

## Beckenbauer Cup Real's

AFP, Munich

Real Madrid won the Franz Beckenbauer Cup on Friday, beating Bayern Munich 4-2 in a penalty shoot-out at the Allianz Arena in a testimonial for the German World Cup winning veteran.

French international Franck Ribery, besieged by problems both on and off the pitch, played 60 minutes of the game as he battles for full fitness a week ahead of the start of the new Bundesliga season.

In the eighth minute of the match, Spanish World Cup star Sergio Ramos conceded a penalty, but Holger Badstuber's spot-kick was saved by Iker Casillas in what was the best chance of regulation time.

"The result is not important. What was important was to face a difficult opponent like Bayern and pose them a lot of problems," said Real coach Jose Mourinho.

## Chelsea seal Ramires deal

AFP, London

English Premier League champions Chelsea on Friday completed the signing of Brazil midfielder Ramires from Benfica for a fee thought to be around 17 million pounds (20 million euros).

The 23-year-old has joined the Stamford Bridge side on a four-year contract having received a work permit and passed a medical.

The former Cruzeiro player will miss Saturday's opening Premier League game against West Brom.

"Every player in the world would love to play for Chelsea and it's a great opportunity that was given to me, I will give my best to repay this chance, and I am very happy," Ramires told www.chelseafc.com.

Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti said: "He is a fantastic player, he is very young and will be the future of the Brazilian national team, and I hope he will be the future of Chelsea."

Meanwhile, Ancelotti said he was unaware of a complaint made by Brazilian club Santos over the pursuit of teenage striker Neymar.

"I don't know anything about this," said Ancelotti.

"What I can say about Neymar is that he is a fantastic player but he is not a Chelsea player now and it's difficult for me to speak about this."

He added: "We are interested in all the best young players that come through in all the world and Neymar is one of these, but that doesn't mean that we will sign him."

## Mark hands in transfer request

AFP, London

Fulham's Australian international goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer on Friday handed in a transfer request as he stepped up his bid to be allowed to join Arsenal.

Schwarzer's impressive performances last season, when the unfashionable London side reached the Europa League final, brought him to the attention of Gunners boss Arsene Wenger, who had a two million pound bid rejected in May.

"My understanding is that he has handed in a transfer request," said Fulham boss Mark Hughes.

"He has indicated that he would like the opportunity to leave. Obviously we haven't encouraged Arsenal to come back to the table because they haven't been back since May."

"If they do come back and talk to me or my chief executive, then further conversations will be had but at the moment there is no point because we are not talking to anybody because they have not come back to us."

Schwarzer is keen for a taste of Champions League football before the end of his career, which has led him to hand in the request.

But Hughes has warned the Australian that he would not necessarily be guaranteed first-team football at the Emirates.

"Sometimes it is not always greener on the other side," Hughes said.

"I understand that at certain times of their careers players feel that when an opportunity presents itself, they feel they have to consider it very carefully."

"I think that is the case with Mark so I fully understand where he is coming from in that respect."



Real Madrid captain Iker Casillas (foreground) receives the Franz-Beckenbauer trophy from the former Bayern Munich president amid applause from their teammates (background) at the end of their friendly match in Munich on Friday.

## Wolves reach agreement for Diego

AFP, Berlin

Former German champions Wolfsburg have reached an agreement to sign Brazilian playmaker Diego from Juventus, the Bild newspaper claimed in its Saturday edition.

Wolfsburg finalised negotiations with Diego's father who is also the player's agent.

Djair da Cunha wanted an annual salary for his son of eight million euros over three years while Wolfsburg general manager Dieter Hoeness has proposed six million a year over four years.

Now it remains for a transfer fee to be agreed with Juventus demanding 19 million euros while Wolfsburg offer 17 million.

The German Bundesliga is not unfamiliar to Diego, who played three seasons with Werder Bremen in 2006-2009. The Brazilian failed to light up Serie A in his first season in Italy with Juventus.

Wolfsburg, who finished eighth in the league last season, are aiming for an improved result in the coming season under the helm of former England manager Steve McClaren.

