

Barca to fly to London early

AFP, Madrid

The Barcelona squad will fly to London on Tuesday evening for the Champions League final, two days earlier than planned, due to the disruption to air travel caused by the ash cloud from an Icelandic volcano, the club said.

The club had intended to leave on Thursday for Saturday's final at Wembley against Manchester United.

"Due to the uncertainty caused by ash from the Grimsvotn volcano, the first team of Barcelona will travel to London on Tuesday at 10pm," it said in a statement on its website Tuesday.

It said a board spokesman would address a press conference at 5pm (1500GMT) Tuesday to explain travel details for supporters.

The plume of ash from the volcano has already reached Britain and halted hundreds of flights.

Barca was also seeking to avoid a repeat of last year, when the squad travelled 1,000 kilometres by coach to Milan for their Champions League semifinal because the ash cloud from another Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjoell, disrupted air travel throughout Europe.

The Catalan giants lost that match 3-1 against Inter.

MU strong as ever

AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona's two-time world player of the year Lionel Messi has dismissed suggestions that Manchester United lack the quality of previous squads ahead of the two sides' Champions League final on Saturday in London. The match will be a repeat of the 2009 final in Rome when Barcelona beat Manchester United 2-0, with Messi scoring the second goal.

Some in the English media have suggested Manchester United were crowned champions for a record 19th time earlier this month despite lacking the sparkle of past squads but Messi said he did not think the team was any weaker than in 2009.

"They won the English championship and they are in the Champions League final. They can't be very weak if they have achieved all that," said the 23-year-old.

"It is a final, it is a special match given what is at stake. The good memory of Rome is behind us. This will be a totally different match. We are facing a very strong adversary, which has very good players."

After a bruising Champions League semifinal against Real Madrid, Lionel Messi believes that Manchester United's style of attacking football will make it an attractive final.

Messi is hopeful that Manchester will play their usual attacking game rather than stopping Barca from playing.

"Manchester like to have the ball and pass so if they do the same against us then it will be an open match," he said.

"We always go out and try to play good football and I can't say if Manchester will do the same but that is their usual style."



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi addresses a press conference during the Open Media Day at Nou Camp on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Messi, who scored two delightful goals in the first leg of the semifinal against Real, said that one moment of individual brilliance could settle the match.

"They have a tough defence with players that have a lot of experience and have won a lot of games so it will not be easy," said Messi.

"This week we will watch videos and talk about ways that we can beat them."

"It is a good way to finish the season by playing in the Champions League final and it would be very disappointing to lose. It is a big game for the team, the coach and for everyone so we will all do our best."

"There is no team which has a better chance to win and I think that

the match will be decided by an individual action, so we will have to be ready to take advantage of it when it happens.

"It would be great if I could score in the final but the priority is that someone in the team does."

Messi, who is yet to hit similar heights at international level, highlighted three players he felt could damage Barcelona.

"They have a good team with Chicharito (Hernandez), (Wayne) Rooney and (Antonio) Valencia and so it will be very tough, I don't know if it will be easier or harder than last time. Valencia is fast down the right wing and sets up a lot of goals," said Messi.

Messi has been crucial again for

Barca this season by providing moments of magic at key moments but with the world attention on Wembley this weekend he denies he feels under any pressure to deliver.

"I think that we can win any game that I play and I have confidence in the team. Each match I give everything and act as though it is my last and this is just one more for me. I want to play every game and now I am ready for the final," he said.

Barcelona and Manchester United are both seeking a fourth European Cup, which would take them level with Ajax and Bayern Munich and behind only Liverpool with five wins, AC Milan with seven and Real Madrid with nine.

Juventus still paying for it

AFP, Rome



It is five years since Juventus were found guilty of match-fixing for their part in the Italian Calciopoli scandal and having finished the 2010/11 season in seventh, it seems they are still paying for it.

Juve drew 2-2 against Napoli on Sunday as Roma beat Sampdoria 3-1 to ensure the Old Lady of Turin not only finished seventh for the second year in a row but have missed out on European football for the third year in the last six.

