

22
DAYS TO GO

WORLD CUP SPECIAL

Star sport



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'I have no will to live'

"It's not only that I don't have any desire to play anymore -- I don't have any desire to live. It is absolutely heartbreaking."

--Argentine hardman Martin Demichelis

--REUTERS, Berlin



Did U Know?

After the third World Cup, held in France in 1938, the tournament did not take place for 12 years because of World War II. During that time, an Italian football federation official hid the Jules Rimet trophy and kept it safe until the competition resumed in 1950.



TALK TURKEY



Sir Alex Ferguson
(Manchester United manager)
"A lot of people might think I am selfish but Wayne (Rooney) is the most important player in the team at Manchester United. We have to ensure the boy is going to be fit at the start of the season for us, so we all become selfish in that respect."

What to WATCH

TEN Sports
West Indies v India
First ODI
Live at 8:30 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Asian Games Hockey Qualifier
Oman v Sri Lanka (10:00 am)
Chinese Taipei v Hong Kong (2:00 pm)
Bangladesh v Singapore (4:00 pm)
Venue: Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium

A Didar day in school soccer

Didarul of Koyra Madinabad School slammed a double hatrick to sink Keundia Secondary School 7-0 in the banglalink tiger trophy National School Football tournament at the Narail Stadium yesterday.

The boy from Narail hit a hatrick in the first-half and then repeated the feat in the second. Hafiz added the other for the winners.

Salampur Dakhil Madrasa of Natore also won by the same margin, thanks to a hatrick from Sohel.

Laxminarayan Cotton Mill High School of Narayanganj thumped five past a hapless Emarat Hossain School, again due to a hatrick from striker Raju.

Amidst all the goalfest, Baliadanga High School and Bagatipara Pilot High School managed to secure a goalless draw.

Hasan takes Bagerhat home

Bagerhat won a thrilling group final against Magura by nine runs at the Khulna Divisional Stadium in the Dhaka Bank Under-19 National Youth Cricket competition yesterday.

Winning the toss, Bagerhat batted and notched up 195. Jupiter scored 40 while Ripon took 4 for 20 for Magura.

Useful contributions from Shohan and Muktar were not enough to see Magura through as they were bowled out for 185. Hasan took five wickets for Bagerhat, who now move on to the final round.

At the Comilla Stadium, Laxmipur cruised to a 42-run win over Noakhali.

'Asia's reputation on the line'



AFP, Singapore

Asia's standing as a reputable footballing continent will be on the line at the World Cup, and AFC president Mohammed bin Hammam Wednesday rallied regional teams to stand up and be counted.

Five Asian Football Confederation teams will be in action -- Japan, South Korea, Australia, Iran and Saudi Arabia, with plenty at stake.

"In the context of Asian footballs profile on the world stage, this is the reputation and credibility of Asia," bin Hammam told AFP in an interview.

"We say that 'the future is Asia', and in the past we have claimed that Asia has never been fairly represented in terms of the FIFA World Cup and other international football activities.

"Therefore, the 2006 FIFA World Cup is the time for us to show what we have in our hands."

Japan and South Korea successfully joint-hosted the last World Cup in 2002 and both teams performed well in front of home fans, but whether they can repeat the feat in hostile

territory remains to be seen.

If they flop, their 2002 efforts may go down as a fluke.

Australia, meanwhile, are playing in their first World Cup in 32 years, while Iran has never progressed beyond the group stages.

Saudi Arabia's best effort was in 1994 in the United States when it tore through the group stage to reach the round of 16, where it fell to Sweden.

Bin Hammam said how Asian teams fare will determine how the region as a whole is regarded by FIFA, world football's governing body.

"Obviously there are two scenarios: based on a positive performance, new facts will need to be presented to FIFA to review AFC's ranking on the world stage," he said.

"Likewise, should we have a negative performance, this is contrary to what we are claiming and we will need to review ourselves. Hopefully this will not happen."

"All I can say at this stage is that I hope our Asian teams perform in a way to honour the fans in Asia, and to make us proud of our sporting achievements." Asian champions Japan start their World Cup campaign against Australia on June 12 in the tough Group F which also includes Brazil and Croatia.

South Korea, semi-finalists at the last World Cup, open their Group G account against African debutants

Togo in Frankfurt on June 13. They will also play 1998 champions France and Switzerland.

Iran are grouped with Mexico, Portugal and Angola while the Saudis take on Tunisia, Ukraine and Spain.

Bin Hammam said that whatever happened, the popularity of football in Asia would be boosted by the June 9-July 9 extravaganza.

"In terms of our fans, we already know that football is Asia's number one sport," he said.

