



HEROES' WELCOME: Barcelona players drive through the streets on an open-topped bus to celebrate their Champions League victory in Barcelona on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

# Fans cheer their heroes



AFP, Barcelona

Tens of thousands of ecstatic fans cheered Barcelona's Champions League heroes during a victory parade through the city centre in an open-top bus Thursday.

Leo Messi, Samuel Eto'o, Thierry Henry and their teammates flew back from Rome after a stunning 2-0 win over Manchester United on Wednesday -- the third part of a unique treble including the Spanish league and cup titles.

The players and coach Pep Guardiola then rode through the city in an open-top bus decked out in the club's royal blue and burgundy colours and marked "Champions," dancing and waving to the fans.

The crowd, many of whom waved the red and yellow flag of the Catalonia region, chanted "Ole, Ole, Champions!" and "Barca, Barca and Barca!" as the bus headed through the city's main thoroughfares for the club's Camp Nou stadium.

Cameronian Eto'o, who scored one of the goals in the final, stood at the front, blowing kisses to the crowd.

"Eto'o, Africa says thank you," said one banner carried by a Senegalese man who said his name was Yatma.

"Since he (Eto'o) came here we (Africans) are better treated," he said.

Two little girls, aged six and eight, both wearing Messi strips, were disappointed that they could not see the Argentine star, who scored the second goal.

"Messi isn't there, Papa," they cried, who tried to console them. "He'll be on the other side," he said.

One jubilant Catalan, Alfons, said: "I lived in Buenos Aires building motorways, just as Messi helped lift us up on the road to glory," Messi, he insisted, was a Catalan.

Dozens of youths also clambered onto the Columbus monument, at one end of the

famous Las Ramblas avenue, to await the team.

The joyful scenes contrasted with those in the early hours of Thursday when police in the city arrested 119 people and more than 150 people were injured as victory celebrations descended into riots.

Around 100,000 people spilled onto the streets of the Catalan capital after the victory. But the carnival atmosphere turned ugly after midnight when youths began clashing with police around Las Ramblas.

Youths hurled bottles as they tried to storm through metal barricades keeping a mob back from shops, prompting a surge by baton-wielding riot officers.

Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to control rioters, who damaged lampposts, telephone kiosks and bus stops, media reports said.

Terrified passers-by covered behind walls as the clashes intensified.

Spain's TVE public television said one of its cameramen was among those hurt.

The statement said police had issued "repeated warnings" to the rioters.

The celebrations had started peacefully as thousands of joyous fans, many draped in the dark red and blue of their club, let off fireworks and honked horns.

Many fans mocked rivals Real Madrid, which ended the season trophyless -- Barca's own fate for the past two seasons until new coach Pep Guardiola rejuvenated the team this year.

And in the Spanish capital, Catalans jumped into the fountain in the Plaza Cibeles, the traditional site for celebrations by Real supporters.

Barca fans had already twice savoured success in recent days after their team won the Spanish title and lifted the Spanish Cup.

"Champions! (three times)," headlined the Catalan newspaper La Vanguardia.

Barca and their supporters have experienced "the greatest night in their history," it said.

The nation's top-selling paper, El Pais, said Barcelona now has "a legendary triple crown" and is "at the top of the world."

## PRIMERA LIGA FIXTURES

**Saturday all 1900 GMT**  
Real Mallorca v Villarreal, Deportivo La Coruna v Barcelona, Atletico Madrid v Almeria, Valencia v Athletic Bilbao

**Sunday all 1700 GMT unless stated**  
Numancia v Sevilla (1500 GMT), Espanyol v Malaga (1500 GMT), Osasuna v Real Madrid, Racing Santander v Getafe, Sporting Gijon v Recreativo Huelva, Real Betis v Valladolid

# Everton ready to step up

AFP, London



Everton midfielder Tim Cahill believes Saturday's FA Cup final against Chelsea represents the chance to start a golden era for David Moyes' team.

While Chelsea's star power and big-match experience makes the west London club favourites to win the Wembley clash, Cahill is convinced Everton are on the brink of something special and the Australia international wants the Toffees to make the final their coming of age party.

