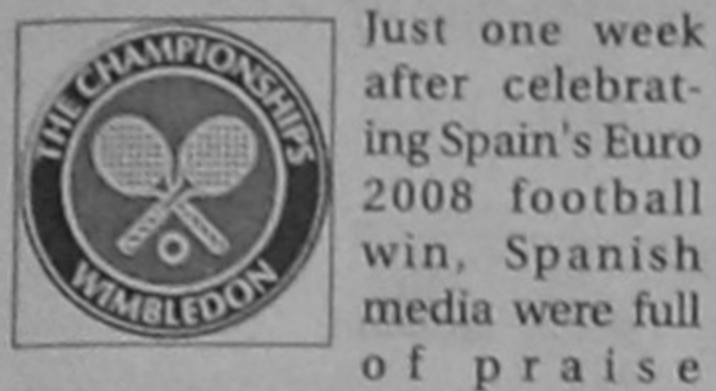


Press hail 'King Nadal'

AFP, Madrid



Just one week after celebrating Spain's Euro 2008 football win, Spanish media were full of praise Monday for new national champion Rafael Nadal who became the first Spaniard to win Wimbledon in over 40 years on Sunday.

"Long live King Nadal!" wrote sports daily AS on its front page below a photo of the 22-year-old ATP world number two being congratulated by Spain's Crown Prince Felipe and his wife Princess Letizia after his win on Sunday.

"Memorable victory in the best final in the history of Wimbledon," it added.

Nadal ended Swiss rival Roger Federer's five-year reign at Wimbledon with an epic 6-4, 6-4, 6-7, 6-7, 9-7 win in the longest final - four hours and 48 minutes -

in the history of the tournament. "It doesn't matter what the ATP say, Rafa you are the number one," rival sports daily Marca said on its front page beside a photo of Nadal biting his new trophy.

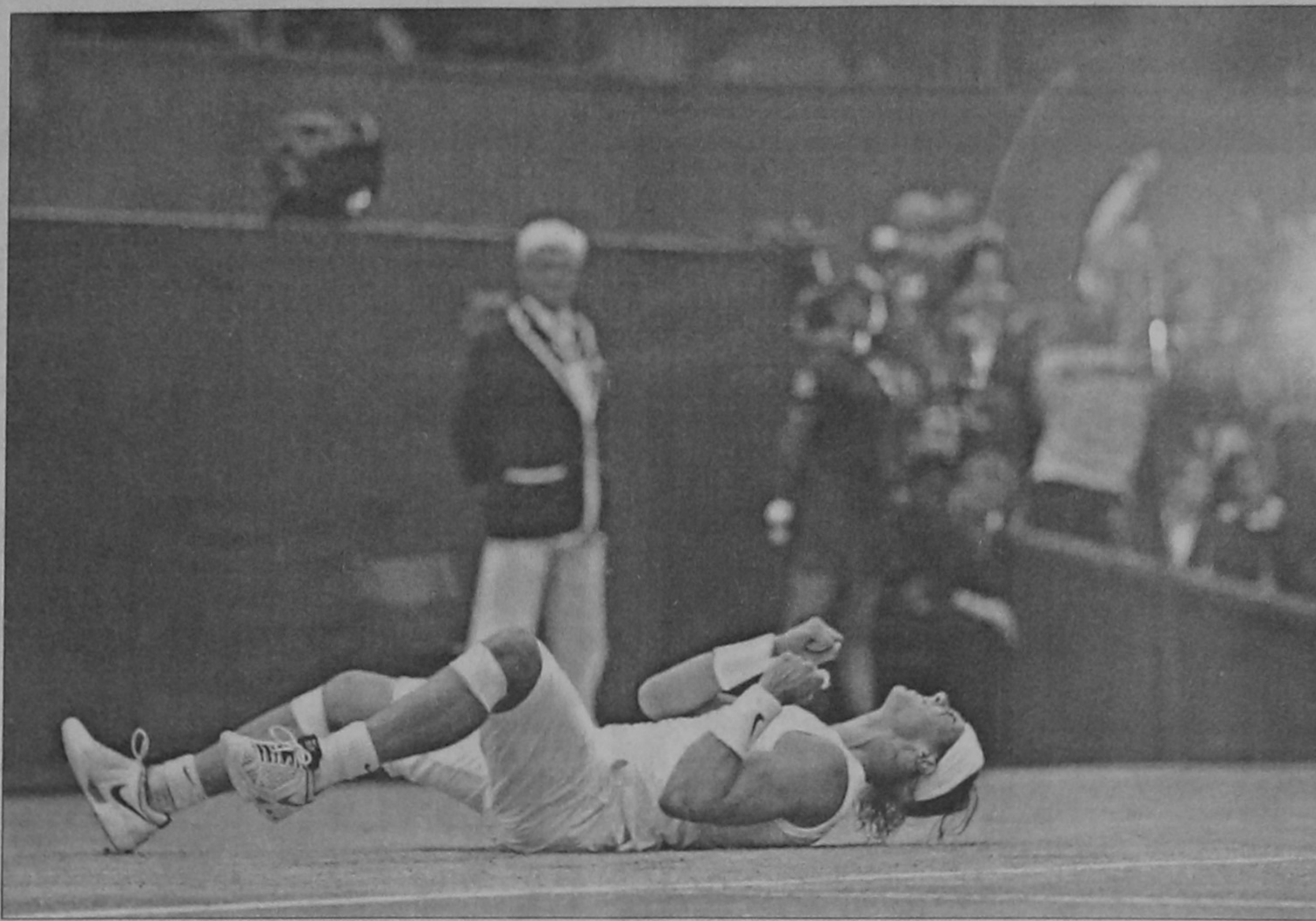
"Rocky' Nadal beat Federer in the match of the century," it added.

