



Barcelona forward Thierry Henry (C) is locked in a tussle with fellow newcomer Yaya Toure (L) and Gianluca Zambrotta during a simulated match in a training session at the Nou Camp on Monday.

Di Michele banned for betting

INTERNET, undated

New Torino striker David Di Michele has been banned for three months after being found guilty of illegally betting on matches.

The Italian international has been punished for breaking article five of the sporting code of conduct by abusing his position as a professional footballer in attempt to make financial gains via betting.

The striker has only just transferred from Palermo to Torino and starred in their first pre-season friendly.

"We finally know how long we will be without David and, more or less, we expected this verdict," said Torino president Urbano Cairo, who confirmed there will be no appeal.

"I have spoken to Di Michele and told him that I want a hat-trick in his first game back."

Meanwhile, Mantova midfielder Vincenzo Sormese has

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Ribery, Klose fit for start

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's French international midfielder Franck Ribery said on Tuesday he had shaken off a knee injury and expected to be fit for his new club's Bundesliga kickoff on August 11.

"My knee is really fine, it turned out to be no more than a little knock," said Ribery, who joined Bayern in a 26-million-euro deal from Marseille in the close season.

Ribery had suffered the knock during the semifinal of the League Cup against VfB Stuttgart and had to sit out the final on Saturday against Schalke 04 which Bayern won 1-0.

The club said another high-profile summer signing, German international striker Miroslav Klose, should be ready for the first match of the season against Hansa Rostock.

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Ferguson confident

APP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson remains confident that Manchester United will get the right results in their long-running transfer sagas over Carlos Tevez and Michael Heineken.

At the latest, Ferguson's pursuit of Tevez will be resolved when his representative Kia Joorabchian meets West Ham in the High Court on August 22, although a conclusion could be reached out of court in the next couple of days.

Although Ferguson expects Tevez to line up in a United shirt sooner rather than later he admits the protracted deal has gone on too long.

"I'm confident we'll get the player and I think (United chief executive) David Gill is also confident," he said. "It has been dragging on and it can be frustrating particularly with the deadline at the end of August."

"I don't let it annoy me or worry me because we are confident the deal will go through."

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Barca head to Asia

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona head to Asia on Thursday for a pre-season tour reinvigorated by their new signing Thierry Henry who scored during his debut last week for the club at an exhibition match in Scotland.

Barcelona vice-captain Xavi Hernandez said the arrival of the 29-year-old French international from Arsenal last month boosted morale at the club after they missed out on their third successive Primera Liga title last season, which was won by arch-rivals Real Madrid.

"Henry's arrival was the key moment. It was as if everything was erased and we could begin again. For

us and the fans," the midfielder said.

"In the streets I see people full of enthusiasm, which is not easy to achieve. There are only a few players who can lift a depressed club," he added.

Henry scored the winner during Barcelona's 1-0 exhibition victory at Dundee United last Thursday.

The striker netted a penalty kick rebound in the dying seconds after coming on as a second-half substitute at Tannadice for Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o.

"I hope it will be the first of many goals," he said after the match.

Barcelona went on to defeat Hearts 3-1 on Saturday in the second match of their six-day tour of Scotland with two goals by Ronaldinho and one by Brazilian teenager Giovani Dos Santos that was set up by Henry.

The formal Arsenal star, who took over from Ronaldinho in the second half, rolled the ball across the face of the goal six minutes after he came on, allowing Dos Santos to stab it in.

Barcelona signed Henry as part of a spending spree totalling around 65 million euros (88 million US dollars) that also saw Argentina centre-back Gabriel Milito, Ivory Coast midfielder Yaya Toure and French left back Eric Abidal join the team.

An estimated 30,000 people

turned out to watch Henry's official presentation at the Nou Camp last month, more than came to see

Ronaldinho when he signed in 2003.

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Chelsea feeling the strain

INTERNET, undated



Chelsea's grueling pre-season programme took its toll yesterday when another six players were added to their growing injury list ahead of Sunday's Community Shield clash against Manchester United.

Although the club insist the injuries to John Terry, Andriy Shevchenko, Paulo Ferreira, Arjen Robben, Claude Makelele and Michael Essien are not serious, they were of enough concern to keep them out of a full-scale practice

match at their training ground yesterday.

