

Liverpool get Barmby

LONDON, July 15: English Premiership club Everton on Friday agreed to sell England midfielder Nick Barmby to city rivals Liverpool for 6 million pounds (9 million dollars), reports AFP.

The 26-year-old former Tottenham star shocked Everton earlier this month by revealing he wanted to join bitter rivals Liverpool and his dream came true Friday.

An Everton statement announced: "Everton and Liverpool have today agreed the transfer of Nick Barmby to Liverpool in a package worth up to 6 million pounds."

"The clubs wish to emphasize that negotiations have continued over the past week in a spirit of goodwill and integrity and they both wish each other success in the forthcoming season."

Basler takes a swipe at Ribbeck

COLOGNE, July 15: Mario Basler took his revenge on Germany's fallen coach Erich Ribbeck Friday by declaring him a loser who was solely responsible for the triple world champions' dismal Euro 2000 campaign, reports AFP.

"Ribbeck alone is the one responsible for the whole mess, he's a failure," Basler was quoted in the newspaper Bild.

Basler was one of the first players to fall by the wayside after Ribbeck took charge in September 1998, something the 31-year-old Kaiserslautern winger has not forgotten.

"He just didn't have the best 22 players in Belgium and Holland (Andreas Moller was missing for example)," Basler said.

"And when you have a player like Thomas Hassler you simply have to let him play. But Ribbeck never had any character to start with."

Hassler played just one game at Euro 2000, having won a recall for the tournament after two years away from the national team.

Basler, a temperamental and often lazy player, has a history of ill discipline behind him and was thrown out of Bayern Munich last year for brawling in a pizza restaurant late at night when he was meant to be taking care of himself at a physical rehabilitation clinic after injury.

He remains keen though to play for his country again - but under certain conditions.

"I am not going to sit on the bench. If Rudi Voller calls then I will be asking him first if he is really counting on me."

Djorkaeff will be back at Kaiserslautern

BERLIN, July 15 (Reuters/Internet): Youri Djorkaeff, fresh from winning Euro 2000 with France, will rejoin German First Division team Kaiserslautern after the summer break, ending weeks of speculation that he would go elsewhere.

"Youri will return to the Betzenberg (Kaiserslautern's stadium) after his holiday. That's certain," Denis Djorkaeff, the 32-year-old midfielder's brother and adviser, told Kicker magazine on Thursday.

Djorkaeff, who scored twice during the European Championship, said recently that he wanted to leave Germany's 1998 champions after only one season to seek a place in a team with a higher international profile.

But Kaiserslautern chairman Juergen Friedrich insisted Djorkaeff would be back.

Sino natant banned for doping

BEIJING, July 15: China is set to slap a four-year ban on world record holder Wu Yanyan after she was found guilty of doping, officials indicated today, reports AFP.

"We will punish her in accordance with our policy to strictly prohibit doping, strictly test against doping and strictly punish violators," an official from the anti-doping committee of the Chinese Swimming Association told AFP.

"This incident shows that we have zero-tolerance in matters concerning the use of banned substances and that no matter who is involved, we will strictly punish," she said on condition of anonymity.

Wu tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid 19-norandrosterone at the Chinese national swimming championships and Olympic trials for this year's Sydney Games held in May in Jinan city, Shandong province.

According to the Beijing Youth Daily, both A and B samples of Wu's urine tested positive in internal Chinese doping tests, meaning that Wu's punishment would be meted out by the Chinese Swimming Association and not by FINA, the international swimming ruling body.

A formal announcement by the association was expected as early as next week, the official said.

Wu set the world record for the women's 200 meter individual medley in a time of two minutes 09.79 seconds in Shanghai at China's National Games in October 1997. She went on to win at the distance in the world championships in January 1998.



The historic Maracana Stadium of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

—Star file photo

Remembering Maracana



MONTEVIDEO, July 15 (AFP): Uruguay will Sunday celebrate the 50th anniversary of their greatest sporting achievement all too aware that in the five decades since that triumph the country's sporting reputation has plummeted.

