

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Are you satisfied with the Tigers squad for the World Cup?

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NEO Cricket

New Zealand v Pakistan

Second ODI

Live from 4:00am

STAR Cricket

Australia v England

Fourth ODI

Live from 9:20am

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live from 8:30pm

English Premiership

Liverpool v Fulham

Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

Australian Open

Men's & Women's Qtrs



Chelsea winger Florent Malouda (L) scores the second goal against Bolton Wanderers during their Premier League encounter at the Reebok Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP

IN
brief

AFC helps flood victims

AFP, Doha

All ticket revenue from the Asian Cup semifinals on Tuesday will be donated to help flood victims in Australia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, organisers said.

A joint statement by Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Mohamed Bin Hammam and Qatar Football Association (QFA) chief Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al Thani said the flooding had been tragic.

"Our thoughts and wishes go to all those who suffer in our fellow Asian nations of Australia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, recently struck by flooding and national disasters," it said.

"It is the joint decision of the AFC, the QFA and the organising committee of the Asian Cup to offer the proceeds of the semifinal matches of the AFC Asian Cup to a disaster relief fund in order to help those affected.

"Our condolences are offered to those who have lost their loved ones during these tragic events."

The semifinals see Japan face South Korea at the Al Gharafa Stadium, while Australia play Uzbekistan at the Khalifa Stadium.

Top three get byes

AFP, Doha

The top three finishers at the Asian Cup in Qatar will automatically qualify for the 2015 edition in Australia, the Asian Football Confederation confirmed on Tuesday.

It was the same scenario for the current tournament, which allowed 2007 winners Iraq, runners-up Saudi Arabia and third-placed South Korea to avoid the qualifying process.

"The top three teams have a bye to the 2015 tournament, which will be held in Australia. This is to motivate the teams," said tournament director Tokunaki Suzuki.

He added that if 2015 hosts Australia qualify as one of the top three in Doha, no new berth would be created.

Babel move back on

AFP, Liverpool

Dutch international striker Ryan Babel's on-off move to Bundesliga side Hoffenheim from English Premier League giants Liverpool was back on track on Monday as he was due to fly to Germany to finalise personal terms.

The 24-year-old looked to have sealed a 7million euros deal last week only for it to be placed in doubt as he said he would prefer a return to his former club Ajax but the club announced later on Monday that Babel was going to Germany after all.

"Ryan Babel has agreed a move to TSG 1899 Hoffenheim," read a terse statement on the Liverpool website.

Babel has struggled to make an impact during his three-and-a-half-year spell at Anfield since leaving Ajax.

Behrami joins Fiorentina

AFP, Rome

Swiss international winger Valon Behrami signed for Serie A side Fiorentina from English Premier League strugglers West Ham on Monday for a fee reported to be 5million euros.

The 25-year-old Yugoslavia-born player - capped 28 times and who has appeared at two World Cup finals and the Euro 2008 finals - signed a three year contract ending a two year spell with the English side.

Behrami - whose World Cup last year was marked by a red card in the group match against Chile - has previous experience playing in Italy, having

Blues thrash Bolton

AFP, Bolton



Didier Drogba, Florent Malouda, Nicolas Anelka and Ramires were all on target as Chelsea ended their miserable run of away form with a 4-0 victory at Bolton here on Monday to keep alive their dim hopes of the Premier League title.

Carlo Ancelotti's side had fallen away from contention for the title with a record of one win in nine matches but they have now won their past eight matches at the Reebok Stadium without conceding a goal.

Victory moved them up to fourth and to within seven points of leaders Manchester United, who travel to Blackpool on Tuesday which continued the poor run of Owen Coyle's side, who have now suffered four defeats in their last five matches in a damaging run of form and are just eight points above the bottom three.

Drogba gave Chelsea an early lead with his 10th of the season and Frenchman Malouda equalled that tally with a second goal just before half time.

Anelka then added a third goal, his 13th of the campaign, shortly after half time before Ramires scored a fourth, his first goal for the club.

Having put on celebrations of the life of recently-deceased club legend Nat Lofthouse before the match, Bolton's players were determined to put on a strong performance and Kevin Davies forced an early save from Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech as the hosts did all the early pressing.

But Chelsea took the lead with their first real attack with 10 minutes gone.

Malouda pounced on a hesitant Gretar Steinsson and fed Drogba, who drove a powerful shot past Jussi Jaaskelainen from just

outside the area.

Ramires also drove over from long range as Chelsea looked for a second before Bolton's Gary Cahill headed wide from a free kick from Stuart Holden.

Chelsea still looked stronger going forward and Anelka almost got on the end of a long ball forward from Cech.

But Jaaskelainen did well to keep the advantage at one goal when Drogba thumped a shot at his near post after another fine throughball from Malouda.

