

Scud plans 2008 return

AFP, New York

Australian two-time Grand Slam runner-up Mark Philippoussis, idle since undergoing right knee surgery in January, plans to make a return to the ATP Tour next season.

But the 30-year-old Aussie once known as "Scud" for his rocket-like serves, has not played an elite-level match since being hurt last December in Perth at the Hopman Cup and knows he faces a difficult road back to top form.

"I love the sport of tennis. I miss the game. In my heart, I do believe I can do it," Philippoussis said. "To make that happen, I need to work hard. It's going to be a long, long way back."

Philippoussis has dropped to 457th in the rankings after having reached ninth in the world in April of 1999.

With hopes of being ready for the Australian Open tune up events in January, Philippoussis has turned to Gil Reyes, Andre Agassi's former fitness trainer, in order to help revive his career.

"My knee is doing great. It's 100 percent now," Philippoussis said. "But I've had to take care of my back. I haven't worked out the way I wanted to. I wasn't physically enough good enough to play."

Philippoussis, who has won 11 ATP titles and was runner-up in the 1998 US Open and Wimbledon in 2003, will test his level at a 30-and-over Champions Tour event next month in Dallas.

"What I'd love to do is start playing a couple of small events at the end of the year, get match fit and concentrate on getting back next year, hopefully at the Australian," he said.



Switzerland defender Ludovic Magnin loses his boot during a friendly match against Chile in Vienna on Friday.

Swiss clinch close tie

Japan win on penalties

Football

INTERNET, undated

Switzerland and Austria have already qualified for Euro 2008 as co-hosts, negating the need for a preliminary campaign. The pair, though, have joined a four nations tournament with Japan and Chile, and in the first match, the Swiss defeated Chile 2-1 in a close-fought encounter.

Switzerland are in good stead for next year's co-hosting of Euro 2008 following a victory in the first game of their four-nations tournament in Austria.

Bayer Leverkusen's Tranquillo Barnetta opened the scoring after thirteen minutes following a brilliant passing move involving Behrami, Inler and the goal scorer.

Switzerland kept their new-look opponents at bay for much of the first half, but a lapse in concentration - and a good piece of vision from Sanchez - leveled the scores.

The forward waited past the

right side of the stationary Swiss defence to even things up just on the stroke of the interval.

The "Nati" came out of the blocks quickly in the second half, though, and soon regained the lead with a sweet strike, but an equaliser should have followed two minutes later.

Suazo thought he'd restored parity in the 57th minute, only for the offside flag to ruin his celebrations. It was a debatable decision, though, and the officials might have got it wrong.

The game wound down from the point, but a frisson of excitement was generated with the introduction of Marcelo Salas.

The veteran all-time top Chilean goal scorer has been out of international action since 2005, but the 32 year old Universidad de Chile player has since earned a recall.

But the former Lazio star could not prevent a Swiss win.

Japan overcame Austria on penalty kicks in the tournament's second match later on Friday evening.



ZERO GRAVITY: Austrian goalkeeper Robert Olejnik makes a spectacular save during his side's Under-21 Euro 2009 qualification match against Belgium in Mechelen on Friday. Austria won 1-0.

Cruz extends with Inter

INTERNET, undated

Julio Cruz has signed a one-year extension to his deal with Internazionale, ending possible interest from Lazio.

Argentinian striker Julio Cruz has committed himself to the Serie A champions until 2009, his club Inter being keen to prevent him leaving for free next summer.

The 32-year-old joined Inter from Bologna in 2003 and has hit 34 goals in 86 appearances, including seven in 15 matches last season.

Lazio wanted to sign Cruz in August, but Inter turned down the offer and tried to tempt the Roman side to take two other players instead.

"I asked (Inter president) Massimo Moratti for Cruz," said Lazio president Claudio Lotito. "But they refused to consider selling him."

"Only Alvaro Recoba and Adriano were on the market and I wasn't interested in the Brazilian."

