

Pre-Euro doping tests all negative

AFP, Vienna

There were no positive results in pre-Euro 2008 doping tests carried out on players from all 16 teams taking part in the June 7-29 European championships, UEFA announced on Tuesday.

"Urine and blood tests have been carried out for one month on players from all the teams, in an impromptu manner, at their houses, after training or after matches. All have come back negative," said UEFA spokesman William Gaillard.

UEFA said last month that 284 out-of-competition doping tests would be carried out.

During the tournament, two players from each team, will be chosen by ballot to undergo testing after each of the 31 matches.

Kuhn's wife hospitalised

AFP, Zurich

Swiss football coach Kobi Kuhn's wife was taken to hospital on Monday less than a week away from her husband's side's first match at Euro 2008.

Alice Kuhn was hospitalised after suffering an epileptic fit and losing consciousness according to the Swiss Football Federation.

The federation added that Kuhn, 64, would join up with the national squad on Tuesday morning at the latest.

Switzerland open their campaign in Basel on Saturday against Euro 2004 semifinalists the Czech Republic.

Moyes accepts libel damages

AFP, London

Everton manager David Moyes accepted substantial libel damages at the High Court on Tuesday over an allegation in Wayne Rooney's autobiography which accused him of a "serious breach of trust".

Moyes was paid an undisclosed sum by Manchester United and England forward Rooney, co-author Hunter Davies and publisher HarperCollins.

Rooney's book - My Story So Far - claimed Moyes caused "a serious breach of trust towards a young player under his management" because he allegedly told a local newspaper of a private conversation with Rooney, during which the star stated his intention to leave Everton.

The Everton boss's solicitor Edward Parladonio told the court that the allegation was "wholly untrue".

Moyes said in a statement: "I am glad that these issues have now been resolved and that my name has been fully cleared in this matter."

"Anyone who knows me well would, I hope, regard me as a man of honour and integrity."

"I was disappointed and wanted people to know that what had been written was completely untrue."

"I felt that I had no choice but to take action for a full apology and damages."

"Having accepted these, I do not intend to make any financial gain from this and shall give that to the Everton Former Players Foundation."

"All of the above said, we have now moved on and I wish Wayne and his family all the best for the future both on the field and off it."

Iniesta likely to miss warm-up

INTERNET, undated

Spain midfielder Andres Iniesta is likely to miss their final Euro 2008 warm-up against the United States on Wednesday because of a stomach upset. The Barcelona playmaker has not travelled with the rest of the squad after being ordered to rest because of gastroenteritis.



Italian national football team captain Fabio Cannavaro (C) walks with the help of crutches as he arrives for a press conference in Oberwaltersdorf on Tuesday. Cannavaro was ruled out of the upcoming Euro 2008 championships after suffering an injury to his left ankle.

Vieira's place in doubt

AFP, Clairefontaine

France coach Raymond Domenech said on Monday that he would make a decision about whether to retain injured captain Patrick Vieira in the squad till the eve of their first match against Romania next Monday.

The 31-year-old Inter Milan star injured his left thigh while training on Friday leading Domenech on Monday to call up AC Milan's former Arsenal midfielder Mathieu Flamini, who has just two caps to Vieira's 105.

"A player who is injured is always disturbing," said Domenech.

"And what's more this is a player with 105 caps and captain of the team."

"We have already experienced such situations like in the 2002 World Cup finals with Zinedine Zidane and we know what the consequences of that can have (France went out in the first round)."

"We must heed that so we don't make the same mistakes."

"Zizou's thigh problem affected

him and it was difficult to motivate him."

Domenech said he was neither optimistic nor pessimistic about Vieira's injury but he conceded that it was a problem he could have done without so close to the first match with Romania, which takes place next Monday.

"With seven days to go, I've known easier situations to handle," said Domenech.

"This is more worrying. There isn't a lot of time left, but at the same time there is still some time."

"My dictum is still the same: By June 9 it is imperative that everybody is ready."

Vieira -- a member of the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 winning sides -- is definitely out of the Romania clash but Domenech will hope that a player described by fellow squad member Sebastien Squillaci as integral to their campaign will be fit for the matches against Italy and Holland.

