



A combo picture shows the practice session of the Brazil team at the Nou Camp in Barcelona yesterday. Ronaldo's shirt draws some attention from fellow players (L) while Roberto Carlos takes a shot (C) and Rivaldo (far right) and Kaka pass through posts.

# Rivaldo to return against Malaysia



AFP, Barcelona

Brazil star Rivaldo will be back in competitive action for the World Cup warm up tie against Malaysia next week, his coach Luiz "Felipao" Scolari confirmed here on Friday.

Scolari conceded that the Barcelona winger would not make an appearance in the tie against a Catalonia eleven on Saturday after failing to recover from the knee injury he picked up three weeks ago.

"He will not be playing on Saturday but will be fit enough to play 45 minutes against Malaysia," Scolari said of the May 25 match in Kuala Lumpur.

Other injury news was equally promising. Both Luis and Roberto Carlos, arrived at the training camp

here to complete the 23-man squad after their Champions League final in Scotland on Wednesday.

Bayer Leverkusen defender Lucio had to be substituted in his side's 2-1 defeat to Real Madrid after turning an ankle.

"On the night itself it was agony," he admitted. "But the day after it felt much better and today (Friday) it feels totally recovered," he claimed.

Team doctor Jose Luis Runco took Lucio for tests at a Barcelona hospital while Real Madrid star Roberto Carlos went through a full work out.

More than 90,000 tickets have been sold for Saturday's match and it will be their second in the Nou Camp where the four-time World Cup winners drew 2-2 with Barcelona three years ago.

The Brazilians are in Spain to fine-tune their preparations for first round World Cup matches against Turkey, China and Costa Rica.

# Star-crossed Canizares



REUTERS, Madrid

The freak accident that ruled Spain goalkeeper Santiago Canizares out of the World Cup has forced coach Jose Antonio Camacho to make a rapid readjustment to his plans for the finals.

The Valencia player, who was set to be Spain's first choice keeper, severed a tendon in his right foot in a bizarre accident involving a bottle of cologne in his hotel room at the team's training base in Jerez on Friday.

A shard of glass dropped on to the player's foot and cut into the tendon in his big toe after he had accidentally smashed the bottle against the sink in the bathroom.

The 32-year-old, who has won 35 caps for Spain, was rushed to hospital where he underwent surgery to repair the tendon.

Doctors said he would be immobilised for about a month before beginning his rehabilitation.

Spanish team doctor, Genero Borras, said that the player was devastated by the injury.

"Canizares is in shock," he was quoted as saying in sports daily Marca on Saturday.

"It is very difficult for him to take in an accident like this. This was going to be his World Cup and now he will miss it because of a simple domestic accident."

Spain coach Camacho responded to the news by calling up the uncapped Malaga keeper Pedro Contreras, but Real Madrid's Iker Casillas is now likely to be his number one choice ahead of Valladolid's Ricardo.

The decision confirms that Spain's former number one keeper Jose Molina of Deportivo Coruna is completely out of favour.

Molina has not played for the national side since making a gaffe in Spain's opening match of Euro 2000 against Norway and, despite his outstanding form for his club this season, Camacho has decided to overlook him once again.

For Casillas the last week has seen a remarkable turnaround in his fortunes.

The 20-year-old, who was



PHOTO: INTERNET

Spain goalkeeper Santiago Canizares walks downstairs after giving a press conference in Jerez yesterday where he announced his withdrawal from the World Cup.

dropped by Real coach Vicente del Bosque in the second half of the season, began Wednesday's Champions League final on the bench.

But an injury to Cesar saw him come on in the 68th minute to become the hero of the second half as he produced a string of superb reflex saves to help Real to hang on to their 2-1 lead against Bayer Leverkusen.

Cesar's injury meant that he was ruled out as a replacement for Canizares and Casillas has now been elevated from the Real bench to the status of Spain's number one keeper.

"It was a terrible piece of bad luck for Canizares...and I am certainly not happy because a team mate has been injured," Casillas told sports daily As.

"But football is like that ... Now Ricardo, Contreras and myself will have to fight it out for the place and any of us could be chosen.

"It is my first World Cup and I just want to enjoy it whatever happens."

The Spain squad leaves on Monday for South Korea and Japan, where they are pitted against Slovenia, Paraguay and South Africa in the opening round.

# Chilavert, a real character



AFP, Paris

Larger than life Paraguay captain Jose Luis Chilavert may have twice been voted best goalkeeper in the world but he is equally famous for his goals, fights and outrageous comments.