The last Spaniard to win Wimbledon was Manuel Santana in 1966 when Spain was still ruled by dictator General Francisco Franco.

"Nadal will win Wimbledon many more times, especially when Federer is not taking part," Santana predicted in an interview published in daily newspaper ABC.

Daily newspaper El Mundo said "Rafael Nadal has opened a new era in tennis with his win over Federer while top-selling daily El Pais said "Nadal has become a giant".

"Neither the rain neither Federer could stop Nadal," it added.



A DREAM LANDING: Rafael Nadal falls on the ground just after winning the championship point against Roger Federer in the marathon 'gentlemen's' singles final of the 2008 Wimbledon Championships at the All England Tennis Club in London on Sunday.

'Greatest final ever'

AFP, London



The nail-biting clash which saw Rafael Nadal snatch the Wimbledon crown of five-time champion Roger Federer after five sets was hailed as "the greatest final ever" by the British press Monday.

The battle -- pictures of which dominated most front pages -- eclipsed even the 1980 final between John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg and its result elevates Spaniard Nadal to a new and dazzling sphere of success, they added.

Moreover Roger, Rafa is the new king of Wimbledon," blazed the headline of the Daily Mail newspaper, which said that the whole of Britain had "stood still to watch a titanic sporting encounter".

"They can put a roof on the Centre Court, but can they ever cap the brilliance of a rivalry that drives each man to greater heights and defies superlatives?" it added.

The Daily Telegraph hailed "the greatest final ever" and said that the match represented "the dawn of a new era" with the world num-

ber one being defeated by his only serious rival.

It hailed Federer's fightback from two sets down as "amazing", adding that the drama of the match had been increased by poor weather which meant that the stars kept playing until 9:16pm (2016 GMT).

"Such was the pre-thunderstorm gloom during the third set that almost the only things that you could make out on Centre Court were the numbers glowing on the electronic scoreboard, (London Mayor) Boris Johnson's blond hair... and a yellow ball flashing from sideto side," the paper said.

"It was a surprise that the umpire didn't offer night-vision goggles or miners' headlamps to the players."

The Guardian hailed Nadal's transformation from "king of clay" to "grass master" and labelled the clash "the final of finals".

"The Greatest -- Nadal ends the reign of King Roger" was the headline in the tabloid Sun.

Meanwhile, The Times had the strongest praise of all for the match, saying simply that many spectators would say it was the greatest game of tennis ever played.

The final was the winner

THE GUARDIAN



As well as euphoria, Rafael Nadal may actually be feeling a hint of frustration right now, for while the Spaniard has just won his first Wimbledon title and so become the first man to hold this Championship and the French Open since Bjorn Borg in 1980, he will surely be aware that the triumph may forever be overshadowed by the epic battle he had to endure to get there.

