

Klinsmann turns down USA

INTERNET, undated

Juergen Klinsmann has been offered the chance to coach the USA, but is set to turn it down over salary, according to the Bild newspaper.

The US Soccer Federation is reportedly prepared to pay Klinsmann 1.8 million euros, but Klinsmann wants 2.5 million -- which is less than he earned in charge of his native Germany, who he took to the World Cup semifinals this year.

The former international striker lives in California. He has been the favourite for the role in media speculation for some time, although the US Federation has always maintained that they are considering a number of candidates.

The latest names said to be in the frame are Lyon coach Gerard Houllier, Manchester United assistant boss Carlos Queiroz and former England manager Sven Goran-Eriksson.

Meanwhile USA chief Sunil Gulati revealed that the nation had accepted an invitation to play in the Copa America next year, a competition nominally for South American countries.

"The results over the summer emphasised that we need to get in some additional competition," Gulati said, in reference to the USA's group stage exit in Germany.

The tournament will take place in Venezuela, beginning only two days after the end of the Gold Cup, the competition for Central and North America.

That could mean using two drastically different squads, but such a decision would be left up to the new coach, Gulati concluded.

Guti believes in Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder Guti says the club are capable of ending a three-year trophy drought and can win Primera Liga this season, La Sexta television reported him Friday as saying.

"I see us ending up in the Cibeles," said Guti, in allusion to the Cibeles fountain in central Madrid where Real traditionally celebrate success.

Having joined the 30-something club this week he and the likes of teammates Ronaldo and David Beckham will be hoping for a dip in the water come May, particularly the latter pair as a trophy would sweep away the clouds of doubt about their futures.

Beckham has spent much of the season on the bench and Ronaldo also moaned that he had suffered that fate for most of Wednesday's laboured win over Steaua Bucharest which saw the club through to the last 16 of the Champions League.

"Ronaldo needs to bide his time, wait for his chance and seize it," said Guti of the Brazilian, who told ABC newspaper he felt he did not have the backing of coach Fabio Capello.

Guti, whose in-depth interview La Sexta will broadcast Sunday, said he believed the league race would go to the wire -- Real currently trail Barcelona by two points -- and "the team that makes the least mistakes will carry off the title."

Referring back to Ronaldo's moping from the bench, he noted that "there are few players who can say they are indispensable at Real."

Guti insisted he intends to see out his career with the club, but is an avid admirer of the English game. "I always said I'd like to change my arm in England if it came to it," he noted.

Sagnol to succeed Kahn

REUTERS, Paris

France defender Willy Sagnol believes he will take over as Bayern Munich captain when Germany goalkeeper Oliver Kahn retires.

Right back Sagnol, 29, joined the Bundesliga side in 2000 from Monaco.

"I will definitely be Bayern's captain when Oliver Kahn quits," Sagnol told the French sports weekly L'Equipe Magazine on Saturday.

"Being captain in a great foreign club is a source of pride because in these traditional clubs, the armband does not go to the player who has the best relationships with the media but to the boss, the one who is really in charge."

Sagnol has won 50 caps for France since his debut in a 4-0 rout of Turkey in Istanbul six years ago.



LOOKING FOR NEW TALENT! India coach Greg Chappell (L) looks on as a model displays a designer line of collection on the fifth and final day of the Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hair banned as international umpire

REUTERS, Mumbai

Australian umpire Darrell Hair has been banned from umpiring any more international matches, International Cricket Council (ICC) president Percy Sonn said on Saturday.

"He shall not be appointed to officiate in any international games until the end of his contract," Sonn told a news conference at the end of a two-day ICC meeting.

"We have given instructions to our management to discuss Hair's future with him."

Hair's elite umpires' panel contract is due to expire in March, 2008.

Pakistan blamed Hair when they forfeited the fourth Test against England last August after they were penalised for alleged ball tampering.

The Pakistan team refused to take the field after tea on the fourth day of the fourth Test after Hair and fellow umpire Billy Doctrove penalised them five runs and changed the ball.

Hair and Doctrove then decided Pakistan had forfeited the Test. It was the first forfeiture in the history of Test cricket.

