

England versus France

D for 'Group of Death'



AFP, Lisbon

England were paired with title-holders France while Holland and three-time winners Germany were drawn in the same group for the Euro 2004 finals in Portugal here on Sunday.

England and France will slug it out in Group B along with Switzerland and Croatia.

Holland must also contend with 1996 finalists Czech Republic and playoff qualifiers Latvia in Group D.

Host nation Portugal face neighbours Spain in Group A, while Italy will expect to qualify from Group C, which also features Sweden, Bulgaria and Denmark.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson was relieved that England, who have never won the European title, managed to avoid Group D, which is set to earn the title of the championships' 'Group of Death'.

"D is the most difficult group," said Eriksson. "We will have the first match against France, in Lisbon. It will be a big, big, game and very nice. Difficult, but beautiful.

"France is one of the favourites to win the tournament and you hope to have them in the final, but we are playing in the biggest stadium in Portugal (the Stadium of Light).

"Switzerland and Croatia are doing very well, so I don't expect that to be easy.

"France are a difficult one but I think we can beat them if we play our game."

France coach Jacques Santini said the clash with France, on June 13, would be "like a derby" because France stars such as Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira play club football in the English Premiership.

"It's a very balanced group and each match will have its own particular identity," said Santini, who has just guided France to a run of 13 matches without defeat.

"We played the Swiss in a friendly a few weeks ago, Croatia was the last step we took before winning the (World Cup) in 1998 and well, France in England which will open our group campaign will be more like a derby given the



UEFA vice-president Senes Erzik (C) of Turkey hands over the trophy of the Euro 2004 to Portuguese Football Federation president Gilberto Madail while former French superstar Laurent Blanc (L) looks on during the draw ceremony in Lisbon yesterday.

GROUP FIXTURES

Table with 4 columns: Group, Match, Date, Venue. Lists fixtures for Groups A, B, C, and D.

Davis Cup Australia's 28th triumph

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia won the Davis Cup for the 28th time on Sunday when a courageous Mark Philippoussis beat Juan Carlos Ferrero in a five-set struggle in his home city of Melbourne.

Needing to win just one of the two concluding rubbers to secure the title, Australia snatched an unassailable 3-1 lead when Philippoussis defied injury to beat the French Open champion 7-5, 6-3, 1-6, 2-6, 6-0.

Philippoussis needed medical treatment on a pectoral muscle after the fourth set when the momentum had suddenly turned against him but he decided to play on in agony.

"There was no way I was going to pull out," Philippoussis said. "This is Davis Cup and you leave your heart out there.

"At the end of the day I was completely numb. I felt like I wasn't playing but watching from the sideline."

Q'land's first outright win

AFP, Sydney

Queensland, the powerhouse state in Australian cricket, snatched their first outright win of the new Sheffield Shield season Sunday when they wrapped up a 61-run victory over South Australia at Adelaide Oval.

Needing 283 to win, South Australia were all out for 222 in their second knock as pace pair Michael Kasprovicz (5-84) and Andy Bichel (4-52) captured the honours.

Gayle gives

FROM PAGE 13 Jacobs, Dillon, Rampaul, Edwards.

Table with 4 columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists bowling figures for various bowlers.

ets and won five-match series 3-2. Man-of-the-match: Chris Gayle. Man-of-the-series: Chris Gayle.

Streak praises

FROM PAGE 13 SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard table with columns for batsmen and bowlers, showing runs, balls, and other stats.

Result: West Indies won by 72 runs (D/L method). Man-of-the-match: Fidel Edwards. Toss: Zimbabwe.

number of players playing in the Premiership."

Arsenal star Vieira, who is currently injured and so attended the draw in Lisbon, admitted the pairing with England was exciting.

"It's going to be a very difficult game to start for us. But it's going to be an open game and also an open group. Anybody can beat anybody.

"We're pleased and worried at the same time.

"But we will approach the game (against England) the same way as we approach all the others."

Rudi Voller, the coach of three-time winners Germany, had no doubts his side were in the hardest group after being thrown together with old rivals Holland and 1996 finalists the Czech Republic.

"That is without doubt a strong group," Voller said. "Certainly there were quite a few other combinations which would have been much easier on paper. It was clear beforehand that at this tournament there would be no easy preliminary groups."

Voller, who led Germany to runners-up spot behind Brazil at the 2002 World Cup, did see some good points from the draw.

"I don't see starting against Holland as a problem because at a European championship everyone is concentrating fully right from the start. The only thing that bothers me is our late start on June 15 when all the other groups have already played."

