



German 'keeper Jens Lehmann (R) shakes hands with star striker Miroslav Klose (L) after the end of the match against Ecuador in Berlin on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

'The Black Pearl' guides Portugal

INTERNET, undated
Portugal's World Cup squad has advanced to the second round for the first time in 40 years and now it's getting a helping hand from someone who's been there.

Eusebio, the Portuguese soccer icon who helped guide the national team to a third-place finish in 1966, is staying with the team at its training camp in Marienfeld. He arrived in Germany after Portugal's opening win over Angola and he watched its second match, a 2-0 victory over Iran that propelled the Portuguese into the round of 16.

"After we beat Iran there's no way I'm going back to Lisbon. I feel I have to be here with the players," Eusebio said Tuesday. "I have a hunch they can go even further than we did."

Portugal's Brazilian coach said he appreciated the presence of Eusebio, nicknamed the Black Pearl, who was on hand to dispense words of wisdom.

"Often when we're round the table at lunch or dinner we'll ask Eusebio to say a word to the players," Scolari said. "It helps their confidence and motivates them."

Eusebio was the top scorer at the 1966 World Cup with nine goals, including one against England in the semi-final loss and one against the Soviet Union in the third-place game victory.

German hooligans detained

AFP, Cologne

Police arrested 45 German hooligans in the western city of Cologne early Wednesday after they had scuffled with and taunted foreign fans after England's 2-2 draw with Sweden in a World Cup match.

The troublemakers were known to the authorities, who intervened when it appeared they were planning something in a local bar, a police spokesman said.

Several people were slightly injured in the brawls.

The worst trouble came after the match, which thousands of England fans watched on a big screen on the bank of the river Rhine before going on to drink in the bars and pubs of the old town, police said.

About 50 Germans provoked a group of mainly England fans in one bar and they came to blows before police intervened.

Around the stadium "the situation was equally tense" a police spokesman said, although there were no reports of arrests there.

Some 200,000 people were partying into the night in the streets of Cologne, according to police.

Some 35,000 English fans and 10,000 Swedes attended the match which ended in a 2-2 draw.

The result meant that England won the group stage and thus avoid playing Germany in the next round, taking on instead Ecuador on Sunday in Stuttgart. Sweden also progressed and will play Germany next in Munich on Saturday.

Tens of thousands of fans who could not get tickets for the game watched it on a giant screen with English commentary in the square outside Cologne Cathedral.

Germany on right track



INTERNET, undated

Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann claims Germany have restored their World Cup reputation after comfortably winning Group A.

Juergen Klinsmann's men easily saw off an under-strength Ecuador 3-0 in their final Group A encounter and, after three wins in as many matches, they are full of confidence for the knock-out stages and the clash against Sweden on Saturday.

Many experts had written Germany off in the wake of poor performances over the past 12 months, but Lehmann claims the host nation is in the frame for a final place.

"The respect is back, at least after today," Lehmann said.

"And the tournament team myth is alive. We are quite confident and we know what we can do."

And the 36-year-old Arsenal

keeper warned it is dangerous to write the Germans off - no matter what the odds might be.

"We are always capable of playing at a very high level," he said.

"Other teams could be more skilful or whatever, but sometimes they don't know how to perform, unlike us Germans - we know about our abilities and we want to perform at the highest level."

Lehmann also claims the World Cup has turned a land of doubters into a euphoric nation of believers.

"The German people are very, very critical," he conceded.

"The most famous word in Germany is 'but' which means 'you are great - but you can do better'. They like to criticise."

However, Lehmann believes that Oliver Neuville's injury-time winner against Poland has given a football-crazy nation ever-growing confidence.

"So far we have created a new spirit, a new national spirit and a new wave," Lehmann said. "We want to ride a little bit longer on that wave."

"The tournament could end on Saturday for us, but we will try to

extend that."

Lehmann admits a lot depends on how youngsters like Bastian Schweinsteiger, Lukas Podolski and Philipp Lahm cope with the mounting pressure.

