

German pride at stake



AFP, Paris

Scotland coach Berti Vogts comes face-to-face with his own countrymen on Saturday aiming to deliver a hammer blow to Germany's Euro 2004 dream.

Vogts, who has presided over just three wins in fourteen matches since taking over the national side, must get the better of Rudi Voller's

"They lost to the Welsh, they were beaten in their last game against Scotland and they also found it hard against the Republic of Ireland in the World Cup."

The last time Voller was in Britain, he presided over a 1-0 World Cup qualifying win against England at Wembley and he is expecting another fierce encounter in Glasgow.

"I'm looking forward to it - and to meeting up again with Berti. I've got great respect for him which won't be

automatic qualifying place is developing into an all-Scandinavian battle with Norway out on top with 10 points and Denmark, the 1992 champions, in second spot on seven points.

The two clash in Copenhagen with Norway sweating on the fitness of goalkeeper Frode Olsen who has an ankle injury.

The Netherlands, winners in 1988, can take top spot in Group 3 if they beat Belarus in Minsk where they lost 1-0 eight years ago.



PHOTO: AFP

German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn signs an autograph for an unidentified airport personnel on arrival at Glasgow's international airport on May 5.

World Cup finalists at Hampden in their Group 5 qualifier to keep their campaign on track.

However, in the weekend's most highly-charged clash of the 19-game programme, the 56-year-old won't expect any favours from a German side he used to coach until 1998.

Michael Ballack has already warned that some players have "scores to settle" dating from their time under Vogts at Bayer Leverkusen. Ballack, now with Bayern Munich, has claimed that "working with Vogts was difficult from the start.

"Berti Vogts had great knowledge of the game, but his relations with the players weren't easy - he had his problems there," said Ballack.

"I don't have to keep secret that some Leverkusen players had a problem with him. Some players want to show him something - me too."

Scotland are third in Group five with seven points from four games - the same as Germany but Voller's men have played one game less.

Vogts is remaining positive about the task in hand especially as the Germans were beaten the last time they played.

"I have seen how Germany have trouble against British opposition," said Vogts.

affected by our rivalry on Saturday," said the coach.

"Scotland is the highlight of our season. We need to defend our leadership of the group."

In Group 10, the Republic of Ireland face Albania in Dublin with Sunderland winger Kevin Kilbane insisting he can help rekindle a campaign that has seen Brian Kerr's men taking just four points from four matches.

They are already four points behind leaders Switzerland who face second-placed Russia on Saturday in Basel.

"We know Albania will be a tough game," said Kilbane. "They have some very good players and they will be out to upset us."

Sven-Goran Eriksson's England, who lead Group 7, don't play Saturday but the Swedish coach will be keeping a wary eye on the match between group rivals Slovakia and Turkey in Bratislava.

England lead the group with ten points from four matches with the Turks a point behind and Slovakia in third, four points off the pace.

"Our target is to win all of our remaining matches and finish on top of the group," said Turkey coach Senol Gomez whose side lost 2-0 to the English last time out.

Slovakia lost 3-0 in Istanbul in the first meeting between the two sides. In Group 2, the race for the sole

The Dutch are second in the table behind the Czech Republic who don't play again until Wednesday against Moldova where they will be expected to welcome back playmaker Pavel Nedved.

Spain lead Group 6 by four points and face third-placed Greece in Zaragoza but they will have to do without the services of Real Madrid's Guti who has an ankle injury.

"Spain are the favourites but I believe we can get a result if we play with intelligence," said Greece's German coach Otto Rehhagel.

Defending champions France are the runaway leaders in Group 1 with a perfect record of five wins in five leaving Slovenia and Israel, who meet on neutral territory at Antalya in Turkey, to scrap for the runners-up spot.

Wales and Italy, the top two in Group 9, also don't play Saturday leaving Serbia and Montenegro and Finland, who meet in Helsinki, to try and make up lost ground.

Only the winners of the ten groups are guaranteed a place in the finals next summer with the other five finalists being decided by play-offs between the group runners-up.

Portugal, as hosts, qualify automatically.

