

Copa glory for Atletico

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Former Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan star Ronaldinho was instrumental in helping Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro defeat Paraguay's Olimpia in a penalty shoot-out on Wednesday to win the Copa Libertadores for the first time.

Trailing 0-2 from the first leg, Atletico opened the scoring through the tournament's leading scorer Jo in the 36th minute but had to wait until three minutes from time to snatch the equaliser through defender Leonardo Silva.

After a goalless extra-time, the final went to penalties which the Brazilians won 4-3 in front of 60,000 fans at the Mineirao Stadium.

A World Cup winner with Brazil in 2002 and Champions League winner with Barcelona in 2006, Ronaldinho returned to his home country in 2011 with his top ambition being to win the South American continental cup to go with his other honours.

"This is why I came back to Brazil," the two-time winner of the world player of the year award said. "Not long ago people were saying that I was done but we showed today that isn't the case."

Olimpia, aiming for their fourth Copa Libertadores title and first since 2002, were left rueing a host of golden goal opportunities.

"You can't miss so many chances in a Copa final," coach Ever Almeida said.

Atletico will now go on to represent South America at the World Club championships in Morocco in December alongside teams such as Bayern Munich and Mexican side Monterrey.



It was the title I was missing. I came back to Brazil for this. Everyone said I was finished, let them talk.



Brazilian club Atletico Mineiro's players celebrate with the Copa Libertadores trophy after their tie-breaker win in the final against Paraguayan Olimpia at the Mineirao Stadium in Belo Horizonte on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bolt says he's clean

AFP, London



Six-time Olympic champion Usain Bolt insisted he was a "clean" athlete and that fans could trust him despite recent failed drugs test by Jamaica's sprint rival Asafa Powell and Tyson Gay.

"I was made to inspire people," Bolt told a London news conference on Thursday, ahead of his return to the Olympic track on Friday where he will run in the 100 metres at the Diamond League Anniversary Games.

"I was given a gift, I know I'm clean. For me it happens [failed dope tests], I'm not going to stress about it," added Bolt, the 100m and 200m world record holder.

Bolt's compatriot Powell, the former

100m world record holder, tested positive for the banned stimulant oxilofrine at Jamaica's national trials last month and is still waiting to discover whether analysis of his 'B' sample confirms the original finding.

Meanwhile United States sprinter Gay also tested positive for the same stimulant in an out-of-competition test in May.

But Bolt, 27 next month, refused to condemn either of his rivals Thursday.

"There's a lot of details to be discussed, I'm just waiting to see what's going on," Bolt said.

"I spoke to Asafa, it's tough, it's hard. I spoke to him and told him to stay strong," said Bolt, who in London last year repeated his Beijing feat of winning the 100m, 200m and 4x100m Olympic gold medals.

"In life you learn anything is possible. You have to be very careful as an athlete, there are a lot of things on the banned list."

Bolt has never failed a drugs test and most observers of athletics agree, such is his stellar reputation, that it would be a potentially terminal disaster for the sport if he did test positive for a banned substance.

Asked how track and field fans could "trust" him, Bolt replied: "How long have you been following Usain Bolt?"

"If you've been following me since 2002 you know I've been doing phenomenal things since I was 15, I've broken every record there is to break. Right now I'm living out my dream. I've shown throughout the years I've always been great."

Pep wants to cut squad

AFP, Munich



Coach Pep Guardiola will sit down with director of sport Matthias Sammer and chairman Kaz Rummenigge about reducing Bayern Munich's star-studded squad after they play Borussia Dortmund on Saturday in a repeat of the Champions League final.

Guardiola's Bayern enjoyed a 2-0 win at home to his former employers Barcelona in Wednesday's friendly.

With the Bundesliga just over two weeks away, Guardiola has some tough decisions to make as he attempts to accommodate a plethora of stars with 10 full international midfielders in his squad.

With Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger and Mario Goetze returning from injury and Spain's Javi Martinez back from Confederations Cup duty, some of Bayern's

stars will find themselves on the bench next season unless they find new clubs.

"We will talk about this after the Super Cup, we are still getting to know the players," said Guardiola, who played Germany winger Thomas Mueller as a lone striker against Barcelona.

Having signed Spain Under-21 captain Thiago Alcantara from Barcelona, Guardiola has said he is trying out ideas.

