

Real Madrid confident on Villa

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez on Thursday declared that the transfer of Valencia's Spanish international striker David Villa to the nine-time European champions was "a matter of time".

Real are hoping to secure Villa's capture for a fee in the region of 40 million euros, having already this month paid 65million to take Brazil playmaker Kaka from AC Milan and a world record 93million to prise Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United.

Speaking to Valencia-based local television station Canal 9, Perez expressed optimism over the transfer of Villa, who was the top scorer at last year's European Championship and who has expressed a desire to move to Madrid.

The transfer would happen "in a context of friendship and co-operation" between Real and Valencia, according to Perez, who stated that the completion of the deal was "a matter of time".

Valencia for their part recently announced that they had received "no satisfactory offers" for their star player, reportedly sparking interest from a host of European heavyweights including Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester United.

According to Spanish media, Valencia are holding out for 50million euros for the 27-year-old Villa, Real having previously offered closer to 40million.

Perez also said that Real would not be able to propose a fee similar in size to those which are set to bring Kaka and Ronaldo, the last two winners of the European Footballer of the Year award, to the Bernabeu.

Villa is currently in South Africa for the Confederations Cup with Spain but has previously declared that the only team he wishes to join is Real.

Zidan pays tribute to Zidane

AFP, Johannesburg

While not in the same class as French great Zinedine Zidane, Egypt's star striker Mohamed Zidan has revealed his admiration for his namesake.

By scoring twice against Brazil in Egypt's opening Confederations Cup match, Zidan matched the exploits of Zizou, who famously managed a brace against the South Americans at the 1998 World Cup.

"Zinedine Zidane was the best player in the whole world and I always try to learn a lot from him," said Zidan, who picked up a knock in Egypt's shock victory over Italy on Thursday but is expected to be fit for their last group game.

"I usually watch a lot of the matches that Zidane played and look to learn from his skills and moves."

Zidan honed his scoring touch in Europe, where he has spent much of his career, with time at Danish side Midtjylland preceding spells with German outfits Werder Bremen, Mainz, Hamburg and now Borussia Dortmund.

"It's really nice to have a similar name like him and I hope that I can be as good as he was one day," added Zidan, who recently announced his engagement to Egyptian actress Mai Ezzidine.

When asked by fifa.com about his future at club level, Zidan said he was happy at Dortmund.

"I had a good season because I played several times and scored seven goals. I have three years left on my contract and I hope that I can make a name for myself at club level too," he said.

Egypt, the African Nations Cup holders, can qualify for the Confederations Cup semi-finals if they beat the United States on Sunday and Italy lose to Brazil.

Good night's rest do the trick: Dunga

AFP, Pretoria



Spain may be the best team in the world but with the World Cup less than a year away Brazil, with Thursday's majestic 3-0 win over the United States, reminded the world that they can play a bit too.

And Robinho, author of one of the goals, delivered an ominous warning to Brazil's rivals at the Confederations Cup, the Manchester City striker declaring: "We played well but we want to play even better in the games ahead."

Coach Dunga must have felt like the cat who'd got the cream as he purred over a performance that oozed class in every department, from man of the match Maicon's darts up the right, to Kaka's midfield mastery and finishing that was smoother than Dulux.

Brazil, by their high standards, had something to prove after putting in a less than convincing second half performance against Egypt, who in topping world champions Italy 1-0 are now favourites to take second place in Group B behind the defending champions.

"We didn't play well in the second half in our last match," conceded Kaka, "but today we showed our real form."

Dunga put his side's refund vigour down to nothing more than a good night's kip.

"What changed (between Egypt and the US) was a lack of tiredness."

"Against Egypt we were exhausted having had no rest and having just arrived in South Africa. Today they had time to rest and their bodies had adapted to the different time zone."

"I used some players like Maicon and Miranda who hadn't been playing for some time that made life easier for everyone else. The new players in the side did brilliantly...I

have no complaints."

Four of Brazil's seven goals at the Confed Cup have come from set pieces, with Dunga acknowledging: "Yes that's something we go over, we try and place the players in the best positions."

"We moved the ball around quickly as well which of course is a characteristic of South American football."

Maicon proved the backbone of Brazil's attacks up the right flank, but Dunga denied the left side was any weaker.

"The left side is also strong, but Robinho is more of an individual type of player so sometimes it's better for the left side to protect rather than move forward like the right."

