



PHOTO: AFP

Martin Luis, captain of Costa Rica fights for the ball with Vorobey Andriy of Ukraine during their pre-World Cup warm-up match in Kiev on Sunday.

Iran give Croatia a scare



REUTERS, undated

A Marko Babic penalty deep in stoppage time salvaged a 2-2 draw for Croatia against Iran in one of the World Cup warm-up matches on Sunday.

Iran, who are also in the finals in Germany, were on the verge of a notable victory when their goalkeeper Ebrahim Mirzapour slid into one of his own defenders and then clipped Croatia's Ivica Olic as the ball ran free.

Bayer Leverkusen's Babic calmly converted the kick.

Iran took the lead after 21 minutes when a shot from Mohammad Nosrati was not cleared and the ball fell to Ali Karimi who drove it into the net.

Croatia drew level 10 minutes later when Jurica Vranjes's cross was knocked back by Hajduk Split's Niko Kranjcar and Dado Prso shot past Mirzapour.

The match became disjointed after the break with both sides making several replacements.

One of Croatia's substitutes, defender Mario Tokic, gifted Iran a

second goal after 82 minutes when his poor return ball landed at the feet of Arash Borhani who accepted the chance.

It looked like Croatia were heading for their first defeat under coach Zlatko Kranjcar until, six minutes into stoppage time, they were handed a lifeline.

"Iran's goals came from our own mistakes," Kranjcar said.

"Despite that, we had the game under control. We had a number of chances we failed to convert. Now we have a few days' rest and the players will be ready for the World Cup."

USA 1 Latvia 0

Striker Brian McBride's header two minutes before halftime gave USA a 1-0 victory over Latvia in Connecticut.

The US team dominated their third and final preparation match in six days, coach Bruce Arena using nine players likely to start his side's opening World Cup Group E game against the Czech Republic on June 12.

Latvia goalkeeper Aleksanders Kojlinko was busy throughout the opening 45 minutes, making a handful of impressive stops.

In the 13th minute, Beasley unleashed a wicked shot from 20 metres, forcing Kojlinko into a bril-

liant diving save. Eight minutes later, he headed a free-kick by Eddie Lewis against the right post.

McBride was involved in a clash of heads and returned to the field with a large welt above his left eye before nearly putting USA ahead on 27 minutes with a fierce long-range shot.

Latvia nearly grabbed an equaliser against the run of play a minute from time when substitute Girts Karlson's header forced goalkeeper Kasey Keller to save well.

Ukraine 4 Costa Rica 0

Ukraine proved they can score without skipper Andriy Shevchenko when they beat Costa Rica 4-0 in their farewell performance before departing for the World Cup.

Less than three weeks before they begin their first World Cup finals campaign against Spain, they outclassed a hapless Costa Rica side who face hosts Germany in the competition's opener in Berlin on June 9.

Ukraine struck three times in the opening 40 minutes in Kiev, Serhiy Nazarenko, Andriy Vorobei and Maxim Kalnychenko all on target. Olexiy Belik completed the easy victory 13 minutes after the break.

Despite the emphatic victory, Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin was not totally pleased with his team's perfor-

mance.

"In a warm-up the result doesn't count," he told reporters.

"What really counts is discipline on defence, team work and the ability to play an all-round game. We need to work on all those aspects of the game."

Macedonia 2 Ecuador 1

In Sunday's other international friendly, Ecuador's poor run of form since booking their place in Germany continued when they were beaten 2-1 by Macedonia in Madrid.

To make matters worse for Ecuador, who have only won one of their last nine games, striker Carlos Tenorio was carried off on a stretcher with a leg injury midway through the second half.

"Carlos has a calf injury, but we will have to wait for the results of a scan tomorrow," said Ecuador coach Luis Fernando Suarez. "I just hope and pray that he will be with us for the start of the World Cup."

A raft of international friendlies take place next week, starting with Ghana against Jamaica in Leicester on Monday.

In the pick of Tuesday's games featuring World Cup qualifiers, England face Hungary, Argentina face Angola and Germany take on Japan.

Ronaldo's room tops

Ronaldinho's

REUTERS, Zurich

Ronaldo's hotel room topped that of teammate Ronaldinho's in an online auction, fetching 1,010 Swiss francs (825.8 dollars) for a one-night stay in the room of Brazil's leading striker after the team's stay in Switzerland.

"I was surprised that Ronaldo came out on top," said assistant manager Philipp Musshafen at the Park Hotel in Weggis, which launched the eBay auction.

The Brazilian team set up camp at the luxury hotel at the foot of the Swiss Alps last week to train for the World Cup in neighbouring Germany next month.