Domenech, who defied his critics to guide France to the 2006 World Cup final where they lost to Italy, said that Vieira was determined to recover.

"I sense that Vieira is determined to be fit, when he could have given up

instead. But he really wants to do everything possible to prepare himself for the tournament," said Domenech.

However, Domenech admitted that were France to be without one of their icons then things could become difficult especially as they are in the 'Group of Death' with Romania, Italy and Holland.

"Yes, when Pat is at his best he is irreplaceable... If we are pushing the deadline to the limit is because of that."

"I know all about his ability to motivate himself and inspire the others."

Domenech said that there had been some debate over who would replace Vieira.

"There was a discussion over whether Mathieu (Flamini) or Alou (Diarra) should be recalled."

"However, I would say Flamini has more variety to his game, than the other midfielders who could have been recalled."

Domenech has till the eve of the Romania match to replace Vieira if he feels that he won't be fit.

The man most likely to fill in for him in the starting XI is Lyon's Jeremy Toulalan, who has 12 caps to his name.

Torres suffers ankle injury

AFP, Madrid

Spain striker Fernando Torres sat out training with the Spanish Euro 2008 squad on Monday because of a twisted right ankle.

The Liverpool marksman injured his ankle during Saturday's 2-1 victory over Peru and is unlikely to figure in Wednesday's warm-up match against the United States.

Spain -- who are bidding to emulate the 1964 squad in winning the title -- are in Group D at Euro 2008 along with defending champions Greece, Russia and Sweden.

Fans pay to see Portugal

AFP, Neuchatel

The Portuguese football team rang up over 120,000 euros (187,000 dollars) on Tuesday alone by charging fans to attend their pre-Euro 2008 training sessions.

More than 12,000 fans attended Tuesday's session in Neuchatel, paying 9.30 euros (14.4 dollars) each to see their idols including Cristiano Ronaldo go through their paces at the Maladiere Stadium.

Portuguese football federation technical director Carlos Godinho justified the fee by the need to finance the hefty expenses generated by the European championships.

"Moreover we're the only team to train on front of 12,000 fans," he added.

Sven arrives in Mexico

AFP, Mexico

Swedish coach Sven Goran Eriksson, whose year-long reign as Manchester City manager ended on Monday, has arrived in Mexico to tie up a deal to coach the national side, local media reported.

"Sven arrives in Mexico," the sports daily Record headlined Monday.

The newspaper added that that according to national committee member Jorge Vergara, the 60-year-old former England boss has already been hired to lead the national side.

Eriksson, who was filmed shortly after his arrival on Sunday night in a hotel in an exclusive area of Mexico City, is expected to be officially unveiled on Tuesday after meeting with officials, reports added.

Eriksson's year in charge of Man City saw a remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of a club that had spent the previous campaign on the edge of the relegation battle.

City finally finished the season in ninth place, but despite the bonus of a place in next season's UEFA Cup via the Fair Play league, the club's owner Thai tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra was not satisfied.

Eriksson will replace former Mexican football star Hugo Sanchez, who lost his job in March after Mexico failed to qualify for the Olympic Games.

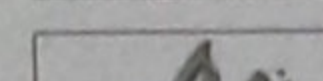
Mexican Jesus Ramirez has been in charge since and is expected to lead the side for the last time in a friendly against Argentina Wednesday in San Diego.

Mexico will then play a friendly in Chicago on June 8 against Peru before beginning qualifiers for the 2010 World Cup against Belize in June.

Eriksson coached England from 2001 to 2006. He also coached Italian sides AS Roma, Sampdoria, Fiorentina and Lazio and Portuguese giants Benfica.

Cannavaro ruled out

AFP, Rome



Injury-hit Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro said Tuesday that he intends to stay with the national side for the duration of Euro 2008 despite being ruled out of the competition with an ankle injury.

"I've asked the coach to stay on with the team. It seems right to me after two years of working together," Cannavaro told a press conference at the world champions' base at Oberwaltersdorf, south of Vienna.

"It's my last chance to experience a Euro. I'll be an ordinary spectator but I hope to be useful."

The 34-year-old Real Madrid player, who has 116 caps for the national side, also insisted that he was now more determined than

ever to captain Italy during their World Cup title defence in 2010.