Aside from Maicon other players to shine in the Pretoria winter sunshine were Ramires, Real Madrid's million dollar baby Kaka, and Felipe Melo who headed in Maicon's freekick for the opener.

Robinho said it had been important for Brazil to play well against the US after starting the defence of their Confed Cup crown "with a bit of a bump".

Italy's loss to the Pharaohs has taken some of the edge off Saturday's encounter between two countries who between them boast nine World Cups.

Nevertheless it will still be a match to savour with Dunga suggesting: "They are two great teams. When Brazil face Italy you never know what's going to happen."

"It's the kind of game where the side that scores first has a big advantage."

Asked about any tinkering he might consider for Saturday's final group game the Brazil boss replied: "We'll see after medical check-ups which players have recovered and change the team accordingly. If we have to make changes we will."

Monaco sign Traore

AFP, Monaco

Malian international defender Djimi Traore signed for French first division side Monaco on Thursday from English Premier League outfit Portsmouth, the French club announced.

The 29-year-old, who was loaned to recently promoted Premier League side Birmingham last season, has signed a two-year contract with the 2004 Champions League finalists.

Traore began his career with French team Laval before signing for Liverpool at the age of 18.

The long-limbed left-back won several trophies while on Merseyside, including the 2005 Champions League following a memorable penalty shootout victory over AC Milan in Istanbul.

Traore, who also won the FA Cup in 2001 and 2006 as well as the 2001 and 2003 League Cup and the 2001 UEFA Cup, has played for Charlton and French side Rennes since leaving Liverpool.

Mokoena urges S Africa

AFP, Bloemfontein



South Africa captain Aaron Mokoena has urged the country to get behind the national team when they play Spain on Saturday for a place in the Confederations Cup semi-finals.

Bafana Bafana need a point against the rampant European champions to be sure of a berth in the last four and Mokoena said the support they get at the 40,000-capacity Free State Stadium in Bloemfontein will be vital.

"It will be very difficult but after our win (against New Zealand) we now have regained our confidence," he told local media.

"All we need is the support from South Africa."

So far the hosts have drawn 0-0 with Iraq and beaten the All Whites 2-0. Even if they lose they can still go through if Iraq fail to beat New Zealand on the same day.

Spain have already qualified and even if, as expected, Vicente del Bosque fields a weakened team on Saturday South Africa still have their work cut out against a side that has won its last 14 games.

"I think they'll play well regardless of who they field, it really doesn't matter because they are so good," said Mokoena.

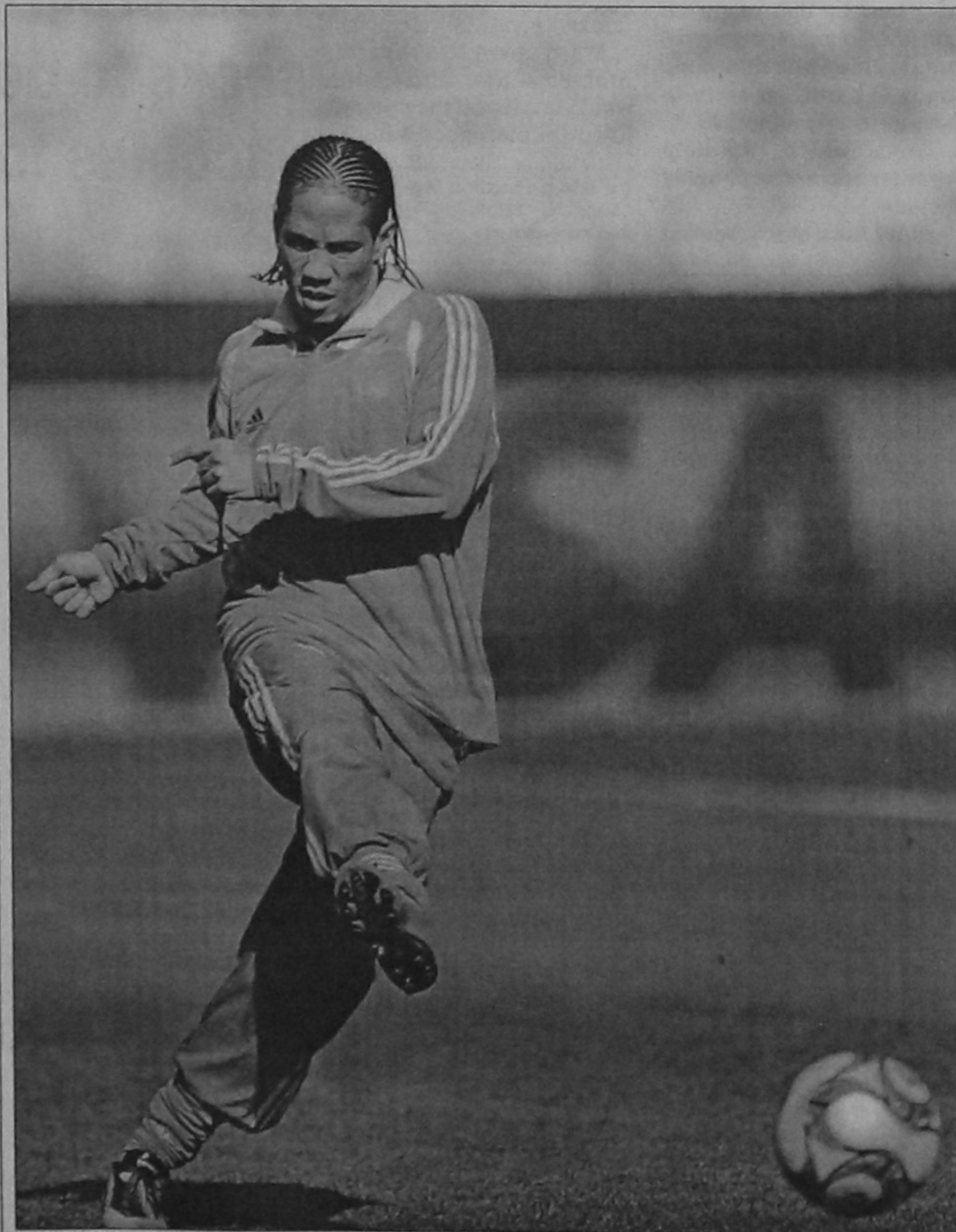
"They have qualified but they will still want to do well."

