

Soccer

Disappointed U.S. faces Panama for third place

By RACHEL COHEN
Associated Press

CHESTER, Pa. — Asked what winning the third-place game at the CONCACAF Gold Cup would mean, U.S. captain Michael Bradley paused for a moment, then said softly, “Not much.”

The midfielder quickly added that pride and competitiveness would keep the Americans playing hard against a short-handed Panama squad, a promise repeated often by his teammates and coach Jurgen Klinsmann on Friday. Once the U.S. was stunned by Jamaica in the semifinals, cutting short its bid to repeat as Gold Cup champion, Saturday’s third-place match was left to build momentum and try out different lineups.

In many ways, those are always objectives for Klinsmann as he seeks to develop a squad that can contend against the world’s best. For a coach in his position, the trick is to win enough in the short term to stick around to possibly see through those long-term results.

“We want to continue the process toward 2018,” he said about the next World Cup. “This is Year 1 after the World Cup in Brazil, a year of rebuilding the pieces and bringing in young, new players, trying a lot of things out.”

Klinsmann specifically defended two young players, center backs John Brooks and Ventura Alvarado. The 22-year-olds have been shaky at times in the Gold Cup, and they were unable to prevent Jamaica’s Darren Mattocks from heading in the first goal of Wednesday’s 2-1 loss on a throw-in.

“They have to go through these pains,” Klinsmann said, adding, “We’re going to do a step back here and there.”

He noted Brooks and Alvarado had made for a winning pairing in their brief tenure together before the semi-final defeat, including breakthrough victories in June exhibitions against world champion Germany and the Netherlands, another European power. “Enormous, enormous talent” is how he described the two.

“We’re going to keep on developing young players, keep looking into the future,” Klinsmann said. “Two, three years down the road — what does this team look like? ... You have to keep developing a team that you have in mind toward 2018 that’s hopefully better than you did in Brazil.”

Panama, reeling from the chaotic finish to its semifinal loss to Mexico, will be without five players because of suspension or injury. On the verge of victory Wednesday, the Panamanians, playing with 10 men, were called for a disputed hand ball. Mexico tied the game on the penalty kick and went on to win 2-1 after another penalty in extra time.

Midfielders Valentin Pimentel and Gabriel Gomez and forward Blas Perez are hurt, while forward Luis Tejada and goalkeeper Jaime Penedo were each suspended two games by CONCACAF on Friday. Penedo was disciplined for pushing the assistant referee after Wednesday’s match. Tejada received a red card, then was punished additionally for not leaving the field “in a timely manner.”

Panama’s federation also was fined an undisclosed amount.

In the Panamanians’ latest criticism of CONCACAF, the federation’s president, Pedro Chaluja, told reporters earlier Friday that “we feel that that game was fixed.”

“There are third parties with interests, and we know that it can’t be possible that the best-ranked referee in CONCACAF has such a poor and suspicious performance in a game,” he said.

Coach Hernan Gomez said Chaluja’s reaction was “human nature” but wouldn’t add to the criticism, saying “rules are rules.” CONCACAF confirmed Friday it would review requests from Panama and Costa Rica — which lost to Mexico on a disputed call in the quarterfinals.

Gomez initially said that six players were at risk of missing World Cup qualifiers because of yellow card accumulation, but CONCACAF officials said yellow cards in the Gold Cup wouldn’t affect qualifying.

Panama played some kickball during Friday’s practice, seeking to add a lighthearted note to a trying week.

Klinsmann plans to shake up his lineup against Panama, but didn’t offer any specifics other than to say DaMarcus Beasley would play in the second half.

Gold Cup



United States

vs.



Panama

- **Saturday**
- **1 p.m.**
- **TV: FS1**

Tour de France

Froome upset with stage winner Nibali

By JOHN LEICESTER
Associated Press

LA TOUSSUIRE, France — Chris Froome always expected his rivals to throw everything at him and his Tour de France race lead. He just didn’t expect that would happen when he was stopped by the side of the road.

Showing bristle beneath his mild manners, the British rider angrily tore into Vincenzo Nibali, calling him “unsportsmanlike,” after the defending champion accelerated away while Froome was fixing a stuck wheel on the toughest Alpine climb on Friday.

Nibali, who went on to win Stage 19, said: “He was very angry but that’s his problem.”

Froome said a stone or piece of asphalt jammed between his brake and rear wheel on the Col de la Croix de Fer climb, forcing him to pull up momentarily to unjam it.

While Froome stopped, Nibali rode away.

Those weren’t the only fireworks on the exhausting Alpine stage that moved Froome one step closer to a second Tour victory.

On the stage’s final climb to the La Toussuire ski station, Nairo Quintana launched his most sustained and telling attack against the 2013 champion, and this time got the better of him.

