

Magpies snap up French duo

Football

REUTERS, Paris

Newcastle United's French shopping spree continued on Tuesday when they signed France and Montpellier defender Mapou Yanga Mbiwa and Girondins Bordeaux forward Yoan Gouffran.

French champions Montpellier said on their website that Yanga Mbiwa's transfer to the Premier League side was agreed pending the completion of a medical.

Yanga Mbiwa, 23, has won three caps and is regarded as one of the top centre backs in France.

Later on Tuesday, the 26-year-old Gouffran, who has scored eight Ligue 1 goals this season, wrote on his Twitter feed: "Tomorrow I will be a Newcastle player and I am proud. "Thanks to all who supported me, thanks to the officials and staff members who helped me grow," he added.

Newcastle, fifth in the Premier League last season, are 16th this term and stand only two points above the relegation places.

The north-east side have also drafted in Lille and France right back Mathieu Debuchy in the transfer window and Nancy fullback Massadio Haidara is poised to join the club's French contingent which already included midfielder Yohan Cabaye.

Newcastle have been hit by defensive injuries this season and the new arrivals will help cover for the expected exit of captain Fabricio Colocchini amid reports the centre half wants to return home to Argentina.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Bradford City striker James Hanson (L) celebrates his goal with teammates during their League Cup semifinal second leg against Aston Villa at Villa Park on Tuesday.

Argentina recall Banega

Football

REUTERS, Undated

Ever Banega has been recalled to the Argentina squad for next month's friendly against Sweden, with the Valencia midfielder named for the first time since October 2011 after a freak car accident sidelined him for six months.

Banega has not played for Argentina since the shock 1-0 away loss to Venezuela in a World Cup qualifier, having suffered the injury last February when his car rolled onto his leg as he was filling up with fuel.

Paris St Germain winger Ezequiel Lavezzi returns to a 23-man squad named by coach Alejandro Sabella on Tuesday for the Feb. 6 match in Solna after missing the last two qualifiers, victories over Uruguay and Chile in October that kept Argentina top of the South American group.

Defender Cristian Ansaldi, who won one cap under each of Sabella's predecessors Diego Maradona and Sergio Batista, gets another chance thanks to his fine form in the Russian league with Rubin Kazan.

Midfielder creator Walter Montillo, who has joined Santos from Cruzeiro in the Brazilian league, is the only non-European based player in the squad having won his second cap in a 2-1 win over Brazil in November.

Wigan Athletic striker Franco Di Santo was chosen again after making his debut as a substitute in the 0-0 draw against Saudi Arabia that closed a good 2012 for Argentina.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Sergio Romero (Sampdoria), Mariano Andujar (Catania), Cristian Alvarez (Espanyol)

Defenders:
Hugo Campagnaro, Federico Fernandez (both Napoli), Fabricio Colocchini (Newcastle United), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City), Ezequiel Garay (Benfica), Cristian Ansaldi (Rubin Kazan)

Midfielders:
Javier Mascherano (Barcelona), Fernando Gago, Ever Banega (both Valencia), Enzo Perez (Benfica), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid), Augusto Fernandez (Celta Vigo), Fabian Rinaudo (Sporting Lisbon), Walter Montillo (Santos)

Forwards:
Sergio Aguero (Manchester City), Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid), Franco Di Santo (Wigan)

Bradford stun Villa

Football

AFP, Birmingham

Fourth-tier Bradford City continued their League Cup fairytale by completing a sensational 4-3 aggregate semifinal win over Aston Villa on Tuesday that sent them into the final.

After James Hanson had cancelled out Christian Benteke's opener for Villa, Andreas Weimann scored in the 89th minute to give the hosts a 2-1 win, but it could not keep Bradford from a first major final since they won the 1911 FA Cup.

League Two side Bradford, who had previously accounted for Arsenal and Wigan Athletic in the competition, become the first team from England's fourth level to reach the League Cup final since Rochdale in 1962.

The biggest game in the Yorkshire club's modern history will occur at Wembley Stadium on February 24, when they will face either Chelsea or Swansea City, who resume hostilities on Wednesday with Swansea 2-0 up from the first leg.