Regardless of what happens, the captain believes high profile matches against quality opposition like Spain will stand them in good stead for the World Cup next year.

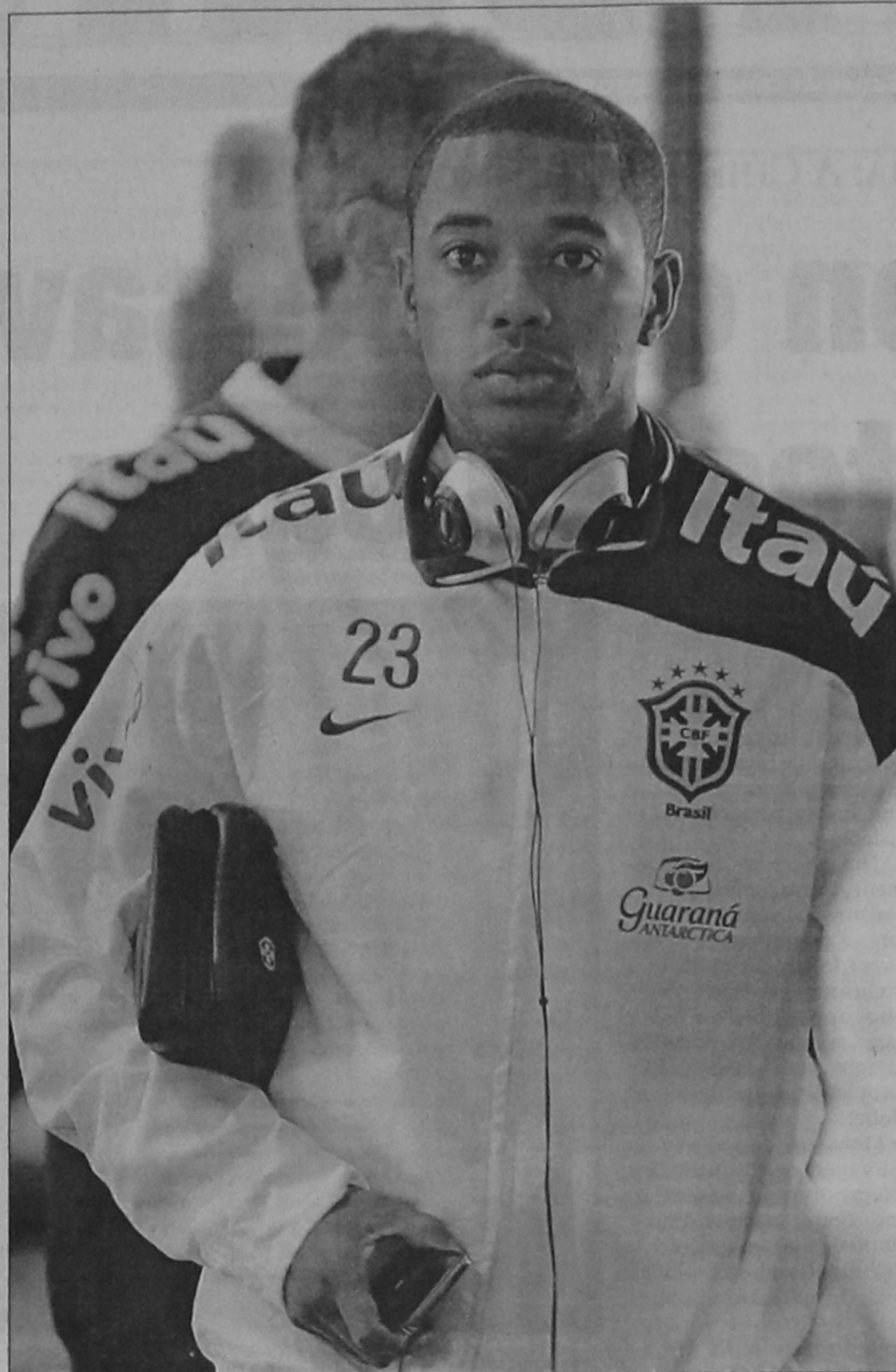
"These are the sort of games that should test our character," he said.

