



Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard takes questions from journalists during a press conference in Hong Kong yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Sania sends Martina packing

AFP, Los Angeles

Marion Bartoli's struggle to find the form that swept her to a surprise Wimbledon final continued Tuesday as she fell in the first round of this 600,000-dollar WTA hardcourt tournament.

The sixth seed from France, who received a first-round bye, fell to Russian Maria Kirilenko 7-6, 6-3.

Also losing on Tuesday was seventh seed Martina Hingis, who suffered a 6-2, 2-6, 6-4 loss to Sania Mirza of India.

A finalist here in 1998, Hingis was making her first appearance in the tournament since 2001.

The Swiss star had faced the 20-year-old Mirza three times - all in 2006 - and won twice.

Mirza, finding her fitness after her season was disrupted by a knee injury, has had an impressive hardcourt season so far, upsetting three seeded players en route to reaching the final at Stanford.

She had reached the semifinals at Cincinnati the week before and progressed to the quarterfinals at San Diego last week.

Russia's Maria Sharapova, the world No. 2 who won her first title of the season on Sunday in San Diego, is the top seed.

## Daunting task for champs

AFP, Berlin



Bundesliga's top team face a tough task to defend their crown.

Last season's Bundesliga title had looked like a two-horse race between Schalke 04 and Werder Bremen until Stuttgart won their last eight games and held their nerve to be crowned on the last day of the season.

But this time around, sides will know what to expect and will all want to beat the Bundesliga's best.

Stuttgart's success was built on coach Armin Veh's ability to blend his foreign imports with fresh home-reared talent, including potentially world-class striker Mario Gomez.

Having scored on his Germany debut in March against Switzerland, it was the 22-year-old who came off the bench on the penultimate weekend of the season at VfL Bochum to help turn a 2-1 deficit into a 3-2 win.

Gomez signed a five-year contract this summer which keeps him at Stuttgart until 2012, turning

down a possible move to Italian giants Juventus, and the striker is set to be a major force for his club and country this year.

Having damaged knee ligaments on March 10 at Wolfsburg, the Bochum win on May 12 was Gomez's first game back and the hot-shot needed just seven minutes to put Stuttgart level before Brazilian Cacau hit the winning goal.

While Stuttgart were fighting back in Bochum, league leaders Schalke 04 lost at deadly-rivals Borussia Dortmund and second-placed Werder Bremen slipped at home to Eintracht Frankfurt, allowing Stuttgart to leap into top spot.

With their rivals falling by the wayside, the new leaders held their nerve for a 2-1 win over Energie Cottbus on the last day of the season, but it is unlikely Stuttgart will be given any such gifts by their rivals this season.

It was Stuttgart who effectively ended Bayern Munich's hopes of a top-three spot to win a Champions League place when Brazilian Cacau scored twice in two minutes in April's encounter.

Bayern flexed their financial might in the summer and splashed out 69 million euros to rebuild their squad, so starting the season as favourites to win their 21st German title, but in contrast Stuttgart have spent more modestly.

Romanian striker Ciprian Marica has been brought in from Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk for seven million euros, while Brazilian striker Ewerthon comes in on loan.

Battling midfielder Yildiray Basturk, who has long been courted by Veh, has come over from Hertha Berlin and Brazilian defender Gledson comes in from Hansa Rostock.

Stuttgart stalwart goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand finished his contract and left for Valencia, his replacement Raphael Schaefer is from Nuremberg.

In pre-season, Stuttgart were beaten 2-0 at home by the new and improved Bayern in the German League Cup semi-final, but were missing several top names and will be without Gledson for their opening games against Schalke and Hertha Berlin.

The Brazilian was hit with a double suspension after being sent off in Stuttgart's narrow German Cup first-round win at the weekend.

With last season's runners-up Schalke first up at the sold-out Gottlieb-Daimler Stadion on Friday night, Stuttgart will have to play like champions from the first whistle if they are going to end the season on top.

## Brazil set Mexico date

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil and Mexico have been scheduled to play a friendly on September 12, but the venue has yet to be decided, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) announced on Tuesday.

The Mexicans will be the second nation to face Dunga's Brazilian side, which beat Argentina 3-0 to claim the Copa America in July, in a friendly this summer following their match against Algeria on August 22 in the southern French city of Montpellier.

