

Teamwork

FROM PAGE 22
At the age of 28, the indispensable centre-half is one of the team's elder statesmen and is highly appreciative of the contribution being made by the young guns.

Since settling into the post, the venerable Aragones has constantly underlined the importance not just of team spirit, but of the need for the fans to get right behind the team and the players to give their all.

"Things couldn't be going better," concluded Puyol. "We've got a close-knit squad, which is the most important thing, and it doesn't matter who comes in or who goes out - it's the team ethic that counts."

Old foes clash

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France's first World Cup victory since their 3-0 triumph over Brazil in the 1998 final.

"I don't make us favourites or the outsider. We start the game 0-0, it's not comment or FIFA rankings that make the difference, it's what happens on the pitch," said Domenech.

"We know that if we aren't solid at the back against Spain we might as well prepare our ticket home."

"But we've also got to cause our rivals problems so you have to find a balance between defence and attack."

"Spain are a side who score a lot of goals, who play well and who have high-quality players."

"But we know them well. We have to find their weak points and exploit them."

Patrick Vieira, who hit form with a vengeance scoring the first goal and setting up the second in Cologne on Friday, had a warning for the Spaniards.

The Juventus midfielder commented: "I'm getting stronger just like the team. We're getting better and better in each match."

"Hope this result (against Togo) will prove a trigger and that it's going to free us because when we're liberated we're capable of beautiful things."

"We've got a great French team here."

Just how great we will find out on Tuesday.

Intriguing midfield

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they have some great players. They could spark into life at any minute and we'll have to play a great game to beat them."

Although their head-to-head record is evenly balanced, Spain have never beaten France in a competitive match. They lost to Les Bleus in the final of the 1984 European Championship and in the quarterfinals of Euro 2000.

However, centre back Pablo Ibanez insisted their past failures would not have any influence on Tuesday's game.

"This team doesn't think about the past, only the present," he said. "France are a very strong side, but they have their weak points too and we'll be working on exploiting them."

Cafu on verge

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captain a side to two titles having led them to victory over Germany in 2002.

Cafu revealed that he had been so keen to set the new marks that he had approached coach Carlos Alberto Parreira during the final group match with Japan, which he had sat out having picked up a yellow card in the 2-0 win over Australia.

"I wanted to come on," admitted Cafu, who also won the World Cup in 1994 and was then on the losing side in 1998.

"During the match, I sidled up to professor Parreira, and spoke to him."

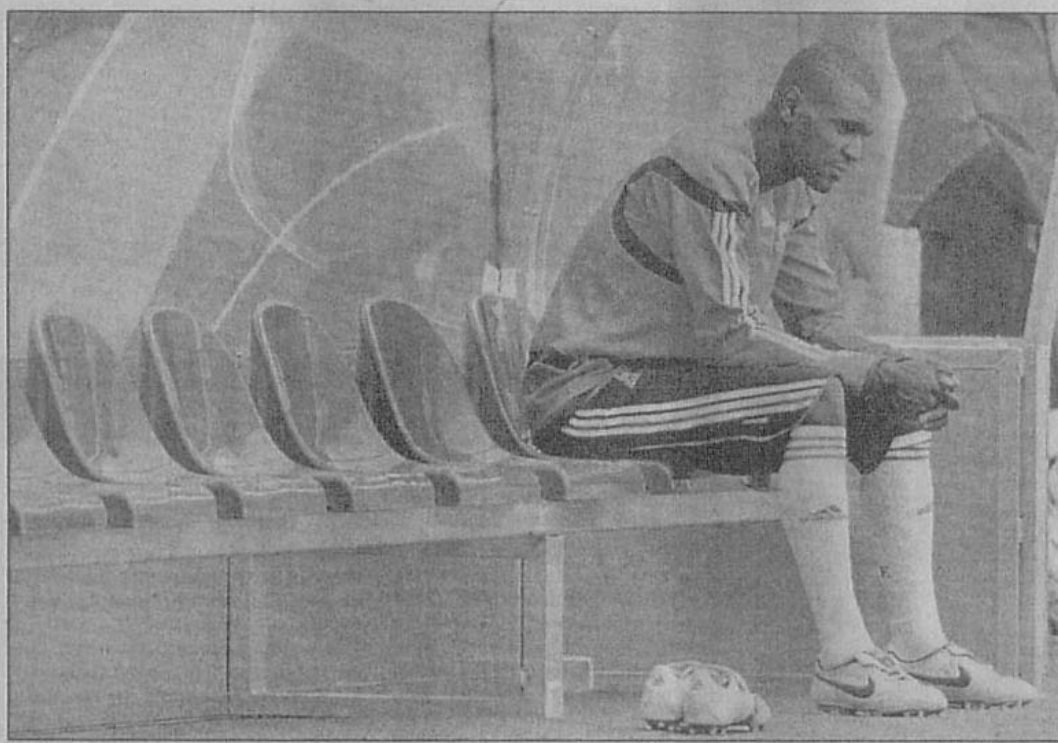
"I saw he was thinking about the substitutions. However he didn't want to send me on as he did not want to take the risk that I be booked and be suspended."

