

# France destroy Ukraine



Football

AFP, Donetsk

Three late goals saw a second-string France side inflict a 4-1 humbling of joint Euro 2012 hosts Ukraine in a friendly here on Monday to extend their unbeaten run under coach Laurent Blanc to nine matches.

All the goals came in the second-half as the French came from a goal down - scored by veteran Ukrainian Anatoly Tymoschuk - with Kevin Gameiro levelling with his first goal in four appearances, a double from Marvin Martin on his debut and another from defender Younes Kaboul rounding off the victory.

The last three goals came in the final three minutes with Sochaux's Martin emulating French legend Zinedine Zidane in scoring a double on his debut.

Blanc, who made 10 changes to the side that performed poorly in the 1-1 Euro qualifier with Belarus on Friday, was delighted that his reserves had given the senior players something to think about.

"I think that yes, they have given the other players a reminder," said Blanc.

"The match was still a friendly and nothing was at stake.

"We are in the process of constructing a squad but there has to be competition because if people think that they are sure of being first choice then the squad will not make progress.

"These young players really give it a go, they try things, they are creative and they seized their chance.

"They proved that they are capable of competing for something other than being a substitute. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We need to see longer term."

Blanc, who refused to blame goalkeeper and captain for the match Steve Mandanda for his error in the Ukrainian goal, was delighted for Martin making such an impact on his debut.

"I was sure that the comparison would be made," Blanc said referring to Zidane's debut.

"I wish him the same career as Zidane had after that but the thing that really pleased me was the overall team performance.



French midfielder Marvin Martin (L) reacts after scoring his team's second goal during their international friendly against Ukraine at the Dombass Arena in Donetsk yesterday.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## Real eyeing Coentrao

AFP, Madrid

Benfica left-back Fabio Coentrao could be on his way to Spanish giants Real Madrid, according to a Spanish sports daily, which said the two clubs will meet this week to seal the deal.

Big-spenders Real are ready to pay 25 million euros while the Lisbon club wants 30 million, the cost of buying out his contract, the daily Marca said Tuesday.

The 23-year-old, who starred for Portugal at the World Cup in South Africa, is "one of the priorities" of Real coach Jose Mourinho for next season, the papers said.

Mourinho, who is also Portuguese, is keen to rebuild the squad after the club finished second to Barcelona in the Spanish league for the third successive season.

Another sports daily, AS, published an interview with Coentrao in which he said his dream is to play for Mourinho, "the best coach in the world."

Coentrao, who can also play in midfield, last September extended his contract with Benfica by one year until the summer of 2016.

## No crisis in Asia



Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian football is not in "crisis" and is running smoothly despite corruption allegations which have left its leader suspended from the sport, a senior official said Tuesday.

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) general secretary Alex Soosay said there were no plans for an extraordinary regional congress; stressing president Mohamed bin Hammam's ban was only "provisional".

"There is no insecurity, we are very stable. There are no issues of crisis as such," Soosay told AFP, on the sidelines of the AFC Champions League final stages draw in Kuala Lumpur.

"The administration is functioning very efficiently."

Asian soccer was shaken by last week's dramatic FIFA congress in Zurich when bin Hammam was accused of vote-buying in his failed attempt to topple the world body's long-time leader, Sepp Blatter.

Soosay's comments echo those of Blatter, who in a much-criticised speech last week shrugged off corruption allegations engulfing football's governing body and denied the sport is in crisis.

Bin Hammam has been suspended pending an investigation. But Soosay said his stand-in, senior vice-president Zhang Jilong of China, would visit the AFC's Kuala Lumpur headquarters soon to take up his duties.

"The daily acts are running smoothly and professionally," Soosay said.

"The acting president will take office. By next week he will be here," he added. "He is a very experienced man, we can rely on him. He has been an AFC vice-president since 1997."

Soosay said he had not received complaints from AFC member countries and said there was "no need... for the moment" to hold an extraordinary congress, which could decide to vote for a new president.

"I don't think there is any (unhappiness from members) at the moment, everything's stable," he said.

"Under the general secretary, our activities in the AFC are moving very smoothly. The day-to-day operations are stable and managed professionally under the guidance of the general secretary."

Zhang has called for a "revolution" to make regional football more transparent after a series of corruption allegations tarnished FIFA, including some claims directed at bin Hammam.

Asian football is also battling a number of problems including FIFA's suspension of Indonesia's membership for failing to halt a rebel league, and a South Korean match-fixing scandal which prompted one player's apparent suicide.