There has been no let-up during Chelsea's exhaustive build-up to the season, and many of the side will be forced to play through the pain barrier during tonight's friendly against Danish side Brondby.

All six casualties travelled to Copenhagen later yesterday, but there are increasing concerns in the Chelsea camp about the number of players struggling for fitness so close to the start of the season.

They open their Premiership campaign at home to Birmingham six days after facing at Wembley in

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Reyes moves to Atletico

APP, Madrid

Spanish international winger Jose Antonio Reyes became the eighth player to join Atletico Madrid in the close season when he moved from English Premiership side Arsenal for a fee believed to be 12 million euros on a four year contract.

The 23-year-old had been on loan at Real Madrid last season but the Spanish champions did not want to meet Arsenal's asking price offering just six million euros.

Reyes played a pivotal role in the final match of the season that saw Real take the title off their bitter rivals Barcelona as he scored two of the merengues' three goals in their victory over Real Mallorca.

Reyes joined Arsenal in January 2004 and made 110 appearances for the side, scoring 23 goals, after transferring from Sevilla in January 2004.

He was part of the Arsenal side that completed the 2003-04 Premiership season undefeated, and made his last appearance for the north London club in the Champions League final in Paris against Barcelona as a substitute, in May 2006.

Atletico have spent over 50 million euros (68 million US dollars) on the transfer.



New Atletico Madrid signing Jose Antonio Reyes displays his jersey during his presentation at the Calderon stadium in Madrid on Tuesday.

Blatter all praise for Iraq

APP, Zurich

President of world football's governing body (FIFA) Sepp Blatter on Tuesday praised the Asian Cup winning team of Iraq by saying they were proof of a "united football".

"It was absolutely extraordinary. Exceptional. Most of the team players play inside the country during a belligerent situation. Iraq had to play the qualifying phase outside their country. This was very difficult for them.

"They deserved to win. It's good for football and their country," said Blatter during Brazil's presentation of their dossier for the 2014 World Cup in Zurich.

"I hope this will have a positive influence on the Iraqi nation."

"The team comprised of all the relevant factions, Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, all together."

"Football can unite. This shows how football can bring everybody together."

Iraq became Asian Cup champions for the first time with a stirring 1-0 win over Saudi Arabia in Jakarta on Sunday that was welcomed in Baghdad by barrages of gunfire.

Atletico shifts to new stadium

APP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid will move to a bigger capacity stadium in 2010 under an agreement reached with the local council, the Spanish first division club's president and city officials said on Monday.

"We need to grow, to have a modern stadium, bigger than the existing one," Enrique Cerezo told a news conference.

Under the deal Atletico will move to Stadium Madrid, a key part of the city's failed bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, which will seat roughly 75,000 after it is refurbished.

The club's current home, the 55,000-seat Vicente Calderon which opened its doors in 1966, is set to be torn down after the move to be turned into a riverside park.

Atletico have spent nearly 50

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Deco fancies Jose link-up

APP, London

Barcelona midfielder Deco has admitted he would love to be reunited with Jose Mourinho.

Deco could leave the Nou Camp if Barca receive a substantial offer and, were that to happen, the Portugal international believes a move to Chelsea would suit him best.

He enjoyed a successful spell with Mourinho at Porto and the prospect of linking up with his compatriot at Stamford Bridge is tempting.

"The idea of working with Jose again appeals to me," Deco told the Sun. "He was a huge influence on my career and he did so much for me. I've worked with him before and it would be good to work with him again."

"The Premier League is definitely on a par with La Liga and playing there absolutely appeals to me. The English league is a possibility and it would definitely be somewhere I'd like to play."

The arrival of Thierry Henry could force boss Frank Rijkaard to Ronaldinho in midfield, possibly leaving Deco as the odd man.

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Thaksin controversy continues

APP, London

A human rights organisation has slammed the Premier League for allowing former Thailand prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra to buy Manchester City.

Human Rights Watch insist Thaksin is a "human rights abuser of the worst kind" and are angry the Premier League did not use their fit and proper person test to stop him taking over at Eastlands.

