

Real Sol still to come

REUTERS, London
Arsenal have yet to see the best of Sol Campbell, manager Arsene Wenger has said, after deciding to rest the England defender for Saturday's clash against Blackburn Rovers.

Campbell, who joined Arsenal on a free transfer from north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the close season, is not fully match fit, the team's French coach said on Friday.

The defender has been dogged by injuries for much of this year after suffering first ankle ligament and then hamstring problems.

Though he played in Arsenal's Champions League victory over Panathinaikos on Tuesday, Wenger said: "He needs to keep working on his basic strength."

"He still needs to work hard before he can play again every three days. But we haven't seen the best of him yet."

"He has looked sharper and more mobile but it could take another two to three weeks," Wenger told reporters at the club's training ground in London Colney, near St. Albans.

Wenger intends to bring Campbell back for Arsenal's penultimate Champions League clash in group C against Real Mallorca on Wednesday.

Currently third in the group, behind Mallorca on goal difference, Arsenal desperately need three points from the Spaniards at Highbury if they are to get on course for the second place.

Campbell's absence on Saturday means Martin Keown should be recalled alongside Matthew Upson in central defence.

Goalkeeper David Seaman has yet to recover from a shoulder injury and will again be replaced by Richard Wright.

Ashley Cole had already been ruled out of the game by a hamstring strain and is also very doubtful for the Mallorca clash, while fellow defender Lee Dixon is still on the long-term injury list.

FFF taking no chances

AFP, Paris

World and European champions France are taking no chances with their security and health and will hire a private jet to travel to Melbourne for the November 11 friendly against Australia, French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet confirmed Friday.

The move follows criticism from European football bosses that the French squad were robbing them of valuable players midseason for meaningless matches played on the other side of the world.

Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger was particularly critical that Thierry Henry, Patrick Vieira, Sylvain Wiltord and Robert Pires were called up hot of the heels of another friendly in Chile.

Lassissi has surgery

AFP, Rome

AS Roma defender Saliou Lassissi has had an operation on his fractured left tibia, the player's agent Antonio Caliendo said Friday.

Lassissi, an Ivory Coast international, sustained the injury in a pre-season friendly with crack Argentine outfit Boca Juniors and has not yet played a competitive game for the side he joined from Fiorentina in the summer.

"The operation was a success," said Caliendo. "Now the lad has started a new therapy which is showing signs of improvement. But he is still in pain and unable to sleep."

UAE in playoffs



AFP, Nicosia

Five months ago, the United Arab Emirates stood on the brink of World Cup humiliation.

Despite pouring millions of dollars into the game and hiring French coach Henri Michel to lead them in the qualifiers for the 2002 finals in Japan and South Korea, the UAE were a laughing stock.

Beaten by football paupers India and Yemen in their first round matches, only a 3-2 win over the Yemenis in the return fixture as well as a change of coach put the UAE back on track and they managed to squeeze into the second round by just one point.

Incredibly, they have now defied the critics. Their runners-up spot behind China in Group B of the final round of qualifiers means that they will face either Iran or Saudi Arabia in the Asian play-off.

Victory in that two-legged encounter would then put them into another two-legged clash against the Republic of Ireland for a place in the finals next summer.

A 2-2 draw with Oman in Abu Dhabi on Friday confirmed their runners-up spot despite Uzbekistan's shock 1-0 win over China in Tashkent and once the Group A section is completed on Sunday, the identity of the UAE's opponents will be known.

The UAE, who reached the World Cup finals in Italy in 1990, promoted Dutchman Tini Ruijs to take charge of the team after Abdullah Saqr, who had taken over from Michel, quit following the 2-0 defeat to Qatar in August.

Once again, the team was in dire straits. They had just three points from three games having opened their second round campaign with a 4-1 win over Uzbekistan before losing to China and Qatar.

"I have nothing to prove," Ruijs, who had been Saqr's assistant, said at the time.

He was proved to be right. On Friday, the Emirates came back from 2-0 down against Oman to clinch a 2-2 draw. The result gave them 11 points from their eight matches and second spot in a group dominated by China who claimed the automatic qualifying place for the finals with 19 points. The Uzbekis finished third with 10



China's Du Wei (R) tries to control the ball as teammate (C) Li Weifeng and Uzbek Maksim Shatsim watch during their World Cup qualifier in Tashkent on October 19.

points. Oman took the lead in the 22nd minute through Taqi Moubarak and then stunned the home crowd by adding a second four minutes before the interval through Hani Dhabet.

Abdulrahman Ibrahim reduced the arrears just after the interval before Mohammed Omar added the equaliser after 60 minutes.

