

Gattuso distraught

INTERNET, undated
Injured Italian hardman Gennaro Gattuso admits he almost broke down into tears after being told that he would be sidelined for the next two weeks.

The Milan man was informed on Wednesday that he would miss the start of the World Cup Finals as a result of a muscle problem which he picked up in Wednesday's 0-0 draw against Switzerland.

"When I came out of the hospital this morning I just wanted to cry, then I saw an old man in the street and realised there are more serious problems in this world," he said.

"I have to admit that I am deeply disappointed inside, but I have to stay positive for the rest of the squad."

"Being sidelined for 10 to 15 days is an eternity for me, but I usually have a very quick recovery time."

Gattuso is now expected to miss the games against Ghana and USA, but is hoping to be fit for the Czech Republic.

There were suggestions that Gattuso may even be withdrawn from the squad, but both the Coach and the player have rubbished that claim.

"I'll replace him on the pitch, but not in the squad," said Marcello Lippi. "He will stay with us. It's often better to pick up injuries now rather than in the competition."

Gattuso responded: "Even if Lippi decided to send me home then I would have chained myself to the team bus. You would have had to call the police to take me away."

Gattuso becomes the Azzurri's third injury victim with Gianluca Zambrotta and Alessandro Nesta both set to miss the Ghana opener.

"I've never been superstitious, but it does seem as if someone has cast a spell on us," the midfielder concluded.

Spain fight back against Croatia



AGENCIES, undated

A classy extra-time goal from striker Fernando Torres and a free-kick from debutant Mariano Pernia earned Spain a 2-1 victory over fellow World Cup qualifiers Croatia in the final warm-up match for both sides.

Spain appeared to be heading for defeat after centre back Pablo Ibanez had nodded the ball into his own net when Niko Kranjcar had floated a seemingly innocuous ball into the area in the 14th minute.

But Pernia, making his first appearance in a Spain shirt after being called up to replace the injured Asier del Horno, made it 1-1 when his miscued free-kick made its way through a forest of defenders and crept past keeper Stipe Pletikosa at the far post just after the hour.

Torres looked to have spurned the chance to win the match for Spain 15 minutes from time, when he had a weakly struck penalty saved by Pletikosa, but he atoned for his error when he scored a fine individual goal in stoppage time.

The Atletico Madrid striker cut his way past two defenders and slotted the ball past Pletikosa and inside the post to give his side the win and stretch their unbeaten record to 22 matches.

France 3 China 1
French beat China 3-1 in their last warm-up match before World Cup in which striker Djibril Cisse broke his right leg which rules him out for the tournament.

David Trezeguet (30th minute) and Henry (second-half injury time) scored for France, which also got an own goal in the 89th minute when Yun Wang tried to clear a cross from Franck Ribery and sent it into the net from 15 yards.

Zhi Zheng converted a penalty kick for China in the 69th after he was tripped by Eric Abidal.

"We showed some good play going forward and had good movement in attack, but we did not finish that well," Domenech said. "It was tough because we were holding back a bit and playing with one foot on the brakes. However, we were solid at the back."

Australia 3 Liechtenstein 1
Australia scored two goals in the last 15 minutes to beat Liechtenstein 3-1 in their last

The Socceros open their World Cup play Monday against Japan in Kaiserslautern.

Playing without striker Mark Viduka, Australia dictated the pace but never led until Kennedy jumped for his header goal.

Liechtenstein was hard-pressed to get out of its own half early on, with few offensive options other than the long ball. The tactic worked after eight minutes, when Australia's Lucas Neill headed an own goal from a long-distance free-kick.



PHOTO: AFP

Australia midfielder Tim Cahill (L) attempts to block a kick by Liechtenstein captain Daniel Hasler during their friendly in Ulm, Germany on Tuesday.

warm-up. The teams were tied 1-1 until substitute Joshua Kennedy scored in the 75th minute. John Aloisi added another goal in the 82nd, tapping in a rebound off the goalpost.

"What I cannot stand is the lack of concentration in the first 20 minutes," said Australia coach Gus Hiddink, who also complained of "some very sloppy defence on one, maybe two positions."

Mike Starovski tapped in one such cross in the 20th minute to make it 1-1.

Australia winger Harry Kewell played 60 minutes after sitting out recent friendlies against Greece (1-0) and the Netherlands (1-1). Kewell injured his groin in Liverpool's FA Cup final win over West Ham last month.

Hiddink also rested goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer and several other possible starters.

Injury ends Martyn's career

AFP, London

Former England goalkeeper Nigel Martyn on Thursday announced his immediate retirement after being told he needs an ankle operation.

The 39-year-old, who had been set to agree new terms at Everton, had not played since January due to a stress fracture.

Martyn, whose contract was due to expire this month, underwent a scan Wednesday and would have been offered a new deal if it proved positive.

Specialists, however, have recommended surgery to pin the bone and Martyn decided to call time on his playing career.

Martyn joined Everton from Leeds in September 2003 and made 100 appearances for the club.

Pochettino hangs up his boots

REUTERS, Madrid

Former Argentina international Mauricio Pochettino has brought his playing career to end, rescinding the last year of his contract with Primera Liga side Espanyol.

"I thought it was the best thing for me and for the club. There is no other reason behind the decision and I don't know what I am going to do tomorrow," Pochettino was reported as saying on the Espanyol website.

The 34-year-old centre back was in his second spell at the Barcelona-based club with whom he won the King's Cups in 2000 and 2006.

