



France's out-of-favour striker David Trezeguet (L) shoots the ball during a training session of the national team against a local German side in Arzen on Wednesday.

Parreira wary of Aussies



AFP, Konigstein

Australia could prove to be the wild card team in world champions Brazil's World Cup Group F warned the five-time title winners coach Carlos Alberto Parreira on Thursday. Parreira also expressed his huge admiration for the Socceros coach Guus Hiddink, who has twice taken teams to the World Cup semi-finals with the Netherlands in 1998 and South Korea in 2002.

Both Brazil and Australia, who meet in Munich on Sunday, opened their campaigns with wins, Brazil scraping home 1-0 over Croatia while Australia scored three goals in eight minutes to come from behind and beat Asian champions Japan 3-1. "Australia are a redoubtable side," said Parreira, who was in charge when Brazil won the 1994 World Cup.

"They knocked out Uruguay in the play-offs, played well in their friendlies and won well against Japan.

"They are physically strong and have three or four players who have superb technique. It is not going to be easy even if they are that strong.

"When I spoke to the squad, I told them that Australia could be the wild card team.

"They have got Guus Hiddink, who is one of the best coaches in the world as he proved with the Netherlands, South Korea and now with Australia.

"I really respect his work and I

even invited him to Brazil at the end of last year. Against Australia we must play our natural game, and must avoid taking them on physically. "We have to keep the ball on the ground and pass the ball around so we exhaust them. We will be pressurised but it is imperative we keep the ball moving around. We want to qualify for the second round in the second match."

Parreira said that there was no question of Ronaldo not playing despite a below-par performance against Croatia, in which he was substituted, and a visit to hospital after he complained of dizzy spells.

The health worry brought back memories of the fit he suffered on the day of the 1998 final which resulted in a 3-0 defeat by France.

"The team against Australia will be the same that played against Croatia," said 63-year-old Parreira, who has also coached Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia at World Cup finals.

"Ronaldo trained normally with the rest of the team on Thursday afternoon. You talk of a problem (with his health) but there is none, the team doctor just told us that.

"Ronaldo is very calm and relaxed. He has come through his medical problem. All we wish is for a highly-motivated Ronaldo for the Australia clash."

Parreira, who vowed after the 1994 World Cup triumph never to return to the hotseat because of the personal criticism he had received, said that while Ronaldo was one of the most important players on the team.

"There are no untouchable play-

ers in the Brazilian team but there are important players," said the coach.

"And Ronaldo is one of those -- for what he has done in the past. He must continue to play. There is a hierarchy in the team. All teams have one.

"Look at Ballack with Germany. He did not play in the first match (because of a calf muscle injury) but he played in the second one. It is logical. He has a stellar past with Germany."

Parreira said that he did not regard Brazil as the super hot favourites.

"That (the favourite's tag) came from outside and not within the camp," he explained.

"I have always said there are eight favourites and Brazil are one of them.

"Of course we did not see the best Brazil can play in the win over Croatia but it still meant we won a record eighth successive World Cup finals match, a record that had stood for 80 years.

"It is important to start by winning. It means we will be more relaxed and the performance will be as well (against Australia) and technically we will be better.

"Favourites or not favourites...in 1994 we weren't, nor in 1970 or in 1998 and 2002. The great virtue of Brazilian football is to grow in adversity.

"The real challenges start in the second round. In the second round if you lose, you are on your way home," added Parreira, who nominated Ecuador, the Czech Republic and Germany as the best teams he had seen during the first batch of first round matches.

'Africans must be united'

AFP, Hanover

Angola's coach called for African nations to cooperate to improve their football after a winless opening week for the continent at the World Cup.

Four of the five African teams lost their first games with only Tunisia registering a draw against lowly Saudi Arabia. "We are very conscious of that but we're improving," said Angola coach Luis Oliveira Gonçalves.

"We have a lot of difficulties but the African football officials must work together to improve African football.

"We should feel happy about what we've done so far. However we need to give a little bit more to improve our football."

Angola, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo are all making their World Cup debuts, while Tunisia is playing their fourth tournament but have not won a game since 1978.

Goncalves said that although they only had one point between them, the difference was not huge between African teams and the rest of the world.

"Despite the fact that we haven't won any matches so far and only Tunisia drew, the matches are very tough and balanced," he said.

"There's no big difference between the winner and the loser." Three of the opening defeats were by just a goal with Ghana losing 2-0 to Italy.

