

## Gerrard found not guilty

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool and England football star Steven Gerrard was found not guilty of affray Friday over an alleged assault on a businessman during a bar brawl.

The player showed no emotion when the verdict was read out, after 70 minutes of jury deliberation.

Judge Henry Globe told Gerrard: "The verdict is a credible verdict on the full facts of this case, and you walk away from this court with your reputation intact."

Gerrard was accused of being part of a group that injured Marcus McGee at the Lounge Inn nightclub in Southport near Liverpool, northwest England, in December last year.

The midfielder was celebrating his club's 5-1 win at Newcastle United at the time. He denied the charge of affray. An initial charge of assault was dropped at a court hearing in March.

Giving evidence at the trial Thursday, the 29-year-old midfielder had insisted he punched 34-year-old businessman McGee only in self-defence after an argument about what music was being played.

But he said he was sorry about what he did, adding: "Obviously I am upset about how the whole thing turned out."



PHOTO: AFP

England and Liverpool star Steven Gerrard arrives at Liverpool Crown Court to face trial for affray on Friday.

## Henry pledges future to Barcelona

AFP, London

Thierry Henry has declared he now loves life with Barcelona so much he cannot contemplate ever playing for any other team.

The 31-year-old is regarded as a legend at Arsenal, where he became the club's record goal-scorer during eight Premier League campaigns in north London, but he is beginning to enjoy his time in Catalonia just as much.

After a rocky first season at the Nou Camp, in which Barca failed to lift a single trophy, it was rumoured the French striker was keen to return to England.

But following a stellar 2008-09 campaign, which saw Josep Guardiola's side out-play Manchester United to win the Champions League, as well as claiming the Spanish league and cup double, Henry believes he has finally embarked upon a special relationship that would be hard to end.

"I had a difficult first season, it has to be said, but when we won the treble we had a special event on the pitch," he said. "I took the microphone and said some things that really came from my heart."

"I said to the Barcelona fans that finally I was a fan of the club. That was the first time I felt I could say that. In the first season I didn't deliver, although I don't feel I cheated anyone."

"It would be impossible to walk out after that. And I also had a great discussion with the boss, who reassured me he wanted me to stay."

"I still miss London, don't get me wrong, but Barcelona is an amazing town and finally I feel I am part of the team at this club."

Henry scored 26 goals last term as part of a three-pronged strike force also featuring Leo Messi and Samuel Eto'o.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona's new signing Brazilian Keirrison da Souza Carneiro gives the thumbs up outside Nou Camp after agreeing terms with the Catalan club on Thursday.

## Evra in awe of Park

AFP, Seoul

Patrice Evra counts Park Ji-Sung as a close friend but even he has been amazed at the fanatical support the midfielder gets on home turf, calling him "the David Beckham of Korea."

The France left-back has accompanied Park on some promotional events on the Korean leg of their pre-season tour of Asia and said he was in awe.

"When Ji first arrived in Manchester he never talked and people didn't know much about him. But when we arrive in Seoul you can see he is the King of Korea," he told the club website.

"They shake, they cry, they scream when they see him. It's amazing. He's like the David Beckham of Korea."

"I'm very happy for him because he's a really good friend and on the pitch he always gives 100

percent for the team. That's why people love him." Park's enthusiasm and ability have endeared him to Sir Alex Ferguson with the club to offer him a new contract.

Britain's Daily Express said it would see Park's current 30,000 pounds (49,500 dollars) a week deal doubled to 60,000 pounds.

Ferguson, meanwhile, has paid tribute to the welcome the team have received in Asia, saying the support they have in the region never ceases to amaze him.

"I'm still amazed sometimes when we arrive at hotels and there are thousands of fans hanging about. Then they're in the corridors and in the lifts," he said.

"You have to admire that love of the club. We experienced it here in Seoul two years ago and it's just as good this time."

"In fact, it's typical of the whole Far East -- we have a terrific fan base and there's a great fanaticism here."

## Lucio slates Van Gaal

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's new Dutch manager Louis Van Gaal "showed me a lack of respect," "Kicker" soccer magazine quoted Brazil captain and star defender Lucio as saying on Thursday.

"Every coach has his own opinion and that is normal, but I was not given enough respect during my separation (from Bayern to Inter Milan) and I consider I deserved better treatment," the Brazilian said.

"I am a world champion (in the 2002 winning Brazil team) as well as winning the Confederations Cup twice and was chosen best defender in the Bundesliga."

