

ATLETICO 'SIGN' MATT DAMON

Atletico Madrid on Wednesday unveiled their latest big summer "signing" -- the Hollywood star Matt Damon. The actor was presented with a shirt of the Champions League finalists by club president Enrique Cerezo, a respected film producer, complete with Damon's name on the back. Damon, 45, said Atletico "remind me of my favourite team, the Boston Red Sox", the baseball team whose colours are also red and white. "It's our summer signing, joining next week, fresh from the US," joked Cerezo, who has similarly "signed" in the past movie stars Harrison Ford, Halle Berry and Samuel L. Jackson.



-AFP

Booters impressed by Saintfiet's disposition

SPORTS REPORTER



Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet has started injecting the style he wants the Bangladesh team to adapt against Bhutan in the

upcoming Asian Cup qualifying playoffs from the very first day of his training, captain Mamunul Islam said yesterday.

The 43-year-old Belgian is expected to strike a deal with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) within a few days to guide the national team against their South Asian opponents in September and October.

"He [Saintfiet] has already set a target of winning the matches against Bhutan and we, the players, will have to accomplish it. He has started showing the way we will play against Bhutan and also how the pace of the game should be. He studied our previous matches which we lost despite having better ball possession and he is going to change the style we played (under Lodewijk de Kruijf). He has showed that it is possible to score with only three touches from counter attacks," Mamunul explained.

Mamunul, one of the most experienced players of the team, termed the new coach as a friend and a guardian. "While it took nearly six months to get close to de Kruijf, it seems that the new coach is more accessible. He is friendlier yet at the same time more severe."

Though Saintfiet conducted only one session on the opening day, he made the national players realise that there

is no short-cut to securing a place in the final squad for the Bhutan ties, and the only way to do so is by impressing the coach with performance and discipline during the training sessions.

"He told us that he doesn't want to know any names or jersey number of players and that he doesn't want to know how much money the players are getting. He will only consider those players who will perform," young winger Jewel Rana said. "I think this statement from the coach will increase the competition among the players and we all are eager to do well to draw his attention."

Jewel also informed that Saintfiet is telling them to enjoy the game first and to increase their concentration level.

Defender Nasiruddin Chowdhury was a bit surprised to see Saintfiet's knowledge about the players.

"He knows A to Z about the players. He even knows the names of more than 25 players and in which positions they play for the team. That means he came here after studying a lot about the team," said the veteran defender.

"We don't have any other option but to win against Bhutan and we need to be back on the right track after losing our way in recent past," added Nasir.

However, defender Atiqur Rahman Meshu, who is not in the squad, believes that Bangladesh needs a change to produce good results at international level.

"We need to build up a single team which is not there at the moment. For a long time, a group of players have been playing, but not doing much. It is time to bring a change in the squad and give room to youngsters, who can inject a fighting attitude," opined the experienced defender.



Tom Saintfiet kicks the ball as his charges watch intently on the second day of the national team's training camp at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

FIFA to compensate Fahad

SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA has agreed to compensate Tk 1.8 lakh to Abahani midfielder Atiqur Rahman Fahad, who sustained an injury during Bangladesh national team's World Cup qualifying match against Jordan in March.

"FIFA has agreed to compensate the player through club under its club protection project following our application after Fahad sustained a meniscus injury during the match against Jordan on March 24.

"FIFA calculated that Fahad needed three months to recover from the injury and it will be giving Tk 3000 per day for the last two months as the first month is not considered. The compensation will be provided considering Fahad's club agreement and social safety net," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag.

Allardyce FA's leading candidate

AFP, London



Sam Allardyce looks to be in pole position to become the next England manager after his club Sunderland revealed Wednesday they granted at his request permission to speak to the Football Association.

The 61-year-old Englishman, who was interviewed for the England job 10 years ago but lost out to Steve McClaren, spoke with the three-man FA panel on Tuesday about succeeding Roy Hodgson, who resigned after England were beaten by Iceland in the Euro 2016 last-16 clash.

Sunderland, who Allardyce saved from relegation last term, made clear they wished the situation to be resolved as quickly as possible so they can prepare for another tough campaign in the Premier League.

"The Football Association contacted Sunderland AFC to seek permission to speak with our manager as part of what was supposed to be a confidential discussion process with potential candidates for the position of England manager," read a statement from Sunderland.

"At Sam Allardyce's request, we agreed to this.