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni meanwhile agreed that group D was the one to avoid.

The veteran coach is positive that Italy will qualify from their group C but - perhaps referring to their last-minute defeat to France in the 2000 European Championships final - warned they would have to perform when it mattered.

"On paper we are favourites (to win the group), but I say on paper because on the pitch things can turn out differently," said Trapattoni.

"I think the toughest group is D, while France and England shouldn't have problems in qualifying."

"For us it was important to avoid France and Portugal. Psychologically it's a small advantage."

France start favourites

REUTERS, London

Betting on the Euro 2004 Championship after Sunday's draw:

- 100-30 France
4- 1 Italy
13-2 Netherlands, Portugal
7- 1 Spain
15-2 England
12-1 Czech Republic
18-1 Germany
22-1 Sweden
25-1 Denmark
50-1 Bulgaria
66-1 Greece
80-1 Croatia, Russia

Rivaldo on Chelsea trail

AFP, London

Unsettled Brazilian striker Rivaldo, who is set to leave European champions AC Milan during the winter transfer window, fancies a move to Chelsea -- who he has compared to an all-star NBA team.

The 31-year-old forward has failed to become a regular starter for Carlo Ancelotti since joining AC from Barcelona at the start of last season and most recently has been angling for a move to the English Premiership.

Manchester United wanted to sign Rivaldo 18 months ago while he was with the Spanish league side and the Brazilian World Cup winner has recently held negotiations with Liverpool.

Premiership Leeds end barren spell

AFP, London

Leeds celebrated the prospect of financial salvation on Saturday by ending a run of five straight defeats.

A ninth-minute strike by teenage striker James Milner was enough to secure a 1-0 win over fourth-placed Charlton and give Eddie Gray his first victory since taking over as caretaker manager following the sacking of Peter Reid.

It was only Leeds' third victory of what has been a miserable season so far and they remain bottom of the table because their goal difference is worse than fellow strugglers Wolves.

But a battling display will nevertheless have given the Elland Road faithful reason to hope on a day, which brought good news of the pitch with confirmation that a takeover of the club is imminent.

Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's royal family and a Leeds fan of 25 years standing, confirmed that he was heading up a group of Gulf investors who are planning to take over the cash-strapped club.

Leeds' victory was enough to drag them level on points with Wolves, who drew 1-1 at home to Newcastle earlier on the day.

Alan Shearer rescued a point for the visiting Magpies after an embarrassing blunder by goalkeeper Shay Given had gifted Wolves the lead.

Given was left red-faced after rushing from his box in the 27th minute only to totally fluff his clearance and leave Nathan Blake with a clear run for his first goal of the season.

But four minutes later Shearer swept home his 12th Premiership goal of the season from Lomana Lua Lua's pass to bring the Magpies level and that was how it stayed, although Wolves twice hit the woodwork in the closing stages.

Aston Villa moved out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win over Southampton that was every bit as desperately-needed as Leeds' victory.

Leicester and Blackburn completed a good day for clubs struggling at the wrong end of the table with wins over Portsmouth and Tottenham respectively.

Omar going

FROM PAGE 13 requires just rest," Asif added.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed agreed Kapali could still bat despite carrying the niggling shoulder.

"He can bat and bowl but not for too long. If he wants to do that he might require a simple ice treatment."

U-20s set

FROM PAGE 13 between Bangladesh and Nepal.

"We live at an altitude of 4,800 feet while Bangladesh's altitude is only 100 feet. It's causing problem to my boys who have hardly gone out of Nepal," said Ashoke.

He also raised a question about the Bangladesh players' age.

"To me, a few of their players looked over-aged."

But Yousuf denied the allegation saying his squad members were selected on completion of all necessary procedure regarding age.

The former Nepal midfielder international, however, looked confident with his team who had been playing together for the last five years under FIFA goal project as members of the under-14 side.

Serie A Inter Cruz past Juve



AFP, Rome

The title race in Italy was thrown wide open on Saturday as Inter Milan bounced back from their Champions League humiliation in midweek by ending Juventus' unbeaten run with a stunning 3-1 victory over the Serie A league leaders.

Argentine striker Julio Cruz scored twice and speedy Nigerian teenager Obafemi Martins added a third as Inter chalked up their fourth consecutive league win and extinguished the memory of Tuesday's 5-1 thrashing at home to

on Sunday.

Inter remain fourth but close the gap on Juve to four points. Juventus are on 26 points, two ahead of Roma and Milan.

