



Jamaican sprint king Usain Bolt (L) gets on marks with a pupil in Thessaloniki on Friday. Bolt will participate in the World Athletics Final in Greece and this will be his last appearance of a memorable year.

Cahill ready to shine

AFP, London



Australia midfielder Tim Cahill believes Everton will reap the rewards of his rare international break when his side travel to Fulham in the Premier League on Sunday.

Cahill was allowed to remain in England rather than undertake the gruelling trip for a Socceroos friendly against South Korea in Seoul last weekend.

In Cahill's absence, Australia were beaten 3-1 but the 29-year-old expects to be much fresher for Everton this weekend as a result of his unexpected rest.

"The international break has been good. I've been lucky enough to stay back and just rest and prepare for the Fulham game," Cahill told the Liverpool Echo.

"It was only a friendly against Korea, but it's not often that I get this chance.

"It's a massive game against Fulham. It's great to have a win under our belts and to move forward."

After starting their Premier League campaign with two successive defeats, David Moyes's side climbed away from the foot of the table with a 2-1 victory over Wigan in their last match.

Cahill knows it is essential to maintain the

momentum from that result if the Toffees are to win at Fulham for the second successive season.

A Leon Osman double on the final day of last season gave Everton their first success at Craven Cottage for almost 43 years and former Millwall star Cahill said: "We're starting to play with a bit of fluidity and the team is looking good."

"We know it's going to be a difficult game but I think the best thing for us is that we're on a bit of a high and we look to keep this train on the tracks."

"Fulham's ground is small and it's a bit more intimate. But I like playing there; I've played there for many a year, starting with Millwall."

"It's got good history, and it seems to be working for them. So we're going there knowing what they're all about and any result for us will be brilliant."

Unlike Cahill, Fulham's Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer did travel to South Korea and is now an injury doubt as a result.

Schwarzer suffered a stiff neck during the trip and Pascal Zuberbuhler is on standby to deputise on Sunday.

England international Andrew Johnson, a former Everton striker, returns from a collarbone injury, but midfielder Danny Murphy faces a late fitness test.

Ossie backs Maradona

Football

SOCCERNET

Ossie Ardiles has told ESPN Soccernet that the next two games will be "make or break" for Diego Maradona, and that the consequences would be much more far reaching than merely being sacked as Argentina manager.

Ardiles, a personal and long-standing friend of the besieged Argentinean coach, knows that Maradona will suffer on a personal and emotional level to intolerable degrees.

Ardiles told ESPN Soccernet: "This is make or break for him, and I know how much it will hurt him if Argentina fail to qualify for the World Cup; it will hurt him very, very much, absolutely."

Maradona has suffered two successive defeats against Brazil and Paraguay to put his country's qualification at risk, and his body language shows a man falling into a deep depression, fighting with his nation's media, and a public who want to believe in their once golden boy of the world game.

When asked Ardiles, who nurtured the kid Maradona into the national team in 1978, if Argentina will qualify and he took a deep intake of breath as he commented: "Hmmm, we can only wait and see."

"I have to be perfectly honest and say that Argentina have some fabulous individuals and for that reason I would say they can 'can' qualify. But they are not playing as a team, and there is no getting away from the fact, that this is the responsibility of the manager."

"But we have two games to go, and two games for Diego to get them playing as a team. I desperately want him to succeed, because I know if he gets Argentina to the World Cup finals he might do something special, but he needs to get there first."

"Of course the signs are not very good for qualification, but I am going to say 'yes' they can qualify because of the immense amount of talent Diego has at his disposal."

Ardiles brought Maradona to White Hart Lane to pay in his testimonial, the one day Diego played for an English club and wore the white shirt of Spurs.

On that day, Maradona was late for the big game, and Ardiles personally drove him from his London hotel base to North London, with me sitting in the back seat, and Ossie translating as Maradona first talked openly about his infamous Hand of God goal.

Ardiles has remained firm friends with the legend of his country's football, but, as yet, has not been in touch with the troubled Argentina manager.

