Ismael injury shocker

AFP, *Munich*

Bayern Munich suffered a blow on Tuesday as French defender Valerien Ismael broke his tibia in training.

The 30-year-old was virtually an ever present in the double winning side last season - playing 34 of their 38 league matches - but faces up to six months on the sidelines and will undergo an operation later on Tuesday.

"Valerien Ismael was seriously injured and will be operated on for a broken tibia," the club said in a statement.

Ismael, who would have been competing with Belgian international Daniel Van Buyten for a place in the starting line-up, numbers Lens, Strasbourg and Werder Bremen amongst his former clubs.

Van der Meyde wants dog back!

THE GUARDIAN

Everton winger Andy van der Meyde has made an emotional plea after his pedigree dog was stolen at the weekend, saying he was prepared to pay anybody who secured the safe return of the seven-month-old French mastiff.

When thieves forced their way into the Wirral home of the footballer last Saturday, their haul included a Ferrari, a black Mini Cooper convertible, Rolex watches, jewellery - and a much-loved jowly pup called Mac.

The Ferrari and the Mini have been recovered, but the dog is still missing. Yesterday Van der Meyde said: "Obviously I want my stuff back. But I want Mac back more than anything. He is just a puppy."

The burglary is the latest in a line of unlucky episodes for the footballer, who has been nicknamed "Meydey" by Everton fans.

Last week the Dutchman collapsed during a night out in Liverpool and was taken to hospital. He claimed his drink was spiked, but his plight inspired little sympathy among bosses at Goodison Park, who fined him £50,000 for socialising two days before a match.

A spokesman for Merseyside police said: "The victim has not reported receiving any ransom demands. It is likely the dog was not targeted but taken during the burglary as an item of potential value."

The Missing Pets Bureau, which helps to trace missing or stolen animals, has seen an increase in the number of thefts. A spokesman, Simon Worsford, said: "We only report a dog as stolen if there is a crime reference number. We have around 100,000 pets on our database and about 80% of the animals registered are dogs."

Walcott scores for U-21s

AFP, *London*

Theo Walcott showed England fans what might have been at the World Cup finals when the 17-year-old scored within three minutes of the England Under-21 clash with Moldova.

In doing so Walcott became the youngest ever scorer in England Under-21 matches as the English eked out a 2-2 draw.

Walcott was a controversial choice as one of former England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson's four strikers for the World Cup finals.

Despite Michael Owen being injured and returning home and Peter Crouch out of form the Arsenal forward was never given a chance not even when reduced to 10 men with Wayne Rooney's sending-off against Portugal in the quarter-final.

England lost the match in a penalty shoot out and Eriksson's successor Steve McClaren pointedly restored the more experienced Jermain Defoe to the squad for the friendly with Greece while sending Walcott back to the Under-21s.

Ashton set for Nov return

INTERNET, *undated*

Dean Ashton will aim to recover from a broken ankle in time to feature in West Ham's UEFA Cup campaign after cruelly being denied his England debut.

Ashton is expected to be out until mid-November after suffering a broken ankle during an England training session on Tuesday.

It is a bitter blow for the 22-year-old, who would have made his senior international debut against Greece tonight before embarking on a first full Premiership season and a campaign in the UEFA Cup.

But Ashton now faces 12 weeks on the sidelines and the miserable prospect of missing some major games for both club and country.

And West Ham are set to be without their £7.25million record signing for at least the first 10 league games of the season plus next month's two-legged UEFA Cup first-round tie.

Hammers manager Alan Pardew said: 'We are absolutely devastated. It's a massive blow for Deano and his family, and for everybody here at West Ham United.

PHOTO: AFP

Japan striker Hisato Sato (C) shoots to score his team's second goal in their AFC Asian Cup qualifying match against Yemen in Niigata on Wednesday.

Double blow for United

AFP, *London*

Manchester United's Wayne Rooney and Paul Scholes were both banned Tuesday for three matches by the FA after losing claims for wrongful dismissal during a pre-season friendly against Porto in Amsterdam on August 4.