The player himself was delighted to end speculation and pledge his future to the club.

He said to Channel Inter, "I am delighted to have renewed my contract."

"I only signed today, but we agreed on a deal a long time ago and I have never had any problems with it. I'm in my fifth season here and it feels like home to me."

Cruz has been capped 17 times for Argentina, and has also served Feyenoord, River Plate and Banfield.

Cameroon appoint Koppel

AFP, Berlin

Horst Koppel revealed Friday that he would be named Cameroon's new coach up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

"I've reached agreement with the Cameroon Football Federation," Koppel, 59, confirmed.

Koppel, sacked as coach of German league side Monchengladbach in June 2006, was one of 78 candidates up for the job, a list that included his fellow German and former Togo coach Otto Pfister, Portugal's Artur Jorge and Jean-Pierre Papin, the recently appointed coach of French side Lens.

Koppel says he expects to start next month.

We can be great: Wenger

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Arsene Wenger firmly allied himself to Arsenal's board yesterday when he extended his contract as the manager at the Emirates Stadium into the next decade. Alongside his announcement that he had committed to the north London club until May 2011 there appeared to be a veiled message for the shareholders who are vying for control of Arsenal. "It is a special environment for me," Wenger said of the club he joined in September 1996.

"But as well you must be careful to respond to that kind of trust and confidence by achieving the results and, as well, by behaving like the club wants you to behave. It's a club of values, traditions and you feel that you have to respond to that kind of responsibility."

That might be considered a tacit warning for his friend, David Dein, who was ejected from his role as vice-chairman over "irreconcilable differences" with his fellow directors in his strategy for the club. Last week Dein sold his 14.58% stake in the club to the Uzbek-born oligarch

Alisher Usmanov for £75m.

The chairman, Peter Hill-Wood, yesterday took the opportunity to underline that Arsenal are thriving without Dein, who previously had responsibility for player contracts.

"I think the relationship with Arsene and the board has always been absolutely excellent," said Hill-Wood. "Recently I suppose it's been borne out by the transfer-market dealings that Ken Friar has been handling for us."

"He's got a very good relationship with Arsene. I think Arsene and the board of course are very happy with the results of those dealings - both selling and buying players. In short, the relationship between the board and Arsene, I think, is absolutely first-class."

Wenger has declared himself unworried by the investors who are battling for power, which has also seen the US billionaire Stan Kroenke build a 12.19% stake in the club, focusing instead on the quality of his promising young team, which lies second in the Premier League.

"I wanted to get a taste of how hungry this team is first before I definitely [signed on]," Wenger said. "I must say that it's a great

pleasure to work with this team because we share the same hunger and desire to do well. I'm confident we can. I want to win the championship, win the Champions League and be consistent. It's simple. I want to achieve the maximum with this team and it is young and very ambitious as well, and I feel I share that ambition with my team."

He continued: "I love the job I have at Arsenal - I love to win and I feel I can win with Arsenal. They are the main reasons [I signed]. My heart is tied to this football club, so signing a new deal was always my intention. Arsenal is the club of my life. I feel I share the ambition with everybody to make Arsenal the best club in the world and that everybody works to be successful in that."

Wenger said his latest crop of players can eclipse the achievements of those over the past 11 seasons. "Yes, they have the ability," he declared. "The first signs this season are that the team has really matured. There is a completely different attitude towards the competition. They are more responsible, more disciplined and that can bring success."

Stam not surprised at Fergie admission

Football

INTERNET, undated

Former Manchester United defender Jaap Stam claims Sir Alex Ferguson's recent admission that he made a mistake by selling him in 2001 has come as no surprise.

Ferguson sold the Dutchman to Lazio in a move viewed by many United fans as one of his few errors during more than two decades in charge at Old Trafford.

Six years later, 35-year-old Stam is still performing to a high standard for Ajax after returning to his homeland from Italy in 2006.

