

What to WATCH

ESPN

Wimbledon C'ships

Second Round

Live from 6:00pm

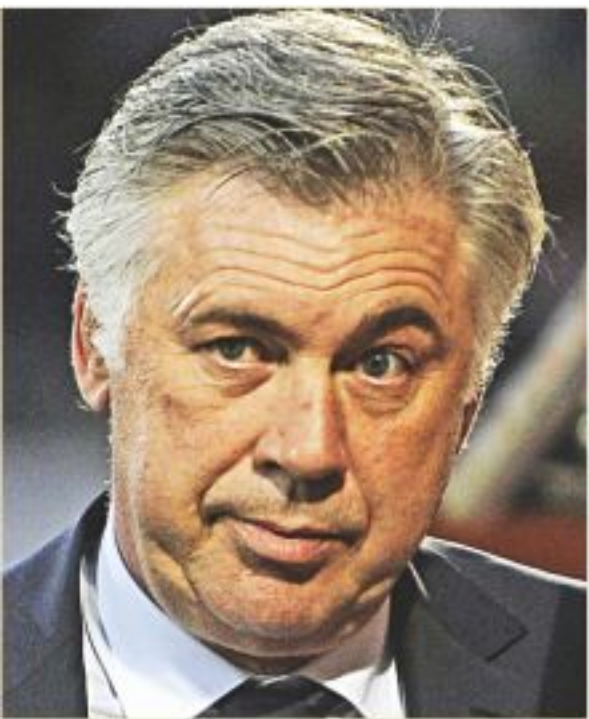
STAR Sports

FIFA Confederations Cup

First Semifinal

Brazil v Uruguay

Live from 1:00am (Thursday)



## Real appoint Ancelotti

AFP, Madrid

Carlo Ancelotti has been appointed as the new coach of Real Madrid on a three-year deal, the club confirmed on Tuesday.

"Carlos Michelangelo Ancelotti will be the coach of Real Madrid next season," said a statement on the club's website.

Ancelotti will be formally presented to the media on Wednesday afternoon, it added.

The 54-year-old Italian's protracted move from Paris Saint-Germain was finally confirmed after the French champions also appointed Laurent Blanc to be their coach for next season on Tuesday.

That cleared the path for Madrid to end a five-week wait to announce their new boss after the departure of Jose Mourinho.

# Spain still the best

REUTERS, Fortaleza



Although Barcelona and Real Madrid failed to win the Champions League last season, many of the same players have forgotten what it is like to lose when they are united in the red shirts of Spain.

The world and European champions' 3-0 win over African champions Nigeria at the Estadio Castelao on Sunday meant they finished top of their group with maximum points and reinforced the belief that next Sunday's Confederations Cup final will be between them and the other group winners, hosts Brazil.

Spain and Brazil have been the best two teams in the competition and while the Confederations Cup may not be high on the list of everyone's priorities, winning it would give Spain a clean sweep of every international honour available.

Wins in the 2008 and 2012 European championships and the World Cup three years ago have put Spain's trophy cabinet almost at full capacity, but there is one space left for the last of the missing silverware - the Confederations Cup.

Coach Vicente Del Bosque would not be drawn on the possibilities of winning it after Sunday's comfortable victory over Nigeria, and gave little away about their chances in the semi-final against Italy.

"It will be tough as they are seeking revenge after losing 4-0 to us in last year's European final," he said.

Del Bosque, 62, does not have to say much as his team do the talking for him.

They look set to extend their long unbeaten run of 28 competitive matches. The last team to beat Spain competitively were Switzerland who produced a 1-0 upset at the 2010 World Cup.

Spain now seem to be playing with even more confidence, authority and at times sheer brilliance, than a year ago.

Consistency is key with eight of the side that beat Italy last year starting against Nigeria. The only absentees were Iker Casillas (rested), Xabi Alonso (injured) and David Silva, who started as a substitute on Sunday but replaced Pedro for the last 15 minutes.

They may not play the most sparkling football ever seen, but their possession game is a highly effective one which produces delightful passages of play at regular intervals.

Jordi Alba's two excellent goals against Nigeria which came either side of Fernando Torres's fifth goal of the tournament had all the trademarks of the world's best team.

Eight Barcelona players also started against Nigeria - the most from one club since eight from Barca played against Poland in 1959.

Sergio Ramos and Alvaro Arbeloa of Real Madrid and Roberto Soldado of Valencia made up the rest to form effectively a 4-4-2 variation to their normal 4-2-3-1 plan.

Playmaker Xavi remains Spain's pivot point, with the likes of Andres Iniesta on the left and Silva on the right tormenting defences with their creativity and Cesc Fabregas relishing the freedom to roam.



