

# Gerrard thrills huge crowd

AFP, Melbourne



Steven Gerrard sent the 95,000 crowd home happy with a trademark goal in Liverpool's 2-0 win over Australia's Melbourne Victory at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Wednesday.

The Liverpool skipper scored in the first half and Spaniard striker Iago Aspas got home in injury time off some Luis Suarez trickery, to seal a hard-fought win over the two-times A-League champions.

Despite an emotional rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone" by the capacity red-clad crowd prior to the kickoff, Liverpool struggled to dominate the home side -- even though they were missing all their Socceroo stars playing at the East Asian Cup in South Korea.

Gerrard's goal gave Liverpool the half-time lead, but it took until deep into injury time before they added a second goal after some clever lead-up work from want-away Uruguayan striker Suarez.

New signing Aspas was there to score from close range off Suarez's pass with the last kick of the game.

Every touch made by Gerrard was greeted with a huge roar from the pro-Liverpool capacity crowd.

Gerrard had a long-range shot beaten away by goalkeeper Nathan Coe midway through the opening half, but Victory were comfortable on the ball, passing it around the pitch for long periods and not overawed.

The Victory produced a much stiffer, more composed performance than the A-League All-Stars thrown together and battered by Manchester United 5-1 in Sydney a few days earlier.

Liverpool got the breakthrough in the 32nd minute when Gerrard interchanged passes with Welsh midfielder Joe Allen before storming into the goal area and firing past Coe.

While Gerrard was hero-worshipped by the Australian Liverpool fans, a huge roar greeted Suarez sitting among the substitutes when his face was shown on the big screen.

Gerrard made way on the hour, and then Suarez made his way on to the ground among wholesale substitutions in the 72nd minute.

Suarez was playing for the first time for Liverpool since biting Chelsea's Branislav Ivanovic. Suarez was suspended for 10 games over the incident and will miss the start of the Premier League season as a result.

It was Liverpool's second win of their Asian pre-season tour after they defeated Indonesia XI 2-0 in Jakarta last weekend.



Bayern Munich striker Thomas Mueller tries to steer the ball past Barcelona goalkeeper Jose Manuel Pinto (R) during the 'Uli Hoeness Cup' friendly match at the Munich stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Reds mock Suarez bid

AFP, Melbourne



Liverpool owner John W. Henry questioned whether Arsenal were on drugs Wednesday after they made a renewed bid to sign top striker Luis Suarez.

"What do you think they're smoking over there at Emirates?" tweeted the American businessman, after Arsenal reportedly offered 40,000,001 pounds (\$61 million) for the Uruguayan star.

Liverpool rank Suarez, the Premier League's second top-scorer last season with 23 goals, in the same category as Edinson Cavani, who joined France's Paris Saint Germain for 55 million pounds.

According to British reports, Arsenal's offer of over 40 million pounds triggers a clause in Suarez's contract which says Liverpool must consider the bid and inform the player.

It was not clear whether Henry was scoffing at Arsenal's attempt to sign Suarez from a rival club, or at the amount they

are offering.

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard said he had been working to convince Suarez to stay at the club since he flew in from Montevideo, telling him there's "a lot of love" for him at Liverpool.

"He is still a Liverpool player," the club captain told The Australian newspaper.

Suarez, 26, has made clear he is keen to play Champions League football. But manager Brendan Rodgers said he was in "great spirits" as he joined his team-mates.

Asked this week whether he expected Suarez to remain at Liverpool, Rodgers said: "Yes, very much so."

He added that he was relaxed about the Suarez speculation, saying "the bottom line is he is employed by the club".

"He's an integral part of the squad. He's arrived in great spirits," Rodgers said.

Pressed on what would be the price-tag for Suarez, Rodgers replied: "I didn't say we would sell him. I said that every player has a value and a worth. Doesn't mean you've got to sell them."

# Baptista returns to Brazil

AFP, Madrid

Brazilian forward Julio Baptista has agreed a deal to terminate his contract with Malaga and join Brazilian side Cruzeiro, the Spanish club confirmed on Wednesday.

"Julio Cesar Baptista and Malaga football club reached a friendly agreement last Friday to rescind the player's contract and allow him to leave the blue and whites," said a statement on the club's website.

Baptista joined the Andalusians in January 2011 and played a key role in saving Malaga from relegation at the end of the 2011/12 season.

# Pep's Bayern see off Barca

AFP, Munich



Pep Guardiola's Bayern Munich enjoyed a 2-0 win at home to his former employers Barcelona in Wednesday's friendly as the Spaniards only played their stars until the break.

Although Barcelona left new Brazil signing Neymar at home, first-team regulars Javier Mascherano, Adriano, Alex Song and Alexis Sanchez, plus Argentina's Lionel Messi played the first-half in Munich.

Goals by Philipp Lahm and Mario Mandzukic either side of half-time was enough to give the Champions League winners victory over the Catalan giants at a sold-out Allianz Arena in front of 71,137 fans.

With the Uli Hoeness Cup on offer, in honour of Bayern's president, this was Munich's second pre-season title in four days having won Sunday's Telekom Cup final with a 5-1 win at

hosts Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Barcelona had something to prove on their first return to Munich since their 4-0 drubbing in April's Champions League semi-final, which the Germans had backed up with a 3-0 win in Spain.

