



Thierry Henri (R) scoring the golden goal past Cameroon keeper Idris Kameni on June 29.

Final under his shadow



AFP, Paris

France greeted Sunday's Confederations Cup triumph with a mixture of humility and subdued satisfaction, dedicating the night to Marc-Vivien Foe.

The 28-year-old collapsed and died playing in Thursday's semi-final against Colombia but the Indomitable Lions chose to go ahead with the final after Foe's wife Marie-Louise urged them to play as a tribute to her husband.

Thierry Henry, whose golden goal in the seventh minute of extra time brought the game and the competition to a conclusion, said: "When I scored I knew that was it but my feelings were mixed in my head."

The Arsenal ace, whose four-goal haul earned him the golden

boot title as the competition's highest scorer, added: "I did my job, now for me it's rest, rest, rest."

Marcel Desailly, skipper of Les Bleus for whom this was a morale-boosting result after last summer's World Cup debacle, said his side had tried to be professional playing in a match some, including himself, would have preferred not to take place.

"We knew Marc-Vivien Foe's family were in the stands. We tried to be as respectful as possible, but all the same it was difficult," he said.

"The Cameroons played well, they were appalled and engaged. I don't know whether I could have found the strength in their place."

For Djibril Cisse, who had a header go close in the first half, the lasting image of an extraordinary night was the two captains Desailly and Rigobert Song emerging onto the pitch holding a giant photograph of the fallen lion.

"It was very hard to play considering the circumstances. Marco was a friend, we dedicate the victory to him," said the Auxerre striker.

"The result doesn't wipe out our elimination from the World Cup

but it goes some way to putting things in their place," he added.

Fellow striker Sidney Govou, a former teammate of Foe's at French champions' Lyon, described the atmosphere in the Stade de France as "strange".

"The ambience weighed on our emotions throughout the match. You could sense we were a little apprehensive."

He added that winning counts even if the final was "a very special occasion".

Midfielder Olivier Dacourt singled out the solidarity shown by both sets of players.

"It was moving. Marco was a great warrior in spirit, and at least we could give everything for him even if it was hard to go through with."

"The emotion was enormous, it's always harder when emotions are running high."

Lyon keeper Gregory Coupet insisted that by staging the final they had gone along with the wishes of Foe's family.

"The Cameroons wanted to play, and we respected their wishes and those of Marie-Louise (Foe's widow)."

"This title is for Marco. For me I will keep the image of a fallen lion."

One of the most touching tributes to Foe was paid by his own coach, Winfried Schafer.

The German said that in all his 35 years in football he had never met anyone with such a remarkable character.

"Marco wasn't simply a good footballer, but a huge character. It's a loss for all of Cameroon, tonight they played for all of Africa."

Despite the wretched circumstances Schafer said he was able to look to the African and Olympic champions' future with optimism.

"It's going to be a good one," insisted the coach who disclosed that Cameroon skipper Song had offered him invaluable support over the past few days.

Song, who grew up in the same district in Yaounde as Foe, reflected: "A night like that stays in the memory all time."

"Everyone was behind us, but all the same we're a little disappointed about the deal we made with Marco (to win)."

"Yet we proved we had the ability to compete in a competition of this quality."

A sombre occasion



AFP, Paris

The wife of Marc-Vivien Foe, the Cameroon international midfielder who died on Thursday, joined Pele to watch her late husband's Cameroon team take on France in the Confederations Cup final here Sunday.

The night at the Stade de France was thick with emotion, with Cameroon, led by Foe's lifelong friend Rigobert Song, discarding their traditional green and yellow colours for plain white with black armbands.

Marie-Louise Foe was joined by her late husband's brother at the

match which Cameroon wanted to play as a poignant tribute to their fallen 'Indomitable Lion'.

The 28-year-old father of three collapsed and died in the 72nd minute of his country's semi-final against Colombia in Lyon on Thursday.

It was the express wish of his widow and the Cameroon team that the final went ahead. Many of the France side including skipper Marcel Desailly were in favour of cancelling the fixture.

In a show of solidarity the teams linked arms in a circle in the centre of the pitch holding a large photograph of Foe for the minute's silence which preceded the kick-off which was completely observed.

France also chose to wear black armbands.

When the Cameroon squad - all with their absent colleague's name and his number 17 position written on their warm-up kit - had come out to test the turf they received a huge cheer from the then half-full stadium.

Some fans too sported black t-

shirts with the words "Foe forever" on the front.

One sign in the crowd said "Marco, we love you."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, speaking at the launch of FIFA's centennial anniversary before the game, said: "We are all of us still under shock from the tragic demise of Marc-Vivien Foe."

"Tonight his widow will be here, but one player will be missing."

Blatter added: "It will be a very emotional occasion. The French team were touched by this event too, but it's good the final's going ahead. Football is life, life is football."

Cameroon supporter Ahidjo Njoya, 32, said: "Cameroon is sick, the nation's in mourning."

The evening was pared down to let the game stand on its own, all the ancillary side shows that normally accompany a night such as this, like the closing ceremony, abandoned to take account of the unique circumstances in which it was being staged.

McManaman linked with Everton

AFP, London

Real Madrid's Steve McManaman could be on his way back to English Premiership side Everton - although the Toffees may have to battle Manchester City for the wantaway England midfielder's signature, according to BBC reports here Sunday.

McManaman's future at the Spanish giants has looked shaky since the arrival of England teammate David Beckham from Manchester United and the subsequent departure of coach Vincente Del Bosque whose contract was not renewed last week.

Real's midfield is now packed with star talent, including Beckham, Luis Figo, Frenchman Claude Makelele and Zinedine Zidane. As a result McManaman has dropped down the pecking order.

Del Bosque used McManaman more in the Champions League than the Primera Liga and he made only a few league appearances for the 'Meringues' last season.

Everton manager David Moyes is said to be keen to sign McManaman and although the player may be willing to take a cut on his reported weekly wage of 60,000 pounds (99,000 dollars), it remains to be seen what kind of package the Merseysiders can put together to tempt him.

Manchester City manager Kevin Keegan is also said to be a big admirer of McManaman, who appeared in Keegan's England side in Euro 2000.

Raul welcomes Beckham!



AFP, London

Real Madrid star Raul says England captain David Beckham will be just one of a galaxy of stars at the nine-times European champions.

But Raul, reportedly in trouble last week when he allegedly slammed the decision to axe coach Vicente Del Bosque plus veteran defender Fernando Hierro, believes the former Manchester United player can help Real win even more trophies.

"Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and Luis Figo are other players in the dressing room. That's what's best about this team. Beckham knows it and that will be positive for him," Raul told the Sun newspaper.

"He'll help us a lot but if the rest of us do not play our part we won't win any titles."

"Contrary to what many say, Real are a unit. Individual brilliance is always a last resort."

"It was claimed we couldn't fail with Ronaldo and the others but we've stumbled in Europe and in Spain. Now they're saying the same about Beckham but we'll have to be very focused on the pitch."

"From the news I have he's a regular bloke who won't have any difficulty adapting."

"We'll simply help him, like any new player who comes into the squad. No footballer is treated differently, whatever he's called. Beckham has enough charisma to win over the fans quickly. All he needs to do is to show his class on the pitch."

Real have broken the world

transfer record twice in the last three years with the signings of first Portuguese star Luis Figo and then Zidane for 72 million euros (72 million dollars).

And last year they spent 45 million euros (45 million dollars) on Brazilian superstar Ronaldo, despite a recession-hit transfer market.

Raul expects Becks and his popstar wife Victoria to adapt to life in Spain.

"It's not for me to give anybody advice about their private life. But Beckham and his wife will win over the people if they keep on doing what they have so far. Why do they need to change? In England they're much loved."

"We'll try and mould David to Spanish lifestyle quickly and yes, if necessary, we'll invite him to eat paella."

