

Soldado on the spot

AFP, London

New signing Roberto Soldado proved there is life without Gareth Bale by giving Tottenham Hotspur a 1-0 win at promoted Crystal Palace in their Premier League opener on Sunday.

Bale, strongly linked with a move to Real Madrid, was absent with a foot injury, but a 50th-minute penalty from £26 million (\$40.4 million, 30.4 million euros) club record signing Soldado meant Spurs did not miss him.

Tottenham manager Andre Villas-Boas gave league debuts to Soldado, Paulinho and Nacer Chadli, and his side largely controlled the first half beneath bright summer sunshine at Selhurst Park.

Palace goalkeeper Julian Speroni had to tip a dipping Gylfi Sigurdsson shot over the bar and then thwart Soldado at his near post, while Chadli headed over from a deep Aaron Lennon cross in first-half stoppage time.

The breakthrough arrived five minutes into the second half, with Soldado adroitly sending Speroni the wrong way from 12 yards after Dean Moxey blocked Lennon's cross with a flailing hand.

Another of Spurs' new recruits, French midfielder Etienne Capoue, made his entrance as a 57th-minute substitute.

Rooney mum on future

AFP, London



Unsettled striker Wayne Rooney refused to discuss his future at Manchester United in his first public comments since he was linked with a move to Chelsea.

The 27-year-old made his first appearance for United this season as a substitute in their 4-1 win at Swansea City on Saturday, laying on second-half goals for Robin van Persie and Danny Welbeck.

However, a picture that was circulated widely on Twitter showed that he did not celebrate with his team-mates after Van Persie's goal put United 3-0 up, fuelling speculation he remains concerned about his Old Trafford future.

United have rejected two bids for Rooney from Chelsea during the close season, but he was reluctant to comment on their approaches.

Quizzed about his future by Sunday newspaper reporters after England's 3-2 friendly win over Scotland on Wednesday, he said: "I am here to talk about England."

Rooney missed United's entire pre-season campaign with hamstring and shoulder injuries but played for the first 66 minutes against Scotland before his second-half cameo at Swansea.

He admitted that he needs to get more playing time behind him in order to return to top form.

"You are always looking forward to a good pre-season," Rooney said.

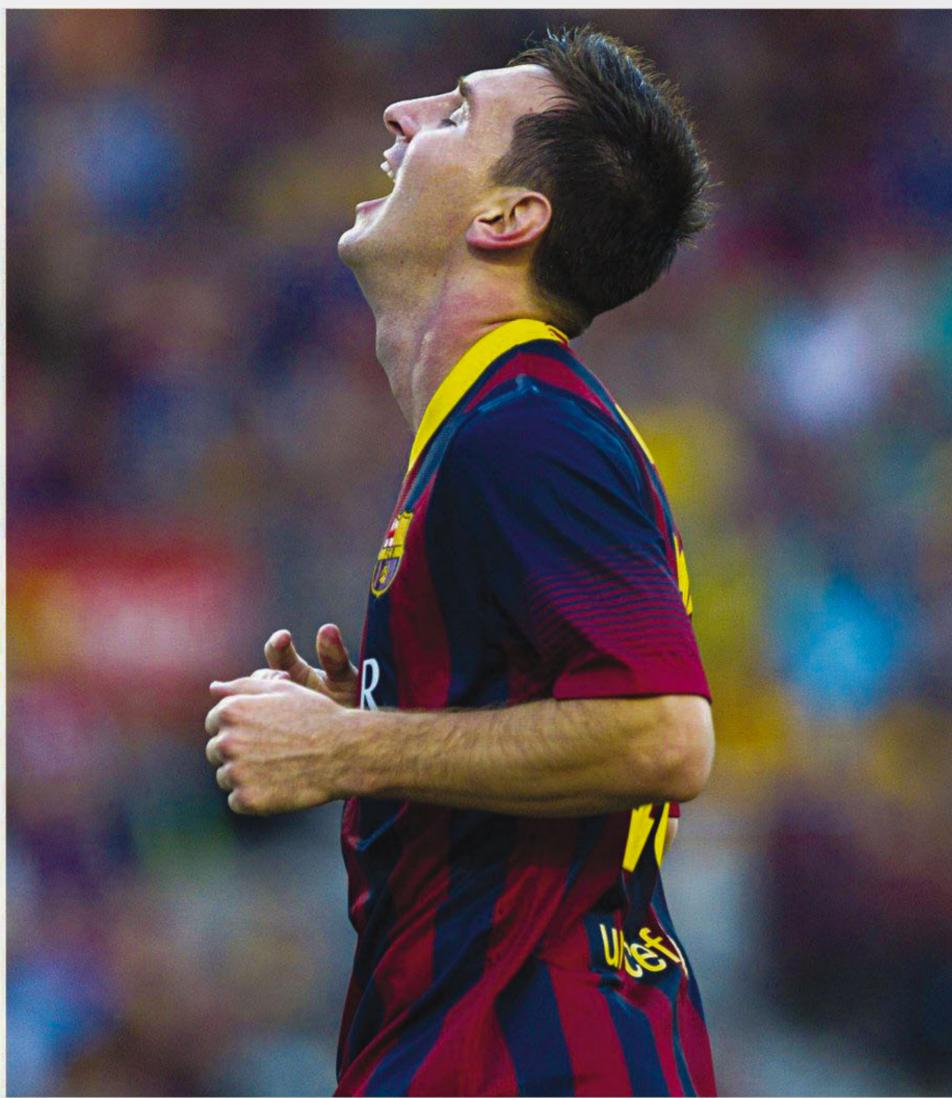
"It's important you do that, but I had the injury to my hamstring and the injury to my shoulder so it's disappointing."

