

Villa out of hospital

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona forward David Villa has been released from hospital five days after an operation on the broken leg he sustained in this month's Club World Cup, the Spanish and European champions said on Saturday.

"This means the Barca number seven can spend the Christmas holidays with his family," the La Liga club said on their website (www.fcbarcelona.com).

Spain international Villa, the world and European champions' all-time leading scorer, is expected to be sidelined for up to five months, putting his participation at Euro 2012 in doubt.

He broke his left tibia playing in the Club World Cup semi-finals in Japan and doctors said the 30-year-old had been suffering from a stress fracture.

Obasi joins Schalke

REUTERS, Berlin

Hoffenheim striker Chinedu Obasi has joined Bundesliga rivals Schalke 04 on loan until the end of the season, Schalke said on their website on Saturday.

The 25-year-old Nigerian has played 65 league matches for Hoffenheim, scoring 13 goals.

"He's a quick offensive talent," said Schalke's general manager, Horst Heldt, adding that Obasi will be eligible for the club's Europa League ties in 2012.

No T-shirts for Terry

THE GUARDIAN

Chelsea have confirmed they rejected a proposal for their players to wear T-shirts in support of captain John Terry.

Some of the Blues squad and staff had raised the prospect of donning supportive slogans on their tops, showing their backing for Terry, who has been charged with racially abusing QPR defender Anton Ferdinand.

A club spokesman said: "We were aware of the idea being discussed among some of the players and staff."

"The club fully supports John but did not think the wearing of T-shirts was an appropriate or helpful show of that support."



Bahrain player Ismael Hassan poses in Doha on Saturday upon his return from the Arab Games in Manama where Bahrain bagged a gold medal.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Doping ban for Indian athletes

Football

REUTERS, Mumbai

Six Indian women athletes, including Asian Games double gold medallist Ashwini Akkunji, have been given one-year suspensions after testing positive for banned anabolic steroids earlier this year.

India's 400 metre runners Akkunji, Jauna Murmu, Mandeep Kaur, Priyanka Panwar, Sini Jose and Tiana Mary Thomas were found guilty in June and July and were provisionally suspended by the National Anti Doping Agency (NADA).

All six athletes had tested positive for methandienone, while Thomas and Kaur's samples also featured the banned steroid stanozolol.

The one-year bans will be effective from the date of the athletes' provisional suspension, a NADA disciplinary panel, chaired by Dinesh Dayal, ruled on Friday.

With next year's Olympic Games starting on July 27, the suspensions are likely to rule the athletes out of the prestigious event in London.

Akkunji and her team mates had not taken the banned drugs intentionally so were given a reduced sentence, the disciplinary panel ruled.

"We did not find any significant fault on the part of these athletes on how the banned substances entered their bodies and they will get reduced penalty," Dayal said.

Akkunji, Kaur and Jose were part of India's 4x400m relay team that last year won gold at the Delhi Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games in Guangzhou, China. Akkunji also won the 400m hurdles in Guangzhou.

Also given a suspension was Harikrishnan Muraleedharan. The male long-jumper had tested positive for methandienone and was suspended for two years.

Johnson desperate for Euro spot

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester City winger Adam Johnson is desperate to cement a regular place in Roberto Mancini's side to guarantee his spot in England's Euro 2012 squad.

His stunning strike in the midweek win over Stoke, which kept City clear at the top of the English Premier League, should ensure he starts Monday's match at West Brom.

"Obviously I'm disappointed I haven't played as many games as I would like, everyone wants to play games," said the 24-year-old.

"But I think that was my fifth Premier League goal so it's all I can keep doing, scoring goals and getting goals and playing well, then hopefully force my way in."

"The players we have, it's packed in areas, obviously the manager rotates certain players around, but I have to keep working hard and keep trying to play."

"When I found out I was starting against Stoke I was happy and I don't mind the rotation system as long as it is fair, hopefully that's going to continue. I understand I'm at a massive club and I am happy with that."

Johnson believes strong performances against West Brom and Sunderland on New Year's Day will help push his case with England boss Fabio Capello.

"It's on the back of my mind because Fabio Capello likes players that play every week, that's a major thing for me to try and go there after missing out on the World Cup, I want to play in these major tournaments, I need to keep trying to play well and think about it when the time comes," the winger told mfc.com.

"I wouldn't say I'm worried but I would be gutted if I didn't go. There is a lot of competition and people playing well week in week out, so I just want to try and play well in and week out and have a place on that plane."

"I think this club has enormous potential. I hope it can now realise this potential both domestically and in Europe."

Russian buys into Monaco

Football

REUTERS, Monaco

Billionaire Russian businessman Dmitry Rybolovlev acquired a majority stake in second-tier French club AS Monaco on Friday.

