

Hodgson eyes fairytale

AFP, Hamburg

Fulham manager Roy Hodgson is hoping that his side's fairytale journey to the Europa League final ends with them lifting their first ever major trophy here to on Wednesday when they face Spanish outfit Atletico Madrid.

However, for Fulham - who have defied the odds this campaign to see off Juventus and Hamburg - to triumph they will need veteran Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer to be back to his reliable self after a dreadful blunder in Sunday's 4-0 defeat by Arsenal.

The Fulham squad flies in on Tuesday morning and Hodgson is hoping the flight leaves without a hitch having already had problems getting to Hamburg for last month's semi-final.

The volcano eruption in Iceland which disrupted European flights last month meant Fulham had a 1,000 mile round-trip to get to Hamburg.

More disruption to flights caused by the volcano over the weekend now seems to have passed, but Atletico flew to Hamburg earlier than planned on Monday afternoon just to be sure.

Schwarzer has been in stellar form this season and one of the stars on the road to the final.

However an error on Sunday saw Arsenal's Andrey Arshavin nick the ball, round the Australian and slot in from a tight angle for the opening goal.

But Hodgson - who guided Inter Milan to the 1997 UEFA Cup final where they lost on penalties over two legs - said he would rather the blunder came in Sunday's Premier League defeat than against Atletico on Wednesday.

"Schwarzer made a rare mistake, better he did it there than on Wednesday," said 62-year-old Hodgson, who rested midfielders Zoltan Gera, captain Danny Murphy and Simon Davies at the Emirates Stadium for Wednesday's final.

"He has hardly put a glove wrong all season, so better he did it then and I have told him

that.

"I am happy to finish 12th (in the Premier League), we have had the final in mind and we are probably a few points down from where we would have been if we weren't involved.

"But getting to the Europa League final really overshadows anything we would have done in the league," added Hodgson, who has been linked with a move to a bigger club following his superb steward-

and Bjorn Helge Riise were both substituted against Arsenal on Sunday and need to shake off injuries.

Atletico's veteran Uruguayan striker Diego Forlan is excited about the prospect of playing in a European final as he bids to help the Madrid club claim some silverware after a frustrating season.

The former Manchester United striker fired home a Jose Antonio Reyes cross to

Murphy is very experienced, and who has won titles and up front, they can create danger and score goals."

But despite knocking out Liverpool in the last four, Forlan says both sides will have their chance to win the Europa League in the competition's inaugural season.

"I think it is 50-50," he said. "Of course, we'll go there believing in ourselves and in the way we are playing.

"We know that we have



ship of Fulham on a relatively low budget.

However, he does have worries over the fitness of several key players.

Striker Bobby Zamora faces a race against time to overcome an Achilles problem, while defender John Pantsil

confirm Liverpool's exit at Anfield in the semi-final and is looking forward to the final.

"Fulham are a team that work very well and have good players," said Forlan.

"Defensively, they are very solid.

"Their captain Danny

improved a lot, are more solid and working well as a team.

"It is a final, so it's the details that will decide whether we win or lose.

"These are unique games, and different circumstances can occur, so you never know."

IN BRIEF

Maradona drug free for 6 years

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Diego Maradona, whose off-field problems earned him as many column inches as his on-field brilliance, says he has not touched drugs for six years.

After serving drug bans as well as being dogged by the Italian taxman Maradona has reinvented himself as a coach and told Argentine television he is now clean.

"Ten days ago I completed six years without taking drugs and today I value everything I have," Maradona said in an interview on Sunday night.

"If I regret anything it is not having been at the side of Claudia (Villafane, his former wife) to see my daughters grow up," said the 49-year-old who just led Argentina into the World Cup finals by the skin of their teeth following an infuriatingly inconsistent campaign.

Maradona's love of the high life saw him seriously ill by 2004, when he suffered a heart attack and then a bout of alcohol-induced hepatitis in 2007 before gradually winning his battles with addiction.

Ribery ruling on May 18

AFP, Geneva

International sport's top court said on Monday that it aimed to rule by May 18 on an appeal filed by Bayern Munich and its French playmaker Franck Ribery against UEFA's three-match ban on the French player.

The Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) said in a statement that Bayern had asked for the ban to be cut to one match.

