

Cesc back in training

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona midfielder Cesc Fabregas was able to train with his Spanish teammates after recovering from a right thigh injury ahead of their departure to Poland and their base camp for Euro 2012 later on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old had been sidelined since suffering the injury in the 3-0 Spanish Cup victory over Athletic Bilbao late last month.

However, while Fabregas was able to train fully with the defending champions Real Madrid fullback Alvaro Arbeloa trained apart because of a 'trapped nerve in his back' according to the Spanish federation.

Sevilla striker Jesus Navas had to go to hospital for a precautionary x-ray on his right hand after he bruised it during the training session.

"Jesus Navas went to hospital to undergo x-rays on his right hand after he bruised it during a training session this morning (Tuesday) so as to re-assure himself that it was not serious," read a statement on the federation's website.

The Spanish, who wound up their warm-up matches with a 1-0 win against China last Sunday, are due to arrive later on Tuesday evening at their base of Gniewino.



Former Flamengo star Ronaldinho (C) takes part in a training session with his new club Atletico Mineiro in Belo Horizonte on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldinho joins Mineiro

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Former Brazil star Ronaldinho, having quit Flamengo last week amid claims he is owed some 20 million dollars in salary, on Monday signed for modest top flight side Atletico Mineiro.

"We are happy to announce we have managed to bring Ronaldinho to Atletico," said his new club president Alexandre Kalil on the team website after netting the 32-year-old former Barcelona and Milan star and ex-world player of the year.

Ronaldinho, World Cup winner in 2002, will receive around 150,000 dollars in basic salary a season compared with nearer 600,000 at Flamengo, according to Lancenet web portal.

Pele meanwhile defended Ronaldinho amid criticism of his recent showings for "Fla".

"I think it's a little unjust - he is no longer the Ronaldinho of ten years ago but he is talented... Flamengo are not doing well and as a result neither is

Barzagli blow for Italy

AFP, Rome

Key Italian central defender Andrea Barzagli is a major doubt for Euro 2012 after tearing his left calf muscle according to the team doctor.

The 31-year-old Juventus star - a member of Italy's 2006 World Cup winning squad - will definitely be out for around 20 days according to the doctor Enrico Castellacci.

"We will do our utmost so that he recovers in time, but that will be tough," said Castellacci.

"What is for certain is that he will not be available for the group stage matches."

Sweden's Ibra puzzle

REUTERS, Stockholm



As their 3-2 victory over the Netherlands showed when they qualified, Sweden are far from a one-man team, but Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic casts a long shadow over Erik Hamren's side.

Always a controversial figure in Sweden, his absence for that victory over the Dutch had many commentators suggesting that Sweden played better without the big striker.

But there is little chance that coach Hamren will drop one of Serie A's most prolific scorers of the last decade.

The 30-year-old has divided opinion since he burst onto the Swedish soccer scene with hometown club Malmo FF in 1999.

Flamboyant, outspoken, and outrageously talented, the most common description of him in Swedish media during the early part of his career was 'un-Swedish' - it was not always clear if this was a positive or negative attribute.

Not that it bothered Ibra. He moved swiftly from Malmo to Ajax Amsterdam where he continued his footballing education, but it was in Italy that he became a household name, winning title after title with Juventus, Inter and AC Milan.

The only blip in his prestigious career was a short spell at Barcelona, where the individualist Ibra had a hard time.

Used to being the big fish in a small pond, Zlatan found it tough to adapt to the Catalan collective despite a good start to his career at the Camp Nou.

A move back to Italy and Serie A saw a return to form and his experience and leadership were rewarded with the captain's armband for his country.

It was not a unanimously popular decision - in true Zlatan style, opinion was divided as to whether such an individualist was the right man lead the Sweden's team, until then firmly rooted in the collective consensus.

There have also been doubts about the influence he exerts over other players, particularly the younger ones - many of them are in awe of Ibra and his achievements and defer to him on and off the pitch.

What has never been in doubt is his ability to score goals, and he has netted 30 in 76 internationals for his country. Perhaps more than any other striker in Europe, it is the wide range of goals he scores that is most remarkable.

His powerful free kicks and penalties make him a threat from set pieces, and he is happy to shoot with either foot from well outside the box. He is also an excellent header of the ball.

An injury-time rocket from the most acute of angles against Hungary in 2009 is now part of Swedish folklore, as is his back-heel to claim a point against Italy at the 2004 Euro finals.

Long dismissed in England as over-rated, his improved range of passing was never more apparent than in this season's first Champions League meeting with Arsenal, when he was instrumental in a 4-0 victory.

Sweden coach Erik Hamren has used recent friendlies to deploy Ibra as a playmaker rather than a target man, allowing him to create chances for others as well as score himself.

Now the wrong side of 30, opportunities are running out if Zlatan wants to make a lasting impression on the world stage.

Opinion might still be divided, but he has been a winner all through his career, and he will once again be seeking to prove his critics wrong in Ukraine this summer.