Thaksin, 58, has had almost one billion pounds in assets frozen by the military government which ousted him from his homeland last October. He also faces a succession of corruption charges relating to his five years in power.

"Under any definition, I don't see how Thaksin can be fit and proper," HRW's Brad Adams told BBC Sport on Tuesday.

"I've written a letter to the Premier League asking what this test means."

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Brazil bids for WC 2014

Football

APP, Paris

Brazil, the only candidate bidding to host the 2014 World Cup, is set to officially present its bid at the headquarters of world football's governing body FIFA in Zurich on Tuesday.

The only other country which might have made a bid was Colombia but it pulled out of the running in April.

Only problems with the bid however could derail hopes of organising an event last held on Brazilian soil in 1950 when they lost the final to Uruguay, a defeat which rankles among Brazilians to this day.

The Brazilian delegation, headed by Brazilian federation (CBF) president Ricardo Teixeira and which includes famous author Paulo Coelho and 1994 World Cup star Romario, is set to declare they have agreed to all the guarantees demanded by FIFA to host the event.

This first administrative step will put the bid, for what the Brazilians want to call "Copa 2014," officially into the FIFA system.

question of whether to renovate the mythic Maracana stadium or use the Engenho de Dentro stadium, which was inaugurated for the 2007 Pan American Games which have just finished.

Brazil, which also hopes to host the 2016 Olympics in Rio, wants to follow in the footsteps of Germany (1974 World Cup and 1972 Olympics), and Mexico (Olympics 1968 and 1970 World Cup).

However a senior European IOC member told AFP last week that it would be unlikely that Rio would succeed in winning the right to host the Olympics.

"IOC members don't like feeling they are the pudding, ie coming after another major sporting occasion," he said.

However, he has a strong chance of qualifying on appeal, taking into account factors such as the competition for places in his national team.

His bizarre departure does beg the question why there was no one from Chelsea to smooth the way for his arrival. A club statement said: "At airport immigration there was a request to clarify Alex's current status. All the paperwork for his entry was in order. After an initial delay he was cleared to enter the country. He chose to voluntarily fly back but will return when necessary."

His former club PSV said they do not expect Alex to come back but have contacted Chelsea about the possibility of extending the loan if Alex fails to get a work permit. Chelsea maintain that they do not own the player, simply that they have an option to buy him which they are exercising. In reality they paid the money to bring Alex from Brazil in 2004 and parked him at PSV until they needed him and he could qualify for a work permit.



Former Manchester United star Eric Cantona (C) heads the ball during a visit to the 5th Homeless World Cup Soccer tournament in Copenhagen on Tuesday.

Jury still out on Martins

APP, Newcastle

The jury is still out on Obafemi Martins, who scored 17 goals in his first season at Newcastle United, but failed to convince all their supporters that he represents a worthy successor to the great names who have worn the No.9 jersey.

The Nigerian's critics point to a lacklustre end to the season that also started quietly and the fact that six of his goals came against UEFA Cup opposition that was hardly Premiership standard.

However, it is a harsh assessment of the 22-year-old when judged against the circumstances surrounding a debut season that was hardly what he anticipated when moving from Inter Milan for 10 million pounds.

While Martins was aware that Michael Owen would be out for most of the season, he hardly anticipated having to form makeshift partnerships with Antoine Sibierski, a half-fit Shola Ameobi and even Albert Luque on occasions. And, if Martins's form did dip significantly in the wake of Newcastle's UEFA Cup exit against AZ Alkmaar, he was not alone.

He was accused of walking out on Newcastle after being left out of the side at the end of the season and has been involved in regular disputes with the Nigerian FA.

And this summer brought reports - questioned by police - that his car was hit by gunfire while he was in Nigeria.

Whatever the truth, the incident has not affected him. Martins's form in the pre-season matches has been

impressive - and timely in view of the fact that he faces genuine competition for his place this season.

Owen and Ameobi are fit again and Luque is showing signs of the form, but new signing Mark Viduka is the man who poses the main threat to Martins.

The Nigerian was accustomed to being on the fringes at Inter, who often used him as an explosive substitute in the later stages of games.

He would not be content with a similar role at St James' Park, although former Newcastle favourite and England international Alan Shearer is among those who favour Viduka ahead of him.

But Vid