

# CZECH REPUBLIC V ITALY Do or die

AFP, Hamburg

Italy believes Czech Republic midfielder Pavel Nedved poses the biggest threat to their hopes of reaching the last 16 of the World Cup.

The Italians will come face to face with the 2003 European Footballer of the Year here in Thursday's crunch Group E clash that has all the makings of a classic.

Italy needs a draw to advance to the knockout stages, while the Czechs must win to guarantee qualification. In fact, all four teams in a group, which also includes Ghana and the United States, still have a chance of making the next round.

Nedved knows all about Italian football having played in Serie A since 1996, and Fabio Cannavaro has identified his Juventus teammate as the man most likely to cause the Azzurri defensive headaches.

"He is an annoying player to play against," the Italy captain said.

"He has a great spirit and an inner strength that is an example to others. He's a real professional, a player to fear."

Italy midfielder Andrea Pirlo agreed with his skipper about the need to keep tabs on livewire Nedved.

"We all know him because he plays in Italy. He's a great player who can decide a match - we'll have to watch out," he said.

Pirlo insisted Italy will be going all out for victory against the Czechs rather than try to snatch a draw.

"We always play to win," said the AC Milan playmaker.

"That's always been our approach, to walk onto the field to play a winning game. So that's what we'll do against the Czech Republic."

Italy lead the group on four points, followed by the Czechs and Ghana both on three, and the United States on one.

The Czechs have not lost to Italy in their three previous meetings,

but their coach Karol Bruckner insisted his team were the underdogs.

"Italy are an experienced side with a great defence - they are the favourites," he said.

Italy will be without their suspended midfielder Daniele De Rossi, who was sent off in the 1-1 draw with the US for elbowing Brian McBride in the face.

In a tactical change, Italy coach

Marcello Lippi is expected to move Gianluca Zambrotta from the defence to the left-hand side of midfield to combat the threat of Nedved.

Playing at their first World Cup since 1990, the Czechs have been rocked by injury problems, but they were given a major boost on Tuesday when striker Milan Baros resumed training.

The Aston Villa forward, who was top scorer at Euro 2004, missed his country's first two matches with a foot injury.

"I am still not 100 percent, but of course I am hoping that I can play," Baros said.

Jan Koller, the Czech's other first-choice forward, is recovering from the torn thigh muscle, which kept him out of the 2-0 defeat against Ghana and has an outside chance of playing.

Defender Tomas Ujfalusi and reserve striker Vratislav Lovkenc will both be suspended after receiving their second yellow cards of the tournament.

## TEAMS

### Czech Republic (4-4-2)

1-Petr Cech; 2-Zdenek Grygera, 6-Marek Jankulovski, 22-David Rozehnal, 13-Martin Jiranek, 4-Tomas Galasek, 11-Pavel Nedved, 8-Karel Poborsky, 10-Tomas Rosicky, 18-Marek Heinz, 15-Milan Baros.

### Italy (4-4-2)

1-Gianluigi Buffon; 2-Cristian Zaccardo, 13-Alessandro Nesta, 5-Fabio Cannavaro, 3-Fabio Grosso, 21-Andrea Pirlo, 8-Gennaro Gattuso, 19-Gianluca Zambrotta, 10-Francesco Totti, 9-Luca Toni, 11-Alberto Gilardino.

## Rino promises qualification

INTERNET, undated

Italy midfielder Gennaro Gattuso has promised that the Azzurri's World Cup adventure will not end this week.

The AC Milan enforcer said: "We respect the Czech Republic, but we don't fear them and are certain that we are staying in Germany for a little longer."

Having endured disappointments during the 2002 World Cup and 2004 European Championship campaigns, Gattuso says Italy are fully motivated to get at least the draw they need to make the last 16 in Germany.

"It is inevitable to think about our exits from the past, but we need to focus on the present now," he stated.

"We know that it will be a very hard game for us in terms of what we will have to do physically for 90 minutes."

There was a hint of Serie A rivalry too when the Rossoneri's combative midfielder was asked about Juventus and Czech star Pavel Nedved's alleged 'diving'.

