

Milan tempt Torres

INTERNET, undated
Andriy Shevchenko's replacement could well be Spain striker Fernando Torres...

The Atletico Madrid youngster has been a Rossoneri target for several years now...

The 30m-pound cash provided by Chelsea for Sheva will prove useful for bringing in the Spaniard...

"I feel that my future depends on this World Cup," commented Torres...

Chelsea and Arsenal are also interested in the 22-year-old, who was his country's leading scorer...

Curiously, he'll be facing off against Shevchenko in this evening's clash between Spain and Ukraine in Group H.

Juve hint at Capello exit

INTERNET, undated
Juventus have laid out plans for their 'English style' club, but hinted that Fabio Capello will leave...

"We'll give more space to young players and are aiming for a new model of club, starting from the Juve spirit..."

The future of the tactician has been in doubt ever since the Calciopoli scandal broke...

"The Bianconeri changed their entire Board of Directors in the wake of the scandal..."

The former Roma and Milan boss has never been particularly popular with a section of the die-hard Juve fans...

Sant'Albano's comments suggest that Capello has warned he'll move on, reportedly to Real Madrid...

The Bianconeri changed their entire Board of Directors in the wake of the scandal...

"I want to imitate the English model of football clubs," continued the CEO...

The Stadio Delle Alpi will be reconstructed this year to reduce the capacity from 70,000 to 43,000...

"Our history is made of success, team spirit, entertaining sport, but also of elegance and gentlemanly conduct..."

He also lamented that the Stuttgart pitch had not been prepared properly.

Because it had been watered at midday rather than just before the match...

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States viewership reaches new height

AFP, New York

The United States lost their first 2006 World Cup match to the Czech Republic...

The match on Monday earned the highest rating (2.3) and the largest audience ever (2.06 million households)...

The previous all-time high for a soccer game on ESPN2 -- sister channel to the more widely available ESPN cable channel...

At Friday's opening match when Germany beat Costa Rica 4-2, the scene in front of the giant screen at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate was a sea of German flags...

Even the fans who wrapped themselves in the German flag and perched themselves on the concrete blocks of the nearby Holocaust memorial did not raise eyebrows.

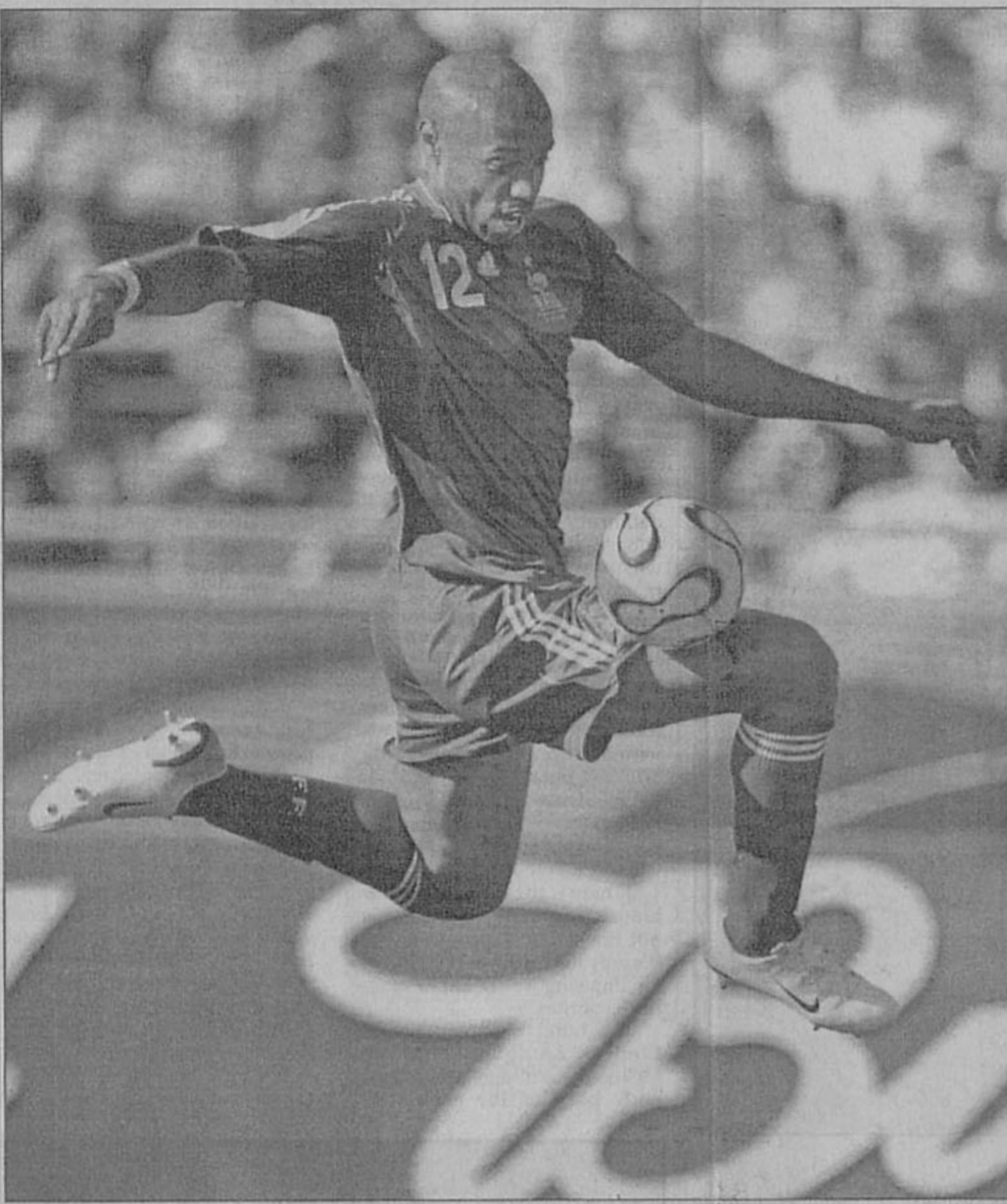
"For the first time, it is cool and politically correct to wear the German colours, even in a trendy area like this..."