He also played for Newell's Old Boys, Paris St Germain and Girondins Bordeaux.

He was a member of the Argentina squad that competed at the World Cup finals in 2002.

England face wrath of Ferguson



INTERNET, undated

Eriksson wants to play striker in group games; United manager breaks off holiday to vent anger at FA.

An exhaustive day of medical checks, frayed tempers and delicate negotiations ended with Wayne Rooney landing back in Germany late last night for the World Cup. He described himself as "delighted" but Sir Alex Ferguson was vehemently against him going and will be dismayed by the disclosure that Sven-Goran Eriksson is toying with the idea of using the forward in England's final group match against Sweden on June 20.

No sooner had Rooney been reunited with his teammates at their Black Forest hotel - to whom his first words were reportedly "the big man's back in town" - than it transpired that Eriksson had informed his coaching staff that, fitness permitting, he would like to field Rooney for 30 minutes if England have already beaten Paraguay and Trinidad & Tobago to confirm their place in the first knock-out phase. Having scored a rare victory over Ferguson, Eriksson believes a second-half appearance could help Rooney's rehabilitation, particularly if there is little riding on the game.

England's head coach is not reckless enough to take such a decision without receiving the approval of the team's doctor, Lef Sward, but Ferguson will be full of foreboding at the mere suggestion. The Manchester United manager has strong reservations about

Rooney taking any part in the tournament, never mind accelerating his recovery to make his comeback in only 12 days' time. Tellingly, some of Rooney's own representatives are also concerned that Eriksson may be gambling with his long-term fitness. The Swede is close to the end of his employment with the Football Association and there is a suspicion that he has become demob happy.

"There is a huge difference between running round a few poles and kicking a lightweight football around to having 13 stone of Argentine defender jumping on your recently broken foot," said one of the people involved in the process. "If Rooney gets injured in the course of the tournament then you can expect the mother of all Glaswegian explosions."

Breaking off from his holiday in the south of France, Ferguson voiced his misgivings in the strongest possible terms during a series of fractious top-level telephone calls to, among others, the FA executive director David Davies, but ultimately he was powerless to do anything more than request that his star player be treated with extreme caution. The FA will try to appease United and their manager by promising to update them on a daily basis.

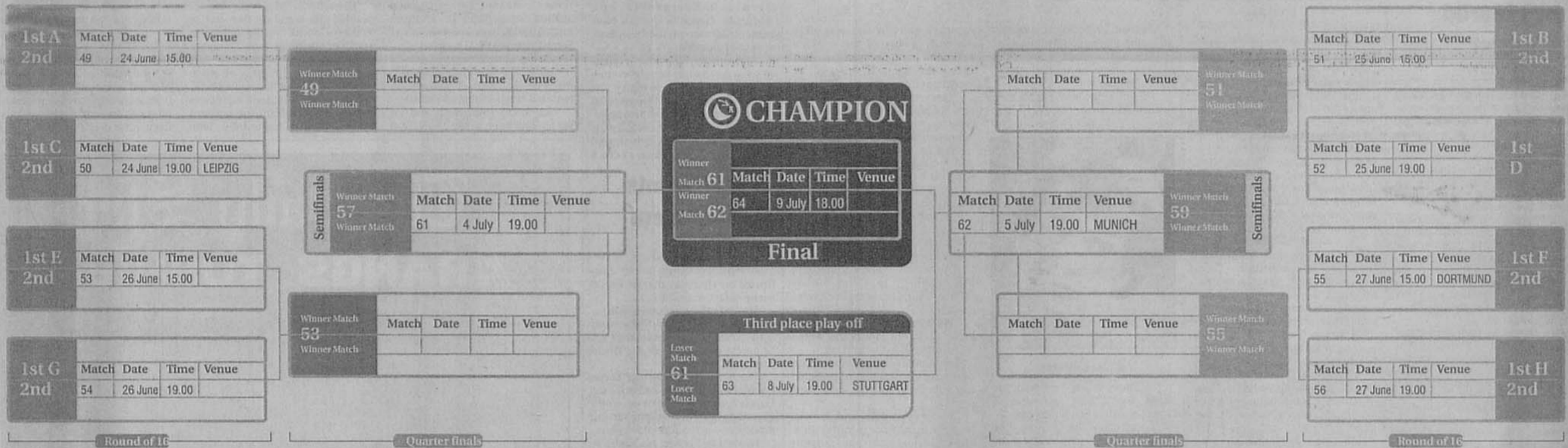
FIFA's regulations meant United could not withdraw their player, as Ferguson would have liked, but it says everything about the club's position that their first reaction to being told that Rooney's recovery was ahead of schedule was reportedly to request a second opinion.



PHOTO: AFP

Italian forwards (from L) Filippo Inzaghi, Alberto Gilardino and Francesco Totti warm up during their first training session in Duisburg on Thursday on the eve of the World Cup.

WORLD CUP 2006 FIXTURES



NOTE: ALL TIMES ARE GMT. TO KNOW THE BANGLADESH STANDARD TIME PLEASE ADD 6 HOURS WITH GMT.

Table of match fixtures from June 9 to June 23, including teams, venues, and times.

Group A, B, C, and D tables showing team names, matches played (MP), wins (W), draws (D), losses (L), goals for (GF), goals against (GA), and points (PTS).

Group E, F, G, and H tables showing team names, matches played (MP), wins (W), draws (D), losses (L), goals for (GF), goals against (GA), and points (PTS).

Table of match fixtures from June 17 to June 22, including teams, venues, and times.

1st Round

1st Round