"He spoke about the record but he did not want to take any chances," added Cafu.

Robinho out

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Robinho, who has looked sharp when he has been fielded by coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, impressed in all three group matches, two as a substitute and then starting the 4-1 win over in preference to Adriano, who scored in the 2-0 win over Australia.

Amid reports that Adriano was unhappy at playing no role in the final group match against the Japanese, the Inter Milan forward is likely to return in Robinho's absence to partner the back to form Ronaldo.



French defender Eric Abidal takes a break from training in Cologne on June 22.

PHOTO: AFP

'French midfield the best'



AFP, Hamelin

France defender Eric Abidal, who returns after suspension, reckons France will have the edge over Spain in Tuesday's last 16 clash in a number of key departments.

Abidal was responding to the pre-match hype coming from the Spanish camp and domestic media with coach Luis Aragones confident his impressive team can send Les Bleus home after their smooth passage through Group H but the 25-year-old suggested the 'thirtysomething' French had a few aces up their ageing sleeves.

"They are younger than us for sure," Abidal, who plays for French champions Lyon, said here Sunday after a public training session at the local stadium watched by a crowd numbering a couple of hundred.

"We're older for sure but we've got more experience."

"They might have speed on their side and good technique but they don't have (Zinedine) Zidane. We've got players who can make the difference at any moment."

"And with Patrick (Vieira) and Claude (Makelele) we've got the best midfield of any of the teams in

the competition.

"And the best defence," the defender quickly added with a grin.

He summed up his imminent battle with the Spanish frontline in military terms.

"It's war. I win and they die, not to be taken literally of course!"

Abidal, who missed a large part of last season with a broken foot suffered last November, ruled out of Friday's 2-0 win over Togo after picking up a second yellow card in the previous match against South Korea, was sanguine about Spain putting themselves forward as favourites.

"Perhaps they are confident and see us as losing but the test is still to come," said Abidal, who turns 27 two days after the July 9 final.

"We know where we want to go and we know how we want to get there."

"We know what we've got to do." If all goes well for the 1998 champions on Tuesday they could face Brazil, if the defending champions see off Ghana in their last 16 fixture prompting, Abidal to say: "Brazil would be a dream game, but don't forget we've already beaten them (in the 1998 final)."

Domenech's squad were put through an hour's training earlier, entering the Weserbergland stadium to the accompaniment of a creaky rendition of the Marseillaise

from a tannoy system that had seen better days and watched by a large group of French students on work experience in the region.

Abidal watched the Togo game from the French dressing room with Zidane, who was also suspended, and recalled: "We were glued to the TV saying the lads had to play the perfect match."

"When we scored the bottles were flying everywhere."

"When none of our chances were going in at the beginning I thought back to 2002 (when France crashed out of the first round without scoring a goal)."

