



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 49 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."

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.

"Crouch, 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 Crouch but we will have to wait and see."

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 overwhelming 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 Cameroon 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."

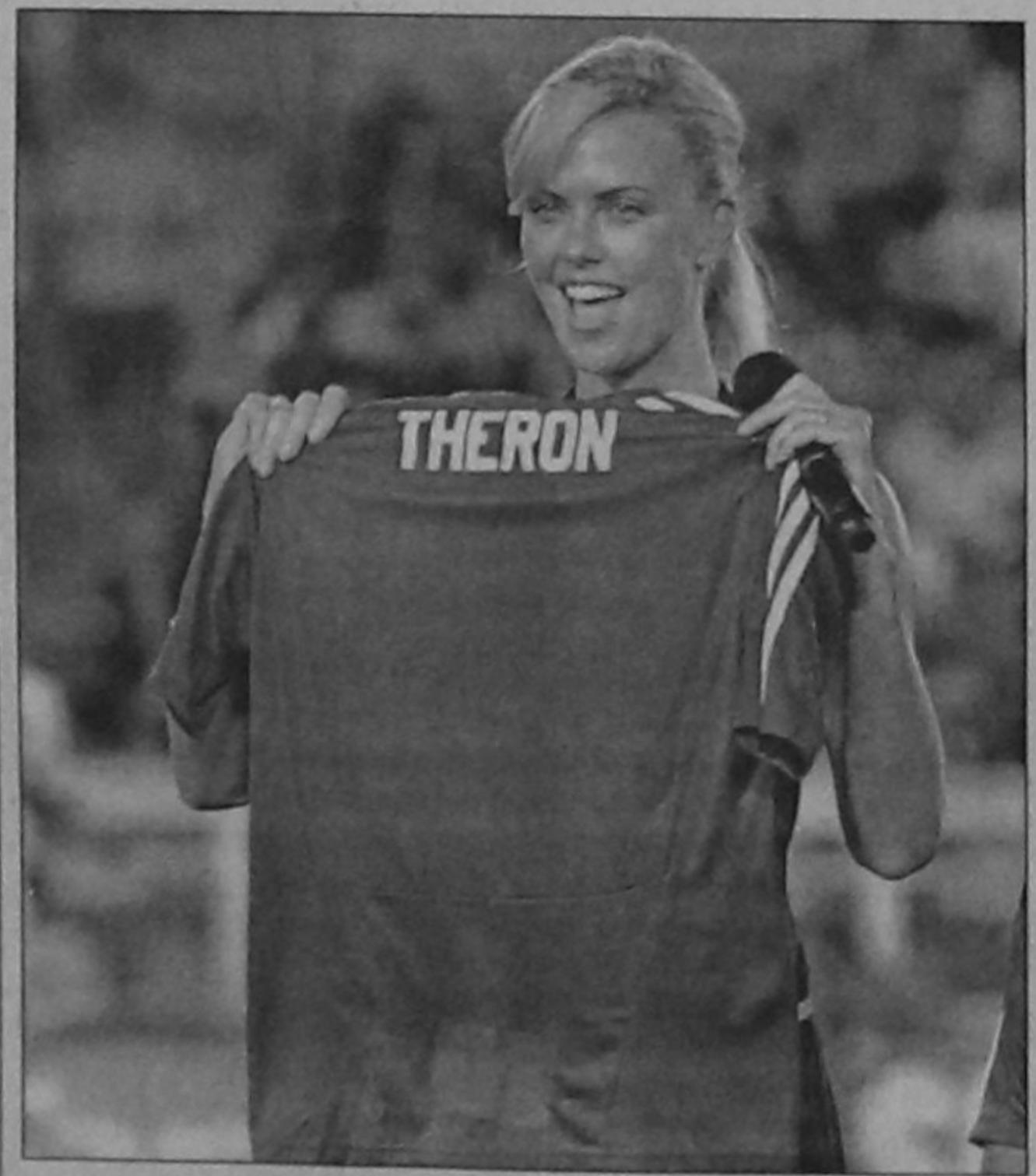
Guardiola added that he was very grateful towards Eto'o, not just for last season but for what he has done in five years (at the club).

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.

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".



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.

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

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"I don't know the weather or the city. I am not here for the money, I am here for the challenge," Eriksson said at his first press conference on Wednesday.

"I don't know the 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."

Chelsea see off Inter

Football

SOCERNET

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.

Chelsea were dominant throughout the opening half and Drogba opened the lead in the 11th minute, receiving a short corner on the left and crossing for Lampard 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

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.

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