For Paul Lambert's Villa, it was the latest embarrassment in a disappointing season that has seen them thrashed 8-0 by Chelsea and slip to within one place of the Premier League relegation zone.

Villa manager Lambert hailed Charles N'Zogbia's performance in Saturday's 2-2 draw at West Bromwich Albion and the French winger was at the fore as the hosts made a storming start on a freezing night in Birmingham.

Three times within the opening 16 minutes he found Benteke's head from the right flank.

Matthew Lowton headed a knock-down from the Belgian over the crossbar in the sixth minute, while Benteke directed a header straight at Bradford goalkeeper Matt Duke 10 minutes later.

Fabian Delph shot over following a surging foray down the centre of the pitch and Gabriel Agbonlahor worked Duke with a low shot before Villa took the lead in the 24th minute.

This time the chance came from the left, with Joe Bennett shaping an inviting cross into the area that Benteke leapt to volley past Duke at the near post.

It was one-way traffic, and after Stephen Ireland had seen a goal ruled out for offside, Duke produced a superb one-handed save to tip an N'Zogbia drive over the top

before dealing with a chipped Ireland shot in the same fashion.

Benteke bundled a lofted Ireland cross narrowly wide at the back post, but just as it looked as if Villa were set to run riot, Nakhi Wells served a reminder of Bradford's threat with a left-foot shot that curled just wide.

The half-time whistle will have come as some relief to the visitors but within 10 minutes of the restart, they had reasserted their control of the tie.

As on several occasions in the first leg at Valley Parade, Villa were undone from a set-piece, with Hanson slipping past Ron Vlaar to meet Gary Jones' corner with a header that rocketed into the roof of the net.

Lazio hold Juve in Cup

REUTER, Milan

Disjointed Juventus were held 1-1 at home by Lazio in the first leg of their Italian Cup semifinal on Tuesday despite Federico Peluso's first goal for the club.

Peluso, signed from Atalanta earlier this month, out jumped his marker and headed Serie A leaders Juventus in front in the 63rd minute following Emmanuele Giaccherini's cross from the left.

Lazio, third in Serie A, levelled four minutes from time when Stefano Mauri scored from close range after Antonio Candreva's corner was headed back into the area.

Juventus, who as usual rested goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and Andrea Pirlo from the competition, struggled in the first half and survived several let-offs.

They nearly went ahead nine minutes after the restart when Alesandro Matri's first-time volley was tipped over by Federico Marchetti.

After going in front, Juventus threatened to get a second as Arturo Vidal hit the post when he should have scored and also had a header saved by Marchetti.

Shakira, Pique blessed with son Milan

AFP, Madrid

Colombian pop star Shakira and Barcelona defender Gerard Pique on Wednesday announced the birth of their son Milan.

"We are pleased to announce the birth of Milan Pique Mebarak, son of Shakira Mebarak and Gerard Pique, on January 22 at 9:36 pm (2036 GMT), in Barcelona, Spain," the pair said on Twitter.

They said Milan "means dear, loving and gracious in Slavic; in Ancient Roman, eager and laborious; and in Sanskrit, unification. Just like his father, baby Milan became a member of FC Barcelona at birth".

The baby weighed in at almost three kilograms (6.6 pounds) and both Shakira and Milan "are in excellent health", the singer and the football star said in their statement.

In Bogota, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos sent his congratulations to the couple "on behalf of Colombia and my family" via Twitter.

Pique irked much of the world's media late last month by announcing his girlfriend had given birth -- but then revealing it was a prank.

The announcement had also been made on Twitter. "Our boy has already been born! We are very happy! Thank you all for your messages!" he said.

But the message came on the "Day of the Innocents" when people in Spain play practical jokes on each other.

Later Pique seemed to be letting fans know it was a joke in a second message: "He already has a name! He is called Innocent! Happy Day of the Innocents to all!"

Britain's Daily Mirror had said in its online gossip column: "We're not very happy with Gerard Pique today."

Malaga take Lugano

REUTERS, Madrid

Malaga have strengthened their squad by taking Uruguay defender and captain Diego Lugano on loan from Paris St Germain until the end of the season, the Spanish club said on Wednesday.

