



FACTFILE

Age: 34

Height: 1.70m (5 feet 7 inches)

Position: Midfielder

Senior international debut: v Netherlands, November 15, 2000

Last international appearance: v Netherlands, World Cup Group B match, June 13, 2014 International caps: 133

International goals: 13

Clubs: Barcelona 1998-to date

Honours: International -- World Cup (2010), European Championships (2008, 2012)

Club -- Champions League (2006, 2009, 2011); Club World Cup (2009, 2011); European Supercup (2009, 2011); Spanish Championships (1999, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013); Spanish

Navas ready to fight for starting berth

REUTERS, Madrid



Costa Rica goalkeeper Keylor Navas is ready to fight with Iker Casillas and Diego Lopez for a place in the Real Madrid starting lineup after sealing what he called his "dream" move from Levante.

"If I am here it's not because I bought a lottery ticket," Navas told a news conference on Tuesday after passing his medical, signing a six-year contract and being presented to fans at the Bernabeu stadium.

"I feel capable of taking on these challenges," added the 27-year-old, whose performances at the World Cup prompted the world's richest club by income to lure him to the Spanish capital for a reported fee of 10 million euros (\$13.4 million).

"My work is my foundation and when you work hard you feel ready to take on any kind of challenge.

"I am very calm. What I have to do is train hard and be available to the technical staff and when I get my chance be ready for it."

The arrival of Navas has created something of a headache for Real coach Carlo Ancelotti, who is now spoilt for choice for keepers with three top-class performers vying for a place.

Casillas was first choice in the Champions League and the King's Cup last season, while Lopez, whom Spanish media have said may be discarded, played in La Liga, continuing an awkward rotation policy begun under Ancelotti's predecessor Jose Mourinho.

Navas said Casillas, 33, and the 32-year-old Lopez had been an inspiration to him during his career.

Known as the "Falcon of Costa Rica" for his agility, Navas spent his first year in Spain playing for second-division Albacete before Valencia-based Levante came calling in 2011.

"I think they (Real) will have more choice now," Navas told reporters.

Xavi calls time on Spain

REUTERS, Barcelona



Spain midfielder Xavi, one of the most decorated footballers of all time who defined the nation's spectacularly successful 'tiki-taka' possession-based playing style, has retired from internationals at the age of 34.

The Barcelona player represented his country 133 times, a record for an outfield player and only bettered by goalkeeper and captain Iker Casillas, and was a key figure in Spain's glittering run when they won the 2010 World Cup and the 2008 and 2012 European Championships.

Xavi had a disappointing 2013-14 season, when Barca failed to win major silverware for the first time in six years and holders Spain were knocked out of the World Cup in the group stage, and reports suggested he was poised to end his career in the Middle East or the United States.

However, he has decided to play on at club level under new coach and former team mate Luis Enrique but has called time on his international career before Spain begin their qualifying campaign for Euro 2016.

"I'm grateful for all those years," Xavi told a news conference after a Barca training session.

"It has been a fantastic time. I'm not 20 any more, but I still have the motivation of a kid."

"I was disappointed on two levels at the end of last season as I did not feel useful to Barca or to the national team."

"I would like to single out Luis Enrique, who has made me see that I can still be important."

Xavi, who has won three Champions League crowns, seven La Liga titles and a host of other trophies with Barca, made his debut for Spain in a friendly against the Netherlands in November 2000.

He played in four World Cups and three European Championships and won 100 of his 133

matches for the Iberian nation, controlling play from a central position, regularly providing assists and also scoring the occasional goal.

His last appearance for Spain was a bitter 5-1 reverse to the Netherlands in their opening Group B match in Brazil in June.

He was dropped by coach Vicente del Bosque for their next game against Chile, which they also lost and were eliminated, and replaced by Atletico Madrid's Koke, whom he has singled out as his natural successor.

"I would like to express my appreciation for a fantastic player," Del Bosque said on Spain's official website (www.sefutbol.com) after Xavi's announcement.

"We are losing a unique player from the national team and it will be hard to find his equal," he added.

"He has been a key figure in the team's playing style which has brought us so much success. We will miss him both on and off the pitch."



Real Madrid's latest signing Costa Rican goalkeeper Keylor Navas kisses his new club's emblem during his official presentation at the Bernabeu yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Neymar on the mend

REUTERS, Barcelona

Neymar's injured back is healing "satisfactorily" although there is no specific date for the Brazil forward to return to training, his club Barcelona said on Tuesday.

Neymar fractured a bone in his back following a challenge from Colombia defender Juan Zuniga in last month's World Cup quarter-final and was ruled out for the rest of the tournament.

The 22-year-old, who has targeted a return to action in a friendly on August 18, had tests on his return to Barca after his post-World Cup holiday and the club said the results were "satisfactory".

"The player will follow a specific recovery programme," Barca said on their website.

"The progress of the injury will determine when he returns to training," they added.

Barca begin their La Liga campaign at home to Elche on August 24.

Sunderland sign Rodwell

AFP, London

English midfielder Jack Rodwell will attempt to resurrect his career at Sunderland after the Premier League club on Tuesday announced his arrival from Manchester City on a five-year contract.

"Sunderland have completed the signing of midfielder Jack Rodwell from Barclays Premier League champions Manchester City," the northeast club announced on their website.

Rodwell, 23, spent two years at City after signing from Everton in 2012, but injuries prevented him from making an impact at the Etihad Stadium. Sunderland did not disclose the fee they had paid for Rodwell, who has won three England caps.

MU see off Liverpool

AFP, Miami



Manchester United ended their US pre-season tour on a high note on Monday, rallying for a 3-1 triumph over English Premier League rivals Liverpool.

In the final of the International Champions Cup friendly tournament, Louis van Gaal's men overturned an early Steven Gerrard penalty -- the third spot-kick United have conceded on tour -- to claim victory through second-half goals from Wayne Rooney, Juan Mata and Jesse Lingard.

Brendan Rodgers' Liverpool, at the end of their own pre-season tour of the United States, provided easily the biggest test of United's pre-season so far as the old foes clashed before 51,104 fans at Sun Life Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

United were perhaps less sharp than in their previous matches on the tour, but improved in the second half and head home with five victories from five matches under new manager van Gaal.

Rooney captained Manchester United for

the first time on the tour.

And after Gerrard beat David De Gea from the penalty spot in the 14th minute--after Raheem Sterling drew a challenge from Phil Jones, it was Rooney who grabbed the equalizer in the 55th.

Javier Hernandez flew down the right and sent in a cross that Rooney fired past Simon Mignolet. Two minutes later, Luke Shaw's pass found Mata, who beat Mignolet with a low shot to put United up 2-1.

Rooney was also involved in a brief controversy that flared in the 65th minute.

A long range shot from United's Ashley Young bounced back into play off the goal frame and Rooney poked the ball home, only for officials to belatedly disallow the goal when they realized the ball had been out of play on the net behind the goal.

Lingard completed the scoring in the 88th, blasting Young's pass past Mignolet.

"It's obviously great to win the game and win the tournament," Rooney said. "We've worked hard in the pre-season. Today in the first half Liverpool were the better team. We were poor, we didn't move the ball quick enough. We knew we had to put that right."

Ecclestone ends bribery trial

AFP, Munich



A German court ruled Tuesday that Formula One tycoon Bernie Ecclestone can make a controversial \$100-million payment to end his trial on bribery charges.

In a move that will likely see him stay at the helm of the lucrative sport, the 83-year-old Briton struck an accord with prosecutors on the record payment which then got the Munich tribunal's blessing.

"The proceedings will be temporarily suspended with the agreement of the prosecution and the accused," pending payment within one week, presiding judge Peter Noll said.

The \$100-million (75-million-euro) accord is believed to be the largest of its kind in German criminal justice history.

Ecclestone, a diminutive businessman who has kept firm control over F1, has a fortune estimated at \$4.2 billion, according to Forbes magazine, making him one of the richest 400 people in the world.

Noll said \$99 million of Ecclestone's payment would go to the Bavarian state coffers while \$1 million would be donated to a child hospice foundation.

Ecclestone went on trial in the southern city of Munich in April on charges of paying a \$44-million bribe to a Bavarian state bank executive for help in maintaining his four-decade grip on Formula One.

A settlement is allowed in German criminal cases if the prosecution, the aggrieved parties and the court agree, but the Ecclestone deal has stoked fierce criticism.

Marquez joins Verona

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico captain Rafael Marquez is set to continue his career after signing for Serie A side Verona on Monday from two-time defending Mexican champions Leon.

The 35-year-old -- whose foul on Arjen Robben in the final minute of injury time of their last 16 game at this year's World Cup finals led to a penalty and a 2-1 win for the Dutch -- had been at Leon since December 2012 after a brief spell at MLS club New York Red Bulls.

"Rafael Marquez has signed for Serie A club Verona," Leon tweeted on their Twitter account.

"We wish him plenty of success in this new phase of his career."

Marquez, who holds the national record of 16 World Cup appearances at four World Cup finals.

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