The bans will start from Wednesday, August 23, 14 days on from the day the Football Association, the sport's governing body in England, received the match officials' report from the Dutch FA.

That means Rooney and Scholes are available for United's English Premiership opener at home to Fulham on Saturday but will miss the league games away to Charlton and Watford on August 23 and 26 respectively as well as the Old Trafford encounter with Tottenham on September 9.

England internationals Rooney and Scholes were sent off for violent conduct and serious foul play respectively.

"At an Independent Disciplinary Commission hearing today, Wayne Rooney and Paul Scholes had claims for wrongful dismissal rejected and will therefore both serve three-match suspensions," the FA said in a statement.

United were refusing to comment Tuesday on the bans, but had previously been confident that both would see their red cards downgraded to bookable offences.

Earlier this week, Red Devils boss Alex Ferguson, who had said he believed Rooney was falling victim to his own tempestuous reputation, said as he confirmed United's appeal: "I am surprised it has carried on this far".

Rooney appeared to make contact with Portuguese player Pepe during an aerial challenge and was shown his second straight red card following his dismissal in the World Cup quarter-final against Portugal.

The striker said this week: "I feel a bit let down. I did not take my eyes off the ball once. On the way down, my hands brushed against the player. There was not much contact but the lad went down and stayed down."

Scholes was dismissed for a second bookable offence after a scything 68th-minute challenge although Ferguson said at the time: "There is no excuse for Paul -- it was a tackle from behind."

Aragones under fire

Football

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Spain coach Luis Aragones said that his side's performance in their 0-0 draw against Iceland on Tuesday was one of their worst since he took charge two years ago.

However, it was the Aragones himself who came in for the biggest criticism from the Spanish media on Wednesday.

"The Spain coach is refusing to accept the failure at the World Cup and refusing to admit that time is running out," said sports daily Marca in its editorial. "What exactly has Luis done to deserve an extension of his contract."

Prior to the World Cup Aragones had promised to quit his post if Spain did not reach the semi-finals but he went back on his decision when they were knocked out by France in the first knockout round.

Aragones said he saw no reason why he should be held to his word and insisted he saw plenty of reason for optimism despite the team's premature exit.

He kept faith with the vast majority of the World Cup squad for Tuesday's match, but the team showed little no sign of improvement as they struggled to create chances against a limited Iceland side who dominated for much of the match.

The 68-year-old tried out two different formations during the game, 4-3-3 in the first half and 4-4-2 in the second, but neither system brought the desired results.

Aragones refused to take the opportunity to give the only newcomer to the squad his debut when he left midfielder Borja Oubina on the bench.

Sports daily AS said that he should have followed the example of world champions Italy.

"The new Italy coach Roberto Donadoni didn't call up a single member of the World Cup winning starting team for his first match of the season. He knows something that Luis doesn't and that is that the key to success is motivation."

Aragones himself appeared to have been resigned to the fact that his players had little enthusiasm to play a friendly in the middle of August.

"It was probably the worst game since I took charge as coach, but I expected that," he told reporters. "We are not ready at this stage of the season, we lacked pace, stamina and strike power. The players were tired."

Spain open their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign at home to Group F minnows Liechtenstein on Sept. 2 and then meet Northern Ireland in Belfast four days later.

Super Cup derby kicks off season

Football

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Spanish and European champions Barcelona will have to hit the ground running in a frantic start to the season kicking off with a local derby against Espanyol in the Spanish Super Cup on Thursday.

The traditional curtain raiser to the season against the King's Cup winners is the first of five high-profile matches awaiting Barca in the space of 12 days.

They host Espanyol in the return leg at the Nou Camp on Sunday, meet German champions Bayern Munich in the annual Hans Gamper trophy on Tuesday and then face UEFA Cup winners Sevilla in the European Super Cup in Monaco the following Friday.

Three days later they begin their title defence away to Celta Vigo.

