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SOUTH AFRICA 2010
FIFA WORLD CUP



PM IN CHARGE: Italy coach Marcello Lippi (R) gestures as forwards Gianpaolo Pazzini (C) and Alberto Gilardino look on during a training camp in Sestriere on Monday.

Italy open training

AP, Sestriere

Defending champions Italy opened their World Cup training camp Sunday before a backdrop of snow-capped mountains in the Alps.

The Azzurri chose to train in Sestriere, which sits at an elevation of 6,500 feet, to prepare for playing games at high altitude at the tournament in South Africa.

The squad was met with a small protest when players failed to sign autographs at a send-off in Turin. But fans cheered the players when they trotted out on the training field in Sestriere -- the resort that was the site of Alpine skiing during the 2006 Turin Olympics.

Coach Marcello Lippi has brought 28 players, meaning he will have to cut his squad by five when he submits his final 23-man list to FIFA on June 1.

"Everybody is under observation," Lippi said. "I still have some reservations about the final list so the workouts over the next few days will be key."

Lippi already has one injury worry, with starting center back Giorgio Chiellini out for a few days because of a

PHOTO: AFP

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Rossi fixes it

Espana 82 was an expanded, and rather unwieldy, tournament with 24 places now up for grabs for the qualifiers and a changed structure. There was to be a second group stage once again but with the re-introduction of a semifinal stage.

The first stage, with six groups of four, saw a record scoreline when Hungary walloped El Salvador 10-1 as well as a surprise when Algeria defeated West Germany 2-1. Despite this win, the Algerians failed to reach the second round when a footballing Anschluss between Austria and the Germans conspired to let the Germans win 1-0. Newspapers around the world proclaimed the game as a carve-up and few of those who watched the stultifying fare on offer could disagree. German fans of a certain age remain embarrassed by the game.

The heroes of the first round were Northern Ireland, making their first finals appearance since 1958. With Norman Whiteside, the youngest player to feature in a finals tournament, they managed to qualify by beating Spain 1-0 with a famous Gerry Armstrong goal in Valencia. The Spaniards also suffered the ignominy of drawing with Honduras and it was not to be a happy tournament for the hosts.

The other home nations -- England and Scotland -- suffered contrasting fortunes. The Scots were beaten 4-1 by Brazil, despite an iconic early goal from David Narey, and were eliminated after drawing 2-2 with Soviet Union.

England were the form horses of the first round, beating heavily-fancied France 3-1 with Bryan Robson scoring the finals' fastest ever goal (27 seconds) and later nodding in another. Wins over

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Federer off the mark

AFP, Paris



Top seed and defending champion Roger Federer began his campaign for a 17th Grand Slam title with a comfortable 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 win over Australia's Peter Luczak in the French Open first round on Monday.

Federer, who completed a career Grand Slam by winning his first Roland Garros crown here in 2009, will face Colombia's Alejandro Falla for a place in the last 32.

The Swiss star was barely troubled by the 71st-ranked Luczak, who has never won a match at the French Open in four attempts.

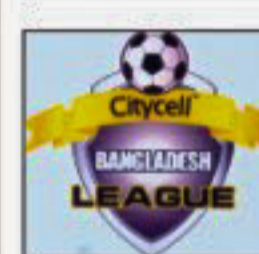
After wrapping up the first set, Federer secured breaks in the fourth and sixth games of the second, as 30-year-old Luczak ran out of steam on another sweltering day in Paris where temperatures nudged 30 degrees.

Two more breaks followed in the fifth and seventh games of the third set with the match wrapped up after 1hr 48min courtesy of a

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Abahani can party today

ANISUR RAHMAN



Abahani are all set to crown themselves as champions of Bangladesh League when they take on Farashganj Sporting Club in their penultimate match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

A point against the old town outfit, who suffered a 3-1 defeat in the first leg, will be enough for Abahani to lift the professional league title for a third successive year.

Abahani, who have made the Bangladesh League a property of their own since its inception in 2007 in place of the Premier Division League, will also turn their final league clash against bitter rivals Mohammedan Sporting Club an academic one provided they overcome the Farashganj challenge.

The awesome record of 21 wins against a draw with Mohammedan only suggests that Abahani fans can get ready to party today unless Farashganj pull off a miracle.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said that they were on the verge of completing a terrific treble. He also added that the well organising capacity, strength of the squad and the efforts from the coaching staff and the players had brought them close to glory once again.

