

Atletico snap up Salvo

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid, looking to recover from a dismal first half of the season, have signed 19-year-old striker Eduardo Salvo from Argentine side Lanus for 8 million euros, Spanish media said Tuesday.

"I have fulfilled the dream of my life, because it is a dream to play alongside players like (fellow Argentine Sergio) Aguero or (Diego) Forlan," Salvo told the sports newspaper Marca.

"Atletico is one of the greats of Europe and I am joining with the hope of battling for major things."

Lanus chairman Nicolas Russo confirmed the transfer, lamenting that this "fantastic player" was "irreplaceable."

The Spanish club have been looking for a striker to replace Frenchman Florent Sinama-Pongolle, who left for Sporting Lisbon earlier this month.

Atletico last week signed Portuguese international midfielder Tiago from Juventus and he was presented to the fans on Tuesday.

"I want to repay the trust that the club has placed in me," the 29-year-old said.

"With Tiago and Salvo, Atletico is closing its reinforcement programme," club chairman Enrique Cerezo said on Monday.

Atletico, who finished fourth in the league last season, have been in poor form this season, crashing out of the European Champions League while struggling in the league.

However, wins in their last two league games, against Sevilla and Valladolid, have given cause for optimism.

Mourinho to face charge

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho looks set to face a penalty for insulting a journalist after the Football League referred his case to the sporting justice disciplinary committee.

Following Inter's 1-1 draw at Atalanta in December, Mourinho allegedly screamed abuse at Corriere dello Sport journalist Andrea Ramazzotti.

Ramazzotti had strayed into a restricted area to listen in to interviews the official Inter TV Channel were conducting with players after the game.

According to press reports, Mourinho, who later claimed he had told Ramazzotti several times before not to come into that area beside the club's team coach, swore at the reporter.

Corriere, alongside several other major Italian newspapers, boycotted Mourinho's next press conference in protest.

Mourinho is accused of having violated article 1 of the sporting justice code by "using hurtful language towards sports journalist Andrea Ramazzotti" and of having "grabbed him by the forearms".

Inter have also been called before the sporting justice to explain their employee's actions.

Mourinho has often found himself in hot water this season in Italy, twice being sent-off and serving one-match touchline bans.



PHOTO: AFP

FLYING HIGH: Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez jumps for joy after scoring the third goal against Blackburn Rovers during their Premier League encounter at the City of Manchester Stadium on Monday.

Malawi stun Algeria Burkina Faso hold Ivory Coast

Football

AFP, Luanda

The form book was shredded on day two at the Africa Cup of Nations as Algeria crashed to minnows Malawi and favourites Ivory Coast stuttered against Burkina Faso.

Away from the pitch Angolan security forces, who arrested two suspects in connection with Friday's deadly attack on Togo, sealed off the footballers' village in Cabinda in a bid to ward off any further attacks.

It was going to be a tall order to follow up Sunday's sensational curtain raiser when Mali fought back from four goals down to snatch a point against hosts Angola, but little Malawi managed it.

In only their second ever appearance in the competition they inflicted a remarkable 3-0 thrashing of Algeria, who arrived in Angola proudly carrying their ticket to the World Cup.

But the Carthage Eagles looked anything but world class as they were torn apart in the searing heat.

Goals from Russel Mwafurirwa, Ivis Kafoteka and Davie Banda, did it for the Algerians, who now have a mountain to climb if they are to make it into the quarterfinals.

Algeria coach Rabah Saadane put the shock loss down to a cocktail of well organised rivals, the heat, and errors on the part of his players.

"We hope the Confederation of African Football (organisers) can organise matches later because the weather was very hot and we didn't perform well."

"Our best players did not do their best - it

was a difficult time to play. "They weren't in their best shape, there was a lot of humidity. We hope to play later next time."

Midfielder Rafik Saifi tried to put a brave face on the defeat.

"It's better to lose one match 3-0 than three games 1-0. We still have two more first round matches, and we'll be doing our best to qualify."

Malawi coach Kinnah Phiri suggested the result, while unexpected, was not totally out of the blue.

