

# Bolt quick as usual

**Athletics**

REUTERS, Paris

World record holder Usain Bolt overcame a slow start to power past Jamaican compatriot Asafa Powell and win their first 100 metres showdown of the season in 9.84 seconds at the Paris Diamond League meeting on Friday.

Triple Olympic champion Bolt, whose season has been interrupted by an Achilles tendon strain, pulled away over the latter part of the race from Powell, who finished second in 9.91 seconds.

Bolt's time was the third fastest in the world this year.

Yohan Blake completed a Jamaican sweep of the top three with a personal best time of 9.95.

"I'm happy with my time. I'm feeling very good," said Bolt, who returned from injury last week to equal Powell's fastest time in the world this season of 9.82.

"The crowd was wonderful. Thank you for your support," said the exuberant

Jamaican, who raced in a distinctive purple vest with his surname emblazoned across the front.

His victory lap of the stadium was greeted with cheers and rapturous applause.

Bolt said he completed the race without any pain from the Achilles injury and, according to his doctor, should be completely recovered in two to three weeks.

Clear skies and good conditions at the Stade de France helped provide five year's bests. Olympic bronze medalist David Oliver thundered home in the 110 metres hurdles in a time of 12.89 seconds, just 0.02 slower than the world record set two years ago by Cuba's Dayron Robles, who withdrew from Friday's meeting with an injury.

"I was hungry before this season and wanted very much again to win races. Now it is coming," Oliver said.

"Today was excellent. I broke the U.S. record and became the third fastest under 12.90. I executed well today, maybe at 90 percent."

In the first race of the evening, former world and Olympic 400 metres champion Jeremy Wariner coasted home in world leading 44.49 seconds. "Another world lead in the last two weeks. I still have three races this season and the goal is to run at least one of them under 44 seconds," the American said.

In the men's 3,000 metres steeplechase, Olympic champion Brimin Kipruto of Kenya set a season's best of 8:00.90 ahead of compatriot Paul Kipsiele Koech.

The women's 5,000 was comfortably won by Kenyan world champion Vivian Cheruiyot, who shaved nearly three seconds off the year's best time with 14:27.41.

Russian Anna Alminova also set a season's best by more than a second in the women's 1,500 of 3:57.65.

Australia's world pole vault champion Steve Hooker failed to clear his opening height of 5.40 metres as France's Renaud Lavillenie maintained his season's unbeaten run, clearing 5.91 for a fourth Diamond League victory.

## Don't blame Evra

TELEGRAPH

Evra, captain of the France squad, was dropped from the team by coach Raymond Domenech for the 2-1 defeat against the hosts following his role in the players' strike in the wake of Nicolas Anelka being sent home for verbally abusing Domenech.

French World Cup winner Marcel Desailly has since called for Evra to be suspended by the French Football Federation, but Ferguson insists the Manchester United full-back has been wrongly painted as the villain.

Ferguson said: "It was a team decision, but the fact Patrice was captain meant he was put forward as the team's spokesman.

"They made a decision they all regret now, a terrible decision, but it wasn't an individual, it was a collective decision that he, as captain, took to the coach."

## Fergie refused England twice

**Football**

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson says he twice rejected the opportunity to coach the England national team.

"I was offered the chance to manage the England team on a couple of occasions but, of course, it was just out of the question," said the Scot, whose side beat Celtic 3-1 in a pre-season friendly in Toronto on Friday.

"It's a poisoned chalice anyway. I think it's a terrible job, plus the fact that I would have had a tremendous handicap being Scottish.

"No matter which way you look at it, that's important."

The quality of coaching in the English game has once again fallen under the microscope after England's disappointing World Cup, where they were knocked out in the last 16 after a 4-1 defeat by old rivals Germany.

Ferguson, though, feels the blame lies with the intensity of the English Premier League.

"The English season is exhausting," the 68-year-old told Canadian television channel TSN. "Look at December, for instance, when we play eight or nine games even though it's the worst time of the year for the pitches, when they are heavier and the weather is at its worst."

