

S Africa gets nod

AFP, Pretoria



South Africa's 2010 readiness got a thumbs up on Monday after a successful Confederations Cup, with organisers confident that hitches will be ironed out ahead of the continent's first World Cup.

Security passed with no major incident, a critical concern with crime levels in South Africa among the world's worst, while the football curtain raiser was also praised for unifying South Africans 15 years after democracy.

"The rehearsal, as this tournament has become known, has been very satisfactory. We are happy with the level of commitment shown by the organising committee and the government," FIFA boss Sepp Blatter told journalists.

The world football body gave organisers a 7.5 out of ten for the Confeds Cup, saying it hoped the score will rise to 10 by next year for the world's football extravaganza.

Blatter identified transport - hit by reports of bottlenecks at public park-and-ride facilities - and accommodation as areas that needed improvement before 450,000 fans descend on the country.

"One item in question beforehand was security but the organising committee headed by Danny Jordaan have done a very good job - the hospitality and reception by the (local) population has been really remarkable," said Blatter.

"So I am satisfied with the way the competition went but there are still challenges which will have to be dealt with in terms of transport and accommodation."

FIFA secretary general Jerome Valke said problems will be discussed at a debriefing on Tuesday.

"There aren't any problems that won't be resolved before the draw in December" he added.

Valke expressed confidence in the country's ability to provide security for the World Cup.

saying "South Africa has exceeded expectations during the Confederations tournament".

Despite a widely-reported theft at the hotel of the Egyptian team, police logged 39 criminal cases that consisted mainly incidents of petty theft reported around the stadium vicinity and at two hotels hosting delegations.

During the World Cup, the number of police will be increased to 30,000, according to the organising committee.

Deputy police chief, Andre Pruis said the event's joint security team was "satisfied that years of planning and preparations resulted in a tournament during which no major security breach occurred".

"We will build on lessons learned and expand on best practices to assist FIFA and the LOC in presenting the best World Cup ever in 2010," said Pruis.

The World Cup will be played for the first time on African soil with benefits expected to spill over into neighbouring countries.

The event is expected to rack up billions for South Africa, with researchers on Saturday saying that the global crunch was unlikely to affect a 55.7 billion rand (7.1 billion dollars) boost for Africa's largest economy.

Consulting firm Grant Thornton estimates that 483,257 foreign tourists - including fans, teams, and media - will spend 8.5 billion rand during the month-long tournament to be played in nine host cities.

The Confederations Cup was also lauded for filling stands with fans of different races, with football traditionally supported by black South Africans.

"The tournament drew the most diverse spectators this country has ever seen, that is a huge achievement for us as a nation," said local organising committee chief Danny Jordaan.

Amid gushing praise, South Africa's press cautioned that the country had a year to iron out challenges.

"But even the most cynical among the foreign visitors have slowly come to accept that SA will host a world-class Soccer World Cup next year after successfully staging the Confederations Cup."



Bayer Leverkusen's new coach Jupp Heynckes (C) conducts a training session at the Bay Arena on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kaka passes Real medical

INTERNET, undated

Kaka successfully passed his medical with Real Madrid this morning, the Primera Division giants have confirmed.

The 27-year-old had already completed a first set of medical tests with Madrid whilst on international duty in Brazil prior to the official announcement of his transfer from AC Milan on June 8.

Kaka, who Madrid have paid Milan a fee reportedly in the region of £56million for, will be presented by his new club at the Bernabeu this evening at a ceremony starting at 2030 local time.

The former Sao Paulo player arrived in Madrid Tuesday morning having just helped Brazil win the Confederations Cup in South Africa - being named player of the tournament in the process.

Kaka underwent various tests at the Sanitas La Moraleja Hospital in the Spanish capital, which he passed with flying colours according to the club's medical team.

Carlos Diez, Real Madrid's medical chief, said: "The tests taken show that he is a player in perfect condition to play football at the highest level as has been seen at the Confederations Cup."

