



Combo of celebrating Argentine goalscorers (L-R) Maxi Rodriguez, Esteban Cambiasso, Rodriguez after his second goal, Carlos Tevez, Hernan Crespo and Lionel Messi against Serbia and Montenegro on Friday at Gelsenkirchen stadium.

Argentina eye path to glory



AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Argentina are cautiously eyeing the path ahead in the 2006 World Cup despite a dazzling display to secure qualification from Group C with a 6-0 humiliation of Serbia-Montenegro.

After their second game, the Argentinians emerged alongside Spain and the Czech Republic as the on-form sides in the tournament late Friday with a collective performance blending huge technical quality, speed, control and creative zest.

"This has practically assured qualification but no more than that," said captain Juan Pablo Sorin.

"We can celebrate victory, and by qualifying swiftly yet with caution it does remove the pressure we had in 2002. But the forthcoming games will be very tough, against the Netherlands and in the last eight too."

Goals from Maxi Rodriguez (2), Esteban Cambiasso, Hernan Crespo, substitutes Carlos Tevez and Lionel Messi sealed the fate of an unsettled Serbia-Montenegro team which was a pale shadow of the incisive side that qualified for Germany with a virtually clean sheet.

"We were playing six-a-side football," said Chelsea's Crespo, who scored one and supplied Esteban Cambiasso with a glorious back-heeled pass after a fluid cross-field team effort for Argentina's third.

Argentinian coach Jose Pekerman also had the opportunity to display the huge range he has available in his squad.

Albeit with Serbia reduced to ten men, his two second half substitutes, Corinthians firebrand forward Tevez and teenage hope Messi left their imprint on the game by scoring high quality goals and helping to create other chances.

Yet, the players they were replacing -- notably the every dynamic Javier Saviola, who earned applause from his teammates when he went off in the 59th minute -- were hardly

also-rans.

The injured Nemanja Vidic's absence from the centre of the Serb defence might have limited the scoreline, but it would barely have affected Argentina's victory such was the breadth of the South Americans' control.

"It's an absolutely terrible result, the worst in our history, and I've got take responsibility for it. I did what I could but nothing worked," said Serb coach Ilija Petkovic, who tried a host of substitutions to stem the tide.

"I don't want to point the finger at any player in particular."

Argentina's players also demonstrated the versatility prized by Pekerman, with midfielders turning into lethal goalscorers fed by forwards like Saviola and Crespo.

In response to their coach's complaint about losing possession against Ivory Coast, the Albicelestes powered diagonally from the wings and rarely tested their opponents with high balls forward.

Although the Serbs initially forged some inroads towards the Argentine goalmouth, they were stifled by a

well-organised defence that began at midfield.

"I just hope that Argentina can go on improving and can go on and do better each time," player of the match Juan Riquelme said.

In only 15 minutes on the pitch, Messi marked his return from injury with his first World Cup goal and gave flashes of his scintillating skill.

Under the eyes of a cigar-puffing Diego Maradona, who regards the 18 year-old as his heir, the young Barcelona forward also fed Crespo with an inch perfect curling cross for the fifth goal.

Ominously for other teams in Germany, Argentina has only scored as many goals in a World Cup final once before, at home in the first round against Peru in 1978. They then went on to win the tournament.

"We have a great team, a large number of good players, we feel like winning," said Pekerman, adding his usual note of caution about the next opponents on June 21 and afterwards.

Xavi enjoying spotlight



AFP, Kamen

Argentina's crushing 6-0 defeat of Serbia and Montenegro could have a positive effect on the ambitions of fellow World Cup contenders Spain, according to Barcelona midfielder Xavi.

Group H favourites Spain have been elevated by their voracious media from ambitious hopefuls to potential finalists after their impressive 4-0 defeat of Ukraine in their opening match on Wednesday in Leipzig.

Spain have in 56 years and nine previous attempts failed to get past the quarter-finals stage.

But after notching up their 23rd successive match unbeaten against Ukraine, Luis Aragones' rejuvenated side appears more than capable of breaking the hoodoo.