"You'll have to put up with me for another two years," he said.

"For me this accident is a challenge, to be able to return to the highest level."

"I had planned to stop after the Euro, but now, my challenge is to reach the 2010 World Cup. I have no fears for my career."

Cannavaro tore two ligaments in his left ankle during a training session on Monday, just hours after Italy arrived in the country, after colliding with teammate Giorgio Chiellini during a practice match.

Italy team doctor Andrea Ferretti said he believed the centre-back would be out of action for "several months".

Cannavaro said he was hoping to undergo surgery as early as Wednesday in Vienna to be able to rejoin the team and begin his physiotherapy as quickly as possible.

And he had words of comfort for Chiellini, who had been devastated by what happened.

"I comforted him. He was broken. I told him that it wasn't his fault. We lost a player it's not worth losing a second," said Cannavaro who has been replaced by Fiorentina's 26-year-old defensive rock Alessandro Gamberini.

His absence is a serious blow to Italy, who are in the so-called 'Group of Death' with 2006 World Cup finalists France, the Netherlands and dark horses Romania.

But Cannavaro remains confident of his team's chances despite his injury.

"I'm confident. The team has enough experience and is sufficiently well trained to get a good result," he said.

Coach Roberto Donadoni added: "It's extremely important to have him here with the group."

Inter are 'special'

Football

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan's newly-installed coach Jose Mourinho, who infamously described himself as "the special one" when unveiled at Chelsea in 2004, refused to repeat the claim on Tuesday, saying instead that the Italian club was special.

"I am Jose Mourinho, nothing else. It's Inter that are special," said the Portuguese, speaking in good Italian at his first press conference after being named Inter coach on Monday.

"I think I'm a good coach, but I don't want to be special," he said.

"I'm still me, I don't change, with the same passion for my work."

"I've always thought that it would please me greatly to coach a big club in Italy. So I thank president Massimo Moratti and (technical director) Marco Branca for having given me this opportunity. It's a great challenge for me."

Mourinho replaces 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.

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 added that he had no plans for a big shake-up of the Inter squad for next season, saying only that he had his eye on "a maximum of two or three players".

"Reading the press over recent days, I had the impression I was going to coach a team of 60 players. I read that I wanted to buy all the players in Europe but it's not true."

"It's a message I'm sending to

my new players: I like the squad and I like their mindset, I trust them."

"Inter are a very good team, so there's no need to change everything. We need two or three players maximum to get better, to be a little more competitive."

Italian newspapers have speculated that Mourinho might try to recruit players from his former club Chelsea, with the names of Didier Drogba, Michael Essien, Frank Lampard and Ricardo Carvalho often mentioned.

Mourinho admitted that Mancini had left big boots to fill.

"A cycle has just finished with a great coach. Now it's a new cycle that must start. I have a lot of respect for the work of Roberto Mancini, but I'm Jose Mourinho and I have a different method and manner of working."

"I've always had a very strong rapport with the players and I'm sure that after a few weeks, it will be the same here."

Safina stuns Sharapova

French Open

AFP, Paris

Dinara Safina sent top seed Maria Sharapova crashing out of the French Open on Monday to throw the Roland Garros title chase wide open.

Safina battled back from a set and 2-5 down, and also saved a match point, to see off her Russian compatriot 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 and reach the quarterfinals for the second time where she will meet countrywoman Elena Dementieva.

Seventh seed Dementieva, who was runner-up to Anastasia Myskina

in 2004, made the last eight with a 6-4, 1-6, 6-2 win over yet another Russian Vera Zvonareva.

Monday's famous victory was Safina's third win in six career meetings against her fellow Russian and postponed, at least for another year, Sharapova's dreams of winning the only Grand Slam title to have eluded her.

"I had many opportunities but I guess it was a combination of not taking those chances and being a little unlucky at times," said Sharapova.

"Physically you have to stick with her. She's had great success on clay and is a really tough opponent on this surface. It went in the wrong

direction really fast. It was just one of those days."

Safina, the 13th seed, demonstrated her claycourt credentials in May when she won the lucrative Berlin tournament, beating Justine Henin, to send the former world number one into retirement, Serena Williams and then Dementieva in the final.