The Chelsea chances continued, with John Obi Mikel slipping the ball through for Anelka, whose shot was blocked by a sliding challenge from Zat Knight.

Bolton threatened just before the break when Johan Elmander got on the end of a Davies flick only for his prod at goal to be pushed wide by Cech.

Chelsea continued to dictate play after the half time break, with Michael Essien wasting a good chance to send Anelka through again after another swift attack.

An effort from Martin Petrov from almost 30 yards hinted at the growing frustration of the home team.

But 10 minutes after half time, Chelsea punished Bolton with a ruthless break.

Essien found space down the left and although Knight beat Drogba to the Ghanaian's cross, Anelka's low shot had enough power to beat Jaaskelainen.

Bolton's night was all but over but substitute Mark Davies almost got on the end of a return pass from Elmander as he looked to reduce the deficit.

But the hosts knew they were always struggling to make any impression and after Anelka's shot was blocked from Essien's cross, Ramires steered a fourth goal past Jaaskelainen.

Van Bommel
Milan's

Football

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain Mark van Bommel has joined Serie A leaders AC Milan after losing his starting place with the German champions this season, the clubs said on Tuesday.

"Captain Mark van Bommel is joining AC Milan effective immediately," Bayern said in a statement. "The Dutch international asked for his contract to become void to transfer for sporting reasons."

The 33-year-old midfielder has signed a short-term deal until June, injury-hit Milan said on their website (www.acmilan.com).

The Dutch international, who joined Bayern from Barcelona in 2006 after winning the Champions League, had dropped down the pecking order under coach Louis van Gaal with the arrival of Brazilian Luiz Gustavo in January further hampering his chances.

"I leave Bayern with a heavy heart but my head held high," said Van Bommel, who won two German championships and Cups and reached last year's Champions League final before playing at the World Cup where Netherlands reached the final.

"I spent four and a half happy and successful years (at Bayern) and would like to thank the club and the fans. Bayern will always occupy a big place in my heart," he said.

Milan are hoping he will provide some solutions to their injury crisis in midfield although Van Bommel is ineligible to play for the Italians in this season's Champions League having already featured for Bayern in the group stage.

"It was Mark's specific request to release him from his contract so he can transfer for sporting reasons," said Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"Mark was always an exemplary professional, an important and successful player. Based on those achievements we granted his wish," he said.

Argentina leave
out regulars

Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Striker Carlos Tevez was among several leading Argentine internationals left out of the squad named on Monday for their friendly against Portugal in Geneva next month.

Also missing from coach Sergio Batista's squad to make room for less experienced players were defenders Gabriel Heinze and Martin Demichelis and striker Sergio Aguero. Real Madrid's Gonzalo Higuain is recovering from back surgery.

"Neither Tevez nor any of the lads who were left off this list are out of the national team," Batista told La Red radio.

Batista named winger Enzo Perez of Argentine champions Estudiantes and Velez Sarsfield's uncapped forward Juan Manuel Martinez from the local league plus defender Marcos Rojo, who has just joined Spartak Moscow from Estudiantes.

"I have to see players, lots, and I do that in matches. I

have to see if they can wear the national team shirt but I haven't punished anyone," Batista said when asked if there were disciplinary reasons for the omissions.

"This doesn't mean that the players left out now are out of the Copa America. This is a good moment to try out some youngsters."

Argentina, who meet Portugal in Geneva on February 9, are preparing to host the Copa America in July. Batista's record since taking over from Diego Maradona is wins over Ireland, Spain and Brazil and a defeat by Japan.

Batista also has his eye on the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, which could be a bridge too far for players in their 30s like Heinze and Demichelis.

Continuing to call up 37-year-old Javier Zanetti might appear to contradict Batista's plans, but he said: "If he carries on (playing) the way he is, at the same level, he'll surely be at the Copa America."

Argentina have another friendly away to the United States at New Meadowlands in New Jersey on March 26.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Sergio Romero (AZ Alkmaar/NED), Mariano Andujar (Catania/ITA).

Defenders:

