

# Oceania get raw deal Finals remain 32-team event



AFP, Paris

Oceania suffered a massive blow on Saturday when they lost their automatic place in the 2006 World Cup finals following a FIFA executive committee meeting here.

World football's governing body also decided not to increase the number of teams from 32 to 36 until at least after the 2010 World Cup as had been demanded by the South American federations, CONMEBOL.

After FIFA's executive committee had voted overwhelmingly to give Oceania's half a slot to the south Americans the Oceania delegates showed their disapproval by staging a walk-out from the meeting.

The executive committee had voted Dec. 17 to give Oceania a guaranteed berth and take away South America's playoff spot. Saturday's vote to reverse that decision was 22-1, with Oceania dissenting and FIFA President Sepp Blatter abstaining.

Ahongalu Fusimalohi of Tonga, Oceania's only executive committee member, said FIFA had made his region a "laughingstock".

"We're being pushed around as if we never did exist," he said. "If it was so right seven months ago, how can it be so wrong seven months later?"

Fusimalohi walked out of the meeting in protest along with Australia's Basil Scarsella, the president of the Oceania Football Confederation.

Scarsella, a nonvoting observer of the executive committee, called the matter a "politically driven decision that's got nothing to do with

common sense or the development of football."

In the past, the winner of Oceania qualifying always met a team from another continent in a home-and-home playoff, and no team from Oceania has played in the World Cup since New Zealand in 1982. In the last tournament, Australia lost the playoff 3-1 to Uruguay, the No. 5 team in South America qualifying.

Blatter, who had made getting Oceania an automatic berth one of his campaign pledges when he was running for his second term, confirmed: "The executive committee has asked Oceania to give up half a slot from its full slot received on December 17 in Madrid.

"The Oceania representatives are sad and I'm not very happy



SEPP BLATTER

either. I know how to lose, they've got to learn that too."

He said the decision had been based on a number of factors, including New Zealand's poor performance in the Confederations Cup and administrative problems, especially in Australia.

"There is no doubt that if the distribution of slots was being discussed now Oceania wouldn't have received a full one," he said.

On the Oceania walk-out after the vote Blatter promised: "I'll do my utmost to win them back inside the FIFA family. You win some, you lose some, but you must go on."

"I remember in 1999 the Asian delegates left my first congress but they came back."

He promised to find a solution to help Oceania.

"There are several possibilities being considered," he said.

South America were thrilled with Saturday's vote.

Brazilian football federation president Ricardo Teixeira said: "It's been seven months that we've defended this idea, it's a great satisfaction to see justice done."

"New Zealand, during its participation in the Confederations Cup, has shown that Oceania still has some progress to make."

Blatter explained the need for simplicity was behind the move to keep the World Cup to 32 teams until at least the 2010 edition.

"We talked to the fans and if we increased it to 36 things would become too complicated."

"At the moment things are simple and transparent. The idea put forward by CONMEBOL was a win-win situation, two slots here, two there - but when you consider the practical details it has to be clear."

Franz Beckenbauer, president of the German World Cup's organising committee, welcomed the move to keep the World Cup to 32 teams.

"From our point of view the existing format is the best," said the German football legend.

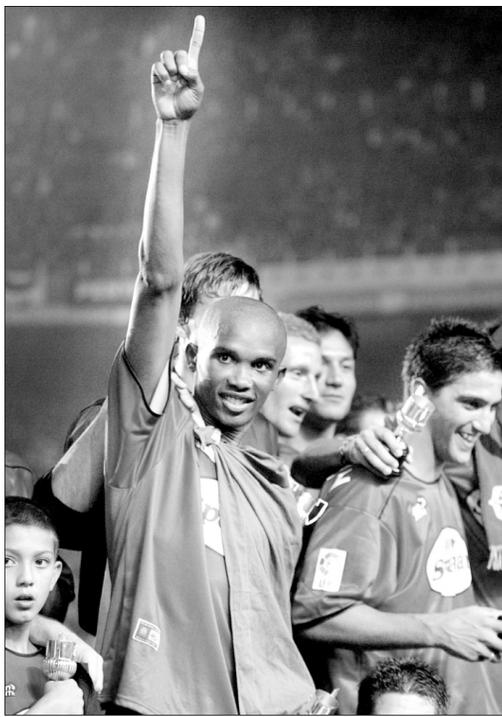
"It's clear there's not a transparent and fair system with 36 teams," he added.

