



Clint Dempsey stands next to a Honda Ridgeline which he won along with the Honda Player of the Year Award at a ceremony at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

Dempsey best in the States

AFP, Los Angeles

New England Revolution midfielder Clint Dempsey, the only American to score a goal at this year's World Cup, was named US Soccer's national team Player of the Year here Tuesday.

The 23-year-old veteran won the award in voting by a 207-member American sports media panel, receiving 237 points to 184 for runner-up goalkeeper Kasey Keller and 127 for US forward Brian McBride.

Dempsey scored a team-coleading four goals in nine games with the Americans, including the lone US tally in a 2-1 loss to Ghana that kept the US squad from advancing to the second round.

An Italian own-goal brought the only US marker in their 1-1 draw with the eventual World Cup champions, a weak-shooting effort hindering the 2002 quarter-finalist American line-up.

Since his US debut in 2004, Dempsey has 23 caps and six goals for the Americans.

Dempsey scored seven goals this season for Major League Soccer's Revolution, including three in the team's past four matches. The Revolution, 10-8 with 12 draws, have clinched an MLS playoff berth.

Coupet to bury WC heartache

AFP, Paris

France goalkeeper Gregory Coupet insisted Tuesday that he was ready to move on from the heartache of losing out to his old rival Fabien Barthez at the World Cup.

"The World Cup passed me by and that's hard to forget," admitted the 33-year-old Lyon goalkeeper four days before the World Cup finalists travel to Scotland for their third Euro 2008 Group B qualifier.

"It wasn't an easy time for me but the desire to return to competition and to play have carried me through."

Coupet won five French league titles with Lyon, but despite his irreproachable performances for France since Euro 2004 had to watch from the sidelines as Les Bleus marched to the World Cup in Germany.

He was at the centre of a spectacular bust-up with coach Raymond Domenech shortly before the finals, when he stormed out of France's pre-tournament training camp following the coach's decision to pick Barthez as his No. 1.

The Lyon keeper had filled that position for most of the preceding two years and was furious after losing out to Barthez at the 11th hour.

"I've never had any privileged relationship with any coach. It's the same situation with Mr Domenech. The adventure got off to a painful start but maybe it will take a positive turn in the future. In any case I've had enough discussions on the subject so they know my mind."

"Playing for France has always been my objective, it's something that is within me," he said.

"It's not a job for me, it's my passion. You only have to look at what I did before the World

Cup. On a sporting level I did everything in my power."

But Coupet admitted that he still found it hard "to forgive ... Raymond Domenech knows it only too well."

"We had frank and honest discussions, sometimes bitter. But I respect the man. We're there to work, not to love one another."

After being second choice three times at the 2002 World Cup, Euro 2004 and the 2006 World Cup, Coupet will be hoping to finally be the first choice but is not taking anything for granted.

"We're there to serve the French team but when we're not as good as we should be there are players behind to take our place," he said.

"You have to keep calling yourself into question, if I'm not good, there's no reason why I should be on the team."

Aussie stars set for swan song

AFP, Sydney

Goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac, midfielder Stan Lazaridis and defenders Tony Vidmar and Tony Popovic are set to hang up their international boots after Australia's friendly against Paraguay on Saturday.

Josip Skoko, 30, who skipped the Socceroos in last month's Asian Cup qualifier loss to Kuwait, was also considering doing the same, Australian Associated Press reported.

Interim coach Graham Arnold has said he wants all pending retirements made public by Friday.

Popovic, who made his international debut 11 years ago against Colombia, started in Australia's 2-0 loss to Brazil at the World Cup but was forced off with a calf injury before halftime.

He admitted the friendly in Brisbane on Saturday presented a rare opportunity for him to exit on his own terms and in front of a home crowd.

"It's something I've been thinking about for a little while," the 33-year-old Popovic said.

"After the World Cup you're high on emotion, I thought I better think about it for a little while and make sure I don't make a rash decision, but I'm very happy with it."

"It's an honour to play for your country. I'm privileged, proud and I'll go out very happy and content."

While Australia has played two Asian Cup qualifiers since the World Cup, Saturday's match and next Wednesday's clash with Bahrain in Sydney will be the first to feature a near-full strength Socceroos team since Germany 2006.

Captain Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell and Josh Kennedy are the only members of the World Cup squad unavailable.

Lippi wants Liga future

INTERNET, undated

Former Italy Coach Marcello Lippi has confirmed his football comeback could be in Spain next season.