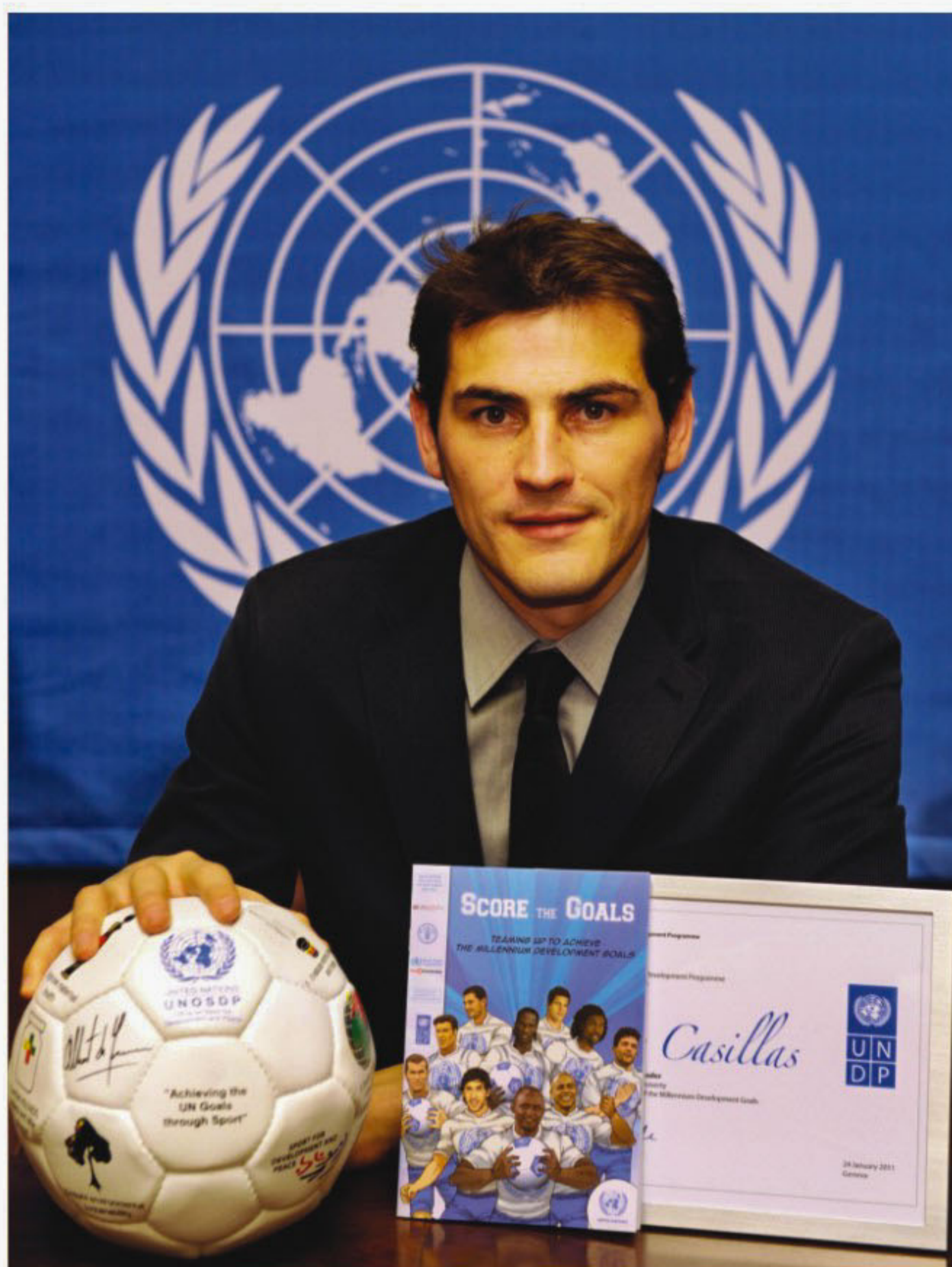
Javier Zanetti (Inter Milan/ITA), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City/ENG), Nicolas Pareja, Marcos Rojo (both Spartak Moscow/RUS), Nicolas Burdisso (AS Roma/ITA), Ezequiel Garay (Real Madrid/ESP), Nicolas Otamendi (Porto/POR), Gabriel Milito (Barcelona/ESP).

Midfielders:

Esteban Cambiasso (Inter Milan/ITA), Fernando Gago, Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid/ESP), Lucas Biglia (Anderlecht/BEL), Jose Sosa (Napoli/ITA) Enzo Perez (Estudiantes), Javier Mascherano (Barcelona/ESP), Ever Banega (Valencia/ESP), Javier Pastore (Palermo/ITA).

Forwards:

Lionel Messi (Barcelona/ESP), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Napoli/ITA), Diego Milito (Inter Milan/ITA), Nicolas Gaitan (Benfica/POR), Juan Manuel Martinez



Real Madrid and Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas poses during a press conference at the United Nations office in Geneva on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Casillas joins
fight against
poverty

AFP, Geneva

Real Madrid and Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas signed up to a UN drive against poverty on Monday, joining five other sports stars as a goodwill ambassador for the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

"While my job on the pitch is to prevent goals, my job at UNDP will be to help score them," said Casillas.

Casillas will be involved in raising awareness for the UN's Millennium Development Goals, aimed at halving world poverty between 2000 and 2015 by tackling hunger and disease.

"Life has given me so many things, I would like to give something back," he said during a ceremony at the UN's European headquarters in Geneva.

"I want to travel and help," he added.

Casillas is joining four other footballers already signed up by UNDP - Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Chelsea's Didier Drogba and Marta Vieira da Silva - as well as Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova.