

Italian midfielder Andrea Pirlo is in tangle with Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien (L) during their World Cup match at Hanover Stadium on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

Pirlo proves critics wrong

REUTERS, Hanover

Italy midfielder Andrea Pirlo's goal in Monday's 2-0 Group E win over Ghana did more than break the deadlock in a tricky test for the Azzurri -- it cast aside the many doubts over the playmaker's form. Pirlo has always been a crucial figure in Lippi's side but after a below-par season for his club AC Milan there had been fears that he would be unable to rediscover his best form in Germany.

On Monday though Pirlo was back to his peak, sweeping up in front of the defence, ensuring possession was well maintained and prompting Italy's attacks.

His well taken goal, after Francesco Toti alertly spotted that he was left unattended on the edge of the area at a corner, was the best moment of an exceptional performance from Pirlo which deservedly earned him the man-of-the-match award.

"Right from the start I tried to win the ball in midfield and then launch our attacks," said Pirlo.

"Ghana were very strong in midfield, we knew that would be the case, but we were even better."

"Obviously it was fantastic to score the goal but the important thing was the result. We knew it would be a tough match and so we're very satisfied," said the midfielder.

Pirlo, whose career was transformed four years ago when Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti moved him to a deep role, had particular reason to be pleased with his fifth goal in the Italy shirt.

"I spoke to my son before the game and he asked me to score a goal for him, it was nice to be able to give him what he asked for," he said.

While three-year-old Niccolò Pirlo will have plenty to brag about at nursery on Tuesday morning, Lippi also had his wish granted.

Hamann considering Bolton move

REUTERS, Bolton

Liverpool midfielder Dietmar Hamann says he will decide this week about a possible move to Bolton Wanderers.

Liverpool said on their website that they had given English Premier League rivals Bolton permission to discuss personal terms with the 32-year-old German.

"The decision to sell me has not entirely come as a shock to me, but deciding whether to go or not is very hard for me," the website quoted Hamann as saying.

"I'll be back in England later this week and that's when I'll decide whether to go to Bolton. They're the only club which have shown any interest."

Hamann, who played for Germany in the 2002 World Cup finals, joined Liverpool from Newcastle United in 1999.

Call to jail Cafu

INTERNET, undated

The Italian prosecutor leading a court case against Brazil's World Cup captain Cafu on charges of falsely obtaining an Italian passport called yesterday for a 10-month prison sentence if the player is found guilty.

The prosecutor also sought jail sentences for Cafu's wife, the former president of Roma Franco Sensi and another former Roma player Gustavo Bartelt. The verdict could come as soon as today but, even if found guilty, the 36-year-old Cafu is unlikely to face jail, as under Italian law people with no former convictions usually have prison terms of less than two years suspended.

The case dates back to 2001 when 11 players in Italy were handed bans of up to a year after they were found to have obtained Italian passports with false documentation. Gaining dual citizenship allowed the players to avoid being counted among the restricted number of non-EU players allowed at each club.

An orange bowl

INTERNET, undated

When the Ivory Coast and the Netherlands meet Friday night in Stuttgart, the stands could well be a sea of orange, the uniform colour for both teams.

"It's good for the atmosphere. The stadium will be full of fans wearing orange, but it will be hard to distinguish who is for what team," Ivory Coast striker Arouna Kone said Monday at the team's hotel in Niederkassel. "The only way to tell will be by the colour of the skin."

On the field, of course, only one team will be wearing predominantly orange, while the other will likely wear white with orange trim. The Ivory Coast also has some green in its colour scheme.

Domenech blasts 'spy' press



REUTERS, undated

France coach Raymond Domenech criticised his country's media for helping World Cup opponent Switzerland by revealing details of his likely line-up. Reporters from the L'Equipe and Le Parisien newspapers viewed a closed training session and revealed Monday that Franck Ribery would play against the Swiss on Tuesday.

Domenech's already tense relationship with French media has now deteriorated further. "To spy on us when we are trying to work makes no sense," Domenech said.

"That the Swiss should do it, at least, I find that normal. That you

should spy on the Swiss and tell us what they are doing, that's also normal.

"But that our own media should tell others what we are doing?"

Domenech confirmed Monday that Ribery would start, leaving Thierry Henry to operate alone in attack and relegating David Trezeguet to the bench.

Domenech had hoped picking Ribery would catch the Swiss off-guard. Even though he traditionally announces his team on the eve of the match, the newspaper's revelations gave the Swiss a day's preparation to work out how to play.

Domenech angered the French press when he refused to hold a news conference after announcing his squad for the World Cup -- leaving around 5 million TV viewers to work out his

choices for themselves. A day later, he offered exclusive comments on his squad to subscribers of a cell phone company, SFR, which is also a private sponsor of the team.

Previously, Domenech's girlfriend Estelle Denis, a TV personality, announced on a midnight soccer show that Bordeaux defender Franck Jurietti had been called up to the squad before other media were given the news.

Prior to the World Cup, Domenech also said no details would be given regarding player injuries and ordered his medical staff to say nothing. Lyon's Florent Malouda has apparently picked up an injury, but no details were made available.

Domenech was tightlipped about Tuesday's match.

He said he had "a book to finish" before "a good night's sleep."

Cahill the toast of Aussie football



AFP, Kaiserslautern

Teammates have acclaimed substitute Tim Cahill's second goal world-class as Australia parted long and hard after their first ever victory at the World Cup over Japan.

Guus Hiddink's Australians, playing in their first finals in 32 years, produced one of the great fightbacks, coming back from 1-0 down with three goals in the last eight minutes for a rousing 3-1 victory over the Asian champions here Monday.

Hiddink was lauded for his change in tactics and use of substitutes to turn things around for Australia after Japan's contentious first-half goal, but it was the mercurial Everton midfielder who destroyed Japanese resistance with two goals in five minutes after all looked lost.

Cahill, who came on eight minutes after halftime for Marco Bresciano, fired home in a goalmouth scramble in the 84th minute and was on the spot again five minutes later to lash home a volley from outside the 18-yard box for a 2-1 lead.

Another goal from substitute striker John Aloisi two minutes into injury time sealed a fantastic win ahead of Group F games against reigning champions Croatia and 1998 semi-finalists France.

Cahill began the day crestfallen at missing out on the starting eleven, but his day ended as the official man-of-the-match in a team performance that made the football world sit up and take notice.

"He was absolutely gutted in the morning when he was told he was being left out and a few of the boys gathered round and told him he would come on and score the winner and so it turned out," Blackburn Rovers defender Lucas Neill said.

Cahill, who now has 11 goals in 16 internationals, said he had confidence in the team cause even when it looked like it was going sour after Shunsuke Nakamura's 26th-minute goal against the run of play.

"Guus is a great manager and he knows his stuff. Starting me on the bench obviously was another way of bringing me on and being another weapon for the team, they (Japan) were tired a bit and I got into the spaces where I normally do," he said.

"To get the goals was an added bonus, but even watching from the sidelines I said to a few teammates that we could still win the game, we just needed to get into their faces a bit more and get the ball upfield because Japan are a very good team."

"A lot of people have been giving me stick because I don't normally score that many goals outside the 18-yard box so that could be my first so it is fantastic."

"When Johnny (Aloisi) laid the ball off to me, everyone seemed to back up and I took a touch and I gave their keeper the eyes and that's what happened... in the back of the net."

Aloisi, who netted his 23rd international goal, acclaimed Cahill's 89th-minute strike as something special.

"It was an unbelievable goal. His first goal was a pure Timmy Cahill goal, in the box, right position, right time, but the second goal was first-class," Aloisi said.

"He gave the 'keeper the eyes, he looked the other way and he

whipped it into the other corner, it was a world-class goal."

Neill echoed the mood in the ebullient Australian camp when he said: "We've got something I think a lot of teams don't have and that's Aussie spirit."

