

Duo eager for action

REUTERS, Berlin



Germany's versatile attacking midfielders Marco Reus and Mario Goetze are hoping their time to shine in the national team will come at the World Cup in Brazil next month after both players endured a disappointing maiden tournament at Euro 2012.

The 24-year-old Reus and Goetze, 21, are considered the best players of their generation in Germany but they have yet to leave their mark in a major tournament for their country.

"We both want to play, that's for sure," Goetze, sitting next to Reus, told a news conference at their northern Italian training camp. "At Euro 2012 I did not have any rhythm. I had been injured prior to that so it was a different situation."

The Bayern Munich midfielder had made only a 10-minute substitute appearance at their Euro 2012 quarterfinal win over Greece but he seems to have carved out a starting spot since then.

"How often do you get to play in a World Cup? It is something special and we have set ourselves big aims," said Goetze, who won the domestic league and Cup double with Bayern this season.

Just like Goetze, Reus had also limited playing time two years ago, featuring only in two games.

"I hope to be playing at this tournament because it is as big as it gets," said Reus, who almost single-handedly led Dortmund to a second-place finish in the league with a superb second half of the campaign where he either scored or set up the vast majority of his team's goals.

It is difficult to imagine a starting Germany without both players though competition in the crowded midfield is fierce with Mesut Ozil, Toni Kroos, Thomas Mueller, Julian Draxler, Lukas Podolski and Andre Schuerrle also in contention.

"The Euro is two years ago and I think I have developed even further," said Reus. "Now I have the rhythm I need. I am in a good position but it is not in my hands it is up to the coach."

The Germans will play Ghana, Portugal and United States in their World Cup Group G.

Goetze's ability to play as a striker further enhances his chances of making the starting lineup like Reus, who is expected to charge down the left wing, slicing open opponents' defences.

"We both feel well anywhere in midfield. Up front, centre left or right, it is just good that we can play these different positions," Reus said.



Germany players stretch during a training session in the scenic St. Martin, northern Italy yesterday in preparation for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tiki-taka on the decline?

AFP, Paris



FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil

Having won the last three major international tournaments, it is worth wondering if reigning champions Spain might finally come a cropper at this World Cup.

Their remarkable run of success simply has to come to an end eventually, and there are concerns that their style of football -- epitomised by the ageing Xavi Hernandez -- is already outdated.

Spain followed the Barcelona way of playing to win the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012. In the latter tournament, they ultimately triumphed in style, destroying Italy

4-0 in the final, but the sterile way in which they dominated earlier matches led many to label Vicente del Bosque's side boring.

Even if wasn't always thrilling, it was effective. But the two years since have witnessed the decline of the Pep Guardiola empire at Barcelona.

The Catalans' possession-based game, popularly known as 'tiki-taka', was made to look utterly one-dimensional as they were taken apart by Bayern Munich, all power and fast transitions from defence to attack, in the Champions League semifinals in 2013.

Fast forward a year and Bayern, with Guardiola in charge, were playing the 'tiki-taka' and being torn apart on the counter-attack by Real Madrid at the same stage. Recently, as a result, it has become popular to

mourn the death of that style.

Alternative ways of playing have emerged at club level. Borussia Dortmund's high-octane counter-pressing game took them to the 2013 Champions League final, while Atletico Madrid have achieved extraordinary success with a 4-4-2 formation centred around defensive discipline, midfield industry and the brute attacking force of Diego Costa.

Jose Mourinho has taken things to extremes at times. His approach is often that if you willingly renounce possession you will make fewer mistakes and therefore win the game.

But to say that 'tiki-taka' is dead is to jump to conclusions. After all, until 2011, Guardiola's Barcelona mixed their mesmerising short passing with a crucial element, a high-energy pressing game. And Guardiola's Bayern

won the double in Germany in the season just finished.

'Tiki-taka' can still succeed if played at the right tempo, and Spain are set to maintain the faith in a style that has served them so well previously.

"Why would we change? We've done very well with this style. There's no need to change it," midfielder David Silva told British newspaper The Independent.

There are different ways to win matches, though, and all are valid. Playing with two forwards has become less commonplace in the last decade, and both the 4-2-3-1 and Barcelona's classic 4-3-3 with one central forward, or perhaps a false nine, will be prominent in Brazil.

Nevertheless, several Central and South American sides will play with two strikers, including Uruguay and Chile.

Ronaldinho to rent out his home

INTERNET

Ronaldinho missed out on Brazil's World Cup squad, but now he's hoping to join FIFA and corrupt politicians in profiting off of the tournament. For just R\$534,148 (\$15,354) per night, you can rent the legendary footballer's Rio de Janeiro home through Airbnb.

The five bedroom, six bathroom house, which is inside a gated community in Rio's Barra da Tijuca neighbourhood, has a verified listing page on Airbnb and Ronaldinho tweeted the link to advertise the accommodations with the hashtag "#CasaR10."

The sparsely decorated house, which also has a three-car garage, features a pool and several unique features that are not at all surprising to find in a place Ronaldinho calls home.

A security deposit of \$1023 is required and an addition charge of the same amount will be added on for more than three guests. Smoking is only allowed outside and a "service team" will be available to guests. The house also features a sauna, barbecue, cellar, and "a special refrigerator for beer."

Evra signs new deal

AFP, London

Patrice Evra ended speculation that he was set to leave Manchester United by signing a one-year contract extension with the Premier League club on Friday.

France left-back Evra was reportedly considering quitting United after eight years but, following the confirmation of Louis van Gaal's appointment as the team's new manager, he has decided to extend his contract, which was due to expire next week, by another 12 months.

A tweet from United's official Twitter account read: "We can confirm that Patrice Evra has extended his contract at mufc for another year."

Evra seemed likely to leave after it emerged that United had tabled a bid for Southampton's England left-back Luke Shaw.

But the former Monaco defender has opted to remain for at least the first year of the van Gaal era in Manchester.

Evra's contract extension will be welcomed by the vast majority of United fans, who have taken the 33-year-old to their hearts since he joined the club in 2006.

Evra is a popular member of the dressing room too and is renowned for his leadership skills.

Fergie's wines sell big in Hong Kong

AFP, Hong Kong

A single bottle of wine belonging to legendary former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson sold for more than HK\$1 million Saturday at a Hong Kong auction, part of a global 5,000 bottle sale.

The wines being auctioned, which are part of Ferguson's collection, are worth an estimated £3 million (\$5 million) and include many rare and fine wines, such as Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Burgundies, and Finest First Growth Bordeaux from Chateau Petrus and Chateau Lafite, ranging from 1986 to 2011 vintages.

Saturday's sale at Christie's Hong Kong saw around 90 percent of 257 lots sold for a total of almost HK\$30 million (\$3.87 million), the auction house said. The firm's pre-sale estimate for the Hong Kong sale was between HK\$26 million and HK\$32 million.

Rosberg takes pole for Monaco GP

AFP, Monaco

Nico Rosberg took pole from Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton for Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix after a controversial final qualifying session on Saturday.

Hamilton was on target to top the time sheets with his final qualifying lap but his effort was negated as the yellow flag was out when he passed Rosberg's car which had spun off.

That left Rosberg in pole with his previous fastest lap of 1min 15.989sec.

Behind the Mercedes-occupied front row came the Red Bulls of Daniel Ricciardo and Sebastian Vettel.



Croatia players jog during a training session in Bad Tatzmannsdorf, Austria on Friday as part of their preparation for the upcoming World Cup in Brazil.

PHOTO: AFP

Fixing inquiry nears end

AFP, Wellington



An inquiry into corruption that has rocked world cricket is entering its final stages, officials said Saturday, as former New Zealand international Chris Cairns was to fly to London to be interviewed by police.

Cairns has vehemently denied any involvement in corruption but believes he is the person alleged to be "Player X" - the match-fixing ringleader mentioned by former teammates Lou Vincent and Brendon McCullum.

International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive Dave Richardson said he believed investigators were "not far away" from interviewing Cairns and the inquiry would be wrapped up in a matter of weeks.

"We are at the end of the investigation. It is close to being finalised and I'm sure Chris Cairns will be spoken to and given an opportunity to put his side of the story," Richardson told Radio Sport. Cairns' lawyer confirmed to the

New Zealand Herald that he was heading to England on Saturday to be interviewed.

"Chris Cairns is meeting with the Met police to conclude the interview he started and is also hoping to meet with the ICC anti-corruption unit," lawyer Aaron Lloyd said.

Details of the investigation into match and spot-fixing of cricket matches in several countries, as well as the role of Player X, have emerged in a series of leaked documents in recent weeks.

Much of the evidence came from former New Zealand international Vincent, who already faces several charges along with Pakistani pacesman Naveed Arif.

According to the leaked evidence, Vincent provided a "treasure trove" of information about offers of cash and sex to fix matches.

New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum, who is not under investigation, has told how he was shocked when his "hero" Player X unsuccessfully tried to recruit him in a match-fixing scam in 2008.

Cairns confirmed last December he had been linked to the corruption investigation and has since consistently challenged ICC investigators to talk to him.

He has already held initial talks with London's Metropolitan Police.

When details of Vincent's testimony first emerged, the ICC suggested it could take more than a year before the investigation was completed, but Richardson has now indicated "a matter of weeks" was realistic.

"Although part of it does involve a police investigation in the UK, which I can't really vouch for as to when that will be finalised.

"But certainly from our perspective the investigations are close to finality and hopefully we should be making announcements pretty soon," he said.

Vincent and Arif face multiple charges by the England and Wales Cricket Board over allegedly fixing the outcome of a match against Kent when they were playing for Sussex in 2011. Vincent has said he expected to face more charges.

Luiz joining PSG

AFP, London



David Luiz is on the verge of joining Paris St Germain after Chelsea on Friday revealed they have agreed a deal to sell the Brazil defender to the French champions.

Luiz's move is reported to be worth a world record fee for a defender of £50 million (\$84 million, 61 million euros) and the transfer will be rubber-stamped once he has agreed personal terms and passed a medical.

"Chelsea Football Club and Paris Saint-Germain have agreed terms for the transfer of David Luiz to the French club," a statement on Chelsea's website announced.

"The move is now subject to David Luiz agreeing personal terms with PSG and passing a medical examination." PSG representatives are believed to have flown out to Brazil to complete Luiz's medical at the World Cup hosts' training base on Friday.

The French club's willingness to shatter the record for a defender was motivated by their desire to seal a deal before Barcelona or Bayern Munich could swoop for the centre-back.

PSG claim the formalities of the deal will be completed on June 10 to ensure Luiz can concentrate on the forthcoming World Cup.

A statement on the PSG website read: "Paris St Germain, Chelsea FC and David Luiz would like to confirm that they reached an agreement regarding the terms of an upcoming transfer of the Brazilian defender that would occur during the next transfer window which is to start on 10 June 2014.

"In accordance with the player's wish to prepare for and play in the World Cup in his home country in the best possible conditions, both clubs and David Luiz wished to reach an agreement as soon as possible between, on the one hand, Paris St Germain and Chelsea FC, and on the other, between the Parisian club and the player, in order to formalise the transfer as soon as the transfer window opens."

The hefty price convinced Chelsea to off-load Luiz, who was primarily used in a defensive midfield role by Blues manager Jose Mourinho after being unable to break up the central defensive partnership of John Terry and Gary Cahill.

Luiz, who joined the west Londoners from Benfica for £21.3 million in January 2011, made only 19 appearances in the Premier League this season, although he did help Chelsea eliminate PSG from the Champions League quarterfinals.

The 27-year-old's fee will beat the two previous highest fees for a defender, both paid by PSG for Marquinhos, who cost £30.1 million, and Thiago Silva, who arrived from AC Milan for £35.3 million.

Meanwhile, the previous best deal received by an English club for a defender was when Rio Ferdinand left Leeds for Manchester United for £30 million 12 years ago.

The healthy profit Chelsea have made on Luiz's sale is likely to be reinvested in the squad, with Atletico Madrid striker Diego Costa reportedly Mourinho's number one target.

With Luiz on the way out after 143 appearances for Chelsea, Mourinho is likely to give more opportunities to highly-rated young defender Tomas Kalas, who impressed in the team's 2-0 win at Liverpool towards the end of the season.

