

Torres burns Kiwis

AFP, Rustenburg



Liverpool's Fernando Torres says he has nothing more to prove after scoring the fastest hat-trick of his career in Spain's 5-0 rout of New Zealand in the Confederations Cup.

The star striker bagged three goals in the opening 17 minutes as Spain extended their unbeaten run to 33 games.

Arsenal's Cesc Fabregas and Valencia's David Villa also got on the scoresheet in a match that looked headed for a double digit result before New Zealand woke up.

"I've never got a hat-trick so quickly and it was nice to achieve that with the national team," said Torres, who has now scored 22 goals for Spain.

"I owe it to my colleagues. I score but I benefit from the work done behind me."

"I don't think I have anything to prove. Let me tell you I don't believe any players in this team have anything to prove. We are all playing at a top level."

The Group A victory, Spain's 13th consecutive win, extended their unbeaten run as they look to overturn Brazil's world record 35-matches without defeat between 1993 and 1996.

Yet despite them being the world's number one ranked team and packed with star names, the Royal Bafokeng Stadium here was half empty, something that will worry FIFA with the World Cup in South Africa less than a year away.

Spain opened their account after six minutes when Fabregas slotted the ball to Torres on

the edge of the box and he coolly curled his shot into the top right hand corner.

It was 2-0 eight minutes later after Villa cut the ball back for Torres who side-footed it past flailing goalkeeper Glen Moss.

The Liverpool striker collected his hat-trick on 17 minutes when Villarreal's Joan Capdevila crossed from the left and he out jumped the defence to powerfully head home.

It was his second hat-trick for his country - the other coming against San Marino in qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

New Zealand's confidence was shattered as their defence, missing injured Blackburn star Ryan Nelson, was run ragged.

With Spain keeping possession and pressing forward, Fabregas got their fourth on 24 minutes with a simple tap-in after Capdevila squared the ball into his path.

The only other time the two teams have met was at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 1997 when Spain won 13-0 and All Whites coach Ricki Herbert looked a worried man in the dugout with another double figure demolition appearing possible.

He took off striker Jeremy Brockie, replacing him with Jeremy Christie to shore up the defence, and the tactic worked with the score remaining the same at the half-time whistle.

But it didn't stay that way for long with Villa scoring the fifth just three minutes after the restart following a comical miskick from defender Andy Boyens gifted him the ball and the Valencia striker made no mistake.

It was his 29th goal to put him alongside Hierro and behind only Raul as Spain's leading scorer of all time.



Spain striker Fernando Torres (L) celebrates with teammate David Villa after scoring his second goal against New Zealand during their Confederations Cup match at the Royal Bafokeng Stadium in Rustenburg on Sunday. Torres scored the fastest hat-trick of his career in Spain's 5-0 rout of New Zealand.

La Seleccion the toast in Spain

INTERNET, undated



The Spanish media are delighted with their team's 5-0 thrashing of New Zealand on Sunday, in their impressive Confederations Cup debut. The handsome win, with an early hat-trick from Fernando Torres, is the front-page splash in every Spanish newspaper on Monday.

Barcelona paper La Vanguardia talks about "an impressive win, in front of the whole world," whilst Madrid paper ABC calls Vicente del Bosque's team "the best national team ever."

The current numbers of "La Seleccion" would certainly support this claim. Spain have now gone 33 games without defeat, since 2006, and are three games away from breaking the world unbeaten record of Brazil between 1993 and 1996.

In addition, they have won all 11 of their matches since Del Bosque took over from Euro 2008 hero Luis Aragones 11 months ago.

The taciturn, understated Del Bosque has made an excellent start in the job: practically qualifying Spain for the 2010 World Cup finals,

and now setting the Confederations Cup on fire on a flood of goals.

According to Madrid daily El Mundo, "what is positive about this result (against New Zealand) is not just the scoreline, but that the team was faithful to its traditional style of play... possession football, with precise passing and fast breaks down the flanks."

Sports daily Marca points out that Del Bosque's team does not play with conventional wingers, "so it is important that the full-backs (Sergio Ramos and Joan Capdevila) make good progress down the flanks and put over centres, as they did last night."

Most Spanish papers on Monday carry the judgement of New Zealand coach Ricki Herbert, who said that "we have played against the best team in the world."

Spain are top of FIFA's national team rankings, and are likely to stay there for some time.

The only note of caution is truck by sports daily AS, which comments that "the initial group will be too easy" and that "this tournament will not really begin until the second finals."

Spain's other two Group A matches will be against Iraq on Wednesday and hosts South Africa on Saturday. Then they will, presumably, face either Brazil or Italy in the semifinals.

Kiwi coach vows to bounce back

AFP, Rustenburg

New Zealand coach Ricki Herbert vows his team will bounce back after crashing 5-0 to Spain, a team which he rated as clear favourites for the Confederations Cup title.

