

Costa suffers hamstring injury

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's top scorer Diego Costa looks set to miss his side's crucial La Liga match against Malaga on Sunday due to a hamstring injury.

Depending on the extent of the injury, the 25-year-old could also be a doubt for Atletico's trip to Barcelona on the final day of the La Liga season and the Champions League final against Real Madrid on May 24.

"Diego Costa has undergone some scans to determine the extent of a grade one injury in his right hamstring," the club said in a statement on their website on Friday.

"The striker did not train with his teammates in a session on Friday morning."

Atletico need four points or two draws from their final two league games to seal the La Liga title for the first time in 18 years.



Sheikh Russel players celebrate their 5-0 victory over Sri Lanka Air Force SC in their second group stage match of the AFC Presidents' Cup at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Brazil worth half a billion

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's 23-strong World Cup squad is worth an estimated half a billion euros, Brazilian financial daily Valor reported Thursday, a day after Luiz Felipe Scolari named his list.

According to a calculation by Pluri Consultoria consultants, the squad, led by Barcelona superstar Neymar, is worth 514.23 million euros.

A pre-announcement in April estimated had valued the potential squad at 470.2 million behind reigning world champions Spain (486.9 million) and Argentina (474.1 million).

The April estimates made Argentina and Barcelona star Lionel Messi the most expensive player for the June 12-July 13 tournament starting with a price tag of 138.1 million euros ahead of Portugal and Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo. Taking estimated marketing pulling power into account, Neymar himself was only given a value of 67.4 million euros ahead of Germany and Bayern Munich forward Mario Goetze (59.7 million).

The Brazilian media, meanwhile, pored over Scolari's choices which contained no major surprises, as he had been expected to leave out former world players of the year, Kaka and Ronaldinho.

"Felipao opted for a family with ambition," was the front page headline from Estado de Sao Paulo while Folha de Sao Paulo greeted "the new family" -- one containing only six players with previous World Cup experience.

Even so, the average age is 28.4 years old compared with 26.7 when a side coached by Scolari and inspired by Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho lifted the 2002 trophy in Japan.

In addition, the team is unlikely to be very different from the one which has already tasted tournament success on home soil, at last year's Confederation's Cup, when a tired Spain were sent packing in the final.

Folha de Sao Paulo noted the squad's relative lack of World Cup experience was unparalleled since that of the 1950 side, which lost the trophy match in Rio to Uruguay.

Sepp wants new term

AFP, Zurich

FIFA president Sepp Blatter on Friday strengthened expectations that he will soon announce his bid for a fifth term as the head of global football.

"I want to do this, because things aren't over yet. My mandate is running out, but my mission is not finished," the 78-year-old was quoted as saying by the Swiss tabloid Blick.

Blatter is widely expected to announce his formal candidacy at the FIFA Congress, before the World Cup, in the Brazilian city of Sao Paulo.

In response to the new reports, FIFA stressed that Blatter's plan was still to ask the 209 national associations in world body at the congress whether they want him to run again.

The election will be held in 2015.

Blatter said Blatter's comments came in response to questions about his future during a debate it organised in Zurich.

Blatter has been FIFA's president since 1998. He joined football's governing body in 1975 and was its secretary general before succeeding Brazilian Joao Havelange as president.

Blatter has previously been guarded about his plans for a new term.

In February, he told Swiss public

broadcaster RTS that he "wouldn't say no" to a new mandate.

"If I'm in good health, and I currently am, I don't see why I should stop work, and especially the job of consolidating FIFA," he said then.

The only candidate to have entered the race formally so far is Frenchman Jerome Champagne, an ex-diplomat and former secretary general of FIFA, who left the organisation in 2010.

Champagne, 55, has said that if his



former boss Blatter enters the race, he will pull out.

Michel Platini, head of European governing body UEFA, who has crossed swords with Blatter over his running of FIFA, is another potential candidate.

The 58-year-old French football legend said recently that he was the

only person who can beat Blatter.

But Platini, in charge of UEFA since 2007, has still not said whether he will run in the election.

Platini has said he will announce his decision in the second half of the year after seeing any reaction to Blatter's decision.

During the Blick debate, Blatter played down concerns about preparations for the World Cup in Brazil which runs from June 12 to July 13.

The Brazilian organisers have faced repeated criticism, and FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke this week said that the governing body had "been through hell" over the football showcase.

There have been nerve-wracking delays to the completion of stadiums, which forced FIFA to extend its deadline to hand over facilities, and concerns over social protest.