Having been relegated to Serie B for their part in Calciopoli -- and been stripped of both the 2005 and 2006 titles -- they missed out on Europe that season and the next, following their return to Serie A.

But in their first season back in the top flight, Juve surprised many people by claiming a third-placed finish.

Having had to sell stars such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Patrick Vieira and Fabio Cannavaro when they dropped into Serie B, they were expected to need some time to regroup.

But their second season back in the top flight saw them finish second and many were predicting a Juve title the next season -- amongst them the then Italy coach Marcello Lippi.

But what happened instead was the Turin giants have taken one step back after another, their return to the upper echelons of the table proving merely a false dawn.

And with a second disastrous season in a row now completed, they have decided to part company with coach Luigi Delneri, meaning they are looking for a seventh coach in the space of five years.

Fabio Capello walked out with the club relegated to Serie B, to join Real Madrid, and Didier Deschamps did likewise after guiding them to promotion back to the top flight, claiming they weren't supporting him enough.

Juve finally seemed to have found some stability with Claudio Ranieri, who was at the helm for their first two seasons back in Serie A.

However, he was inexplicably fired two games before the end of the 2008/09 season because the club were afraid they would miss out on a top three finish and direct qualification for the Champions League group stages.

Such a scenario seems laughable now with the club failing even to make it into the Europa League.

As it happened, they won their last two games under Ciro Ferrara and finished second.

But that was the end of the progress the club had been making.

Whoever does get the job next season will find that out for himself and unless he finds the answer, Italy's big three will continue to be one short.

Italy recall Pirlo, Balotelli

Football

AFP, Rome

Andrea Pirlo and Mario Balotelli have been recalled by coach Cesare Prandelli to the Italy squad for the Euro 2012 qualifier against Estonia in Modena on June 3.

Pirlo missed the last qualifying match against Slovenia in March due to injury while Balotelli was excluded for disciplinary reasons.

Daniele De Rossi, who served a three-game ban at the end of the season for elbowing an opponent, has not been called up.

De Rossi was barred from the squad for the game in Ljubljana because he was suspended by UEFA for having punched Dario Srna during a Champions League game against Shakhtar Donetsk.

At the time he said he respected the Italian national team's code of conduct and that he

hoped it would be his last exclusion.

Juventus centre-back Leonardo Bonucci has also been dropped in favour of Fiorentina's Alessandro Gamberini in the 25-man squad.

Juve still have five players in the squad, more than any other club, and that doesn't include Pirlo who has been released by AC Milan and is on the verge of joining the Turin giants.

Manchester City striker Balotelli is one of only two foreign-based players in the squad alongside Villarreal striker Giuseppe Rossi, a reported target for Barcelona and Inter Milan.

Italy are in total control of Qualifying Group C with a five-point lead over their nearest rivals, and a game in hand.

Victory would leave them needing only two more wins from their final four games to ensure top spot in the group and a place in Poland and Ukraine next year.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo), Emiliano Viviano (Bologna)

Defenders: Davide Astori (Cagliari), Federico Balzaretti and Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Domenico Criscito (Genoa), Alessandro Gamberini (Fiorentina), Christian Maggio (Napoli), Andrea Ranocchia (Inter Milan)

Midfielders: Alberto Aquilani and Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Thiago Motta (Inter Milan), Antonio Nocerino (Palermo), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan)

Forwards: Mario Balotelli (Manchester City/ENG), Antonio Cassano (AC Milan), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Sebastian Giovinco (Parma), Alessandro Matri (Juventus)

Aguero wants to leave

Football

AFP, Madrid

Argentine star Sergio 'Kun' Aguero has announced he wants to leave Atletico Madrid, and some of Europe's top clubs are reportedly lining up to snatch him.

"I said long ago that when I wanted to go, I would say so publicly. And the time has come. So I have kept my word and here I am," the 22-year-old striker said in a statement posted on his website late Monday.

"I find it hard to leave Atletico. It hurts me and saddens me. But I don't find it hard to explain why I am doing it."