"We came here as underdogs but we've been playing well, the signs were there. We drew 1-1 with Egypt, drew 0-0 with Ghana, and beat Mozambique in warm up games."

The game was held in a near ghostly silence, with all but a couple of hundred of the 11 November stadium's shiny new 50,000 seats vacant.

The day's second match took place up in Cabinda where Group B has been reduced to three teams following Togo's departure after the attack on their coach by separatist rebels killed two and injured nine.

Ivory Coast were odds-on favourites to take the three points but the continental giants, boasting the likes of Didier Drogba and brothers Kolo and Yaya Toure dominated possession but created few clearcut chances and looked far from potential champions.

Burkina Faso set out a defensive stall and contained their opponents with relative comfort to keep alive hopes of finishing among the top two in a mini-league completed by Ghana and qualifying for the quarterfinals.

Players stood silently before the kick-off to honour the dead while police, soldiers and special forces cast a ring of steel around a complex housing the teams.

IN BRIEF

Real lose Higuain

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Argentine international striker Gonzalo Higuain has suffered a tear in his left calf muscle and will be sidelined for three weeks, the club said on Tuesday.

The injury was detected after the 22-year-old underwent medical tests at a Madrid hospital on Tuesday, it said in a statement.

Higuain has been a regular for Real this season, scoring 11 times in the league and two in the Champions League despite the arrival of Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, Brazil's Kaka and France's Karim Benzema.

Inamoto on the move

AFP, Rennes

Japanese international midfielder Junichi Inamoto looks set to join his eighth club since 2001 with a move to J-League side Kawasaki Frontale from French First Division outfit Rennes.

The 29-year-old - capped over 70 times and an iconic figure when Japan co-hosted the 2002 World Cup finals - has failed to make an impact at Rennes despite being reunited with Frederic Antonetti, who coached him at J-League club Gamba Osaka.

Inamoto, who only appeared in the League Cup for Arsenal after joining them in 2001 before moving on to Fulham and also saw service with Turkish giants Galatasaray, West Brom, Cardiff and German team Eintracht Frankfurt, is desperate to make the Japanese squad for this year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

Lavezzi out for a month

AFP, Rome

Argentina forward Ezequiel Lavezzi will be out for at least a month after suffering a thigh injury against Sampdoria on Sunday, his club Napoli said on Monday.

Lavezzi pulled a muscle during the first half of the match and was replaced by countryman German Denis, who went on to score the only goal of the game. Napoli said 'El Pochito' - which means 'the chubby one' - will miss four to five weeks. It means he will not be available for Wednesday's Italian Cup trip to Juventus.

Tevez fires City

AFP, Manchester



PHOTO: AFP

Carlos Tevez scored a hatrick as Manchester City moved up into fourth place in the English Premier League table with a 4-1 win over Blackburn Rovers at Eastlands here on Monday.

Victory meant City maintained their perfect record under Italian manager Roberto Mancini with their fourth straight success even if they did concede their first goal under the former Inter Milan boss when Morten Gamst Pedersen scored for Rovers to make it 3-1.

But the match belonged to Argentina's Tevez who was in brilliant form as he made it 11 goals in his last nine games.

The former Manchester United striker opened the scoring in the seventh minute and, after Micah Richards's superb second, Tevez struck two expert curling shots, the second in stoppage time, to seal City's win.

City are now just seven points behind leaders Chelsea and the big-spenders, backed by their billionaire Abu Dhabi-based owner Sheikh Mansour, could yet have a big influence on the destiny of this season's title.

By contrast, defeat left Rovers just three points above the relegation zone with all the teams below them having games in hand.

As new signing Patrick Vieira, the former Arsenal midfielder who signed from Serie A champions Inter Milan last week, watched on from the stands, City wasted little time in giving the home crowd something else to cheer.

Rovers and England keeper Paul Robinson's poor punch from Martin Petrov's corner fell to

City striker Benjani Mwaruware and the Zimbabwean's mishit shot went into the net off Tevez's thigh.

Rovers looked as if they might go in at half-time just a goal behind until, six minutes before the break, Richards started and finished a fine move with Benjani again involved in the build-up.