Barca have just returned from a draining two-week promotional tour of Mexico and the United States, but coach Frank Rijkaard has said there is no danger of his players holding back in Thursday's match.

"We are very optimistic about the Super Cup and winning it is one of our objectives this season," the Dutchman said earlier this week. "It is an important trophy for both the players and the club."

The majority of Barca's players have been released from international duty to prepare for the game and Rijkaard's only selection worries centre on Carles Puyol, Xavi and Juliano Belletti who all have minor injury niggles.

Thursday's game at Montjuic will give new signings Eidur Gudjohnsen, Gianluca Zambrotta and Lilian Thuram a chance to play their first competitive matches for the Catalans, while Ronaldinho and Lionel Messi will be raring to go after their disappointing performances at the World Cup.

"It is going to be a real pleasure to play alongside Messi, (Samuel) Eto'o, Ronaldinho and Deco," Zambrotta said earlier this week. "The level technical skill and spirit of the team are really impressive."

Espanyol are essentially the same outfit as the one which avoided relegation by the skin of their teeth last season, but they are experts at upsetting the form book as evidenced by their 4-1 demolition of favourites Real Zaragoza in the final of last season's King's Cup.

"There is no doubt that Barca are the favourites," Espanyol coach Ernesto Valverde said on Monday. "They are the league and European champions and play the second leg at home.

"But we are in good shape and nowhere is it written that the favourites always win."

Barca aim to offload Saviola

INTERNET, *undated*

Barcelona are determined to thrash out Javier Saviola's sale before the end of the summer market.

After returning from the USA, Barca directors are sitting down with the Argentine this week to seek an agreement over his departure. Barca want to sell, while Saviola would prefer a loan move before leaving next summer on a Bosman.

Racing Santander, Real Zaragoza and Sevilla, where Saviola spent last season, are all interested in taking the striker off Barca's hands.

Japan scrape to win

AFP, *Niigata*

Defending champions Japan scrapped a 2-0 victory against Yemen Wednesday in an Asian Cup qualifier, their first official win under new coach Ivica Osim.

Midfielder Yuki Abe broke the deadlock in the 70th minute, heading in a corner from Alessandro Santos after the home side struggled to find the target, missing dozens of clear-cut opportunities.

Striker Hisato Sato put the result beyond doubt a minute into injury time, smacking home a rebound off Yemen goalkeeper Salem Saeed who fumbled a Santos freekick.

From the whistle, Japan overwhelmed Yemen with their speed and ball skills but the visitors were solid in defense, throwing virtually everyone behind the ball.

The defending Asian champions kept up the pressure, sending in a barrage of crosses and unleashing a volley shots but failing to find the net until Abe's strike.

The three-time Asian Cup winners are now joint leaders of Group A on six points with Saudi Arabia, who thumped India 3-0 earlier Wednesday. Japan thrashed the Indians 6-0 in February, giving them no chance of qualifying.

Japan play Saudi Arabia away on September 3 and three days later face Yemen at home.

Yemen's defeat leaves them in a serious predicament with only the top two from each group qualifying for the finals in July next year, co-hosted by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Newcastle face fight for Kuyt

AFP, *Newcastle*

Newcastle United manager Glenn Roeder admitted Wednesday that he has a big battle on his hands if he wants to win the race to sign highly-rated Netherlands striker Dirk Kuyt.

Roeder said he would be in Dublin later to watch Kuyt as the Republic of Ireland take on the Dutch in a friendly encounter.

A string of other English Premiership clubs have been linked to the Feyenoord forward.

"He is not the quickest striker I have ever seen in my life, but there is no doubt he knows how to score a goal," Roeder said on BBC radio.

"He is a very, very hard working player, and his body language on the pitch suggests he is the sort of player you would like in your dressing room. He is very committed to the team effort.

"There are lots of plusses as far as Dirk Kuyt is concerned, but I do know we are not the only club who are interested in him.

"Another club, in the top four, are very strongly interested in him.

