

Scary websites

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldinho can put quite a scare in opponents. Fans, too, it seems.

The Brazilian's Web site is among the most likely to lead viewers to unsafe screensaver sites, including adware, spyware and malicious downloads, according to a survey by McAfee, Inc. David Beckham and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo also pose significant risk among player sites, while Angola is the most dangerous team Web site.

"Soccer fans are famous for the depth of their feelings for player, club and country, but sadly, the vendors of spyware, adware and other unwanted software know how to exploit fans' passions for financial gain," said Chris Dixon, director of strategy for McAfee SiteAdvisor. "This survey shows yet again that the problem of Web security has truly gone global."

McAfee SiteAdvisor searched Google for each of the 736 World Cup players, adding the phrase "World Cup Screensaver." It then cross-checked the results with its own database of spyware and spam safety test results for more than 3.8 million of the Web's most popular sites. The "winners" were searches resulting in the highest percentage of risky Web sites.

Angolan goalkeeper Lama's Web site was the most dangerous among players, with visitors having a 45 percent chance of landing at an unsafe site. Fans visiting Ronaldinho and Beckham's sites had as much as a 30 percent chance of being taken to dangerous sites.

Among teams, Angola topped Brazil 24 percent to 17 percent, followed by Portugal, Argentina and the United States.

Ecuador erupts in celebration

INTERNET, undated

The Tricolours gave Ecuador a reason to party.

Ecuador erupted in massive street celebrations Thursday after its team beat Costa Rica to advance to the second round of the World Cup for the first time. President Alfredo Palacio called to congratulate the team, saying there would be "popular celebrations with bands" in Quito, Guayaquil and El Chota.

"Dear players, distinguished Ecuadoreans... on behalf of our country, we're here united and proud, willing to follow your example," Palacio said. "It's an enormous achievement that unites us all."

In Quito, Ecuador's capital, the streets filled with yellow, blue and red flags after the team's 3-0 victory over Costa Rica in Hamburg. Fans formed honking car caravans.

"Germany, here we come!" shouted Romel Andrade, who watched the game in a restaurant in northern Quito.

Ecuador plays Germany on Tuesday with a chance to claim first place in Group A.

"Let it come, let it come, let Germany come!" said another group of raucous fans in Guayaquil, the country's second-biggest city.

Although the government did not declare an official holiday as it did after Ecuador's 2-0 victory over Poland last week, every activity stopped after the match began at 8 a.m. local time. Stores opened late, and people gathered to watch the game on big-screen televisions in plazas, restaurants, cafes and workplaces.

Barcelona to let Saviola go

AFP, barcelona

Argentina international striker Javier Saviola has been told he is not wanted by Barcelona, the Spanish champions confirmed on Thursday.

Saviola is under contract at the Nou Camp until the end of the coming season but he has spent the last two years on loan at Monaco and Sevilla.