## Dutch priest suspended

REUTERS, Amsterdam

A Dutch priest has been suspended for dedicating a Mass to the Dutch national soccer team -- while wearing an orange cloak -- ahead of the World Cup final against Spain.

Priest Paul Vlaar from the town of Obdam prayed last Sunday for team spirit for the national team, while worshippers, also dressed in orange clothes, were singing soccer songs in the church. It was decorated with orange flags.

The Haarlem-Amsterdam diocese said in a statement on Friday that Vlaar "failed to do justice to the holiness of the celebration of the Eucharist."

Bishop Jozef Marianus Punt has imposed a period of reflection on the priest with immediate effect.

Vlaar's prayers appear to have fallen on deaf ears, however, as the Dutch lost the match 1-0.

# MU kick off in style

**Football**

REUTERS, Toronto

Empty seats proved that in some markets, even the world's most famous soccer club must do more than simply show up to fill a stadium as Manchester United kicked off their North American tour with a 3-1 win over Celtic.

Making their first visit to Canada since 1982, the Red Devils were greeted by an enthusiastic audience of 39,139 on a perfect summer's evening but the number of

empty seats were no doubt an unfamiliar sight for a club used to seeing sellouts wherever they go.

The slightly disappointing crowd might have been expected with ticket prices for Friday's match against their Scottish opponents ranging from \$75 to \$165 and United doing little to help promote the contest.

United manager Alex Ferguson cancelled his only pre-match media appearance on Thursday and when his squad were delayed arriving in Toronto by bad weather, only one player was available to the

media with Scottish midfielder Darren Fletcher fielding just five questions.

The Red Devils were also forced to share the sporting stage this weekend, going head-to-head with the Toronto Indy being raced on city streets and offering free admission on Friday.

Despite the absence of players who represented their countries at the World Cup in South Africa, the crowd was treated to an entertaining contest with Dimitar Berbatov, Danny Welbeck and Tom Cleverley scoring for United and Georgios Samaras

replying from the penalty spot for Celtic.

"I thought the atmosphere was very good," Ferguson said, downplaying the 10,000 empty seats. "The first game is one you always want to get over because fitness comes into it.

"The surface was quite firm and it is a pitch I would not have taken a risk on with certain players to play 90 minutes."

Toronto had rolled out the green carpet for the Red Devils, laying down a temporary grass field on the Rogers Centre's concrete floor with 18 tractor-trailer loads of specially grown Kentucky bluegrass shipped in for the one off friendly.

While the four-city tour is being billed as preparation for the upcoming Premier League season it is also an opportunity to expand sport's biggest brand and reconnect with their nearly 10 million North American supporters after a six-year absence.

Attendance may not have been what organisers had hoped, they averaged 60,000 a game in 2004, but there was no dismissing United's massive appeal.

Wearing their new kit in competition for the first time, United's legions of loyal supporters were lined up five deep around souvenir kiosks at halftime eager to be among the first to grab the new shirt.

"Interesting that they (United) chose to go to Toronto to launch their Tour which I guess is a reward for soccer having taken off in Toronto with the incredible fan base there," Robert Tilliss the CEO of Inner Circle Sports, a local investment and advisory merchant bank focused on sports, told Reuters.

"I'm sure they took some direction from the MLS who said, 'Toronto has been one of our stalwarts, you guys should think about playing up there, they'll sell a lot of tickets and it's a soccer haven'."

United continue their tour with a games against Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union (July 21) and the Kansas City Wizards (July 25).

They wrap up the tour in Houston on July 28 against the MLS All-Stars but before returning home they will travel to Mexico, where they will help Guadalajara (July 30) open their new stadium as part of the deal when they signed Mexican striker Javier Hernandez.



Manchester United midfielder Paul Scholes (R) goes airborne to receive the ball during their friendly match against Celtic in Toronto on Friday.



Sprint king Usain Bolt of Jamaica crosses the finish line to win the men's 100 meters dash in the IAAF Diamond League athletics meeting at the Stade de France in Paris on Friday.

