

City, MU in tickets row

AFP, London

Manchester United have complained to the English Football Association (FA) over their allocation of tickets for next month's eagerly awaited FA Cup clash with Manchester City, reports said on Tuesday.

FA rules state that visiting teams are entitled to a ticket allocation equivalent to 15 per cent of capacity, which would give United 7,100 tickets to the January 8 showdown at Eastlands.

City, however, have only offered United 5,500 tickets - 11 per cent of capacity - citing safety reasons.

Local media reports said that the issue came to light during discussions about ticket arrangements for a possible replay, when City learned they would only receive 8,500 tickets - 11 per cent - for any return match at Old Trafford.

United enjoy a special dispensation from the FA rules because Old Trafford's 76,000 capacity is far greater than any other club in England.

The spat is likely to heighten anticipation surrounding the third-round clash, which comes with City and United locked in a neck-and-neck league title race.

United are also determined to avenge their 6-1 humiliation by City at Old Trafford earlier this season.



Chelsea forward Daniel Sturridge (L) vies with captain John Terry (C) and Spanish forward Fernando Torres during a training session at Stamford Bridge on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Juve aim to stay top

AFP, Rome

Italian league leaders Juventus must negotiate a tough midweek trip to third-placed Udinese if the Old Lady of Turin is to go into the holiday period top, fending off their opponents and AC Milan.

The Milanese, currently two points adrift of top spot, could go top in their own right on Tuesday, a day before Juve's game, if they can win at midtable Cagliari.

This final pre-holiday round of league action should in fact have been the first of the season - but the games fell victim to a strike which delayed the start of the campaign back in August.

Juve have yet to lose in the league this season but they will have to work hard to pull off maximum points at the Stadio Friuli against an Udinese side known as little zebras - owing to their Juve-like black and white stripes.

After finishing fourth last season to earn a shot at the Champions League qualifier - they ultimately went out to Arsenal - Udinese had to regroup having lost three stars.

Chilean winger Alexis Sanchez joined Barcelona, Gokhan Inler, who switched to Napoli, and Christian Zapata, who joined

Spain's Villareal.

But they have still managed to keep in touch with last season's form, winning nine and losing only two of their 15 games to date.

They also have the meanest defence with just nine goals conceded.

Sunday brought a 2-2 draw with fellow highfliers Lazio - a match where coach Francesco Guidolin sprung a surprise in leaving hotshot Antonio Di Natale on the bench to begin with.

That means he is fresh to face Juve.

On the debit side for Udinese, defensive linchpin Mehdi Benatia is suspended.

Juve coach Antonio Conte will hope that could be a factor which tips the balance. Massimiliano Allegri's AC Milan meanwhile head to Sardinia to visit a Cagliari side which boasts just one win in the last ten games.

Chairman Massimo Cellino, who has already fired two coaches this season, may soon start thinking of sharpening the axe once again if Davide Ballardini cannot manage a revival.

Elsewhere, Lazio will look to stay in touch with a win over Chievo while 2010 champions Inter Milan, still in the race in fifth under Claudio Ranieri despite their woeful start to the season, will seek a fourth straight success as they take on Lecce.

FIXTURES

(all times GMT)

Wednesday

(1845 unless stated)

Udinese v Juventus (1600), Atalanta v Cesena, Bologna v AS Roma, Inter Milan v Lecce, Lazio v Chievo, Napoli v Genoa, Novara v Palermo, Parma v Catania

City wary of Potters

AFP, London



Every Premier League match Manchester City play for the next few months is sure to be billed as a test of the table-toppers' title credentials and that will be the case when they face Stoke on Wednesday.

Tony Pulis's side, renowned for their physical approach, recently ended title-chasing Tottenham's 11 match unbeaten league run.

City too suffered a wobble, going down 2-1 to Chelsea, but bounced back last weekend with a 1-0 win over Arsenal in a high-class encounter.

That suggested the team assembled so expensively by City manager Roberto Mancini and the club's wealthy Abu Dhabi owners had the stomach, as well as the skill for a title fight.

But their resolve is sure to be tested by Stoke, who provided Italian manager Mancini with his first opponents after he succeeded Mark Hughes at Eastlands two years ago.