"Saying that, I do think that the popularity and impact of the World Cup will have a positive commercial effect on AFC competitions and on domestic football in Asia in making football more attractive to the commercial sector.

"This is in terms of both interest and contribution from broadcasters and sponsors."

Bin Hammam, a Qatari, would not be drawn on which Asian team he fancies to do well.

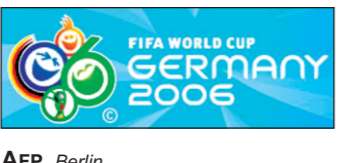
"I know that every team representing Asia has made a lot of effort to prepare and to perform to their best ability," he said.

"I respect these efforts and am confident that everyone will perform well on behalf of their continent."



England's Michael Owen (L) and Theo Walcott (2nd R) run during a training session at the Vale do Lobo resort, 220 km south of Lisbon on Wednesday.

Of football and politics



AFP, Berlin

Soccer players are booed as they give the Nazi salute. Spectators jubilantly unveil a red and white banner sporting the logo of Poland's "Solidarity" trade union, whose goal was democracy for communist Poland.

These are just two snapshots of World Cup history on display at a Berlin exhibition, and they show how political tensions can cast a shadow over "the beautiful game" despite the insistence of power brokers that politics does not play on the pitch.

The exhibition of work by top photo-journalists will run until the end of July at the German Historical Museum, giving fans of the game a chance to visit between matches during this year's tournament in Germany from June 9.

The show tracks the history of the 17 World Cups held since the first tournament took place in Uruguay in 1930, mixing memorable soccer moments with pictures that went beyond the action on the field to become defining images of an era.

One black-and-white photo from the 1938 World Cup in France shows the German team with their arms raised in the Nazi salute. The description says the players were greeted by catcalls.

The world was on the brink of war and just months before Germany had annexed Austria in Adolf Hitler's first step towards creating a "Greater Germany".

German coach Sepp Herberger was ordered to put five or six Austrians and five or six Germans on the starting roster. He was furious about this political interference and dismissed his team as a "Viennese melange with a dollop of Prussian cream".

Hitler's "master race" failed to dominate the pitch, but he may have taken consolation from the fact that the 1938 title went to his fascist ally - Mussolini's Italy.

Four decades later, another dictator was given the soccer post that Hitler did not get - Argentina's Jorge Rafael Videla.

A photo from 1978 shows the legendary long-haired Argentine striker Mario Kempes jumping for joy after his goal broke the deadlock in extra time with the Netherlands, helping seal Argentina's World Cup victory in the final in Buenos Aires.

We also see jubilant Argentine fans in the stands, decked out in blue and white, the country's national colours.

But the accompanying description says that while the final was underway on June 25, 1978, women gathered outside the stadium to protest against the human rights abuses of the military dictatorship that had taken power in a coup two years earlier.

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21 venues at terrorist risk

AFP, Berlin

German security authorities believe 21 World Cup matches are at high risk of terrorist attack, Stern magazine reported on Wednesday.

The assessment compiled by Germany's Federal Crime Office, known as the BKA, said Islamic extremists posed a particular danger, according to the magazine.

The tournament-opening match between Germany and Costa Rica in Munich on June 9, the final in Berlin on July 9 and any match involving the United States were considered the top targets, the report said.

Matches involving nations which contributed troops to the US-led invasion of Iraq -- Australia, England, Poland and Spain -- could also be targets of Islamic extremists.

The German government has stressed that it has no indication of a credible terrorist threat to the 64-match tournament which will take place in 12 cities.

But the BKA is concerned that with security set to be tight at stadiums, extremists may turn their attention to the so-called Public Viewing Areas where fans can follow matches on big screens.

Some politicians said they saw nothing new in the report.

"The internal picture painted by the BKA doesn't surprise me. It

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'Zizou' wants a triumphant farewell



AP, Paris

Zinedine Zidane has it all worked out: He will hoist the World Cup trophy in Berlin on July 9 and retire from soccer.

"I will be very, very motivated at the World Cup, I assure you," the French star said. "I can't be satisfied with what I have achieved these last two years. I want to win another World Cup and I will give everything I have."

His two headed goals helped Les Bleus to a 3-0 win over Brazil in 1998 for France's only world championship, securing "Zizou's" place in French sports history.

French fans, starved for success since the 1984 European title, chanted his nickname on the Champs-Elysees. His face, projected by laser onto the Arc de Triomphe, looked over the scene with his trademark fixed stare.

The same fans begged him to come back when he retired from international soccer after defending champion France's quarter-final exit against Greece at the 2004 European Championship. He obliged them last August, and France scraped through in World Cup qualifying.