"It is good that we need something out of the game so we should see how we get that point."

South Africa qualify for the World Cup automatically as hosts.



South African midfielder Steven Pienaar kicks the ball during a training session on the eve of their match against Spain at the Free State stadium in Bloemfontein on Friday.



Brazil star Robinho arrives at a gym in Centurion on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cahill's plea to Viduka

AFP, Sydney



Australia's two-goal hero Tim Cahill has urged undecided striker Mark Viduka to return to the international fold to spearhead the Socceroos' World Cup bid in South Africa next year.

Viduka, 33, missed all 14 qualifiers over the past 16 months as Australia bagged a place in the 2010 finals with two games to spare.

The Newcastle United striker last played for his country in the quarter-final loss on penalties to Japan at the 2007 Asian Cup in Hanoi.

Injury, coupled with a decision to focus exclusively on Newcastle's failed attempt to stay in the Premier League, kept him away from international duty.

Cahill, whose two goals in the team's 2-1 victory over Japan on Wednesday ensured Australia finished top of their Asian World Cup qualifying group, has issued a plea for Viduka to lead Australia's attack in South Africa.

"He's a player of stature and brings to the team his experience, knowledge and goals," Cahill was quoted as saying in Friday's press.

"People question that he doesn't get his goals, but he does all the ugly work, holds the ball up, makes us look good, makes me look good."

"We miss that and it's crazy because we'll take any experience."

Torres happy at Liverpool

AFP, London

Liverpool striker Fernando Torres has told Manchester United and Barcelona to forget about trying to lure him from Anfield.

Torres recently signed a new contract with the Premier League club but reports this week suggested United may use some of the cash from their imminent world record sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to make a 50 million pounds bid for the Spain star.

Barcelona have also been linked with Torres but the former Atletico Madrid forward insist he is happy in England.

"I'm very happy with my contract at Liverpool and wouldn't leave just to earn a little more somewhere else where I wouldn't be that happy," he told the Daily Mail.

"To want any more would be greedy and that is not me. As long as Liverpool want me, I will stay."

"Madrid obviously are spending lots of money and I'm sure that United boss Sir Alex Ferguson will be looking for a big name to replace Ronaldo, but I'm very excited about what the boss is doing here at Liverpool."

"A lot of players have committed themselves to Liverpool with new contracts and players don't do that unless they think they can have their ambitions met."

Vuvuzela in spotlight

AFP, Pretoria



The vuvuzela is an integral part of a fan's armoury in Africa, the noisy plastic trumpet as essential an item as getting decked out in the national colours or painting one's face.

But the din created by the instruments which can reach a deafening crescendo especially when South Africa have the ball has prompted complaints from some players and television stations.

The latter say the vuvuzela makes commentary tricky while the former, well at least one based in Europe, Xabi Alonso, complain it makes communication amongst players difficult.

