

Owen eases

Michael Owen on Sunday strenu-

ously denied reports that he was

prepared to walk out on Liverpool

should the club fail to qualify for

The England striker, who has 18

months of his contract to run,

insisted negotiations were going

well on a new deal and said he felt

insulted that his loyalty after 12

years at Anfield was now being put

Newspaper reports this week

quoted Owen as hinting his future

depended on Liverpool making it

into Europe but in an interview with

The News of the World he said those

comments had been taken out of

"I find it a little insulting that,

"I have signed five contracts with

after 12 years' service, my loyalty is

Liverpool and on each occasion

they have been sorted out very

quickly and satisfactorily. The

comments which have been made

about me this week have come from

people who don't know the truth,"

He added: "The stories resulted

from some comments which I gave

to a magazine several months ago.

Some of the words I never even said

and the rest were taken completely

claims that I will walk out on

Liverpool if we don't get into the

Champions League. It has all got

that I am as committed to Liverpool

as any player at the club. I have been

the same ever since I first came to

Owen said he has spoken out to

"I am certain 99 percent of them

understand the situation anyway.

But, as usual, these stories have

been fuelled by people that simply

What's eating

the Beckhams?

Britain's most talked about mar-

riage, between English football

captain David Beckham and the

singer popularly known as Posh

Spice, is not on the rocks, a spokes-

woman for the couple said Saturday.

tabloid said Victoria Beckham had

told her soccer star husband that

their marriage was over unless he

quit Spain, where he plays for Real

"It's my turn now. It's my way or

But the England captain is refus-

ing to back down and has told his

pop star wife that her place is with

him and their children in the

Spanish capital, the newspaper

A trial separation had even been

After five days apart they were

reunited on Monday, but began

arguing within hours, it added,

quoting an insider as saying the

However a spokeswoman for the

couple said Saturday: "The story is

rubbish and they've got their lawyer

looking at it with a view to possible

making up stories that there is a

problem when there is not," the

"They are fed up with people

marriage is "at breaking point".

the f...ing highway," she is quoted as

Madrid, and returned to Britain.

telling Beckham.

discussed, it said.

A story in The Sunday Mirror

put the record straight for the

"I want every supporter to know

completely out of hand.

Anfield as an 11-year-old.

Liverpool fans.

don't know the facts.

AFP, London

"They have led to a lot of false

next season's Champions League.

nerves

AFP, Liverpool

into question.

being questioned.

Owen explained.

out of context.



SCOTCH TIME! Scotland players are over the moon after James McFadden's (2nd R) goal against Holland at Hampden Park, Glasgow on November 15.

Scotland upset Oranje order

Latvia bemuse Turkey



Latvia beat World Cup semi-finalists Turkey 1-0, Scotland edged the Netherlands 1-0 and Wales drew 0-0 in Russia in a series of upsets in Saturday's first leg playoffs for Euro

Favourites Croatia were held 1-1 at home by Slovenia in another surprise result for the underdogs, but Spain restored some order with a 2-1 victory at home to Norway

The five playoff winners will join the other 11 known finalists in the European Championship being held in Portugal from June 12-July 4 next year. All the second legs will take place next

The first goal of the day came in the 200th international match played at Hampden Park, which has just cele-

brated its 100th anniversary. Winger James McFadden fired the winner before 51,000 delighted home fans as Scotland earned their first competitive win over the Dutch since

the 1978 World Cup finals. The Netherlands had an outstanding team on paper with Ruud van

Nistelrooy and Patrick Kluivert up

supported by Edgar Davids and Andy Van der Meyde in the middle

But as in 2001, when they were surprisingly dumped out of the World Cup playoffs by Ireland, the Dutch failed to combine effectively as a team

The national football team of war-

ravaged Iraq made a winning start to

their visit down under after they

defeated Western Australian Invitation

side 1-0 at the Joondalup Arena, near

Although victory was welcome, the

Iraq's arrived here on Friday night

Led by coach Bernd Stange, the

for a 10-day Western Australian visit

aimed at sharpening the side and

team flew into Perth, the Western

Australian capital to a rousing welcome

from about 70 members of Perth's Iraqi

Supporters chanted songs and

Players got less than 48 hours to

overcome their jetlag and prepare for

Sunday's match, which was dubbed a

Western Australian glamour side, Perth

Glory -- current Australian champions

-- told reporters the last four or five

months had been the toughest of his

life as he tried to rebuild the Iraqi team,

facilities, no soccer balls, no equip-

Even the nets for the goals, and we have

"There is nothing left in Iraq -- no

"Everything is looted after the war.

