

## Bale set to miss Olympics

AFP, London  
Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh winger Gareth Bale is set to miss out on a place in the Great Britain Olympic football team after suffering a back injury in training.

Bale, who turns 23 in July, is keen not to aggravate the problem further with the Olympic football tournament coming just before the start of the new Premier League season.

Spurs' opening Premier League game will be against Newcastle United on August 18 and, with that in mind, Bale is believed to have told GB Olympic team coach Stuart Pearce that he does not wish to be considered for selection.

Bale -- who this week signed a new four-year contract with Spurs -- had previously made little secret of his desire to represent GB at the Olympics, and last year risked the wrath of the Welsh FA by posing in a British Olympic team shirt without their permission.

## Keep your head Balo, says Cassano

SOCERNET  
Antonio Cassano has urged his Italy strike partner Mario Balotelli to control his aggression during the Euro 2012 final against Spain.

Balotelli, who scored a brace against Germany in the semi-final, will spearhead Italy's attack in Sunday's final as the Azzurri aim to win their first European Championship since 1968. But Cassano insists the volatile 21-year-old must harness his "fire" in order to fulfil his potential.

"Balotelli is young and still needs to mature," Cassano said. "He is also emotive and sometimes his temperament can be his own worst enemy. But he has fire in his stomach and it makes him strong, so you have to be careful how you handle him."

"To tame him would be wrong, though he has to learn to control his emotions and direct them in a positive way. Only he can decide whether he wants it all or whether it all goes to waste. I have great empathy with him and know how hard it is, especially when occasionally you think the whole world is against you."

"But at the moment Balotelli is on top of the world, very focused and dreaming of making Italy champions."



PENNY FOR HIS THOUGHTS: Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas (L) and midfielder Xavi Hernandez sit before the start of a training session at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Blanc, France part ways

REUTERS, Paris  
Laurent Blanc will not be staying on as France coach after his contract expires on Saturday, the French federation said, with Didier Deschamps tipped as the favourite to take the job.

"Laurent Blanc has contacted the FFF president, Noel Le Graet, to tell him his decision not to ask for another contract," the FFF said in a statement on their website (www.fff.fr).

France lost 2-0 to holders Spain in the quarter-finals of Euro 2012 last Saturday. Blanc took over from Raymond Domenech after Les Bleus were eliminated in the first round of the 2010 World Cup, leading them on a 23-match unbeaten run before they lost against Sweden in the group stage of Euro 2012.

Under Blanc, France sometimes played some nice, quick-passing football but once again, two years after the World Cup fiasco, suffered from off-pitch drama.

Deschamps, Blanc's team mate and captain in the France squad that won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 titles, is the front runner to take over amid

speculation that he is close to leaving Olympique Marseille, who he has coached since 2009.

The French federation's executive committee is due to meet on Tuesday when a replacement for Blanc will be discussed.

Blanc has already been linked with the Tottenham Hotspur job after Harry Redknapp was sacked by the north London club after the Premier League season ended.

"If Laurent Blanc leaves it's a shame because he had indicated his wish to continue. But Didier Deschamps is among the very good coaches," former France captain and current UEFA president Michel Platini was quoted as saying in French media on Saturday.

"It is the FFF president who chooses. I do not think we have bad players. Progress has been made, we have potential but it is our (rightful) place (to have been) in the quarter-finals. Anyway, Didier Deschamps does know the team."

France start their qualifying campaign against Finland in September.

## Casillas reflective

AFP, Kiev

Ahead of Sunday's Euro 2012 final against Italy, Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas admitted he still had difficulty taking in the scale of his achievements with the national team over the last four years.

The captain of the team that triumphed at Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup, the 31-year-old is bidding to become the first player to skipper a side to success at three consecutive international tournaments.

Having progressed through the Spanish youth teams before making his international debut in 2000, Casillas is well placed to analyse the startling rise of the Spanish national side in recent years.

He has been joined on the journey by his midfield colleague Xavi, 32, and the Real Madrid goalkeeper said the foundations put in place by the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF)

augured well for the future.

"We started 15 years ago when we were 16 and we went through all the youth teams together and this has taught us a lot," he said on Saturday.

"It shows all the youngsters coming through will have their chance and I hope that they'll continue improving."

Spain's success at Euro 2008 represented their first title since the 1964 European Championship and Casillas said that even he had been surprised by the success that followed.

"Four years ago, we achieved something that nobody expected because we'd never done it before," he said.

"The World Cup also, because people were rooting for us and we managed to win. The evolution of the team is quite visible, and the continuity as well."

"Four years ago, Spain were in the final and we never imagined we'd have won the Euro and the World

Cup within two years.

"History has been created already because we're in the final again and we wouldn't have thought that possible four years ago."

## Villa, Puyol in attendance

AP, Kiev

David Villa and Carles Puyol will attend Spain's European Championship final against Italy as spectators after missing the tournament because of injury.

