

Momo's int'l return delayed

REUTERS, Johannesburg

A knee problem has delayed Momo Sissoko's return to international soccer after a break of nearly three years from the Mali side.

The Paris St Germain midfielder last played for Mali at the 2010 African Nations Cup finals and had been due for a return after being called up by new coach Patrice Carteron ahead of Saturday's qualifier in Botswana.

A minor knee complaint had put paid to those plans, the coach said on Friday as the team headed for Botswana from preparations in Johannesburg.

"We discussed it and thought it better he continues to work on his strength and fitness in Paris. He will be back in the next game," Carteron told reporters.

Mali had already lost captain Seydou Keita, striker Mustapha Yattabare and defender Adama Tamboura to injury but enjoy a 3-0 lead from the first leg last month.

Spanish-based midfielder Pape Kouly Diop has been ruled out of Senegal's qualifier against the Ivory Coast in Dakar on Saturday, the Senegalese news agency APS reported.

Diop, who plays for Levante, suffered a knee injury in training on Tuesday.

The Ivory Coast soccer federation said full back Guy Demel would not recover in time from a thigh strain suffered while playing for West Ham against Arsenal last weekend.



Brazil playmaker Kaka (L) does a double high five with Oscar to celebrate Oscar's opening goal during their international friendly against Iraq at the Swedbank Stadion in Malmo on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

KAKA scores on comeback

Football

REUTERS, Undated

Kaka scored on his Brazil comeback after a two-year absence and Oscar notched a brace as the 2014 World Cup hosts demolished Iraq 6-0 in a one-sided friendly in Sweden on Thursday.

Chelsea midfielder Oscar set the South Americans on their way to an easy win in Malmo with two goals in a five-minute spell midway through the first half against opponents who are coached by former Brazil captain Zico.

Real Madrid's Kaka, who last played for his country at the 2010 World Cup, added the third early in the second half before Hulk, Neymar and Lucas shared three more goals as Brazil's incisive passing sliced through the Iraq defence.

Iraq goalkeeper Noor Sabri prevented Brazil from inflicting further embarrassment with an inspired performance.

Iraq, unable to play at home for security reasons, face Australia in a World Cup qualifier in neutral Doha on Tuesday and Zico was unhappy at the timing and venue of the Brazil match.

"We left Qatar where it was 35 Celsius, travelled for 10 hours to a place where it's five Celsius and we have to go back again afterwards," he told Brazilian media before the match. "It wasn't the right moment."

"I wanted to play Wales and they gave me Brazil."

Brazil broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute when Neymar carried the ball forward and set up Oscar, who slotted it past the oncoming Sabri. Five minutes later, Kaka pulled the ball back from the byline and Oscar turned it in from close range for the second.

Sabri then denied David Luiz, Neymar and Kaka in quick succession and Paulinho headed against the underside of the crossbar, leaving Iraq grateful to be only two goals behind at halftime.

Three minutes after the break, Kaka burst down the left, slipped past a defender and fired the ball into the roof of the net from a narrow angle.

Sabri made two more saves before Hulk scored the fourth in the 55th minute, cutting inside his marker and firing a low shot into the bottom far corner.

Neymar scored the fifth with a curling shot in the 75th minute and then played a one-two with Lucas who completed the rout.

Five-times world champions Brazil face Japan in another friendly on Tuesday in the Polish city of Wroclaw.

Iran are fourth out of five teams in Asian qualifying Group B after taking two points from three games.

Dauids joins Barnet

REUTERS, Undated

After a glittering career spent at European giants Barcelona, Juventus and AC Milan, former Dutch international Edgar Davids has dropped to the basement of English soccer to join fourth tier side Barnet.

The tough-tackling midfielder, known for wearing protective glasses throughout most of his career, has agreed to become joint head coach of the north London side and has expressed an interest in pulling on his boots again after a two-year hiatus.

"I'm happy to explore my possibilities and share my knowledge and experience with Barnet Football Club. I am very excited about the challenge ahead," Davids said in a statement on the club's website.

