

'Brazil's time to shine'

REUTERS, London



Despite a glorious past that includes five World Cup triumphs, Brazil have never struck gold in the Olympics and former striker Ronaldo thinks it is now their time to shine.

The Olympic soccer tournament will feature some of the world's top names with Brazil, world champions Spain, the old Olympic kings from Uruguay and a rare appearance from host nation Britain, all in with a chance of glory.

Among the leading individuals involved in the men's competition are Brazilians Neymar, Hulk, Thiago Silva and Alexandre Pato, Uruguay's Luis Suarez and Spain's Juan Mata and Jordi Alba, who both scored in their victory over Italy in the final of Euro 2012.

Brazil, naturally, are among the contenders and will attempt to overcome their Olympic nemesis by winning the gold medal for the first time at their 13th attempt since they first competed in 1952.

Former Brazilian striker Ronaldo, a World Cup winner in 2002 and an Olympic bronze medalist in 1996, told Reuters it was Brazil's time to win gold.

"There is no real reason why we fail at the Olympics, which we take very seriously," he said.

"In some way these are already a successful Games for us because Argentina (winners in 2004 and 2008) were eliminated in the qualifiers and cannot defend their title so now would be perfect if we became champions in their place."

Brazil face Egypt, Belarus and New Zealand in their opening group.

The two competitions, comprising 16 men's teams and 12 women's, are among the most complex on the program with the women starting with six matches on July 25, two days before the Games' official opening. The men start with eight matches the following day. The first event of the entire London Games is the women's match between Britain and New Zealand on July 25 at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.



Brazil goalkeeper Rafael Cabral dives for the ball during the Olympic bound team's training session in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ibra no closer to PSG deal

AFP, Rome

AC Milan's Swedish international striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic is still a long way off reaching agreement for a move to French club Paris Saint Germain, his agent said on Friday.

"In Italy, you invent stories, we're very far (from an agreement)," agent Mino Raiola told Italian television station Mediaset Sport.

Raiola revealed he was due to meet PSG sporting director Leonardo on Friday, but added: "Today I see Leonardo, but I don't want to."

Sources close to the French club have said that an agreement between the two clubs was reached Thursday for Ibrahimovic and Brazilian teammate Thiago Silva.

Qatari-owned PSG are reported to have made a global offer of 65 million euros (\$79m) for both Ibrahimovic and Thiago.

Brazil set SA, China date

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil will tackle China in a friendly international on September 10 in the north-east city of Recife, three days after facing South Africa in Sao Paulo, the Brazilian football federation (CBF) said.

"It gives us pleasure to announce that Brazil will play China in Recife as part of our preparations for the Confederations Cup and the 2014 World Cup," said CBF president Jose Maria Marin.

The game against China will be at the 62,000-capacity Arruda Stadium.

Drogba hits China jackpot

Football

AFP, Beijing

Didier Drogba arrives in China this weekend amid a spending spree on foreign talent that football chiefs hope will give the local league a much-needed boost but critics say is ruining the sport.

The former Chelsea striker will join his new team, Shanghai Shenhua, on Saturday, making him the highest-profile overseas player in the Chinese Super League as it tries to rebuild after years of corruption and scandal.

He will join the likes of French striker Nicolas Anelka, Nigerian Ayegbeni Yakubu and World Cup winning Italian coach Marcello Lippi on mega-contracts in China, with those deals funded mostly by local business titans.

Drogba and Anelka will play together at Shenhua, with each reported to be on salaries of more than \$15 million a year -- roughly double the amount they received in the English Premier League.

The Chinese Football Association believes the domestic game, which has endured years of corruption and repeated failures by the national team, is set to take off on the back of the influx of expensive foreign talent.

"The high-level world-class players and coaches will be able to provide a learning opportunity to our domestic players and coaches," CFA spokesman Dong Hua told AFP.

"I hope our coaches and players can improve through this exchange and enhance the level of Chinese football as a whole."

But football analysts and players with experience in both the Chinese and English leagues say the big spend-

ing amounts to little more than the vanity projects of club owners who should instead be pouring cash into grassroots development.

"The spending is ego-fuelled craziness coming from these big owners, which is not sustainable and will end in disaster in the long run," Rowan Simons, a prominent Beijing-based commentator on Chinese football, told AFP.

"The level of investment required to bring Drogba and Anelka is totally out of sync with the scale of football."

"When a single player's salary is several times the entire revenue of the club in a year, I think it is fairly obvious that we have gone the wrong way in one direction."

Concerns from football purists also centre on the star signings being drafted in to promote the commercial interests of the mega-rich Chinese club owners.

State media have reported that part of Drogba's deal includes him being a spokesman for a Chinese online gaming company.

Anelka was reportedly paid millions to endorse an online game developed by Internet company The9, whose chairman Zhu Jun is also the chief investor in Shenhua.

Guangzhou Evergrande, who currently top the CSL, are owned by Evergrande Real Estate Group, which is controlled by tycoon Xu Jiayin.

Xu, one of China's richest men, reportedly has a fortune of \$7.2 billion and a war chest of \$70 million for his club.

Part of that was spent on luring Lippi for an annual salary of \$12.66 million, according to Chinese Internet portal Sohu.com.

"These are not investments in football for football's sake... and it is defi-

nately not sustainable," Yan Qiang, football commentator and vice-president of Titan Media, one of China's leading sports publishers, told AFP.

"Some of these owners are investing like they are carrying out some sort of personal public relations exercise, while others are doing it to increase the awareness of their own companies."

