

Parreira's priority

Football

AFP, Mexico

Five-time world champions Brazil head for Mexico for Wednesday's friendly in Guadalajara with new coach Carlos Alberto Parreira keen to get a win under his belt after replacing Luiz Felipe Scolari.

Parreira, who masterminded Brazil's 1994 World Cup triumph in the United States, has so far failed to see his charges find their spark following a goalless draw with China and a 2-1 loss in Portugal - now led ironically by Scolari.

Of last summer's World Cup-winning squad, only three stars are missing: Goalkeeper Marcos, defender Cafu and midfielder Rivaldo, all injured.

Roberto Carlos, who would potentially have been rested anyway with Real Madrid still going all guns in the Champions League, is suspended after pushing the referee in the Portugal defeat a month ago.

Parreira is set to introduce 19-year-old Santos striker Robinho and will also field Lyon pair Juninho and Edmilson.

"I've called him up as he's a young man who has shown the promise of a

potentially great player," explained Parreira.

A mouth-watering attack will comprise Ronaldinho and Ronaldo, fresh from his Champions League hat-trick against Manchester United.

Ronaldinho is also on form after



CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA

leading Paris Saint Germain into the French Cup final last Sunday.

Mexico, who flopped in the second phase at the World Cup in losing to the United States after an impressive opening, are coached by Argentine Ricardo Lavolpe, whose

stewardship has so far brought a 1-0 defeat to his homeland, a goalless draw with Colombia and a 1-1 stalemate against Paraguay as well as a 1-0 win over Bolivia.

"It's always very motivating to face Brazil. We must make the most of the opportunity and enjoy it," said Mexico's Monaco defender Rafael Marquez.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Dida (AC Milan/ITA), Julio Cesar (Flamengo)

Defenders: Beletti (Villarreal/SPA), Junior (Parma/ITA), Edmilson (Lyon/FRA), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Luisao (Cruzeiro), Anderson Polga (Gremio)

Midfielders: Emerson (AS Roma/ITA), Flavio Conceicao (Real Madrid/SPA), Gilberto Silva (Arsenal/ENG), Ze Roberto (Bayern Munich/GER), Juninho Pernambucano (Lyon/FRA), Athirson (Flamengo), Kleberson (Atletico Paranaense)

Strikers: Amoroso (Borussia Dortmund/GER), Adriano (Parma/ITA), Ronaldinho (Paris SG/FRA), Ronaldo (Real Madrid/SPA), Diego (Santos), Robinho (Santos)



French national strikers Thierry Henry (R) and Djibril Cisse control balls on their heads during a training session at Clairefontaine on April 29 ahead of their friendly against Egypt.

Henry feeling the blues

Football

AFP, Clairefontaine

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry, freshly named the English Professional Football Association's player of the year ahead of Ruud van Nistelrooy of Manchester United, admitted Tuesday the Dutchman is the more likely to pocket a Premiership title medal this season.

Having joined the France squad for Wednesday's home friendly against Egypt, Henry said: "Winning a championship or a cup is more important than this kind of distinction. It's great to be recognised by your peers - especially in England when it's not always so easy to be accepted when you're not English."

"But my pleasure is mitigated. Now the title is in Manchester United's hands as if they win their final two games that's it."

"The match at Bolton (Arsenal

let slip a 2-0 lead to draw last Saturday) summed up the season. We had the match in our hands and I am still asking myself how we conceded two goals in the last ten minutes."

"We just have to hope that Manchester lose a few points. But we have to recognise that if they win the title we will have given it to them as a gift."

France coach Jacques Santini meanwhile said the team would seek to do better than their last home friendly - a 2-0 home reverse against the Czech Republic in February.

"We have to succeed in this match and produce more of a spectacle than we did last time out."

However, since then France have beaten Israel away and swamped Malta at home.

