



Injury nightmare continues

INTERNET

The perils of pre-World Cup friendlies were realized by several countries on Saturday, but none worse than Mexico. With his teammates in tears, midfielder Luis Montes was stretched off shortly before halftime after a collision with Ecuador's Segundo Castillo left him with a horrifying leg break that required medical staff to cut off his sock before stabilizing him and sending him off to the hospital.

Adding to the nightmare for Mexico, captain Rafa Marquez was also sent to the hospital with a foot injury minutes later. Ecuador's Castillo, who collided with Montes, was also sent for medical evaluation with a suspected torn ACL.

Ghanaian central defender Jerry Akaminko will miss the World Cup finals after breaking his left ankle during Saturday's friendly with the Netherlands, the Ghanaian football federation announced on Sunday.

The 26-year-old, who plays his club football for Eskisehirspor in Turkey, broke his ankle in the third minute of time added on in the match in Rotterdam which Ghana lost 1-0.

Akaminko is due to be sidelined for at least three months.

No upsets in friendlies

AFP



Holland continued their build-up to the finals with a 1-0 win over fellow Brazil-bound Ghana, Manchester United striker Robin van Persie's fifth minute goal proving decisive.

The Dutch, who open their World Cup campaign against titleholders Spain in a rematch of the 2010 final, have only one further prep lined up, against Wales on Wednesday in Amsterdam.

Van Persie's goal came after a neat build-up between Wesley Sneijder and Arjen Robben.

The 2010 quarter-finalists Ghana were unable to produce any real chances against a stout Dutch defence but looked in good physical shape ahead of their opening World Cup game against the United States on June 14.

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal, who takes over at Manchester United after the World Cup, said: "We created quite a few chances even if the game wasn't of great quality."

"I'm very happy with the way my new (5-3-2) system worked. For sure it's not attractive as the old system of 4-3-3, you shouldn't wait for a great show with 5-3-2."

"But up against Ghana, which is a great side, this system worked really well."

"There will be critics but I assume and I truly believe in this system and in my players chosen to carry it out."

In Lisbon, Portugal, without injured star striker Cristiano Ronaldo (thigh), Pepe and Raul Meireles, played out a goalless draw with Greece.

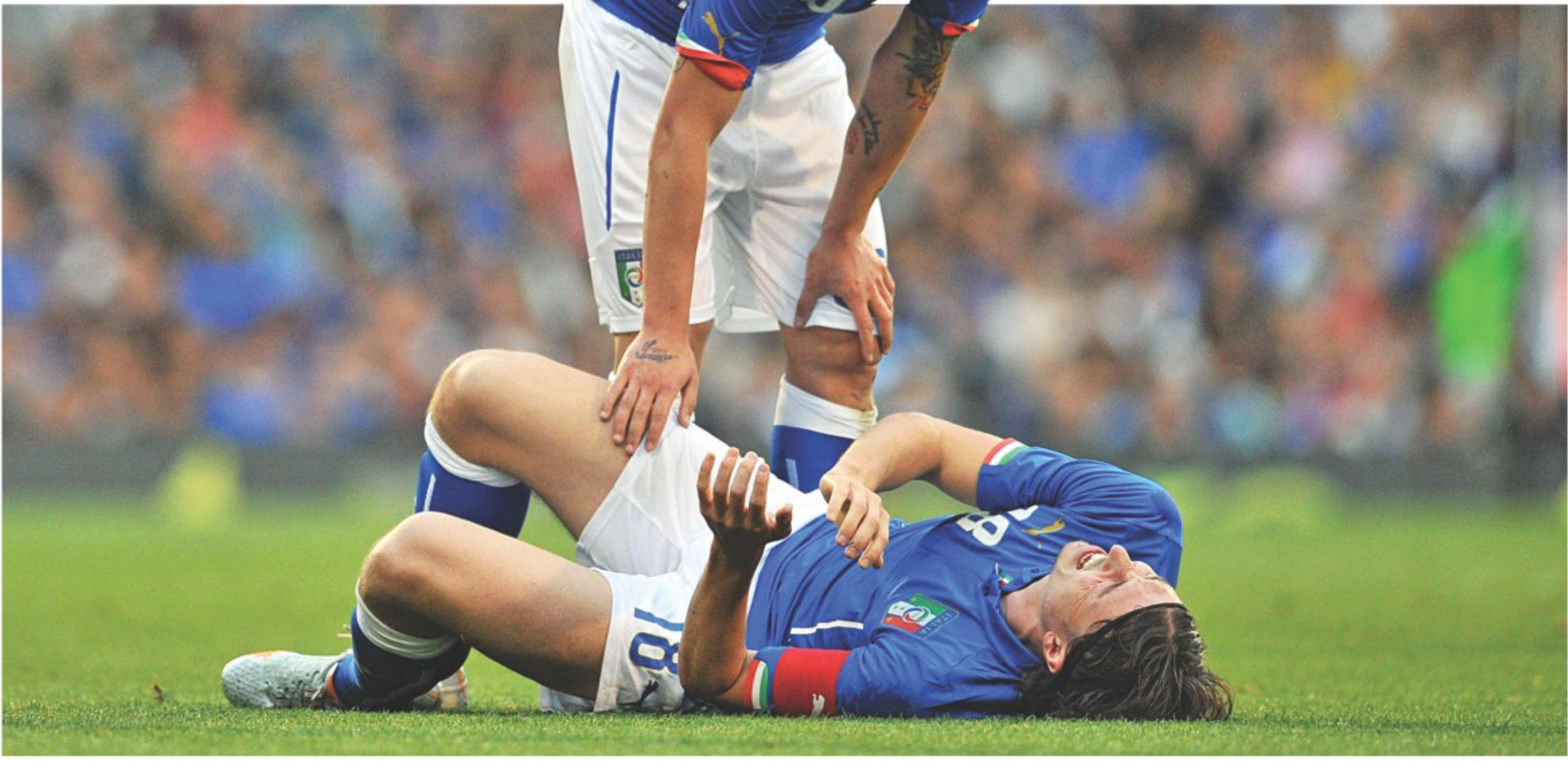
The fixture was a rematch of the Euro 2004 final in the Portuguese capital which the hosts under then coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, now boss of Brazil, lost 1-0.

