

# Big guns cruise

## Football

AFP, Johannesburg

A new kid and an old hand on the African coaching block were celebrating Wednesday after debut victories in friendly matches.

Serb Goran Stevanovic got his Ghana career off to a perfect start as the four-time African champions turned up the heat during the second half to thrash Togo 4-1 in Belgian city Antwerp.

Frenchman Henri Michel, coaching in Africa for 17 years with mixed results, guided 2012 Africa Cup of Nations co-hosts Equatorial Guinea to a 2-0 victory against fellow minnows Chad in capital Malabo.

Ivory Coast edged Mali 1-0 in southern French town Valence as African teams took advantage of FIFA friendly dates to fine tune ahead of Cup of Nations qualifiers late next month.

Former Partizan Belgrade coach Stevanovic has a hard act to follow as compatriot Milovan Rajevac took the 'Black Stars' to the 2010 Cup of Nations final and the last eight of the World Cup six months later.

The Serb wants the 'Black Stars' to lift the Cup of Nations trophy in Gabon next February and the first step was whipping the modest Togolese through goals from Dominic Adiyiah, John Mensah, Samuel Inkoom and

a Serge Akakpo own goal.

Amewou Komlan levelled for the 'Sparrowhawks' by converting an early second half penalty, but it was one-way traffic toward the Togo penalty area after that.

Michel is used to handling 'big guns' having coached Cameroon, Morocco, Tunisia and Ivory Coast plus leading clubs Raja Casablanca of Morocco, Zamalek of Egypt and Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa.

Equatorial Guinea are ranked only 44 of 52 African football countries and represent the greatest challenge for a 63-year-old who steered France to third place at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico.

Nigeria-born Daniel Ekedo scored from the penalty spot seven minutes after half-time in Malabo and an Abbas Maigue own goal on 74 minutes sealed the fate of the Chadians, who lie six places higher on the rankings.

Former African Footballer of the Year Didier Drogba wore the orange of Ivory Coast for the first time since Francois Zahoui replaced Sven-Goran Eriksson as coach last August and set up the decisive third-minute goal.

The Chelsea striker controlled a lofted pass from midfield and held off two Malians to find Gervinho, who pushed the ball across the penalty area for Didier Ya Konan to net with a sweetly struck shot.



Ivory Coast captain Didier Drogba (L) tries to go past Mali's Ousmane Bertme during their international friendly at the Pompidou Stadium in Valence on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Ireland beat Wales

## Football

AFP, Dublin

The Republic of Ireland won the inaugural Nations Cup match as they beat Wales 3-0 at Lansdowne Road here on Tuesday.

What was meant to be a fresh era for Welsh football under Gary Speed saw his first game in charge end with another depressing defeat.

Neither side looked especially impressive in a dreary opening 45 minutes but after Darron Gibson broke the deadlock on the hour with his first international goal, the Republic pulled away with Damien Duff and substitute Keith Fahey also finding the back of the net.

Manchester United's Gibson may never score a better international goal than the 20-yard strike that flew past Wales keeper Wayne Hennessey.

Six minutes later, it was 2-0 to the hosts after Fulham favourite Duff turned in a cutback from eight yards.

Wales -- who next month face old rivals England in a Euro 2012 qualifier in Cardiff -- conceded a third goal eight minutes from time when Fahey powered in a 25-yard free-kick.

The Nations Cup is a four-team tournament also featuring Scotland and Northern Ireland, who play each other here on Wednesday.

# Motta bursting with pride

## Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta said on Tuesday that his heart would be bursting with pride when he makes his debut for his adopted country Italy in Wednesday's friendly with Germany.

The 28-year-old - whose great grandfather Fortunato Fogagnolo emigrated from Italy aged 20 for Brazil - said that while he would not be able to join in the singing of the national anthem, he felt 100 percent Italian.

"I may have been born in Brazil, but I feel 100 per cent Italian," said Motta, after learning that Italy coach Cesare Prandelli had selected him in the starting line-up.

"To wear the 'azzurri' shirt gives me a totally different emotion of all those that I have experienced before in football.

"Tomorrow (Wednesday) will be for me a huge occasion, I feel privileged. The national anthem? I know it but I don't know how to sing it."

# Gray, Keys in radio show

## Football

AFP, London

Former Sky Sports presenters Andy Gray and Richard Keys, who lost their jobs last month amid a sexism scandal, have been signed up to present a radio show on talkSPORT, the station said on Tuesday.

The pair will host a three-hour show every weekday on the British commercial speech station starting on February 14, it was revealed, just two weeks after the presenters left Sky in disgrace.

Their appointment comes after Keys spent nearly an hour on talkSPORT to

apologise for his remarks last month.

"It's an ideal opportunity for Richard and me to do what we do best, and that's talk about sport," said Gray.

Keys added it was "the start of something new and exciting for Andy and myself."

"Andy and Richard are iconic broadcasters with massive TV careers who I know will have an impact on national radio, so it's great for the industry," said Moz Dee, talkSPORT programme director.

The sexism scandal erupted in January after details emerged of an off-air conversation between the men, in which they disparaged lineswoman

Sian Massey.

The men said she was unlikely to know the offside rule as she prepared for a Premier League match between Wolves and Liverpool.

Former Everton and Scotland striker Gray lost his job, for which he was reportedly paid £1.7 million (\$2.7 million, two million euros) a year, after the comments about Massey emerged.

His dismissal was also the result of a similar incident in December over a lewd comment made to Sky Sports News presenter Charlotte Jackson.

