

Eduardo to return in August

AFP, Zagreb

Arsenal's Croatian striker Eduardo Da Silva, who suffered a horrific leg break earlier this year, said doctors had given him the all-clear to return to action in August, Croatian sports daily Sportske Novosti reported on Friday.

The 25-year-old Brazilian-born Croatian has been recovering since mid-April in a clinic in Rio De Janeiro and his return is good news as just in March, he had believed his recovery would take 15 months.

Eduardo suffered a compound fracture of the left leg following a tackle from Birmingham defender Martin Taylor at St Andrews in February.

"I am returning to Europe from Brazil at the beginning of August, perhaps even the end of July," Da Silva told Sportske Novosti. "Doctors tell me by then I will be fully recovered and able to play football again. I hope so too."

"I'm feeling well and my rehabilitation is going better than I would ever have hoped."

Croatia are in Group B of the June 7 to 29 Euro 2008 finals and will face Austria on June 8, Germany on June 12 and Poland four days later.

The recent absence of Eduardo, who has scored 13 goals in 18 matches for his country, has been a huge disappointment for coach Slaven Bilic. His replacement in the meantime has been 28-year-old Dortmund striker Mladen Petric.

A modest Eduardo had faith in his colleagues at the 16-nation tournament in Austria and Switzerland.

"I think the boys will play very well without me," Da Silva said. "They'll get through the group and, after that, we'll have to wait and see."

Emre set for Fenerbahce

AFP, Istanbul

Newcastle's Turkish international midfielder Emre will sign a three-year deal with Istanbul side Fenerbahce next week, the Turkish press reported Saturday.

Fenerbahce confirmed on their television network FP TV that they are currently negotiating with the Turkish team captain and his manager, but did not reveal further details.

But according to press reports the 27-year-old will sign a contract on Monday in a deal worth 10.5 million euros (16.3 million dollars).

Emre joined Newcastle from Inter Milan for 3.8 million pounds in 2005 and is under contract until 2011.

Frei seals Swiss win

REUTERS, St Gallen

Swiss captain Alex Frei broke his country's scoring record on Friday, netting twice for the Euro 2008 co-hosts, who enjoyed a comfortable 3-0 warm-up win over Liechtenstein.

Frei, 28, headed past Liechtenstein keeper Peter Jehle midway through the first half to equal Kubilay Turkulmaz's tally of 34 goals.

The record lasted just a few minutes longer with the Borussia Dortmund striker neatly turning in a Ludovic Magnin cross on the half-hour mark before running to embrace Switzerland coach Koenig Kuhn.

Johan Vonlanthen completed the scoring after a quick buildup move involving Frei and second half substitute Hakan Yakin.

Though clearly superior to their tiny neighbours, the Swiss were less dominant than the scoreline suggested and came close to conceding on a handful of occasions.

Raphael Rohrer had two good first half efforts for the visitors before Switzerland-born captain Mario Frick came close to improving on his own more modest national record of 13 goals with a low drive that Diego Benaglio did well to smother.

Switzerland began the match close to full strength with only injured midfielder Tranquillo Barnetta missing from the lineup most likely to start Euro 2008's opening match against the Czech Republic on June 7.

The Swiss, who are hosting the tournament with neighbouring Austria, have also been drawn against Turkey and Portugal in the group stage.

Vieira shortens training session

AFP, Toulouse

France captain Patrick Vieira cut short his training session here on Friday after pulling his left thigh towards the end of the run-out.

Inter Milan's Vieira however recovered to complete some more running, meaning he should be fit for Saturday's Euro 2008 warm-up match against Paraguay in Toulouse.

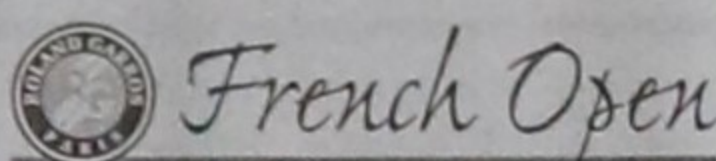
France play in the tough Group C, comprising World Cup final conquerors Italy, 1988 champions The Netherlands and Romania, in the June 7 to 29, 16-nation football showcase in Switzerland and Austria.



PHOTO: AFP

World number one Maria Sharapova of Russia exults after winning a point against Karin Knapp of Italy during their French Open third round match at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday.

Maria enters last 16



AFP, Paris

Maria Sharapova led a Russian charge into the last 16 at the French Open on Saturday finally shaking off the poor form that has seen her struggle to live up to her top seeding.

The 21-year-old Russian world No. 1 defeated Italy's Karin Knapp 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 with two contrasting sets.

In the first Sharapova again struggled with her serve and consistency as Knapp came within two points of taking a one set lead.