In Tashkent Uzbekistan sent China crashing to their first defeat in the final Asian round of World Cup qualifiers.

Striker Nikolai Shirshov grabbed the only goal in injury time at the end of the Group B game to give his side third place in the five team group.

Uzbekistan went into the match with a new coach, Leonid

STANDINGS										
Group A (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)										
Iran	7	4	3	0	9	4	15			
Saudi Arabia	7	4	2	1	13	7	14			
Iraq	8	2	1	5	9	10	7			
Bahrain	7	1	4	2	5	8	7			
Thailand	7	0	4	3	4	11	4			
Group B (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)										
China	8	6	1	1	13	2	19			
UAE	8	3	2	3	10	11	11			
Uzbekistan	8	3	1	4	13	14	10			
Qatar	8	2	3	3	10	10	9			
Oman	8	1	3	4	7	16	6			

China win group and qualify for World Cup finals
UAE qualify for play-off against runner-up in Group A (either Iran or Saudi Arabia) with winners of that match to face the Republic of Ireland for a place in the finals.

Westerveld in no hurry

REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool outcast Sander Westerveld is in no hurry to leave Anfield, according to his agent.

The goalkeeper has dropped down the Liverpool pecking order after manager Gerard Houllier signed Polish international Jerzy Dudek and England under-21 keeper Chris Kirkland.

Westerveld's agent Ton van Dalen insisted Friday that the Dutch international, who said earlier this month that Rangers were interested in signing him, will not leave until the right offer comes along.

"When you have played at Liverpool it is not easy to find another club on the same level where you will be happy. He will take his time to decide and wait for the right opportunity," Van Dalen told Liverpool's official website.

"Of course, Sander is keen to leave Liverpool because he is not playing first-team football - that is what he wants."

"He is keeping his options open, because he has to make sure it is the right move for him."

Liverpool scoff Taribo move

AFP, Liverpool

English Premiership giants Liverpool denied on Friday that they were on the verge of signing Nigerian international defender Taribo West.

"I haven't seen what he has said but I can assure you that he will not be coming here," said Phil Thompson, the stand-in boss of Liverpool who has taken charge of the team following Gerard Houllier's heart surgery last week.

Earlier on Friday, West told a Nigerian radio station that he was on the verge of signing for the Anfield club.

"But for Houllier's illness, I would have signed a four-year contract with Liverpool this week. Everything has been sorted out and all I needed do was bring down my stuff from Milan," West told the Rhythm FM station.

Ze Maria flirting with Lazio

AFP, Perugia

Perugia's Brazilian international midfielder Ze Maria encouraged Lazio to follow up their interest with a bid in Friday's issue of Corriere dello Sport.

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti is an admirer of the 28-year-old who can also play in defence and Ze Maria did nothing to discourage a bid from Lazio when the transfer market reopens in January.

"Lazio already were looking at me last season," said Ze Maria. "Of course I'm happy that Cragnotti is such an admirer. At the moment I'm thinking of Perugia but maybe in the New Year I will change city."

Asked if that meant a move in January, Ze Maria said: "I have always felt at home at the Olympic Stadium (the ground Lazio share with AS Roma). I am just carrying on and we will see what happens in January."

Chelsea conceded two late goals in Thursday's surprise 2-0 defeat in the second round, first leg tie and Bosnich made it clear the absences had taken their toll.

Bosnich, who finally made his debut for Chelsea after joining nine

Munich's day of reckoning

Football

REUTERS, Munich

Munich will discover on Sunday whether the city will host the opening game of the 2006 soccer World Cup or miss out on the event entirely.

Residents will be asked in a referendum whether they are happy to pay more tax to bear the costs for the infrastructure needed around a new stadium, to be built in a northern district of the Bavarian town.

Munich's two First Division clubs, Bayern and TSV 1860, have agreed to share the costs for the stadium.

The Olympic stadium, built for the 1972 Games and the showcase venue for the 1974 soccer World Cup in West Germany, is showing signs of wear.

A majority must vote in favour of the new stadium, with at least 10 per cent of 905,000 voters required to take part in the referendum.

Franz Beckenbauer, chairman of the organising committee of the 2006 World Cup, has warned that Munich would be left out of the finals if it failed to agree on a new stadium.

"The whole world would laugh at us," said Beckenbauer, who is also the Bayern Munich president.

He said that if Munich missed out Berlin, where the Olympic stadium is undergoing a major facelift, would host both the opening game and the final.



FRANZ BECKENBAUER

'Use Sheringham'

2002 FIFA World Cup Korea Japan

REUTERS, London

Former England captain Alan Shearer believes the skills and footballing brain of Tottenham striker Teddy Sheringham must be used by England at next year's World Cup finals.

