



HAI HAI SIR IS LEAVING! Germany's Michael Ballack (L) and Bastian Schweinsteiger share a light moment as coach Jurgen Klinsmann (R) walks away during a training session in Berlin on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

ECUADOR V GERMANY Fight for top spot

AFP, Berlin

Hosts Germany are ready to run the risk of suspensions and fatigue as they go all out to finish top of their World Cup group with a win over Ecuador in Berlin on Tuesday.

Both Germany and Ecuador have already qualified for the last 16 after enjoying wins over Costa Rica and Poland and their duel will decide who wins the group.

A draw would see Ecuador finish top courtesy of their superior goal difference so Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann is set to go for the jugular.

That means Germany captain Michael Ballack starting the match even though another yellow card would rule him out of the second round tie.

Ballack's importance was evident when he returned against Poland after missing the opening 4-2 win over Costa Rica.

With the captain back running the midfield, Germany played a much more disciplined game and clinched a 1-0 win with a goal from Oliver Neuville in stoppage time.

"We will take the Ecuador game seriously. We want to keep our rhythm going and Michael Ballack will play," Klinsmann revealed.

Defender Christoph Metzelder, a doubt after injuring his knee in training, and winger David Odonkor are also walking the suspension tightrope.

In contrast Ecuador are set to rest some key players with man-

ager Luis Suarez claiming they are tired.

"I will change the entire team if they are not fit enough for this tough match against Germany, but I don't think that will be necessary," Suarez said.

"The only thing I can be sure of is that the 11 men I field against Germany will be the best team I have. We want to beat Germany."

In truth, the significance of finishing first remains to be seen with the winner scheduled to face the Group B victor where England and Sweden are slugging it for top spot later on the same day.

As it stands Germany would play England and Ecuador would take on Sweden.

"I am not thinking of who we can meet in the last 16. You have to

look forward but there is no point in looking too far ahead," Klinsmann said.

"We just want to concentrate on beating Ecuador and finishing top of the group so we can play in the bigger stadium."

Germany will play in Munich's intimidating ground should they finish first while Stuttgart will be the venue if they end up second.

While Klinsmann insists he does not care who the next opponent is, some of his players are keen to avoid a last 16 match-up against old foe England.

"We cannot pick who we want in the last 16. We have had big games against England in the past and we would rather play them later on," said defender Philipp Lahm.

But Ecuador are up first and Klinsmann admits he has been impressed by a team that have scored five goals and are yet to concede.

"Ecuador are the third best team in South America behind Brazil and Argentina. I think they are showing that here," said the former Monaco striker.

"People said they could only win at altitude in Quito but they have proved that is not the case."

It is Germany's first game in Berlin and the hosts aim to put on a show in the capital.

"We want to give the 80,000 fans in Berlin a treat with a win over Ecuador," added Klinsmann.

They then hope to be back at the venue for the final on July 9.

TEAMS

Ecuador (4-4-2)

12-Cristian Mora; 4-Ulises de la Cruz, 3-Ivan Hurtado, 17-Giovanny Espinoza, 18-Neicer Reasco; 8-Edison Mendez, 20-Edwin Tenorio, 14-Segundo Castillo, 16-Luis Antonio Valencia; 11-Agustin Delgado, 10-Ivan Kaviedes

Germany (4-1-2-1-2)

1-Jens Lehmann; 3-Arne Friedrich, 21-Christoph Metzelder, 17-Per Mertesacker, 16-Philipp Lahm; 19-Bernd Schneider, 8-Torsten Frings, 13-Michael Ballack, 7-Bastian Schweinsteiger; 20-Lukas Podolski, 11-Miroslav Klose

Ballack won't hold back

REUTERS, Berlin

Michael Ballack said on Sunday he would play his usual aggressive game against Ecuador in Germany's final group game, even though he is threatened by suspension after picking up a yellow card.

"It's very difficult to hold back at the World Cup," the Germany captain said at a news conference. "We want to win this game, play well and keep our confidence high."

"You need consistency and stability in defence" - Ballack

"Strong tackling is part of the game."

Germany have ruled out resting Ballack for Tuesday's match at the Olympiastadion, when they will have to beat Ecuador to secure first place in Group A.

Another yellow card would rule Ballack out of the second round match, which is likely to be against Sweden or England.

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'Bring on the English'

THE GUARDIAN

Michael Ballack insists Germany will not fear England, should the two teams meet in the second round. The countries will face each other in the last 16 if England finish top of Group B and the host nation end as runners-up in Group A - or vice-versa.

"We are certainly not afraid of [England] and I don't think they are afraid of us either," Ballack said. "If we can add to our good performances we will have much more confidence for a potential meeting with England."

"You can build respect through good performances and that is what we have done thus far. We want to do the same in the game against Ecuador [tomorrow] and not think about England, Sweden or Trinidad & Tobago right now. For us it is important to have a good game against Ecuador and then they will automatically have some respect for us. A win would fur-

ther boost our confidence."

Although England are favourites to top their group, Ballack is still wary of the threat posed by Sweden. The Germany captain added: "The favourites are England or Sweden and we expect those two teams to advance. I think they are on the same level right now. They both have great individuals who can make the difference."

Germany's passage through the draw is likely to be more difficult than in 2002 when they reached the final by beating Paraguay, USA and South Korea in the knockout stages. This time it could be England followed by a quarter-final match with Argentina. "It can get very tough," Ballack said, "but we are well prepared. If we remain in the right frame of mind then we can keep up with the likes of England or Argentina."

The assistant coach Joachim Low confirmed Ballack will play against Ecuador even though he will be suspended for the second-

round match if he is booked. "After missing out on the opener, it is now important for him to find his rhythm," Low said. "But we will speak to him to make sure he does not commit any unnecessary fouls."

Ballack was forced to miss the 2002 final against Brazil after being shown a yellow card in the semi-final minutes before scoring the late winner that sent Germany through.

Germany's president, Horst Koehler, has welcomed his country's flag-waving - a display of national pride rare since the second world war - as evidence that it is now more relaxed. "I would not yet evaluate this as if flag intoxication were sweeping the country," Koehler said, "but rather as an indication that the country is continuing to become more normal, that people are now pointing in a more relaxed way to their flag and decorating themselves with it. We should find that good."

Recognition near impossible

AFP, Berlin

Germany manager Jurgen Klinsmann admits the people in the United States do not recognise him when they see him in the street and believes that will not change even if he guides the hosts to World Cup glory on July 9.

Since retiring from playing football the 41-year-old Klinsmann chose to make the United States his home running a sports marketing company in California.

Asked on whether winning the World Cup would make him famous in his adopted homeland, Klinsmann replied in Die Welt newspaper: "Definitely not because football is sport number seven or eight in the United States."

Basketball, American football, ice hockey and baseball are just some sports that are more popular than football in America.

"In Los Angeles when I get off the plane no-one knows me. Not even the taxi drivers," explained Klinsmann, who won the 1990

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DON'T TRY THAT IN THE MATCH: Ecuador forward Ivan Kaviedes (L) tricks with the ball as fellow striker Felix Borja looks on during a training session in Bad Kissingen on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP



WILL THE ROOSTER CROSS THE GROUP? A young French supporter sports a hat with a cock, which is their national mascot, prior to the game between France and South Korea in Leipzig on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Ecuador sans stars

AFP, Bad Kissingen

Ecuador are set to take on host nation Germany in their Group A decider on Tuesday without striker Carlos Tenorio and midfielder Luis Valencia and forward Agustin Delgado is said to be a doubt.

"Some of the guys are very tired or affected by injuries," coach Luis Suarez said on Friday as the team returned to their training base after the emphatic 3-0 win over Costa Rica that sealed their first ever place in the last 16.

Valencia and Tenorio, who scored his second goal of the tournament against Costa Rica, both have injured ankles.

Giovanny Espinoza was nursing a knock and Delgado, who also scored his second of the tournament against

the Costa Ricans, has been suffering constant knee and back pains.

"I will change the entire team if they are not fit enough for this tough match against Germany, but I don't think that will be necessary," Suarez said.

"The only thing I can be sure of is that the 11 men I field against Germany will be the best team I have. We want to beat Germany."

Both teams have six points, but a draw against Germany in Berlin's Olympic Stadium would be enough to guarantee Ecuador top spot in the group because they have a superior goal difference.

Group B duo England or Sweden await them in the last 16 depending on the outcome of their final group match.

Klinsmann's future in his own hands

AFP, Leipzig

Whether Jurgen Klinsmann stays on as German coach after the World Cup is down to him alone, the German Football Federation (DFB) said on Sunday.

"An extension of his contract just depends on him," said DFB co-chairman Theo Zwanziger.

"If we go out of the tournament to a big opponent in the second round it won't throw everything into doubt. But I know that Klinsmann's criteria (for staying) are higher than my own," Zwanziger admitted.

Klinsmann is looking for at least a place in the last eight, which is what 1990 winning coach Franz Beckenbauer has also defined as the minimum target.

The 1990 World Cup-winning striker under Beckenbauer had no coaching experience when he took

the job two years ago.

In media reports on Sunday 41-year-old Klinsmann said he would "see how things go during the tournament" and added that "I will decide whether to continue after consulting my wife and children."

His contract runs out after the tournament.

The Germans, who reached the final against all expectations in 2002 under predecessor Rudi Voller, have already booked their passage to the last 16 with wins over Costa Rica and Poland and Zwanziger said the team's showing to date was "very satisfying."

On Tuesday they meet Ecuador to determine which of the two countries wins Group A.

Klinsmann also said Sunday he thought assistant Joachim Low would make a good successor when the time came.

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