



Barcelona players Gianluca Zambrotta (L), Eric Abidal and Victor Valdes stand alongside coach Frank Rijkaard (R) as they form the name of their sponsor engraved in balls during a press conference in Beijing on Friday.

## Adebayor doubtful starter

AFP, London

Arsenal striker Emmanuel Adebayor is set to miss the start of the Premiership campaign after suffering a groin injury.

Togo star Adebayor, 23, has been sidelined for most of the Gunners' pre-season programme since sustaining the problem at the club's Austrian training camp.

He could be back in training next week, but Arsene Wenger has ruled him out of Arsenal's opener against Fulham on August 12.

"Adebayor has a groin problem. He missed the Emirates Cup and will miss the Ajax Tournament," Wenger said.

"At best he will be back next week. We hope he can come back in to normal training on Tuesday and Wednesday. But I think he will miss the start of the Premiership."

## Tevez saga near end

AFP, London

Carlos Tevez is expected to complete his protracted move to Manchester United this week after his representatives finally agreed a deal with West Ham.

After weeks of wrangling over who should receive Tevez's transfer fee, the Argentina striker's plea to have his future resolved has prompted his agent Kia Joorabchian to settle his dispute with the London club.

Joorabchian, who owns the companies that represent Tevez, issued a writ for breach of contract against West Ham after they denied he was due any money and the row was set for the High Court.

But after lengthy talks this week, a settlement has been negotiated that is reported to see West Ham receive two million pounds, while Joorabchian will be paid 10 million pounds by United to sign Tevez on a two-year loan deal, with an option for a further three years.

West Ham should now release Tevez's registration so the 23-year-old can join the Premiership champions in time for the start of the season.

The England Football Association and the Premier League have to ratify the deal before it can be concluded, with an announcement expected on Friday.

## Milan rope in Pato

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan on Thursday announced a deal to sign Brazilian prodigy Alexandre Pato.

The 17-year-old, hailed by some pundits as the new Kaka, will move from Internacional, the FIFA Club World Champions.

A statement posted on the www.acmilan.com web site on Thursday evening confirmed a deal had been struck but did not disclose the terms.

"The highly talented Alexandre Pato will train with Milan and will be able to play friendly matches from September 3, 2007," the statement read. "From January 2008, he will be eligible for competitive games."

Reports suggest Pato will sign a five-year contract with the Rossoneri and Italian daily La Gazzetta dello Sport reports that the deal is worth 20 million dollars to Internacional.

"Pato's first contract with Milan is for five years," the paper reports Pato's agent Gilmar Velloz as saying.

Pato is expected in Milan on Friday.

# Barca land in Asia

## Football

AFP, Beijing

Barcelona's stars arrived in Beijing Friday hoping to put to rest the recent controversy over whether their promotional Asia tour is the best way to get fit for the start of the season.

"We have all the tools we need to work (here) just like in any other place," Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes told a press briefing here.

"It's a good place where we can work and get in shape for the season."

The Catalan giants who finished second in the Primera Liga last season are in Beijing for an exhibition match on Sunday against Chinese league team Beijing Guoan.

New recruit Thierry Henry, Brazil's Ronaldinho and Cameroon international striker Samuel Eto'o, all arrived safely in Beijing and were expected to play.

Asian fans will however not see Icelandic striker Eidur Gudjohnsen, Brazilian midfielder Edmilson or defender Carles Puyol, who have all missed the trip due to injury.

Meanwhile, Argentina's Lionel Messi and Gabriel Milito, and Mexico's Rafael Marquez are on holiday after playing for their national teams in the Copa America tournament.

With stops also in Japan and Hong Kong before they return to Spain on August 11, the tour has drawn criticism from some key players who have argued it could impact on training ahead of the Spanish championship that starts on August 25.

"It would be better to stay in Barcelona to prepare for next season. It is not easy to prepare in such a distant place," defender Gianluca Zambrotta said earlier this week.

"It is not easy for the players, the constant travel, the jet lag," the 30-year-old former Juventus player

added.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has downplayed the objections, saying a pre-season tour of Asia carried out two years ago did not stop the club from winning the Primera Liga and the Champions League.

The club went on a two-week pre-season tour of the United States and Mexico in August 2006, which was blamed by several players, including Ronaldinho, for their lack of peak fitness when the season began.

The club also defended itself prior to their departure from Spain Thursday.

"The tour gives the team a unique way to maintain contact with more than 100 million Barca fans on the continent," the club said in a statement on its website.

The number of Barcelona fans in China has gone up six-fold in the last three years and seven-fold in the same period in Japan, it said.

# Champs seeded 12th

## Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Iraq may have won the Asian Cup championship last month but they have been seeded a lowly 12th in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers according to Asian Football Confederation (AFC) rankings released Friday.