EURO 2012 PREVIEW

Dangers of expectation

AFP, Paris

Underdogs or potential finalists? Dark horses or dead carts? Few teams competing at Euro 2012 are shrouded in as much uncertainty as Laurent Blanc's France.

Les Bleus are unbeaten in 18 games -- a run including friendly wins over England, Brazil and Germany -- but are only ranked 16th in the world, having fallen as low as 27th in September 2010.

They are touted as contenders for the top prize in Poland and Ukraine, but were 12 minutes from the playoffs before a Samir Nasri penalty in their last qualifier at home to Bosnia-Herzegovina secured their place at the tournament.

Their squad will feature players from Real Madrid, Manchester United, Bayern Munich and AC Milan, and yet they insist on portraying themselves as underdogs.

"There will be a favourite -- England -- and behind them, the three teams all have realistic hopes of qualifying," said Blanc after France were drawn alongside England, Sweden and co-hosts Ukraine in Group D.

The reason for France's circumspection is the dark shadow cast by the events of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, which continues to linger over the squad.

Having touched rock-bottom after the training ground strike that brought ridicule on the whole country, France's confidence remains fragile.

Results may be pursuing an upward curve, but there is still some way to go before the wounds heal completely and Blanc has repeatedly warned against

the dangers of expectation.

"The problem is that people have very short memories," he said in February.

"After the trauma of the 2010 World Cup, everyone said that we had to rediscover some humility. And 17 months later, we want to pretty much win the Euro or

reach the final.

"It's very good to have ambition, but you can't do it with a magic wand. Yes, we were world champions in 1998, European champions in 2000, and World Cup finalists in 2006. But wake up, stop living in the past!"

"Since 2006, we haven't won one knockout match in an international competition."

The French media have expressed doubts about France's ability to dominate opposing sides, but February's 2-1 friendly win over Germany in Bremen has made it increasingly difficult to downplay the team's potential.

Germany were missing several key players but France's enterprising victory was nonetheless impressive.

The emergence of Lille right-back Mathieu Debuchy has softened the blow of Bacary Sagna's absence through injury, while strikers Olivier Giroud of Montpellier and Karim Benzema of Real Madrid have enjoyed the best seasons of their careers.

There are concerns at centre-back, though, with Philippe Mexes having spent several games on the bench at Milan during the second half of the season and



PHOTO: REUTERS

Croatia star Luka Modric (R) controls the ball during a training session, in preparation for the upcoming Euro 2012 championship, at the Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb on Monday.

Twitter common sense

AFP, Warsaw



With football one of the most talked-about sports, Twitter has become like an extra man to monitor when it comes to big tournaments like Euro 2012.

But while teams like reigning champions Spain initially banned their players from using the popular micro-blogging site during the tournament in Poland and Ukraine, for the most part football federations are following the example of Italy.

"There's no ban," one official said. "It's just a question of common sense."

What common sense means, though, depends on the country.

In a recent interview with the weekly Die Zeit, Germany coach Joachim Loew indicated that he had given "clear rules" to his squad on how to use social networking sites.

"What goes on in the dressing room, what we talk about as a team, tactics, injuries and the rest of it are taboo, as are the private lives of teammates or the management team," he was quoted as saying.

Asked if Germany officials would be discreetly monitoring whether the players followed the rules, Loew said only: "If anyone flouts the rules, he'll know about it. I don't need to surf the Internet to do that."

"No one's asked us to exercise self-restraint, only to be careful that what we say doesn't affect our team-mates or the French team," added France midfielder Florent Malouda. "It's more about being responsible than holding back."

"It (Twitter) is not a new thing. I've got an account myself and I hardly talk about football on it. You can talk about yourself but you've got to be careful not to get into anyone's private lives. But it's not banned."

England similarly have no ban in place, although supporters of the "Three Lions" put that down more to the fact that few international players are Twitter regulars.

Among the England starting XI that played against Belgium in a warm-up match last Saturday, only defender Glen Johnson tweeted regularly.

Spain's Twitter ban was announced, ironically, with a tweet from Fernando Lorente.

He told his followers at the weekend that he had to "say goodbye as we're not allowed to tweet from the training camp".

The ban appeared to have been short-lived as Cesc Fabregas wrote on Monday: "Good news! We're finally allowed to use social networks. We'll stay in touch during the Euro!"

However, for avid tweeters Nicklas Bendtner and Christian Eriksen there seems there will be no relaxation of the ban by Danish coach Morten Olsen, who has issued a blanket ban.

"There is so much communication during the championships that we want to limit it to meetings with the media," Danish football federation spokesman Lars Berendt said.

For Alexandre Fourtoy, communications director with European football's governing body UEFA, there is no general advice.

"But any player or journalist, for example, who films parts of the match on his phone and puts the images on Facebook or Twitter will have broken our broadcast rights rules and that could have consequences for their accreditation," he added.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Could the Tigers have played other formats before World T20s?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

Follow The Daily Star Sport on

twitter

www.twitter.com/dssport



NEO Sports

French Open

Men's & Women's Singles

Quarterfinals

Live from 8:00pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News