"These tests have been done to complement the ones done in Brazil. We have incorporated new protocols, such as a biomechanic study, which allows us to study the player and be able to prevent future injuries and optimise his performances."

Kaka, who has agreed a six-year contract, was the first signing confirmed by Madrid after Florentino Perez returned to the club presidency at the start of this month.

Coupet signs for PSG

AFP, Paris

Former France international goalkeeper Gregory Coupet signed for French giants Paris Saint Germain on a two year contract from Spanish side Atletico Madrid.

"Its signed and sealed, for two years," confirmed the 36-year-old former Lyon star on leaving PSG's headquarters.

Coupet, who spent 12 seasons at Lyon and was capped 34 times, will replace Mickael Landreau, who later on Monday joined PSG's championship rivals Lille on a three year contract.

Landreau, a 30-year-old former French international - capped 11 times - will be unveiled on Tuesday.

Coupet, who retired from international football following France's first round exit at Euro 2008, failed to make the first choice spot at Atletico and played just six times in the Spanish league and twice in the Champions League as he played second fiddle to Argentinian Leo Franco.

Coupet, who launched a tirade against France coach Raymond Domenech last September accusing him of being a dictator, should also be joined at PSG by Sochaux' Turkish forward Mevlut Erding.

Van Gaal begins tenure

AFP, Berlin



Dutch coach Louis van Gaal begins his tenure in charge of German giants Bayern Munich on Wednesday with demands for more silverware and Champions League glory never far from his ears.

The last time Bundesliga big-boys Bayern lifted Europe's top domestic honour was in 2001, but the Germans have consistently failed to reach the last four of the tournament since.

Ex-Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann was sacked by Bayern in April after just ten months in charge following a string of poor results, so van Gaal arrives from Dutch champions AZ Alkmaar knowing he does not have the luxury of time.

Bayern look to have temporarily fought off interest from Manchester United, Barcelona, Real Madrid and Chelsea for French playmaker Franck Ribery, but only a good Champions League campaign this season will keep the wolves away.

Ribery will report with the

rest of the squad for training on Wednesday, but has made no secret he wants European success and van Gaal plans to have him as the chief playmaker in his side when the Bundesliga starts on August 7.

"We want to build around Ribery who Louis van Gaal absolutely wants under his command," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge with Munich bidding for their 22nd Bundesliga crown after Wolfsburg won last season's title.

Van Gaal could not have wished for an easier opening to the season with Bayern set to face SpVgg Neckarelz, the lowest ranked side in the competition, in the first round of the German Cup which takes place on the first weekend in August.

The sixth division side will be the first serious opponents for van Gaal and give him the luxury of looking at combinations before the league begins.

But while Klinsmann tried - and failed - to bring innovative ideas and more dynamic football to Munich, van Gaal is expected to bring fierce discipline and he has to make a few decisions.

The goalkeeper issue has to be resolved after Michael Rensing, tipped to be Oliver

Kahn's replacement after the ex-Germany captain retired, lost his place to veteran Hans-Joerg Butt.

And van Gaal has plenty of selection in attack with last season's first-choice pairing Miroslav Klose and Luca Toni facing tough competition from new signings Mario Gomez, Ivica Olic and promising youngster Thomas Mueller.

Toni struggled for form last season and has said he must play regular football this season if he is to win a place for Italy at next year's World Cup.

With Germany veteran Klose - the top-scorer at the last World Cup - likely to start alongside rising star Gomez, Toni will have to work hard to guarantee himself first-team football next season.

"I am lucky, I earn a lot and I am not a slave to my salary," Toni told Italian television earlier this week hinting he might be prepared to leave for a club where he would be paid a smaller salary.

Whoever van Gaal picks in his team, the Dutchman will be expected to do better than last season when Bayern finished second in the Bundesliga and were dumped out of the Champions League by eventual champions Barcelona.