"It is the start of the knock-out phase and some players have never had that before in their lives," he said. "So we will see how they will get on with that. Mentally we are quite strong but now it is a completely new competition."

Lehmann added he was pleased that Germany will play Sweden rather than England in the second round.

"For me it would be better not to play England," he said with a smile. "Because I live there and have many friends and would feel the consequences."

Meanwhile, defender Robert Huth fancies Germany's chances after making his World Cup debut.

"We've got the whole country behind us and that is important," he said.

"We know that the real tournament starts now and that it could all be over on Saturday. But we are very confident."

Adriano fancies Italy clash

INTERNET, undated

Adriano is eager to face Italy as soon as possible and celebrate a goal against them, but teammate Marcos Cafu isn't so sure.

If the Azzurri go through second in Group E, they'll come face to face with the Selecao in the next phase.

"As far as I am concerned, facing Italy, playing well and scoring a goal would be the ideal for me," said the Inter striker.

In Serie A since 2001-02, he knows his potential opponents all too well, having worn the jerseys of Fiorentina, Parma and the Nerazzurri.

The goal he netted in the 2-0 win over Australia was his first in almost three months, as he hadn't scored since the March 29 Champions League meeting with Villarreal, and allowed him to celebrate the birth of son Adriano Junior.

"Fabio Cannavaro and Alessandro Nesta are really great defenders and it's difficult to get past them with the ball at your feet. I know they'll make it tough for Brazil, but I hope to have this opportunity and, if I do, then I won't hesitate to score."

However, Selecao teammate and San Siro rival Cafu is less eager to meet his Milan friends quite so soon into the competition.

"I think Italy will definitely qualify, but I would prefer not to meet them now," warned the Milan full-back. "At this moment in time, I don't think it'd be ideal to face a side like Italy."

Merkel turns soccer expert

AFP, Berlin

The World Cup is challenging Germans' image as reserved people, in particular that of Chancellor Angela Merkel who has turned into a committed cheerleader for the national side.

Merkel, a former scientist who last year became the first woman to lead Germany, did not miss one of the host nation's matches as they beat Costa Rica, Poland and Ecuador to finish top of Group A.

Television cameras showed a smiling chancellor clapping and bouncing up and down in her seat as Germany trounced Ecuador 3-0 in Berlin's Olympic Stadium on Tuesday.

"It was a wonderful match, may it continue like that," she said.

But Merkel's most prominent display of emotion came in Germany's nail-biting clash with Poland in Dortmund.

Merkel gasped, mistakenly cheered, and then threw her arms in the air in despair as the Germans hit the crossbar twice. When Oliver Neuville scored the winner in stoppage time, she jumped out of her seat.

"It's great to see how thrilled the chancellor was. I can't remember the last time I saw her so emotional as when we scored that goal against Poland," German captain Michael Ballack said.

Merkel, who leads a power-sharing government, has said she has arranged her work schedule around Germany's matches for the rest of the tournament, which she - and 80 million Germans - hope will end back in Berlin for the final on July 9.

Minnows whine over refs



AFP, Berlin

World Cup referees are intimidated by big name reputations leaving the smaller teams reduced to the status of second-class citizens.

That's the opinion of squads like the United States, Australia and the Ivory Coast who are convinced that crucial decisions are going against them and that when yellow cards are brandished, they are more likely to be in their direction.

USA coach Bruce Arena expressed his discontent after his team finished with nine men against 10-man Italy in their 1-1 draw at Kaiserslautern and was furious that his side was penalised for 24 fouls to Italy's 13.

"The powers of the game get a little more respect. One day USA will get some of those calls," Arena said.

Italian manager Marcello Lippi took exception to the complaint but kept his thoughts to himself.

"I have no comment about what Mr. Arena says about us," Lippi said. "I have things to say about his people, but I'm not doing it."

Australia also believe they were unjustly treated during their 2-0 defeat at the hands of champions Brazil in Munich and fumed that referee Markus Merk pulled them up for 25 fouls against only nine for Brazil.

