



Barcelona winger Ludovic Giuly celebrates after scoring the only goal of the game against Espanyol during the first leg of the Spanish Supercup at the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona.

Salihamicic hangs up int'l boots

REUTERS, Sarajevo

Bosnia's Hasan Salihamicic has called time on his international career because of recurring injuries which prevent him from giving his best, a Bosnian daily reported on Friday.

The 29-year-old Bayern Munich player has been a key member of the Bosnia team since his debut 10 years ago when he scored their first official goal but doctors told him he could not continue on two fronts.

"After countless injuries and ten operations in 10 years and after consultations with doctors in the United States and Germany, I decided it would be best to bid farewell to the national team because of my health," Salihamicic told Bosnia's best-selling daily *Dnevni Avaz*.

Salihamicic was capped 41 times and scored six goals for Bosnia, who have never qualified for a major tournament.

"I intend to continue playing for several more years, depending on my health," Salihamicic told the newspaper after Bosnia's 2-1 friendly loss to World Cup runners-up France on Wednesday in Sarajevo.

"I want to concentrate on Bayern now. I want to win another Champions League title and secure a new contract," said the player nicknamed "Brazzo" (little brother) who is tied to Bayern until next June.

Wenger launches Real attack

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is unhappy with Spanish side Real Madrid in their pursuit of Gunners forward Jose Antonio Reyes.

The Spanish giants have been tracking the 22-year-old during the summer and the former Sevilla midfielder has regularly expressed his desire to move back to Spain.

He did not play in Arsenal's win over Dinamo Zagreb in the Champions League and it seemed he was set for a move to the Bernabeu after not being cup-tied.

But a deal has yet to be struck and Wenger has grown increasingly frustrated with Madrid's approaches.

He said: "Real Madrid create unrest everywhere. You see the same situation at Lyon in France and you see the same situation here. They come up with nothing."

"They just destabilise the players and that is why we are not very happy."

SPANISH SUPER CUP Barca draw first blood

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

French winger Ludovic Giuly gave league champions Barcelona a 1-0 victory over King's Cup winners Espanyol in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup at Montjuic on Thursday.

The former Monaco player steered a first-time shot past goalkeeper Gorka Iraizoz in the 44th minute after Ronaldinho had threaded a clever pass through the defence.

Barca struggled to find their rhythm in the first half of the traditional curtain-raiser to the season

and it was city rivals Espanyol who had the better of the opening minutes.

The goal settled the nerves of the European champions and they would have extended their lead in the second period but for a string of fine saves from Iraizoz.

Frank Rijkaard's side host Espanyol in the second leg at the Nou Camp on Sunday.

Espanyol, who beat Real Zaragoza 4-1 in the final of the King's Cup but only avoided relegation thanks to a last-gasp goal in the final match of the season, played the more fluent football for much of the first half.

Barca struggled to find their rhythm in the first half of the traditional curtain-raiser to the season

good work by new signing Francisco Rafa and also forcing Victor Valdes to make a fine reaction save from a venomous 20-metre drive.

Valdes came to the rescue again when he parried a fierce shot from midfielder Pablos Zabaleta.

Barca were in better form in the second half and substitute Lionel Messi and Ronaldinho had several chances but were thwarted by the alert Iraizoz.

Rijkaard gave Italian World Cup winner Gianluca Zambrotta his debut in the game.

The club's other two close-season signings, Eidur Gudjohnsen and Lilian Thuram, were left on the bench.

Mourinho to block Gallas exit

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho reckons wantaway defender William Gallas will probably have to see out the remaining year of his contract with the Premiership champions.

The France international is keen for a move as he is unhappy at being played out of his favoured position as a central defender.

But his boss told Friday's edition of *Publico*: "He still has a year left of his contract with Chelsea. He's probably going to stay. I have to defend Chelsea's interests."

Mourinho added: "For the first time in my career I'm ready to keep a player who doesn't want to stay realising that it won't be easy."

"I've already explained to Gallas that the club who wants to sign him is a phantom, faceless club. It hasn't made any concrete offer, it works in the shadows."

"And it's making the player behave improperly."

The Blues' boss said time was running out for the unnamed side to make its intentions clear.

"If between now and August 31 this anonymous side doesn't make itself known, if it doesn't end its barely ethical way of doing business, and if it doesn't make a serious, honest proposal in accordance

with the value of the player then he will end up staying put."

Gallas, who celebrated his 29th birthday on Thursday with a goal in France's 2-1 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina the day before, said he hoped the transfer would be resolved soon.