Against Egypt, Santini's side will have to turn on the style without Real Madrid's Zinedine Zidane, who is being rested ahead of his club's Champions League semi final against Juventus.

Nine-month ban for Bosnich

Football

AFP, London

Former Australian international goalkeeper Mark Bosnich was banned for nine months by the Football Association (FA) on Tuesday after a disciplinary hearing into his testing positive for cocaine.

The hearing did not agree with the 31-year-old former Manchester United keeper's claim that his drink had been spiked by a known cocaine user on a night out at a fashionable London night club.

The FA commission ruled after a two-day hearing he was guilty of charges of improper conduct and breaching their doping control regulations.

However he was not slapped with the maximum penalty of a two-year suspension, with his nine-month ban backdated to start from December 23, 2002, when a



MARK BOSNICH

temporary worldwide restriction was first enforced.

Bosnich, who has had his contract terminated by Chelsea, was not fined, but he must pay the costs of the hearing which could amount to 10,000 pounds (15,000 US dollars).

Ginola becoming an actor

Football

AFP, London

David Ginola is set to follow his equally unpredictable former French team-mate Eric Cantona



DAVID GINOLA

into the acting profession he revealed on Wednesday.

The 36-year-old former Paris Saint Germain, Newcastle and Spurs winger has previously starred in shampoo adverts but has admitted he needs professional training if he is to make it in real acting.

Ginola has signed up with legendary English drama school Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) for private lessons, though he will also join in with group sessions from time to time.

"I know how hard I had to work to be a footballer," he said.

"And I imagine it's the same for acting."

"However before I read a script or go for a part I need proper training and I am not ignorant of that fact."

Ginola had hinted several times that he might favour a return to football after being released by Aston Villa last summer but while he was linked to French First Division outfit Nice they insisted he went on an adiet.

He refused to do so. Perhaps he had designs for his first dramatic role as Sir John Falstaff in Shakespeare's Henry IV Part I.

Kenyon wants WC share!



AFP, London

Manchester United chief executive Peter Kenyon has called on football's governing body FIFA to compensate clubs for providing players at the next World Cup finals in Germany in 2006.

Kenyon has called on the clubs to get a share of the profits from the tournament, which could amount to about 60 million dollars.

Kenyon said the G14 group, representing the richest clubs in Europe, would drop its opposition to the Confederations Cup and the Club World Championship in return for a World Cup windfall.

"We accept that the Confederations Cup is contracted and will happen, but we think there is a way we can work with FIFA," he told the Times newspaper.

Michael van Praag, the Ajax chairman and Kenyon's fellow vice-president of the G14 group, said: "The only ones who do not benefit from the huge revenues of the World Cup finals are the clubs who provide the players."

"We get the players back demotivated, tired and injured. We also have to pay their salaries and insurance while they are away playing for someone else for up to six weeks."

The G14 clubs met in Brussels Tuesday.

They are thought to be seeking 20 per cent of World Cup profits, which topped 200 million dollars for last year's event in Japan and South Korea.

They also welcomed a renegotiation of Champions League media rights, opening the way for them to screen match action via internet sites and in-house television channels from next season. But it is the issue of compensation that will cause most arguments.

Real lay it to rest

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United on Wednesday welcomed a move by Real Madrid to crush speculation that they were planning a summer swoop for David Beckham and insisted they had never contemplated selling the England captain.

Rumours Beckham could be on his way to Spain have been circulating for months and reached a crescendo when he was left on the bench for last week's second leg of the Champions League quarter-final between the two clubs.

Real were reportedly keen on Beckham because his iconic status in Asia could help lift their profile in the fastest growing market for footballing merchandise.

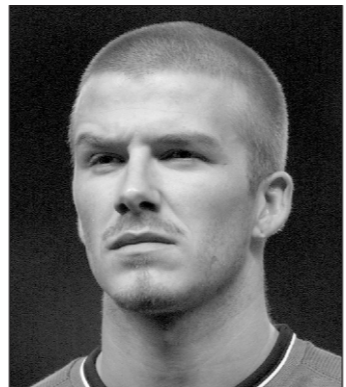
But the Spanish giants moved on Tuesday to end the speculation by issuing a statement on their website denying any bid was imminent.

