

Ronaldinho for Sydney

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 1: Striker Ronaldinho Gaucho, who was not called up for Brazil's 2002 World Cup qualifier against Peru on Sunday, is still in coach Wanderley Luxemburgo's plans for the Sydney Olympics, reports AFP.

Luxemburgo revealed the news on Wednesday hours before training for the Peru game. Luxemburgo said he had nothing personally against Ronaldinho Gaucho, in reply to critical newspaper reports, and the player himself took the Peru rejection well.

"The coach said that I would be selected for Sydney," Ronaldinho Gaucho said. "But football is for the present moment and Brazil currently has great players and Luxemburgo chose others."

Holyfield-Ruiz bout called off

LAS VEGAS, June 1: Evander Holyfield's June 10 fight with John Ruiz for the vacant WBA heavyweight title was called off after Holyfield suffered an injury in training, reports AP.

Holyfield had been scheduled to fight Ruiz at Caesars Palace for the piece of the title taken from Lennox Lewis by a judge for not defending it against the top-ranked contender.

Marc Ratner, executive director of the Nevada Athletic Commission, said he was told Wednesday afternoon that Holyfield was injured training in Houston and the card was canceled.

A spokesman for promoter Don King said he believed Holyfield injured a rib, but that specifics would be discussed at a new conference Thursday in Las Vegas with King, Holyfield and Holyfield's doctor.

Spokesman Greg Fritz said it was possible a new date could be announced for the fight at that time.

Caesars Palace spokeswoman Debbie Munch said the hotel had begun refunding tickets bought for the bout.

Holyfield's manager, Jim Thomas, was not immediately available for comment. But Norman Stone, the manager for Ruiz, said his fighter was bitterly disappointed about the postponement. Stone said several hundred Ruiz supporters had bought nonrefundable plane tickets to fly from the Boston area to Las Vegas for the fight.

"You can't say he's faking because he's never pulled out of a fight before that I know of," Stone said of Holyfield.

Lewis holds the other two major portions of the title, and beat Holyfield last November when they met for the undisputed title.

But when he decided to defend against Michael Grant instead of the top-ranked Ruiz, a judge ruled that Lewis was contractually obligated to fight Ruiz or be stripped of the WBA version of the title.

Hailie set for half marathon debut

LONDON, June 1: Hailie Gebrselassie is set to run his first half marathon, competing in the Great North Run in England after the Sydney Olympics, reports Reuters.

The 13.1 miles race from Newcastle to South Shields will be held on October 22.

Gebrselassie said today: "Although I regularly exceed the half marathon distance in training it is logical I should compete over the distance before finally stepping up to 26 miles."

The decision sparked speculation that the Ethiopian may break the one hour barrier for the distance for the first time in Britain.

The 10,000 metres world and Olympic champion had been due to return to action last weekend in the Netherlands after missing the entire indoor season due to an ankle injury. But the meeting was called off because of gale-force winds.

Gebrselassie would have been having his first half since the Seville world championships last August when he collected his fourth consecutive 10,000 metres title.

No merry-making for Spaniards

PARIS, June 1: Former French Open champions Sergi Bruguera and Carlos Moya had already fallen at the first hurdle as less than half the 15-strong Spanish contingent remained in the hunt at Roland Garros today, reports Reuters.

Alex Corretja, in the third round after a five-set win over 1999 semifinalist Fernando Meligeni of Brazil on Wednesday, took the baton as chief defender of Spain's proud clay court tradition.

"It's pleasing for me to re-assert that after a two and a half hour match I managed to win against an adversary like him," 1998 finalist Corretja said, counting Spain's few remaining blessings.

Alberto Berasategui, finalist in 1994, and Felix Mantilla, who reached the semifinals two years ago, were also eliminated, Mantilla falling to Argentine qualifier Agustín Calleri.

Two Spanish survivors were paired against each other in the third round today. Albert Portas and qualifier Juan Balcells, while 1995 quarter-finalist Albert Costa was up against Hernan Gumeny.



England striker Emile Heskey (R) threatening the Ukraine goal during their international friendly at the Wembley on May 31. —AFP photo

Euro 2000 warm-up

England blank Ukraine



LONDON, June 1: England beat Ukraine 2-0 in an international friendly match at Wembley on Wednesday in the second of three friendlies before the team jet out for the 2000 European Championships which start in Holland and Belgium on June 10, reports AFP.

