

Riquelme calls time on Boca

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Former Argentina midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme announced he was leaving Boca Juniors after the defeat by Corinthians in the Libertadores Cup final.

Corinthians won South America's elite club trophy for the first time by beating Riquelme's side 2-0 in the second leg of the final in Sao Paulo on Wednesday night, recording a 3-1 aggregate victory.

"I've told the (club) president I'm not going to carry on," former Barcelona and Villarreal playmaker Riquelme told reporters at the Pacaembu.

"I feel empty. I haven't got anything else to give to the club," said the 34-year-old who helped Boca to their 10th final in search of a record-equalling seventh crown.

"I can't play at half (steam)," Riquelme added before saying he would decide soon if he would continue his career at another club.



Romarinho lifts the Copa Libertadores trophy for Brazil's Corinthians after their victory against Argentina's Boca Juniors

PHOTO: AFP

Libertadores Corinthians'

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil's Corinthians won the Copa Libertadores for the first time, defeating Argentina's Boca Juniors 2-0 in the second leg of the final before an ecstatic home crowd of 40,000 late Wednesday.

The Corinthians prevailed 3-1 on aggregate as the two teams drew the first leg 1-1 in Buenos Aires last month.

Striker Emerson scored twice in the second half (in the 54th minute and the 72nd), denying Boca Juniors a seventh continental crown in their tenth appearance in the final of South America's elite club competition.

The Sao Paulo side had never previously gone past the semi-finals of the Copa Libertadores.

But they won plaudits this year by beating Neymar-inspired holders Santos 2-1 on aggregate in the last four.

The Corinthians, the reigning Brazilian champions, coached by Tite, also beat Vasco da Gama in the quarter-finals and did not lose a game on their run to the final.

Their historic win sparked scenes of wild jubilation by tens of thousands of fans both inside the Pacaembu stadium and throughout this huge metropolitan area of 20 million people.

Amid exploding fireworks, Captain Alessandro lifted the trophy and passed it on to his colleagues before they all set off on a victory lap as die-hard supporters danced and chanted: "The Cup is ours!" and "We are the champions!"

"It's great to be here, to wear this jersey," said a beaming Emerson.

"We are going to celebrate now. We have to celebrate a lot. We deserve it. We don't have a star, but we are a very strong team and Emerson had an exceptional night," said Paulinho.

Tite underscored the "friendship" among his players, whom he praised as a "solid, strong and organized group."

Van Persie snubs Arsenal contract

Football

AFP, London

Robin van Persie has rejected the offer of a new Arsenal contract, the striker announced via his official website on Wednesday.

The Dutch international has a year left on his current deal with the English Premier League club, who could now be tempted to cash in on their prize asset, rather than see him leave for nothing on a Bosman free transfer at the end of next season.

"I've thought long and hard about it, but I have decided not to extend my contract," Van Persie, who scored 37 goals in 48 appearances for Arsenal last season, including 30 in the Premier League, said Wednesday.

"You guys, the fans, have of course the right to disagree with my view and decision and I will always respect your opinions," added the 28-year-old, whose performances last season saw him named Player of the Year by both his fellow professionals in the Premier League and England's Football Writers' Association.

Premier League champions Manchester City and Italian title-holders Juventus are among the clubs to have been repeatedly linked with signing the Dutchman.

Van Persie added he had met with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger and chief executive Ivan Gazidis at the end of last season to discuss his future but had been disappointed by the answers he'd received regarding the Gunners' ambitions.

Since signing from Dutch side Feyenoord in 2004, Van Persie has won just one major

trophy with Arsenal -- the 2005 FA Cup.

It is a poor return for a player of his talent and he said it was a desire to win silverware that was behind his decision to leave the Emirates Stadium.

"This is an update for the fans about my current situation," Van Persie said.

"I have kept quiet all this time out of respect and loyalty for the club and as agreed with Mr Gazidis and Mr Wenger, but since there is so much speculation in the media, I think it is fair for you guys to know what's really going on at the moment.

