

Egypt set
USA date

AFP, Chicago

The United States will visit Egypt for a football friendly against the reigning Africa Cup of Nations champions on February 9 at Cairo, the US Soccer Federation announced Monday.

The Americans have beaten the seven-time Africa Cup winners in their only prior meetings, the most recent a 3-0 triumph over the Pharaohs at the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup in South Africa.

The other US triumph also came at a neutral venue, a 3-1 victory at Seoul in 1987.

US coach Bob Bradley was excited about the chance for the American side to play a first-ever match in Egypt ahead of next June's Gold Cup tournament, the North American continental championship.

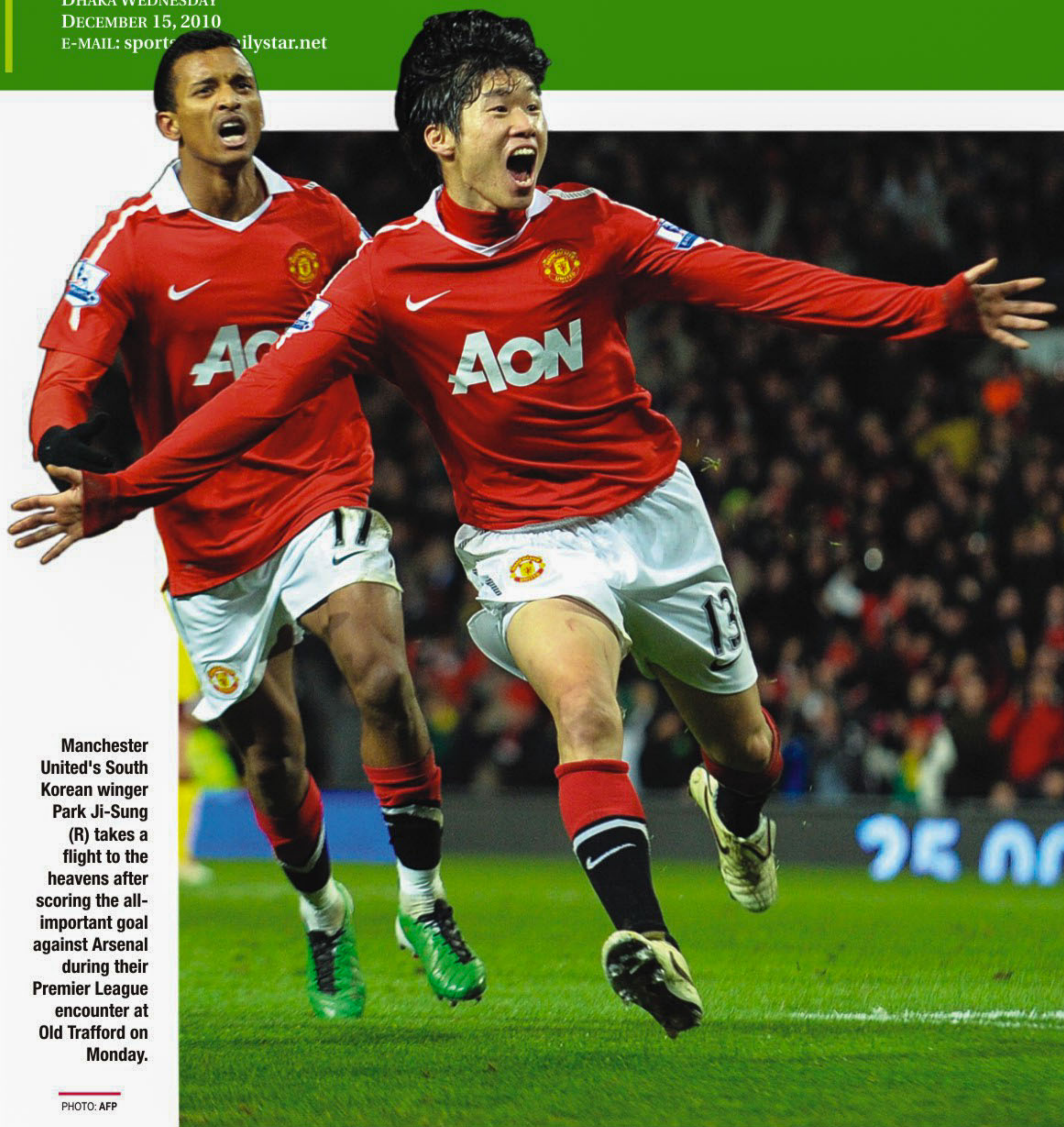
"Egypt is an extremely talented and competitive team," Bradley said. "Their performances in the Confederations Cup and the Africa Cup of Nations have demonstrated their ability to challenge the top teams in the world."

