

Change in US roster

Los Angeles Galaxy defender Chris Albright was named to the US FIFA World Cup squad Wednesday, replacing injured Frankie Hejduk just one day after the Americans announced their 23-man roster.

Hejduk, a Columbus Crew defender who would have played in this third World Cup, suffered a torn right knee ligament during a 1-0 Crew loss to Kansas City last Saturday.

Hejduk, 31, completed the game and a Tuesday training session before experiencing pain in his knee. Doctors examined the knee Wednesday to confirm the injury, opening the door for Albright.

Albright has 19 appearances for the US national team, scoring his lone goal in a 2-2 draw at Jamaica in 1999.

More cricket in the EAP

Participation in the International Cricket Council's East Asia Pacific (EAP) development programme expanded by 21 per cent in the region's 10 ICC member countries last year, the ICC said on Thursday.

EAP officials said a total of 32,804 participants were involved in formal cricket programs within the region, a massive growth since regional research figures were first collected in 2001.

"Although we cannot yet compete in terms of participation with the regions long established sports of soccer and rugby, this significant and continual growth over the past five years indicates that cricket's popularity within many non-traditional areas of the Pacific Islands and Eastern Asia is on the rise," ICC EAP Regional Manager Tim Anderson said in a statement.

Anderson said cricket was making considerable strides in Indonesia, Vanuatu and Japan.

He said Indonesia has junior development programs in Jakarta and Bali that include over 10,000 children, while cricket is seen as the fastest growing sport in Vanuatu.

Japan received ICC Associate membership last year and has 22 active cricket grounds, the EAP said.

"The extensive and sustainable growth of cricket in countries without a traditional link to the game demonstrates the success of the ICC Development Programs objective to take cricket beyond its traditional boundaries and become a truly global sport," Anderson said.

ATTACK ON JOURNOS Govt committee meets newsmen

The government committee for ascertaining the extent of loss of the injured journalists talked to the newsmen on Thursday at Chittagong Press Club.

The committee headed by Mir Mosharrar Hossain, Joint Secretary (Dev) of the Information Ministry recorded the deposition of statement of the journalists who came under police atrocity on the opening day of the second Test between Bangladesh and Australia at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on April 16.

Eight newsmen including three photojournalists, victims of police brutality, gave the committee with the details of the extent of their injuries and loss of their professional equipment.

Committee members Deputy Secretary of the Youth and Sports ministry Saiful Haq Bhuiyan, general secretary of the Dhaka Union of Journalists Omar Faruk, general secretary of the Chittagong Union of Journalists Mohammad Shanewaj and general secretary of the Photo Journalists' Association Mir Ahmed Miro were also present on the occasion.

BKSP, Kalindi

They were winners by 90 runs against Sourav Smriti High School at the Dhanmondi Cricket ground.

Young opener Asif led the way with 56, as BKSP scored 217. Masud of Sourav Smriti took four wickets.

Forkan took five for 24, while Mominul took four wickets to skittle out Sourav Smriti for 127 runs.

The final between BKSP and Kalindi High School will be held at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Titu to skipper

And Sports Fazlur Rahman in chair. Rahman is also the chairman of the organising committee.

**SQUAD**

Rasel Khan Bappi, Zahid Hossain, Shamsuddin Tuhin, Tabib-A-Noor, Hedayetul Islam Razib, Mashiur Rahman, Mahmudur Rahman Chayan, Asadur Rahman Chandan, Mahbob Ehsan Rana, Zahidul Islam Rajon, Rahul Kanti Roy, Khondokar Hasan, Shahidullah Titu, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Zahed Bib Tabib Shuvo, Shamim Reza, Maksudul Alam and Ahrafuul Islam Shishu.



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona talisman Ronaldinho (C) deals with two Celta Vigo players during their Primera Liga match in Vigo on Wednesday.

Ronaldinho—the guiding light

Football

AFP, Madrid

As Barcelona fans celebrated their second successive Spanish championship on Wednesday, they were giving much of the credit for getting this title to their Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho.

Even more than the goal scoring machine Samuel Eto'o, who found the net 25 times after Wednesday's 1-0 victory over Celta Vigo, or their inspirational captain Carles Puyol, it has been Ronaldinho who has returned Barcelona to heights the club scaled in the early 1990s.

A bewilderingly skilful player with the ball at his feet, whom many have compared to the recently-deceased George Best, he was the driving force behind Barca's 14-game winning streak in the middle of the season which was instrumental in them winning La Liga again.

Ronaldinho is usually modest when it comes to assessing his own brilliance.

"I have always loved playing football. For me it's a pleasure not a job. But I couldn't achieve the things I have done without the other players in the Barcelona team," said the ever-smiling Ronaldinho, whose joy is evident to all.

His teammates are more effusive about his ability.

"He's a genius who does the most

unbelievable things with the ball day in, day out," said his team mate Eto'o recently.

It was his day in, day out work for Barcelona that got him elected as the FIFA World Player of the Year for the second successive year in December.

His football feats this season, on both a domestic stage and also in the Champions League, have been seen on TV screens around the world and regularly filled Barcelona's Nou Camp stadium to its 98,000 capacity.

However, the defining moment of this campaign was arguably when Barcelona beat bitter rivals Real Madrid 3-0 in their own Santiago Bernabeu stadium in November.

Ronaldinho's runs down the left flank tormented the Real defenders that night but brought the usually hostile home crowd to its feet, applauding his every touch.

In a Brazilian jersey, he did win FIFA's largely ignored Confederations Cup last summer but it was largely for his performances for Barcelona that won the votes of the national coaches and team captains around the world.

His performances for Barca since the start of the year has made him an early favourite for an unprecedented third successive World Player of the Year award.

"The Brazilian has got people used to seeing things they have never seen before, skills they could never have imagined they ever contemplated and

can't understand," said the respected British magazine World Soccer in January.

There is perhaps only one small facet which is holding Ronaldinho back from being the complete player.

"Ronaldinho plays very well but he does not possess the essential team mentality," commented another Brazilian legend Pele recently, mildly criticising Ronaldinho's lack-of-enthusiasm for helping out his own defenders.

This season he has improved this aspect of his game but his reluctance to return to his own half is still apparent in many games.

Nevertheless, he can now relax for two weeks and let others do the hard work.

Barca's next big date with destiny is against Arsenal in the Champions League final on May 17 in Paris, a city he knows well from his two years at Paris Saint-Germain, where he played before joining Barcelona in 2003.

"The club has a duty to its fans to win the Champions League. We are one of the historical 'greats' of world football. We are something special and the fans are looking to us players to make up for some disappointing seasons," said Ronaldinho.

However, there have been few disappointments since Ronaldinho arrived in Barcelona, especially this season.

Messi ruled out of Arsenal final

INTERNET, undated

Lionel Messi is almost certain to miss the Champions League final against Arsenal on May 17 with the muscle injury that has sidelined him for nearly two months.

The Argentinian has only "a two percent possibility" of recovering in time to play in Paris, El Pais newspaper quoted an unnamed member of Barcelona's medical staff as saying. "There are no miracles with this type of injury," he added.

The teenager, who returned to Barcelona on Saturday after a week's rest in Argentina, tore muscle fibres in his right thigh in the Champions League game against Chelsea on March 7. He aggravated the injury in training last month and has been warned not to rush his recovery. "If he's in too much of a hurry, he'll miss the World Cup," added the member of Barcelona's medical staff.

Serena to miss Wimbledon & French Open

AFP, St. Petersburg

Former world number one Serena Williams, a seven-time Grand Slam champion, said Wednesday she will miss Wimbledon and the French Open this year because of a chronic left knee injury.

The 24-year-old American is only 2-1 this season, reaching the third round of the Australian Open in a title defence in her only appearance so far this year.

"These past few months have been very frustrating for me personally, as I have had to take this time off to fully mend from a chronic knee injury," Williams said.

"What I can tell you today based on what I am being told by my doctors is that I should be in a position to be playing again by the end of this summer."

That could put her in position to play in the US Open, where she won her first major title in 1999.

Williams took nine months off in July of 2003 after winning Wimbledon. She returned in March of 2004 and won a tournament in Miami.

Williams won four Grand Slam titles in a row starting at the 2002 French Open and also captured Wimbledon in 2003 as well as the 1999 US Open and 2005 Australian Open.

The announcement came on the same day that her sister Venus Williams, the reigning Wimbledon champion, won her first match of 2006 at the Warsaw Open. She had played only two matches since a US Open quarterfinal loss last year.

Uruguay 1930

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Additional factors built tension: local derby, impending military dictatorship against Uruguayan coalition. Belgian referee John Langenus demanded guarantees of protection and planned a quick escape route to his ship. He later admitted to feeling genuine fear.

On the day of the final, he was put under extra pressure, both camps wanting to use a ball manufactured in their own country. Langenus ordered each half to be played with a different ball. Dressed in his usual cap and plus fours, he went out to play the part of gamekeeper.

Naturally the day of the final was declared a national holiday. Someone died in the celebrations, a mob stoned the Uruguayan embassy in Buenos Aires, and the two FAs broke off relations. It really did matter. Even the Europeans were about to believe it.

United we stand...

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key ingredient that has prevented the national team from inspiring real enthusiasm from amongst the country's football fans.