Shearer insists that Sheringham, who will turn 36 next year, has not lost any of his playing ability with age, adding that no other England player "in that position does a better job."

"There is no reason why Teddy cannot go to Japan and South Korea. In fact, I think he definitely should go," Shearer told The Sun newspaper on Saturday.

"I watched him on television against Derby the other night and it's easy to see how he can still control a game."

"Whether he can play 55 games



TEDDY SHERINGHAM

a season remains to be seen. But the form he is in at the moment doesn't surprise me at all.

"I have no doubt Teddy can still do it for England, no other player in that position does a better job."

After being dropped by coach Sven Goran Eriksson for England's World Cup qualifiers against Germany and Albania, Sheringham

was brought back for the final match against Greece earlier this month.

The Tottenham Hotspur striker made the most of his international recall, scoring a goal in the Old Trafford qualifier to help his country to a 2-2 draw.

Sheringham, part of Glenn Hoddle's England squad at the 1998 World Cup, is now vying with fellow strikers Emile Heskey, Andy Cole, Michael Owen and Robbie Fowler for a place in Japan and South Korea next year.

"People say you begin to lose your pace as the years go by but that cannot happen with Teddy -- he never had any," Shearer said.

"But for what he lacks on the ground, he has an extra yard in his head."

"He is so hard to mark, gives some great passes and can worry anyone with his intelligent runs."

"He is still such a great player. Intelligent, clever and a great pro to boot. I tell you, there is a lot of football still left in him."

Owen ready to return

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Liverpool

England striker Michael Owen could make his comeback from injury for his club's next Champions League game against Boavista on October 24, acting Liverpool manager Phil Thompson has said.

Owen has been sidelined since tearing a hamstring in an English premier league match against Tottenham on September 22.

He also missed England's 2-2 draw with Greece which clinched qualification for next year's World Cup finals.

But the Liverpool striker trained with his club for the first time in six weeks on Friday afternoon and Thompson told a news conference at Anfield that Owen could make the trip to Portugal.

"Michael has been doing very well and...we felt it would be good for him to join in his first day's training with the squad since the injury," said Thompson, who takes charge of his first league game since manager Gerard Houllier's hospitalisation at Leicester on Saturday.

"With a bit of luck - depending on how it goes over the next few days

there is a possibility he could travel to the Boavista game on Wednesday."

Thompson said that Houllier was recovering well after undergoing 11 hours of open-heart surgery last weekend to repair a dissected aorta.

"I saw Gerard today for the first time since we got back from Kiev on Wednesday and there was a real improvement," he said.

"He is looking great and still has his sense of humour. The first thing he did was look at me and say 'I

don't think I'll make Boavista on Wednesday."

Thompson then denied reports that Nigerian Taribo West is about to join the English Premiership club.

West, who was on loan with Derby last season, had been reported as telling an African radio station that he was on the verge of joining the Anfield club.

But Thompson said: "I can assure everyone that Taribo West will not be joining Liverpool or anything like that. Absolutely not."



MICHAEL OWEN

The sixth MLS

Football

AFP, Columbus

When the San Jose Earthquakes take on the Los Angeles Galaxy in Major League Soccer's sixth championship game here on Sunday it can be considered as a massive achievement that the league is still around.

MLS officials have publicly said the league's owners have lost more than 250 million dollars since kicking off two years after the US hosted the 1994 World Cup.

The 12-team league, which is operated under a unique single-entity concept, faces numerous challenges, which includes increasing television exposure, building more soccer-specific stadiums and expansion.

MLS controls all player signings and movement in a single entity as owners and investors invest in the league instead of a single team.

"We have no place to go but up," commissioner Don Garber said. "The market is growing around us. More and more families are supporting the game. It's our job to convince them into watching the professional game."

But transforming soccer into the

US's fifth major sport won't happen overnight.

"There are no lightning-in-a-bottle solutions that will suddenly pack our stadiums, explode television ratings, or guarantee a US victory in the World Cup," Garber said.

"I wouldn't say we're out of the woods. We're not. It's a sports before we are part of the sports culture in this country."

In what has to be considered the most encouraging news in several seasons, attendance went up for the first time. Crowds were up an average of 8.75 percent per game, from 13,756 to 14,961 as all but three of the clubs showed gains. The attendance fell short of the 17,406 average achieved during its inaugural 1996 season.

"We clearly needed to make improvements," Garber said. "Our goal was to make progress. I would have taken a bounce off the bottom."

Many league officials peg the future of the league on soccer-specific stadiums.

New stadiums will allow teams to generate their own revenue, and to schedule games any time they want. It also would eliminate ugly gridiron football lines that dominate the field from early August to the end of the playoffs.