Like Borg-McEnroe in 1980, the mind-boggling encounter that took place on Centre Court until late on Sunday evening will be celebrated for generations to come, not for the individual who won it, but for the thrills and spills along the way.

Over four and three quarter hours, the undisputed best two tennis players in the world refused to be beaten, refused to give up and

in the pursuit of ultimate victory, played the most sublime shots and rallies this great venue has possibly ever seen. It was little surprise then that after the rackets had been put down and the trophy table had been wheeled out, the crowd roared both men with equal vigour.

Indeed it could be argued that Roger Federer was given the louder cheer. That should of course not take away from what Nadal has achieved. The ATP rankings will not show it, but the 22-year-old can now rightly be hailed as the best in the world. He destroyed Federer at Roland Garros in a show of clay-court supremacy, and while the win on grass was considerably more of a struggle, it was nevertheless deserved.

But what seems to be the case at this moment in 2008 is that it is not the tussle to be top of the pile that will last from the Nadal-Federer years, but instead the existence of the rivalry itself; who won what will be secondary to the matches the pair gave the world.

And what of that encounter on Centre Court. Initially it appeared that a repeat of the French Open final was to be played out. Nadal went two sets up with a display of consistently powerful serving and deadly accuracy with the forehand while Federer seem preoccupied with thoughts of a second grand-slam final defeat, seen most clearly in the way he self-destructed at the net. Given the chance to break Nadal for the first time, the 26-year-old smashed a shot long when it would have been easier to have simply dinked the ball into his opponent's court. The score was brought back to deuce and Nadal soon established what then appeared an unassailable lead over a clearly rattled man.

Federer twice lost his cool, once with the crowd and once with himself. But that was only the start of the drama, and if he had been agitated and reckless in the first two sets, Federer was deadly and determined in the following pair, twice winning the tie-break to

bring the match back to level terms. No moment in that period best summed up the quality of tennis on show than when Nadal hit a passing shot from the very edge of the baseline to go 8-7 up in the second tie-break only to see his championship point obliterated by a sublime passing shot by Federer as he slid away from court.

For those who were there, the final set will be remembered as a war of attrition fought out under ever decreasing light and against a chilly persistent wind. Nadal eventually won it 9-7 and then deservedly absorbed the magnitude of his fifth grand-slam title by climbing into the royal box. Underneath him a giddy crowd applauded wildly but, family and friends aside, they were not cheering the victor as much as they were celebrating the occasion. With Nadal and Federer still only in their mid-twenties, more should follow and for that, we should all be thankful.

Chelsea after Kaka

AFP, Rome

Chelsea have put a big-money offer on the table for Brazilian playmaker Kaka, AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani said Sunday, without giving further details of the proposed deal.

"An astronomical offer has come in from Chelsea for Kaka," Galliani told Italian newspaper La Stampa, adding that club have also expressed interest in the club's World Cup winner Andrea Pirlo.

Despite failing to qualify for the Champions League, Galliani insisted the Rossoneri have been continuing to strengthen their squad and increase players' salaries. "This means we'll be 50 million euros (78 million dollars) in the red," he said, adding: "All we would need to do in order to wipe out our debts is sell Kaka and Pirlo."

AC Milan have been linked with various players in the close season, including Barcelona duo Samuel Eto'o and Ronaldinho, and Arsenal's unsettled star Emmanuel Adebayor.

Laporta barely survives

AFP, Madrid

FC Barcelona president Joan Laporta survived a confidence vote held Sunday that was brought against him by a supporter who was angered by the Spanish club's second straight season without any major title, final results show.

Less than half of all Barcelona supporters who cast ballots, 37.75 percent, voted to keep the 45-year-old at the helm of the club while 60.6 percent voted against him staying on, the club said on its web site.

But to be successful, the vote against Laporta needed to have the support of over two-thirds of voters with a minimum turnout of 10

percent of the 118,528 club members entitled to take part.

Turnout reached 33.15 percent, meaning 37,294 eligible voters turned out at Camp Nou to cast their ballots.