Victory in the 1964 European Championship and a runners-up spot in the same tournament 20 years later are the country's only two significant achievements, while they have not got past the quarterfinals of the World Cup since 1950.

A string of disappointments have eroded loyalty to the national side.

Fans and commentators talk of a quarterfinal jinx and have even tried to find comfort in conspiracy theories in a bid to explain why one of the traditional powerhouses of European football has failed to make its mark at an international tournament.

Triumph at the World Cup would almost certainly break the shackles that have restricted the national side for so long.

"Success could be the catalyst for change," says Torres. "If Spain achieves something important it will infect the people and help create an identity for the national team. It will also affect the clubs as say it did in France or Italy.

McClaren gets England job

Football

AFP, London

Steve McClaren was named as the new England manager, in succession to Sven-Goran Eriksson, by the Football Association (FA) here Thursday.

The Middlesbrough manager, currently Eriksson's deputy in the England set-up, will take over from the Swede following the World Cup finals in Germany and will take up his new role from August 1 on a four-year contract.

"This is the biggest honour that any coach can have, and is obviously the highlight of my career. It's a massive challenge and one that I welcome. I have hugely enjoyed my time at Middlesbrough and am very grateful to the club," said McClaren.

"However, this was an opportunity I couldn't refuse. My immediate priority is next week's UEFA Cup Final with Boro, and then working with Sven and his coaching team to achieve success in Germany this summer, before I turn my thoughts to the Euro 2008 qualifying campaign"

McClaren was selected by the nominations committee composed of FA chief executive Brian Barwick, FA chairman Geoff Thompson, Dave Richards, Noel White and David Dein, with Sir Trevor Brooking, the former

England midfielder in an advisory role.

The appointment was unanimously agreed by Thursday's FA Board meeting.

McClaren has been part of the



STEVE MCCLAREN

England set-up since October 2000 as assistant coach to Sven-Goran Eriksson, excluding a period between October 2002 and May 2004.

He was a member of the coaching team at the 2002 World Cup in Korea/Japan and Euro 2004 in Portugal, and will also be in Germany with England this summer.

McClaren, 45, has been Middlesbrough manager since 2001. During this time he led the club to their first major honour, the League Cup in 2004, and next week's UEFA

New era beckons Barca

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona fans and players alike believe that the Catalan club is on the verge of establishing a new dynasty in Spanish football after winning the Primera Liga title for the second consecutive year. "The reason I signed for Barcelona was to make history. I've never thought I was wrong because I knew I was signing for a great team," said FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldinho after helping clinch the club's 18th championship.

"I'm very proud to be participating in the change of cycle we are experiencing at the moment. Now we all want it to continue in the Champions League final (against Arsenal on May 17)," added the Brazilian who has been one of Barca's stars this season.

The title was in Barcelona hands at half-time in their match at Celta Vigo on Wednesday after their nearest rivals Valencia lost 2-1 at Real Mallorca but they went to add a cherry to the cake and win 1-0.

"We have been working hard all

season for this moment and we deserve to enjoy it," said Ronaldinho.

"The dressing room has seen a few bad moments this season but the pain was worth it.

"But the fiesta is going to be very short, so I'm going to enjoy every minute of it, because it'll soon be back to work for the Champions League final."

Samuel Eto'o, the Spanish first division's leading scorer who took his tally to 25 for the season with the only goal of the game on Wednesday, said: "Winning a second league title is even better than the first one last year because two consecutive titles are very difficult.

"I hope to carry on like this. If I continue to score, great, but if I don't, then it's not important," added the three-time African Player of the Year, who is still looking to become the first player from that continent to also lift the European Golden Boot award.

However, Wednesday night was not about the individual efforts of Eto'o but the Barca team in its entirety.

Barca coach Frank Rijkaard said: "This triumph is a testimony to the

Cup Final against Sevilla.

Barwick said: "I'm delighted to be able to announce Steve's appointment today. He has shown himself to be a top-class coach for both country and club, leading Middlesbrough to the most successful period in the club's history.

"He is the only current English manager in the Premiership to have won a major trophy.

"Steve is highly-respected within the game, has a wealth of international experience and ensures continuity within the England team set-up. I would also like to express my gratitude to Middlesbrough FC, and the other candidates and clubs involved, for their co-operation throughout this process."

Meanwhile Eriksson said: "I'm obviously very pleased for Steve, but also for the England team. I have worked closely with Steve ever since I came to England and know how good a coach he is.

"He is well-liked and well-respected by the players and staff. I have no doubt that he has all the credentials to be very successful in the job and wish him all the best.