The company Monaco Sport Invest (MSI), linked to businessman Dmitry Rybolovlev, has signed a deal to become the majority shareholder of AS Monaco, the seven-times champions said in a statement.

The 45-year-old tycoon, ranked 93rd on the Forbes list of billionaires, has pledged to invest at least 100 million euros (\$130 million) in the club over the next four years.

Rybolovlev, who sold his stake in fertiliser producer Uralkali for \$6.5 billion in June 2010, acquired 66.67 percent of Monaco.

"I am a passionate football fan," said the Russian. "Having lived long enough in Monaco I realise the club is not just one of the principality's sports teams but also represents one of the main symbols of the principality, its pride and traditions."

"I think this club has enormous potential. I hope it can now realise this potential both domestically and in Europe."

Monaco reached the 2004 Champions League final but were relegated from the top flight at the end of last season and are now bottom of Ligue 2 with 13 points from 18 games.

Prince Albert II, Monaco's head of state, welcomed the deal.

"The agreement opens a new page in the history of the football team so dear to the principality," said the Prince.

"I hope the club can rediscover its former prestige which made it one of the jewels of Monaco's sporting life."

Cahill on Chelsea radar

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Chelsea have opened formal talks with Bolton Wanderers aimed at deflecting long-standing interest from Tottenham Hotspur in Gary Cahill and at securing the England centre-half for around 7 million pounds when the transfer window opens.

Cahill will enter the final six months of his contract at the Reebok Stadium in the new year and Bolton are resigned to the fact that he will not agree new terms to remain at the club.

That has left the Premier League strugglers seeking a fee for his services now in the hope that Owen Coyle will be able to sign a replacement in the January window, and Chelsea are confident the 26-year-old will reprise at Stamford Bridge the central defen-

sive partnership with John Terry that has proved effective for England recently.

André Villas-Boas confirmed this week that Chelsea were monitoring Cahill's situation and, with the Brazil international Alex placed on the transfer list and sidelined, a centre-half has become a priority in the market. "Regarding Gary Cahill, there has been dialogue between ourselves and Chelsea," Coyle said. "He is a top player and is [still] fully focused on Bolton. That doesn't surprise me. I've said from day one I believe Gary Cahill can play for anybody, I think he has those qualities.

"There is serious interest in Gary, but I've got to say we have two huge games before 1 January [against Newcastle and Wolverhampton Wanderers], before anything could happen. More than his ability, he's an out-

standing man, and because of the lad he is his focus will be doing the best for his team-mates, who he's stood shoulder to shoulder with for years here, and trying to help them get points in these two games. Then whatever January brings, so be it. There's nothing signed and sealed at the moment but it's fair to say there has been dialogue [with Chelsea]. I've got to be up front and tell you, as I always do, and that's the situation."

Tottenham were close to securing Cahill on transfer deadline day in August but could not agree a fee, a failure that scuppered Sébastien Bassong's proposed move to Queens Park Rangers. Arsenal were also linked heavily with the former Aston Villa defender, though Arsène Wenger confirmed on Friday that he had adequate cover in central defence and is not looking to strengthen in that area.



Muhammad Waqas (R) of Pakistan vies for the ball with Liu Yixian (L) of China during the fourth and last field hockey match between Pakistan and China in Lahore yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan blank China

Hockey

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan on Sunday completed a clean sweep of China in their four-match series, the first international hockey event in the troubled country since 2004.

Pakistan won the final match 2-1 to emerge unbeaten in the series after taking the first three games in Karachi and Faisalabad earlier this week by 3-0, 5-3 and 3-1.

Pakistan gained the early lead when vice-captain Shakeel Abbasi made a field goal in the first major attack of the match.

Fareed Ahmed drew the second in the 26th minute to double the lead,

while China's lone goal came in the 33rd minute when Dong Yang dodged Pakistan's defence in the final moments of the first half.

"The Chinese played a much improved game today. They kept us tight," said Pakistan captain Muhammad Imran.

"We had a clear edge on them in the first two matches but they had a good come back in the last two," he added.

Pakistan, however, gifted the series trophy to their rivals to acknowledge their support for the violence-hit country.

A campaign of Taliban and Al-Qaeda linked attacks across Pakistan, including an attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in 2009, made Pakistan a virtual "no go" zone for international sport.

"China lost the hockey series but won the friendship series by coming to Pakistan. So, we will give this trophy to them," Asif Bajwa, the secretary of Pakistan Hockey Federation, said at the awards ceremony.

"They have proved that there is no security threat to any foreign team in Pakistan and sport is fully protected over here," he said.

Pakistan, which last hosted an international major hockey event seven years ago, hopes the Chinese tour will help convince other foreign teams to visit.

The country is also working to resume a bilateral hockey series with arch-rivals India, after they were suspended following the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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