

Heartbreak for Gaz?

INTERNET, undated
England defender Gary Neville is bracing himself for the possibility of more World Cup heartbreak.

Neville missed the 2002 tournament in Japan with a broken metatarsal and will have a scan on Wednesday to determine the extent of the calf injury picked up in training ahead of last week's clash with Trinidad and Tobago.

The Manchester United full-back has already been ruled out of the final group match with Sweden and the chances of him being fit to participate in the second round at the weekend are receding.

Neville has not even been able to undertake any gentle running and his match fitness will also come into question if he is absent for much longer.

He suffered a hamstring injury in the World Cup warm-up international with Hungary three weeks ago and looked rusty in the World Cup opener against Paraguay when he won his 80th cap.

Neville, 31, looked a disconsolate figure sitting in the team dug-out on Monday evening while his team-mates went through their final training session before facing the Swedes.

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson confirmed: "Gary Neville has not started running yet. He will have a scan on Wednesday. It will decide if he can start running -- or not.

"Will he play in the second round? We hope so -- but we are not sure. Hopefully he will do running on Wednesday or Thursday but let's see what the scan says."

Jamie Carragher will again deputise in Neville's rightback role against Sweden and wants to keep his place, but he has sympathy for Neville's plight.

Gonzalez fit for qtrs

REUTERS, Germany

Argentina midfielder Luis Gonzalez, injured during the 6-0 rout of Serbia and Montenegro, should be fit for the quarterfinals if they reach that stage, a member of the team staff said on Sunday.

Gonzalez suffered a groin injury in the first half of the Group C match in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

"If Argentina qualify for the quarterfinals, (Gonzalez) should be okay. The injury is less serious than we feared at first," physical trainer Gerardo Salorio told Reuters.

"The rest of the lads are fine, without any problems."

Gonzalez warmed up with the rest of the squad during Sunday's training session but did not take part in any of the exercises with the ball or practice games.

Argentina, top of Group C on goal difference, are preparing for their final first-round match against Netherlands in Frankfurt on Wednesday which will decide the group winners.

"It's going to be a nice match because both teams play good football," midfielder Javier Mascherano said.

Argentina beat Ivory Coast 2-1 in their first match while the Dutch defeated Serbia & Montenegro 1-0. Netherlands then beat Ivory Coast 2-1 on Friday.

If Jose Pekerman's team beat the Dutch or draw they will stay top and play the runners-up in Group D in the second round match in Leipzig on Saturday. If they finish second, they will face the Group D winners in Nuremberg next Sunday.

Portugal have already qualified from Group D while Mexico are the favourites to take the other spot.

FIFA resolves pay row

INTERNET, undated

FIFA have stepped in to end the row over Togo players' pay demands by agreeing to pay the squad's bonuses directly.

The players had threatened to boycott their remaining World Cup matches because they feared the Togo football federation would not keep their promise to pay the bonuses after the tournament.

FIFA have now agreed to pay the players' bonuses directly rather than pay the federation first and leave it to them to pass the money on to the squad.

The action means Togo's last match against France on Friday in Cologne will now go ahead although after their 2-0 defeat by Switzerland yesterday the west African side are unable to qualify for the next round.

FIFA communications director Markus Sieglar said: "It is in the form of an advance to Togo, so the situation should now calm down."

The players wanted \$110,000 each to play in the tournament, plus \$21,000 each for a win and \$11,000 per draw.



Argentine skipper Juan Pablo Sorin (R) heads the ball as teenage sensation Lionel Messi looks on at Herzogs Park training camp in Herzogenaurach on Tuesday ahead of their match against Holland.

Stats don't bother Messi



REUTERS, Herzogenaurach

Lionel Messi said he took little notice of statistics after discovering he had become the sixth youngest goalscorer in the history of the World Cup and the youngest Argentine to play in the tournament.

The gifted forward, who turns 19 on June 24, marked his World Cup debut with the last goal in Argentina's 6-0 rout of Serbia and Montenegro in Gelsenkirchen on Friday, a Group C victory that put the South Americans in the second round.

"Sincerely, I don't think about (statistics)," Messi told reporters on Saturday. "I'm happy that I played, for myself, but I don't think about those things."

"I was lucky to make my World Cup debut and on top of that score a goal."

Pele is the youngest World Cup scorer of all time, the great Brazilian having netted at the age of 17 years and 239 days.

The previous youngest Argentine to play in the tournament was Roberto Luis Iraneta, who was 19 when his side lost to Sweden 3-2 in May 1934.

Messi, the best player at last year's World Youth Cup won by Argentina in Netherlands, won his eighth senior cap on Friday and scored his second international goal.

He said he was pleased to get off the mark at the tournament after sitting out Argentina's opening 2-1 win over Ivory Coast in Hamburg a week ago.