"Surely I did not need to show him further proof of my abilities?" he added.

Last week, the 31-year-old defender signed a three-year contract with Inter for a reported 8 million euros.

Meanwhile, Bayern's Franck Ribery is still unable to train due to a knee injury, the German club said on Thursday.

The 26-year-old French midfielder has an inflammation to his left knee which prevented him from training with the squad at a pre-season camp at Donaueschingen in south-east Germany.

Ribery, under contract at Bayern until 2011, continues to be the focus of media speculation in Germany about a possible switch to big-spending Real Madrid, a move Bayern management have said is impossible.

Striker Luca Toni also missed training with a thigh sprain, the club said.

## Stuttgart want Negredo

AFP, Madrid

Stuttgart are interested in signing Real Madrid's Spanish striker Alvaro Negredo after the German club's bid to get Klaas-Jan Huntelaar fell through, Spanish sports paper Marca said on Friday.

The 23-year-old, scorer of 19 goals while on loan at Almeria last season, is now back on Real's books.

But staff at the Bernabeu have indicated they would like to sell him because of the current glut of forwards and attacking midfielders including Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Arjen Robben, Raul, Karim Benzema, Gonzalo Higuain and Ruud Van Nistelrooy as well as Huntelaar and Negredo.

Other clubs said to be in the frame for Negredo's services include Villarreal and Seville as well as English side Tottenham.

Dutch international Huntelaar, also surplus to requirements in Madrid, joined the rest of the squad for training on Friday after missing the side's pre-season visit to Ireland while he awaits the outcome of discussions about a possible transfer to Tottenham.

Real have spent at least 209 million euros this summer on stellar signings.

The Spanish club has unsuccessfully attempted to lure French star Franck Ribery from Bayern Munich as well as Spanish international Xabi Alonso from Liverpool.

'Brazil can afford WC'

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil is financially well-equipped to stage the 2014 football World Cup as well as the 2016 Olympic Games, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Friday.

"We meet all the requirements for the World Cup but we want more -- we also want the 2016 Olympic Games, Lula said in an interview with Sao Paulo's Radio Globo."

The president promised 80 billion Reales (29.7 billion euros) would be available to fund the 2014 World Cup which world football body FIFA awarded to Brazil two years ago.

The radio station has carried out a survey of 12 Brazilian cities which would be involved in the soccer tournament, estimating stadium infrastructure and other essential facilities would add up to at least 80 billion.

"Obviously we would not want to organize the World Cup if we did not have the money," added the President.

The International Olympic Committee is to make a final decision on October 2 about the location of the 2016 Olympics, with Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Tokyo and Chicago in the running.

## Torres ready for action

AFP, Singapore

Fernando Torres has had barely three weeks away from football but that is enough for the Spanish striker who is itching to get back into action.

After Liverpool finished second in the Premier League Torres jetted to South Africa to play for his country at the Confederations Cup, where he scored the fastest hat-trick by a Spanish player.

It meant he had less time off-duty than others, but the 25-year-old is now focused on his pre-season preparations and wants to get more time on the clock after appearing for only 10 minutes against Thailand on Wednesday.

Manager Rafael Benitez is carefully managing his top asset, but he should get a game against Singapore on Sunday as they wrap up the Asian leg of their pre-season tour.

"Whatever Rafa thinks is best is fine for me," said Torres.

"I am feeling good and want to get to 100

percent as soon as possible.

"It's difficult to return to training in this weather and this heat. We are tired and stiff but we still have one month before the season starts so there is time to be ready."

With Steven Gerrard in court on affray charges back in Liverpool, Torres is the star attraction for fans in Asia and he has been overwhelmed by the attention.

"It's important for us to come to Asia to see our amazing fans," he said.

"It was really nice to hear them singing my name and to see so many fans with my shirt on at our last game. It makes me really proud."

"I'm not surprised how big Liverpool are out here but I am surprised how popular I am. I have to thank Liverpool for making me that player."

Torres, who recently signed an improved contract, insisted on Thursday that the Reds can win the Premier League this season.

"I came to Liverpool to win trophies and it's been two years without one which is a long time for Liverpool," he said.

"But I'm sure we can win the Premier League or the Champions League."