An ICC inquiry cleared captain Inzamamul Haq of ball tampering on Sept. 28 although it banned him for four one-day internationals for bringing the game into disrepute. The ICC also said Hair would not officiate in the Champions Trophy which concludes in India on Sunday for "safety and security" reasons.

Hair had already been embroiled in further controversy when the ICC revealed that he had offered to retire in exchange for 500,000 dollars and the Pakistan Cricket Board made it clear it did not want him involved in any more of its games.

Premiership Fulham edge out Everton

REUTERS, London

A deflected second-half shot from Claus Jensen gave Fulham a 1-0 home victory over Everton in an early Premier League kick-off on Saturday.

Danish international Jensen turned sharply on the left after 66 minutes before firing in an effort that flicked off Everton midfielder Lee Carseley and beyond goalkeeper Tim Howard.

American Howard had earlier made a fine save to stop an Ian Pearce header but sixth-placed Everton will feel aggrieved they failed to go home with at least a point after dominating the first half.

Striker Andy Johnson had a strong penalty claim turned down in the opening half and the England international also failed to score with two close-range volleys.

Johnson then brought a superb double save from Fulham goalkeeper Antti Niemi with eight minutes remaining.

Fulham moved up to seventh with 16 points, one behind Everton.

Leaders Manchester United are in action later against Portsmouth at Old Trafford while champions Chelsea, behind United on goal difference, face Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday.

Silent protest from Schalke fans

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Schalke 04 fans will stage a silent protest against their team during Sunday's match at home to German champions Bayern Munich.

Three leading supporters associations have said they will refuse to support their team during the opening 19min 04sec of Sunday's Bundesliga match in protest at the growing chasm between players and supporters.

Fans are dismayed at Schalke's poor form this season. They have already been ousted from the UEFA Cup in the first round and the German Cup in the second round.

Schalke are third in the league, behind Werder Bremen and Bayern, but coach Mirko Slomka has come under fire recently and there are rumours of internal discontent.

"Playing 19 minutes at home without the support of our own fans will not be very nice but we have to accept their decision," said Slomka.

The club's general manager Andreas Muller was sympathetic towards the fans' grievances.

"We understand their reaction," he said. "We agree with them that this team can do better and needs to show more passion, desire and ambition."

'Asians wanted Hair cut'

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

Pressure from Asian nations resulted in Darrell Hair's sensational removal from the elite umpiring panel, due to be confirmed later Saturday, a highly-placed ICC source told AFP.

He said the four South Asian Test-playing nations tabled the motion to sack the controversial Australian three months after he was at the centre of a ball-tampering row with Pakistan.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, together with South Africa, Zimbabwe and the West Indies, voted for Hair's dismissal, he said.

England, Australia and New Zealand wanted him to remain.

"The Asian bloc comprising India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh tabled a motion at the meeting that Hair be taken off the panel," the source said.

"The motion was put to vote and was passed by a 7-3 majority."

"The four Asian nations plus South Africa, Zimbabwe and the West Indies voted against Hair. England, Australia and New Zealand wanted him to continue."

The decision was taken on the opening day of the two-day executive board meeting of the International Cricket Council (ICC) here and was to be formally announced later.

It comes after Pakistan lodged a complaint against Hair for his role in the forfeited Oval Test against England in August and demanded an inquiry into his conduct.

Hair awarded the first forfeited match in Test cricket's 129-year history when Pakistan refused to return to the field in protest at being accused of ball-tampering.

Captain Inzamamul Haq was later cleared of illegally altering the ball, although he was banned for four one-day matches for bringing the game into disrepute.

Hair's reputation plummeted still further when the ICC revealed he had asked for 500,000 dollars in

return for quitting the panel. The controversies followed a string of stormy episodes during Hair's 14-year international career, often involving Asian teams.

In his very first match, in January 1992, he infuriated India at Adelaide with a series of contentious lbw decisions.

But he first hit the headlines in 1995, when he repeatedly no-balled Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan for chucking.

He further inflamed Sri Lankan opinion by describing the spinner's action as "diabolical" in his autobiography.

Hair also upset Pakistan last

November by ruling that captain Inzamam had been run out by a throw to the wicketkeeper during the Faisalabad Test, even though the batsman appeared to be taking evasive action.