But Blatter insisted that he took things in his stride.

"This is my tenth World Cup. My first was in 1978. Brazil is going to be something huge, really outstanding," he said.

He reminded his audience that fears had reached fever pitch ahead of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, notably over its reputation as a crime hotspot

AFC PRESIDENTS' CUP Sk Russel rout Lankans

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Sheikh Russel KC all but confirmed their final-round berth in the AFC Presidents' Cup after a massive 5-0 win over Sri Lanka Air Force SC at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Striker Mithun Chowdhury struck a brace while Shakil Ahmed, Haitian midfielder Pascal Millien and substitute Sabuj Biswas netted one goal apiece in the complete demolition of the Lankan side. The win took Sheikh Russel to the brink of qualification for the final-round in their debut appearance in the third-tier club competition of Asia.

Sheikh Russel are on top of the four-team table by virtue of better goal difference (+5) over Pakistan's KRL Football Club (+3), who are on equal four points. Sheikh Russel will need only a draw in their last match against winless Ugyen Academy, who lost 0-3 against KRL FC yesterday in the other match on Sunday.

However, there is a mathematical possibility of Sheikh Russel being eliminated if they go down by 4 or more goals against Ugyen while Sri Lanka Air Force beat last edition's runners-up KRL FC 1-0 on the final day.

Sheikh Russel KC started yesterday's match with the same eleven which played out a goalless draw in their first match. The

Bangladesh league champions looked disorganised at the start but took the control of the game once taking the lead in the 14th minute.

Millien played a key role in setting up three goals while scoring one for himself. The first goal came when Millien played a through-pass for winger Shakil, who finished it off with a low drive from outside the box.

After failing to cash in on any of five successive corner kicks, Mithun doubled the lead in the 35th minute when he slotted the ball at the back of the net after receiving a low cross from Millien. Mithun then widened the margin ten minutes into the second half before Millien himself got on the score-sheet with a free-kick on the hour-mark.

Sabuj, who came on the pitch at the start of the second half, completed the rout four minutes from time to provide Sheikh Russel's first win at international level.

"We faced heavy pressure from the opponents in the first 15 minutes but we reorganised ourselves to control the match and went on counter attacks which were finished clinically by our forwards," said captain Biplob Bhattacharjee through email after the match.

"We have ensured qualification for the second round but we are targeting of becoming group champions with another outright win over Ugyen Academy in our last match," said the veteran goalkeeper.

Ramdin named Test captain

CRICINFO, PORT OF SPAIN

Denesh Ramdin, the West Indies wicketkeeper, has been named captain of the Test side and will take over from Darren Sammy, who will remain the T20 captain. This means West Indies have three separate captains for all three formats.

Ramdin's first assignment will be the home series against New Zealand which begins on June 8. He has led the national side in three T20s and an ODI. His experience with Trinidad & Tobago is more extensive with 37 matches at the helm across formats. He has 21 wins under his belt and took T&T to the semi-final of the Regional Four Day Competition this season.

This is the second time in as many years that Sammy has had to relinquish captaincy. Last May he had to make way for Dwayne Bravo to become ODI captain after criticism regarding his batting too low and his ability as a strike bowler. Sammy's tenure as Test captain began in November 2010 but an overall record of 8 wins to 12 losses - including a spell of five defeats in their last six matches - might have hurt his cause.

'Jones will be fit'

AFP, Manchester



England defender Phil Jones will definitely overcome a shoulder injury in time for the World Cup, according to Manchester United interim manager Ryan Giggs on Friday.

Jones, 22, suffered the injury in United's 3-1 win over Hull in midweek and there were concerns that he had suffered a dislocation and would not be fit to go to Brazil.

England manager Roy Hodgson is set to name a provisional 30-man squad on Monday and Giggs says that Jones and Wayne Rooney, who has missed the last two games with a groin problem, will be available.

Giggs, who is in charge of United for the final time against Southampton on Sunday, said: "Phil's injury isn't as bad as I thought on the night."

"He's obviously out for Sunday but should be ok for the World Cup."

"Wayne has just started training over the last couple of days. Sunday probably will be a little bit too quick for him but he'll train and be fine for the World Cup also."

Holland coach Louis van Gaal is the odds-on favourite to be David Moyes' permanent replacement, with reports suggesting an appointment will be made next week.

Giggs, whose future at United remains unclear, has been in charge for the final four matches of the season and says the spell has whetted his appetite to work as a manager.

But the 40-year-old admits the whole club is looking forward to the appointment going through.

He added: "Everyone is (looking forward

to an announcement). It's been a difficult season for us and when the management situation gets sorted out then we can move on and that will probably be in the next couple of weeks.

"There's not really a lot of pressure on me at the moment. It was four games and we couldn't really win anything, could only qualify for the Europa League and we'll carry on trying to do that."

"You get a little taste of the pressure you're put under regarding picking teams and wanting to do your best, so you get a little taste of it."

While Giggs has not been considered for the permanent role, he admits that his brief stint in charge has made him even more determined to be a manager when his playing days are over.

He added: "It just depends what time of day you're asking that question. Sometimes you probably think 'I can do without it' and other times it gives you so much pleasure."

"After the game on Saturday (a 1-0 defeat to Sunderland) you'd do without it but you learn more from defeats and not doing so well, just like when you're a player."

"But I've enjoyed it, I've enjoyed the whole experience and it's definitely helped me prepare for what will come after my playing career."

Giggs has backed proposals, which have come from a Football Association commission, for a new division in the Football League to include Premier League 'B' sides.

The plans have caused controversy but Giggs feels that it will help players to progress.

He said: "I would support it. Only speaking from my experience I remember playing at Old Trafford for the reserves when I was maybe 15 or 16 against Everton at 2 on a Saturday afternoon."

"I was playing against men and it

WC stadium worker electrocuted

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

A worker died Thursday at the World Cup stadium in Cuiaba after he was electrocuted, becoming the eighth fatality during event preparations, an official source told AFP.

A spokesman for the regional World Cup secretariat told AFP work would not be halted at the venue in central western Brazil following the accident.

The 32-year-old man was working on electrical installations at the Pantanal Arena when he suffered a shock and died despite attempts by emergency services at the scene to revive him.

A series of fatal accidents have marred preparations for the June 12-July 13 tournament in 12 cities across Brazil.

Three workers died in the Amazonia Arena in the Amazonian city of Manaus, and three other fatalities occurred at Sao Paulo's much-delayed Corinthians Arena, which hosts the opening match between Brazil and Croatia on June 12.

One further death occurred at the new stadium in the capital,

WORLD CUP BRIEFS

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Eat your beans

Brazil's squad have been given their World Cup food for thought. Brazilian fare will be on the menu -- rice and beans with meat - even if 19 of the squad are based abroad and have got used to eating foreign food. "Most of them have spent years playing abroad and are missing Brazilian habits and food from here," says nutritionist Silvia Ferreira.

The last Diego

Diego Maradona's doping rap at the 1994 World Cup in the United States caused a storm. Now readers of "The Last Maradona", by journalists Andres Burgo and Alejandro Wall, can find out more about the former star's drug-related travails. The work is subtitled "when they cut Diego's legs off" and looks at various issues surrounding the controversial case background.

Two million Bleus and counting

A month to go to the World Cup and the French team already have more than two million Facebook followers.

After cheering the team through the playoffs against Ukraine support has taken off on social media with some 5,000 supporters a day signing up. The French Football Federation this week responded by offering two fans the trip of a lifetime to watch Les Bleus in Brazil.

World Cup art

Argentine artist Peti Lopez, a former youth level player, is paying tribute to the World Cup, painting emblematic scenes from former competitions on old footballs -- one for each tournament to date. "What better than to unite my two great passions, art and soccer," he noted.

Ozil out to make charitable mark

German star Mesut Ozil says he is determined to make his World Cup mark off the pitch as well as on it by funding vital surgery for 11 Brazilian children.

"I have often read that little remains in the organizing country after a World Cup. We want to prove the contrary in Brazil," said Ozil.

Presidential seal of approval

Italian President Giorgio Napolitano has opened an exhibition honoring 104 years of the 'squadra azzurra' at the Italian Football Federation's headquarters in Rome. On show are items such as Amedeo Biavati's shirt from the 1938 World Cup final win in France and also that of Giovanni De Pra, a bronze medalist at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, the oldest surviving Italian national shirt. Other items include 1968 World Cup jerseys from keeper Dino Zoff and 1982 striker Paolo Rossi, as well as a pipe used by former coach Enzo Bearzot.

Taking sanctuary?

Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari went to mass at the Our Lady of Caravaggio in the southern town of Farrupilha prior to announcing his successful 2002 World Cup squad. This week, he paid a return visit to the sanctuary, three days before unveiling his squad for the tournament on home soil.