However Goncalves said he was hoping for an improvement, with football high on the agenda for African governments after more pressing needs like health and education.

"Unfortunately in our continent we have other priorities like health, education and development which are consuming our budget," he said.

"But African officials are well aware of the quality of football in Africa and we hope we will be better in the near future."

Spector joins Hammers

AFP, London

American left-back Jonathan Spector has joined English Premiership club West Ham from Manchester United in a 500,000-pound (\$25,000 dollars) transfer.

Spector, 20, spent all of last season on loan at Charlton and had been in the running for a place in the United States' World Cup squad before dislocating his shoulder.

He had joined United in 2003 but made only eight first team appearances. West Ham boss Alan Pardew admitted he had been keen to land Spector for some time and told the club's website: "Jonathan is a player we have been tracking for the past 18 months or so.

"Having developed as a young player at Manchester United, he arrives with a fantastic pedigree, and I was also very impressed by his character, which was a big factor in bringing him to the club."

Goal drought puzzles France



REUTERS, hamelin

France could tell you that relying on two of the finest marksmen around is no guarantee you will score on the World Cup scene.

Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet have been nightmares for defenders in England and Italy respectively for years but are not quite as prolific when on international duty.

Both have had their moments, Henry scoring 33 goals from 79 appearances and Trezeguet netting just one less in 63 caps, but now that their scoring instinct is needed most, it seems to have gone missing.

Both 28, the former world and European champions are at the peak of their powers at club level.

Only if they live up to the occasion can France, who have not scored a World Cup goal since lifting the trophy eight years ago, dream of going a long way in the

finals. Henry was a shadow of the player he is for Arsenal in Tuesday's dull 0-0 Group G draw with Switzerland while Trezeguet, who keeps treating the Juventus fans with plenty of goals, did not even come on.

"I have no regrets," said Henry. "I kept trying to put myself in a position to score and there was no one-to-one situations. You have regrets when you miss those."

Despite his credentials, Trezeguet has been used mostly as a substitute over the years, starting only two internationals alongside Henry since Raymond Domenech took over as coach after France's quarter-final exit from Euro 2004.

Just two days before France played Switzerland, Trezeguet had said he found it difficult to understand why he was not an automatic starter.

"When you have players like Thierry Henry, Zinedine Zidane or myself, you should not ask yourself questions," Trezeguet said.

"In my opinion the example to follow is Brazil. Look at them, they play with Ronaldo, Ronaldo, Adriano and Kaka all together in

the same team and see nothing wrong with that."

Domenech had been expected to pair Djibril Cisse with Henry up front for France's opener until Cisse broke his leg in a warm-up game.

The coach then decided to field Henry as a lone striker but could revert to a system with two forwards when France play South Korea in their next match on Sunday in Leipzig. Togo complete the group.

The favourite to team up with Henry is not Trezeguet but Louis Saha, who pushed Dutch scoring machine Ruud van Nistelrooy on to the Old Trafford substitutes' bench last season.

The key to success for France is to put Henry in a position to score.

Zidane, one would think, would be the ideal person to do that but he never has.

The two have played together for France 53 times but, in an amazing statistic, not once did Zidane present Henry with the decisive pass.

He might start on Sunday. Otherwise, maybe Henry should ask Saha.

Sponsorship choices criticised

REUTERS, London

Health experts criticised organisers of the World Cup on Friday for choosing a fast food giant, a brewer and soft drinks maker as official sponsors of soccer's showcase event.

They said it is difficult to reconcile FIFA's choice of McDonald's Corp (MCD.N: Quote, Profile, Research), Coca-Cola (KO.N: Quote, Profile, Research) and Budweiser beer, which is made by Anheuser-Busch (BUD.N: Quote, Profile, Research), as official partners for the World Cup which aims to promote sports and health.

"The presence among FIFA's current official partners of Budweiser beer, McDonald's and Coca-Cola illustrates the tensions that exist between international sport and health promotion," said Jeff Collin of the University of Edinburgh.

No one from the companies was available to comment but FIFA dismissed the idea that the sponsors were offering products detrimental to the general well-being of the population.

Markus Stegler, FIFA's Director of Communications told journalists in Berlin on Friday: "It is a free society and everyone is entitled to their own opinion."

"The sponsors mentioned however are actively involved in promoting good health. We believe these companies are up to the standard, are conscious of the issues we have in our society and there is no reason that they should not be sponsors."

