

# Benitez hails Ronaldo

AFP, Melbourne

Real Madrid manager Rafael Benitez on Thursday hailed his superstar striker Cristiano Ronaldo as the best in the world as he played down reports of tension between the pair.

Real Madrid take on English Premier League heavyweights Manchester City in the final match of the International Champions Cup in Melbourne on Friday, however Spanish reports say the atmosphere has become testy on the training pitch during the club's pre-season tour of Australia.

But Benitez, who took over from Carlo Ancelotti in June, suggested he had no problems with Ronaldo.

"Luckily, I have had the opportunity this week to spend quite a few days with him," Benitez told reporters.

"And I can say that he's competitive, he likes to win, and for that reason he is the best in the world."

"I would like all players to have that desire to win and to compete. You've all seen him train today and I think his performance will be up to scratch."

"I talk to all the players a lot. I have had the opportunity to talk to him, too. We talked about football and yes, he is competitive."

"Seeing Ronaldo up close training, I can see that he's doing very well."

Ronaldo is the world's third-highest paid sportsman this year after boxers Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo runs with the ball during a training session in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Vidal set for Bayern

AFP, Berlin

Chilean international midfielder Arturo Vidal is set to join Bayern Munich in the coming days, subject to a medical, according to the German champions' president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

Bayern are set to pay around 35 million euros (£24.6m; \$38.5m dollars) for the 28-year-old Juventus star who will leave the Italian champions after four successful years.

"I can confirm that there is an agreement between the two parties (Bayern Munich and Juventus). He still needs a medical but if everything goes as planned, he should be training with us next week," said Rummenigge from Bayern's tour of China, according to the SID sports news agency.

It's a return to Germany for Vidal who played for Bayern's Bundesliga rivals Bayer Leverkusen for four years from 2007 to 2011, scoring 21 goals in 144 appearances.

Vidal's good form for Leverkusen convinced Italian giants Juventus to pay 10.5 million euros to bring him to Turin, where he earned plaudits for his energetic displays and superb passing skills.

The Chilean scored 48 goals for the Old Lady in 171 appearances, which has persuaded Bayern to part with big money to bring him to the Allianz Arena.

Bayern manager Pep Guardiola targeted Vidal as a replacement for Germany captain Bastian Schweinsteiger who left for Manchester United in a 25 million-euro deal last week.

Vidal, who started his career at Colo Colo in his native Chile, leaves Juventus after a magnificent 2014/15 which saw him win a fourth-straight Serie A title, the Coppa Italia and finish as a runner-up in the Champions League after the final defeat to Barcelona.

He was also a key member of the victorious Chile side which won a first Copa America title earlier this month after beating Argentina in a penalty shootout in Santiago.



Vidal, though, was the centre of controversy during the tournament after crashing his Ferrari in the Chilean capital under the influence of alcohol.

The midfielder subsequently avoided a trial but was banned from driving for two years and forced to pay compensation to another driver involved in the crash.

The former Leverkusen player is currently on holiday in Miami, but is expected to complete his move to five-time European champions Bayern by the end of the week.

He is the fourth big-name player to leave Juventus this summer after the departures of Andrea Pirlo (New York City), Angelo Ogbonna (West Ham United) and Carlos Tevez (Boca Juniors), although the Bianconeri have captured Sami Khedira, Mario Mandzukic, Paulo Dybala and Simone Zaza.

Massimiliano Allegri's men are also reportedly close to signing Schalke's 21-year-old Germany international forward Julian Draxler.

Vidal will be Bayern's fourth summer signing after the arrivals of Douglas Costa, Joshua Kimmich and Sven Ulreich.

# 'Ramos going nowhere'

AFP, Melbourne



Manager Rafael Benitez said Thursday he is "100 per cent" confident skipper Sergio Ramos will stay at Real Madrid amid fevered speculation linking him with

Manchester United.

Spain international Ramos has been linked to United in a swap deal with Spanish goalkeeper David De Gea, but Benitez made it clear the defender was going nowhere.

"It's very simple, De Gea is not our player so nothing to say about him," he told reporters ahead of Real Madrid facing Manchester City in the final match of the International Champions Cup in Melbourne on

Friday.

"The update about Sergio Ramos is that he is our player and he's a key player for us."

"He's the captain and I would like to see him at the beginning of the season because I think he will be crucial for us in the season."

"Yes, for me 100 per cent (staying). I insist that it is clear for both me and the club that Sergio will be here."

"Football is a curious world, but Sergio will be playing for us this season," he added.

"I have a lot of respect for (Manchester United manager) Louis van Gaal, but Sergio will stay with us."

Reports have said Manchester United want to use Real Madrid's interest in De Gea in an attempt to sign Ramos, believing the defender was keen to move after the Spanish club

failed to offer him an extension to his contract, which expires in 2017.

Ramos scored Real's injury-time equaliser in their Champions League final win over Atletico Madrid in 2014 and has made 445 appearances for the club since joining from Sevilla in 2005.

He has 128 caps for Spain and was in the starting line-up when they won Euro 2008, the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012.

Croatia midfielder and teammate Luka Modric said Ramos was an important part of the team.

"We hope that he stays. He's a very important part of the team. He's our captain, our leader, both on and off the pitch and he's happy where he is," Modric said.

"He's the best defender and he wants to stay at the club."

## BJMC beat Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER

Visiting Maldives women's handball team suffered a 21-16 defeat at the hands of Bangladesh Jutes Mills Corporation (BJMC) team in the second friendly match at the Shaheed (captain) M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium yesterday.

