

FIFA WORLD CUP GERMANY 2006

17 DAYS TO GO

WORLD CUP SPECIAL

Star sport

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'I want to be top scorer'

"Being the top scorer at the World Cup is a dream that I can't hide. People talk a lot about my performance at Euro 2004 but sometimes they forget the good things I have already achieved for the national squad."

— Portugal striker Pauleta

AFP, Lisbon

CHESS OLYMPIAD

BD men start brightly, but women not

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's team made a flying start in the 37th Chess Olympiad with a 4-0 thrashing of Liechtenstein in the first round in Turin, Italy on Sunday.

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman beat Mannhart Marcel, International Master Enamul Hossain defeated Ferster Fabian, International Master Abdullah Al Rakib beat Guller Andras while International Master Reefat Bin Sattar beat Schadler Martin.

But the women's team started on the wrong foot as they lost their opening round against USA 3-0 with WIM Rani Hamid, WFM Zakia Sultana and Nazrana Khan all losing their boards.

A total of 146 countries are taking part in the men's group while 110 countries in the women's group.

Narayanganj ride on Rony

SPORTS REPORTER

Rony cracked a hundred as Narayanganj romped into the final round of the Dhaka Bank Under-19 Cricket Tournament with a massive 125-run victory over Madaripur at the Faridpur Stadium yesterday.

Tangail and Gaibandha also became zonal champions with comfortable wins against their respective rivals to confirm their places.

The final round line-up was yet to be completed as the zonal final match between Rajshahi and Thakurgaon was stopped due to rain after the former side scored 225-8 in their allotted 50 overs. Thakurgaon's chase will take place today.

Besides the three teams, Chittagong, Chandpur, Khulna, Bagerhat, Barisal, Sylhet and BKSP earlier confirmed their berths to join reigning champions Comilla to compete in the 12-team final round, which will kick off at four different city venues from May 25.

At the Faridpur Stadium, Rony smashed nine fours and five sixes to score 130 from 121 balls as Narayanganj piled up 245 for 8 in 50 overs.



Did U Know?

Brazil met Germany in the World Cup only once to date.



Landon Donovan
(US playmaker)

"I'm not going there to prove I can play and I'm good enough to be there. Germany, South Africa or Antarctica - I couldn't care less. It's about our team gaining respect. Then again, maybe things will change when I get there."

Who has a point to prove in Germany during the World Cup after a disappointing three-month stint at Bayer Leverkusen last year.

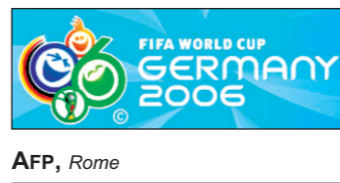
What to WATCH

TEN Sports
India v West Indies
Third ODI
Live at 7:35 pm



French players (from L-R) Zinedine Zidane, Willy Sagnol, Claude Makelele and Lilian Thuram attend a *Fartlek* session on the first day of their training camp on Monday in the French Alps city of Tignes.

Scandal overshadows Italian dream



AFP, Rome

If a week is a long time in football, a couple of months has been an eternity for Italians fans who until recently had been looking forward to a summer of glory at the World Cup.

In March, Italy crowed confidently after Marcello Lippi's talented young Azzurri served notice of their emerging threat with a scintillating 4-1 rout of tournament hosts Germany in a friendly.

But the sudden eruption of a wide-ranging corruption scandal in the closing weeks of the Serie A season has rocked the Italian game to its foundations, turning the mood of burgeoning optimism into one of plunging pessimism.

The various probes into allegations of fraud, match-fixing and illegal betting have now reached the door of the Azzurri's dressing room, embroiling Lippi as well as goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and defender Fabio Cannavaro.

Lippi, who is not under investigation in connection with any of the allegations, was questioned for

three hours on May 19 as part of the probe into GEA World, a sports management agency run by Alessandro Moggi, the son of disgraced former Juventus chief Luciano.

"I was questioned as a witness," Lippi stressed in a statement released by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), whose boss Franco Carraro has already resigned in connection with the scandal.

"I responded to the prosecutor's questions. From this point on I will think only of the national team," added Lippi, who earlier in the week had shrugged off questions about the various probes.

"I have nothing to fear from the investigations and I have never thought of resigning."

Even so, pressure is mounting on Lippi and there have been calls in the media for him to step down.