## THE BREAKDOWN

AFP, Paris

How the places at the 2006 World Cup will be decided after FIFA opted to retain the 32-team format on Saturday:

- Europe (UEFA): 13 places plus Germany (hosts)
- Africa (CAF): 5
- Asia (AFC): 4.5
- South America (CONMEBOL): 4.5
- North America, Central America and Caribbean (CONCACAF): 3.5
- Oceania (OFC): 0.5



FOR THE FRIEND IN HEAVEN: Mallorca's Cameroon international Samuel Eto'o points to the skies as he dedicates his goals to international mate Marc-Vivien Foe during the final of the Spanish King's Cup at Martin Valero stadium of Elche on June 28.

# Eto'o's homage



AFP, Elche

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o struck two goals to lead Real Mallorca to victory in the Spanish Cup here on Saturday and then dedicated the win to international teammate Marc-Vivien Foe who died after collapsing at the Confederations Cup on Thursday.

Eto'o, who had flown back from France where the Confederations Cup is being played to take part in the final, scored in the 72nd and 83rd minutes of the 3-0 win over Recreativo Huelva but his thoughts were with Foe who died following Cameroon's semi-final win over Colombia in Lyon.

"This victory is for him," said Eto'o who left the ground straight after the match to fly to Paris where

Cameroon face France in the final of the Confederations Cup on Sunday.

After scoring his first goal on Saturday, Eto'o ran to the Mallorca supporters, removed his shirt and pointed to the sky to dedicate his goal to Foe just as Thierry Henry had done when he scored for France in their win over Turkey on Thursday.

Eto'o had left France before Thursday's tragedy.

His goals, which followed a first-half penalty scored by Uruguayan international Walter Pandiani, also handed Real Mallorca a place in the UEFA Cup next season.

Mallorca had reached the final the hard way by beating league champions Real Madrid in the quarter-finals and Deportivo La Coruna in the last four while defeat merely compounded the misery for Recreativo who had been relegated from the top flight earlier in June.

# Liverpool go for Kewell



BBC ONLINE, London

Liverpool have made a late move to beat off competition from Arsenal and clinch a £7m deal for Leeds United's Harry Kewell.

As exclusively revealed on this website on 19 May, Liverpool have been secretly pondering a move for Kewell after Blackburn Rovers slapped a £17m price tag on Damien Duff.

Kewell's agent Bernie Mandic confirmed the Australian winger is within days of making a final decision on his future.

And it is understood an official announcement will be made on Monday 7 July, with Liverpool closing in on a dramatic swoop.

BBC Sport understands that Liverpool have not yet made an official bid, but have re-ignited their interest after failing to make the breakthrough in a proposed deal for Republic of Ireland winger Duff.

Italians Inter Milan appear to have the only foreign interest after Barcelona dropped out of the race.

Mandic told this website: "Harry

will make a decision by the end of the month and Leeds will be informed - which is what all parties have been saying all along.

"All our discussions have been amicable and professional. Harry will make a decision over the next couple of days and Leeds will naturally be informed first about that decision.

"Leeds chairman Professor John McKenzie gets back from Japan on Wednesday and he is the man who needs to be informed, along with Peter Reid obviously," added Mandic.

Mandic reacted swiftly to suggestions from Leeds boss Reid that he had been having difficulty tracking Kewell down.

Mandic added: "It is wrong to suggest Harry doesn't want to speak to Peter Reid. Peter's words may have been taken out of context.

"Harry and I have never had a problem with Peter Reid on anyone else at Leeds United.

"He has the greatest respect for Peter. I have also spoken to him recently and there was no suggestion of a problem.

# Lions had a duty



AFP, Marcoussis, France

Sombre Cameroon insisted on Saturday that they had a duty to play Sunday's Confederations Cup final against France and that not to do so would be a betrayal of fallen teammate Marc-Vivien Foe.

"To stop would be an act of treason to Marco. Cameroon has a duty to go out and play to the end," said defender Lucien Mettomo, a teammate of Foe at Manchester City.

The 28-year-old Foe died after

collapsing in his team's semi-final against Colombia in Lyon on Thursday sending shockwaves throughout the football community.

"I continue to speak about him in the present tense," added Mettomo.

"When I go back to my room or walk down the corridor I think I will see him there. I can't start to think about what happened.

"We must play to respect his memory, just like his wife and mother said to us. If we had refused, Marco would see us and say: 'I fell for what?'"

Cameroon skipper Rigobert Song said that all of the squad agreed that the match should go ahead.

"The decision to play is a sign of respect for Marco," said Song. "It was a unanimous decision taken by the whole delegation.

"He was a big brother to me. He was always cool. He was a year older than me and we grew up in the

same area and we have shared many things.

"At half-time against Colombia, he said: 'Boys, we have to give everything and those that can't must be replaced'," said the Lens defender who also showed reporters a yellowing photograph of him with Foe when they played as juniors.

"His death is something I must work out in my head. He was very close to me," added Song.