"But we knew that the first goal was going to come and liberate the team."

Zidane and all the others who weren't in action in Cologne, were given an extra run-out on Saturday as Domenech's first XI took the afternoon off and went for a bicycle ride.

One of the items on the menu was penalties in the event that they were needed to split the two teams on Tuesday.

Abidal, who doesn't yet figure on France's scoring chart, was asked whether he'd volunteer for a spot-kick.

"Of course," was his instant reply, before adding: "I've taken one before for Lyon in the Champions League last year... and missed!"

Behave or leave!

REUTERS, Stuttgart

Aggressive and intimidating behaviour would not be tolerated, a German police chief said on Sunday, after more than 520 England fans were held in the two days before the World Cup match against Ecuador.

Over 60,000 England fans were in the southern city for the second-round game and fighting broke out on Saturday between several hundred England and German supporters, prompting riot police to intervene.

They detained 400 England fans after they clashed with German supporters, throwing bottles, tables and chairs in a square in the city centre. Fourteen Germans and five people from other nations were also held. Two Britons were still being held for criminal offences and the rest have been released but banned from the city.

"Anybody who is with any group that throws bottles or other missiles, that will not be tolerated," Stuttgart police chief Siegfried Stumpf said.

On Friday, 122 English fans were held for aggressive behaviour.

The English have a long history of soccer-related violence but there had been little trouble in Germany, with only a small number of arrests for mostly drunken behaviour or people trying to get into a stadium without a ticket.

"I don't consider these people to be English football supporters because they actually damage the reputation of the many thousands of real English supporters that will be here today," Stephen Thomas, the head of the British police team working in Germany, said on Sunday.

Spain up against history

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while the defeat left a permanent scar on the Spanish footballing psyche. Tuesday's match in Hanover will be the 22nd anniversary of that match.

As well as giving Spain a chance to record their first competitive victory over the French, the last 16 clash also sets up some intriguing individual duels.

Midfielder Cesc Fabregas will get another chance to pit his skills against former Arsenal teammate Patrick Vieira in a contest that will embody the battle between the young guns of

Spain and France's old guard.

The 19-year-old stepped into Vieira's shoes when the big Frenchman left for Juventus last year and then had the audacity to outplay his old master when Arsenal beat the Italians in the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

This time though, Arsenal teammate Thierry Henry will be lining up on Vieira's side.

Spain skipper Raul, who will be celebrating his 29th birthday on the day of the game, will face his Real Madrid teammate Zinedine Zidane in what could be the Frenchman's last competitive match.

Raul has a score to settle because of his penalty miss in 2000 and is still looking to make his mark on the international stage after winning almost everything at club level. After packing in club football at Real, Zidane is hoping for one last hurrah with the national side he inspired to World Cup success back in 1998.

France striker Henry is aiming to get the better of Spanish centre back Carlos Puyol, something he failed to do when Arsenal lost to Barcelona in the final of the Champions League in Paris last month.

Cesc faces

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to feature at some point in the France match

Joining Arsenal as a 16-year-old in 2003, he enjoyed a fast-track promotion to the first team following injuries to Gilberto Silva and Edu.

He became the club's youngest ever player and goal scorer in his first season and surprised many with a maturity and work ethic beyond his years.

Last season he was set the daunting task of stepping into Vieira's shoes after the Frenchman left for Juventus, but his vision, skill and mental resolve left the Highbury faithful with little reason to bemoan the loss of the influential midfielder.

Fabregas has kept his feet on the ground and said on Saturday that he remains grateful to Vieira for the help he gave him when the two were teammates.

"Patrick was really good to me. He helped me both on and off the pitch and I will always be grateful to him," he told reporters.

Fabregas was in the starting lineup in the 1-0 victory over Saudi Arabia, but he knows that he is likely to begin Tuesday's match on the bench.

"We've got a young squad and everyone wants to be in the first team," he said after Friday's match. "I'm working hard and ready to play whenever I'm needed."

