

Cabanas demands damages

AFP, Asuncion

Gunned-down Paraguayan footballer Salvador Cabanas has lodged a demand for compensation from his former Mexican club America with FIFA's court of arbitration, his lawyer Gerardo Acosta said on Thursday.

The 29-year-old striker was shot in the head by a drug dealer in the public toilets of a bar in Mexico on January 25 while on a night out with his wife and brother-in-law.

His initial request for compensation was rejected by the Mexican Football Federation on the grounds that the shooting did not occur during his work time.

Acosta said that while Cabanas had wanted an amicable settlement with America he was forced to go before world football's governing body to safeguard his future and that of his wife and children.

Hospitalised for two months Cabanas missed the World Cup in South Africa where Paraguay reached the quarterfinals.



Manchester City striker Jo celebrates scoring the equaliser against Juventus during their Europa League encounter at the Olympic Stadium in Turin on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea-MU tie called off

AFP, London



Heavy snow and freezing temperatures derailed the English Premier League fixture list Saturday, leaving only two matches left as blizzards blanketed Britain.

Wigan's home match against Aston Villa and Liverpool's late game against Fulham were both axed due to heavy overnight snow before Birmingham's tie with Newcastle at St Andrews was called off, club officials confirmed.

Shortly afterwards, Arsenal's game with Stoke at the Emirates became the fourth casualty of the weather as a blizzard swept across London.

The forecast of more snow over the weekend also claimed Chelsea's heavyweight showdown with Manchester United at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Although Liverpool's pitch is protected by undersoil heating, a club spokesman said the game was called off after police warned of treacherous conditions around the ground with sub-zero temperatures forecast for later.

"The safety of all fans attending the game is paramount and although the Anfield pitch is playable, the conditions around the stadium and further afield for people travelling to the match are such that the decision was taken, following police advice on safety grounds, to postpone the game."

Wigan earlier issued a statement confirming their game had been postponed, citing "freak snow" as the reason.

Birmingham-Newcastle was called off at the request of referee Mike Jones and the local authorities, citing safety reasons.

"Unfortunately all that good work has been undone by incessant snowfall and referee Mike Jones and the local authorities have asked for the game to be called off."

Holdings frozen out

AFP, Paris



Atletico Madrid's dreams of defending their Europa League title died on a snowy pitch in western Germany on Thursday, as they crashed out of the competition following a 1-1 draw at Bayer Leverkusen.

Atletico, who defeated Fulham in last season's final in May, had to better Aris Salonika's result at home to Rosenborg to progress from Group B and their hopes were ultimately dashed by a 2-0 win for the Greek side.

Nevertheless, Atletico took to the pitch at the BayArena knowing that only victory would give them any chance of reaching the last 32.

A snow-splattered playing surface, necessitating a bright pink ball, made for a sloppy game but it was the hosts who went ahead when Patrick Helmes drove home after racing onto a flick-on in the 69th minute.

The visitors responded quickly, Fran Merida placing the ball inside the left-hand post barely three minutes later, but Aris's triumph at home to the group's bottom side rendered Atletico's

RESULTS

Juventus (ITA) 1 (Giannetti 43)
Manchester City (ENG) 1 (Jo 77)
FC Salzburg (AUT) 0 **Lech Poznan** (POL) 1 (Stilic 30)
Aris Salonika (GRE) 2 (Cesarec 45+1, Faty 90+2) Rosenborg (NOR) 0
Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Helmes 69)
Atletico Madrid (ESP) 1 (Merida 72)
Levski Sofia (BUL) 1 (Mladenov 45) Sporting Lisbon (POR) 0
Lille (FRA) 3 (Obraniak 30, Frau 56, Sow 89) Ghent (BEL) 0
AEK Athens (GRE) 0 **Zenit Saint Petersburg** (RUS) 3 (Bukharov 44, Rosina 67, Denisov 88)
Anderlecht (BEL) 2 (De Sutter 12, Suarez 41) Hajduk Split (CRO) 0
Getafe (ESP) 1 (Sardinero 15) Young Boys (SUI) 0
Stuttgart (GER) 5 (Gebhart 20, Hoegh-og 48, Gentner 65, Pogrebnyak 70, Marica 90+3) Odense (DEN) 1 (Utaka 72)
Debrecen (HUN) 2 (Kabat 48, 86) Sampdoria (ITA) 0

result redundant. French league leaders Lille booked their place in the knockout phase with a 3-0 win at home to qualification rivals Ghent amid similarly chilly conditions in northern France.

