

# Khedira warns Ballack

Football

AFP, Brussels

Germany captain Michael Ballack has been told he faces a fight to win back his midfield place by Real Madrid's Sami Khedira.

Ballack has been left out of the Germany squad as he recovers from an ankle injury.

The knock kept him out of the World Cup and in his absence Khedira took his place in the heart of Germany's midfield, scoring the goal against Uruguay which earned the Germans third place in South Africa.

His World Cup performances earned Khedira a 14-million-euro transfer from Stuttgart to Real Madrid and the 23-year-old says veteran Ballack will not just walk back into the national side at his expense.

"In his career, Michael Ballack has done much for German football and has produced several excellent performances at major tournaments," said Khedira.

"But with all due respect to him: that now may no longer matter."

"I know that I do not have to hide and bring to the national team my own style and, hopefully, success."

Since the World Cup, Khedira has taken over the role of leading Germany's defence in midfield and will not surrender his place without a fight.

"There are other excellent midfielders in Germany, not only Michael Ballack," said Khedira with Leverkusen's Simon Rolfes and Stuttgart's Christian Ginter also on the

fringes of the national squad.

"But anyway, I look only at myself. I was challenging for a place, went to the World Cup and returned as a regular national player," he said.

"And not out of luck, but because I have put in some good performances in South Africa."

National coach Joachim Loew has said Bastian Schweinsteiger and Khedira form the backbone of his midfield as Germany look to qualify for Euro 2012 to be held in the Ukraine and Poland.

"At the moment, the defensive midfielders are Bastian and Sami, that is set," said the 50-year-old Loew.

Despite being criticised, along with Germany teammate Mesut Ozil, for his lack of Spanish by Real coach Jose Mourinho since the pair's arrival in the Spanish capital, Khedira says he is working on his languages.

"I have been there now for two or three weeks. My English is so good that I can give and understand all tactical instructions 100 per cent," he said.

"Sometimes I understand it, even in Spanish, but of course, I want to learn the language quickly."

"I am now taking private Spanish classes three times a week."

Khedira says he has adjusted to Real's style of play under Mourinho straight away, but is learning fast.

"It is a completely new style of football at Real and a very different philosophy," he said.

"Having played my style of football for 20 years, I can't just change it within three weeks, but I know I am on the right path."

