

Valeron to go under the knife

AFP, Madrid

Spain international Juan Carlos Valeron must have another operation this week in a further setback to his career which has been hampered during the last year with a knee problem.

The 31-year-old midfielder, who has made 45 appearances for his country, will go into a Madrid hospital on Friday for a third operation to his left knee, Deportivo La Coruna club doctor Cesar Cobian said at a press conference on Tuesday.

Cobian said: "His left knee is not allowing him to perform as an elite footballer even after 14 months of medical treatment and re-education."

Valeron first got injured in January 2006, with a recurrence in July, and only returned to action on January 7 this year when Deportivo beat Real Madrid 2-0.

Moratti receives threatening mail

AFP, Rome

An anonymous package containing a threatening letter, a gun case and some ammunition has been sent to Inter Milan owner Massimo Moratti, the Corriere della Sera reported on Wednesday.

The paper said the parcel had been sent to Inter's headquarters in Milan about 10 days ago. Milan prosecutors are believed to have opened an investigation.

According to the Corriere, Inter have received menacing phone calls and letters over the last eight months in protest at the Italian football federation's decision to strip Juventus of the 2005-06 Serie A title and award it to Inter after the country's match-fixing scandal.

Juventus also forfeited the 2004-05 title, and were demoted to the second division with a nine-point handicap.

SPANISH KING'S CUP Sevilla thru' to semis

AFP, Madrid

Sevilla beat Real Betis 1-0 on Tuesday night to qualify for the semi-finals of the Spanish Cup after playing the final 33 minutes of a match interrupted last month because of crowd violence.

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos was knocked unconscious by a bottle thrown from the crowd during the quarterfinal tie on February 28 after Sevilla had gone into the lead with a 57th-minute goal by Frederic Kanoute.

The completion of this match was ordered to be played behind closed doors at first division side Getafe, who are based in the Madrid suburbs. Real Betis were also handed a three-match stadium ban by the Spanish football federation.

Sevilla join Barcelona, Deportivo La Coruna and Getafe in the last four.

Donadoni talks Italy tactics

Football

INTERNET, undated

Roberto Donadoni has discussed tactics and squad selection ahead of the Azzurri's clash with Scotland next week.

Donadoni gave a Press Conference at the Coverciano training camp today where his squad are preparing for the qualifier at Bar's Stadio San Nicola on Wednesday March 28.

The definitive list of 20 players making the trip to Bari will be released on Friday, but prior to that the ex-Livorno boss has work to do.

Scotland face Georgia on Saturday in Alex McLeish's first game at the helm and Donadoni is keen to know how the new man will manage the side.

"I want to go to Glasgow on Saturday morning to watch Scotland as we know nothing about the new Coach," he revealed.

As for the formation, Donadoni's main decision is whether to employ a striking trident or settle for two

frontmen.

"It depends on the players. I'm trying to field a balanced side and I need strikers who can defend as well," he explained.

"Three strikers who can cover and mark doesn't necessarily mean a lack of balance."

One of Donadoni's major worries will be a lack of cohesion within the side. As the scheduled friendly with Romania was cancelled, the Azzurri haven't played since November's 1-1 friendly with Turkey.

"I don't want to make excuses, but it's a handicap not having played for so long," admits Donadoni. "Because of what happened (in Catania) I've made not one but three steps backwards."

The Bergamo-born tactician also responded to claims that this season's Serie A has been devalued by the Calcipoli verdicts.

"It's not a lower quality championship but it's strange in certain ways," he stated.

"The wrongdoings didn't take place on the football pitch so to not have a flagship side like Juventus is taking something away."

"If Inter are dominating and have at most two Italian players on the pitch it makes my job harder and I have to look elsewhere."

Before leaving for an afternoon training session, Donadoni answered questions on the absence of Francesco Totti and Antonio Cassano, as well as the inclusion of Alessandro Del Piero.

"When Totti makes himself available and resolves all his physical problems, I'll decide if he should be in the team."

"For now my attention is elsewhere and I get tired of repeating these answers," he stated weary.

"Cassano's taking the chances that (Fabio) Capello gives him but we'll have to see if he can become more consistent and as for Del Piero, if I thought he was finished he wouldn't be here."

"He can play a role for the national side and earn his place. He's playing in Serie B but his past speaks for itself."



PHOTO: AFP
Italy defender Marco Materazzi (L) passes by coach Roberto Donadoni at the training ground of Coverciano in Florence on Tuesday. Italy take on Scotland on March 28 in their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign.

