



Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Carlos Tevez of Manchester City spearhead Argentina's 26-man squad announced Wednesday for next month's Copa America.

Tevez figures in the list despite complaining that he had been left out of his country's 4-2 friendly win against Paraguay last weekend.

Only four of coach Sergio Batista's squad are based in Argentina, which is hosting the July 1-24 competition.

Messi, fresh from guiding Barcelona to Champions League glory, has his sights firmly set on winning the event.

"I'm raring to go," Messi said after touching down here from Spain on Tuesday.

"I was lucky enough to win everything with Barcelona and on an individual level, and now my goal is to play in and win the Copa America with Argentina."

Messi was instrumental in Barca's 3-1 victory over Manchester United at Wembley last Saturday, scoring the second goal as the Catalan giants dominated the English champions.

Argentina national team leaves the pitch after training at the Abuja National Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sepp set for re-election

Football

AFP, Zurich

FIFA president Sepp Blatter was set to be re-elected as head of world football on Wednesday after attempts to force a postponement of the scandal-tainted ballot ended in a crushing defeat.

Blatter is poised to be returned to power for another four-year term in a vote by acclamation at around 4pm local time (1400 GMT) after an English motion to halt the ballot was dismissed by 172 votes to 17.

Addressing delegates, English FA chairman David Bernstein said proceeding with the election following the withdrawal of Blatter's rival Mohamed bin Hammam would provide a "flawed mandate."

But FIFA delegates dismissed the motion by a landslide, leaving the way clear for Blatter to be re-appointed as head of the organisation which has been rocked by several weeks of damning graft claims.

Speaking after the vote to reject a postponement, Blatter pledged to initiate wide-ranging reforms including an overhaul of the way in which

future World Cup hosts were chosen.

Blatter said World Cups would be picked by all 208 FIFA members, rather than the 24-strong executive committee which has awarded hosting rights in the past.

"I want to give more power to the national associations," Blatter said.

"In the future the World Cup will be decided by the FIFA Congress. The executive committee will create a shortlist - but will make no recommendations only a list - and the Congress will decide on the venue."

Blatter, 75, had fought a vicious election battle against former ally bin Hammam, the Qatari head of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) who withdrew from the race on Sunday amid allegations of vote-buying.

Bin Hammam and influential FIFA vice-president Jack Warner were suspended by the organisation's ethics committee pending an investigation into claims they offered cash bribes in a bid to topple Blatter.

The revelations followed testimony in the British parliament last month that senior FIFA officials had sought cash and favours during the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022

World Cups.

The decision to award the tiny oil-rich Gulf state of Qatar the 2022 tournament has met with widespread criticism and allegations of corruption.

Earlier Wednesday, the head of Germany's football federation, Theo Zwanziger, called for FIFA to re-examine Qatar's victory in the 2022 race.

"I think there is a significant degree of suspicion that one cannot just dismiss," Zwanziger told ZDF public television, when asked about calls for the sport's world governing body to take away the event from Qatar.

"And that is why I reckon that the awarding of this World Cup must be re-examined with regard to these concerns," he said.

Blatter's pledges for reform came after several key sponsors spoke out against the negative impact that recent corruption scandals were having on the organisation.

FIFA's sponsorship deals have helped to raise hundreds of millions of dollars for the organisation since Blatter took over in 1998, making FIFA the richest sports body on the planet with mammoth cash reserves of \$1.3 billion.

MU extend Owen deal

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United on Wednesday handed striker Michael Owen a surprise new one year contract extension in a move that may cast doubt on Dimitar Berbatov's future with the Premier League champions.

Sir Alex Ferguson, who awarded the 31-year-old Owen a place on the bench for last Saturday's Champions League final ahead of Berbatov, said: "Michael has proved to be a top footballer."

"It is unfortunate that he did not get more opportunities but the form of Chicharito (Javier Hernandez) put everyone in the shade and his partnership with Rooney proved invaluable."

"I am delighted Michael is staying for a further year and we will look to give him more opportunities in the new season."

Former Liverpool and England striker Owen commented: "I am delighted to have agreed a one-year extension to my contract."

Juve appoint Conte

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus on Tuesday signed former club captain Antonio Conte as the replacement for departed coach Luigi Delneri.

The 41-year-old has signed a two-year contract taking him up to the end of June 2013.

Earlier in the day Juve officially announced Delneri's departure, although the 60-year-old had already revealed his imminent exit before the end of the season.

