

Brazil's Derby delight

Football

AFP, Derby

Brazil made it three wins out of three for new coach Mano Menezes here on Monday as they beat Euro 2012 co-hosts Ukraine 2-0 in an international friendly watched by just 13,000 spectators in a ground with a 33,000 capacity.

The Brazilians - who are rebuilding after their disappointing World Cup where they went out in the quarterfinals beaten by the Netherlands - scored a goal in each half through star fullback Dani Alves and AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato.

Menezes, appointed after Dunga was sacked following the World Cup disappointment, said he was pleased with how the mainly inexperienced and young side was coping at international level.

"This is my third game as Brazil coach and the team is making progress," said Menezes, who was not first choice for the post but got the nod when Fluminense refused to release Muricy Ramalho.

"But we need to play games like this tonight against different kinds of teams, different kinds of philosophies of football to make some improvement. But I am satisfied because at the moment my goal is to build a team for 2014 (when Brazil host the World Cup)."

Alves, who along with Robinho were the only two survivors from the starting line-up from the Dutch match, struck for the second game in succession midway through the first-half.

The Barcelona star met Robinho's cross from the right wing and his volley beat the Ukrainian keeper Andriy Dykan after taking a

slight deflection off a defender. Menezes singled out skipper Robinho for special praise.

"He is more mature now," said Menezes. "He is one of the players who, even though he is not so old, is one of the most experienced players I have."

"Robinho's happiness is very important for us, so now he is one of those to look up to for the young players."

The Brazilians should have added a second in the 35th minute after Ukraine lost possession inside their own half.

Pato got clear but his shot cannoned off the post and Carlos Eduardo following up was unable to keep his effort down and it went well over the bar.

However, Eduardo made up for his miss when he created Brazil's second goal in the 64th minute as he found Pato - who was left out of the World Cup squad - in the penalty area and the 21-year-old AC Milan ace turned his marker and slotted past Dykan.

Alves went agonisingly close to making it 3-0 with 15 minutes remaining as his freekick from just outside the penalty area grazed the crossbar.

The Ukrainians - deprived of their veteran star Andriy Shevchenko because of a slight thigh injury - rarely threatened though they had the ball in the net once through Oleksandr Aliyev but it was ruled out.

The first major target for Menezes will be a successful defence of the Brazilian's Copa America title in Argentina next year.

Thus far the 48-year-old former Corinthians coach has guided the Brazilians to victories over the United States and Iran and will face bitter rivals Argentina in Doha on November 17.



Brazil starlet Alexandre Pato goes airborne to celebrate his goal against Ukraine during their international friendly at Pride Park on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Real eyeing Llorente

SOCCERNET

Real Madrid sporting director Miguel Pardeza considers Athletic Bilbao striker Fernando Llorente to be an "interesting" player but said it is too early to discuss the club's transfer plans.

Jose Mourinho is currently relying on Gonzalo Higuain and Karim Benzema as the club's orthodox strikers and said during the summer that he was keen to bolster the squad's attacking options.

Asked whether Llorente would be a target in the next transfer window, Pardeza told AS: "It's too early to tell."

"We're happy with the squad. I don't see any pressing need but I don't know yet whether we will have injury problems between now and January. Anyway, it's always a possibility. We won't be looking into it until much further down the line."

US duo back in Europe

AFP, Philadelphia

US captain Carlos Bocanegra and defender Steve Cherundolo have returned to European clubs and been replaced on the American roster for Tuesday's friendly against Colombia.

Both players were part of the Americans' 2-2 draw with Poland on Saturday in Chicago.

Bocanegra was released Sunday to return to Saint-Etienne of the French league while Cherundolo left Monday for Hannover, the third-place team in the Bundesliga which have a major match this weekend at Bayern Munich.

Holloway punished

AFP, London

Blackpool boss Ian Holloway has been given a one-match touchline ban after an altercation with officials during his team's 2-1 defeat by Blackburn last month, the Football Association confirmed Monday.

Holloway was also fined 9,500 pounds for his part in a bust-up with referee Mike Dean in the tunnel at Bloomfield Road following the defeat.

Holloway, who admitted a charge of improper conduct, had raged at match officials for allowing Brett Emerton's injury-time winner which he believed was off-side as well as an apparent foul in the build-up.

"I thought the referee had a poor game and he is going to report me for what I said to him in the tunnel," Holloway said after the match.

"I can't believe what he saw. I thought there were some unbelievably strange decisions out there."

"I waited for him in the tunnel. Never mind, I have got to learn and I should know better - but it is ridiculous."

The ban rules Holloway out of this weekend's visit of Manchester City.

Paraguay cruise

Football

AFP, Wellington

Paraguay's attacking finesse proved too much for New Zealand as the World Cup quarterfinalists held off a second half challenge for a 2-0 victory in an international friendly Tuesday.

Paraguay showed superior finishing skills against the All Whites to ensure there was no repeat of the drab 0-0 draw when the two sides last met in the group stages of the World Cup in South Africa.