Club president Florentino Perez backed up that view by telling reporters at a meeting of Europe's top clubs that he had never had any plans to bid for Beckham.

United's chief executive, Peter Kenyon, welcomed Perez's statement and insisted the club had never had any intention of letting the midfielder go.

"I am delighted Mr Perez has confirmed this in such an emphatic manner but, anyway, we at Manchester United never had any intention of selling him."

"All the speculation about David's future has reached new heights lately because he's had a



DAVID BECKHAM

phenomenal season, but this had almost been overshadowed by everything we've achieved."

"David has stated himself that he doesn't want to go anywhere but we have always been reluctant to make any public statements of any sort about the make-up of our team for next season."

"I'm also assured by David's people that they don't want him to

leave Manchester United. Everyone at Old Trafford will be grateful to have this confirmed in such a manner by Real Madrid."

In their statement, Real insisted that Beckham was not bound for the Bernabeu.

The statement read: "Because of information in various sections of the press on the existence of Real Madrid interest to sign David Beckham, the club would like to make clear:

"1. There is no contact between Real Madrid and Manchester United on this subject."

"2. There has been no direct or indirect contact between Real Madrid and Beckham."

"3. Contrary to the rumours on this matter, Real has no intention of negotiating the signing of Beckham."

"4. That, despite the club rule not to use official channels to deny rumours, this statement was sent out to finally put an end to the uncertainty created by certain sources in linking Beckham to Real Madrid."

"5. In spite of the rumours, there is an unconditional, friendly relationship between the two clubs and respect for Beckham."

Most observers took the combination of official statement and Perez's emphatic comments as a signal that the deal, if it was ever under consideration, was now dead.

Nigeria want a Samba start

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria plans to play against world champions Brazil in a friendly match to formally launch the country's bid to host the 2010 World Cup, officials told AFP Wednesday.

"We are discussing with Brazil through the Nigeria Football Association (NFA) for a friendly match on June 11 in Abuja to launch our bid," said Tijjani Yusuf, secretary of the Nigeria bid committee.

"We hope to get a positive feedback on this arrangement in the next few weeks."

The proposed tie would be the first such match at full international level between the two countries, who though have clashed at youth and Olympic levels.

The country's bid committee is presently in the United States of America to solicit support to host the global soccer finals ahead of five other African countries.

Serie A starts August 31

AFP, Rome

The 2003/2004 Serie A season will begin on August 31 and finish on May 16 2004, the Italian Football League has confirmed.

The first round of the 2003/04 Italian Cup will start on August 17, while the Super Cup, which pits the 2003 league champions against the 2003 Cup winners, takes place on August 24.

The start of the 2002/2003 season was delayed by two weeks because of a row over television rights.

Libya's Argentine significance

Football

AFP, Tripoli

Libya hope their World Cup dream - qualification in 2006 and potential hosting of the 2010 event - can come a little step closer with a strong showing in Wednesday's friendly here against two-time champions Argentina.

The vice-president of the Libyan Football Federation is Saadi Khadafi, son of President Moamer Khadafi, who has persuaded the South Americans to provide top-rank opposition for his side - induced by a reported payment of one million dollars.

"We are determined to reach the 2006 finals," said Saadi Khadafi who is also president of and a prolific striker for Libyan side Al Itihad - while he has additionally taken a stake of 7.5 percent in Italian giants Juventus as the North Africans seek ever-increasing links to the top table of the game.

A further example of that was Al Itihad paying 300,000 dollars for the right to take on Barcelona in a friendly at the Catalan giants' legendary Nou Camp a month ago, when they lost 5-0.