Loew confident about Czech clash

Football

AFP, Berlin

German coach Joachim Loew said on Wednesday his side expect to poach a win from their arch-rivals the Czech Republic when they travel to Prague for Saturday's Euro 2008 crucial qualifier.

Germany and the Czech Republic are level on ten points each after four games with the Germans only leading on goal difference, but despite several injury concerns, Loew insists his side can win away.

Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez -- the Bundesliga's joint top-scorer -- is already out with a knee injury, while

key players Bastian Schweinsteiger (bruised foot), Torsten Frings (thigh) and Christoph Metzelder (eye) sat out training on Tuesday with minor knocks, but are expected to be fit.

And Loew -- who has had six wins and a draw since taking over from predecessor Juergen Klinsmann after the 2006 World Cup -- is confident of being able to name a near full-strength side, despite the minor knocks.

"Confidence is high in the squad, we want to remain top of Group D on Saturday night," said Loew, "and I am confident we'll succeed. All our thoughts are on beating the Czech Republic."

Gomez's injury means 21-year-old Bayern Munich striker Lukas Podolski, who has scored 22 goals

in 37 internationals, will partner Schalke 04's Kevin Kuranyi up front.

"Of course we have some injuries, but these are, nevertheless, the best players Germany has here," said Podolski. "We respect the Czechs, but we go to Prague to win."

Podolski's strike partner Kuranyi says the Czech Republic are the biggest threat so far on the road to next year's European Championships and will be a huge test for the Germans away from home.

"The Czechs will be our toughest opponents and our main rivals to qualify, so we will have our work cut out in Prague," he said.

FIFA extend Navarro ban

AFP, Madrid

Football's world governing body FIFA banned Valencia defender David Navarro from all football for seven months backing up UEFA's decision to suspend him for breaking the nose of Inter Milan's Nicolas Burdisso in their Champions League match a fortnight ago.

UEFA had asked FIFA to extend the ban to all world football and the Spanish club confirmed on Tuesday they had received a statement from FIFA.

"Valencia received FIFA's official statement on Tuesday which confirmed the ban had been extended," announced the club.

Earlier on Tuesday both Valencia and Inter Milan filed appeals with UEFA over the penalties incurred after a mass brawl in their Champions League tie two weeks ago.

The appeals hearing will take place at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland on March 28, and all of the players have been summoned to attend, UEFA said in a statement.

UEFA fined both clubs 155,772 euros (207,223 dollars).

Burdisso picked up a six-match ban for his part in the flare up at the end of the acrimonious last 16 second leg tie on March 6 which ended goalless but saw Valencia go through to the quarterfinals on the away goals rule.

Burdisso's teammate Maicon was also hit with a six match ban while UEFA's disciplinary committee dished out three and two match suspensions respectively to two further Inter players, Ivan Cordoba and Julio Cruz.

Valencia player Carlos Marchena was also hit with a four-match ban for his role in the incident.

Valencia, Inter appeal against penalties

AFP, Geneva

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Domenech urges against complacency

Football

REUTERS, Marcousis

France coach Raymond Domenech urged his squad not to take victory for granted when they travel to Lithuania for a Euro 2008 qualifier on Saturday.

"France's run to the World Cup final in Germany last year had made them complacent but they had lost twice in their last four games, said Domenech.

They dropped to second in the Euro 2008 qualifying Group B following a 1-0 defeat in Scotland in October before being outplayed in their Champions League tie two weeks ago.

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"I've played over 100 Champions League matches and I've never been suspended so I'm approaching this from the principle that I will play AC Milan," he added. Bayern meet AC Milan in the quarterfinal on April 3 and 11.

Kahn apologetic

Football

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn on Tuesday apologised for his behaviour during the post-match doping control after his team's Champions League first knockout round second-leg tie against Real Madrid.

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The decision has now been overturned, Bayern said in a statement on its website.

Van Bommel cleared for Milan tie

REUTERS, Berlin

Mark van Bommel will be able to play in the second leg of Bayern Munich's Champions League quarterfinal against AC Milan after his two-match ban was reduced to one on appeal, Bayern said on Wednesday.

Van Bommel, the Dutch midfielder, was dismissed after receiving a second yellow card towards the end of Bayern's 2-1 win over Real Madrid at the Allianz Arena on March 7.

That would normally only bring a one-match ban but UEFA said it was doubling the punishment by enforcing a deferred sanction for offensive gestures he made to the crowd in the first leg.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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