



Former Manchester United star David Beckham (C) takes a shot under pressure from Juventus midfielder Felipe Melo (R) during Gary Neville's testimonial match at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pirlo pens Juve deal

AFP, Rome

Italy midfielder Andrea Pirlo on Tuesday signed a three-year deal to join Turin giants Juventus.

Only last week the 32-year-old had been released by Serie A champions AC Milan.

It means Pirlo joins a select group of players to play for Italy's big three: Inter, Milan and Juve.

The first was Italy legend Giuseppe Meazza followed by Aldo Serena, Roberto Baggio, Christian Vieri, Edgar Davids, Patrick Vieira and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Pirlo spent 10 years at Milan having begun his career at Brescia.

He moved to Inter in 1998 before going on loan to Reggina and back to Brescia.

He joined Milan in 2001 and went on to win two Champions League crowns and two Serie A titles with the rossoneri.

MU close in on De Gea

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has confirmed the Premier League champions are close to signing Atletico Madrid goalkeeper David De Gea.

Speaking after Gary Neville's testimonial match on Tuesday night, the manager said: "We've been working on it (De Gea transfer) for quite a while. We identified him quite a while back as one we should go for."

"He's a young goalkeeper, very quick, good composure, presence and an outstanding replacement for (Edwin) van der Sar."

'Rooney the dangerman'

AFP, Barcelona



Barcelona defender Gerard Pique has highlighted former team-mate Wayne Rooney as the danger when they face Manchester United in the Champions League final at Wembley on Saturday.

Pique knows the United side well having spent four years at Old Trafford up until 2008.

He moved aged just 17 but failed to make an impact on the first team and ended up moving back to Catalonia. He has since established himself among the best defenders in the world, winning the treble in his first season back at Barca including the Champions League beating United in the final in Rome.

He now finds himself again facing his old side and knows that he will have to be at his best to contain Rooney.

"He is one of the best strikers in the game and has scored a lot of goals," said Pique.

"I will have to concentrate hard to not to give him space. I have a good friendship with him but we both want to win this game and we will be fighting

for our own interests.

"It was always difficult playing against him in training as it is with (Lionel) Messi now," added Pique.

Pique, who was a pivotal member of the defence when Spain at last won the World Cup last year, also paid handsome tribute to United manager Sir Alex Ferguson who he feels has had a big bearing on his career.

"He has won loads of titles and although the teams change he keeps on winning. I had several really good years there but Barcelona is my home and I wanted to return here. He (Ferguson) understood this," said Pique.

Barca coach Pep Guardiola still hasn't decided on his defensive make-up for the final but could choose to play Javier Mascherano in the centre alongside Pique with the talismanic Carles Puyol still not 100 per cent match fit after a long injury spell.

A former Liverpool player, Mascherano admits that it is a bigger game than normal for him personally while he has not forgotten his sending off in 2008 against United where he had to be restrained by fellow players after receiving two yellow cards.

"It was a big mistake when I got sent-off but this game now is totally different because it is not a game between United and Liverpool but the final of the Champions League," he explained.

"After spending three-and-a-half years at Liverpool you are going to feel a bit different in this game but I am now a Barcelona player."

Mascherano feels that United are as strong now despite losing Cristiano Ronaldo.

"I know Ferguson, he is very clever and for that reason he has been there for so long," said Mascherano.

"We don't have an advantage now because they have Chicharito (Hernandez), (Antonio) Valencia and Nani who has improved a lot in the last two years.

"It would be a big mistake if we were to think that they are weaker now as they have some very good players. I don't know if I am going to play but I will do my best if I start or have the chance to come on from the bench."

Mascherano is not fazed by the possibility of being in the backline and played there in the ill-tempered semifinal against Real Madrid.

Beckham plays in Neville testimonial



AFP, Manchester

David Beckham and Ryan Giggs both made appearances as former team-mate Gary Neville waved farewell to Manchester United at Old Trafford on Tuesday night.

Around 42,000 fans saw Juventus emerge 2-1 winners in Neville's testimonial game which marks the final chapter in his playing career before a move into the media.

And the 36-year-old is hoping his first task will be to see his old club beating Barcelona in the Champions League final.

"The most important thing for this club now is to go and win that trophy on Saturday," said Neville, who spent 20 years at United.

There was no mention of Giggs' off-field problems, after the Welsh player was named by a British MP as the footballer who had sought to prevent details of an alleged affair

being published, as the veteran set up Wayne Rooney for United's only goal.

Paul Scholes, Anderson, John O'Shea and Rafael also played some part, although there was no action for Darren Fletcher.

Neville thanked Beckham, Nicky Butt and brother Phil, who helped complete the famed 'Class of 92' for one more United appearance.

And Beckham echoed Neville's words of hope for his old club this weekend.

"I hope we win. It is as simple as that," Beckham told Key103.

"Barcelona are such a great football side, one of the best in the world.

"But if any club, and any manager, can beat them it is Manchester United and Sir Alex Ferguson. The manager continues to do it. He continues changing teams and players, yet Manchester United keep on going.

"That is why there is so much respect for him throughout the game and why he is the best manager in the world."

Messi solution in place

AFP, Manchester



Sir Alex Ferguson said Manchester United would solve the problem of how to deal with Lionel Messi here Tuesday ahead of his Champions League final showdown with Barcelona.