'Only Jesus or Virgin Mary can replace Diego'

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona's faltering reign as Argentina coach would only be ended by the arrival of either Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary, team manager Carlos Bilardo said Friday in a bizarre exchange with reporters.

"If Jesus Christ returned or the Virgin Mary, then I'd accept it. Otherwise, no," said Bilardo.

Maradona skipped Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title when Bilardo was coach.

But the 48-year-old has come under intense pressure with the team's 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign threatening to fall apart.

Since he took over, Maradona has overseen four defeats in six qualifiers, two of which came in the last week against Brazil and Paraguay.

Argentina are fifth in South American qualifying with only the top four guaranteed spots in the final; the fifth-placed team would have to face a play-off.

Maradona has two matches left - against Peru and Uruguay next month - to repair the damage.

"Diego deserves to be the coach," added Bilardo. "But at the moment, he needs to show

that he is the man."

Argentina, who last failed to qualify for the World Cup in 1970, were in third place in qualifying when Maradona replaced previous coach Alfio Basile in October 2008.



DIEGO MARADONA

Dirk influenced John

Football

INTERNET, undated

Everton new boy John Heitinga asked Liverpool's Dirk Kuyt for advice over whether he should move to Goodison Park from Atletico Madrid.

Heitinga sought Holland team-mate Kuyt's opinion on the £6.2million move and was told Everton was a "big club" and that he should not think twice about moving to Merseyside.

Heitinga said: "I did ask Dirk about Everton, and he said it was one of the big clubs in England. We will be playing against each other soon when the derby comes around, so I just want to make sure we win."

He is expected to make his Everton debut on Sunday at Fulham, and intends to thank Kuyt for his help by beating him in the Merseyside derby, the first of which this season is on

November 29.

He added: "In my eyes the Premier League is better than in Spain, the whole atmosphere is different. Goodison is an old stadium, but you can smell the football atmosphere there."

"I prefer to play in central defence or central midfield. But I can play on the right side."

"I have done both. One trainer (at Atletico Madrid) played me in the centre and then he was kicked out and the new man played me on the right. I can cope with that."

Everton will also have £10million Russia international Diniyar Bilyaletdinov on show at Craven Cottage, and the former Lokomotiv Moscow winger said: "This is the best moment of my life, to join a club like this. I have played at a high level in Russia but this will be difficult."

"The tempo of the game in England is so much higher, and it will maybe take a bit of time for me to get used to it."

"But like Johnny I came here to win trophies, and that is my aim now at Everton where I have been very impressed with the other players."

IN BRIEF

Hanover facing injury crisis

AFP, Berlin

Hanover are facing an injury crisis with nine injured or ill players missing from the squad ahead of Sunday's Bundesliga clash with Werder Bremen.

Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke is the biggest name out as he struggles to recover from the mystery virus which kept him out of Wednesday's World Cup qualifier victory over Azerbaijan.

Hanover's ex-Germany striker Mike Hanke will also be missing in Bremen for the north Germany derby as he needs an operation early next week to remove his tonsils and is expected to sit out the next three weeks with a knee injury.

Coach Andreas Bergmann must also do without forward Mikael Forssell as the Finland international has a left foot injury which has been plaguing him for the last four weeks, while Brazil defender Vinicius needs a back operation.

Viduka to return home

AFP, Brisbane

Former Middlesbrough and Newcastle striker Mark Viduka is returning home to live in Australia, his agent told an Australian website on Saturday.

Uncertainty had surrounded the former Socceroo's future since Newcastle were relegated from the English Premier League last season.

The 33-year-old had been linked with a possible move to English clubs Portsmouth, Fulham and West Ham but his agent, Steve Kutner, ruled out another contract in Europe.

"I can confirm that Mark will not be seeking another contract in England or Europe and is coming home to Australia to live," Kutner told the worldgame.com.au.

"He's about to enter a new phase in his life and whether that includes playing again in Australia I am not sure."

Senna out for three weeks

AFP, Madrid

Villarreal midfielder Marcos Senna will be out of action for up to three weeks after suffering a recurrence of a muscle injury during Spain's 3-0 World Cup win over Estonia on Wednesday, the club said Friday.

