

Montgomery handed 5 yrs in prison

AFP, Norfolk

Disgraced former 100-meter world record holder Tim Montgomery was sentenced to five years in prison here Friday after the former athletics star admitted to distributing heroin last year.

The mandatory five-year sentence will be served on top of a four-year prison term the 33-year-old American had received in New York earlier for his role in a checking fraud conspiracy, the Virginian-Pilot reported.

Montgomery, who pleaded guilty in federal court last July to heroin distribution charges, apologized to the sentencing judge and his family, which includes a son Tim born to another disgraced US track star, Marion Jones.

US Drug Enforcement Administration agents said Montgomery sold 111 grams of heroin to an undercover informant for about 8,500 dollars, with four meetings between Montgomery and the informant videotaped by the federal authorities.

Montgomery was sentenced to three years and 10 months last May for his role in the check fraud scheme after pleading guilty to conspiracy and bank fraud in April of last year.

Montgomery set a world 100m record of 9.78 seconds in Paris in 2002 that was stricken from the books in 2005 after he was issued a two-year doping ban for links to the BALCO steroid scandal, a punishment that led to his retirement.

While Montgomery never failed a drug test, his admission of using a once-undetectable steroid in 2001 to BALCO investigators in 2003 was enough to see him stripped of his 2000 Sydney Olympic gold medal from the US 400 relay.

Cuban booters go missing

AFP, Washington

Cuba midfielder Pedro Faife and forward Reynier Alcantara are missing, coach Reinhold Fanz told the Washington Post on Friday, the eve of a World Cup qualifier against political rival United States.

The newspaper's website reported that the players have been missing for two days and cannot be located, according to the German-born coach, whose team was down to 16 players for a practice Friday at RFK Stadium.

"It is always a problem for the Cuba team," Fanz told the Post. "We have security but you can't handcuff them to their rooms."

Both the US and Cuban federations had no comment on the matter, but Cuban sources told AFP that at least two players would not be returning home with the team after the World Cup 2010 South Africa qualifying match on Saturday.

Faife, 24, and Alcantara, 26, were both Cuban reserves in a 1-0 US World Cup qualifying victory at Havana last month, the US team's first match in Cuba since 1947. Faife entered in the 52nd minute while Alcantara did not play.

The Post said 12 Cuban players have defected while on US soil for matches in four separate incidents, most recently when seven under-23 players defected in Tampa, Florida, during the Beijing Olympic qualifying tournament.

With a victory the Americans would clinch one of six berths in next year's North American final regional qualifying tournament, where three berths in the 2010 World Cup will be at stake. A loss could eliminate Cuba from contention.

Bilic fears for Spurs stars

INTERNET, undated

Croatia boss Slaven Bilic fears the crisis at Tottenham Hotspur could undermine his country's bid to qualify for the 2010 World Cup.

Luka Modric is Bilic's key player but the £16.5million signing from Dinamo Zagreb has so far struggled to make an impact at White Hart Lane.

Bilic, whose qualification hopes were hit by last month's defeat to England, also has Vedran Corluka in the Spurs squad, with Juan Carlos Ramos' men bottom of the Premier League and enduring their worst start to a season since 1912.

"I am worried about the results at Tottenham, where some of our key players are playing - defender Vedran Corluka and in particular Luka Modric," Bilic told FIFA.

"Luka is aware the situation is not good. He is aware that more is expected of him and that he has to lead the others."

"One of the things we must do at team headquarters is help set him on the right road."

Modric has been hampered by a knee injury in recent weeks and admits he needs to improve at his new club. "I am not satisfied with my performances at Tottenham. I have to do better and I can do better," said Modric.

"The problem has been a knee problem - it's been causing me pain."

Hamilton grabs pole

AFP, Fuji Speedway

A delighted Lewis Hamilton grabbed his sixth pole position of the season Saturday to boost his hopes of winning the Japanese Grand Prix and taking the world title.

The McLaren driver, who leads Felipe Massa of Ferrari by seven points with three races remaining, took pole with a dazzling last-gasp lap in a tense qualifying session while the Brazilian fell away and ended fifth.

"It was just perfect for me," said Hamilton.

"I felt we did a good qualifying session with no major problems and in Q3 I managed to get all my sectors together and bring it home."

"I have to say that the team have done a terrific job. We have had such a consistent, fast and reliable car for the last two years and that is down to them," added the Briton.

Massa, who lost grip and performance in the third qualifying session after two strong earlier performances, was disappointed, but not downhearted.