Ronaldinho's hotel room fetched 850 francs. In total the five rooms auctioned, including those of Kaka, Adriano and Roberto Carlos, reaped 3,200 francs.

"We will donate the amount to a Brazilian institution," Park Hotel's Musshafen said.

The winners will spend the night of June 3 at the hotel, just hours after the Brazilians move out at the end of their two-week stay.

They will also be given signed Brazilian football shirts. Normal rates for the five rooms on offer range from 480 to 780 Swiss francs each.

Atletico snap up Aguero

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's major shareholder Miguel Angel Gil Marin has said the Primera Liga club has agreed a deal with Independiente's 17-year-old Argentine striker Sergio Aguero.

"Deals have been closed with Aguero, Mariano Pernia and Ze Castro and we hope they will all be a great success," Gil Marin told a news conference on Monday. "We are continuing to scour the market to improve our team."

Aguero and has caught the eye of a number of European clubs, including Bayern Munich.

Pernia, 29, is an Argentine-born left back with dual Spanish nationality who moves from near-neighbours Getafe, while Ze Castro is a 23-year-old Portuguese centre back from Academia.

The club also announced that Spain left back Antonio Lopez had signed a contract extension until 2012, ending media speculation that he was close to a move to Barcelona.

The new signings come as part of a general overhaul of the club's sports section which sees former Valencia sports director Jesus Garcia Pitarch installed as sports director.

Former Real Sociedad coach Jose Maria Amorrtu will head up the youth system.

The club have already confirmed former Osasuna coach Javier Aguirre as coach for next season.

Milan want Nistelrooy

INTERNET, undated

Milan want to replace Chelsea-bound Andriy Shevchenko with out-of-favour Manchester United striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy.

Although linked with a host of Europe's top strikers, the Sun newspaper insists that the Rossoneri are hunting the Dutchman.

"Van Nistelrooy is the man we want," a Milan spokesman is quoted as saying. "He is one of the few players in the world who could replace Sheva."

Van Nistelrooy is understood to be available for transfer after allegedly clashing with boss Sir Alex Ferguson at the end of last season.

After being regularly dropped to the bench in the business end of the campaign he left the ground before United's last match of term against Charlton.

"There were a couple of issues during the week that concerned us in terms of the spirit of the club," Ferguson commented after that match.

Ruud is now expected to be shown the door even if he recently stated that he would not decide on his club career until after the World Cup.

The former PSV Eindhoven star has amazingly netted 150 goals in 200 games for the Old Trafford outfit in his five-year stay.

Inter have also been associated with the player even if they are understood to primarily be tracking Fiorentina's Luca Toni.

'We're not prima donnas'



AFP, Clairefontaine

France coach Raymond Domenech has launched a withering attack on a French television programme which he claimed depicted his World Cup squad unfairly as aloof and distant.

Domenech was taking issue with a TF1 documentary which followed his side's high altitude training camp in the Alps last week.

The programme contained a number of scenes of stony-faced players ignoring fans, with the reporter suggesting they had been instructed to behave like that by the French team management.

"I can't let that pass -- it was presented as if we were holed up in a bunker," stormed Domenech.

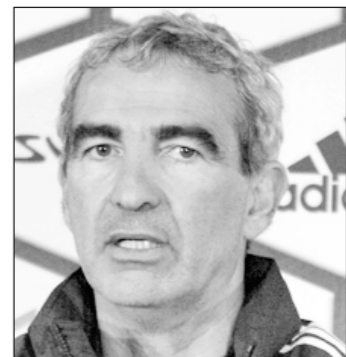
"As if we'd forbidden the players to be approached by the public. It's wrong!"

"The players have always respected the fans. It's absolutely scandalous to portray things like that," he added.

His comments came the day after France and in particular 'keeper Fabien

Barthez and midfielder Vikash Dhorasoo were subjected to whistling during the 1-0 World Cup warm-up win over Mexico in front of a crowd of 80,000 at the Stade de France on Saturday night.

Bayern Munich defender Willy



RAYMOND DOMENECH

Sagnol denied the team were deliberately going out to be antagonistic.

"It's not us that are looking for enemies -- we find them every day in the media or by going to the Stade de France and hearing all that whistling."

"We're not paranoid but everyone agrees that Saturday's game wasn't important, that it served only as a preparation game and now we can feel there's

dissatisfaction and disappointment about the French team."

On a more positive note Sagnol believes the mood among Les Bleus is a world apart from the tired squad that set off on that ultimately disastrous defence of their world title in Asia four years ago.

"The spirit is radically different to 2002, that's for sure. We've got over all that now, and in terms of our serenity that's no bad thing."

"We also have the advantage this time of having a lot of players who still haven't won anything at international level and because of that their motivation is huge, you can sense the atmosphere."