It is 14 years since Everton last won a major trophy -- when Paul Rideout's goal clinched a 1-0 victory over Manchester United in the FA Cup final -- but even that was a rare moment of triumph in a barren period.

While more title success may be asking too much, under Moyes's astute leadership Everton now look capable of breaking into the Premier League's top-four and staying there.

They underlined their case by finishing fifth and knocking out Liverpool, United and Aston Villa en route to Wembley despite missing key players like Mikel Arteta and Ayegbeni Yakubu for long periods.

Victory at Wembley would validate Everton's rise and, although Chelsea are keen to win the Cup as a farewell present for departing boss Guus Hiddink, it could be that Moyes's success-starved players have more motivation on Saturday.

Sydney-born Cahill, who was on the losing side when he played for Millwall in the 2004 FA Cup final against United, is in no doubt that Everton can win if they show enough belief.

"We need to believe we can win. We need to believe that once we cross that white line this

our chance of winning some silverware," he said.

"On a day like the FA Cup final, I will be looking for that telling moment that hopefully will change the game, that telling pass that might put someone in or that tackle that's going to stop them scoring."

Everton captain Phil Neville, the former United midfielder, is one of the few players in the squad to have tasted sustained success, but he admits he would swap all that to help his current team become a major force.

"I think this club is going in the right direction. We can restore Everton to where it belongs and that is at the top of English football," Neville said.

Chelsea last won the FA Cup against United in 2007. That victory remains their last piece of silverware and midfielder Frank Lampard acknowledges it is time to end the trophy drought.

"It's very important we win something for the confidence of the club and take something away from the season," Lampard said.

"Personally the way I have played, I think it is my best season, and to round it off we do need to win the Cup."

Win or lose, it will be an emotional occasion for Hiddink, who resumes his role as Russia coach on a full-time basis immediately after the match.

Hiddink has made a big impact during his brief spell as interim manager and Lampard would love to send him home on a high.

"Our form since Guus Hiddink took over has been championship-winning form, and we only didn't go to the Champions League final because of things that happened on the night," Lampard added.

"It will be great to finish off with a big day out and a win for him," Lampard said. "It would be lovely if we could do that. All the players here and everyone he's worked with wants his season to finish like that."

# Barca saw 'Gladiator' before final

AFP, Madrid

To motivate his players for the Champions League final in Rome, the Barcelona coach showed them clips from the film "Gladiator" just minutes before the match, a news report said Friday.

Barcelona beat Manchester United 2-0 in a dazzling and attacking display in Rome's Olympic stadium on Wednesday night.

Coach Pep Guardiola ended the pre-match warm-up session early to show the players a seven-minute video that included clips from the film "Gladiator", the newspaper El Pais said.

The Ridley Scott film, which won five Oscars in 2000, stars Russell Crowe as a Roman general, known as "the Spaniard", who is betrayed and enslaved but who rises through the ranks of the gladiatorial arena to avenge the murder of his family.

The video, put together especially for Guardiola by a journalist friend, also shows some of the best moves by each of the players during the season.

It concludes with a message from Barcelona's sponsor that appears on the screen:

"We are the centre of the field, we have accuracy, we have effort, we are attackers who are defending, we are defenders who are attacking, we have speed, we have the respect of our adversaries, we are each goal that we score, we are the ones who are always looking for the opponent's goal. WE ARE ONE."

El Pais said that when video ended and the lights came up, "some players were crying and their shouts indicated that the aim had been achieved."

It said Guardiola then let them enter the stadium without saying another word.

# Niko Kovac ends career

AFP, Vienna

Former Croatian captain Niko Kovac is retiring from football, his Austrian club Red Bull Salzburg announced on its website Friday.

The 37-year-old midfielder, who already announced his international retirement in January after winning 83 caps and scoring 15 goals between 1996 and 2008, will hang up his shirt at the end of the current Austrian league season, the club said.

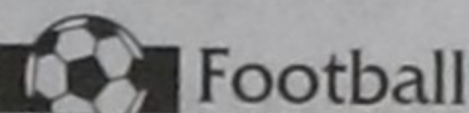
Kovac will play his last game in a friendly match against his former team Bayern Munich on July 10 in Salzburg.

