

FIFA president has doubts about La Liga match in USA

AFP | Barcelona

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has expressed concern about La Liga's proposal to stage a fixture between Girona and Barcelona in the United States.

The two clubs have each approved a request submitted to the Spanish Football Federation for the match to be played at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami on January 26. It was originally scheduled as a home game for Girona, at their Estadi Montilivi.

The idea has proven controversial. Girona would be surrendering the advantages of playing at their own home ground, which in theory could benefit Barcelona.

Infantino said yesterday: "I think I would prefer to see a great MLS game in the US rather than La Liga being in the US. In football, the general principle is that you play a 'home' match at 'home', and not in a foreign country."

La Liga president Javier Tebas responded on Twitter. He wrote: "I will remind the president of FIFA that in the MLS, three teams of Canada participate, and Toronto is the current champion, and also in Canada there is another professional league."



Barcelona players celebrate after scoring a goal

Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver all compete in the MLS but play home fixtures in their own cities, in Canada.

Infantino also confirmed the plan will need approval from the Spanish and US Football Federations, as well as UEFA and CONCACAF, the governing bodies in charge of European and North American football respectively.

He added: "FIFA should also express a view on the matter,

not least since it would have implications for football at a global level as well."

La Liga is discussing playing one game per season in the US as part of a 15-year agreement with the media company Relevent.

Girona supporters have been offered a "compensation package", which is believed to include free flights to the US, as well as 5,000 tickets for the reverse fixture at the Camp Nou

later this month.

The offer to play the game abroad has been accepted by Girona, who have described it as "a great opportunity to expand and grow, not only for the club but also for our city and our territory".

Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde said on Friday: "Everything is still far away. It has been discussed with the players and there is an intention



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(for the match to be moved)."

Real Madrid coach Julen Lopetegui believes moving the game would undermine the quality of the league.

"I'm not in favour of it," Lopetegui said on Friday. "I think we should all play in the same conditions, on the same pitches - that's what makes the league equal."

La Liga has said the match is part of a long-term project, "targeted at promoting football in the United States and Canada".

Di Francesco denies racist insults provoked Costa

AFP | Milan

Sassuolo winger Federico Di Francesco yesterday rubbished claims that he provoked Juventus forward Douglas Costa with racist insults which resulted in the Brazilian spitting in his face.

Costa was sent off for aiming an elbow and headbutt before spitting in the face of Di Francesco, the son of Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco, in Sunday's game the champions won 2-1 in Turin thanks to Cristiano Ronaldo's first goals for the club.

Costa, 28, later posted an apology to his teammates and fans on his Instagram account, although he replied to one comment by saying that people did not know what Di Francesco had said to him.

"You don't know what he said to me. But no big deal... I say sorry to all those who I have to say it to, because I did wrong," Costa wrote.



Costa saw red after clashing with Di Francesco

And amid the speculation, 24-year-old Di Francesco hit back at suggestions he had aimed racist insults at his rival.

"I'm deeply troubled by the allegations and inventions that have appeared in some national media outlets," Di Francesco said.

"All of this is offensive and derogatory. I won't allow any racist behaviour and/or phrases, which do not belong to my ethical values and are the fruit of other people's imagination, to be attributed to me. I ask for and demand respect!"

Refs must do more to protect Bayern stars - Rummenigge

AFP | Berlin

Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge wants referees to give their stars more protection after Corentin Tolisso and Rafinha both suffered long-term injuries at the weekend.

Bayern flew to Portugal ahead of their opening Champions League group stage game at Benfica on Wednesday without World Cup winning France midfielder Tolisso or right-back Rafinha.

Tolisso, 24, tore the cruciate ligament in his right knee following a tackle by Kevin Volland after scoring a superb goal in Bayern's 3-1 home win against Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday and is expected to be out for months.

It was Tolisso's first start of the season.