Needing to win to go through behind Sporting Lisbon in Group C, Lille took the lead in the 30th minute when Ludovic Obraniak seized on a loose back-pass before rounding the goalkeeper and tapping home.

More effective pressing of the opposition defence allowed Pierre-Alain Frau to squeeze home Lille's second in the second half, before club top scorer Moussa Sow rounded off victory in the 89th minute.

In Group A, Manchester City made sure of top spot by drawing 1-1 with Juventus in Turin.

Niccolo Giannetti, in his first start for the club at the age of 19, prodded Juve in front two minutes prior to the break, before Brazilian striker Jo levelled with a tidy finish 13 minutes from time.

It meant that the Italian giants, who had already been eliminated, ended the group phase with six draws from six matches -- only the second team to do so in a UEFA competition after AEK Athens in the 2002-03 Champions League.

Tough draw for Gunners

AFP, London



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insists his team can beat Barcelona after the Gunners were drawn against the Spanish giants in yet another Champions

League showdown on Friday. Barcelona defeated Arsenal in the 2006 final in Paris before sweeping aside the English club 6-3 on aggregate in last year's quarterfinals, and will start as huge favourites for next February's last 16 clash.

Speaking on Arsenal's official website after Friday's draw, Wenger acknowledged his team faced a daunting draw but said victory was possible. "My reaction is very simple -- difficult but possible," Wenger told Arsenal.com, denying the Gunners would have a score to settle after their recent defeats to Barca in the competition.

"Revenge is not on my mind. We want to qualify and we want to knock them out. So is it difficult? Yes. Is it possible? Yes."

"Barcelona are certainly the favourites [for the competition] and a famous team but, on their side, they did not want us either because they know they will get a game," Wenger added.

In last season's tie, Arsenal fought back from 2-0 down at home to draw the first leg 2-2 and then took an improbable lead in the Nou Camp before Lionel Messi struck four times to seal a 4-1 victory.

Wenger believes his side have improved since last season. "I think we are better than last year and we have a good opportunity to show that," he said.

"(But) it is too early to speak about this game concretely. You can just speak about the draw. The whole context might be completely different in two months. We don't know what we will do and how we will feel."

While Arsenal were handed the toughest draw of the English clubs, Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was adamant his team would not take anything for granted in their meeting with French side Marseille.

"Marseille are a handful at their own ground, their fantastic atmosphere and incredible support guarantees that," Ferguson told MUTV.

"They've had a good change in fortunes in the last two or three years, after a dry spell, and think it'll be a difficult tie."

"Didier Deschamps is the coach there, and they've got one of our old players in Gabriel Heinze so it'll be nice to see him."

Tottenham manager Harry

RESULT OF THE DRAW

AS ROMA (ITA)	VS	FC SHAKHTAR DONETSK (UKR)
AC MILAN (ITA)	VS	TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR FC (ENG)
VALENCIA CF (ESP)	VS	FC SCHALKE 04 (GER)
FC INTERNAZIONALE (ITA)	VS	FC BAYERN MÜNCHEN (GER)
OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS (FRA)	VS	REAL MADRID CF (ESP)
ARSENAL FC (ENG)	VS	FC BARCELONA (ESP)
OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE (FRA)	VS	MANCHESTER UNITED FC (ENG)
FC KØBENHAVN (DEN)	VS	CHELSEA FC (ENG)

Redknapp meanwhile said his side would relish the prospect of a return to the San Siro to face AC Milan after playing Inter Milan at the famous venue during the group phase.

"It will be a great game. I would have taken AC Milan before the draw. They are leading the league in Italy but it has the makings of a great game over two legs. I'm looking forward to it," Redknapp said.

Chelsea meanwhile were rewarded

with the plum draw, a tie against minnows FC Copenhagen, the first Danish side ever to reach the last 16.

Chelsea boss Carlo Ancelotti warned against complacency however.

"It was a good draw, but we don't have to be happy because it is still a Champions League game," Ancelotti said. "Copenhagen had good performances in the group and they were able to draw with Barcelona. They are a good team."



Inter Milan players (L-R) Ivan Cordoba, Diego Milito and Javier Zanetti jog during a training session at the Zayed Sports City in Abu Dhabi on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Milan chase Cassano

AFP, Rome



AC Milan and Sampdoria are in negotiations over the transfer of Antonio Cassano, Milan's vice-president Adriano Galliani admitted on Friday.