"I still want to leave," said Gallas, who was outstanding in the centre of defence as France reached the World Cup final.

"I hope that it will be settled soon, but that doesn't stop me from still playing for them while it is being settled," added Gallas who has been linked with Premiership rivals Arsenal and Italian giants AC Milan.

Cole left out of opener

AFP, London

Ashley Cole, linked to champions Chelsea, misses Arsenal's Premiership opener against

Aston Villa on Saturday despite the England international insisting he is ready to play.

Cole criticised Arsenal in the promotional material for his autobiography and was tipped to receive a hostile reception from Arsenal fans if he were to play for the club again.

He didn't play in the Champions League qualifying win against Dinamo Zagreb and was not included in the official team photo for the new season at the Emirates Stadium.

But Chelsea and Arsenal have yet to agree a deal for the 25-year-old defender, meaning Cole could be forced to remain at the Emirates Stadium until January at least.

He issued a statement through his agents Friday saying: "I have made myself available for selection this weekend and it is now up to the manager whether he decides to play me."

"I maintain I have no problem with the fans and the manager; they have both been very supportive of me throughout my career, in particular I hope the fans understand where my grievances lie."

Yet his name was noticeable by its absence when Arsene Wenger released his line-up for Saturday's game.

Wenger had earlier told

Arsenal TV Online: "If he doesn't go, of course he is a great player."

"He has permission to go somewhere if he wants to do it, but if there is not an opportunity for him and the club, he will stay at the club (Arsenal)."

Wenger meanwhile is unhappy with Spanish side Real Madrid in their pursuit of Gunners forward Jose Antonio Reyes.

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"They just destabilise the players and that is why we are not very happy."

Capello cautions Milan duo

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid boss Fabio Capello has told Milan and Inter to archive any thoughts of signing Ronaldo this summer.

The former Juventus maestro was questioned about the Brazilian's future on Thursday and was categorical in his response.

"Ronaldo will not move to Milan and will not go to Inter either, just to make things clear," he declared.

"I only like to talk about players who I have on my team and I don't like discussing sales or new signings before they are finalised."

"However, in this case, I can confirm that Ronaldo is going absolutely nowhere," concluded the former Italian international.

The 29-year-old has been paired with the two San Siro clubs with the Rossoneri supposedly slightly favoured in the chase.

Ronaldo is now back in training after becoming the World Cup's top scorer of all time during Germany 2006 when he grabbed his 15th Finals goal against Ghana.

REUTERS, Paris

Five times French Champions Olympique Lyon face their first real test of the season this weekend at runners-up Girondins Bordeaux.

Bordeaux are joint leaders of Ligue 1 with Lille and promoted Nancy, on six points from two wins in two matches.

Girondins Bordeaux: Lyon are two points adrift after being held to a 1-1 draw at home by Toulouse last Sunday.

"We have to be fair, we didn't deserve to win. We were not at our usual level. Our attacking game was too slow and defensively we let them take the upper hand," said Lyon's coach Gerard Houllier.

"This bad experience will give us extra motivation. We shall not lose in Bordeaux," he added.

More than any other team in the French championship, Lyon's

league preparations have been affected by the World Cup.

Brazil's Cris and Juninho, Switzerland's Patrick Mueller, Portugal's Tiago and France's Gregory Coupet, Eric Abidal, Sidney Govou, Florent Malouda and Sylvain Wiltord were allowed to delay their return to training.

Six of their players, Coupet, Abidal, Malouda, Wiltord, Vincent Clerc and Jeremy Toussaint were members of France's squad who defeated Bosnia 2-1 in a friendly on Wednesday in Sarajevo.

Lyon chartered a plane to bring them home on Wednesday evening to increase their chances of starting Sunday's match.

Girondins Bordeaux young midfielders Julien Faubert, scorer of the winning goal, and Rio Mavuba also played in Sarajevo.

The match will be played at a packed Jacques Chaban-Delmas stadium. Bordeaux are regarded as the team most likely to end Lyon's five-year reign in the French championship.

Reinforced by the return of former Werder Bremen playmaker Johan Micoud, the Girondins made a perfect start to the season with wins at home against Toulouse and at Lorient.

Lille, who are in the race for a Champions League berth through the third qualifying round, travel on Saturday to Paris St Germain who are looking for their first win of the season. Nancy, the surprise third joint-leaders, host another promoted team, Sedan.

Olympique Marseille host AJ Auxerre while Stade Rennes and Monaco, the only two teams still without a point face each other.