"To play against the champions of Africa in what will be a fantastic environment in Cairo is a great opportunity."

The Americans open their 2011 campaign on January 22 against Chile at Los Angeles.

The Pharaohs, ranked 10th in the world by FIFA, went undefeated to win this year's Africa Cup of Nations with Mohamed Nagy scoring five goals and captain Ahmed Hassan being named player of the tournament.

However, unlike the United States they failed to qualify for the World Cup finals, losing in a play-off to bitter rivals Algeria.



Manchester United's South Korean winger Park Ji-Sung (R) takes a flight to the heavens after scoring the all-important goal against Arsenal during their Premier League encounter at Old Trafford on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Van Marwijk
to quit after
Euro 2012

AFP, The Hague

Dutch coach Bert van Marwijk says he intends to quit his post and return to club football after Euro 2012, Dutch magazine NUSport on Tuesday quoted him as saying.

"I think I will leave my post as national coach after 2012. I will be at the end of my contract and it will be time to think of something else," said the 58-year-old who guided the Dutch to the World Cup final in the summer where they lost to Spain.

He added he was thinking of a return to club management although "not in the Netherlands."

"My preference would be Germany, England or Spain. Various clubs have already contacted me but for the time being my heart still lies with the Oranje," said Van Marwijk, who has coached Feyenoord and Germany's Borussia Dortmund.

Van Marwijk succeeded Marco van Basten two years ago in the national job and under his tutelage the Dutch have, as well as their World Cup run, started off strongly in the Euro 2012 qualifiers as they target a berth in the finals in Poland and Ukraine.

Lyon suffer
triple blow

AFP, Lyon

Lyon will be without defenders Cris and Pape Diakhate and French international midfielder Jeremy Toulalan for Sunday's clash at French champions Marseille, the club revealed on Monday.

Both Toulalan and Diakhate missed last Sunday's 2-0 victory over Toulouse, the former with a recurrence of a left thigh injury, but the latter's absence was not explained.

Cris became a doubt for the Marseille match when the Brazilian veteran finished the Toulouse game with a painful groin.

French international right-back Anthony Revellere, meanwhile, is another doubt after he went off before the final whistle with a calf problem.

Better news for Lyon was that Argentine attacking midfielder Cesar Delgado made a return to action in a reserve game on Sunday, while French international midfielder Yoann Gourcuff is also back in training after suffering an injury in a Champions League match with Schalke three weeks ago.

Lyon are presently third in the title race as they chase their first league crown in three years, two points adrift of leaders Lille, while Marseille are fifth, a further two points behind.

Do or die for Atletico

AFP, Paris



EUROPA LEAGUE

Holders Atletico Madrid are one of several high-profile sides whose continued participation in this season's Europa League will be at stake when the group phase concludes on Wednesday and Thursday.

Atletico ended a 48-year wait for major European honours when they won the inaugural edition of the re-styled tournament last season, but they travel to Bayer Leverkusen on Thursday

knowing that their fate is not in their hands.

Third in Group B ahead of the encounter, Atletico must win at the BayArena and hope that second-placed Aris do not prevail at home to bottom side Rosenborg in the other group game.

Atletico and Aris are level on points, but having lost to the Greek side home and away, the defending champions will be eliminated by virtue of an inferior head-to-head record if they cannot better their result.