"We're all winners, we're all brought up that way and it shows in every sport we play and that really shone through against Japan."

"We've been playing in some big games of late and we're not scared to take them face on."

"Anything's possible, but we need to concentrate now on recovering and make sure that we can nick one or two more points so that it's all not for nothing."

Australia's next World Cup assignment is mighty Brazil in Munich Sunday.

Tunisia are

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two year contract, revealed he had no idea when his star striker Santos might be fit as the 27-year-old Brazilian-born marksman, injured, a knee in a friendly last week.

"We still do not know when Santos will be able to play," said Lemerre, who himself is bidding to move into the second round for the first time after the catastrophic first round exit of then champions France in 2002.

"We are still hoping that he will be 100 percent soon."

As a precaution Lemerre brought in striker Haykel Guemamdia when defender Mehdi Meriah was ruled out of the tournament.

"In defence we already have a lot of alternatives," said Lemerre, who turns 65 on June 18.

Aside from the Saudi clash, Tunisia play Spain in Stuttgart on June 19 and round off their first round campaign against Ukraine in Berlin on June 23.

Germans poke at Beckhams

INTERNET, undated

The German press is enjoying itself with the David Beckham circus after Victoria and the rest of the family rolled into Frankfurt at the weekend.

The mass circulation tabloid Bild abused the whole family yesterday including mum Sandra who, the paper charmingly observes, has "a smile like a peasant". They described Romeo as looking like a girl -- "he should have been called Juliet" -- while sister Joanne is described as "lardy".

"Look at her arms, look at her breasts, look at her bum, very British. She belongs on a beach in Majorca drinking sangria out of buckets and you can count on her to be the first one up on the table topless," the paper said.

Age is an asset

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said reserve forward Issam Jomaa, whose own injured knee has already cut Lemerre's options.

Boumnijel, a lean man who stands 6-foot-2, says he can offer leadership to his less-experienced teammates.

"I have a lot of responsibility. I have a lot of experience and that helps the younger ones," Boumnijel said. "It's about finding the right words to calm them, creating the right atmosphere."

If Tunisia remains an African power, it will do so without Boumnijel. He's looking to move into coaching and doesn't believe he'll be around to beat the record by Milla, who was 42 when he played -- and scored -- during the 1994 tournament.

"At the last World Cup," he said, "I didn't think I would play another tournament."

Senna tips

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undoubted potential. Spain face Ukraine in their opening World Cup Group H match on Wednesday before taking on Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.

"We are working at a maximum level and I believe that it will be very difficult to beat us," said Senna.

"The players are united and the atmosphere is excellent."

"Spain have a team good enough to win the World Cup."

The Brazil-born star admits he is not guaranteed of a starting place in the side to face Ukraine but is ready to repay coach Luis Aragones's faith in him should he be called upon.

"The coach Luis Aragones has confidence in me and I want to fight hard for the team," added Senna.

"I have not been assured of my place for the opening game against Ukraine but I am confident."

The grass to blame



GUARDIAN ONLINE, undated

After the ball, the weather and a lack of water, struggling World Cup stars have started blaming the grass for lacklustre displays. On top of claims that the Adidas Teamgeist ball swerves too much for the goalkeepers and the weather is too hot for England, World Cup organisers were forced to defend the pitches of the 12 tournament venues yesterday after complaints from players and coaches.

Among England's gripes after the laboured victory over Paraguay was Rio Ferdinand's suggestion that Michael Owen's lack of sharpness could be put down to conditions underfoot. "The pitch maybe didn't suit him today," he said, a reference to a surface that was dry, discoloured and bare in patches.

The struggling strikers' union was joined by Holland's Ruud van Nistelrooy, who blamed the surface in Leipzig for his substitution after an ineffective 69 minutes against

Serbia & Montenegro. "The pitch gave me problems. I felt it was too dry and it was difficult to play on," he said.