Football

REUTERS, London

Goalkeeper Mark Bosnich has admitted that Chelsea's UEFA Cup defeat to Hapoel Tel Aviv was due in large part to the six players who missed the trip to Israel.

Emmanuel Petit, Graeme Le Saux, William Gallas, Albert Ferrer and Eidur Gudjohnsen stayed behind because of security fears in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States. Captain Marcel Desailly had an Achilles problem.

Chelsea conceded two late goals in Thursday's surprise 2-0 defeat in the second round, first leg tie and Bosnich made it clear the absences had taken their toll.

Bosnich, who finally made his debut for Chelsea after joining nine

months ago, told the Evening Standard: "I'd be lying if I said it wasn't significant -- of course it is."

"Of the six players who didn't go, three or four of them are the heart of our team so that's just telling the truth."

"But we've got a big squad and it's disappointing that with so little

time left to go we couldn't pick up a 0-0."

Looking ahead to the second leg at Stamford Bridge on November 1, he added: "They've still got to come to our place and that won't be easy for them. We'll make sure of that."

The Australian international, who joined from Manchester United, has been an understudy to both Ed de Goey and Carlo Cudicini between the posts.

"I was only playing because the other two keepers were injured. I felt rusty -- it's been 18 months since I played -- and did okay, but then unless the side wins you're never satisfied."

Bosnich had been more direct after the match, telling television reporters: "I'm sick of making excuses. I have done nothing wrong at all this season."

"I was told I was playing twice this season but it didn't work out like that."



MARK BOSNICH

Being 'Super Dario' not enough

2002 FIFA World Cup Korea Japan

AFP, Piacenza

He may be the Italian First Division's leading goalscorer but Piacenza striker Dario Hubner admits he has his work cut out to earn a place in Giovanni Trapattoni's World Cup squad.

Hubner, at 34, tops the goalscoring standings with seven goals so far in a career that only really took off when he turned 30 but such is his prowess as a goalscorer that many are calling for "Super Dario" to be given his chance with the "Azzurri".

But Hubner, in an interview with Corriere dello Sport, admits that it is a long shot as he prepared for Sunday's home match with Brescia, one of his former clubs.

"Despite my 34 years if I manage to score 30 goals by the end of the season then I will think about the national team," said Hubner. "But Trapattoni is not short of good strikers even if (Christian) Vieri is not fit at the moment and (Filippo) Inzaghi is not in good form."

"So I think I will be watching the World Cup on TV."

Hubner's record of 156 career goals in professional football (Serie A and B) speaks for itself but it was only

in 1997-8 that he made his debut in the top flight at the age of 30 when his former club Brescia were promoted.

Until then he had spent most of his career at the hardly illustrious Pievegina, Pergocrema, Fano and Cesena. In his first season in the top flight with Brescia he scored 16 goals but the club was relegated.

Last season Brescia and Hubner returned to Serie A and Hubner scored 17 goals only to be sold to Piacenza at the end of the season, because he was considered incompatible with Roberto Baggio.

Hubner, born at Muggia near Trieste, admits his career may have been damaged by his refusal to leave his adopted home at Crema in northern Italy.

"When I was at Cesena two English clubs - Leeds and Nottingham Forest - were looking at me. But if you think that I refuse to leave Crema then I am hardly likely to leave Italy, am I?" said the player.

Even Milan seems to be another planet for the prolific forward. "When I was at Brescia I used to speak about Milan with (former AC Milan player) Filippo Galli and it sounds like another world."

"I have one dream it would be to spend just one year with a club like AS Roma, Lazio, Inter, AC Milan and Juventus - not necessarily as a starter but just to know what the atmosphere is like."

Saviola agents take legal action

AFP, Barcelona

Two intermediaries who acted in the record summer signing of Argentine star Javier Saviola to Spanish side Barcelona lodged an appeal with a court here Friday demanding one million dollars unpaid commission from the player's agent.

Saviola, who set a Youth World Cup record when he scored 11 goals on the way to Argentina's victory last June, went on to complete a 22.6-million-dollar transfer from River Plate to Barcelona.

The 19-year-old player is also reported to receive an annual 2.5 million dollars as part of the five-year deal, which was a record transfer between an Argentinean and European club.

Former player Orlando Gimenez and his partner Joaquin Martinez claim that Saviola's agent Alfredo Cabrera Brizuela contracted them to approach Barcelona and promised them 30 per cent of the transfer fee when the deal went through.

River Plate had initially said the diminutive playmaker - who has also represented Argentina at full international level - was not for sale, reportedly rejecting inquiries from Barcelona and AC Milan.