The nervous All Whites suffered stage fright on Sunday against the star names of Spain and were four goals down after 24 minutes before they woke up and made a match of it.

Herbert, who played for New Zealand at the 1982 World Cup finals, said it had taught his team, which rarely gets to play such top class opposition, some hard lessons.

"The guys are obviously disappointed. There were too many individual errors but they will take on the chin," he said.

"We're not surprised by the Spanish performance, I think they are the favourites to go on and win the tournament."

New Zealand, the Oceania champions, are playing in their third Confederations Cup but have yet to take a point from seven games.

Herbert said breaking that jinx was a key motivation in their two remaining group games here against South Africa on Wednesday and Iraq next Saturday.

"We haven't got a point and there's certainly a burning desire to get that," he said.

"But the competition itself is enough motivation for us. It's a new day today and we'll bounce back."

"We're learning, but we do have a few things to turn around, particularly against the hosts South Africa who after their 0-0 draw with Iraq will also be looking to turn it around a bit."

High stakes showdown

AFP, Sydney



North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran are bidding for automatic berths at next year's World Cup in South Africa in an intriguing final round showdown in Asian qualifying on Wednesday.

The North Koreans will book their ticket to the World Cup for the first time in 44 years if they win their clash against the Saudis in Riyadh.

But even a draw could prove enough, depending on Iran's result in Seoul against the already qualified South Koreans.

North Korea are level on 11 points with Saudi Arabia in Group B but have a superior goal difference of plus-two.

Iran are a further point adrift in fourth spot.

Iran must beat South Korea to have any chance of winning an automatic World Cup spot, although a draw and a Saudi defeat could clinch their place in the play-off against the third-placed team from Group A.

North Korea last reached the World Cup finals in England in 1966, where they advanced to the quarterfinals. If they qualify it will be the first time that both Koreans will be at football's showpiece.

The North Koreans have never won in Saudi Arabia, while the Saudis are bidding

for their fifth consecutive World Cup finals appearance.

"We knew we had to get four points from our last two games," Saudi's Portuguese coach Jose Peseiro said. "If we win against DPR Korea (North Korea) in Riyadh, we will get a ticket to South Africa. DPR Korea may just have to draw but only a win will do for us."

Iran's coach Afshin Qotbi is confident his team will win in South Korea.

"I believe Iran will qualify for the 2010 World Cup as the Iranian players have great self-confidence to beat the South Korean squad on its own turf," he said, even though Iran have yet to beat South Korea in their past four World Cup qualifiers.

"Perhaps I know the South Korean squad better than its own coach because I was with them for two World Cups," said Qotbi, who had a long stint with the South Korean national side.

Australia and Japan, who have already claimed the top two places in Group A, meet in their final match in Melbourne, with the Aussies

favourites to finish top.

Australia hold a two-point lead over Japan and need only a draw to top the group while the under strength Japanese must win.

Captain Yuji Nakazawa is running a high temperature and is a doubt for Japan, who are already without Celtic star Shunsuke Nakamura and four other regulars.

Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer said his teammates were looking to beat Japan and go through the final phase of qualifying without conceding a goal.

"We've had an amazing run of seven games without conceding a goal, and if we can continue that to eight, we've got a good chance of beating Japan," Schwarzer said.

Japan have yet to beat Australia in three World Cup qualifiers going back four decades but overall the teams have won five times each with six draws.

"I hear Australia will field their best side and it will be a tough battle. But we will conquer them," Japan coach Takeshi Okada said.

Bahrain need only a point from their home game against Uzbekistan in Manama to finish third in Group A and go into a play-off with the third-placed team from Group B.

Whoever wins that play-off match will then take on Oceania champions New Zealand over two legs, with the victor securing a place in South Africa.

Barca, Real fight for Villa

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona on Sunday went head-to-head with bitter rivals Real Madrid in the battle to sign Spanish international striker David Villa from Valencia.

"Negotiations to sign David Villa have been opened. There are a lot of players who want to come here. That's great and it's something that people should know," Rafael Yuste, vice-president of Barcelona, told local radio.

The Mundo Deportivo newspaper on Sunday reported that the champions had tabled a 35-million-euro bid for Villa.

Real Madrid, who have already bought superstars Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo this month, had been chasing Villa but were reported to have been put off by a 42-million-euro asking price.

Jose eager on Portuguese duo

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho is eager to sign Portuguese duo Ricardo Carvalho and Deco from Chelsea, according to the Italian club's president.

"The coach has asked for Deco and Carvalho and we have started talks," Massimo Moratti told La Gazzetta dello Sport newspaper.

"We want to sign the two of them and I'm delighted to have seen that the two players want to come here."

