



DROGHA 1, NISTELROOY 0: (L) Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogha juggles the ball during a training session in Trisdof on Wednesday. (R) Dutch forward Ruud van Nistelrooy with the ball in his hand perhaps seeking advice from his striking partner Arjen Robben of how to score at Freiburg stadium. Ivory Coast and the Netherlands face off in Stuttgart on Friday.

HOLLAND V IVORY COAST Dutch aiming to ride Elephants out

AFP, Stuttgart
The Netherlands go into Friday's Group C match against Ivory Coast seeking a win that would almost certainly book their passage into the second round of the World Cup. After recording a vital 1-0 win over Serbia and Montenegro on Sunday, the Dutch will be hoping for a repeat of the inexperience the young west Africans showed in their 2-1 loss to Argentina in their opener.

in the second round. We want to qualify as soon as possible, and

TEAMS
Netherlands (4-3-3)
1-Edwin van der Sar (110-0); 14-Johnny Heitinga (19-2); 13-Andre Ooijer (20-2); 4-Joris Mathijsen (9-0); 5-Giovanni van Bronckhorst (58-3); 18-Mark van Bommel (38-7); 20-Wesley Sneijder (24-5); 8-Philip Cocu (98-10); 17-Robin van Persie (11-1); 9-Ruud van Nistelrooy (52-27); 11-Arjen Robben (21-7)
Ivory Coast (4-4-2)
1-Jean-Jacques Tizie (25-0); 21-Emmanuel Eboue (12-0); 4-Kolo Toure (43-1); 3-Arthur Boka (24-1); 12-Abdoulaye Melle (18-0); 5-Djamel Zokora (39-0); 2-Kenya Akala (23-3); 18-Gnani Yaya Toure (15-2); 15-Aruna Dindane (35-11); 18-Abdelkader Keita (27-6); 11-Didier Drogha (33-24)

don't want to have to go into the third game having to secure a win." Ivory Coast will no doubt be buoyed by the mothers of the 23 players in the squad holding a three-day fast and prayer sessions before Friday's game in Stuttgart, but more realistically will be aiming to inject some ruthlessness into their play. Coach Michel Henri, lambasted in the Abidjan press after the Argentina game, was disappointed after that match but remains confident. "I believe we paid for our inexperience at this level," said the Frenchman who guided France to the 1986 World Cup semi-finals and who has also coached Morocco and Cameroon. "Now we need a big performance against the Dutch and a

good result. That is what we are going to address ourselves to. "We have to work on our strengths and weaknesses and while we are in a less comfortable situation (after the Argentina loss) I still say we can beat the Dutch." Ivory Coast striker Arouna Kone, who has spent three seasons in the Dutch league - the last with PSV Eindhoven, has earmarked left winger Arjen Robben as the dangerman. Robben turned in a scintillating, goal-scoring, man-of-the-match performance against the Serbs, and Kone said: "Robben is probably the most important player in their team. "In their first match, all attacks were led by him." Among the biggest concerns for

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Cocu hails Van Der Sar

INTERNET, undated
Veteran midfielder Phillip Cocu believes Holland are in safe hands under the captaincy of goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar. It may be unusual for an international side not to be skipped by an outfield player, but Cocu considers Manchester United's 35-year-old shot-stopper Van der Sar to be fully qualified for the role. The clean sheet Holland kept in their World Cup opener against Serbia and Montenegro - the Dutch won 1-0 - was their 10th consecutive in competitive games. Cocu gives Van der Sar plenty of credit for that and for steering the team past their European opponents. "He is one of the best 'keepers in the world and it's so important to have that steady influence," said Cocu. "Often the goalkeeper can make all the difference, we've seen it many times. He transmits calmness to the defence." Coach Marco van Basten is a big believer in youth and Van der Sar, one of three players who remain from Holland's 1998 squad - they failed to qualify four years ago - shares considerable responsibility for making sure the younger players are not overruled by the occasion in Germany.

'Points are vital'

AFP, Freiburg
Dutch playmaker Giovanni van Bronckhorst said the Netherlands were aiming to ease their passage into the second round from the World Cup's group of death with a win over Ivory Coast on Friday. The Dutch notched up a 1-0 win over Serbia and Montenegro in the first Group C clash Sunday, while the Africans battled hard before succumbing 2-1 to Argentina in what is quite rightly dubbed the group of death. "In our group, all points are very vital," van Bronckhorst said after an open training session here Tuesday. "It's clear that we've got four very strong teams (in the group). There's been a one-goal difference in both games so far. "For our next game against Ivory Coast, if we win that we are almost in the second round. We want to qualify as soon as possible, and don't want to have to go into the third game having to secure a win." The 31-year-old Barcelona star said that thoughts, however, were not focused on topping the table. "Of course we want to finish top

but the most important thing is to get through from this group." Dutch coach Marco van Basten said he expected Ivory Coast, led from the front by Chelsea striker Didier Drogha, to be difficult opponents. But he added: "Ivory Coast changed a lot of players and also their system. What we can do is just focus on ourselves. "We have to wait until we see their list of players on the day of the game before deciding which tactics to employ," van Basten said. The win in the opener against Serbia and Montenegro, however, had given the team confidence, van Basten said, despite an unusually high number of technical errors which he put down to nerves, the heat and the dry condition of the pitch in Leipzig. Manchester United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar, who suffered badly from cramps in that match, trained separately from the rest of the squad at Freiburg on Tuesday. But van Basten insisted that his captain would take the field come Friday. "He will be fit. He has a little bit of a problem with his calf, but it's

only light, not a big problem," he said. The coach also gave his backing to van der Sar's club team-mate Ruud van Nistelrooy, who was subbed against the Serbs and replaced after 69 minutes. "He's an experienced player. I've played a lot of games at a high level and sometimes you play good, sometimes bad, that's football," van Basten said, adding that he had "absolute" confidence in his striker returning to form. Van Basten also poured more cold water on comments by Robin van Persie that fellow winger Arjen Robben had been too selfish in the Serbia game, despite the Chelsea winger scoring the winning goal and the man-of-the-match accolade. "We discussed it a little bit with the two players and also said something about the situation generally to the whole team. "It's never been an issue for us." Van Basten also hinted that influential Hamburg midfielder Rafael van der Vaart might be in line for a call-up for the Ivory Coast game, possibly at the expense of

