



Barcelona playmaker Andres Iniesta (2nd from R) is blocked by Athletic Bilbao defenders Koikili Lertxundi (2nd from L) and Mikel San Jose (R) during their Copa del Rey encounter at Nou Camp on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

## Bilbao defy Barcelona

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Athletic Bilbao survived a constant state of siege to hold a weakened Barcelona to a 0-0 draw at the Nou Camp in a King's Cup last 16 first-leg match on Tuesday.

La Liga leaders Barca had won 10 successive games in all competitions, scoring 31 goals in the last seven, but they ran out of ideas against their resolute Basque visitors.

Valencia dominated against local rivals Villarreal but were held 0-0, while second division Cordoba also drew after coming back to make it 1-1 against Deportivo Coruna.

Pepe Diaz pounced on an error to equalise late on after Depor had taken the lead with a Riki penalty.

The other first legs are to be played on Wednesday when Real Madrid host Levante and holders Sevilla entertain Malaga.

The second legs are scheduled for Jan. 5.

Barca and Bilbao, who have won the cup 48 times between them, last met in the competition in the 2009 final when Pep Guardiola's side ran out 4-1 winners on their way to a six-trophy haul that year.

The hosts started with the likes of Lionel Messi, David Villa and Sergio Busquets on the bench, but for all their possession and pretty patterns they lacked a cutting edge.

Gorka Iraizoz tipped Andres Iniesta's effort over the bar in the first half, but it was not until Villa and Messi joined the game after the break that the pressure grew on his goal.

Villa had the ball in the net near the end, only for the effort to be ruled out for off-side, and Gerard Pique skewed a good chance wide.

"Some days the ball just doesn't want to go in," Barca's Brazilian defender Dani Alves told reporters.

"We'll have to make a great effort because in San Mames it will be tough"

At Mestalla, Valencia controlled the east-coast derby but the closest they came to scoring was when Juan Mata volleyed against the post just after the re-start.

## Rafa's Inter future in doubt

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan are set to fire coach Rafael Benitez, but first want to slash his compensation payment according to the Italian press on Wednesday.

The Spaniard, who has struggled since becoming coach of the Italian champions six months ago, all but sealed his fate with a verbal outburst against the club's management after winning the club World Cup in Abu Dhabi last week.

He accused his bosses of failing to support him in the transfer market and accused the players of taking their own decisions.

Inter president Massimo Moratti was reported to be furious over the remarks and wanted to fire Benitez even though the dismissal of the former Liverpool boss, who took over from Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho, could cost the club between four and eight million euros.

## Kakuta pens new deal

AFP, London

French youngster Gael Kakuta has signed a new four and a half year contract with Chelsea, the club has announced on its official website.

Reports had suggested the 19-year-old striker could be set to leave Stamford Bridge at the end of the season after talks that opened in September failed to come to an agreement over a contract extension.

But the Frenchman, who joined Chelsea in 2007 after a legal wrangle with former club Lens, ended speculation about his future by agreeing to a new deal which will now run out in 2015.

"Since I signed for Chelsea when I was 16 all I was thinking about was to get to the first team," said Kakuta, who has made nine appearances for the club this season.

## Sepp defends choices

Football

AFP, Geneva

FIFA President Sepp Blatter on Wednesday defended the "historic" choice of Russia and Qatar to host the World Cups in 2018 and 2022, calling it part of a "natural" progression into new regions.

The head of world football's governing body also paid tribute to South Africa's role in organising the world's most watched sporting event on the African continent for the first time.

"2010 has been a year of 'fulfilment', a historic year, one in which we've broken new ground," Blatter said in an end-of-year interview on FIFA's website.

"We have made historic decisions in terms of sport and geopolitics. We've sent the World Cup to new territories," in eastern Europe and the Arab world, he added.

"When I became the FIFA President, the decision was made to go into Asia. And then I said we had to go to Africa, which is what we did."

"It's only natural, then, that we should keep on moving into new regions."

Blatter said he was delighted with the executive committee's choice of Russia and Qatar this month and suggested that critics did not

understand that there was "more to football than just kicking a ball".

"The sporting media don't always appreciate the social or cultural importance of awarding the World Cup finals to a country," he explained.

"They just think about penalties, corners, refereeing and money. But, as I've already said, this decision wasn't about making money."

"The socio-cultural impact of the game on the future of our society is a subject that is close to my heart," he added in the guise of a message for the football Confederations' Congresses, in Doha, Qatar on January 7.

The 74 year-old Swiss head of FIFA, who is expected to stand for re-election in May, said the World Cup in South Africa had "a phenomenal impact".

"Back in 2004, when the competition was awarded to South Africa, the country was a young republic that had been in existence for ten years and was looking to find its place in the modern world."

"Since then, both the rest of the world and South Africa itself have come to realise just how important a country it is."

He nonetheless expressed disappointment that more African national sides apart from Ghana did not make it to the second round of the competition.

## Balotelli dreams of Milan

Football

SOCCERNET

Mario Balotelli has confirmed his desire to play for AC Milan but insists he is "very happy" at Manchester City.

