

MU snap up Valdes

AFP, London

Manchester United signed former Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes on an 18-month contract on Thursday.

Valdes left Barcelona, where he had spent his entire career, at the end of last season and has been training with United since October as he recovers from an anterior cruciate ligament injury suffered last March.

The deal, which includes an option to extend Valdes' stay at Old Trafford for an extra year, reunites the 32-year-old with Louis van Gaal, United's Dutch manager, who gave the Spaniard his debut during his second spell as coach of Barcelona.

"It is a real honour to sign for Manchester United," Valdes told United's official website.

"I would like to thank Louis van Gaal and the club for allowing me to do my rehabilitation and to train with the team.

"From my short time here I can already see this is a very special club.

"I worked with Louis van Gaal during my time at FC Barcelona and to have the opportunity to work with him here at Manchester United is a dream come true."

Valdes won six league titles, three Champions Leagues and two Copa del Rey crowns during his time at Barcelona, while he was a member of the Spain squad that won the World Cup in 2010 and the 2012 European Championship.

Chelsea cool Messi talk

AFP, London



Chelsea assistant manager Steve Holland on Friday distanced the Premier League giants from a move for Barcelona's Argentina star Lionel Messi.

The Stamford Bridge club have been linked with an approach for Messi whose future in Spain has been thrown into doubt because of a breakdown in relations with Barca coach Luis Enrique.

The four-times world player of the year has a £200 million (\$302m) buy-out clause in his contract with the La Liga club.

But his wage demands mean that any move for the player would require a total outlay of around £500 million (\$756m).

Chelsea are one of the few clubs believed to have the resources to fund a deal of that size, but Holland believes Financial Fair Play regulations would prohibit a move.

And Holland insists Blues manager Jose Mourinho has no intention of making changes to his playing squad during the current transfer window.

Mourinho did not attend Friday's routine press conference after being charged with misconduct by the Football Association.

And Holland said: "With Financial Fair Play, many players have been sold to balance the books. That has been the case in the last 12 months.

"But when you see the numbers that have been mentioned around the Messi deal I would think it looks impossible under Financial Fair Play."

He added: "I think he has made it clear in this window nobody leaves, nobody goes.

"I recall he said a similar thing at this time last year and a few things happened that meant we had to be reactive. Manchester United made a huge offer for Juan Mata and there was an offer for Kevin De Bruyne.

"Jose was happy to keep them. But sometimes you have to react. But the hope and expectation is that nobody comes or leaves."

Mourinho will take charge of his side against Newcastle this weekend, 48 hours after being hit with a FA misconduct charge for comments he made in the wake of his side's draw at Southampton.

The Chelsea manager condemned referee Anthony Taylor's display after midfielder Cesc Fabregas was booked for diving when television replays showed the player was fouled inside the Southampton penalty area.

Rooney voted England's best

AFP, London

England captain Wayne Rooney has been voted his national team's player of the year for 2014 after topping a supporters' poll.

Although he failed to inspire England to success at the World Cup, it was still a memorable 12 months for the Manchester United striker.

The 29-year-old scored eight goals in 13 appearances and was named England skipper following Steven Gerrard's retirement from international football.

Rooney also moved to within three goals of Bobby Charlton's all-time scoring record.

Rooney took 27 per cent of the votes from an online poll of supporters club members, more than second-placed Danny Welbeck (11 per cent) and third-placed Raheem Sterling (seven per cent) combined.

"I'm both very happy and proud to be named the England fans' player of the year," Rooney told the Football Association's website after winning the award for the third time.

"The fact that this award is chosen by the fans makes it even more special, so I would like to thank all those who voted.

"I would also like to thank all the England fans for their support throughout what was a mixed year.

"Receiving an honour such as this from the fans is always something that fills you with personal pride."



Barcelona striker Luis Suarez is ecstatic after his goal against Elche during their Copa del Rey encounter at the Nou Camp on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Barca destroy Elche

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona eased their crisis ridden week with a comprehensive 5-0 thrashing of Elche to all but seal their place in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey.

Despite the speculation surrounding his future in recent days, Lionel Messi captained the side on his return to the starting line-up and scored from the penalty spot after goals from Neymar and Luis Suarez had already put the hosts in command.

Jordi Alba added a fourth after the break before Neymar rounded off the scoring in style with a powerful drive from 20 yards out.

Barring a meltdown in the return leg on January 15, Barca will face the winners of the tie between Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid in the last eight.

Messi and Neymar were among eight changes made by under fire coach Luis Enrique from the side that lost 1-0 at Real Sociedad on Sunday.

The two South American stars looked keen to make a point to their boss from the off and Neymar was unlucky to see a penalty appeal turned away 10 minutes in when he was bumped to the ground by Damien Suarez.

Dani Alves was then inches away from a spectacular opener as he returned a punch from Elche keeper Przemyslaw Tyton back towards goal from 30 yards out, but the ball

flew just wide.

Neymar also came close when he lifted a wonderful pass by Messi over the onrushing Tyton only to see the ball fly also just beyond the far post.

However, Barca finally made the breakthrough 11 minutes before half-time when an enticing low cross by Suarez was smashed home at the far post by Neymar.

The Uruguayan found the net himself moments later with a brilliant individual effort as he rolled his marker before cutting inside and fooling Tyton with a near post finish.

Messi's name was chanted regularly by the sparse Camp Nou crowd in a sign of support after a difficult few days for all those at the club, and he added his name to the scoresheet from the spot after Neymar had been upended by Enzo Roco.

The one way traffic continued after the break as another sumptuous pass from Messi freed Alba inside the area to fire low past Tyton to make it 4-0.

Yet, the best was still to come from Enrique's men when Neymar cut inside onto his favoured right foot and thumped home his second of the night off the underside of the bar from 20 yards.

The Brazilian was denied the chance to grab his second hat-trick of the season, though, as he was replaced by Pedro Rodriguez with 23 minutes remaining after suffering another heavy challenge from Suarez.

WI secure tense win

AFP, Cape Town

West Indies defeated South Africa by four wickets in the opening Twenty20 international at Newlands on Friday with opener Chris Gayle hitting the fastest ever half century by a West Indian in the format.

South Africa made 165 for four after winning the toss and deciding to bat with Rilee Rossouw unbeaten on 51, made off 40 balls with five fours.

Gayle then blasted 77 off 31 balls as West Indies reached their target with four balls to spare.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SA: 165 for 4 in 20 overs (du Plessis 38, Rossouw 51 not out, Miller 24; Cottrell 2-33, Holder 1-20)

WI: 168 for six in 19.2 overs (Gayle 77, Samuels 41, Smith 20; Tahir 3-28, Parnell 2-39)

Result: West Indies won by 4 wickets, Man of the Match: Chris Gayle



Major General Mizanur Rahman Khan, vice-president, Kurmitola Golf Club inaugurates the prestigious Aga Khan Gold Cup with other high officials of the club and members of the Aga Khan community yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Aussies thrash Kuwait

AFP, Melbourne

Hosts Australia showed impressive firepower to beat Kuwait 4-1 in their Asian Cup opener on Friday after talisman Tim Cahill kicked-started them following an early scare.

Massimo Luongo, Mile Jedinak and James Troisi were also on target for the Socceroos, who could have scored six or seven and were serenaded with a chorus of "Oles" by a sell-out crowd of 30,000 in Melbourne.

Kuwait had stunned Australia with a goal from Hussain Fadhel after just eight minutes, the big defender stooping to head in a corner and silence the home fans.

But Cahill relieved the tension on a wet and chilly evening by slamming home the equaliser in the 33rd minute after smart work down the right from Luongo.

Luongo put Australia in front moments before half-time with a superb header to give the home side a huge boost going into the break.

Skipper Jedinak stroked home a penalty in the 62nd minute, giving the Socceroos a two-goal cushion as they continued to press, playing with a verve that was sorely missing as they managed just a single win in 11 matches last year.

Troisi poked home a fourth in stoppage time to cap a dominating performance by Ange Postecoglou's side.

Cahill almost grabbed a second, forcing a superb save from Hameed Youssef on the hour-mark, before Mathew Leckie smashed a left-foot shot against the underside of the bar as the floodgates threatened to open.

The former Everton forward, who has now scored 38 times in 78 internationals, added: "It's always special. I always talk to the boys about taking the opportunities and savoring them. I'm 35 but I feel great. When you play for your country, you've got to give it everything."

Substitute Nathan Burns also rattled the crossbar with a diving header as the Socceroos began to turn on the style against Kuwait, who had beaten them in five of their previous 10 meetings.

Australia, runners-up to Japan four years ago, are also drawn alongside Oman and 2002 World Cup semifinalists South Korea in Group A as they bid to win their first Asian Cup with a new-look side, after golden generation failed to win a major title.

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