

Brazil suffer keeper blow

AFP, London

Gold medal favourites Brazil suffered their first Olympic Games setback on Tuesday when first-choice goalkeeper Rafael Cabral was ruled out of the tournament with an elbow injury.

The 22-year-old Santos player picked up the injury to his right elbow during a training session at Arsenal's London Colney training ground on Monday and has flown home to receive treatment.

Cabral started in Brazil's 2-0 friendly win over Great Britain at the Riverside Stadium in Middlesbrough on Friday.

Brazil coach Mano Menezes is expected to confirm Cabral's replacement later on Tuesday.

The South American giants begin their Olympic campaign on Thursday against Egypt in Cardiff.

Social media buzzing

AFP, London

Social media was buzzing Tuesday with leaks from a rehearsal of the London 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony, despite director Danny Boyle's plea for spectators to "save the surprise".

Tens of thousands of spectators attended a technical rehearsal on Monday, one of the final run-throughs before Friday's £27 million (\$42 million, 34.5 million euro) spectacular.

The ceremony's artistic director, film-maker Danny Boyle, pleaded with the audience -- which included guests of the Games organisers and families of those taking part -- not to leak out details about the event, which is set to be watched by billions worldwide on television.

The Twitter hashtag "savethesurprise" was emblazoned on the stadium's giant screens.

Boyle, 55, who directed the hit films "Trainspotting" and "Slumdog Millionaire", and his creative team have done their best to keep most details of the opening ceremony secret.

But the Oscar winner acknowledges that in the age of social media and camera phones, keeping everything under wraps will be impossible.

However, details began to emerge nonetheless as people left the run-through buzzing with excitement and taking to Twitter.

Spectators tweeted pictures of the event, some with their spare hand covering most of the action.



Japan goalkeeper Shuichi Gonda dives for the ball during a training session ahead of the London Olympics in Glasgow on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Games start in Wales

AFP, London

The first event of London 2012 won't take place at Olympic Park but some 132 miles away in Wales, where women's football gets the Games underway on Wednesday -- two days before the opening ceremony.

Hosts Great Britain will play their first match in an Olympic women's football tournament when they face New Zealand in the Millennium Stadium, in the Welsh capital Cardiff.

An Olympic Games can provide a sport that otherwise struggles for attention with a huge boost -- for example, there was a surge of interest in hockey in Britain after the men's team won gold at Seoul in 1988.

Now Hope Powell, coach of the British women's football team, wants her side to make the most of their turn in the spotlight.

"It puts women's football out there, puts it on the map and hopefully will showcase the sport," Powell told the BBC.

"It's our first time as Team GB and you will be nervous, but I'm sure they will rise to the occasion," added Powell, who also coaches the England women's team.

"It is the first event, which is fantastic for us -- I hope it will be a real positive.

"Hopefully, because there aren't other sports taking place that day, the media interest will be unprecedented."

Wednesday's game will mark the first Olympic match by a combined British team since 1960, when Great Britain's men played at the 1960 edition in Rome.

And Powell, echoing the motto made famous by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, said for her side taking part, rather than winning, was a triumph in itself.

"The success is that we are in it," she said. "We will try to get out of the group."

This year Wales will have its largest contingent at an Olympics, with 30 athletes confirmed as British team members while Dai Greene, the world 400m hurdles champion, is captain of the track and field team.

AVB blasts Modric

AFP, Los Angeles

Andre Villas-Boas has launched a fresh attack on Luka Modric after branding the Tottenham midfielder as unprofessional following his summer revolt.

Modric, a target for Real Madrid, is desperate to force through a summer move and has angered Spurs by going on strike.

The Croatian has been hit with an £80,000 (\$124,000) fine for refusing to train and missing the club's pre-season tour of America, where they play a friendly against LA Galaxy on Tuesday and the New York Red Bulls on July 31.

And with Spurs refusing to move on their £40 million (\$62 million) asking price, new Tottenham boss Villas-Boas has condemned Modric's stance.

"We understand this type of player revolt is nothing new," said the Portuguese coach. "But the club has to protect themselves. We have to hold onto our values and rights."

"Last year he behaved professionally. Unfortunately this is the first time Luka has taken these actions."

"The situation as it stands is he is under club discipline for not being present."

"We don't know what advice he is receiving. As far as I know he is back in London."

"There is a sense of respect for what he has done, but the chairman feels that the fact he is not present is not common professional behaviour."

"Hopefully this situation will be solved in two ways -- that the clubs interested meet the demands of Tottenham regarding his value or the player continues to club duty."

"Hopefully this won't drag on too long as it doesn't help Luka or us."

Meanwhile, Tottenham have been dealt a further blow after it emerged Scott Parker is set to miss the start of the new season.

Parker is poised to undergo an Achilles injury that will him out for six weeks.

He will miss England's friendly with Italy next month and is a major doubt for opening two World Cup qualifiers against Moldova and Ukraine in September.

"We think there might be a small tear on his Achilles," said Villas-Boas.

"We are evaluating the situation at the moment -- with regards to an operation, which would take four to six weeks to heal."

"It is a situation that also depends on our ability to have

MU eyeing Moura

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has confirmed his interest in Brazil international Lucas Moura.

But Ferguson denied a deal, reported to be £26million (\$40.3m), had been agreed for the 19-year-old Sao Paulo winger, who is a member of Brazil's Olympics squad.

"It's not correct. We haven't reached an agreement for the player," Ferguson was quoted on Man United's website as telling a press conference in Shanghai on Monday.

"We've shown an interest but until such time as we get a deal agreed we can't say he's our player."