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"For the first time, it is cool and politically correct to wear the German colours, even in a trendy area like this..."

"And we Germans still have a problem with that."



France's crowd-favourite forward Thierry Henry in action against Switzerland on Tuesday.

Henry flatters to deceive



AP, Stuttgart

This time Thierry Henry blamed hot grass and bad refereeing for France's 0-0 draw against Switzerland.

Barely a month ago, Henry argued that a poor linesman and cynical tackling from defenders cost the Champions League final against Barcelona.

But in both matches, a greater truth stood out amid the accusations: that Henry misses chances in big games.

Switzerland defender Patrick Mueller handled Henry's first-half shot, and Russian referee Valentin Ivanov waved away French penalty appeals.

"Once again the referee didn't see it and it came at a moment in the match when we were really on top," Henry said.

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Germans rediscover identity



AFP, Berlin

Germans have rediscovered their flag and are waving it with pride during the World Cup, freeing themselves of the historical guilt that once made gestures of patriotism a taboo.

The banner's black, red and gold are popping up everywhere across the football extravaganza's host country -- whipping in the wind on passing cars, sprayed on dogs' fur, painted on faces -- and for once in Germany, no one is shocked.

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early evening kick-off, Henry said it was sticky underfoot in the hot conditions.

"The ball was getting stuck under the player's feet all the time," he said. "Then I saw them watering the pitch after the match. What's the point of that? There's no game there tonight."

After both Arsenal's defeat, and Tuesday's draw against the Swiss, Henry pointed his accusing finger at everything else except the fact he failed to score.

Against Switzerland Henry missed with a tame header, twice shot weakly at goalkeeper Pascal Zuberbuehler, and mis-hit a simple pass to Sylvain Wiltord.

On the bench sat David Trezeguet, a far less skilful player than Henry but a far better finisher. Trezeguet failed to even make a substitute appearance, even though the match was crying out for a centre-forward to convert Zinedine Zidane's brilliant passing into goals.

France coach Raymond Domenech leapt to the defence of Henry by also blaming the hot grass.

"If they had watered the pitch just before, the ball would have slid properly," Domenech said. "Rather than keep getting stuck."

The bigger issue remains whether Henry, for all his great skill, is truly a big-game player.

While he plunders goals galore for Arsenal -- 214 in 342 -- his strike rate for France -- 33 in 79 games -- is well below. It does not compare historically with the world's best marksmen.

Henry's last crucial goal in a major competition was against Portugal in the semifinals of the 2000 European Championship. Although he scored France's winner at Ireland in World Cup qualifying, he failed to score at the last World Cup -- despite finishing Premiership top scorer.

Trezeguet scored France's Golden Goal winner against Italy at Euro 2000 and has a far better international record of 32 in 63.

Trezeguet works far better with Zidane.

In 54 matches together for France, Henry has never scored on an assist from Zidane.

Against the Swiss, Zidane carved open the defence to put Henry in dangerous positions.

As against Barcelona, when he missed a close-range chance and a one-on-one with the goalie, the result was the same -- he missed.

Henry said he has grown a thick skin to suggestions that he goes missing in big games.

"I live with that on a daily basis in England," Henry said. "When I score, I am great. When I don't, suddenly there is a problem."

himself a part -- of reducing the nation's history to the "12 dark culpable years" of the Nazi era.

The revival of a certain national pride began tentatively under conservative former chancellor Helmut Kohl and gained momentum when the capital of the reunified country moved back to Berlin in 1999 under his Social Democrat successor Gerhard Schroeder.