Zico, the Brazilian coach of Japan, claimed in the build-up to yesterday's 3-1 defeat to Australia that the grass in Kaiserslautern was too long. "The players are more used to a shorter-cut pitch. Training was a good opportunity to play on this pitch and get a little bit more used to the high-cut grass."

The German organising committee will be dismayed at the criticism after spending a huge amount of time and effort developing pitches that would be as good to look at on television as they are to play on. The pitches were overseen by a "grass excellence team" and were grown at a secret location near Heythuysen in the Netherlands, close to the German border. Developed by the Dutch farmer John Hendricks, who also supplies the grass for the Bernabeu, it is a supposedly resilient mixture of two types of grass - poa pratensis and lolium perenne - intended to allow the ball to travel quickly and promote flowing football.

The evidence of the opening games is that while the pitches are true they are slow and offer a great deal of purchase to the ball when back-spin is applied. As yet, despite the exceptionally hot, dry weather, there is no evidence of pre-match watering.

The resilience of the pitches is also open to question with the surface in Frankfurt acknowledged to have been less than perfect by organisers. "In Frankfurt there were training sessions that put a certain amount of stress on the grass and after that a certain amount of work had to be done," said a spokesman for the organising committee.

FIFA said that teams may be prevented from training on match pitches the day before games if there is a risk that it will harm the playing surface, though they will be permitted to "cheek out" the surface. "Training on match pitches is not an absolute right," he said.

The surface at the Olympiastadion in Berlin also has discoloured areas in one half but that did not stop Brazil training exclusively at that end yesterday afternoon.

Diet danger for Oz



AFP, Sydney

Australian men were warned Tuesday that their unhealthy World Cup diets would result in them "blimping out", as the nation's interest in the tournament soared after the Soccerroos' victory over Japan.

Dietician Karen Inge said Australian men's love of beer and fatty foods would have their waistlines bulging if they did not adopt a healthy regimen over the month-long tournament.

Inge said she conducted a spot survey asking about 20 Australian males what they were eating during the event and was concerned about the results.

"They were eating about two-and-a-half times their daily energy requirements, including up to 384 grams of fat -- that's five times the recommended intake," she told AFP.

"If you sustain that over four weeks you'll blimp out, you'll end up looking more like a soccer ball than a soccer player."

Inge said while some cultures

snacked on relatively healthy foods, such as pasta in Italy, Australian men preferred to munch fare such as pizza, chips and peanuts.

"Aussie men are sports nuts and while they're watching it they like to drink beer and eat this stuff to soak up the alcohol -- it's all deep-fried or sugar-coated," she said.

"There's not a fruit or vegetable in sight."

Inge recommended healthy alternatives such as popcorn, low-alcohol beer and fruit for the Aussie bloke who wants to enjoy the football while maintaining a trim figure.

Casillas wants

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However, Casillas believes that even without their attacking talisman, Ukraine, who are also favoured to go into the second round ahead of group rivals Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, should not be ruled out.

"Out of the three group rivals Ukraine is the strongest," added the 25-year-old.

"I believe that it's our most important game and that we will be battling with Ukraine for top spot."

He warned: "Shevchenko is a great player, but Ukraine also know how to play without him."

Wanchope's dream

INTERNET, undated

Paulo Wanchope's first thought after scoring twice in Costa Rica's opening game against Germany was of Juergen Klinsmann.