On July 16, 1950 unfancied Uruguay squared up to favourites and hosts Brazil in the deciding match -- technically it was not a final -- of the 1950 World Cup in the footballing equivalent of the lion's den -- Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Arena in front of a 199,584 crowd that remains a world record for a stadium-based sporting event.

Uniquely in that tournament the destiny of the World Cup would be decided in a group format with the four top teams -- Brazil, Uruguay, Spain and Sweden in the final pool.

Brazil thrashed Sweden 7-1 and Spain 6-1 in their first two final round games while Uruguay had drawn 2-2 with Spain and beaten the Swedes 3-2.

That left Brazil needing only a draw to win the World Cup for the first time in the final match and when Friaca opened the scoring for the hosts it looked as though the floodgates would open.

But Uruguay then produced their best football of the tournament and after Juan Schaffino had equalised Alcides Ghiggia scored the memorable winner that silenced the huge Maracana crowd but is still celebrated in Uruguay 50 years later.

Brazil's golden age had to wait a further eight years before a certain 17-year-old called Pele appeared on the world stage.

Only nine members of the victorious Uruguay squad -- including both goalscorers -- are still alive.

Uruguay, though surprise winners, were despite their modest size and population the first super powers of the world's most popular game.

They lifted the Olympic title in 1924 and 1928 before winning the first ever World Cup on home soil in 1930. That Maracana triumph remains, however, the finest hour of the 'Celeste' (Sky Blues).

But the small nation -- independent for 175 years -- has since seen their fortunes dwindle and have not even qualified for the last two tournaments.

Politically the country has also sunk into relative obscurity -- cynics observe that the only two occasions that the country has hit the international headlines since were in 1972 when a rugby team from Uruguay were involved in a plane crash in the Andes, having to resort to cannibalism to survive.

The other occasion was the heroic resistance by Uruguayan workers to a military coup a year later.

Drastic situations need drastic remedies and last year the Uruguayan Football Association (AUF) finally looked across the River Plate for help to get out of the crisis.

They engaged legendary Argentinian Daniel Passarella as head coach in a money-no-object bid to qualify for the 2002 finals in Japan and South Korea.

Passarella has a good crop of youngsters brought through by youth team coach Victor Pua who led the under-20s to the World Youth Cup Final in 1997.

Those youngsters formed the base of the team that reached the 1999 Copa America Final losing 3-0 to Brazil but Uruguay have made a good start to qualifying for the World Cup, currently occupying one of the four automatic qualification spots in the South American section.

And signs that the fallen giant of world football is beginning to awake were given further credence in their last World Cup qualifier when the 'Celeste' had the better of a 1-1 draw against Brazil -- in the Maracana of all places.

A team that was ranked as low as 74 in FIFA's rankings last year is now listed at number 35 and now 50 years after Uruguayan football reached its zenith the good times may finally be starting to roll again.

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Betis to loan Denilson to Flamengo

SEVILLA, Spain, July 15 (Reuters/Internet): Relegated Real Betis have reached an agreement to loan Brazilian international midfielder Denilson to Flamengo for as long as the Seville-based team are in the Second Division.

In a press conference on Saturday Betis sporting director Faruk Hadzibegic made public the agreement which was reached late on Friday night.

Although the Spanish club would not confirm the details it is believed Brazil's Flamengo will pay 500 million pesetas (2.81 million dollars) plus the player's salary during the loan agreement.

The 22-year-old arrived at Betis two seasons ago bearing the onerous tag of the world's most expensive player after joining the club for 35 million dollars from Sao Paulo.

The talented Denilson found it very difficult to adapt to Spanish football, scoring only five goals in two years.

He failed to recapture the form that led to his selection for Brazil's World Cup squad at France '98 and did little to save Betis from relegation last season.

