



Barcelona star Lionel Messi reacts on the ground during their Spanish Kings Cup match against Sevilla at Nou Camp on Tuesday. Barca lost the match 1-2.

PHOTO: AFP

England set altitude camp in Austria

AFP, Vienna

Fabio Capello's England squad will travel to Austria for a training camp at altitude prior to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the camp's organisers said Tuesday.

"We have organised the camp in conjunction with the English Football Federation (FA)," said Nikolaus Pichler, a representative of the IFCS company which organises training camps for professional teams in the region of Styria.

"The team manager Fabio Capello will be there with the team in Irnding, which he is already familiar with. He has already visited here with other teams, such as AS Roma and Real Madrid."

The exact dates of England's stay will be announced soon, added Pichler, who said he is negotiating with two other national teams interested in setting up camp in Styria.

Serbia and South Korea have already booked stays for the end of May/beginning of June while Germany and the Netherlands are said to be considering the option.

England, who won their sole World Cup in 1966, face the United States, Algeria and Slovenia in Group C in the opening round.

Seven of South Africa's 10 World Cup stadiums - including the venue for the final, Soccer City in Johannesburg - are at altitude.

This has prompted many teams to prepare their players properly for the demands of several thousand feet above sea level.

Matthaus splits from his fourth wife

AFP, Berlin

Former German international and World Cup-winning skipper Lothar Matthaus has split from fourth wife Liliana and is set to enter divorce proceedings after just a year of marriage, Bunte tabloid reported Tuesday.

"I don't like the word divorce, but I am going to consult with lawyers," said 1990 World Cup star Matthaus. "I have the impression Liliana is subject to some bad influences," added the former Bayern Munich and Inter Milan star.

Former model Liliana, 22, met Matthaus at the Munich beer festival in 2007 and the pair rapidly became a couple. But she left the family home early last month while insisting nobody else was involved.

"Sunday evening she came to see me saying she still loved me and that she missed me but that she needed time to think," said Matthaus, who tied the knot with Liliana on New Year's Day last year in Las Vegas.

ESPN goes 3-D in US

AFP, Las Vegas



Television entered a new dimension on Tuesday as US sports giant ESPN said it will broadcast some World Cup soccer matches live from South Africa in 3-D and Sony teamed up with Discovery and IMAX to launch a 3-D TV network in the United States.

The new "ESPN 3-D" service plans at least 85 live sporting events during its first year, starting with the opening FIFA World Cup match between South Africa and Mexico on June 11, ESPN and ABC Sports president George Bodenheimer said.

Up to 25 World Cup matches will be shown on what ESPN called "the industry's first 3-D television network" along with college basketball, college football and other US domestic sports events.

Japanese electronics giant Sony, Discovery Communications and IMAX Corp. announced meanwhile that they were creating a joint venture to "develop the first 24/7 dedicated 3-D television network" in the United States.

They said the new 3-D network, which is expected to launch next year, will feature "high-quality premium content from genres that are most appealing in 3-D, including natural history, space, exploration, adventure, engineering, science and technology, motion pictures and children's programming."

Sony, Discovery and IMAX said they will be equal partners in the venture aimed at bringing a "high-quality three-dimensional viewing experience to home television audiences."

The duelling announcements came as representatives of leading electronics firms from around the world gathered in Las Vegas for the annual International Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

Japanese and South Korean television manufacturers have been pushing 3-D TV in the home for some time now but its growth has been stunted by a lack of programming, the need to wear special glasses and the high price

of a 3-D set.

Last month's release of science fiction blockbuster "Avatar," a 3-D film by "Titanic" director James Cameron, has renewed interest in 3-D, however, and some industry leaders believe the time has come for 3-D TV in the home.

"This is a turning point for 3-D," Consumer Electronics Association chief executive Gary Shapiro told USA Today newspaper.

ESPN's Bodenheimer said ESPN 3-D "marries great content with new technology to enhance the fan's viewing experience and puts ESPN at the forefront of the next big advance for TV viewing."

ESPN said it had tested the technology for more than two years, including events where it showed a US college football game in a limited number of movie theatres.

For the moment, ESPN will just broadcast special live sports events in 3-D while the Sony, Discovery, IMAX deal calls for the creation of a dedicated 3-D channel.

"By partnering with Sony and IMAX on 3D, Discovery will lead the way in revolutionizing the next-generation home viewing experience in the US and around the world," Discovery president and chief executive David Zaslav said.

Sony president and chief executive Sir Howard Stringer called it a "groundbreaking new venture."

"It is clear to us that consumers will always migrate to a better and richer entertainment experience, and together we are determined to be the leader in providing that around the world," Stringer said in a statement.