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Van Basten still wants to play

AFP, Freiburg
Hailed as one of the legends of his footballing generation, Marco van Basten admitted Tuesday that it was more enjoyable to savour the World Cup as a player and not a coach. But the former AC Milan striker who took over the reins from Dick Advocaat following Euro 2004 where the Netherlands went out in the semi-finals stressed that he also drew pleasure from conducting the Dutch charge on the World Cup from the sidelines. "It's better being a player," van Basten said after overseeing a training session here ahead of Friday's Group C match against Ivory Coast. "It's nice being healthy and being on the pitch and playing football. That's a beautiful thing to do. "But I'm also happy to be the coach at the moment because physically it's much easier," he joked. Van Basten, the youngest coach at the World Cup at only 41 years old, added: "At the moment I'm a little bit older and happy I don't have to act like the players on the field, in the heat and (deal with) all this tension, so I'm okay.

"Also as a player I felt tension, and as the coach also so there's no big difference." He said the expectations back in the Netherlands and among the hordes of travelling Dutch fans were enormous. "Working with the national team, you always have a lot of expectations. We can't change that but we have to work with the boys and... hopefully it gives good results." Certainly, the ambience at training is very good, with van Basten's young assistants - John Van't Schip, Rob Zitsche and Stanley Menzo - bringing an element of fun to proceedings. Van Basten came to the Netherlands job with very little experience: he previously helped coached the Ajax reserves under Van't Schip. But that did not stop the striker who scored a wonder goal in the Netherlands triumph over the then-Soviet Union in the final of Euro 88 from ringing the changes. Van Basten has bid to bury the infighting that has bedevilled Dutch squads in previous World Cup campaigns. He controversially ditched the old guard, leaving at home such seasoned campaigners as Edgar

Davids and Clarence Seedorf, often linked to dressing room dissent, and brought on board a raft of talented youngsters. Two such youngsters, Robin van Persie and Arjen Robben, both 22 years old, gave van Basten cause to intervene after the former had criticised the Chelsea winger for being too selfish during the 1-0 opening win over Serbia and Montenegro. "There was no problem really. It was football talk, positive and constructive and that was that," van Basten said. "We discussed it a little bit with the two players and also said something about the situation generally to the whole team. "It's never been an issue for us." The Dutch - finalists in the 1974 and 1978 World Cup finals and semi-finalists in 1998 - face a tough task in qualifying for the second round of football's showpiece tournament. Boosted by the 1-0 win over the Serbs on Sunday, the Oranje face African Nations Cup finalists Ivory Coast on Friday and round off their campaign in the Group of Death with two-time champions Argentina - a repeat of the 1978 final - on June 21.



GO DEUTSCHELAND: A female German fan among thousands gathered in front of a giant screen near the Brandenburg Gate cheers her national team during the hosts second World Cup game against Poland at the Westfalenstadion in Dortmund on Wednesday.

A colourful prospect

INTERNET, undated
If football matches were a colour, then Friday's Group C clash between the Netherlands and the Ivory Coast in Stuttgart would no doubt be orange. Think of "orange" and the Dutch immediately spring to mind. But orange is also the 1st choice colour of jerseys worn by the "Elephants". Because of this, they are sometimes referred to as "the Holland of Africa". "In this game only one colour will dominate: it will be an 'orange party' and the people on the stands will only be distinguishable from the colour of their skin," quipped Ivory Coast forward Bakary Kone ahead of Friday's match. Both sides played attractive, aggressive football during their opening matches against Serbia and Montenegro and Argentina respectively. And though Africa's latest football revelation walked away disappointed by its 2-1 defeat against the fancied South Americans, most expect it to give the Netherlands a tough time in Stuttgart. "The Ivory Coast were unlucky against Argentina. They are strong both physically and technically and we have a lot of respect for them. It's going to be tough," Dutch coach Marco van Basten

said. After their 1-0 victory over Serbia and Montenegro, a win on Friday would greatly bolster the Dutch's chances of making it through to the next round. But Dutch defender Giovanni van Bronckhorst wants his team to go one step further and end up at the top of what has been described as the World Cup's "group of death." "We want to win the group," he told reporters in the run-up to Friday's match. The Ivory Coast desperately need a win, meaning both sides have a huge incentive to go on the attack in Stuttgart. "For us, it's going to be like playing a final," French coach Henri Michels said. "The Netherlands are in a much more comfortable situation than us, so it's going to be difficult for us. We were too naive against Argentina, but we have learned our lesson," Michel said. Both coaches have hinted that they will field similar formations to those that played in their opening games. This means van Basten is likely to insist on a three-pronged attacking line-up formed by Arjen Robben, Ruud van Nistelrooy and Robin van Persie. Asked about van Nistelrooy's

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