

Reyes seals Sevilla move

Winger Jose Antonio Reyes has quit Atletico Madrid and completed a move back to Sevilla, the club in his native city where he began his professional career said on Thursday.

The 28-year-old former Arsenal player had agreed a deal until the end of the 2014-15 season, Sevilla said in a statement on their website (www.sevillafc.es).

"He is coming home eight winters after leaving for Arsenal for a juicy amount of money which turned out to be fundamental in the construction of the current Sevilla team," the statement said.

Reyes told a Spanish newspaper on Sunday he had decided to leave Atletico even though new coach Diego Simeone was counting on him and said his father's health had been a factor in his decision to seek a move.

Local media have reported that Sevilla will pay Atletico 3.5 million euros (\$4.5 million) to take him back plus bonuses.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (2nd from L) poses after giving presents to patients during a charity visit at the Hospital del Mar in Barcelona on Thursday.

Colombia appoint Pekerman

REUTERS, Bogota

Former Argentina coach Nestor Pekerman has been put in charge of Colombia's bid to end a 16-year wait to reach the World Cup finals in Brazil in 2014.

Pekerman, who steered his country to the 2006 World Cup quarterfinals in Germany, was named on Thursday to replace Leonel Alvarez, sacked following Colombia's 2-1 home defeat by Argentina in their last qualifier in November.

"The Colombian Football Federation's (FCF) executive committee, headed by its president Luis Bedoya, has reached an agreement in the last few hours for Argentine Jose Nestor Pekerman to become the new coach of the senior Colombia team," a FCF statement said.

"In the coming hours we expect the definitive signing of the contract that will link him to the national team that is taking part in the qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup in Brazil in 2014."

Barca seek away lift

REUTERS, Madrid



Barcelona have been imperious at their Nou Camp stadium this season but will be keen to improve their patchy away form when they take on city rivals Espanyol on Sunday as La Liga swings back into action after the winter break.

Pep Guardiola's side, chasing a fourth straight domestic league title, are three points behind leaders Real Madrid after 16 games despite humbling their rivals 3-1 in the capital last month.

While Barca are unbeaten at home, where they have won eight and drawn one and scored 39 goals without reply, they have won only three of their seven away games, netting 11 and conceding eight, and suffered a surprise 1-0 reverse at Getafe in November, their only defeat of the campaign.

Guardiola told a news conference after Wednesday's 4-0 King's Cup home win over Osasuna he expected a "difficult and physically tough" challenge in the Catalan derby at Espanyol's Cornellà-El Prat arena (2030 GMT).

Barca have won only two of their last

five away games against their neighbours, although they inflicted a 5-1 drubbing on Mauricio Pochettino's team when they visited last season.

"Espanyol have been doing things very well for many years now," Guardiola said.

"They have an excellent coach, they can count on the aggression of young players and they can play good football."

"What we have to do is recuperate well because it's a vital game for the future of our league challenge."

Real Madrid have question marks over the fitness of winger Angel Di Maria and defender Sergio Ramos ahead of their game at home to promoted Granada on Saturday (1900).

Both missed Tuesday's comeback Cup win over Malaga through injury and the absence of Ramos, who has switched from right back into central defence this season, was particularly obvious as the home side conceded twice from corners to fall two goals behind by halftime.

A verbal rocket from coach Jose Mourinho at the break and the introduction of Karim Benzema lifted the players, however, and the France striker sealed a 3-2 win with a well-taken goal.

Valencia have done well to keep pace with the big two during the first

half of the season and are four points behind Barca in third ahead of Sunday's game at struggling Villarreal (1700).

Valencia's less illustrious city rivals Levante, this year's surprise package, are four points further back in fourth and host Real Mallorca on Saturday (1700).

Hopes are high at Atletico Madrid that new coach Diego Simeone will help the capital's second club find the consistency that will secure them a berth in European competition next season.

Argentine Simeone, a former Atletico player known for his tough tackling and commitment, replaced the sacked Gregorio Manzano last month and makes his debut at ambitious Qatar-owned Malaga on Saturday (2100).

An erratic campaign has left Atletico in 10th place and they have lost seven of their 16 games and conceded four more goals than they have scored.

"We are all very pleased with the new coach and we are working very intensely and very hard," midfielder Juanfran told a news conference on Wednesday.

"He was a great professional as a player and as a coach you see the same characteristics," he added.

Tevez keen on Milan

AFP, Undated

Carlos Tevez looks set to snub interest from Inter Milan in order to join their bitter city rivals AC Milan, according to the Argentine's agent, Kia Joorabchian.

While Inter's technical director, Marco Branca, travelled to England to meet Manchester City officials on Thursday, Joorabchian held talks with Milan chief executive Adriano Galliani in Rio.

Joorabchian told Italian media that he is hoping to come to an agreement with Milan rather than Inter.

"We're here (in Rio) to finalise with Milan. We haven't heard from Inter since August," he said.

Following a telephone conference call involving Tevez, Galliani, Joorabchian (all of whom were in Rio) and City, the agent added: "I'm confident that Milan and Manchester City will soon come to an agreement."

Italian press claim Tevez has already found a home in Milan—close to the La Scala Opera House—and that City will give Milan an answer next week.

Galliani is said to have described the offer made to the Premier League leaders as "fantastic".