PHOTO: REUTERS

**WILL IT BE FOUR IN FOUR?** Brazil superstar Neymar (C), who scored in all three group league games, shares a light moment with teammates Fred (L) and Oscar during a training session in Belo Horizonte ahead of their today's Confederations Cup semifinal against Uruguay.

# Brazil beware Uruguay



**BRAZIL**  
6 WINS

HEAD TO HEAD

Played: 12

Draws: 3



**URUGUAY**  
3 WINS

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Brazil may have waltzed through their group to reach the semi-finals of the Confederations Cup but they are only too aware of the party pooping abilities of Wednesday's rivals' Uruguay.

It was the Uruguayans who delivered Brazilian football its arguably greatest ever blow in winning the 1950 final in Rio's famed Maracana stadium, the revamped version of which will host Sunday's final where either world champions Spain or Italy await.

That 'Maracanazo' loss sent shockwaves around Brazil and they only made up for the reverse eight years later when, with a teenaged Pele in the team, they finally lifted the trophy for the first time in Sweden.

More recently, Uruguay have also shown they can mix it with their more powerful neighbours, the nation of barely 3.5 million lifting the 2011 Copa America in Argentina, where Brazil lost in the quarterfinals to Paraguay.

Brazil goalkeeper Julio Cesar on Monday warned the host nation they must beware if they are not to suffer an ambush in Belo Horizonte, a venue which earned its own place in World Cup folklore in the 1950 event by hosting a United States win over England.

Uruguay have shown some mediocre recent form in World Cup qualifying but the 2011 South American champions have found some form with wins in Brazil over Nigeria and thrashing minnows Tahiti.

Moreover, Julio Cesar points out that in Edinson Cavani, Diego Forlan - match winner against Nigeria with a record 34th goal for the Celeste - and Luis Suarez the Uruguayans have no shortage of firepower.

"They are very strong in attack and can decide a game on their own," the shot-stopper said.



The trio are set to return after being rested for the 8-0 whipping of Tahiti.

"I know them all well and we shall have to beware. The tiniest thing can decide a match," added Cesar, who faces the prospect of playing second tier English football next season after being relegated with Queens Park Rangers.

Brazil, starting to come to the boil under 2002 World Cup handler Luiz Felipe Scolari, saw off Japan, Mexico and Italy but Uruguay had to regroup after losing their first match against world champions Spain, who will face Italy in the other semi-final.

"Nobody is favourite. They will be confident as they won the Copa America in 2011," said Julio Cesar.

The four semi-finalists have won 12 World Cups between them - a record five for Brazil, four for Italy, two for the Uruguayans and one for Spain.

Uruguay last beat the Seleccion in 2001 - ironically it was Luiz Felipe Scolari's first match in charge, but Big Phil would months later lift the World Cup to land a Pentacampeao or fifth title.

Since then the record book reads four wins for the Auriverde and two draws.

Brazil were booed off here after a friendly draw against Chile in the run-up to the Confederations event, but midfielder and local boy Bernard says this is totally different.

"That was a friendly and we were just putting the group together. But now we have a solid platform with three straight wins under our belts."

Uruguay's wily coach Oscar Tabarez says his team has "reached its minimum objective" in making it out of the group stage and while he accepts Brazil are probably favourites, he sticks to an old optimist's dictum.

"In football, nothing is impossible. Though it will be tough as Brazil are a great team and playing at home."

# BALOTELLI

## blow for Italy

AFP, Fortaleza



Having seen Confederations Cup semi-final opponents Spain neatly dismantle Nigeria in their final group game on Sunday, the last thing Italy needed was an injury to increasingly influential striker Mario Balotelli.

The 22-year-old has been ruled out of the tournament due to a torn thigh muscle, and his absence only serves to emphasise his growing importance to Cesare Prandelli's side.

It would have been unthinkable a little over a year ago, but the controversy-prone AC Milan striker is now the player around whom Italy's whole attacking strategy revolves.

Prior to last year's European Championship, Balotelli had only scored one international goal in 10 appearances, but his performances in Poland and Ukraine suggested he was ready to take on a more prominent role.

There were bumps in the road, and he was dropped to the bench for the final group game against the Republic of Ireland, but his two goals in the 2-1 semi-final win over Germany -- the second an unforgettable thunderbolt -- felt like a coming of age.

Although he failed to make a mark in the final as Italy were crushed by Spain, he finished joint-top scorer with three goals and was named in UEFA's 23-man Team of the Tournament.

His form then dipped alarmingly at Manchester City, accelerating his divorce from exasperated coach Roberto Mancini, but since returning to Italy with Milan in January, he has been a revelation.