Of these 1.37 percent cast blank ballots while 0.27 percent of the votes cast were deemed invalid.

The result means Laporta and his team will be able to continue at the helm of the club until their current term expires on June 30, 2010.

Lawyer Oriol Giralt collected over 9,000 votes from fellow club members to force Barcelona to hold the vote after the Catalan side ended the season in third place, meaning it missed out on automatic qualification for the Champions League.

Under Laporta, who has headed

Barcelona since 2003 and was re-elected in 2006, the club won back-to-back league titles and the Champions League but he has grown increasingly unpopular with supporters due to the recent drought in silverware.

Laporta responded to the club's third-place finish by replacing Frank Rijkaard as the club's manager with reserve team manager Josep Guardiola.

Guardiola quickly announced that he was not counting on the club's stars Deco, Ronaldinho and Eto'o for next season as he seeks to revive the team.

To be eligible to vote supporters had to be of legal age, been members of the club for more than a year and their membership must have been up to date.

Ballack keeps Blues waiting

AFP, Berlin

Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack has said he is in no rush to sign a new contract with Chelsea, but insists that he is keen to stay at Stamford Bridge.

The Blues are already back in training but Ballack, who has a year to run on his current contract, has opted to holiday in Sardinia following his country's Euro 2008 final defeat to Spain just over a week ago.

The 31-year-old will not return to London for another couple of weeks but he believes there is still plenty of time to consider his future.

"I have a contract until 2009 and there is an option to extend it, so there is no need to rush," he told Bild newspaper. "We will just wait and see what happens."

Although he narrowly missed out on silverware last season, conceding the Premier League and Champions League titles to Manchester United, Ballack believes being at Chelsea gives him the best chance of glory.

"I am playing in the best league in the world with one of the strongest teams in the world. That's why at the moment there is no question of me returning to the Bundesliga," Ballack said.

Atletico rope in Brazilian Paulo

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid announced Sunday the signing of Brazilian midfielder Paulo Assuncao from Portuguese first division side Porto for an undisclosed fee.

The 28-year-old will join his new teammates at Atletico on Monday, the Spanish club said in a statement posted on its website without specifying the length of his contract.

Assuncao joined Porto in 2005 from AEK Athens but has been eager to leave the Portuguese club after falling out with its management.

Atletico said meanwhile that it is in talks with several clubs which are interested in signing its Portugal international Maniche, 30, ended last season out on loan at Inter Milan after having fallen out with coach Javier Aguirre.



Russia football coach Guus Hiddink (C) talks to reporters upon his arrival at Incheon International Airport, west of Seoul on Monday. The Dutch tallman, who recently led Russia into the semifinals of Euro 2008, arrived in Seoul to attend the formal opening of a football field he has helped to establish for disabled children during his stint with South Korea in 2002.

Real boss hints C'ron to stay at United

AFP, Madrid

Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo will likely stay at Manchester United next season because the English champions are not willing to let him go, Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon said Sunday.

"Ronaldo has said he would like to play here, that it is a dream, that he would be excited to come to Real Madrid but it is a desire of the player which can not be carried out without Manchester's agreement," the online edition of sports daily Marca quoted him as saying. "Manchester has to want it. Once they decide to sell him and

communicate this, we can say we are talking about a possible transfer. But as of today that is not happening," Calderon said.

"Theoretically we still have time, there are still two months left until the end of August if Manchester gets in touch with Real Madrid and makes an offer," he added.

The most probable outcome "as of today" is that "Cristiano Ronaldo will continue to play for Manchester United next year," Calderon said.

Calderon and Manchester United chief executive David Gill will hold talks in Switzerland next week over the 23-year-old, Spanish sports daily AS reported Saturday.

The private talks will take place on Monday at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon on the sidelines of a wider

meeting of European clubs, it said.

United on Friday moved to quell further talk that their prize asset was about to link up with the Bernabeu club, saying the rumours were "utter nonsense and totally laughable. Cristiano Ronaldo is not for sale".

Manchester United have repeatedly said the player - whose contract runs until 2012 - is definitely not for sale.

Last month the club reported nine-time European champions Real for trying to unsettle Ronaldo, but FIFA did not find the Spaniards had breached any regulations.