"I've thought about it for a long time and I'm convinced that I must be true to myself. I think that I should

not rule out the possibility to keep learning, to keep growing."

Aguero, who is married to Diego Maradona's daughter, moved to Spain from Independiente of Argentina in 2006.

His decision to leave Atletico, which finished seventh in the Spanish league last season, has reportedly left a number of top European clubs eagerly eyeing the striker.

The president of Italian club Juventus, Andrea Agnelli, and its sporting director Giuseppe Marotta were in talks with Aguero's agent on Tuesday, according to Italian news agency Ansa.

Spanish sports daily Marca said the player's agents also plans to meet with Real Madrid officials this week. Another sports paper, AS, said Real

would have to fork out 75 million euros for the player.

Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester City are also reportedly interested.

In January, Aguero signed a contract extension that committed him to Atletico until 2014, with a buyout clause of 45 million euros.

The player stressed that his decision "is not an economic issue but strictly a sporting one. So I want to clearly express my appreciation to the club for the efforts it has made to give me a salary that equates with those of the largest clubs in the world."

"I want to say also that this decision has been maturing for some time. The issue was discussed and agreed with Atletico last year on the occasion of the renewal of my contract."

Giggs in injunction row

Football

AFP, London

Britain's press celebrated Tuesday after a British lawmaker defied a court ruling to name Ryan Giggs as the footballer who used an injunction to keep details of an alleged affair secret.

Liberal Democrat lawmaker John Hemming named the Manchester United player using his centuries-old right to freedom of speech in the House of Commons, despite an injunction which gave the married sportsman anonymity in the British media.

Hemming acted after a Scottish newspaper on Sunday published Giggs's photograph, arguing that it could no longer support a gagging order while the footballer had been named by thousands of people on microblogging site Twitter.

"With about 75,000 people having named Ryan Giggs on Twitter it's obviously impractical to imprison them all," Hemming told the House of Commons.

Hemming was rebuked by the Speaker, but not before journalists had taken note -- the media are entitled to report parliamentary proceedings without fear of being sued, and Hemming's words were swiftly used nationwide to name Giggs.

The Sun hailed the move in an editorial entitled "Freedom wins", saying: "The Giggs shambles proves that court injunctions, as a weapon of protection for the rich and powerful, are useless in the age of Twitter and Facebook."

The tabloid's owners, Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers, had on Monday twice failed to get the gag order lifted at the High Court.

Their first attempt before Hemming's remarks was rejected by judge David Eady, who said: "The court's duty remains to try and protect the claimant, and particularly his family, from intrusion and harassment so long as it can."

After Hemming spoke out The Sun tried again, but was rejected.

Prime Minister David Cameron admitted on Monday that the current situation regarding privacy laws and the Internet was "unsustainable" and his government later said it was setting up a parliamentary committee to look into the issue.

"It's not fair on the newspapers if all the social media can report this and the newspapers can't, so the law and the practice has got to catch up with how people consume media today," Cameron said in an interview with ITV.

He added: "But there's a difficulty here because the law is the law and the judges must interpret what the law is."

A columnist for the Daily Mail on Tuesday urged the leader to "put our politically motivated judges back in their boxes, saying: 'No one has voted for secret justice in Britain'."

Despite the furore, Giggs is likely to be in the Manchester United lineup for the Champions League final against Barcelona on Saturday where he could add to his record as the most decorated player in the history of the English game.

In a bid to stem the online debate, Giggs's lawyers announced Friday they were taking legal action to force Twitter to reveal the identity of users who broke the gagging order. But it only provoked more indignant Tweets.

Hemming later said it was this action that prompted him to name Giggs, saying: "He was going after the ordinary people who have been gossiping about him on Twitter."



Manchester City forward Carlos Tevez collects the FA Cup during their end of the season celebration at the City of Manchester Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think the BCB can hire the new head coach by June 15?

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What to WATCH

SET Max

Indian Premier League
Mumbai v Kolkata
Second Play-Off Match
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

STAR Sports

French Open

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Sk Russel v Arambagh
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National