

BASTON OUT AFTER FREAK ACCIDENT

Atletico Madrid forward Borja "Baston" Gonzalez has had an operation on his left arm after breaking a bone in a freak training ground accident. The 23-year-old suffered a left ulna fracture during a power-training exercise on Thursday. The accident occurred after a rubber band anchored to the floor got dislodged and hit Baston's arm. The surgery involved inserting a plate with screws into the arm. "I want to thank everyone for the support and affection I have received," Baston told the club's official website. "The surgery went well and now I am only thinking of recovering in order to return to work with the rest of my team mates as soon as possible." Atletico did not specify the estimated recovery time for Baston, who spent the 2015-16 campaign on loan with Eibar where he scored 18 goals in 32 league appearances.

-REUTERS



Nani looks to spark success at Valencia

REUTERS, Madrid

Nani, who was recently crowned European champion with Portugal, wants to help bring the good times back to new club Valencia.

The Spanish side struggled this past season and ended the La Liga campaign with just 44 points and in 12th place, their worst finish in three decades.

Valencia have paid Fenerbahce Nani's 8.5 million euro (\$9.47 million) buyout clause and he has moved to Spain on a three-year deal, just 12 months after leaving Manchester United.

"People think that when you win an important championship, you relax," Nani said at his unveiling at the Mestalla stadium, which was attended by 12,000 fans.

"But that is not my thinking. I'm very eager. This is a big club, with great fans. I want to be a part of this great club.

"My aim is to contribute in the best possible way, to help in every game I play and try to achieve our aims."

Valencia are accustomed to finishing high in the standings and playing in Europe,

with back-to-back appearances in the Champions League final in 1999 and 2000 and a 2004 UEFA Cup success, among their notable achievements.

Their disappointing 2015-16 campaign has meant they will not play in a continental competition this season.

"It's normal that big clubs in the world go through bad years, the same thing happened to Manchester United and now they are better," said Nani.

"The same has happened to Valencia. We hope to return to the club to the level it deserves as soon as possible."

Portugal's Euro 2016 final triumph over hosts France was still at the front of Nani's thoughts.

"The European Championship was a unique experience, we made history," he said. "It was a dream come true and now I'm delighted because I have a new chapter to look forward to, with new aims to achieve.

"I'm going to try to be happy like I was with my country and in the other clubs that I've played at.

"Valencia is the best option for me. It has been at world level. It's an ideal club for me to be happy and prove my level. I wanted to play in La Liga."



Valencia's latest signing Portuguese forward Nani poses during his official presentation in Valencia on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Maradona TV series planned

AFP, Buenos Aires

Diego Maradona's larger-than-life exploits are coming to the small screen, producers said Thursday, announcing the Argentine football legend will be the subject of a new TV series targeting international audiences.

"Every month of my life could make 100 episodes. Everything I've lived surpasses any kind of fiction," Maradona said in a press release from Argentine TV channel Telefe, the producer of the new series.

Telefe said it had signed a deal with Maradona to make a show about his life, but did not give details on the format, cast or release date.

Maradona said he was "happy and enthusiastic that Telefe is developing this project for the world."

Telefe's content director, Tomas Yankelevich, said the company was looking for partners to make an "unprecedented super production."

"It's an incredible challenge as a producer to think about fictionalizing the life of the best player of all time and probably the best-known person in the world," he said.

Payet pledges future to West Ham

AFP, London

France playmaker Dimitri Payet handed West Ham a huge boost ahead of the new Premier League season by telling the club he is "100 per cent staying" with the Hammers.

Payet had been linked with a move away from West Ham after backing up a superb debut season in England with several impressive performances for his country as France reached the final of Euro 2016.

But the 29-year-old, who signed a new long-term contract through until 2021 in February, insisted he was fully committed to staying at West Ham.

"I've heard about all the interest and I'm flattered. But I love West Ham," Payet told The Sun.

"We had a fantastic season and I can't wait to play in the Olympic Stadium.

"I'm 100 per cent staying at West Ham, I love the club. I can tell the Hammers fans that."

Payet scored 12 goals and provided 13 assists and was named the club's player of the year as West Ham finished seventh, their highest league finish since the 2001-02 season.

Schippers ready for a different experience

AFP, Monaco



Dutch sprint sensation Dafne Schippers predicted that the Rio Olympics would be an altogether different experience from the London edition four years ago.

In 2012, a fresh-faced Schippers finished 12th in the heptathlon won by Briton Jessica Ennis-Hill on that famed 'Super Saturday'.

Schippers has since ditched the gruelling, two-day multi-discipline event to concentrate on the sprints, her last major championships in the heptathlon coming in the 2013 worlds in Moscow when she won bronze.

But the change has not been without some success: her world championships-winning time in the women's 200m at Beijing last year was the fourth fastest time ever run; last week she defended her European 100m title before helping the Dutch team storm to victory in the 4x100m relay.

"It's always very special to have a competition like this at home," Schippers said of the European championships in Amsterdam, billboards of the sprinter dotted across the

city to ensure maximum coverage.

"It was the first tournament like that in our country. I'm happy with my results and now I want to go on to the next stage. The Euros were a first step to Rio.

"I have Monaco on Friday, then London (Diamond League meet on July 22-23) and then Rio. I search competitions with other fast girls with good starts. I'm hoping to run faster than the 10.90sec I ran in the Euros."

Schippers said her improvement in the 100m, in which she will race on Friday at the Stade Louis II, had much improved.

"In the 100m, I've worked very hard on my start which is now better and better. I'm more stable now and am running faster times than last year," the 24-year-old Utrecht-born athlete said.

"The Olympic Games are very special," she added. "I was in London as a 20-year-old and I was very happy to be there. This is different because I'm going for medals."

But Schippers said that natural talent was only one part of the story behind her success.

"Talent is not only just natural talent but the ability to train very, very hard," she insisted.

"You have to love a bit of pain and not everyone has it."

'Kante, make up your mind'

AFP, Stegersbach



Leicester City manager Claudio Ranieri has called on French midfielder enforcer N'Golo Kante to decide quickly on his future as the Premier League champions plan the defence of their title.

Kante's future is uncertain with a new contract from Leicester on the table amid interest from a host of rival clubs including Chelsea.

Ranieri has warned he does not want to be left waiting for a decision from the 25-year-old, who was one of the stand-out stars of last season's title triumph and emerged with credit at Euro 2016 although he didn't get to play in the 1-0 defeat in the final against Portugal.

"We offered a new contract to him, he went away because he wanted to finish Euro 2016, and now there is so much speculation around him," said Ranieri at Leicester's pre-season training camp in Austria.

"I don't want to lose him but I can understand if he wants to go.

"I would like now to be sure who stays

with me or not, because the friendly matches start now and I have to start to manage and change and try things."

Ranieri has made regular calls to 25-year-old Kante, who has a release clause of around £20 million (\$26.6m, 23.9m euros) in his contract and is understood to be being monitored by European champions Real Madrid as well as Chelsea.

"Maybe it is not Chelsea, maybe it is another team who made the Champions League," said Ranieri.

But Ranieri is more bullish about his chances of keeping Riyad Mahrez, who was crowned PFA player of the year for his eye-catching displays last season.

The Algeria international has also been at the centre of summer transfer speculation but Ranieri does not expect him to leave the King Power Stadium.

"I am very confident with him," said the Italian. "He stays here with us.

"He enjoys it and is not a man saying 'coach I want to go'. He is happy."

Meanwhile, Ranieri is still to sign a new contract of his own despite leading the club to a fairytale title win last season.

The 64-year-old believes he will agree a new deal before the start of the

season but insists the negotiations between his representatives and sporting director Jon Rudkin are not a pressing concern.

He signed a three-year agreement last summer but is likely to be rewarded for last season's title success with a four-year contract.

"I think before we start the season I will sign, but I signed one year ago," said the former Chelsea manager.

"I think I will sign but it's not important for me."

One man who has signed a new deal is Jamie Vardy, whose goals fired Leicester to the title.

He turned down the chance to join Arsenal and instead penned a four-year contract with the Foxes.

He and Kante have been given extra time off after playing at Euro 2016, but Ranieri says Vardy's new contract has already boosted the squad.

"It is unbelievable," said Ranieri.

"It was fantastic because Jamie is our point of reference, or one of our points of reference.

"Of course all his team-mates are happy and gave us a lot of energy to have another good season."

'I believe I can fly'

Superstar track and field athlete Usain Bolt flashed the same smile that he always wears on his face in a recent interview with The Telegraph. However, the Jamaican world record holder offered a much different insight than he normally does, with an excellent introspective dialogue. The following are excerpts from the interview:

On his hopes for Rio 2016

What I always wanted was to be great. For me, greatness means being remembered. People talk about sports all the time, and I want to be a part of that conversation, you know what I mean? When they talk about greats it's always Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Pelé. I want to be a part of that conversation so when they talk about the greats they say Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Pelé, Usain Bolt.

[When reminded that he is already spoken of in those terms] Yeah, but I'm still running. I want that when I retire I'm so great that you can't forget me, because you can never forget what Ali and all these guys have done. I think this Olympics will help me to do that. People tell me, 'you're a legend'... Yeah, but this Olympics will do it.

You always have to be confident. I believe I can fly. My coach always says when you get to 28, 29 that's it -- you can maintain, but he doesn't think you can go faster. But in my case, he says, I've never really pushed the barrier and got to my full potential.

How he started running

I gave trouble at school, but people know that's how I was, so I wasn't bad trouble, if you know what I mean? I was so that person that people know was always smiling. I was so in love with cricket I didn't want to do anything else. Track was just something I was doing because I was good at it, and because I was winning people said "You should do this." So, all right.

On Tyson Gay being allowed back

You have to understand it felt like he [Tyson Gay] cut me deeper. It was like the relationship I had with him... It wasn't like a bond or anything, but it was so competitive. I respected him so much as an athlete and over the years a rivalry built up and it got so big, and I really enjoyed it. I love competition, so he was my biggest rival and he made me feel like when I go out there I have to be at the top of my game at all times and I have to be focused, I have to be ready. And then when I heard about the drugs scandal I



was like, come on...

Maybe over time I'll move past it, but it really bothered me -- really, really bothered me.

On his personal life

I've been dating for two years, but I'm not going to tell you who she is. I want to keep it small for now, because I know when it gets out there's going to be a lot of things to say, and I told her she can't handle it. Because I've been through the media. I understand how you guys are -- especially the British media. You know that's true! The tabloid media, I should say. I've noticed that in Britain, every famous person, as soon as they get famous, they have to get married -- like, it's a rule. And I'm like, that's not fair! Like, Rooney got married so young -- all the footballers that are English, as soon as they get really famous they have to get married. And I think it's unfair to them.

You get famous, there's so much pressure of girls wanting you. And for you to get married at 21, you have not lived one bit. But I'm not English! I'm Jamaican! We have a totally different culture, so you can't judge me based on your culture. I want to get married. Because my parents are married. I've thought about it, but I know I'm not going to get married before 35, for sure.

Nadal will be ready for Rio

AFP, Madrid

Rafael Nadal will be fit and ready for Rio, the head of the Spanish Olympic Committee insisted Thursday, even though the 14-time Grand Slam title winner is still sweating on his place in the squad.

Nadal was the Olympic champion at Beijing in 2008 but missed the London Games with a knee injury four years later.

The 30-year-old is due to be Spain's flag-bearer at the opening ceremony in Rio on August 5 but still needs the go-ahead from the International Tennis Federation after he failed to meet qualifying criteria.

"Nadal's commitment is total and he will go to Rio to participate," said Alejandro Blanco, the president of the country's Olympic committee (COE).

"I have no doubts over his participation. He is training regularly in order to achieve what he wants -- a medal."

Nadal is due to play singles and also the mixed doubles with French Open champion Garbine Muguruza at Rio.

However, he is still recovering from a left wrist injury which caused an early withdrawal from the French Open as well as forcing him to sit out Wimbledon.

Conte aiming to light a fire

AFP, London



Antonio Conte says he hopes Chelsea under his stewardship will light up the Premier League title race this season.

The 46-year-old -- who guided Italy to the quarter-finals of Euro 2016 only losing on penalties to world champions Germany -- said Chelsea may not be top of everyone's list to challenge for the crown after finishing 10th in their title defence last term.

"We are under-rated a bit, and might slip under the radar, but I hope there's a small flame flickering here that can hopefully grow into a blazing inferno," said Conte at his unveiling to the media at Stamford Bridge on Thursday.

The Italian -- who rejected the opportunity to follow the example of predecessor 'Special One' Jose Mourinho and give himself a nickname -- said a club the size of Chelsea shouldn't be scrabbling around in mid-table.

"When you are a player, a footballer, or a manager of a great club like Chelsea, you must play to win," said Conte, who also took the opportunity to confirm Chelsea icon John Terry would be club captain.

"To win. To win the title. Or to fight and, at the end, to compete with the other teams to win the title and reach your targets."

"I know that this league is very, very difficult because there are six or seven teams who can win the title. For this reason, this situation is very exciting for me. It excites me, this situation."

"We know that, this year, it won't be easy for us because if we think about the last season and 10th position... Last season was a bad season, yes?"

"I know, that there is only one team who wins the title. But we must stay there at the end of the season, to fight for the title and be there for the Champions League. Chelsea belongs in the Champions League, and we must stay there."

Conte, whose animated behaviour on the touchline was one of the more memorable features of the Euro, refused to compare himself to Mourinho.

"It's always tough to compare people," said Conte, who as a hardworking midfielder helped Juventus win five Serie A titles and to the Champions League trophy.

"There are certain managers who are winners. On that I would agree with you.

"Regardless of the job they do, some coaches have a winning mentality besides their working methods and philosophies.

"There are winners in football, but not everyone has that in them. Those who do are, indeed, special."