

Hernandez pulls out of Olympics

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United striker Javier Hernandez will not play for Mexico at this summer's London Olympics, his club announced on Thursday.

Hernandez, who turns 24 on June 1, had initially been called up as one of Mexico's three over-age players, but United have now agreed with the Mexican FA he will have the full summer off instead.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson told the club's website: "His form last season was fantastic. He's found the second year more difficult, but a lot of that is down to not having a summer break for three years and playing every summer for his country.

"Next year he will be fine as we have agreed with the Mexican Football Association that he is going to get the requisite rest he needs to perform in the Premier League."

Hernandez, nicknamed Chicharito, will still be involved in Mexico's two World Cup qualifiers at the start of June.

Hector Gonzalez Inarritu, Mexico's director of the national teams, said that Ferguson has denied permission for Hernandez to participate.

"Alex Ferguson denied Javier Hernandez's participation in the Olympic games," Inarritu told a press conference.

Other United players could also be called up for the Games with Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes potential over-age players for Team GB, along with Danny Welbeck, Phil Jones and Chris Smalling if they are not in the England squad for



Atletico Madrid striker Radamel Falcao (R) celebrates his second goal with teammates during their Europa League final against Athletic Bilbao at the National Arena Stadium in Bucharest on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Nesta quits AC Milan

AFP, Milan

AC Milan's World Cup-winning defender Alessandro Nesta confirmed Thursday he will quit the Serie A side after ten years with speculation rife that he intends to join MLS side New York Red Bulls.

"This is my last season at Milan," the 36-year-old told a press conference.

"I have taken stock, and the rhythm of Serie A, the Champions League and the Italian Cup meant I couldn't play all the time.

"It doesn't suit me to sit on the bench and if I don't feel important I prefer to stay at home."

The 78-times capped Italy centre-half said he would like to play in the United States, where he has been linked with a move to the New York Red Bulls, but refused to confirm a move.

"I'd go gladly," said Nesta. "It would be a wonderful experience. I'd gladly go across the Atlantic but as long as nothing has been signed I'm saying nothing. And there are other great and interesting opportunities like that one."

If he did join the New York club he would link up with other former Europe-based stars including France's Thierry Henry and Mexican Rafael Marquez.

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Falcao powers Atletico

AFP, Bucharest



second Europa League trophy in three seasons.

Falcao, who also became the first player to win successive Europa League/UEFA Cups with different sides having scored the winning goal for Porto last term, scored a brilliant first-half double to take his tally for this season's competition to 12.

Brazilian attacking midfielder Diego, who missed the 2009 final for Werder Bremen against winners Shakhtar Donetsk because he was suspended, added a third late in the second-half to give Argentinian coach Diego Simeone a trophy just months after he took over the hotseat.

Falcao opened the scoring on seven minutes with a spectacular goal taking the ball down the right and then into the box and as defender Fernando Amorebieta slipped he curled the ball round three defenders and the keeper

from the edge of the box for his 11th goal in 15 Europa League games this season.

Bilbao's far younger side - an average age of under 24 - took a while to settle but gradually started to make more of an impact.

Their leading striker Fernando Llorente - scorer of 29 goals this term - had missed with an early header when he was not helped by being shoved in the back but he should have done better in the 19th minute.

Found brilliantly in the box he only had Belgian youngster Thibault Courtois to beat but his usual sure touch let him down and his shot skimmed off his boot and wide.

Falcao, though, was unstoppable at the other end and his second stemmed

from the hapless Amorebieta being dispossessed as he tried foolishly to dribble it away from the box.

Turkish playmaker Ardi Turan found the Colombian, who completely fooled centreback Javi Martinez sending him the wrong way as he went the other before curling the ball into the top far left corner to double Atletico's lead.

The two sides were more evenly matched in the opening 15 minutes of the second-half with Diego going close for Atletico but finding the side netting while Inigo Perez forced a good tip over the bar from 19-year-old Courtois.

Llorente, though, was not having the sort of night that will see him promoted over Fernando Torres in the Spanish Euro squad as once again found in a good position on the hour mark his first touch let him down and another chance went begging.

Atletico kept pressing but clear chances were rare, though Gomez Ibai had some Atletico fans hearts beating faster with his volley from outside the area which just cleared the bar with 20 minutes remaining.