Chilavert will sit out Paraguay's first World Cup match to complete his latest ban, four matches handed down by FIFA after he spat in Roberto Carlos' face after Brazil beat Paraguay 2-0 in qualifying.

The extensive list of his clashes includes once punching an Argentine journalist who suggested he had put on weight, fighting former Argentine captain Oscar Ruggeri and Colombian striker Faustino Asprilla.

Hardly the best track record for a man who has said he wants to be President of Paraguay when he finally hangs up his boots.

The agile but volatile 'keeper was voted South American Player of the Year in 1998, world 'keeper of the year in 1995 and 1997.

And even if his goalkeeping ability has declined in recent years, he remains a huge personality on the pitch.

His greatest international performance came four years ago at France 1998 when he conceded just two goals in four matches as Paraguay narrowly missed the quarter-finals, losing 1-0 in extra-time to France thanks to a golden goal from Laurent Blanc in their second round tie.

At 36 the 2002 World Cup will almost certainly be Chilavert's swan song. Paraguay's Group B games are in Korea where they will take on South Africa, Spain and Slovenia.

The controversial 'keeper was swift to stir up ill-feeling against the team many feel will be Paraguay's chief group rivals, though the big man himself evidently begs to differ.

"If Spain had played in the South American qualifiers, I am sure they would not be going to the World Cup," Chilavert told a Paraguayan radio station on a recent trip there.

"It's really easy to get through if



JOSE LUIS CHILAVERT

you are playing teams like Andorra, Liechtenstein or Israel," he added.

Chilavert is also hoping to add to his 50-plus goals tally amassed from penalties and free kicks throughout his career. The latest coming against Bolivia in a South America group qualifying match.

If he does he'll be the first ever 'keeper to do so in a World Cup finals match.

"I'm doing more than 120 free-kicks every day," he claimed recently.

Chilavert revealed a milder side to his nature when he toured the Japanese city of Matsumoto last month to pave the way for the Latin American country to set up their pre-World Cup base camp.

He gave a lecture to some 400 students at a junior high school in the city, telling them: "Do your best in studies and sports," and recalling his childhood when his family was too poor to afford a pair of soccer boots.

He also signed autographs, posed for pictures and coached young players in dribbling and passing at the ground reserved for the Paraguay World Cup squad.

But it was not long before controversy flared up again when newspapers in Paraguay suggested he pressured coach Cesar Maldini into excluding midfielder Julio Cesar Enciso, with whom he has not seen eye-to-eye in the past, from the Paraguay squad.

In typical fashion Chilavert made an impassioned plea to the country's budding sports journalists not to follow the example of their incompetent elders.'

# Maldini plays it safe



AFP, Asuncion

There were few surprises as Paraguay coach Cesare Maldini named his squad of 23 for the World Cup in the Far East from May 31 to June 30.

Maldini silenced his critics in Solna, near Stockholm on Friday after the South Americans scored an impressive 2-1 win over fellow World Cup qualifiers Sweden.

And the Italian coach stuck with the same squad as selected for Paraguay's first friendly against Bolivia which ended in a 2-2 draw last February.

The only changes from the side which qualified for the World Cup are Olimpia defender Julio Caesar Caceres and midfielder Carlos Bonet of Libertad, who was capped for the second time against Sweden.

A slick Paraguayan display at the Raasunda Stadium on Friday that at times left Sweden scrambling should keep Maldini's opponents quiet for now.

First-half goals from Bayern

**SQUAD**

**Goalkeepers:** Jose Luis Chilavert (Strasbourg/Fra), Ricardo Tavaroli (Olimpia), Justo Villar (Libertad)

**Defenders:** Francisco Arce (Palmeiras/Bra), Celso Ayala (River Plate/Arg), Carlos Gamarra (AEK Athens/Gre), Denis Caniza (Santos Laguna/Mex), Pedro Sarabia (River Plate/Arg), Daniel Sanabria (Libertad), Julio Caceres (Olimpia)

**Midfielders:** Roberto Acuna (Real Zaragoza/Spa), Estanislao Struway (Libertad), Carlos Paredes (Porto/Port), Gustavo Morinigo (Libertad/Par), Diego Gavilan (Los Tecos/Mex), Juan Carlos Franco (Olimpia), Carlos Bonet (Libertad), Guido Alvarenga (Leon/Mex)

**Strikers:** Jose Cardozo (Toluca/Mex), Roque Santacruz (Bayern Munich/Ger), Nelson Cuevas (River Plate/Arg), Richard Baez (Olimpia), Jorge Campos/Catolica/Chi)

back for Sweden after the interval but the home side were unable to break down a determined Paraguay defence marshalled brilliantly from the back by Jose-Luis Chilavert.