The Brazilian-born Spanish international left the pitch during Villarreal's 1-1 draw with Osasuna in their opening match of the season on August 30 because of the injury in his left leg.

Bolt's season farewell

Athletics

AFP, Salonika

Jamaican sprint phenomenon Usain Bolt will line up in the 200m during the World Athletics Final on Saturday and Sunday for what will be his last appearance of a memorable 2009.

The triple world and Olympic champion and world record holder in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay had been scheduled to compete in Shanghai on September 20 and in Daegu, South Korea, five days later.

But he confirmed on Friday that would travel neither to China nor South Korea due to "fatigue".

"I have been suffering from fatigue from as early as the Zurich meet and after careful discussions with my coach and management team, even with medical advice, we felt it necessary to close the season," Bolt said in a statement.

In Greece Bolt will be competing in his ninth 200m competition of the year. His season also featured fifteen 100m, a 150m exhibition race on the streets of Manchester, a number of 4x100m relays, including the World Championship final, and even the 400m in individual and relay form at the very start of the season.

Fatigued or not, Bolt, who has improved his world records in both the 100m (9.58sec) and 200m (19.19), has produced stellar perfor-

mances on cue whenever needed, even when the conditions were against him.

The Greek public can therefore expect another high-octane performance from the star of last year's Beijing Olympics, whose last performance in the 200m saw him register a time of 19.57 - the fourth quickest in history - despite mild temperatures in Brussels last week.

"Lightning Bolt" will not be the only familiar face on show in Salonika, however, with no less than 28 recently crowned world champions also making the trip.

Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele, winner of the 5,000m and 10,000m, America's Sanya Richards (400m) and Russian pole-vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva, who shared one million dollars (700,000 euros) by remaining unbeaten in the Golden League series, will all be looking to swell their bank accounts even further.

World athletics governing body the IAAF has put up three million dollars (nearly two million euros) of prize money for the 36 weekend events, with 30,000 dollars going to the winners of each competition and 2,000 dollars to the finalists.

Croatia's Blanka Vlasic will once again attempt to beat Bulgarian Stefka Kostadinova's 1987 world record of 2.09m in the women's high jump, having failed to do so by a centimetre in Zagreb at the end of August.

Isinbayeva is another budding record-breaker, as she seeks to add to the 5.06m mark she set in Zurich on August 28.

Lewis on pole in Monza

AFP, Monza



Defending world champion Lewis Hamilton grabbed the 15th pole position of his career here Saturday when he produced a stunning last-gasp lap to take the prime starting spot for Sunday's Italian Grand Prix.

Hamilton, in his McLaren Mercedes, clocked a best lap of one minute and 24.066 seconds to outpace his nearest rival and close friend Adrian Sutil by just two-tenths of a second, so denying widespread celebrations in Delhi and Mumbai.

Sutil was second for the ever-improving Force India team, running on the same Mercedes engines as the McLarens, with two Finns, Kimi Raikkonen in a Ferrari, and Heikki Kovalainen in the second McLaren, taking third and fourth to fill the second row.

Brazilian veteran Rubens Barrichello was fifth for Brawn GP ahead of the current championship leader, his team-mate Jenson Button, the pair failing to break into the top four for this race.

Italian Vitantonio Liuzzi was seventh on his comeback debut with Force India and two-times champion Fernando Alonso eighth for Renault with the two Red Bulls of German Sebastian Vettel and Australian Mark Webber qualifying ninth and 10th.

On the first runs in the shootout, Hamilton set the pace with 1:24.605, a lap that left him in front of Raikkonen's Ferrari and the stunning Sutil's Force India while Button's first laps left him down in 10th.

With decent fuel loads, the cars were not showing their outright pace, as in Q2, but it was still a surprise when Sutil went top in the final seconds only to be overhauled shortly before the chequered flag fell by Hamilton.

On another glorious afternoon of blue skies, warm sunshine and perfect dry conditions, the opening mini-session delivered just what the local fans had come to see - a Ferrari on top of the time-sheets, with the flying Finn Raikkonen setting the pace ahead of Hamilton.