The whole of Spain can feel it too, and after their demolition job on Oleg Blokhin's debutants the Spanish media ran out of superlatives salivating over their World Cup potential.

But after Argentina overtook Spain's impressive scoring margin on Friday against a Serbia and Montenegro team that leaked only one goal in dominating Spain in the qualifiers - it was time for some perspective.

Spain play their second Group H encounter against 2004 African Nations Cup winners Tunisia on Monday, which could secure qualification for the second round.

However for the rest of the competition, Xavi believes Argentina's exploit could help ease the pressure.

"Argentina's win can be a good thing for us - it will help to calm some of the euphoria that has surrounded us since Wednesday," Xavi told reporters after the team's training session on Friday at which Aragones focused on the same starting lineup as he used against Ukraine.

Xavi, who has returned from an injury lay-off to lay claim to a midfield position that had been threatened by Arsenal's teenage sensation Cesc Fabregas, was almost flawless against Ukraine.

But while Spain should breeze past Tunisia - who have failed to win a match at the World Cup since their debut in 1978 and have their backs to the wall after a 2-2 draw with the group's anticipated whipping boys Saudi Arabia - Xavi believes Roger Lemerre's side should not be taken

for granted.

"It's obvious that on paper and historically Spain is superior than Tunisia," added the 26-year-old Barcelona midfielder.

"But we haven't seen much of them. We just know that Tunisia are perhaps more technically gifted than Ukraine."

"We have a few similarities, for example both teams play at quite a fast rhythm. Like us, they also like to hold on to the ball."

"We hope to qualify as of Monday, although we will go into the match with respect for Tunisia."

If Spain beat Tunisia on Monday then it is likely they will top Group H

following their final match against the Saudis on June 24.

That would pit them against the runner-up in Group G, which is currently wide open after 2002 semi-finalists South Korea's win over Togo and 1998 champions France's draw with Switzerland.

It's in the next match that things get complicated, with a possible quarter-final encounter against either Brazil, Italy, Croatia or the Czech Republic.

For the moment, Xavi admits it's all positive feelings in the Spain camp.

But he admits its working with Aragones that has opened his eyes to

their potential.

