

PORTUGAL V MEXICO

Draw will suffice

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Mexico have one foot in the World Cup second round, but will be casting uneasy glances over their shoulders as they prepare to take the last step against Portugal on Wednesday.

Held to a surprise draw by Angola, Mexico can still be beaten to second place in Group D if they lose and the African debutants thrash Iran.

While a goal avalanche appears unlikely from Angola, who are yet to score, Mexico are taking nothing for granted.

"There is no other option than to defeat Portugal," said defender Carlos Salcido. "We must make no mistake this time."

Elimination would be a cruel blow for Mexico, who topped the group after the opening games.

They have had mixed fortunes here, matched for 45 minutes before subduing Iran 3-1 and frustrated by Angola last week.

However, they refused to be disheartened by the goalless encounter in Hanover.

"The game against Portugal is going to be more difficult but we're ready and we're capable of winning the game," said midfielder Pavel Pardo.

"Football is like life; you have good days and bad days, and tonight didn't go well for us."

Coach Ricardo Lavolpe also has faith in a team, which has beaten both Brazil and Argentina over the past two years.

"I think generally we have an idea about football. The team moves around very well. When we play against any team we need to focus on ourselves, not so much on the opposition," he said.

The Central Americans are gunning to make it past the quarter-finals for the first time in 13 attempts.

They will be boosted by signs that Portugal, already qualified

with maximum points from their two games, will take a more relaxed approach to the match.

"Against Mexico we can be calmer, we can rest some players and then we'll have to see what happens in the last 16," said their coach Luiz Felipe Scolari.

However, a dreadful record against European opponents points to the potential for a nasty surprise.

Mexico have won just one of their last 10 World Cup matches against European sides. In four of their five forays past the first round, their campaign floundered against teams from Europe.

Portugal will also be keen to continue their winning streak, and not just for reasons of pride. Winning Group D is likely to mean missing a date with free-scoring Argentina, favourites to top the parallel Group C.

Portugal are expected to win the match, despite Mexico's status as group seeds and their fourth place in FIFA's unreliable ranking system.

Under Scolari, who coached Brazil to the 2002 title, Portugal reached the Euro 2004 final and they have now qualified for the knock-out stages for the first time since 1966.

TEAMS

Portugal (4-2-3-1)
1-Ricardo, 13-Miguel, 16-Ricardo Carvalho, 5-Fernando Meira, 14-Nuno Valente, 8-Armando Petit, 18-Maniche, 17-Cristiano Ronaldo, 7-Luis Figo, 11-Simao Sabrosa, 21-Nuno Gomes

Mexico (5-3-2)
1-Oswaldo Sanchez, 16-Mario Mendez, 4-Rafael Marquez, 5-Ricardo Osorio, 3-Carlos Salcido, 14-Gonzalo Pineda, 6-Gerardo Torrado, 7-Antonio Naelson Zinha, 8-Pavel Pardo, 10-Guillermo Franco, 19-Omar Bravo

Mexico unfazed by stars

AFP, Goettingen

Mexico say they are unfazed by taking on Portugal's array of stars such as Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo in their crucial Group D encounter in Gelsenkirchen on Wednesday.

Portuguese coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, who led Brazil to the 2002 title, is keeping his starting line-up under wraps but that does not worry the Mexicans, who have to go for the win after only following up a win over Iran with a draw against Angola.

"It shouldn't matter to Mexico whether Figo, Cristiano Ronaldo, Deco or Pauleta play. We know they are important players who make a difference for Portugal, but what

matters for us is that Mexico go out there and win to take first place in the group," said Mexico's Argentine-born Villarreal striker Guillermo Franco.

Mexico, nicknamed the 'Tri' after their tricolor flag, have put themselves under pressure with the Angola stalemate.

"A win is vital as that's the only result which really serves our purpose. Although a draw might well see us reach the next round we are only thinking of winning," said midfielder Pavel Pardo.

Mexico believe Portugal may hand a chance to a few of their fringe players but Pardo said that that would not make the task any easier for the 'Aztecs'.

"It could be more dangerous as

the reserves will want to grab their chance of holding down a first team place - against us they might have that chance."

For defender Carlos Salcido "the Portuguese will certainly keep back a few players for the next phase," where they could meet Argentina or The Netherlands.

For Franco, whatever the outcome of the Portugal match, future rivals "know that in any event they have a tough opponent in Mexico."

Four years ago Mexico, quarter-finalists on home territory in 1970 and 1986, won their group at Italy's expense and looked set to do more damage but they then slid out to the United States.



CAN YOU DO IT NOW? Mexico forward Omar Bravo (R), who scored two goals against Iran, shares a smile with attacking midfielder Jesus Arellano during their team training session in Goettingen on Monday.

Borgetti misses out

AP, Goettingen

Jared Borgetti will miss Mexico's Group D finale against Portugal on Wednesday with a torn left thigh muscle, though the team hopes to have him back if it qualifies for the World Cup's second round.

Dr. Jose Luis Serrano, the team physician, said Monday night that Borgetti would not be able to play for the next four to five days. If Mexico advances to the round of 16, its next game would be Saturday or Sunday against either Argentina or the Netherlands.

"The muscle is 75 to 80 percent healed, and fortunately we found only a little inflammation of the tendon," Serrano said during a news conference at the team's training site. "This is a good result."

Borgetti missed El Tri's scoreless draw with Angola on Friday, and trainer Milton Graniolatti was the first to confirm that the forward's injury would keep him out of the

last group game. "He cannot play for this game against Portugal," Graniolatti said after the team's midday training session on Monday. "But there's hope he will play in the next game."

Borgetti, who underwent a second MRI examination on Monday, did not attend the practice session. He did some light jogging in Sunday's training but did not take part in scrimmages or drills.