Juventus and Italy keeper Buffon meanwhile has been questioned after newspaper allegations that he placed illegal bets on Serie A matches when he was at Parma. Buffon has denied any wrongdoing.

Buffon's team-mate Cannavaro saw his house raided by police investigating transfer dealings at Juventus although it is not clear what the player's involvement was

thought to be.

The danger for Italy's World Cup hopes is that the scandal will rumble on throughout the tournament, leaving Lippi and his squad sagging under the weight of relentless questioning by the media.

World Cup organiser Franz Beckenbauer said he hoped Italy's campaign would not suffer but worried that the scandal might take a toll on morale.

"It probably won't hit the Italian national team, who are one of the favourites most people would choose at this World Cup," Beckenbauer said.

"But the players will have the distraction of being asked about the scandal. It could put a dampener on team spirit, but I hope it doesn't," he added.

A crumb of comfort for Italian fans could be a historical omen. The Azzurri ended up winning the 1982 World Cup in the wake of the last major corruption scandal to hit Serie A.

The difference between now and 1980 however is that the investigations had been completed and wrapped up by the time the World Cup rolled around, Paolo Rossi returning from a ban in time to lead

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No more excuses for Spain

REUTERS, Madrid

Coach Luis Aragones says it is time for Spain to stop making excuses for past disappointments at the World Cup and produce the goods at next month's tournament in Germany.

"We've got to banish the excuse mentality," Aragones told sports daily AS on Monday. "I've never liked alibis that don't justify anything."

"We have to take go into every game convinced that we can win and if that doesn't happen, then off we go home."

Spain have not got beyond the World Cup quarter-finals since 1950 and were disappointing in qualifying for Germany.

However, Aragones believes that their emphatic 6-2 aggregate win over Slovakia in the playoffs has served as a turning point.

"That game helped us change and allowed us to start dreaming about what we could achieve," he said. "After that game, the team, players and the fans rediscovered

Asia hard-pressed for '02 heroics

AFP, Singapore

Matching their heroic achievements in 2002 is going to be a tough ask for Asian teams in Germany, with making the second round a more realistic target.

Japan and South Korea joint-hosted the last World Cup and both teams performed magnificently in front of home fans, with South Korea shocking everyone by reaching the semi-finals and Japan making the round of 16.

The Korean performance was the best ever by an Asian team at the World Cup. The previous honour belonged to North Korea, who reached the last eight in 1966.

But a repeat seems unlikely in hostile territory despite Asian football making progress over the past four years, with growing numbers of players gaining valuable experience by plying their trade in Europe.

While ultimate glory may be elusive, at least the region has more teams than ever in with a chance, with Australia now part of the Asian family and in their first World Cup finals in 32 years.

As well as Japan and South Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the Asian Football Confederation teams flying the flag.

South Korean coach Dick Advocaat is a realist but believes his squad is capable of pulling off a surprise or two in their group against Togo, Switzerland and 1998 champions France.

"We have a very balanced squad and a squad that is capable of surprising a lot of people in the world," he said of a team that contains 10 veterans of 2002.

Manchester United midfielder Park Ji-Sung, a 2002 star, is the kingpin and will link up with Premiership colleague Lee Young-Pyo of Tottenham Hotspur, another 2002 veteran.

He will anchor the defense with Choi Jin-Cheul, at 35 the oldest player in the squad. In attack Advocaat was forced to revise his plans after first choice center forward Lee Dong-Gook was forced out through a knee injury.

He has turned to another veteran, striker Ahn Jung-Hwan of Duisburg in the Bundesliga, and a rising new star, Park Chu-Young,



A classic Romiseta decorated with typical Swiss and Brazilian symbols is parked outside a gas station in the city of Weggis, Switzerland on Sunday. The city is preparing to welcome Brazil's World Cup team.

Lehmann doesn't like Teamgeist

REUTERS, Geneva

Germany's Jens Lehmann is predicting hard times for goalkeepers at the World Cup because of the choice of ball.

"It's a ball for the outfield players and the crowd -- not for the goalkeepers," Germany's number one said at a news conference on Monday.

"When it rains it's not going to be very comfortable for us. It gets very slippery. It also moves a lot in the air."

The World Cup ball is known as the Teamgeist and is made by Adidas. Lehmann compared it to the ball from rival manufacturer Nike.

"The Nike ball feels more like an old fashioned leather ball," he said. "The Adidas one is more plastic."

"When it comes down to it, both of them make the goalkeepers look bad."

Lehmann had a thoroughly disappointing Champions

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