"We would like to find the possibility of bringing this particular player to Newcastle, and we are working hard on that at the moment."

It could be tough to tempt Kuyt to switch to St James's Park, where there will be no Champions League football this season.

Newcastle finished seventh in the Premiership last season and are in the second qualifying round of the UEFA Cup, having had to play in the Intertoto Cup in the hope of securing some European football.

However, Roeder has tempted Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff to join from champions Chelsea.

He is desperate to sign a top striker to replace Alan Shearer, the Magpies legend who retired at the end of last season.

The English Premiership kicks off on Saturday and Newcastle enter the campaign without their main hitman Michael Owen, who injured a knee while on England duty during the World Cup.

That leaves the Magpies with former forgotten man Albert Luque and youth team graduate Shola Ameobi as their main attacking threat.

Knockout blow for Dempsey

AFP, *New York*

Clint Dempsey, the only US player to score a goal in this year's World Cup, received a two-game Major League Soccer ban on Tuesday for elbowing World Cup teammate Jimmy Conrad in the face.

Dempsey, a midfielder for the New England Revolution, was also fined 1,000 dollars for the incident, which took place last Wednesday in a goal-less draw with the Kansas City Wizards.

Wizards' defender Conrad suffered a broken jaw and will be sidelined for upto six weeks after being struck in the face by Dempsey in the 57th minute.

Dempsey produced the lone goal by a US player in a 2-1 loss to Ghana that doomed the Americans' bid to qualify for the second round in the World Cup.

Dempsey's troubled MLS season also included a two-game suspension and 750-dollar fine for an altercation with Chicago Fire defender Gonzalo Segares. Dempsey appealed the decision and only had to serve a one-game ban.

Dempsey also had been suspended by him team for two weeks in March for brawling with teammate Joe Franchino.

Dhorasoo film creates controversy

Football

AFP, *Paris*

Paris Saint Germain midfielder Vikash Dhorasoo sought to reassure his manager and teammates on Tuesday after they expressed concern over a film he shot during France's World Cup campaign.

France manager Raymond Domenech indicated Tuesday in no uncertain terms that he didn't want any part of Dhorasoo's project which was made with the help of French film director Fred Poulet.

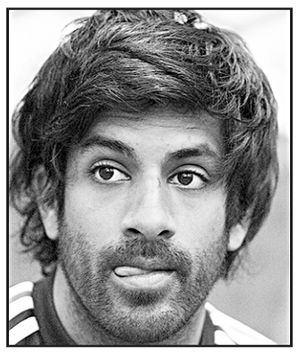
And new France captain Patrick Vieira told Dhorasoo - who has been left out of the French squad for Wednesday's friendly with Bosnia and Herzegovina - that he had no right to make public private moments of France's time in Germany.

Dhorasoo, who played a peripheral role during the World Cup and did not feature in the final, also received a stern warning from the French Football Federation (FFF) that he could only go ahead and show images of the France team after getting their specific approval.

But in the face of this criticism the player went on French radio to take the heat out of the row arguing that the documentary was a purely personal reflection on his time in Germany.

"I want to reassure everyone, I would never allow myself to take images and voice recordings from people withuot their permission," he said.

"I don't need to ask for authorisation to show this film as it's just about me, there's no one else in it. It's my story, it's as if I'd written a personal diary which I then published.



VIKASH DHORASOO

"My Super-8 camera was my pen."

Earlier Domenech had been adamant that he didn't want to appear in the controversial documentary.

"I never gave him my approval and I won't be giving it now, that's clear," the manager said at Les Bleus' training camp here ahead of their departure for Sarajevo.

"It's better if he edits me out of it right now," Domenech insisted.

"It (the World Cup) is not something that concerns me now, it's a memory. There are those who have written about it, me for example, and others who take photos."

"I saw him filming during the World Cup, we talked about it, it was a film for him. It didn't strike me as being problematic.