Australia, despite their abject play in the Asian Cup, stayed on top as the number one seed.

South Korea, the 2002 World Cup semifinalists, came in second while Saudi Arabia was seeded third ahead of Japan. In the Asian Cup semifinals, the Saudi squad beat Japan 3-2 in the semifinals.

Rounding out the top 10 seedings were, in order, Iran, Bahrain, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, North Korea and China at number 10.

Seeded fifth, Iran will be among the five top-ranked teams who get a bye from the gruelling first round stages.

The draw for round one will be held in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

With the top five being given byes, teams ranked 6-43 are paired by draw and play one home-and-away knockout round. Teams ranked from 6-24 will be placed in Pot A and teams ranked from 25-43 will be placed in Pot B. From 19 teams that progress through this round the lowest eight based on ranking move to round two and the other eleven to round three, the AFC said.

In round two, the eight lowest-ranked teams will be paired by draw and play one home-and-away knockout round. Four teams progress to round three.

The next round sees 11 qualifiers from round one and four qualifiers from round two joined by five highest-ranked countries. These 20 teams are split into five groups of four. First and second in each group qualify for the next round, the AFC said.

The 10 remaining teams are split into two groups of five teams. The top two teams in each of the two groups qualify automatically for the South Africa World Cup in 2010.

Teams that finish third in each

group play a home-and-away playoff and the team winning that playoff confronts the winner of the Oceania FC qualification in a home and away playoff to get the jackpot spot in the World Cup.

The seeding is as follows (The top 12 followed by South Asian nations):

1. Australia
2. South Korea
3. Saudi Arabia
4. Japan
5. Iran
6. Bahrain
7. Uzbekistan
8. Kuwait
9. North Korea
10. China
11. Jordan
12. Iraq
27. Maldives
28. India
30. Sri Lanka
33. Bangladesh
35. Pakistan
36. Afghanistan
39. Nepal
41. Bhutan

# No friendly fire

## Football

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson admits there is little point telling his Manchester United players to ease their way into the new season when they face Chelsea in the Community Shield.

Injuries to Owen Hargreaves, Paul Scholes, Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer mean Ferguson has fairly limited options for the showpiece clash at Wembley on Sunday.

The Scot has traditionally used the match for his own purposes, preferring to give action to players he feels need match fitness rather than chasing the trophy.

That is partly the reason that United have lost five out of their last six Community Shield matches.

But he knows his men will be going at full throttle against their main rivals for the Premiership title in what is his first meeting with Jose Mourinho in this fixture.

Ferguson said: "Over the years we've come up against the team that's been second to us on many occasions.

"It's always been difficult to assess how important it is in the build-up because a lot of times we've used it as a stepping stone to the first game of the season, playing players who needed a game, and that's the way we've always viewed it.

"But at the moment Hargreaves, Anderson, Gary Neville, Saha and Solskjaer are a bit short on games and won't be involved.

"It will be a competitive game. Even though I'm saying we've used it as a stepping stone on other occasions, it's always been competitive.

"I don't think you can avoid that simply because football players, particularly playing against teams they are going to be competing with for the top honours in the season, are going to be competitive and I think it will be that way on Sunday."

The teams' last meeting at Wembley was a dour affair, with Didier Drogha's late strike settling a scrappy FA Cup final back in May.

The two best teams in the country going head to head on such an occasion was never going to live up to the hype but this time around, Ferguson is

expecting a more fluent match.

He added: "It will be a better game than the FA Cup final because there was possibly tiredness from both teams.

"We had the same players every week from the beginning of April so they did a good job that way.

"The other thing was, the pitch was a bit dead. There had been a lot of rain during the week and then there was sun on the Saturday morning and it just deadened it a bit so the speed of the game wasn't great.

"I know the grounds man and he will make sure it's a good pitch eventually but it just needs time to settle down. If it's a better pitch it might be a better game."

The Community Shield marks the end of Ferguson's 21st pre-season in charge of United and he is eagerly awaiting the start of the Premiership campaign, which sees his team start their title defence against Reading at Old Trafford on August 12.

"You want to get into it," he said.

"Pre-season? I've had too many to think it's exciting but you've got to have preparation, that's essential."

## Adu looking to play

AP, New York

Freddy Adu's off to Europe later this week, still the centre of attention and ready to be in the centre of the field.

"I can't wait to get started," said Adu, who's moving from Real Salt Lake to 31-time Portuguese champion Benfica for a \$2 million transfer fee.

"Coach made it clear that I'll be a pretty big part. If they're going to spend that kind of money on someone, they're going to showcase them."

To Adu, that means allowing him to play his natural position, the central attacking midfielder. That's the position that earned him praise and attention as a youth; interest from Italy's Inter Milan at age 10 and an early call to the US under-17 national team.