"The car was great to start with but in Q3 I just did not have the grip," he said.

"It may have been down to the fuel load, but we shall have to see. It won't be easy in the race, but we will do our best."

Cisse eyes int'l return

Football

INTERNET, undated

France striker Djibril Cisse is confident that he can revive his international career at Sunderland and return to Raymond Domenech's squad. The 27-year-old is currently on a season-long loan deal at the Stadium of Light from Marseille with a view to completing a permanent move next summer.

Cisse has made an impressive start on his return to the Premier League, where injuries blighted a two-year stay at Liverpool earlier in his career, with two goals in seven appearances to date as he finds his feet once again.

But he insists there is lot more to come and that at his best, he can force his way back into the France squad.

Cisse won the last of his 37 senior caps as a substitute in a 1-0 friendly victory over England in March, and although he was included in the provisional squad for Saturday's World Cup qualifier in Romania, he did not make the cut.

He said: "I like playing for France so at the moment, I am a bit disappointed that I am not in."

"But I am going to try to work hard and have a good season with Sunderland, and maybe I will come back."

"I am always on the pre-list, but finally, I am not (in the squad)."

"But it's going to come, it is going to come. It is just a case of being patient and it will come."

Patience is something Cisse has had to demonstrate in abundance in recent years after twice suffering leg fractures during his time at Liverpool.

I flipped my lid: Gallas

Football

INTERNET, undated

William Gallas admits he has had to reassert his authority as Arsenal captain after conceding he "flipped his lid" against Birmingham City last season.

French defender Gallas was given the armband by Arsene Wenger ahead of the 2007/08 campaign, but blotted his copybook in a 2-2 draw at St Andrews in February.

Birmingham were awarded a last-minute penalty and, in protest at the decision, Gallas retreated to the halfway line and sat down sulking.

The result was seen as a pivotal moment in Arsenal's faltering title bid and Gallas acknowledged he made a mistake with his actions.

He believes some of the criticism aimed in his direction was unfair, but is confident he still has the backing of his teammates to be Gunners skipper.

Gallas told L'Equipe Magazine: "The controversy about my captaincy? People had to find a scapegoat as we didn't win any trophies last season."

"So, they talked and talked again about the Birmingham match. Indeed I made a mistake. I must admit I flipped my lid. We should have won that game easily."

"Before Arsenal, I spent six years at Chelsea. That team was capable of getting ugly wins. If we had an opportunity to win a cup, we would never miss it."

There I became imbued with

Hamilton, the 23-year-old who has taken the sport by storm in the last two seasons, now has a perfect opportunity on Sunday to build on his seven points lead in his quest to become Formula One's youngest champion.

He will share the front row of the grid with Finland's defending champion Kimi Raikkonen of Ferrari while his McLaren teammate Heikki Kovalainen, another Finn, is behind them in third.

"It was a great final effort by both drivers and important to have them both ahead of Massa," said McLaren team chief Ron Dennis.

Asked if he would allow Hamilton "off the leash" to race for victory without taking a cautious strategic approach for the championship, Dennis grinned and said: "We don't want to pass over any victories that might come our way, but who knows?"

Spain's two-time world champion Fernando Alonso, who won in Singapore two weeks ago, was fourth for Renault ahead of Massa.

Poland's Robert Kubica was sixth for BMW Sauber ahead of Italian Jarno Trulli in a Toyota, his teammate Timo Glock of Germany, fellow German Sebastian Vettel and his Toro Rosso teammate Sebastien Bourdais of France.

The final part of the session, Q3, saw the Ferraris take command with Raikkonen producing a fast lap in 1:18.890 after appearing to be

languishing among the chasing pack.

Massa was second behind him and Hamilton a fraction adrift in third in a closely-fought battle with Kovalainen for fourth before Hamilton pitted in readiness for his bid for pole.

Raikkonen clocked an improved 1:18.644 but Hamilton blitzed through in 1:18.404 to take the prime starting spot.

The opening part of qualifying was run on a drying circuit and the times improved steadily as Hamilton set the pace.

In the end, however, it was the talented Glock who raised a smile for hosts Toyota with the fastest lap.

The session saw the elimination of the bottom five runners -- German Nick Heidfeld in his BMW Sauber, the two Hondas of Briton Jenson Button and Brazilian Rubens Barrichello and both Force India men, Italian Giancarlo Fisichella and German Adrian Sutil.