Leverkusen, currently second in the German top flight, are already assured of a last 32 berth, but runaway Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund face a winner-takes-all game at

Sevilla on Wednesday.

The Spanish side hold a one-point lead over their Group J rivals, meaning Dortmund -- 11 points clear in the Bundesliga after a record-breaking 43-point haul from

FIXTURES	
Wednesday	1800GMT
FC Bruges (BEL) v Villarreal (ESP),	Dynamo Kiev (UKR) v FC Sheriff Tiraspol (MDA),
Lausanne Sports (SUI) v Palermo (ITA)	2005GMT
Karpaty Lviv (UKR) v Paris Saint-Germain (FRA),	Sevilla (ESP) v Borussia Dortmund (GER),
Liverpool (ENG) v FC Utrecht (NED),	Napoli (ITA) v Steaua

their opening 16 games -- have to win.

French first division leaders Lille face a similarly high-stakes assignment at home to Ghent.

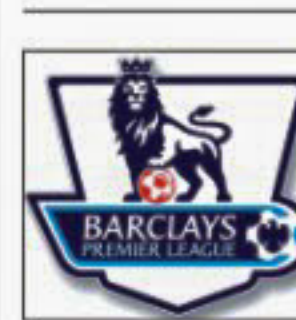
The Belgians are two points ahead of Lille in second place in Group C, so Rudi Garcia's men know that only victory will take them through.

Napoli, flying high in Serie A, must win at Steaua Bucharest to progress from Group G, while already qualified Liverpool welcome FC Utrecht to Anfield for their final commitment in the pool.

Two of the competition's star attractions, Juventus and Manchester City meet in Turin.

Big Sam sacked

AFP, Blackburn



BARCLAYS PREMIER LEAGUE

A "shocked" Sam Allardyce was sacked as manager of Blackburn Rovers with immediate effect on Monday after nearly two years in charge, the English Premier League club announced on their official website.

Also on the way out of Ewood Park was Allardyce's assistant, Neil McDonald, with first team coach Steve Keane placed in temporary charge.

A stunned Allardyce, in a statement issued via England's League Managers' Association (LMA), said: "I am very shocked and disappointed to be leaving Blackburn Rovers."

"I am extremely proud to have managed this club and I enjoyed a fantastic relationship with the players, my staff and the supporters during my time in charge. I now wish them and the football club every success for the future."

LMA chief executive Richard Bevan said Allardyce, as happened when he was at Newcastle, had paid the price for being in the post when the club had been sold.

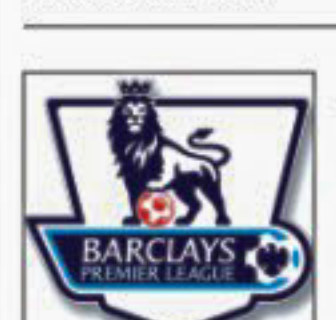
"When new owners take over a club, sadly, the manager's position often hangs by a thread," Bevan said.



SAM ALLARDYCE

Diego for Rovers?

EUROSPORT



BARCLAYS PREMIER LEAGUE

Argentine legend Diego Maradona is being lined up as the new manager of Blackburn Rovers, according to a report in the Daily Mirror.

Rovers' new owners, Balaji and Venkatesh Rao, are determined to make the club sexier, and to do that they are determined to bring in someone with iconic status. The overall plan, the Mirror claims, is to help launch Venky's as a UK-wide fast food chain.

The newspaper quoting "an insider" at the VH Group claimed that "Maradona is seen as the right profile for the VH Group."

Given Maradona's well-known weakness for fast food, they might just be on to something.

In terms of football management, the picture is less clear. After two abortive starts in club coaching in South America the 50-year-old was handed the reins of the Argentina national team in 2008. He led a nation with an absurd array of talent to their worst ever defeat, a 6-1 loss to Bolivia, during a spell which almost saw them fail to qualify for the World Cup, though he did turn things round subsequently.