Equally satisfying for the tifosi was the sight of the luckless-so-far Giancarlo Fisichella cruising through to Q2 in 11th place, following his crash during morning practice.

He was clearly showing no nerves and plenty of determination on his dream debut with Ferrari.

Down at the bottom of the pile, however, there were exits for German Timo Glock of Toyota, Japanese kazuki Nakajima and his Williams team-mate German Nico Rosberg, Swiss Sebastian Buemi and his Toro Rosso team-mate Spaniard Jaime Alguersuari, who had to take a five place penalty after requiring a new gearbox following practice.

The track temperature was by mid-session hovering at 40 degrees Celsius and the air temperature was a balmy 27 degrees, conditions that ensured no problems for the leading teams including Brawn's sensitive machinery.

Button, driving with greater confidence and much more of his once-customary smoothness, appeared to be back to his best again after his run of five races without a podium.

Team chief Ross Brawn was certainly showing no signs of strain as his outfit began the countdown towards the championship finale. Acknowledging that the Italian race was important, he said: "Well, the car looks ok, doesn't it?"

"It's a pretty challenging track for the drivers. It's a nice place to be here at Monza and the fans are always very warm. This sunny weather should help us."

"But we have to put the whole sequence together. One stops looks to be a logical choice tomorrow but I think many might make two. There will be two races going on which will come together towards the end."

The second part, Q2, saw Button emerge on top with a best time of 1:22.955 ahead of Hamilton and Barrichello with Sutil fourth for Force India, again making the best of their Mercedes-Benz engines.

But it saw a sad early exit for Fisichella, who was only 14th fastest for Ferrari and failed to make the top-ten shootout.

He was sent packing along with compatriot Jarno Trulli of Toyota, Frenchman Romain Grosjean of Renault, Pole Robert Kubica and his BMW Sauber team-mate German Nick Heidfeld, who suffered an engine failure.

Vettel crept through in 10th place, four behind Red Bull team-mate Webber, who was sixth just behind the astonishing Liuzzi, the Italian ensuring that Force India had two cars in the top ten for the first time.

Blues denied loan recalls

INTERNET, undated

FIFA have told Chelsea they cannot recall any players on season-long loans under the terms of their transfer ban.

It is another body blow for the English club who were banned from signing any new players during the next two transfer windows when FIFA found them guilty of inducing teenager Gael Kakuta to breach his contract with Lens two years ago.

Although the Blues intend to appeal against the punishment, coach Carlo Ancelotti was hoping to minimise the damage by recalling England Under-21 defender Michael Mancienne from Wolves, forward Scott Sinclair from Wigan and Argentinian striker Franco di Santo from Blackburn.

Di Santo can return, as his agreement was only for half the season. But Sinclair's was for the full season and in Mancienne's case, FIFA will have to rule on whether an "emergency release clause" can be applied.

"If it's a season-long loan, it cannot be terminated in order to bring players back," said a FIFA spokesman.

The club expect to hear from the sport's world governing body in the next 10 days with their full reasoning behind the transfer ban.

Bodnar given suspended sentence

AFP, Budapest

Hungary international Laszlo Bodnar was given a one-year suspended prison sentence after causing the death of a cyclist while driving at excessive speed in late August, Hungary's Football League MLSZ announced Friday.

The local court in Nyiregyhaza found Bodnar guilty of involuntarily causing the fatal road accident, the MLSZ said in a statement.

Along with his suspended sentence, Bodnar will have to pay a fine of 250,000 forint (950 euros), it added.

Bodnar, 30, a defender with Hungarian first division side Debrecen, was driving to his parents' home in the north-east of the country in late August when he struck the 34-year-old cyclist, who later died from his injuries.

Tests showed no alcohol in the player's bloodstream but the autopsy concluded the victim had been riding his bicycle drunk, the MLSZ said.

Bodnar skipped Hungary's World Cup qualifier against Sweden on September 5 but played against Portugal four days later.

As Debrecen's top player, he is due to face Lyon, Liverpool and Fiorentina with his side in their Champions League group matches.