"I'm very happy with the way we played," Maldini said. "Sweden are a good side but we were quicker, and we converted our chances," he added.

Maldini's Swedish counterpart Lars Lagerback bemoaned a poor performance in the opening 45 minutes which cost his team.

"We didn't play well in the first half. Paraguay have got some very good players - they were much quicker than us on the ball," Lagerback said.

The result will worry Swedish fans as the Scandinavians prepare to face Argentina, Nigeria and England in the World Cup's 'Group of Death'. England defeated Paraguay 4-0 in a friendly last month."

Paraguay will be up against Spain, Slovenia and South Africa in their Group B tie in Japan.

The team begin their World Cup preparation Sunday in a training camp at Matsumoto, Japan. Their first match will be on June 2 against South Africa in Busan.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Paraguay's Celso Ayala (No 5) fights for possession with Sweden's Henke Larsson (L) during their friendly international in Stockholm on May 17.

# Figo gives hope as Portugal fly off



PHOTO: INTERNET

Portuguese superstar Luis Figo (L) relaxes while his teammate Pedro Pauleta concentrates on a magazine inside the Macao-bound plane yesterday. The Portuguese team started their World Cup camp later in the day.



AFP, Lisbon

Luis Figo said he was hoping to shake off a niggling leg injury when Portugal step up their World Cup preparations with a week-long training camp in Macau this week.

Speaking just before leaving Lisbon for the former Portuguese colony close to Hong Kong with his teammates, Figo said he would use the training camp to make sure he was fully fit for the finals.

Figo was substituted during Real Madrid's European Champions League final against Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday, and looked short of fitness.

"I hope to be in top shape. I want to get to peak fitness in the next few days when we're in Macau," Figo said.

Portugal, who play South Korea, the USA and Poland in Group D, play fellow World Cup qualifiers China in a warm-up international on May 25.

# Owen says he's better



INTERNET, London

England striker Michael Owen's forgettable goal against Argentina four years ago in St Etienne made his global reputation as one of the world's emerging stars.

Now the Liverpool forward has not the slightest doubt that he is a far more complete player than he was then, the Mirror reported.

Owen said: "St Etienne does feel like a different world now, a long time ago. But I didn't want to be remembered just for that goal against Argentina.

"You can't play well in every game and I've had ups and downs and injuries. But four years ago, I'd have settled for being where I am now.

"I've made progress. It's not just in football. Over four years you'd expect young golfers or tennis players to improve. I feel I've done all right.

"I'm an all-round better player than I was against Argentina last time. I'm better in the air...and with my left foot!"

Owen smiled broadly as he made reference to Glenn Hoddle's doubts over his technical ability.

The Reds' boss Gerard Houllier shared them and told Owen he had to learn. Houllier said: "Michael had to improve his left foot. He did and I can pick out two games to show the work he's done.

"I said to him: 'If you want to be a top player you have to use your left foot. If you have to come back on your right foot, you lose your advantage and the goalkeeper knows what you're going to do.'

Owen accepted Houllier's advice.

The striker added: "Gerard has been a great help. I wanted it to happen as well, to improve and become a better player.

"I'd have wanted to be the player making the run he made. Now I do that a bit more. But I never want to take away my main asset, which is getting behind defenders."

Since France 1998, Owen has scored 87 goals in 159 games for Liverpool.

His England goal record is now running at 15 in 34 appearances, with seven coming in his 10 matches for Eriksson.

He said: "I don't think anyone's ever questioned what I can do.

"They have questioned my fitness, straight after a setback. If they're still questioning me, it will be the case through my career. I can only keep doing it and keep proving people wrong.

"So far I've always answered them. If you're going to be a top player you've got to be able to do things on the big occasions, to prove the doubters wrong.

"I was just happy to be involved last time. There were great players only on the bench so I went there thinking that if I played only five minutes I'd still be able to say I'd been part of the World Cup. Now it is different, with expectation on me, but I don't mind having that.

"This time I'm more experienced, with over 30 games for England and having played against world-class players. I've got that advantage.

"I've scored in big games and I hope that continues. It would be great to get the Golden Boot because not many people have won that.

"We're one of eight teams who have a real chance of winning it. Obviously France and Argentina might be ahead of us in that list, but we wouldn't be scared of them.

"We don't want to be talking about lifting the World Cup yet but we know we'll be a hard team to beat. We know our quality and that we can pose other teams problems.

"When you're together as a squad that feeling and belief can grow. All the best teams in the world have that spirit when things are going well. You need that."