The ICC did not include Hair in the panel for the ongoing Champions Trophy tournament in India, saying it was doing this for "safety and security reasons."

The 56-year-old veteran of 76 Tests first stood in first-class cricket in 1988-1989, having previously been a fast bowler for North Sydney and Mosman in the Sydney grade club competition.



DARRELL HAIR

'Bans not for example'

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan doping tribunal chairman Shahid Hamid Saturday said that bans on pacemen Shoab Akhtar and Mohammad Asif were not an attempt to set an example to the cricketing world.

"We acted on the regulations of doping," Hamid told AFP in an interview.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) welcomed the action against the players by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) as a fine precedent for cricket-playing nations.

ICC president Percy Sonn said: "The PCB has done extremely well in handling this matter in such an efficient manner and its strong stand against doping is a fine precedent."

The three-member tribunal, which included former captain Iftikhar Alam and doping expert Doctor Waqar Ahmed, banned Akhtar for two years and Asif for one year after both tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone.

While the 23-year-old Asif may return after his ban, which ends on October 16, 2007 the punishment may effectively end 31-year-old Akhtar's career. His ban expires in

2008. The action also rules the pair out of next year's World Cup in the West Indies. Both Akhtar and Asif are due to appeal against the bans within the next couple of days.

When asked why Pakistan had lost two key players ahead of the next year's World Cup in the West Indies, Hamid said: "Our hands were tied by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) codes of doping, which were also adopted by the Pakistan Cricket Board and International Cricket Council."

"We gave them the best chance to prove their innocence and once the doping offence was established then the commission has to impose minimum penalty under the regulations and the minimum penalty was two years."

Hamid justified the lesser ban on Asif.

"If the commission comes to the conclusion a player has diminished responsibility and was unaware of the doping consequences, the commission has to lessen the penalty but not by more than half," said Hamid, a former governor of Punjab.

The PCB conducted doping awareness lectures and also provided literature to boost awareness among the players early this year. But Asif told the tribunal he did not attend the

programme because he was out of the country and playing county cricket in England at the time.

Hamid said this provided him with 'partial benefit of the doubt'. He added that both players, the PCB and the WADA could appeal against the decision.

"If a player or the PCB is aggrieved by the decision they have the right to appeal either to the same tribunal or to (the) appeal committee provided some new material have come to prove their point."

"WADA can also be aggrieved by the decision as they were in the case of British athlete Linford Christie, who was cleared by a British committee but WADA took the appeal to the court of arbitration, which reversed the decision."

When asked why a medical report on Akhtar, describing him an "occasional smoker, drinker and inclined towards western lifestyle", was made public, Hamid said it was part of his sworn statement and the tribunal never asked for it.

Hamid said the tribunal had also made recommendations to the PCB on doping issues.

"We were not fully satisfied with the medical side and nutrients (for Pakistan players) so we have suggested some recommendations to the PCB," he said.

UEFA for four-club rule

Football

INTERNET, undated

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has pledged to maintain four English teams in the Champions League if he is re-elected for a fifth and final term of office.

Johansson, 77 next week, is standing against Michel Platini in the election on January 26.

Platini wants to limit each country to having a maximum of three teams in the Champions League but Johansson promised to maintain four teams from England, Spain and Italy.

However, Johansson accepted the income from the tournament perpetuated divisions within domestic leagues and that he was in favour of redistributing money from Europe's top club competition to even clubs who do not qualify receive some benefits.

"The five big countries in Europe give us the main part of our income so it makes sense that they benefit the most," said Johansson.

"I am in favour of redistribution of money to other members of the league, not only the three or four at the top."

"They also contribute to the competition in that they help the top

clubs be fit for the Champions League."

Johansson also said England would be front-runners to win the right to stage the 2018 World Cup.

The Swede met Chancellor Gordon Brown and expressed his view that if England bid for 2018 there would be no repeat of the humiliation suffered when they went against Germany for the 2006 tournament.

In that campaign, England bid despite a gentleman's agreement they had had with UEFA countries not to stand against Germany.

Johansson said: "I told Mr Brown about the gentleman's agreement for 2006, but this time most certainly there will be a positive reaction because the other big countries in Europe -- Italy, Germany, France and Spain -- have had it recently and you have not had it since 1966."