Liverpool striker Robbie Fowler, plagued by injury all season, put England in front from close range after the Ukraine keeper Viatcheslav Kernenko failed to hold out Alan Shearer's powerful header a minute before the interval.

And Arsenal captain Tony Adams sealed victory for Kevin Keegan's men after 68 minutes with a low shot inside the area.

Manchester United midfielder Paul Scholes saw his first half shot cannon off the post while at the other end England keeper Nigel Martyn did well to keep a clean sheet by twice denying Andrei Shevchenko - top scorer in Italy's Serie A this season - and Oleg Luzhny in the second period.

Ukraine were quickly into their stride with some quick decisive passing with Shevchenko prominent in the early stages.

The AC Milan striker made a run into the England penalty area after skating past the challenge of Adams and it needed Sol Campbell to make the interception.

England retaliated and won a free-kick in a dangerous position 30 yards out when Sergei Popov brought down Fowler.

Beckham's curling free-kick looked to have the better of Kernenko but curled inches wide of the far post.

England looked threatening when they ventured forward and the woodwork came to the rescue of the visitors in the ninth minute.

Fowler was again the creator with a ball into the path of Scholes, who ran forward into the Ukraine penalty area and drilled in a left-footed shot which bounced back off a post.

Much of the early excitement had gone out of the game as England finally looked as if they were coming to terms with the Ukrainian attack - and in the 44th minute they broke the deadlock.

Beckham sent over a right-wing corner which picked out Shearer and his downward header should have been collected by Kernenko.

But the Ukraine keeper allowed the ball to slip from his grasp and Fowler needed no second invitation as he drilled the rebound into the roof of the net from almost point-blank range.

Keegan decided on a change in attack for the second period, bringing on Emile Heskey in place of his Liverpool teammate Fowler.

Shevchenko continued to cause plenty of problems for England. He turned Adams and then went past Campbell before getting in a shot on the turn which was saved by Martyn.

Steven Gerrard burst into the Ukraine penalty area but his shot from a narrow angle was comfortably held by Kernenko.

Martyn then showed his quality twice in the space of four minutes to deny Shevchenko.

First he managed to turn a close-range header around the post following a centre by Arsenal defender Luzhny.

Then the Leeds keeper did well to tip over an in-swinging, curling free-kick from Shevchenko.

Sandwiched in-between these two efforts, Scholes appeared in vain for a penalty after believing he had been caught in the area by Husin.

With just over 15 minutes left Keegan made a double substitution - and it meant a first cap for Gareth Barry.

Aston Villa's teenage defender Barry and Nick Barmby came on for Phil Neville and Paul Scholes respectively as England were now in the driving seat.

Barmby quickly made his presence felt by threading a pass into the path of Heskey, who again got clear off the Ukrainian defence with his extra pace.

But once again the question mark over his finishing power was raised as he saw his shot blocked by the advancing Kernenko.

Heskey, who was man of the match on his full debut against Argentina, caused problems with his pace and one run ended with his low shot flashing across the face of Kernenko's goal.

England were now building some momentum and it came as no surprise when they doubled their lead in the 68th minute courtesy of Adams' fifth goal for his country.

Beckham sent in an in-swinging corner which Kernenko could only punch clear. The ball rebounded off Shearer into the path of Adams eighth yards out and his shot, although slightly mishit, contained enough power to reach the corner of the net.

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World Cup 2006 Brazil may back SA

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 1: Brazil who are bidding to host the 2006 World Cup may hand over their support to South Africa in return for the same favour should Brazil bid for the 2010 World Cup, ambassador for the Brazilian bid Zico announced Wednesday, reports AFP.

The former Brazilian international wants to avoid Europe hosting another World Cup and has pledged total support for the South African bid.

Zico claims it is unfair that Europe obtains the rights to host the world's biggest footballing extravaganza every eight years simply because Europe has the biggest voting power.

Latin America has three votes, Central and North America three, Asia and Africa four votes, Oceania and FIFA president Sepp Blatter one vote each while Europe has eight.

"If the FIFA president feels that an African country should be chosen this time to respect the rotation system, there is nothing we can do except wait until 2010 when it is the turn of America," he declared.

Last March Zico claimed: "It would be a gross deception if Brazil fail to win the 2006 World Cup as it is the desire of a whole country."