McClaren has managed to retain the services of Bosnian striker Edin Dzeko, who became a target for several clubs after finishing as the Bundesliga's top scorer last season.

## City snap up Balotelli



Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini completed the signing of Italian striker Mario Balotelli from Inter Milan on Friday.

Balotelli agreed a five-year contract with the Premier League club after flying into Manchester for a medical earlier in the day.

The 20-year-old was a long-term transfer target for Mancini, who worked with the player during his spell in charge at Inter, and it is believed he has cost City around 24 million pounds (29 million euros).

He is City's fifth big-money signing since the end of last season, taking their spending to over 100 million pounds (121 million euros) after the arrivals of Jerome Boateng, David Silva, Yaya Toure and Aleksandar Kolarov.

"I think that Mario is one of the best players of his age in Europe and I am very happy to be working with him again," Mancini told City's website.

"His style of play will suit the Premier League and City fans will enjoy watching him."

Balotelli will not be available to play in Saturday's season opener at Tottenham, but Mancini is confident he has all the qualities needed to be a success.

"He is still so young there is a big chance for him to improve. He is a strong and exciting player," Mancini added.

Balotelli hinted that he was sad to leave Italy.

"I'm sorry to leave Inter and Italy, because I would have preferred to continue my professional growth in my own country," he told his personal website.

Balotelli, who has Ghanaian parents, had endured a stormy spell at Inter.

He fell out with former manager Jose

Mourinho last season and was left out of the squad for a European tie against Chelsea.

He also angered fans of the European champions by allowing himself to be photographed in the shirt of their arch rivals AC Milan and was racially abused by Juventus fans during a match in 2009.

Despite all the controversy, Balotelli remains an incredibly gifted player, with pace, power and the ability to score spectacular goals.

While Balotelli has arrived at Eastlands in time for the new season, another of Mancini's targets, Aston Villa midfielder James Milner, may not get his wish to join City until next week at the earliest.

Mancini's club have been negotiating with Villa over England international Milner for several weeks and the Italian said: "We need another two or three days for this situation. We need everyone to be happy."

It is believed City are ready to sell midfielder Stephen Ireland to Villa as part of the deal but the Republic of Ireland international is still discussing a pay-off before agreeing to leave.

Mancini also admitted Wales striker Craig Bellamy's time at Eastlands is over after accusing him of false statements to the media.

Bellamy has been fined after claiming Mancini was trying to force him out of Eastlands and had stopped speaking to him.

He will not be included in City's 25-man squad for the coming season, with Fulham and Scottish club Celtic ready to fight it out for his services.

"I have to choose 25. The rest must find another team. Craig is out of the list," Mancini said.

"Bellamy can talk but it is not important because it is false. Last year Craig played all the games with me. This year I have chosen other players. I am the manager. I make this choice."

## Arsene's heart belongs to Arsenal

REUTERS, London



Arsene Wenger has pledged his future to Arsenal, signing a three-year contract extension that will keep him at the north London Premier League club until the end of the 2013/14 season.

"My heart belongs to Arsenal and my desire is to see this team win silverware," the Frenchman told Arsenal's website (www.arsenal.com) on Saturday.

"My commitment and drive are as strong and fresh as ever. I feel my personal position is that I am as motivated as ever, if not more," he said ahead of his team's opening league match of the season away to Liverpool on Sunday.

"I have the trust from my board and hopefully of the fans as well and also from the players," added the 60-year-old, who will be embarking on his 15th campaign in charge.

Earlier this month Wenger told the British Observer newspaper that "if I extend my contract, it means I will finish my career at club level at Arsenal."

As the club's longest serving manager, he has won three Premier League titles and led them through an undefeated league season, but is under pressure from some fans after five campaigns without a trophy.

"I feel that we have not won for a few years now and it is important to get back to winning trophies."

## FIFA ponders WC changes

AFP, Berlin

Football's governing body FIFA is considering scrapping drawn games from the group stages of the World Cup finals, the organisation's chief Sepp Blatter has said.

