



Argentina forward Angel Di Maria (L) shakes off Japan defender Michihiro Yasuda (C) to score the all-important goal during their friendly match in Tokyo on Tuesday.

Argentina see off Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Athens gold medallists Argentina posted a 1-0 win over Japan on Tuesday in the last tune-up match for the Beijing Olympics, a contest that was called off in the second half due to heavy rain and lightning.

The referee halted the game 38 minutes into the second half due to the lightning, and the game was scrapped seven minutes later.

The only goal came in the 68th minute soon after the visitors faced a scare when midfielder Yohei Kajiyama's shot was saved by Argentine goalkeeper Oscar Ustari.

Argentina counter-attacked, with Sergio Agüero speedily moving up the centre to send the ball to fellow forward Angel Di Maria in the front line, who fired home from the edge of the box.

Japan fought throughout the match.

Midfielder Keisuke Honda's middle shot hit the bar in the 58th minute, while Honda created Japan's best chance on a free kick in the 10th minute -- though Masato Morishige's shot was saved by Ustari.

"I have mixed feelings, I can't help it," said Japan coach Yasuharu Sorimachi. "Our real competition starts in Beijing. We are going to prepare for it from now on."

At the Olympics, Argentina will play Ivory Coast, Australia and Serbia in Group A, while Japan will take on the United States, Nigeria and The Netherlands in Group B.

Keane seals Reds move

AFP, Liverpool



Robbie Keane hailed his arrival at Anfield as the start of a "new chapter in my life" as he was unveiled as a Liverpool player on Tuesday.

The Republic of Ireland international has completed a 20.3 million pound (40.6 million dollar) four-year move from Tottenham to join the club he has supported all his life.

The 28-year-old, who will now wear the number seven shirt made famous by legends like Kenny Dalglish and Kevin Keegan, will make his debut Wednesday in a friendly away to Villarreal.

"To wear that shirt is an honour, and something I truly understand. If I can have half as much success in it as Keegan and Dalglish did, I will be a happy man," said Keane.

"I've been waiting for this day

since I was a kid. Everyone knows I am a massive Liverpool fan, so to be sitting here today in a Liverpool tracksuit is a dream come true.

"Maybe you never feel it is going to happen. I could have come here as a teenager, but those Wolves because I felt there would be more chance of immediate first team football, and that proved to be the case.

"Now I am enjoying every minute and I can't wait to pull on that red shirt.

"This is a massive club and want to do everything I can to make them even more successful."

Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy was far from happy at the way in which Liverpool had signed up his club captain.

But Keane said: "The reasons I left Spurs are that I am a huge Liverpool fan and the chance to play for them may never come around again.

"This opportunity is something

I couldn't let go. I am at an age now when I believe I am at my peak, and aim to kick on.

"This is a great opportunity now for me, the whole package that Liverpool has to offer really inspires me.

"I am just grateful to be here. I love the club and this is the one dream I had still achieve."

I do not think I let Spurs down. I had six fantastic seasons there and gave them everything. Since day one, I always give everything, and that will never change," said Keane.

"The Spurs fans were always magnificent to me and I will always have a place in my heart for them.

"But this is a new chapter in my life and one that I am looking forward to.

"There are players leaving Spurs, but there are also good players coming in. I can only focus on Robbie Keane and what is good for me."



Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez (L) stands with new signing Robbie Keane at the club's Melwood training complex on Tuesday.

Messi threat for C'Ron

AP, London



No wonder Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson insists Cristiano Ronaldo would be wrong to play for Real Madrid. The Portuguese star probably would be overshadowed by Lionel Messi.

Ferguson actually believes Ronaldo is at the best club anyway. But the fact that the winger would be compared week by week in the same league as Messi most likely would hurt his chances of proving himself the world's best player.

Messi is at the centre of a tug of war between Barcelona and Argentina's team for the Olympics. He played brilliantly for his club in warm-up games in Scotland.

After scoring and mesmerizing the Hibernian defence in Barca's 6-0 victory in Edinburgh on Thursday, he went on as a second-half substitute against Dundee United on Saturday and collected a hat trick in a 5-1 victory at Dundee United.

Weaving inside and outside defenders, Messi had them going in different directions and chasing his shadow. By the time they realized where he had gone, the ball was in

the back of the net.

"He was fantastic to watch and what a difference he made to the game," said Dundee United manager Craig Levein, who played for Scotland at the 1990 World Cup. "It's not often that we lose 5-1 and I'm smiling watching the opposition playing football. He was just a real delight to watch."

Although these aren't the toughest opponents Messi will face next season, the 21-year-old Argentine showed he has the skills and the goal-scoring ability to dwarf even the likes of Ronaldo.