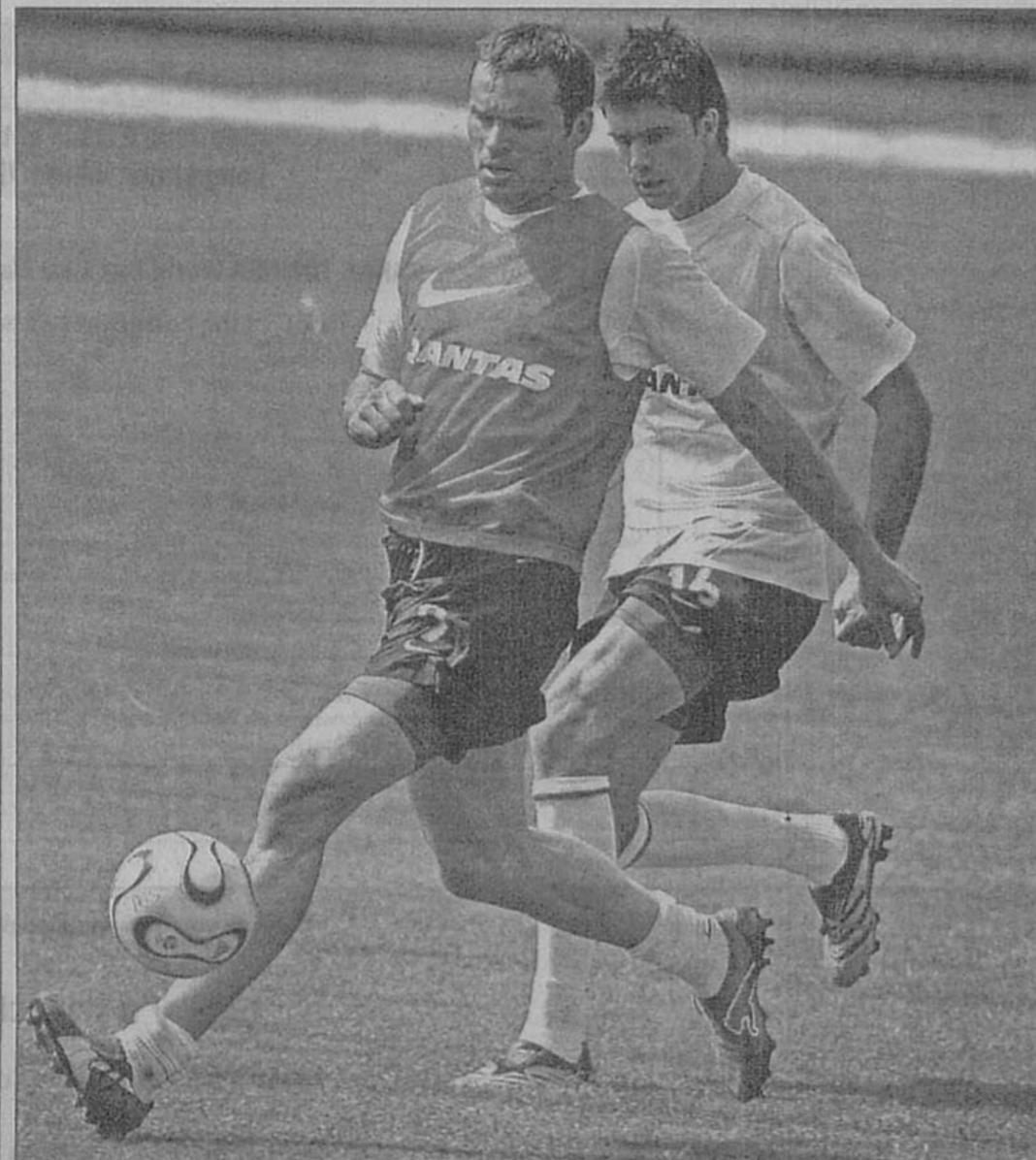
"It is totally different from other World Cup campaigns, where we haven't been able to get past the quarter-finals. But this time we hope that's not the case," he added.

"Since I've worked with Luis (Aragones), he's always tried to instil in me the importance of the technical side of football, as well as the importance of ball possession."

"And I think that's the best philosophy for the current team."

"He (Aragones) is a demanding coach, and knows exactly what he wants from each player."

"He lives and breathes football 24 hours a day."



Australian captain Mark Viduka (L) is shadowed by teammate Michael Beauchamp during their training session in Ohringen on Thursday.

Serbian press laments

AFP, Belgrade

Serbia-Montenegro's 6-0 drubbing at the hands of Argentina at the World Cup was received as a national catastrophe at home Saturday, with newspapers slamming the side across their front pages.

"Defeated and humiliated," read the headline in the influential Politika daily, underlying the fact that the defeat was "the worst in our history at such championships."

"They disgraced Serbia," read a banner headline in the daily Press written over a photo of desperate Serbia-Montenegro's players after the match.

"Only five minutes were needed to spoil the mood of tens of thousands Serbia-Montenegro's football fans, a half of hour to get them into depression and 90 minutes to leave them feeling outraged," the daily said.

Almost all Belgrade-based newspapers published photos of desperate or tearful fans watching the game at squares and open cafes in the capital.

"We have only ourselves to blame for what happened yesterday, regardless of the strength of the former world champions" Argentina, the sport daily Sportski Zurnal said.

"We were flying high and that's why the fall was so painful. Yesterday's shame in Gelsenkirchen brought us down to earth with a bump," it said, accusing the coach Ilija Petkovic of having making mistakes before the match.

Vecernje Novosti daily said the game was a "tango for everybody who enjoys football, but a total disaster for fans of our team."

"It turned out that the difference between the wishes and the capabilities of our team at this World Cup was too big," it said.