Many clubs in Australia's A-League are struggling financially while FIFA is targeting Malaysia and Singapore as the source of match-fixing scandals in wealthy European leagues.

## Fulham appoint Jol

AFP, London

Experienced Dutchman Martin Jol was named the new manager of Premier League side Fulham on Tuesday, replacing Mark Hughes who resigned last week after one season in charge.

The 55-year-old former Tottenham boss has agreed an initial two-year contract with the option of a further 12 months.

Jol, who was sacked by Spurs in 2007, was linked with the Fulham role last year but Dutch club Ajax refused to release him from his post as head coach.

He has been out of work since quitting Ajax last December and said he was excited at returning to England.

"I am very happy to join Fulham football club, a wonderful traditional club," he told Fulham's website.

"It is a club with good, solid foundations and a great fan base.

"I am looking forward to being part of the Fulham family and thank the chairman for the trust he's shown in me."

## A scoreless thriller



Football

AFP, Melbourne

Australia and Serbia fought out a pulsating scoreless draw in Melbourne on Tuesday in their first meeting since last year's World Cup in South Africa.

The skilful Serbs, without many of their leading stars, had some great scoring chances, but the Australians, also without their big guns, gave as good as they got in the end-to-end contest.

Australia ended Serbia's quest for the last 16 at last year's World Cup with a fighting 2-1 victory in Nelspruit.

On that occasion the Socceroos hit back magnificently in the second half, rocking the Europeans with two goals in four minutes in their best performance of the tournament.

This was another breathless encounter between the 16th-ranked Europeans and the Socceroos, four rungs below them.

Adem Ljajic was narrowly wide with a free kick in the 10th minute and midfielder Zdravko Kuzmanovic blazed just wide with Australian goalkeeper Adam Federici beaten.

Australian midfielder Mile Jedinak forced goalkeeper Damir Kahrman into a scrambling save off a free kick and he again went close minutes later when his on target shot was blocked by defender Slobodan Rajkovic.

But the best chance of the opening 45 minutes was wasted by Ljajic as he blazed over the bar when it was easier to score five minutes before halftime.

Brett Holman, whose long-range goal stunned the Serbians at the World Cup, brought out a diving save from Kahrman in the final minute of the half.

## Last-gasp Korea

AFP, Seoul

South Korea squeaked past an aggressive Ghana 2-1 in an international friendly in Jeonju Tuesday, thanks to a Koo Ja-Cheol goal off a rebound in injury time.

With the teams tied 1-1, Ghana's keeper Richard Kingson dived to stop Ji Dong-Won's close-range header.

But Koo, who came into the game in the second half, blasted home the rebound to secure victory, Yonhap news agency reported.

South Korea opened the scoring in the 10th minute when Jirose above two defenders to head the ball past Kingson for his sixth goal in 11 career international matches.

Asamoah Gyan struck level for Ghana in the 62nd minute, after Sulley Ali Muntari pushed a pass between two defenders to set up the Sunderland striker.

But Ghana had missed several chances to equalise before then.

Gyan was denied after the South Korean defence was caught unawares in the 51st minute.

## Argentina's India tour confirmed



Football

AFP, New Delhi

Lionel Messi and his Argentina team mates will travel to India later this year to take on Venezuela in a friendly designed to boost football on the subcontinent, a report said Tuesday.

The FIFA-sanctioned game is scheduled for September 2 in the eastern city of Kolkata and the Argentinean team will then travel to Bangladesh where they will take on Nigeria, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported.

"The Argentina Football Association has indeed signed a contract to bring in the full-strength squad including Messi and Carlos Tevez among others," Bhaskar Goswami of the Celebrity Management Group was quoted as saying by PTI.

"The contract guarantees their participation."

The Argentina squad will arrive in Kolkata on August 30 and will take part in a number of events, including a charity programme and a football clinic for children during a four-day stay.

It was unclear if world player of the year Messi, whose club side Barcelona begin their La Liga title defence the day before, would fly out with his Argentina team mates or join the tour later.

After the Kolkata outing, the Argentine contingent will travel to Dhaka for another friendly against Nigeria on September 6, the report said.

Football is yet to take off in cricket-mad India despite enjoying considerable success in the 1950s and 1960s when they won two Asian Games gold medals.

### SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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#### Ten Cricket

West Indies v India

Second ODI

Live from 7:00pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm



#### Bangladesh League

Abahani v Aramagh

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: BNS



The Euro 2012 official ball is pictured in Donetsk yesterday. Poland and Ukraine will co-host the 2012 European Football Championship.

PHOTO:  
AFP