But with Gerardo Martino back in Spain, ahead of Friday's official unveiling as Barcelona new manager, caretaker coach Jordi Roura had no qualms about blooding his entire bench of juniors at half-time.

Likewise, with the Bundesliga season a fortnight away, Guardiola gave both Brazil centre-back Dante and Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger, back from a minor ankle op, their first pre-season appearances.

Messi made a bright start with a run through midfield before blasting his shot wide, while at the other end, Germany's Toni Kroos forced Barcelona goalkeeper Jose Manuel Pinto into a diving save.

France winger Franck Ribery and Holland's Arjen Robben then combined

and only the desperate boot of Barcelona's Adriano deflected the Dutchman's shot in a lively first five minutes.

Bayern took the lead on 13 minutes when captain Philipp Lahm latched onto Ribery's chipped cross and lobbed his header over Pinto.

At the other end, Bayern's Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer denied Barca's Sergio Roberto with the ball at his feet and pushed the shot wide.

Germany's Thomas Mueller, playing as Bayern's lone striker, was only denied again by Adriano's desperate intervention as Bayern pressed for a second with half-time approaching.

The half-time break heralded a host of changes, including the full Barcelona team, while goal-scorer Mandzukic would become one of 10 second-half introductions.

Bayern grabbed their second on 87 minutes when squad member Diego Contento whipped in a cross which Croatia's Mandzukic buried from close range.

# Falcao slams age rumours

AFP, Bogota

Monaco's Colombian striker Radamel Falcao on Tuesday took to Twitter to slam rumours about his age amid claims he is 29, not 27.

"I am surprised by these media reports about my age - they are ridiculous," said Monaco's recent 60 million euro signing from Atletico Madrid.

"I vehemently deny (the story) and want to put an end to it once and for all," said Falcao after TV station Noticias Uno showed the player's former headmaster as saying the star was born in 1984 and not 1986.

Asked to comment by AFP, Falcao's father Radamel Garcia and the Colombian Football Federation both declined to comment.

# Maradona undergoes eye surgery

AFP, Buenos Aires

Football legend Diego Maradona underwent successful eye surgery on Tuesday, his surgeon said.

Maradona, 52, underwent surgery to correct presbyopia, age-related loss of ability to focus on close-by objects, in the western Argentine city of Mendoza.

"Maradona was fine, it was a normal routine presbyopia procedure we do. He did well; he's a great patient," surgeon Roberto Zaldivar told reporters.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Monaco's 60 million euro signing Colombian striker Radamel Falcao stretches during a training session in La Turbie on Tuesday.

# Moyes won't lose Rooney

AFP, Yokohama

Manchester United boss David Moyes Tuesday said Wayne Rooney is coming back to fitness after a hamstring injury and moved to reassure fans the striker is not leaving the club.

Moyes said Rooney, whose departure from United's pre-season tour with a minor hamstring tear heightened speculation over his future, was on course for a quick recovery.

"So far as I know, he is coming back, he is jogging," Moyes told reporters in Japan. "We are not going to lose him."

Rooney's return could be timely after forwards Robin van Persie and Danny Welbeck both suffered minor problems in Tuesday's 3-2 defeat to Yokohama Marinos in Japan.

Moyes admitted that United had "a couple of wee worries" over the pair, after van Persie was withdrawn with a thigh problem and Welbeck pulled up with a groin twinge.

The start of Moyes's stewardship has been dominated by talk about Rooney, the subject of a bid from United's rivals Chelsea.

Manchester United have games in Osaka and Hong Kong over the next week before rounding off their tour with a game in Sweden. Their first Premier League game is on August 17.

# 'Messi influenced my appointment'

REUTERS, Rosario



Gerardo Martino believes a recommendation from fellow Argentine Lionel Messi was behind his surprise appointment as Barcelona coach on Monday.

"The details of how the situation developed I don't know (but) I have no doubt Jorge (Messi's father) and Lionel had some influence," Martino, the former Paraguay coach, told a news conference in Rosario.

"I'm sure they were asked their opinion and we've come to this outcome," added the 50-year-old, who comes from Rosario like the Messis.

Martino, who led Newell's Old Boys to the Argentine "Final" championship last month, added: "I was expecting some job proposals and I can't say I was expecting this one."

"The situation was unexpected and of course it took me by surprise," added Martino, who quit Newell's after they lost their Libertadores Cup semifinal two weeks ago.

Barcelona went in search of a new coach after Tito Vilanova had to step aside to undergo more treatment for throat cancer.

"This is a very important job opportunity which came about due to a very unfortunate occurrence (Vilanova's illness)," Martino said.

# Juve earned more than Bayern

AFP, Paris

Juventus may have been knocked out in the quarterfinals but they were the biggest financial winners from last season's Champions League competition.

Bayern Munich beat German compatriots Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in May's Wembley final yet neither side could match Juve's earning power, a UEFA report said.

The Italian champions made 65.3 million euros (\$86.3 million) last season from their participation, more than 10 million euros more than Bayern earned.

The two finalists unsurprisingly were the next biggest winners with Bayern earning 55.0 million euros and Dortmund making 54.2 million euros.

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