Ibrahimovic doubtful

AFP, Berlin

Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic could be forced to miss his country's Group B decider against England because a groin injury is not responding to treatment, coach Lars Lagerback said on Saturday.

"As things stand at the moment, it does not look as if he will be able to play," Lagerback said.

Juventus forward Ibrahimovic was withdrawn at half-time in the 1-0 win over Paraguay on Thursday, saying he had strained a groin muscle while warming up.

Sweden trail England by two points in Group B and need to win Wednesday's match in Cologne to finish top of the group.

England and Sweden's opponents in the next round, Germany and Ecuador, face off to decide the positions in Group A on the same day.

Lagerback said he would prefer to meet the South Americans.

"Both teams are strong, so it does not really matter who we play against. But Ecuador would perhaps be easier, because Germany have the home crowd behind them."

Brazil vulnerable: Viduka

AFP, Ohringen

Brazil showed in their hard-pressed 1-0 World Cup win over Croatia that they are vulnerable, Australian skipper Mark Viduka said here Friday.

"The game against Croatia showed that they are vulnerable in places," Viduka told reporters at team training.

"I thought Croatia should have got something out of that game, I thought they were the better team."

Viduka was asked if Australia could exploit the Brazilian defence out wide as Croatia did down the flanks.

"I don't know what to expect on Sunday, but they are not superheroes or anything like that, they're people like us and why not?" he said.

Viduka said it was a concern that Australia gave away four yellow cards in their exhilarating 3-1 win over Japan last Sunday.

"That's a bit of a concern for us, because a few of them were given out quite lightly, but we have to keep every man available for every game and we'll see how (coach) Gus Hiddink is going to re-arrange the team," he said.

Viduka said every game at the World Cup was a crunch one for the Australians, making their first finals' appearance in 32 years.

"You saw in the Japan game it was end-to-end stuff, in these games it's not like a league or anything, you have to go for it and that means you could be vulnerable as well. I think we have to go for it (against Brazil)."

Viduka said the manner of Australia's win over Japan, with their three goals coming inside the last eight minutes in energy-sapping heat in Kaiserslautern, had given his team a massive lift in confidence.

"To get the three points in the first game against Japan and in the manner that we did it gave everybody a big high afterwards," he said.

Marco hails fighting spirit



AFP, Stuttgart

Dutch coach Marco van Basten hailed the fighting spirit of his young team after they scraped past a gallant Ivory Coast for a 2-1 win here that ensured the Oranje a passage to the last 16.

Two goals midway through the first half from Robin van Persie and Ruud van Nistelrooy gave the Netherlands a cracking start to a pulsating game.

The African Nations Cup runners-up hit back with a wonder goal in the 38th minute from Bakary Kone but the Dutch defence then held out against wave after wave of Ivorian attack for the remainder of the game.

"We started very well. We played good football, created some chances and we scored two goals," said 41-year-old van Basten.

"But we sat back a bit and they came at us, started playing some football and made it difficult to the last minute."

"We were happy to end the game with a victory," said van Basten, whose side will now play Argentina, 6-0 winners over Serbia and Montenegro earlier Friday, in a dead game on Wednesday before going into the second round of 16 three days later.

The Dutch defence was stretched all over the park by the strong-running Africans in the second-half, but the coach said they did a good job in only conceding one goal.

"The defenders did a very good job. We only took one goal," said the former AC Milan and Dutch striking legend, who scored one of the greatest goals of all-time as the national side beat the then Soviet Union in the Euro 1988 final.

Ivory Coast coach Henri Michel said the result showed the gulf between the small and big nations at the World Cup.

"It's more than disappointing. We had a lot of hope going into this tournament," said the Frenchman, who took the Ivory Coast to the final of this year's African Nations Cup, the fourth finals in a row that he has successfully taken African teams to the finals.

"Everyone tells me this team plays great football. What's more important is the result. And the result was not good. We're out and that's the bottom line."