Zidane's impact over the four final qualifying games was highlighted by a rousing talk at halftime

of a game at Ireland. With the score 0-0, his calm demeanor cracked. In graphic language he made his teammates fully aware of what was at stake.

Thierry Henry responded. He curled the ball past goalkeeper Shay Given to give France a 1-0 win.

"Just to see Zizou on the field inspires you," Henry said.

Zidane was supposed to do that in 2002. But he was injured in a warmup game against South Korea while still exhausted from a superb season with Real Madrid that was capped by a wonderful volley for a goal in the Champions League final.

Zidane questioned whether he should play. But coach Roger Lemerre, formerly coach of France's military soccer team, picked Zidane for the tuneup just five days before France's opener against Senegal.

After 38 minutes, Zidane limped off the field, clutching his thigh. He missed the following game (0-0 against Uruguay) and hopped around in pain while heavily taped in a 2-0 defeat to Denmark that sent the French home humiliated.

"I will do anything to avoid injury this time," Zidane said. "I am aware of what I bring to the team, of everything we can do."

Zidane says his performances the last two years have been below par, an assessment that reflects more his colossal standards rather than the facts. While his hairline has thinned further, his talents have not diminished.

In January, he scored a stunning hat trick for Madrid against Sevilla, and followed with two against Espanyol in February.

"It's promising for the future," Zidane said at the time. "The important matches are coming."

Those begin in earnest on June 10



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

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First WI-India ODI today



AFP/REUTERS, undated

India off-spinner Ramesh Power has been ruled out of Thursday's first one-day international against the West Indies due to an ankle injury.

"He will struggle to make the playing eleven, but we will continue to monitor his situation," India captain Rahul Dravid said after his team's 116-run win over Jamaica on Tuesday.

Team physiotherapist John Gloster was hopeful that Power would be available for the remaining four one-dayers.

"Power has a right ankle ligament strain, but the good thing is there is no fracture," said Gloster.

Power, with 12 wickets in 11 one-dayers, sustained the injury during Monday's training session and did not play the practice game the next

day.

Meanwhile, seamer Shanthakumaran Sreesanth was also a doubtful starter for Thursday as he had not recovered fully from the ankle injury suffered during the two one-dayers against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi last month.

"Sreesanth's condition will also be monitored regularly," said Dravid.

India, looking for their first Test series win in the Caribbean in 35 years, will play four Test matches after the one-day series.

Meanwhile, West Indies have omitted young stumper Denesh Ramdin from a 14-man squad to face India in the first two one-dayers.

Ramdin, 21, had been replaced by Jamaica's Carlton Baugh Jr. for the last two one-dayers against Zimbabwe and that squad had been retained, West Indies convenor of selectors Joey Carew told the board's Web site.

West Indies swept the Zimbabwe series 5-0, with two of the games washed out.

The last three games will be played in St. Kitts (May 23) and Trinidad (May 26 and 28).

SQUADS

WEST INDIES (from): Brian Lara (captain), Chris Gayle, Runako Morton, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Marlon Samuels, Dwayne Smith, Carlton Baugh Jr., Corey Collymore, Fidel Edwards, Jerome Taylor, Ian Bradshaw, Dwayne Bravo, Dave Mohammed.

INDIA (from): Virender Sehwag, Robin Uthappa, Rahul Dravid, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif, Suresh Raina, Venugopal Rao, Mahendra Dhoni, Irfan Pathan, Harbhajan Singh, Ajit Agarkar, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Rudra Pratap Singh, Munaf Patel.

Iran earn 1st point

SPORTS REPORTER

Iran opened their account in the 15th Asian Games qualifying hockey tournament as they earned a draw against Singapore in a goalless affair at Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

With the day's outcome, Iran secured one point from five matches while Singapore moved to four points, playing same number of matches.

Singapore, however, are out of contention with their collection after a disappointing mission in Dhaka.

On the other hand, the draw against Oman on Tuesday confirmed Bangladesh's berth in the Asian Games' final round which will be held in Doha, Qatar in November.

Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei and Oman are in the race to qualify for the Games with nine, nine and seven points to their credit respectively.

Bangladesh take on Singapore while Oman are set to face Sri Lanka today. Chinese Taipei will play against Hong Kong in the day's other match.

Three to snorkel across Padma

SPORTS REPORTER

Three swimmers from adventure group called Daccabasecamp are to cross the River Padma snorkeling on May 19.

The threesome -- Fazlul Kabir, Lipton Sarkar and Salman Saeed -- will be the first to undertake such a venture, which is part of their quest to snorkel across the main three rivers of the country -- Padma, Meghna and Jamuna.



Goalmouth action from the goalless Asian Games qualifying match between Iran and Singapore at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR