



Spain captain Iker Casillas makes a save during a coaching clinic in Caracas on Monday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Debuchy wants out

AFP, Paris

France winger Mathieu Debuchy, under contract at Lille until 2015, has said he wants to leave the club and will not take part in training on Tuesday, according to L'Equipe.

"What I want is to leave. I want to play in another league. I've been talking with Lille for a while but unfortunately nothing's come of it," he was quoted as saying by the sports daily.

"I'm a little disappointed by how events have turned out. Training's due to start again on Tuesday but I won't be there. I wanted a month of holiday to recuperate completely. I need it," he added.

Debuchy, who was part of the France team that played in the European championship last month, has been linked to a number of clubs, including English Premiership side Newcastle United, where his international team-mate Yohan Cabaye plays.

The 26-year-old said playing with Cabaye at the northeast club was one of his "priorities", adding that Inter Milan had also expressed an interest.

## Sepp causes a stir

REUTERS, Zurich

FIFA President Sepp Blatter set out to mend his relationship with Germany on Tuesday by clarifying comments which appeared to suggest the country could have "bought" the right to host the 2006 World Cup.

The 76-year-old Swiss wrote a letter to Bild newspaper, explaining that what he was trying to say in an interview published on Sunday was that World Cup hosting decisions were always surrounded by suspicion.

In the interview with Swiss paper Sonntagsblick, Blatter remembered that Germany were awarded the tournament ahead of South Africa in 2000 after the Oceania representative on FIFA's executive committee, Charles Dempsey, abstained from voting.

"World Cups being purchased? There I am reminded of the vote for the 2006 World Cup, where somebody left the room at the last minute. And so suddenly instead of 10-10, the vote stood at 10-9 in Germany's favour," Blatter was quoted as saying, although the actual final vote was 12-11.

"I'm happy that I did not have to cast the decisive extra ballot. But, well, suddenly someone stood up and left. Perhaps in that case, I was also too well-meaning and too naive.

"No I don't suspect (that the 2006 World Cup had been purchased). I'm making an observation."

In Tuesday's letter to Bild, Blatter said he wished to put his comments into context.

"I wanted to say that one can always find a pretext to doubt the legality of a decision," he said.

"It shows that with a World Cup hosting vote, you can always find a pretext to spin a conspiracy theory. Even in connection with Germany, which delivered a perfect World Cup, a summer fairly tale of which the whole country can be proud."

He added: "I don't believe in conspiracy theories, but only in facts. As long as there is no concrete evidence to hand, one must and should stick by the legality of the vote."

"This applies to Germany just as much as for other countries. That is the core of my message."

Blatter's remarks caused outrage in Germany and prompted some politicians to suggest he be stripped of an honorary award he received in 2006 for services to the country.

## United fever grips SA

AFP, Johannesburg

Manchester United fever is sweeping South Africa with tickets selling fast for a two-match tour despite the absence of England star Wayne Rooney and many other first choices.

The Rio Ferdinand-skipped Red Devils were scheduled to arrive in Indian Ocean city Durban late Monday ahead of a midweek friendly with AmaZulu and another against Ajax Cape Town this weekend.

Rooney, Phil Jones, Ashley Young, Danny Welbeck (England), Patrice Evra (France) and Nani (Portugal) are resting after starting their close-season breaks

late because of Euro 2012 commitments. Veteran Ryan Giggs and Tom Cleverly (Great Britain) and David De Gea (Spain) are also absent as they prepare for the football tournament at the London Olympic Games.

Injuries and sickness rule out Nemanja Vidic, Chris Smalling and Darren Fletcher, leaving legendary manager Sir Alex Ferguson with just a few instantly recognisable names like Ferdinand, Paul Scholes and Javier 'Chicharito' Hernandez on tour.

The lack of many first-choice Red Devils has had no effect at the box office with the organisers saying only a few thousand higher-price tickets are available for the AmaZulu match at Moses Mabhida Stadium Wednesday.

A spokesman said all 11,000 tickets for a Tuesday training session have also been snapped up in a country where English Premier League football enjoys a passionate following with many games broadcast live.

Before leaving England centre-back Ferdinand dismissed suggestions that depleted United might struggle: "We do not want to lose a game -- it is as simple as that. At United we want to win every game."

A lot of attention will focus on major close-season signing Shinji Kagawa from Japan, who arrived at Old Trafford last month after several successful seasons with Bundesliga giants Borussia Dortmund, who he helped win the domestic double last season and the title the season before.

## MU retain top spot in Forbes list

REUTERS, Undated

English soccer club Manchester United retained their title as the world's most valuable sports team, according to an annual top 50 list released by Forbes on Monday that was dominated by National Football League (NFL) franchises.