Eto'o demands transfer bonus

AFP, Madrid

Samuel Eto'o is demanding a "transfer bonus" of 15 million euros from Barcelona to sign for Manchester City, which could scupper any deal for the Cameroon striker, Spanish media said on Monday.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said at the weekend that Eto'o had received a "stratospheric" offer from a foreign club, later identified as Manchester City, who are ready to pay 30 million euros to Barca plus 10 million a year in salary.

But Catalan sporting dailies Sport and Mundo Deportivo said Eto'o, whose contract with Barca ends in 2010, is demanding a "transfer bonus" of 15 million euros, something the Spanish club will not accept.

The player's agent, Josep Maria Mesalles, called a news conference for Tuesday to clarify the situation surrounding Eto'o, who could now stay on at the Spanish and European champions, said Mundo Deportivo.

Laporta has publicly said he wants the 28-year-old, the club's top scorer last season, to remain.

But the Cameroonian has not been offered an extension to his contract, and Spanish media said the Catalan club would prefer to sell him in order to buy other players, such as Valencia striker David Villa.

Grafite staying till 2012

INTERNET, undated

Brazilian striker Grafite has extended his contract with German champions VfL Wolfsburg by one year until the end of the 2012 season, the Bundesliga club confirmed Tuesday. "Grafite is a class striker and is enormously important for the team," said coach Armin Veh.

Grafite was the Bundesliga's top scorer last season with 28 goals as Wolfsburg raced to a surprise first league title under coach Felix Magath, who has since moved on to Schalke 04.

"I am happy about my contract extension and am looking forward to the upcoming season and the Champions League," said the 30-year-old striker.

"The team has high hopes and I want to play my part in ensuring further success."

Grafite is expected to earn in the region of 2.5 million euros (3.5 million dollars) a year under the new deal.

It remains unclear whether Grafite's striking partner Edin Dzeko, who netted 26 goals last term and was a reputed target of AC Milan, will also be offered an improved deal before the Bundesliga resumes on August 7.

The 23-year-old Bosnian's current contract with Wolfsburg runs out at the end of 2011.

Chelsea appeal bans

AFP, London



Chelsea announced on Monday they'd appealed against the bans handed out to striker Didier Drogba and defender Jose Bosingwa by European football's governing body UEFA earlier this month.

Drogba was given a four-match ban and Bosingwa a three-match ban, with other games suspended for their comments following Chelsea's 1-1 second leg semi-final draw with eventual champions Barcelona at Stamford Bridge in May which saw the London club go out of the Champions League.

The Blues were also fined 85,000 pounds (100,000 euros) for the improper conduct of their players and the throwing of missiles by their fans.

"Chelsea Football Club can confirm it has today (Monday) lodged an appeal against the UEFA bans given to Didier Drogba and Jose Bosingwa, and the fine imposed against the club," said a Blues statement.

"We believe these punishments are unnecessarily harsh given the circumstances."

"We would reiterate that the players and the club are acutely aware of our responsibilities towards setting a good example as role models and upholding the values of the game."

"That is why honest and sincere apologies were made

swiftly after these regrettable incidents occurred."

Chelsea crashed out of Europe's premier club competition after Andres Iniesta's injury-time equaliser for Barcelona took the Catalans through to the final on the away goals rule.

The Blues had a number of penalty appeals turned down during the match by Norwegian referee Tom Henning Ovrebo and Ivory Coast international Drogba, who had been substituted, came back onto the pitch to swear at the official after the final whistle in front of watching TV cameras.

Portuguese defender Bosingwa, meanwhile, likened Ovrebo to a "thief" in a post-match interview before withdrawing his comments.

'Benzema can leave'

Football

SOCCERNET

Lyon coach Claude Puel has admitted the club would let Karim Benzema join another club if the striker wished to do so.

The 21-year-old is one of the world's hottest properties at the moment, with Manchester United, Inter Milan and Real Madrid among the clubs reportedly considering a 40m euro (£34m) bid.