Libya are now working on an ambitious attempt to host or co-host the 2010 World Cup and the Argentina match will be a major test for the side who lost 4-2 to Canada in Tripoli on February 12.

Argentina, who also have things to prove after last summer's World

Cup flop, say they will take the match no less seriously.

"It's not going to be the most competitive of matches maybe but we will approach it very keenly, as always," insisted coach Marcelo Bielsa.

Argentina last played in Africa in 1995, drawing 1-1 against South Africa.

Bielsa will be missing several stars such as Manchester United's Juan Sebastian Veron.

Walter Samuel, Roberto Ayala and Hernan Crespo.

But that opens the door to younger players including striker Javier Saviola of Barcelona.

Other newer faces include Fabricio Coloccini of Atletico Madrid, Bernardo Romeo of Hamburg and Lionel Scaloni of Deportivo La Coruna.

Libya's side primarily come from Al Itihad and Nasser, but they also include midfielders Tariq Taib of Tunisia's Afriqi and Jehad Montasser of Italian outfit Trestina.

The North Africans have been through a variety of coaches in recent years including Carlos Bilardo, who coached Argentina to the 1986 World Cup, as well as Italians Eugenio Bersellini and Franco Scoglio.

But home-bred Abobakre Pani is now in charge as the 2006 dream draws closer.

For 2010, the Libyans would have to see off African rival bids from Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa and Tunisia.



South African Sports Minister Ngconde Balfour (L) and Chief Executive Officer of the 2010 Soccer World Cup Bid company Danny Jordaan hold an official jersey at the national launch of the country's bid for the 2010 FIFA World Cup at a mayoral banquet in Cape Town on April 29.

Bid to host World Cup 2010 South Africa get going

Football

AFP, Cape Town

South Africa launched its bid to host the 2010 Soccer World Cup in Cape Town on Tuesday, with organisers vowing to do all they could to make sure an African country would host the coveted tournament for the first time.

Danny Jordaan, chief executive of the country's bidding committee, told a banquet in Cape Town that the bid was "an African bid and South Africa was merely the stage."

"The bid will embrace all of Africa," he said, adding that when the committee went to Paris for FIFA's (the world soccer governing body) 100th anniversary next year, it would be hoping to hear the outcome as one of the favourites.

He added however that South Africa should not be complacent because there would be fierce competition from countries like Egypt,

Nigeria and Morocco.

South Africa lost the bid to host the 2006 World Cup to Germany amid much controversy in July 2000.

They were pipped 12-11 by a Franz Beckenbauer-led Germany in the final round of voting after octogenarian Charles Dempsey, who was representing Oceania, abstained.

Dempsey's vote would have tied the votes at 12-12, and with FIFA chief Sepp Blatter pledging to use his special vote to support an African country, the result would have gone in South Africa's favour.

His walk out triggered worldwide condemnation and calls for the quadrennial showcase of international football to be rotated around the continents instead of every alternate tournament going to Europe.

Jordaan has said the bid committee had received the technical requirements from FIFA and were now putting a working programme together. A bid book would be given to FIFA at the end of May.

Irvin Khoza, the chairman of the bid committee, described the World

Cup as being close the heart of Mbeki and in keeping with the spirit with his idea of an African renaissance.

"We want the cup to be hosted in South Africa, we want to take up where our cricket colleagues left off," he said referring to South Africa's hosting of the Cricket World Cup in March.

"This is the first time a Soccer World Cup will be hosted in Africa and the logical route is from Cape to Cairo," in reference to the competition from other African countries.

Sport Minister Ngconde Balfour told the gathering it was up to Khoza and Jordaan to get the bid.

"I only have to crack the whip," he said.

South Africa's squad, called Bafana Bafana (the boys, the boys) on Wednesday will play Jamaica to mark the local launch of its bid. The international launch will be marked by a game against England on May 22.

Jordaan confirmed that England had promised to select its strongest possible squad for the match.