"They have a good conscience and are valuable members of the World Cup."

Collin and Ross MacKenzie of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London noted in a commentary in The Lancet medical journal that FIFA received an award in 2002 from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for its tobacco-free policy.

But they added that a ban on smoking in stadiums has been dropped for the 2006 World Cup in Germany and that branded lighters and ashtrays are among the official merchandise.

Top spot a must: Ballack

INTERNET, undated

Germany captain Michael Ballack says the host nation wants to finish top of Group A.

Juergen Klinsmann's men are already through to the second round with Ecuador, who they face next Tuesday in a game which will decide first place in the group.

After their 3-0 win over Costa Rica on Thursday, Ecuador need only a draw to clinch the premier berth.

But with England the team lurking in the knockout phase if they finish top of Group B, Ballack does not want to finish second.

"It has always been our goal to win the group," said the Chelsea midfielder. "But Ecuador are in great shape and it showed when they beat Poland. Hopefully we can keep our concentration up."

Rooney relief for English media



AFP, London

England's newspapers shrugged off concerns about the national side's lacklustre World Cup form on Friday as they celebrated qualification for the 2nd round and Wayne Rooney's return to action.

Rooney played only a marginal role in England's late, late 2-0 win over minnows Trinidad and Tobago in Nuremberg on Thursday, but the Manchester United forward still dominated the newspaper headlines.

"We're throo," was the headline of choice for sub-editors on the Daily Mirror and Daily Star tabloids, while their rival, The Sun, went for "Nice to See Roo," and headlined its back page coverage with "Smackeroo" above a picture of Rooney embracing fellow

Liverpudlian Steven Gerrard.

The relief at seeing Rooney back in an England shirt after his rapid recovery from a broken bone in his right foot was summed up The Times, which said the side's "hesitant and uncertain World Cup campaign acquired hope and purpose within a single minute," when the 20-year-old came on as a substitute.

On the inside pages, relief over the result and Rooney's return was offset by large amounts of pessimistic comment about England's chances of going all the way in Germany, an objective the media here had declared within the grasp of Sven-Goran Eriksson's squad before the tournament.

"England are progressing through this World Cup with maximum points and minimum panache," noted the Daily Telegraph.

"Witless England dig their way to late victory," was the headline in the Guardian, with their football

correspondent commenting that the display against T and T will have Eriksson's squad "out of the reckoning so far as most observers are concerned."

That view was backed up by The Sun, which commented: "England have to get their act together or they will be going home well before the final."

The Daily Mirror noted that Thursday's match, in which the Caribbean state got within seven minutes of securing a famous point, could "so easily have ended in utter humiliation."

But the paper underlined that "World Cups are normally won by teams that build up a momentum after struggling to impress early on."

With that hope in mind, most of the newspapers expect Rooney to start England's final group game, against Sweden, and there was widespread speculation that Michael Owen could be dropped to the bench.

Janas has no regrets



AFP, Warsaw

Polish coach Pawel Janas said Thursday he had "no regrets" about managing the Poland team his way, despite their early exit from the World Cup.

"Of course I made mistakes. Only people who do nothing make no mistakes," Janas, who has been lambasted in the press and by fans back in Poland, said.

"What I could do, I did. Maybe someone could have done better but, sorry, I did it my way."

A slack Poland lost its opening match to Ecuador 2-0 last week, and then the side went down to Germany 1-0 in its second match Wednesday, despite putting up a good fight.

"I like working with the team and I would like to continue working with it and qualify for the Europeans. But it is not my decision to make," Janas said before packing his bags to head back to Poland with the team.



AFP, Berlin

Ronaldinho, Ronaldo and Rooney are facing unexpected competition at the World Cup from a global army of scantily-clad Ophelies, Olgas and Oanas.

Never heard of them? You won't find them on the pitches, but they're making vital contributions in the cut-throat circulation battle waged by the world's non-sports magazines to grab and hold football fans' regular readers.

Flamboyant Hugh Hefner's multi-million-selling Playboy has left nothing to the imagination in their sales push by gathering 14 models from around the world, putting them into skimpy tops and placing them on the front of its USA edition.

France's Ophelie Marie, Olga Ursulova of the Netherlands and Oana Bercaaru from Romania are three members of the team as are Estela Pereira of world champions Brazil and Asia

represented by Pani Lee.