The forward spent Monday doing rehab, including riding a stationary bicycle and swimming, Serrano said. Borgetti's progress will be evaluated each day.

"The ideal thing, for me, is another five days," Serrano said. "We would be able to say that with those five days more, we would consider him 100 percent recuperated."

The 33-year-old Bolton striker, whose 38 career international goals lead El Tri, was hurt while chasing

down a loose ball early in the second half of Mexico's 3-1 win over Iran on June 11.

Two other key players are also nursing minor injuries, but Serrano said both should be ready to play against Portugal.

Defender Rafael Marquez, Mexico's captain, had muscle spasms in his right thigh against Angola, and attacking midfielder Antonio Naelson - better known as Zinha - banged up his right knee in a collision during the game.

Marquez was also hampered a bit by fatigue, Serrano said, after going straight from FC Barcelona's Champions League-winning campaign into preparations for the World Cup.

Mexico goes into Wednesday's game with four points, second in Group D. Portugal, the group leader with six points, has beaten Angola 1-0 and Iran 2-0. Mexico could win the group by beating



RING-A-RINGAROSIES: Portugal players (L to R): Cristiano Ronaldo, Petit, Nuno Valente and Helder Postiga juggle a ball while holding hands during a team training session in Marienfeld on Monday.

Portugal take it slow He can do anything

AFP, Frankfurt

Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari refused to get ahead of himself after taking Portugal into the World Cup knock-out stages for the first time since 1966.

Scolari said Portugal would take it one game at a time after recording their second successive victory with a 2-0 win over Iran.

"It's only the second time Portugal has qualified for the second round in 40 years but we have to look at it game by game," he said.

"Against Mexico we can be calmer, we can rest some players and then we'll have to see what happens in the last 16."

"We always want more and we hope with today's performance, which was much than against Angola, we might be viewed by our opponents as a team to be reckoned with."

Scolari would not be drawn on whether he would rather face Argentina or the Netherlands, who will fight it out for the top spot in

Group C on Wednesday. Portugal will play the runners up in that group if they are not beaten by Mexico the same day.

"I don't have a preference -- my preference is for Portugal to qualify," Scolari said.

But he said the Euro 2004 finalists, regarded as outsiders here, had the potential to spring a surprise in the last 16.

"All the teams are very balanced and very even, they're in good condition. There are five or six teams which I believe are the best, they might be playing very well but one day they can have an off-day and be eliminated."

"So there's no point in choosing, you have to play your game."

Deco, whose magical finish from 25 yards finally penetrated Iran's defence in the 63rd minute, said Scolari had drilled it into the team not to look too far ahead.

"Our objective was first to take

AFP, Marienfeld

Portugal goalkeeper Ricardo said on Monday that he would strip down to his underwear if it helped win a World Cup penalty shoot-out.

Ricardo unusually removed his gloves during Portugal's penalties win over England in the Euro 2004 quarter-finals, when he saved from Darius Vassell before thumping home the winning kick himself.

"That wasn't something planned, it was totally spontaneous," Ricardo said.

"But for the team to qualify I would even take my trousers off." He added that Portugal were working hard on their spot-kicks with the knock-out stages looming.

Portugal head into Wednesday's final Group D game against Mexico after securing their place in the last 16 with wins against

Angola and Iran. "We've been practising penalties," Ricardo said.

Ricardo was controversially picked ahead of long-time Portugal keeper Victor Baia by coach Luiz Felipe Scolari for Euro 2004.

But he grew in stature after his quarter-final heroics, and has now become the first Portuguese goalkeeper to open a World Cup with two clean sheets.

"That's nice but the most important thing is that we have got a place in the last 16," Ricardo said. "But I feel really proud we kept our door shut."

Rising star Miguel, who terrorised Iran's defence in Saturday's 2-0 win with his runs from right back, heaped praise on Scolari for taking Portugal into the knock-out stages for the first time in 40 years.

He said Scolari, who coached

Brazil to the world title in 2002, had improved Portugal's preparations and worked to stamp out the fragility that saw them flop in 1986 and 2002.

"Scolari gives us a psychological advantage," he said. "Now we have learned to take every game as seriously as we should."

The last time Portugal qualified from the group stage was in 1966, when thanks to Eusebio's nine goals they reached the semi-finals before being beaten by eventual champions England.

They floundered in a relatively easy group in 1986 and were surprisingly sent packing in 2002 after defeats to the United States and South Korea.

Portugal needs only a draw against Mexico to finish top of Group D and avoid a likely match-up with Argentina, the tournament's most impressive team so far.

Option draw is dangerous

REUTERS, Goettingen

Mexico cannot risk banking on a draw against Portugal in their last World Cup Group D game on Wednesday and must aim to win if they are to reach the second round, defender Mario Mendez said.

A point against Portugal will guarantee Mexico a place in the last 16 but defeat could spell the end of their tournament.

If Angola beat Iran and Mexico lose, the Africans and North Americans will be divided only by goal difference.

"We want to win the next match, I think if you get there thinking of only getting a point you might lose," Mendez told reporters on Monday.

"In this situation, anything can happen and you must be careful."

Mendez's teammate, midfielder Pavel Pardo, agreed that Mexico had to try to beat the Portuguese.

"We must win and we must qualify and that's all that is on our minds," Pardo said.

"Mathematics, whether we finish first or second, or who we might play next, does not concern us. It's all about winning."

Mexico beat Iran 3-1 in their opening match but were held scoreless by Angola, giving the Africans their first point on their debut at a World Cup.

Portugal have already reached the second phase after two wins while Iran will be heading home after two defeats.



JUST ONE AUTOGRAPH PLEASE! A German fan is being chased by a security officer as she runs onto the pitch seeking autographs of Australian players during the Soccerros training session in Ohringen on Monday.