Rafinha, 33, is also set for a lengthy spell on the sidelines after tearing ankle ligaments



Bayern Munich's Brazilian defender Rafinha (second from left) will be sidelined for several weeks after tearing ankle ligaments at Bayer Leverkusen

from a stamp on his heel by Leverkusen winger Karim Belarabi, who was sent off for the foul and banned for four games.

Bayern have now lost three players in as many league matches as France winger Kingsley Coman also tore ankle

ligaments after being fouled on the opening day of the season against Hoffenheim.

"It can't go on like this or by matchday 10 (in the Bundesliga), we won't be able to put out 11 players," fumed Rummenigge before Bayern jetted off yesterday.

Don't ask for Messi's shirt at halftime, PSV coach tells team

Reuters | Madrid

PSV Eindhoven coach Mark van Bommel says his players can fight it out for Barcelona star Lionel Messi's shirt if they win at the Nou Camp yesterday - but they had better not ask him for it at halftime.

Van Bommel wants the Dutch league leaders to stay professional as they begin the Champions League season facing the player he called the best in the

world.

"If tomorrow we get a good result, I don't care if they fight for Messi's shirt," Van Bommel told a news conference on Monday.

"That is part of being a professional, to always be concentrating. I know they will ask him for the shirt, but they shouldn't do it at halftime."

PSV winger Hirving Lozano may one day line up with the Argentine at Barcelona, having revealed the Catalan side were



Barcelona star Lionel Messi removes his shirt after a game

interested in signing him in the close season after he impressed for Mexico at the World Cup.

"My agents told me that Barca asked about me and it would be a dream to play here in the future," he said, "but now the important thing is focusing on PSV and enjoying it as much as possible."

Despite Messi's exalted status, Barcelona have won only one of the last five Champions Leagues. "It's hard to explain, I don't

understand it," said midfielder Philippe Coutinho, who is looking forward to making his debut in the competition for the Catalan club after being cup-tied last season.

"It's hard to watch the game from outside. I always want to play to help, but I couldn't last season."

Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde said PSV, on paper no match for his side, deserved respect.

Spain taxman drops accusations against James Rodriguez

AFP | Madrid

Spain's taxman has dropped accusations that Colombia's James Rodriguez evaded millions of euros in taxes when he played at Real Madrid, the El Mundo daily reported yesterday.

The newspaper revealed in July that tax authorities accused the Bayern Munich midfielder of having evaded 6.35 million euros (\$7.4 million) in taxes and would have to pay that amount plus a fine and interests for a total of 11.65 million euros.

They reportedly said James was transferred to Real Madrid from Monaco for 80 million euros mid-2014, but that he registered as a non-resident that year and should have registered as a resident.

But the 27-year-old's lawyers, according to El Mundo, submitted new documents that saw tax authorities drop their accusations.

Wilshere faces spell on sidelines after ankle surgery

AFP | London

West Ham midfielder Jack Wilshere is facing a spell on the sidelines after undergoing ankle surgery, the Premier League club have announced.

Wilshere, 26, had an operation on Monday after missing Sunday's 3-1 Premier League win at Everton because of his injury.

Reports said the former Arsenal player and England international could be out of action for up to six weeks.

The club's head of medical Richard Collinge said the procedure went well.

Arsenal chief executive Gazidis to join AC Milan

AFP | London

Arsenal chief executive Ivan Gazidis is to leave the club to take up a similar post at Italian giants AC Milan, the Premier League club announced yesterday.

Speculation that Gazidis -- who oversaw Unai Emery's appointment to replace Arsene Wenger in May -- will depart for Italy has been rife for some time.

Now the move has been confirmed, with Raul Sanllehi, currently head of football relations at the Emirates Stadium, to become head of football when Gazidis heads to Milan.

Arsenal's chief commercial officer Vinai Venkatesham will take over the role of managing director at the same point.

Gazidis, 54, has reportedly been offered £3.6 million (\$4.7 million) a year -- a £1 million increase in his present salary -- and an equity stake in the AC Milan by the American owners Elliott Management, who took over in July.