"We still haven't got the nod from Chelsea but I think we'll manage to find that quickly."

Central defender Carvalho and Brazilian-born midfielder Deco, both 31, have played under Mourinho at Porto, winning the 2004 Champions League. Carvalho also played for the Portuguese coach when he was in charge at Chelsea.

Moratti added that Inter had as yet received no offers for star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, a possible off-season signing target for Barcelona.

Tired Kewell to sit out Japan clash

AFP, Sydney

Australian attacker Harry Kewell will sit out Wednesday's World Cup qualifier against Japan because of fatigue, coach Pim Verbeek said Monday.

Verbeek said Kewell had a heavy workload in the recent games against Qatar and Bahrain as the Socceroos secured their passage to next year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

Defender Chris Coyne has

Tevez's no to Man Utd

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Carlos Tevez has informed Sir Alex Ferguson that he has no plans to return to Manchester United despite the club's renewed efforts to persuade him to reject Manchester City's overtures.

Ferguson has interrupted his holiday in the south of France several times over the past two weeks to ring Tevez and appeal to him to think carefully about the consequences of leaving a club of United's standing, but the Argentinian has now told the manager that he planned to sever his ties with the Premier League champions.

That is unlikely to prevent Ferguson trying to persuade him from changing his mind before the striker officially becomes a free agent on 30 June, but United's management are realistic about the situation and increasingly fear that Tevez will soon confirm he is following Cristiano Ronaldo out of the club.

City have offered Tevez a 75% pay rise, meaning a £140,000-a-week salary, and the chance to re-establish himself as a first-choice player, whereas, telling in all the various discussions with Ferguson there has been no indication from the manager Tevez can expect to play in more of United's key games this season.

Tevez's main grievance is the frequency with which he was left out of United's bigger matches last season and he has come to feel disenchanted because of the way the club's chief executive, David Gill, has handled his proposed signing, repeatedly postponing talks before publicly stating that he thought Tevez was over-priced. That has left the way clear for City to capitalise and, unless Ferguson can convince Tevez otherwise, the Abu Dhabi-owned club confidently expect to pull off one of their biggest transfer coups of modern times despite Liverpool also maintaining their own interest in Tevez.

City have the advantage because they can

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South African Bernard Parker (R) gets in the way his teammate Kagiso Dikgacoi's (C) goalbound header during their Confederations Cup match against Iraq at Ellis Park Stadium in Johannesburg on Sunday.

AFP, Johannesburg



The 2009 Confederations Cup opened with a goalless stalemate between hosts South Africa and Asian champions Iraq at Ellis Park here on Sunday.

South Africa coach Joel Santana said his Bafana Bafana side had been undone by a combination of missed chances and Iraq's defensive strategy.

"We had 17 shots on goal, compared to three from Iraq," the Brazilian remarked.

"After a nervy start we controlled all aspects of the game and could have scored three or four goals. I was surprised at the way they held back in defence."

"Do you know how many minutes we played football in the first half? 32! It wasn't us stopping the match all the time. They tried to paralyse the game."

"This wasn't the result we wanted but I don't think we played badly."

Iraq's experienced coach Bora Milutinovic defended his tactics.

"To some the game may have been boring. For me it was one of the highlights of my career, and now we have a point and a chance to qualify for the semifinals."

Santana gave a starting place to the nation's favourite footballer, Teko Modise, who sat out the warm-up win over Poland, with Everton midfielder Steven Pienaar, who had limped off injured in that match, on the bench.

Milutinovic, opting for a five-man backline,

had the luxury of fielding a full-strength side captained by striker Younis Mahmoud with the artful Nashat Akram in midfield.

In a cagey first half, one of the rare bright moments came early on when Russia-based midfielder MacBeth Sibaya forced Iraq goalkeeper Mohammed Kassid into an athletic dive to keep out his angled 20-metre attempt from the right.

That effort came minutes after Kassid had safely scooped up Bernard Parker's shot from outside the box.

Akram, who will be the first Iraqi to play in western Europe after signing for Steve McClaren's Dutch side FC Twente, had a frustrating time, sending one free-kick over Itumeleng Khune's bar and another into the South African wall.

South Africa striker Theminkosi Fantele picked up a yellow card from Uruguayan referee Jorge Larrión after an over-zealous tackle on Iraqi midfielder Karrar Jasim in the opening minutes.

With a quiet or perhaps not-so-quiet word from Santana ringing in their ears, South Africa emerged for the second half with much more urgency, encouraging the home crowd of 48,837 or so which included South Africa President Jacob Zuma.

Dominating play, the hosts had a clear chance in the 69th minute only for Fantele's miscued shot to edge wide of Kassid's right-hand post, the Maccabi Haifa striker banging his head with his fist in frustration.

After Akram received the second booking of the encounter Fantele was at the centre of the

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