Raul dismissed reports of a potential dispute over his No 7 shirt.

"A lot of fuss has been made. There's an internal rule here which says that new players are given numbers which are free. That's a fact and Beckham confirmed it in Asia."

Fears that Beckham would have to compete with Figo for a place in the Real Madrid team next season were dispelled by new Real coach Carlos Queiroz last week.

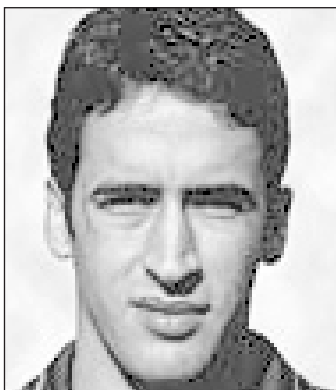
Queiroz, Beckham's coach at Manchester United where he was deputy to Alex Ferguson, is considering switching Beckham to central midfield so Figo can continue on the right-hand side.

Beckham was used on the right by United manager Alex Ferguson.

Figo said he did not feel threatened by Beckham.

"I always welcome the opportunity of playing with the best," he told the Portuguese daily A Bala.

"Queiroz has not given me any assurances. I'll play for my place in the side. I don't look upon myself as one of the bosses at Real. I've only ever said I was the one who decided on my future, nobody else."



RAUL

Beckham will cost Real 35 million euros if they are successful.

They are to receive 5.25 million pounds (7.5 million euros) on completion of Beckham's transfer and 12 million pounds (17 million euros) in instalments over next four years.

A further seven million pounds (10 million euros) will be based on Real's performances in the money-spinning Champions League -- 875,000 pounds (1.25 million euros) every year they qualify, 875,000 pounds every year they reach the quarter-finals.

Beckham's debut for Real in an official match should be on the

holiday island of Majorca.

Real Mallorca were confirmed as Real's Super Cup opponents at the weekend when they defeated Huelva 3-0 in the Spanish Cup final.

Precedent dictates the cup winners play the first match of the two-legged tie at home, meaning Beckham will return from Real's four-match tour of the Far East then head off to Palma for an August 16 match.

The second leg of the game, likely to be played a week later after Beckham has turned out for his country in the August 20 friendly with Croatia, will be his first appearance for Real at the Bernabeu.

The England skipper is then expected to launch his Spanish League career the following weekend.

All this depends on Beckham passing a medical on Wednesday.

The England captain will be flown into El Torreon, a military airport once used by the US Airforce, so that he can be met by a car on the runway. He will then be whisked away by police escort to the Bernabeu for his medical.

Beckham's medical will be filmed by Real Madrid TV and the live rights auctioned off to the highest bidder.

Japanese television companies are understood to have expressed the most interest.

Following his medical, Beckham will be presented at the Raimundo Saporta hall, the gymnasium of Madrid's basketball team which has a 5,000-strong capacity, in a ceremony will take place in Spanish, English and Japanese.



PHOTO: AFP

Marie-Louise Foe, the widow of Cameroon player Marc Vivien Foe, sits in the official stand during the final of the Confederations Cup.

Another year at Leverkusen

AFP, Leverkusen

Brazilian international defender Lucio is staying another season at German first division club Bayer Leverkusen despite reported interest from Juventus and AS Roma, Leverkusen said on Sunday.

Lucio, 25, a member of Brazil's World Cup-winning team, is officially under contract with the 2002 Champions League finalists until 2007 but he would only confirm that he will stay until the end of the 2003-2004 Bundesliga season.

"I have definitely decided to play one more year for Leverkusen," said Lucio in a statement. "We have a strong team and both I and my family feel extraordinarily at home in Germany."

His decision means he will play no part in European club competition, as Leverkusen had a disastrous 2002-2003 season, sacking coach Klaus Toppmoller and narrowly avoiding relegation.

The club backed by the Bayer pharmaceutical giant is making budget cuts and other star players such as Yildiray Basturk are expected to leave.

Socceroos from Asia?