The 32-year-old arrived on the Costa del Sol on Tuesday, has passed the pertinent medical tests, and will be presented after training with the squad for the first time later in the day, the club said.

He is eligible to play for Malaga in the Champions League, but the club do not have an option to make the move permanent at the end of the season.

The centre-back played with Brazil's Sao Paulo and Turkey's Fenerbahce before moving to Paris in 2011, but has found his opportunities limited.

Lugano becomes Malaga's second mid-season recruit after the fifth-placed club in La Liga landed Chelsea's promising Brazilian midfielder Lucas Piazon on another six-month loan deal last week.



Brazil talisman Ronaldinho was recalled to the national team after his last appearance in February 2012.

PHOTO: INTERNET FILE

Scolari picks R'dinho

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Mercurial forward Ronaldinho was given another chance by Brazil as Luiz Felipe Scolari named his first squad since returning for a second stint as coach on Tuesday.

Scolari, who led Brazil to their fifth world title in 2002 and was called back in November to lead their attempt to win a sixth on home soil in 2014, also brought back tried and trusted goalkeeper Julio Cesar.

Both Ronaldinho and Julio Cesar, Brazil's regular first-choice goalkeeper from 2007 to 2011, made their last appearances against Bosnia in February last year.

"I want what everyone else wants which is that they play the football they are capable of playing," the man known as Big Phil (Felipao) told reporters when asked what he expected from Ronaldinho and fellow forward Neymar.

"Few can play the game better than them. I also want good behaviour. I want them to be responsible, regardless of their age."

Ronaldinho, 32, has been in and out of the Brazil squad over the last few years and missed the 2010 World Cup as his career went steadily downhill, widely

blamed on his partying lifestyle.

He reached his peak with Barcelona, when he was voted FIFA's World Player of the Year in 2004 and 2005, then spent three less successful years with AC Milan before joining Flamengo at the start of 2011.

He walked out on the Rio de Janeiro club last year but then found a new lease of life with Atletico Mineiro.

Scolari reiterated that he would be satisfied with nothing less than the "hexampeonato" next year and he has barely 18 months to build a world-beating team and only one competition, the Confederations Cup which Brazil hosts in June.

Despite this, and a lowest-ever world ranking of 18th, Scolari said he expected to be successful.

"We have placed our bets on a World Cup win and that is what we are working towards," he said. "The supporters are right to demand it."

The former Portugal and Chelsea coach, whose predecessor Mano Menezes was unceremoniously sacked despite improving performances and results, will make his debut against England at Wembley on Feb. 6.

Scolari dropped unsettled Real Madrid midfielder Kaka and brought back Lazio midfielder Hernanes and included uncapped Bayern Munich midfielder Dante.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:
Julio Cesar (Queens Park Rangers), Diego Alves (Valencia)

Defenders:
Daniel Alves (Barcelona), Adriano (Barcelona), David Luiz (Chelsea), Dante (Bayern Munich), Leandro Castan (AS Roma), Miranda (Atletico Madrid), Filipe Luis (Atletico Madrid)

Midfielders:
Ramires (Chelsea), Arouca (Santos), Paulinho (Corinthians), Hernanes (Lazio), Oscar (Chelsea)

Forwards:
Hulk (Zenit St Petersburg), Neymar (Santos), Ronaldinho (Atletico Mineiro), Lucas (Paris St Germain), Fred



Channel 9
BPL
Barisal Burners v Chittagong Kings
Live from 10:00am
Khulna Royal Bengals v Duronto Rajshahi
Live from 6:00pm
STAR Sports
Australian Open
Women's Singles Semifinal
Live from 8:30am
Men's Singles Semifinal
Live from 2:30pm
TEN Action
Copa del Rey
(QUARTERFINALS, 2ND LEG)
Real Betis v Athletic Madrid
Live from 1:00am (Friday)
Malaga v Barcelona



BPL
Barisal Burners v Chittagong Kings
Time: 10:00am
Khulna Royal Bengals v Duronto Rajshahi
Time: 6:00pm