



Brazil star Ronaldinho warms up during a training session at Hanoi's My Dinh Stadium on Thursday.

Brazil will blend youth and experience

AFP, Hanoi

Ronaldinho said on Thursday that Brazil will blend youth and experience as the 'auriverde' bid for a first Olympic football gold.

"There are many young players who have a lot of experience and I think that will make the difference for us," Ronaldinho, who has just left Barcelona for AC Milan, said ahead of a warm-up Friday against the Vietnamese national side in Hanoi.

Despite five World Cups, when it comes to the Olympics Brazil have been found wanting with runner-up finishes in 1984 and 1988 and a bronze medal in 1996.

"We have let many chances (of gold) slip," Ronaldinho observed as he trained at the My Dinh stadium in Hanoi, the squad having arrived in Vietnam from Singapore on Tuesday.

"Many good teams have played the Olympics and we have never managed to win it," he added.

"Now we have the opportunity - we have a very good team."

He added the side would do all it could "to win a medal that is important for us."

Record shirt deal in Germany

AFP, Berlin

The Bundesliga's 18 clubs will receive a record 114 million euros (178 million US dollars) collectively from their individual shirt sponsorship deals, according to estimates from German sports agency SID.

Last season, the Bundesliga clubs earned more than 100 million euros for the first time, but even more money is expected to pour into the coffers of Germany's professional clubs.

Defending champions Bayern Munich are expected to receive 20 million euros (31 million US dollars) from Deutsche Telekom, while Wolfsburg can expect 15 million euros (23.5 million US dollars) from car manufacturers Volkswagen, who own the club.

Bayern's main rivals, Schalke 04 and Werder Bremen will receive 12 (19) and 8.5 million euros (13.2 million US dollars) respectively, while lowly Energie Cottbus, the only former East German club in the Bundesliga's top tier, receive 1.3 million euros (2 million US dollars).

The first sponsorship deal in German football was in 1973 when an alcohol manufacturer paid Eintracht Braunschweig 90,000 marks (45,000 euros, 70,000 US dollars) to print their names on the football shirts.

Internal strife at Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's German coach Bernd Schuster hit out Wednesday at the Spanish club's managers as he complained that he was being kept in the dark over possible new recruits.

"I am the last to find out anything. I would love to know more. I am pleased because the president has come to inform me of what is going on," he told reporters at the club's training camp in Austria, Spanish media reported.

"I am not that bothered as I am used to being more or less the last to find things out. Everyone else seems to know things before me," he added when asked about the possible arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United.

Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon, who arrived at Real's Austrian training camp on Wednesday, said earlier in an interview published in sport daily AS that he is still willing to splash out on the Portuguese star.

Calderon said the Spanish champions were close to signing Dutch midfielder Rafael van der Vaart from Hamburg, as desired by Schuster, but were not interested in recruiting Spain striker David Villa from Valencia.

Real have long been linked with a big money move for Ronaldo, with reports suggesting the price tag could be 85 million euros (134 million US dollars), but Manchester have made it clear they will not let the 23-year-old go.

Schuster has hoped to add several new faces to his squad and has reportedly blamed the focus on efforts to recruit Ronaldo for the lack of new signings so far.

Real Madrid's arch-rivals Barcelona meanwhile have dished out over 80 million euros on new players.

Spurs unveil Bentley

AFP, London



Tottenham on Thursday unveiled new signing David Bentley, who has cost an initial 15 million pounds (22 million euros) from Blackburn.

Spurs announced the move late Wednesday and confirmed the news in a statement to the London Stock Exchange after he passed a medical.

A statement from Tottenham PLC read: "Tottenham Hotspur plc is pleased to announce that agreement has been reached with Blackburn Rovers for the transfer of the registration of the England international midfielder, David Bentley, age 23 years, to Tottenham Hotspur FC for a total consideration of 15 million pounds and up to an additional two million pay-

able upon future performances. "The player's contract is for a period of up to six years."