"I'd very much like to be a Coach in La Liga. It's a type of football that I enjoy," said the 2006 World Cup winner on RAI Uno programme 'Porta a Porta'.

"I haven't received any offers from Italian clubs, but I did get plenty of interest from abroad. However, I don't intend to resume work in the next few months."

Lippi surprised many when he resigned from his post just days after winning the most prestigious trophy in the sport, although once again he hinted that it was the pre-tournament Calciopoli scandal and attempts to implicate him in it that

soured the situation. "Guido Rossi had asked me to stay on. I said enough was enough, because I didn't consider all that controversy to be healthy. I earned my place at the World Cup, so I didn't feel I should be put under pressure to give that up. Besides, there were other factors that also pushed me to quit after the tournament. It was a two-year experience and the end of a natural cycle."

New Italy boss Roberto Donadoni also admitted this week he had offered to resign following the dreadful start to his campaign, but Lippi defended his heir.

"Donadoni is a wise and capable Coach. I am sure that he'll slowly emerge from this situation and with the strength of this squad can give Italy some magic moments."

The Azzurri lifted the World Cup after a penalty shoot-out with France, but it could be the last time

this happens. FIFA President Sepp Blatter has urged for major games to be replayed or decided by taking more and more players off the field.

"In my view a penalty kick is a technical test, not a lottery. It's difficult that a team which didn't deserve it will emerge on top after a shoot-out. It would be complicated to replay a match of that magnitude and with such a tight international schedule."

Lippi's greatest club achievements were at Juventus, who have been demoted as a result of the Calciopoli scandal and stripped of their last two Scudetto titles.

"I really didn't expect them to be in Serie B, but considering what happened, the club hierarchy took the decision with dignity and the right determination, which is typical of Juventus."

Real still keen on Mexes

INTERNET, undated

Spanish giants Real Madrid are still keen on bringing Roma's Philippe Mexes to the Bernabeu, despite strong resistance from the Giallorossi.

Real coach Fabio Capello knows the French defender well, having taken him to the Italian capital from Auxerre in 2004, and now the tactician wants his man to join him in Spain.

"Capello wants Mexes," said agent Ernesto Bronzetti in the Guerin Sportivo magazine. "Roma, however, consider the player untransferable and are not willing to discuss any offer."

Capello joined the Liga side in the summer and despite the signing of World Cup winner Fabio Cannavaro from Juventus to shore up the back line, his defence is still leaking goals.

Mexes -- who has enjoyed a solid start to the season with Roma -- could help to plug those holes, and Los Merengues are expected to make a move for him during the January transfer window.

Barton escapes police charge

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City midfielder Joey Barton has escaped a police charge after dropping his shorts in the direction of Everton supporters following their 1-1 draw at Goodison Park on Saturday.

Merseyside police confirmed Wednesday they have terminated their inquiries into the incident, and will now leave the Football Association (FA) to consider any further punishment.

"Merseyside Police has been in consultation with the FA in relation to the (Barton) incident. The FA will now continue with their own investigation," a police statement read.

City boss Stuart Pearce earlier called for a sense of perspective to be applied to any punishment meted out to the 23-year-old midfielder.

"Let's get things into a little bit of perspective," said Pearce.

"Maybe some of the things that were said to that player are a more serious matter but we are not going to rake that up."

"At best it's a bit of comedy that everyone should laugh off."

Collimore targeting comeback

AFP, London

Former England striker Stan Collimore revealed Wednesday that he is targeting a comeback.

The former Liverpool and Aston Villa player has embarked on a three-week fitness programme in Tenerife.

"I've had physical tests and I'm confident I will come back faster, stronger and fitter than I ever was," Collimore told the Daily Mirror.

"A month from today I guarantee I will be able to stand side by side with any striker in the country and my physique will be up there with any of them."

"This time I'm not going to self-destruct. You are not going to see headlines about me being kicked out of a bar somewhere in the early hours rolling drunk."

The 35-year-old added: "I know I can still be among the best."

Collimore last played professional football for Real Oviedo in Spain's Primera Liga in 2001.

Since then he has tried to forge a career as an actor, appearing in Basic Instinct 2.

Kaiser apologises

AFP, Johannesburg

Franz Beckenbauer apologised for the confusion surrounding his comments about South Africa's ability to host the 2010 World Cup.

