

Soccer to build harmony

Christian ministers will tackle Muslim imams in a pre-World Cup friendly officiated by a Jewish referee as part of an initiative aimed at increasing understanding among religions, it was announced Wednesday.

The eight-a-side match presided over by three Jewish officials was organised by the German Protestant Church and will take place Saturday, just over a month before the big World Cup kick-off on June 9.

The friendly match is part of a wider initiative associated with a conference organised by the British Embassy in Berlin on integration, racism and football and will be the first such match in Germany, according to the Church of Berlin and Brandenburg.

Churches of different Christian denominations are also organising a series of events including festivals and concerts under the banner "kickoff2006 - Kick-off Faith," using football's global appeal to promote tolerance and unity.

At Geithain in the east of Germany, the protestant church is also trying to organise a mini-World Cup among 32 churches to mirror the actual event.

Unlike the FIFA-organised World Cup, though, there are no plans for a cartoon mascot.

Malik set to return for Eng tour

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan all-rounder Shoaib Malik has undergone successful surgery to correct his suspect bowling action and should be fit for the tour of England.

Malik, 24, has been reported twice by match officials in the last two years and has primarily played as a batsman. The operation took place in Cape Town, removing floating bones from his right elbow and repairing tissues.

He has been advised to rest for six to eight weeks before batting and bowling again.

"I suffered pain in my right elbow while batting or bowling and it was one of the reasons why I had problems extending it properly," Malik told Reuters on Tuesday.

"I am happy that this problem is done with now.

"I am confident I will be fit by the time the team leaves for England in late June. It is a tour I have been looking forward too for a long time," he said.

Malik said his elbow had been damaged in a road accident in 2003 and due to his cricket commitments he could not take time out to get it repaired. He has played 15 Tests and 117 one-day internationals.

Flintoff

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The other possible alternative as captain is Andrew Strauss who captained England in two ODIs in India though Graveney was unwilling to reveal too much more. "There's a huge difference between a one-off Test match and doing a whole series. We'll monitor the situation. Michael Vaughan is

Proteas wait

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Pollock pulled out at the very last minute from the drawn second Test at Newlands with a back injury.

Haroon Lorgat, convener of selectors, has said he could wait till Friday before deciding whether or not to risk Pollock for a Test in which South Africa need only a draw to win the series.

Nicky Boje, who injured his hand during the second Test, will also be given until then before any decisions are made.

Pollock says he is already feeling much better and that the next two days will be decisive.

"I bowled three overs on Monday morning and three again in the afternoon. It wasn't at full throttle, but at least I'm feeling good.

"I'll try to bowl six overs on Wednesday and six again on Thursday. If the selectors are prepared to wait, a final decision could be taken on the morning of the Test. Shane Jabaar (physio) has advised me to take things slowly and not be over-hasty. I don't think I'll have problems given how I'm feeling now."

Meanwhile, Lorgat also praised Hashim Amla's maiden Test century, saying: "This is exactly the healthy competition we as selectors are looking for. Hopefully others will also perform better." Despite not every batsman firing, Lorgat said the batting line is likely



Italy coach Marcello Lippi instructs his charges during a training session of the national team at La Borghesiana stadium in Rome on Tuesday. Lippi named a 29-man squad for a pre-World Cup get-together on Monday.

'Rooney needs a miracle'



AFP, London

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said Wednesday that striker Wayne Rooney had more than one break in his foot and would probably need a "miracle" to be fit for the World Cup.

Eriksson added that he planned to name Rooney in his provisional 23-man squad on Monday, a week before the official FIFA deadline, and then keep his fingers firmly crossed.

He has been promised an update from Manchester United on Thursday.

"I knew yesterday that he had more than one fracture. That's what I heard," said Eriksson.

"I don't know what that means but I'm not that pessimistic. I'm born that way.

"Miracles happen in life now and then, but I don't really know."

When pressed on whether Rooney now needs a miracle, Eriksson said: "Maybe."

Rooney broke a bone in his foot on Saturday but has refused to give up

hope of playing some part in England's World Cup campaign, despite the scepticism of his Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson.

It will be at least six weeks before he can play again, effectively ruling him out of at least the opening stages in Germany.

England team doctor Leif Sward will go to Manchester on Thursday to speak to Manchester United doctor Mike Stone and discuss Rooney's injury and his World Cup chances.

Unless Eriksson is told Rooney has no chance at all of being fit for any part of the World Cup finals, the Manchester United striker will be named in the squad on Monday.

"I will probably name him on Monday. It will be 26 and maybe 27 players. Three or four of those players will know they are reserves.

"I will not rule him out until the doctors tell me there is no chance. No one wants that to happen. Everyone hopes he can take part in the World Cup at some stage."

On Monday night, United boss Sir Alex Ferguson hit out at Eriksson's optimism, claiming the England boss was peddling a "wild dream."

But the pair spoke on Tuesday and

agreed Rooney would stay in Manchester until he was fit to play, rather than join up with the England squad on May 15.

Eriksson said: "We had a long chat about Rooney and the fact that he is going to stay in Manchester.

"I might pick him but he is going to stay in Manchester to do all the recovery until he is fit for football."

"I think that's fair. He is staying at home and working with the physios and masseurs in Manchester.

"Nobody knows when he will start running. Nobody knows today."

Manchester United issued a statement later Wednesday refuting reports that suggested Rooney was definitely out of the World Cup.

"Despite stories in the press we believe Wayne is still six weeks away from full training," the club said.

"We are not prepared to discuss anything specific in relation to his injury or his rehabilitation."

There was better news for Eriksson about Michael Owen, who suffered discomfort from his return from a broken foot on Saturday.

"I am quite sure Michael will be fit," the Swede said.

BUNDESLIGA

Hamburg keep title race alive



AFP, Berlin

SV Hamburg kept the German title race alive on Tuesday thanks to a 1-0 victory over struggling FC Cologne.

Hamburg are now two points behind leaders Bayern Munich who need five points to defend their title and are at home to VfB Stuttgart on Wednesday.

German international defender Lukas Sinkiewicz scored an own goal after three minutes to help Hamburg move seven points ahead of third-placed Werder Bremen with two games left.

If Bremen fail to win their game in hand against MSV Duisburg on Wednesday Hamburg will claim second spot and direct entry into the Champions League.

"We did not understand how to calm the game down at 1-0 and tried to play genius passes all the time," said Hamburg coach Thomas Doll.

"Cologne got stronger but we held on and have strengthened our grip on second."

Second would be a remarkable achievement for Doll's team who finished eighth last season.

In the race for the final UEFA Cup spot Bayer Leverkusen took a giant stride towards Europe thrashing nearest rivals Hertha Berlin 5-1.

Leverkusen, who have collected more points than any other team since the league restart in January, are now five points ahead of sixth-placed Hertha with two games left.

Brazilian international Juan scored after five minutes to put Bayer ahead and it got progressively worse for Hertha.

Bulgarian international Dimitar Berbatov scored twice in as many minutes to take his season's goals tally to 18.

Berbatov, who is tipped for a big-money exit in the summer, is now just two goals behind the league's top-scorer Miroslav Klose.

"We are confident of keeping Dimitar," said Leverkusen coach Michael Skibbe. "We have a good chance of playing in Europe and as long as a team does not come in with a 16 million euro bid we should be ok."

The 5-1 home defeat piles the pressure on Hertha manager Falko Gotz who targeted the Champions League in pre-season.

"It is incredible two set-pieces and a quick counter attack and we are three

goals down -- but that is football," said Gotz.

"I cannot criticise my team. They kept going despite trailing so badly. Now we just have to secure six and qualify for the Intertoto Cup."

Leverkusen's win means Borussia Dortmund may have to enter the much-maligned Intertoto cup despite their fortunate 2-1 win over Hannover.

Czech international Tomas Rosicky produced a brilliant free-kick just three minutes after coming on to pull Dortmund level in the 59th minute.

Christian Worns then scored the winner in the 81st minute to sink Hannover.

"I have never experienced a game like that in my two years in charge," admitted Dortmund manager Bert van Marwijk.

"We did not deserve to win after the first half when we were awful."

It was a good night all round for Dortmund with Czech international forward Jan Koller playing his first match in seven months.

The 32-year-old Koller, who had been sidelined with a cruciate ligament injury, came on in the 71st minute as he builds fitness ahead of next month's World Cup in Germany.

Standard Liege, Steve Cherundolo of Germany's Hannover, Cory Gibbs of Dutch side Den Haag, Fulham's Carlos Bocanegra and US-based players Eddie Pope, Frankie Hejduk and Jimmy Conrad.

USA players will assemble May 10 at Cary, North Carolina, for training and play three international friendlies on home soil later this month before departing June 1 for their German home base in Hamburg.

The USA squad features 12 players returning from the 2002 squad that made a World Cup quarterfinal run. There will be 12 European-based players and 11 from US Major League Soccer teams.