The match also led to Socceroo Harry Kewell facing a FIFA disciplinary committee after his confrontation with Merk.

The Liverpool striker was cleared by the inquiry and is free to face Croatia in Thursday's crucial clash which will decide their World Cup fate.

"I think I was just overheated at the moment, it was just one of those things," said Kewell.

Photographs and television replays showed Kewell yelling at Merk and furiously pointing his finger at him over his display.

Brazil was awarded 26 free-kicks to Australia's 14, while Merk set the disciplinary tone early when defender Brett Emerton was yellow-carded in the 13th-minute for his reaction to conceding a soft free-kick.

Ivory Coast coach Henri Michel backed the American and Australian complaints after his side was eliminated despite two stirring displays against Argentina and the Netherlands.

"I have the feeling that referees do favour the bigger named teams than the smaller ones and that annoys me a lot," added Michel.

Michel believes his side were unfairly dealt with when Gianni van Bronckhorst scythed down Emmanuel Eboué only for the Dutchman to escape punishment.

Similarly Mark van Bommel's horror tackle on Bakari Kone saw the Barcelona midfielder walk away without a caution and the Ivory Coast playmaker taken off.

However, the stream of complaints isn't just restricted to the supporting cast.

Besieged France coach Raymond Domenech has also been critical of the officiating and is convinced that Group G rivals Switzerland have been getting all the breaks.

"I think that after two matches that Swiss have been largely favoured by the refereeing," said Domenech whose side drew 0-0 with Switzerland and were then held to a 1-1 draw by South Korea.

Domenech is convinced that Togo should have been awarded a penalty when Emmanuel Adebayor was brought down by Patrick Muller. He also thinks that France should have been awarded a spot-kick for a Muller handball.

Ronaldo's mind on Muller mark



AFP, Bergisch Gladbach

Brazil star Ronaldo says he has brought his shooting boots with him to the World Cup and fully intends to overhaul German legend Gerd Muller, whose 14 World Cup goals are a record.

Ronaldo stands stuck on 12 -- level with Pele -- after drawing a blank against both Croatia and Australia, but he says he will get there eventually.

"That's two games now I've not scored and I really have worked up an appetite to do so," the 29-year-old, who netted twice in the 2002 final win over Germany, said.

"The goal will come. The most important thing is we won and I will try to score in the next game" against Japan on Thursday, he

added. Amid calls from Ronaldinho for improved form, Brazil coach Carlos Parreira will ring the changes for the Group F encounter with the Japanese with Gilberto Silva and Cincincho set for call-ups into the starting line-up.

Ronaldo said he is drawing inspiration from Real Madrid clubmate Raul, who like him had a poor domestic season but came off the bench to score for his country on Monday in the come-from-behind win over Tunisia.

"I hope I can score like Raul did," Ronaldo told reporters.

With two wins under their belts Parreira will seek to use his opportunity to rest some regulars, on the basis of his training session Tuesday which saw Gilberto Silva link up in midfield with Kaka and Juninho with Ronaldinho.

Ronaldo is set to keep his place as "he needs to get his rhythm" and "is not ready for 90 minutes," according to Parreira, who will

nonetheless likely give a portion of the match to Fred, scorer against Australia, or Real Madrid youngster Robinho.

Robinho is, in Parreira's words, "a very useful player and we will know when to deploy him."