Winfried Schaefer, the coach of the African champions, said the final against France will be "the most difficult he has had as a coach.

"But we must try and put on a good show for Marco and for all of Cameroon."

Mettomo said he didn't want to consider the outcome of the final.

"If I could predict the future, I would have been able to save Marco."

# Blatter defends final



AFP, Paris

FIFA boss Sepp Blatter rejected suggestions Saturday that Sunday's Confederations Cup final should have been cancelled after Marc-Vivien Foe's death, stressing that the show must go on.

"It was never a question of not playing the final," said the Swiss-born world football chief.

"I would have understood it if the Cameroon team had said they didn't want to go ahead with the final when I met them on Friday.

"But they told me they wanted to play in the memory of Foe, they said they had to play."

The 28-year-old Cameroon international collapsed and died during his country's 1-0 semi-final win over Colombia in Lyon on Thursday. The cause of his death remains unclear.

"Football," Blatter reasoned, "is part of our life, we shouldn't stop the competition because of such a tragedy.

"I remember in Munich in 1972 the Olympic Games went on even after the act of terrorism.

"Pleasure and satisfaction, suffering and death are all part of life and football's a part of it yet in 28 years with FIFA I've never had to deal with a similar situation.

"People may say I'm harsh but in

life you have to accept risks. Life goes on, we never know when our final day will come. The players want to perform."

Special arrangements have been made for the final to take into account the tragic circumstances of Foe's shock death.

The closing ceremony has been scrapped and before the match

players from both teams will form a circle in the middle of the pitch in a gesture of solidarity as a minute's silence is observed.

The Cameroon team have been granted permission to have Foe's name on their shirts, while the France team are expected to wear black armbands.

A special medal for Foe will be given to the Cameroon captain after the game and there is also a chance the winner's prize money of 20 million euros could be split.

Blatter said he was looking forward to seeing a proper hard fought final.

"These players are full of energy, may the best team win."

Blatter meanwhile was dismissive of press reports linking the tragedy to drugs.

"It is cynical to suggest this. All the drug controls so far (during the competition) have come back negative. Let us wait on the results of the French coroner in this case."

# Colombian hearts cry



PHOTO: AFP

Colombians players (L-R) Giovanni Hernandez, Jairo Patino and Mario Yepes observe one minute of silence in homage to Cameroon midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe before the Confederations Cup 3rd place decider against Turkey on June 28 June.



REUTERS, St. Etienne

Cameroon midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe was in Colombia's hearts during their 2-1 defeat to Turkey in Saturday's Confederations Cup third place playoff, said coach

Francisco Maturana.

But once the match got underway the thoughts of both the coach and his players turned to trying to beat the World Cup semi-finalists in a hard-tackling game.

Foe collapsed in Cameroon's 1-0 semi-final win over the Colombians in Lyon on Thursday and died shortly afterwards.

"He was in our hearts, but once we started to play, we concentrated on playing well and trying to win," Maturana told reporters.

"This way of approaching the game was a homage in itself."

Colombia defender Mario Yepes

echoed his coach's view, saying: "You have to continue, but with respect."

"For me, the competition had finished the day before yesterday (after the semi-final). I said before the game (today) that because of what happened, this match wasn't important.

"But once you're on the pitch, you want to win."

A minute's silence was held before the game at the Stade Geoffroy Guichard in which the players wore black armbands.

# Lyon feel the pain



REUTERS, Lyon

Still shocked after the death of Marc Vivien Foe at its Gerland stadium three days ago, the city of Lyon, where Foe's family is living, was mourning the Cameroon midfielder on Sunday.

The player's wife, Marie-Louise, was to be flown to Paris by a private flight chartered by French champions Olympique Lyon to attend the Confederations Cup final between Cameroon and France.

Foe died after collapsing during the competition's semi-finals against Colombia.

Lyon's prosecutor office said they had not yet authorised the body to be handed back to Foe's family while further tests were underway.

Foe's funeral should take place in midweek at Lyon's St. Jean church and Lyon players, now in pre-season training in the ski resort of Tignes, will drive down to attend the ceremony.

Foe played for Manchester City on loan but still belonged to Olympique Lyon and the French champions were all shell-shocked by the news of his death.

Club president Jean-Michel Aulas cancelled a trip to Spain to discuss transfers and decided that Foe's shirt number of 17 will from now on be removed from the team's line-up.

The same will apply at RC Lens, the French club at which Foe made his European debut.

"We're trying to keep a brave face in spite of everything," said Lyon defender Jeremie Brechet.

"Marco is in everybody's mind. It's awful. We're all thinking about

his family. But we need to overcome and to go on in spite of it all," he added.