French football chief Jean-Pierre Escaltes sought to take the heat off the team.

"The team's concentrating. The leitmotiv is total concentration," said the president of the French football federation.

"It doesn't want to repeat the mistakes of previous years. When 5,000 fans want autographs they can't all go away with signed shirts."

France have two more friendlies -- against Denmark and China -- before their opening World Cup match against Switzerland on June 13.

Totti recovery lifts Italy



INTERNET, undated

Francesco Totti played an entire 70-minute match against an Italian amateur team Sunday, continuing his recovery from leg surgery.

The game was Italy's first test against outside competition since opening their World Cup training camp a week ago. They have trained every day but their preparations have been overshadowed by the wide-ranging scandal in Italian football in which several players in the national team and the coach Marcello Lippi

have been embroiled.

Totti's fitness is Italy's biggest worry on the field. The Roma playmaker needed surgery after breaking his left leg and straining ankle ligaments in a Serie A match in February. He was only on the field for a limited period in Roma's last two games of the season, but in the training match against Sestese he produced an array of crisp passes for his teammates and scored in the final minute with a characteristic lob. Italy won 10-0 with five goals from Alberto Gilardino and two from Vincenzo Iaquinta. Mauro Camoranesi and Marco Materazzi also scored.

The Azzurri then won another informal game 10-0, against Serie D's San Gimignano. Luca Toni scored four

goals, Filippo Inzaghi added three, Alessandro Del Piero got two and Simone Perrotta one, but the defenders Gianluca Zambrotta and Alessandro Nesta left the game injured. Zambrotta hurt his left thigh and, when the rest of Italy's squad took a 24-hour break on Sunday to return home and vote in local elections, he remained at the Azzurri's Coverciano training complex to undergo medical tests. Nesta's injury was believed to be less serious.

"I'll stay here and take care of myself with ice. I want to participate in the World Cup and take care of myself in the best way possible," Zambrotta said Sunday. "It doesn't make sense right now for me to go anywhere." Italy's first match at the World Cup is against Ghana in Hanover on June 12.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil midfielder Kaka (R) vies with Felipe of Brazilian Under-20 team during a training match with on Sunday in Weggis, Switzerland.

World Cup marketing mania



REUTERS, Berlin

A voodoo doll with five pins and the national emblems of all your enemy teams. Toilet paper with World Cup trivia. Pork slices emblazoned with a soccer player dribbling down the field.

These are just a few of the unofficial World Cup-related items available in German stores and on German Web sites as merchants try to cash in on World Cup mania before the month-long international soccer tournament kicks off in Germany on June 9. The competition transfuses much of the world, and interest among Americans has been growing.

"Put a charm on your favourite team with this special set. It includes one voodoo doll, 34 national emblems and five needles. Weaken any opponents: Simply attach the emblem, stick in the needles and off you go," the description says.

But the maker warns there is "No guarantee!" it will work. One can also catch up on World Cup trivia while perched on the throne thanks to toilet paper with printed questions and answers about World Cup history.

One question on the toilet paper asks who won the first World Cup in 1930. The paper provides the correct answer -- Uruguay. But the encyclopaedic paper provides the incorrect answer to least one of its own questions. It says there have been a total of seven World Cups since 1930, but the answer is 17.

The theme cannot be missed at one of Germany's leading electronics and home appliance chains. Among the World Cup-inspired items available are a soccer-ball radio and CD player and a vacuum cleaner decorated with

the familiar black and white pentagons and hexagons.

In Berlin, it's hard to find a pizza delivery service without a soccer deal. One pizza place has a "World Cup" offer good until the tournament ends -- three pizzas (a "Salami," an "Atlantic" and a "Hawaii") and five litres of beer.

Only 15 companies were awarded the right to market goods with the official World Cup logo and FIFA, the world soccer organization, is on the lookout for any piracy.

But these marketers of unofficial World Cup goods are careful to avoid anything that would open themselves up to a FIFA legal challenge.

They simply include soccer balls, fields, goalposts and soccer phrases -- all of it in the public domain and not subject to any trademark laws -- in the hope that the World Cup euphoria taking hold of Germany will make their products irresistible.

With two weeks left until the World Cup starts, it is almost impossible to escape the soccer theme.

One German supermarket chain superimposes pictures of soccer balls over run-of-the-mill advertisements of pork steaks, beer kegs, Swiss cheese, frozen spinach, barbecue sets, plastic food containers, biscuits, canned sausages and canned corn.

Makers of sausage, virtually a staple food in Germany, have also got in on the act. In some supermarkets you can find soccer ball sausages and slices of pork luncheon meat that show a soccer player dribbling a ball.

