

Mexico demolish USA

Football

AFP, East Rutherford

Carlos Vela scored once and set up two goals as Mexico defeated the United States 5-0 to win the Gold Cup and snap the Americans' 58-game home unbeaten streak in the tournament.

Half-time substitute Vela was one of five different players to score for Mexico which posted its fifth Gold Cup title.

It also marked their first win against the US outside of Mexico in over 10 years, halting a 15-game losing skid.

"I believe this is a great win for Mexico because we showed the pride we have in our hearts today," Mexico's Giovanni Dos Santos said. "This is a huge step for us in the process."

Mexican captain Gerardo Torrado opened the scoring from the penalty spot in the 56th minute, comfortably beating American goalkeeper Troy Perkins.

Dos Santos, who was named man of the match, made it 2-0 just six minutes later before Vela found the target in the 67th minute to give Mexico a commanding 3-0 lead.

Jose Castro (79) and Guillermo Franco (90)

rounded out the scoring for Mexico.

"The win injects us with some motivation, confidence and maturity," Dos Santos said.

Despite playing in the US, the crowd at the 79,000-seat Giants Stadium was overwhelmingly pro-Mexican.

The last time Mexico beat the US was in 1999. Mexico also won despite the organizers' decision to allow the Americans to add seven extra players to their squad because of the closeness of the Confederations Cup and Gold Cup tournaments.

It was the worst home loss for the US since June 1985 when they were dominated 5-0 by England.

"When a goal is scored, there's always a change in the game and we didn't respond well," US coach Bob Bradley said.

Said American forward Brian Ching, "We were chasing the game a lot in the second half, and it tired us out. Look at anybody in the United States and this loss has to anger you."

The teams meet again in Mexico City on August 12.

"This ends here in this locker room," Mexico coach Javier Aguirre said. "We're celebrating now, but that's it. Tomorrow is another day and we begin working for Aug. 12, and that's a different story."



Mexico striker Guillermo Franco (C) celebrates his goal against the US during the CONCACAF Gold Cup final at Giants Stadium in New Jersey on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rafa upbeat on title hopes

Football

AFP, Singapore

Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez says his team are getting better by the day and he has no doubt they will be title contenders again this season.

The Reds got their first pre-season win under their belts with a 5-0 thrashing of Singapore on Sunday, at the same time that arch-rivals Manchester United crushed Hangzhou Greentown in China 8-2.

The Singapore result followed Liverpool's 1-1 draw with Thailand, a 0-0 draw with St Gallen of Switzerland and a 1-0 loss to Rapid Vienna.

Benitez said the team was starting to gel and find its form with just three weeks till their opening Premier League game of the new campaign on August 16 against Harry Redknapp's Tottenham.

"It was a good game. We worked hard and played at a high tempo with a professional mentality," he said.

"I think we are improving physically every single day."

"Some of the players returned late from

international duty so it was important for them to play for 30 minutes.

"You can see that some of them are a little bit tired, but the mentality and attitude was good and it was a very good game."

Liverpool finished second to Manchester United last season but many feel this year is their best chance to win the title since they last got their hands on it 20 years ago.

Benitez is upbeat about the year ahead.

"We have confidence that we can be at the top of the table. It can happen," he said.

"The message is clear, we have to be contenders, we have to work harder than last year."

"We need to get to the top of the table and stay at top and be competitive for the whole season and hopefully win the trophy."

A plus point for Liverpool on Sunday was a brace from young Hungarian striker Krisztian Nemeth on his senior debut after excelling in the reserves.

He was introduced to the action after an hour and wasted no time in finding the back of the net, with Benitez praising his abilities.

"Nemeth is a great finisher. He has scored a lot of goals in the reserve team and on Sunday he showed why," he said.

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Maradona rubbishes Pompey link

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona insisted on Sunday that he has no intention of abandoning his post as Argentina coach, dismissing reports linking him with a move to English Premier League Portsmouth.

"I was watching television and a journalist said that Maradona was going to quit the national team. No, the blue and white colours (of Argentina) are in my veins," said Maradona.

"No way would I jump ship. I have a contract and I will stay with Argentina until the 2011 Copa America."

Last week, Dubai-based Arabian Business magazine claimed Maradona would work alongside new Portsmouth owner Sulaiman Al Fahim as the club's global ambassador.