Ronaldo relies more on his speed and is better in the air. Messi has the edge in dribbling in tight situations. He draws defenders toward him and out of position, then leaves them trailing with short bursts of fancy footwork, either scoring himself or setting up others.

Ronaldo certainly outshone Messi last season. He scored 42 goals for United and helped the Red Devils win the Premier League and Champions League, ousting Barcelona in the semifinals. But he missed a third-minute penalty kick in the first leg at Camp Nou and, in those two games, Messi looked the better player.

Messi has also been hampered by injuries. In 2006, he tore muscle fibers in

his right thigh in a Champions League game against Chelsea and missed the rest of the season, including Barcelona's victory over Arsenal in the final. Last year, he had two long spells on the sidelines with leg injuries. Without him, Barca finished well behind Madrid in the Spanish title race.

Barcelona's new coach, Pep Guardiola, prefers to take the heat off Messi and stresses the importance of team play.

"I understand that everybody thinks that Messi is different, of course he is different, but I have to treat him the same as the others," said Guardiola, who replaced Frank Rijkaard at the end of last season.

"I don't understand football only with one player. I understand football as a result of the work of the group. For him to do the things he does, he needs someone to bring the ball to him, to create opportunities to score."

Now Messi is fit and appears to be getting back to his best form while Ronaldo has an ankle injury that will sideline him until early October.

While Messi doesn't yet know whether he will go to the Olympics, Ronaldo doesn't know which team he'll be playing for next season.

Ronaldo says he wants to move to Madrid, and the Spanish club is eager to get him for what would

certainly be a world-record transfer fee. But United is holding him to his contract, which still has almost four years to run.

Messi is unlikely to be leaving Barcelona. His value to the club and his bid to regain both the Spanish league and Champions League titles are behind his reluctance to let him go to China.

After Messi was placed on Argentina's Olympic squad, Barcelona said it had not given permission for him to go. FIFA, which has instructed clubs to release the players for China, has appointed a judge who is to rule Tuesday. Several German clubs have also refused to release players for the Olympic tournament, which begins in 10 days.

Messi is vital to Argentina and Barcelona.

Guardiola wants Messi when his team plays in the qualifying round of the Champions League, which coincides with Olympic soccer. But Argentina is defending the Olympic title and is offering Messi the chance to win a gold medal.

If the judge's decision goes the way of the Olympic teams, Messi could be one step ahead of Ronaldo. While the Portuguese star sits at home wondering where he'll play next season, Messi could go into the season an Olympic champion.

Euro generates record profits

AFP, Zurich

The Euro 2008 football championship generated record profits of 250 million euros (392 million dollars), European football's governing body UEFA announced on Tuesday.

A total financial turnover of 1.3 billion euros was generated during the June 7-29 tournament which was co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland.

Euro 2008 president Martin Kallen said: "We wanted to organise the best Euro ever: the objective was achieved."

He said that profits would be totally reinvested in competitions for junior players and women as well as training programmes for coaches and referees.

In total it cost 600 million euros to organise the event.

The profit surpasses the 223 million euros from Euro 2004 in Portugal.

Maniche staying with Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's Portugal international midfielder Maniche, loaned out to Inter Milan last season after a falling out with manager Javier Aguirre, is sticking with the Spanish club next season.

"There is no Maniche case, the problem is sorted out, he's an Atletico player," club president Enrique Cerezo said.

The 30-year-old, who joined Atletico in 2006, has patched up his differences with Aguirre in recent weeks.

"When I'm in the wrong I recognise it. It's important to know when you've made a mistake and to sort things out," he said.

Maniche did not join the Atletico on its pre-season tour of Mexico as the club was in the process of trying to negotiate his departure.



Tottenham Hotspur's newly signed players, Mexican forward Giovani dos Santos (L), Croatian midfielder Luka Modric (R) and Brazilian goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes, pose during a photocall at their training ground in Essex on Tuesday.

Gallas sorry for captaincy errors

AFP, London

William Gallas has apologised for the mistakes he made last season as Arsenal captain and promised to learn from his errors should Arsene Wenger entrust him with the on-field leadership of the side in the upcoming campaign.

Gallas was criticised for setting a bad example when, after Birmingham City secured a late draw against the Gunners at St Andrews in February, he spent several minutes sitting on the turf after the final whistle in what appeared to be a protest at the decision that led to City's equalising penalty.

"You know I learned a lot, you want to be the best captain, give good advice to your players, but sometimes you can make mistakes as well so I think this season I know what I'm going to do and I know I am ready to change my way to speak to the players," Gallas told Arsenal TV.

Experienced midfielder Gilberto Silva has left Arsenal for Panathinaikos with recent additions Samir Nasri and Aaron Ramsey enhancing the youthful feel at the Emirates Stadium.

"They (the Arsenal squad) are young," Gallas said. "They are very shy but it won't be difficult for them to settle in, the squad is fantastic the atmosphere is very good so I think it will be fine for them."