The average age is 28.6 years, slightly younger than the 2002 squad, and an average of 44.2 caps, 11 fewer a man than four years ago. Reyna is the leader with 106 caps.

Hahnemann has the fewest with six caps while Onyewu has the lowest among field players with 12.

"As usual, we will not make any bold statements or predictions,"

Arena said. "However, I can assure everyone that the team that steps on the field on June 12 against the Czech Republic will be a team all Americans will be proud of."

Goalkeepers: Kasey Keller (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Tim Howard (Manchester United), Marcus Hahnemann (Reading)

Defenders: Steve Cherundolo (Hannover), Eddie Lewis (Leeds), Eddie Pope (Real Salt Lake), Oguchi Onyewu (Standard Liege), Cory Gibbs (Den Haag), Carlos Bocanegra (Fulham), Frankie Hejduk (Columbus Crew), Jimmy Conrad (Kansas City Wizards)

Midfielders: Landon Donovan (Los Angeles Galaxy), DaMarcus Beasley (PSV Eindhoven), Clint Dempsey (New England Revolution), Pablo Mastroeni (Colorado Rapids), Claudio Reyna (Manchester City), Bobby Convey (Reading), John O'Brien (Chivas USA), Ben Olsen (DC United)

Forwards: Brian McBride (Fulham), Josh Wolff (Kansas City Wizards), Eddie Johnson (Kansas City Wizards), Brian Ching (Hous-

Chelsea, United fined in Kenya!

AFP, Nairobi

A Kenyan judge has suggested that arch-rival English football clubs Chelsea and Manchester United pay fines slapped on two men for a Nairobi barroom brawl during the two sides' weekend Premiership decider.

Nairobi resident magistrate Catherine Mwangi fined Roy Kirimi and Kenny Marango the equivalent of 70 dollars (56 euros) each for disturbing the peace after they fought over the outcome of Saturday's match.

The two men face 50 days in prison if they fail to pay the fines and after being sentenced on Tuesday appealed for leniency, saying they could not afford the penalty, according to court officials.

Mwangi was unsympathetic to the men whose fisticuffs cause a major disruption and damage to the bar where they watched the game, the officials said.

"Tell Manchester and Chelsea to pay the fines for you," they quoted Mwangi as telling the pair.

The English Premiership is hugely popular in Kenya and football fans regularly crowd bars around the east African nation to watch the matches on satellite television and cheer on their favourite teams.

In Saturday's game, Chelsea wrapped up their second consecutive Premiership title in style at home by beating nearest rivals Manchester United 3-0.

Magath hints at Bayern exit

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich coach Felix Magath said Wednesday he has a burning ambition to manage abroad after spending his entire career in Germany.

The 52-year-old Magath is on the brink of guiding Bayern to a second successive league and Cup double this season but admits he may seek a new challenge when his contract expires in June 2007.

"One fundamental problem in Germany is that performances are never really acknowledged for their worth," Magath said in Bild daily.

"We have set a lot of records this season but that doesn't seem to matter.

"To be honest I would like to work somewhere else. It is what I have wanted for some time. A different environment, a different mentality, a new challenge. Unfortunately I never managed to do it as a player."

Magath spent a decade at SV Hamburg as a player winning three domestic titles (1979, 1982, 1983) and the 1983 European Cup.

As a coach he started with unfashionable FC Saarbrücken in 1989 before spells with Werder Bremen, Eintracht Frankfurt, VfB Stuttgart and now Bayern.

Magath has been in charge of Bayern since July 2004 and delivered a league and Cup double in his first season.

This season Bayern have retained the German Cup and require just five points to become the first team to win a league and Cup double in successive seasons.

Name will

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"I've cut down on the number of ODIs prior to this, so it is a situation where the guys have to learn to play the game," he said.

Lara also downplayed the decision of the West Indies not to go into the first two matches without an appointed vice-captain.

"I sense that you're going to see another captain on the field before the series is over because I don't think I have intentions of playing all seven," he said.

Bits and Bobs

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Unprecedented stadium TV coverage

AFP, Frankfurt

For the first time in the history of the World Cup all the stadia will be kitted out with giant hi-tech television screens to show live action at the finals in Germany.

The German Organising Committee for the 2006 World Cup, which begins next month on June 9, revealed Tuesday that all the 12 stadia at the finals will show live match action and replays of the key moments from the game.

At the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea the same service was available but not in all of the host stadia.