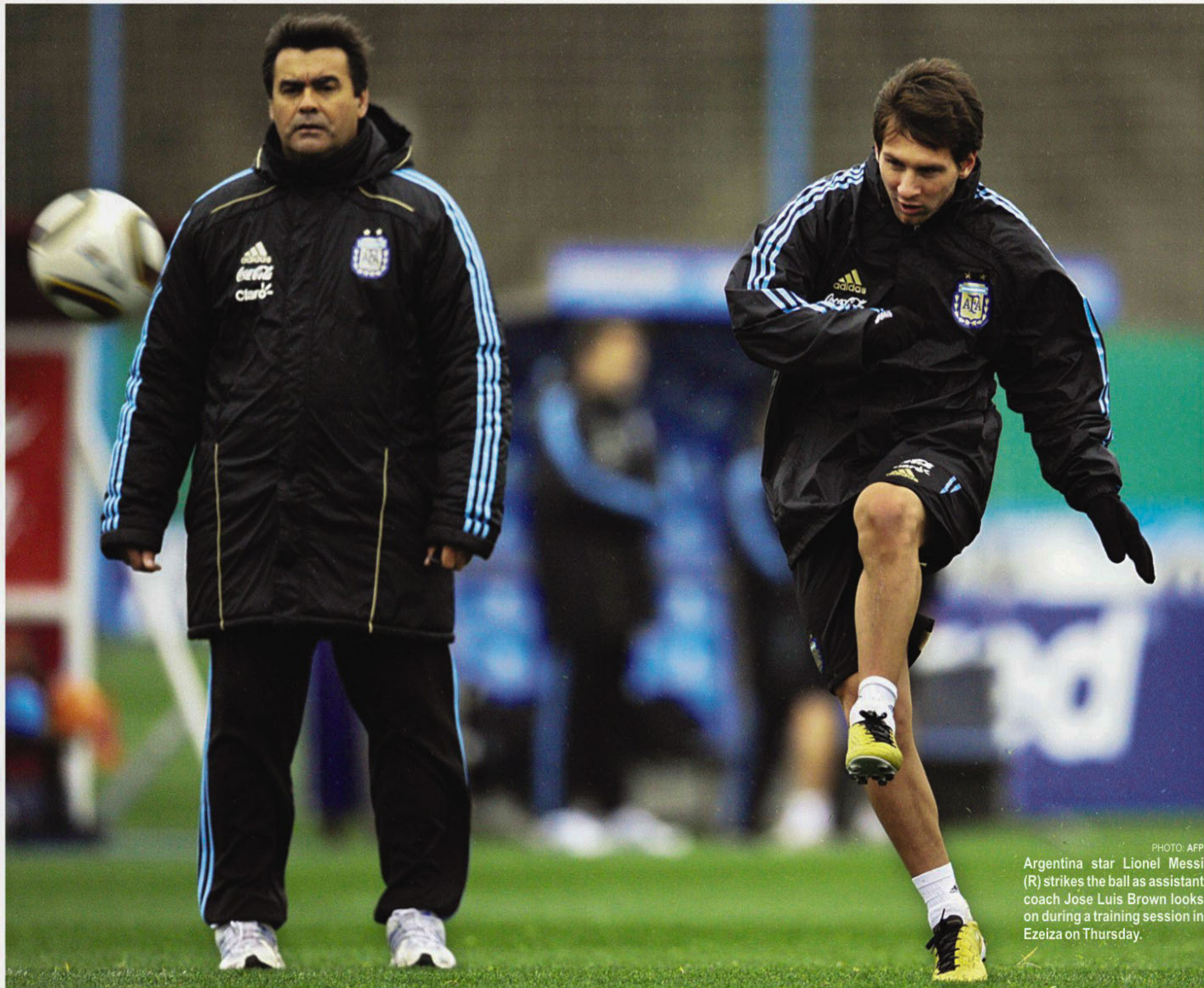


PHOTO: AFP  
Argentina star Lionel Messi (R) strikes the ball as assistant coach Jose Luis Brown looks on during a training session in Ezeiza on Thursday.

# 'I'm not Ronaldinho'

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's Brazilian teenage talent Coutinho has pleaded not to be dubbed the new Ronaldinho as he begins his Italian adventure.

Coutinho has been much hyped in Italy since Inter bought him two years ago from Vasco da Gama when he was just 16.

He remained in Brazil until this season as Italian league rules stipulate that a foreigner cannot play for an Italian team until he has turned 18.

And as Coutinho plays in a similar 'trequartista' position between forwards and midfielders, the comparisons with AC Milan's Ronaldinho were inevitable.

But Coutinho wants to nip those in the bud straight away.

"I'm just Coutinho, a kid who's getting better. Ronaldinho is an extra-terrestrial who's won everything," he told La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"He is football. If we have a similarity it's maybe that we like to start on the left and head for goal."

"But please don't get us confused. I'd be happy to achieve half of his success."

But while Coutinho is star-struck by his compatriot, he is also highly impressed by one of his own club team-mates: Wesley Sneijder.

"He deserves the Golden Ball, I watch him in training

and I'm enchanted, he's a legend.

"I'm trying to steal his secret, his speed of thought. His head flies, he sees things before the ball arrives. I need to be quick like Sneijder."

As for the future, Coutinho is hoping to form part of an attacking trident in the Brazil team to rival the great Ronaldo-Ronaldinho-Rivaldo combination that guided the Selecao to

the World Cup in 2002.

Coutinho, Milan's Pato and Neymar of Santos are three youngsters for whom Brazil has high hopes.

"It would be a great trident but as for a central striker, pay attention to Andre at Dynamo Kiev."

"And you're forgetting Robinho, another phenomenon. Milan have made a great signing there."