FIXTURES

Saturday

Auxerre v Marseille, Le Mans v Valenciennes, Lens v Lorient, Nantes v Troyes, PSG v Lille, Rennes v Monaco, Sedan v Sochaux, St Etienne v AS Nancy Sunday

Bordeaux v Lyon, Toulouse v Nice

A futile exercise

Football

GABRIELE MARCOTTI

I engaged in a bit of masochism on Wednesday night. With the help of three televisions, two satellite dishes, my trusty DVD recorder and several cups of coffee, I watched four international friendlies: Ireland vs. Holland, England vs. Greece, Italy vs. Croatia and Norway vs. Brazil.

"It's a long term injury," Roeder said. "I don't know if he'll play again this season."

"He's getting the best possible treatment and will have the best surgeon in the world operating on him."

"Michael has an injury that will take a fair bit of time to repair," he added. "If we put a date on it and we say that he'll be back by next March, and then he's not fit, then it will cause more problems."

Owen signed for Newcastle from Real Madrid in August last year, but the England striker had been plagued by injury since his arrival on Tyneside and has rarely played for his new club.

The 26-year-old missed the second half of last season with a broken foot but recovered in time to appear for his country in Germany, only to suffer his latest injury against Sweden in the group phase.

The operation to work on his cruciate had been delayed until now as he required urgent surgery on his knee immediately after the World Cup in July.

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Others, like his fellow debutantes Roberto Donadoni of Italy and Dunga of Brazil, chose largely experimental sides. Holland's Marco van Basten, on the other hand, went with a mixed approach, bringing in some newcomers like Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (who probably should have gone to the World Cup) while keeping an unchanged backbone.

Still, at the end of the night, we were left knowing very little we didn't already know.

England rolled over Greece, 4-0, dominating the first half and taking its foot off the pedal in the second. Steven Gerrard started out on the right in David Beckham's old position and the benefits to Frank Lampard in the middle were obvious (though the latter didn't have a

particular good game, goal aside).

Peter Crouch scored two goals and missed another open chance. None of the second-stringers who came on made much of an impact. And that's it. Some insight, huh?

The guys wearing blue shirts, who were defeated 2-0 by Croatia in Livorno, were supposedly Italy, though you wouldn't know it. Just one of the 23-man world-champion squad (third-choice goalkeeper Marco Amelia) played in the game.

And, because Italy's under-21 team played on Tuesday night, rather than selecting gifted youngsters who might one day develop into international-calibre players, Donadoni was left with a hodge-podge of third-tier players, most of whom are unlikely to ever feature for the Azzurri again. All we learned was that Slaven Bilic's new-look Croatia is better than Italy's C team.

As for Dunga, Dunga's appointment was greeted with scepticism and the draw against Norway did nothing to dispel it. Just three of the 11 who started the quarterfinal match against France at Germany '06 were included in the starting XI (among the notable absences Dida, Ronaldinho, Kaka, Adriano and Ronaldo) and all those who were featured play outside Brazil.

Given the circumstances, it makes you wonder why he didn't give more domestic players a shot, though, to be fair, it was nice to see the oft-forgotten Moscow-based trio of Wagner Love, Dudu Cearense and Daniel Carvalho. Whether it means much in the greater scheme of things, that is, whether we ever will see them playing for Brazil again, is another matter.

Van Basten's Holland at least offered up the chance to see Huntelaar's debut and his two goals showed he can more than cope at this level. That said, playing Ireland - an Irish team without Richard Dunne, Robbie Keane and Damien Duff -- in the very same week that coach Steve Staunton was threatened by a lunatic with a handgun

isn't a very telling test. A more settled Irish team might have offered more of a challenge, this one was simply outclassed. What's more, as the game wore on, you got the sense that most players' minds were elsewhere -- namely with their club teams.

What was confirmed on Wednesday night however was that international friendlies really are pointless at this stage of the season. Indeed, most international friendlies, apart from those immediately before a World Cup or continental championship, are just exercises in futility.

Re-think is desperately needed. One solution could be leaving out the stars, the guys who you know will always start. This doesn't mean scrapping the bottom of the barrel to conjure up 20-odd players, the way Donadoni and Dunga did. Instead, play the guys who have something to prove, either because they're trying to break into the team or because there is competition for their place in the line-up.

For example, there was no need to see John Terry and Rio Ferdinand Wednesday night in an England shirt. Why not play, say, Jamie Carragher and Michael Dawson instead?

That way, you would get truly motivated players with something to prove. The matches would feel more real and there would be less of a need to go through the half-dozen substitutions which regularly mark the second halves of such games. Clubs would be happier, too, as their big guns wouldn't be involved.

(Gabriele Marcotti writes for *Si.com*)

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