FIXTURES

Matches on Saturday in the Euro 2004 qualifying competition:

- Group One**
At Antalya, Turkey
Israel v Slovenia
At Ta' Qali
Malta v Cyprus
- Group Two**
At Copenhagen
Denmark v Norway
At Craiova
Romania v Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Group Three**
At Tiraspol
Moldova v Austria
At Minsk
Belarus v Netherlands
- Group Four**
At Budapest
Hungary v Latvia
At Serravalle
San Marino v Sweden
- Group Five**
At Glasgow
Scotland v Germany
At Reykjavik
Iceland v Faroe Islands
- Group Six**
At Zaragoza
Spain v Greece
At Lviv
Ukraine v Armenia
- Group Seven**
At Bratislava
Slovakia v Turkey
At Skopje
Macedonia v Liechtenstein
- Group Eight**
At Sofia
Bulgaria v Belgium
At Tallinn
Estonia v Andorra
- Group Nine**
At Helsinki
Finland v Serbia and Montenegro
- Group Ten**
At Basel
Switzerland v Russia
At Dublin
Republic of Ireland v Albania

Relishing the prospect



AFP, London

Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy said the purchase of Paris Saint Germain's Ronaldinho would give the side a huge boost for Champions League success although PSG say he is not for sale.

Next season's PSG coach Vahid Halilhodzic told Friday's L'Equipe newspaper that neither Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho nor Argentinian Gabriel Heinze were for sale.

"They are not for sale and that's it. There will be pressure but I don't see how my position will change," Halilhodzic said.

Yet, according to the British press, it appears increasingly likely the Brazilian World Cup winner is on his way to Old Trafford for nine million pounds (15 million dollars), although three years of his contract remain, and van Nistelrooy could not be happier.

"It is fantastic news for the club and for me. We could not sign a better player, I genuinely mean that," van Nistelrooy said in Friday's Daily Mail.

"I imagine Ronaldinho will play in the hole behind the main striker and that is exactly what we need."

He added: "The manager has been looking for that type of player since he tried to sign Paolo di Canio 18 months ago."

"Now it looks like we are close to getting the best in the business. Ronaldinho is a sensational player and I am so excited."

"It is obvious a player like this will only make the team better. He will help us in the Premiership and he will give us a better chance to go all the way in the Champions League." Press reports in Britain claimed



RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

"We want to go to the end with contracts or at least respect them as much as possible. If there are offers I don't want to hear them. It is not even worth speaking about them."

Asked about a visit to Paris of Kenyon, Graille said: "I am delighted for him. He was here three weeks ago and I refused to meet him."

Graille, who has brought



RONALDINHO

United chief executive Peter Kenyon had been in Paris on Wednesday negotiating a fee for 23-year-old Ronaldinho.

But Francis Graille, recently elected PSG president, said that the player will be expected to see out his contract at the Parc des Princes which runs until 2006.

"The club is sticking to its position," Graille told Le Parisien newspaper.

Halilhodzic to replace Luis Fernandez, insisted that neither he nor Halilhodzic would agree to a sale of the Brazilian.

But the player's agent and brother Roberto Assis claimed Ronaldinho had a gentleman's agreement with the previous board to leave the club earlier than 2006.

Beckham insisted while on holiday in the United States however that he wanted to stay at Old Trafford.

Don't expect a honeymoon



REUTERS, Madrid

While Barcelona presidential candidate Joan Laporta is confident of bringing David Beckham to the Nou Camp, the England skipper may well be taking time out to mull over the implications of a move to sunnier climes.

Despite its alluring holiday brochure appeal, Spain has hardly lived up to its promise as an idyllic destination for British footballers and many have struggled to replicate the success they enjoyed on home soil.

Beckham is unlikely to be drawing any lessons from Stan Collymore, the last Englishman to sign - and then spectacularly fail - at a Spanish club, but he may look more carefully at the experiences of another former Liverpool man, Steve McManaman.

The talented midfielder moved to Real Madrid in 1999 when he was in his prime at the age of 27, a year younger than Beckham is now, and the move effectively signalled the end of his international career.

From being one of the leading lights at Anfield, he quickly had to settle for a bit-part at Real, and has spent more time watching Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo and Raul from the sidelines than playing alongside them on the pitch.

Having said that most players would be pretty happy if they had two European Cup winners medals and a league championship to show for a four-year stint with one club.

McManaman's experience, however, may be one of the reasons why a move to Barcelona would be more appropriate for Beckham than following in his footsteps to the Bernabeu.

Beckham could step into the Barca first team with ease whereas,

with Figo on the right flank, Roberto Carlos rampaging on the left and Zidane given free rein in the middle, Real would be hard-pressed to find room for another creative midfielder.