Both Lyon and Benzema have always claimed he will remain at the Stade Gerland at least until next summer's

World Cup, but Puel knows that could swiftly change.

"We know his importance at Olympique Lyonnais and his efficiency in our squad," Puel told the club website. "He's an exceptional player, but we also know the financial figures of the club."

"We will evaluate the situation with him when he comes back - July 2 - what he wants to do, we'll listen to him. For several months he has said that he wishes to stay with us for the year before the World Cup."

"If he has any dreams of leaving we will discuss them with him if there are any concrete offers, which is not the case at the moment."

"So there is no 'Benzema

problem' because the player is still with us. Ahead of a transfer which could be out of the ordinary, there is everything to consider."

Puel insists, however, that Benzema will only leave if the club manage to line up a suitable replacement.

"We will study the situation if it happens to present itself," he continued. "This doesn't mean that he will definitely leave Lyon."

"For any coach it would be a great loss to lose Karim. It would mean that we have to replace him - therefore it would be out of the question to lose Karim if one or two players of his calibre were not coming in."



PHOTO: AFP

Olympique Lyon player Honorato Ederson tries a trick during the start of their training session at the Gerland Stadium on Monday.

Football

SOCCERNET

Inter Milan have not given in to defender Maicon's demands for a pay increase, claiming that they have not "undervalued" their star.

The Brazilian right-back, who has been linked with Manchester City, Real Madrid and Chelsea this summer, claims he has been undervalued by Inter but club president Massimo Moratti feels otherwise.

"We consider Maicon for the value that he has," Moratti said. "We have not undervalued him."

Maicon is back home in South America after helping Brazil win the Confederations Cup. He shone for Jose Mourinho's Inter as the Nerazzurri clinched a fourth straight Serie A title this year and recovered from a thigh injury to join his national team in South Africa.

"I was convinced he would have won the award for best player of the Confederations Cup, considering he was coming from an injury," said Moratti. "But I'm glad Kaka won it because he's a good lad."

Moratti is not surprised by the strong interest shown by top European clubs in the 27-

year-old Maicon.

"It wasn't difficult to predict that Maicon would become the strongest right-back in the world," he said. "We have seen this for the last three years and his merit has contributed to our success. His demands? These are issues for the club."

"Am I worried about Inter? Why would I? We are strong and all of our players have remained in the team."

"In fact, we have reinforced ourselves with the likes of Diego Milito and Thiago Motta."

Maicon joined Inter in the summer of 2006 from Monaco and is under contract at the San Siro for a further four seasons.

Real plan razzmatazz

INTERNET, undated



Brazilian superstar Kaka is set to launch Tuesday the new commercial strategy of Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, who is preparing a night-time party to "unveil" the first gem of his latest project.

Perez likes to do everything on a large scale, and for the first signing of his new stint in the Real Madrid presidency he is preparing an unprecedented event: a prime-time show, with over 20,000 fans saluting Kaka at the Santiago

Bernabeu, according to club estimates.

Until now, tradition dictated the same procedure for new signings. The club would call a press conference before lunch, the president would make a speech at his box in the stadium, the player would wear his new shirt before a few fans, and balls would be given away to those in attendance.

Kaka is now set to change that protocol.

The Brazilian is expected to land in Madrid early Tuesday, and even he may not yet know what Real Madrid have in store for him. First, he will tour the stadium - a visit that is set to be recorded by club cameras - before signing his new contract.

Later, there is set to be a

major presentation ceremony, with videos of Kaka's best-ever performances shown on stadium screens. The razzmatazz will be backed up with a fireworks display.

The event is scheduled to take place at 8.30 pm, a time of day that was not chosen at random. That is when many prime-time newscasts start in Spain, and several of them are expected to open their programmes with a live connection to the Bernabeu.

Given the time difference, the presentation is also liable to be followed from Brazil and the rest of South America, in what is intended as another sharp business move from "King Midas" Perez.

Real Madrid are of course

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