"It was in a World Cup I got to play my first official (competitive) match since my injury," Messi said referring to the pulled thigh muscle

he suffered with Barcelona three months ago.

There had been much talk in the Argentine media since the start of the World Cup about when coach Jose Pekerman would let Messi off the leash.

"When I went on (Pekerman) asked me to play up front, moving about with Carlos (Tevéz) and Hernan (Crespo)," he said.

Twice former champions Argentina were 3-0 up when Messi came on for the last 15 minutes of a match they completely dominated. They scored three more goals with Messi on the field and he played a part in all three, ending with his own in the 88th.

"The truth is we had a great match but we still haven't achieved anything," said Messi.

"We have to keep improving things to play better each day because we're going to get much more complicated matches which, if you lose, you go back home."

Aragones keeps smiling



AFP, Stuttgart

Spain coach Luis Aragones had a wry smile on his face as he shot down suggestions that Group H rivals Tunisia had forced his team into a corner here Monday.

Spain, who are bidding to get past the quarterfinals for the first time in 56 years, produced a commanding second half performance to recover from a 1-0 deficit to waltz off deserved 3-1 winners.

Despite Spain's complete domination of their rivals, Tunisia coach Roger Lemerre rejected claims that his team have collapsed under the weight of the Spanish attack.

"First of all we have to digest this reverse," said the Frenchman, who celebrated his 65th birthday on Sunday.

"To say that in the second half we collapsed is wrong, I don't think so."

"Spain had a few key chances, but I don't think we collapsed at all. Overall Tunisia can be proud of their efforts, I sincerely believe

to get back in to the match and

go on to win it was very important for us and for the rest of the tournament," he said.

Aragones, as he had forewarned, admitted Tunisia had caused his side problems.

But he did not agree with suggestions Spain had been backed into a corner.

"I said that Tunisia posed a threat," said the 67-year-old.

"We weren't in a corner. On the contrary -- there were two counter attacks by Tunisia, and that gave them a couple of chances to score."

Aragones is known as a master tactician, and he was forced to act when Lemerre tried to outfox him by playing an extra midfielder in a diamond formation.

"For me, Roger Lemerre is an intelligent and extraordinary coach and when he put an extra man in midfield it upset our plans."

"We were playing far too long in the first half."

"When Cesc (Fabregas) came on beside Xavi and Raul also came on we started to create chances."

"We don't have big, two-metre tall players, but we do have Raul who can react quickly."

"The way Cesc and Raul interpreted our kind of game worked perfectly."

Delighted Kuhn eyes last 16

AFP, Dortmund

Switzerland had one foot in the World Cup second round after Monday's 2-0 win here over Togo left Kobi Kuhn's inexperienced progressive side needing just a point from their remaining group game.

Goals in either half from Alexander Frei and Tranquillo Barnetta lifted Kuhn's youngsters to the top of the table on goal difference and ended Togo's slim hopes of pursuing their turbulent World Cup adventure beyond the first round.

Togo bow out of their first World Cup against 1998 champions France, the third team still in the chase for a last 16 berth from Group G, on Friday.

Kuhn, who was sent home by Switzerland from the 1966 World Cup after breaking a curfew, summed up his class of 2006's performance as doing well -- but will do a lot better.

"For a long time we made far too many mistakes but we are also here to learn and we can keep on improving."

Despite only needing a point from Friday's fixture in Hannover he insisted: "We want to beat South Korea."

Kuhn showed remarkable agility for a hexagenarian, jumping for delight when Frei opened the scoring in the 16th minute.

Kuhn said his side had been far from perfect.

"We made far too many mistakes, and we should have built a lot more on what Togo were offering us in midfield."

"But we're here to learn. I hope we can improve and keep on improving. I know what my team are capable of doing."

Switzerland were supported by a sea of red in the 65,000-seater stadium and Kuhn paid tribute to the supporters.

"There was an extraordinary atmosphere, and in Dortmund of all places, but this team have triggered this enthusiasm not because it always plays so well but even when performances are not so good it has a lot of temperament."

"The fans want to see players give everything for their country."

Press effusive in praise

REUTERS, Madrid

Spain suffered on the way to a dramatic 3-1 victory over Tunisia on Monday, a performance that showed their hunger for a place in the last 16 of the World Cup, the country's newspapers reported on Tuesday.

With headlines like "National Take Off" and "Suffering, we're also the best," the papers focused on "golden child" Fernando Torres who scored twice, including a penalty, to help Spain come back from a goal down at halftime.

Torres, 22, is top scorer at the tournament with three goals and gaining new-found respect in Spain. Sports daily, Marca said Spaniards feared "it was the same as usual" after Tunisian striker Ziad Jaziri teased his way past three defenders to score in the eighth minute.

