

PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba (R) celebrates with teammate Salomon Kalou after scoring the opening goal against Inter Milan during their friendly encounter at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena on Tuesday.

## Benzema next Ronaldo

**Football**

AFP, Maynooth

Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema has what it takes to become a new Ronaldo, the Spanish club's former Brazilian World Cup winner who is the 21-year-old's inspiration, Real's Brazilian left-back Marcelo said on Tuesday.

Real won their opening pre-season friendly 1-0 against Irish champions Shamrock Rovers on Monday thanks to a goal from Benzema, who joined Real from French side Lyon for 35 million euros (50 million dollars) earlier this month.

"That did not surprise me because Benzema is a great player. He is very young and we can't yet compare him to Ronaldo but he could become like him," said Marcelo in Maynooth near Dublin where Real will wrap up a pre-season training camp on Wednesday.

"He helps the team a great deal with his work

and his magnificent passes," he added.

Spanish media said the 21-year-old stole the show from Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo, who Real signed for a record fee of around 94 million euros last month, during the match against Shamrock Rovers.

Ronaldo was closely attended to and was taken off at half-time having failed to sparkle against some muscular defending.

When Benzema was officially unveiled as a Real player earlier this month, he said the Brazilian Ronaldo would be his inspiration as he looks to fire the goals to help the Spanish giants dethrone Barcelona in La Liga.

"Ronaldo is the greatest player in the world. He is my inspiration and every time I go on the pitch I will try to repeat what he did," he said.

The Brazilian left Real for AC Milan in January 2007. Ronaldo, who won two World Cups with Brazil and been named Fifa World Player of the Year three times, is now at Brazilian side Corinthians.

## Swine flu alert at Liverpool match

AFP, Bangkok

Fans arriving for Liverpool's exhibition match with Thailand on Wednesday had to pass through thermal scanners at Rajamangala Stadium as a precaution against swine flu.

"We want to scan audience members to make sure they don't infect anyone else," Dr Somchai Chakrapan, head of Thailand's Disease Control Department, told local media.

Anyone with a fever would not be allowed into the 76,000-capacity stadium and have the price of their ticket refunded, he added.

The Public Health Ministry reported on Wednesday that 44 people had died in the country after contracting swine flu, representing a steep rise in the last week.

The number of cases has risen to 6,776 with most sufferers having recovered without complications.

The health authorities have also advised spectators to wear face masks as a guard against infection.

Some fans arriving at the stadium had customised their masks with the Liverpool club logo.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who was born and raised in the north of England and supports Newcastle United, was due to attend the match.

The kick-off is scheduled for 8pm local time.

## Redknapp keen on Crouch

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp insists David Beckham won't be moving to White Hart Lane, but he refused to rule out a swoop for Portsmouth striker Peter Crouch.

Redknapp had been linked with a move for LA Galaxy star Beckham but, speaking after Tottenham's 4-0 friendly win over Peterborough on Tuesday, he played down any bid for the England midfielder.

"I don't know where that has come from," he told Sky Sports News. "David Beckham is a fantastic player, an amazing professional but there is no truth in that."

"We don't know David's situation as we have not made an enquiry and we don't know where that has started from."

However, Redknapp did confirm he is still keen to sign Beckham's England teammate Crouch, who rejected a 12 million pounds move to Sunderland earlier this week.

"Crouchy, I have signed several times, and if Portsmouth want to sell we could be interested," Redknapp said.

"It depends on everything about price etc, but everyone has their price and it would be up to the chairman and Portsmouth to sort out a price. I love Crouchy but we will have to wait and see."

# Chelsea see off Inter

**Football**

SOCCERNET

Slick Chelsea dominated former boss Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan at the Rose Bowl to get their World Football Challenge campaign off to a winning start in Pasadena, California.

Goals from Didier Drogba in the 11th minute and a Frank Lampard penalty just after half-time gave Chelsea the victory over the Italian champions in front of 81,224 fans.

