

City top EPL spending on agents

REUTERS, London
English champions Manchester City led the way in spending on players' agents' fees in the year to the end of September 2012, according to figures published by the Premier League on Friday.

City, who also topped the previous year's list, paid 10.54 million pounds (\$16.89 million) to agents in the latest period after spending 9.66 million from Oct. 1 2010 to Sept. 30 2011.

Liverpool were in second place, having laid out 8.60 million pounds, while the Premier league's bottom club Queens Park Rangers spent 6.82 million on agents, up from 2.5 million.

Tottenham Hotspur (6.6 million) were fourth on the list ahead of European champions Chelsea (6.5), Arsenal (5.6) and West Ham United (4.4) while Manchester United's spending on agents' fees fell to 3.7 million from 4.5.

The total of 77 million pounds spent on agents by the 20 top flight clubs in the 12 months to Sept. 30 rose 5.13 million from a year earlier, according to the figures on the Premier League's official website.

Mancini wants Toure bros to skip ANC

AFP, Manchester
Manchester City boss Roberto Mancini wants brothers Yaya and Kolo Toure to skip the Africa Cup of Nations in January. The Ivory Coast are expected to call up both men, as well as City fringe player Abdul Razak, for the tournament which takes place in South Africa from January 19 to February 10.

"If we lost Yaya and Kolo and maybe Abdul in January could be important -- if we have two or three players injured and we don't have other players, I hope that they don't go to this competition."



West Ham United striker Carlton Cole (L) heads in the equalising goal during their Premier League encounter against Chelsea at Upton Park yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sepp prefers evolution

AFP, Sao Paulo
FIFA president Sepp Blatter hailed technical advances in the game Friday as the organisation prepares to try out goalline technology at the upcoming World Club Cup in Japan.

"There is no revolution in football -- there is evolution. There will always be errors from referees because they are human beings," said Blatter.

World governing body FIFA has been trying out two technologies and will put them to the tournament test at the Club World Cup starting December 6 in Japan with the better version being maintained for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Two systems -- one German, one English -- have been certified by FIFA and are now fighting one another for the right to be used in Brazil in two years' time.

Rafa's Chelsea Hammered

AFP, London



Rafael Benitez's difficult start as interim Chelsea manager took a significant turn for the worse when his side were beaten 3-1 by West Ham United at Upton Park on Saturday.

An impressive recovery saw the Hammers overturn Juan Mata's first-half opener with goals from Carlton Cole, Mohamed Diame and Modibo Maiga.

It left Chelsea without a win in seven Premier League games -- their worst run since February 1995.

Benitez has been in charge of three of those games, but after successive scoreless draws, the manager was entitled to feel confident he would oversee his first victory when Mata's goal capped a dominant first-half display.

But West Ham were transformed after manager Sam Allardyce introduced Diame and Matt Taylor at half time and ultimately deserved victory for a vastly improved performance in the second period.

Benitez made four changes to the side that started the 0-0 draw against

Fulham, underlining the manager's pre-match assertion that the demands of the season are already beginning to tell on Chelsea's senior players.

Mata, surprisingly held back on the bench in mid-week, returned in place of Ryan Bertrand, while Victor Moses and John Obi Mikel came in for Oscar and Oriol Romeu, and Gary Cahill stepped in for suspended centre-back David Luiz.

Allardyce was forced into changes of his own, after striker Andy Carroll was ruled out for two months with a knee injury picked up in the narrow mid-week defeat at Manchester United.

After the frustrations of Benitez's first few days in charge at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea desperately wanted to make a positive start.

And after surviving an early lapse when Winston Reid was allowed a free header in the Blues penalty area, they opened up the West Ham defence with ease to allow Mata to score the confidence-lifting opening goal.

The move was as simple as it was incisive, stemming from a throw-in on the half-way line.

Moses released Torres on the

right-hand side of the West Ham area and the striker's cut-back found Mata, who finished side-footed from 12 yards.

The effect on Chelsea was tangible and Benitez's side began to press forward with a fluency that was noticeably absent during their previous two games.