Davids, 39, last played for Crystal Palace in the English Championship (second division) in 2010 after picking up honours throughout his career, which also featured spells at Inter Milan, Ajax Amsterdam and Tottenham Hotspur.

Barnet are bottom of League Two (fourth division) and face a battle to avoid relegation to the Conference, which features a number of part-time teams.

"I am delighted to welcome Edgar to our club. His experience as a player throughout his illustrious career will be a massive benefit to all our players and I look forward to forming a strong partnership with him," said Mark Robson, who will manage the team alongside Davids.

Low blood sugar caused car crash

AFP, Berlin

The horror car crash which has left Bundesliga footballer Boris Vukcevic in a coma for the last two weeks was caused by the midfielder's low blood sugar level, a report has revealed.

The 22-year-old has been in an artificial coma since undergoing surgery for serious head injuries after his Mercedes car was hit head on by a truck on September 28 at Bammental, near Heidelberg.

Vukcevic is a diabetic and he was hypoglycemic, suffering from low blood sugar level, at the time of the accident, according to a medical report from the University of Heidelberg, where he is hospitalised.

His condition has improved only slightly since the crash.

Local police are still investigating the accident, which they say occurred when Vukcevic's car crossed into the lane of oncoming traffic and was hit by a truck coming in the opposite direction.

De Boer wants 2022 WC in winter

Football

REUTERS, London

The 2022 soccer World Cup in Qatar should be played in December or January rather than in the middle of the year, bid ambassador Ronald de Boer said on Thursday.

The finals were awarded to Qatar by world governing body FIFA in 2010 and are due to be held in the summer months when the temperature can reach more than 40 degrees Celsius. In December and January the average is a far less intense 17 degrees.

"I think sometimes a change is good - it would be great to have it in the winter," Dutchman De Boer, who ended his glittering playing career in Qatar, told delegates at the Leaders In Football business convention at Stamford Bridge.

"Everyone will be fit, physically fit, mentally fit and I don't see a problem with it. For the fans I think it will be great."

Nasser Al-Khater, the organising committee's communications and marketing director, said for the time being no changes could be made to the schedule.

"When we bid, we bid to host it in summer and until the football authorities ask us to move it, that's when it will go ahead," he told delegates.

However De Boer, who works for the

Qatari FA as a technical advisor, echoed the thoughts of UEFA president Michel Platini, who cast his vote as a FIFA executive committee member for Qatar and strongly favours a winter finals.

"When the African Nations Cup is on, if you have an African player at your club he has to go and play for his country," said former Barcelona and Ajax Amsterdam defender De Boer in reference to the African tournament.

"They play in January and February. And not every league is in sync with the big European leagues: in Russia and Scandinavia they start earlier, and in the United States they have a different schedule.

Until Thursday, Platini had been a lone senior voice in calling for a winter finals.

However Karen Espelund, a UEFA executive committee member speaking during an earlier debate, said a special presidents' and general secretaries' congress would be held in due course where a debate on a winter finals would be on the agenda.

"I think all the bodies should come together to find a common solution and try also to change," De Boer told reporters. "It's very easy to stick with the old thing because we've done it already for years."

"I think it's great what Platini said, it's the first step," he added.

Borini adds to L'pool woes

REUTERS, London

Liverpool may have to make do with one recognised striker until the January transfer window after learning that Fabio Borini had fractured his foot training with Italy's under-21s on Thursday.

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) website confirmed that the 21-year-old suffered the injury to his right foot while preparing for the match against Sweden in Pescara.

Foot injuries are often slow to heal, meaning Borini, signed from Roma in July, could be set for a lengthy absence.

That would leave Uruguayan Luis Suarez as Liverpool's sole fit striker as they try to kick-start their season.

Borini's injury highlights the paucity of options available to manager Brendan Rodgers, who allowed towering striker and club record signing Andy Carroll to join West Ham United on loan in the summer.

Silvio won't quit Milan

Football

REUTERS, London

Silvio Berlusconi remains committed to his AC Milan soccer team, one of the club's directors said on Thursday, playing down speculation that the former Italian prime minister was ready to sell up.

The billionaire businessman has owned Milan since 1986 and they have been European champions five times under his leadership. Their success helped to make Berlusconi a familiar face in Italy and burnish his image as he moved into politics in the 1990s.