Other soccer items at supermarkets include "soup strikers" -- instant soup with soccer ball noodles; "half-time" pizza with Berlin curry sausage; crunchy snacks shaped like soccer balls and players. One can even buy a "World Cup" of potato salad.

Germany's thriving sex shop industry has also tried to capitalize on

World Cup fever. One of the leading German erotic paraphernalia peddlers is marketing vibrators with names like "home team," "captain" and "hard shot on goal."

A poster seen at some German sex shops has a picture of two women in thongs, one squatting over a soccer ball in front of a goalpost. She wears socks with black, red and gold stripes -- the colours of Germany's flag. Another woman sporting red and white -- the national colours of neighbours Austria and Switzerland -- lies on her back, clutching a vibrator.

"Our boys only rejoice after they've scored," the poster declares.

Real want me: Sven

INTERNET, undated

Sven Goran Eriksson has told senior England players: Real Madrid want me.

The Swede, confident he will get the job next season, is already making plans.

And his close contact with England stars will raise fears he could try to convince several of them during the World Cup to follow him to Spain.

Any attempt by him to sound out players in the squad about possibly joining him at the Bernabeu will spark fury.

Eriksson has said all along he wants his future sorted out before the World Cup.

And he knows the leading candidate in Real's presidential elections, millionaire businessman Villa Mir, is targeting him and favourite to win control.

Mir has teamed up with ex-world rally champion Carlos Sainz, who would be vice-president.

Sainz said: "Eriksson is one of our options."

Deschamps turns down Marseille

AFP, Paris

Former France captain Didier Deschamps said Sunday he had turned down an offer to coach Marseille next season.

Deschamps, who has been out of work since leaving as the coach of Monaco last season, said he had not agreed fully with the southern club's terms.

"I was very honoured to have been approached by Marseille," said Deschamps.

"We had very positive talks but they won't be pursued because, at the moment, we could not agree on terms."

Deschamps held talks with Marseille president Pape Diouf and the club's leading shareholder Robert Louis-Dreyfus on Wednesday in Paris.

Former Marseille coach Jean Fernandez left the club citing "personal reasons" last week.

In his short spell with Monaco -- his first position as manager -- Deschamps took the Principality to the final of the Champions League in 2004, where they were beaten by Portuguese giants FC Porto 3-0.

Fernandez gets Auxerre job

AFP, Auxerre

Auxerre announced on Monday that they had appointed Jean Fernandez as their new manager just a week after he parted company with Marseille.

The 51-year-old Fernandez will replace former France manager Jacques Santini who was sacked by the Burgundy side on May 16.

Santini had replaced long-time helmsman Guy Roux at the start of last season, but failed to qualify the side for Europe.

Auxerre chairman Jean-Claude Hamel said that the club had had contacts with several potential managers and that Fernandez had proved the most impressive.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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ACROSS

1 Endeavor
4 Actress Gardner
7 Decline
12 Court
13 Chat-room
14 Lisa Marie's dad
15 Toss into the mix
16 Archaeologist's souvenirs
18 Born
19 Open
20 "A good walk spoiled," said

DOWN

1 Nasally
2 Copland ballet
3 Make like Slim Whitman
4 Comment re Yorick
5 Eddy
6 Sacrifice site
7 Took off
8 Carte lead-in
9 Insulation material
54 Bishopric (Abbr.)
10 Perch
11 Curvaceous character?
17 401(k) alternatives
21 Escapes
23 Ooze
24 Foolhardiness personified
25 Call for help
26 Stick with a kick
28 "— Town"
30 Id counter-part
31 Clumsy craft
32 Conk out
33 Gelfin
36 Meyers or Green
37 Puts on the line
40 Got up
42 Football ref, slangily
43 Fork options
44 Magnani and Moffo
45 Rumble souvenir
46 React in sorrow
48 Past
49 Same old same-old
50 Make lace
51 "— got it!"

Solution time: 25 mins.

F A T S O C K T A M E
L I C E T R U E N A I L
T E N D E R L Y N A I L
N O R T H E N A B L E
L A T H E W O E N
H I F S G I L L O T T E R
T R O T D E B S E T A
T O N E D D A Y N A G
N O T T O T A L S
T E N U O U S D O C
O V E R T E N E R T I F E
R I C E T E A L T E N
E L K S T I M P S T E I S

CRYPTOQUIP

P W O H V C D J V O N S D C J P O H S

N C D J J - N D B H S C Z L B C U H K

S W O K D E L C B J W , P O C O

S W O Z D H K U E S S C U V J ?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CABBIES HAVE WEIRD JOBS. JUST IMAGINE THAT THEY ARE ENCOURAGED TO DRIVE CUSTOMERS AWAY!

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals E

The Cryptoquip 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.