



Spain striker Fernando Torres (C) arrives with his team at their hotel in Feldkirch yesterday on the eve of their Euro 2012 qualifier against Liechtenstein.

Buffon left out from Europa list

AFP, Rome

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon has been left out of Juventus's 25-man Europa League squad.

Buffon is currently recovering following surgery on his back after suffering a herniated disc during the World Cup in South Africa.

Juve named three goalkeepers in their list: Marco Storari, Alex Manninger and youngster Marco Costantino.

Other players to miss out on the list are new signings Fabio Quagliarella and Alberto Aquilani having already played for Napoli and Liverpool respectively in the competition.

Timo joins Lisbon

AFP, Berlin

Former Germany international goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand has signed a one year deal with Portuguese side Sporting Lisbon.

The 31-year-old, a free agent after the ending of his contract with Hoffenheim, won the German league with Stuttgart in 2007, and has seven caps to his name.

Speaking of the move Hildebrand said: "I am really happy that this transfer has been concluded. It will enable me to look at the future with more assurance."

'Real lack firepower'

Football
AFP, Rome

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho hit out at his club for not backing him in the transfer market and leaving him short in front.

Despite boasting attacking resources including Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Gonzalo Higuain and Karim Benzema, Mourinho told Thursday's La Gazzetta dello Sport that he wanted more.

"As coaches we're always unsatisfied, we always want more and for that reason I'm with those who ask for new signings," he said.

"Even if each person does it in his own way, some more introverted, others more aggressive."

"At Madrid I wanted another striker, Higuain and Benzema are not enough."

But he admitted that buying players is never easy when in charge of a big team as selling clubs inflate their prices.

What he did get was German midfielders Mesut Ozil and Sami Khedira, and he said he is happy with them.

"Transfer dealings are not easy with Real, if you move a finger a storm breaks out."

"These two are good players, young, and they were in the last year of their contracts."

"We paid 25 million euros (for the pair), that's a competitive price."

Despite the embarrassment of playing riches at his disposal, Mourinho's Real started the season with a 0-0 draw against Real Mallorca and immediately came in for some harsh criticism from the Madridista press.

But that's something he accepts as an occupational hazard.

"This is Madrid and you can't change it. If you can't live with this pressure it's best not to accept (the job)."

"At this stage of my career it was the best time for such an experience."

"After Chelsea and Inter Milan, after 10 years of success and big clubs, after a demand-

ing league such as Italy, I have the right age and maturity."

And what he's already realised is that no teams are going to come out and attack his and give them space to get in behind their opponents.

"There's an elementary reality, we're playing against teams that keep things tight and try to hit us on the counter-attack."

"Even in a friendly playing Real is like a World Cup final."

"This summer, to protect a 1-1 draw a coach made four substitutions between the 90th and 94th minutes."

"I have to be prepared tactically for the possibility that we lose the ball and we get jeered."

"And then find some solutions to open up closed defences."

The former Chelsea, Inter and Porto boss also took the opportunity to weigh into the goalline technology debate, proving in favour.

But he says first and foremost, players have to stop cheating.

Last year in the Champions League semifinal, second-leg away to Barcelona, and with Inter protecting a 3-1 first-leg lead, he had Thiago Motta sent off after some blatant simulation by Sergio Busquets.

After challenging Motta for the ball, Busquets crumpled to the ground clutching his face and writhing in apparent agony, only to be caught on TV cameras taking a sneaky peak through his fingers to check if his play-acting had worked.

It did, Motta was dismissed for an alleged elbow but Inter still held on to reach the final, playing an hour with 10 men.

"The most important technology is the collaboration between players and referees so we can stamp out dives such as Busquets' with Thiago Motta."

"And then it's impossible not to introduce goalline technology, it's elementary, basic and avoids injustices."

"As for other things such as offsides, that's a discussion for our children."

'Robben's injury a mystery'

AFP, The Hague

Holland coach Bert van Marwijk on Thursday reacted to criticism from Bayern Munich over Arjen Robben's injury, insisting that he had been "very careful" with the winger at the World Cup.

Bayern believe Robben could miss the rest of 2010 as he struggles to recover from a thigh problem he picked up playing for his country before the start of the World Cup.

Although he played a major part in the Netherlands' march to the final he now needs complete rest after aggravating the injury, prompting Bayern president Karl Heinz Rummenigge to demand this week compensation from the Dutch football federation.

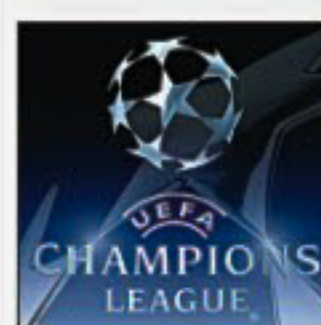
Marwijk, making his first comment on the issue, told local media: "I've heard that Arjen could be out for a long time. That's a tough blow for him. I am there to support him in this difficult period."