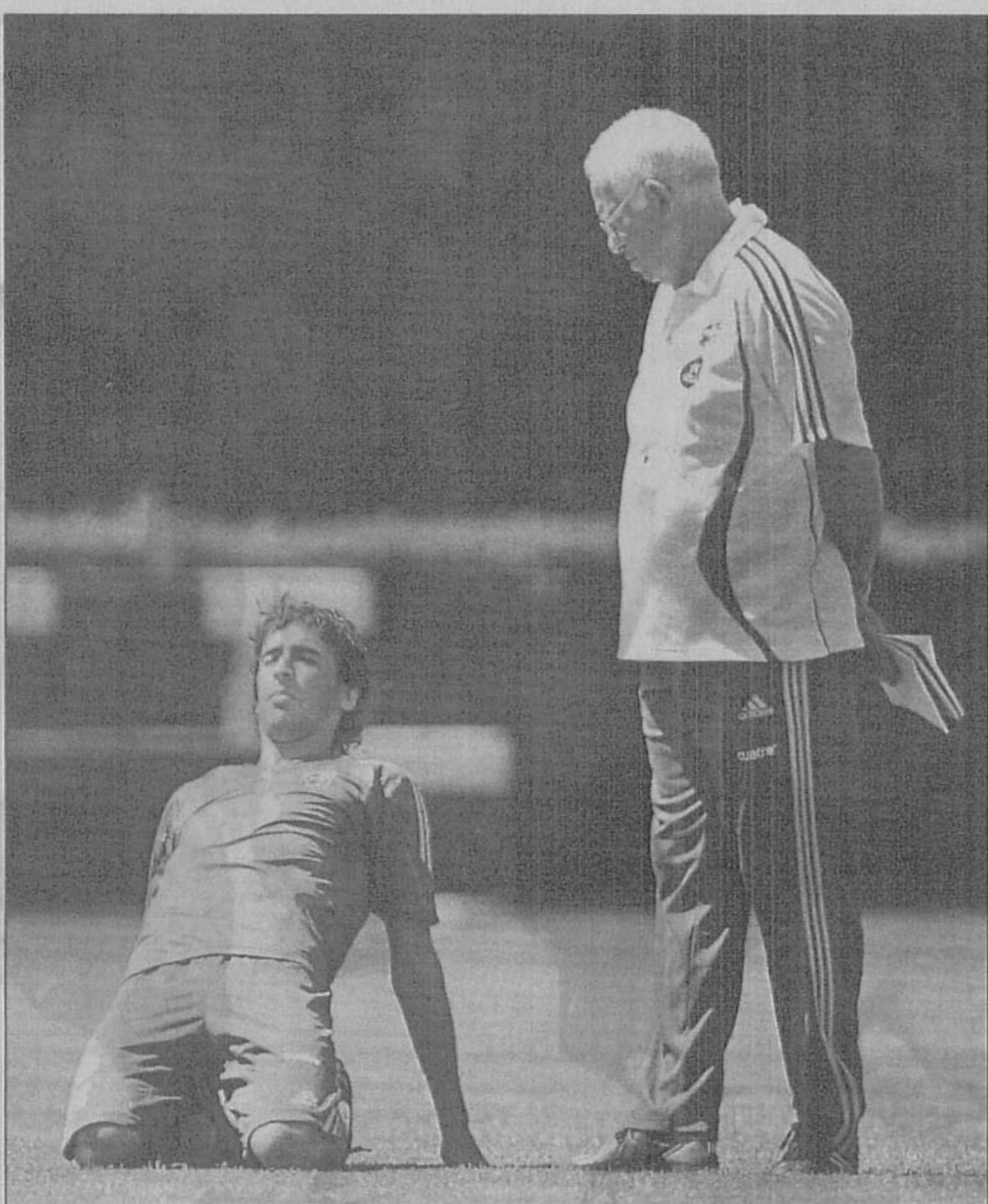
Barca manager Frank Rijkaard has no plans to keep the pacy forward, who is currently preparing for his country's second World Cup match against Serbia and Montenegro on Friday, and will either sell him or agree another loan move.

The European champions' sports director Txiki Begiristain told the club's website: "The situation with Saviola is closed, he does not interest us and I think that is quite clear."

"We will have to look for the best solution for both parties when the World Cup finishes."

Begiristain also admitted Eidur Gudjohnsen's signing from Chelsea this week may not be the last new arrival at the Catalan club this summer.

He added: "I cannot say categorically that we are not going to have any more new players because it is our responsibility to always keep an eye on the market."



Spanish forward Raul (L) stretches as coach Luis Aragones instructs during a training session in Kamen on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Raul facing WC wilderness

AFP, kamen

Spain returned to their team base here Thursday still on a high after their impressive 4-0 win over World Cup Group H rivals Ukraine but with star striker Raul down in the dumps.

Looking to erase their tag as perennial under-achievers by moving past the quarterfinals for the first time in 56 years, Spain face Tunisia on Monday in a bid to seal their place in the second round.

But while the football-mad Spaniards awake from the hangover of Wednesday's triumph in Leipzig, knowing their team are now real contenders, more than a few will spare a thought for Raul.

The country's record scorer, with 43 goals in 95 games, was confined to making a second half substitute appearance replacing two-goal hero David Villa of Valencia in the 55th minute.

And the Real Madrid striker, who

looked gloomy on Tuesday after learning he would not be starting the game, was just as subdued as he played down their heady start to the campaign.

"It's a great victory for the start of the World Cup, but we have to go step by step," said Raul.

"It will boost our confidence, but let's not get carried away. It's just the start."

Whether Raul gets to play any further part with Luis Aragones' youth-packed squad is a big question.

Despite a season hugely compromised by a three-month injury lay-off, Raul came off the bench and came close to scoring with a header that fell into the hands of Ukraine keeper Oleksandr Shovkovskiy.

However, when given the chance, Raul looked a pale imitation of the player whose speed and nose for goal once left many defenders bamboozled.

And by the end of the game his efforts were easily eclipsed by those of Atletico Madrid's Fernando Torres and Villa.