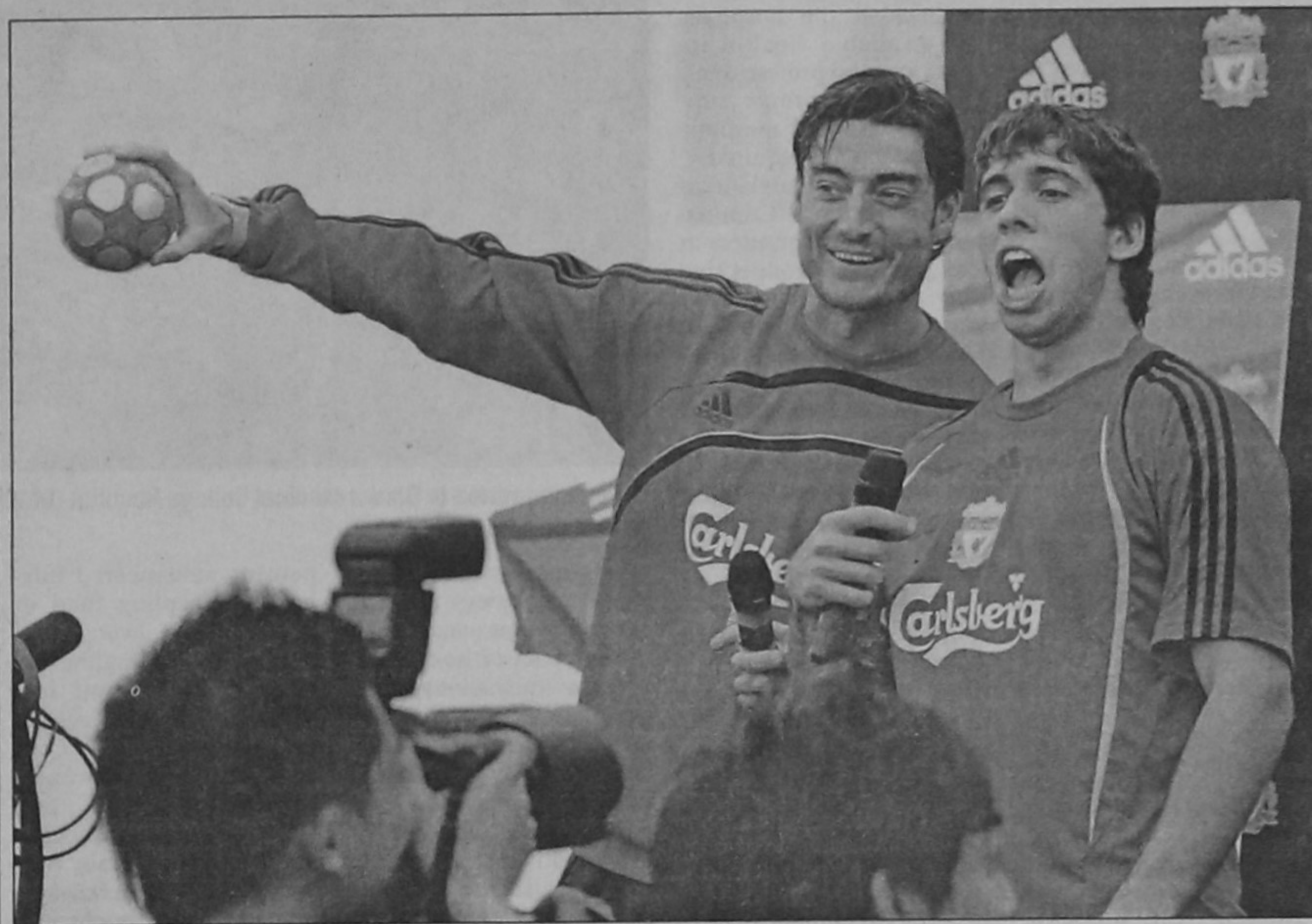


PHOTO: AFP

Liverpool players Albert Riera (L) and Emiliano Insua (R) prepare to throw mini autographed footballs to fans during a visit to a sports shop in Singapore on Friday.

## USA in final again

AFP, Chicago

The United States blanked Honduras 2-0 Thursday to earn a berth in their third-straight CONCACAF Gold Cup final.

Kenny Cooper scored as the game reached 90 minutes to clinch the win while Clarence Goodson's goal late in the first half proved to be the winner.

The United States will meet Mexico in Sunday's final at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The Americans have won the past two Gold Cup titles and will meet Mexico for the fourth time in the final.