A quick glance around the news stands inside Berlin's cavernous Hauptbahnhof central railway station sees the German edition also featuring the girls, except this time, they are even more lightly clothed.

"Playboy created an international editorial team to come up with ideas that would be globally relevant for our international editions," spokeswoman Lauren Melone told AFP.

"In 2002, Playboy Brazil featured a world team with Brazilian models. It was a success both locally and internationally.

"Due to the popularity of this pictorial and football globally, the international team thought a pictorial of this nature, including models from around the world shot at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles, would make for an exciting and sexy feature for many of our international editions."

But like the 32 teams at the World Cup, the magazine, which claims a worldwide readership of 15 million, faces stiff competition.

At the Hauptbahnhof store, shelf space is dominated by the World Cup. A sober biography of German

England can't dampen soca spirit



AFP, Port of Spain

Trinidad and Tobago's World Cup heroes may have lost to England but that did little to dampen celebrations at home over the side's performances in Germany.

The "Soca Warriors", as they are known by their fans, kept England at bay until the 83rd minute before going down 2-0 to goals from Peter Crouch and Steven Gerrard.

In the capital Port-of-Spain, football fans gathered at popular bars as the match finished, much as they have done throughout their team's campaign.

The mood around the capital

was upbeat, with most fans proud of the team's performance. "I'm going to wear red tomorrow. We still have to show support," said Lisa Ready after the match.

Trinidadians had been wearing red since Wednesday and as a show of support most of the nation's cars have been decorated with flags since the World Cup started, with some cars now sporting three and more flags.

Thursday was a public holiday, which left most people at home, with friends or at bars and other venues to watch the match.

The streets, which were deserted during the match, came alive. St James, an area popular for its many bars was the scene for an impromptu carnival.

Talk at bars after the match focused on how well the "Warriors" played and how England was suffi-

ciently worried to bring on star striker Wayne Rooney.

Rooney's entrance was seen as a victory by some. "Hey, we've made it to Germany, we've done good already. What more do you want?" one fan asked.

Not everybody was upbeat. "The last thing I saw was the sad look on Shaka's face," said an ice cream vendor.

She had watched the match then rushed to the corner to catch the crowds that were gathering at one of the popular bars.

Trinidad's hopes of reaching the last 16 knockout stages have not completely vanished however as a win over Paraguay in their last game coupled by a loss for Sweden against England could see them snatch an unlikely lifeline.

World Cup a hit with world leaders



AP, Washington

The White House and European leaders are preoccupied with a very grave matter these days.

What's going on at the World Cup?

Televisions at the White House have been tuned to the World Cup, while the British and Swedish prime ministers tried to catch glimpses of the games during a European Union summit Thursday in Brussels, Belgium. Of the 32 World Cup teams, 10 are from EU nations.

"The president follows sports," White House press secretary Tony Snow said. "And obviously, soccer's more popular in other countries than it is in the United States. But it's got a pretty good constituency."

Bush called the US team on Monday to wish them luck before their first game against the Czech

Republic. Even though the United States got shut out in that game, Snow rejected the notion they were out of contention before Saturday's match-up with Italy.

"Here, wait a minute. Ill-fated American team?" Snow said in a response to a reporter who used the phrase. "They've got a big match against Italy coming up. Come on."

"It ain't over 'til it's over," he said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair watched the last 10 minutes of England's first half against Trinidad and Tobago on Thursday in a private room before briefly joining the summit's opening session. His official spokesman said the prime minister left the session for the final 35 minutes of the game, which England won 2-0 to advance to the second round.

Sweden's Goran Persson acknowledged it would be a struggle to concentrate on Thursday's working dinner, which clashed with Sweden's game against

Paraguay. Persson planned to keep up with the action.

"Who said that I will attend the dinner?" Persson said coyly, before adding he would dine with the other leaders, but keep tabs on the game through mobile phone text messages. Sweden beat Paraguay 1-0.

The EU's midyear summits traditionally clash with the World Cup or soccer's European Championship, prompting leaders to slip away from meetings in search of a television screen. Spanish and German leaders have previously skipped summit sessions to follow crucial games. A 2002 summit in Seville, Spain, was delayed for an hour to allow diplomats to watch Spain lose to South Korea in the World Cup.

In 1992, Denmark's then-foreign minister, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, wore a hat and scarf in his country's red-and-white colours to a summit in Lisbon, Portugal, to celebrate Denmark's 2-0 victory over Germany in the European Championship final.