In Q2, it was much the same story with Hamilton out quickly and then this time outpaced by a determined Massa while the drop zone was the scene of a final scramble for top 10 survival.

In the end, the dropouts were German Nico Rosberg, his teammate Kazuki Nakajima of Japan, Australian Mark Webber and his Red Bull teammate David Coulthard of Britain, and Brazilian Nelson Piquet of Renault.



PHOTO: AFP

Lewis Hamilton of Britain drives his McLaren-Mercedes during the qualifying session of the Japanese Grand Prix at Fuji Speedway on Saturday. Hamilton captured the pole position for today's race.

Hleb wants Cesc at Nou Camp

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona midfielder Alexander Hleb admits he has been trying to persuade former Arsenal teammate Cesc Fabregas to join him at the Nou Camp.

Spain international Fabregas vowed earlier this week that he would one day like to return to Barca, the club he left to join Arsenal in 2003, and for Hleb that day can not come soon enough.

Hleb moved to Barca this summer after three seasons at the Gunners, and the Belarus ace would be delighted if the highly-coveted Fabregas followed suit.

"We get on very well on and off the pitch. For me he is like a brother. We call each other a lot to talk about things," Hleb said in El Mundo Deportivo.

"He tells me he misses me at Arsenal and, without wanting to detract from anyone, I would love it if he came to Barca to be a part of all this."

Scotland dream of Euro 2016 joint bid

AFP, Glasgow

Scotland could be a candidate to stage the 2016 European Championships, but in association with another country, according to UEFA general secretary David Taylor, who is himself a Scot.

Taylor, who is a former Scottish Football Association chief executive, says a decision last month to increase the number of finalists from 16 to 24 for the event would aid Scotland's chances of qualifying.

But he added an enlarged event would be harder to stage for a small country.

"Scotland clearly couldn't do it by themselves, but there's nothing to rule out a joint bid," Taylor told Saturday's Daily Record.

In Taylor's view, only England, France, Spain, Italy and Germany have sufficient venues to stage the competition in their own right.

"There would be less candidates to potentially act as host because we'd need more stadiums, possibly 10 rather than eight, so it is a step up in terms of organisation," Taylor explained.

Grenoble after Younes

AFP, Doha

French side Grenoble have bid for Iraqi international striker Younes Mahmoud, his Qatari side Al-Gharafa reported on Saturday.

Al-Gharafa, Qatari champions, said on their website they had "received an offer from Grenoble for the services of Iraqi international Younes Mahmoud in the winter transfer window."

There was no mention of a putative transfer fee or any indication of a response from Grenoble.

Al-Gharafa indicated the root of the interest in Mahmoud was the fact that Grenoble coach, Bosnian Farouk Hadzibegovic, knows him from his time in charge of Qatari side Al-Wakrah prior to heading for France last year.

Mahmoud, 25, was a revelation at the Asian Cup last year, voted player of the tournament as Iraq won the event.

Afterwards he indicated he would like to try his hand in the French league.

Grenoble, promoted last season, are currently eighth in the top flight.

39th game back on

THE GUARDIAN



The president of the Asian Football Confederation, one of the most vocal opponents of the Premier League's proposed "Game 39" international round of matches, has softened his attitude so significantly that he would "welcome" Premier League games in Asia.

Mohamed bin Hammam, speaking in London yesterday, said his initial rejection of the idea last February had been prompted by "shock" after having had no prior discussion with the Premier League. Since then he has met the league's chief executive Richard Scudamore several times and has been persuaded that if an international round does go ahead, the Premier League and its clubs will operate as "partners" and help develop football across the continent.

The "Game 39 proposal" - for an extra league match to be played by each club at venues around the world - was widely derided across the globe when it was leaked after a presentation by Scudamore to the Premier League clubs. When Bin Hammam heard the news he denounced the Premier League as "putting money before responsibility and dignity" and said he would "vote strongly against" it.

"We had no contact or dialogue

with them," he said.

Bin Hammam, president of the AFC since 2002 and an increasingly influential figure, was formally introduced to Scudamore at the International Football Arena conference in Beijing during May.

He has since made it clear that the AFC would want the Premier League and its clubs to help develop coaching, technical expertise, refereeing and other

Football

INTERNET, undated

Steve Bruce is confident that Wigan can seal a permanent deal for striker Amr Zaki despite his impressive start in the Premier League attracting the attention of other clubs.

"There is an agreement in principle with his club," Bruce told the Daily Star. "There is a lot of the season to go, so there is no rush."