City won that match and also beat Stoke in last season's FA Cup final.

However, the Potters are now on a run of four straight league wins and a wary Mancini said: "It will be hard against Stoke. They are a strong team, who defend very well. It will not be an easy game."

Reigning champions Manchester United, currently two points behind City, will look to maintain the pressure on

their local rivals when they travel to Fulham.

United may have suffered a shock Champions League exit at the hands of unheralded Basel but back in the Premier League it has been business as usual for Sir Alex Ferguson's men with subsequent wins over Wolves and QPR.

"It was a disappointment (exiting the Champions League)," said Ferguson, in charge at Old Trafford for the past 25 years.

"We have to do something about it and I think the players have done that."

Tottenham, seven points behind City, face Chelsea in an intriguing London derby on Thursday.

Chelsea could be 12 points adrift of top spot by the time they kick-off at White Hart Lane but striker Daniel Sturridge has said anyone who thinks they are out of title contention is "stupid".

"There are still five months to go and people would be stupid to assume we're out of the title race," he said after scoring in a frustrating 1-1 draw away to Wigan on Saturday.

Chelsea captain John Terry is set to be fit for Wednesday's match despite a training ground scare on Monday where the England centre back "pinched" his Achilles tendon.

Spurs though will be without winger Aaron Lennon because of a hamstring injury suffered in last weekend's 1-0 win over Sunderland.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has conceded the Gunners, away to Aston Villa on Wednesday, have all but abandoned hope of winning the title following a defeat by City that left them 12 points off the summit.

FIXTURES

(1945 GMT unless stated)

Wednesday

Aston Villa v Arsenal, Everton v Swansea (2000 GMT), Fulham v Manchester United (2000 GMT), Manchester City v Stoke, Newcastle v West Brom, QPR v Sunderland (2000 GMT), Wigan v Liverpool (2000 GMT)

Thursday

Tottenham v Chelsea (2000 GMT)

Villa has successful surgery

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona striker David Villa had successful surgery on his broken left leg on Monday and doctors said it would take him four to five months to recover.

Spain's all-time leading scorer has said he was targeting returning for a possible Champions League final on May 19, and being able to help his national team defend their European Championship title in Poland and Ukraine in June.

"The surgery went fantastically well," Barca doctor Ricard Pruna told a news conference.

"He has been sending messages to his colleagues and laughing with his wife. I have never seen someone in such good spirits after an operation."

Villa broke his left tibia while playing the Club World Cup semifinals with Barca in Japan last Thursday, and specialist Ramon Cugat said the 30-year-old had been suffering beforehand from a stress fracture.

"Some players can finish their professional careers with a stress fracture," Cugat said.



Barcelona striker David Villa gives the thumbs up from a gurney at the Quiron Clinic in Barcelona on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tevez loan move ruled out

AFP, London

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini on Tuesday ruled out a loan move involving Carlos Tevez as the Premier League leaders prepared to meet officials from AC Milan.

City chiefs are due to meet Milan officials on Thursday to discuss Tevez's future but the Serie A club has made it clear they only want to sign the Argentine striker on loan.

Mancini however indicated City would take a hard-line negotiating stance over the South American's future.

"I hope we can find a good solution for us and Carlos," said Mancini.

"We want Carlos to come back and play football and the best solution for us is to sell him. We can't let him leave on loan."

"When Manchester City buy a player, they have to pay a lot of money. But when we want to sell them, they have to go on loan. This is not good. It is not correct for the other players."

"Manchester City paid Carlos a lot of money for three years. It is correct that if one club, it could be Milan, Juventus, PSG, Inter, want him, they pay Carlos for his value. This is correct."

Carbon foot-print cut

AFP, Belo Horizonte



With solar panels, recycled stadium seats and rain water sprinklers, Brazil hopes to make the 2014 World Cup the most environmentally-friendly yet.

At a dozen stadium construction and renovation sites around the country, builders are hoping to meet or even exceed new FIFA recommendations aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of the world's biggest sporting event.

"We are no longer accepting engineering works that do not take into account environmental sustainability," Jose Roberto Bernasconi, the head of the Sao Paulo architecture and engineering syndicate (Sinaenco-SP), told AFP.

