

Costly US triumph

FOXBORO, Massachusetts, Aug 18 The United States' 7-0 World Cup qualifying victory over Barbados on Wednesday might have come at a high price, reports AFP.

The Americans may have lost midfielder Chris Armas to a knee injury for more than a month.

Armas, the top US defensive midfielder, strained the medial collateral ligament of his left knee when he was tackled by Barbados' midfielder Eric Lavine in the 41st minute of the CONCACAF Group E semifinal qualifying match.

The possible loss of Armas, who stars for the Chicago Fire in Major League Soccer, could have ramifications for the US beyond qualifying. He was one of three average players to play for the US Under-23 team in the Sydney Olympics next month.

The US team (1-1-1, four points), which moved into second place by goal differential over Guatemala (1-1-1, four), hosts its Central American rivals in a qualifier in Washington on September 3. The top two teams will advance to next year's six-team North American confederation finals.

"Hopefully he'll be back in three weeks," US coach Bruce Arena said. "You know how those MCLs go. It could be six, nine or 12 weeks."

Arena, though, was just happy his players got their confidence back after a pair of disappointing results.

"Coming in where we were, I'm not ranting and raving about performance," he said. "It was a convincing win. It was a big night for us and also for our confidence, in the win column and the goal column."

Barbados (1-2, three) will be down two starters who were red carded for their next qualifier at group leader Costa Rica (2-1, six) on September 3. Defender Augustus Hurdle and Lavine were sent off late in the first half for hard fouls.

Barbados coach Horace "Tobacco" Beckles promised things would be different for when the next time the U.S. and his team meet on November 15.

"It's not over," he said. "When they play us in Barbados, it's going to be a different game. There's going to be a different game at a level playing field."

Added Arena: "Before this is all said and done, Barbados is going to have good days."

Group E is the closest of the three semifinal groups.

In Group C, Trinidad and Tobago and Mexico can advance to the final round with victories over Canada and Panama, respectively, on September 3.

In Group D, a victory over St. Vincent and the Grenadines on September 3 will boost Jamaica into the next round. Honduras virtually can clinch a spot with a September 2 victory over El Salvador.

Vialli gives a piece of his mind

LONDON, Aug 18: Chelsea boss Gianluca Vialli launched a crackdown on player-power at Stamford Bridge on Thursday after fining French international Frank Leboeuf two weeks wages, according to a report on SkySports.com, reports AFP.

Vialli held club-to-face talks with Leboeuf at the club's training ground after the French international publicly criticised Vialli's managerial style.

The central defender told an internet site on Tuesday: "Vialli has problems with everybody, with Albert Ferrer and many others - it's normal for a coach to get along with his lads, but not him."

Insisting that Vialli had not backed him sufficiently after he was sent off against Leeds last season and had "even tried to get me out of the club", Leboeuf concluded that he was "not sure that the coach has much faith in me".

His comments drew immediate criticism from Chelsea's managing director Colin Hutchinson who said that the comments were "unprofessional and out of order".

While it seems increasingly apparent that Leboeuf is unhappy at Stamford Bridge and could find that his future lies elsewhere, Vialli will have left him in no doubt that he should have kept any criticisms private.

"Whatever happens between us has to remain between us," Vialli told SkySports. "Whatever decisions I make and whatever I decide to do is going to remain within these four walls."

"I'll deal with the situation in the best possible way, trying to make the right decision but without making it public."

Asked about his relationship with his players, Vialli added: "In general - and we are not speaking about Frank Leboeuf's situation - I would like everything to be as smooth as possible."

"But as a manager, I know that sometimes, generally speaking, you might have to deal with problems."

"You deal with them in the best possible way, trying to make the right decisions and sorting things out quickly in order to get on with your job. The same goes for the players."

"I think I get on very well with the players. I said to the players one day - you are the soldiers, I am the general."

"We are all working for the same cause, which is the club. It happens that I'm the general so I'm the guy in charge and I make the decisions."

"If you make mistakes, I've got to punish you or fine you. If you are behaving well, I try to praise you."

Romario coming back?

Luxemburgo in two minds



RIO DE JANEIRO, Aug 18: Brazil's poor performances in their World Cup qualifiers could force coach Wanderley Luxemburgo to abandon his dream of leading his country to their first Olympic gold medal, reports Reuters.

Luxemburgo is in charge of both the full and Olympic Brazilian teams but the dismal performances of the former, beaten 3-0 by Chile on Tuesday, could force him to pull out of the trip to Sydney.

The coach admitted after Tuesday's fiasco in Santiago that he had not decided what to do. He appears to be in a no-win situation.

If he travels to Australia with the Olympic team on August 28, he will miss the senior side's next game at home to Bolivia in Rio de Janeiro and could be accused of deserting them.

Australia, however, must look an enticing prospect compared to Rio's Maracana stadium, where the crowd seem to take pleasure in tormenting their own team.