Ramires found space on the left to set up Moses, who shot wide, before a sweeping four-man break ended with Torres firing wastefully over.

Chelsea's failings meant West Ham remained in the game but Allardyce's side appeared to be affected by the demands of a testing week that had seen them lose at Tottenham Hotspur and Old Trafford.

They had Jussi Jaaskelainen to thank for restricting Chelsea to a single-goal lead at half-time after the goalkeeper produced an excellent save to repel Mata's close-range shot.

Allardyce made two changes at half-time, introducing Diame and Taylor for James Tomkins and Gary O'Neil.

And the changes had an immediate effect, with the Hammers transformed from the side that had struggled in the first half.

Kaka to replace Becks?

Football

REUTERS, Los Angeles

David Beckham has been helping L.A. Galaxy in their bid to sign Brazilian playmaker Kaka from Real Madrid as his replacement, the Major League Soccer club's owner said on Friday.

Kaka recently expressed interest in a future move to MLS and on Friday Tim Leiweke, president of Galaxy's owners AEG, told SI.com they wanted to sign the 2007 World Player of the Year.

"We're well aware of Kaka's interest in MLS, and we in turn have made it very clear to him that he's aware of our interest in him," said Leiweke.

"We have a great relationship with Real Madrid, and just as we worked through a player with them six years ago (Beckham), I'm absolutely convinced we could find the right deal this time, too," he added on the Sports Illustrated website.

In an earlier interview with the Galaxy's official podcast Leiweke said they wanted a player to boost the club's profile in the Hispanic community and said Beckham, who played with Kaka at AC Milan, had taken a leading role in the bid.

"The guy who introduced us to this player is David Beckham. David has done the yeoman's work on our behalf at introducing us, getting him comfortable, getting his family comfortable, talking about L.A. and the organization," Leiweke said.

Beckham will play his final competitive game with the Galaxy in Saturday's MLS Cup final against Houston Dynamo.

The 30-year-old Kaka has long been linked with an eventual move to MLS and his comments after the friendly in New Jersey earlier this month between Brazil and Colombia, indicating his desire for a move in the future, intensified speculation.

Galaxy's Ireland striker Robbie Keane said he would be delighted to see the Brazilian take Beckham's spot.

Confed cup draw held

Football

AFP, Sao Paulo

Hosts Brazil will face Japan in the opening match of the Confederations Cup on June 15 next year in Brasilia following Saturday's draw in Sao Paulo.

After their curtain-raiser against the Asian champions Brazil will face CONCACAF champions Mexico and then four-times world champions Italy, Euro 2012 runners-up, in their pool matches.

World champions Spain are in Group B along with double world champions Uruguay, Oceania champions Tahiti and whoever wins the Jan 19-Feb 10 Africa Cup of Nations.

The intercontinental showpiece, a dry run for the 2014 World Cup which Brazil will also host for the first time since 1950, runs to June 30, when Rio de Janeiro will host the final at the Maracana stadium.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter lauded Brazil for the giant country's efforts on readying its infrastructure for both events with six venues staging the Confederations Cup and 12 the World Cup.

Although FIFA has at times been critical of the country's efforts, in recent months the game's world body has been more conciliatory and Blatter, noting the country last staged a World Cup in 1950, struck a positive tone.

"A lot has changed in this country since 1950," said Blatter, noting that "it is a question of trust and confidence" to hand organisation of a major event to a country.

"Now, Brazil has developed - not

only in their culture but also in their economy. We are very happy to be in a country which is the sixth economy in the world."

And he assured listening Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff that "FIFA is behind you."

Rousseff responded by saying Brazil would seek to win on the pitch and off.

"Winning is a mission in itself - but we also must win beyond the stadiums by putting the organisation in place. The venues will be ready," she insisted.

"We are certain that we have prepared things properly in order to hold an outstanding sports event and in June 2013 we will show we are

in a position to hold the upcoming World Cup.

"We will make the World Cup the most organised and most joyful," added Rousseff.

The eight-nation Confederations Cup brings together four former world champions in reigning top-ranked side Spain, five-times winners the Brazilians themselves, four-times champions Italy and Uruguay, inaugural world champions in 1930 and then 1950, when they beat their hosts in Rio.

