

Robben best in Kicker poll

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's Dutch star winger Arjen Robben was named footballer of the 2009/10 Bundesliga season by sporting magazine Kicker on Sunday.

The 26-year-old - who is due to miss the next two months owing to a thigh muscle injury which has provoked a major row between his club and his national federation - saw off three clubmates in the voting by sports journalists.

Robben - who was a major influence as the Dutch reached the World Cup final where they lost 1-0 to Spain - received 445 votes while German international midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger, World Cup Golden Boot winner Thomas Mueller and German captain Philipp Lahm got 180, 118 and 35 votes respectively.

Robben, who staged an amazing recovery from his initial injury in the final warm-up match prior to the finals to start in all the knockout stage matches, was outstanding as Bayern did the domestic double and reached the Champions League final last season. Compatriot and Bayern coach Louis van Gaal was voted coach of the season.

FA could have sacked me: Capello

AFP, London

Fabio Capello has given an honest assessment of England's dismal performance at the World Cup and admits he would not have blamed the Football Association if they had sacked him.

The Italian coach had never seen one of his teams perform that poorly and for a few days it seemed he may well be sacked as the criticism grew stronger.

Eventually the FA decided to retain his services, but Capello would have had no complaints if they had terminated his contract.

"I would have understood if the FA decided to sack me. This is not a good period for me but I am looking forward. It is our job. When you win you are the best and when you lose it is nothing," Capello said.

"The fans had a lot of confidence in the team and the results weren't possible.

"I also had a lot of confidence in the team because my target was to play the final and we didn't play."

Capello is expecting England fans to boo the team when they play their first match since the World Cup - a friendly against Hungary at Wembley on Wednesday.

Capello added: "I understand the supporters. I think they will boo, but we need the support of the fans. It's possible they will boo on Wednesday."

"I want to improve and play at the Euros because it will be very important for me."

"I spoke a lot about the situation but I am a fighter and I never stop in my career. I am always looking forward."

11-goal thriller for Arsenal

AFP, London

Arsenal, playing without World Cup final stars Robin van Persie and Cesc Fabregas, came back from 3-0 down to defeat Polish side Legia Warsaw 6-5 in a roller-coaster pre-season friendly on Saturday.

Legia stormed ahead through Ariel Cabral, in the 17th minute, a Laurent Koscielny own-goal in the 33rd minute and Artur Jedrzejczyk, three minutes later.

Moroccan international Maroune Chamakh cut the deficit in the 38th minute from a cross from Samir Nasri.

Arsenal went 4-3 thanks to an Emmanuel Ebou double in the 52nd and 60th minutes and a strike from Kieran Gibbs in the 63rd.

The scoring continued when Jedrzejczyk grabbed his second of the match to make it 4-4 with 15 minutes left.

Jay Emmanuel-Thomas capitalised on a defensive error in the 81st minute to make it 5-4 and Nasri found the target with an 84th-minute free-kick.

Legia's Maciej Iwanski added the 11th goal of the match in the last minute.



Bayern Munich striker Miroslav Klose carries the Super Cup trophy after the Bavarians defeated Schalke in the final at Augsburg on Saturday to claim their first title of the season.

A new-look England

Football
AFP, London

Fabio Capello has drafted in Arsenal youngsters Jack Wilshere and Kieran Gibbs for Wednesday's friendly against Hungary as the England coach rings the changes after his team's World Cup flop.

Capello had vowed to take a closer look at the best young English players in the aftermath of his side's second round exit against Germany in South Africa and he has stuck to his word.

The Italian is keen to see if midfielder Wilshere, 18, and left-back Gibbs, 20, are worthy of a place in his plans for the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign and the Arsenal duo could win their first caps on Wednesday, with Fulham's Bobby Zamora also in line for his international debut.

The casualties of England's woeful efforts at the World Cup are goalkeepers David James and Robert Green, West Ham defender Matthew Upson and Liverpool midfielder Joe Cole.

Aston Villa's Emile Heskey had already retired after the World Cup but Tottenham pair Peter Crouch and Jermain Defoe, who both went to

SQUAD
Goalkeepers: Ben Foster (Birmingham), Joe Hart (Manchester City), Paul Robinson (Blackburn)
Defenders: Wes Brown (Manchester United), Gary Cahill (Bolton), Ashley Cole (Chelsea), Michael Dawson (Tottenham Hotspur), Kieran Gibbs (Arsenal), Phil Jagielka (Everton), Glen Johnson (Liverpool), John Terry (Chelsea)
Midfielders: Gareth Barry (Manchester City), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Adam Johnson (Manchester City), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), James Milner (Aston Villa), Ashley Young (Aston Villa), Theo Walcott (Arsenal), Jack Wilshere (Arsenal)
Forwards: Darren Bent (Sunderland), Carlton Cole (West Ham United), Wayne Rooney

South Africa, are missing from the squad.

