

Walchhofer finally bags Val Gardena downhill win

VAL GARDENA, Italy (AFP) — Austria's Michael Walchhofer put paid to years of runner-up places on the Val Gardena downhill Saturday claiming victory ahead of Switzerland's Didier Cuche and American Scott MacCartney.

Walchhofer, a former world champion in the discipline, thus claims his second downhill win of the season after dominating the field at Beaver Creek, Colorado at the end of November.

"It's the last 'classic' missing from my collection, it's one of my best victories," said a delighted Walchhofer, who admitted he had to use sheer speed to overcome the more "technically proficient" Cuche.

Cuche had won the men's super-G on Friday and was hoping to claim a rare double, but he could only look on in agony as Walchhofer scorched the run in a time of 1min 56.70 to beat him by 0.18sec.

The Swiss racer benefited from the absence of Austrian ace Benjamin Raich to regain the overall World Cup lead after 12 races. He now has 453 points and a 12-point cushion on Raich.

But he is keeping a lid on his overall victory pretensions.

"Of course after a victory (in the super-G) and a second place here you are super-motivated," said Cuche.

"I might be in the (overall World Cup) lead but I'm not going to waste my energy counting the points. We can do that in March."

MacCartney finished a deserved third at 0.56 to claim his



Austria's Michael Walchhofer clears a gate on his way to win the Val Gardena Men's Downhill Ski World Cup in Val Gardena December 15, 2007. Walchhofer won ahead of Switzerland's Didier Cuche and Scott MacCartney of the U.S. was third.

(Reuters/Alessandro Bianchi)

first World Cup podium in the discipline and only the second in his career after his second place finish at Garmisch in January 2006.

"It was a great race for me, and a great result," said the American, who is the latest from the ambitious US team to secure a podium finish of late.

"It's a great season so far for

the team, with Marco (Sullivan) second at Lake Louise and Steve (Nyman) second at Beaver Creek.

"With me second today that makes three different skiers on the podium, without forgetting Bode Miller's second place in the super-G (on Friday)."

Miller, the runner-up to Cuche in the super-G, finished eighth after

seeing his lightning start evaporate on the tricky middle section.

Walchhofer, 32, had previously finished runner-up four times on the Val Gardena downhill run.

Swiss racer Silvan Zurbriggen meanwhile will not race again this season after sustaining knee ligament damage in a crash in the downhill.

Capello can help revitalize English coaching: Brooking

LONDON (AFP) — Fabio Capello can help lay the foundation for a complete overhaul of English football's coaching system, according to Sir Trevor Brooking.

Capello has been confirmed as England coach on a four and a half year contract but Brooking, the English FA's director of football development, is more concerned with the Italian's impact on the long-term future of the game.

Brooking is convinced coaches need to be better educated before they can produce players with the technical ability necessary to compete at international level.

Capello's vast experience at some of Europe's biggest clubs could be invaluable to reevaluating the English system and Brooking is keen to pick his brains.

"We have to use Fabio's massive knowledge of a variety of different countries and structures. If we can't suck that out of him, we want pilloring," Brooking told BBC1's Football Focus.

"The harsh reality is that the technical play of our youngsters is below that of a lot of major European countries," Brooking told BBC TV's Football Focus.

"The extension of that is that they wonder who is producing these players. That is why there is no progression across Europe of our players and coaches to be in other countries."



Brooking would prefer to see England and the Premier League's top clubs managed by homegrown coaches but he knows it will be a long process.

"We have to look at what we are going to do in the future and how we are going to change it," he said. "I do believe, and I always have, that we should have English coaches."

"We need to create our own vision and get ourselves into a position where we have better English players and better English coaches and have that recognized outside this country."

"It needs significant resource because the FA have not invested enough money or put together a proper support structure."

"I will fight tooth and nail to get the leadership and investment required to make that happen because if we don't we will just get left behind."



Shamsai summoned to Iran futsal squad

Tehran Times Sports Desk

TEHRAN — Asian Futsal Player of the Year Vahid Shamsai was here Saturday called up for a six-sided tournament in Azerbaijan.

Manager Hossein Shams invited 25 players for the meet and the training camp will start on Dec. 29.

Azerbaijan is to host the competitions from Jan. 13-19.

Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Turkey, and Russia will compete in the tourney.

Dour Bayern cling to top spot as Bremen blitz Leverkusen

BERLIN (AFP) — Bayern Munich will stay top of the Bundesliga for Christmas but only by virtue of a superior goal difference over Werder Bremen after they were held to a 0-0 draw at Hertha Berlin on Saturday.

While Bremen were busy destroying Bayer Leverkusen 5-2, Bayern gave their traveling fans little to cheer about as they picked up their second consecutive 0-0 draw in freezing temperatures in Berlin.

The result comes at a troubling time for Bayern.

Captain Oliver Kahn was suspended for the Hertha game and heavily fined after criticizing teammates Luca Toni and Franck Ribery for inconsistent performances in the wake of last weekend's goalless draw with struggling Duisburg.

After their spectacular start to the season, when they hammered rivals Bremen 4-0 on the second weekend, Bayern have become mere shadows of their former confident selves having won just two of their last seven league games.

And, according to reports in the German press on Friday, a replacement for coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, out of contract next June, is already being sought for next season.

With in-form striker Toni out with a thigh injury, it was down to Miroslav Klose to be the lone forward supported by converted striker Lukas Podolski and Ribery in the midfield.

Georgian football coach's son held for family massacre

TBILISI (AFP) — A 20-year-old Georgian has been detained over the murder of his father, a prominent football coach, and three other family members, an official said Saturday.

Nikolai Nadiradze was arrested after his father, Temur Nadiradze, his mother, his 24-year-old brother, and his 21-year-old pregnant sister-in-law were shot to death in the family home in western Georgia, Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utuashvili told AFP.

Temur Nadiradze was a coach at the Torpedo football school, where he trained many top footballers, including Malkhaz Asatiani, a star of the Georgian national team who plays for Lokomotiv Moscow in the Russian Premier League.

FIFA bans high-altitude matches without acclimatization

TOKYO (AFP) — Football's governing body FIFA on Saturday banned all matches at an altitude of more than 2,750 meters (9,022 feet) "without acclimatization", relaxing its earlier limit.

It also set up a 40-million-dollar referee training project and increased from 10 to 15 percent the share of FIFA's subsidies that must be spent by each national association to promote the women's game.

The decisions were made by the body's executive committee, which met on the sidelines of the Club World Cup, FIFA president

Sepp Blatter said.

The committee also raised objections to proposals for matches to kick off at noon during next year's Beijing Olympics, citing the summertime temperature of up to 40 degrees (104 degrees F) in the Chinese capital, he added.

In May, FIFA originally slapped an unconditional ban on matches at 2,500 meters or higher after its medical committee advised that playing at such a height was neither healthy nor fair.

It also cited home-field advantage of high-altitude teams over visiting teams from lower alti-

tudes.

After provoking objections from Latin American countries, the limit was relaxed to 3,000 meters in June but still affected some venues in the middle of World Cup qualifying matches.

Blatter said the next World Cup qualifying round in South America won't be held until June next year.

"Until then, we will have time to work out the exact application of this decision," he told a news conference.

However, he added: "Concerning FIFA international competitions, in the international

calendar there is not so much time to acclimatize (before matches)."

High-altitude cities include Bogota in Colombia at 2,640 meters, Quito in Ecuador at 2,800 meters and La Paz in Bolivia at 3,577 meters.

Of the financial aid to referees, 35 million dollars will be "directly invested in the grass-roots program" to educate referees at the level of national football associations, Blatter said.

The rest will be used to train referees for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa and promote professional refereeing "at the highest level", he said.

"The future of our game is intrinsically linked with the quality of refereeing," Blatter added.

FIFA allocates 250,000 dollars to each national association and 2.5 million dollars to continental confederations every year.

Now each national association must spend 15 percent of the subsidies on promoting the women's game.

"Our sport has been, and still is, sport for men and boys. I'd say it's a macho sport," Blatter said. "But in the past 15 years, women's sport has remarkably developed in all continents. Even in Iran and Saudi Arabia, women's football is in."

Blatter said FIFA has been helping women's football have more access to sponsorships since this year when the women's World Cup was held in China.

Noting that the first women's international tournament was held only in 1989 and the first World Cup two years later, he said: "Now (women's) football is all around us. So we try to go faster than men's football but it's not easy."



The Hernando Siles stadium is situated at 3,600m altitude in La Paz. Football's governing body FIFA banned all matches at an altitude of more than 2,750 meters (9,022 feet) "without acclimatization", relaxing its earlier limit.

(AFP/File/Aizar Raldes)