

Iniesta in hospital

AFP, Madrid

Spanish international midfielder Andres Iniesta had to go to hospital here on Tuesday suffering from a serious bout of food poisoning.

The Barcelona star is out of Wednesday's Euro 2008 warm-up match with the United States in Santander according to team doctor Jorge Candel.

"We have carried out some tests," said Candel.

"He (Iniesta) is suffering from food poisoning after eating something on Sunday.

"Today (Tuesday) he underwent some specific treatment, and is doing well. If everything goes well, he will come to Santander.

"Iniesta began vomiting and suffering from an upset stomach on Monday night and had all the symptoms of gastroenteritis.

"We tested him at a clinic, where he was admitted because we could not lessen the symptoms."

Spain begin their Group D campaign against Russia on June 10 in Innsbruck followed by Sweden at the same venue on June 14 and finish their first round matches against titleholders Greece in Salzburg on June 18.

Dutch arrive late

AFP, Lausanne

The Dutch squad arrived for Euro 2008 in Geneva on Tuesday albeit rather later than planned after heavy traffic round Amsterdam delayed their departure.

Five of the 23-man squad - part of an overall delegation of 46 - were held up and forced the team to delay their plane.

The Dutch will feel more than a little at home once they arrive at their base of Lausanne, as they often have training camps there and were based there before the 2006 World Cup finals.

The Dutch - who are bidding to add to the 1988 European crown when the team included their present coach Marco van Basten - will undergo a training session on Wednesday morning followed by a short press conference.

The Dutch are in the 'Group of Death' - Group C - and open their campaign against world champions Italy in Bern on June 9, followed by World Cup finalists France on June 13 in Bern and round off their group matches against dark horses Romania also in Bern on June 17.

Ronaldo is okay

AFP, Neuchatel

Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo trained normally with the rest of the Euro 2008 squad on Tuesday a day after he took a knock on his right ankle.

The Manchester United attacker's presence at training will have been a huge relief to coach Luiz Felipe Scolari coming just four days away from the 2004 finalists first match against Turkey in Geneva.

Ronaldo, who scored 41 goals in all competitions for United last season which saw them scoop the Premiership and Champions League trophies, played in a team also comprising Deco and veteran Nuno Gomez.

The practice match was a complete sellout as all 12,000 places were taken at a price of 16 Swiss francs apiece.

Greece feeling no pressure

AFP, Seekirchen

Greece are not feeling the pressure ahead of the defence of their European crown claimed number one goalkeeper Antonis Nikopolidis on Tuesday.

The Olympiakos star - who was outstanding at Euro 2004 - said that there was a good excuse for two disappointing warm-up results for Euro 2008, a 0-0 draw with minnows Armenia and a 3-2 defeat by Hungary.

"We are not under pressure, we have come to give the best of ourselves," said Nikopolidis.

"There were a lot of new players in the warm-up matches," he added.

Greece will play all their group D matches in Salzburg and open their campaign against Sweden in Salzburg on June 10, followed by Russia on June 14 and wind up with Spain on June 18.

Butt leaves Benfica

AFP, Lisbon

German goalkeeper Hans-Jorg Butt looks set to join German champions Bayern Munich after being released from his contract with Portuguese side Benfica.

Benfica, who finished fourth in the championship last season, released a statement on its website stating that both parties had come to a mutual agreement which will cost nothing to either side.



French forward Thierry Henry controls the ball during his side's final friendly football match against Colombia ahead of Euro 2008 at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on Tuesday. Playing his 100th match for France, Henry set up the only goal that Franck Ribery scored from penalty.

Ribery scores for France

AFP, Paris



A first-half penalty by Franck Ribery managed not to ruin Thierry Henry's 100th international appearance and give France a 1-0 win over Colombia in their final warm-up match before Euro 2008.

The 25-year-old Bayern Munich star slotted home the penalty after Henry was fouled in the 23rd minute for his fourth goal in 27 international appearances while coach Raymond Domenech will be delighted that his side has not conceded a goal in their last four matches.

However, the lack of goals up front will cause him some worries, though, the sphinx like coach

didn't seem too concerned by that afterwards.