But in MLS, the 18-year-old was mostly used on the outside wings of midfield, first with DC and then Real Salt Lake. He scored five goals in 30 games his first season, but had fewer goals each season since.

International interest in Adu was reinvigorated during the Under-20 World Cup last month in Canada, where Adu was credited with helping the United States to the quarterfinals.

Benfica, he says, "Was the first to come to the table."

Adu, getting his things together at his suburban home in Maryland, will leave for Portugal on Sunday, with Benfica scheduled to begin play in a European Champions League qualifier Aug. 14 and start Portuguese league play the following weekend.

"I'm pretty sure I'll get thrown in right away," Adu said. "Then again, it's not a done deal. I still have to earn the right to be on the field."

Regardless, he doesn't regret leaving MLS and brushed off criticism that he never had his heart in MLS.

"People are going to say stuff," he said. "I tried hard for every team I played for. I have heard that I didn't give it all I had. I did give my all."

# Lyon's hunt begins for magnificent seventh

## Football

AFP, Paris

The French Championship gets underway on Saturday and the pressure is on champions Lyon, who are in the hunt for a record seventh consecutive title, as once again they are the team to beat.

Despite a slight drop in form at the end of last season, Lyon won the League in April with six games remaining and were 17 points ahead of second-placed Marseille while third-placed Toulouse were a massive 23 points adrift.

With the summer departure of Gerard Houllier, disciplinarian Alain Perrin took over as coach of the six-time champions and already got the club off to winning ways by claiming the Peace Cup pre-season tournament in South Korea in July and the French Champions Trophy against Sochaux on Saturday.

"It has created a huge amount of solidarity and morale is high," said Perrin after the win in Asia.

However, the newly-appointed coach, who in the summer saw the departures of a plethora of talented players including Eric Abidal, Florent Malouda and Tiago to Barcelona, Chelsea and Juventus respectively, is under no illusions about the tasks ahead and the pressure that comes with being the team to beat.

"Lyon will be up against clubs such as Marseille, Monaco, Paris Saint Germain and Bordeaux.

"We are our own major threat. The danger is that everybody touts us as favourites and this could have a paralysing effect on us. The squad was shattered (last season).

"Last year Lyon went through a troubled period at one stage but they were so many points ahead of the

others that it didn't have serious consequences. So you have to bare in mind that we can still be fragile."

Lyon, who captured the signature of Italian World Cup winning defender Fabio Grosso in July, commence their title defence on August 5 on home soil against Auxerre and could miss first-choice goalkeeper Gregory Coupet for the first four months of the season due to a knee injury.

Meanwhile, Marseille, whose highest-profile summer signings included Boudewijn Zenden and Djibril Cisse from Liverpool, Algerian international Karim Ziani and Frenchman Benoit Cheyrou both from Auxerre, will open their 2007-2008 title challenge on August 4 away



GREGORY COUPET

at newly-promoted Strasbourg.

The Mediterranean giants, who are the only French club to win the Champions League in 1993, will have added motivation this season having booked a direct qualification spot to Europe's top club competition thanks to their second-placed finish in the domestic league last term.

# British clubs get tough draw

## UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Nyon

British clubs Liverpool, Arsenal and Celtic were all handed tough draws in the third qualifying round of the Champions League made here on Friday.

Liverpool, last season's losing finalists and champions in 2005, face French outfit Toulouse, while Arsenal take on Sparta Prague in the two legs to

be played on August 14/15 and 28/29.