"But I've had to deal with it and I have been working hard to try to get myself fit again."

"I've missed pre-season with a couple of injuries but I played a few minutes (against Scotland) and hopefully I can kick on now."

RESULTS

Arsenal 1 (Giroud 6) **Aston Villa 3** (Benteke 22, 61-pen, Luna 85)
Liverpool 1 (Sturridge 37) Stoke 0
 Norwich 2 (Whittaker 51, Van Wolfswinkel 71) Everton 2 (Barkley 61, Coleman 65)
 Sunderland 0 **Fulham 1** (Kasami 52)
 Swansea 1 (Bony 82) **Manchester Utd 4** (Van Persie 34, 72, Welbeck 36, 90)
 West Brom 0 **Southampton 1** (Lambert 90-pen)
West Ham 2 (Cole 13, Nolan 76)
 Cardiff 0



Barcelona's Argentine superstar Lionel Messi celebrates one of his two goals in his side's 7-0 thrashing of Levante at the Camp Nou yesterday.

Mourinho's winning return

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho made a winning return as Chelsea manager with a 2-0 success at home to promoted Hull City in the club's opening Premier League game on Sunday.

Back at Stamford Bridge after spells at Inter Milan and Real Madrid, Mourinho saw his side prevail through early goals from Oscar and Frank Lampard on a warm, sunny afternoon in west London.

"There are no doubts it was a deserved victory," Mourinho told Sky Sports.

On the reception he received from the Chelsea fans, he added: "It was fantastic. It's something you don't forget, it's something that makes me think I made the right move by coming back."

"I'm one of them (the fans), so I'm so pleased and so happy with that."

Goalkeeper Allan McGregor was among five debutants for Hull and he was quickly involved, clumsily clattering Torres but then plunging to his right to repel Lampard's subsequent penalty in the sixth minute.

It was a temporary reprieve, however, as seven minutes later Oscar put Chelsea ahead by poking the ball beneath McGregor from De Bruyne's pass.

Lampard got on the score-sheet in the 25th minute with a dipping 30-yard free-kick that deceived McGregor.