"But the rules are clear concerning these major competitions. You don't have the right to show the image of the France team shirt or the faces of another player as these rights belong to the France team.

"He should change his job, in fact that's precisely what he's done. When you are observing others you can't be an actor, it's a pity."

Vieira's nose has also been put out of joint over Dhorasoo's screen memoirs.

"I wasn't aware of what he was doing. I'm surprised.

"He should be careful, as it's about the life of a group" the Inter Milan midfielder said.

"There are some things that you can't reveal. You can't publish things that the group doesn't want out in the public domain," the former Arsenal star added.

FFF president Jean-Pierre Escalettes said he would be seeking assurances from Dhorasoo that the film didn't contravene the Federation's rights governing the filming of individuals.

"Any screening of images of the France team whether on the pitch or in training has to get authorisation from us first," he told Le Parisien newspaper.

"And for the moment he hasn't had that."

Hargreaves weighs Utd move

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Since Roy Keane left Old Trafford last November, Manchester United's search for his replacement has been like a protracted game of Guess Who? Now, however, it seems there are only two cards standing: Marcos Senna and Owen Hargreaves, who today said that he wants to move to Old Trafford after receiving a "fantastic offer" from the club.

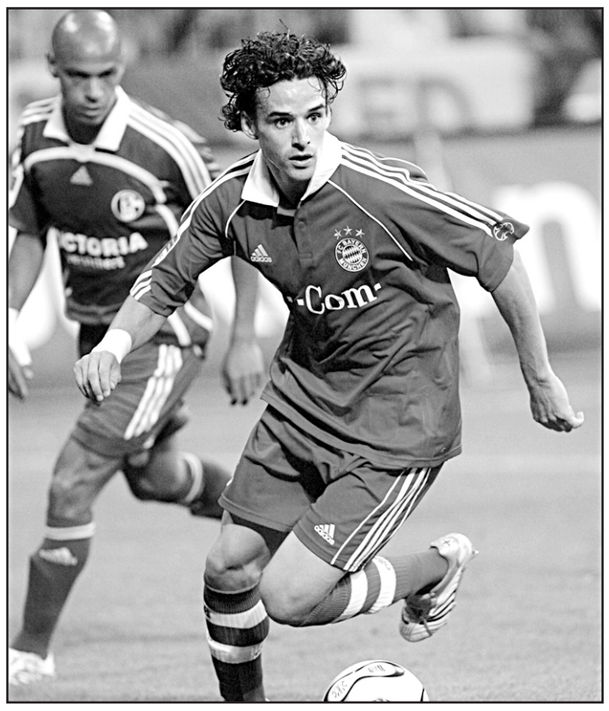
Hargreaves, who will play at Old Trafford for England against Greece tonight, told the German magazine Sport Bild that he was thinking over a move to join Sir Alex Ferguson's squad. He has recently signed a contract extension with Bayern Munich that takes him up to 2010, but has a longstanding desire to move to the Premiership.

"The offer from Manchester United is fantastic," said Hargreaves. "Particularly as an England international, it is of interest and you never know if such an opportunity will arise again. I hope to make the next step this summer so I hope Bayern will cooperate."

It may not run quite so smoothly, however. After losing Michael Ballack to Chelsea, Bayern are understandably loath to sell Hargreaves. "I won't let players leave our team, especially not someone like Hargreaves," said their manager Felix Magath recently, although reports suggest that they may accept an offer of around £17m. While that seems an inordinately high fee, United have already set a precedent by paying up to 163;18.6m for Michael Carrick, Hargreaves' understudy at the World Cup.

It was in Germany that Hargreaves turned his public perception in this country completely on its head, chiefly with a truly outstanding display in the quarter-final against Portugal. From being a laughing stock before the tournament, he is now seen as one of the pillars of Steve McClaren's new England. And with United desperate for an established defensive midfielder, Hargreaves' energy, humility - he simply wins the ball and gives it to better players as quickly as possible - experience, temperament and Englishness would seem to make him an outstanding candidate for Ferguson.