"After my title in Berlin, this was one of my best matches and one of my best comebacks," said Safina who saved a match point in the ninth game of the second set and was also 2/5 down in the tiebreaker which followed.

"I knew I could beat her but I put too much pressure on myself and was way too passive. I was too dependent on her and I was 2-5 down in the second set and facing a match point."

"But I hit a winner on her match point and it changed things."

Dementieva said she was getting used to facing her compatriots.

"I feel like I'm playing in the Russian championships," said Dementieva who had defeated Vera Dushevina in the first round.

Zvonareva, a quarterfinalist in 2003 and who had beaten Dementieva in the semifinals of the Charleston claycourt tournament in April, looked on course for victory after dominating the second set.

But she then suffered the kind of final set meltdown which has dogged her throughout her career.

Her brittle on-court temperament allowed the 26-year-old Dementieva to race to a 5-0 lead in the deciding before she managed to avoid a whitewash by taking the sixth and seventh games.

But her suspect service failed her in the eighth game and Dementieva fired a sweet, deep backhand on her first match point to wrap up victory on a humid Philippe Chatrier Court.

"Zvonareva admitted that her final set performance left a lot to be desired."

"I think I lost concentration," she said.

"She was much better from the beginning of the third set and I made quite a few unforced errors and I was always behind."



Russian player Dinara Safina celebrates after winning against compatriot Maria Sharapova during their French Open fourth round match at Roland Garros in Paris on Monday.

Football fever grips Austria

AFP, Vienna



It took time, but with less than a week to go before the start of Euro 2008 and with sunny weather bringing people out in droves, Vienna is starting to show some football fever.

Preparations for the 100,000-square-metre fan mile enclosing City Hall Square, Heroes' Square and the Ring road in between, which is to be closed for a whole month starting on Monday, are in full swing.

Stages and giant screens are being set up and the still-shuttered food huts are already in place, ready to be opened for business.

Euro 2008 banners, which already greet visitors at the luggage claim area at Vienna's international airport, line all the main arteries of the city, while every

other shop window seems to have a football theme, whether the products on sale are ladies' shoes, cakes or umbrellas.

Meanwhile, Strandbar Herrmann, a popular summer hang-out with sand and deck chairs on the banks of the Danube canal, re-christened Swiss Beach for the occasion with giant screens and cheesy dishes to satisfy the appetite of Austria's alpine neighbours, is already buzzing.

"You can feel that the country's rejoicing," says bar manager Clemens Haubenwallner, who already witnessed crowds flocking to the Strandbar to watch live games during the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

The sandy beach expects to receive some 3,500 fans per day during the Euro and has already had upwards of 2,000 in the last few days as temperatures hovered around 30 degrees and people came out in force.

"I'm a football fan, I'm glad it's

here in Austria," Haubenwallner says of the championship, although he is less than optimistic about his team's prospects.

"I'm just afraid it will all be over for Austria after the first match," he says half-amused, half-resigned.

"If they get flattened... I'm just being realistic."

The on-the-pitch performance of the national team, ranked 101 in the world by FIFA, hasn't stopped a wave of patriotic feeling sweeping across Austria.

In a country where nationalism has had disastrous consequences in the past, red-white-red flags are no longer seen only on official buildings and hotel fronts these days.

Transport Minister Werner Faymann temporarily suspended a law allowing the state flag to be flown only on official limousines and Austrians are now displaying their national colours on their cars, bicycles and motorbikes, often two, three or even four at a time.

Austria's 5-1 win against minnows Malta on Friday in its last friendly game before the Euro -- its first win this year -- has not hurt the mood either.

Meanwhile, fans of all ages are already boasting their favourite team shirts.

One souvenir shop on Kaerntnerstrasse, the main shopping street in the city centre, doubled its surface to sell official Euro 2008 paraphernalia, from shirts to baseball hats, beer mugs and keychains, and has been doing very good business in the last two weeks, says a salesman.

Even drivers of the traditional Viennese horse carriages, who are having to alter their sightseeing routes and are being deprived of their prime tourist spots due to the Ring road closure, are staying positive.

Says "Fiaker" driver Erich Wittmann: "We might have more tourists wanting us to take them all the way to the stadium."