Bentley, who started his career across north London at Arsenal, is in line for a debut at the Feyenoord Jubileum Tournament in Rotterdam this weekend.

Arsenal will receive a percentage of the deal as per the terms of his transfer to Blackburn in 2006.

"Making the move here was an easy decision to make to be honest. I've been trying my hardest to come here and be part of this. All my friends are season ticket holders. All I want to do is just get out there," Bentley told Sky Sports News.

"I'm excited by it. There are a lot of good players here, you look at (Luka) Modric, Giovanni dos Santos and I'm looking forward to fitting in the side somewhere," he added.

Tottenham manager Juande Ramos is also still reported to be

chasing mercurial Russian Andrei Arshavin, one of the stars of Euro 2008, having offloaded Republic of Ireland striker Robbie Keane to Liverpool.

Ramos was thrilled at the capture of Bentley, telling reporters: "I'm sure he will bring the best ability to our team and we can help him maximise his potential."

Bentley repaid the compliment, saying he was looking forward to repaying the Spaniard's faith in him.

"Working under someone like Ramos is great. He's going to get the best out of me."

"I've got a lot of respect for him for what he's achieved. I've talked a lot to the other players about him and I'm sure he'll push me on to the next level. He's really good."

Spurs midfielder Jermaine Jenas and centre-back Michael Dawson have meanwhile signed one-year contract extensions keeping them at the club until 2013.

C'Ron still wants to play for Real

AFP, Madrid

Manchester United's Portuguese striker Ronaldo is still dreaming of Real Madrid, despite his club's total opposition to his leaving, Spanish sports daily AS reported on Thursday.

Ronaldo's agent Victor Mendes has, according to AS, been in contact with Real to pass on the message that the player still harbours ambitions of playing at the Bernabeu.

The newspaper quoted Ronaldo as saying, via Mendes, "keep calm. I'll sort things out next week. I will go to Manchester and tell them I only want to play at Real Madrid and that the decision is non-negotiable."

Ronaldo, who had surgery on his ankle at the start of the month and then followed up with a fortnight break in Los Angeles, returned to Europe Wednesday, arriving in Lisbon to continue his convalescence.

Manchester United have insisted there is no chance they will free a player who scored 42 goals last season on the way to landing the Champions League and Premiership titles amid claims that Real would pay up to 85 million euros for his services.

Real Madrid's German coach Bernd Schuster hit out Wednesday at the Spanish club's managers, saying he was in the dark over possible new recruits as the will-he-won't-he Ronaldo speculation rumbles on.

"I am the last to find out anything. I would love to know more," Schuster told reporters at the club's summer training camp in Austria.

Schuster spoke out after Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon told AS he is still willing to splash out on Ronaldo, 23, whose is under contract at Old Trafford until 2012.

Real will be in England this week for the weekend Emirates Cup contest hosted by Arsenal.

Ben Haim joins Man City

AFP, Manchester

Israel international defender Tal Ben Haim has joined Manchester City from English Premier League rivals Chelsea, according to the buying club's website on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old will arrive at City on a four-year deal for an undisclosed fee - the second signing since Mark Hughes took over as manager.

It is the Israel international centre-back's second high-profile switch in just over a year, after he moved to Stamford Bridge on a free transfer from Bolton Wanderers in June 2007.

His move is still subject to a work permit although it is expected he will receive one given his regular appearances for Israel, which included two matches against England during the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

Ben Haim will now link up with Brazilian striker Jo, who joined the Eastlands club earlier this month for an estimated 19 million euros.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Capello backs Milan

AFP, Rome



A title.

England coach Fabio Capello said the acquisition of Ronaldinho has made AC Milan favourites for the Serie A title.

Milan have not been champions of their country since 2004 and last season they finished a dismal fifth - missing out on Champions League qualification - despite winning the World Club Cup.

However, they have bought well over the summer, bringing in Italy international defender Gianluca Zambrotta from Barcelona and box-to-box French midfielder Mathieu Flamini from Arsenal.

But the piece de la resistance was surely the capture of Ronaldinho, whom Capello believes can return to his top form.