"Zaki is ours at the moment, so let's enjoy it while we can. We will try to set up a deal when the time is right."

"We're in pole position to sign the lad because he's here at the moment."

Zaki has scored five league goals since joining Wigan and also netted

at all with the Premier League before they launched the proposal," Bin Hammam said yesterday. "The idea that a league would play outside its territory was shocking news. No positive aspects had been put for our consideration."

Bin Hammam added that the Premier League's popularity in his confederation, which includes the Middle East, Far East and China, the league's most lucrative overseas television markets, could hamper football's growth there.

"Most of the foreign revenue to the Premier League is coming from Asia," he said. "People love to see the Premier League clubs on television. That is not worrying in itself, but I am nervous that television companies are willing to pay huge amounts to the Premier League but not to invest in local leagues. We and the Premier League should be partners. If they want to play matches in Asia they are welcome, and we should know what the benefits will be to all our stakeholders."

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infrastructure, and said he is now satisfied that would happen. "I see they are responsible people and I do not see it as all being about money and greed. When we talked, I saw that Richard Scudamore does really care about football and fans and the national associations, and that touched us a lot."

Scudamore's charm offensive continued this week, where he and Bin Hammam had dinner and where the AFC president was guest of honour last night in London at the launch of the Premier League's International Good Causes programme.

Bin Hammam said revenues from Asia-staged matches would have to be shared "automatically" with host associations. He would also expect the Premier League clubs to "share their experiences, and the secret of their success."

The international round proposals are due to go before the Premier League clubs again in February, although Scudamore said it is "unlikely" they will be in the form of Game 39. However he is adamant it will be a "meaningful" fixture and not a friendly. The proposal is still likely to face fierce opposition from fans' groups as well as Uefa and Fifa, which both see it as an aggressive and financially driven attempt to expand English football's reach.

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in their Carling Cup win over Notts County in August.

But Bruce is hopeful that a deal can be done to keep the Egyptian at Wigan and see him continue to make an impact in the Premier League.

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"It's a double-edged sword - the better he does here, the more expensive he will be."

Bruce also revealed that he did not expect Zaki to adapt to Premier League life so quickly, but is in no doubt that he will continue to improve.

"I've got to say Zaki has started better than we thought he would," added Bruce.

"We brought him here because we thought he could make an impact and we're delighted because he's certainly done that."

"There's a long way to go yet, a long winter ahead. Hopefully he'll continue how he has been doing."

Bayern not feeling crunch

Football

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich and Real Madrid officials are confident their clubs will hold firm against the global economic crisis. Bayern's Uli Hoeness and Jose Angel Sanchez of Real Madrid were quoted in newspapers on Friday as football clubs throughout the world are worried about the global financial crisis.

Bayern General Manager Uli Hoeness was quoted in Friday's edition of the Bild newspaper as saying that German football is well-off, even though income may drop.

"I believe that German football has less to worry about than other countries," said Hoeness.

"The big question, however, is if we are moving into a recession where the advertising spend drops and companies are less inclined to pay money for sponsorship."

The German 1974 World Cup winner said that he was con-

cerned for clubs in some other countries.

"Here and there clubs could go under, but not the big ones."

"Chelsea, for instance, has its debts with Abramovich, but they are not in danger because the club belongs to him. There is no bank involved that can close the club, as long as Abramovich does not demand his money back."

"One needs to see if the ice on which everything was built will last," he said.

Hoeness said that it was not certain that foreign investors in English football would continue investing such huge sums after losing a lot of money on the stock exchange.

"It would be good for competition if clubs in future actually had to earn the money they spent," said Hoeness.

He said that he was not concerned about his own club Bayern Munich, as they were financially "in a very strong position."

The crisis has also led to Borussia Dortmund shares plummeting on the Frankfurt stock

exchange, at one stage on Friday being traded as low as 91.3 cents.

Although they managed to pick up slightly in the course of the day to 94 cents, they were still valued at only a fraction of the 11 euros (14.82 dollars) they were sold for when the club first listed eight years ago.

In Madrid meanwhile, general director Sanchez said that the global economic and financial crisis will not affect the club.

"Real Madrid are in a very good economic and financial situation," general director Jose Angel Sanchez told Real Madrid Television on Friday.

"We are on top of the world club income list, and our income is constantly increasing," he added.

"Therefore, I can say that Real Madrid are in a very solid financial position. We are very well protected from the crisis, in the medium term."

Real Madrid's main sponsor, the online betting company bwin, is not directly affected by the global economic crisis.