## UEFA Cup draw held

AFP, Paris

Confirmed draw for the second preliminary round of the UEFA Cup following Partizan Belgrade's failed appeal against its one-year ban from European competitions for violence in a UEFA Cup qualifier last month: Cluj (ROM) v Anorthosis

Famagouste (CYP)

Otelul Galati (ROM) v Lokomotiv

Sofia (BUL)

FK Rabotnicki (MKD) v NK

Zrinjski (BIH)

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## Fergie's house comes first

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson was told he could not watch Manchester United's friendlies on Wednesday because he had to help his wife move house.

The Ferguson family are in the process of moving into their new residence this week and the United manager's partner Cathy insisted there was no way he could go to either of the champions' matches at Glentoran and Dunfermline.

Ferguson may be the main man at Old Trafford but he knew better than to cross his wife, so his coach Mike Phelan was in charge at the Dunfermline game, while assistant

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## Gomez best in Bundesliga

AFP, Berlin

VfB Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez was on Wednesday voted Bundesliga player of the year for 2007 for propelling his club to the title with 14 goals last season.

The lanky Gomez, 22, polled 196 votes in the Kicker magazine poll of sports journalists to finish ahead of Werder Bremen's Brazilian star Diego, who received 175 votes, and German veteran Bernd Schneider of Bayer Leverkusen (156).

Stuttgart coach Armin Veh was an easy winner of the Coach of the Year award with 449 votes for leading his unfancied side to their first Bundesliga title for 15 years.

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# Frank defends Barca tour



AFP, Hong Kong

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard defended the team's Far East pre-season tour when the team arrived in Hong Kong here on Wednesday.

Barcelona defenders Gianluca Zambrotta and Lilian Thuram have criticised the tour, saying it will hamper training for the Spanish championship that kicks off on August 25.

But Rijkaard disagreed. "We are all aware that we have to build up our preparation plan and are going on travel and are far away from home which is not an ideal situation," he said at the pre-match press conference.

"But we are a good team with good players and we play with good spirit," he said, adding that the team had won some important games on the road.

"It can't be an excuse that we

cannot prepare well. We won't complain about travelling because it is our job and we have to do the best with our best possible players," he said.

The Dutchman said Barcelona were bringing a strong squad to Hong Kong for the final friendly match of their three-match tour, missing only three players who played in the recent Copa America.

New signing Thierry Henry and his partners up front -- new sensation Giovanni Dos Santos, three-time African Footballer of the Year Samuel Eto'o and Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho -- are with the star-studded squad.

Former Arsenal star Henry has been used on the flanks during the tour rather than as an out-and-out striker but Rijkaard praised the performance of the France international.

"His form is fine and he is adjusting himself well in a new team," said the coach. "He can give great contribution to Barcelona once he has

fitted into the team."

Despite the arrival of the marksman and other new players, Rijkaard did not spell out exactly what the target was this season.

"It will be an exciting season with so many wonderful players.

We hope to win as many games as possible," he said.

Ronaldinho said the Champions League would be Barcelona's prime target in the new season as well as the Spanish title. "We are confident of doing well and the pre-season tour will definitely help us," he said.

With two typhoons approaching Hong Kong, the match on Friday night against a Mission Hills Invitation XI, a squad made up of players from Kitchee FC and Happy Valley FC, may be postponed.

A fallback date on Saturday has been scheduled, according to match organiser Ken Ng Kin.

# Bayern aim to dominate

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich kick off the new Bundesliga season on Saturday with a squad rebuilt at a cost of 69 million euros as the German giants seek to bounce back after their worst season for a decade. In the hunt for their 21st German title, Bayern showed their full spending might to overhaul their side after stumbling to fourth spot last season.

Italian World Cup-winning striker Luca Toni and German striker Miroslav Klose were brought in to provide firepower up front while French midfielder Franck Ribery was snapped up for 26 million euros from Marseille in a bid to fill a hole that has been gaping since Michael Ballack moved to Chelsea last year.

Ribery, who was courted by a host of top European clubs, is

expected to line up alongside talented Bastian Schweinsteiger and Dutch hardman Mark van Bommel, forming a trio with the potential to develop into a formidable midfield.

Defensive midfielder Owen Hargreaves was granted his long-awaited transfer to Manchester United while strikers Roque Santa Cruz and Claudio Pizarro have also left for the English Premiership.