"It is lucky for Milan that he is going to the Olympics," Capello said in an interview published in Thursday's Gazzetta dello Sport.

"He will return match-fit and motivated following his year off."

The twice former world player of the year enjoyed three successful seasons at Barcelona, winning two titles and the Champions League, but lost his way last season amid rumours his commitment was waning as his love for the night-life affected his performances and attitude.

But Capello believes he can still get back to his form of old.

"If he has the desire to get back to his best, to rediscover his old self, to become once again one of the best three players in the world, he's gone to the right place."

"Milan has everything to put him back into orbit."

Milan have had a good pre-season, even winning the Tim Trophy earlier this week - a three-way competition between Italy's biggest three clubs, Milan, Inter Milan and Juventus, where they each play 45 minutes against their two rivals on the same evening.

Milan won both their mini-matches on penalties following draws to claim the trophy, considered quite prestigious despite its format which usually sees the teams playing virtually two separate line-ups in their two matches.

With that success, their summer signings and the fact that Milan will not be distracted by the Champions League this coming season, Capello agrees with Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon that Milan are title favourites.

"Great transfer signings and Tim Trophy success; Milan are favourites for the scudetto if, as I believe they will do, they concentrate on the championship," said Capello.

"Europe can wait this time. (Coach Carlo) Ancelotti will use his best team in Serie A."

However, Capello admitted that the pressure is on Milan who, despite winning the Champions League in 2007, have a lot to prove in their own domestic championship.

"Milan can't wait any longer. Waiting makes you grow old. It's important to pick the right signings," said Capello, suggesting that maybe Milan still need some new faces, particularly with striker Marco Borriello facing two months on the sidelines.

Maria pulls out after win

Tennis

AFP, Montreal

Russia's Maria Sharapova withdrew from the WTA Rogers Cup Wednesday just moments after winning a marathon second-round match over Marta Domachowska.

The third-seeded Sharapova needed two hours, 56 minutes to beat the unseeded Domachowska of Poland 7-5, 5-7, 6-2 and then pulled out of the tournament with an injured right shoulder.

"Coming into this tournament I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to compete," Sharapova said.

"In the last few weeks I've been trying to find a solution to the aggravation I did to the shoulder back at Indian Wells in one of my matches. I haven't found the solution yet."

"I just spoke to a couple of doctors and they advised me to try to find the cause of the problem, what's causing my bursitis, because they think there's something else behind it rather than just that."

Sharapova was scheduled to play a third round match against Japan's Ai Sugiyama who was victorious in a walkover. This was Sharapova's first match since her disappointing performance at Wimbledon.

After splitting the first two sets, Sharapova stepped it up and dominated the third set against Domachowska.

She won the first four games before her opponent got on the score board. They split the final four games of the match as Sharapova held serve in the eighth game to advance.

Sharapova was upset in the second round at Wimbledon by countrywoman Alla Kudryavtseva. Sharapova is playing this hardcourt event for the first time since 2004, when she lost her open-

ing match and fell to 1-2 at the Rogers Cup tournament.

Top seed Ana Ivanovic played her first match since a sub-par Wimbledon and was tested by unseeded Czech Petra Kvitova before advancing 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