That would allow Ribery to take part in the Champions League final against Inter Milan on May 22 if the CAS panel of arbitrators rules in his favour.

European football's governing body rejected a first appeal by Ribery against the three match ban last week, but Bayern decided to exercise its right to take the case to the CAS.

Wolves hire McClaren

AFP, The Hague



Former England manager Steve McClaren has left FC Twente to take over at

German Bundesliga outfit Wolfsburg, the newly-crowned

Dutch champions announced on Tuesday.

The 49-year-old Englishman has agreed to a two year contract for an annual salary of three million euros.

"I have had two fantastic years at FC Twente, but made a promise to my wife and children (who remain in England) that I would not spend more than two years living away from them," he said.

"Now we will all live together in Germany."

McClaren took over as coach at the unfashionable side from the university town of Enschede in the north of the country in 2008 after being booted out of the England job for failing to reach the Euro 2008 finals.

He was an immediate success and this season handed FC Twente their first Dutch league title in the club's history although they



STEVE MCCLAREN

did take the honour as SC Enschede in 1926 after which they were restructured in a 1965 merger.

Mercilessly panned for his abject failure to get past Croatia in England's qualifying group for Euro 2008, McClaren decided to take advice from the late Sir Bobby Robson to follow his own example and try his hand in the Dutch league.

He subsequently transformed the club, nicknamed 'The Tukkers' (The Reds), from also-rans to league champions in the space of two years.

At the same time the club's management increased their stadium's capacity from 13,000 to 24,000 in 2009 with plans already afoot to further extend to 40,000 in the months to come.

McClaren is the first English manager since Robson at Porto

in 1996 to win a major European league title.

Twente, who will now play in next season's Champions League group stages, can boast an array of players being widely-courted by the continent's giants.

For his part McClaren gets the chance to take his rise out of the ashes onto a higher stage with Wolfsburg, who won the Bundesliga title in the 2008/2009 season but lost out to a resurgent Bayern Munich this year.

Hammers sack Zola

AFP, London



West Ham have sacked manager Gianfranco Zola, the Premier League club confirmed on Tuesday.

Zola was widely expected to leave Upton Park following a turbulent campaign which strongly criticise the Italian and his players following a series of disappointing results.

Former Chelsea star Zola just managed to keep his side in the top-flight, but they finished only one place above the relegation zone and he has paid the price for his faltering relationship with the club's owners.

"West Ham United confirm that they have terminated the contract of Gianfranco Zola," a statement on the club's website read.

"The Board of Directors would like to thank him for his contribution and wish him well for the future. The Club will now be focusing its efforts on seeking a replacement."

Zola, who arrived at West Ham in September 2008 for the first managerial role of his career, admitted after the team's final game of the season, a 1-1 draw with Manchester City on Sunday that the chaotic nature of West Ham's campaign had caused him to lose some of his love for football.

Sullivan had piled the pressure on Zola when he slammed a 3-1 home defeat against Wolves as "pathetic" and the Hammers boss had contemplated quitting fter a 1-0 home defeat against Stoke on March 27, the team's

sixth successive loss, left them just above the drop zone.

But, following a weekend trip back to Italy to clear his head, the 43-year-old vowed to carry on and ensure his club stayed up.

A gritty draw at Everton and wins over Sunderland and Wigan guaranteed West Ham's survival, but there was never much chance of Zola remaining in charge.

The search for his successor is likely to see Sullivan and co-owner David Gold consider Croatia boss Slaven Bilic, who is a former Hammers star, ex-Manchester City manager Mark Hughes, Portsmouth chief Avram Grant and Birmingham manager Alex McLeish.

Former West Ham striker Tony Cottee, who starred for the Hammers in the 1980s, believes Sullivan and Gold were right to act quickly over Zola's future so they can concentrate on bringing in his replacement.

"I am pleased they haven't messed around and it dragged on for months," he told Sky Sports News.

"If they are going to do it, get it done, but the fans will judge it on the calibre of the manager coming in."

"I think Gianfranco has done a decent job in difficult circumstances. But having said that the results haven't been good enough and obviously the board have now made a decision."

"What I would criticise the board for is not sacking him when they first arrived at the club. It did appear right from the start that Zola was not their man."

Cottee believes Bilic would be the perfect appointment at Upton Park.