"I would be surprised if UEFA did not vote for England this time although they are not bound by any agreement."

He added: "I spoke with the Chancellor and he is very keen on the idea of it coming back to England."

"I allowed myself to inform him that the other confederations have proposed that the World Cup should go to Europe every third time."

"After Germany this year, it is

going to South Africa in 2010 and then to South America in 2014.

"The next time it might be back in Europe would be 2018."

FIFA insist no decision on which continent will host 2018 has yet been taken and last month Sepp Blatter talked positively about Australia being the hosts of that tournament.

Blatter however has also said he would welcome a bid from England as "the home of football" for 2018.

Bosnia coach sacked

AFP, Sarajevo

Bosnia's football federation said Friday it had sacked national coach Blaz Sliskovic due to poor results.

Bosnia is unlikely to qualify for the 2008 European Championships after collecting just four points in as many matches.

"The board has decided to dismiss Blaz Sliskovic," the FA said in a statement, adding that it had also sacked the coaches of Bosnia's junior and other squads.

Sliskovic had announced his

AFP, Birmingham



Martin O'Neill has told his players they are playing for their futures as Aston Villa prepare to tackle Blackburn at Villa Park on Sunday.

Villa have made a great start under O'Neill, only losing for the first time in the English Premiership in last week's 3-1 reverse at Liverpool.

They were the last team to lose their unbeaten record and despite that defeat at Anfield still sit seventh in the table.

But O'Neill is aiming for much higher and is contemplating which of his players are good enough to fulfill his own ambitions.

With the transfer window due to open in January and billionaire US backer Randy Lerner due to hand O'Neill a substantial kitty, his players face a race against time to convince the Northern Irishman they should remain a part of his long-term think-

ing. "I want another two months of football before I make a genuine and concerted judgement on the players here -- and that's on the players who have played pretty often," said O'Neill.

"You can imagine how less informed I'd be on those who would have played less."

Villa's players are under pressure to improve on last week's display where they were 3-0 down at half-time before a second-half revival that could have yielded more than the one goal from young striker Gabriel Agbonlahor.

And it could not be a worse time to face a Blackburn side that are gradually showing signs of returning to the form that saw them qualify for Europe last season.

Blackburn thrashed Switzerland's Basel 3-0 in the UEFA Cup on Thursday, and sit 10th in the table, only three points behind Villa.

Boss Mark Hughes knows his team will be in for a battle against

one of the teams they should be fighting against for UEFA Cup qualification this season.

"Since they have had a change of management with Martin O'Neill coming in this season they have been on a great run of results," he said.

"We've always found it hard going to Villa Park and that will be certainly the case this time as there is a buzz and anticipation about the place."

"But teams of the like of Aston Villa we have to overcome."

O'Neill looks set to stick with forward pairing Milan Baros and Juan Pablo Angel, despite them being ineffective against Liverpool.

O'Neill blamed that on a lack of service from their teammates.

That means Chris Sutton will have to content himself with a place on the bench, despite his fine cameo role at Anfield.

For Blackburn Robbie Savage is out with a hamstring injury and Australian midfielder Brett Emerton is also a doubt.



DIDIER DROGBA

Drogba extends Chelsea stay

REUTERS, London

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba has signed a new four-year contract that will keep him with the English champions until 2010, the club said on Friday.

Drogba, who signed from Olympique Marseille in 2004 for a reported 24 million pounds (45.78 million dollars), had less than two years left on his old deal.

"I am not playing well just because I wanted to sign a new contract, I am playing well because I feel good and I am happy to train with my friends," Drogba told the club's Web site.

"I want to say thank you to (manager) Jose (Mourinho) for believing in me since the beginning and now we will be together for a long time. The best period of my career I think."

"I am happy because when I came here it wasn't easy for me to say I would be signing a new contract with Chelsea, because everybody knows the first year was difficult."

"The second one was okay but I knew I could do better," said the 28-year-old Ivory Coast international.

Drogba has scored five times in the Premier League this season and is joint top scorer in the Champions League with five goals, including the injury-time equaliser in a 2-2 draw at Barcelona on Tuesday.