Before today's match, the enviable statistics of Abahani even outshone the success rate of the likes of treble winners Inter Milan of Italy; Spanish League champions Barcelona; English Premier League winners Chelsea and German League champions Bayern Munich. However, it will only count as facts considering the ferocity of competitiveness and standard of the games in Europe.

This kind of achievement however in nothing new for Abahani, who also became unbeaten champions in the 1991 Premier League and in the 18-team First Division League in 1983.

Still, the popular Dhanmondi outfit has to live with a little discomfort in a league where 'compromised or fixed

match' syndrome is an open secret and more importantly the difference of strength is acutely big between top two teams from the rest.

"It is nothing new in our country to raise fingers against the table toppers whether it is Abahani, Mohammedan, Brothers or Muktijoddha," said Brothers Union manager Amer Khan.

"No one can dare to say that they haven't taken any unfair means on way to championship or to avert relegation. I have experienced that when I was a player and to be frank nothing has changed till today," said the former footballer-turned-organiser.

The manager of Brothers Union's 2004 Premier League champions side, Amer said that he was still in dilemma when it came down to 100 per cent fairness.

"But our League triumph in the next season [in 2005] was absolutely fair."

Amer, however, showered praise on Abahani.

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Barry crucial to England

AFP, London



Gareth Barry has been given an extra 24 hours to prove he has recovered sufficiently from an ankle injury to go to the World Cup with England.

The Manchester City midfielder's appointment with a specialist who is due to assess the state of his damaged ligaments has been delayed to Tuesday, increasing the likelihood that he will get a green light to travel to South Africa.

England coach Fabio Capello wants Barry to have at least a 50-50 chance of being fit enough to feature in England's opening match, against the United States in Rustenburg on June 12.

If the odds are less encouraging, the 29-year-old will be left at home forcing

Capello to do without a player who has started 19 of the 22 matches England have played under him.

Aston Villa's James Milner and Manchester United's Michael Carrick are among the possible replacements if Barry does not make it, although Capello has also been looking at the possibility of switching to a three-centreback system.

The Italian's thinking on that subject was expected to be illuminated by his line-up for Monday night's friendly with Mexico at Wembley, for which England were to be without Chelsea's John Terry, Ashley Cole, Frank Lampard and Joe Cole as well as Portsmouth goalkeeper David James.

All of them were involved in the May 15 FA Cup final and they have been left behind at England's pre-tournament training camp in Austria while their teammates strut their stuff on the much-criticised Wembley turf.

Gary Taylor-Fletcher, one of Blackpool's scorers in their Championship play-off win over Cardiff on Saturday, has become the latest player to incur an injury attributed to the surface at the national stadium.

"The England players have got to be careful," he warned after suffering an ankle injury on Saturday. "One slip and it could all be over for them."

Terry described the pitch as "the worst we have played on all year" after the FA Cup final and his call for the Football Association to stop allowing the venue to be used for rock concerts, rugby matches and other money-spinning events has been backed by Rio Ferdinand.

"It should be a football stadium," Ferdinand said. "That is what it was built as."

The Manchester United defender however

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PM awards SA Games medalists

SPORTS REPORTER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday promised all sorts of assistance from her government for the betterment of sports in the country and urged the organisers to come up with long-term plans.

The assurance came at the cash-awarding ceremony for the medal winners of the 11th South Asian Games at Radisson Hotel last night. The Games was held in Bangladesh from January 29 to February 9.

Sheikh Hasina, who promised to reward the medal winners before the start of the Games, said the Bangladesh contingent practised well and that's why they succeeded.

Bangladesh won 18 gold, 24 silver and 55 bronze medals.

The prime minister awarded Tk 5 lakh to gold medalists, Tk 3 lakh to silver winners and Tk 50,000 to bronze medal winners.

A teams neck and neck

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A thrived on two half-centuries from Nazimuddin and Faisal Hossain to keep on a par with West Indies A on the second day of the four-day match at BKSP yesterday.

After Syed Rasel and Sohrawordi Shuvo's five-fors, Nazimuddin hit 72 and Faisal remained not out on 64 as the second string Bangladesh side scored 205 for five before stumps were drawn for the day more than an hour before the scheduled closure.

The decision to cut short

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