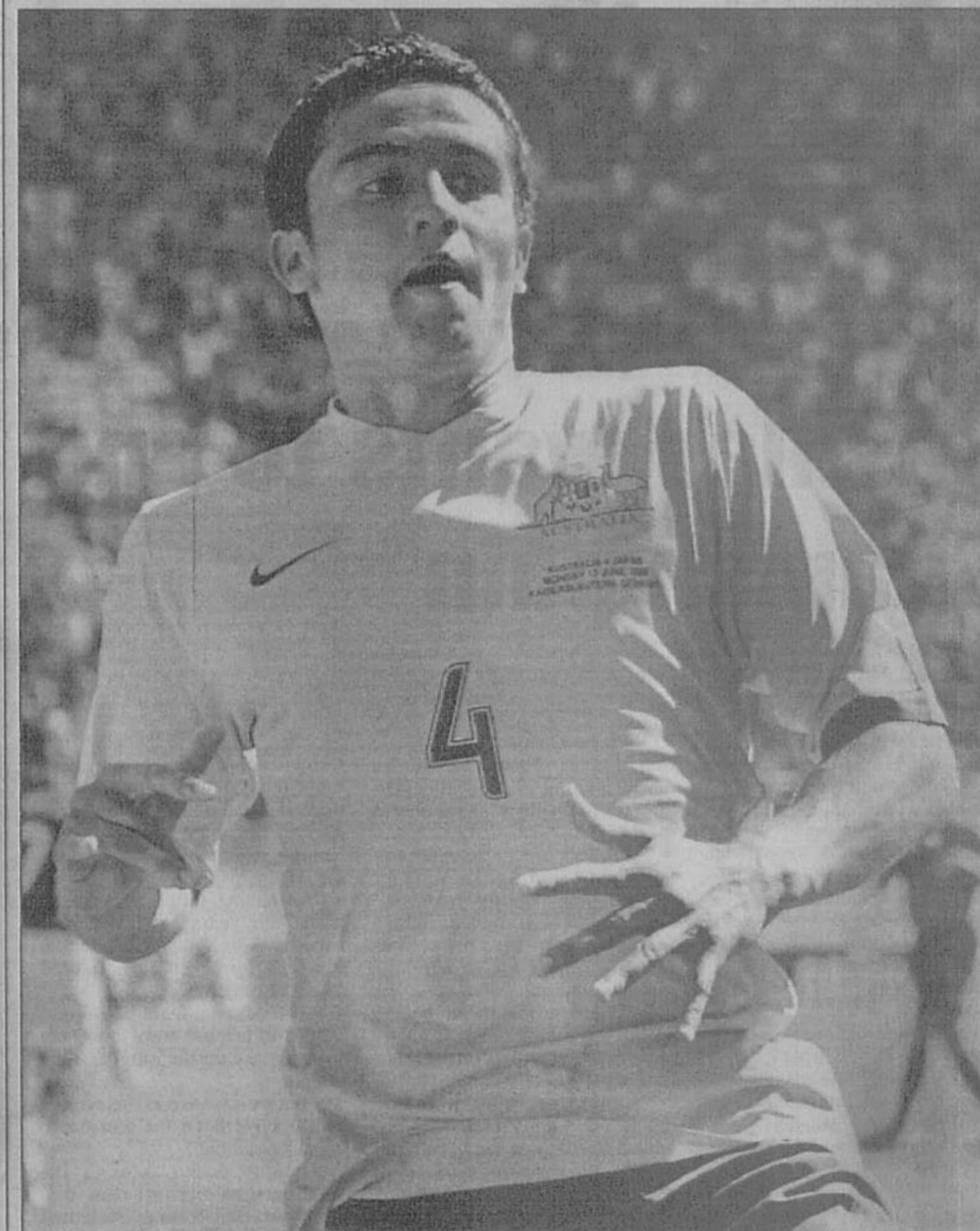
Costa Rica's top scorer said he was a big Klinsmann fan as a kid growing up, and once asked for the former Germany striker's autograph when he travelled to Central America in 1988 with his former club Stuttgart.

Klinsmann is now coach of the German national team and watched from the sideline as his squad defeated Costa Rica 4-2 in the tournament's opening match.

"I was 12 years old and I asked for his autograph when he arrived in Costa Rica with Stuttgart to play several exhibition games," Wanchope said on his Web site.

Wanchope said that when he scored against Germany "I remembered that Juergen Klinsmann was my idol, because of his goal-scoring ability as a player."

"I never imagined that I would meet Klinsmann ... I saw him before the opening game, but we didn't talk."



Australian midfielder Tim Cahill runs in ecstasy after scoring against Japan in their World Cup match in Kaiserslautern on Monday. PHOTO: AFP