"I can't comment on the injury, all I can say is that (at the World Cup) we were very careful with him. It's a big mystery what's happened to him."

Robben suffered a left thigh injury in Holland's final prep match before leaving for South Africa, a 6-1 win over Hungary in Amsterdam on June 5.

Extra refs welcomed

AFP, Nyon



Top European club coaches on Thursday welcomed the experiment with two extra assistant referees in the Champions League this season.

"The controversial thing was always going to be technical aids but I think (UEFA president) Michel Platini was brilliant on this issue," said Liverpool coach Roy Hodgson after a meeting between 17 elite European coaches at European football's governing body.

UEFA decided this summer to carry on with a trial of two extra linesmen it began with Europa League matches last season, expanding it to the Champions League for two years mainly to keep track of goalmouth incidents.

"It's better to have three pairs of eyes than one pair of eyes," Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson commented after the meeting.

UEFA technical director Andy Roxburgh said coaches preferred the experiment to technical aids.

"One of the things they're positive about

and look forward to is the experiment in the Champions League of the additional referees," he told journalists.

"They're very much aware of problems going down the technological route, like the president if possible they like to keep the human route," he added.

Roxburgh said the practice was bound to evolve and improve with experience over the two year period.

UEFA also hopes it will have a deterrent effect on pulling and tugging in the goalmouth as well as simulation, and make a difference when the referee is left behind by a fast break from the other half.

Football's top rule making body, the International Football Association Board, agreed in July to expand the experiment with extra match officials in Europe, following a spate of high profile refereeing oversights during the World Cup.

The elite club coaches forum was also asked about the away goal rule in European competitions.

UEFA is considering whether to modify the rule, such as by making it void during extra time of a return leg. Roxburgh said clubs appeared reluctant to change it entirely after 40 years.

A new-look Italy

AFP, Rome



It will be a new-look Italy that takes to the field in Tallinn on Friday for their opening Euro 2012 qualification match against Estonia.

There are likely to be only three names who also appeared on the Italian team-sheet for their last competitive match, a 3-2 defeat against Slovakia at the World Cup in South Africa.

Coach Cesare Prandelli already rang the changes for last month's friendly against Ivory Coast, a 1-0 defeat in London, and given the squad he picked for his first two competitive appointments -- against Estonia and then at home to the Faroe Islands on Tuesday -- he has showed he has no intention of turning back to the old guard.

Only Giorgio Chiellini, Daniele De Rossi and Simone Pepe, who started against Slovakia in June, are likely to be picked from the start against Estonia.

Andrea Pirlo, who only came on as a substitute against Slovakia as he'd been out injured prior to that game, will start in Tallinn and wear the captain's armband.

But otherwise it will be a younger, fresher and considerably less experienced Italy in Estonia.

Of the eight defenders Prandelli picked in his squad, only Chiellini has more than three caps and half of them are awaiting their debut.

Up front it is a similar situation with Prandelli having handed debuts to Amauri and Mario Balotelli against Ivory Coast.

Both are injured and hence miss the Estonia clash but Prandelli has already revealed he will likely start with Giampaolo Pazzini as his targetman, the Sampdoria striker having only nine caps, many as a sub, to his name.

In goal with Gianluigi Buffon and his under-

study Federico Marchetti injured, Prandelli's three keepers have one cap between them, and that because the coach picked Salvatore Sirigu against the Africans.

It is only in midfield that there is any great experience with Pirlo and De Rossi boasting 125 caps between them.

And their roles will be increasingly important in the coming campaign as they try to lead their team-mates to the promised land.

What Prandelli has decided to do is concentrate on quality rather than experience and Pirlo admits the country has to start almost from scratch.

"We need to start playing football, South Africa 2010 proved that you need quality to win," he said.

"Keeping the ball on the ground, interchanging, we'll also learn to do this. The problem with Italian football is that we all have less quality: players, fans, stadiums, we need to get that back."

Prandelli has decided that his best bet to do exactly that is to bring in young, talented players and develop them into international stars.

But with qualification for Euro 2012 at stake, he insists that this isn't a case of trying out potential.

"We have new players who I hope will have a future (with Italy)," he said. "(But) we're playing for points so we won't be experimenting."

"We're at the beginning of a cycle and we want to win points right away."

Both Prandelli and Pirlo agree that Estonia will be no pushovers, despite their lowly 94th position in the FIFA world rankings.

Pirlo pointed to the fact that this team was only beaten 1-0 by Brazil earlier this year.