The Milan neighbours are not the only ones keeping tabs on Tevez, as French league leaders Paris Saint-Germain are also believed to be interested in the 27-year-old.

Milan originally offered to take the striker on loan until the end of the season with an option to buy him for 23 million euros (\$29.4m) in the summer.

Henry rejoins Arsenal

REUTERS, London



Former France striker Thierry Henry has rejoined Arsenal on a short-term deal, the Premier League club said on Friday.

Henry, 34, who is currently playing for the New York Bulls, made 370 appearances for Arsenal from 1999-2007 and remains the club's leading goal scorer with 226 goals.

"Thierry Henry has today rejoined Arsenal on a short-term loan deal," the north London club said in a statement on their website www.arsenal.com.

"After negotiations between Arsenal, Henry, the New York Red Bulls and Major League Soccer, the striker will team up with the Gunners on a temporary basis during a period of fixtures in January and February that will see Gervinho and Marouane Chamakh depart for Africa Cup of Nations duty."

Henry, who has been training with the

club, told the website that manager Arsene Wenger had asked him to help during the absence of the two players.

"When it comes to Arsenal my heart will always do the talking," he said.

"Once I knew the plan behind it I was okay with it. I am not coming here to be a hero or prove anything, I am just coming here to help. People have to understand that."

"Marouane and Gervinho are going to the Africa Cup of Nations, so I was asked to fill in the gap. It is a loan deal and I'll be on the bench most of the time. If I can make the bench that is."

"The boss has a team here already who are doing something good. I am just going to be part of the squad."

Henry reassured Red Bulls' fans he planned to return.

"I am not coming here for the whole season, I will be back and I want to win the Major League Soccer Cup with the Red Bulls."

Coin triggers debate

REUTERS, London

A commemorative coin issued for this year's London Olympics with a diagram explaining soccer's tricky offside rule has fallen foul of referees who say the explanation is out of date and confusing.

The shiny 50 pence coin, one of a set of 29 produced for the Games and Paralympics and each featuring a different sport, shows a player with two passing options in front of goal, one marked offside and the other not.

The offside rule has long been a challenging concept, even to many football fans, and the coin immediately became the talking point that the Royal Mint had hoped it would be.

"Sadly it's totally out of date," Referees Association member Mal Davies told the Guardian newspaper on Friday.

"It's always good to see attempts to explain the law to a wider audience, and the coin looks good. But unfortunately it just confuses the issue even more."

The offside law was overhauled in 1995, as a measure to limit stoppages, with the revised version stating that it was "not an offence in itself to be in an offside position".

A player in an offside position is penalised only if deemed to be involved in active play when the ball is played by a team mate. Otherwise, the game can continue uninterrupted.

Production journalist Neil Wolfson, whose design for the coin won a public competition of more than 30,000 entries, rejected the criticism, saying: "Nowhere on the coin does it say that the 'offside' player is committing an offence."

"There are clearly space limitations on the coin face so it was obviously impossible to go into the finer details of the offside rule."

Transfer talks dominate

REUTERS, Milan



Juventus take their unbeaten Serie A record to Lecce on Sunday but, like the weekend's other matches, the game has been buried by a whirlwind of transfer rumours following the opening of the January window.

The resumption of the league after the Christmas break has gone almost unnoticed amid endless speculation over who is going where, topped by the long-running saga over the possible move of Manchester City forward Carlos Tevez to AC Milan.

AC Milan's Brazilian striker Alexandre Pato has been the subject of a possible big money move to Paris St Germain, especially after the player complained last week of a "lack of communication" with coach Massimiliano Allegri.

Coincidentally, Milan met PSG in a friendly in Dubai on Wednesday, with Pato scoring the only goal.

"Before the game, I said hello to (PSG coach) Carlo Ancelotti, as was right and was to be expected," he told reporters. "Was my agent in Dubai? You know better than I do."

Milan said on their website (www.acmilan.com)

that he "should stay" at the club but there was plenty more elsewhere to fuel the rumour mill.

New reports to surface on Thursday suggested that Juventus midfielder Fabio Quagliarella could be joining either Inter Milan or AS Roma and that Lazio were chasing Bayern Munich striker Ivica Olic.

Roma's Chilean midfielder David Pizarro was expected to be moving on after he was reported to have stormed out of a training session on Wednesday. He was quickly being linked with Juventus.

As for the football itself, Genoa's new coach Pasquale Marino will make his debut after replacing Alberto Malesani, who was fired following a 6-1 loss at Napoli in the last match before Christmas, as they visit Cagliari (Sunday 1400).

Malesani was the 11th coaching victim of the Serie A season with two of them at Sunday's opponents.

Joint leaders AC Milan and Juventus, with 34 points from 16 games, are both away on Sunday, although the defending champions appear to have the more difficult job at Atalanta (1400).

That match will feature a battle between the championship's two leading scorers, Atalanta's Argentine

forward Geremi and Inter's Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who is one behind.

"The game is Atalanta versus Milan and not Denis versus Ibrahimovic," said former Napoli and Udinese striker Denis, playing down the personal duel.



Schalke striker Raul (C) attends the Qatar Open tennis match between his compatriot Rafael Nadal and Mikhail Youzhny of Russia at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SPORTS POLL
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Brothers Union v Farashganj SC
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Rahmatganj v Wari Club
Venue: Kamalapur Stadium