AFP, Sydney

National coach Frank Farina on Sunday called for the scrapping of the Oceania Confederation (OFC) and urged Australia to seek to qualify for the World Cup football finals through Asia.

This follows FIFA's stunning backflip on its decision to allow a team from the South Pacific region direct entry to the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany.

World soccer's governing body FIFA announced at a meeting in Paris on Saturday that its December 2002 decision to give Oceania a direct path to the World Cup was overturned.

Instead, the South American confederation would regain an extra half qualifying spot with the top Oceania team expected to battle its way through a qualification path as it has done for three decades.

An outraged Farina said

Australia should forget about Oceania and look to join the Asian Football Confederation because FIFA showed its disdain for the region.

"What's the point of having an Oceania confederation," Farina asked.

"They've got no respect for the region."

Farina said the decision was clearly a political one to appease the powerful South American lobby seething at originally losing a World Cup finals spot to Oceania.

"It's a disgrace. It's a political decision," Farina said. "FIFA should tear up its motto 'for the good of the game' and throw it out the window."

The FIFA executive voted 22-1 in favour of handing Oceania's extra half spot back to South America and cited as reasons the disarray in Soccer Australia (SA) and Oceania's poor on-field performance indicated by New Zealand's showing at the current Confederations Cup in France.

The OFC is expected to meet in the next week to discuss the way forward with president Basil Scarsella saying the aim would now be to secure the best possible qualifying path for the region.

He was hoping FIFA may agree to a four-way play-off series with the other confederations with extra half spots -- South America, Asia and North/Central America.

The top two teams in that series would then make the World Cup finals.



AFP, Sydney

Australians, furious over FIFA's reneging on Oceania's promised automatic entry into the 2006 World Cup finals, want the head of the governing body's chief, Sepp Blatter.

Newspapers on Monday urged the confederation of 11 South Pacific states to actively campaign for the demise of the Swiss football bureaucracy.

Emotions ran high with some football writers labelling Blatter as a double-crosser after FIFA overturned its decision six months earlier to give Oceania direct passage into the World Cup finals for the first time.

Blatter had made getting Oceania an automatic berth one of his campaign pledges when he was running for his second term 18 months ago.

Now the Australian football community is talking about getting even with Blatter over what they call his betrayal.

"First and foremost, all support for the presidency of Sepp Blatter must end," the Sydney Morning Herald urged on Monday.

"The man has spoken with a forked tongue once too often regarding Oceania. We were decisive in getting him elected and now we must campaign for his demise."

"His promise now that 'we'll do the utmost to win them (Oceania) back inside FIFA's family' is as empty as it is nauseating. He is up for re-election in 2006 and, having so

ruthlessly betrayed Oceania, does not deserve a single vote.

"Instead, the region's 11 votes (12 if New Caledonia become a full member next year) must now be shifted to Asia, because in the murky world of FIFA politics, this is where our futures lie."

"The Asians opposed Blatter in the last election, and Oceania now must form an alliance with our nearest neighbours. Not simply to rid the game of one man, but to create a better future for ourselves."

The Australian newspaper weighed in saying: "Here is the deception at its simplest. Blatter promised Oceania an automatic place in the next World Cup. For this Oceania had to vote for Blatter as president come the FIFA election. Having secured the presidency, Blatter turned his back on the countries represented by Oceania. A double cross."

The national newspaper said the excuse that uncertainty in Australian soccer administration had forced a FIFA re-think did not carry weight.

"FIFA does not give a fig about soccer in this region. The world body couldn't care less. It neither respects it nor cares for it. We are considered irrelevant and disposable," said The Australian.

"When Blatter wooed Oceania for its votes (the Australian) game was all but bankrupt, the Howard government had not intervened and the David Crawford report (on the running of Australian football) had not been initiated. If Australian soccer was stable enough to be given entry back then, it is now worse now."

Nick Greiner, the former Soccer Australia president and ex-premier of New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, called FIFA's decision to strip Oceania of its World Cup finals spot an act of bastardry.