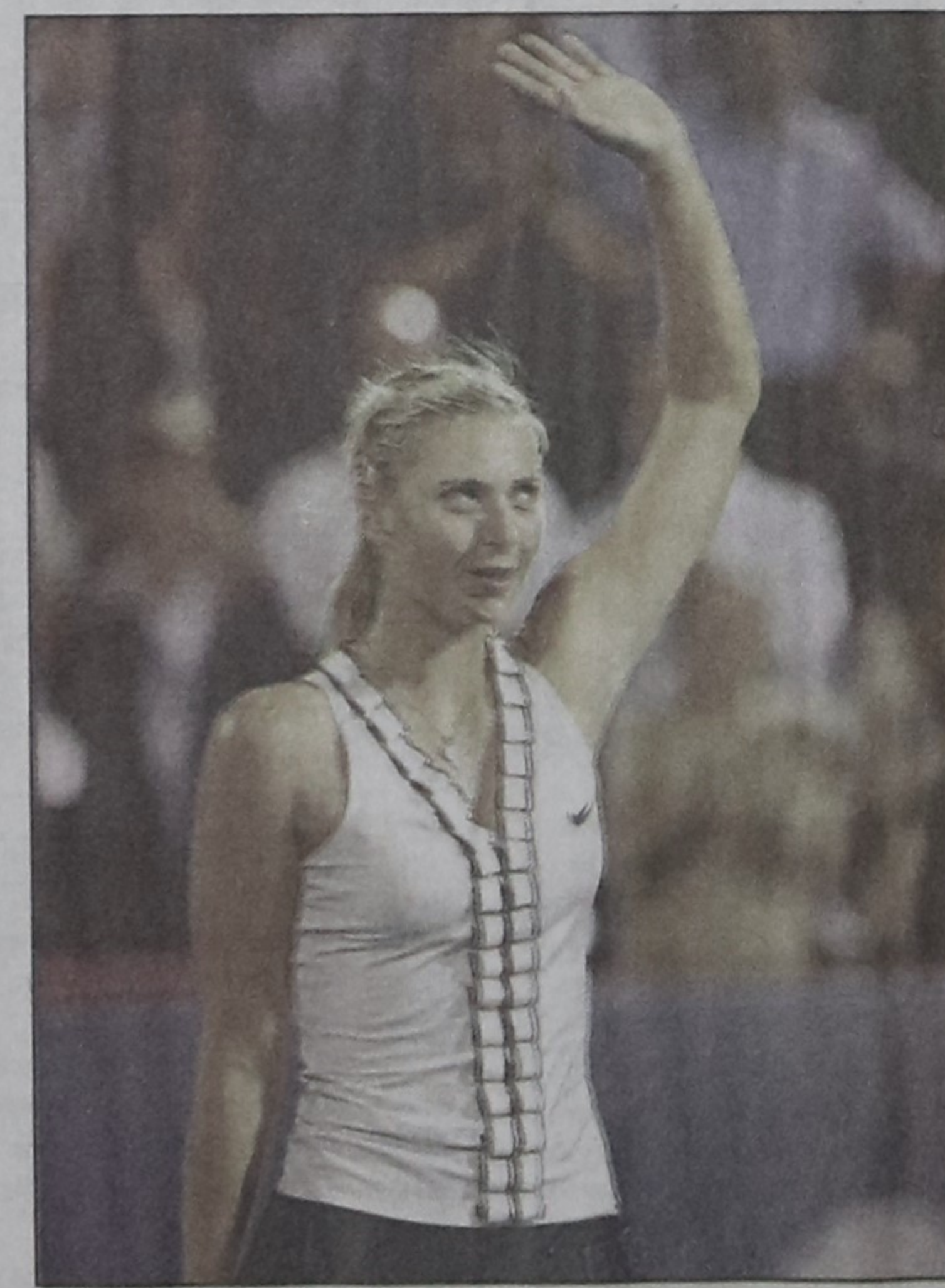
"It wasn't the best match I've played," Ivanovic said. "She played a match before this week and for me it was the first match since

Wimbledon.

"So in the beginning I obviously struggled to find my rhythm a little bit. But I'm happy I won. You have to win even if you don't play your best. That was the case for me today."

Ivanovic connected on just 59 per cent of her first serves and won 11 of 16 break chances.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



Russian star Maria Sharapova waves to the crowd after defeating Marta Domachowska of Poland during the Rogers Cup at Stade Uniprix in Montreal on Wednesday.

Football

AFP, Villarreal

Rafael Benitez believes he has already seen signs that his new strike force of Robbie Keane and Fernando Torres will gel ahead of the start of Liverpool's coming campaign.

Keane made his Liverpool debut following his 20 million pound (40 million dollar) move from Tottenham Hotspur as Benitez's side played out a scoreless friendly draw with La Liga outfit Villarreal here Wednesday.