The impressive nature of the Blues' performance more than the scoreline, however, will have delighted new head coach Carlo Ancelotti, especially coming so soon into the ex-AC Milan chief's first pre-season campaign and against his former cross-city rivals.

Mourinho, facing the club he led to two Premier League titles during his three seasons at Stamford Bridge between 2004-07, had seen his Inter team open its campaign with a penalty shoot-out defeat to Mexico's Club America on Sunday. Chelsea, meanwhile, had warmed up with a 2-0 win over Major Seattle Sounders the previous day but had since lost German midfielder Michael Ballack to a broken toe.

Led once again by John Terry in central defence with Ricardo Carvalho, Chelsea fans at the Rose Bowl saw their African players start for the first time in pre-season, John Obi Mikel and Michael Essien returning to midfield with Didier Drogba and Salomon Kalou in attack.

It was the central defenders, though, who had Chelsea's first sights on the Inter goal, Florent Malouda receiving a short corner on the left and crossing for Carvalho to head over the bar at the near post in the second minute and Terry heading from the resultant Malouda corner from the right.

Chelsea were dominant throughout the opening half and Drogba opened the lead in the 11th minute, receiving a short pass from Lampard with his back to goal, turning and shooting unimpeded from 20 yards, the ball bouncing over Inter Milan keeper Vid Belec's outstretched left hand and into the bottom corner of the goal.

The Londoners continued to play with purpose and fluency, highlighted in the 16th minute when Lampard and Branislav Ivanovic exchanged a one-two down the right, the Serbian full-back advancing to the byline and centering for Drogba whose shot was straight at a grateful Belec.

Trailing 1-0 at the break, Inter's first real chance came as Chelsea adjusted to the five changes made by Ancelotti at half-time.

With Carvalho making way for Alex in defence, the incoming centre-back gave the ball away to Mario Balotelli on half-way immediately following the restart and the through ball found Diego Milito who cut inside Terry but was blocked at his feet by Petr Cech, the Chelsea keeper making his first meaningful contribution of the game.

Daniel Sturridge, who scored on his debut at Seattle, and Nicolas Anelka had replaced Drogba and Kalou and they quickly caused problems. Deco, on for Malouda, sent Sturridge clear in the box in the 48th minute and when his cross from the left was blocked by Ivan Cordoba's hand, Lampard was given the chance to add to his goal scored against the Sounders, converting the penalty, right footed into the bottom corner.

Ancelotti made further changes in the 64th minute, taking off Cech, Essien and Ivanovic for Ross Turnbull, Juliano Belletti and Michael Mancienne, who was called straight into the action, blocking a Balotelli bicycle kick on the six-yard line after Inter sub Zlatan Ibrahimovic had crossed from the right.

Late substitute Franco Di Santo nearly added a third for the Londoners in stoppage time, taking a delicate Deco chip over the top on his chest and shooting right-footed over the bar.

## City ride on Ireland

**Football**

AFP, Durban

Stand-in skipper Stephen Ireland scored at the end of the first half to give Manchester City a 1-0 victory over Kaizer Chiefs on Tuesday in the Vodacom Challenge.

The midfielder used his left foot to finish off a Kelvin Etuhu cross in the third minute of stoppage time after a fast attack down the right flank exposed ball-watching Chiefs defenders at Absa Stadium.

New signings Emmanuel Adebayor, Carlos Tevez and Roque Santa Cruz watched from a stand as City showed improvement after a 2-0 loss to Orlando Pirates last Saturday in the first match of a South African tour.

City, whose starting line-up included other close-season signings Wayne Bridge and Gareth Barry, are guaranteed a place in the Challenge final in Pretoria on Saturday.

Arch domestic rivals Chiefs and Pirates clash on Thursday in Port Elizabeth to decide who faces the big-spending English Premiership outfit for a trophy won by Manchester United last year.

After a lively first half which offered both teams scoring chances, the game deteriorated

dramatically on a cool winter evening in the Indian Ocean city and the final whistle came as a blessing for the incident-starved crowd.

Ireland should have put City ahead on 19 minutes after springing an offside trap, but goalkeeper Itumeleng Khune darted off the goalline to block the ball with his body.