Whether it be at Barca or Real, though, Beckham would be expected to make an immediate impact whenever he stepped on to the pitch.

No less a figure than Ronaldo has been the target of the ire of Real fans on several occasions this season when he has failed to live up to his billing as the world's top player.

Former England striker Gary Lineker, who enjoyed an early burst of success after moving from

season.

Aside from matters on the pitch, there is the no less important issue of whether or not Beckham would be able to settle into Spanish society.

Times have moved on since Liverpool striker Ian Rush said after his move to Juventus that "living in Italy was like living in a foreign country," but even a globetrotter like Beckham would find it hard to adjust to a new language and culture.

If he does make the switch to Spain, Beckham will be in for a shock if he expects to find the same sort of privacy he enjoys at United's secluded Carrington training ground.

A battle-hardened legion of

Talks bend like Beckham!

AFP, London

The David Beckham transfer saga has taken a new twist with Barcelona claiming they are ready to announce their pledge to sign the Manchester United star, the Sun newspaper reported on Friday.

Beckham has been linked with a move away from Old Trafford and off for the last few months, even though he has sworn his loyalty to the club he joined as a trainee in 1991.

Juan Laporta, one of six candidates for the Barcelona presidency, told the Sun: "We have shown United guarantees and they are very happy. Everything is in place."

And Laporta's campaign organiser Xavier Roig told the Sun: "We are ready to make an announcement on Saturday."

Two years ago, Florentino Perez became Real Madrid club president after promising to sign Portuguese midfielder maestro Luis Figo - which he duly did.

No formal bid can be put down in writing however until Barcelona's new president is elected on June 15.

Barca are among a host of clubs including European Champions AC Milan reportedly keen to secure the services of the 28-year-old England captain, whose contract at United expires in 2005.

Beckham insisted while on holiday in the United States however that he wanted to stay at Old Trafford.

Teixeira assures Parreira



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, who has had to take a makeshift squad to the Confederations Cup in France, will not be judged on his team's results there, soccer chief Ricardo Teixeira said on Thursday.

Parreira has found himself in an almost identical situation to Emerson Leao, who also took a below-strength team to the same tournament in Japan and South

Korea two years ago but was still sacked after his team finished fourth.

Leao is still bitter with Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Teixeira after learning of his dismissal from a member of the staff as the squad was about to board the plane for the 24-hour flight home from Tokyo.

"Of course, I hope that the Brazilian team wins another title," Teixeira said in an interview with the CBF's website.

"But I want to make it clear from the outset that I'm not demanding results. I know that the team staff had difficulty in picking the 23 players and there was a great concern in not disrespecting the clubs."

"It was a balanced and sensible selection," he added. "Parreira will have an excellent chance to spend time with the players."

The Confederations Cup will take place with the Brazilian cham-

ionship in full swing and coincides with the two-leg final of the South American Libertadores Cup.

As a result, Parreira took care not to pick more than three players from the same Brazilian club and decided against choosing any from the Libertadores Cup semi-finalists Santos, whose squad includes some of the country's exciting prospects.

Parreira has also decided to rest European-based players such as Rivaldo, Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Cafu and Gilberto Silva to give them a break after two years of non-stop football.

He says he wants them to recharge their batteries for the South American World Cup qualifiers, which start in September.

Brazil finished fourth at the last Confederations Cup after goalless draws with Japan and Canada followed by a humiliating 1-0 defeat to Australia in the third-place match.

Samba and Scotch!



AFP, Glasgow

Marcio Maximo Barcellos, the man who nurtured superstars Ronaldo and Ronaldinho, said on Thursday he was relishing the challenge of becoming the first Brazilian to manage a British team.

The 40-year-old was named as the new coach of Scottish club Livingston and said he was delighted to be at the helm of the club.

"I'm very proud to come here to give my contribution to Scottish football," said Barcellos.

"Challenges are part of life and you have to adapt for any challenge. Livingston is one more for me."

"I feel very comfortable because when I was here on Wednesday I had a very good reception, not just

from the chairman who believes in me, but from all the staff from Livingston."

Barcellos replaces Jim Leishman, who will become general manager at the club while Leishman's assistant Davie Hay will continue in a consulting role with the first team.

The South American said he would relish working with the younger players.