"I said that I didn't want the England coach to be with the team at the World Cup, unless he was already involved in the set-up. Steve is a key part of my coaching staff and I'm delighted to have him with us in Germany."

talent of the players and their hard work.

One league victory might have been attributed to a bit of good fortune but two back-to-back triumphs in one of the most competitive leagues in the world have confirmed Rijkaard's coaching credentials.

Rijkaard admitted that he had seen the players start their celebrations when the news of Valencia's loss had filtered through to them in Vigo and he had to calm them down in the dressing room and get them to focus on another 45 minutes of football. From their Primera Liga triumph, Barcelona head to Paris for the Champions League final against Arsenal.

If they lift Europe's top club trophy then comparisons with the era in the early 1990s when Johan Cruyff was the Barca coach will be truly valid.

Cruyff, Rijkaard's mentor and role model in many respects, won four consecutive league titles and the 1992 European Cup, the only time that the Catalan club have won the honour.

A small town in Germany

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from a Brazilian co-worker and were looking forward to hosting the fun-loving team.

Brazil fever has certainly hit. The local adult education college is offering courses in Brazilian Portuguese, the soccer team dons yellow, green and blue "Brazil-look" shirts for away games, and shop windows sport Brazilian flags and football-themed decorations.

Businesses in the town, which boasts one of the highest average incomes in Germany and almost 100 millionaires among its 18,000 residents, are hoping for a bonanza.

"It's going to be good for business," said local restaurateur Alex Tsingirdaklis, who is hiring 15 more staff and plans to turn his Latin-American locale, Bahia Latino, into

a bar offering Brazilian snacks, drinks, and music.

"But I also hope it will bring a bit more life into the town, that there will be a lot of dancing and singing -- Germany is not usually very good at joie de vivre."

Hallert said the biggest headache for organisers, besides security, was uncertainty about how many visitors to expect.

Some 5,000 Brazilian fans have booked hotels in Cologne but may visit Koeningstein once or twice; the Brazilians news conferences and training sessions are expected to draw about 500 journalists; and then there are countless German and international fans who will also want to be part of the action.

"We have been told to prepare for

between 2,000 and 10,000 visitors a day. That's a big difference, obviously," Hallert said.

Organisers, who have budgeted 500,000 euros for the two-week spectacle, are hoping to minimise the chaos by arranging for more frequent trains from Frankfurt and maybe shuttle buses to car parks in surrounding villages. But locals will still face disruptions to their daily routine.

"The locals are a little bit under stress at the moment, especially the Falkensteiners because they are going to have to cope with traffic disruptions," Hallert said.

"Koenigstein is normally a very quiet, tranquil place and it is going to disturb the peace and quiet for some."

BITS AND BOBS



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With major doubts over Ledley King and Rooney, plus fears regarding Michael Owen and Ashley Cole, at least Terry should be available to figure in the warm-up games after the scan showed there was no deep bruising on the bone.

Terry fit for finals

INTERNET, undated

A scan on John Terry's injured ankle has provided England coach Sven Goran Eriksson with some positive news.

The Chelsea skipper missed his first match of the Premiership season when the champions slipped to a rare defeat at Blackburn Rovers in midweek, perhaps illustrating his importance to the side.

The commanding centre back needed stitches in a wound caused by a late challenge from Wayne Rooney at Stamford Bridge on Saturday but played on, despite his obvious discomfort.

There was some concern he could have made the injury worse, but the 25-year-old will be fine for the World Cup finals in Germany this summer.

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Hosts to announce squad on May 15

REUTERS, Frankfurt

Germany coach Juergen Klinsmann will announce his squad for the World Cup on Monday, the German Football Association announced on Thursday.

May 15 is deadline day for the 32 teams to name their 23-man squads, after FIFA rejected requests from some coaches, including Klinsmann, to put back the date to nearer the start of the June 9-July 9 tournament.

The Germans get the World Cup underway with a Group A game against Costa Rica in Munich on June 9.

Hargreaves hopeful

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich midfielder Owen Hargreaves admits he is hopeful of securing a place in England's World Cup squad after national coach Sven Goran Eriksson came to watch him in Bayern's 3-1 win over VfB Stuttgart on Wednesday.

"It is a good sign that he (Eriksson) was in the stadium," said Hargreaves. "I am glad that we won the game and he had something to see."

The 25-year-old Hargreaves produced one of his best displays of the season in front of the England manager who must name his final 23-man squad on May 15.

England are strong in midfield with Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Joe Cole and captain David Beckham but the versatility of Hargreaves, who can play anywhere in midfield as well as right back, could see him picked for next month's finals.

Hargreaves, a Champions League winner with Bayern in 2001, was part of Eriksson's squad at the 2002 World Cup but an injury cut short his tournament.