

USA fire  
Bradley

AFP, Chicago

Bob Bradley was fired as coach of the United States national football squad on Thursday, barely a year after guiding the Americans into the round of 16 at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

US Soccer Federation president Sunil Gulati announced the removal of Bradley in a statement after a meeting between the two and US Soccer chief executive officer Dan Flynn at Los Angeles.

It comes just two days before the draw for the 2014 World Cup takes place in Rio.

Bradley took charge in January of 2007, first on an interim basis and then as the permanent replacement for Bruce Arena, who was dropped after the Americans failed to advance beyond the group stage at the 2006 World Cup.

Bradley went 43-25 with 12 drawn in his four and a half years guiding the US team, including an upset of Spain and a runner-up finish at the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup and a 2007 CONCACAF Gold Cup crown.

But the Americans lost to Mexico in last month's Gold Cup final as they did in the 2009 Gold Cup championship match.

"We want to thank Bob Bradley for his service and dedication to US Soccer during the past five years," Gulati said.



PHOTO: AFP  
Argentine superstar Lionel Messi runs with the ball during a friendly match on behalf of the Chilean Red Cross at the National Stadium in Santiago on Thursday.

## England's new era

Football

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

England coach Fabio Capello is due to attend Saturday's World Cup preliminary draw in Rio de Janeiro, but given that the Italian will have taken his leave by 2014, the 1966 champions stand on the cusp of a new era.

Capello will stand down after next year's European Championships and it will be left to a new man, as yet unidentified, to pick up the thread when the World Cup returns to Brazil for the first time since 1950 - when England famously lost to the United States.

A new Three Lions regime will at least have the advantage of being seeded as England are currently rated the fourth-best side in Europe and sixth in the world.

That advantage will not be enjoyed by 1998 champions France, whose recent slide down the FIFA rankings below the likes of Norway and Greece means Les Bleus will not be seeded.

The European arrangements will comprise nine groups with all group winners advancing to the finals automatically with the eight best runners-up going into two-legged playoffs. The four winners of those contests will also advance.

With the demotion of Laurent Blanc's French into pot two they could actually end up in the same group as Capello's men, as could the likes of Russia and Sweden.

Even pot three sides such as the Czech Republic or even 1974 nemesis Poland, now a pot four also-ran, could trip England up.

Recent campaigns have seen a levelling off of quality between the top sides and relative newcomers to the international stage, such as Montenegro, who are pushing England hard in their Euro 2012 qualifiers and who are now only two places below France in the rankings after vaulting into FIFA's top twenty.

On the bright side for England, they

cannot meet reigning champions Spain or the other seeds Holland, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Croatia, Norway and Greece.

Even if they do not manage to win their group, the French will take comfort from the fact that last time out they managed to squeak into the 2010 finals in South Africa via the playoffs, thanks to Thierry Henry's handball which helped them to eliminate Republic of Ireland.

Yet France are still paying the price for last year's disastrous World Cup showing, having crashed out in the group phase amid a player revolt sparked by the sending home of striker Nicolas Anelka for launching a foul-mouthed tirade at then coach Raymond Domenech.

The European qualifiers will start on September 7 and end in October 2013, ahead of the playoffs, which will take place on November 15 and 19.

FIFA will ensure that politics does not intrude onto the qualifying scene by keeping apart squabbling neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as Russia and Georgia. UEFA policy is to ensure that those teams are not placed in the same group.

Capello aside, a total of 38 coaches are expected to attend Saturday's draw, including Brazil's Luiz Menezes and Vicente del Bosque, who led Spain to glory last year.

Organisers on Wednesday officially confirmed the dates for the event which will start on June 12 with the final on July 13.

The trophy match is due to be held at Rio's Maracana stadium - although FIFA insisted Thursday that the choice is subject to pending formal ratification at the world body's executive committee meeting in October.

The giant arena previously hosted the deciding match of the World Cup in 1950, when hosts Brazil were stunned 2-1 by Uruguay.

## WC draw system

Football

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Guide to Saturday's 2014 World Cup draw in Rio:

- A total of 203 nations registered to participate in the World Cup qualification process. Brazil qualify automatically as hosts while Bhutan, Guam, Mauritania and Brunei Darrussalam did not enter.

- Europe will gain 13 qualifying slots from its 53 federations. Teams will be split into eight groups of six teams and one group of five. All nine group winners will qualify directly. The eight best runners-up will play two-legged play-offs to decide the final four berths.

- Africa will gain five berths from 52 federations. Africa's lowest ranked 24 sides will go through home and away November preliminaries and the winners will progress to a second round home-and-away series.

They join the other 28 better ranked sides from the continent. They will play a group stage of qualifiers and the group winners will go into a third round of qualifying.

The ten winners will play home-and-away playoffs in October and November

2013 and the winners of those games will qualify for the World Cup.

- South America will have 4.5 berths - as well as pre-qualified hosts Brazil - from 10 federations, who will all play each other.

- Asia will have 4.5 slots for 20 teams surviving after their first two rounds of qualifying finished this week. On Saturday these 20 will be divided into five groups of four and the top two from each will go forward to two groups of five. The top two of each of those groups will advance and the two third placed sides will face off with the winner taking on a team from Oceania in a playoff.

