

WAGs affect performance: Dynamo coach

KIEV: Dynamo Kiev's coach blamed his players' girlfriends and wives for the team's performances this season and ordered the squad to a training camp away from any distractions, the club's Web site said.



Dynamo, last year's champions for the 12th time since 1992, have started the season poorly, spending most of August and September languishing in the bottom half of the 16-team league. On Saturday, their recovery continued when they beat Zarja Lugansk 2-1 to move to third behind arch rivals Shakhtar Donetsk and Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk.

Asked by a female reporter at a news conference whether the performance was shameful for the reigning champions, coach Josef Sabo said: "Personally, I'm not ashamed because I see how in a short time they have made very good progress, because I have taken them away from their women, from their wives."

"We went to the (training) base, because women in football are a scourge. They do not understand that men need to work, that they have a hard job to do," he said. **REUTERS**

planet sport

GERMAN ARCHITECTS TO PREPARE PLAN



CHENNAI: Two German architects will next week visit New Delhi to prepare a master plan for the country's first-ever Formula One track, according to Indian Olympic Association President Suresh Kalmadi. Kalmadi said although venue for the race was not finalised yet, he was confident India would host the race in next couple of years. "Bringing F1 is not a simple matter but we are very confident," said Kalmadi at the prize distribution ceremony for the JK Tyres National Road Racing Championships.

GP WINNER ABE KILLED IN STREET CRASH



TOKYO: Three-time MotoGP winner Norifumi Abe of Japan was killed in a street crash when his motorbike collided with a truck making an illegal U-turn, police said yesterday. The 32-year-old ploughed into the truck while it was making the turn yesterday in the Tokyo suburb of Kawasaki, they said. Abe began riding motorbikes at the age of five and became the youngest-ever title winner when he won the 500cc class at the All Japan Road Race Championship at the age of 18. He then joined the 500cc MotoGP, the world's premier motorcycling championship, in 1994.

IRAN-BORN GERMAN WON'T PLAY ISRAEL



BERLIN: An Iranian-born player in Germany's under-21 national soccer team has withdrawn from an upcoming match against Israel citing "personal reasons", the German Football Association (DFB) said yesterday. Ashkan Dejagah, 21, who plays for Bundesliga club VfB Wolfsburg, asked national team managers to allow him to withdraw from Germany's European Championship qualifier against Israel, to be played in Tel Aviv on Friday, the DFB said. "He came to us citing personal reasons that seemed very plausible," DFB spokesman Jens Grittner said.

THE LIONEL KING

Legends, coaches, fans, rivals... Barcelona's Messi continues to stun everyone with his feat of scoring in six consecutive games



Lionel Messi celebrates one of his goals with his team-mates this season

BARCELONA'S ARGENTINE striker Lionel Messi continues to stun Spanish football audiences unabated with the 20-year-old international scoring in each of the last six games including two Champions League and four La Liga matches.

Sunday's 19th-minute strike against Atletico Madrid meant Messi became the top-scorer in the league with six goals from as many matches. In the European competition, the Argentine has scored twice in two matches.

The match was touted to be a battle between Messi and compatriot Sergio Aguero of Atletico, a battle which was won by Barca striker hands down.

"Messi cannot be compared with anybody," Frank Rijkaard said in the build-up to yesterday's encounter. "He is a specific kind of player and a special one. Aguero is a great player and one who has been in

very good form. But when I speak of Messi, I speak of him alone. He is in a league of his own."

Messi's success has won him comparisons to former Argentine football legend Diego Maradona and sparked talk that he could be a contender for the forthcoming Fifa World Player of the Year awards.

ALL HAIL MESSI SPANISH MEDIA, sports fans and Messi's team-mates and rivals have all heaped praise on the player whose nickname is "the flea" because of his shortness.

"Messi is in a state of grace. There are few other players in Europe with his form," said Sevilla coach Juande Ramos whose side was defeated 2-1 by Barcelona this season with both goals coming from the Catalan club's star. Messi scored twice within six minutes during his side's 4-1 thrashing of Real Zaragoza.

"He is probably the best player in the world because he is not just happy to destabilise you with his dribbling, he scores as well," said Zaragoza coach Victor Fernandez. Messi's rise to superstardom has been meteoric. He made his first team league debut for Barcelona in October 2004, when he was the third youngest player ever to appear in the club's famous

blue and claret jersey. Later that season, while still only 17, he became the

LA LIGA TOP-SCORERS

- 6 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
- 5 Sergio Aguero (Atletico Madrid); Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal)
- 4 Ricardo Oliveira (Real Zaragoza); Wesley Sneijder (Real Madrid); Luis Garcia (Espanyol); Frederic Kanoute (Sevilla); Juan Arango (Real Mallorca)
- 3 Javi Guerrero (Recreativo Huelva); Alexander Kerzhakov (Sevilla); Thierry Henry (Barcelona); Raul (Real Madrid); Rafael Sobis (Real Betis); Daniel Guiza (Real Mallorca); Ariel Ibagaza (Real Mallorca)

youngest player for the Catalan club to score in a league match. He followed up these prodigious feats with an outstanding display at the under-20 World Cup in the summer of 2005 where he was voted the best player of the tournament.