"I believe in youth. I worked with Ronaldo in Brazil and you can't put your focus only on the senior team," said the new coach.

"We are professional and we need to work professionally to bring success here."

The Brazilian concluded a three-year stint as the technical director for the Grand Cayman Islands and rejected the offer of a 10-year extension to move to Scotland.

Caniggia parts with Rangers

AFP, Glasgow

Argentinian veteran Claudio Caniggia has left Rangers after failing to win a new deal, the Scottish club said Thursday.

Having helped the club to the treble this season the 36-year-old striker's departure follows that of Dutch defender Arthur Numan.

Caniggia, who starred for Argentina in the 1990 World Cup and was in the squad for last year's finals in Japan and Korea, played 78 games for Rangers and scored 21 goals.

Caniggia came to Scotland to link up with Ivano Bonetti at Dundee and after one season was bought by then Gers boss Dick Advocaat in June 2001.

He is considering a number of offers including one to play in Qatar.

Real mighty rich



REUTERS, London

Real Madrid have replaced Manchester United as the world's richest club, says a survey of club finances carried out by World Soccer magazine.

Madrid, with an annual income of 180 million pounds (\$300.5 million) have a greater revenue than any other club, according to the figures for 2001-02 when they won the Champions League, and could easily afford to buy David Beckham from their rivals.

Manchester United are second on the list with an income of 148.1 million pounds (\$247.2 million). Newly-crowned European champions AC Milan come in fifth.

Only one other Spanish club, Barcelona, features in the top 20, which is made up of eight clubs from England, five from Italy, three from Germany and two from Scotland and Spain.

World Soccer's research team used a variety of sources. The demands on clubs to disclose financial information are different in each country, and clubs quoted on stock markets often have to provide more information to investors than their leagues.

In Spain and Germany, clubs have to submit a budget to the League for the next season. This is

often very conservative because it envisages a worst-case scenario as far as income is concerned and won't take into account factors such as a lucrative extended run in the Champions League.

The result is that such budgets, which look forward, often bear little resemblance to published accounts, which are retrospective.

World Soccer editor Gavin Hamilton told Reuters: "Wherever possible, World Soccer used information submitted to stock exchanges; 13 of the top 20 have reported to various exchanges."

"Clubs such as Liverpool publish full sets of accounts on their website, even though they are not obliged to do so, while others, such as Inter (Milan), keep their financial cards as close to their chests as legally possible."

"Some clubs include income earned from transfer dealings in their total turnover figures, but we have excluded them. Some also include earnings by subsidiary companies, such as Chelsea, while others are subsidiaries of larger companies themselves and do not provide separate accounts, like Bayer Leverkusen."

"Debt figures are particularly difficult to verify, and for that reason are not included in the current report. Some of the figures may vary slightly to those published elsewhere due to currency fluctuations."



STEVE MCMANAMAN

Everton to Barcelona in 1986, has issued a clear warning about what could happen if a player does not find his feet quickly.

"In England you get one year to find your feet and adapt," he said recently. "But in Spain if you start the season badly it can end up going catastrophically wrong."

Former Manchester United striker Mark Hughes, who followed Lineker to Catalunya, never made the grade at the Nou Camp and was quickly bundled off to Bayern Munich on a loan deal after just a



STAN COLLYMORE

sports reporters attend every training session at both Real and Barca.

Even the biggest stars are expected to grant regular interviews while the "Prensa Rosa" - the nearest equivalent Spain has to the British tabloids - are already sharpening their teeth on stories about Beckham and pop star Victoria.

Most British and Irish players who have enjoyed success in Spain, like Liverpool trio John Aldridge, Sammy Lee and Michael Robinson, all played for smaller clubs well clear of the glare of the media spotlight.

Sex can wait!

REUTERS, Sofia

Bulgaria coach Plamen Markov has imposed a ban on sex until after Saturday's Euro 2004 qualifier at home to Belgium.

"On Wednesday evening the coach issued an order - no sex until the qualifier against Belgium... Plamen Markov thinks players should concentrate to the maximum on the decisive match," sports daily newspaper 7 Days Sport said on Thursday.

Wives and girlfriends cannot visit the players in the 18-man squad, who are attending a training camp at the presidential residence of Boyana outside Sofia. The players said it was the first time such a ban had been imposed.

Bulgaria are top of Group Eight with 10 points from four matches ahead of Croatia (7 points) and Belgium (6).