Brazilian authorities are racing to build or renovate 12 stadiums in time for the event, and Sports Minister Aldo Rebelo pledged earlier this month that work on the venues will largely be completed ahead of schedule.

However, FIFA President Sepp Blatter expressed concerns over the weekend about Brazil's preparations, and other top officials have complained about the lack of infrastructure and poor public transport and roads.

But at the Governor Magalhaes Pinto stadium in the southeastern city of Belo Horizonte, planners say they have exceeded the world football body's sustainability guidelines and are looking to secure an official certification from the US Green Building Council.

Renovators of the stadium -- first built in 1965 -- are adding a six-million-gallon rainwater collection system and are deliberately sourcing materials locally to reduce fuel emissions.

All of the concrete removed from the original structure was reused in the renovations or other nearby projects, some 800,000 cubic meters of dirt removed from the site was used to patch up mining damage, and the original 50,000 seats were donated to local stadiums and gymnasiums.

"Everything was reused. There was no other waste or discarded materials that could have been reused," said Vinicius Lott, of the state government's Sustainable Cup project.

Builders plan to install some 6,000 solar panels on the roof to provide electricity to some 1,500 nearby homes.

"There's an idle roof receiving a lot of sunlight. So we decided to cover it with photovoltaic cells and turn it into a solar power plant," says Alexander Heringer, an electrical engineer involved in the project.

The \$6.5 million solar plant will generate some 1.5 megawatts per hour -- a tiny fraction of the thousands of megawatts produced by a hydroelectric dam -- but the costs should be fully recovered during its 25-year life span.

The operating costs are also expected to be "very cheap" because the panels will require little maintenance and will be cleaned by rain water, Heringer said.

Brazil plans to offer an international tender for the panels -- which cannot be manufactured domestically -- and Heringer said German, Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Italian firms have expressed interest.

After the stadium's completion, the state government plans to launch similar solar projects at another stadium and an international airport.

Belo Horizonte, with some 2.5 million residents, expects to host six 2014 World Cup matches and three Confederations Cup matches in 2013.

Miyamoto hangs up his boots

AFP, Tokyo

Tsuneyasu Miyamoto, Japan's captain at the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, announced his retirement Monday to take up a course to become a sports executive, in a bid to lift the status of Japanese football.

The 34-year-old defender who played for Austria's Salzburg in 2007 and 2008, said he would retire by turning down offers from several sides including his current J-League club Kobe Vissel and a team in Thailand for next season.

Miyamoto was nicknamed "Batman" after grabbing world media attention for wearing a black mask to cover his broken nose during the 2002 World Cup at home when the Blue Samurai reached the last 16.

"I don't think there is a big role left for me to play on the pitch," he told Japanese media on Monday, adding he would enrol next September in a 10-month postgraduate course endorsed by football's world governing body FIFA.

The FIFA Master programme is designed to develop "all-round managers who can cope with the increasingly complex world of sport", according to its organiser, the International Centre for Sport Studies.

"People will gather there from around the world and I want to cultivate future contacts for Japan," said Miyamoto. "I want to make a contribution to help raise the status of Japanese football."

His proficiency in English, a rare quality among Japanese players, is expected to help him through the course, which is provided at three universities in Britain, Italy and Switzerland.

He has usually played centre back, despite being relatively short at 176 centimetres (5ft 9in), since his professional debut with Gamba Osaka in 1995.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Who is Bangladesh's sports personality of 2011?

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BTV

Bangladesh v Pakistan

Second Test, Day 5

Live from 9:30am

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

English Premiership

Fulham v Man United

Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

English Premiership

Wigan v Liverpool

Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

TEN Action+

Serie A

Lazio v Chievo

Live from 1:40am (Thursday)

TEN Sports

Serie A

Bologna v AS Roma

Live from 1:40am (Thursday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Pakistan

Second Test, Day 5

Time: 9:30am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur

National Cricket League

Time: 9:30am

Khulna v Sylhet, Day 4

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium

Dhaka Metro v Rajshahi, Day 4

Sylhet Divisional Stadium