Maicon, the Brazilian defender who was named man of the match after his contribution including the third goal in Brazil's 3-0 win over the United States, said he wasn't worried by them.

"I don't listen to noise from fans, it doesn't concern me," he told the post-match press conference at Pretoria's Loftus Versfeld stadium.

"It might have an impact on other people but certainly I have no complaints."

His Brazil boss Dunga remarked: "It's not my job to decide - we can't rule on that in one day, we'd have to look at all the pros and cons, whether it's better or worse not to have trumpets - I'm sure they'll (FIFA) make the right decision."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter raised the matter ahead of Thursday's Group B game here, saying: "It's a local sound and I don't know how it is possible to stop it."

"I always said that when we go to South Africa, it is Africa. It's not western Europe."

"It's noisy, it's energy, rhythm, music, dance, drums. This is Africa. We have to adapt a little."

Alonso knows what he would do with them if he was making the decision.

"I think they should be banned," said the Spain midfielder.

"We're used to when people shout but not to this trumpet noise which doesn't allow you to concentrate and is unbearable."

But one person at the Confed Cup is a fan - 16-year-old South African Zoe Goetaan who bought a red one to support Spain.

"I like to make noise and to make a good atmosphere," she said.

FIFA bans TV monitors

AFP, Pretoria

Television monitors will no longer be allowed alongside the pitch at the Confederations Cup following Brazil's controversial winning penalty against Egypt.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter announced the ban here on Thursday ahead of Brazil's 3-0 victory over the United States.

"There is no more video in front of the fourth official on the side of the field so no one can say there is any interference in any decisions on the basis of video," he told a press conference.

FIFA acted after Egypt complained about a penalty decision by English referee Howard Webb that cost them the match in the 4-3 loss to Brazil on Sunday.

The teams were locked at 3-3 in their Confederations Cup opener when a spot kick was given in the dying minutes for a deliberate handball inside the penalty area by Ahmed al-Muhamadi, who blocked Lucio's shot.

Deputy coach Shawky Gharib said the team was bemused after Webb initially gave a corner only for the decision to change, seemingly after the fourth official, Australian Matthew Breeze, watched a video replay.

However, FIFA had on Tuesday dismissed the complaint.

"FIFA analysed the decision by going through all the evidence at its disposal, including the referee's match report, as well as the additional statement that Howard Webb provided at FIFA's request," it said in a statement.

FIFA said their analysis showed the decision "was achieved through teamwork between the match referee and his assistant referee number one, Mike Mullarkey, who confirmed the offence to the referee from his clear viewing angle".

Milan want Dzeko

AFP, Rome

Bringing Bosnian striker Edin Dzeko from Wolfsburg to Italy is a top priority, AC Milan said on Friday.

"We are still hopeful of getting him," said AC Milan coach Adriano Galliani. Although it is thought the 23-year-old wants to go to Milan, the German club have made it clear they want to keep him.

"The man himself should have a say about his future," Galliani said. "It is difficult to keep a player who is unhappy, that is a rule which applies to everybody and is the law of the market," he added.

AC Milan, who came third in the Italian first division last season to qualify for the Champions League, are desperate for a new striker following the multi-million euro transfer of Brazilian ace Kaka to Real Madrid.

Blues match Reds' bid for Johnson

AFP, Portsmouth

Portsmouth executive chairman Peter Storrie revealed on Friday that Chelsea have matched Liverpool's 17.5 million pounds bid for England defender Glen Johnson.

Johnson appeared to be on his way to Anfield after Liverpool's offer was accepted earlier this week, but Storrie confirmed the Fratton Park club have now agreed terms with Chelsea as well.

The 24-year-old has already had one spell at Chelsea before leaving due to lack of first team opportunities and must now decide if he wants to return to Stamford Bridge.

"The matter will come to a conclusion at the beginning of next week. I do not have a preference over the move, it is up to Glen," Storrie said.

"The deals are almost identical so it really is down to him and what club he prefers, which one is going to pay him more money."

"Glen wants to play regularly in the Champions League, he has got himself back in the England side so I understand that. Sometimes you have to be fair to players."

Storrie admits that Johnson needs to be playing Champions League football next season in order to cement his place in the England team ahead of next year's World Cup in South Africa.

"It's a big year for him with the World Cup coming up," Storrie said. "Playing Champions League football will make him an even better player than he is today."