Martins wants Wolfsburg switch

SOCCERNET

Newcastle striker Obafemi Martins wants to join German champions Wolfsburg.

The Nigerian appears unwilling to hang around at St James' Park following United's relegation from the Premier League.

"The Bundesliga will soon be the best league in the world," he said in the Wolfsburg Allgemeine Zeitung. "Therefore Wolfsburg excites me. I hope the transfer happens."

Martins would be hard-pressed to win a first-team place with Wolfsburg, whose front two of Grafite and Edin Dzeko scored 53 Bundesliga goals between them last term.

Bayern defend Ribery

Football

SOCCERNET

Bayern Munich have issued a statement insisting winger Franck Ribery has always been committed to the club and has no intention of seeking a way out of his contract.

Spanish giants Real Madrid have publicly pursued the 26-year-old, who has made it clear that he would prefer to leave the Allianz Arena this summer.

Bayern, though, have stood firm over their refusal to sell.

Club president Beckenbauer was quoted in the German press on Sunday claiming Ribery "doesn't give a damn" about Bayern and only joined them to make a name for himself.

He was also quoted as suggesting Ribery was aware of FIFA's article 17, which allows a player under the age of 28 to walk away from a club after three years of his contract, when he signed his four-year deal with Bayern in 2007.

But the club have now moved to end speculation over the Frenchman's future once and for all with less than two weeks to go before the start of the Bundesliga season.

A statement from the Bayern board read: "Our player Franck Ribery has always behaved professionally, correctly and seriously."

"Bayern have at no time had and do not have the impression from Franck Ribery that he would only use Bayern in order to further his own career. He has always given himself and his abilities to the service of the team."

"Franck Ribery has never commented on the possibility of making use of FIFA Article 17."

That article appears, though, to be a source of concern for the Bavarian giants, who would like to see it removed.

The statement ended: "We would, though, be very happy if Franz Beckenbauer, in his role as a member of the FIFA Executive, would take care that Article 17, which greatly burdens the whole of professional football, be abolished and therefore more contract stability for all clubs worldwide is provided."

Eto'o wants C League

AFP, Rome

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o arrived in Milan on Monday ahead of his Inter Milan medical and stated he wants to win the Champions League.

Eto'o has twice already been on a Champions League winning team with Barcelona, scoring against Arsenal in the 2006 final in a 2-1 victory and again against Manchester United in May in a 2-0 success.

"I'm very happy to be here at Inter. I've come here to work hard and win the Champions League," said Eto'o.

The 28-year-old will undergo a medical at Inter before putting his name to a five-year deal with the Italian champions.

He is part of a swap deal that will see Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic head to Catalonia while Inter will also pocket 50 million euros and take Belarus winger Alexander Hleb on loan for a year.

Eto'o said few words to the hordes of waiting press and photographers at Milan's Linate airport upon his arrival but he did congratulate his new team-mates on having beaten city rivals AC Milan 2-0 in a friendly in the United States on Sunday.

He also had a word of thanks for Inter president Massimo Moratti. "He has a big heart," said Eto'o.

Eto'o arrived with his agent Jose Maria Mesalles, who last week agreed personal terms with Inter.

Inter and Barca have also agreed terms but the deal will only go through once Ibrahimovic completes his move, which should happen early this week.

Becks gets into fracas again

SOCCERNET

David Beckham was clashed with another fan just one week after an ugly confrontation with spectators during his first home match for the Los Angeles Galaxy after returning from Italy.

The latest incident saw the 34-year-old exchange words with a male in the crowd, who was wearing an England shirt, during the Galaxy's 1-1 draw with the Kansas City Wizards on Saturday.

Beckham appeared to take offence at something the man said, and later claimed the spectator had insulted his wife, Victoria.

"He shouldn't actually be wearing that shirt because what he was saying about my wife was a disgrace," Beckham said.

The former England captain was on Friday fined £600 by Major League Soccer over his earlier confrontation with fans.

Beckham had received a less than friendly welcome at his first home game after returning from a five-month loan spell at AC Milan - the team the Galaxy were playing.

'Zlatan wanted out'

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti has explained his reason for selling Zlatan Ibrahimovic, claiming the Swede wanted to join Barcelona.