"He is a great player," said Rhino. "I have a tendency to gesticulate a lot on the pitch, while he likes to fall to the ground."

"I've been angered by him on a few occasions in the past, even if I repeat that he is a fine player."

"But let's not judge others, we need to just think about ourselves at this time."

Gattuso was hastily introduced to the Italian side following injury during the game against USA after Daniele De Rossi had been sent-off.

"I felt no pain nor had any problems against the USA and that is positive. I'm not at 100 per cent, but I'm fine."

"De Rossi's elbow? I can't give him any advice, that needs to come from somebody who is a little calmer than myself," he added.

## 'Be realistic'

AFP, Duisburg

Gianluca Zambrotta has appealed to the Italian media to be realistic about their team's chances at the World Cup, rather than build them up as potential champions one day, and then shoot them down the next.

The Azzurri went from heroes to zeros in the space of five days in the eyes of the press after their 2-0 opening Group E victory against Ghana was followed by a 1-1 draw with the United States.

"There needs to be a more balanced view, it's too excessive," said Juventus defender Zambrotta who is being tipped to switch to midfield for Italy's make-or-break clash against the Czech Republic on Thursday.

"After the Ghana match they were saying we could win the World Cup, but now we are talked about as if we are also-rans. It's up and down."

Needing a point from their final group match against the Czechs to reach the last 16, Italy came into the World Cup brimming with confidence after friendly wins against Germany and Holland.

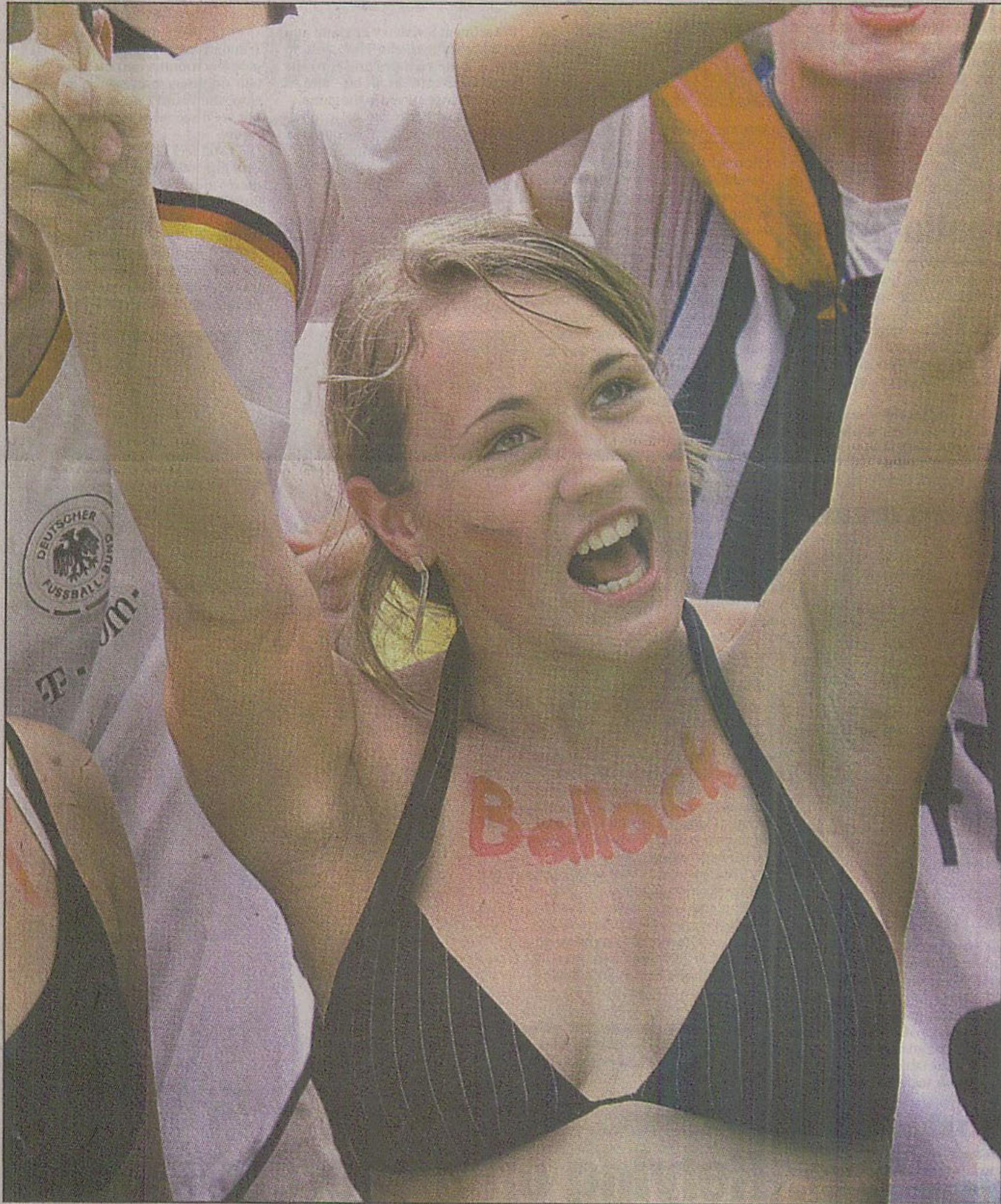
This self-belief prompted headlines such as 'Only Brazil better us' and 'To Germany to win', in Italy's sports dailies, but history suggests their crowing was way over the top.

