



## Greece squad meets ahead of crucial home ties

After two wins in as many away games, the national soccer team is preparing for its first home ties for the World Cup qualification group on Saturday and next Wednesday. Otto Rehhagel and his players met on Tuesday for the first time this month for the first session before the games against Moldova and Switzerland. Of the 22 players called up, only Giourkas Seitaridis was unable to attend as his club, Atletico Madrid, claimed he was injured and would not allow him to travel to Athens. The national team's doctor, Haris Christopoulos, has traveled to Spain to examine him.

Otherwise the national squad was at full strength, including even the injured midfielder Giorgos Karagounis who is on the road to recovery and could feature in the match against Switzerland. "We have had a very good start with the two victories and now we have two games at home that we are obliged to win to get close

er to our target," said defender Avraam Papadopoulos. "In theory, smaller teams are always dangerous and demand plenty of caution just like every other game. I believe the fans will be at our side," he added.

The squad consists of goalkeepers Costas Chalkias (PAOK) and Alexandros Tzorvas (Panathinaikos), defenders Sokratis Papastathopoulos (Genoa), Traianos Dellas (Anorthosis), Sotiris Kyrgiakos (AEK), Loukas Vintra, Nikos Spyropoulos (Panathinaikos), Avraam Papadopoulos and Christos Patsatzoglou (Olympiakos), midfielders Vassilis Torisidis (Olympiakos), Costas Katsouranis (Benfica), Angelos Basinas (AEK), Giorgos Karagounis, Sotiris Ninis and Alexandros Tziolis (Panathinaikos) and strikers Giorgos Samaras (Celtic), Angelos Charisteas (Nuremberg), Fanis Gekas (Bayer Leverkusen), Nikos Liberopoulos, Ioannis Amanatidis (Eintracht Frankfurt) and Dimitris Salpididis (Panathinaikos).

## Olympiakos faces tricky UEFA Cup trips

The Greek champion will need the striking force of the Serb and the defensive strength of its Greek players in the group stage of the UEFA Cup, drawn yesterday.

Olympiakos has been handed a tougher-than-expected UEFA Cup group but still has strong hopes of qualifying for the knockout stages.

The Reds were in the second pot of seedings on the basis of their European record, but yesterday's draw was rather unkind to them as they will have to face opposition from Portugal, Germany and Turkey. The group is so complicated that four of its five teams have realistic chances of proceeding to the next stage.

The Greek champion will have to travel to Istanbul to face Galatasaray and to Kharkiv in Ukraine to face unheralded Metalist, both tricky games for coach Ernesto Valverde's men. In fact the Reds kick off the group stage with their trip to the inhospitable Ali Sami Yen Stadium in Turkey on October 23.

At the Karaiskaki Stadium, Olympiakos will host Benfica and Hertha Berlin, two teams that are not exactly giants but are capable of getting the result they need on the day.

The top three of each group advance to the round of 32. If Olympiakos wins its two home ties it should make the next stage.

Valverde said after the draw that it had not been a good one for Olympiakos: "No game will be easy. We have to face four very good teams. Even Metalist, which many people will underestimate, has eliminated Besiktas."

# Greek tragedy or a new kind of art?

## GRAFFITI HITS ATHENS MONUMENTS

ATHENS (AFP) — The authorities call it a Greek tragedy, but the graffiti artists who have increasingly left their mark on this ancient city and its monuments say they are simply responding to a different sort of muse.

Churches and archaeological sites in Greece used to enjoy a certain immunity from graffiti and the stylised signatures known as tagging, but are now increasingly part of the action as the phenomenon takes off in Athens.

"There is an inability to distinguish what is a monument, and what is not," said Zetta Antonopoulou, an architect who has conducted extensive research on Athens statues, many of which are routinely marked with spray paint. "It's getting out of control and it's not easy to explain why," she adds.

The "art form" has come a long way since 1810. It was then that a young tourist in Greece carved his name into the ancient temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounio south of Athens. Little did he know that the scrawl would become a cherished part of modern Greek heritage.

The traveller was 22-year-old George Gordon, Lord Byron, the maverick English poet who died fighting alongside the Greeks in their war of liberation against the Ottoman Empire and who is considered a national hero here.

Two centuries later, Greek archaeologists are proud of young Byron's handiwork — but contemporary graffiti artists are not as welcome. "The mark left by Byron is a historical docu-

ment ... youths today write slogans, it's not the same thing," says Miranda Karatza, an archaeologist who heads the Greek culture ministry's sites and monuments office.

While other forms of graffiti related to sports or politics have been around for a long time in Greece, many Athenians remain unaccustomed to the latest phenomenon of street art and wall tagging by young "crews" marking territory. "Graffiti is vandalism, it's an element of conflict, and sometimes things that are nice are also ruined," said Fotis, a 28-year-old street artist.

Fotis, who paints lizards and dragons, said he turned to graffiti as a way out of hooliganism and substance abuse but also in reaction to growing up in "a city full of ugliness and hate".

While full-fledged street art in Athens mostly keeps to the suburbs and alleys around the centre, quick-fix tagging on the city's main squares and public monuments is the clearest indication of the trend.

"A certain level of tagging is unavoidable in any city but in Athens it has been allowed to run riot," a reader recently commented in local English language weekly Athens Plus. "More depressing still is the corresponding lack of any concern about it."

One striking example is Syntagma Square, one of Athens' busiest gathering points which recently became a popular hangout for teen skateboarders. "We have to send crews to clean the walls and steps around once a



month," says Alexandros Pouloudis, a supervisor at Athens' city maintenance office, noting that a comprehensive cleanup can cost up to 2,000 euros (2,950 dollars).

In the case of statues and monuments that must be carefully restored, the cost can exceed 20,000 euros, adds conservation expert Bessy Argyropoulou. "The longer graffiti remains on stone or marble the more it is absorbed," she says. "It's not a quick and dirty operation like washing a car."

Closely associated with hip hop and rap music, street art arrived in Greece in the early 1990s and experienced a boom ahead of the Athens 2004 Olympics, says Antonis Katsouris, an

urban culture writer for Highlights magazine. "Graffiti is an identity statement in a hostile urban environment," he said. "And hip hop and rap are very popular in the poorer Athens districts."

Within a decade, a group of young painters inspired by Greek folk art and iconography caught the eye of art galleries, entered the mainstream and started taking commissions from hotels and restaurants.

"That generation has since abandoned the street (and) artistic graffiti is no longer as prevalent," he said. "But tagging is going strong, and there is certainly no shortage of walls in Athens."