Conte has just guided Siena to promotion back to Serie A, a feat he had already achieved with Bari in 2009.

He takes over a Juve team in turmoil having finished seventh for the second year in a row and missed out on European qualification altogether.

But Conte believes the Old Lady of Turin is not in need of a major facelift.

"There's a good foundation which comes from a season that wasn't easy," said Conte.

"I'm banking on the desire for redemption from those in the squad."

"There's an excellent foundation with some investments made last year, I'm very calm, there's absolutely no need to start all over."

"All we need to do is adjust certain things and provide great motivation and desire to a

group with a great base.

"For me it's a return home after seven years, something I've always dreamed about and that I set my heart on from the moment I began this career."

"I can't wait to get started."

However, veteran Juve and Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon warned against placing too high expectations on his shoulders.

"The following months will determine if it was the right decision or not but his CV speaks volumes," he said.

"As a coach he's always attained the results asked of him, he adds a winning attitude."

"As a player he was extremely charismatic and he knows the club. But there's a long way between that and winning."

"The players need to make themselves available and he needs the club's support."

"Without a strong club, a coach won't win."

Conte was an integral part of the successful Juventus team in 1990s and beginning of the new millennium.

He played 296 games for the Turin giants, winning five league titles and the Champions League in 1996.

He was also capped 20 times by Italy and was part of the squads that reached the 1994 World Cup final and 2000 European Championships final.

Zhang calls for revolution

Football

AFP, Singapore

Acting Asian football boss Zhang Jilong called for "revolution" Wednesday and vowed to battle corruption after stepping in for suspended leader Mohamed bin Hammam, who is fighting bribery claims.

Zhang said regional football needed reforms after a welter of graft scandals engulfed world body FIFA, including vote-buying allegations against bin Hammam, the embattled Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president.

"The Asian football environment is not that healthy," Zhang told Chinese state broadcaster CCTV. "We need, let's say, revolution. We need reform," he said, to make Asian soccer more transparent and with greater "fair play."

The AFC senior vice-president also promised to bring corrupt officials to book and said allegations like those against bin Hammam -- who is accused of trying to bribe his way to the FIFA presidency -- damaged the sport.

"Scandals such as bin Hammam's bribery allegations harm the sport's beauty. Anyone who does not show transparency should pay for it," he told Chinese website Sina.com, according to the China Daily newspaper.

The strident comments come just days after Zhang's automatic appointment as Asia's caretaker chief following bin Hammam's suspension from footballing activities by FIFA, pending an investigation.

Bin Hammam, whose withdrawal from the presidential race left long-time FIFA leader Sepp Blatter as the lone candidate, is

accused of offering cash gifts in return for votes in Wednesday's poll in Zurich.

Zhang also denied making earlier comments, also reported by Sina.com and the China Daily, that bin Hammam was "still the president" and that FIFA had "no right" to bar him from Asian duties.

The AFC's executive committee has voiced the "deepest concern" over developments involving bin Hammam and said it hopes "the outcome of the investigation will be in the best interests of football in Asia and beyond."

Zhang also promised not to promote Chinese football -- which has also been hit by a major corruption scandal -- at the expense of the wider region, and said he hoped to steady the AFC after a turbulent period.

"My priority at the new post is to ease the negative effect of bin Hammam's corruption allegations on Asian soccer," he said, according to the China Daily.

"We should aim to improve the AFC's operations and make it run more transparently... I hope to solidify the whole Asian soccer community and make the federation operate steadily after the crisis."

In Zurich, bin Hammam lodged a formal protest against his ban on Wednesday, claiming he had been given no time to appeal before the congress. "I was punished before I was found guilty," he complained.

The Qatari faced down a challenge to his FIFA executive committee seat in 2009 and was instrumental in winning his home country's hosting rights for the 2022 World Cup, a victory seen as the launch-pad for his presidential bid.



Spain midfielders Andres Iniesta (L) and Xabi Alonso take part in a training session at Football City in Las Rozas near Madrid yesterday.

SPORTS POLL

Do you think Shakib Al Hasan is being overworked?

No 52.2%

Yes 47.8%

TOTAL VOTES: 134

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Barcelona are the greatest club side ever?

Visit the sports page of www.thecitizen.net to cast vote

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STAR Sports

French Open

Women's Semifinals

Live from 6:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News



Bangladesh League

Muktijoddha v Abahani

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Bangabandhu

PHOTO: AFP