The cries of "idiot, idiot" and "get out, Wanderley", which rang around the arena during Brazil's draw with Uruguay in June may still be fresh in the coach's ears.

Brazil are fourth in the South American World Cup group, still good enough for a place in Japan and South

Korea, but their record of three wins, two draws and two defeats is not the stuff expected of the four-times world champions.

Luxemburgo has taken most of the blame for constantly changing the team and for sticking with the out-of-form Rivaldo in midfield and Roberto Carlos at left back.

Although Luxemburgo has insisted that the door for Romario is open, critics feel that some animosity dating back to the pair's days at Flamengo remains.

Romario, approaching his 35th birthday, has looked as sharp as ever for Rio de Janeiro's Vasco da Gama.

At least Luxemburgo does not have Bolivia's problems. Ninth in the table with five points from seven games, the Bolivians almost pulled out of the tournament last month because of financial problems.

The situation is so grim that expenses for this week's 2-0 defeat in Ecuador were paid by their opponents.

Bolivia's play of playing matches at high altitude in La Paz has also backfired, as their foreign-based players no longer have time to adapt.

Most have therefore been dropped by coach Carlos Aragon, in favour of locally-based youngsters.

Brazil had also struggled in the qualifiers then and needed to draw their last game at home to Uruguay to qualify for the

United States World Cup.

Romario, kicked out of the team for disciplinary reasons, was reprimanded and responded by scoring both goals in a 2-0 win.

Romario has again found himself out in the cold since Luxemburgo's takeover two years ago. During this time he has been picked only twice - for a match against Spanish club side Barcelona and for the brief British tour this year which he ultimately missed through injury.

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Match-fixing CBI's report next month

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The interim report of the match-fixing inquiry is to be submitted by September, Sports Minister Sukhdev Dhindsa informed the Rajya Sabha today, reports PTI.

Answering supplementaries during question hour, he said, the CBI has been investigating the matter and has questioned many cricketers and office-bearers of BCCI, both past and present.

Dhindsa said CBI had been asked to complete the inquiry expeditiously, adding it was difficult to spell out a specific time-frame in such probes.

He said sports policy would be tabled in the parliament during the next session.

BUET b'ball Sports Reporter

Sher-e-Bangla Hall clinched the BUET Inter-Hall Basketball Championship, which concluded at the university gymnasium on Thursday, says a press release.

Subhwardy Hall finished runners-up in the six-team event after losing to Sher-e-Bangla Hall in the final.

Dr. Nooruddin Ahmed, vice-chancellor of the BUET, witnessed the match and distributed prizes among the winners.

Amazing Saqlain

LONDON, Aug 18: Saqlain Mushtaq put in a remarkable performance to take seven wickets for just 11 runs as leaders Surrey beat Derbyshire at The Oval by an innings and 45 runs in just two days in the County Championship First Division on Thursday, reports AFP.

Having put on 68 for their first wicket the visitors looked well poised to overhaul their first innings deficit of 142, but Mushtaq soon took over and removed Derbyshire for just 97.

Yorkshire skipper Lehmann hit a quick-fire half century despite suffering from a painful back injury as the Tykes hit back at Leicester.

Leicestershire had set a total of 351 in their first innings and looked to be in control when Vince Wells left the visitors reeling on 24 for three, but Lehmann (51 not out) and Gavin Hamilton (58 not out) steadied the ship.

Lancashire had their bowlers to thank for rescuing them against Kent at Old Trafford.

The home side had posted a first innings total of 236 on a good batting pitch and relegation-threatened Kent looked on course for a surprise win.

But Peter Martin (two for 22) and Mike Smithurst (two for 12) hit back for third-placed Lancashire and left Kent struggling on 41 for four at the close of play.

Rain washed out much of the second day's play at Taunton after Durham, who resumed on 324 for six, had been removed for 378 thanks to some smart bowling from Adrian Pierson, who removed the lower order to finish on three for 41.

In response, Somerset started well with Jamie Cox and Mark Lathwell putting on an unbeaten partnership of 58 before rain intervened.

Essex were spared the embarrassment of being forced to follow on against Gloucestershire at Colchester after finishing their first innings on 174 in reply to the visitors 324.

But Gloucestershire captain Mark Alleyne was left to rue his decision not to enforce the follow on as his side finished the day on just 11 for two.

Australia needed 13 off the last over, also bowled by Pollock, with Waugh swatting the first ball for four.

Waugh then hit a single to put Jason Gillespie on strike and the third ball went for four leg-byes.

Gillespie was run out on the fourth ball from a direct hit by Pollock at the non-striker's end. Waugh edged two through slips on the fifth ball and could only manage a single on the last to force the tie.

The third and final match of the one-day series takes place in Melbourne on Sunday.

"We really should have won - but in the end a tie was a fair result," said Waugh.

"We did well to restrict them to that score, but I was disappointed with our batting."

France's Division 1 fixtures for the weekend: Paris, Aug 18 (AFP): French First Division matches over the weekend:

Friday: Bastia v Lyon Saturday: Lens v Toulouse, Metz v Paris St. Germain, Nantes v Marseille, Rennes v Strasbourg, Sedan v Lille, Troyes v Auxerre, St. Etienne v Bordeaux

Sunday: Monaco v Guingamp

FA to revamp Cup with cash LONDON, Aug 18: The Football Association will revamp the FA Cup with large cash incentives to rekindle interest in a competition tarnished by the withdrawal of champions Manchester United last season.

"We will offer a substantial financial prize to the winners, but we haven't yet decided on an exact figure," a spokesman told Reuters.

Press reports on Friday speculated the winners could pick up one million pounds.

Other steps aimed at reviving the 120-year-old tournament include playing all matches at weekends and ensuring no club is allowed to drop out of the tournament, as Manchester United did last season to play in the World Club Championship in Brazil.



South Africa's Jonty Rhodes is about to execute a reverse-sweep during the second one-day international against Australia at the Colonial Stadium in Melbourne yesterday.

Australia, SA do alike



MELBOURNE, Aug 18: Arch-rivals Australia and South Africa sensationally tied their second one-day cricket international played indoors at Colonial Stadium here Friday night, reports AFP.

Needing two runs off the last ball, Shane Warne went for a straight drive only to hit the stumps at the bowler's end and had to settle for a single to tie the game.

South Africa, who scored 226 for eight off their 50 overs batting first after winning the toss, looked headed for their second defeat in as many days when Australia appeared to be cruising at 164 for four in the 39th over.

But Shaun Pollock's team chipped away and slowed the Australian run-rate before opening batsman Andrew Hall became the unlikely hero with his medium pacers, taking 2-8 from three overs.

It recalled parallels with the famous tied match between the two rivals at last year's World Cup semifinal at Edgbaston when Allan Donald was run out on the third-last ball, enabling Australia to proceed to the final on their higher round robin standing.

Just when commentators were sounding the death knell for South African cricket here Friday, they fought back magnificently and had Australia having to score 28 runs to win in the last three overs with four wickets to spare.

Skipper Steve Waugh, who cracked an unbeaten century in a man-of-the-match performance on Wednesday's 94-run win, took the fight to his counterpart Pollock, taking 14 runs off Pollock's second-last over to have his team needing 14 runs to win off the last two overs.

Hall was named man of the match after snaring the crucial wickets of Waugh for 30 and Michael Bevan for three.

Waugh and Bevan were the keys to Australia's game-one win, scoring centuries in their record 222-run stand.

South Africa tonight had restricted Australia to 12 runs off five overs before Waugh and Bevan took 14 off Pollock in the 48th over.

Hall then snared Bevan and Waugh in the 48th, his first wickets in one-day international.

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Other steps aimed at reviving the 120-year-old tournament include playing all matches at weekends and ensuring no club is allowed to drop out of the tournament, as Manchester United did last season to play in the World Club Championship in Brazil.

"We're going to go back to the traditional formula, playing matches at weekends when everyone can see them, instead of during the week. The final will be the last domestic fixture of the season," the spokesman said.

Australia had an opening stand of 78 between top-scorer Waugh (48) and Adam Gilchrist (37) and were coasting to another easy win, but the 34th over proved a turning point.

Left-arm spinner Nicky Boje bowled a wicket-maiden, claiming Damien Martyn, and from there the pressure built on the home side.

Boje, brought into the side for Friday's game, snared 2-33 from his 10 overs in another vital contribution.

Australia lost 4-47, including Martyn, and that brought together Waugh and injured Bevan, who was out for three.

Earlier, an eventful fifth-wicket stand between Jonty Rhodes and Mark Boucher helped boost South Africa's total after it was stalling in the middle of its innings.

Their partnership of 87 off 86 balls came at a price, with Rhodes suffering a recurrence of his groin strain late in his knock of 54 off 51 balls.

Rhodes needed Hall as a runner after he pulled up awkwardly at the end of a run and South Africa could not utilise his outstanding acrobatic fielding talents when Australia batted.

But Boucher inflicted pain on Australia in his innings of 51 from 63 deliveries - when he was on eight and the score at 113 for four in the 30th over, he skied a ball off comeback paceman Gillespie to Bevan at deep square leg.

Bevan dropped the straightforward chance and also dislocated the top knuckle in his right index finger, leaving the field for the rest of the innings.

Rhodes and Boucher came together with the score on 95 for four in the 25th over and steadily took the advantage away from Australia with a well-paced partnership.

The pick of the bowlers was Gillespie, back for his first international since breaking his leg in an on-field collision with captain Steve Waugh last September during the first Test against Sri Lanka.

The paceman took 3-40 from 10 overs, bowling Jacques Kallis for 22, as well as Klusener and Pollock near the end of the innings.