## Juve after Forlan

INTERNET

Juventus are eyeing a move for Diego Forlan, with reports suggesting the Bianconeri are ready to lodge a bid for the 2010 World Cup's Golden Ball winner.

The Uruguayan has been linked with Juventus in recent weeks, but negotiations had yet to kick off. But now it seems that director Giuseppe Marotta is holding talks with Atletico Madrid.

"Juventus haven't made us an offer yet..." was the official line from the Europa League winners' President Enrique Cerezo.

Although Forlan's contract with Atletico expires in 2013 and his release clause is set at £30m, Juventus are preparing a bid they believe could tempt the Spanish side.

The Bianconeri are confident the player would be tempted to test himself in Serie A and are ready to offer around £15m for his services.

The relationship between the two clubs is good considering the Tiago Mendes deal and this should help negotiations.

Atletico are also interested in left-back Fabio Grosso and the former Lyon player could be part of the Forlan deal.

However, Liverpool have also reportedly tested Atletico's demands for Forlan and Juve will have to move quickly if they do not want to miss out on the ex-Man United man.

## Hammers sign duo

REUTERS, London

West Ham United have signed Mexico international Pablo Barrera and Olympique Lyon striker Frederic Piquionne, the Premier League club said on Friday.

West Ham have paid UNAM Pumas 4 million pounds (\$6.14 million) for 23-year-old pacy winger Barrera, while Piquionne has moved for an undisclosed fee. Barrera, who played three times for his country at the World Cup in South Africa, has signed a four-year contract with manager Avram Grant's side.

# Struggling clubs blocked in Italy

REUTERS, Rome



Serie B side Ancona and 20 teams from the Italian lower divisions were blocked from competing in the coming season on Friday because of their financial problems.

The Italian soccer federation said in a statement the decision had come after the country's soccer finance watchdog deemed the clubs' balance sheets too precarious.

"Serie B side Ancona and 20 Lega Pro clubs will not be readmitted to their championships after the consideration of (soccer's financial watchdog) Covisoc's findings," the statement said.

Italian soccer has been hit hard by the global economic crisis given smaller clubs were struggling even before the recession.

Fifteen other semi-pro clubs in the lower divisions had already been dropped from their championships because of money woes.

The federation board meeting which decided on the new measures was not attended by representatives of Serie A or Serie B in pro-

test at the recent decision to allow clubs to only buy one non-EU player this season rather than the previous two.

Clubs complained that the decision, made in the wake of Italy's shock exit in the World Cup group stage, was too rash and could not be suddenly enforced in the middle of a transfer window.

"There's no turning back," federation president Giancarlo Abete told a news conference.

Abete also said a decision would be made at the next board meeting in August over a new head of the federation's technical committee, with former Italy great Roberto Baggio interested in the role having stayed out of the game since his 2004 retirement.

In a separate development, the Italian professional footballers' association has hinted at a possible threat to strike on the first day of the league season after a disagreement with the federation over several of the new rules.

"We are considering drastic industrial action," association chief Sergio Campana told reporters. The association threatened a similar strike for the first day of last season but the action was averted.

## Barca snap up Adriano

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona have agreed to sign Sevilla midfielder Adriano Correia for up to 13.5 million euros (\$17.5 million), subject to medical checks, the La Liga champions said on Friday.

Adriano, 25, will arrive in the Catalan capital on Saturday. The versatile midfielder, who can also play at fullback, could make his Barca debut in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup on Aug. 14.

The initial fee will be 9.5 million euros, possibly rising to 13.5 million depending on the Brazilian's performance, Barca said on their website (www.fcbarcelona.com).

The club indicated on Thursday that they had around 50 million euros to spend on strengthening a squad already boosted by the arrival of Spanish World Cup striker David Villa.

They are trying to persuade Arsenal to sell them Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas but have already had a 35-million-euro approach rejected.



Barcelona's new signing Brazilian full-back Adriano Correia gives two thumbs up outside Nou Camp on Saturday.