Stange said he believes he has a

crucial morale-boosting role to play in

Iraq, and hopes the tour will help

promote the team and give the players

he declared. "Football is peace and we

are glad to be here to enjoy the hospi-

tality and the welcome from the Iraqi

Western Australian people.

"We are the good news from Iraq,"

largely from his own pocket.

no machines to cut the grass.'

Stange, the popular former coach of

waved Iraqi flags and banners reading

trip has more to it then just playing

Football

AFP, Perth.

here, on Sunday.

building goodwill

"Iraqi Pride Never Dies".

"World Peace Game.

and squandered their scoring chances. "It was a great performance in the first half, we played brilliant football," said Scotland coach Berti Vogts.

"In the second, the legs were a little bit tired but it was organised and we functioned as a team.

Disappointed Dutch skipper Frank de Boer said: "This is a terrible result for

'Now we have to score at least two goals in Amsterdam on Wednesday, and that may be difficult considering the number of chances we missed Wales, without two of their most

influential players after long-term injuries to midfielder Simon Davies and forward Craig Bellamy, faced sustained pressure in Moscow.

But despite being dominated for much of the game. Wales take their qualifying hopes back to Cardiff, while Russia will be without suspended playmaker Alexander Mostovoi and goalkeeper Sergei Ovchinnikov after both were booked on Saturday.

Despite encouraging results, Scotland and Wales will have their work cut out to join England, who qualified automatically as group winners, to complete a British trio in

Britain last had three teams at a major championship in 1986, when England, Scotland and Northern Ireland played in the World Cup finals. since the World Cup in 1958.

Latvia joined the surprise packages by beating a Turkey side reduced to 10 men after a 73rd minute red card for

A 'peace' trip down under

defender Emre Asik.

world, secured victory over a side who have struggled since finishing third at the 2002 World Cup. A 29th minute strike by Maris Verpakovskis, his fifth of the qualifying campaign, proved to be the winner.

Though Senol Gunes's men will still expect to qualify, the year is clearly turning sour after his former Group Seven leaders were pipped to the top slot by England.

Along with Asik, Turkey will also be without keeper Rustu Recber and defender Fatih Akyel next week after yellow cards on Saturday, while Latvia will miss defender Valentins Lobanovs.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE Results from Euro 2004 play-offs, first

Latvia 1 (Verpakovskis 29) Turkey 0 Second leg in Istanbul on Nov 19

leg matches on Saturday:

Croatia 1 (Prso 5) Slovenia 1 (Siljak 21) Second leg in Llubljana on Nov 19

At Moscow Russia 0 Wales 0 Second leg in Cardiff on Nov 19

Scotland 1 (McFadden 22) Holland 0 Second leg in Amsterdam on Nov 19

Spain 2 (Raul 21, Berg 84-og) Norway 1 Second leg in Oslo on Nov 19

Spain, surprisingly forced into the playoffs after finishing second to

Greece, suffered an early shock in

Valencia when they fell behind to

Steffen Iversen's 14th minute opener

Raul equalised after 21 minutes and Spain's overwhelming secondhalf pressure eventually paid off when Henning Berg turned the ball into his own net under pressure from Raul five minutes from time.

Goal-happy Dado Prso, who 10 days ago scored four times in Monaco's sensational 8-3 Champions League win over Deportivo Coruna, gave Croatia a fifth minute lead in But Ermin Siljak levelled for

Slovenia midway through the first half to swing the match their way -although a later booking means he will miss the second leg.

With the away goals rule in operation, a goalless draw next week will give Slovenia a remarkable third major tournament appearance in four years after Euro 2000 and the 2002 World Cup. Euro 2004 hosts Portugal and

European champions France were also in action on Saturday as they warmed up for the tournament with friendlies against Greece and Germany respectively.

The Portuguese were held to a 1-1 draw in Aveiro after Luis Figo missed a first-half penalty, while the French sauntered to a 3-0 win over rivals Germany in Gelsenkirchen and a record of 13 wins in a row to eclipse the previous mark set in 1984.

Argentina blank Bolivia



REUTERS, Montevideo

Colombia hit a new low in the 2006 World Cup qualifiers on Saturday as a home defeat against outsiders Venezuela left them bottom of the South American group without a point after three games.

Argentina gave a performance which is unlikely to rekindle public interest as they beat Bolivia 3-0 at a half-empty River Plate stadium while Paraguay and Uruguay made home advantage count in 2-1 wins over Ecuador and Chile respectively.