However, the club's fortunes have dimmed in the past couple of seasons. At the same time, Berlusconi, 76, has been distracted by political and legal problems, losing office and facing accusations he slept with an under-age prostitute.

There has been speculation that he was ready to sell the club or at least part of his stake, with chocolate company owner Michele Ferrero the latest businessman to be tipped as a possible buyer.

Milan director Umberto Gandini said talk of a sale was inevitable when much of continental Europe was suffering economically,

but give it little credence.

"I think Mr Berlusconi is one of the most dedicated owners that we could have," he told the Leaders in Football conference.

"I'm pretty sure that he and his family and his holding company will continue to support us," he added.

The balance of power in European soccer is switching to newly rich clubs like Paris St Germain who bought Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Thiago Silva from Milan this summer.

PSG are bankrolled by Qatari owners and are seeking to build a team swiftly in the French capital, where they are the only major soccer club.

However, PSG are one of the teams who risk falling foul of new rules being introduced by UEFA to force clubs to curb their losses or face exclusion from European competition from 2014-15.

PSG Director General Jean-Claude Blanc said the club was aiming to use its monopoly in Paris to grow revenues and was committed to meeting the Financial Fair Play rules, without giving details on how it would do so.

"We are working to make sure that within 3-5 years we are at the top of the game, respecting other clubs, respecting the rules, respecting Financial Fair Play," he told the conference.

Mourinho chooses C'Ron over Messi

Football

REUTERS, Lisbon

It would be a crime if Cristiano Ronaldo lost out to Lionel Messi for the 2012 Ballon d'Or, his Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho said on Friday.

Mourinho hit back at remarks by Barcelona coach's Tito Vilanova last weekend that Messi, who has won the award for the past three years, was "the best (player) in the world by a long way".

"When someone with the same responsibility as me comes out and says: 'Mine is the best on the planet' then I have to say: mine was not born in Madeira, he was born on Mars; he is not from planet Earth, he is the best in the universe," Mourinho told Portuguese daily A Bola in an interview.

"If Messi is the best on the planet, Ronaldo is the best in the universe. It would be a crime if Ronaldo did not win the Ballon d'Or."

Ronaldo won the award in 2008 and Mourinho said it was time to recognise him again.

"If you are going to give out the Ballon d'Or because a player is the best, give it to Cristiano or Messi. But I ask: if the two are on the same level, is it normal that one wins four and the other one? It is not."

In Sunday's 2-2 La Liga draw at the Camp

Nou, Ronaldo became the first player to score in six consecutive 'Clasicos' with his ninth and 10th strikes on his 16th appearance against Barca.

Mourinho said a player needed to win big titles to deserve the Ballon d'Or.

"How can you win the Ballon d'Or without collecting titles, without winning anything important? Don't come to me telling me about the Intercontinental Cup or the Supercup, this is small stuff. Tell me about fat titles," Mourinho said.

The Portuguese coach said Ronaldo had had a tougher career than his Argentine rival.

"It is harder to be Cristiano than Messi. Messi grew up in the team where he plays, with the players with whom he plays. Not Cristiano. He was in England, then they put him here in a losing team. He had to grow over the last two years with this team which has been forming," Mourinho said.

"One (Messi) plays as a (number) 9 and roams around in those 50 square metres where the distance to goal is smaller and defence less intense."

"The other (Ronaldo) plays as a winger. How does a winger score as many goals as a number 9? Besides, Ronaldo is a player who is not protected by anyone."

The Ballon d'Or, which merged with the World Player of the Year award in 2010, will be awarded on January 7 in Zurich.



What to WATCH

STAR Sports
Shanghai Masters
Semifinals
Live from 3:00pm

STAR Cricket
Champions League T20
Titans v Perth Scorchers
Live from 6:00pm
KKR v Delhi Daredevils

DAY'S EVENT

GP Federation Cup
Team BJMC v Arambagh
Time: 3:30pm

Muktijoddha v Sk Jamal
Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Soccer Club Feni v Khulna Abahani
Time: 3:30pm