Hargreaves, by his own admission, is a limited player, and at this stage of his development he lacks the forensic ability which made Keane, in his later years, so important and which has enabled the name 'Makelele' to define a position. But he is a hyperactive, vigorous, in-your-face ballwinner who would add much-needed energy to a United midfield which might otherwise revolve around more languid technicians such as Carrick and Paul Scholes, although how the three would fit into Ferguson's preferred 4-4-1-1 system remains to be seen.



OWEN HARGREAVES

CROSSWORD *By Eugene Sheffer*

ACROSS

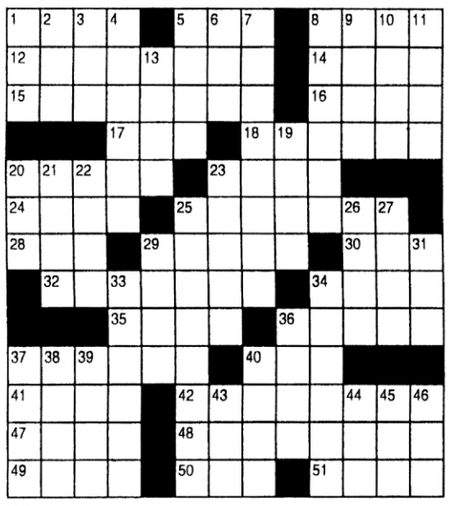
1 Skeletal component
5 Prizefighter
8 Comical Caroline
12 Some skillets
14 Right on the map?
15 They're often in the basement
16 "Arrivederci"
17 Do some math
18 Make into confetti
20 Big
23 Discard
24 One of HOMES
25 Coffeehouse staffer
28 Label
29 Command
30 Cleopatra's slayer
32 Latino neighborhoods
34 Dog bane
35 Stuff too numerous to mention (Abbr.)
36 Singer's rendition
37 African antelope
40 Intention
41 Modern-day coin
42 Grill
47 As well
48 Estrange
49 Damon or Dillon
50 Afternoon social
51 "Star —"

DOWN

1 Tucker's partner?
2 — pro nobis
3 Postal Creed word
4 Lock together
5 Settled up
6 Samovar
7 Movements
8 Summarizes
9 Barbershop sweepings
10 Birthright barterer
11 On
13 Test the waters
19 Ottoman leader
20 Say it's OK
21 Spirited steed
22 Latvia's capital
23 Cuts grooves into a pedestal
25 Insult
26 Bath powder
27 "... — of troubles"
29 "— take arms against (27-Down)"
31 Crony
33 Start the computer up again
34 Incite
36 Aura
37 Paper quantity
38 Shake in the grass?
39 Formerly
40 1998 Andrea Bocelli album
43 Stout cousin
44 Jam ingredient
45 Multipurpose truck
46 "A mouse!"

Solution time: 24 mins.

E	V	I	L		F	A	C	E		M	B	A
M	I	C	A		O	R	A	L		E	L	M
I	N	O	N		N	I	C	K		G	O	O
R	E	N	D		D	A	T		R	A	C	K
			L	S	U		U	R	U			
S	A	L	U	T	E		S	A	B	L	E	S
A	D	O	B	E				I	B	E	R	T
W	O	B	B	L	E		U	N	E	A	S	Y
			E	E	L		S	Y	R			
Y	E	A	R		I	V	E		B	A	R	K
A	P	R		A	S	I	F		A	S	I	A
N	E	T		T	H	O	U		N	E	A	T
K	E	Y		M	A	L	L		D	A	L	E



CRYPTOQUIP

D U Q R W U I U D L N E R W G I H S Q N H D J W E I U X S Q J Z W S J Z W X G E H , U D W W I J S A W E A U J G W - L X W D D W G .

Saturday's Cryptoquip: IF A BIBLICAL PROPHET ORDERED SOME LAMINATED PLASTIC, IS THAT FORMICA FOR MICAH?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals M

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.