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Legion Field to host different kind of football

■ **SOCCER:** College football mecca ready for International football during the 1996 Summer Games

By Ken Berger
The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Legion Field is used to big crowds, ear-ringing noise and an atmosphere that looks like the whole world is partying inside the old gray stadium. Just not for a game that involves a round ball.

This is international football, or soccer, as it is known in America. The site of some of this country's best college football wars is playing host to Olympic soccer starting Saturday, and it promises to be quite a hit.

The opening game between the United States men and Argentina is sold out. That's right, 81,085 fans will rock the steel girders of the stadium that bears the sign, "The Football Capital of the South." They will cheer the world's most popular game at America's biggest event, the Olympics.

"College football will always be king here," said Gene Hallman, president of the Alabama Sports Foundation, which helped bring the games to Birmingham. "But we're showing we can support events beyond that."

Eleven games will be played in Birmingham from July 20-28. The medal round will be in

Athens, Ga.

Birmingham sold far more tickets than the other four preliminary soccer venues — Washington, Miami and Orlando. Total sales for the Birmingham games have exceeded 280,000, with orders still coming in the week before the games.



THE 1996 OLYMPICS

The crowd for Saturday's game will be ranked in the top 10 in Olympic soccer history, Hallman said. It will also be one of the biggest crowds in history to watch the U.S. Olympic team.

Legion Field has been repainted and decorated with flags, yellow fabric and Olympic rings. The rings hover over a statue of legendary Alabama football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, whose opinion on playing a game with a round ball at Legion Field is up for debate.

"I believe the Bear would be proud of the community support we've received for Olympic soccer," Hallman said.

The U.S. men, considered a longshot to win a medal, play at least two games at Legion Field in the men's tournament, primarily lim-

ited to under-23 teams. Joining them will be Argentina, Italy, Mexico, Tunisia and Korea.

Women's teams include Germany, Japan and Brazil in the first year for Olympic women's soccer.

The United States, which started playing Olympic soccer at the Paris Games in 1924, has never gotten past the first round. But coach Bruce Arena likes his team's position as the underdog.

"It's also a nice position to be in," Arena said. "There's not a whole lot of pressure on us to win the gold medal."

The United States carries a 5-0-2 unbeaten streak into the Olympics. Players to watch include defender Alexi Lalas and midfielders Claudio Reyna and Brian Maisonneuve. Lalas and Reyna are two of the wild-card players not subject to the age limit, along with goalkeeper Kasey Keller.

Argentina won the World Cup in 1978 and '86, but has never won Olympic gold. Despite being considered one of the favorites along with Brazil, the Argentines are not taking anything for granted.

"They don't think they have already won the gold medal," said Carlos E. de Giacomi, the executive secretary of the Argentine Football Association. "If they did, they would go directly to Atlanta and get them."

Football: Irvin cleared with court but NFL still has questions

■ Continued from Page 9

If not, Irvin would face a sentence of up to 20 years. The judge also could sentence Irvin to hundreds of hours of community service.

"We're very pleased with it," defense attorney Don Godwin said. "Michael is glad to get this behind him and get back on with his life. He intends to get down to Austin to be part of the training camp and to help the Dallas Cowboys."

Cowboys training camp opens Wednesday, but Irvin's playing status was unclear.

"His status will be reviewed under the terms of our substance abuse policy," NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said.

Under the NFL's substance abuse policy, first-time offenders are subject to suspension for up to four regular-season or playoff games if they violate the law. While it is not known if Irvin had

any previous violations, the no-contest plea would put him in that category.

Irvin's agent, Steve Endicott, had no immediate comment on his client's plea.

Defense attorneys said the beginning of training camp was unrelated to the plea bargain.

If the judge accepts the plea bargain during formal sentencing Tuesday morning, his attorneys said, Irvin will report to training camp on time.

"It starts this week, and Michael's going to be there and be right along with his teammates doing what he can to help the Cowboys return to victory again," Godwin said.

Prosecutor Mike Gillett said discussions about a possible plea bargain had been continuing since Irvin was indicted in April.

"I think the important thing is it's been disposed of in what I see as a positive manner for our office and for Mr. Irvin," Gillett said.

NBA: Mutombo flies south to Hawks, \$50 million contract

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the big guards and the small forwards."

"I coached Harvey for five seasons," said Bullets General Manager Wes Unseld. "His versatility and his strong defense will make him a solid addition to this team."

Other NBA transactions: Dikembe Mutombo signed with the Atlanta Hawks. The 7-foot-2 center, who played all five of his seasons with Denver and led the league in blocks the last three seasons, signed a five-year contract believed to be worth at least \$50 million.

"It was time for me to move on with my life," Mutombo said.

The Hawks also traded swingman Stacey Augmon and forward Grant Long to the Detroit Pistons for two first-

round and two second-round draft picks.

DETROIT PISTONS — Acquired G Stacey Augmon and F Grant Long from the Atlanta Hawks for four conditional draft choices. Signed G Michael Curry and C Don Reid. Renounced their rights to F Lou Roe, C Mark West and C Eric Leckner.

HOUSTON ROCKETS — Agreed to terms with C Hakim Olajuwon on a five-year contract extension.

MIAMI HEAT — Agreed to terms with C Alonzo Mourning and F Juwan Howard on multiyear contracts.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS — Renounced the rights to F Ed Pinckney.

WASHINGTON BULLETS — Signed F Tracy Murray to a multi-year contract.

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