Italy forward Cassano has been frozen out at Samp since allegedly "gravely insulting" club president Riccardo Garrone in an argument in October. On Thursday an arbitration body rejected Sampdoria's bid to have the 28-year-old's contract terminated, although they did suspend him until the end of January and reduce his salary by half.

However, Garrone had already made it clear that Cassano would never play for the club again whatever the outcome of the arbitration.

And Galliani has now admitted that negotiations "are well under way but absolutely not concluded."

The stumbling block is a five million euro payment Sampdoria owe to Real Madrid, from whom they bought the forward.

"That's the problem," Galliani told Sky Italia. "We're not willing to pay it and for the moment Sampdoria don't seem to be either, hence there's still a nice little problem to solve."

"Let's say two out of three things are practically done: the agreement with the player and the one with Sampdoria but we have five million reasons to worry about this thing."

However, Galliani denied that Cassano's expected arrival would signal the departure of

Brazilian former twice world player of the year Ronaldinho.

Instead he insisted that Cassano would merely replace Filippo Inzaghi, who has a knee injury and is due to miss the rest of the season.

"Even if Cassano obviously has very different characteristics he will replace Pippo Inzaghi."

"We began the season with five strikers and we need to go back to having five."

"It's nothing to do with Ronaldinho, Cassano will arrive, if he arrives, but we're not saying it's a done deal."

"Everyone has said it's a done deal but I don't tell lies, I don't know who will pay this five million (euros) so it will be very difficult."

"If Real Madrid don't reduce their demands, if we don't come to an agreement with Sampdoria, with the player etc, it certainly won't be Milan who pay."

Milan have a history of prevailing with such complicated transfer negotiations having managed to procure Ronaldinho from Barcelona in 2008 even though Manchester City had offered the Spaniards a 40 per cent higher fee.

And in the summer Milan snagged Zlatan Ibrahimovic from Barca for 24 million euros -- to be paid over a four-year period -- less than half what the Spaniards had paid for the Swede a year earlier having also given up Samuel Eto'o to Inter Milan.

And a few days later Milan convinced City to part company with Robinho for less than half the amount the English side had paid Real Madrid for the Brazilian.

Sepp backs winter WC



AFP, Abu Dhabi

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has said he would support moves to stage the 2022 World Cup in Qatar during the winter months, but warned that such an action would be difficult to implement.

Fears that the searing heat that prevails in the Gulf emirate in the traditional World Cup months of June and July would make it dangerous for players and fans alike, quickly followed FIFA's decision to award the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

German legend Franz Beckenbauer, a FIFA executive committee member, and FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke are among those who have voiced support for a switch of dates.

Blatter told a press conference in Abu Dhabi where the club World Cup is taking place that he too supported a winter World Cup.

"It is important to play when the climate is appropriate and I'm thinking about the footballers, not only the fans but the actors," he said.

"Personally I think it would be better that it is played in the winter ... but it's not easy to realise."

Blatter, however, said he had no regrets over the vote earlier this month which saw Qatar defeat rival bids from United States, Australia, Japan and South Korea.

"The basic principle signed is about 64 matches in Qatar in the months of June and July, that's what we have at the moment," he said.

"If Qatar wants a change, the demand must come from Qatar and sent later to FIFA. All the countries (in the zone) are happy and proud for the Middle East and Gulf."

The change would have major implications for domestic competitions in Britain and the rest of Europe where the league programmes would be in full swing.

Bayern-Inter tie sold out in 6 hours

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich announced on Saturday they sold out of tickets for their Champions League last 16 home match against holders Inter Milan on March 15 just six hours after they went on sale.

The tie will be a re-match of last season's Champions League final which Inter won 2-0 in Madrid.

Temperatures in Bavaria may be well below zero, but tickets for the second-leg of the re-match at Munich's Allianz Arena of last May's final are already red hot.

The first-leg will be held in Milan on February 23.

"All 66,000 tickets have already been sold," said Bayern's media director Markus Hoerwink.

Bayern fans were only allowed to buy two tickets per person online when the tickets went on sale on Friday.

Real freeze bonuses

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid, one of the biggest spending clubs on new recruits in recent years, have decided to freeze their bonus structure for this season, Spanish media reported on Friday.

Each player will collect 1.135 million euros (1.5 million dollars) if they win a treble this season, the league, Spanish Cup and Champions League, the same as was offered to them last season, sports daily AS and Marca said.

For the individual trophies they will earn 575,000 euros for Champions League success, 360,000 euros for victory in the Spanish league, and 200,000 euros if they take the Spanish Cup.

Real have not won a major trophy since their league win in the 2007-08 season.