Whereas the hosts, under re-appointed Luiz Felipe Scolari, their 2002 World Cup winning coach, see the event as a dress rehearsal for

2014, Blatter said ahead of the draw the meeting of continental champions is an important date in its own right.

"This is really a rendezvous of world champions. High quality is here -- we have 12 World Cup stars," said Blatter, in reference to the roll of honour in terms of word titles.

Asian champions Japan, CONCACAF champions Mexico, and Oceania surprise package Tahiti are also invited to the party for which 132,000 tickets have already been sold, FIFA indicated Friday.

The winners of January's Africa Cup of Nations will likewise compete.

"There is great passion for football in Brazil, the mecca of football," added Blatter, who is confident that all will be in place in six months time when the action starts in Brasilia before further encounters in Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Recife, final host Rio de Janeiro and Salvador.

Defending Confederations Cup champions Brazil will be out to prove they can rise above recent poor showings which have left them outside FIFA's rankings top ten.

That slump precipitated the sacking of Mano Menezes as coach and Scolari's return rescue mission, but Spain coach Vicente del Bosque says the auriverde are "the team to beat".

FIFA Secretary General Jerome Valcke, who earlier this year infuriated Brazil by saying it needed a "kick up the backside," was effusive Saturday as he looked forward to June.

"Brazil will receive the cream of the cream," he enthused.

EL SHAARAWY on the double

REUTERS, Rome



AC Milan recovered from a goal down to win 3-1 at 10-man Catania thanks to a second-half double from Stephan El Shaarawy and a strike by Kevin-Prince Boateng who was sent off near the end of a lively Serie A clash on Friday.

The win, which was Milan's third in a row including the 3-1 defeat of Anderlecht in the Champions League earlier this month, moved them up to seventh place on 21 points, 11 adrift of leaders Juventus who host Torino in the Turin derby on Saturday.

However it was not without controversy as El Shaarawy's equaliser was scored from an offside position, punishing a Catania side who have already suffered bad decisions in their matches with Inter Milan and Juventus this season.

Catania, who stay ninth with 19 points from 15 games, took a deserved lead in the 10th minute through ex-Milan defender Nicola Legrottaglie, who thumped a header past Marco Amelia from a Francesco Lodi corner.

Massimiliano Allegri's Milan side huffed and puffed through a scrappy first half but did not cre-

ate one decent chance. Had his shaky defence faced a more incisive attack, Milan could easily have conceded more goals.

One goalmouth scramble just after the half-hour mark saw the jittery Milan defence haphazardly ping the ball around their own box under little pressure from any Catania players.

The first 10 minutes of the second period had more action than the first half, with Catania's Pablo Barrios helping Milan's cause four minutes after the break when, having already been booked, he kicked out at Antonio Nocerino and was sent off.

Milan took advantage of the extra man with a controversial goal from El Shaarawy, who tapped home a Robinho flick-on from an offside position after 52 minutes for his 11th league goal of the season.

Catania were rocking and could have been behind a minute later when El Shaarawy looked to have been tripped in the box only to be booked for simulation.

Boateng did put Milan in front in the 57th though with a spectacular long-range strike that curled past the stationary Mariano Andujar after the midfielder was left free to shoot.



What to WATCH

Channel 9
Bangladesh v West Indies
Second ODI
Live from 9:00am
STAR Cricket
Australia v South Africa
Third Test, Day 3
Live from 8:30am
ESPN
Serie A
Lazio v Parma
Live from 8:00pm
English Premiership
Norwich City v Sunderland
Live from 10:00pm
STAR Sports
Primera Liga
Granada v Espanyol
Live from 5:00pm
Deportivo v Real Betis
Live from 10:00pm
Celta Vigo v Levante
Live from 12:00am (Monday)
Mallorca v Zaragoza
Live from 2:00am (Monday)
Serie A

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match; Day 2)
Khulna v Dhaka
Venue: Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium, Rajshahi
Sylhet v Rajshahi
Venue: BKSP
Dhaka Metro v Rangpur
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra
Chittagong v Barisal