2010 WORLD CUP CORNER

King, Carra selected

AFP, London

Fabio Capello has named Ledley King, Jamie Carragher and Scott Parker among his provisional 30-man squad for the World Cup finals.

Capello has opted to take a gamble on Tottenham centre-back King even though he struggles with a degenerative knee problem, while Liverpool defender Carragher has been persuaded to come out of international retirement.

There is also a surprise place for West Ham midfielder Parker, who been in fine form for his club this season but had rarely been mentioned as a contender for Capello's squad.

There is no place for Manchester United midfielder Owen Hargreaves despite predictions the injury-hit star would be a shock inclusion.

Manchester City midfielder Gareth Barry does make the squad even though he is expected to be out of action for up to four weeks with an ankle injury.

Barry's City team-mate Adam Johnson is one of two uncapped players in Capello's squad, the other being Tottenham defender Michael Dawson.

Chelsea midfielder Joe Cole, who hasn't

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Joe Hart (Man City), David James (Portsmouth), Robert Green (West Ham)

DEFENDERS: Leighton Baines (Everton), Jamie Carragher (Liverpool), Ashley Cole (Chelsea), Michael Dawson (Tottenham), Rio Ferdinand (Man Utd), Glen Johnson (Liverpool), Ledley King (Tottenham), John Terry (Chelsea), Matthew Upson (West Ham), Stephen Warnock (Blackburn)

MIDFIELDERS: Gareth Barry (Man City), Michael Carrick (Man Utd), Joe Cole (Chelsea), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Tom Huddlestone (Tottenham), Adam Johnson (Man City), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Aaron Lennon (Tottenham), James Milner (Aston Villa), Scott Parker (West Ham), Theo Walcott (Arsenal), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Man City)

FORWARDS: Darren Bent (Sunderland), Peter Crouch (Tottenham), Jermain Defoe (Tottenham), Emile Heskey (Aston Villa), Wayne Rooney (Man Utd)

Rossi in but no Totti

AFP, Rome

Villarreal striker Giuseppe Rossi was the only new name in defending champions Italy's 30-man provisional World Cup squad, announced on Tuesday by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

The 23-year-old, who has scored three goals in 14 international appearances, was the only addition to the 29-man group that was summoned to a 48-hour get-together in Rome last week.

Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi missed the rendezvous in the capital due to his participation in the Italian Cup but he has returned to the squad.

As Lippi had announced on Monday, there were "no surprises" in the list, with Roma captain Francesco Totti, inform Sampdoria playmaker Antonio Cassano and controversial Inter Milan forward Mario Balotelli all overlooked.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli), Federico Marchetti (Cagliari), Salvatore Sirigu (Palermo)

DEFENDERS: Salvatore Bocchetti (Genoa), Leonardo Bonucci (Bari), Fabio Cannavaro (Juventus), Mattia Cassani (Palermo), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Domenico Criscito (Genoa), Fabio Grosso (Juventus), Christian Maggio (Naples), Gianluca Zambrotta (AC Milan)

MIDFIELDERS: Mauro Camoranesi (Juventus), Antonio Candreva (Juventus), Andrea Cossu (Cagliari), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Gennaro Gattuso (AC Milan), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Riccardo Montolivo (Fiorentina), Angelo Palombo (Sampdoria), Simone Pepe (Udinese), Andrea Pirlo (AC Milan)

FORWARDS: Marco Borriello (AC Milan), Antonio Di Natale (Udinese), Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina), Vincenzo Iaquinta (Juventus), Giampaolo Pazzini (Sampdoria), Fabio Quagliarella (Napoli), Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal/ESP)

Spain pick Valdes

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's uncapped keeper Victor Valdes and winger Pedro Rodriguez were in a list of 30 players announced on Monday from whom coach Vicente del Bosque will select the 23 for June's World Cup in South Africa.

Del Bosque said the line-up was made "with my heart and with my head."

Besides Valdes and Rodriguez, three others are on track for their first caps: Atletico Madrid keeper David De Gea, Osasuna defender Cesar Azpilicueta and Athletic Bilbao midfielder Javi Martinez.

Injured players Andres Iniesta of Barcelona, Cesc Fabregas of Arsenal and Liverpool's Fernando Torres are also included on the list.