With wingers Shaun Wright-Phillips and Aaron Lennon both dropped, there is a place for Aston Villa's Ashley Young.

Most of Capello's senior men are included, including John Terry, Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Ashley Cole and Wayne Rooney.

Captain Rio Ferdinand is still sidelined with the knee ligament injury he suffered just before the World Cup, while David Beckham is absent as he recovers from an Achilles injury.

Wilshere, who has yet to start a Premier League game for Arsenal, will become the 10th youngest England international of all-time if he plays some part against Hungary.

He has already set a few notable landmarks in his fledgling career, including becoming Arsenal's youngest league debutant two seasons ago and being the fifth 16-year-old to feature in the Champions League.

With five under-21 caps to his name, he has already made a favourable impression on Capello's assistant Stuart Pearce and his fine half-season on loan at Bolton last term did not go unnoticed by the England coach.

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Robinson retires from England duty

AFP, London

Blackburn goalkeeper Paul Robinson retired Sunday from international football despite being named in the England squad to face Hungary at Wembley on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old former Leeds and Tottenham shot-stopper was included in Fabio Capello's squad named Saturday having been left out of the World Cup squad.

Robinson, who will not be replaced in the squad for Wednesday's friendly game, now wants to concentrate on club football.

He won 41 caps after making his bow against Australia in 2003 and was number one for the 2006 World Cup campaign.

But some high-profile mistakes saw him lose his way and his first-choice status as England missed out on qualification for Euro 2008 under Steve McClaren.

Two errors saw him fluff a backpass from Gary Neville during a 2-0 defeat in Croatia, and he then palmed a long-range effort from Roman Pavlyuchenko into the net in a 2-1 defeat in Russia.

Arsene Arsenal for life

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said on Sunday he would be delighted to end his managerial career at the Premier League club and ensure that happens by signing a new contract at the end of the upcoming season.

The Frenchman - who turns 61 in October - has had offers in the past to try and lure him away from Arsenal but declined them and is nearing 14 years in charge at the London club.

He told the Observer that should he sign a new contract it would take him up to 65 an age where he said he would definitely move to another less pressurised job than club manager.

"I am at the stage where if I extend my contract, it means I will finish my career at club level at Arsenal," said Wenger, who has failed to deliver silverware to Arsenal since winning the 2005 FA Cup.

"If I go for a different challenge - I have been offered many challenges you know - it has to be now."

"That's a decision I have to make. But basically, I have no desire to change from here. I have one more year, and we are maybe thinking about extending it."

Wenger, who guided Arsenal to three Premier League titles and the domestic double in 1998, said that unless his body told him otherwise he would definitely retire as a manager in 2014.

"I've set myself a target until 65 and then I will certainly make a move to some different job, unless I still feel like I feel today," said Wenger, who desires above anything else to lift the Champions League trophy with Arsenal having lost on their only appearance in a final to Barcelona in 2006.

Fresh faces in Brazil

Football
AFP, Rio De Janeiro

New Brazil coach Mano Menezes has called up 10 new players for Tuesday's friendly against the USA, the team's first outing since their disappointing World Cup campaign.

Menezes has taken over from Dunga who was axed after the quarter-final loss to the Netherlands in South Africa last month.

Included in the squad are players expected to lead the assault on the 2014 World Cup which is being staged in Brazil.

Amongst the call-ups are Santos midfielder Paulo Henrique Ganso and his club mate, Neymar, a striker tipped to be one of Brazil's

SQUAD
Goalkeepers: Renan (Avali), Jefferson (Botafogo), Victor (Gremio)
Defenders: David Luiz (Benfica/POR), Henrique (Racing Santander/ESP), Reber (Atletico Mineiro), Thiago Silva (AC Milan/ITA)
Midfielders: Rafael (Manchester United/ENG), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Andre Santos (Fenerbahce/TUR), Daniel Alves (Barcelona/ESP), Ederson (Lyon/FRA), Carlos Eduardo (Hoffenheim/GER), Hemanes (Sao Paulo), Paulo Henrique Ganso (Santos), Lucas (Liverpool/ENG), Julciel (Corinthians), Ramires (Benfica/POR)
Attackers: Robinho (Santos), Neymar (Santos), Alexandre Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Andre (Santos), Diego Tardelli (Atletico)

future superstars. Manchester United

defender Rafael also gets a call as does Lyon midfielder Ederson, who led the national Under-17 team to the world title in 2003.

"I wasn't even thinking about the Brazil team. I've been focusing more on Lyon and on having a good pre-season," Ederson told www.fifa.com.

"Even so, you're always hoping for the call. I had an amazing experience with the U-17s and I wanted to have that opportunity again."

"Every player dreams about making a World Cup, especially with the next one being in Brazil. But there's still a long way to go. What matters now is to keep doing well for my club, to win titles and to give my all every time I'm called up. That's my long-term goal. The rest will come naturally."