The 19-times English champions, who are preparing for a listing on the New York Stock Exchange, were valued at \$2.23 billion, up from \$1.86 billion last year and 19 per cent above No. 2 Real Madrid (\$1.88 billion).

The top 50 list included seven soccer teams, with Arsenal falling three places to 10th overall and Barcelona rising 18 spots to eighth.

- Forbes Top 10 teams:**
1. Manchester United (soccer) - \$2.23 billion
  2. Real Madrid (soccer) - \$1.88 billion
  3. New York Yankees (MLB) - \$1.85 billion
  3. Dallas Cowboys (NFL) - \$1.85 billion
  5. Washington Redskins (NFL) - \$1.56 billion
  6. Los Angeles Dodgers (MLB) - \$1.40 billion
  6. New England Patriots (NFL) - \$1.40 billion
  8. Barcelona (soccer) - \$1.31 billion
  9. New York Giants (NFL) - \$1.30 billion
  10. Arsenal (soccer) - \$1.29 billion

## Giggs proud to represent GB

REUTERS, London



Ryan Giggs said on Monday that he hoped the British Olympic soccer team's return to the Games after a 52-year absence was not just a one-off.

Britain has not competed in the soccer finals since Rome 1960, and last took part in the qualifiers in 1971 when they failed to reach the 1972 Munich Games.

Professional players have been allowed to take part in the Games since 1984, but forming a Team GB has always been blocked by the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland football associations, amid fears that they

might lose their independent status within FIFA.

However, when London was awarded the Games a British team was obliged to compete as hosts.

"I hope it is not a one-off from what I have experienced so far," British captain Giggs told reporters at one of the first media conferences held at Olympic Park.

"Of course I am Welsh and proud of it, but for me to have the chance of playing in the biggest tournament in the world right now, it has been great and I hope it continues."

Asked if he would lobby Welsh officials to rethink their past policy of opposing a British team, the 38-year-old replied: "Whether people have

been English, Welsh, whatever, those I have met have wished me well and the team well.

"I hope fellow British footballers can experience the same thing in the future. I am not sure I would lobby anyone, I am not a politician but I hope we carry on in the future."

Craig Bellamy, 33, a Welshman like Giggs, said the experience was totally different to the one he was used to in the Premier League.

"It is new to us, we are meeting other athletes, eating with them, being part of a huge British squad," he said.

"It feels very different from just being in a football team, it feels very special being with other athletes all trying to win medals for Britain."

## Tito eyes fresh start

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona's new coach Tito Vilanova refused to contribute to the controversy over the lifting of Jose Mourinho's and his bans after last year's infamous eye-poke incident as he started work at the Nou Camp on Tuesday.

Pep Guardiola's former assistant, who has since stepped up to the top job, was deliberately poked in the eye by Real Madrid boss Mourinho during a melee on the touchline at the end of last season's Spanish Super Cup between the sides.

"What happened in that game that is still being talked about a year further on, I am tired of it," Vilanova told a news conference.

The Spanish federation (RFEF) imposed a two-match Super Cup ban on Mourinho, and one on Vilanova for reacting to the aggression by pushing him away.

Last week, newly re-instated federation president Angel Villar lifted the punishments as part of a general amnesty, something he has traditionally done to players and coaches after sealing re-election.

from Barcelona with club spokesman Toni Freixa saying Mourinho's actions could not be allowed to go unpunished.

"The one-man panel imposed a sanction, the president decided on an amnesty (for us), and I accept it. It has worked this way for many years," Vilanova added.

"The biggest punishment the two of us will have are the images, that people will be able to see for many years."

Vilanova was giving his first news conference since the club returned to start pre-season training on Monday and inevitably he was asked if there was any lingering bad blood between him and the coach of their arch-rivals, the La Liga champions.

"Mourinho has already greeted me at the Bernabeu in the league (since then), and I don't think we have a bad relationship," he said.

Barcelona resume their rivalry with Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup, the traditional curtain-raiser to the new season between the league champions and the King's Cup winners next month.

The first leg is at the Nou Camp on Aug. 23, with the return at the Bernabeu on August 29.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi stretches during the first training session of the season at the Joan Gamper Training Camp yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
Is Roger Federer the greatest tennis player of all-time?  
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote  
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**What to WATCH**  
**TEN Action**  
Tour de France  
Stage 16  
Live from 6:00pm  
**ESPN**  
Sportscenter India  
Sports News

**DAY'S EVENT**  
**Premier Div Hockey**  
Ajax SC v Wari Club  
Time: 2:30pm  
Sonali Bank v Usha KC  
Time: 4:15pm  
Venue: Maulana Bhasani Hockey