"It is good that a man like Ferguson dares to admit that he makes mistakes," Stam told AD Sportwereld.

"It doesn't surprise me, though. I always knew for myself that United made an error by selling me."

"I know that this is the same feeling for many people around the club, from colleagues to fans."

"When I speak with people I hear they should never have let me go."

Speaking earlier this week, Ferguson admitted the size of Lazio's offer clouded his judgment of the player's worth to the Premier League champions.

"We got the offer from Lazio - £16.5million for a centre-back that was 29," said Ferguson. "It was an offer I couldn't refuse."

"But in playing terms it was a mistake. He is still playing for Ajax at a really good level."

In response, Stam conceded that Ferguson's honesty must be applauded.

He said: "A big coach must also be able to see the mistakes he made - if needed, a few years after he made them."

The former Holland international's exit from Old Trafford in

August 2001 came shortly after his autobiography was published amid controversy.

He claimed that Ferguson had illegally tapped him up before buying him from PSV Eindhoven and revealed blunt insights from the United dressing room.

Many assumed his book was the reason behind his departure, a take on events that Stam is happy to subscribe to.

"Until that transfer I learned to know Ferguson as a man who thinks along fixed lines, who always handles interests of the club," Stam said.

"In the weeks surrounding my departure the relationship became difficult."

"My biography played a role for sure, because the club needed to sell it to the fans that I could leave Manchester United."

"That book became the stick to hit me, you could say."

Brazil drop injured pair

AP, Sao Paulo

Fenerbahce's Edu Dracena and Sporting Lisbon's Gladstone will replace injured defenders Alex and Alex Silva for Brazil's exhibition games against the United States and Mexico.

Alex Silva hurt a muscle in Sao Paulo's 0-0 tie against Atletico Mineiro in the Brazilian league on Wednesday, while Chelsea's Alex has an injured ankle, the Brazilian Soccer Confederation said on Thursday.

Brazil, the South American champions, play the United States on Sunday at Chicago and Mexico on Wednesday at Foxborough, Mass., their final games before the start of World Cup qualifying in October.

Bierhoff backs Lehmann

INTERNET, undated

Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff believes that Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann will soon win his battle for the number one jersey at the Emirates Stadium.

Lehmann has lost his place with the Gunners after poor early season form and then Achilles and elbow injuries.

But he will be in goal for Germany today for their Euro 2008 qualifier with Wales in Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.

And Bierhoff has no doubts about seeing Lehmann as Germany's last line of defence in the Welsh capital.

He said: "No coach in his right mind would leave him out. And I know he will overcome his Arsenal crisis, if you can even put it like that."

"He has been at the very top for so long, a great goalkeeper who will win his first-team place back at Arsenal."

"He has been a little tense this week because of the ongoing problem at Arsenal, but if he is nervous maybe he will use that energy to play well against Wales."

And Bierhoff was also dismissive of any problems Michael Ballack may be having at Chelsea, who have left him out of their Champions League squad for the group stages.

A Chelsea statement insisted that the decision was taken purely on fitness grounds.

Bierhoff said: "It is difficult for us to judge what is happening at Chelsea, we have obviously not had anything official from them."

"But this is a matter for the club and player only, it is not for us to get involved and I think the first thing he must do is to concentrate on getting himself fit and then he will be able to play his best football again."

Germany are expected to win in Cardiff and virtually secure their place in next summer's finals in Switzerland and Austria, but Real Madrid defender Christoph Metzelder insists that they will have to be wary of Wales skipper Craig Bellamy.

He said: "All I can remember of the last time I played against Wales is John Hartson. He is tough. All I can say is that we both hurt a lot after that match."

"(But) I know all about Bellamy from watching him in European games and with Liverpool."

"He is not tall or physical, but he is very quick off the mark. We must be on the look-out for him all the time."

"We will have to take him out of the game if we want to reduce the danger that Wales can offer."

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