Portugal coach Paulo Bento said: "Tonight we couldn't call on many players, not only Cristiano, and I reckon we put up a good display."

Portugal open in Brazil against Germany, before the USA and then Ghana in Group G.

Croatia tuned up for their clash with hosts Brazil in the World Cup curtain-raiser with a 2-1 win over Mali, while in Oslo Fabio Capello's Russia were held 1-1 by Norway.

Elsewhere, Algeria saw off Armenia 3-1 and Bosnia Herzegovina beat Ivory Coast 2-1 with Manchester City striker Edin Dzeko responsible for both of Bosnia's goals.



Italy's midfielder Riccardo Montolivo lies injured as Marco Verratti stands over him during their friendly match against Republic of Ireland at Craven Cottage in London on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Italy name WC squad

AFP, Rome

Florentina striker Giuseppe Rossi was the major absentee when Italy coach Cesare Prandelli named his 23-man World Cup squad on Sunday.

Rossi's exclusion was perhaps not a huge surprise as he missed four months of the season due to injury and didn't have enough time to rediscover his form and fitness to convince Prandelli of his worth.

Italy are in Group D alongside England, Uruguay and Costa Rica.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Salvatore Sirigu (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Mattia Perin (Genoa)

Defenders: Ignazio Abate (AC Milan), Andrea Barzagli (Juventus), Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus), Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus), Matteo Darmian (Torino), Mattia De Sciglio (AC Milan), Gabriel Paletta (Parma)

Midfielders: Alberto Aquilani (Fiorentina), Antonio Candreva (Lazio), Daniele De Rossi (Roma), Claudio Marchisio (Juventus), Thiago Motta (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Marco Parolo (Parma), Andrea Pirlo (Juventus), Marco Verratti (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA)

Forwards: Mario Balotelli (AC Milan), Antonio Cassano (Parma), Alessio Cerci (Torino), Ciro Immobile (Torino), Lorenzo Insigne (Napoli)

Agrani win

SPORTS REPORTER

Agrani Bank kept their hopes of qualifying for the Bangladesh Premier League alive after a 2-0 win over Victoria Sporting Club in the Premier Bank Bangladesh Championship League match at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Tony Barman and Mannaf struck one goal each for Agrani, who increased their point tally to 23 from 16 outings, three less than second-placed Farashganj SC.

The runners-up of the second-tier league will move to the top-tier along with the Rahmatganj MFS, who have already won the championship with three matches in hand.

Army, Ansar take crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Ansar became champions in men's and women's sections respectively in the National Boxing Championships which concluded at the Mohammad Ali Boxing Stadium yesterday.

Montolivo blow for Italy

REUTERS, London



Italy's World Cup plans were hit on Saturday when accomplished midfielder Riccardo Montolivo broke his leg during their penultimate warm-up game against Ireland at Craven Cottage which ended in a 0-0 draw.

The incident, following an accidental collision with Ireland defender Alex Pearce, overshadowed the rest of the match, which was a lively attacking affair, and left the Italy squad stunned by what had happened to their team mate.

"It's what we feared, a fractured tibia. It will probably need some months, Riccardo is out of the World Cup. He didn't deserve this," team doctor Enrico Castellacci told Rai TV.

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli told reporters the whole squad were shocked and devastated by the injury to their captain on the night who was winning his 58th cap.

"All our thoughts are with Riccardo and we will have to wait till tomorrow to make a rational assessment of the situation. After what happened everyone got distracted. It is too emotional now," he said.

"We saw the players inside. Everyone is broken and really sad about what happened."

"We fly back to Florence tomorrow but he will fly back to Milan and undergo surgery."

"We will have to sit down and assess the condition of all the players in the squad. The impact of what happened affected everyone tonight."

