

# De Stefano imprisoned?

AFP, Madrid



A 36-year-old woman who means to marry Real Madrid great Alfredo Di Stefano, 50 years her senior, alleged Friday he was being kept incommunicado as his family tries to block the marriage.

"Alfredo Di Stefano has lost his freedom," said Gina Gonzalez, a Costa Rican who has worked as the Argentine ex-player's secretary, in a statement she read out to reporters in Madrid.

"I have absolutely credible information that in recent days Alfredo has picked up the telephone in his home and contacted certain people and that at that moment the call has been cut off, because they have taken the telephone from him to stop him talking," she said.

"It is clear that his freedom is being snatched away from him."

Di Stefano is one of Real Madrid's most celebrated players, having represented the club for 11 seasons between 1953 and 1964, winning five European Cups. He now holds the title of honorary club president.

He announced in an interview in El Mundo newspaper on May 4 that he planned to marry Gonzalez.

"I am in love and I am getting married to Gina," the newspaper quoted him as saying. "I want to and I have been a widower for eight years."

His children have applied for him to be placed under legal guardianship on the grounds of ill health.

That move "is based exclusively on our desire to obtain his maximum protection in all aspects of his life", the family said in a statement, adding that he had been examined by a psychiatrist.



Italy's Andrea Pirlo (L) celebrates with Mario Balotelli after scoring against San Marino during their FIFA friendly at Dall'Ara stadium in Bologna on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

# Italy warm up well

AFP, Milan



An experimental Italy side outclassed San Marino 4-0 three days before coach Cesare Prandelli trims his squad for the double challenge of a World Cup qualifier and next month's Confederations Cup.

In a largely one-sided game at Bologna's Stadio Dall'Ara, Andrea Poli, Alberto Gilardino, Andrea Pirlo and Alberto Aquilani were all on target as Prandelli ran the rule over his final, 23-man travelling party to be named Monday.

Italy face the Czech Republic away on June 7 and then travel to Brazil for the Confederations Cup a week later and Prandelli said he was happy with the performance.

"I wanted to look over a few things tonight, and I'm satisfied," he said.

"We were still lacking in a few departments but, physically, we looked in good shape. I liked the spirit and determination of the players."

Prandelli would not give any hint as to the players he would be cutting from the squad.

"I will have to make decisions but all that will be done in the coming days."

Prandelli's starting XI looked nothing like the sides he has sent out in various tactical formations in previous fixtures this season.

Employing a 4-3-3, the coach handed a rare start to Bologna's Alessandro Diamanti, who was flanked by Bologna club-mate

Alberto Gilardino and Giacomo Bonaventura on what was the Atalanta striker's debut.

It meant no start for Mario Balotelli or Stephan El Shaarawy, however given their domination throughout it seemed Prandelli, on this occasion, could do without the AC Milan stars.

Only seven minutes in, Bonaventura almost handed Italy the lead when he got on the end of a knock down following a long ball from Pirlo, only to see the visitors' goalkeeper Aldo Simoncini pull off a fine one-handed save.

Midfielder Christian Maggio had the ball in the net but was ruled offside and then a well-struck, angled drive from Diamanti was on target but punched out by an alert Simoncini.

Gilardino made his plea for a place in the squad with a smart first-time shot from a long midfield ball just before the half-hour.

But it was Poli who stole the show moments later, the Sampdoria midfielder pouncing on a loose ball and riding a sliding tackle before rifling the ball past Simoncini to score his first goal for Italy.

The hosts went 2-0 up on 34 minutes when Gilardino finished off good work from Aquilani, who had forced a save from Simoncini, to score on the follow-up.

Prandelli made a number of changes after the interval, with Bonaventura, Gilardino and Diamanti replaced by Cagliari striker Marco Sau, Balotelli and Alessio Cerci.

# Caxirola banned

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

The "caxirola", Brazil's percussion answer to South Africa's plastic vuvuzela horn, will be banned from stadiums during the Confederations Cup and the World Cup for safety reasons, authorities said Friday.

"The secretariat of major events decided that from a public safety standpoint, it would not be appropriate to allow it inside stadiums," Justice Minister Jose Eduardo Cardozo said in a brief statement to the press.

Medeiros Hilario, the official on the Cup's Organizing Committee who is in charge of security, said: "Fans will not be allowed in stadiums with musical instruments and that includes the caxirola."