"As announced earlier this year I had a meeting with the boss (Wenger) and Mr Gazidis after the season.

"This was a meeting about the club's future strategy and their policy. Financial terms or a contract have not been discussed, since that is not my priority at all.

"I personally have had a great season but my goal has been to win trophies with the team and to bring the club back to its glory days.

"Out of my huge respect for Mr Wenger, the players and the fans I don't want to go into any details, but unfortunately in this meeting it has again become clear to me that we in many aspects disagree on the way Arsenal should move forward."

He added: "I love the club and the fans, no matter what happens. I have grown up and become a man during my time with Arsenal FC."

"Everybody at the club and the fans have always supported me over the years and I have always given my all (and more) on and off the pitch. I am very proud of being part of this fantastic club for the last eight years."

Chettri heads to Lisbon

AFP, Lisbon

India captain Sunil Chhetri has signed for Sporting Lisbon and will play with the B team for two seasons, the Portuguese football club confirmed on Thursday.

The signing is part of an agreement with Indian football authorities to develop the game.

"With our experience in scouting and the development of high level players we are ready through a set of local partnerships to find the best solutions to accelerate the development of football in India," Sporting said in a statement.

The statement described the 27-year-old striker as "an idol in his country", adding: "He will symbolise the dreams of all the young people who have ambition to play in Europe."

Chhetri expressed his delight at the move.

"From 163rd (India's FIFA ranking) to playing in the 5th ranked nation in the world, it's one opportunity I will never forget in my life," Chhetri was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

"I will have to do a lot of hard work. I will leave no stone unturned, so that I don't regret later in my life. When I am 40, I don't want to feel that I could have done better."

Yes to Goal Line Technology

Football

AFP, Zurich

Football's world governing body FIFA has agreed to allow the introduction of goal-line technology (GLT) at a meeting of the sport's executives here on Thursday.

The technology will be used at the Club World Cup in Tokyo in December, the Confederation Cup in 2013 and also the World Cup in 2014.

The decision by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) -- custodians of the game's laws -- followed a vote at the Zurich headquarters of FIFA, the international association of football federations.

It means footballing authorities around the world can introduce the technology into their competitions, using either the Hawk-Eye or GoalRef systems that have been undergoing tests.

The English Premier League, the world's richest football league, welcomed IFAB's decision.

"The Premier League has been a long-term advocate of goal line technology," the EPL said in a statement.

"We will engage in discussions with both Hawk-Eye and GoalRef in the near future with a view to introducing goal-line technology as soon as is practically possible."

The development comes after FIFA president Sepp Blatter lent his weight to calls for the technology to be introduced after Ukraine was denied an apparent goal

against England in the recent Euro 2012 championships, losing 1-0.

"After last night's match (GLT) is no longer an alternative, but a necessity," Blatter Tweeted.

Replays showed that Marko Devic's shot in the 62nd minute had crossed the goal line before being cleared by England defender John Terry.

FA general secretary Alex Horne told a news conference in Zurich it was "a hugely important day" for football.

He said: "We believe that it is a great day for football. From an English perspective today is a hugely important day, it is a cause we have had on our agenda for a number of years.

"This is about having the right technology helping the referee in a relatively rare occurrence - the scoring of a goal."

Fans have called for years for the football world to embrace technology which would eliminate human error, citing its use in other sports including tennis and cricket.

But opponents to GLT included UEFA president Michel Platini, who said he preferred the system of five match officials, implemented for the first time at the Ukrainian championships and also agreed on by IFAB at Zurich.

Prior to the IFAB vote on GLT, even Platini stated that he expected it to get the go-ahead.

Individual associations may yet decide whether to use the technology in their competitions. That means UEFA could still decide not to implement the system.

Wedding bells for Iniesta

REUTERS, Zagreb

Walking down the aisle to get married this weekend will be much more nerve-racking than playing in Euro 2012, said Spain's Andres Iniesta, who was voted the best player of the tournament for his cool, commanding performances.