Paraguay's Jose Cardozo and Uruguay striker Javier Chevanton both scored their fourth goals in three

Argentina went top of the single South American group with seven points from three games, though they could lose that place when Brazil -who have six from two -- face Peru in Lima on Sunday.

Paraguay and Uruguay also have six points, Chile four and Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador three apiece.

Beleagured Colombia coach Francisco Maturana was under pressure even before the defeat against opponents who had only ever previously won one qualifier away from home and who come from a country which prefers baseball to soccer. By the time the final whistle went in

Barranquilla, the crowd were shouting "Get out, get out" and the only question seemed to be whether Maturana would resign before or after Wednesday's meeting with Argentina in the same

Mexican-based Juan Arango did the damage with a rasping 25-metre left foot drive in the eighth minute. After that, Colombia attacked desperately but could not make the breakthrough. "I know that you've got a lot of

questions and I haven't got many answers," the 54-year-old -- a qualified dentist who took Colombia to the 1990 and 1994 World Cups -- told reporters. "It's a difficult moment, this result

is a slap in the face for Colombian "Despite the situation... this is a

group (of players) which is capable of

achieving their goals, with or without Argentina, still treated with suspicion by the public after last year's first round exit at the World Cup, struggled for 57 minutes to break down a packed Bolivian defence before Andres

D'Alessandro, Hernan Crespo and

Pablo Aimar scored in quick succes-

Aimar brightened up a wet, windy night at the River Plate stadium with a cheeky backheel into the net.

But Argentina's performance, in a niggly game full of flying tackles, was still disjointed and they clearly

missed suspended Juan Sebastian Veron in midfield Chile, unbeaten in their first two

games, took a 21st-minute lead against Uruguay in Montevideo but the "Charruas", who started without Alvaro Recoba because of a hamstring injury, equalised with a stunning free kick from Chevanton.

Halftime substitute Marcelo Romero headed the winner four minutes after the break as Chile goalkeeper Nelson Tapia was slow off his line.

Bayern Munich striker Roque Santa Cruz scored the first and set up the second for Cardozo, who last year broke the Mexican championship scoring record by hitting 36 goals in 25 games, as Paraguay once again proved difficult to beat in Asuncion.

Edison Mendez replied for Ecuador who were happy with their performance, if not the result.

"With each day that passes, I like Ecuador more and more," said their Colombian coach Hernan Dario Gomez, who was Maturana's assistant in 1990 and 1994.

South American World Cup group table after Saturday's matches (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

STANDINGS

Argentina	3	2	1	U	8	2	1
Uruguay	3	2	0	1	8	5	6
Brazil	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Paraguay	3	2	0	1	7	6	6
Chile	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Peru	2	1	0	1	5	3	3
Ecuador	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Bolivia	3	1	0	2	4	8	3
Venezuela	3	1	0	2	1	5	3
Colombia	3	0	0	3	1	7	0



Argentina's playmaker Andres D'Alessandro celebrates his goal against Bolivia at the Monumental stadium in

France too hot for Germans

Football

France coach Jacques Santini paid

tribute to the way his players pulled

together after their World Cup humili-

ation as they won a record 13th match

in a row with a 3-0 defeat of Germany

Thierry Henry scored one goal and

created another and Zinedine Zidane

combined brilliantly with David

Trezeguet as the European champions

outplayed last year's losing World Cup

France left those finals a broken

team, the 1998 winners crashing out in

the first round amid rumours of a

divided team camp split along age

In surpassing the previous French

record of 12 victories set in 1984 by a

team featuring Michel Platini,

Santini's team showed the progress

they have made since the former Lyon

"I am very happy for the players,

who have made great efforts over the

last 15 months, whether it be the new

coach took over after the World Cup.

AFP. Gelsenkirchen

here on Saturday.

Iran face being banned from staging international football matches after a homemade pitch during a 2004 Asian Cup qualifier this week, an official Wednesday's return leg

between Iran and North Korea in Tehran had to be stopped in the 60th minute after a firecracker landed near North Korean player So Hyok Chol.

tinue playing and left the field following the incident which came after Iran had taken the lead with a 56th minute penalty.

hosting international matches, may be fined for not searching the spectators before the match and controlling the people and might also receive some warnings," Iran representative Mohammad Mehdi Khabiri told the Asian Football Federation, media reports said.

expected early next month.

could face sanctions too.