IMAX chief executive Richard Gelfond said "this new business venture is the first step in our strategic effort to take 3-D into the home and extend the IMAX brand."

"We are thrilled to work with such strong partners to be the first to make in-home 3-D a reality," he said.

Discovery, Sony and IMAX said the 3-D network would launch first in the United States and they would eventually "explore international distribution opportunities in selected markets."

Puma's unified African kit

Football

AFP, Nairobi

German sportswear giant Puma on Wednesday unveiled a "unified African kit" the continent's teams can use if their national colours clash during the African Nations Cup and World Cup finals.

Designed to help create awareness for the safeguard of the environment, the African Unity Kits were launched in Nairobi, where the German firm announced a partnership to raise funds for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

Cameroun star forward Samuel Eto'o, whose side is one of the 12 teams being sponsored by Puma at the African Nations Cup finals which start in Angola on Sunday, took part in the unveiling of the new uniform.

Eto'o, along with the rest of the Cameroon squad arrived in Nairobi on Tuesday for a nine-day pre-Nations Cup training camp before travelling to Luanda.

Puma chief executive Jochen Zeitz said the use of the kits had been approved by FIFA as a third kit which can be worn when there is a clash of uniforms between competing teams during the Nations Cup and the World Cup.

"In 2010, Africa will be at the centre of the footballing world. Puma is creating a unique kit embracing the diversity of African Nations teams while valuing the unity of players and supporters towards a common goal," said Zeitz at a news conference.

"Biodiversity and therefore valuing and protecting all life on our planet is a huge issue, not only in Africa, but around the world. We are proud to partner with UNEP to raise both awareness and funds through the sale of Unity products," he added.

The kit comes with replica jerseys in brown pantone colour which were created by mixing soil samples from Ghana, Ivory Coast, South Africa and Cameroon and matching shorts.

Zeitz said funds raised from the sale of the kits would go towards the support of biodiversity projects in Africa.

Serie A Inter stretch lead

AFP, Rome

Serie A champions Inter Milan started the new year with a 1-0 win over Chievo to stretch their lead over AC Milan, who face Genoa later Wednesday, to 11 points.

Inter were deprived of a number of midfield stars, handing a rare start to want away French midfielder Patrick Vieira who is being tipped to move to Manchester City.

However their absences due to injury proved no major handicap and striker Mario Balotelli gave Jose Mourinho's side a welcome lead when he struck on the counter in the 12th minute.

Inter were given little trouble for the remainder of the match and pocketed the three points to sit on 42 in total after 18 games.

Milan, with England star David Beckham back for the first game of his loan spell from LA Galaxy, host Genoa at the San Siro where they will be favourites to claim the spoils in the day's late match.

Juventus sit in third, a point adrift of Milan, and face Parma away at 1600 GMT when the rest of Serie A will also be in action.

IN BRIEF

'Vieira leaving Inter'

AFP, Rome

French midfield veteran Patrick Vieira is set to leave Inter Milan within days, amid reports of interest from Manchester City, coach Jose Mourinho said Tuesday.

Asked what the chances were of the 33-year-old staying on Mourinho told reporters "I think they are very slim."

Earlier, the Times newspaper had reported that City were in talks over a move for Vieira, who has also had the rule run over him by Lyon.

Vieira, who has had a shaky past three seasons at Inter Milan, is desperate to play for France at the World Cup and is looking to play regular first team football, denied him in Italy with stiff competition for starting places at Inter.

C'Ron most popular sports star on Facebook

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Portuguese international striker Cristiano Ronaldo is the most popular sports star on Facebook, the sports daily Marca reported on Wednesday.

The flamboyant footballer could count 3.2 million fans on his social network site on Wednesday, putting him ahead of Swiss tennis star Roger Federer with 3.18 million and US swimmer Michael Phelps, 2.86 million.

Ronaldo, 24, arrived in Real Madrid from Manchester United last summer in a world record 94-million-euro deal.

He is also the most profitable player ever in a club which had such stars as Zinedine Zidane and David Beckham, generating 80 million euros in advertising revenues per year.

Berger calls it quits

AFP, Prague

Sparta Prague's former Czech international midfielder Patrik Berger has announced that he is retiring because of recurrent injuries, his team coach said Wednesday.

Sparta Prague coach Jozef Chovanec said that the 36-year-old had informed him of his decision on Tuesday. "Patrik told me yesterday 'It's over. My knee can no longer hold up,'" said Chovanec.

Berger started his career as a Sparta Prague trainee before joining city rival's Slavia Prague aged 18 years. He then moved to Borussia Dortmund in Germany followed by seven years at Liverpool, then Portsmouth, Stoke City and Aston Villa.

He rejoined Sparta in 2008 but rarely featured because of health problems, playing his final match on August 8 last year.