Maldives, who notched up a 24-17 win over Viquarunnisa School and College in the first match, were trailing 7-13 in the first half.

They will play two more friendly matches against Bangladesh Youth Women's team today and Bangladesh national women's team tomorrow.

## Bolt ready for Gatlin

AFP, London



Usain Bolt insisted Thursday he would be ready for the challenge of toppling the informal American Justin Gatlin at the World Championships in Beijing next month.

The Jamaican track king made the pledge on the eve of his return from injury in the 100m on the opening night of the Anniversary Games Diamond League meeting in London on Friday.

Bolt has not raced since winning the New York Diamond League 200m race on June 13 because of a pelvic problem.

The world record holder at 100m and 200m also said that he had "a problem" with Gatlin's United States teammate Tyson Gay about his doping past but not with Gatlin, who has served two doping suspensions and who has run the four fastest times of 2015 at both 100m and 200m.

Asked whether he had lost respect with rivals who had failed drugs tests in their sprinting careers, the 28-year-old Jamaican replied: "The only person I really had a problem with was Tyson."

"The reason is I competed with Tyson throughout the years and I had so much respect for him. I looked at him as one of the greatest competitors I competed against. He was dedicated. He worked hard."

"When it happened (Gay tested positive for anabolic steroids in 2013 and served a one year ban) I was really disappointed. That really hurt me."

Asked why he did not have a similar problem with Gatlin, Bolt said: "It was before my time. I'm not saying it was right what he did but because me and Tyson competed so closely that hurt."

Gatlin has run 9.74sec for 100m this year and Bolt a modest 10.12sec in his only race at the distance in 2012 - in Rio de Janeiro in April.



Former Brazil star Ronaldinho (C) kicks balls towards children attending a class of Free Stripe promoted by a private enterprise in Mexico City on Wednesday.

## Messi angers Gabon

AGENCIES, Libreville



The magnificent forward flew there earlier in the week as part of a five day trip around Africa. France Football reported that the gig paid 3.5 million euros.

But the trip hasn't all been plain sailing as Messi has angered the Union of Gabonese People political party by turning up for the illustrious event 'dressed for the zoo'.

It's fair to say that Messi wasn't in the snazziest gear when he met Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba. We know a jazzy polka-dot number that would have been suitable.

Instead he turned up in denim shorts and a t-shirt, provoking an extraordinary rant in which he was called a 'multi-billionaire' among other things.

To be fair, he is a billionaire in Gabonese currency.

Here's the full rant: "The Messiah of football arrived as if he was going to a zoo in Gabon: dirty, unshaven and with his hands in his pockets like he was looking to swing peanuts! We called Lionel Messi, who is a multi-billionaire, but no one has the right to appear before officials of the same banana republic... hands in the pockets of torn and ragged shorts... Hands in pockets, it is a total lack of manners, it is appalling. Gabon is not a zoo! It is not known why the Argentine picked Gabon but at least we have the right to terminate his neglect, lack of respect for the standards and principles. It is uncomfortable to see the attitude and attire of Messi. Just for these reasons related to compliance with the host country, we condemn the dishonesty of the footballer and this is the



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## BECKHAM'S NEW INK

David Beckham has revealed his latest tattoo today on Instagram. Beckham has chosen to ink a memory of Manchester United's famous treble winning season in 1998-99 on his hand, as he's had '99' inked on his left pinky finger. As if his latest artwork needed explaining, Beckham wrote "99 was a good year for me". Aside from winning the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League that season, Beckham played 55 games for Man United, scoring 9



## Feni post 4th win

SPORTS REPORTER

Feni Soccer Club posted their fourth victory in the Manyavar Bangladesh Premier League with an emphatic 4-2 win over relegation-threatened Farashganj SC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The win pushed them into seventh position of the 11-team table with 15 points from as many games while Farashganj went deep into the red zone with five points from 15 outings.

Feni Soccer, who came into the match with a morale-boosting 6-3 win over Rahmatganj MFS, did not waste much time to open the account, thanks to a third-minute strike from midfielder Ali Hossain while the lead was doubled by forward Sohel Miah, who placed a Alaudin cutback home inside the box in the 24th minute.

Kababba Jabe beat Farashganj goalkeeper Sujan Chowdhury from distance on the half-hour-mark to make it 3-0 to take the match away from the old Dhaka outfit, who then pulled one goal back through Rasel seven minutes into the break.

Alaudin struck an own goal in the 71st minute while trying to clear Farashganj's forward Yusuf's cross to bring some excitement to the match. But Gambian hitman Dawda Cisse scored Feni Soccer's fourth goal to kill off the match in the 77th minute.

Defender Jahirul Islam's marching order in the dying minutes added more misery to Farashganj SC's 10th defeat in 15 matches.

## JFA under-14 women's c'ship gets underway

SPORTS REPORTER

The final round of the JFA U-14 Women's National Football Championship gets underway from tomorrow at the artificial turf adjacent to the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Six venue champions and two best runners-up among 34 district teams qualified for the eight-team finals where the participating teams, split into two groups, will take part in the round-robin matches and the top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

Mymensingh will play against Dinajpur while Sathkhira will face Khulna on the opening day while other four teams are Narayanganj, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Tangail.

The champions and runners-up will be awarded Tk 30,000 and Tk 20,000 respectively in the championship funded by Japan Football Association.