The final decision will be made in Zurich at FIFA headquarters on July 6 between applicants South Africa, Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco.

Newcastle sign Argentine Bessedas

NEWCASTLE, England, June 1: English Premiership outfit Newcastle United confirmed on Wednesday that they have signed Argentine striker Christian Bessedas from Vélez Sarsfield of Buenos Aires for just over 4 million pounds (six million dollars), reports AFP.

Barthez felt let down

PARIS, June 1: French international goalkeeper Fabien Barthez revealed here on Thursday that he would have stayed with French champions Monaco had he not learnt that they were negotiating behind his back with English champions Manchester United, reports AFP.

The 28-year-old, a talismanic member of France's 1998 World Cup winning side, on Wednesday had signed a six year contract for United for a fee of 7.8 million pounds (11.7 million dollars) payable on June 1 - a British record for a keeper.

Despite Barthez's relations with Monaco having deteriorated in recent weeks, with club coach Claude Puel attacking his attitude in an end-of-season clash against former club Marseille, the shaven-headed guardian protested in an interview with L'Equipe that it had been Monaco and not him pursuing the move to Manchester.

"Only a few days ago I still wanted to stay at Monaco," he said.

"However, sometimes things go on between clubs that a player knows nothing about."

"Once I learnt that Monaco were ready to negotiate with Manchester I had no wish to stay with a club that was prepared to sell me," he added.

However, Barthez, who conceded just two goals during the 1998 World Cup finals, admitted that it was a dream move and one he hadn't expected after he turned them down the previous year.

Barthez, who said the only problem in signing had been not finding a pen on Tuesday night, said he would not feel any pressure in playing for one of the biggest teams in the world.

"Listen I made my football debut in 1990 at the age of 20 with Marseille and won the European Cup that season (1-0 over AC Milan) and I have also won a World Cup so I don't think pressure comes into the equation," he said.

Barthez, who expressed his admiration for United coach Sir Alex Ferguson declaring him to be a gentleman, admitted also that he was prepared for the British tabloid press intruding into his private life.

"I've spoken to other French players playing in England about that but I already knew their reputation and I am prepared for it," said Barthez, who has clashed with the French paparazzi notably one incident with a photographer in 1998 when he was dating super model Linda Evangelista.

The Tupolev TU134 was seized shortly after landing at Stansted Airport in Essex, northeast of London, on Tuesday, while a Yak 42 carrying Ukrainian FA officials was grounded shortly afterwards at nearby Luton Airport.

English FA spokesman Steve Double said they had been doing everything they can to help the stranded Ukrainians,

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Hasselbaink not in Dutch fold!



NYON, Switzerland, June 1: Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard caused a surprise here on Thursday by leaving out in-form striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink from his final Euro 2000 squad, reports AFP.

Rijkaard, who won the European championships as a player in 1988, also dropped Barcelona defender Winston Bogarde and PSV Eindhoven's Andre Ooijer from the squad.

Rijkaard admitted that Bogarde, who lost his place when a niggling calf injury returned in training here on Wednesday, was the most upset of the trio as the 29-year-old had also missed the 1998 World Cup semi-final when he broke his leg on the eve of the match.

"It is a personal nightmare," an emotional Bogarde said on leaving his compatriots.

Rijkaard said that Ooijer had been cut because he had enough cover on the right side of defence while Hasselbaink, who was in the Dutch 1998 World Cup squad, lost out because the Dutch coach preferred Roy Makaay, whose goals

spearheaded Deportivo La Coruna's first ever Spanish title last season.

Hasselbaink, who looks set for a 14 million pound move to English FA Cup winners Chelsea from relegated Spanish giants Atletico Madrid, lost out despite scoring 24 goals in Atletico's desperate season.

Hasselbaink joined Madrid who were relegated this season after 64 years in the top flight from another English club Leeds last season for 19 million dollars and was a huge hit in the Primera Liga scoring 35 goals in 47 matches.

The Dutchman was also a success at Leeds where he

notched 34 goals in just 69 appearances, after joining them from Boavista of Portugal with whom he scored 20 goals in 29 matches.

Unsurprisingly the squad is dominated by players playing their trade abroad with only five home-based players, including the veteran Aron Winter, making the final 22 compared to six alone from Barcelona.

SQUAD
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