Cruz, standing in for the injured Christian Vieri, said Inter had redeemed themselves with their first away to Juventus in 10 years.

"The game against Arsenal was strange but we know we are a good team and we showed that tonight," said the former Bologna marksman.

"We knew that it was going to be a very difficult game but luckily we've closed the gap on Juve which is what we set out to do.

"We were successful in putting away our chances and that was



ZERO GRAVITY: Inter Milan Nigerian forward Obafemi Martins celebrates after scoring against Juventus during their Italian league match on November 29.

Arsenal.

Juve's only reply in Turin came a minute from time when Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero headed home from close range.

Inter's win not only resurrected their own title ambitions but also gives Roma and AC Milan, who share second place, the chance to leapfrog Juve at the top of the table

crucial. Now we must maintain the same character and then we can go far."

Juve coach Marcello Lippi admitted a rejuvenated Inter were worthy of the three points.

"We are a team full of quality but we were unable to express ourselves," he said.

"Inter had something extra than us in terms of character and deter-

Primera Liga

Ronaldo rescues Real



AFP, Madrid

David Beckham endured a fierce test of his composure and character on Saturday before an ankle injury put an end to his participation in Real Madrid's 1-1 draw at Osasuna.

The England skipper had been mercilessly targeted by the

experience."

Former Marseille man Bakayoko had put Osasuna into an 11th-minute lead but Ronaldo equalised with a crisp long shot 16 minutes from time as Real escaped with a point to avoid a third league defeat of the season.

It was the Brazilian World Cup winner's 10th goal of the season but it came against the run of play against a team who had won this

mination and I have to compliment them for the way they performed. We will take a look at where we went wrong but don't forget it was our first defeat of the season.

"On many other occasions against our rivals we have shown that we have something more, but tonight was not the case."

Inter went ahead after their first attack ended with Martins being chopped down by Montero just outside the penalty box.

Cruz accepted responsibility and curled a vicious free-kick which Gianluigi Buffon got a hand to but could not prevent from finding the top corner.

Juventus should have drawn level just after the half hour when a free-kick was deflected into the path of Mauro Camoranesi, but the Argentine born Italy international shot wildly over the bar from six yards.

Inter dominated at the start of the second-half and it was no surprise when Cruz scored his second of the night in the 69th minute, firing low past Gianluigi Buffon after the Juve goalkeeper had saved his first effort.

Martins, who was a real handful for the Juve defence, completed Juve's misery six minutes later, snatching possession from a hesitant Nicola Legrottaglie before slotting past Buffon.

Earlier on Saturday Lazio's brittle confidence sunk even lower after they crashed to a 3-0 defeat away to a spirited Siena.

Brazilian Rodrigo Taddei was the architect of Lazio's downfall, scoring twice in the final four minutes of a pulsating first-half before setting up compatriot Fernando Menegazzi for a late third as Roberto Mancini's men fell to their fourth league defeat of the season.

Lazio, whose Champions League hopes are hanging by a thread after Wednesday's disappointing 1-1 draw at home to Besiktas, were forced to play the last 23 minutes with 10 men following the sending-off of Dejan Stankovic for verbally abusing a linesman. Lazio remain fifth on 19 points while Siena, promoted as champions from Serie B last season, move up to seventh after recording only their third victory of the campaign.

Table with 2 columns: Team, Standings (played, won, drawn, lost, goals, points). Lists top six teams in Italian championship.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP XADJ MFXV QCD VAF0OZJR NH IQZT-FCGDC, GF KADH NSH IDCMAQJGZVD KACFSRA MQKKT-D-TFRV? Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IN A TOWN RULED BY TURKEYS, I THINK THE STREETS MIGHT BE MADE WITH GOBBLESTONE. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals L

Germany to tour Asia

AFP, Lisbon

Germany will play friendly internationals against Japan, South Korea and Thailand in December 2004, it was announced here on Saturday.

Harald Stenger, spokesman for the German Football Federation, said that the game with Japan will be staged on December 16 at a venue yet to be decided with the match against South Korea, who lost to Germany in the semi-finals of the World Cup last year, being held in Busan on December 19.

The date and venue for the match with Thailand has yet to be decided.

Wolves fan hurt by fireworks

AFP, Wolverhampton

English Premiership club Wolves have banned pre-match fireworks displays after a near tragedy when a device shot into the crowd and hit a female fan in the face.

The woman, who was sitting behind the Wolves dugout, suffered a fractured cheek bone after being struck just below the eye before kick-off in Saturday's Premiership match against Newcastle. Seven other people required medical treatment, mainly for shock.