Ronaldo is scheduled to undergo an ankle operation next week and is not scheduled to join the club on their pre-season tour of South Africa which begins on July 18.

Arshavin not interested

AFP, London

Russia forward Andrei Arshavin is only interested in playing for Spanish club Barcelona despite reported interest from the English Premier League, his club claimed on Monday.

"Arshavin wants to move to Barcelona - he doesn't want to play anywhere else," a spokesman for his club Zenit St Petersburg told BBC Sport.

The 27-year-old played a starring role for his country at Euro 2008, helping them reach the semi-finals.

But his club's asking price for the 39-million-dollar ranked Arshavin could prove to be a major stumbling block in any potential deal.

The Spanish club are the sole club to have bid for the player, despite reports suggesting he was set for talks with Arsenal and Chelsea.

"Barcelona have made an offer but we are still negotiating with them. I don't know when a decision will be made but I think Arshavin will leave the club," added the Zenit spokesman.

Socceroos set dates with SA & Holland

AFP, Sydney

Australia will play South Africa and the Netherlands in warm-up games in August and September ahead of their Asian World Cup qualifying campaign, Football Federation Australia said Monday.

The Socceroos will play 2010 World Cup hosts South Africa at Loftus Road, London, on August 19 and the Netherlands in Eindhoven on September 6, FFA said.

Australia open their final Asian World Cup qualifying group against Uzbekistan in Tashkent on September 10.

"With many of South Africa's first-team players also based in England and elsewhere in Europe, meeting them in London is an efficient and valuable opportunity for both of us," FFA chief executive Ben Buckley said.

Australia last played South Africa in a 1-1 draw in Durban in 2005 after the Socceroos won their previous encounter 1-0 in London in 2004.

WWIPs to attend opening ceremony

AFP, Paris



Representatives of 10 countries have already confirmed that they will attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing on August 8.

Here is a provisional list of countries represented by their head of state, prime minister or a minister. HEAD OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT

US President George W. Bush, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, accompanied by foreign minister Ranganee Dadfar Spanta,

Australia Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, South Korea President Lee Myung-bak and Vietnam President Nguyen Minh Triet.

MINISTER Indian Sports Minister Singh Gill, Italy's junior minister for sports Rocco Grimaldi and Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos.

OTHER Belgium: Crown Prince Philippe, the

son of King Albert II

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is expected to announce his decision on whether to go the Olympic ceremony on the margins of the G8 summit in Tokyo after a meeting planned on Wednesday with Chinese President Hu Jintao. His aides have already signalled that his response will be positive.

German President Horst Koehler and Chancellor Angela Merkel decided several months ago not to go to Beijing for the Olympics.

'BIRD'S NEST' REPLACES MAO ON OLYMPIC NOTE China's iconic 'Bird's Nest' National Stadium will replace communist hero Mao Zedong on a special currency note to be issued on Tuesday for the Beijing Olympics, the country's central bank said.

The People's Bank of China said in a weekend statement on its website that it would issue six million Olympic 10-yuan (1.5-dollar) notes.

On one side of the note is an image of the National Stadium, known as the "Bird's Nest" because of its interlocking mesh of steel, according to images of the currency posted on the website.

Above the stadium -- the main venue for next month's Games -- is the dancing-man emblem for the 2008 Olympics.

Both the picture of the Bird's Nest and the emblem are set against the backdrop of the Temple of Heaven, one of the country's best-known landmarks.

The images will replace a portrait of Mao, who founded communist China in 1949 and whose face adorns all modern Chinese bank notes. But older, smaller denomination notes are still in circulation without this image.

The last time Mao's image was removed from a Chinese currency was for the 2000 millennium celebrations. At that time, the central bank replaced Mao's portrait on a 100-yuan note with a dragon.

The other side of the Olympic note features the famous ancient Greek marble statue of a discus-thrower, Discobolus, portraits of athletes and the numerals "2008."

On normal notes an image of the famous Three Gorges waterway in southern China features on that side. The waterway has recently been controversially dammed.

Watermarks and other technologies are to be used in printing to prevent counterfeiting of the notes, the bank said.

The notes, predominantly a greenish-blue with a splash of red, are slightly larger than the ordinary 10-yuan notes, which are a more sombre grey and black.