Even so, anything less than a win would be a disaster for Italy, not least for their already shattered morale which needs a quick fix following the World Cup.

Ibra slams Guardiola

Football
AFP, Stockholm

Zlatan Ibrahimovic on Wednesday took another swipe at Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola, dismissing him as a "small time" coach.

"In my book, a great coach solves his problems. A small-time coach runs from them," the 28-year-old Sweden forward told a press conference in Stockholm.

"There was only one person (on the Barcelona team) who wanted to get rid of me," he insisted, explaining why he left the team and signed for AC Milan over the weekend on an initial one-year loan with a pre-arranged 24-million-euro permanent deal arranged for the

end of the season.

He had spent just one year in Spain following a 50-million-euro plus Samuel Eto'o switch from Inter Milan.

"I have never had problems with any coach before during my career," he said.

"But suddenly I had a thousand problems and I had no communication with 'the Philosopher'. No communication whatsoever. I don't know what his problem was," he said of Guardiola.

"I couldn't take it. I had no choice but to find a new place of work and I was lucky to go to a club like Milan. I am 28 years old and can not afford to lose a year sitting on the bench and watching the weather," he added.

Ibrahimovic is in Stockholm with his national team for a Euro 2012 qualifier against Hungary on Friday.

Quest for redemption

AFP, London



Fabio Capello launches his quest for redemption on Friday knowing only a convincing victory by a makeshift England team over Bulgaria can hush a growing band of critics clamouring for his dismissal.

After an extended honeymoon where Capello was lauded for presiding over an imperious World Cup qualifying campaign, a familiar storyline has unfolded in the wake of England's calamitous showing in South Africa, which ended with a miserable 4-1 second round defeat to Germany.

Now, just months after being favourably compared to Sir Alf Ramsey, the architect of England's 1966 World Cup triumph, Capello finds himself subject to the sort of ridicule dished out to less celebrated occupiers of the managerial hotseat known as international football's "Impossible Job."

One tabloid even branded him "Jack-ass" -- above a picture of the Italian wearing a pair of super-imposed donkey ears -- following his decision to drop Arsenal starlet Jack Wilshere back into England's Under-21 squad.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, the Daily Mirror called for Capello to be fired next week, regardless of the outcome of England's opening Euro 2012 Group G qualifiers against Bulgaria at Wembley on Friday and Switzerland in Basel next

Tuesday.

"It is obvious that it is over for Capello," the Mirror wrote. "Everybody knows he should be gone already. The FA knows it. The England fans know it. The players know it. And most of all, Capello knows it."

In public however, Capello has brushed off the criticism with the confidence of a man who amassed five Serie A titles, two La Liga crowns and one European Cup during a glittering career in club management.

"I've read and heard a lot of different things but I am focused on my job," Capello told journalists ahead of the Bulgaria match. "I'm a fighter. It's my job, I fought for it. I am here because I enjoy my job."

"We must focus on the games we play against Bulgaria and Switzerland -- and the future will be to play the finals because England is a very important country to play in the Euros."

Capello has also dismissed suggestions that his faltering grasp of English has hindered his ability to communicate effectively with his players.

"I never had a problem with the players. When everything was okay I was a fantastic manager, I spoke fantastic English," Capello said. "After we lose against Germany it's bad."

Against Bulgaria on Friday, Capello will be forced to field an untested start-line-up missing injured Chelsea mainstays John Terry (hamstring) and Frank Lampard (hernia) along with long-term casualty Rio Ferdinand.

Injuries have also robbed Capello of two attacking options after Peter Crouch (back) was forced to withdraw from the squad just days after Bobby Zamora suffered a thigh problem.

Capello acknowledged that a Bulgaria team able to call on the technical craft of England-based players Martin Petrov and Stilian Petrov will be more than capable of exploiting any possible gaps in his defence, and he was impressed by their display in a 1-0 friendly defeat against Russia last month.

"It will not be an easy game because they played good football and they played very well against Russia in that game," Capello said. "They lost 1-0 but they played good football, because technically they are really good."

Aston Villa skipper Stilian Petrov is determined to end his international career on a high -- preferably at England's expense.

The 31-year-old, who has vowed to retire from international football following the Euro 2012 campaign, is desperate to lead his side to the finals in Poland and Ukraine.

"England will be favourites to go through from our group but I've decided this will be my last international campaign and would love to lead Bulgaria to the finals," he said. "I won't be too popular at Wembley."

"England are in a period of change but it could go both ways. It could be good for us, it could be bad for us. We hope it will end good for us."



England midfielder Steven Gerrard (2nd from L) stretches with teammates during a training session at Wembley yesterday. England take on Bulgaria in a Euro 2012 qualifying match tonight.