But in the second after breaking serve in a marathon second game, Sharapova visibly relaxed allowing her to deploy her impressive arsenal of groundstrokes.

She knows though that she will have to add more consistency to her game before going up against compatriot Dinara Safina with a quarterfinal place at stake. The pair have met five times with Sharapova

winning three.

Safina made it through to the fourth round in Paris for the third straight year with a 6-2, 7-5 win over China's last representative Zheng Jie.

Following the two of them into the last 16 was 2006 runner-up Svetlana Kuznetsova who comfortably saw off another Russian, Nadia Petrova 6-2, 6-1.

The fourth seed said that she had come into Paris in poor form but that just playing in a Grand Slam event had given her the boost she needed and she felt that she has the chance to go all the way this year.

"Definitely I think I have a chance," she said. "I think there are a few players who have a really good shot to win it and I hope one of them is me."

She next takes on rising star Victoria Azarenka of Belarus a player she has beaten on two previous occasions.

"She's tough. She can play good," Kuznetsova said. "She has nothing to lose but I believe I have more experience being out there. I

think clay suits me a little better, but it's going to be a tough match."

The 18-year-old Azarenka, a former world junior champion, crushed Italian veteran Francesca Schiavone 6-1, 6-1 and she has lost only two games in her last two matches.

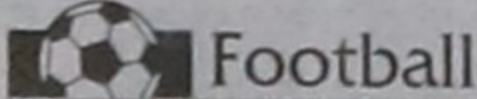
She lost to Kuznetsova in the fourth round of last year's US Open, but is convinced it will be different this time.

"I played her two times already. Probably won't be that scary anymore. It will be a good match I think," she said.

Also into the last 16 was the third seed Jelena Jankovic of Serbia who defeated Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia 7-5, 6-3 in a game held over from late Friday with Jankovic a set and 4-2 ahead.

In the men's tournament unorthodox Radek Stepanek continued his rich vein of form by seeing off Spanish claycourter Tommy Robredo 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 and he is on course for a semifinal tilt at top seed Roger Federer who he defeated recently in Rome.

Mourinho meets Moratti



AFP, Rome

Former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho is close to being named the new boss of Inter Milan according to Italian press reports following the release of pictures of the Portuguese coach meeting with Inter president Massimo Moratti in Paris.

The lunch meeting allegedly took place on Friday with other Inter officials also reported to have attended.

Gazzetta dello Sport claimed on Saturday that the meeting was held to discuss transfer targets, more specifically a 30-million-euro (46.6-million-dollar) bid for Barcelona's Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o.

Italian news agency Ansa claimed Mourinho will sign offi-

cially at the beginning of next week, before heading out to Japan to take charge of a Rest of the World team for Hidetoshi Nakata's testimonial on Wednesday.

Mourinho has been out of the game since leaving Chelsea by mutual consent early last season.

He had won two Premier League titles with the London club, the FA Cup and two League Cups in just over three seasons.

Before that he coached FC Porto to the Champions League crown, UEFA Cup, two league titles and a Portuguese Cup in an incredible two-year period from 2002-2004.

Mourinho is expected to replace Roberto Mancini who was sacked as coach of the Serie A champions on Thursday, despite having just led them to a third successive league title.

The 43-year-old former Italy international striker, is consequently favoured to take over at

Chelsea.

Inter had been heavily criticised for the way they dealt with Mancini's sacking, posting a terse and uncompromising message on their website.

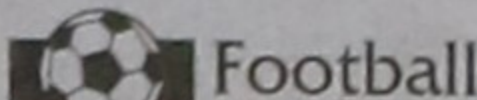
But Moratti moved on Saturday to try to improve Inter's image by finally thanking Mancini for the success he brought the club, which included two cup wins.

"There has been thanks from me for the work he did. I told Mancini personally and I'm repeating it now," said Moratti.

However, he then repeated criticism of Mancini for announcing his departure immediately following Inter's Champions League second round elimination at the hands of Liverpool in March, before retracting it a day later.

"That statement caused many problems at Inter and destabilised the team," added the president.

Adriano warns Argentina



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Adriano said on Friday that he wanted Argentina to be afraid of him.

Recalled to the Brazil squad for only the second time since the last World Cup, Adriano has a good record against Argentina whom Brazil face in a World Cup qualifier at Belo Horizonte's Mineirao stadium on June 18.

The Emperor scored with the last kick of the game in the 2004 Copa America final when Brazil drew 2-2 before winning on penal-

ties and notched two to help Brazil win 4-1 in the Confederations Cup final one year later.

"I'm going to do everything to make them much more afraid of me," he told the Terra web site (www.terra.com.br) in an interview in Seattle where Brazil face Canada in a friendly on Saturday.

Asked if Argentina were his favourite victims, he replied: "Certainly, certainly."

"I hope I can repeat (the goals) in the Mineirao."