Big Sam's sacking takes up plenty of column inches, with The Daily Telegraph and The Sun reporting slightly less entertaining reasons for him getting the boot: a dispute over having players bought against his wishes in the January transfer window.

The Telegraph claims that the new owners at Blackburn want to bring in Rangers striker Kris Boyd and former Hull man Geovanni. The Daily Mail is not so sure, quoting Allardyce himself claiming, "it has still not really been explained to me and I am a bit confused in my own head as to why."

Still, it's not all bad for Sam. At least he can sit around the house counting his pay-off - either £1.5 or £2.5 million depending on who you believe - while he figures out what happened.



Osasuna forward Carlos Aranda (R) celebrates his goal with teammate Juan Francisco Torres during their Primera Liga clash against Valencia at the Mestalla on Monday.

Osasuna dent Valencia

AFP, Barcelona



LFP

Struggling Osasuna won only their second point away from home all season as they stormed back to draw 3-3 against Valencia and put a dent in their rival's Champions League hopes on Monday.

Valencia went into the game looking to close the gap on the top four with Villarreal and Espanyol both losing at the weekend but in the end it was Osasuna who were celebrating having recorded just one previous point away against Deportivo La Coruna.

"It was a game in which both teams had a half in which they were superior and in the second-half we were unable to cope with Osasuna's attacks," said Valencia coach Unai Emery.

"We worried about conceding an equaliser and that was what happened. We have to be critical of ourselves and be stronger."

Meanwhile Osasuna coach Jose Antonio Camacho praised the way his side battled back at 3-1 down.

"We didn't deserve to be two goals down but in the second half it was all us," he said.

"With ten minutes to go we were losing and that was not just but we did not give up and were able to claim something from the game."

Valencia were lively in attack and Roberto Soldado had already wasted a good opening before he broke the deadlock mid-way through the first half.

Defender Mario Stankevicius, forward for a corner, slotted in a loose ball in the area to double the lead and while Juanfran Torres pulled a goal back, Ariz Aduriz headed home a Joaquín Sanchez corner to give them a comfortable cushion at half-time.

Osasuna were showing plenty of invention but little clinical finishing. They benefited though from a goalkeeping howler from Cesar Sanchez as he came and failed to claim a cross allowing Miguel Flano to score.

In a grandstand finish substitute Carlos Aranda stabbed the ball into the back of the net as the Valencia defence once again failed to clear their lines.

On Sunday Argentinian superstar Leo Messi had scored a brace as Barcelona produced another excellent exhibition of attacking football to beat Real Sociedad 5-0 and maintain their two point lead at the top of the table.

The onus was on them after Real Madrid had earlier beaten bottom side Real Zaragoza 3-1 but they never looked troubled with David Villa, Andres Iniesta and Bojan Krkic scoring the other goals.

Milan lose
veteran duo

AFP, Rome

Serie A leaders AC Milan will be without veterans and 2006 World Cup winners Gennaro Gattuso and Gianluca Zambrotta for Saturday's final game before the Italian winter break against Roma.

Gattuso has a thigh problem while Zambrotta has picked up a knee injury, Milan said in a statement.

Gattuso should be out for seven to 10 days while Zambrotta could miss as much as two weeks, although in both cases that would translate to just the game against Roma as Milan won't then play again until January 6.

Thiago Silva, meanwhile, underwent minor knee surgery at the weekend but will be available to join the team on their winter training camp in sunny Dubai.

Wales appoint
Speed

AFP, Cardiff

Gary Speed has been appointed as the new manager of the Wales national team on a three-and-a-half-year contract, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) announced here on Tuesday.

The 41-year-old former Wales captain was given permission by English Championship side Sheffield United, where he had been the manager, to speak to the FAW, who wanted him as their first-choice successor to John Toshack.

Wales had been without a manager since Toshack's exit on September 9.

Several candidates, including caretaker boss Brian Flynn and former Sweden national manager Lars Lagerback, were interviewed last week before the FAW opted for Speed, who holds a Welsh record 85 caps for an outfield player.