Referring to his microphone, Gray held his trousers and said: "Charlotte, can you tuck this down here for me?"

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
Have the organisers done a good job with the World Cup preparations?  
Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote  
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**What to WATCH**  
**ESPN**  
Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 8:30pm

**DAY'S EVENT**  
**Bangladesh League**  
Sheikh Jamal v Sheikh Russel  
Time: 4:00pm  
Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur

# European clubs oppose winter World Cup

## Football

AFP, Geneva

European football clubs on Tuesday voiced strong opposition to talk of a winter World Cup and criticised the way world governing body FIFA has been handling changes in football.

"The time for monopolies is over. Football needs democracy and transparency," said European Club Association chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"ECA members agree that all clubs must be meaningfully involved in all decisions affecting club football. Now is the time for change," Rummenigge, who is also chairman of Bayern Munich, added after the 136 member association's general assembly here.

In a statement, the ECA expressed "its concern on the way matters of such importance are managed by football's world governing body" and "its opposition" to the "disruption" of mooted changes to the international fixture list including a winter World Cup. It pointed to the sudden discovery of a FIFA decision last October to add eight new dates to the international match list in 2011 to 2014 "without any consultation" or "precise reason", despite growing warnings

about player exhaustion.

"ECA is supportive of national team football but also believes that player's exhaustion through the excessive number of games must be addressed as a top priority," it said in a statement. "Currently this is not the case."

The stance of powerful European clubs, which own many of the world's top international players, added to a wave of discontent with FIFA in the wake of the controversial race late last year to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

They called for fixed rules for several seasons, a limit of one international tournament a year and a clear seven week break after major international tournaments like the World Cup continental championships.

Clubs have repeatedly complained about the growing intensity and breadth of league, European and international matches and the impact on players, as well as transfer and commercial issues over the years.

They have gradually united with the lead of big name clubs, forging ties with UEFA despite tensions.

But club executives feel increasingly left out of FIFA's decision making which they argue is now "heavily affecting club football without the involvement of the stakeholders concerned".

# Bendtner wants out

## Football

INTERNET

Striker Nicklas Bendtner admits he may have to consider a future away from Arsenal this summer after being frustrated at his lack of first-team opportunities.

Bendtner is only just returning to full fitness and sharpness after injury problems this season. But the Danish international clearly feels he has to play regular football to achieve his goals in the game.

"I have a lot of feelings for Arsenal and it means something great to me. I would be sad to leave it, but you have to think about yourself and, with the career goals I have, I cannot be sitting on the bench," Bendtner said.

"That's the way it is. I will do my best for Arsenal throughout the season.

"Hopefully, I will be there next season as well, but we have to wait and see.

"But, if my situation at Arsenal doesn't change, I will have to look at it because I want to play football.

"There is no doubt about that. If I cannot play at Arsenal, then I do not want to sit on the bench - but every player thinks like that."



Danish and Arsenal striker Nicklas Bendtner (C) speaks during a press conference at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## IN brief

### Gomez reveals Blues offer

AFP, Berlin

Chelsea offered Bayern Munich 42 million euros (35.7 million pounds, 57.3 million dollars) last month for striker Mario Gomez, but the German giants said no, the Bundesliga's top scorer revealed Wednesday.

"I only found out about the offer after the club had turned it down," the 25-year-old Germany international told the Sport Bild weekly in an interview.

"But it wouldn't have mattered anyway. I am already at a top club and I am playing where I always wanted to."

Chelsea instead ending up paying 50 million pounds (59 million euros, 80 million dollars) for Liverpool striker Fernando Torres just before a transfer deadline, smashing the British record.

### Bundesliga trio questioned

AFP, Hamburg

Bundesliga club St. Pauli said Tuesday that three of their players have been questioned by police in connection with suspected match-fixing and illegal betting.

"Our players have in no way been accused of anything, but have been called in to help an investigation" concerning the manipulation of results and bet-fixing, said the Bundesliga club's vice-president, Gernot Stenger.

The three men concerned are Florian Bruns, Carsten Rothenbach and Ralph Gunesch.

The case goes to court in March following allegations from former St. Pauli player Rene Schnitzler, who claims he received 100,000 euros (136,500 dollars) for helping fix five second division games in 2008.

### Pep extends Barca deal

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola has agreed to stay with the Spanish champions until June 2012, the club said Tuesday.

"The signing of the contract will take place in the next few days," the club said in a statement posted on its website.

The 40-year-old, who spent most of his playing career at Barcelona, coached Barcelona's B team before taking control of the first-team squad in June 2008 from Dutchman Frank Rijkaard.

The former Spanish international playmaker won seven trophies in his first two seasons at the Camp Nou.

He had a remarkable debut season winning the Champions League, league title and Spanish Cup.

Guardiola added the World Club Cup, the Spanish Super Cup and the European Super Cup to his impressive haul the following year, as well as retaining the Spanish League with a record breaking 99 points.

Guardiola's existing contract was set to expire in June 2011.

### Coach punishes Diego

AFP, Wolfsburg

New Wolfsburg coach Pierre Littbarski has imposed a one-match ban on midfielder Diego after the Brazilian broke orders by taking a penalty, which he then missed, during the 1-0 defeat to Hannover at the weekend.

"I've suspended him for one match because of what happened. That will be the end of the matter and afterwards he can show us if he can help us," said Littbarski, who has taken over from Steve McClaren, his former boss who was fired on Monday.

McClaren had designated Patrick Helmes as official penalty taker but Diego, signed in the close season for 15 million euros, insisted he took the spot-kick only to see it come back off the crossbar.