New Zealand, who finished with 10 men after defender Winston Reid was red-carded for an 89th minute challenge on Federico Santander, never looked like overturning the deficit after going two goals down in the first halfhour.

The result gave the South Americans the only win of their Asian tour after 1-0 losses to Australia and Japan and a 1-1 draw with China.

The All Whites, missing skipper Ryan Nelsen and striker Shane Smeltz through injury, stood back early, wary of an opponent ranked 17th in the world.

Paraguay's Nelson Valdez, the record signing for La Liga side Hercules, attempted to take advantage with a number of long range shots but failed to trouble New Zealand keeper Mark

Paston.

The striker finally put the South Americans ahead through a 22nd minute penalty, awarded after Edgar Benitez fell victim to a clumsy Ben Sigmund challenge.

Five minutes later, Paraguay midfielder Osvaldo Martinez found himself in the clear in the 27th minute, latching onto an Enrique Vera through ball and flicking it over Paston's head.

Paraguay asserted their dominance for the rest of the half as New Zealand's defence struggled without Nelsen's calming influence.

New Zealand came out firing after the break, creating a hatful of early chances, the best of which was a close range Jeremy Brockie volley cleared off the line by the feet of keeper Justo Villar.

But the All Whites could not take their chances and Paraguay were content to sit on their lead, soak up the pressure and attempt to hit New Zealand on the break.

New Zealand coach Ricki Herbert said the result was disappointing after the All Whites' surprise World Cup performance, where they finished as the only undefeated team, but saw encouraging signs for the Brazil 2014 campaign.

"The depth's growing, football's in great shape (in New Zealand) and it's great to be part of it," he said.



Paraguay players (L to R) Edgar Benitez, Osvaldo Martinez and Enrique Vera celebrate their second goal against New Zealand during their international friendly at the Westpac Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Zizou in the dugout?

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid has no plans to sell under-fire striker Karim Benzema and would welcome having Zinedine Zidane in a coaching role, the Spanish club's sporting director Miguel Pardeza said Tuesday.

Real coach Jose Mourinho said Sunday that Zidane, a former Real player who has since June 2009 been a special advisor to Real president Florentino Perez, should be closer to the pitch.

"I would like to have him more with me and less with the president. I don't think he wants to become a coach but I would still like to have him with me," he told French TV channel TF1.

Asked about Mourinho's wish, Pardeza told sports daily AS that it was a "desire which we take into account".

"Someone like Zidane is never out of place. He is a world reference and a myth for Real Madrid fans. In the end he accepts Mourinho's suggestion, it would be welcome," he added.

Zidane, a three-time world player of the year, retired from football after his fifth season with Real in 2006 and the World Cup that year.

Pardeza said Mourinho is "generally" pleased with Benzema's performances "but he also tells us that he thinks the player can give us

much more."

"But we have time, you have to be patient and we continue to back the player. The idea of selling Benzema is not on the agenda," Pardeza added.

"I'm not despairing. I expect he will triumph at Real Madrid."

Reports in Britain last week claimed Benzema was being widely tipped for the exit during the January transfer window after struggling to get a start in his favoured centre forward position under Mourinho.

The 22-year-old signed for Real Madrid in July 2009 from Olympique Lyon on a six-year contract in a deal worth 35 million euros.

Last month France coach Laurent Blanc, who has made little secret of his desire to build the French national team around Benzema, said the player was "not used to working".

Pardeza also said he was confident that Portuguese international defender Pepe would soon reach an agreement with the club over his contract extension.

He joined Real from FC Porto on a five-year contract in July 2007 but AS reported last week that he was prepared to leave the club in 2012 after being frustrated in negotiations over a new deal.

"I understand that a player sees his particular case as a great priority, but the club also has other issues. But I am convinced that there will be no problem and Pepe will stay with us for a long time," said Pardeza.

Bayern want Bommel released

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich have called for the immediate release of team captain Mark van Bommel from international duty with the Netherlands.

Bayern made the request to the Dutch Football Federation on Tuesday.

"The management of Bayern Munich has asked the president of the Dutch federation to release Mark van Bommel to Munich without delay," the reigning German champions announced.

Bayern said they had made the request following talks with club doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt who wants to take over the treatment of van Bommel.

Van Bommel was due to line up for the Netherlands in Tuesday evening's Euro 2012 Group E qualifier against Sweden.

This demand is the latest twist in a rift between Bayern and the Dutch federation with the club blaming the 'Oranje' for playing Arjen Robben at the World Cup despite their striker carrying a thigh injury.

Joaquin out for Barca clash

SOCCERNET

Valencia winger Joaquin Sanchez is set to be sidelined for the next two weeks through injury, ruling him out of Saturday's showdown with Barcelona at Camp Nou.

Joaquin underwent tests on his damaged left ankle on Tuesday morning, after which it was estimated that he will be out action for ten to 15 days.

Joaquin, 29, will have more tests on Friday to determine more accurately how long he will be missing, but it could be that he will sit out the Barca game, next week's Champions League trip to Rangers and the visit of Real Mallorca the following weekend.