Denilson had recently come under fire from both fans and the succession of managers that have passed through the doors of the Seville club and was known to be unsettled in Spain.

Hadzibegic also confirmed an offer had been made for the club's Spanish international striker Alfonso Perez.

He would not reveal which club had made the bid but said it was Spanish and did not come from Real Madrid or Barcelona.

Speculation has centred on free-spending Deportivo Coruna.

TOKYO, July 15 (Reuters/Internet): The Japanese organising committee for the 2002 World Cup (JAWOC) could put less than half of Japan's allotted 750,000 tickets on sale to the general public, the Kyodo news agency said on Saturday.

JAWOC, which has yet to make a final decision on how to allocate tickets, may make just 45 per cent available to ordinary fans with the rest going to the Japan Football Association (JFA), Kyodo said quoting unidentified sources.

Japan and South Korea are to co-host the tournament. The JFA will reportedly receive 25 per cent of the tickets, with another 20 per cent going to officials of the 10 venues throughout Japan where matches will be held, Kyodo said.

Another 10 per cent are expected to go to guests prepared to pay top yen for executive boxes, it said.

Some JAWOC officials want more tickets to go to the public and are hoping for a compromise, Kyodo said. A formal decision is not expected until the end of the month.

While JAWOC has yet to finalise a system for fans to purchase tickets for the 2002 World Cup, it is likely they will be allowed to apply by post to enter a lottery, Kyodo said.

Juve won't go shopping

TURIN, Italy, July 15: Juventus are not planning to make any more major signings before the start of next season, general manager Luciano Moggi said on Friday, reports Reuters.

The Turin club bought French striker David Trezeguet from Monaco for some 26.5 million dollars last month but have otherwise made few purchases since they finished second in last season's Serie A title race.

In contrast, champions Lazio have been splashing out on remodelling their squad and broke the world transfer record this week when they signed Argentine striker Hernan Crespo from Parma for 110 billion lire (\$53.08 million).

"We came second with 71 points last season and our policy has been to reinforce our squad," Moggi said. "We signed a European champion (Trezeguet) a month and a half ago and that's why we're not interested in the Crespos and (Marcelo) Salases."

Italian newspapers had speculated that Juve might try to buy Brazilian forward Rivaldo from Barcelona before the start of next season but Moggi appeared to rule that out.

He confirmed, however, that Juve were interested in buying Rivaldo's compatriot, defender Athirson, from Rio club Flamengo.

Moggi said Juventus had completed the signing of young Dutch midfielder Sergio De Windt from Ajax Amsterdam and were close to selling Argentine striker Juan Esnaider to Spanish club Celta Vigo.

Bejbl joins Lens

PRAGUE, July 15: Czech international Radek Bejbl has left relegated Spanish outfit Atletico Madrid for French First Division side Lens, the daily Sport newspaper reported here Saturday, reports AFP.

The player signed a three-year deal for an undisclosed sum in the Spanish capital Madrid Friday, the newspaper reported.

The 27-year-old midfielder was part of the Czech Republic's Euro 2000 campaign but played for only 130 minutes in their three matches.

Eric an Englishman at heart



LONDON, July 15: Eric Cantona reckons English football is the best in the world and will beat anybody.

Cantona -- once labelled the bad-boy of French football -- was an instant hit at Old Trafford following his 1.2 million (1.92 million dollars) move from rivals Leeds in 1992, playing a major role in the club's revival.

However his fiery temperament followed him across the Channel and the maverick, yet brilliant, striker often found himself at odds with the establishment and was handed an eight-month ban following his infamous kung-fu kick on fan Matthew Simmons at Crystal Palace in January 1995.

But Cantona, back in this country to play in the Dreamcast Beach Football Challenge at Richmond Athletic Ground

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"I think they are better when they try to score goals. If they play like they did in the first 20 minutes against Portugal, they will beat anybody."

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