The Irishman played just 45 minutes and was withdrawn before Torres came on as a second-half substitute.

But with his side's first competitive game -- a Champions League qualifier -- looming in less than two weeks' time on August 12, Liverpool manager Benitez knows the duo will have to bed in before the serious business of the season

gets underway.

Their first taste of joint action could come when Liverpool continue their pre-season preparations with a friendly against Scottish giants Rangers on August 2.

"You could see Robbie was working hard against Villarreal and trying to impress and that was the key," said Benitez. "We'll have enough games left now to play him with Torres."

"In the next game Torres could play maybe 45 minutes so I hope they can play together. They'll definitely play together before the start of the season," the Spaniard added.

Keane, who grew up a Liverpool fan and watched from the Kop as a boy, admitted his first experience of playing for the club was an emotional one.

But he made clear his move from Tottenham was not merely a sentimental one and that his aim was to challenge for the major trophies that eluded him during a

six-year spell at White Hart Lane.

His first showing offered plenty of effort but it will be in two weeks' time that the new player's impact will be truly tested.

"I was delighted to get that game under my belt," said the forward. "I've been dreaming about that moment since I was a kid. I enjoyed every moment of it. It has sunk in I'm a Liverpool player - it had to."

The trip to Spain has been good for me to get to know the lads and I'm just looking forward to this season."

Liverpool remain unbeaten in their pre-season programme and Benitez declared himself satisfied at his team's progress, particularly against a side they could face at some stage during the coming Champions League campaign.

He added: "It was difficult to play against a team that held the ball well, moved the ball well and passed the ball well, especially now when we're not quite there yet physically."



Bayern Munich striker Lukas Podolski (L) scores his first goal during a friendly match against Japan's Urawa Reds at the Saitama Stadium on Thursday. Bayern Munich won 4-2.

Barry staying at Villa

Football

AFP, Birmingham

Aston Villa captain Gareth Barry is to stay with the Midlands club after repeated approaches from Premier League rivals Liverpool.

Barry appeared to have his heart set on a move to Anfield, where he would have joined up with fellow England midfielder Steven Gerrard.

But while Benitez was unable to meet Villa's valuation, he did sign striker Robbie Keane from Tottenham this week for a fee of more than 20 million pounds (40 million dollars), a clear indication of his priorities.

It had seemed as if Barry had done permanent damage to his relationship with O'Neill when, in an interview with the News of the World in June, he said the Villa boss was more interested in commenting on Euro 2008 for the BBC than retaining his club captain.

O'Neill promptly banned Barry from pre-season training and the player was booed by Villa fans when he played in a friendly against Walsall last week.

But he got a better reception when he came on as a substitute in Saturday's Intertoto Cup tie with Odense at Villa Park.

But now manager Martin

Gunners thump Stuttgart

AFP, Stuttgart

German veteran keeper Jens Lehmann conceded three second half goals as former club Arsenal beat his new side Stuttgart in a pre-season friendly late Wednesday.

Lehmann, 38, saw goals from fringe Gunners players Carlos Vela and Jack Wilshere, plus another from Nicklas Bendtner secure the win for the English Premiership side, for whom the keeper starred for five seasons prior to a summer move.

Last season, Lehmann fell out with Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger, who benched him for much of the campaign, preferring Spaniard Manuel Almunia.

But Lehmann still starred for Germany as Die Mannschaft reached the final at Euro 2008 before bowing to Spain.

Before joining Arsenal he played for Schalke 04, with whom he won the UEFA Cup, and then starred in a Bundesliga title win with Dortmund after a brief spell at AC Milan.

Lehmann recently said he hoped to stay in the frame for Germany but coach Joachim Loew is inclined to give younger shot-stoppers Rene Adler and Manuel Neuer a chance.

On Thursday, Lehmann was quoted as saying he had made his mind up and would inform Loew.

"I know what I am going to do but I will speak first with Joachim

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5