COUTINHO

# 'Pressure no factor'

Football

AFP, Watford

Steven Gerrard has told his England teammates they have to be strong enough to cope with the pressure of playing for their country in the aftermath of a dismal World Cup.

Gerrard knows it is vital England make a positive start to the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign to quell the growing calls for coach Fabio Capello to be sacked and restore some belief to an under-fire squad.

Several England players were booed during the friendly win over Hungary last month as fans showed their frustration at the team's underachievement.

But the Liverpool midfielder, who will again captain England in the absence of injured first-choice skipper Rio Ferdinand, knows the negative atmosphere is inevitable after such a poor World Cup and he insists the players cannot use that as an excuse.

"The players and the manager realise we are under pressure at the moment, which is normal after under-performing at the World Cup," Gerrard said at England's team hotel on Thursday.

"A win always helps in this situation. That is the challenge. The difficult thing is there is slightly more pressure on us this time. But we

have to cope with that and handle it.

"We qualified really well for the World Cup playing good attacking football and if we can put in a good performance and take maximum points, we will go into the next game with confidence."

Gerrard was one of the few players to return from South Africa with any credit as Capello's side were eliminated from the tournament by Germany in the second round after three underwhelming displays in the group stage.

He appears to relish the responsibility of wearing the captain's armband and was in fine form, scoring twice, in the 2-1 win over Hungary.

"I'm really enjoying being captain," he said. "I've captained Liverpool for many years and thrive on responsibility. My performances for England have been good with the armband."

"It does make it more difficult to have injuries because they are fantastic players with big experience."

"But now they are injured it puts a bit more responsibility on myself and the other experienced players to try to pull the lads together and get two wins."

"After the team under-performed in South Africa there have been changes made. And, with injuries to big players, it's a fantastic opportunity for people to stake a claim and give the manager something to think about when we next get together."

# Mano starts training camp

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

The Brazil team on Friday started a six-day training camp in the Spanish city of Barcelona under the eye of new coach Mano Menezes, according to the Brazilian football federation.

Menezes, the successor to Dunga who was axed after Brazil were knocked out of this year's World Cup in the quarterfinals, called up 22 Europe-based players for the camp.

The primary goal of the get-together was "to get to know the players better", he said, adding that Brazil-based players had not been included so as not to disturb their ongoing domestic season.

Brazil will play one friendly match while in northeast Spain, against Barcelona's 'B' team on Tuesday.

Menezes got his tenure off to a winning start with a 2-0 victory over the United States in August. The team's next international match is against Argentina in a friendly in Doha on November 17.

# Borriello rejected Man City

SOCCERNET

Roma's new €10 million signing Marco Borriello rejected an approach from Manchester City and also had an option to join Real Madrid, according to the player's agent.

Borriello joined the Giallorossi from AC Milan on transfer deadline day after rejecting a loan move to Juventus in favour of a permanent deal, and agent Tiberio Cavalleri has revealed a number of other high-profile clubs were also interested in striking a deal.

"On Monday Roberto Mancini called me and we spoke," Cavalleri told Il Corriere dello Sport. "He wanted Marco at Manchester City, but I told him Marco was only interested in playing in the Champions League."

"Then on Tuesday the big hit came from Real Madrid. But Karim Benzema did not leave for Marseille..."

Borriello, 28, opted to join Roma after being seduced by a text from Italian midfielder Daniele De Rossi and a heart to heart with club president Rosella Sensi.

"If I am here today, I owe it to Rosella Sensi, to her words and to the passion that she knew how to transmit to me," Borriello said.

# Delneri defends buys

AFP, Rome



Juventus coach Luigi Delneri has been defending his exuberant off-season transfer dealings.

While Serie A rivals AC Milan were relatively quiet in the transfer market until the last few days when they landed two coups, bringing superstars Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Robinho to the club, Juve's policy seemed more one of quantity than quality.

Delneri brought in 10 players while letting the likes of playmaker Diego return to Germany, although he did offload veterans David Trezeguet and Jonathan Zebina.

Although his acquisitions included five full Italy internationals, he was over-

shadowed by Milan's dealings.