Question marks remain however over a defence that conceded 40 goals last year with no major reinforcements except Marcel Jansen, who is nursing an injury.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld said that while the club had undertaken the most expensive recruitment campaign in Bundesliga history, he could not guarantee success.

"That is the goal, but I cannot guarantee to win the title," Hitzfeld told Kicker magazine.

Bayern will also have to suffer the humiliation of sitting and watching as the continent's best teams do battle in the Champions League -

the four-time European champions have only qualified for the UEFA Cup.

Newly promoted Hansa Rostock will be the first visitors to the Allianz Arena. They are on a high after destroying their amateur opponents 8-0 in Saturday's German Cup first round win.

Defending champions VfB Stuttgart start the 2007-2008 campaign on Friday when they host last season's runners-up Schalke 04.

In contrast to Bayern, Stuttgart have had a quiet build-up to the new season.

They were beaten by Bayern Munich in the German League Cup semi-final in pre-season and will be looking to emulate last term when they saw off the challenge of Schalke, Werder Bremen and Bayern.

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# 'Rooney can make difference'



AFP, London

Steve McClaren believes a revitalised Wayne Rooney can provide the spark to help England avoid Euro 2008 embarrassment.

Rooney has enjoyed an impressive pre-season after a much-needed rest and England coach McClaren sees signs that the Manchester United striker is about to take his game to a new level.

It is vital for McClaren that Rooney is firing on all cylinders going into the crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers next month that will define his reign as England coach.

McClaren said: "It is great to see Wayne coming back from his break this summer in top form.

"I spoke to Sir Alex quite early on and he told me how fit Wayne was. He certainly looks very fit from what I have seen.

"It is his first full pre-season for a while as well, so you are bound to benefit from that.

"Speaking to Wayne, I know he is dying to get back into the England squad and he is going to be a big player for us."

If England are to avoid a humiliating failure to reach the finals they must win their home matches against Israel and Russia in September.

McClaren knows he would

almost certainly be sacked if England failed to reach a major finals for the first time since 1984.

But he insists the trauma of being jeered by their own fans during the qualifier against Andorra has brought England's players closer together.

McClaren hopes that chastening experience has made England more determined to prove the critics wrong.

"Sometimes you have to go through bad times," he said. "They can bring you together and I just felt

after that period in March there was a definite reaction, which was reflected in the performances and results of the last three games.

"In times like that, it is about believing in ourselves, believing in what we were doing and what we were trying to achieve.

"It is about sticking to the preparation that we know and making sure we get the results. You are going to get bad times and adversity.

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WAYNE ROONEY

# South Africa renames host cities



AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's process of renaming towns and cities will not have a negative effect on the staging of the football World Cup in the country in 2010, officials said on Tuesday.

While the names of various host cities were being changed, they would be coupled with their former names for international purposes.

"We have agreed on the name changes proposed by various host cities, that they will be used within South Africa," Local Organising Committee (LOC) chairman, Irvin Khoza, told reporters here.

"But for international purpose it was important we use double-barrel names, a combination of both old and new names for the cities."

The South African government has been systematically re-baptising places since coming to power after the fall of the whites-only apartheid regime in 1994, seeking to remove titles deemed offensive and to honour black heroes.

The process has been fraught with emotion from sectors of society who felt their culture was being marginalised in the process, while others fear the process could cause global confusion ahead of the World Cup.

"It will take years and years for the marketing plan that has been established to sensitize the world on these name changes, to deal with issues of the maps and issues of souvenir shops around the world in educating the international public on the names that have been adopted.

"We also agreed that both names will appear on tickets

issued for the tournament in 2010," Khoza added.

Of the 10 cities presented to FIFA to host the event, those affected by the process are Mangaung (Bloemfontein), Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth), and Tshwane (capital Pretoria).

FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke said the country would use the FIFA preliminary draw, to be held in the coastal city of Durban on November 25, to show the world its readiness.

"It (the draw) gives the world the first image of what will be the World Cup in South Africa. The world's eyes will be on South Africa."

He said preparations were "on track" although stadiums in Cape Town and Mandela Bay were running "a few weeks late".

"But we are confident they will be ready in time for the Confederation Cup in 2009," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Sania Mirza of India hits a backhand against Martina Hingis of Switzerland during her match at the East West Bank Classic in Carson, California on Tuesday.