Torres, who is only 22 years old,

Pressing matters for coaches

AFP, berlin

National football coaches don't just have to plan their tactics for the next game at a World Cup they have to also think long and hard on how to play against their domestic press.

It is not just the English coach who has to cope with constant barrages -- though countless ones have had to deal with prying into their private lives unlike their foreign counterparts.

Sven-Goran Eriksson has dealt with it in a typically Buddhist-style with calm and tranquillity to the fore.

However the mantle of the most harassed national coach of recent times may fall to the French hotseat where four successive coaches have had a rough ride and seldom seemed capable of handling it.

Aime Jacquet started it all by going head to head with French sports paper L'Equipe who criticised him constantly and not only did he then guide France to the 1998 World Cup but he also sued them.

Roger Lemerre could expect no mercy from the press once he failed so catastrophically with the French in the 2002 finals, Jacques Santini passed through timidly, and now Raymond Domenech has taken up the mantle of lambasting the press while several players are publicly boycotting speaking to the journalists.

At the centre of the row with Domenech was the revealing of details of a closed training session which suggested the plan was to start Frank Ribery, the rising star of the team, for the first time in Tuesday's World Cup clash against Switzerland.

Two newspapers, L'Equipe and Le Parisien, carried the reports in their Monday editions, saying the Marseille player was set to replace David Trezeguet.

This prompted an astonishing outburst by Domenech at a tense eve of match press conference.

"I find this spying on a closed training session, when we're preparing for a game, just a 'scoop' sad and disappointing."

"I could understand if you had spied on the opposition but that our own media does it to us and tells everyone else I find that upsetting."

"The last training session is always the one where you finalise the team."

"I am sorry but it's a shame."

And if those Frenchmen thought they got a rough ride then their compatriot Henri Michel could tell them it gets a lot rougher in Africa as he has found out for the best part of 12 years.

In his latest incarnation as Ivory Coast coach he has taken them to the African Nations Cup final and to their first ever appearance at the World Cup finals -- but even a praiseworthy 2-1 defeat by Argentina in their opening match still had the press on his back.

"The 2006 World Cup: A personal defeat for Henri Michel," read one of the headlines as they laid into him over his failure to put Lens striker Aruna Dindane up front with Didier Drogba.

"I make my choices and that is why I am sitting here and you are sitting there," was the 57-year-old's curt response at one point to a journalist's question about his team selection.

"Journalists write about the news, and if I wasn't here what would you write about," he added.

Others take a different tack and prefer to take the credit when it is due

Italians ignorant about Americans

REUTERS, duisburg

Italy face the United States in World Cup Group E on Saturday but Marcello Lippi's players admit they have little clue about who they will be up against.

Of three Italian players asked what they knew about the American team, only midfielder Andrea Pirlo was able to name a single member of the USA squad.

"There is (Claudio) Reyna, who plays in Europe and then there is the other lad from PSV Eindhoven," said Pirlo, referring to midfielder DaMarcus Beasley.

"I don't know much about the players who don't play in Europe but we will watch some videos," added the Italy midfielder who scored the opening goal in Monday's 2-0 win over Ghana.

Striker Vincenzo Iaquinta, scorer of Italy's second against the Africans, knows even less about Bruce Arena's American side.

"I know very little about them, I know they have some players in Europe. Certainly they are a good side. We will be talking about them with the coach and watching the videos," said the forward.

Striker Alberto Gilardino said the USA team had not been a matter of discussion among the Italian squad.

"We haven't talked about them yet. This afternoon (Thursday) we will watch some videos. I know they like to play the ball around but we have two days to weigh them up," he said.

The USA lost their opening group game 3-0 to the Czech Republic.

Ghana practise in secrecy

INTERNET, undated

Ratomir Djukovic wants his players' full attention.

The Ghana coach closed practice Thursday at the team's training site in Wuertzburg in southern Germany. When fans and reporters gathered outside the gates for a peak of the Black Stars, the team bus and van blocked the view.

An elderly Ghanaian man, equipped with cow bells and a cassette recording of beating drums, was allowed to stay in the stadium. But a group of Turkish-speaking Germans who drove from Stuttgart to see Fenerbahce star Stephen Appiah arrived too late.

Time off for good show

AFP, kamen

Spain coach Luis Aragones rewarded his players by allowing them to spend Friday with their wives, girlfriends and children before resuming training in the early evening.

