

Owen scores again

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Michael Owen hit the target again Monday as Manchester United made it two wins out of two on their pre-season tour, beating a plucky Malaysian XI 2-0.

Owen struck after 13 minutes from close range for his second goal in as many games, soon after teenage striker Federico Macheda put the team in front.

But despite countless other chances they failed to stretch their lead in the energy-sapping conditions.

"It was sticky night and I was exhausted just watching it," said Sir Alex Ferguson.

"It was not as good a game as the other night, we had a lot of chances in the second half and maybe we should have done better with the finishing."

But he singled out Owen for praise after his storming start for the club.

"If he stays fit it will be an absolute bonus for us," he said.

"There were a couple of cases tonight where he's shown his real experience, and that's what he's really good at, his positioning, and he's so quick to get to the ball."

On a steamy night, the teams observed a minute's silence in memory of those who died in the Jakarta bombings last Friday.

United were due play Indonesia on Monday but cancelled the trip after the hotel they were to stay in was hit by the blasts which killed at least eight people and injured more than 50.

Sir Alex Ferguson rung the changes for this hastily-arranged match, the second against the hard-working Malaysians in as many days following their sluggish 3-2 win on Saturday, with Jonny Evans the only player to keep his

place.

After coming off the bench to score on his debut, Owen was in the starting 11 for the first time, teaming with Macheda up front.

Despite a blunder in their opening game of the tour Ben Foster started in goal with Gary Neville, Wes Brown, Fabio, and Evans at the back.

Ryan Giggs, Michael Carrick, Darren Fletcher and Zoran Tasic were in the middle.

Fletcher was the first to trouble the keeper with a deep cross from the right and it wasn't much longer before United got the breakthrough with Macheda latching onto the end of a low cross in the 11th minute.

The big Italian, who became an instant hero when he scored a stunning injury time winner on his debut against Aston Villa in April, controlled the ball before slotting home with his right foot.

It was 2-0 two minutes later when Owen once again showed he has lost none of his predatory instincts, pouncing on a loose ball in the box after Tasic crossed from the left, driving it into the net from close range.

Giggs was enjoying himself running at the defence while Owen was unlucky not to get a second when his cheeky back heel hit the post.

Dimitar Berbatov replaced the former Newcastle hitman after 61 minutes, part of a quadruple substitution, with fresh legs needed.

Wayne Rooney came on soon after and missed a golden opportunity when he scuffed a left foot shot while Darron Gibson almost found the net with his first touch.

But despite pressing the goals dried up and Rooney was lucky not to be sent off for a reckless, and unnecessary, tackle near the end of the game.

They next play FC Seoul on Friday, with Park Ji-Sung, who missed the Malaysia leg, joining his teammates in the South Korean capital.



Bangladesh players celebrate with the trophy after their four-wicket victory over the West Indies on the 4th day of their second and final Test match at the Grenada National Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Gerrard faces trial alone

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard will face trial alone after his six co-defendants on Tuesday admitted taking part in a bar brawl.

The 29-year-old Liverpool midfielder is accused of being part of a group that injured businessman Marcus McGee, 34, at the Lounge Inn nightclub in Southport near Liverpool, northwest England, in December last year.

Gerrard was celebrating Liverpool's 5-1 defeat of Newcastle United at the time. He denies the charge of affray. An initial charge of assault was dropped at a court hearing in March.

Five of the defendants admitted affray, and one admitted a lesser charge of threatening behaviour.

A 20-strong jury panel at Liverpool Crown Court were asked a series of questions about the case, with Judge Henry Globe pressing potential jurors about their footballing loyalty.

"The jury oath or affirmation requires a jury to faithfully try the defendant and give a true verdict according to the evidence," he said.

"Do you confirm that you would be able to put aside any football loyalty or partiality and to take and abide by the strict terms of the oath or affirmation?"

The hearing adjourned for the panel to answer the questions.

Barca counting on Henry

AFP, Barcelona

FC Barcelona are counting on their French striker Thierry Henry for the upcoming season and have given up hope of recruiting Franck Ribery from German side Bayern Munich, the coach of the Spanish and European champions said Monday.

"The role he was will depend on him. If he is fit, he will play, and frequently," Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola told a news conference regarding Henry as the squad resumed training after a break for the summer holidays.

Asked about the possibility of recruiting Ribery, who is being chased by several clubs including Barcelona's main Spanish league rivals Real Madrid, Guardiola sounded a pessimistic note.

"It seems impossible to me. I think he will not come. First of all because Bayern does not want to let him go. And then because his agent prefers that he go elsewhere," he said.

The 26-year-old Frenchman, a member of the Bayern squad for the past two years, has made it known that he would like to join Real but the German club are reluctant to let him go.

Rafa fears Man Utd's war chest

Football

AFP, Bangkok

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez said on Tuesday he fears Manchester United will use the war chest from the Cristiano Ronaldo mega-transfer to make the Premier League champions even stronger.

"I am sure they will have money and they will buy some players," Benitez said, with United's Sir Alex Ferguson profiting from Ronaldo's record-shattering move of 80 million pounds (131 million dollars) to Real Madrid.

But Benitez hopes that Liverpool, runners-up last season, can close the gap with new signing Glen Johnson providing the missing link.

"We have to be strong next season -- we have improved with Glen and hopefully we can do a little bit better and that will be enough," said Benitez, who signed the England full-back from Portsmouth for 17 million pounds.

Johnson agreed with his new boss that Liverpool could end their title drought in the coming season.

"Liverpool are right up there with the world's best. They showed that last season. A few minor errors can be cut out and that will lead to massive improvements," he said.