Richards ran some 50 yards from the heart of City's defence, beating several retreating Rovers players, before passing to Benjani inside the box.

Benjani's shot hit the post but Richards, who'd continued his run, slotted home the rebound.

Rovers manager Sam Allardyce sent on strikers David Hoilett and Nikola Kalinic at half-time but it was City who scored next, just four minutes into the second-half.

Tevez started the move from inside the City half before finding Benjani, a rejuvenated figure under Mancini, who gave a return ball to his fellow striker.

Then Tevez raced towards the Rovers area before unleashing a magnificent 20-yard curling shot past Robinson.

Tevez might have had a hatrick in the 57th minute but his header from eight yards out was off-target.

Rovers pulled a goal back 19 minutes from time when Pedersen made the most of a poor first touch by Vincent Kompany to beat Shay Given from 16 yards.

City fans then had to endure a few nervous moments but, importantly, their defence held firm for the remainder of the match and then, in the first minute of injury time, Tevez wrapped things up with a sublime finish.

Kaka prefers Spain

AFP, Madrid



PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian international striker Kaka, who joined Real Madrid from AC Milan in June, said on Tuesday he enjoys playing in Spain more than in Italy because the football played here is "technically richer".

"I enjoy myself more here than in Italy because here there is a more open football that is technically richer. Italian football is more tactical," he told news radio Cadena Ser.

The 2007 FIFA World Player of the Year, who had been at AC Milan since arriving from Sao Paulo in 2003, said his priority is winning the Champions League with Real and he "feels totally recovered" from a hernia.

"I prefer to win the Champions League over La Liga. It is a more important tournament and it would be a dream to win it at the Bernabeu," he said, referring to Real's stadium which will in May host the final of Europe's premier club

competition for the first time in 30 years.

Ricardo Izecson Dos Santos Leite, which is Kaka's full name, won the 2007 Champions League with AC Milan as well as the 2004 Italian league title, two European Super Cups and the world club championship in 2007.

The 27-year-old returned to action during Real's 2-0 win over Real Mallorca after being sidelined with a groin strain since his side's 1-0 loss to arch-rivals Barcelona at the end of November.

"I played for seven months with pain but thank God it no longer hurts me. On Sunday I was able to play for nearly 70 minutes without pain. I know people expected much more from me but the hernia limits me a great deal," he said.

Kaka also heaped praise on Portuguese playmaker Cristiano Ronaldo, who joined the Spanish side from Manchester United one month after his own move to Real made headlines around the world.

"Cristiano Ronaldo is a great player and a very funny person. We are friends and talk about everything. He's a phenomenon," he said.

Real are currently in second place in La Liga, two points behind Barcelona.

MU owe C'Ron one

AFP, London

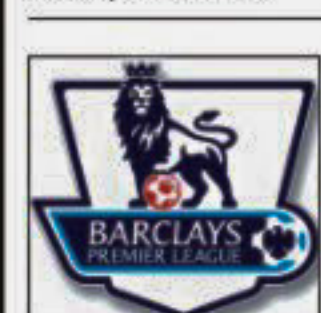


PHOTO: AFP

Only Cristiano Ronaldo's world record transfer prevented Manchester United making an annual loss of more than 30 million pounds, figures released by the English Premier League champions showed on Monday.

United declared a pre-tax profit of 48.2 million pounds (77.7 million dollars, 53.6 million euros) for the year up to June 30, 2009.

But without the departure of Portugal winger Ronaldo, sold to Spanish giants Real Madrid for 80 million pounds (129 million dollars, 90 million euros), the Old Trafford club would have been reporting a loss of 31.8 million pounds.

The club's figure also showed they had paid 41.9 million pounds in interest on a huge loan of 509.5 million pounds.

Turnover was up to 278.5 million pounds from 256.2 million a year ago. United's figures were released at the same time as the club announced plans to refinance their debts by raising 500 million pounds through a bond issue.

"Manchester United today announced that it will be seeking to raise approximately 500 million pounds aggregate principal amount from an offering of senior secured notes due 2017," a United statement said Monday.

"The notes, whose proceeds will be used to refinance existing debt secured against the club, will be issued by MU Finance plc."

The incentive for investors is that they will in turn receive an attractive rate of interest over seven years in addition to getting their initial investment back from United.

That United, whose Old Trafford ground is often filled close to its capacity of more than 76,000, should find themselves in this position will be a source of wonder to some fans of less well-supported clubs.

But many United supporters' groups were concerned by the huge amount of debt the club were saddled with as a result of the 790 million pounds takeover by their current owners, the US-based Glazer family, in 2005.

And this latest announcement did little to win over Manchester United Supporters' Trust chairman Duncan Drasdo, who said: "Most supporters have had enough...the latest trading statement would have shown a substantial loss were it not for the sale of Ronaldo."

"The day the Glazers put the club up for sale you can expect celebration on the streets of Manchester."

Last week United manager Sir Alex Ferguson moved to quell fans' fears that the club's debts were preventing him from signing new players with the Scot insisting the decision not to spend three-quarters of the money received for Ronaldo was his alone.

FROM PAGE 18 COL 1

Jordaan slams Angola

Football

AFP, Johannesburg

Angola knew for years that staging Africa's premier football tournament in the restive enclave of Cabinda posed a security risk, South Africa's World Cup organising chief said Tuesday.

"How long is it known that there is a separatist group in Angola for many years? What are the possibilities of a terror attack? It was known," Danny Jordaan told AFP.

"It is a responsibility of the host nation to deal with those issues," said Jordaan, who led a technical team to Angola in 2006 to assess its readiness for the tournament, on behalf of the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

All the concerns about the tournament were included in a report that was handed over to CAF, he said.

Jordaan again brushed off worries that the deadly attack on Togo's team as it travelled through the oil-rich enclave could affect the World Cup, which kicks off in South Africa in June.

"What happened in Angola has nothing to do with South Africa. Please judge us fairly," Jordaan told a news conference earlier.

"We must be judged on reality, not on perception. We hosted 147 major international events since 1994 and we didn't

have any incidents," he said. South Africa has invested 1.3 billion rands (175 million US dollars, 121 million euro) on security, he said.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's special adviser of sports condemned the attack, saying the assault on players "means attacking the very human values that the sport embodies".

"This abhorrent deed is not only a violent act against innocent civilians, it is also an attack against the values of sport," Wilfried Lemke said in a statement.

Meanwhile, a second separatist group on Tuesday claimed it was behind last week's attack, heightening security concerns at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Two people have been arrested over the attack, but Angolan authorities have revealed few details about the men captured after the gun attack on Togo's convoy, which killed the squad's assistant coach and media spokesman.

In the wake of the attack, Angolan security forces have clamped down on the Cabinda enclave, a tiny but economically crucial province that produces more than half of the oil in Africa's top producer.

Soldiers have cordoned off the footballers' village in Cabinda, along with tight security at the 20,000-seat Chiayi stadium, which hosted its first match in the tournament without incident on Monday.

But the duelling statements Tuesday from different separatist groups in Cabinda highlighted the difficulty in pinpointing exactly which of the province's many guerrilla forces was behind the attack.

The attack was initially claimed by Rodrigues Mingas, head of the Forces for the Liberation of the State of Cabinda-Military Position (FLEC-PM), who lives in exile in France.

But a larger group known as the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda-Armed Forces of Cabinda (FLEC-FAC) on Tuesday said they had opened fire on Togo's convoy on Friday, killing two of the squad.

While Mingas on Sunday threatened more attacks during Africa's premier football tournament, FLEC-FAC said their intended target was Togo's military escort and vowed not stage any more attacks during the competition.

"We are not terrorists, the attack did not target our Togolese brothers," said Jean-Claude N'Zita, a top adviser to FLEC-FAC who lives in exile in Switzerland.

"Every time the Armed Forces of Cabinda sees an Angolan convoy, they open fire," he said.

"We have nothing against our African brothers, and we like football," he said by telephone, dismissing Mingas's faction as "opportunists".