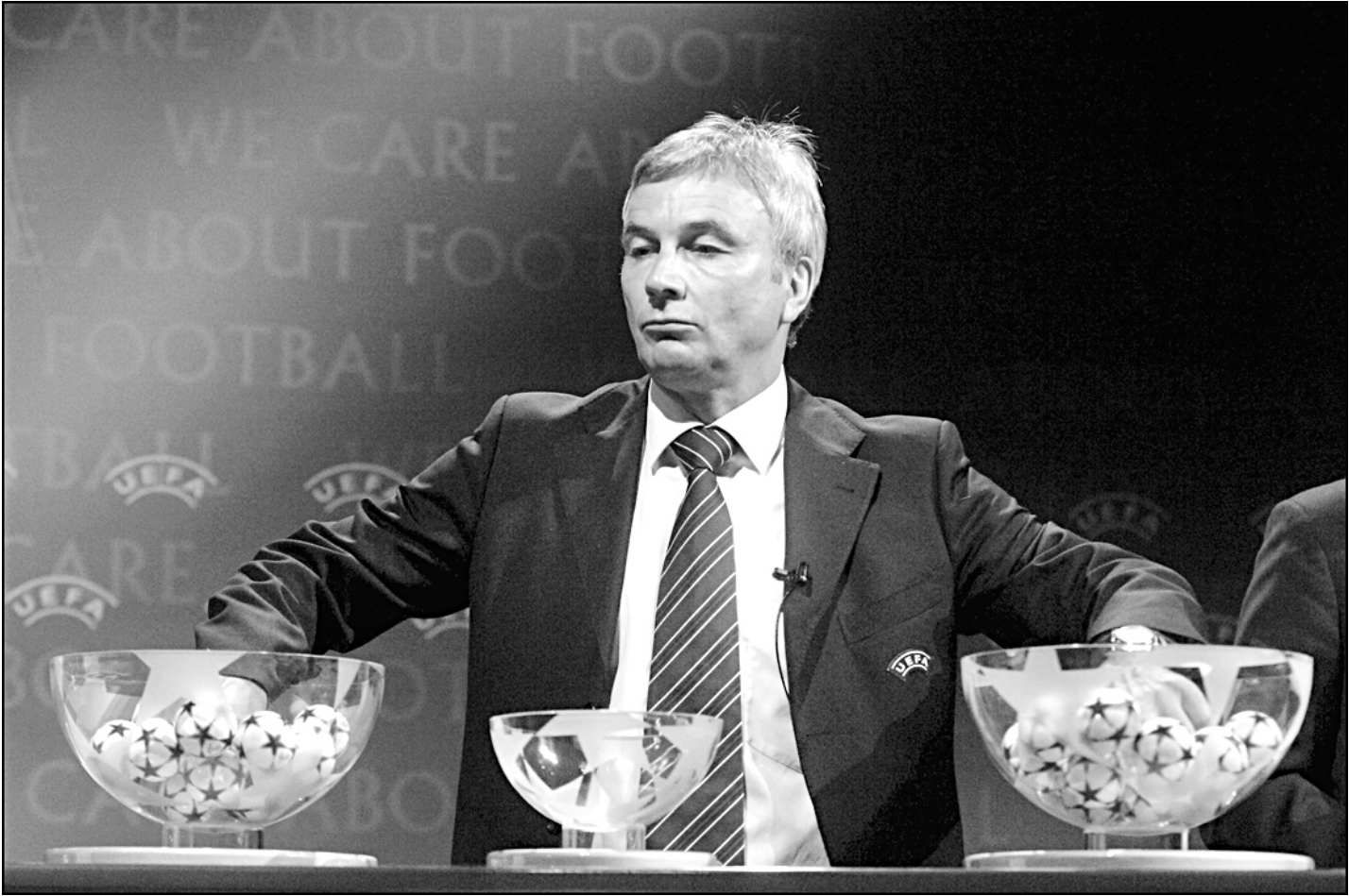
But it was Scottish champions Celtic who were arguably given the worst draw, against Russian champions Spartak Moscow.

Rangers, who enjoy a 2-0 first-leg lead over FK Zeta in their second qualifying round tie, will play Red Star Belgrade or Estonian club Levadia Tallinn should they win.

Reigning UEFA Cup champions Sevilla will play AEK Athens, while Lazio face Dinamo Bucharest.

## 3RD QUALIFYING ROUND DRAW

FH Hafnarfjörður (ICL) or BATE Borisov (BLR) v Zaglebie Lubin (POL) or Steaua Bucharest (ROM)  
Tampere United (FIN) or Levski Sofia (BUL) v Astana (KAZ) or Rosenborg (NOR)  
Spartak Moscow (RUS) v Celtic (SCO)  
Werder Bremen (GER) v NK Domzale (SLO) or Dinamo Zagreb (CRO)  
FK Ventspils (LAT) or FC Salzburg (AUT) v Pyunik (ARM) or Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)  
Ajax (NED) v MSK Zilina (SVK) or SK Slavia Prague (CZE)  
Valencia (ESP) v Debreceni (HUN) or IF Elfsborg (SWE)  
Ghent (BEL) or FK Sarajevo (BIH) v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)  
Fenerbahce (TUR) v Anderlecht (BEL)  
Rangers (SCO) or FK Zeta (MNE) v Red Star Belgrade (SRB) or Levadia Tallinn (EST)  
Toulouse (FRA) v Liverpool (ENG)  
Benfica (POR) v FC Copenhagen (DEN) or Beitar Jerusalem (ISR)  
Lazio (ITA) v Dinamo Bucharest (ROM)  
Sparta Prague (CZE) v Arsenal (ENG)  
FC Zurich (SUI) v Sheriff (MDA) or Besiktas (TUR)  
Sevilla (ESP) v AEK Athens (GRE)  
**First legs: Aug 14/15**  
**Second legs: Aug 28/29**



UEFA general secretary David Taylor makes the draw for the Champions League 2007/2008 in Nyon on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP