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Martino names first squad

AFP, Buenos Aires

New Argentinian national coach Gerardo Martino kept faith on Tuesday with the players who got Argentina to their first World Cup final since 1990 and lost 1-0 to Germany when he named his first squad for a friendly with the same opponents in Duesseldorf on September 3.

Martino, who stood down from the Barcelona job at the end of last season after they finished trophy-less, was named as the new coach only last week and replaced Alejandro Sabella, who declined to extend his contract after the World Cup final.

Germany won the final 1-0 with a goal by Mario Goetze in extra-time.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Mariano Andujar (Catania/ITA), Sergio Romero (Sampdoria/ITA)

Defenders: Marcos Rojo (Manchester United), Jose Basanta (Fiorentina/ITA), Martin Demichelis (Manchester City/ENG), Ezequiel Garay (Zenit Saint-Petersburg/RUS), Marcos Rojo (Manchester United/ENG), Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City/ENG), Hugo Campagnaro (Inter Milan/ITA), Federico Fernandez (Swansea/ENG)

Midfielders: Ricardo Alvarez (Inter Milan/ITA), Lucas Biglia (Lazio/ITA), Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid/ESP), Augusto Fernandez (Celta Vigo/ESP), Javier Mascherano (Barcelona/ESP), Enzo Perez (Benfica/POR)

Forwards: Sergio Agüero (Manchester City/ENG), Gonzalo Higuain (Napoli/ITA), Ezequiel Lavezzi (Paris



Real Madrid midfielder James Rodriguez (2nd from R) celebrates his goal with teammates during their Spanish Supercup tie against Atletico Madrid at the Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Atletico deny Real

AFP, Madrid



A Raul Garcia equaliser two minutes from time denied James Rodriguez a dream home debut for Real Madrid as Atletico Madrid salvaged a 1-1 draw in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup on Tuesday.

Rodriguez had surprisingly started on the bench, but replaced Cristiano Ronaldo at half-time when the World Player of the Year was substituted due to a muscle injury.

Colombian World Cup star Rodriguez opened the scoring with his first goal for Real 10 minutes from time.

However, Atletico got a precious away goal to take into the return leg at the Vicente Calderon on Friday when Garcia flicked home a late corner from

close range.

Real boss Carlo Ancelotti did though allay fears that Ronaldo's injury could rule him out for a prolonged period of time.

"He had a strain after the first-half and he wasn't comfortable. We will evaluate him tomorrow and do all the proper checks, but it doesn't appear anything too serious," said the Italian.

And despite once again finding it difficult to break down Atletico's dogged defence, Ancelotti is confident that a repeat performance will see his side emerge victorious on Friday.

"Atletico have a small advantage because we have to score in the Calderon.

"We have the potential to score goals at the Calderon and we will try. If we repeat the way we played today we will win the Super Cup."

Atletico coach Diego Simeone hailed his side's work rate and expressed his surprise that compatriot Angel di Maria didn't start the game as he only featured as a late substitute.

Di Maria has been rumoured with a move away from the Spanish capital given their wealth of attacking options with the arrival of Rodriguez, but Simeone claimed he is even more vital to Real than Ronaldo or Gareth Bale.

"In the first-half despite defending close to our area we had three or four chances to score a goal," he said.

"The second half was more or less the same, with a little bit better play from Madrid with the introduction of Di Maria.

"That was logical because he is the best player they have. It is a important draw and allows us to play a for the trophy at home with a 50-50 chance."

UEFA starts probe against Tavecchio

AFP, Paris



European football's governing body UEFA has opened an investigation into a comment made by new Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Carlo Tavecchio that has been widely condemned as racist.

At a public meeting last month, Tavecchio, 71, said: "Here we get 'Opti Poba' who previously ate bananas and then suddenly becomes a first-team player at Lazio."

The comments, which appeared to be aimed at France and Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba, sparked controversy in Italy with many commentators condemning what they saw as an overtly racist outburst.

Tavecchio has acknowledged he should not have made the remark but insists he was only guilty of a clumsy turn of phrase.

"I'm calm and respectful of UEFA's decision," he said in a statement posted on the FIGC's website shortly after the announcement of the probe on Wednesday.

"They are doing their duty and we had expected this but I am sure that I will be able to explain both my error and my true intentions at UEFA headquarters."

Earlier this week, Tavecchio insisted he had a clear conscience over the episode and dismissed suggestions he was a racist.

FIFA upholds Barca ban

AFP, Geneva

Barcelona will not be able to sign any new players until January 2016 after world football's governing body FIFA rejected an appeal over a transfer ban imposed for breaching rules on underage players.

The Catalan giants will be banned from the national and international market for two consecutive transfer windows, starting in January 2015, FIFA said.

Barcelona immediately announced they would appeal to sports' highest court, describing the decision as an "affront" to its youth training academy.

"FC Barcelona announces that it shall continue defending its interests before the highest sporting authority."

Arsenal, Napoli held

AFP, Paris



Ten-man Arsenal were left frustrated after a 0-0 stalemate at Besiktas in Tuesday's Champions League play-off round first leg while Athletic Bilbao earned the upper

hand in their tie with Napoli following a 1-1 draw in Italy.

Demba Ba nearly handed Besiktas a dream start in Istanbul when his audacious effort straight from kick-off came back off the crossbar after almost catching out Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny.

Ba again tested Szczesny with a firmly-struck volley while Olivier Giroud and Santi Cazorla went close for the Gunners before Ba, who scored a hat-trick versus Feyenoord in the previous round, rolled a shot just wide of the post at the end of a lively opening 45 minutes in Turkey.

Olcay Sahan spurned a glorious chance to put Besiktas in front early in the second half much to the chagrin of coach Slaven Bilic while Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger will have to do without midfielder Aaron Ramsey in next Wednesday's second leg after the Welshman was dismissed for a second bookable offence 10 minutes from time.

Arsenal nearly snatched victory in the closing stages but Tolga Zengin made a superb save to tip substitute Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's effort onto the post and keep Besiktas very much in the tie.

Athletic Bilbao secured a vital away goal through Iker Muniain just before the break in Naples and go into the return leg next Wednesday at San Mames as slight favourites despite Gonzalo Higuain netting a 68th-minute equaliser for Napoli in a 1-1 draw.

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