"It's a big opportunity for all of us, and we're all trying to take advantage of that," said Goodson.

American goalkeeper Troy Perkins helped seal the win with a key stop with five minutes to go. He posted his third shutout of the tournament.

It was the American's third victory in two months over Honduras.

"We have to accept reality and learn from what we experienced here," Honduran coach Reinaldo Rueda said. "We didn't reach our objective in reaching the final."

The US team, which has not dropped a game in the

event, fired 17 shots at the Honduran net compared to just 10 for their opponents.

"They're not intimidated by the situations," said American player Brian Ching of some of his younger teammates. "Some of the guys have shown well, and that's always a good sign of things to come."

American coach Bob Bradley said their success in the Gold Cup shows that the sport is on the rise in the US.

"It's a good sign," Bradley said. "It shows that people are working together."

"It's important that our programme, not just the senior national team, but on down to our youth teams, that we continue to grow."

Bradley said Honduras made them work for Thursday's win.

"I think Honduras also proved in this tournament that they also have a deep pool of players because we know the players for their team that are not here," Bradley said. "I think it shows again Rueda does a good job in terms of how he looks to move players in and the options that he has."

Mexico needed penalties to beat Costa Rica on Thursday and advance to the Gold Cup final.

Guillermo Franco's scored in the 88th minute to give Mexico a 1-0 lead, but Froylan Ledezma tied it in the third

minute of extra time. Mexico won it 5-3 in penalties.

## Lee agrees Bolton move

AFP, Seoul

Star South Korean midfielder Lee Chung-Yong is heading to English Premier League club Bolton for about three million dollars, his team said Friday.

The 21-year-old has reached a verbal agreement with the northern English side to sign a three-year contract for a transfer fee of about two million pounds (three million dollars), FC Seoul said.

"The contract will be signed officially after a work permit is issued," the K-League side said in a statement.

The winger is expected to earn about 1.5 billion won (1.2 million dollars) annually, Seoul said.

A successful deal would make Lee the seventh Korean to play in England, following the trailblazing example set by Park Ji-Sung of Manchester United.

Lee, who has spent this week in England for talks with Bolton officials, was due back in South Korea on Friday.

He played a major role in propelling South Korea to next year's World Cup finals in South Africa with four qualifying wins and four draws.

## Woodgate to miss start of season

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp revealed on Thursday that England defender Jonathan Woodgate will miss the start of the season after flying to America for treatment on a groin injury.

Woodgate's latest injury is a major headache for Redknapp as centre-back Ledley King has not been able to take part in pre-season training due to his recurring knee injury, while fellow defender Michael Dawson has a damaged Achilles.

"All three central defenders are struggling for the start of the season in all honesty so it is not an ideal situation," Redknapp told Tottenham's website.

## Neville out of Asian tour

AFP, Seoul

Manchester United captain Gary Neville has suffered a groin strain and will take no further part in the current Asian tour, the club said on Friday.

The injury-prone 34-year-old defender has already left South Korea for Manchester to undergo treatment on what was described as a minor injury.

Neville trained at the Seoul World Cup Stadium on Thursday but departed Friday ahead of the match against FC Seoul.

He will also miss the game in China on Sunday against Hangzhou Greentown.

Sir Alex Ferguson said he could be available for either their Valencia friendly at Old Trafford on August 5 or the Community Shield clash against Chelsea at Wembley four days later.

"It made sense for Gary to head home to start getting treatment at Carrington," he told MUTV. "We're hoping he'll be ready in about 10 days."

The England international was an unused substitute in United's first tour game against a Malaysian XI in Kuala Lumpur before getting 62 minutes under his belt against the same side earlier this week.

Man City loan Caicedo to Sporting

AFP, Lisbon

Ecuadorian striker Felipe Caicedo is being loaned by Manchester City to Sporting Lisbon, the Portuguese club said on Thursday.

The agreement is subject to the 20-year-old passing a medical examination in the Portuguese capital.

Caicedo was headhunted aged just 17 from his native country by Swiss club FC Basel in 2005. He joined City in January last year from Basel for seven million euros - one of the highest transfers paid in the Swiss league.

Sporting kick off their season next Wednesday when they face Dutch club FC Twente in a Champions League 3rd round qualifying fixture.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester City forwards Emmanuel Adebayor (L) and Robinho (R) pose with former South African President Nelson Mandela in his office in Houghton to wish him a happy 91st birthday on Thursday.