Chiefs came close to ending the stalemate when Ryan McGivern almost conceded an own goal as he tried to clear a low cross under pressure from striker Kaizer Motaung, a son of Chiefs owner.

Goalkeeper Stuart Taylor, making a second consecutive appearance as City manager Mark Hughes rested first choice Shay Given, struggled to parry a David Mathebula drive as Chiefs pressed.

Ineffective City striker Felipe Caicedo was cautioned before Ireland struck the winner and Barry received a yellow card early in the second half for shirt tugging.

Barry and Bridge were replaced and Motaung squandered Chiefs best chance of the match nine minutes from full-time, firing wide from close range with only Taylor to beat.

Etuhu, younger brother of Fulham midfielder Dickson, also wasted a glorious opportunity by blazing wide after rounding Khune and facing an unguarded goal on the stroke of full-time.

## Fulham sign younger Riise

AFP, London

Fulham signed Norway midfielder Bjorn Helge Riise from Lillestrom for an undisclosed fee on Wednesday.

Riise, brother of Roma defender John Arne, agreed a three-year contract with the Premier League club after passing a medical.

The 26-year-old told the club's official website: "It is a dream come true for me to have signed for Fulham."

"Obviously I know Bredé (Hangeland) and Erik (Nevland) very well from the national team and they have only good things to say about the club."

"Fulham had a fantastic season last year under Roy Hodgson who is a manager I admire very much."

## Berbatov vows goals

**Football**

AFP, Seoul

Dimitar Berbatov has vowed to score more goals this season with added responsibility on his shoulders after the departure of Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez from Old Trafford.

The Bulgarian international also knows that with Sir Alex Ferguson drafting in Michael Owen he needs to deliver if he is to cement a first team place alongside Wayne Rooney.

"I think I can do better (than I did last season)," he told MUTV on their pre-season tour of Asia, with a game against FC Seoul here on Friday his next chance to impress.

While Berbatov was credited with being one of the team's most creative players last season he was also criticised for not scoring as many goals as a 30 million pound (49 million dollars) striker should. He bagged 14 in 43 appearances.

He also infuriated some fans with lacklustre performances and a perceived lack of fight when the team was struggling.

With the jury is still out after his underwhelming first season, Berbatov said he was determined to prove his doubters wrong.

"I think I can do more. That's why I'm happy to be here on the pre-season tour," he said.

"It's always beneficial to start well and have

a good pre-season, and I feel I'm training well at the moment.

"I'm here to score goals and I hope to score more and more for United this season."

His biggest threat to a regular place in the starting 11 is Owen, signed on a free transfer from Newcastle earlier this month.

It appears to have been a shrewd piece of business by Ferguson with the former England striker scoring two goals in his first two games.

Ferguson has handed him United's legendary number seven shirt, worn by greats like Eric Cantona, David Beckham and Ronaldo, and the experienced Owen said he could handle the responsibility.

"I was quite shocked when the manager asked me to wear it, but obviously very honoured," he told the club website.

"You only have to look at the last half a dozen players to have worn the shirt... there are some fantastic players and I'll obviously do my best to continue that tradition, score a few goals and to do the shirt proud."

"I know it means a lot to the fans. That's what the manager said to me straight away. He said I'd need broad shoulders to wear it and I told him that was fine, that I could handle that responsibility."

"I don't feel it will add extra pressure -- I think I'm old enough and wise enough not to let it get to me. I'm really proud to have it and hopefully I'll do well in it."

## Fans divided on Eto'o

**Football**

INTERNET, undated

The fans of European champions Barcelona have mixed feelings about the imminent departure of Samuel Eto'o, according to online polls on Tuesday. Barca are trying to swap Eto'o for Inter Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, plus around 40 million euros (56.76 million dollars) and the loan of Alexander Hleb for one season.

Josep Maria Mesalles, the agent of Eto'o, started to negotiate on Monday a lucrative contract for the Cameroonian striker with Inter, apparently asking for a salary of 12 million euros per season over five years.