"My early days at Liverpool have been fantastic. Everyone has been good to me and I think I am settling in fast."

C'Ron fails to shine

AFP, Dublin

The world's most expensive player Cristiano Ronaldo was kept at bay by semi-professional defenders here on Monday on his debut for Real Madrid as they eked out a 1-0 victory over Shamrock Rovers.

In one of the more unlikely settings for the debut of the world's most pricey player Ronaldo - who cost Real around 94 million euros from Manchester United earlier in June - was closely attended to and was taken off at half-time having failed to sparkle against some muscular defending.

Indeed it was one of Real's other newboys, French international striker Karim Benzema who sealed the narrow victory over the Irish side - who once boasted talents such as another former Manchester United great Johnny Giles - as the 35million euros signing from Lyon scored in the 87th minute.

Benitez does not often see eye to eye with Sir Alex and he dismissed suggestions by the United manager that free-spending Manchester City would not pose a threat next season.

"I think every club now is trying to improve and Manchester City is one of them," he said. "I would like to be there at the top of the table and be contending but I cannot say too much on the other teams."

Benitez refused to take questions on the future of Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso, who is being chased by Real Madrid to join Ronaldo and Brazil's Kaka in a new line-up of Galacticos.

Alonso arrived with the squad for an exhibition match against Thailand taking place Wednesday night, and Liverpool's local supporters have left him in no doubt that they want him to remain at Anfield.

During a promotional event Tuesday at a Bangkok shopping mall, more than 250 fans chanted his name and waved banners reading "Alonso Please Stay". He acknowledged the fans but made no comment about the transfertalk.

Liverpool have made a slow start in their pre-season games, drawing 0-0 with Swiss club St Gallen and losing 1-0 to Rapid Vienna.

Nasri suffers broken leg

AFP, Vienna

Arsenal and French international midfielder Samir Nasri has been ruled out of action for six to eight weeks after breaking his leg in training on Tuesday.

Nasri broke his right fibula during a training match at Arsenal's summer camp in Bad Waltersdorf, in southeastern Austria, said Andreas Neubauer, a spokesman for camp organiser International Football Camps Styria (IFCS).

The 22-year-old Frenchman, who has 15 international caps, was taken to hospital in nearby Hartberg for tests.

He is now set to miss France's next World Cup qualifying match against the Faroe Islands on August 12.

Arsenal arrived at their training camp on Monday and were due to play a friendly against local side Columbia Floridsdorf on Tuesday evening.

Eto'o agent due in Milan

AFP, Rome

Samuel Eto'o's agent will fly to Milan on Tuesday to thrash out a deal that would take the Cameroonian striker from Barcelona to Inter Milan, the Italians' technical director Marco Branca said on Monday.

The 28-year-old is part of the deal that should see Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic move in the opposite direction.

The Cameroonian is supposedly demanding 10 million euros a year but Italian press reports said Inter will offer him only 8.5 million euros.

And money is likely to be the main stumbling block to an agreement.

"The Cameroonian's agent, Jose Maria Mesalles, will be in Milan tomorrow (Tuesday) during the day," said Branca.

"The deal has not been finalised, there is still much to talk about but I'm optimistic."

Milan unlikely to get Fabiano

AFP, Rome

Brazil striker Luis Fabiano's proposed move from Sevilla to Italian giants AC Milan is unlikely to go ahead according to his agent.

Milan have been in the hunt for a striker all summer since letting Kaka leave for Real Madrid in a 67 million euros deal.

Fabiano has emerged as their prime target but Milan's 14 million euro offer for the 28-year-old has fallen a long way short of Sevilla's 20-million-euro valuation.

"I'm pessimistic," Jose Fuentes told calciomercato.it website. "Milan have made an offer of 14 million euros."

"That figure is not enough for the first choice striker in the Brazilian national team, it's a figure that under-values the player."

"There's nothing to do, Sevilla can't sell at that price and they're right not to."



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United striker Micheal Owen (C) is challenged by Md Azmi Muslim (L) of Malaysia XI during their friendly match at the National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

'Tevez not worth 25m'

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Sir Alex Ferguson has hit back at Carlos Tevez, saying the Argentinian striker wasn't worth the 25 million pounds that rivals Manchester City paid for him, reports said Tuesday.

The 25-year-old international signed a five-year contract with City after his two-year deal at United ran out at the end of last season.

Tevez, a fan favourite at Old Trafford, has claimed Ferguson never got in touch to try to persuade him to stay.

But Ferguson told English dailies in Kuala Lumpur, where United are on an Asian tour, that this was not true.

"We made contact with Carlos. We sent him texts and spoke to him when he was in

Argentina," he said.

"Our chief executive, David Gill, made an offer to (agent) Kia Joorabchian and we spoke to Tevez before we played Inter Milan (in March) and told him we had spoken to Kia, but we never heard back."

In the end Tevez went to big-spending City, where he will play alongside Arsenal striker Emmanuel Adebayor next season.

Ferguson drafted in Michael Owen on a free transfer to replace him, and made clear he felt Tevez was not worth what City manager Mark Hughes paid.

"In my opinion, I don't think he was worth 25 million pounds," he said.

"He was popular with the supporters. The fans quite rightly have their heroes and I was happy to go along with the deal as long as it was the right one but, quite simply, he is not worth 25 million."



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona star Lionel Messi (C) takes part in a training session at the Sports Center Joan Gamper in Barcelona on Monday.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's French starlet Karim Benzema runs off to celebrate his all-important goal against Shamrock Rovers during their friendly tie at the Tallaght Stadium in Dublin on Monday