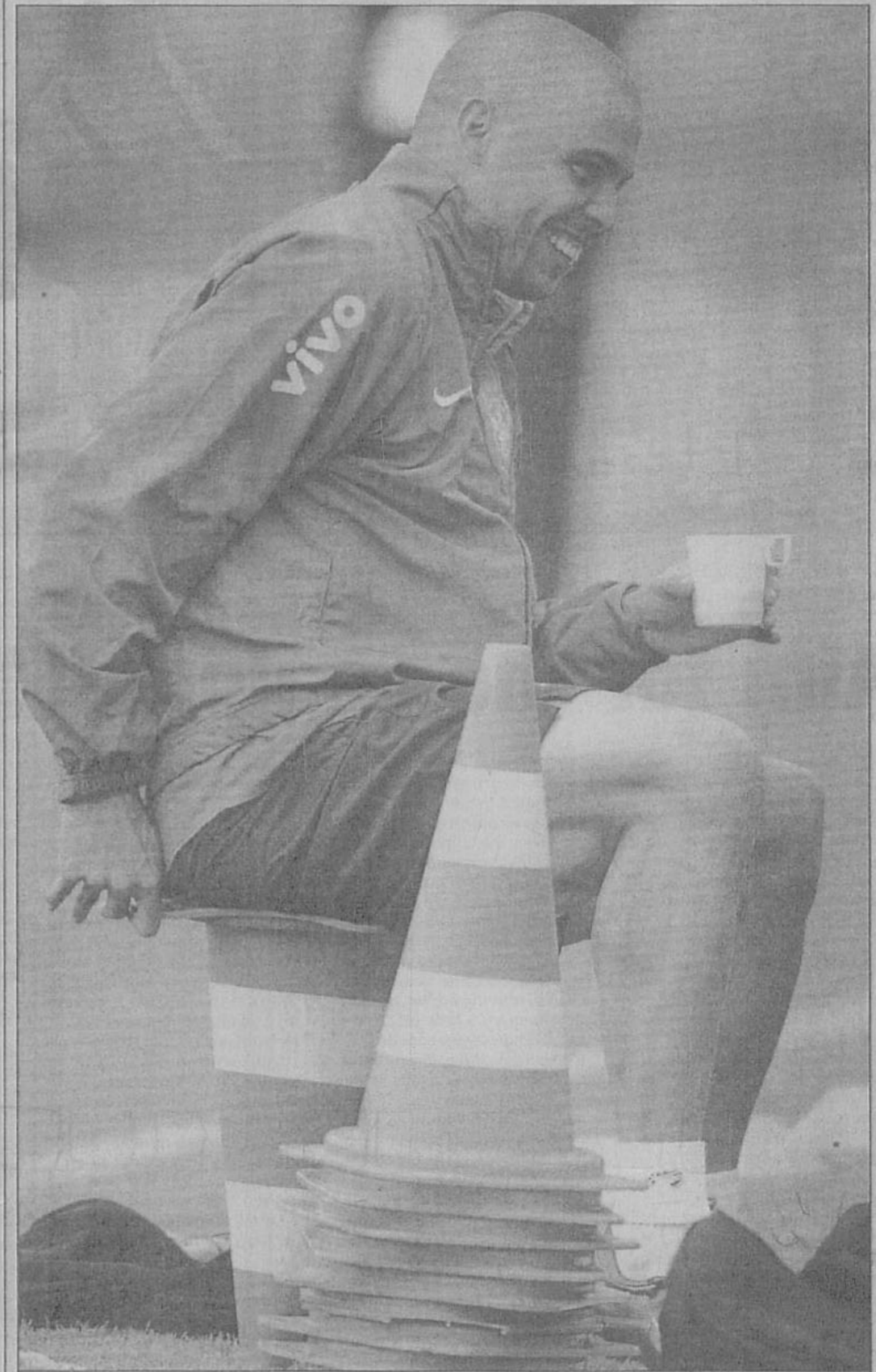
Gilberto Silva could come in for either Ze Roberto or Emerson, the latter being on one yellow card.

And for the same reason, Cincincho, impressive at the Confederations Cup last year, could deputise for skipper Cafu.

Ronaldinho, who like many of his teammates has not found his form in Germany as yet, said he was pleased to have notched up two victories, but said more progress was needed.

"I am very happy and Brazil are doing very well but I also think there is plenty of room for improvement," he told reporters.

Ronaldinho explained that "Brazil play differently to how we do at Barcelona and so I am more in the middle."



Brazil superstar Ronaldo relaxes with a cup of coffee during a training session at Bergisch Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Press snap at England



AFP, London

England faced some flack from the pundits Wednesday after their 2-2 draw with Sweden put them on track to meet "minnows Ecuador" in the ongoing World Cup tournament in Germany.