For the World Cup, the country invested a fortune in an image campaign called "Germany, Land of Ideas" in which homegrown supermodel Claudia Schiffer is gracing giant posters draped solely in the German flag.

Another book released just in time for the championship, Florian Langenscheidt's "The Best of Germany -- 250 Reasons to Love Our Country Today" attempts to banish a favourite German pastime -- talking down the country.

Langenscheidt lists "typically German" products, personalities, qualities and landmarks in which his compatriots can take pride.

"It is up to us to decide whether our country sinks, groaning under its mediocrity, or whether it works, in chorus with other nations, for a better world, sovereign and fully aware of itself."

Journalist Henrik Mueller agrees that patriotism is indispensable in an age of intense competition between nations in an increasingly borderless world.

"Having an intact national identity has become a crucial economic asset," Mueller, the editor-in-chief of Manager Magazin, writes in his new book "Economic Factor Patriotism -- Love of Fatherland in an Age of Globalisation".

"And we Germans still have a problem with that."

A cheeky bet

AFP, Helsinki

Should hosts Germany win the World Cup then the secretary general of the Finnish social-democratic party Maarit Feldt-Ranta will honour a bet and tattoo the German flag onto her bottom.

"Big sports events unleash huge passion. I am a great lover of football and handball after all," said Feldt-Ranta, whose party is a member of the centre left coalition government in power since 2003.

"I'm not the type to generally tattoo myself whatever the occasion, I would much rather have betted on dying my hair, but I will keep my promise. We shall see how the tournament turns out," added Feldt-Ranta, who was stunned when she found her bizarre bet had been leaked to the newspapers.

The wager had been apparently a secret one between several employees of her party.

While Finland didn't qualify for the finals, Germany opened their campaign with a 4-2 victory over Costa Rica.

Germany's best integrated immigrant groups.

Precisely because they are so well integrated, Poles long settled

Kempes tips Crouch for glory

AFP, Berlin

Argentina's 1978 World Cup winning star Mario Kempes believes England's title hopes hinge more on Peter Crouch than Wayne Rooney.

Kempes, who was top scorer at the 1978 finals and inspired the South Americans to their first ever World Cup triumph, insists that the beanpole Liverpool striker is an under-rated threat.

"England might do well, and although they're missing Rooney, they have got Crouch. He can score goals, can't he? He's a typical goalscorer," said Kempes.

"He's more of a penalty-box player than Rooney; he can bring down high balls and put them away. He's got an all-round game."

England captain David Beckham has hit out at a German tabloid's portrayal of his family but is resigned to more of the same abuse if his team progresses to the later stages of the World Cup.

The Bild newspaper targeted several members of Beckham's family on Monday, describing the superstar's sister as a "fat-ham" and his mother as having the "smile of a peasant".

The Real Madrid footballer's popstar wife Victoria was also savaged by the mass-selling daily while Beckham's three young children were lampooned as "dwarves".

Beckham said he did not plan to take legal action over the story but could not hide his contempt when talking to reporters at England's training camp ahead of their Group B game against Trinidad and Tobago on Thursday.

While Beckham said he had grown accustomed to life in the media spotlight and criticism of himself as a footballer, he would never accept personal attacks upon his family.

"I don't really want to give these people any more publicity than they've already had," said Beckham.

"I've come to terms with people criticising me as a footballer, but when it comes to my family that's one thing I won't accept and never will."

"For some reason, some people, one person maybe, has just found it funny to criticise my mum, my sister, my children."

"I find it sad that someone drops to that level. But it's probably just one sad person sitting in a room thinking up something that they can do to maybe try and put me off the next game -- and I'm not going to let them do that."

Asked if he expected more of the same if England were to meet Germany in the second round, Beckham said: "Without a doubt."

Pfister dodges queries

AFP, Frankfurt

Togo's veteran German coach Otto Pfister on Tuesday issued an angry rebuke to questions about why he had walked out on the west African World Cup debutants only to return three days later.

After a curt "no comment", Pfister blasted another journalist who repeated the question.

"Are you deaf or what? I said I wouldn't make any comment," said the 68-year-old.

With Pfister at the helm, Togo lost 2-1 to South Korea in their Group G opener in Frankfurt on Tuesday.

The veteran coach had quit the Togolese camp on Friday over a dispute concerning players' bonuses, but just as it appeared that former Cameroon coach Winfried Schafer might be taking over, Pfister suddenly returned to the team on Monday.

Togo were surprise qualifiers for their first appearance at a World Cup finals beating 2002 quarter-finalists Senegal to the prized place.

Sweden deny

FROM PAGE 19 didn't win and we just discussed how we can do better next time," the Arsenal player said.

"There was no fight and I have great respect for Olof. He is a great captain."