But Delneri insists he is happy with his buys.

"The club did what it could bearing in mind our technical and economic needs," he told Friday's La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"And that's fine by me because I have a young squad with cover in every position."

Milan spent 42 million euros on their two marquee signings, far less than Juve spent in total but Delneri argued that his rivals tactic does not guarantee success.

"Milan bought two stars that no one imagined they could but only time will tell who did well (in the transfer market) and who didn't," he added.

"I remember a year ago that everyone was eulogising over Juve's buys. After the first few games they seemed to be able to

compete with Inter but then we all know what happened.

"Who guarantees that a star will resolve all your problems? We've already got quality given that we're full of internationals."

Despite winning their first four games, Juve slumped to their worst ever season in Serie A with records numbers of defeats and goals conceded last time out.

Juventus actually wanted to buy even more players but were snubbed by Antonio Di Natale, Mario Borriello and Georgia centre-back Kakha Kaladze.

Although, that's not how Delneri sees things.

"Calm down, no one turned us down. Di Natale had already rejected Napoli in a life-choice because he wanted to stay in Udine."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

# Becks targets return

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham, sidelined since March with a torn achilles tendon, is hoping to take the field for the Los Angeles Galaxy against Columbus Crew on September 11.

"The doctors' original date was October 1, but I always kind of said I want to be ready before then," Beckham said in an article posted on the Major League Soccer team's website.

"I'll keep my fingers crossed and hopefully will play in part of the game here against Columbus. I'll be on the bench, and hopefully I'll get on the field for 15-20 minutes. That's what I'm looking at."

The 35-year-old Beckham, England's most capped outfield player, missed the World Cup finals after tearing his left achilles tendon on March 14 while playing on loan for AC Milan.

He took part in his first full training session with the Galaxy on August 11 and has gradually stepped up his work, although he gauged his fitness level as "like being in preseason."

"You wake up with a lot more pain in your body when you're in preseason," said

Beckham, who also admitted that some moves such as quick turns are still tough. "I have to do it because I need to get as close to match fitness as possible."

Beckham, who was on crutches for six weeks, said real fitness will only come from playing matches, and he wants to get back to top form in time to help the Galaxy finish out the season and MLS Cup playoffs.

After a strong start to the season Los Angeles have won only three of their last 10 matches and seen their Western Conference lead over Real Salt Lake dwindle to three points.

"It's just about getting over this slump, then once we do that hopefully we can go all the way," Beckham said.

Similarly, Beckham continues to look toward his own footballing future, even after England coach Fabio Capello's summary dismissal of the veteran from future England plans.

Beckham said his injury never prompted thoughts of retirement.

"Not at any point," he said. "When you first have an injury like this and realize how serious an injury it is, you worry that you're not going to get back to playing top flight soccer. But that probably was in my head for only about 10 seconds."



PHOTO: AFP  
Former England midfielder David Beckham (C) watches a game of baseball between the Baltimore Orioles and Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim at the Angel Stadium last Sunday.

# Torres far from full fitness

AFP, Liverpool

Fernando Torres is still one month away from reaching full fitness although he is ahead of schedule in his ongoing rehabilitation.

The 26-year-old has been hampered by two knee operations in the first four months of the year and an adductor injury sustained in Spain's World Cup final victory in July.

However, the former Atletico Madrid striker scored his first Liverpool goal since April on Sunday as they beat West Brom, against whom he played 89 minutes.

And Liverpool's head of sports science Peter Brukner believes Torres, who is now away on international duty with Spain, will soon be back in top condition.

"He's actually slightly ahead of schedule - he played a game earlier than we thought," said Brukner, referring to the substitute appearance against Arsenal on the opening weekend of the season.

"He started off with a few minutes, then a few more minutes and then started the last couple of (Premier League) games."

"But for a kick on the shin against West Brom he would have played the whole game."

"We're now at the stage where he can play the whole game."

"He's still not at his physical peak, that will take another three or four weeks, but I think you can see in every game he's played he's improving."

"I don't think it will be too long before the old Fernando Torres is back - and I'm looking forward to that."