A FRANK PLAN

BARCELONA COACH Frank Rijkaard made a deliberate ploy of not overusing the youngster in the next season but he still notched up six goals in 17 appearances, many of them coming off the substitute's bench. Last season the upward trajectory continued with 14 goals in 26 appearances despite four months on the sidelines due to injury.

One of his goals scored against Getafe in the Spanish Cup was widely regarded to be amongst the best of last season anywhere in the world. His effort from the halfway line, going past a myriad of de-

fenders before slotting the ball home, has elicited comparisons to Maradona's famous strike at the 1986 World Cup against England.

In a contemporary test of popularity a video of the goal on the video-sharing Internet site YouTube has been one of the most viewed sporting features in recent months. "I do not know whether or not I am the best in the world. I am working away as normal and feel good and I am pleased with the way things have been going," said Messi.

The striker has benefited from an out-of sorts Ronaldinho and the injury-induced absence of Samuel Eto'o and Thierry Henry still finding his feet in the team. "He is currently playing at a very high level," said Rijkaard not wishing to inflate the player's ego although the player has not shown any inclination of getting big-headed about his talent. **AGENCIES**

History favours Alonso in Formula 1 title battle

ALAN BALDWIN

SHANGHAI: Fernando Alonso has history on his side, even if he suspects McLaren team bosses are against him in his battle to win a third Formula One championship in a row.

Team-mate Lewis Hamilton remains the title favourite despite a Chinese Grand Prix that dealt the 22-year-old rookie his first retirement of the season after leading from pole position. The Briton's agonising slip, while limping back on worn tyres, into the gravel trap at the pit lane entry transformed what had looked like a cruise to the championship into a three-way fight down to the wire.

Hamilton will now head for the final race in Brazil on October 21 with 107 points to Alonso's 103 and 100 for Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen.

Alonso, who finished second on Sunday behind Raikkonen, sounded less optimistic about his chances after an angry weekend in which he aimed some heavy criticism at his team. "Hopefully I can do a good race (in Brazil) but for the championship, I still need something really dramatic if I want to win," he said.

PREVIOUS EXAMPLES

HISTORY SUGGESTS there is a better chance of that happening than he imagines. The last time three drivers were in with a chance of the title at the last race was 1986, when Hamilton's compatriot Nigel Mansell led Alain Prost and Nelson Piquet before the Adelaide finale. Prost won the title after Mansell's tyre exploded.

Of the eight occasions since 1950 on which the title battle has gone down to the wire as a three-way fight, only three have seen the driver leading the championship before the final race go on to become champion.

In four of those showdowns, the glory has ultimately gone to the man who had been in sec-



Alonso celebrates his podium finish in China

ond place. Alonso has won both his previous titles, with Renault, at Interlagos while Hamilton has no previous knowledge of the circuit—although that is no big obstacle since he has won three times this year at unfamiliar tracks.

MCLAREN WANTS...

HAMILTON KNOWS a win at Interlagos ends all argument but fourth place would also be enough if Raikkonen were to lead Ferrari to a one-two finish. Both Hamilton and Alonso, who may be leaving the team after Brazil, expect McLaren to give them equal cars and treatment. But there can be little doubt about who the team would rather see win their first title since 1999.

"We weren't racing Kimi, we were basically racing Fernando," McLaren boss Ron Dennis explained the team's delay to bring Hamilton in for new tyres on Sunday. **REUTERS**

Karim & CR on track

SUVAJIT MUSTAFI

KARIM SHEIKH'S inspiring performance led Central Railway to an emphatic 2-1 win against the Mumbai Customs. The 21-year-old from Colaba, scored a 30th minute equaliser with an amazing header.

Sheikh received a perfect pass from India under-20 player Safique from the center and beat the Customs goalkeeper to open the scoring for the eventual winners.

Two minutes later, Sheikh, who was also adjudged the man of the match, got into the act again but couldn't capitalise on the chance. However, he wasn't out of action for long and set up a goal for team-mate Arun EK, whose bicycle kick made it 2-1 in favour of the eventual winners.

Customs would have considered themselves to be unfortunate since they were the first to move the scoreboard in the match through Stalin Matthew's 23rd minute goal.

"Being the favourites, we should have put up a better performance. Mumbai Customs fought well, but at the end of the day what matters is a win and points," Sheikh said.

However, Central Railways



Central Rly's Karim Sheikh (right) in action yesterday

coach Adeep Kenkre wasn't satisfied with his team's effort and especially because Customs scored first.

"I am not pleased. The boys missed too many chances, we wanted to score first, but Customs did so. The example we have set earlier in the season, we were expected to beat Customs by a bigger margin. We have almost qualified to the next round, and we need to play better to beat the best teams," he said.

The match saw some intense moments towards the end in-

cluding a brawl between players from both sides.

Referee Ramesh Subramaniam, who was generally lenient throughout, had to take some tough decisions, and later showed a yellow card to Safique.

Yesterday's win meant Central Railways topped the Group B with seven points. In the other Group B match yesterday, Indian Navy drew 3-3 against Bengal Mumbai FC taking their tally to three points and four points respectively from their four matches.