Balotelli, who moved to Eastlands from Inter in the summer, is a childhood Milan fan and has frequently been linked with a transfer to the club. He fuelled rumours of a move at the end of the season when he had dinner with the club's vice-president, Adriano Galliani, after the Milan derby in November.

While he has not set any date on his intended return to the city, he has confirmed he has every intention of playing for the Rossoneri.

"One day I will play for Milan," he said. "In any case, I am very happy at Manchester City and would like to win the Premier and Europa League."

"Zlatan Ibrahimovic wants me to wear the Rossoneri jersey and I tell him that one day that wish will come true."

Balotelli, speaking as he collected the Tuttosport Golden Boy trophy on Tuesday, also said he believed only Lionel Messi was his superior at present.

"Well, there is only one player who is a tiny bit better than me: Leo Messi. The rest are behind me!"

## Robben set for return

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal said Tuesday he was counting on Arjen Robben returning to action for the first Bundesliga game after the winter break against Wolfsburg on January 15.

The Dutchman has not played since returning from the World Cup in South Africa with a torn hamstring.

"He's very good in training and he feels absolutely no pain," said van Gaal.

"He's very impatient to play, it's normal after six months out, but he has to wait until January 15."

Robben will feature in a friendly against a German regional side on January 12 and if he holds up will play for up to 30 minutes against Wolfsburg.

But van Gaal ruled out the 26-year-old playing during Wednesday's German Cup tie against Stuttgart.

## Christmas comes early for Schalke

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Schalke 04 needed an 84th minute goal from Jefferson Farfan to edge second division Augsburg 1-0 and advance into the German Cup quarterfinals on Tuesday.

Hoffenheim eased past Borussia Muenchengladbach 2-0 with goals to Iceland's Gylfi Sigurdsson and striker Demba Ba.

Schalke, who have won their last three league games after a bad start and qualified top of their Champions League group for the round of 16, saw Christmas come early when coach Felix Magath restored their holidays to 10 days.

Magath had been angered by

Schalke's bad start to the season and late last month he gave them less than a week off and ordered them to return to training on Dec. 27.

However, after their win in Augsburg his players were told to return on Jan. 2 instead.

"I am very satisfied and that is why we all together will have a break until January 2," Magath told reporters. "I am satisfied with my team's performance. It was a tough task especially given the pitch condition."

Schalke found it hard going against well-positioned Augsburg on a rough pitch in freezing temperatures.

The Bavarians even threatened with Tobias Werner midway through the second half but he failed to beat keeper Manuel Neuer at

point blank range.

Spaniard Raul took on the Augsburg defence single-handedly with six minutes left, shaking off three defenders and sending Peruvian Farfan through down the right to fire in the winner.

Hoffenheim had an easier task. Sigurdsson scored with a free-kick from 20 metres in the 35th minute, as keeper Christofer Heimeroth picked the wrong corner, to take the lead.

Ba made sure of their quarterfinal spot in the 63rd minute as Gladbach were punished for the numerous defensive absences.

The loss was Gladbach's sixth consecutive defeat in all competitions and, with the team in bottom place in the league as well, coach Michael Frontzeck's future at the club is now in serious doubt going into the four-week winter break.



Schalke's veteran striker Raul (R) celebrates his team's victory over Augsburg during their German Cup tie in Augsburg on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

## No WC bonuses for duo

AFP, Paris

Nicolas Anelka and Thierry Henry are set to agree to forfeit the bonuses they were due to be paid for France's disastrous World Cup campaign, sports minister Chantal Jouanno said Wednesday.

The two strikers had been the only two members of the squad not to have done so in the face of public outrage over what happened in South Africa in the summer.

"It's been sorted out and they are set to agree," Jouanno said as she came out of a cabinet meeting.

FFF president Bernard Duchaussoy announced last month that the 23-man France squad had agreed to forfeit their bonuses linked to the use of their image rights at the tournament in South Africa.

"A lot of them have signed, it's moving forward," Duchaussoy had said.

Chelsea striker Anelka is currently serving out an 18-match ban after being



NICOLAS ANELKA



THIERRY HENRY

sent home in disgrace from the World Cup after a foul-mouthed tirade at then coach Raymond Domenech leading to his teammates' infamous training strike.

"We haven't discussed it particularly. If there's the slightest hope it's more on Henry's side. Anelka, it would amaze me if he gives in," the source added.

Henry, France's all-time leading

scorer, played a substitute's role at the World Cup and is now playing in the United States with the New York Red Bulls.

Domenech was sacked after overseeing France's first-round exit but Duchaussoy said the terms of his dismissal did not include an agreement to renounce his bonus, and they "could not prevent him" receiving it.

brac

BRAC wins the SAFA Award 2009

(South Asian Federation of Accountants) in the category of Non Governmental Organizations for the Best Presented Accounts and Corporate Governance Disclosures. Mr. S. N. Kairy, Director Finance & Accounts, BRAC received the award from Mr. Surendra Pandey, Honourable Minister for Finance, Government of Nepal at a ceremony held on Sunday, December 12, 2010 at Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu, Nepal. BRAC also received SAFA Award for the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

