

Chelsea's Lampard gets message across to players in Barca victory



Chelsea's David Luiz (right), and Barcelona's Antoine Griezmann (left), compete for the ball during their friendly soccer match in Saitama, north of Tokyo on July 23. (AP)

City manager Guardiola dismisses Chinese media criticism

SAITAMA, Japan, July 23, (Agencies): New Chelsea boss Frank Lampard believes he is getting his message across to the players following their 2-1 victory over Barcelona in a pre-season friendly on Tuesday.

Chelsea's record goalscorer, who returned to the Premier League club as manager on July 4, said that the work his coaching staff and players were putting in on the training ground was beginning to pay dividends.

"It has been good on pitch and off pitch," Lampard said in Saitama, north of Tokyo, on Tuesday.

"Particularly today, I saw a lot of signs from the work we have done, which is really good for me."

"There is more work to do but it has been a good trip."

Chelsea were much improved from their display against Japanese champions Kawasaki Frontale, who beat them 1-0 on Friday, with Tammy Abraham and Ross Barkley on the scoresheet.

Striker Abraham pounced on some unusually slack play from Barca's Sergio Busquets to open the scoring after 34 minutes and midfielder Barkley added the second goal nine minutes from time with a shot from the edge of the box.

Barca midfielder Ivan Rakitic got a stunning consolation in added time for Ernesto Valverde's side - earning the biggest cheer of the night - but Lampard was the happier of the two managers.

Chelsea strikers Olivier Giroud and Michy Batshuayi came on in the second half and Lampard was happy with all three of the options he has up front this season.

"There is competition," he said. "People keep on talking about it but they all



Chelsea's Cesar Azpilicueta holds the trophy after a friendly soccer match between FC Barcelona and Chelsea FC in Saitama, north of Tokyo on July 23. (AP)

need to rise to the competition and show they can be strikers for Chelsea. I have full confidence in them."

Lampard is stuck with those three striking options due to a FIFA transfer ban imposed on the London club.

However, Chelsea have been able to add Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovacic permanently to their squad since he was on loan at Stamford Bridge last season and Lampard reserved his highest praise for the former Real Madrid man.

"(Kovacic is) an incredible talent on the ball and I want to work with him and I want to help him improve and improve," said Lampard, who scored 211 goals from midfield for Chelsea.

"There is so much talent there. I really like him and he was outstanding today. I really am pleased."

Whilst it was Chelsea's fourth game of pre-season, it was Barcelona's first and, without Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez in attack, as they recover from the Copa America, it showed.

French forward Antoine Griezmann,

a recent recruit from La Liga rivals Atletico Madrid, was bright during his first 45 minutes in a Barca shirt and Valverde was impressed.

"He is doing well within the team and it is true that whenever he has the ball then he is really dangerous against the

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other team," he said. "It is true that he has many ideas on how to use the ball and we hope that he continues this way."

"But it is the first game and he needs to learn how Barcelona play, our style and how we dominate."

Barca face Japanese side Vissel Kobe, and their former players Andres Iniesta and David Villa, on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Pep Guardiola made an impassioned defence of Manchester City and his players after criticism in China's state media over his club's "arrogance" during their stopover in Nanjing and Shanghai for last week's Premier League Asia Trophy.

The Premier League champions, who played in the four-team tournament with Newcastle United, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Ham United, were lambasted in an editorial in official news agency Xinhua, which claimed Guardiola and his players "lacked enthusiasm" during their five-day stint in China.

Speaking in Hong Kong, where City will face local side Kitchee on Wednesday evening, the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach said the club had had a positive experience so far during their Asian tour.

"I should say that I don't agree and I should say that it's false," said Guardiola. "To make a statement like this they have to know exactly what is happening within our club. "The players had an incredible time in Shanghai. They were committed in all the commercials they

have to do with the people here in China. The people from the hotel, we take care of all of them with signatures, with pictures. All the people asking something, we are ready to do that."

"So I know we come here (and) it's a unique experience for us. It's not easy to come during the season, to come to Asia, a new culture and to go to the restaurants and know the people. It's amazing to travel and know other people."

"I don't understand how the people can say that. Maybe this one journalist is a little bit upset, I don't know why. But it's far away from what is the reality."

The article on Xinhua's English language website accused City, who are part-owned by the Chinese Media Capital consortium, of lack of engagement with local fans and that staff had adopted a dismissive attitude towards the country's media.

"For the Premier League champions, their appearance in China was nothing more than a commercial obligation, and their lack of enthusiasm and the indifferent treatment of their hosts stands in stark contrast to representatives of other clubs," the article stated.

"For Manchester City, they saw their recent success as a reason not to treat Chinese and foreigners with the same respect. Above all, it was an orientalist expectation on display by the Manchester City press relations staff that Chinese media would operate as an extension of their PR department, rather than as serious football journalists."

