

City appoint Pellegrini

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City on Friday said they had appointed Malaga coach Manuel Pellegrini to take over from Roberto Mancini, earmarking him as the man to bring long-term success to the English Premier League club.

The confirmation of his appointment came after Pellegrini said he had a verbal agreement to move to northwest England, after nine years in charge at Spanish club Malaga.

A statement on the club's website mcfc.co.uk said the 59year-old Chilean had joined on a three-year contract and would take up his role from June 24.

"I am delighted to accept this hugely exciting opportunity," Pellegrini said. "The club has a clear vision for success both on and off

the pitch and I am committed to making a significant contribution. "Everything is in place for Manchester City to continue to

be successful and I am excited to be able to work with such a talented squad, the executive team and the board to deliver for fans who are renowned for their steadfast support."

Manchester City won their first league title since 1968 in 2011/12 but although they finished runners-up last season to rivals Manchester United, the campaign was viewed as a disappointment.

No Nigeria?

REUTERS, Windhoek

Nigeria's soccer team went on strike on Thursday, refusing to leave their hotel in Namibia and missing a flight to Brazil where they are supposed to compete in the Confederations Cup, which gets underway at the weekend. "They are declining to

leave," Namibia Football Association general secretary Barry Rukoro told Reuters. "They were supposed to go at 11 a.m. this morning but they say they are owed money by their association and want it sorted before they will leave the hotel.

"Their officials all departed on an earlier flight this morning but the players and the technical staff are still here. So far there is no indication they are leaving.

Sources said the Nigerian players were angry over unpaid bonus money.

Stunning Bolt banishes blues AFP, Oslo debriefing with his coach Glen Mills Usain Bolt dispelled any concerns

over his early-season form by blasting to a convincing victory in the 200m at the Bislett Games. But the Jamaican sprint star, a six-

time Olympic gold medallist and world record holder in both the 100 and 200m, faces the daunting prospect of having to negotiate the Jamaican national trials to compete in the 100m in the August 10-18 World Athletics Championships.

The one big stain on Bolt's stellar career came in the stifling South Korean heat and humidity of Daegu at the 2011 worlds, a false start seeing him automatically disqualified from the blue riband event of track and field.

Training partner and compatriot Yohan Blake was crowned new world 100m champ and as such earns the right to enjoy a wildcard entry into the Moscow worlds.

It means Bolt returns home for a

before tackling the ultracompetitive world of Jamaican 100m running, despite having twice run under the qualifying time of 10.15sec already this season.

A top-three finish would see him qualify for the 100m and 4x100m relay team.

There is no need to impress on Bolt the dangers of the national trials, after Blake beat him in the pre-Olympic champs over both distances, although the two are unlikely to meet in the June 21-23 Kingston meet.

"Now I'm heading back to Jamaica and will prepare for the world championships," said Bolt after his victory late Thursday. "I love to compete at home.

"I'll go to the trials to try to win, but it's all about the qualification." Bolt certainly impressed over the 200m in Oslo, setting a new Bislett Stadium meet record of 19.79sec despite cold conditions and the fact

that European champion Churandy Martina was disqualified for a false start in the lane outside the Jamaican. "It's always good to have some-

one in front of you," he said. "You can focus on who's ahead and they lead you through the bend." Bolt said the race had left him

feeling like he was "in pretty good 200m shape". "It's my favourite event, and the

race shows that I'm not in as bad shape as I thought. "You have to be very powerful to beat me off the curve," he said, add-

ing that in better weather conditions the race "would definitely have been 19.50sec". The victory, with his closest rival, Norwegian Jaysum Saidy Ndure, finishing more than half a second

defeat by American Justin Gatlin in the Rome meet of the Diamond League.

That brought his tally to just five

away, was a welcome tonic after his

losses in his professional career since taking the world of sprinting by storm at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, including defeats by compatriot Asafa Powell and American Tyson Gay.

But Bolt insisted that sprinting was not about personal rivalries.

"Year after year, people come to try to beat Usain Bolt. But you cannot focus on one person because you never know who's going to show up the next day," he said, citing Gatlin's loss to Frenchman Christophe Lemaitre just days after his Rome victory.