"We have to win something because the trophies are more important at the end of the season. Last season we were near to winning something, I hope this season it will be different. Everybody knows what they have to do, we are ready."

Chelsea rule out 'gimmicks'

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Manchester United and other English clubs might have Asians in their squads but you won't find one at Chelsea, with chief executive Peter Kenyon ruling out any "gimmick" players.

The Blues conclude their three-leg Asian pre-season tour on Tuesday and while Kenyon admits it is a huge market they are keen to develop, he is not interested in hiring players unless they are good enough.

And he doesn't think any from Asia are. "Our view is that the selection of our players is the ability to be in the Chelsea team," he told AFP.

"What drives Chelsea is success on the field, so we are not interested in gimmicks. We are not interested in having, say, an American or an Asian in the team because it represents another revenue stream, if you like."

Asked if there was an Asian player good enough to make the 23-man squad, he replied: "I'm not sure there is one."

"This isn't anti-Asian, but just the competitive nature of the game.

"We have 23 players and over the last few years have seen the best from many countries -- and they've not been able to get in our team."

Manchester United have South Korea's Park Ji-Sung in their squad and he has repeatedly proved his worth. They also have Dong Fangzhou, who has yet to make his mark but has helped raise their profile in China.

"For us, this isn't about a marketing stunt to get someone from Asia to sit on the bench," Kenyon said. "You need all 23 to play a high number of games."

Chelsea have made clear that they want to be the world's most recognised football club by 2014, and Asia is a crucial part of their plans.

The region is football-crazy and already supplies significant revenue to all English Premier League teams through broadcast deals.

While Kenyon is behind the push to capitalise on this popularity, Russian owner Roman Abramovich is fully supportive.

"When it comes to whether we

go here and/or there, that's clearly the executive management and board's role, but he is very supportive of what we are doing," he said.

"But one of the things he has made clear is that while he wants Chelsea to be a global football team, he also wants it to be a legacy for good."

That means Chelsea helping develop grass-roots football in countries they visit, while giving fans in Asia the chance to experience the team first hand.

Chelsea has been working with the Asian Football Confederation in this regard -- the first European club to engage the ruling body about long-term objectives rather than jet in on money-spinning tours and jet out again.

"Clearly we (EPL clubs) all have a significant Asian fanbase," he said.

"It's all too easy to say, let's just look after our fans in England. But you come out here and they're passionate, they're knowledgeable, they want to be as much a part of Chelsea as our English fans."

"So on all sorts of levels we have relationships, and it's about supporting those relationships on a more regular basis."

No League Cup for PSG

Football

AFP, Paris

League Cup winners Paris Saint Germain's bid to overturn a ban on them competing in the 2008-2009 competition was on Tuesday turned down by the French football federation (FFF).

During an emergency meeting Tuesday morning the FFF dismissed a proposal by the French national Olympic Committee (CNOSF) to have the ban transformed into a match behind closed doors at the beginning of the season.

The CNOSF on Monday said they found the sanction "disproportionate".

But the FFF judged the original sanction as "appropriate given the particular nature and the seriousness of the facts".

In April the Professional Football League (LFP) banned the winners from next season's competition after PSG fans displayed a controversial banner during their

League Cup final victory over Lens.

During the match Parisian fans were forced to remove the 25-metre banner which labelled people in the northeast of the country as "paedophiles, unemployed, inbreds".

And FFF president Jean-Pierre Escalettes said that they wanted to send out a strong message that this type of behaviour would not be tolerated.

"PSG aren't being picked on but we had to remain firm faced with something that misrepresents the sport," Escalettes told AFP.

"What shocked us was to hear the CNOSF say that this sanction was 'disproportionate'."

"We think it's a suitable sanction. At the time we were accused of being lax and now we're told it's too severe."

He added that because the incident took place during the League Cup "it was logical and suitable the sanction concern the League Cup and not the French championship".

The draw for the first round of the League Cup takes place on Wednesday.

Cesc pledges Gunners' loyalty

AFP, London

Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas has slammed a report suggesting he is considering a move to Real Madrid.

Fabregas was a key member of the Spain squad that won Euro 2008 and according to a report last weekend in Spanish sports newspaper Marca he was quoted as saying he might move to the Bernabeu, especially if Arsenal did not win a trophy this season.

But in a statement the 21-year-old told Arsenal's official website here Monday: "I have not spoken to any media so it's frustrating to read quotes that I have supposedly said about my future."

"I have spent the summer relaxing with my family, friends and girlfriend and I return to training with Arsenal tomorrow (Tuesday)."

"I think that some people are just trying to make mischief but my intentions are very clear."

"I am happy here at Arsenal, my future is with Arsenal and the priority is to achieve success and win trophies at Arsenal."