The truth is Italy have performed miserably at their previous two tournaments.

SEE PAGE 20 COL 5



Italian coach Marcello Lippi (L) makes a point to his striker Francesco Totti during the team's practice in Duisburg on Monday. Italy face off with Czech Republic in their final Group E match in Hamburg today.



BONKERS ABOUT BALLACK: A German fan takes part in a mass party in downtown Berlin where nearly 700,000 people took to the streets to celebrate their country's crushing 3-0 win over Ecuador in the final Group A match at the Olympic Stadium on Tuesday.

# We need to be more Italian: Cannavaro

AFP, Duisburg

Fabio Cannavaro said Tuesday that his Italy team need to revert back to their old ways of cynical defending if they are to go further at the World Cup.

Italy face the Czech Republic in Hamburg on Thursday needing a draw from the final group game to reach the last 16, and much will depend on the Azzurri's defence.

Uncompromising defending was the cornerstone of past Italy triumphs, and Cannavaro believes the current team need to tighten up at the back.

"We have to start being more Italian, more cynical," said the 32-year-old Italy captain.

"The secret to going a long way in the tournament is to revert back to a more typically Italian defensive approach."

"Our formation is an attacking one, but we mustn't forget how to defend."

Italy defeated Ghana 2-0 in their opening match before being held to a 1-1 draw by the United States.

The performance against the Americans drew heavy criticism from the Italian press, but Cannavaro insisted they would bounce back against the Czechs.

"After the victory against Ghana, it was only natural that we were expecting to produce a good performance against the US, but that didn't happen," said the

Juventus defender who took over as Italy captain after Paolo Maldini retired in 2002.

"Against the US we weren't able to impose our kind of play. We were too passive and we were surprised by their initiative. Now we have a chance to put things right against the Czechs."

Cannavaro expects the Czechs, who need to beat Italy to guarantee qualification for the second round, to be formidable opponents despite their ageing squad and a string of injuries to key players.

"They are an organised team with great experience and will be very difficult to beat," he said.

"We've watched videos of them and they are very dangerous on the

counter-attack."

Cannavaro stressed the need to shackle Czech playmaker Pavel Nedved, his Juventus teammate.

"He is an annoying player to play against," he said.

"He has a great spirit and an inner strength that is an example to others. He's a real pro and a player to fear."

Asked if he had spoken to Nedved, Cannavaro replied: "Not yet, but I will phone him tomorrow."

"I have a good relationship with him and we joked about this match when we were in Turin. I'm sure we will wind each other up some more."

Italy's tigerish midfielder

SEE PAGE 20 COL 5



NOW OR NEVER: Injured Czech centre forward Milan Baros wipes away sweat streaming down his nose during a closed practice session at a school ground in Westerburg on Tuesday.