest challengers to be the usual suspects - Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal.

He said: "I expect Arsenal to improve and I don't think they'll suffer too much without Thierry Henry. His time had gone and I think Arsene Wenger knew that. They need more goals, but they've got Emmanuel Adebayor and they'll have Robin van Persie back, so they're not too bad, are they?"

"Liverpool have bought a group of players, right enough. Fernando Torres is athletic and he's brave and he'll run the channels for them, which he did well for Atletico Madrid. Chelsea have strengthened too, so it will be a tough league again."



PHOTO: AFP

Yellow Jersey holder Spaniard Alberto Contador of Discovery Channel team races as he drinks champagne with teammates before the start of the 146-km long 20th and last stage of the Tour de France cycling race between Marcoussis and Paris yesterday. Contador won the race by 23 seconds from second-placed Cadel Evans of Australia.

Mirza on fire Meets Chakvetadze in final

Tennis

AFP, Stanford

Sania Mirza reached the final of the 600,000-dollar WTA Bank of the West Classic on Saturday with a three-set victory over eighth-seeded Sybille Bammer.

Mirza topped Austria's Bammer -- her third seeded victim in a row -- 6-2, 5-7, 6-3.

In the final she'll get a shot at top-seeded Russian Anna Chakvetadze, who beat third-seeded Slovakian Daniel Hantuchova 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-2.

Mirza, ranked 35th in the world, reached her first final since Forest Hills in August of 2005. Before beating Bammer, the 20-year-old had ousted fourth-seeded Patty

Schnyder of Switzerland in the quarterfinals and sixth-seeded Tatiana Golovin of France in the second round.

"It's a great start to the hardcourt season," Mirza said. "I've had great wins here and I'm starting to hit the ball better."

Mirza, who seems fully recovered from a knee injury that sidelined her for almost 2 and a half months earlier this year, earned a key break in the third set to take a 4-3 advantage. After holding serve to get to 5-3, Mirza broke Bammer again to secure the win.

"I tried to be more aggressive in the third set and play like I did in the first set," she said. "I started to feel tired late in the second set and then I regrouped. It was all mental. I told myself to hang in there and I did."

"In the second set she was a

little shaky, a little nervous," Bammer said. "But in the third set she played great tennis. She played deep and I couldn't move her."

This will be Mirza's first Tier II final appearance. In her only career singles win, she captured the title at Hyderabad (Tier IV) in 2005 and became the first player from India to win a WTA title.

In Chakvetadze she'll face a player who has won eight consecutive hardcourt matches and is in position to capture her second straight singles title.

She claimed her fifth career title and third this season on Sunday at Cincinnati.

Ranked eighth in the world, the 20-year-old also has claimed titles at Hobart and 's-Hertogenbosch this season.



PHOTO: AFP

India's Sania Mirza makes a return against Sybille Bammer of Austria during their semifinal of the Bank of the West Classic tennis tournament at Stanford University on Saturday. Mirza defeated Bammer 6-2, 5-7, 6-3.