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Brazil climb 13 places

AFP, Paris

Confederations Cup champions Brazil climbed up 13 places to ninth in the latest FIFA world rankings released on Thursday, while England continued their slide as they dropped down to 15th.

Despite a heavy defeat against hosts Brazil, who secured a record third straight Confederations Cup title, in Sunday's final, Spain continue to lead the way atop the rankings ahead of Germany and Colombia, with the South American nation moving into the top three for the first time after rising four spots.

Argentina dropped one place to fourth, but the biggest losers inside the top 10 were England as Roy Hodgson's side fell six places after consecutive draws against Montenegro, the Republic of Ireland and Brazil.

England's ranking is their lowest since failing to qualify for the 2008 European Championship and could severely harm their World Cup seeding hopes should they qualify for next year's tournament in Brazil.

Copa America title-holders Uruguay jumped seven places to 12th after their run to the semi-finals of the Confederations Cup, while Belgium made the top 10 for the first time as neighbours France fell outside the top 20.



Uruguayan star Diego Forlan (L) poses with his newly wed wife Paz Cardoso at Cardoso's house in Montevideo on Tuesday. Forlan, 34, married Cardoso, 23, a medical student and a hockey player at a private ceremony.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Giggs now player cum coach

AFP, London



Manchester United announced on Thursday that long-serving midfielder Ryan Giggs is to take on a player-coach role with the English Premier League champions next season.

Giggs, who signed a one-year contract extension last season, has been studying for his coaching badges and the 39-year-old is due to acquire the top-level UEFA Pro Licence next year.

"It's a great privilege to be appointed a player-coach. I hope I will be able to bring my experience to bear, having been both a player and part of the Manchester United family for so long," said Giggs, who will work alongside new United manager David Moyes.

"It's no secret that I have been taking my qualifications and I see this as the first step in my future career. I'm really looking forward to working alongside David and the team."

Moyes, who recently succeeded Alex Ferguson as manager, said Giggs' long career gave him the perfect platform to step into coaching.

"I'm delighted that Ryan has accepted the chance to become player-coach," said the Scot.

"His success and ability to adapt his game over a number of years gives him an unrivalled perspective on the modern game. His career is an example to any aspiring young player and I'm sure that both he and the players will benefit from his new role."

United are expected to announce that former player Phil Neville, who played under Moyes at Everton, will also join the back-room staff at Old Trafford.

The club have already confirmed that coaches Steve Round, Chris Woods and Jimmy Lumsden have followed Moyes to Manchester from Goodison Park.

FIFA bans Cameroon

AFP, Geneva

FIFA on Thursday banned Cameroon from international competition due to state meddling in their football association, meaning they fail to gain from a decision to dock rivals Togo three points for fielding a suspended player in their World Cup campaign.

In a statement, FIFA said that Cameroon's FA, or FECAFOOT, had been suspended with immediate effect owing to "government interference", but did not elaborate.

FIFA statutes require that the game's national governing bodies be able to conduct their affairs free from official control.

"During the period of suspension, FECAFOOT may not be represented in any regional, continental or international competitions, including at club level, or in friendly matches," FIFA said.

It said a special committee would be set up to organise elections for a new FECAFOOT governing body by the end of March next year.

RTV win Media Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

RTV emerged champions in the Kool-BSJA Media Cup football tournament with a 4-3 win over Channel 24 in a penalty shootout at the Artificial Turf adjacent to the Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday.

The seven-a-side game moved into shootout after regulation time of 30 minutes failed to produce any decider, though Channel 24 dominated the show from the outset and yielded a few good scoring chances but their forwards failed to cash in.

The Channel 24 even went 2-0 up in the shootout but fell in trouble as they ended the stipulated five shots at 3-3, thanks to two brave saves from man of the final RTV goalkeeper Anwar Haque, who later thwarted the sudden-death shot too.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin handed over the trophies and medals to the players of both teams while Malik Mohammad Sayeed, head of marketing of sponsor Square Toiletries Ltd, Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) president Sayeeduzzaman and general secretary Saidur Rahman Shamim were among others present.