Spain got off to a perfect start in Group H with a 4-0 demolition job on Ukraine in Leipzig on Wednesday - a performance which confirmed Spain's status as real contenders.

At the very least, Spain look capable of breaking the 56-year hoodoo which has seen them fail to get past the quarter-final stages.

The next match for the perennial World Cup underachievers is against Roger Lemerre's Tunisia in Stuttgart on Monday.

On Friday, Spain were allowed a day of leisure before being called to an evening training session which has been scheduled for 1800 local time.

Spain will leave for Stuttgart on Sunday hoping to claim the three points that would secure qualification for the second round where, depending on whether they finish first or second, they will meet either the winner or runner-up of Group G.

Berlusconi re-elected Milan president

AFP, Rome

Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has been re-elected as president of Serie A side AC Milan, the club confirmed on Thursday.

Berlusconi was forced to step down from the position in December 2004 because of a potential conflict of interests with his role in the Italian government.

He had been president of the club since 1986 and presided over a glorious period which included four European Cup victories.

But Berlusconi returned at a time when the club is embroiled in the match-fixing scandals currently engulfing Italian football.

A club spokesman told AFP: "Silvio Berlusconi was re-elected as president at the assembly of the shareholders which was held on Thursday."

The woes of being Ronaldo

AP, koenigstein

Forget all the talk about proving everybody wrong at this World Cup. Ronaldo wasn't even able to get in shape for Brazil's opening match.

The 29-year-old striker has, indeed, overshadowed all his teammates so far -- including Ronaldinho, Kaka and Cafu -- but for all the wrong reasons.

His World Cup woes started with a weight controversy that even involved the Brazilian president. Then it was blisters on his foot and a mild respiratory infection. The latest was a visit to a hospital late Wednesday because of dizziness.

And then there was his dismal performance in Brazil's 1-0 opening win against Croatia on Tuesday, when he barely touched the ball and was replaced in the 69th minute.

"It's not written in my manual that I'm always supposed to play well," Ronaldo said Thursday, adding that all his problems are in the past, and that he was ready to play against Australia on Sunday.

"Sincerely, it bothers me, the repercussion of all of this," he said, and blamed the media for making a big deal out of what he called "small things."

But given Ronaldo's past with injuries and off-the-field problems, it's hard to believe something else won't come up.

For example, hours before the 1998 World Cup final, he had unexplained convulsions and had to be taken to a medical center. Tests were negative and he got back in time to play, but performed poorly. Brazil

lost 3-0 to host France.

A year later, Ronaldo seriously hurt his knee while playing with Inter Milan in the Italian league. He had surgery and was sidelined about four months.

His second knee injury -- which nearly ended his career -- came during his first match back in action, in the 2000 Italian Cup final. He badly twisted his knee just six minutes after entering the match, and wept as he was carried off on a stretcher. The injury also required surgery, and the rehabilitation kept him sidelined for nearly 17 months.

Many doubted Ronaldo would play at a high-level again, but he recovered nicely and was the key player in Brazil's run to a fifth title in 2002. He was the tournament's top scorer, netting eight goals in seven matches.