Showing for the first time at this Tour that he’s not untouchable, Froome chose not to stay with the Colombian, his closest rival, as he rode away, eating into the Team Sky rider’s overall race lead.

Froome said he preferred to save energy for Saturday’s last Alpine stage, which features two very hard climbs. So rather than hunt down the Movistar rider, Froome rode steadily, telling himself: “I don’t need to panic but I do need to keep something in reserve.”

He didn’t hold back on Nibali. At the finish, “I told him exactly



Wout Poels of the Netherlands, left, Britain’s Chris Froome, wearing the overall leader’s yellow jersey, and Robert Gesink of the Netherlands, front right, climb during the nineteenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race with start in Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne and finish in La Toussuire, France, Friday.

AP Photo/Laurent Cipriani

what I thought of him,” Froome said.

There was other unpleasantness out on the road. TV images of the final climb appeared to show a spectator spitting toward the race leader as he sped past.

Froome said he didn’t see the man but called his behavior “appalling.” Earlier in the Tour, Froome said another spectator threw a cup of urine at him and another punched his teammate Richie Porte.

“We are human beings,” he said. “You can’t come to a bike race to spit at people, or to punch them or to throw urine at them.”

Froome’s reduced lead of 2 minutes, 38 seconds over Quintana, down from 3:10 at the start, should still be enough to get the British rider through the last competitive day in the Alps before the final stage to Paris on Sunday, which is largely ceremonial and won’t change the overall podium standings.

Still, the smaller cushion will force Froome to watch Quintana very carefully and means he cannot afford a bad Saturday on the two “Hors Catégorie” climbs, meaning

they’re so tough they defy categorization.

The last of those, up 21 hairpin bends to the Alpe d’Huez ski station, is cycling’s most iconic ascent and will be lined with screaming spectators.

“It’s the final test,” said Froome. “I’m in a great position,” he added. “I can’t wait to get up there.”

Nibali’s win rescued what has otherwise been a disappointing Tour for him.

The Italian said he didn’t see that Froome had pulled up, even though television images appeared to show him looking back over his left shoulder at the Team Sky rider before accelerating away.

Nibali said he was speaking to a teammate, not looking back at Froome, and that he always had planned to attack on that climb. The manager of his Astana team, Alexandre Vinokourov, defended him, saying: “Vincenzo doesn’t have eyes in the back of his head.”

Froome said: “It seemed to me that Nibali had the whole climb to attack but he chose the moment that

I had a mechanical (problem) to make his move.”

“That, in my opinion, is very unsportsmanlike,” he added. “It’s not in the spirit of the Tour de France.”

Nibali said he was “very disappointed” at the way Froome spoke to him at the finish with language “too hard and too unjust to be repeated.”

He added that as far as he is concerned, no rule says other riders must wait when a race leader has an accident.

After fixing his bike, Froome rode furiously to catch back up with other podium contenders. But Nibali was gone, chasing French rider Pierre Rolland, who summited the Croix de Fer pass first.

Riding with the No. 1 bib as defending champion, Nibali has been crushed by Froome at this Tour. He started the day in seventh place, 8:04 behind.

Hitting 70 kph (45 mph) on the Croix de Fer descent and shaving the edges of bends, Nibali caught Rolland and overtook him on the final climb to La Toussuire.

WNBA

Catchings suiting up for one final All-Star Game

By DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Tamika Catchings didn’t want to get sentimental thinking about her final All-Star Game.

Catchings, who announced last fall that 2016 would be her final season, will be playing in a record 10th game Saturday. The WNBA usually skips the All-Star Game during Olympic years.

“I’m excited,” Catchings said. “I think everybody thought I’d be sad about this coming to the end, the last this, the last that. I’m really not. It’s time. The young players are playing so well.”

The WNBA’s future is bright with young stars Brittney Griner, Maya Moore and Elena Delle Donne, who is playing in her first game after leading the fan voting this season. Delle Donne was supposed to play in the last two All-Star contests but missed them because of injuries.

Catchings is one of the few All-Star veterans playing in the game Saturday, which features 10 first-time participants.

‘Showtime’ Shoni returns for encore

By BRIAN KOTLOFF
WNBA Media

The way Shoni Schimmel sees it, if the fans who vote want to see her in the All-Star Game, the least she can do is put on a show.

The Atlanta Dream guard, who lit up the All-Star stage in Phoenix with a record 29 points, is back as a starter for the Eastern Conference despite experiencing a sophomore slump, averaging 5.0 points in 15.1 minutes off the bench.

She understands as much as anybody why she is here. “It shows how much my fan support means,” said Schimmel,



Schimmel

a CTUIR member and former Hermiston High School standout. The people’s choice garnered 8,881 votes, trailing only leading vote-getter Elena Delle Donne in the East backcourt.