"Sam is very much key to our plans. After what was an extremely challeng-

ing season, we are keen to see a period of stability, both on and off the field, and we want him to remain as manager of our football club.

"The ongoing speculation over Sam's position is extremely damaging



to Sunderland AFC, particularly at this crucial time of the season and we urge the FA to respect the disruption that this process is causing and bring about a swift resolution to the matter."

Allardyce, who apart from an Irish championship with Limerick City in 1992 has never won a major domestic trophy, is one of several names who have been linked with one of the trickiest jobs in the sport.

A fellow former no-nonsense central defender Steve Bruce, now

manager of Hull, Arsenal's veteran handler Arsene Wenger, the United States' German coach Jurgen Klinsmann and young Englishman Eddie Howe, who has impressed at Bournemouth, have all figured in talk about the job.

Allardyce, though, is the odds on favourite with English bookmaker William Hill for, despite not winning anything significant in his managerial career with among others Bolton, Newcastle, Blackburn and West Ham, he generally engenders respect and is seen as a great motivator of players.

His remarks of 10 years ago which fell on stoney ground that England was heading into an 'abyss' may have been ignored by the FA then, but resonate now after successive failures at major championships.

Since Swede Sven-Goran Eriksson guided England to the 2006 World Cup quarter-finals, losing to Portugal on penalties, they have either failed to qualify for a championships -- Euro 2008 which cost McClaren his job -- or failed to get past the first knockout stage in the subsequent two Euros and two World Cups under the autocratic Fabio Capello and then Hodgson.

Allardyce's remark after he lost out to McClaren sounds even more propitious: "The problem isn't now, the problem is in the future."

Messi campaign draws ire of tax authorities

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The campaign Barcelona launched on social media in support of Leo Messi in the face of his conviction for tax fraud, #wearealleomessi, hasn't just provoked a backlash from the public on Twitter, but also now from Spanish tax inspectors.

The president of the Spanish tax inspectors union, Gestha, spoke out on Spanish radio station Cadena Ser, saying: "Our view is that a campaign of solidarity, such as the one being run at the moment by Barcelona, in support of people who have defrauded the public purse isn't something that exactly improves the tax conscience of Spaniards", said Carlos Cruzado.

Messi was sentenced to 21 months in jail for defrauding the tax authorities out of 4.1 million euros, by hiding his income from image rights behind a web of offshore companies. Messi almost certainly won't go to jail as sentences under two years where the individual has no prior convictions are generally suspended. Messi has appealed the conviction.

The frustration of the tax inspectors is understandable in a country that suffers typically high rates of tax evasion and where the tax authorities have for years been

running campaigns to try to make the public aware of the very real need to comply with their tax obligations due to the need for public services and investment.

The campaign run by Barcelona has not been a resounding success. Although it has garnered support from some Barça and Messi fans, it's been widely criticised by many who feel they have nothing in common with someone who, despite earning tens of millions each year, failed to pay their taxes. There has been a wave of reactions on Twitter condemning and mocking the campaign, while a new hashtag #IamNotLeoMessi has been launched in response.

Spain's sports minister Miguel Cardenal also blasted the campaign, saying it was misguided as judicial decisions taken in a democracy "must be respected and accepted."

"If this campaign is aiming to make some kind of complaint about a judicial decision, it is totally mistaken. We are in an advanced democracy with an independent and competent judiciary. Decisions must be respected and accepted. You must not make campaigns of this type if you disagree with the sentence," he said.

Some quarters have raised suggestions of a "black hand", with La Vanguardia highlighting the fact that lead prosecutor Marta Silva de Lapuerta was a Real Madrid board member between 2000 and 2006.



Bundchen to ignite opening

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Ex-supermodel Gisele Bundchen will strut her stuff in her native Brazil next month, this time swapping the catwalk for the stadium hosting the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Rio.

Bundchen will walk through a "futuristic gateway" at Maracana Stadium during the August 5 ceremony marking the start of the first Games hosted in South America, according to Extra newspaper. Extra said the theme of the ceremony would be "the future."

Bundchen, now 35, who was once the highest paid model in the world, also participated in the prize ceremony for the 2014 World Cup final that pitted Argentina against Germany, in Maracana Stadium as well.

Extra said another highlight of the Olympics ceremony would be a performance by samba singer Elza Soares, 79.

Soares, the widow of football player Garrincha, is expected to sing about Rio's favelas.

Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, two living legends of the South American giant's music, are also expected to participate. They will be joined by funk singer Anitta.

"It's very exciting to work for such a great event," O Globo newspaper quoted her as saying.

And in this capital of the Carnival festival, the 12 leading school percussion bands will have the crowd bouncing to the music in the huge arena.

Pele records song for Olympics

AGENCIES, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian legend Edson Arantes do Nascimento, better known as 'Pele', on Wednesday wrote on his Twitter account that he has composed and recorded a song, titled 'Esperanca' (Hope), for the upcoming Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"I wrote and recorded a song called 'Esperanca' for the Olympics. I can't wait to share it with you on July 15!" the 75-year-old legend announced.

The tweet came four days after his wedding with Marcia Cibebe Aoki, a Brazilian businesswoman of Japanese descent, reports Efe.

Music has always been present in the life of Pele, whom the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has declared 'Athlete of the Century'.

Pele already has recorded songs with the late Brazilian pop superstar Elis Regina, sang next to the romantic idol Roberto Carlos, composed Christmas songs in the rhythm of samba, participated in one of the productions of musician Sergio Mendes and wrote children's songs.

Part-timers shock Rodgers' Celtic

REUTERS, Glasgow



Scottish giants Celtic crashed to a 1-0 Champions League defeat to Lincoln Red Imps on Tuesday with the goal scored by Lee Casciaro, a policeman in his day job.

Manager Brendan Rodgers' first competitive match in charge was a humiliating affair, with 34-year-old Casciaro inflicting the hammer blow in the 48th minute.

"Surreal, it's what people dream about, beating a big club like Celtic, we've done it here," the match winner said.

"Getting the winning goal is something that will be with me for the rest of my life," he added.

"Historic result for our club tonight. A brave performance by our lads has delivered a dream result. Well done to all!" Lincoln tweeted.

This was one of 1967 European champions' Celtic's worst ever defeats in the competition, and it left the Hoops counting on turning the second qualifying tie around in the return leg at Parkhead next week.

For Rodgers it was the worst possible start to his Celtic career, the former Liverpool boss having replaced Ronny Deila in May.

Celtic turned up in Gibraltar for their first competitive fixture of the season as overwhelming favourites against their semi-professional opponents who also included a taxi driver, a fireman in their line-up.

"It's [football] like a hobby for us," Casciaro said.

Gibraltar's Red Imps have dominated the domestic game in recent times, much like Celtic, winning the last 14 league titles.

Celtic struggled in the heat and then got caught out by Casciaro, scorer of Gibraltar's first international goal against Scotland at Hampden in 2015, who scored from 12 yards.

Despite sustained late pressure from Celtic Lincoln held out for a famous victory in front of a crowd of around 2,000.

Rodgers tried to inject a sense of realism to the topsy turvy outcome.

"There is no embarrassment," he said. "It was a tough game in tough conditions. We didn't take our chances. We have seen enough to see that we can get through in the second leg. Of course you are disappointed to lose. The result here complicates it a bit for us. We move on to next week."



After heartbreak in the Copa America and his recent conviction for tax fraud, Lionel Messi has taken some time off to soak up the sun and relax on vacation with his family in Ibiza.

PHOTO: DAILY MAIL

Lost baggage costs Rio berth

AGENCIES, Madrid



Spanish pole vaulter Didac Salas' last chance of booking a Rio Olympic berth were dashed when his baggage was lost during his flight from Amsterdam to Barcelona.

Salas returned to Barcelona after failing to achieve the Olympic qualifying mark of five metres 70 cms in the blustery and difficult conditions at the European Championships in Amsterdam, reports Xinhua.

That failure left him with just one chance to make the qualifying standard: an event in Barcelona on Sunday, but he had not accounted for the baggage handlers working for the airline 'Vueling'.

Salas arrived safely in Barcelona, but his

poles didn't, meaning he had to compete using borrowed equipment.

"I was able to use a friend's poles, but it isn't the same because it is very personal and I didn't feel comfortable... It's a shame because I was feeling really good and confident beforehand," he explained in sports paper, Marca after he failed to reach the necessary Olympic standard.

Salas explained that Vueling also lost the poles of fellow vaulters, Jorge Urena and Adrian Valles and although they appeared on Monday, by then it was too late for Salas.

"Maybe I will have the right to some compensation for the late arrival of luggage, but I lost my last chance to go to the Olympic Games and that is something you can not compensate for," he lamented.