Adriano has found a new lease of life since joining Brazilian champions Sao Paulo on loan from Inter Milan, where he had struggled with fitness problems for the

previous 18 months.

He praised Sao Paulo, where he scored 16 goals in all competitions: "Sao Paulo is the club which brought me back to the national team. I'm very happy," he said.

Adriano added that Inter's decision to sack coach Roberto Mancini on Thursday would be good for him.

"I think that for me, it's better," he said. "I've had problems with Mancini for two years.... for one year," he said, changing his mind halfway through the sentence.

"He wasn't good for me. Inter Milan is my second home and I hope to go back and do well."

Scolari denies Chelsea link

AFP, London

Portugal boss Luiz Felipe Scolari on Saturday played down a possible move to Chelsea, insisting the Premier League side have made no contact with him over their managerial vacancy.

The Brazilian has been hotly tipped for a move to the Stamford Bridge club since the departure of Avram Grant last weekend.

Scolari is out of contract at the end of Euro 2008 but he insists he will make no decision about his future until after the championship.

"I am working normally around the national squad," said Scolari, also linked with Manchester City recently, on Sky Sports News.

"It is normal at the end of a contract for a coach to be mentioned with other clubs."

"If I take a decision, I will tell my president. But I haven't made a decision yet. My only decision now is to work until after the European Championship."

"My president is Gilberto Madail. He is my representative. If he had any contact with Chelsea, I haven't been told about it."

Eto'o headbutts a journalist

AFP, Yaounde

Cameroon international striker Samuel Eto'o has been accused of headbutting a journalist during a heated Indomitable Lions press conference, according to press reports here on Saturday.

Local radio reporter Philippe Bony claimed that the 27-year-old Barcelona star headbutted him after tempers flared between journalists and Cameroon players on Friday.

Journalists refused to take part in the press conference in protest at the decision by team officials to limit their access to players during training sessions ahead of Saturday's African Nations Cup and 2010 World Cup qualifier against Cape Verde.

In the melee that followed, members of the Cameroon team confiscated television cameras and mobile phones, according to the journalists present.

"He (Eto'o) grabbed me round the neck, then headbutted me above the lip. My tooth has been loosened," Bony told AFP.

Bony also claimed that he had suffered a double hand fracture after being set upon by Eto'o's bodyguards. The journalist added that he intends to take legal action against the player.

Eto'o -- who is reportedly in the middle of contract talks with London club Spurs -- was not available for comment on Saturday.

Sionko fires Czech

REUTERS, Prague

Two second half goals from Libor Sionko led the Czech Republic to a 3-1 victory over Scotland in their final friendly before Euro 2008 on Friday.

Sionko surged into the centre of the box and beat Craig Gordon on the right to open the scoring in the 61st minute.

Michal Kadlec made it 2-0 in the 84th, blasting a low shot towards the far post.

David Clarkson pulled one back a minute later, picking up a pass in the penalty area, shrugging off Tomas Sivok and beating Petr Cech from close range.

Sionko scored the home side's third two minutes from time.

The Czechs, who reached the semifinals at Euro 2004 where they lost to eventual champions Greece, were in a mixed form in qualifying and have suffered a rash of injuries.

Skipper Tomas Rosicky was ruled out of the tournament in Austria and Switzerland after undergoing surgery to fix a knee problem.

The Czechs are in Group A for the June 7-29 tournament with Portugal, Turkey and co-hosts Switzerland.

Juventus snap up Amauri

AFP, Rome

Juventus have signed Brazilian striker Amauri, widely seen as one of Serie A's best midfielders, from Palermo in a deal worth nearly 23 million euros.

The deal sees Juventus player Antonio Nocerino go in the other direction for 7.5 million euros, a statement from the Turin club said Thursday.

"To play in a big team is a dream I've held for eight years, since I arrived in Italy," Amauri told a press conference.

"I chose Juventus because they wanted me more than the others." The 28-year-old Amauri, who was also courted by AC Milan, has scored 15 goals in 34 games this season.

He first joined Napoli from Swiss team AC Bellinzona in 2001, eventually moving to Chievo in 2003. He joined Palermo in 2006.

Italy outplay Belgium

AFP, Florence



Antonio Di Natale scored twice to help world champions Italy to a 3-1 win over a woeful Belgium in their final friendly before Euro 2008 on Friday.

The Udinese striker volleyed in at the far post on nine minutes following Andrea Piro's cross and then confidently slotted home Alberto Aquilani's pass before the break.

Mauro Camoranesi stroked in the third early in the second period after substitute Alessandro Del Piero's neat layoff.

Belgium have not qualified for next month's tournament in Austria and Switzerland and mustered only a few half chances before Wesley Sonck headed home in injury time.

Di Natale, little known outside Italy, offers the world champions much-needed balance on the left of a three-pronged attack and could be an important player at the finals.