“It’s awesome. You just kind of run with it and embrace it. People like you because of who you are. That’s something that I don’t take for granted.”

Schimmel, who earned the nickname “Showtime” while playing at Louisville, said she’s been thinking about how to top last year, but “having fun is the main goal.”

WHEN: Saturday, 12:30 p.m.
TV: ABC

“They call me old. I’m not old, just wiser than you guys,” Catchings joked.

Eastern Conference coach Pokey Chatman was quiet on if

anything special was planned for Catchings, but did say that everyone was aware of the situation.

“We all know what she’s brought to the game and what

she’s meant to the WNBA over the years,” Chatman said.

It almost would have been fitting if last year’s All-Star Game had been Catchings’ finale. The Indiana Fever forward hit the game-winning layup in overtime to lift the East to a thrilling 125-124 victory over the West. It’s going to be tough to top that.

“That was some game last year,” Chicago guard Cappie Pondexter said. “We all know in the locker room that it’s Catch’s last one and we definitely don’t want her to go out with a loss.”

Moore knows that with Catchings leaving next year, other players are going to need to step up on and off the court.

“She’s been so much a part of what I’ve known as the WNBA,” Moore said. “In high school, I was watching her compete and being compared to her, wearing knee pads like her. She’s somebody who embodies so many things that you want the next generation to look like. The responsibility she takes off the court. She brings so much heart to the WNBA.”

NASCAR

Drivers still adjusting to new rules package at Brickyard

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — A new rules package for Indianapolis Motor Speedway provided visibility issues for drivers. More troubling for NASCAR, though, is that after nearly five hours of practice Friday, there was little indication the changes will produce better racing.

NASCAR, in its effort to improve the on-track product, is using four track-specific aerodynamic packages to see what could be a better fit for the heavy stock cars. The package used two weeks ago at Kentucky was well-received by the drivers, but NASCAR switched to a high-drag setup for Indianapolis, where passing has always been difficult.

“Hey man, this is a big event for us, it’s crucial that this event goes down as a good race every time we are here,” Clint Bowyer said. “Settling for second-best is not an option. I’m proud that NASCAR realizes that and pushes hard to try to figure out something that is better than what we’ve had in the past when we come to such an important venue.”

There were mixed opinions after three long practice sessions Friday, and many drivers said anytime they got too close to another car, the turbulence was so rough, they had to back off to avoid crashing.



AP Photo/Michael Conroy

Sprint Cup Series driver Kevin Harvick (4) drives through the first turn during practice for the NASCAR Brickyard 400 auto race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Indianapolis, Friday, July 24, 2015.

“Passing will be tough to say the least, but we’re trying something new,” Denny Hamlin said. “I can’t fault (NASCAR) for trying — they tried what we wanted to try (at Kentucky) and I thought we had a pretty successful race. Now we’re trying something different. We’ll see if it’s better or not.”

Last year’s Brickyard 400, won for a record fifth time by Jeff Gordon, featured just 15 lead changes at the start/finish line — a number that NASCAR would like to see go up. The five-year average for green-flag passes for the lead is

16, and the margin of victory is a whopping 2.371 seconds.

With drivers feeling as if they had to back off whenever they closed in on another car, it’s not clear if those statistics will be improved Sunday. Carl Edwards said “I couldn’t get closer than 15 car lengths,” to another car before he had to back off.

But Jamie McMurray, winner of the 2010 Brickyard, said it’s too early to judge the package.

“We haven’t had a restart, and to me, the restart is where this package is going to play a bigger role than in practice,” McMurray

said. “The thing with practice is that as you start to catch the car in front of you, typically their car is not very good. So, when you see somebody catching you fairly quick, you pull in so you can work on it and get your car better.”

Part of the high-drag aero package includes a 9-inch spoiler with a 1-inch wicker bill. Although part of the spoiler is clear and gives drivers a gap, most seemed to think it wasn’t big enough to see through from the rearview mirror.

“It’s challenging to see,” Joey Logano said. “I think I can see about five car lengths behind me, and any cars that are further back than that I can’t see.”

“That isn’t the end of the world. If they’re five car lengths back, you’re probably not too worried about it anyway. When they get close is when you want to see it, but it is nice sometimes because we don’t know. We’ll see with this whole drafting package down the straightaway when that run is going to start.”

Hamlin said he’d have preferred a clear wicker, but was surprised at how much he was able to see.

But that wasn’t even Hamlin’s biggest issue Friday.

His vision out the front windshield was severely hampered during practice when his hood flew open. The mishap apparently occurred because his team failed to tighten the hood pins before the second practice.