"You'd have to say it's an act of bastardry of great proportions," Greiner said on Monday. "I've seen a lot of political double-crosses in my time. This is right at the top of the tree."

Don't take off your shirt!

AFP, Paris

Footballers who celebrate a goal by removing their shirts will have to resort to another way of manifesting their joy after FIFA outlawed the practise.

The executive committee of world football's governing body has ruled that in the interests of "discipline and to maintain order on the pitch" players will no longer be allowed to remove their shirts.

FIFA's executive committee took their decision after a report from American Chuck Blazer, president of the organising committee for the Confederations Cup.

River champions of Argentina

AFP, Buenos Aires

River Plate were crowned champions of Argentina for the 31st time in their history after a 2-0 away victory over Olimpo Bahia Blanca on Sunday.

The victory, thanks to goals from Victor Zapata in the 80th minute and Diego Barrado seven minutes later, gave River Plate a four-point cushion over second-placed Boca Juniors, who beat Independiente 3-1.

There is one more matchday left to play.

Fatal goal

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian footballer killed a player from the opposing side who had just scored a goal by punching him in the head, it was reported here Monday.

The Yas-e No daily said an amateur match in Ahwaz in the south-west last Friday turned ugly when a defender punched an opposing forward who had just scored.

The victim was carried from the pitch and when his death was announced over loudspeakers the attacker was detained by the opposing team and handed over to the police.

Rivaldo UAE bound?



AFP, Dubai

Brazil and AC Milan forward Rivaldo is said to be "close" to signing a deal with United Arab Emirates club Al Ain, according to a newspaper report here Sunday.

The 31-year-old Rivaldo moved to AC Milan last summer from Spanish giants Barcelona but has spent much of the season on the bench and is said to have been attracted by the Emirates club's offer, according to the Khaleej Times.

Al Ain, who have reached the semi-finals of the Asian Champions League, are set to be coached by Frenchman Bruno Metsu, who led Senegal's World Cup campaign last year.

However, another factor which could help lure Rivaldo, according to the report, is his failing relation-

ship with Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The report also claimed that the ambitious Emirates club have made contact with another Brazilian, Serginho, in a bid to bolster their squad ahead of the second leg of their Asian Champions League semi-final clash with Chinese side Dalian in September.

Sources close to the richest club in the Emirates told the newspaper: "It is rumoured that Rivaldo is not on good terms with the coach of his club, Carlo Ancelotti, and that is why he has remained on the bench since his transfer from Barcelona."

"Also, the fact that the French coach Bruno Metsu is coaching Al Ain, has given the club some credibility in the eyes of the striker."

Representatives from the club also travelled to France last week to scout the Confederations Cup join an international striker to join the squad's training camp scheduled to start next month.

Liverpool close in on Kewell



AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool hope to snap up Harry Kewell if the Australian star fails to agree new terms with Leeds before the end of the week.

The Australian star returns from holiday this week to decide whether to remain with Leeds and Liverpool are now the front-runners in the race for his signature.

"Certainly Liverpool are an option, as are Arsenal. But Harry has not signed for anybody yet," Kewell's agent Bernie Mandic told the Liverpool website.

He has not yet received a final offer from Leeds and until then he won't make a final determination on where his future lies.

Liverpool joined the race for

Kewell after failing in their attempt to sign Blackburn Rovers' Irish international winger Damien Duff.

The London Evening Standard reported Monday that Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger would be unable to raise the seven million pounds (11.6 million dollars) Leeds want for Kewell.

Wenger had hoped to tempt Leeds with four million pounds (6.6 million dollars) plus England Under-21 star Jermaine Pennant but Pennant, 20, has told Wenger he wants to stay and fight for a first-team place at Highbury.

The 16-goal Aussie has rejected Leeds' offer of a new four-year deal worth 48,000 pounds (80,000 dollars) a week, which Leeds said on their website were the best-ever terms offered a player at Elland Road.

Spanish giants Barcelona are now out of the running for Kewell.