"Conditions for the North Koreans are tougher, since they left the field without the referee's and the AFC representative's consent.'

Lebanon are grouped together in

the 2004 Asian Cup qualifier.

heavily on our shoulders for the next three months. It hurts," said Voller. "You have to be honest and say that France are a terrific team. Once they

to defend our European title.

the ball home before the Juventus striker netted his second after Zidane's sublime pass left him with an easy job.

their new black away strip for the first time, who made the early running. Kevin Kuranyi and Fredi Bobic both shot wide in the opening exchanges

when well-placed in front of goal.

Bixente Lizarazu broke down the

chant "We feel at home", Germany almost reduced the deficit immediately when Jens Jeremies' shot was pushed away by Gregory Coupet, who was preferred in the French goal to

Coupet was called into action twice more in the first half, saving a well-hit free kick from Michael Ballack and

Bobic after Lizarazu left his back pass France were constantly threaten-

ing though and when Henry stripped the ball from Christian Worns, sped down the left wing and timed his cross perfectly Trezeguet only had to slot his pass under Kahn. Bernd Schneider wasted a gilt-

edged chance for Germany to pull a goal back when he screwed his shot A match that at times was anything

but friendly flared up when Robert Pires was booked for kicking Michael Ballack from behind With 20 minutes remaining,

Juventus forward Trezeguet showed great skill to shake off his marker but he poked his shot wide of Kahn's goal as the ball ran away from him.

But France did make it 3-0 when Zidane showed again what might have been if he had been fit in South Korea when his brilliant pass split the defence and Trezeguet made no mistake this time.

Friendly for a noble cause

legal action.'

spokeswoman said.

The match receipts from Sunday's friendly between Italy and Romania will go to the families of those who died in this week's bomb attack on an Italian police base in Iraq.

Italy coach Giovanni Trappattoni has urged fans to make sure there's a capacity crowd for the game in honour of the 19 Italian victims - 12 Carabinieri police, five soldiers and two civilians - of Wednesday's truck bomb attack in Nasiriyah.

"Make an effort and come to the stadium - it's going to be a show of love for the families of the Nasiriyah victims," Trappattoni said.

A full house at the 20,000-seat stadium in Ancona would generate funds of 300,000 euros - there were still 10,000 tickets remaining late Saturday, the Italain daily La Gazzetta dello Sport reported.

In a seperate initiative the Italian professional footballers association has started a collection fund for the children of those who perished.

BET YOU CAN'T SAVE THIS! Iraqi goalkeeper Wisam Khadhum (R) tries to block a shot from five-year-old Daniel Stynes during a coaching clinic for children at Joondalup Arena in Perth on November 15. "There is so much bad news and fied in top of their group for the Asian championships.

war and violence in Iraq, but we are still alive and we play soccer and this is some good news out of Iraq. Training clinics and exhibition

matches in Albany and Bunbury, cities in southern Western Australia, are also

Despite huge obstacles facing the Iraq team, the side have already quali-

Stange insisted his team were in Australia to play a serious game, not just to socialise. "It's serious because we want to

use the fantastic facilities here in Perth for training sessions," he said. "We need every single day. Iraqi football has a bright future.

AFP, Tehran

Iran face ban

explosive was thrown onto the warned Saturday.

The Koreans refused to con-

"Iran may be deprived from

A ruling on the game is

"We have to wait until December 7 when a meeting will discuss the game," Khabiri said, adding that the North Koreans

that Rudi Voller's German side are in an uncomfortable rebuilding phase ahead of next year's Euro 2004 finals.

Iran beat North Korea 3-1 in the first leg in Pyongyang on October 27. went 2-0 ahead we didn't have a Iran, North Korea, Jordan and

Arsenal striker Henry opened the scoring with a diving header, then However it was Germany, wearing

and Henry completely miskicked

Just as France seemed to be under intense pressure, they took the lead.

left wing and his cross from the byline to the far post was met by Henry with a flying header that Oliver Kahn could only push into his own net. As the French supporters began to

November 15.

players for the way that have adapted or the older players for assuming their role as leaders after the disappointment that we know all about," said "Tonight we made the difference by playing to our strengths. It's what we came here to do to round off 2003 in "But we'll probably have to play six matches like this in Portugal if we want The match played in the futuristic Arena AufSchalke also demonstrated "This defeat is going to weigh

> French ace Thierry Henry (R) takes on German defender Arne Friedrich (L) at the Arena Auf Schalke stadium in Gelsenkirchen during their friendly on