The Spanish federation said Saturday the two players who helped Spain win Euro 2008 and the World Cup two years later will be at the match Sunday at Kiev's Olympic Stadium.

Villa is Spain's all-time leading scorer and was top scorer at the European Championship four years ago as well as joint top scorer at the World Cup in 2010.

## Awards don't motivate Iniesta

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Andres Iniesta will head into Sunday's Euro 2012 final with little thought for personal honours, despite many tipping the Spaniard to win the Player of the Tournament award.

Iniesta, 28, was picked in the Team of the Tournament four years ago, but insists he cares little for individual awards when there are team prizes at stake.

The Barcelona midfielder and his Spain team-mates are bidding to become the first team to win three consecutive major international tournaments.

"I never thought about playing for personal credit," Iniesta said at a press conference. "I do not think I am the Player of the Tournament. I feel that what will make me happy is to lift the trophy."

"In football everything is relative; it does not matter who stars and who does not. [Claudio] Marchisio has had a good tournament, [Andrea] Pirlo also. I do not know [who the Player of the Tournament should be] and I really do not care."

## Kanoute next to head to China

REUTERS, Beijing

China's growing popularity as the preferred destination for ageing former English Premier League players shows no sign of slowing with striker Frederic Kanoute completing a move to Beijing Guoan, the Chinese Super League side said.

The Beijing club said in a brief statement on Saturday that the 2007 African Footballer of the Year had completed his move but gave no details of the contract. Kanoute's former club Sevilla said the 34-year-old had agreed a two-year deal with Beijing.

Malian Kanoute spent seven successful years in Spain after plying his trade at English clubs Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham United. Beijing Guoan are currently third in the Chinese Super League and face leaders Guangzhou Evergrande later on Sunday.

The transfer adds to the ever growing list of big foreign signings made by Chinese clubs in recent times.

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
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**What to WATCH**

**TEN Cricket**  
Sri Lanka v Pakistan  
Second Test, Day 3  
Live from 10:30am

**STAR Sports**  
Wimbledon C'ships  
Round of 16  
Live from 5:00pm

**ESPN**  
Sportscenter India  
Sports News



Italians forwards Antonio Cassano (L) and Mario Balotelli take a break during training at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Buffon lauds mentality

AFP, Kiev

Italy have a special ability to achieve beyond their means in times of difficulty, according to captain and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

History is on the brink of repeating itself in the most curious of manners as the Azzurri prepare to tackle world champions Spain in the Euro 2012 final here on Sunday.

Italy are just one win away from landing a major title and once again in the wake of a match-fixing scandal

back home.

Six years ago following the outbreak of Calciopoli, Italy went on to win the World Cup.

Even before that, 30 years ago, the Azzurri won the 1982 World Cup just a couple of years after the Totonero affair, which almost deprived them of star striker Paolo Rossi, who served a two-year suspension for his involvement.

And now, once again, following the Calciocommesse football-betting incident, Italy are on the brink of success.

Buffon says it's a peculiarity to the Italian mentality that allows their players to bring out their best under such circumstances.

"There's something special that's for sure. After all the gossip, Italians have a sense of responsibility and respect for the shirt that goes beyond our limits," he said.

"If you look to our history and our nation we don't always succeed but we bring together a compact group who think in an equivoal way and that's our strength."

## Academies of joy

REUTERS, Kiev

The success of the Spanish national team is mainly down to the efficiency of its clubs' soccer academies and the high quality of coaching staff, coach Vicente del Bosque said.

A day before the world and European champions bid to defend their continental title against Italy, Spain coach Del Bosque said the Iberian nation was experiencing "an incredible era" and was ready to become a leader in European football.

"(Our success) is not a coincidence and has its foundations in many things, in the structure of our football, in the academies, and in better coaches," he was quoted as saying on the Spanish soccer federation's website (www.rfef.es).

"The (Spanish) clubs are devoting them-

selves to training youngsters, some kids leave for foreign teams at a very young age," he added.

"Before we would travel abroad to look at the academies in France, Russia, Germany."

"Now many of these countries come to see what we are doing in Spain."

Spain's probable starting lineup for Sunday's final in Kiev will include six players who are products of Barcelona's youth school, five of whom still play for the Catalan club and one, Jordi Alba, who is poised to return there from Valencia.

Del Bosque said Spain had finally worked out how to convert the dominance of clubs like Barcelona and Real Madrid in European competition over the years into success at the international level.

নির্ধাতনের শিকার নারী ও শিশুর সহায়তার জন্য  
যে কোন মোবাইল থেকে  
নারী ও শিশু নির্ধাতন প্রতিরোধে ন্যাশনাল হেল্পলাইন সেন্টার এর  
১০৯২১ নম্বরে ফোন করুন

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়

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**DAY'S EVENT**

**Premier Div Hockey**  
Sonali Bank v S Bima  
Time: 2:30pm  
Abahani v Wari  
Time: 4:15pm  
Venue: Maulana Bhasani National