His 12 goals in 13 games spear-headed the Rossoneri's successful push for a Champions League place, while his friendship with fellow young forwards Stephan El Shaarawy and M'Baye Niang hinted at a revival for a club traumatised by the departures of several senior players in 2012.

Balotelli scored a stunning 25-yard equaliser in a 2-2 friendly draw with Brazil in March and despite a red card in a World Cup qualifier against the Czech Republic earlier this month, the upward trend in his performances continued at the Confederations Cup.

He scored the winning goal in Italy's 2-1 success over Mexico, converted a trademark penalty in the 4-3 defeat of Japan, and teed up Emmanuele Giaccherini in the 4-2 loss to Brazil with an audacious back-heeled volley.

Prior to the tournament, Prandelli settled on a 4-3-2-1 formation in which everything was channelled towards Balotelli.

Despite expressing disappointment



PHOTO: AFP

**Italy striker Mario Balotelli (L) and his girlfriend Fanny Neguesha arrive at the airport in Fortaleza on Monday for a flight back home to treat a thigh injury that ruled him out of the Confederations Cup semifinal against Spain.**

*"It is difficult to talk about Mario. He is unpredictable, but he is very motivated when he dons the blue shirt. We have said for years he has potential."*

at the booking that Balotelli incurred for tearing off his shirt after scoring against Mexico, Prandelli admitted that he has become a pivotal player for his country.

"It is difficult to talk about Mario," said the Italy coach.

"He is unpredictable, but he is very motivated when he dons the blue shirt. We have said for years he has potential."

Italian newspaper La Gazzetta dello Sport reports that Prandelli could opt to field a 3-5-2 formation against Spain in Fortaleza on Thursday, with veteran Alberto Gilardino coming into the attack in Balotelli's place.

El Shaarawy, eclipsed by Balotelli at the San Siro in the latter half of the campaign, will compete with Juventus' Sebastian Giovinco, who scored the winner against Japan, for the right to partner the Bologna man.

"Without Mario, we need to work even more at a collective level," Prandelli said on Monday.

"We'll have players with different characteristics, but the aim is to make the team even more compact."

Prandelli also has fitness concerns over midfielders Andrea Pirlo and Riccardo Montolivo, but against all expectations, Balotelli has now become every bit as indispensable.

# Guardiola charms on return

AFP, Berlin



Pep Guardiola charmed the world's media as he took charge at Bayern Munich, but the new head coach has got straight down to business

in his bid to maintain the European champion's treble-winning success ahead of Wednesday's first training session.

Such is the hype around his arrival that Bayern are expecting up to 25,000 fans for each of Guardiola's first two training sessions at Munich's Allianz Arena on Wednesday and Thursday evening.

Guardiola has pledged to maintain Bayern's success after the Bavarians won last season's Champions League title, lifted the German Cup and broke or equalled 25 Bundesliga records on the way to the German league title

under predecessor Jupp Heynckes.

Having only arrived in Germany on Sunday, the 42-year-old Guardiola launched a charm offensive in front of more than 250 reporters at midday on Monday, then toured the club's training complex before a series of meetings on Tuesday.

The 42-year-old won over the assembled media with Germany's biggest daily Bild insisting "Pep is already German champion" in a nod to his impressive grasp of the language.

"Guardiola makes people dream," enthused Spain's El Mundo Deportivo, while France's L'Equipe labelled him "the Seducer" as the ex-Barcelona boss, who won 14 titles in four years at the Nou Camp, brings a touch of glamour to the Bundesliga.

Even Bayern's German league rivals were impressed with the arrival of the new coach.

"Now Bayern will be even likeable.

Under Jupp Heynckes there had already been the danger of them being liked," quipped Mainz coach Thomas Tuchel in Bild, while Hans-Joachim Watzke, CEO of rivals Dortmund, said: "he's a good guy who comes across well".

Guardiola has brought a five-strong backroom staff with him, but keeps on Hermann Gerland, who worked alongside Heynckes, as an assistant coach.

Assistant Domenec Torrent, who was alongside Guardiola at Barcelona when they won 14 titles between 2008 and 2012, plus fitness trainer Lorenzo Buenaventura and video analyst Carles Planchart both join him from his Camp Nou reign.

His confidant Manel Estiarte will by Guardiola's side in Munich and the only new addition to his team is former Schalke video expert Lars Kornetka who will provide footage for analysis even during the games.



**Bayern Munich's new coach Pep Guardiola walks along the Bavarians' famed locker room inside the Allianz Arena on Monday.**

PHOTO: REUTERS