Real conquer Galaxy

Football
AFP, Pasadena

Xabi Alonso scored in the 72nd minute as Real Madrid rallied for a 3-2 victory over the Los Angeles Galaxy Saturday in a friendly football match that drew a crowd of 89,134 at the Rose Bowl.

Gonzalo Higuain added two goals for Real, who were unbeaten in their two-match tour of California.

Todd Dunivant and Landon Donovan scored for the Galaxy, who are without a victory in six of their last seven matches.

Sergio Canales launched the play that led to the deciding goal. His back-heel pass freed Higuain for an eight-yard shot that was blocked by Galaxy goalkeeper Josh Saunders.

The long rebound fell to Alonso, who fired inside the left post.

The Galaxy had built a 2-0 halftime lead before Higuain pulled Real Madrid level with

two goals in the space of 10 minutes.

In the 51st minute he redirected Cristiano Ronaldo's cross from the left.

In the 61st Higuain collected a pass from Fernando Gago and scored.

Higuain, who led Argentina with four goals during the World Cup, finished Real Madrid's tour with three goals.

Dunivant had given the Galaxy a 1-0 lead in the 40th minute.

Donovan converted a penalty in the 45th to make it 2-0, after Royston Ricky Drenth kicked Galaxy's Juninho.

From the spot Donovan beat Polish international keeper Jerzy Dudek, who was replaced for the second half by Iker Casillas, the captain of Spain's World Cup championship team.

The Galaxy's Clint Mathis, who said on Tuesday he was retiring, made his final professional start and played 27 minutes.

Mathis, who played 11 years in Major League Soccer, earned 46 caps for the United States, representing his country at the 2002 World Cup.



Real Madrid forward Gonzalo Higuain (C) lifts the ball over advancing LA Galaxy goalkeeper Josh Saunders to score during their friendly match at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena on Saturday.

Prandelli's A-B-C

Football
REUTERS, Milan

New Italy coach Cesare Prandelli has named long-overlooked forwards Antonio Cassano, Mario Balotelli and Amauri in his squad for his first game in charge against Ivory Coast on Tuesday.

Inter Milan's 19-year-old striker Balotelli, being courted by Manchester City despite a series of on-and-off the field problems, earns his first call-up alongside Brazil-born forward Amauri.

SQUAD
Goalkeepers: Federico Marchetti (Cagliari), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo), Emiliano Viviano (Bologna)
Defenders: Luca Antonini (AC Milan), Davide Astori (Cagliari), Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus), Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Stefano Lucchini (Sampdoria), Cristian Molinaro (VfB Stuttgart), Marco Motta (Juventus)
Midfielders: Daniele De Rossi (AS Roma), Andrea Lazzari (Cagliari), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Simone Pepe (Juventus)
Forwards: Amauri (Juventus), Mario Balotelli (Inter Milan), Marco Borriello (AC Milan), Antonio Cassano (Sampdoria)

The inconsistent Juventus striker had the chance of making the Brazil squad last year but hung on to gain Italian citizenship only to be ignored by Marcello Lippi for Italy's World Cup humiliation in June.

In all there are eight new call-ups and only nine players remain from the squad which went to South Africa as



PHOTO: REUTERS

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli listens to a question from a reporter during a news conference in Coverciano on Sunday. Prandelli has named long-overlooked forwards Antonio Cassano, Mario Balotelli and Amauri in his squad for his first game in charge against Ivory Coast on Tuesday.

defending champions but were dumped out in the group stage without winning

Cole staying put at Chelsea

AFP, London

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has conceded that his new club will not be able to prise England defender Ashley Cole away from his former side Chelsea.

Mourinho has been strongly linked with Cole since taking over at the Bernabeu this summer, after leading Inter Milan to the Champions League for the first time, but the Portuguese says the Londoners have closed the door to a possible move.

"We thought about him because he's a good player who I enjoyed working with. But when a coach says 'no' it's no, and we have to accept that," Mourinho told the Sunday Times from the United States, where Real are currently on a pre-season tour.

agame.

Fabio Cannavaro and Gennaro Gattuso retired from internationals after the debacle and former Fiorentina boss Prandelli has signalled a possible end to the Italian careers of Antonio Di Natale and Gianluca Zambrotta by leaving them out.

Gianluigi Buffon and Andrea Pirlo are not fit so AS Roma's Daniele De Rossi is set to be captain for the game at West Ham United's Upton Park in London despite his club side not having played a competitive game yet this term.

Sampdoria talisman Cassano, who has overcome his bad-boy image in recent seasons, was also overlooked by Lippi for two years but makes his return to the squad having last been involved at Euro 2008.

Italy start their Euro 2012 qualifying campaign in Estonia on September 3 before hosting the Faroe Islands in Florence on September 7.