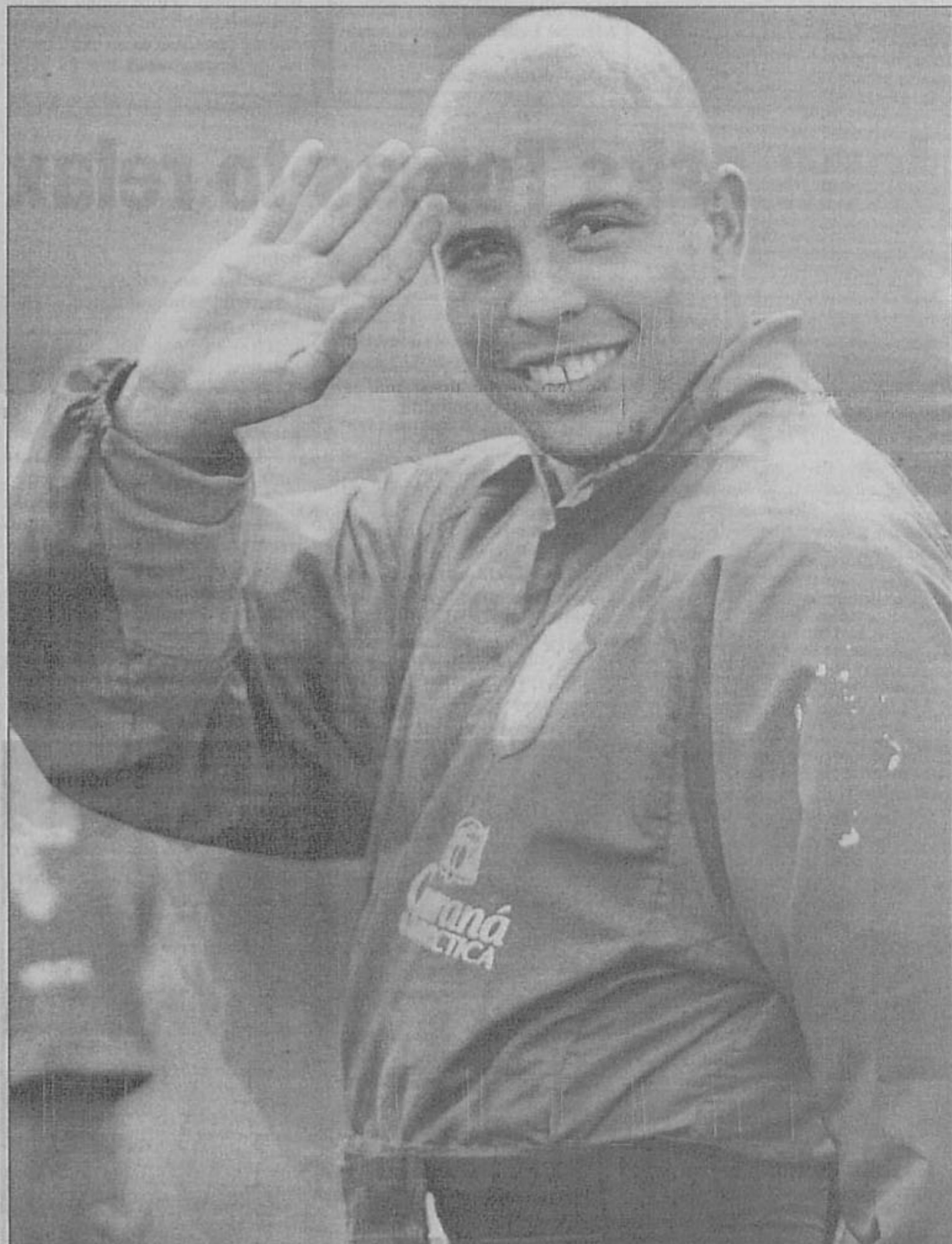
There was a period of calm for the superstar striker after that World Cup, but things began going downhill again as this year's tournament approached.

Real Madrid fans started to jeer him because of a series of bad performances, and a string of injuries kept him from playing in many matches. He netted only five goals in Real Madrid's first 19 games of the year and said he considered leaving the Spanish club because of the criticism.

Even Pele criticised him, as did former French star Michel Platini, who said Ronaldo "has too many kilos" and is "carrying too many kilos."

After arriving for Brazil's training camp admittedly overweight and not in form, Ronaldo was forced to leave a warm-up match because of blisters caused by defective soccer shoes.

A few days later he missed practice because of a mild respiratory



Brazil's under-fire striker Ronaldo jests during a training in Konigstein on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

Brazil disappoint Cruyff

AFP, stuttgart

Johan Cruyff, twice a World Cup finalist with the Netherlands in 1974 and 1978, said Thursday he had been "pleasantly surprised" by the opening games of this World Cup but disappointed by Brazil.

"The level of football is good across the board, even very good. Several teams are playing a much more attacking style than expected," said Cruyff, speaking here ahead of Friday's Group C match between the Netherlands and Ivory Coast.

"Italy, Spain and Ghana have really seduced me. However, I'm a little disappointed by the showings of Brazil, in particular, and Portugal."

"It was a real hash. Brazil showed very little (in scrambling to a 1-0 win over Croatia) and Portugal even less, but then we are only at the start of the tournament."

Cruyff praised the Germans, who have posted wins over Costa Rica (4-2) and Poland (1-0), as "very fresh,

very positive."

Van Basten has bid to bury the infighting that has bedeviled 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.

The Netherlands go into Friday's group of death match against Ivory Coast seeking a win that would almost certainly book their passage into the second round of the World Cup.

But Cruyff warned that the west Africans would provide stiff opposition.

"Ivory Coast surprised me against Argentina (despite losing 2-1). They have power and technique. But their inexperience was clearly a downside."

"They are undoubtedly dangerous opponents. They have not had their last word and I cannot wait to watch a match which should be very open."