German organisers have also promised to screen other live games at the stadia so fans can watch another match on television in the stadium as well as watching their own team in action.

Magic quartet in Brazil opener



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira confidently named his starting line-up on Wednesday for his team's opening World Cup match against Croatia next month.

Parreira, whose side play Croatia on June 13 and face Australia and Japan in their first round group, will field his so-called magic quartet of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Adriano and Kaka.

Injury and fitness-permitting, the world champions' team will be the one that started the World Cup qualifier against Venezuela in October, Brazil's last competitive match.

"To start the Cup, it will be the quartet," Parreira told reporters.

"The team which starts the Cup will be the same one which finished the qualifiers, we have to be coherent."

"Afterwards, during the course of the competition, the results and performances will determine whether or not it's necessary to change," Parreira added.

Brazil began the Venezuela game with Dida in goal, a back four of Cafu, Juan, Lucio and Roberto Carlos, Emerson and Ze Roberto as the defensive midfielders, plus the attacking quartet.

Parreira also said that Ronaldinho would be allowed to play with the same freedom he enjoys at Barcelona.

"It's absurd to say that he plays differently in the national team and Barcelona because of his positioning," Parreira said.

"He has complete freedom in the Brazil team. The difference is that, when he plays for his club, he has the stage to himself and in the national team he has to divide it with other stars."

Parreira declined to comment further about who else would be included in the 23-man squad, which will be named on May 15.

PREMIERSHIP

Champs caught off-guard



AFP, Blackburn

Republic of Ireland international midfielder Steven Reid secured Blackburn Rovers a place in next season's UEFA Cup with a first header that brought Chelsea's title celebrations to an abrupt end as they were at the wrong end of a 1-0 defeat.

Rovers needed just two points to ensure they will finish in sixth spot and their task was made easier by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho's decision to make eight changes after his side claimed a second successive Premiership crown with a 3-0 weekend victory over Manchester United.

Such is the depth of Mourinho's squad that even an unfamiliar starting line-up was still bristling with international pedigree and it was confirmation of the huge strides made by Mark Hughes' side that they fully deserved the win that moved them five points ahead of Newcastle with just one game remaining.

Reid's deft, glancing header may have been Blackburn's only reward on an evening when they were seeking revenge for a fractious defeat in the same fixture last season, but with

more clinical finishing the result could have been even more convincing. Hughes cites Mourinho's post-match condemnation of his side's approach as the reason Blackburn acquired a reputation as an overly physical side that took months to shake off.

But having been inspired by the return to full fitness of Craig Bellamy and the addition of David Bentley, and Florent Sinama-Pongolle on loan from Liverpool, Rovers have convincingly re-invented themselves.

With Chelsea's patched-up side failing to gel, Rovers should have been ahead in the 28th minute when Bellamy diverted Michael Gray's left wing cross against the crossbar and Bentley headed the rebound wide from just six yards.

The miss would have proved costly had Eidur Gudjohnsen not sent a left-foot volley crashing against the top seven minutes later but that would prove to be the closest Chelsea came to scoring all night.

And they were unable to recover after Robbie Savage penalised Geremi's needless handball by whipping in a left wing free-kick that Reid met with a precise touch at the near post.

In fear of early England exit!

AFP, London

An England supporter has taken out a one million pound (1.5 million euros, 1.75 million dollars) insurance policy against England suffering early elimination from the World Cup.

Newcastle United fan Paul Hucker, 34, paid 105 pounds (153 euros, 185 dollars) for the policy with britishinsurance.com against an occurrence that he said would leave him psychologically traumatised.

However, for Hucker's policy to mature, he must prove both that

England's exit from the World Cup in Germany from June 9-July 9 is premature and that he subsequently suffered trauma.

Proving either one of the two conditions for his policy to mature will not be easy. On the first, a panel of five experts must agree that England's exit was premature.

On the second, though, Hunter will have to demonstrate with medical evidence that he has suffered a real shock to his morale rather than a mere state of depression.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and solution time: 24 mins.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and clues.

CRYPTOQUIP FCQ ZEDCOLT UEJZ FJWOLT FX TQF E MJQFFW ZEGDQK FX DMQEB FX COG DEOZ FEKB X UQKKQ Saturday's Cryptogram: FAMOUS PLAY ABOUT A BIZARRE ZOO THAT'S OPEN ONLY TO YOUNG GIRLS: 'THE LASS MENAGERIE' Today's Cryptogram Clue: F equals T The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.