"Two wins and one draw, I will settle for that," said Domenech, referring to the three warm-up matches all against South American opposition.

"It is not the results that are important, it's the style of the performances."

"I prefer three matches unbeaten than three defeats."

Domenech admitted that he was going to have a selectorial nightmare ahead of their opening match on June 9 against Romania.

"That will give me a few sleepless nights, mind you it is something that I don't mind, better than sleepless nights because of an injury crisis," added Domenech, who has a major worry over captain Patrick Vieira who has a left thigh injury.

Ribery ended the match with

an ankle strapped, but he said it was nothing too serious.

"We didn't concede a goal and we beat a good Colombian team," said Ribery.

"We are super motivated and we are good in the head."

"As regards me limping, it's not the ankle."

"We want to win the tournament and it is vital we start well against Romania and take the three points."

Colombia rarely threatened save for a slip in the French defence in the eighth minute.

The French too didn't create too many chances and went closest to doubling their lead when France footballer of the year Karim Benzema's 40th minute shot just went past the post, having been set up by the irrepressible Ribery.

'We aren't on holiday'

AFP, Tenero

Veteran Germany striker Oliver Neuville may be back home at the team's Euro 2008 training camp in Tenero, Switzerland, but his side are already getting down to business.

Germany arrived in Switzerland on Tuesday and head coach Joachim Loew put his players through their paces with a light training session at their Euro 2008 base in the idyllic Swiss town flanked by the picturesque Alps.

Both striker Miroslav Klose, who injured an ankle in Saturday's 2-1 final warm-up win over Serbia, and defender Marcel Jansen, who picked up a leg injury against the Serbs, took part in training.

And for Neuville, who grew up here in the nearby town of Ascona, where the team are staying, the Germans are here only for the serious business of winning Euro 2008 when they open their campaign on Sunday against Poland.

"We are not here on holiday," said Neuville, 35, who scored in Germany's 2-1 win over Serbia on Saturday in their final warm-up.

"If we have an afternoon free, I will show the boys Ascona."

"I know Tenero very well, I had my first training camp here with FC Locarno."

"The conditions here are outstanding and perfect for getting on with the job in hand."

Having flown here on Tuesday from Frankfurt after a two-day break following Saturday's final warm-up win, the 23-man squad are based here for the entire tournament before flying to Klagenfurt, Austria, for Sunday's opening Group B game.

And after Saturday's goal-scoring performance, Neuville is putting pressure on his fellow strikers Miroslav Klose, Mario Gomez, Kevin Kuranyi and Lukas Podolski for a place in the side.

"Before the last World Cup, I was also fourth or fifth choice striker and I accept I have to take my chances if I come off the bench," said Neuville, who has 68 caps.

Guus has faith in Pogrebnyak

AFP, Moscow

Russian national manager Guus Hiddink said Tuesday he would not be leaving injured forward Pavel Pogrebnyak in the Euro 2008 squad regardless of the advice of doctors.

"Pavel is working hard with the team physiotherapist," Hiddink told the press. "I believe he has a chance of recovering and playing in the championship."

"Even if he has to miss the opening match with Spain I'm not set to call anybody in to replace him," Hiddink added. "I'm very pleased with my players' work during our training session in Germany."

Meanwhile, Russian Football Union (RFU) chief Vitaly Mutko said that Pogrebnyak will definitely miss Russia's Euro-2008 opening match with Spain adding that the forward could miss the entire championships.

"Pavel (Pogrebnyak) will not play against Spain," Mutko said. "It's still difficult to predict whether he will play in the remaining matches of the championship or he will have to undergo surgery."

Last week Zenit St Petersburg striker Pogrebnyak, the joint UEFA Cup top scorer this season, netted an opener in a friendly against Serbia before twisting his left knee.

Russia open their European campaign against Group D opponents Spain on June 10 followed by Greece on June 14 and then Sweden four days later.

Of royal shirts

AFP, Paris



The national flags may fly at the respective Euro 2008 matches but several of the teams' strips will bear no reflection of those standards.

Indeed several of them will wear colours more associated with a royal connection.

Italy and Germany may have rid themselves of their monarchies many years ago but that hasn't stopped them wearing outfits recalling those days.