The Swiss supreme told German weekly Focus in its edition of next Monday that he wanted to put an end to defence-minded teams playing to get a draw in the early games of the sport's showcase tournament.

"We are considering doing away with draws in the first round ... and also ending extra-time play," he said.

"If there is no winner at the end of 90 minutes of play, we would proceed directly to penalty kicks."

Another possibility, according to Blatter, would be to revive the "Golden Goal" scenario whereby if a match is drawn, the first team to score a goal would be the winner.

That was used in the 1998 competition in France but was abandoned four years later when the finals were held in Japan and South Korea.

The next World Cup will be held in Brazil in 2014.

"We maintained the club at the top level but we want to get to the next step, to win trophies and to win the title and the Champions League of course," Wengersaid.

Wenger steered Arsenal to the Champions League final in 2006 where they lost to Barcelona, and their last trophy was the 2005 FA Cup, the fourth of the Frenchman's reign.

He won the FA Cup and League Double in his first full season, then in 2003-04 his "Invincibles" side finished the League season unbeaten.

Since then Wenger has set about constructing a team renowned for its flair and attacking style as well as promoting youth but so far they have lacked big successes.

Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas, captain at just 23, recently committed to Arsenal after speculation he would move to Barcelona.

Playmaker Fabregas will be central to the club's hopes this year and Wenger believes success is near.

"Trust me, they are ready to deliver," he said, a view shared by chairman Peter Hill-Wood.

"The exciting and compelling football we play under his stewardship is admired the world over. We believe the young, exciting team he has nurtured over the past five years will reward his and the fans' patience with silverware," Hill-Wood told the website.

## 'L'pool not contenders'

AFP, Liverpool



Roy Hodgson does not expect Liverpool to challenge for the Premier League title this season because he has not had enough time to work with his new squad.

Hodgson welcomes Arsenal to Anfield on Sunday for his first Premier League game as Liverpool boss after replacing Rafael Benitez during the close-season.

The former Fulham manager was the number one choice to replace Benitez because of his honesty and straight-talking values, something he displayed time and time again during his successful three-year tenure at Craven Cottage.

And he has sought to dampen some of the expectation on his side's shoulders ahead of the new Premier League season.

The signing of the likes of Joe Cole plus the expected takeover of the club from controversial co-owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett has raised hopes on Merseyside that Liverpool can become a side to contend with - starting against the Gunners.

Yet Hodgson sees things differently. "After seven training sessions with what I regard as the key players, it is pretty obvious

to all that we are a long, long way from being a team like Manchester United, Arsenal or Chelsea," he said.

"I don't even pretend that the team after six or seven training sessions are going to be anything like the team we want to be."

"It would be ridiculous to suggest that we can be at the top of our game now in terms of how I want the team to play."

Hodgson has to decide if he plays midfielder Javier Mascherano in the club's opening fixture against Arsene Wenger's side after the Argentina captain made it clear he wants to leave the club.

Inter Milan are the favourites to sign him because Benitez wants to be reunited with him but as far as Hodgson is concerned, Mascherano, at least for the time being, is going nowhere.

"At the moment I can quite categorically state there has been no offer from any club for Javier Mascherano," he added.

"And as a result, I don't see why I should put his loyalty or desire to play for the club in doubt every day."

"I don't want to let Javier Mascherano go. At the moment, Javier Mascherano has shown no signs of going, so it's not a question of replacing him."

Ahead of Arsenal's visit to Anfield, Gunners boss Wenger is refusing to give

up on an unlikely challenge for the Premier League title and he considers a difficult opening game against Liverpool will help back up his claims that he has a squad worthy of challenging for the championship.

Wenger said: "We have a tough start against Liverpool but it is a good opportunity to show that we are ready to fight for the title. The team is ready, ambitious and prepared to fight."

"It is a good thing to start at Liverpool because you know you are going into a game where maximum concentration is demanded."

"We are encouraged by a good pre-season and that's why we go there with belief and aim to fire on all cylinders."

"It could be a race between six or seven teams. It is important to be consistent and win the big games."