Pep calm after off-key win

RESULTS

VfB Stuttgart 0 **Bayer Leverkusen 1** (Schwaab 42-og)
VfL Wolfsburg 4 (Knoche 55, Vieirinha 61, Naldo 67, Kutschke 90+1) Schalke 04 0
Werder Bremen 1 (Ekici 23) Augsburg 0
 Freiburg 1 (Freis 71) **Mainz 05 2** (Zimling 64, Mueller 68)
 Hamburg 1 (van der Vaart 44-pen)
Hoffenheim 5 (Roberto Firmino 5, 78, Volland 51, Modeste 67, 75)
 Eintracht Frankfurt 0 **Bayern Munich 1** (Mandzukic 13)
Borussia Moenchengladbach 3 (Krusc 20, Kramer 53, Daems 66) Hanover 96 0

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich manager Pep Guardiola blamed last week's interna-



tional friendlies for the European champions' below-par performance in Saturday's laboured 1-0 win at Eintracht Frankfurt.

A superb volley from Croatia striker Mario Mandzukic was the highlight of an otherwise off-key performance as Bayern failed to dominate Frankfurt despite enjoying 70 percent possession.

Guardiola pointed to the fact that he had 15 of his 26-man squad away on international duty last Wednesday with their respective nations, allowing him only limited time to prepare for the trip to Eintracht.

The ex-Barcelona boss also said he was pleased to see the defending champions control the game better than they had done in their 3-1 home win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on the opening weekend of the season.

"We had much more control over the game compared to last week," said Guardiola, with his side level at the top of the table with Bayer Leverkusen after the first two matches.

"We allowed Gladbach far too many chances on the break, but it was much better today."

"It's never easy after an international break, because we only had three days together."

"We still created plenty of chances, so I'm happy and 100 percent satisfied."

The result means Bayern have the maximum return of six points from their opening matches as they equalled the club record of 27 Bundesliga matches without defeat.

But Eintracht captain Alexander Meier had a penalty appeal turned down in the 90th minute and Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer admitted the Bavarians rode their luck.

Barcelona maul Levante

RESULTS

Real Sociedad 2 (Vela 42, Seferovic 70) Getafe 0
 Valladolid 1 (Ebert 31) **Athletic Bilbao 2** (Susaeta 28, Muniain 50)
Valencia 1 (Costa 64) Malaga 0
Barcelona 7 (Sanchez 2, Messi 11, 42-pen, Alves 23, Pedro 26, 73, Xavi 45) Levante 0

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona welcomed new manager Gerardo Martino with a stunning display in his first competitive match in charge as they hammered Levante 7-0 at the Camp Nou on Sunday.

The Spanish champions showed no signs of early season rust as they ripped the visitors apart with goals from Alexis Sanchez, Lionel Messi (2), Dani Alves, Pedro and Xavi giving them an incredible 6-0 lead at half-time.

There was even more for the home fans to cheer after the break as Neymar



made his competitive debut as a substitute and even after Martino had shown the visitors some mercy by withdrawing Messi with 20 minutes remaining, more woeful defending

allowed Pedro to round off the scoring with his second of the game.

Martino had taken the decision to leave Neymar, Andres Iniesta and Jordi Alba on the bench after their international commitments in midweek and the Argentine's mark on the side he only took charge of on July 23 was very much in evidence as the hosts pressed high up the field from the off to leave Levante camped inside their own half.

It only took Barca barely two minutes to register their first goal of the campaign as a slick pass from Xavi released Cesc Fabregas through on goal and he unselfishly squared for Sanchez to roll into an empty net.

Messi then got his account for the season up and running as he and Pedro exchanged a lovely one-two inside the area and the Argentine side-footed home from close range.

The third arrived on 23 minutes as this time Messi's pressing high up the field proved decisive as he robbed the ball and fed Fabregas and even when Keylor Navas got a hand to the former Arsenal man's pass, the ball dropped kindly for Alves to convert.

Another incredible defence splitting pass from Messi allowed Pedro to curl home the fourth moments later and after Pedro Lopez had stupidly upended Adriano inside the area, Messi stepped up to slam home his second of the evening from the penalty spot.

Barca's first-half rampage still wasn't complete though as Xavi marked the 15th anniversary of his Barca debut with a prodded finish from another delightful lofted through ball by Fabregas.

Huntelaar adds to Schalke woes

AFP, Berlin

Schalke 04's Holland striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar is an injury doubt for Wednesday's Champions League play-off, first-leg tie at home to Greek side PAOK after injuring his right knee.

Huntelaar, who scored twice last weekend in the 3-3 draw at home to Hamburg, injured the knee in a first-half clash with Wolfsburg goalkeeper Diego Benaglio as Schalke lost 4-0 on Saturday in the Bundesliga.

"It looks like a medial ligament injury, I have to wait and see what the test results are on Sunday," said 30-year-old Huntelaar, who has scored 49 goals in 84 league games for Schalke.

Schalke coach Jens Keller admitted Huntelaar is doubtful for Wednesday's European tie.

"It does not look good," said Keller before calling extra training on Sunday in the wake of his team's rout.

After Metalist Kharkiv were thrown out of the Champions League by Europe's governing body UEFA for match-fixing last week, PAOK replaced the Ukrainians in the play-off.



Bayern Munich striker Mario Mandzukic is ecstatic at scoring a stunning goal in their Bundesliga clash against Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

Eng take in 2 rookies

AFP, London

England included the uncapped duo of Warwickshire all-rounder Chris Woakes and Lancashire left-arm spinner Simon Kerrigan in a 14-man squad announced Sunday for next week's fifth and final Ashes Test against Australia at The Oval.

Woakes, already a one-day international, was brought in after pace bowler all-rounder Tim Bresnan, who started with bat and ball in England's 74-run fourth Test win at Chester-le-Street concluded Monday, was ruled out for the rest of the season with a stress fracture in his lower back.

And with pitches at The Oval renowned for taking turn, Kerrigan was added to give England - who've now won three successive Test series against Australia for the first time since the 1950s.

SQUAD
 Alastair Cook (captain), Joe Root, Jonathan Trott, Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, Jonny Bairstow, Matt Prior, Stuart Broad, Graeme Swann, James Anderson, Chris Woakes, Chris Tremlett, Steven Finn, Simon Kerrigan.

Tetchy Wenger defends policy

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger was forced to mount a defiant defence of Arsenal's transfer policy after his side suffered a disastrous start to the Premier League campaign.

A 3-1 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday prompted an angry reaction from supporters at the Emirates Stadium who made it clear they were unimpressed with Wenger's failure to land his principal targets during pre-season.

Yaya Sanogo, the young French striker, remains the only newcomer after failed attempts to sign Gonzalo Higuain, Luiz Gustavo and Luis Suarez.

Yet while Gunners boss Wenger insists he will continue with his efforts to strengthen his squad, he denied the absence of a big name signing was responsible for his side's dismal opening day defeat to an impressive Villa side.

"Could we have won the game with the players we had on the pitch? I say yes," Wenger said.

"And if we don't spend the money it's because we don't find the players."

"We want our fans to be happy and when you don't achieve that you feel sorry and really disappointed."

"My job is to make the fans happy. But we haven't lost a game because of that. That's what I want to convince you of."

"We are in the market, everybody knows we are ready to buy players, but until we buy players we have to win football games and it's not an excuse not to win the game."

Wenger was in a tetchy mood during his post-match press conference as he fielded a barrage of questions about his club's plight.

"You got what you wanted, you should be happy," Wenger told reporters. "Before the start of the season that was all you wrote in the papers so what do you expect?"

"Everybody has opinions and I have to live with that. I think in 16 years I have shown my loyalty to this club."

Umar had a seizure on flight

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's fast-rising batsman Umar Akmal suffered a seizure during a flight to Jamaica and spent a night in a hospital before being rushed home, a relative said Sunday.

"We are told that Umar suffered a seizure on the flight to Jamaica and was rushed to a hospital where he spent a night before being rushed back to Pakistan," the relative told AFP.

Umar had been playing for Barbados Tridents in the ongoing Caribbean Premier League after Pakistan's recent tour to the West Indies.

"Umar's physio was with him who took him to the hospital. The same official will be travelling with him to Dubai as a precaution," added the relative.

Doctors in the West Indies have ruled Umar out of any danger, the family said.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Saturday pulled the 23-year-old from the squad to tour Zimbabwe and replaced him with wicketkeeper batsman Sarfraz Ahmed.