Italy for instance play in blue and white, nothing whatsoever to do with the red, white and green of their national flag, but the colours are those of the House of Savoy, that of King Victor Emmanuel, who was the first King of the unified Italy in 1861.

The Germans too eschewed the

black red and yellow of the flag that was brought in following their defeat in World War I and was introduced under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933).

However, the German football side wanted nothing to do with a flag that represented humiliation and stuck with the all white top which had been the colour of the standard of the German Empire, which came to an end with defeat in the war.

They also carried on sporting black shorts, which was the colour of Kaiser Wilhelm II's eagle on the flag.

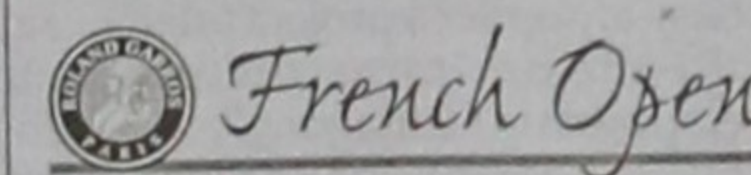
They kept on wearing the white shirt after World War II - where the revelations of the concentration camps and the Holocaust had made the Germans the pariahs of the world - and when they beat huge favourites Hungary 3-2 in the 1954 World Cup final in Switzerland it prompted their coach Josef Herberger to declare "One can once again be proud to be German."

The Dutch too prefer to wear something different instead of the red, white and blue of the national flag, in this case orange as it is the colours of the dynasty of William of Orange-Nassau who ruled the Netherlands during the height of their international power - it was William II who declared their independence in 1648.

The Croats have their national flag colours emblazoned on their shirts but also the red and white diamond shapes represent the 25 small provinces that make up Hrvatska, Croatia.

The French, though, have stuck to their revolutionary ideals, no question of the Royal standard with the fleur de lys being sported, but the good old red, white and blue that was led into battle on many victorious occasions under Napoleon - France coach Raymond Domenech will be hoping that his players come out with flying colours.

Nadal-Djokovic face-off



AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will square up in a French Open heavyweight clash on Friday determined to ignore the history-drenched implications of their mouthwatering contest.

Nadal, the 22-year-old triple champion, is two wins away from joining Bjorn Borg as the only man to win four successive Roland Garros titles.

But should world number three Djokovic take the semifinal, the 21-year-old Serbian will become the first man to defeat the Spaniard at the French Open.

A victory for the Australian Open champion will also see him replace Nadal as the world number two, a position the popular Spanish left-hander has held for three years.

Nadal is growing weary of comparisons with Borg who completed his four successive Roland Garros titles in 1981, five years before he was even born.

He is also quick to remind people that so far he has collected 26 tour trophies whereas Borg won six French Opens and 62 titles in all.

"This is just talk, talk, talk. What is

important is to play well on the court on Friday, and we'll see who wins," said Nadal, who reached the semi-final with a 6-1, 6-1, 6-1 demolition of compatriot Nicolas Almagro, a man with more claycourt match wins than any other player in 2008 coming into Roland Garros.

"It's no more motivation for me. The only motivation is to play good and try to win the title here. But everybody's talking about Borg as if he was somebody from another planet."

Despite Nadal's reluctance to mention himself in the same breath as the great Swede, his form here in 2008 has been so impressive that even the likes of Djokovic and world number one Roger Federer can't fail to be intimidated.

His victory over Almagro was the most one-sided quarterfinal in the history of Roland Garros.

Furthermore, he has lost just 25 games in five rounds, the lowest in any Grand Slam event in the Open era.

But Djokovic is not in an entirely hopeless position.

He may have lost seven of the pair's 10 meetings, but has shared the last four while two of his defeats - at Wimbledon in 2007 and here in the 2006 quarter-finals - have come about through an injury-enforced retirement.

The Serbian, who has been the most successful player on the tour in 2008, lost to Nadal at the same stage in 2007, but took Nadal to three sets in the semifinal of the Hamburg Masters claycourt tournament three weeks ago.

"I don't want to get into the history books by beating Nadal. It's not my priority," said Djokovic.