Bilbao conjured up another chance in the 77th minute as the ball fell to Markel Susaseta, but his goal bound

ROLL OF HONOUR

- 2012 Atletico Madrid (ESP)
- 2011 FC Porto (POR)
- 2010 Atletico Madrid (ESP)
- 2009 Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)
- 2008 Zenit Saint-Petersburg (RUS)
- 2007 FC Sevilla (ESP)

Brazil bows to FIFA

AFP, Brasilia



The senate passed a package of measures demanded by FIFA that include selling beer in plastic cups legislation.

The measures had already been approved in late March by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate made no amendments.

The bill, which still has to be ratified by President Dilma Rousseff, will also allow beer to be sold in stadiums during the 2013 Confederations Cup, but some lawmakers have expressed concern at the move.

Alcohol sales in sports arenas have been banned in Brazil since 2003, and some lawmakers said they feared its renewed availability could lead to violence.

"It's dangerous," warned Senator Jose Agripino Maia from the opposition DEM party. "Just imagine a Brazil-Argentina final --

imagine that with alcohol sales, the violence that could be unleashed and the embarrassment that we would endure."

Football powerhouses Brazil and Argentina have a long history of rivalry, and there will likely be plenty of fans from both countries at the tournament.

FIFA however will still have to negotiate permission for beer sales separately with the individual Brazilian states concerned.

Seven of the 12 cities that will host World Cup games have laws banning beer sales.

The bill also gives FIFA exclusive rights to pictures, sound and other forms of expression linked to the World Cup, with criminal and financial sanctions for any illegal reproduction.

It will also reserve one percent of admission tickets for the handicapped and mandates that 300,000 tickets should be sold at discounted prices.

Brazil is spending millions of dollars building and upgrading highways, airports and stadiums for the event.

But critics, including former football great Romario, now a lawmaker, have objected that the projects are too expensive and behind schedule.

Games torch kindled

REUTERS, Greece



The countdown to the London Olympics began with the kindling of the Games torch by the sun's rays in ancient Olympia on Thursday, sparking a relay that will culminate with the lighting of the Olympic stadium's cauldron at the opening ceremony on July 27.

On a warm and sunny day at the site of the ancient Olympics, actress Ino Menegaki, playing the high priestess, appealed to sun God Apollo and needed only a few seconds to ignite the torch at the ruins of the Temple of Hera with the help of a parabolic mirror, 78 days before the Games get under way.

The relay's first torchbearer, Spyros Gianniotis, a Liverpool-born Greek swimmer who won the gold medal in the 10-km open water event at the 2011 world championships, started the seven-day Greek leg of the relay before the flame is handed over to London organisers on May 17 and flown to Britain a day later.

The second torchbearer was 19-year-old Alexander Loukos, a Briton of Greek origin.

"With this ceremony we begin the final countdown to a dream that came to life seven years ago in Singapore, when London was selected to host the 2012

Games," said International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Jacques Rogge in a brief speech.

This is the last torch ceremony of his presidency, as Rogge steps down next year after 12 years in charge.

"The energy that passes from the sun to the Olympic flame will light a torch that will travel from this birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games to the country that invented modern sport and the spirit of fair play, heralding the opening of the 2012 London Games on July 27," the Belgian surgeon said.

Olympic, London and Greek officials were seated inside the stadium where the ancient Games were held and some 5,000 spectators watched the ceremony from the grassy slopes hugging the arena.

London becomes the only city to have received the Olympic flame twice - the first time being for the 1948 Games.

Britain's capital also hosted the 1908 Games, but the torch-lighting ceremony and relay were introduced for the first time for the 1936 Berlin Olympics as part of Nazi propaganda.

The 70-day British leg of the relay will use 8,000 torchbearers and travel 12,800 km around the country, taking in 1,018 communities and the 1,085-metre summit of Snowdon, before ending inside the Olympic stadium on the opening day of the Games.



PHOTO: REUTERS

An actress, playing the role of a priestess, carries a cauldron with the Olympic flame during the torch lighting ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games at the ruins of the Temple of Hera in Greece yesterday.



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Time: 4:15pm

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