Beckenbauer, head of the organising committee of this summer's World Cup in Germany, caused a stir last month when he reportedly said the tournament -- the first to be held in Africa -- was "beset by big problems."

His comments came amid national and international concerns over the state of stadium construction, transportation arrangements and security plans.

Irvin Khoza, chairman of the local organizing committee, released a letter from Beckenbauer on Tuesday.

"I am very sorry that these statements were falsely portrayed and I shall do everything in my power to support the World Cup in South Africa 2010," he said.

In the letter addressed to his South African counterpart, Danny Jordaan, Beckenbauer said he was surprised at the outcry, adding that he had been responding to "media reports that there are certain difficul-

ties relating to stadia construction, etc."

"At no point did I mention that Germany could be a substitute organizer. On the contrary, it is my own and my colleagues' understanding that it is most important that the upcoming World Cup in South Africa is a success," he said.

Khoza, speaking after a two-day meeting of the organizing committee's board, reaffirmed South Africa's preparedness. The tournament will bring in an estimated 350,000 foreign visitors to the monthlong event.

"I am confident in terms of our program that we will meet our commitments," he said.

The government has earmarked about 710 million dollars for building and renovating 10 stadiums, and a further 1.2 billion dollars on upgrades to airports, roads and railway lines.

Khoza said Parliament would complete funding arrangements this month, and the construction of six new stadiums would begin in January. He also said a proposal had been made to FIFA to allow neighbouring countries to be used as base camps by participating teams.

"This will allow us to make it a truly African World Cup and spread the economic benefits around," he said.

Khoza said the board had been briefed on transportation and security plans.

"Never in the history of the country has the government failed to secure an event," he said.

FIFA secretary-general Urs Linsi, a member of the local organizing committee's board, gave his support for the country's plans.

"We have started planning earlier than ever before. 2010 is now our main focus. There are challenges but we will meet them. It has been an excellent meeting and the lights are green for go-ahead," he said.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter is to arrive in South Africa this month.



German legend Franz Beckenbauer and his wife Heidi pose prior to attending the premiere of "Deutschland. Ein Sommermärchen" in Berlin on Tuesday.



Portugal players jog at a training session on Wednesday at the National Stadium in Oeiras, outside Lisbon. Portugal will play Azerbaijan in Euro 2008 qualifying match on Saturday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Tater
5 Comic-strip
8 Worry
12 Medal deservier
13 — pro nobis
14 Mad
15 Exam format
16 Sea hog
18 Approach the curb
20 Undergoes catharsis
21 Vicinity
23 Skillet
24 Mama Bear's recipe
28 South American city
31 Rushmore face
32 Litigants
34 Promptly
35 Platter
37 Portion of Iberia
39 "Alley ..."

DOWN

1 Buy stuff
2 28-
3 Across's land
4 Buck
5 Arose suddenly
6 Gold, in
7 Distort
8 Like most
9 Holding the scepter
10 Relaxation
11 Very, in Versailles
12 Litter member
13 "Exodus" writer
14 —
15 Aquarius
16 Cushion
17 "Darn it!"
18 "Exodus" writer
19 —
20 —
21 —
22 —
23 —
24 Cushion

Solution time: 24 mins.

ACROSS: 1. TATER, 2. 28-
DOWN: 1. BUY STUFF, 2. 28-
ACROSS: 3. ACROSS'S LAND, 4. BUCK, 5. AROSE, 6. GOLD, 7. DISTORT, 8. LIKE, 9. HOLDING THE SCEPTER, 10. RELAXATION, 11. VERY, IN, 12. LITTER MEMBER, 13. "EXODUS" WRITER, 14. —, 15. AQUARIUS, 16. CUSHION, 17. "DARN IT!", 18. "EXODUS" WRITER, 19. —, 20. —, 21. —, 22. —, 23. —, 24. CUSHION

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12				13				14			
15				16				17			
18				19			20				
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24	25	26					27	28	29	30	
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42	43				44		45		46	47	48
49					50			51			
52					53				54		
55							56			57	

CRYPTOQUIP

GB UVAKN BVGAU QZ TVKN
VO NBBNPQ ZO V SZLOJ,
G SZLAJ PVAA QTVQ
ZGOQFNOQ JGVVYZGOQFNOQ.

Saturday's Cryptquip: THE KING'S SON IS AUTHORTHAN AN ETIQUETTE BOOK TO BE CALLED "THE PRINCE AND THE PROPER."

Today's Cryptquip Clue: B equals F

The Cryptquip 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.