Messi stole the show for Barcelona two years ago, when the Spanish giants outclassed favourites United to win the 2009 final in Rome.

Since then, the diminutive Argentinian has gone from strength to strength, firmly establishing himself as the world's best footballer.

Ferguson insisted however that United would not allow themselves to become obsessed with a gameplan to shackle the South American maestro.

"We have played against Barcelona three times with Messi in the team.

"But there is always a solution to every good player. Hopefully we can find one on Saturday. They have other good players though, and so do we. That is why it is such an appealing game.

"I am sure Barcelona are aware of that."

United's preparations for Saturday's encounter have been jolted by the legal furore involving midfielder Ryan Giggs, named by a British MP as the footballer who had sought to prevent details of an alleged affair being published.

Ferguson gave a blunt response on Tuesday when asked to assess Giggs' importance to United.

"All the players are important to us, every one of them," he said.

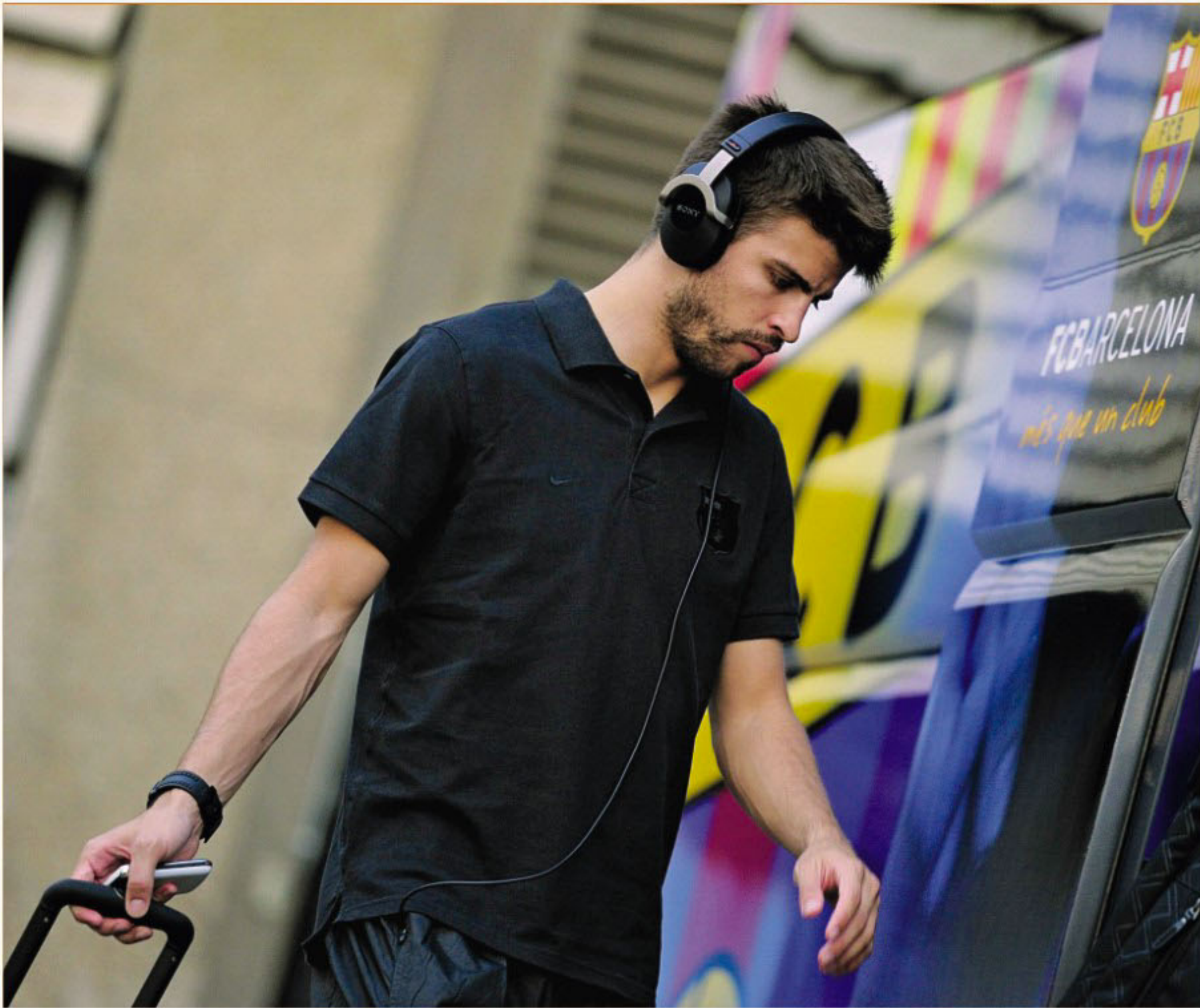


PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona centreback Gerard Pique boards a bus before their departure to London from the Nou Camp on Tuesday.



STAR Cricket

England v Sri Lanka

First Test, Day 1

Live from 4:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

STAR Sports

French Open

Live from 3:00pm



Bangladesh League

Soccer Club, Feni v Sk Jamal

Dhanmondi Club

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Feni Stadium

Farashganj v Ctg Mohammedan

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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