Hanover boss slates Enke's entourage

AFP, Berlin

Martin Kind, the president of Hanover 96, has suggested that suicide victim Robert Enke might still be alive if those closest to the goalkeeper had acted differently.

Enke, who was suffering from depression, took his own life last November with the tragedy sparking an outpouring of grief in Germany with 30,000 people attending his memorial service in Hanover.

Kind, discussing the 32-year-old's death on German television on Sunday night, said: "I can understand that his entourage who were aware of his illness did everything to protect him but I believe that if they'd acted differently different solutions could have been found."

"Perhaps Robert Enke might even still be alive."

Milan cool Kaka link

Football

SOCCERNET

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri has played down reports linking Kaka with a return to the San Siro after his agent was spotted in Italy.

Kaka left Milan to join Real Madrid in a €68.5 million deal in June 2009 but the Brazilian struggled to make an impact at the Bernabeu during an injury-plagued first season.

Bosco Leite, Kaka's agent and father, was spotted in a meeting with Milan sporting director Ariosto Braida at the club's Via Turati headquarters last week, leading to reports the playmaker was set to return.

However, Milan coach Allegri claims he is not thinking of re-signing the 28-year-old at this moment in time, although he did admit Kaka was a player he admired.

Allegri told the Gazzetta dello Sport: "Kaka is

an extraordinary player, but at this moment we don't have time to think about such things. Can calls for his return create problems in the dressing room? No, these calls are not able to disrupt the harmony of the team."

"At this moment, we are in a fundamental stage of the season, and it is necessary for me to concentrate on the Champions League match with Real Madrid, and the Serie A matches with Juventus and Napoli. I have no opinion on a transfer for Kaka, because there are three months until the transfer window, and we are competitive with the players that we already have."

Although poor form and injuries have blighted Kaka's time in Madrid, former Milan team-mate Clarence Seedorf doesn't believe he will quit Real after just one full season at the club.

"It's something unreal. Kaka is a friend and a great player, but I don't think there is any truth in this," Seedorf said. "He is recovering from a big injury, and I hope he returns to form soon."

Lim raises L'pool bid

Football

AFP, Singapore

Peter Lim, a sports-loving Singaporean billionaire, on Tuesday announced an increased offer of 360 million pounds (574 million US dollars) in cash for troubled English football club Liverpool.

"I respect and admire Liverpool Football Club, which is steeped in tradition and history," said Lim, 57, a self-made fishmonger's son whose fortune is estimated by US business magazine Forbes at 1.6 billion dollars.

"I am committed to rebuild the club so that it can soon regain its position at the pinnacle of English and European football, where it truly belongs. This is why I have stepped forward with this offer," he added in a statement.

Lim's offer values the club at 320 million pounds. A further 40 million pounds will be made available to purchase new players.

The package is 20 per cent higher than a US rival's proposal of 300 million pounds accepted by the club's management over a similar offer by Lim during an auction that ended last week.

Liverpool chairman Martin Broughton's decision to sell to New England Sports Ventures (NESV), owner of the Boston Red Sox baseball team, is now being contested by Liverpool's current American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillet.

A High Court hearing on the case started Tuesday in London shortly after Lim made his bid public.

The new offer is in cash and will remove the entire acquisition debt of 200 million pounds taken on by the existing owners that has cast uncertainty over the club's future, the statement said.

"My offer provides a firm financial platform

from which the club can rebuild. Given the manner in which the sale process has been handled, I feel Martin and the Board owe it to me, to the club and to the supporters to consider my offer."

The case being heard in London will hinge on whether Liverpool chairman Martin Broughton had the authority to sell the troubled English giants to NESV against the wishes of its owners.

The boardroom battle has coincided with Liverpool's worst start to a season for nearly 50 years, with the club languishing in the relegation zone and eliminated from the League Cup.

Lim, described by his publicists as a passionate football fan, currently holds the franchise for Manchester United theme restaurants in Asia.

A source close to the tycoon told AFP that if his offer for Liverpool succeeds, Lim will give up the Red Devils restaurant franchise.

Andy Ho, president of the Official Liverpool FC Fan Club which claims 5,000 members, said he was happy with the prospective Singapore link to the team.

"Forty million (pounds) is a lot of money no matter how you look at it. You could get a few good quality payers with the money," he told AFP.

Lim studied commerce, accountancy and finance at the University of Western Australia in Perth, supporting himself as a cabbie, waiter and cook.

He first made a fortune as Singapore's hottest share trader in the 1990s, and made even more money as a private investor who now has interests in agribusiness, fashion, logistics, hood and beverages and healthcare.

Lim funds scholarships for bright but needy Singapore schoolchildren and recently gave a 7.7 million dollar grant to the Singapore Olympics Foundation to help promising young athletes, particularly those from poor families, realise their sporting dreams.



Italy star Francesco Totti (R) receives the Golden Foot award from Prince Albert II of Monaco on Monday. The Golden Foot award is an international career award given to players who stand out for

PHOTO: AFP