"You have to focus on putting everything together.

"If I lose a race, it's back to the drawing board... But I'm never worried about losing a race because at the world championships I show up and get it done."

He added: "Definitely my goals remain the same: to be the best in the world and win three gold medals in Moscow."

Goal drought doesn't faze Neymar

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil superstar Neymar said on Thursday that he was not concerned about having gone nine matches without scoring, as he prepares to spearhead the host country's challenge at the Confederations Cup.

The 21-year-old, who recently agreed to join Barcelona, will be the main attraction when Brazil kick off the competition against Japan on Saturday.

"Regardless of whether or not I score goals, which doesn't mean anything, I'm proud to be with the Brazilian squad. I can't behave for the national team as if I was with Santos, where everyone knew me. Here, they still need to get to know me." On Saturday, Neymar will

once again sport the mythical number 10 shirt once worn by his feted Santos and Brazil predecessor Pele, but he said he felt no added pressure.

"I think that the number has no importance, but the Brazil shirt? Yes."



PHOTO: REUTERS

Brazilian striker Neymar trains on Thursday ahead of today's Confederations Cup opener against Japan in Brasilia.

Acid test for Brazil

AFP, Brasilia



Brazil and coach Luiz Felipe Scolari cannot help but have one eye on next soil, but if the acid test is 12

months away the countdown starts Saturday when the Selecao take on Japan in their Confederations Cup opener.

Scolari led the Selecao to their fifth World Cup, a coronation sealed in Tokyo 11 years ago.

But the fact he is back for a second spell at the helm is evidence of the degree to which impatience and concern rule hearts and minds across this giant footballing nation given a clutch of disappointing showings at major events ever since.

Scolari has insisted since returning to the fold last November, ironically a matter of days after predecessor Mano Manezes' Brazil side spanked the Japanese 4-0 in a friendly in Poland, that the Confederations Cup is a sideshow and that he cannot deliver a second dose of alchemy overnight.

Yet the pressure is on as the fourtime Asian Cup champions should provide a stiff test before further showdowns with Olympic conquerors Mexico and three-time world champions Italy.

hosts will not take the Japanese, coached by hugely-experienced Italian Alberto Zaccheroni, lightly, given the hosts are now safe in the knowledge they have tal a rare chance to watch top-drawer year's World Cup on home booked their World Cup berth and can also draw on the likes of Manchester United favourite Shinji Kagawa.

> "Japan are a tricky proposition and not to be underestimated. Keisuke Honda and Kagawa are superb players and the team as a whole mark you very tightly," said Barcelona-bound Neymar.

Japan say they won't be caught napping as they were in Poland, but will need to keep an eye on in-form striker Fred, who has five goals in his last six internationals -- including two against England in friendly tussles in Wembley -- where England won 2-1 and Rio, which ended 2-2.

"Brazil have a very strong team and we need to make sure they don't dole out a repeat of what they did in Poland," said midfielder Yasuhito Endo.

"We will be out to make a much better impression this time with more at stake."

The tournament is the first major event hosted by Brazil since the 1989 Confederations Cup and the logistical challenge has been a tough one, raising concerns about whether the country

Brazil's star man Neymar says the can produce 12 top notch venues for the World Cup.

> The opening match at the Estadio Nacional affords residents of the capifootball as the city currently lacks a top-flight team.

> The hosts will move on first to Fortaleza then Salvador for their remaining group encounters with Mexico and Italy.

> If the Selecao win Group A, they will then travel to Belo Horizonte -- scene of England's 1950 World Cup upset at the hands of the United States -- for a June 26 semi-final against either reigning South American champions Uruguay or African champions Nigeria, assuming world champions Spain win Group B.

> Should Scolari's men only take second place in the pool phase they would face a likely Spanish test in Fortaleza on June 27.

If Brasilia is off the beaten track in terms of Brazilian footballing tradition, nonetheless striking parallels can be seen

between the city and the national team. The city is a paean to modern architecture, a realised dream for former President Juscelino Kubitschek, who determined in the mid-1950s that the capital should be based in the very heart of the country rather than remain in Rio.