Ibrahimovic has been Inter's best player since joining the club in 2006 and many fans were dismayed that the Italian champions would let the top goalscorer in last season's Serie A leave the club.

But in return Inter have signed Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, brought Alexander Hleb in on loan and scooped 50 million euros from Barca.

And Moratti insists that it was Ibrahimovic's own wish to go.

"Several times over the last few months he expressed his desire to change clubs," he told Monday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"He wasn't forced, he had said that he saw his career developing elsewhere."

"We're talking about someone rather indifferent on a sentimental level, a professional."

Last week Inter coach Jose Mourinho described this deal as the transfer of the summer, claiming that Eto'o is as good as Ibrahimovic and that the Italians had done well

to bank so much money in the swap.

And Moratti claimed that he too was pleased with the deal.

"For Inter this is a positive affair, also from an economic perspective," he said.

"You have to bear in mind that Eto'o's value as a player is not that of his low transfer value."

Eto'o had only one year left on his Barca contract and the Catalans openly wanted rid of him, thus reducing greatly his market value.

Ibrahimovic, meanwhile, was tied into a long-term deal at Inter, who did not want to sell him.

Having won four Serie A titles in a row, Inter are under pressure this season to produce the goods in Europe.

In the last three seasons they have crashed out in the first knock-out round and the Champions League has become something of an albatross around the club's collective neck.

Inter don't seem capable of performing in Europe as they do at home and Moratti is aware of not allowing the quest for European glory to become a burden.

"I don't want the Champions League to become an obsession. The championship is our primary goal and then we can tackle Europe with much courage," he said.

"I believe our team is as good as the others but if things go badly, we won't shoot ourselves."



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona's new signing Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimovic gives the thumbs up outside Nou Camp on Sunday.

Al-Ittihad hold Real

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid were held to a 1-1 draw by Saudi side Al-Ittihad in the Peace Cup on Sunday as Cristiano Ronaldo failed to make an impact in his first match at the Santiago Bernabeu with the Spanish giants.

Real captain Raul put the Spanish giants in the lead in the 55th minute after getting the ball from new team-mate Karim Benzema and fending off Obaid Alshamrani to send the ball past the keeper from 12 yards out.

Six minutes later Real's Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder had a go from 25 yards out but the ball flew over and behind the net.

Hicham Abouchrouane equalized for Al-Ittihad in the 64th minute with a header into the top corner of the net after beating Fernando Gago to the ball following a free kick by Al Saqri from the left flank.

Benzema and Ronaldo, who was presented before nearly 80,000 fans at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium earlier this month after he completed his transfer from Manchester United, were both substituted with 25 minutes remaining.

Real beat Irish champions Shamrock Rovers 1-0 in their first pre-season outing on July 20 in which Ronaldo also failed to make an impact, missing two free kicks before being substituted at halftime.

Real's other big name new signing Kaka and Raul Albiol are still on holiday due to their commitments at the Confederations Cup earlier this summer, as are Spanish internationals Iker Casillas and Sergio Ramos.

Pepe, Ruud van Nistelrooy and Mahamadou Diarra are deemed not fit to play at the moment.

Twelve teams from around the globe, including Sevilla and Aston Villa, are taking part in the fourth edition of the pre-season tournament.

There are four groups with three teams in each. The top team in each group goes through to the semifinals which will be played on July 31. The final takes place two days later in Seville.

Lyon won the last edition of the Peace Cup in 2007.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's Brazilian star Kaka smiles during a training session in Madrid on Monday.

Terry staying at Chelsea

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry on Sunday put an end to speculation that he might be tempted by a mega-money move to Manchester City by confirming that he was "totally committed" to staying at Stamford Bridge.

The 28-year-old issued a statement suggesting that despite numerous reports to the contrary he had never contemplated quitting the London club.

"There has been a lot of speculation recently about my future and I want to clear this up once

and for all," the England skipper said.

"I am totally committed to Chelsea and always have been."

"Chelsea have also made it clear to me consistently that there was never any intention to accept any kind of offer."

City have had two offers rejected for Terry, but boss Mark Hughes was reportedly planning a fresh 35 million pounds bid for the defender.

Although Terry has spent his whole career at Chelsea and remains the club's most talismanic figure, it was believed City's offer to raise his wages to 200,000 pounds a week had forced the Blues skipper to consider his future.

A host of Chelsea players and new manager

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