"He is a key player, a reference point on and off the pitch with a great attitude. He did not deserve this and everyone is just totally shocked and upset."

The incident came after 10 minutes and Montolivo, having stood up to test his leg, went to ground.

He was treated for more than five minutes before being carried off on a stretcher and taken to hospital for an X-ray where it was confirmed he had suffered a fractured tibia.

Italy also had to substitute Montolivo's replacement Alberto Aquilani, who only played for 23 minutes before a knock to the head, but an Italian FA spokesman said his MRI scan was negative as far as any serious injury was concerned.

Prandelli fielded a team full of hopefuls and fringe players challenging for a place in his final 23-man squad for next month's finals in Brazil and most gave a good account of themselves in a game full of chances for both sides.

But he said he did not particularly want to analyse or talk about the performance following what had happened.

"I will think about it in detail tomorrow, I am more concerned with Riccardo right now," he said.

Anyone watching from the England camp might not have learned too much about their Group D opponents, with the likes of veteran playmaker Andrea Pirlo among others left out of what was little more than a training game for the Italians.

But 21-year-old midfielder Marco Verratti could not have done more to play himself into the squad with an excellent industrious performance while Ciro Immobile, who is expected to complete a 15 million euros move to Borussia Dortmund next week, also had a good game.

Immobile had the ball in the net after 55 minutes but the effort was ruled out because he was marginally offside when he connected with Marco Parolo's cross.

"About the positives for tonight, Darmian's performance was fantastic," said Prandelli.

"Immobile? I think he did well. He had a couple of good ideas, as a player he is very generous and his overall performance was very good."

"We are working and I think we are going the right way. We are experimenting in training with our midfield and it is important we come up with the right plan."

Ireland, building towards the Euro 2016 qualifiers after failing to make the World Cup, played well and continually put goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu under pressure with Shane Long, twice, and Wes Hoolahan forcing him into saves.

The most pressing matter now facing Ireland boss Martin O'Neill is whether his assistant Roy Keane leaves the job to become manager of Scottish champions Celtic, a move expected to be finalised next week.

O'Neill told reporters: "I did not talk to him about it today as we were concentrating on the game and I expect the situation to be resolved by Wednesday."

"It was a very competitive game from start to finish tonight and I thought we played very, very well against a good side."

Italy continue their World Cup preparations with a friendly in Verona against Luxembourg on Wednesday before leaving for Brazil where they face fellow former World Cup winners Uruguay and England as well as Costa Rica in the opening stage.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Major General Mizanur Rahman Khan distributes prizes as chief guest among the winners of the second Navana Real Estate Ltd. Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday. Shafiul Islam Kamal, chairman of Navana Group, was present as special guest.

Qatar 2022 open to revote

GOAL.COM



Fifa vice-president Jim Boyce has left the door open for the 2022 World Cup host to be switched if corruption by Qatar can be proven.

Reports in the British media on Sunday claimed that former Asian Football Confederation (AFC) chief Mohammed bin Hammam paid up to €3.7 million to football officials in order to gain support for Qatar's bid.

Bin Hammam was formerly a member of Fifa's Executive Committee until being banned from all football activity for life in July 2013 amid allegations of bribery.

Bin Hammam paid more than \$5 million to get support for the tiny emirate's controversial campaign to host the 2022 World Cup, a British newspaper alleged Sunday.

The Sunday Times said it had obtained millions of emails, documents and bank transfers relating to alleged payments made by Mohammed bin Hammam.

It alleged that Bin Hammam, who is also a former Asian Football Confederation president, used slush funds to pay cash to top football officials to win a "groundswell" of support for Qatar's World Cup bid.

Qatar were awarded the tournament in December 2010, beating off competition from the United States, South Korea, Japan and Australia.

However, the bid has since been shrouded in controversy with doubts over players' ability to play in the Qatari summer

heat expected to see the event moved to the winter months between November and January, while the human rights record has come under immense scrutiny too.

Several figures in world football's governing body, including president Sepp Blatter, have admitted fault in overlooking the climate in Qatar as a potential problem.

And Boyce has welcomed an investigation into the latest claims, putting faith in Fifa's chairman of the investigatory chamber of the Ethics Committee, former United States Attorney, Michael Garcia.

Boyce told BBC Radio 5 Live's Sportsweek: "As a member currently of the Fifa executive committee, we feel that any evidence whatsoever that people involved were bribed to do a certain vote, all that evidence should go to Michael Garcia, whom Fifa have given full authority to, and let's await the report that comes back from Garcia."

"If Garcia's report comes up and his recommendations are that wrongdoing happened for that vote for the 2022 World Cup, I certainly as a member of the executive co would have absolutely no problem whatsoever if the recommendation was for a re-vote."

"If Garcia comes up with concrete evidence and concrete evidence is given to the executive committee and to Fifa then it has to be looked at very seriously at that time, there's no doubt about that."

Cafu, captain of the last Brazil team to win the World Cup, has urged his compatriots to put to bed the nightmare of their 1950 loss to Uruguay this year.

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