Later, a BSJA eleven played a friendly match against a BFF eleven but suffered a 3-1 defeat thanks to goals from former national booters and BFF executive committee members Ilias Hossain, Arif Khan Joy and Bijon Barua while Mahub Babu of ATN news pulled one goal back for BSJA.

20% La Paz babies named after

NEYMAR

INTERNET, Undated

Confederations Cup Golden Ball winner Neymar is only 21 years old, but he's already one of the few South American footballers capable of making people faint just by looking at him and with his impending arrival in Barcelona, that influence over the consciousness of fans could soon extend to other continents. In the fleeting moments when people are not knocked out cold by his existence, they are apparently busy naming their children after him in large numbers -- a phenomenon that has already extended beyond his native Brazil and to the Bolivian city of La Paz.

According to local paper La Razon, two out of every ten babies have been

named after the Selecao star.

And they estimate that this trend will only increase with the majority of men in La Paz named after the Brazilian.

"We believe that in 17 years most adult males will be called Neymar because that is the current trend," civil registry office representative Remigio Condori stated. "It is the name in fashion right now."

Keep in mind that even Neymar himself didn't name his son Neymar (he opted for Davi Lucca).

Of course, if Brazil's leading scorer at the Confederations Cup repeats that feat at next year's World Cup while Neymar fails to keep living up to his impossibly high expectations, half of Japan could be named Fred in two decades.

Chelsea snap up Van Ginkel

AFP, London

Chelsea have struck a deal to sign 20-year-old Dutch midfielder Marco van Ginkel from Vitesse Arnhem, the Premier League giants announced on Thursday.

Van Ginkel, who made his senior international debut for the Netherlands last year, will reportedly cost the Europa League champions £8 million (\$12.2 million, 9.4 million euros).

"Chelsea Football Club and Vitesse Arnhem have reached an agreement for the transfer of Marco van Ginkel," read a statement on the Chelsea website.

Blanc admires Cavani

REUTERS, Paris



Paris St Germain coach Laurent Blanc would be delighted if Uruguayan international Edinson Cavani joined the French champions as they seek a defender, midfielder and striker.

Napoli's Cavani, top scorer in Serie A last season, has been linked to a host of top European clubs with local media reporting that Qatari-backed PSG have made an offer of up to 63 million euros (\$82.12 million) for the 26-year-old.

"I love this player," Blanc told a news conference on Wednesday. "I have seen him play several times with Uruguay and Napoli. I would be very happy should he be in the PSG squad next season."

Former France coach Blanc, who joined PSG last week to replace Carlo Ancelotti,

wants to strengthen the team having been asked to do better than last season in Europe.

Under Ancelotti, who left to take charge of Real Madrid, PSG won their first domestic title since 1994 and reached the Champions League quarter-finals where they went out on away goals to Barcelona after two draws.

Blanc said he wanted to bring in a left back, with former Barca defender Eric Abidal and Lille's French prospect Lucas Digne topping the wish list.

"It's hard not to like Eric Abidal. But we have to talk about it with the president and (sporting director) Leonardo. I am, we are, interested in both players," he said.

The new coach, who met some of the players for the first time on Monday, also denied media reports that Brazil centre back Thiago Silva was willing to leave the club.

"I talked to him on the phone yesterday and I can tell you that he will be a PSG player."



(L) Two South African football fans wearing makarapas pose with Brazilian and Spanish national team jerseys at the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory in Johannesburg yesterday. The shirts signed by the players of the two Confederations Cup finalists were presented to the ailing South African anti-apartheid leader. And the famous Brazilian shirt (R) contained the following message: To Mandela a gift from Brazilian national team and wish you a good recover(y).