Soccer Roundup

De Gea keen to captain Man United

Ronaldo will not face rape charge in Vegas

LAS VEGAS, July 23, (Agencies): Portuguese soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo will face no charges in Las Vegas in connection with a 10-year-old sexual assault allegation because the case cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, prosecutors said on Monday.

Ronaldo, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest soccer players of all time and plays for the Italian club Juventus, has maintained he is innocent.

Kathryn Mayorga filed a civil lawsuit in September 2018 in state court in Nevada accusing the athlete of raping her in a Las Vegas hotel penthouse suite in 2009, then paying her \$375,000 in hush money.

A woman called Las Vegas police on June 13, 2009 to report that she had been sexually assaulted and police took her to the hospital for an examination, the Clark County District Attorney's Office said in a statement on Monday. She declined to identify the person who she said assaulted her.

The statement did not identify the woman, but Mayorga's civil lawsuit mirrors the allegation outlined by prosecutors.

"Based upon a review of the information presented at this time, the allegations of sexual assault against Cristiano Ronaldo cannot be proven beyond a reasonable doubt," the District Attorney's Office said in a statement on Monday.

Manchester United goalkeeper **David de Gea**, reported to be on the verge of agreeing a six-year contract extension, has said he would welcome being captain of the Premier League club.

De Gea, 28, has long been linked with a move away from Old Trafford but said he wanted to help the team return to the summit of English soccer at a supporters' event in Singapore.

United's previous captain **Antonio Valencia** left at the end of last season and De Gea is one of several players in the frame to replace him along with **Ashley Young**, **Juan Mata**, **Chris Smalling** and **Paul Pogba**.

United, who have not lost a match on their pre-season tour so far, beating **Perth Glory**, **Leeds United** and **Inter Milan**, take on **Tottenham Hotspur** in Shanghai on Thursday.

Brazilian veteran left-back **Filipe Luis** has signed for boyhood club Flamengo after leaving **Atletico Madrid** on a free transfer.

The Rio de Janeiro club and the player confirmed the move Tuesday on social media.

Flamengo said the 33-year-old Luis has signed a deal until 2021.

Luis has played in Europe for 14 years but left Atletico on Sunday after his contract expired.

The left-back was a starter for Brazil during its recent run to the Copa America title.

With Atletico, Luis won the Copa del Rey in 2013, the Spanish league in 2012 and 2018. He also had a brief spell with **Chelsea** in between, winning the Premier League in 2015.

Flamengo is third in the Brazilian championship after 11 matches, five points behind leader and defending champion **Palmeiras**.

Olympique Lyonnais captain **Nabil Fekir** has moved to Spain's **Real Betis** for an initial 19.75 million euros (\$22.12 million) fee, the French club has said.

The attacking midfielder was a target for **Liverpool** last season but the deal fell through after the player failed a medical and the French club decided to

sell him to Betis after he entered the final year of his contract.

The deal for the 26-year-old Frenchman includes up to an additional 10 million euros in add-ons and Lyon will also receive a 20% sell-on fee if he leaves Betis.

Fekir's younger brother **Yassin**, 22, has also moved to Betis, with Lyon to receive 50% of any future transfer fee for the striker if he leaves the La Liga side.

Nabil Fekir scored 69 goals in nearly 200 matches with Lyon, becoming club captain in 2017 before winning the World Cup with France last year.

Arsenal manager **Unai Emery** said on Monday that **Real Madrid** midfielder **Dani Ceballos** was someone he admired as the Premier League club work on bringing in one player.

The Gunners have yet to make a marquee signing in this transfer window, but British media have reported that Ceballos, 22, is close to completing a season-long loan move to London.

If Arsenal beat Real they will travel back to England with a 100% record from their United States tour.

Arsenal's youngsters have been impressive, scoring seven of the team's eight pre-season goals, but Emery plans to give the senior players more game time in the US capital.

Brazil women's national team coach **Oswaldo Alvarez**, known as Vadao, has been fired after the team was eliminated in the Round of 16 in the Women's World Cup.

The Brazilian soccer confederation announced the move on Monday and said Vadao's replacement would be named soon.

Thiem beats Cuevas to advance in Hamburg

HAMBURG, Germany, July 23, (AP): French Open finalist Dominic Thiem beat Pablo Cuevas 6-3, 7-6 (3) Tuesday to reach the second round of the Hamburg European Open.

The top-seeded Thiem broke Cuevas in the Uruguayan's first service game of each set, but struggled to press his advantage before closing out the match in 1 hour 42 minutes.

It was Thiem's 250th career tour-level win and set up a second-round meeting with Hungary's Marton Fucsovics.

Also, fourth-seeded Nikoloz Basilashvili beat qualifier Hugo Dellien 6-4, 6-3 in just over an hour, and will next face Juan Ignacio Londero.

Seventh-seeded Jan-Lennard Struff had 10 aces as he eased past Thiago Monteiro 6-1, 6-3.

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