"My priority is to keep winning, keep playing well, and then just try to get as far as I can in the tournament. Winning the Grand Slam title is much more important."

The Serbian respects the challenge of facing Nadal, but believes he is a better player than 12 months ago when he lost the semifinal in straightsets.

"He's been playing better and better. I think the serve is a lot better this year, on clay especially, and he's going for some shots much more. He combines that with his great physical strength and patience."

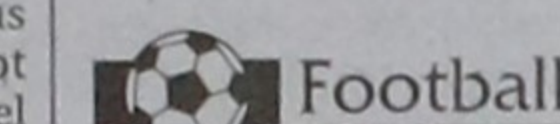
Djokovic believes the key will be to match Nadal stroke for stroke and not allow the champion to dictate.

"I think Hamburg was a really good match for me. If I play that way and if I'm able to keep on going that way, keep that aggressiveness on the high level and be consistent in the strokes and just try to stick with him, then I have a good chance."



King of clay Rafael Nadal celebrates his 22nd birthday by cutting a cake immediately after winning his French Open quarterfinal clash against compatriot Nicolas Almagro 6-1, 6-1, 6-1 at Roland Garros on Tuesday. Nadal set up a mouthwatering semifinal battle with Novak Djokovic on Friday.

Mourinho won't buy many



REUTERS, Milan

Jose Mourinho said on Tuesday his arrival at Serie A champions Inter Milan would not spark a bonanza of transfer market spending and that he would buy two or three players.

He did not rule out bids for some of his former players at Chelsea, however.

"When I read the world's press, it seems like I'm going to work with a squad of 60 players. It's not true," the coach told a packed news conference at the club's training complex the day after the announcement that he had signed a three-year contract.

"Like the players (that we have), they're a beautiful team. I don't need a dramatic change in the team. I think we need two or three players to improve and become more competitive."

Chelsea midfielders Frank Lampard and Michael Essien, defender Ricardo Carvalho and striker Didier Drogba have been linked by media in Britain and Italy to a move to Mourinho's Inter, along with Barcelona duo Deco and Samuel Eto'o, among others.

"I think it's normal that, as a consequence of the relationship I have with the Chelsea players, that almost all of them want to work with me in the future and it's the same for

me," he said when asked about the speculation.

He added he would not say who Inter's transfer targets were.

The 45-year-old said he wanted to change the side's approach, while praising his predecessor Roberto Mancini, who was fired last week 11 days after he led the side to their third consecutive Serie A title.

"I like this group, I like the team's mentality very much. I have a lot of confidence in this group," he said in excellent Italian.

"I want to start a different cycle, practically with the same squad. I think differently to Roberto. I imagine it would be the same situation if Roberto went to Chelsea, for example."

"He'd change things because he thinks differently from me. It's far from a criticism, it's just the reality of football."

Mancini has been linked with the Chelsea post left vacant by the dismissal of Avram Grant, who took over from Mourinho last September.

In contrast with his arrival at Chelsea four years ago, Mourinho said the club he was joining was special, not the new coach.

"I've arrived at a special club," he said. "I've never forgotten that I think I'm a great coach but I don't want to be special. I simply want to be Jose Mourinho, who is the same person as always, who has the same passion

and motivation."

Mourinho's did not promise victory in the Champions League, which eluded Mancini, saying Inter were one of 11 European teams who could realistically aspire to the title.

But he said his track record boded well after he won it with Porto in 2004 and reached two semifinals with Chelsea.

"I think there's a tendency to do well in this type of competition," he said.

He added he was first contacted about taking over at the club the day after the defeat by Liverpool in March in the last 16 of the Champions League, when Mancini said he would quit at the end of the season only quickly to change his mind.

He added that he hoped to help Serie A regain its position as the world's top championship, given that the Italian top flight was widely considered to have lost ground to Spain's Primera Liga and the English Premier League in recent years.

"At the moment Serie A is not the best championship in the world," he said, "I think Serie A can take a road that will take it to being the best championship in the world again like in the 1980s and 90s."

"This is a motivation for me. I want to bring a little contribution and it will be a (source of) pride for me, if I can help."