Mellberg and Ljungberg fought during a training session ahead of the 2002 World Cup in South Korea and Japan after a rough tackle on Ljungberg by Mellberg.

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Home away from home



REUTERS, Dortmund

Tens of thousands of Poles heading west to Dortmund on Wednesday to watch Poland face World Cup host nation Germany will find a bedrock of support when they arrive.

Poles have lived in the gritty industrial area for generations and a constant stream of immigrants -- often swapping work in the coal mines of southern Poland for work in German mines -- has kept links and loyalties alive.

Polish surnames swell the local phone book, corner shops stock Polish sausage and beer and a thriving community guards its cultural heritage while being one of Germany's best integrated immigrant groups.

Precisely because they are so well integrated, Poles long settled

in the Dortmund area have reacted to fears of an influx of Polish hooligans for the Germany game with dismay.

"I am really hoping we won't see any trouble around the game. I just cannot imagine it," said 24-year-old Katarina Gebalczyk, who moved to Dortmund from Poland when she was seven.

Fears of a violent showdown between fans have overshadowed Wednesday's Group A match for months, especially after about 100 Germans and Poles brawl near the border in November.

But German police said on the eve of the game they had no evidence pointing to planned clashes between German and Polish hooligans though they would deploy more officers than usual and remain on alert.

Most of the Poles in the area, even those born and raised in Germany, say their allegiance belongs to Poland and they have buying red and white Polish flags in droves.

"I've been here since the mid 1980s, my kids are all born here. They speak better German than Polish -- but they know who to support," said Waldemar Kazimierzak outside the team's hotel in Essen last week.

However, Gebalczyk is more torn. "I guess I will be happy whoever wins," she smiled, adding she hoped German-Poles could help keep things calm in Dortmund should they see tensions mounting.

Whatever the outcome, national honour is stake and the Poles will look to redeem themselves after losing their World Cup opener to Ecuador 2-0.

Polish team captain Jacek Bak, told a news conference on Tuesday: "The Germans can laugh at us in their newspapers and on TV, but I believe that we as Poles are capable of showing them on the pitch who we are."

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AFP, Bonn

Embattled Japan coach Zico is under pressure following the 1-3 loss to Australia to boost his attack in order to survive the first-round cut at the World Cup and salvage his reputation.

"I believe Zico will change his system," Japan Football Association president Saburo Kawabuchi said as the Asian champions tried to regroup ahead of their second Group-F match against Croatia on Sunday.

"We have a plenty of time to work things out," he told reporters at Japan's training camp here.

Croatia, third at France 1998, lost their opener 1-0 to five-time champions Brazil on Tuesday. A second straight loss would likely prove fatal for both teams.

Zico's cautious three-back defence, joined by two wingers, pushed the Asian champions far too deep and allowed the big and physical Soccerroos space to charge in on goal resulting in a three-goal onslaught in the last nine minutes of play on Monday.

But Zico, a star player in three Brazil World Cup campaigns, may employ his favourite four-man last line which can free up two side backs to join four midfielders in pressing the opponents, the FA chief said.

The same gear shift already paid off at the Confederations Cup in

Germany a year ago.

Kawabuchi recalled that after losing to Mexico in the Confed opener Japan switched from three to four backs. Zico's Japan went on to beat European champions Greece and drew with Brazil, only missing out on the second round on goal difference.

"After the defeat by Mexico, they played great football as if they were a completely different team," Kawabuchi said. "I have just talked about it with Zico. And I am convinced that his team will definitely make it next time in a similar manner."

He said Japan were determined to beat Croatia and take on Brazil "with belief in our victory." "And that's not impossible at all."

At home, Zico was criticised for his dubious substitution tactics, in contrast to Australia coach Guus Hiddink's effective use of players with late substitutes Tim Cahill and John Aloisi striking all the goals.

After replacing an injured defender, Zico substituted striker Atsushi Yanagisawa with former Feyenoord midfielder Shinji Ono late in the second half to boost Japan's attacking midfield. But it only confused the Japanese formation.

Zico sent on super-sub Masashi Oguro after they went down 3-1 in injury time.

Many telephone calls were made to the FA head office in Tokyo on Tuesday, mostly protesting at Zico's strategy or his lack of it, according to the Japanese media.

"Come home without playing any further", "Fire the coach," some of the callers said, the Sankei

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Sports daily reported.

But Zico, who has been involved in Japanese football for 15 years, first as a player, has said he will step down after the World Cup anyway, hoping to coach a club in Europe.

Japan's national side was the first team he served as head coach.

Portuguese international midfielder Petit revealed on Tuesday that he is a target for English Premiership giants Manchester United.

The 29-year-old Benfica star, scorer of four goals in his 37 international appearances, added that he would make a decision after the Portuguese World Cup finals campaign had finished.

"I received an offer of a contract from Manchester United," Petit said following a training session here.