Meanwhile, back in Barcelona, the fans seem to have mixed feelings about seeing Eto'o leave.

On Monday Barca coach Josep Guardiola returned from holiday and said that "I am convinced that the best thing for Barca is that Eto'o leaves."

He tried to explain by saying that "this is not for football reasons... it is a question of feeling... This is not for reasons of behaviour. I am not here to change the character of anyone, but instead to decide with which players to count on for next season."

Guardiola added that he was "very grateful towards Eto'o, not just for last season but for what he has done in five years (at the club)".

He refused to talk about

Ibrahimovic, saying that "he is still an Inter player." However, it is common knowledge that Guardiola has been interested in the Swedish hitman since taking over at Barca in 2008.

Guardiola has sufficient credit at the Camp Nou, after guiding Barca to an unprecedented "treble" last season, that he will manage to get away with offloading Eto'o.

However, online polls taken by Mundo Deportivo and Sport show, on Tuesday, that the Barca fans have mixed feelings about seeing Eto'o leave.

Mundo Deportivo asks its readers, most of whom are Barca fans, "Do you share Guardiola's arguments about Eto'o?" Only 51 per cent of readers have voted "yes", 49 per cent of them opting for "no".

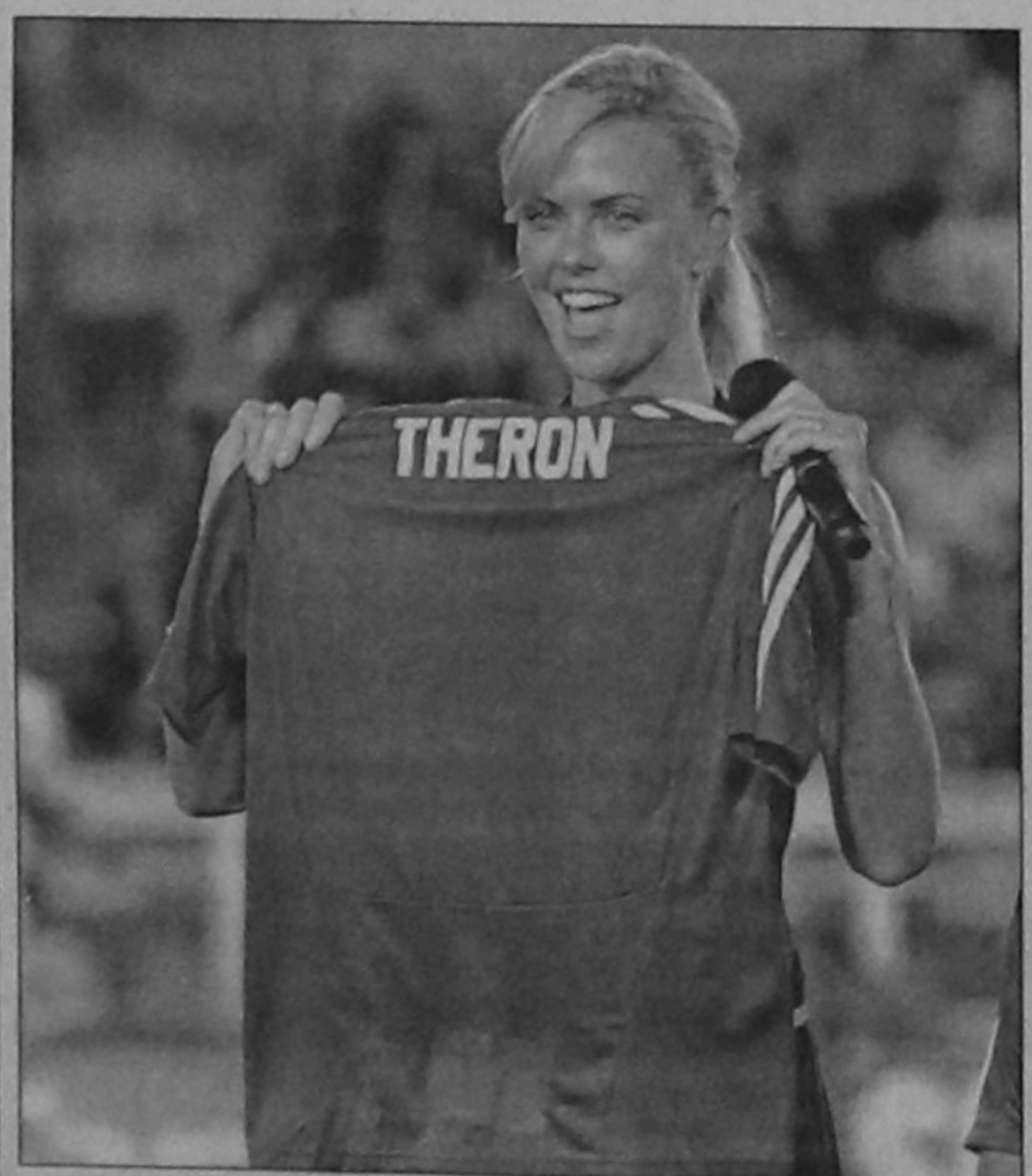


PHOTO: AFP

Hollywood actress Charlize Theron poses with a Chelsea shirt during their friendly match against Inter Milan at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena on Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City midfielder Stephen Ireland (C) attempts a goal over Kaizer Chiefs goalkeeper Thela Ngobeni (L) during their friendly tie in Durban on Tuesday.

## Sven joins Notts County

**Football**

AFP, Nottingham

Sven-Goran Eriksson insists money is not the motivation for his new role as director of football at tiny League Two club Notts County.

Former England coach Eriksson has agreed a five-year contract worth a reported two million pounds (3.3 million dollars) a year to help County rise from the bottom division of English football to the Premier League.

The Swede's stunning move to the world's oldest football club has been funded by Munto Finance, a Middle East consortium backed by Dubai billionaire Abdullah Bin Saeed Al Thani. But Eriksson, recently sacked as Mexico coach, was adamant that his salary wasn't the decisive factor in his arrival at Meadow Lane, although he will also be a shareholder in the club.

"If it was for the money I could have gone elsewhere easily for much more money. I am not here for the money, I am here for the challenge," Eriksson said at his first press conference on Wednesday.

"I'm not here for the weather or the city. If I want that I go to Italy or wherever. I am here for the big challenge. That is the truth."

change that. The dream is to be in the Premier League."

Eriksson was quick to dismiss suggestions that his commitment to County will be less than 100 per cent.

The former Manchester City boss will move to Nottingham and plans to attend virtually every match while he oversees signings, the development of a worldwide scouting system and helps County move to a new training ground.

"I will be based in Nottingham. It would not be possible to do the job living in London or Sweden," he said.

"When my agent first asked if I would be interested in Notts County I said I'm not sure about that. But after listening to the owners and seeing the project I became interested and here I am."

Eriksson admitted he doesn't know any of County's players or their rivals in League Two, but he revealed that the club wanted him because they believe his global contacts will attract top-class players as the team moves up the leagues.

"I don't know the players here and I don't know the players in League Two at all," he said.

"But in international football I know a lot of agents and players. Since this news came out my phone is hot all the time asking how much we can pay for players."

We can't pay Premier League salaries to players in League Two though, we have to be sensible.

## Fabiano not going to Milan

AFP, Rome

Brazil forward Luis Fabiano's agent claimed on Wednesday that a proposed deal to bring him from Sevilla to AC Milan is now dead.

Jose Fuentes told Italian Sky Sport that negotiations have come to an end.

Milan had offered 14 million euros for the 28-year-old but that is a long way off Sevilla's 20-million-euro valuation for a player who is first choice for Brazil.

"In football you can never say never but I've not heard from Milan in a week," said Fuentes.

"Everyone knows that for this deal to go through there needs to be a higher offer than the 14 million euros proposed by Milan. For me the deal is dead."

On Tuesday Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani claimed Sevilla would have to lower their asking price for Fabiano while the day before that Fuentes had said they were under-valuing the player.