Spain have competed in the last eight World Cups but have only reached the last four once and that was back in 1950.

"Spain didn't give up or lose their composure, but they needed a second wind to turn the match," wrote the Mundo Deportivo daily.

Newspapers praised coach Luis Aragones for bringing on midfielder Cesc Fabregas at halftime along with long-time skipper Raul, who has found himself in an unfamiliar position on the substitutes' bench in the first two matches.

"Raul ran out with excitement, anger, hating doubters, hungry for goals and recognition," wrote the AS sports daily.

"We were far superior (to Tunisia) but the truth is that we were suffering until Raul's goal," reported Marca.

Torres' late strikes took Spain "from anguish to ecstasy," reported the Sport daily.

The Swiss sing in...

INTERNET, undated

After crossing a group of Swiss fans chanting away in Dortmund yesterday, our special World Cup unit made an important discovery.

Most of the songs chanted out by the Switzerland faithful are sung in German, even though Italian and French are also the official languages of the European enclave.

"Why in German? Simply because the majority of the fans following the team are from the German part of Switzerland," the group of Swiss supporters from Basle revealed to us.

The Basle-born fanatics also wondered if we were 'drunk journalists'.

"They obviously don't know that we take our work extremely seriously and would never, never, never, have a single beer before a football match."

Sheva boosts Ukraine



AFP, Hamburg

Andriy Shevchenko's timely return to form in Ukraine's 4-0 thrashing of Saudi Arabia was one of many plus points from a game that has revived the World Cup debutants' campaign to qualify for the last 16.

Ukraine, who lost 4-0 to Spain in their opener, showed their attacking intent against a toothless Saudi team from the start.

The match represented a personal triumph for Shevchenko, Chelsea's new record signing leading the way with a fine individual performance and combining fantastically with attacking team-mates Maksym Kalinichenko, Serhiy Rebrov and Oleg Rusov.

It was pressure from Shevchenko that forced Saudi Arabia into conceding the corner from which Andriy Rusol scored the opening goal in the fourth minute.

The former AC Milan striker then opened his own account one minute into the second-half, rising above defender Hamad al-Montashari to head a home a Kalinichenko freekick.

He turned provider for the fourth goal, setting up Kalinichenko with a beautifully-weighted cross past a despairing Mabrouk Zaid in goal and three defenders.

"I'm happy for the whole of Ukraine," Shevchenko said after the match. "We can be proud of ourselves again after the bitterness of our defeat to Spain. We had to do well on Monday and we didn't let ourselves down."

"It's not just the result that's important," added the Ukraine

captain. "The main thing is that the people can see we're playing for them, and that they can believe in us again."

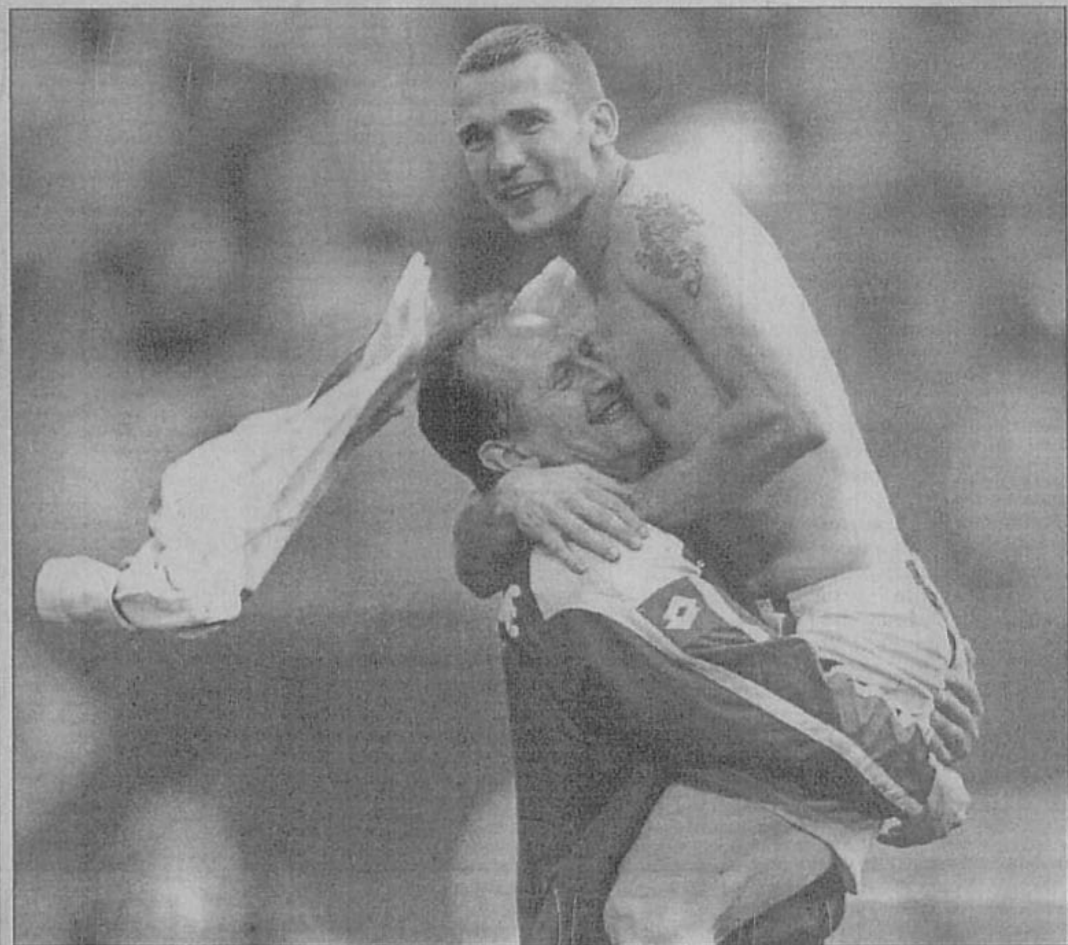
Shevchenko said there was a huge psychological difference between the Spain game and that against Saudi Arabia.