"It will be a special and different day," the Barcelona midfielder told a news conference on Wednesday.

"I am sure it will make me nervous, much more than being on the field of play."

The 28-year-old, who calmly slotted away a spot kick in the semi-final penalty shootout against Portugal, helped world champions Spain to get a second successive European championship triumph with a 4-0 final victory over Italy on Sunday.

"I am pleased for the personal recognition," he said in reference to UEFA's best-player award. "But one player does not represent a championship. My colleagues deserve it as much as I do."

Pele's Brazil still better

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Soccer legend Pele said on Wednesday that he believed the Brazilian side which won the 1970 World Cup was "better" than the Spanish squad that won Sunday's Euro 2012 final.

"Each generation has its preferences but without doubt, if we are comparing, the 1970 generation was better," Pele said.

"The 1970 Brazil team had many more (great) individual players than Spain, which has two or three excellent players," said Pele who was part of the squad that trounced Italy 4-1 in the 1970 World Cup final.

Pele however had high praise for the free-flowing, attacking football style that enabled Spain to trounce Italy 4-0 in Kiev and to be rated currently as the best team in the world.

Pele was speaking at a press conference in his capacity as ambassador of the Copa Santander Libertadores which Argentine giants Boca Juniors are looking to win for the seventh time in the second leg of the final against Brazil's Corinthians here late Wednesday.

The two teams drew the first leg 1-1 in Buenos Aires last month.

Pele was meanwhile asked to clarify his comments in April suggesting that Brazil's Santos star Neymar was better than Argentina's Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi, widely viewed as in a class of his own.

Pele said it was unfair to compare the 20-year-old Santos playmaker with an international career of only 18 months, with "the best player in the world, who is Messi".

"Neymar has everything to be the new Messi, the new Maradona," Pele said, pointing out that Messi has 15 years of international experience.

"Imagine if Neymar had the experience of Messi, who would be better?" Pele asked.



Barcelona officially unveils defender Jordi Alba in their colours at a presentation on Thursday

PHOTO: AFP

Brazil name Olympic squad

Silva, Marcelo make cut

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Porto striker Hulk, AC Milan's Thiago Silva and Real Madrid

defender Marcelo were on Thursday included as the three over-age players in Brazil coach Mano Menezes's squad for the Olympic Games.

Silva has been handed the captain's armband as Brazil go in search of their first Olympic gold medal at London 2012.

Also featuring are younger stars Neymar of Santos, Manchester United back Rafael and Juan of Inter Milan.

Two absentees from the list are Barcelona's Daniel Alves and David Luiz of Chelsea.

Brazil's 22-man Olympic squad - which will be whittled down to 18 before battle begins - are set to prepare

for London at a training camp in Rio de Janeiro from July 9-16 ahead of the July 26-August 11 tournament.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Neto (Fiorentina/ITA), Cabral (Santos)

Defenders:

Daniilo (Porto/POR), Rafael (Manchester United/ENG), Sandro (Porto/POR), Marcelo (Real Madrid/ESP), Thiago Silva (AC Milan/ITA), Uvini (Sao Paulo), Juan (Inter/ITA)

Midfielders:

Sandro (Tottenham/ENG), Romulo (Vasco da Gama), Lucas (Sao Paulo), Oscar (Porto Alegre), Ganso (Santos)

Forwards:

Pato (AC Milan/ITA), Neymar (Santos), Damiao (Porto Alegre), Hulk (Porto/POR)

Replacements:

Marquinhos (Corinthians), Giuliano (Dniepr/UKR), Casemiro (Sao

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think the Tigers have made strides in Twenty20 cricket?

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

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What to WATCH

STAR Sports

Wimbledon C'ships

Women's Singles Final

Live from 7:00pm

STAR Cricket

England v Australia

Fourth ODI

DAY'S EVENT

Premier Div Hockey

Abahani v Azad SC

Time: 2:30pm

Wari v Usha

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Maulana Bhasani National