United have already boosted their squad this summer with 23-year-old Japan international midfielder Shinji Kagawa and teenager Nick Powell.

And Ferguson confirmed that the club are hoping to bring in more than one player before the start of the season.

"We've signed two players in the summer: Kagawa and Powell," he said. "We think they both have fantastic potential."

"At this moment we're looking at other options in terms of bringing other players in. We're not lying on our backsides doing nothing. We're trying hard to bring other players to the club."

the player in surgery as quickly as possible. That's what we are trying to work on."

"It's a difficult one because players react differently to different types of surgeon."

"Scotty prefers to be seen by a Professor Harrison, so we have to wait to see whether we can all get it together as quickly as possible."

"If that's the case hopefully we will be able to get the Achilles open and see the extent of the injury."

Cahill set to join Red Bulls

AFP, Liverpool

Australian international Tim Cahill is poised to join the New York Red Bulls after Everton and the Major League Soccer team agreed a fee for the midfielder.

"Everton have agreed with Major League Soccer (MLS) that Tim Cahill can be transferred to the New York Red Bulls," a statement on the club's official website said on Monday.

"Tim, 32, will move to the Red Bulls for a nominal fee, subject to agreeing personal terms and passing a medical. He will travel to the US in the next few days."

No weighty issues for judo couple

AFP, London

Any man who suggests to his girlfriend she needs to lose weight is entering dangerous territory -- especially if the woman in question can throw him on his back and strangle him.

But for Jason Koster, the boyfriend and coach of Moira de Villiers, New Zealand's lone judo competitor at the London Olympics, it's all part of his job.

The judo competition is divided into strict weight categories and Koster wants de Villiers, competing in the -70kg class, to avoid the stress of worrying about beating the scales.

However, Koster insisted all was going according to plan as far as de Villiers's London preparation was concerned, and insisted his remarks had not caused any problems in their relationship.

"That is on a professional level, not a personal one," he said Tuesday.

"Moira is fighting in the -70kg category, but she doesn't have too much to lose. It is par for the course and we have systems in place so it is not a problem."

Four weeks ago, de Villiers took part in a training camp in Barcelona where she

came up against several potential Games opponents including the Netherlands' Edith Bosch, a former world champion and a silver and bronze medalist at the last two Olympics.

And so good was her experience in Spain, de Villiers would have no qualms about competing against of her recent training partners in London.

"I'm hoping to draw them because I did really well against most of them," said the 22-year-old de Villiers, born in South Africa but an Auckland resident for nearly a decade.

"Edith Bosch is second in the world and she was quite a difficult person because she has got the height over me. But she wasn't able to throw me but I threw her once. It was a really good confidence booster and it made me feel great about where I am."

De Villiers, asked how she felt about being the only New Zealand judoka at the Games, said: "It is only me, so there is quite a lot of pressure, but it is good to get the sport out there."

Koster added: "We can beat anyone and that is the nature of fighting. If you don't think you can beat everyone, then you may as well not be here. We are not here to make up the numbers."



Former England striker Michael Owen carries the Olympic Torch through Battersea dogs home with a Staffordshire Bull Terrier in London on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Messi injured for friendly

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona striker Lionel Messi has suffered an injury during training and will not travel to play Hamburg for the German club's 125th anniversary celebrations, the Spanish giants announced on Tuesday.

"During training yesterday (Monday), the player suffered bruising to his right calf," the club said on its website.

"This morning (Tuesday), he underwent an ultrasound that showed he has intramuscular haematoma."

Messi had been due to be one of the main attractions for Tuesday's game in the continued absence of Spain forward David Villa, still recovering from a broken leg that forced him to miss La Roja's successful defence of their European title.

Barca said last week that he was "close to full form".

The game at the Imtech Arena will be Tito Vilanova's first in charge after taking over from Pep Guardiola.

Barca are due to play five friendlies before the start of the season.

Kaka on his way out

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has left Kaka out of his squad for a friendly against Oviedo later on Tuesday, increasing speculation of the underperforming Brazilian playmaker is poised to leave the club.

According to local media reports, Kaka met Mourinho and Real director general Jose Angel Sanchez on Monday and was told he was not guaranteed a place in the starting lineup this season and should seek alternative employment.

The 2007 World Player of the Year, who joined Real from AC Milan for a fee of around 65 million euros (\$78.76 million) three years ago, has been linked with a move to Paris St Germain, the Ligue 1 club coached by his former boss at Milan Carlo Ancelotti.

A Real spokeswoman said the club's press office had no information on the reason for Kaka's omission from the squad.

The 30-year-old has shown flashes of his former brilliance during his stint in Spain but has been sidelined several times by injury and mainly played second fiddle to German international Mesut Ozil last season.

He suffered a miserable end to his 2011-12 Champions League campaign in May when he had a penalty saved in the semifinal shoot-out against Bayern Munich as Real crashed out to the Bundesliga side.

Koscielny signs new deal

AFP, London

France defender Laurent Koscielny has signed a new contract with English Premier League side Arsenal, the north London club announced on Tuesday, without specifying for how long.

"Arsenal Football Club is delighted to announce that Laurent Koscielny has agreed to sign a new long-term contract," the Gunners said on their official website arsenal.com.

The 26-year-old centre-back arrived in the British capital from Ligue 1 club Lorient in the close season two years ago and has played 85 times for Arsenal in the last two seasons.

His form for Arsenal saw him called up to France's national team and he was part of Les Bleus' squad that took part in last month's Euro 2012 tournament in Poland and Ukraine.

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