

Coach counts on Stoichkov

SOFIA, Feb 8 (Reuters/Internet): Striker Hristo Stoichkov, who turns 33 on Monday, will join on Thursday a training camp of Bulgaria's 19-man squad ahead of a tournament in Hong Kong later this month.

Apart from Stoichkov, who now plays in Japanese Kashiwa Reysol, Bulgaria's coach Dimitar Dimitrov could include only one more foreign-based player — Sporting Lisbon's Ivalo Yordanov. Others were not released by their clubs.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Dimitar Ivanov, Georgi Petkov

Defenders: Malin Orachev, Zlatomir Zagoric, Ilian Stoyanov, Valentin Naidenov, Radostin Kishishov, Vladimir Yonkov, Georgi Antonov

Middlefielders: Zlatko Yankov, Ivalo Yordanov, Stilyan Petrov, Iliya Gruiev, Milen Petkov

Forwards: Georgi Bachev, Hristo Yovov, Georgi Ivanov, Hristo Stoichkov, Ilian Iliev.

Hingis, much more cautious

TOKYO, Feb 8: Swiss teenager Martina Hingis, who officially regains her world number one rank today, said she planned to hold on tightly to the title this time, reports AFP.

"I just hope I can hold it now longer, as long as I play tennis maybe," said Hingis, who regained the top spot she had surrendered to American Lindsay Davenport in October.

"The women's tennis is very competitive right now and it's going to be hard to stay up there... but I hope I can hold everything easier and better now, free from mistakes."

Hingis said she had not expected to win back her number one place during the Toray Pan Pacific Open here, saying it was "surprising that Lindsay lost to Amanda Coetzer of South Africa in the quarterfinals."

Davenport failed to defend the one million dollar tournament and her early exit made it easier for Hingis to win back the title she took in 1997.

Hingis had a difficult time beating former world number one Steffi Graf of Germany in the quarterfinals, before her victories against Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic and Coetzer.

"When I became number one for the first time, I was almost overwhelmed by the situation," said Hingis.

"I grew up like you're going to become number one, then one day you win Wimbledon and all of a sudden everything happens. I was just too confident, almost too much."

On March 31 two years ago, Hingis became the youngest player to reach the number one spot at 16 years eight months and one day.

Monica Seles was the previous youngest at 17 years three months and 19 days, seven days younger than Tracy Austin, while Graf held the number one position for a record 186 weeks more than any man or woman.

Hingis won the Australian Open, Wimbledon and US Open in 1997, while finishing runner-up to Iva Majoli of Croatia in the French Open. But she managed to win only the Australian Open last season.

"I didn't take it seriously any more and I wouldn't practice that much. I lost my motivation because I reached there at such a young age. I had nothing more to teach," said Hingis now 18.

"But I worked on myself. I lost my weight, I mean I'm in a better shape again. My head thinks again and I tried to work on mistakes."

"When you start losing it's like you're going to lose everything. If you'd like to be a champion again and if you don't want to be beaten, you try to work on yourself again. It not maybe people forget about you."

"I didn't want to have it. That's why I'm back here," added Hingis, the winner last month of a third straight Australian Open.



Daniel Fonseca (No 11), Juventus' Uruguayan striker, battles for possession against a Parma defender during their Serie A clash in Turin on February 7. — AFP photo

European soccer scene

LONDON, Feb 8 (Reuters): Manchester United chalked up a record Premier League away win with an 8-1 thrashing of Nottingham Forest, Barcelona stretched their lead in Spain but Girondins Bordeaux were knocked off France's top spot by Marseille during the weekend's action in the major European leagues.

ENGLAND: There was an extraordinary game at the City Ground where Manchester United thrashed bottom club Nottingham Forest 8-1.

Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole each scored twice before substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjaer came on for the last 19 minutes and promptly scored four goals in a 12-minute burst.

Chelsea stayed four points behind with a 1-0 win over Southampton while Arsenal moved up to their, a further point back, after thrashing West Ham. Aston Villa dropped to fourth after losing 3-1 at home to Blackburn Rovers.

ITALY: Third-placed AC Milan ended Florentina's run of 10 successive home wins with a 0-0 draw but there was worse news for the leaders as Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta suf-

fered an injury that could keep him out for a month.

Lazio cut Florentina's advantage at the top to a single point with a 3-0 win over Perugia. It was their ninth straight league victory — a club best and one short of the all-time Serie A record.

Florentina remain top with 42 points ahead of Lazio on 41 and Milan on 37. Parma will draw level with Milan if they win at Juventus later on Sunday.

FRANCE: Fabrizio Ravanelli scored twice as Olympique Marseille beat Bastia 3-1 at home to stifle back to the top.

Marseille moved two points clear of Girondins Bordeaux held 1-1 at Rennes. Patrick Weiser equalised for the hosts three minutes from time.

Rennes dropped to fifth behind Olympique Lyon and Nantes.

Lyon came from behind to beat Nancy 2-1 at home while Nantes beat defending champions RC Lens 2-0.

Marseille have 51 points, Bordeaux 49 with Lyon and Nantes on 38 and Rennes on 37.

SPAIN: Barcelona and Real

Madrid both warmed up for next week's big clash at the Nou Camp with late winning goals on Sunday.

Patrick Kluivert scored eight minutes from time to give Barcelona a 2-1 success at Extremadura — a seventh successive First Division win over the Catalans which took them three points clear on 40 points.

Real Madrid are one of three teams on 37 after Raul Gonzalez completed his hat-trick in the 90th minute to clinch a 3-2 home win over Valladolid.