- In the North and Central American and Caribbean region, USA, Mexico, Honduras, Jamaica, Costa Rica and Cuba are already in round three. 24 teams take part in round two from which six will advance to the third round. Three group winners and three group runners-up advance to round four from where the top three advance to the finals. The fourth-best nation will play off against the fifth-best South American side - not including Brazil.

- Oceania has half a place will the overall winner of their preliminaries facing off against the fifth-best side in Asia.

Argentina appoint  
Sabella

Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina on Thursday appointed Alejandro Sabella as national team coach to replace sacked Sergio Batista, the federation's general secretary Jose Luis Meiszner announced.

"The decision has been taken. Sabella is the choice," Meiszner told official news agency Telam.

Argentina's Copa America quarterfinal exit to Uruguay earlier this month cost Batista his job even though he had only replaced Diego Maradona just eight months earlier.

Batista was vilified in the press for not seeming to know his best team -- he chopped and changed after a poor start before Carlos Tevez, whom he dropped after two games, returned to miss the decisive spotkick against Uruguay.

As a player, Sabella had brief stints with Sheffield United and Leeds. Before coming into the frame as Batista's successor he had been in line to take charge of Al Jazira in the United Arab Emirates.

Sabella, who is 56 and who began his playing career with River Plate in his home city of Buenos Aires, won the Copa Libertadores with Estudiantes two years ago.

That success was instrumental in pushing him to the front of the queue to replace Batista, who was dumped after proving unable in his sole tournament in charge to end a trophy drought at senior level going back to 1993, though he did steer the Olympic side to glory in 2008.

## Fight for scraps

Football

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Australia, South Korea and Japan go into Saturday's 2014 World Cup draw as favourites to snatch three of Asia's four automatic spots for the finals, leaving 17 rivals battling over the scraps.

Forty-three countries from the continent started out on the road to Brazil, but after the conclusion of the second round of qualifiers this week, only 20 are left.

That is made up of the 15 winners of those two-legged ties as well as Australia, South Korea, Japan, Bahrain and North Korea, the region's leading sides from the 2010 qualifying competition.

Saturday's draw will see the 20 teams drawn into five round-robin, home-and-away groups of four teams each, with the five group winners and five runners-up advance to the next round.

That fourth round will have 10 teams in two round-robin, home-and-away groups of five teams each with the top two in each pool heading for the finals while the two third-placed sides play-off with the winner then

facing a continental play-off.

Australia lost out on goal difference to Ghana in the first group stage at the South Africa finals while Japan lost to Paraguay in a round of 16 penalty shoot-out.

South Korea were defeated 2-1 by Uruguay at the same stage, but North Korea lost all three of their group games, including a 7-0 thrashing by Portugal.

Japan go into Saturday's draw having captured the Asian Cup with a 1-0 win in the final against Australia in January.

Goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima believes veteran coach Alberto Zaccheroni will again be key as the Asian qualifiers heat up in September.

"He constantly inspires us with confidence," Kawashima told fifa.com. "Not only confidence in ourselves, but in our teammates as well."

Making up Saturday's draw will be Iran, Iraq, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Syria, China, Kuwait, Oman and Jordan.

UAE, Iraq and Indonesia (who competed as the Dutch East Indies) are aiming to add to their solitary World Cup campaigns of 1990, 1986 and 1934 respectively.

## SPORTS POLL

## WEEKLY QUESTION

Does Stuart Law give you hope?

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## What to WATCH

## Channel i

Sk Kamal Int'l Basketball

Bangladesh v India

Live from 3:30pm

## STAR Cricket

England v India

Second Test, Day 2

Live from 4:00pm

## DAY'S EVENT

Sk Kamal Int'l Basketball

Bangladesh v India

Time: 3:30pm

Venue: Dhanmondi Indoor

Basketball Gymnasium

Bangladesh v Zimbabwe XI

3-Day Warm-up Match, Day 1

Venue: Academy Ground, Harare



PHOTO: AFP  
Paris Saint-Germain's newly recruited midfielder Mohamed Lamine Sissoko (R) and Italian goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu (L) pose with club coach Leonardo at the Parc des Princes Stadium on Thursday.

Aguero seals  
City move

Football

AFP, Manchester

Argentina striker Sergio Aguero completed his £38 million (\$62m) move to Manchester City on Thursday and immediately set his sights on sparking a major trophy haul.

The 23-year-old, who is the son-in-law of Argentina legend Diego Maradona, had already announced his move from Atletico Madrid on his Twitter account on Wednesday, but both the Spanish side and City waited until Thursday evening to confirm the deal.

"My style is to fight to the death for every ball and always give 100 per cent, to be concentrated, give the maximum and to score goals. I have plenty to offer," he told the City website.

"I saw City win the FA Cup last season. I am sure that in the future we will be fighting for plenty of major trophies."

Aguero is seen as the answer to City's problems in attack, where Carlos Tevez has reiterated his desire to leave the English club.

His transfer is City's third major signing of the summer following the arrivals of Gael Clichy from Arsenal and Stefan Savic from Partizan Belgrade.

"I don't think I will have too many problems settling into the team," said Aguero.

"I will do what the manager asks me to do and try to work the way he wants me to. I am sure everything will be fine. I am very relaxed about it."

He is also looking forward to linking up with David Silva and Yaya Toure, who he played against during his time in Spain but who will now be team-mates at City.

"They are great players and they are now in one of the biggest teams in England. I am very lucky to be playing alongside them."