The Croatian captained his national side from 2004 onwards, participating in the European Championship in Portugal in 2004 and in Austria and Switzerland in 2008, as well as the World Cup in Germany in 2006.

He joined Salzburg in 2006, winning two Austrian league titles with the Austrian club.

Before that, Kovac spent most of his career in the German Bundesliga, playing with Hertha Berlin, Bayer Leverkusen, Hamburg and Bayern Munich, with whom he won the German league title in 2003.

# China hold Germany



AFP, Shanghai

New coach Gao Hongbo got his reign off to a promising beginning as China drew 1-1 in a friendly against an under-strength Germany in front of a passionate home crowd in Shanghai.

China got off to the perfect start when four minutes in midfielder Gao Junmin took a pass into the area and breezed past defender Robert Huth to score with an angled shot past Robert Enke in the away goal.

But the euphoria did not last long. Bayern Munich's Bastian Schweinsteiger playing in the unmarked Lukas Podolski, who fired home the

equaliser two minutes later.

"We wanted to play the strategy laid out by the coaches, we wanted to play hard and build up our confidence," an elated Gao Junmin said after the match.

"We came here to learn from the Germans."

With big name stars Michael Ballack and Miroslav Klose at home, German coach Joachim Loew had hoped their absences would give one of his newcomers an opportunity to shine.

As it was, China played on the break, packing the defence and with just one up front, and in the event restricted the Germans to few chances.

Indeed, the best opportunities went to the hosts. In the 36th minute, left-back Cao Yang saw his perfect cross to

Gao Lin wasted.

China continued to create chances, with Enke saving a long-range shot by midfielder Jiang Ning in the 72nd minute, and just tipping a blast from Zhou Haining over the bar moments later.

Germany's best chance fell to Schweinsteiger, but he failed to capitalise on an open net in the 83rd minute.

Gao Hongbo was named head of China's national team earlier this month in the hope he can improve a side which has been dismal in recent years.

The former striker, China's seventh head coach since 2000 and youngest ever at age 44, takes over a team that has fallen to 97th in the FIFA world rankings, behind Iceland but just ahead of Sierra Leone.

# Lippi saves big guns for Confed Cup

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Marcello Lippi has left his top players out of his squad for next month's friendly against Northern Ireland, keeping them fresh for the Confederations Cup in South Africa.

Lippi on Thursday named two squads, with 13 players guaranteed to be on the plane heading for Africa on June 7.

His other squad, comprised of 21 players, will compete for the 10 remaining squad places for the Confederations Cup, which also takes place next month.

They will be the only ones in contention to face Northern Ireland in Pisa on June 6, however, by the time that match is played, Lippi will already have handed in the names of his final 23-man squad for the Confederations Cup as FIFA's deadline is on June 4.

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Morgan De Sanctis (Galatasaray/TUR), Federico Marchetti (Cagliari)

**Defenders:** Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Andrea Dossena (Liverpool/ENG), Alessandro Gamberini (Fiorentina), Fabio Grosso (Lyon/FRA), Andrea Esposito (Lecce), Nicola Legrottaglie (Juventus), Davide Santon (Inter Milan)

**Midfielders:** Marco Biagianni (Catania), Matteo Brihi (AS Roma), Gaetano D'Agostino (Udinese), Daniele Galloppa (Siena), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Pasquale Foggia (Lazio)

**Forwards:** Giuseppe Mascara (Catania), Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria), Sergio Pellissier (Chievo), Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal/ESP)

## PRESELECTED SQUAD FOR CONFEDERATIONS CUP

**Goalkeepers:** Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Marco Amelia (Palermo)

**Defenders:** Fabio Cannavaro (Real Madrid/ESP), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Gianluca Zambrotta (AC Milan)

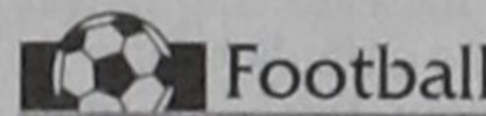
**Midfielders:** Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Daniele De Rossi (AS Roma), Simone Pepe (Udinese), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan)

**Forwards:** Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Vincenzo Iaquinta (Juventus), Fabio Quagliarella (Udinese), Luca Toni (Bayern Munich/GER)



Germany striker Mario Gomez (R) heads the ball ahead of China's Feng Xiaoting during their friendly match in Shanghai on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

# Drogba ready to make amends



AFP, London

Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba has offered to make a second apology to referee Tom Henning Ovrebo for his wild-eyed rant after Chelsea's Champions League semifinal exit to Barcelona.