"We have an advantage that we know each other well and we know how we want to play. If you look at the expectation level this team gave a lot last year. But we want to improve from that and I believe we can."

Liverpool striker Fernando Torres could be used as a substitute after recovering from a thigh strain ahead of schedule, while Arsenal are likely to be without Andrei Arshavin and Nicklas Bendtner.

## Ozil offer rejected

AFP, Bremen

Spanish giants Real Madrid on Friday failed in a bid to persuade Werder Bremen to part with German World Cup sensation Mesut Ozil, with their offer dismissed as "unacceptable".

"We have received an unacceptable offer and we will not allow negotiations to open," Werder sports director Klaus Allofs told the SID news agency.

Financial details of the bid were not disclosed but German media reported that a 16-million-euro price tag had been placed on Ozil whose contract with Werder expires in June 2011.

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho admitted his great interest in the 21-year-old.

"His club said no. No we will have to see what happens. It would be great if he could join us," said Mourinho.

Ozil has been the recent target of clubs such as Arsenal and Manchester United.

The midfielder, who joined Werder Bremen in January 2008 for 4.25 million euros, impressed during the World Cup this summer in which Germany finished third.

## Indian tycoon eyes Rovers

AFP, London

Indian businessman Ahsan Ali Syed stepped up his bid to buy Premier League club Blackburn Rovers after his Western Gulf Advisory (WGA) investment vehicle was given a four-week period of exclusivity to check the club's accounts.

Syed has reportedly allocated 300 million pounds to complete the takeover, cover outstanding debts and "provide the necessary capital to buy new players and invest over the longer term so it can once again become a title contender".

## Inter win TIM trophy



Football

AFP, Rome

Serie A champions Inter Milan scored a psychological victory over rivals AC Milan and Juventus by winning the three-way TIM Trophy pre-season tournament in Bari on Friday.

The three teams played each other for 45 minutes each, meaning each side played an entire 90 minutes throughout the evening.

Having earlier beaten Juventus 1-0, Inter then defeated Milan on penalties following a 0-0 draw to claim the trophy.

Milan finished second after they beat Juventus on penalties after a 1-1 stalemate.

The first 45 minutes of the days saw the champions tackle last season's major under-achievers, Juventus.

Inter dominated throughout and the 1-0 scorline, achieved through Wesley Sneijder's 25th minute wonder strike, was kind on Juve.

Rafael Benitez's side had already created half a dozen chances by the time Sneijder took the ball from 25 yards out, avoided Momo Sissoko and curled a stunning shot into the top corner and past Alex Manninger's despairing dive.

Manninger had been the only person to stand in Inter's way with a pair of important saves from Goran Pandev while he did well to keep out

Macon's dipping volley.

Samuel Eto'o also headed over and Victor Obinna and Esteban Cambiasso both had rasping shots fly just wide of the upright.

Juve only once created any danger but Cambiasso charged down Sissoko's drive and Felipe Melo was wasteful with the follow-up.

Milan had new goalkeeper Marco Aurelia to thank for their victory against Juventus as he made a string of crucial saves.

Amelia had already made brilliant one-handed stops from Diego and David Lanzafame before Ronaldinho gave Milan the lead.

Nigerian Nnamdi Oduamadi, known as Odu, chipped the ball out to the left of the area to the unmarked Ronaldinho who curled the ball around goalkeeper Marco Storari.

When Amelia also saved one-on-one against Amauri it seemed Milan would hold on but Lanzafame set up Diego to finish crisply across the goalkeeper and take the game to penalties.

Still Amelia would not be denied and he saved from both Simone Pepe and Amauri to give Milan the win.

Following a tame 0-0 draw the two Milan neighbours also went to penalties.

This time it was not the goalkeepers who made the difference as five players missed, with Ronaldinho's chip onto the corner of post and bar the crucial miss to give Inter a 3-2 win.



Inter Milan playmaker Wesley Sneijder (C) celebrates his all-important goal with teammates during their TIM trophy encounter against Juventus in Bari on Friday.