PHOTOS: AFP

Leonardo ban extended

REUTERS, Paris

Paris St Germain sporting director Leonardo's suspension for pushing a match official has been extended to 13 months by the French soccer federation (FFF) after the club failed in its bid to have the original ban reduced.

"The superior appeal commission has suspended Leonardo until June 30, 2014," the FFF said in a statement on Thursday.

Television footage showed the Brazilian bumping into referee Alexandre Castro with his left shoulder in the Parc des Princes tunnel after PSG drew 1-1 with Valenciennes in a Ligue 1 encounter in May.

Fierce fight for places

AFP, Berlin



New coach Pep Guardiola will take European champions Bayern Munich to their pre-season training camp in north Italy on Thursday with a fierce fight for places expected, as well as uncertainty over Mario Gomez's future.

Guardiola, 42, took over from predecessor Jupp Heynckes as Bayern coach last week and after 10 days getting to know his squad, the ex-Barcelona boss takes them to Lake Garda for a week ahead of the new season kick-off on August 9.

Under Heynckes, Bayern became the first German club to win the treble of European, league and cup titles but the players will not be resting on their laurels next season.

"The competition is as tough as

ever," said Germany winger Thomas Mueller, while director of sport Matthias Sammer said everyone is starting "from scratch" with tempers expected to be frayed.

"The team has to deal with the new ideas of a new coach. I expect the players to show a great deal of attention and some sensitivity," added Sammer.

Sammer also said Bayern will take time to adjust to Guardiola's ideas as it remains to be seen whether he will stick with the 4-2-3-1 system which won them the treble or a 3-3-3-1 system similar to that which he used at Barcelona.

"I expect from the club, when necessary, also a bit of patience," said Sammer.

"Guardiola has shown that he has a good idea about football. That shouldn't be an excuse, but I have never seen a team go through a process of change which doesn't take some time."

Bayern play their first competitive match under Guardiola on July 27 against Borussia Dortmund in the German Super Cup, but two friendly matches are scheduled at Lake Garda against local opposition on Friday and Tuesday.

Guardiola is expected to have all but three of his squad available, those missing will be only Brazil's Dante and Luiz Gustavo and Javi Martinez of Spain, who are all recovering from the Confederations Cup campaign.

Germany striker Mario Gomez will also be there amidst speculation of his imminent departure to Italy's Fiorentina and Serie A.

Reports say the 27-year-old has agreed a four-year contract with Fiorentina but the delay is caused by the clubs failure to agree on a price, with Bayern wanting at least 20 million euros (\$26m, £17m) for the striker they paid 35 million euros for in 2009.

Puyol to carry on

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona's talismanic defender Carles Puyol, who has been plagued by a spate of injury problems, said Wednesday he has no intention of retiring and was instead hoping to extend his contract with the Spanish champions.

The 35-year-old Spanish international has not played since he underwent a serious operation on his right knee in March.

He had another operation on the same knee in May to remove a Baker's cyst, also known as a popliteal cyst - a benign swelling that occurs behind the knee joint - prompting speculation that he could put an end to his football career.

But asked by Catalan sports daily El Mundo Deportivo if he was going to retire, Puyol said: "Now is not the moment. I am not going to retire. As much as I have suffered, the excitement and the eagerness to play remain."

"If next season I am not fit and something similar happens to me I will consider it, but right now I feel that I want to carry out my contract and, if I can, extend it," he added in an interview published in the online edition of the newspaper.

"I am recovering slowly but progressing very well. This operation is not like the others. The post operation period is more painful but the recovery is faster."

Puyol, whose current contract with Barcelona runs until June 2016, said he was not sure if he would continue to make international appearances for Spain.

"My plan is to recover from my knee surgery and next season we will see. I will always take the decision that is best for Barcelona. I have a good relationship with (Spain coach Vicente) del Bosque, I will not take a final decision (on his international future) or say anything until I talk to him," he said.

Puyol is a product of Barcelona's youth academy and has spent his entire career at the club.