"We will apply this measure during friendly games, then during the Confederations Cup," which will be held in Brazil from June 15-30, he added.

The ban will become effective from Sunday when Brazil and England clash in a friendly match at Rio's iconic Maracana stadium.

The decision followed an April 28 incident during which irate fans hurled dozens of caxirolas on the pitch during a match between Bahia and Vitoria.

The caxirola, named the official instrument of the 2014 World Cup which Brazil will also host, was unveiled by President Dilma Rousseff last month.

# Barcelona strike 100

Mourinho bids winning adieu

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho was booed by the majority of a sparse home crowd as he ended his three-year spell in charge with a 4-2 win over Osasuna.

And Barcelona also rounded off their league season with a 4-1 win over Malaga to match Real's league record of 100 points from last season on the final day of the campaign in Spain.

Mourinho's name was met with a chorus of whistles when it was read out before kick-off, but he did receive support from a small group of the club's ultra fanbase who chanted his name throughout the match.

On the field it looked as if he would be given a good send-off as first-half goals from Gonzalo Higuain -- who was captain for the day in what is expected to also be his last game in a Real shirt -- and Michael Essien gave Madrid a comfortable 2-0 lead.

However, Osasuna struck back with two goals in 11 minutes just after the restart through Roberto Torres and Alvaro Cejudo

to level matters.

But Mourinho was able to sign off with a win as further goals from Karim Benzema and Jose Maria Callejon ensured Real ended the season unbeaten at home in the league.

Barcelona meanwhile rounded off their championship winning season in style as a first-half blitz saw them dispose of Malaga 4-1 at the Camp Nou.

Goals from David Villa, Cesc Fabregas and Martin Montoya in the opening 16 minutes got the hosts off to the best possible start.

Andres Iniesta then made it 4-0 seven minutes into the second-half before Pedro Morales got a consolation goal for Malaga five minutes later.

And there was also time for Eric Abidal to make an emotional final appearance for the club as he replaced Gerard Pique for the final 15 minutes.

The Frenchman announced on Thursday that he was to leave the club when his contract is up at the end of the season after only returning to first-team action back in April after a 14-month absence due to a liver transplant.

# Maracana cleared

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



After an embarrassing brush with cancellation, the iconic Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro will host its first official match since an extensive renovation programme when Brazil tackle England on Sunday in a glamorous friendly.

A local judge ruled on Thursday that the game could not go ahead as it did not meet minimum safety requirements, only for the decision to be overturned after city authorities scrambled an appeal.

The Rio State government later

explained that a mandatory safety report had not been sent to the relevant local authority due to a "bureaucratic failure".

The cancellation saga was the latest unedifying setback in the story of the stadium's refurbishment, which has been beset by delays and disputes since works costing close to \$600 million (460 million euros) began 30 months ago.

The stadium was officially opened on April 27, but Sunday's game will be the first time that a full audience of paying spectators is admitted.

The arena retains its famous circular shape and monolithic concrete shell, but it has a new roof and its two tiers

# Ana supports angry Rafael

AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal was right to blast French Open scheduling as a "joke", said former women's champion Ana Ivanovic.

Nadal, the seven-time champion, was furious that his second round match was cancelled on Thursday's rain-hit programme, forcing him to play on Friday and face a last-32 tie on Saturday.

The Spaniard believes that men should get priority in the schedule when rain is predicted.

"When he has to play day after day, I think he's right. They should play early," said Serb star Ivanovic, the 2008 champion.

"I think it's fair that they play first because they can get more time to recover."

# 'England no hopers'

INTERNET, Undated



Brazil striker Neymar believes England are unlikely to be contenders for World Cup glory next summer.

The Barcelona-bound 21-year-old, who will leave Santos this summer, is preparing to face Roy Hodgson's side in a friendly at the Maracana on Sunday evening.

He claims England's players are high achievers at club level but pose little threat in the international game.

And with Brazil hosting the 2014 World Cup and looking to win the tournament for a sixth time, he cannot envisage the Three Lions mounting a challenge.

Speaking in The Sun newspaper, Neymar said: "I have respect for a lot of the England players as they have achieved great things at their clubs."

"But, as a national team, I don't look at England and think they are going to be a real threat at the World Cup."

"We want to win the World Cup in front of our home fans and the two nations I look at as a real threat are Germany and Spain."


"After that it's a group including Argentina, Holland, Italy and one or two more. But England I don't even think about."





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