"Bring on, er, Ecuador," shouted the front page of the top-selling Sun newspaper, which likened the Latin Americans to little fish, then groaned with an inside-page headline: "We're right up Schmidt creek now."

Chief sports writer Steven Howard, reporting on deadline from Cologne, complained of

"seeing England disintegrate" after the half-time break, "just as they had done against Brazil in 2002 and France and Portugal two years later."

"Once again Sven-Goran Eriksson's side put us through the wringer as they stumbled through" the second half, wrote Howard, who nevertheless hailed Joe Cole as "pure dynamite from the first blast of the referee's whistle."

The Sun's main rival on newsstands, the Daily Mirror, said the result was "Ecuadorable!" and that "we're just pleased it's not the Germans" that England will face in the upcoming knock-out round.

It too dismissed the second half as "bloody terrible," and predicted that the tournament was "over" for Michael Owen after he was carried off the pitch on a stretcher in the first minute, the apparent victim of

a knee injury.

"Relief was tempered by the knowledge that (England's) leading goal-scorer will not be present" for the rest of the series, or indeed from any match in the next six months, Times reported.

The Daily Telegraph ran a triptych of colour close-ups of Owen's painful fall, saying "the night could hardly have begun more wretchedly."

The Guardian, recalling that Sweden remains unbeaten by England for 38 years, said "England's worse habit reasserted itself" in the second half.

"As so often, Eriksson's men proved unable to defend a hard-won lead (and) with Rooney in temporary eclipse England were choosing to live dangerously," observed its football scribe Richard Williams.

'Holland among the best'



INTERNET, undated

Argentina boss Jose Pekerman believes Group C rivals Holland are among the best teams at the World Cup.

The two nations, who meet in Frankfurt tonight, are already assured of their places in the knockout stages having both beaten the Ivory Coast and Serbia and Montenegro.

And their tussles are already part of World Cup's history, with Argentina having beaten Holland 3-1 in the 1978 final before the Dutch exacted partial revenge in the 1998 quarterfinals thanks to Dennis Bergkamp's memorable late winner.

The latest instalment will be a phoney war in comparison as both sides look set to rest players to avoid future suspensions, but Pekerman was nonetheless full of praise for Marco van Basten's squad.

He said: "We will be facing a

great team and one that is faithful to its history. It's a great group - a young group - that is also among the best."

Such words also apply to Pekerman's side, of course, especially after they mercilessly dismantled World Cup debutants Serbia and Montenegro 6-0 in Gelsenkirchen.

Chelsea striker Hernan Crespo, fellow forward Javier Saviola and Manchester United defender Gabriel Heinze are the Argentina players currently on a yellow card, one game before a bookings amnesty kicks in.

Carlos Tevez and Barcelona wonderkid Lionel Messi are two enviable attacking options available to Pekerman, who could also replace Heinze with Gabriel Milito.

Luis Gonzalez is out with a groin injury so Esteban Cambiasso, who replaced him to great effect against the Serbs, should start.

Pekerman admitted he was also contemplating whether to rest play-maker Juan Roman Riquelme as well even though the Villarreal man had been outstanding against the Serbs

and is in no danger of tumbling over the suspension threshold.

He said: "One looks at the games, the number of minutes played, and the type of player and the decision has a lot to do with the different characteristics of each player."

"Roman is a key creative player but the team has others on the field that can help us move the ball around."

"Roman, in the second half the other day, enjoyed it and played very relaxed and he could play again."

The Group C winners will take on the Group D runners-up and vice-versa so both Pekerman and Van Basten will know before kick-off whether they are on course to play Portugal, Mexico or Angola.

Angola, with just one point so far and not a single goal, are unlikely to make it, but Pekerman was convinced Portugal and Mexico both represented stiff challenges.

He said: "Portugal and Mexico arrived with good chances. They work hard, they're organised and they have great individual talent."