At Olympique Lyon's headquarters, a picture of Foe with arms spread after scoring a goal against Nantes in 2001 has been posted on the outside wall.

Flowers and messages have been left at the club's main entrance, which has two lion statues on each side of the door.

"For Marco. An Indomitable Lion (nickname of Cameroon players) has gone but an angel remains," said one of the messages.

The club said 1,500 mails had been received on Foe's website.

The club's television channel repeatedly showed an interview in which the Cameroon player was asked what he would ask God when he went to Heaven.

"What can I do to help happiness on earth?" Foe replied.

# Barca focus on Viduka



AFP, London

Spanish giants Barcelona have made Leeds United striker Mark Viduka one of their top transfer targets, according to press reports on Saturday.

Barcelona vice-president Sandro Rosell told the BBC that the 27-year-old Australian striker is one of several strikers being considered by new coach Frank Rijkaard.

"We are interested in many players, but we are not being transparent about our interests because we have lost out on players twice," said Rosell.

The Nou Camp side have recently tried to lure both England

skipper David Beckham and Brazilian World Cup star Ronaldinho, but have been thwarted on both occasions.

"We have six or seven players as possible targets for each position, and if you wish to say Viduka is on the list then that would be true."

The player's agent Andrea D'Amico said he has been approached by Rijkaard about Australian international Viduka who was top scorer at Eland Road last season with 24 goals.

His golden run of 13 goals in the last nine Premiership matches virtually singlehandedly ensured Leeds avoided relegation.

Leeds do not want to sell, but they are under financial pressure to cut losses.

# Doping out of the question

AFP, Marcoussis, France

Cameroon team doctor Olivier Assamba said here on Saturday doping had nothing to do with the death of Marc-Vivien Foe.

Foe collapsed during their Confederations Cup semi-final against Colombia in Lyon on Thursday and later died. An autopsy did not verify the cause of death though he had previously complained of stomach pains and diarrhoea.

"There is too much speculation. I would like to stop the speculation and urge respect of the death of Marco," said Assamba at a press conference at Marcoussis to the south of Paris. "Doping had nothing to do with his death."

Assamba also said that he did not believe the amount of matches Foe played this season played a role in his death.

Referring to the Confederations Cup schedule, he added: "It's clear that playing a match every couple of days at the end of the season is tough but I don't think it played any role in Foe's death."

# A Perugia gamble!



REUTERS, Torre Alfina, Italy

Perugia side Perugia paraded the most unorthodox signing of Italy's closed season on Sunday when they presented Al-Saadi Gaddafi, son of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, to the press.

Journalists, club officials and TV crews crowded into the courtyard of the 13th century castle in the village of Torre Alfina in Umbria to watch Gaddafi pose with the Perugia shirt that he will wear next season, having signed a two-year contract with the club.

While Perugia's president Luciano Gaucci greeted his new player, a specially invited group of fans chanted and unfurled a banner that read "Welcome Saadi".

Gaddafi's passion for football is well known. As player/owner of Libyan first division side Al-Ittihad the striker scored 25 goals in the last two seasons, and as president of the Libyan football federation he heads Libya's bid for the 2010 World Cup.

Nonetheless, at the age of 28 the move to one of Europe's most competitive leagues seemed unlikely for the striker, especially a move to Perugia - a club that has made a name for itself as a springboard for young talent.

Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi Nakata began his Serie A career at Perugia. Last season's star player, striker Fabrizio Miccoli, earned a call up for the Azzurri after a series of impressive performances.

Cynicism surrounding the move grew after ex-Libyan national team coach Franco Scoglio made disparaging remarks about Gaddafi's skills as a footballer.

"When I was coach of Libya I called him up a few times but I'd prefer to say nothing about his qualities as a player," Scoglio told reporters earlier this month.

Gaucci, however, denied that Gaddafi's arrival at Perugia was simply a publicity stunt.

"We don't have any need of publicity. This is just another gamble by us. I'm staking my reputation on it," he told reporters on Sunday.

"The player is ready and willing. He wants to be here. If he starts or stays on the bench it's all the same to him - that's one of his great qualities."

Gaddafi, meanwhile, admitted playing in Serie A would present a tough challenge.

"It certainly won't be easy. I've got my work cut out for me," he said.

"I know that Perugia is the only Serie A side that can boast players from every continent. That tells you something about their ability to identify and develop talent."

Asked what Colonel Gaddafi thought of his son's latest career move, Gaddafi replied: "He's fine about it."

Japanese midfielder Hidetoshi



PHOTO: AFP

Son of Libyan leader Moamar Kadhafi, Saadi Kadhafi (L) shows his new Perugia team jersey during an official presentation in Torre Alfina on 29 June 2003. Kadhafi is on a one season contract with the Serie A side.