Another former English Premier League star, Marlon Harewood, was credited with helping Guangzhou R&F, the second team from the booming southern Chinese city, rise into the top division last season during a short-term contract.

The former Aston Villa and West Ham United striker said that club owners were ploughing cash into the wrong areas of the game.

"They need to invest in grass roots players who are homegrown as the gap is huge between local players and the ones taken in from overseas," Harewood told AFP.

"It is no use just having one top level striker in the team and expecting him to score goals in every game. They need a better class of players all around the field."

The quality of Chinese players has been under intense scrutiny in recent years, with China already out of the running for the 2014 World Cup after it failed to get through a qualifying group topped by Iraq.

The failure to qualify came despite the CFA luring ex-Real Madrid and Spain boss Jose Antonio Camacho as manager on a reported \$8 million-a-year contract.

The national team has only qualified for one World Cup, in 2002, when it lost all three games and failed to score a single goal.

Sepp can't punish Joao

Football

AFP, Paris

FIFA president Sepp Blatter insisted on Thursday that he did not have the power to punish former supremo Joao Havelange after the 96-year-old Brazilian was accused of taking bribes.

Court documents released in Switzerland revealed that Havelange, FIFA president for 24 years before Blatter stepped into the hotseat in 1998, pocketed at least 1.5m Swiss francs (£986,000) and FIFA executive committee member Ricardo Teixeira at least 12.74m.

The bribes, made by International Sport and Leisure (ISL), were detailed in documents made public by Switzerland's supreme court and published by the BBC on Wednesday.

FIFA's discredited Swiss-based marketing partner collapsed in 2001 with debts of around \$300 million.

But Blatter went on the attack on Thursday, insisting that he was powerless to sanction his predecessor.

"I don't have the power to call him to account. The Congress named him as Honorary President. Only the Congress can decide his future," Blatter told www.fifa.com.

Blatter insisted that payments were not illegal under Swiss law at the time.

"Know what? That commission was paid? Back then, such payments could even be deducted from tax as a business expense," he said.

"Today, that would be punishable under law. You can't judge the past on the basis of today's standards. Otherwise it would end up with moral justice. I can't have known about an offence that wasn't even one."

Blatter admitted he had been referred to as P1 in the court documents.

"It was the Swiss Federal Court that decided to make the publication of the ISL non-prosecution order anonymous. As far as I am concerned, the whole document could have been published 'clean', to put an end to the speculation once and for all," he said.

"However, the Federal Court stated that the 'names of all non-accused third parties' should be made anonymous. I am not accused, so I have been made anonymous as P1, which quite honestly is not difficult to find out."

Terry found not guilty

AFP, London

Former England captain John Terry was found not guilty Friday of racially abusing rival footballer Anton Ferdinand.

Chief Magistrate Howard Riddle cleared the 31-year-old Chelsea skipper at the end of a five-day trial at Westminster Magistrates Court in London.

Terry, wearing a white shirt with a grey suit and tie, left court without speaking to media or supporters waiting outside.

Terry denied committing a racially aggravated public order offence. He told the court that he was sarcastically repeating words he thought Ferdinand had said to him.

The charge was brought by the Crown Prosecution Service, the state prosecutors in England and Wales.

Alison Saunders, the chief crown prosecutor for London, said in a statement: "The very serious allegation at the heart of this case was one of racial abuse."

"It was our view that this was not 'banter' on the football pitch and that the allegation should be judged by a court."

"The chief magistrate agreed that Mr Terry had a case to answer, but having heard all of the evidence he acquitted Mr Terry of a racially aggravated offence."

Modest Beckham

REUTER, Undated



David Beckham has suggested he is not the right man to light the Olympic flame to officially open the London Games, saying on Thursday the honour should go to an Olympian who has won gold medals.

Admitting his disappointment at failing to make Britain's Olympic soccer squad, Beckham took himself out of the running for one of the greatest honours that can be bestowed on a sportsman or woman but offered no hint as to who should have the job of lighting the cauldron on July 27.

"I've always said, lighting the torch in the stadium is something that should be done by an Olympian... who has done incredible things for our country and won gold medals," Beckham told reporters during an interview in Los Angeles.

After the decision to leave Beckham out of the Team GB soccer squad was announced, the odds on the Los Angeles Galaxy player lighting the Olympic cauldron were slashed with British bookmakers Ladbrokes quoting 5/1 at the time.

While Beckham has politely tried to remove himself from consideration as the athlete to open the Games, the former Eng-

land captain had made no secret of his hopes of landing one of the three over-age spots in Stuart Pearce's Under-23 squad.

The world famous trend-setter, who is England's most capped outfield player with 115 appearances, has not featured for the national team since 2009 and instead of playing at the Games he will continue to perform his role as an Olympic ambassador.

"Obviously, all the talk of me possibly performing in the Olympics, it would have been a very proud moment for me," said Beckham, who was part of the bid team that helped win the Games.

"Everyone knows how proud I am of representing my country and to do it in my home town on such a big stage would have been incredible so, of course, I'm disappointed, but life goes on."

"My family are healthy, I'm pretty healthy, so at the end of the day, I'll be there to support the GB team."

"It's going to be a proud moment to be there and know that I was part of bringing the Olympics to the East End of London."

Beckham said support from family, friends and fans around the world had helped him get over the disappointment of missing out on the chance to march into the stadium as an athlete.



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DAY'S EVENT

Premier Div Hockey
Police v Usha
Time: 2:30pm
Wari v Bangladesh SC
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Maulana Bhasani