"It means that Ivory Coast are

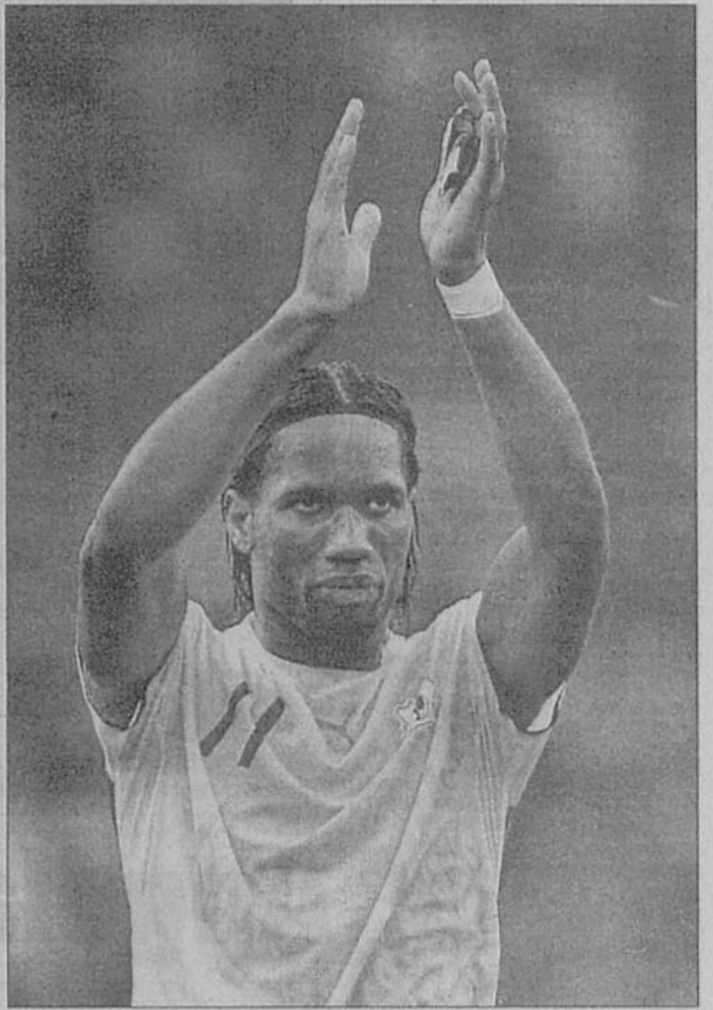
still not at the level of the big teams at the World Cup.

"We conceded four goals here and that is too much," added Michel, who refused to comment on his future and said he was focused only on their third Group C match.

Ivory Coast lost their opening match in the group of death against Argentina, also 2-1, and Michel said it would be very difficult to get

Captain Didier Drogba, whose second yellow card of the tournament will see him miss the Serb game, lamented the luck of the draw that saw his team pooled with such heavyweights as the Netherlands, Argentina and Serbia and Montenegro.

"The draw was fatal," the 28-year-old Chelsea striker said, also regretting his young team's lack of experience at big tournaments.



The World Cup is over for Ivory Coast striker Didier Drogba, who salutes the fans after their loss to the Netherlands in a Group C match at Stuttgart's Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium on Friday, following two yellow cards.

his team up and running for the game against the Serbs.

"When you're in our situation, it's very difficult to motivate the players, to tell them that they can't leave like that but leave with their heads held high," said Michel, who was forced to watch the Ivory Coast's home qualifiers from his home in Beirut because it was judged too dangerous for him to travel to the war torn country.

"We lost to great teams without being discredited. Despite the disappointment there are still some positives."

"I just hope this team will not be broken up because it has some real talent."

"We need to progress together and learn from the lessons of today's mistakes. Ivory Coast has a great future, I'm convinced by that."

Klinsmannia sets in



AFP, Berlin

Franz Beckenbauer has been at every match so far in the World Cup, but for the moment his thunder is being stolen by national coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

While Beckenbauer, nicknamed 'The Kaiser', is every inch a German patriot, he could be forgiven for feeling that his role as head of the organising committee is being steamrollered by the Klinsmann express after the German team reached the second round.