Drogba has already said sorry to Ovrebo once since the spectacular meltdown at Stamford Bridge but he has been charged by UEFA, the European game's governing body, and is keen to make it clear how much he regrets the incident.

Ovrebo was criticised by Drogba and his Chelsea teammates for rejecting four pen-

alty appeals in the second leg clash.

Drogba was given a yellow card by the Norwegian official as he confronted him after the game and UEFA has since accused him of making offensive and insulting remarks towards the official.

Drogba, who is preparing for Saturday's FA Cup final against Everton, insists he will apologise again if that's what it takes to restore his battered reputation.

"The game has gone (Barcelona) and everything is finished," he said. "I have apologised and if I have to, I will do it again. But now my objective is to win the FA Cup."

"I have played some games after that one and I think the spirit of the team and the way

my friends and the club supported me was great.

"The FA Cup is a different competition but the good thing is that even though we are out of the Champions League the spirit has always been good and we are together."

"We were fighting for three trophies a few weeks ago and now we only have one. So we will do our best to win it."

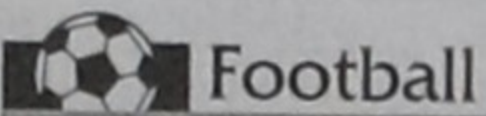
"Some seasons you win more cups than the others, and I hope this year will have the same ending as when we beat Manchester United in 2007."

"Everybody thinks it is going to be an easy game for Chelsea but we have to give a lot of respect to Everton, because of the way they finished the season. We have to concentrate."



Former Real Madrid president Florentino Perez raises his hand during his presentation in Madrid on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

# Perez promises beautiful game



AFP, Madrid

Former Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, set automatically to take charge of the club again on June 1, has promised to deliver fans the beautiful game as they try to move beyond Barcelona's year of hegemony.

Barca won the Champions League, the Spanish title and the Spanish Cup in a superb season under debutant coach Pep Guardiola and Real were left looking ordinary by comparison.

Perez said the team he would help to build would be world beaters.

"We will build a spectacular team with top notch players," Perez told a gathering of Real stakeholders and reporters Thursday.

"We have set up a strong and stable sporting project which will be able to call upon footballers who will turn each Real Madrid match into a fascinating rendezvous," vowed Perez, the architect of the multimillion-dollar era of

'galacticos', global stars such as Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and David Beckham.

The recipe worked for a while and a ninth European Cup duly arrived in 2002 but, aside from a 2007 league title for Beckham's only trophy and a Liga repeat last year Real have seen the pendulum swing spectacularly towards Barcelona this season.

And in the past seven seasons which have elapsed since Zidane's brilliant winner in the 2002 final, the club have performed woefully in the Champions League ever since.

Perez did not mention any names regarding new top signings but the usually well-informed Cadena Ser radio said Chilean Manuel Pellegrini, currently at Villarreal, would become coach in place of stop-gap Juande Ramos, who replaced the sacked Bernd Schuster mid-season.

And reports Thursday said that the club would also land AC Milan's Brazilian playmaker Kaka.

Media reports constantly speculate that Cristiano

Ronaldo, Liverpool's Spanish star Xabi Alonso and Bayern Munich's French star Franck Ribery will don the all-white strip next term.

Pulling strings as top advisors will be Argentine Jorge Valdano, long ensconced in the club's corridors of power, as well as Zidane.

Perez is set to return as chairman as the only other candidate still in the race for the job will not qualify to run, sports daily AS reported on Tuesday.

Little-known Eduardo Garcia will be unable to lodge a bank guarantee of 57.4 million euros with the club which is needed to be able to run for president by a May 31 deadline, the newspaper said.

According to the club's rules, if there is only one candidate for president, Perez will be appointed to the post on Monday, otherwise a vote will be held on June 14.

While the club normally holds elections every four years, it faces the prospect of holding a ballot a year early due to the resignation of former president Ramon Calderon in January.