Berger was capped 44 times and scored 18 goals for the Czech Republic between 1993 and 2001.

COPA DEL REY

Sevilla stun Barca

Football

INTERNET, undated

Sevilla beat defending champion Barcelona 2-1 in the Copa del Rey round of 16 on Tuesday.

Sevilla went ahead in Barcelona's Camp Nou in the 61st minute when Diego Perotti dribbled past Daniel Alves and crossed, and Renato tapped the ball on for Diego Capel to smash home.

Barcelona equalized through substitute Zlatan Ibrahimovic in a 75th-minute counter-attack, but Alvaro Negredo scored from the penalty spot after Diego Capel was brought down in the area. Negredo dedicated the winning goal to teammate Sergio Sanchez, whose playing future was in doubt after news of his heart condition.

"These games are good to show that we're here, that we're not just 11 players, that we have 24 players who will give everything and we dedicate the victory to the fans and above all to Sergio," said Negredo.

Both teams had absences due to the African Cup of Nations, with Barcelona missing Seydou Keita and Toure Yaya and Sevilla without

Frederic Kanoute.

However, Lionel Messi returned for Barcelona after an extended Christmas break and he led the attack alongside Bojan Krkic and Pedro Rodriguez.

Early on, Barcelona looked fresher than during Saturday's 1-1 draw against Villarreal and hoarded possession.

In the 10th, Messi dribbled across the back of the area before unleashing a left-footed shot that Andres Palop just turned round the post.

In the 21st Palop failed to hold onto a long-range free kick by Daniel Alves but Rafael Marquez could not reach the rebound. Seconds later Messi curled a shot toward goal from an almost impossible angle, striking the crossbar.

Having soaked up Barcelona's attacks for half an hour, Sevilla nearly went ahead against the run of play, although when Capel was put through to score his goal was ruled out for offside.

Straight after the break Abdoulay Konko fed halftime replacement Renato in the area and Pinto did well to save his shot. Barcelona substitute Zlatan Ibrahimovic, meanwhile, scored his first goal in the competition.

The return leg will be next week.

Stoke edge Fulham

AFP, Stoke



Stoke mastered the elements better than visitors Fulham to climb back into the top half of the Premier League with a 3-2 win at a snow-covered Britannia Stadium here on Tuesday.

Tony Pulis's side seized control of the encounter after Tuncay Sanli had headed them into an early lead and further strikes from Abdoulaye Faye and Mamady Sidibe gave them a commanding three-goal advantage by half-time.

Ireland winger Damien Duff pulled a goal back for Fulham just after the hour mark and a Clint Dempsey strike five minutes from time made things frantic at the end, but Stoke were able to hold out for a win that lifts them to tenth in the table, a place and three points behind their visitors.

The evening had not started auspiciously for Stoke with their Danish goalkeeper, Thomas Sorensen, suffering an injury the warm-up.

But once the action got underway they were quickly into their stride and Matt Etherington had the ball in the net after only two minutes only to see his effort ruled out for offside.

The home fans however only had to wait ten more minutes for their side to take the lead from a corner.



Stoke City midfielder Abdoulaye Diagne Faye (L) celebrates the second goal against Fulham during their Premier League encounter at the Britannia Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pompey in more trouble

AFP, London



Crisis-hit Portsmouth took another step into the unknown Tuesday after failing to pay their players for the third time this season.

Despite stating Monday the players would be paid their wages for December, believed to be 1.8 million pounds, Portsmouth officials told the Professional Footballers' Association a further delay has now arisen.

PFA chief executive Gordon Taylor said the club, whose side is propping up the English Premier League, were hopeful of paying the players Wednesday.

Taylor told Press Association Sport: "We were expecting the players to be paid today (Tuesday) but that has not happened. We have been told by the club that they are hopeful of paying them tomorrow (Wednesday)."

In a further blow for the club, the Premier League have told Portsmouth they will not be able to re-register Jamie O'Hara as a loan signing unless the transfer embargo is lifted, and there is virtually no chance of that happening during this transfer window.

The Tottenham midfielder's deal runs out on January 15 but Spurs had indicated they were happy to let him stay at Pompey.

A Premier League spokesman said: "If the registration embargo is still in place Portsmouth will not be able to re-register him."

Daniel Azougy, the lawyer taken on by Portsmouth to restructure their debts, has said the club is in "a mess".

Azougy told the Guardian: "First of all I hope we are going to pay the players' salaries as promised. But nobody knows how much (the club) is a mess. When people and the fans of Portsmouth know how big they will appreciate what we're trying to do."

Former owner Alexandre Gaydamak says he is owed almost 30 million pounds and there is also a winding-up petition from HM Revenue and Customs.