Del Bosque plans to announce the final squad for the World Cup, which runs from June 11-July 11, on May 20.

The coach had hinted recently that he would call up Valdes, after the 28-year-old's strong form for the European and Spanish champions over the past two seasons.

Mexico edge Senegal

AFP, Chicago

Second-half substitute Alberto Medina scored four minutes after coming in to give Mexico a 1-0 victory over Senegal on Monday in a World Cup tune-up.

In their second match in four days, Mexico looked sharper than they did in Friday's goalless draw against Ecuador at Giants Stadium.

Medina and Cuauhtemoc Blanco came on in the 56th and immediately energized Mexico.

In the 60th, Andres Guardado, who replaced Israel Castro at halftime, fired a long pass ahead of Medina.

Senegal keeper Khadim Ndiaye came out to collect the ball but slid too far and let it get away.

That left the charging Medina free to bury the ball in the net.

The goal drew a wild ovation

from the sell-out crowd of 60,610 at Soldier Field.

But Mexico couldn't capitalize on efforts from Blanco and Javier Hernandez - who is due to join Manchester United in July.

Minutes after Medina scored Hernandez let a chance to double the score get away as he didn't get to a ball from Paul Aguilar.

Blanco had a point-blank opportunity in the 89th and sent it straight to Ndiaye.

Mexico next play Angola - who like Senegal didn't qualify for the World Cup finals next month - on Thursday in Houston, Texas.

They then head home to host fellow World Cup qualifiers Chile.

They play friendlies in Europe against England, the Netherlands and Italy before opening the World Cup against hosts South Africa on June 11.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Iker Casillas (Real Madrid), Jose Manuel Reina (Liverpool/ENG), Diego Lopez (Villarreal), David De Gea (Atletico Madrid), Victor Valdes (Barcelona).

DEFENDERS: Raul Albiol, Sergio Ramos, Alvaro Arbeloa (all Real Madrid), Joan Capdevila (Villarreal), Gerard Pique, Carles Puyol (both Barcelona), Carlos Marchena (Valencia), Cesar Azpilicueta (Osasuna).

MIDFIELDERS: Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid), Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal/ENG), Sergio Busquets, Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta (all Barcelona), Marcos Senna (Villarreal), Javier Martinez (Athletic Bilbao), David Silva (Valencia).

FORWARDS: Daniel Guiza (Fenerbahce/TUR), Juan Manuel Mata, David Silva, David Villa (all Valencia), Alvaro Negredo, Jesus Navas (both Sevilla), Fernando Torres (Liverpool/ENG), Santiago Cazorla (Villarreal), Pedro Rodriguez (Barcelona), Fernando Llorente (Athletic de Bilbao).

90 per cent tickets sold

AFP, Johannesburg

FIFA has sold 90 per cent of the nearly three million tickets available for the World Cup, which starts in South Africa in 30 days, organisers said on Tuesday.

"All tickets will be sold out. I am quite confident about that," said Danny Jordaan, chief of the organising committee.

"About 300,000 tickets were sold in the last few weeks alone," Jordaan told a press conference.

The majority of the tickets had been snatched up by South Africans, followed by Americans and British.

South Africa was allocated discounted tickets, in a bid to allow ordinary people to watch the tournament, which is being played in Africa for the first time.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Eduardo (Sporting Braga), Daniel Fernandes (Iraklis/GRE), Beto (FC Porto).

DEFENDERS: Miguel (Valencia/ESP), Paulo Ferreira (Chelsea/ENG), Ricardo Carvalho (Chelsea/ENG), Bruno Alves (FC Porto), Rolando (FC Porto), Ricardo Costa (Lille/FRA), Ze Castro (Deportivo/ESP), Duda (Malaga/ESP), Fabio Coentrão (Benfica).

MIDFIELDERS: Pedro Mendes (Sporting Lisbon), Pepe (Real Madrid), Tiago (Atletico Madrid), Deco (Chelsea/ENG), Raul Meireles (FC Porto), Miguel Veloso (Sporting Lisbon).

STRIKERS: Simao (Atletico Madrid/ESP), Danny (Zenit/RUS), Liedson (Sporting Lisbon), Hugo Almeida (Werder Bremen/GER), Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid/ESP), Nani (Manchester United/ENG).