Celta Vigo, 4-1 winners over Villarreal and Valencia, who drew 0-0 at home to Deportivo Coruna, have 37 each but Mallorca are losing touch on 35 after going down 1-0 to Espanyol.

THE NETHERLANDS: The Dutch league spluttered back into life after its winter break but Heerenveen were the only side in the top six to play — and they lost 3-2 at Willem II Tilburg.

Leaders Feyenoord had their game at Canibuur Leeuwarden postponed due to an unfit pitch while Ajax Amsterdam, Vitesse Arnhem, Roda JC Kerkrade and PSV Eindhoven were all without fixtures.

Sleep lost over political soccer

TEHRAN, Feb 8 (Reuters/Internet): Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said he "lost sleep" after watching Iran's soccer team score the first goal against the United States in last year's World Cup in France.

In comments reported by a newspaper on Monday, Khamenei said he knew little about soccer, but went on to analyse the 40th minute goal by midfielder Hamid Estili in the context of the political content between the Islamic republic and the United States.

"I know little about football and had not planned to watch the match because it was late and time for me to go to bed," Quds newspaper quoted Khamenei as saying.

"But as I turned on the television and saw Mr Estili score the first goal, I lost sleep and watched the game until the end."

Iran beat the United States 2-1 in the group match in Lyon on June 21, sparking a massive carnival of joy across the country.

Neither team advanced to the knockout stage, but world soccer's governing body FIFA awarded them, together with Northern Ireland, its 1998 Fair Play prize for their show of

sportmanship in the match.

It was the first top-level sporting contact between the two countries since they broke diplomatic ties after the Islamic revolution which toppled US-backed Shah.

France eat Italian food to beat foes!

PARIS, Feb 8 (Reuters/Internet): World champions France have put Italian food on their menu to beat England in their friendly match at Wembley stadium on Wednesday.

"All the players have an excellent appetite and they eat a lot before a game," French team chef Andre Pisson said. "So we are planning a special menu for the Tuesday's dinner, on the eve of the match."

"They will have pizzas, tagliatelle, spaghetti carbonara and others sorts of pastas," Pisson said. "What game you need to play such a tough game you need consistent food."

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Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979.

Khamenei issued a message after the match saying the victory reflected the nation's revolutionary struggle against the United States. "Tonight, again, the strong and arrogant opponent felt the bitter taste of defeat at your hands," he said.

The Iranian leader said on Monday the message was in reaction to "months of propaganda by the imperialist media trying to turn the match into a political affair".

The Americans expected they would beat us and their president had prepared a televised message to say in a grand-standing way: OK, we won. Now let's shake hands and be friends."

"But this goal poured cold water on their hopes and totally changed the outcome. It became a symbol of our situation with the United States," Khamenei said.

"So I seized the opportunity and issued that message, which in fact made them very angry..."

"I didn't mean to say our players had politics in mind to score against the United States. It's just that the goal completely reversed the political identity they wanted to give to the match."

During the 1998 World Cup, some Brazilian soccer players accused Nike of interfering with the team's training programme, and it was even rumoured the firm ordered Ronaldo to play in the final after he had a hotel-room fit. Nike resolutely denied the claims.

Perugia coach steps down

PERUGIA, Italy, Feb 8 (Reuters/Internet): Ilario Castagner resigned as coach of Italian Serie A side Perugia on Monday, saying he was fed up with club president Luciano Gaucci's interference.

In a resignation letter sent to news agency ANSA, Castagner accused Gaucci of creating "tensions and negative repercussions" inside the Perugia camp.

He said his decision was irreversible.

Castagner guided Perugia to promotion from Serie B last season.

The club made a solid start to the current campaign but have slipped down the table since the start of the year after losing to Udinese, AC Milan and Juventus.

A 3-0 defeat by Lazio on Sunday left them 13th in the table, three points clear of the relegation zone.

Kaiser shocked

BONN, Feb 8 (Reuters/Internet): Franz Beckenbauer slammed Germany after their shock 3-0 defeat by the United States on Saturday.

"The national team is made up of average players, journeymen even," he said.

"For the first time since 1954 we have a generation problem," he added in reference to the ageing squad and recent unsuccessful efforts to inject young blood.

"If you can't play football in the first place, it has nothing to do with tactics," said the man who captained Germany to World Cup victory in 1974 and coached his country to further success in 1990.

Current national coach Erich Ribbeck, who has won only one of four matches in charge, described the result of the Jacksonvile, Florida, friendly as "a major setback".

Former Germany international Guenter Netzer said the poor performance could have serious repercussions for international football in the country.

"This allows the media to put the whole existence of the national team into question. The damage is almost irreparable."

Bayer Leverkusen manager Reiner Calmund said: "If Michael Schumacher performed with such a lack of concentration every time he moved from one continent to another, he would have been dead long ago."

Nike clarifies

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 8: A Rio official Sunday defended a 10-year sponsorship deal with soccer giants Brazil after the contract was criticised as giving the sportswear firm too much sway over the national team, reports AP.

Brazil's media last week revealed the contract allows Nike to pick at least three of Brazil's opponents in friendly games each year.

Nike had wanted a "return" for paying 500,000 dollars to organise and promote each friendly, said Ces Van Nieuwenhuizen, the company's sports marketing director in Brazil, in an interview with Sunday's Folha de Sao Paulo.

He said each opponent had to be submitted for approval by Brazil, adding that Nike has this year picked the Spanish club team Barcelona, South Korea, Japan and Australia.

Nieuwenhuizen, who said the deal which expires in 2006 was worth 160 million dollars, said Brazil had to bring eight first team players to the friendly.

That's to avoid Brazil's soccer federation getting together a street team and passing it off as a national team," Nieuwenhuizen was quoted as saying.

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