"Di Natale has always done well. He is incredibly at ease," Italy coach Roberto Donadoni told a news conference.

Italy's starting lineup was largely their first choice side with centre back Andrea Barzagli preferred to Marco Materazzi but Aquilani's selection in midfield ahead of Massimo Ambrosini was a slight surprise.

Aquilani produced a decent display and helped bridge the gap that sometimes appeared between the midfield and the forwards during Euro 2008 qualification.

"I wanted to see him from the start. He had a good game and played a very important ball for the second goal. I'm happy for him,"

Donadoni added.

Del Piero, recalled for Euro 2008 having been overlooked by Donadoni since September, came on at the break and was upfront alongside Toni in a new 4-3-1-2 formation.

The 33-year-old had said playing on the left of the trident, where Donadoni employed him in the past, did not suit his game and that he would rather play as a striker.

Second-half substitute Antonio Cassano, who sealed a permanent move from Real Madrid to Sampdoria earlier in the day, played in behind the two forwards and showed some nice touches in a bid to justify his surprise selection in the squad.

Italy, who attracted a crowd of only 12,500 for their send-off, travel to their base outside Vienna on Monday with their first match against the Netherlands on June 9 in Berne.



PHOTO: AFP

Italy striker Antonio Cassano (C) holds off Belgium midfielder Timmy Simons (R) during their international friendly at the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence on Friday.

Klose craving glory

AFP, Berlin



He already has a World Cup golden boot to his name and three domestic titles this season, but Germany striker Miroslav Klose is craving a European crown when his country open their Euro 2008 campaign.

Klose, turns 30 the day after Germany's opening Euro 2008 game in Klagenfurt, Austria, against his country of birth Poland on June 8 and wants to add international success to his trophy-filled debut season at Bayern Munich.

He was the top scorer at the last World Cup with five goals.

Having also bagged five at the 2002 tournament, before his 2006 success, he became the first player in history to score five goals or more in consecutive tournaments.

After scoring in Germany's 2-2 draw with Belarus on Tuesday, Klose has 39 goals in 75 internationals and is rapidly approaching becoming the third highest German goal-scorer of all time.

He is now eight goals from Jurgen Klinsmann's 47 mark behind Gerd 'Das Bomber' Muller (68) and Joachim Streich (55).

"That has to be my aim," the Bayern striker told German magazine Sport Bild.

He had a good first season in Munich winning the Bundesliga

title, German League Cup and German Cup.

"Before this season, I have only been a spectator while others have held trophies high," said Klose, who has a reputation for being unselfish in front of goal where he is as strong in the air as he is on the ground.

There is no doubt Klose has worked hard to get where he is, something acknowledged by Germany coach Joachim Loew.

"What Miro still wants is a big success with the national side," said Loew.

Born in Opole, Poland, in 1978, he hails from a sporting family.

His mother played handball for Poland, while his father was a professional footballer.

In 1981, the Klose family escaped communist Poland, by moving to France then Germany.

He made his debut in 2001 while at Kaiserslautern and switched to Werder Bremen in 2004 before Bayern snapped him up last summer as part of a 69 million euros recruitment drive.

A dedicated trainer, Klose scored all five goals at the 2002 World Cup with his head -- the reward for regular hour-long jumping sessions.

"I can still remember clearly the first training session under Jurgen Klinsmann," said Loew, who was Klinsmann's assistant for the 2006 World Cup.

"We were downright impressed how quick and artful Miro was."

That was in 2004 and in the following four years Loew has tracked

Klose's development into one of the Europe's top strikers.

"There are other good strikers, but no one better," said Loew, who admits he values Klose's opinion in training.

"A (Didier) Drogba might play with more impact, but Miro he will fight for the ball."

"Because of his work rate, he counts as one of the most valuable strikers to have in your team."

Bayern thought nothing of paying 12 million euros for Klose and while striking partner Luca Toni scored 24 league goals, Klose bagged ten of his own and created eight.

Former Germany striker and Bayern's chairman of the board Karl-Heinz Rummenigge knows all about the pressure of performing in front of goal.

"When you are criticised as a striker, all you can do is answer with good performances and goals," said Rummenigge.

"You can only prove yourself in that difficult arena, and Miro has done that countless times."

Klose says Italy, France, Portugal and Germany all have the potential to be crowned European champions in Vienna on June 29.

"We are amongst the favourites for the tournament, but it is clear that this European Championships will be of the same quality as the World Cup two years ago."

"These four teams can go all the way, but the main thing for us has to be that we get to the final. We have the quality to do that."



PHOTO: AFP

Germany striker Miroslav Klose gestures after scoring the opening goal against Belarus during their international friendly at the Fritz-Walter Stadium in Kaiserslautern on Tuesday.