But Brazil's Luiz Gustavo has been linked to 2009 German champions Wolfsburg, while Liverpool are reported to be interested in Swiss winger Xherdan Shaqiri.

"We have several players who can play in different positions, I like players who are flexible and can fit into different systems," said the 42-year-old Guardiola.

"Toni Kroos has dropped into a defensive midfielder position, I am trying things out and want to test things in these friendly games."

C'Ron fan gets lucky break

AGENCIES, London

Cristiano Ronaldo free kick during Real Madrid's 6-0 win at Bournemouth to start their pre-season broke the wrist of an 11-year-old fan in two places. Though Ronaldo went on to score twice, one of his trademark free kicks early on in the match went just over the crossbar and hit young Charlie Silverwood on the arm.

"It was Ronaldo's first free-kick of the game. It went straight for me so I blocked the ball with the palm of my left hand and the force, I suppose, reverberated up my arm and broke my wrist," Charlie told the BBC.

"Real Madrid is a once in a lifetime opportunity - seeing them play your local club - so I watched the rest of the match, mostly in pain considering I still had the sling, and afterwards I then went to hospital.

"If I hadn't blocked it with the palm of my hand I would have no front teeth." Ronaldo and Real Madrid did send the boy a shirt signed by the entire team while Bournemouth added an autographed ball as a goodwill gesture.

BHF moves to reassure Jimmy

SPORTS REPORTER

The officials of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday went to the house of national striker Rasel Mahmud Jimmy after the hockey star said that he might quit following a threatening SMS.

Jimmy has reportedly faced a lot of pressure from his parents to quit the game following the SMS and the BHF officials paid a visit to reassure his parents.

The officials spoke to his mother Meher Nigar to reassure her that the police were working to locate the sender of the SMS by Monday. Jimmy is taking part in the national camp for the Asia Cup.

USA in Gold Cup final

AFP, Dallas

The United States advanced to the CONCACAF Gold Cup final by beating Honduras 3-1 on Wednesday.

The victory included a stellar two goals and an assist from Landon Donovan, taking the Americans to a national team record of 10 straight wins.

"We showed again we can overcome a great obstacle and we've got one more to go," Donovan said of a USA side that will now enter a fifth consecutive Gold Cup final.

The USA will attempt to clinch their first title since 2007 in the biennial North American regional tournament on Sunday when they face Panama who beat Mexico 2-1 in the other semifinal.



Manchester United stars, (L-R) Fabio da Silva, Ryan Giggs, and Ashley Young warm up during a training session at the Nagai Stadium in Osaka yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Cesc bid ongoing'

AFP, Osaka



Manchester United boss David Moyes said Thursday the English champions' attempts to sign Barcelona midfielder Cesc Fabregas remained alive after reports said two earlier bids had failed.

Moyes, who was appointed as Alex Ferguson's successor at the end of last season, tabled an initial offer of 25 million pounds (\$38 million, 29 million euros), later upping the ante to 30 million pounds, British reports said.

Asked about any progress in United's talks with Barcelona on Spanish international midfielder Fabregas, Moyes simply said: "Ongoing".

Moyes is keen to sign the creative midfielder but reports from Spain suggest Barca will not make a decision on Fabregas until they appoint a successor to cancer-stricken coach Tito Vilanova.

Moyes also said Robin van Persie, who pulled out of United's last match on their Asian tour with a thigh-injury, was expected to play against Cerezo Osaka on Friday despite being absent from training.

Injured striker Wayne Rooney is on the mend, he added. "Wayne is running, probably at the level where we thought he would be just now and he'll pick up his work again," he said.

'Winter WC to cause chaos'

AFP, Hong Kong



Sepp Blatter's plans to move the 2022 World Cup in Qatar to the winter would spark global "chaos", Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore said on Thursday.

FIFA president Blatter last week confronted the increasingly prickly issue by stating he believed the tournament could not take place in the summer, and that position has been backed by the international players' union FIFPro.

They are concerned about the health dangers -- to players and fans -- of staging the tournament in the Gulf in June and July, where temperatures rocket to 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit).

"We are on the record as saying we don't think it works and we think it's wrong," Scudamore told AFP in Hong Kong.

"We think that the World Cup should have been bid for on the basis that it was going to be where it was going to be, and the great and good of FIFA and the wise people that made those decisions should have made their decisions in the full knowledge of what the consequences were."

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