There is also a freedom and freshness in the German side for the first time in many years, even more so than the one that Beckenbauer coached to the 1990 World Cup title - a team that featured Klinsmann.

Many people put this down to the free spirit which the 41-year-old Klinsmann has developed since he made the United States his home - a

reason for some dissent from within German football circles and from Beckenbauer himself.

"Jurgen Klinsmann should have been here (for a football workshop in March). This is a meeting he had to make and there are not too many of them," said Beckenbauer.

Klinsmann, who was also called to account over that by several other notable figures and had to hold emergency talks over the issue of his absences, took note and announced shortly afterwards he would be spending more time in his homeland before the finals.

It was not the first time that the two had clashed and ironically it was when he was at Bayern Munich as a player that the two had a difference of opinion.

Though Beckenbauer did not name him specifically, he cited several players behaving as if they were playing for 'FC Hollywood'.

Klinsmann, 108-times capped and scorer of 47 goals for Germany, lives in California and defends his trips there on the basis that he is always in touch through e-mail.

The Berliner Zeitung dubbed him

'The California internet coach'.

Klinsmann knows the best way to answer the critics is by lifting the World Cup on July 9 and achieving his goal of emulating Beckenbauer by winning the World Cup as a player and manager.

Only three men have done that; Brazil's Mario Zagallo is the other.

Klinsmann doesn't lack confidence.

He said he had already booked hotel rooms for Berlin on July 9 (the day of the final); Beckenbauer has played a more cautious game and said a quarter-final spot is the very least they should achieve.

Since the tournament started, 60-year-old Beckenbauer's only criticism publicly expressed is his concern about the defence.

"We have been trying for several months to stiffen up the defence but it isn't really working," he said.

Beckenbauer has gone on the record to state that his greatest achievement was winning the bid race to host the World Cup - it would be the ultimate reward for him were Klinsmann to frank that by landing the trophy itself.

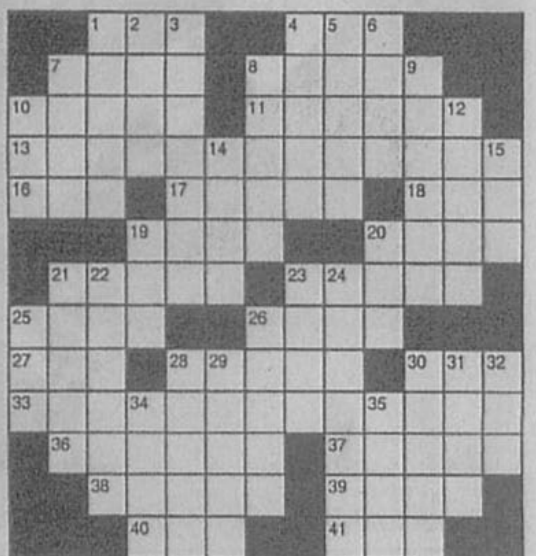
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 28 "Singin' in the Rain" star 30 Jalopy among boats 33 Piece of gym equipment 10 Sword part 11 Pals, below the border 13 Howe creation 16 Billboards 17 Roger Rabbit's ilk 20 Church array 21 Swindled 23 Operatives 25 Solid 26 Relaxation 27 I love: Latin

DOWN 12 Winter forecasts 14 Big bell 15 Type units 19 Silent 20 Chart format 21 He "says" 22 Bricklayer's tool 23 Casa division 24 Medium 25 Distant 26 Gantry or Fudd 28 Jack 29 Tree moth 30 Leg bone 31 Les Etats- 32 Wager 34 "As saying, ..." 35 Instrument of Marxism?

Solution time: 21 mins.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER 5-10



CRYPTOQUIP
P C B Q H C L P V D O S F D S T B
D H X S H P B Q D O H L I D F L
V T H L P Q B W W L Q D H X S H
N D S V Q P ' N A D - N D N I D A D O .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU SUPERVISED THE AFFAIRS OF A NEVERLAND RESIDENT, I'D SAY YOU'RE A PAN HANDLER.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals M
The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.