FROM PAGE 18 COL 1

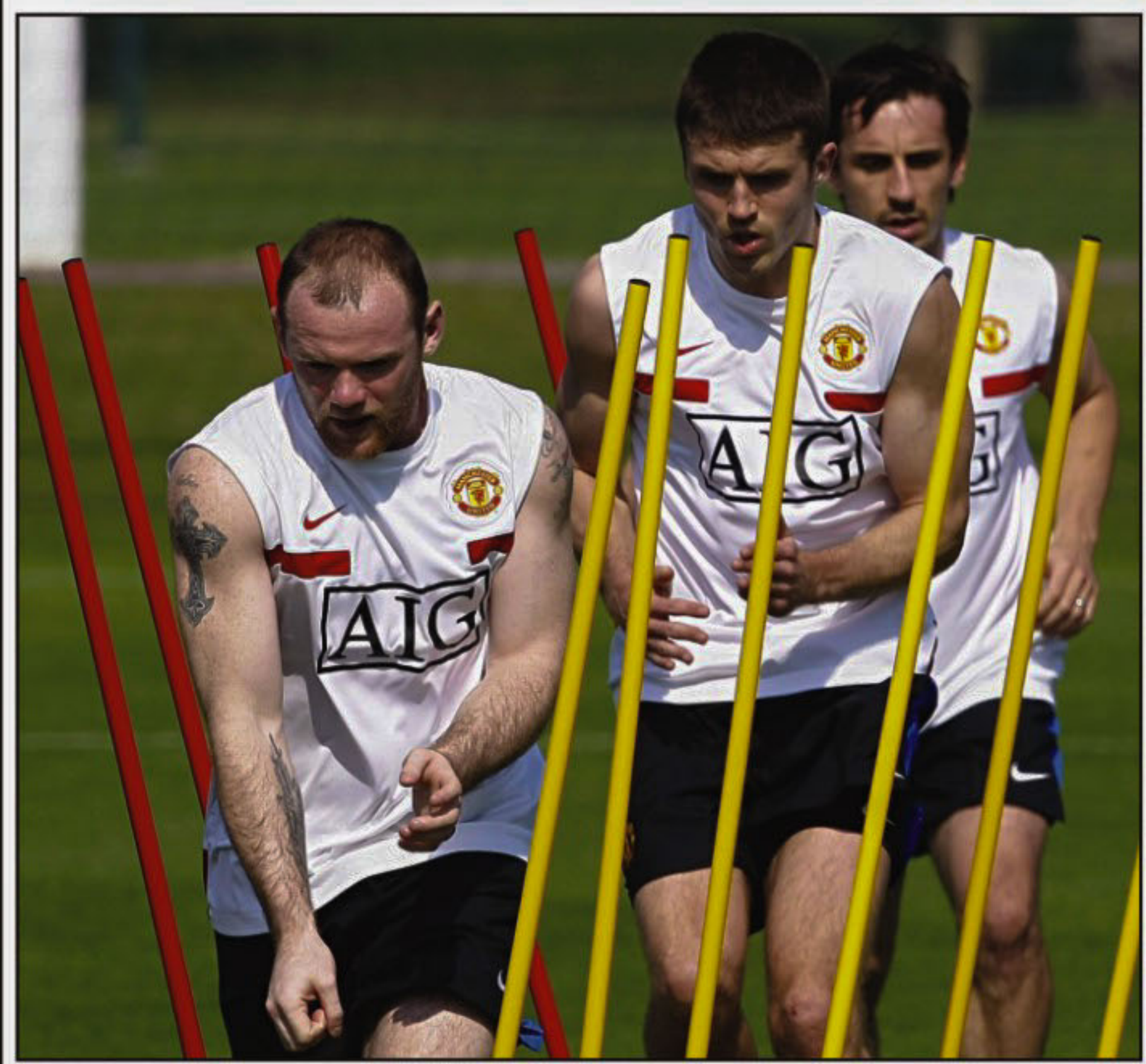


PHOTO: AFP

(L to R) Manchester United players Wayne Rooney, Michael Carrick and Gary Neville take part in a training session in Doha on Tuesday. United are attending a training camp in the Qatar capital.