"During the first game we were overawed by the occasion," he said. "We let in two goals from free-kicks, then came the sending off, but Monday was a completely different story."

"We went ahead almost immediately and played aggressive, flowing football."

Confidence restored, Ukraine now know that the incentive could not be any greater when they face Tunisia in Berlin, and Shevchenko made no attempt to downplay the game's significance.

"The match against Tunisia will be decisive," he admitted. "Everything now hinges on Friday's result."



Ukraine captain Andriy Shevchenko (R) celebrates with assistant coach after their 4-0 win over Saudi Arabia in Hamburg on Monday.

Paqueta facing the axe



AFP, Hamburg

Brazilian Marcos Paqueta has been coach of Saudi Arabia only since the start of the year but already his head is on the chopping board following the 4-0 hiding his team suffered at the hands of Ukraine.

Ukraine outclassed the Saudi team, an aggressive midfield blanket nullifying any attempt by the "sons of the desert" to launch an attack, and in doing so firmly set their own stuttering World Cup campaign back on track.

Saudi Arabia failed to get a shot on the Ukraine goal.

Paqueta took the reins of the Saudi team after they had already qualified for the World Cup and following the departure of disgruntled Argentine Gabriel Calderon, becoming the 16th coach to be hired by the whimsical Saudi footballing authorities in 12 years.

He certainly brought a fine coaching pedigree with him, having led the Brazilian under-17 and under-20 teams to glory at their age-level world championships.

But Monday's loss to Ukraine left Saudi Arabia, whose squad play entirely for clubs in the desert kingdom, without a win in the World Cup since their first appearance in the 1994 World Cup when they reached the second round.

Saudi Arabia have a point from their 2-2 draw with Tunisia from their first match but with just a game against Group H leaders Spain remaining on Friday, they again look highly unlikely to qualify for the last 16.

Paqueta, who speaks to his players through a Portuguese-Arabic translator, was philosophical about his coaching tenure.

Coaching Saudi Arabia, he said, was "not a problem for me, it's a challenge."

"I'm a fighter. I look at life like a challenge. Problems are for men, challenges for warriors."

"I try to do the most I can and prepare myself for that."

Paqueta was eager to praise his team after the 4-0 Ukraine drubbing, saying they had gone some way to erasing the disastrous showing at the 2002 World Cup, where they scored no goals and lost all their games, including an 8-0 thrashing by Germany.

"We suffered the same fate as Ukraine did against Spain, two goals in the first-half and another right at the start of the second-half that created havoc."

"But the team did not give up and fought until the end," the Brazilian said. "I'm at ease and have peace of mind because we did our utmost."

"We knew we had two difficult games against Ukraine and Spain, but in life you have to have hope in everything and be positive right to the end."

"The most important thing is that the players showed they were committed and eliminated the image of its last World Cup participation."

"We now have to concentrate on the Spain game. We have to focus all our efforts on that," he said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP L V L A C P T S M V C A S L S U Q T P Y T Z K S M B P A J S A U H S Z A V V M Z B Y J A O Q O B A MOBPXTX MQ AJT HOBYJA Yesterday's Cryptogram: WHEN SOME BEARS WANT TO MAKE A STEEPED DRINK, DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY END UP BRUIN TEA? Today's Cryptogram Clue: V equals O The Cryptogram 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.



A spectacular save by Tunisian goalkeeper Ali Boumnijel (L) denies Spanish striker Fernando Torres from a possible hat-trick during their match at Stuttgart's Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium on Monday.