Blow out Spanish

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we're liberated we're capable of beautiful things.

"We've got a great French team here."

Defender Eric Abidal says one of the side's perceived weaknesses, its ageing squad of mostly thirty-somethings, comes hand in hand with one of their strengths.

"We're older for sure but we've got more experience," said the Lyon star, adding: "And they don't have Zidane"

Domenech, who didn't take at all kindly to the suggestion at the post-match press conference in Cologne that Vieira had saved his job, has an intriguing dilemma to contend with on the selection front.

Does he, with captain Zidane back marshalling the midfield in what could be his final appearance for France, revert to using Thierry Henry as a solo striker or team him up again with David Trezeguet?

This meeting is a repeat of the 1984 European championship final.

Then France under Michel Platini kicked sand in Spain's face and Zidane and co have their buckets and spades ready to dish out the same treatment on Tuesday.

Record not

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alongside Real Madrid team-mate Robinho than Inter Milan's barrel-chested forward Adriano, who Ronaldo set up for the first goal against Australia but has been reported to be unhappy he did not play any role in the 4-1 win over Japan.

"It was no better or worse with Robinho," said Ronaldo, who may well have Adriano as his strike partner for the Ghana clash as Robinho is struggling with a painful thigh.

"We just showed that we have an excellent squad and that the coach can rely on everybody to do a good job."

"(Carlos Alberto) Parreira (the coach) has to see how we are playing, and I like the others want to play."

"Everybody is in the same boat, those who play will give everything and those who don't will wait for their chance."

"The squad is in good shape, we are united and confident that we can go the whole way. Every one of us is ready to make sacrifices to win the World Cup."

Brazil aiming

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"We're happy we're going to face Brazil. No fear. No fear," Appiah said. "We play the same style too. That's why we have a chance against them."

Brazil is on a 10-match Cup win streak and bidding for a fourth consecutive trip to the final. First they must subdue a club whose coach promises to make Brazil suffer and whose captain vows players are willing to die for the nation.

"We've shown them what's in store for them," Ghana forward Razak Pimpong said. "We're a good club. We're not under pressure here. We have to show we're also here for business too."

If Ghana should upset Brazil, the shocker would be only the second time in 40 years the Brazilians have failed to reach the final eight.

"There's no key, just trying to stop them," Djukovic said. "We will play the same way we have until now. From the beginning we will start to attack them."

"I am confident. But Brazil is Brazil."

'Brazil don't have teamwork'



AFP, Wurzburg

Defending World Cup champions Brazil has weak spots, including teamwork from their all-star lineup, that Ghana coach Ratomir Djukovic said his Black Stars can exploit to pull off a second-round shocker.

Superstar playmaker Ronaldo, World Cup all-time goals co-leader Ronaldo, his Real Madrid teammate Roberto Carlos and AC Milan standouts Kaka and Cafu will lead Brazil against the African squad Tuesday at Dortmund.

"I believe we can stop them because they are not doing so well as before with all these stars," Djukovic said Saturday. "They have excellent individuality but as a team they are not doing so well as before."

The Brazilians have not looked as overwhelming as in their title runs in 1994 and 2002 or even during their run to the final in 1998, but they have improved with every match in quest of a sixth overall crown and fourth final in a row.

"It's better to face them now rather than in the final. In the finals,

they can't be beaten," Djukovic said.

"We don't have options. It's very difficult to stop all these stars for Brazil. We have to prepare a strategy to stop them and how to make some goals."

"If you stop Ronaldinho, they have Ronaldo. If you stop Ronaldo, they have Roberto Carlos. If you stop Roberto Carlos, they have Cafu. So it will be difficult, very tough."

"But our guys, they certainly have the capability to stop the Brazilian team."

Ghana was the biggest stunner among round-of-16 qualifiers, beating the second-ranked Czech Republic and fifth-rated United States to book a date against the tournament favourites.

"They are dangerous tactically so we have to put pressure on them so they don't do anything dangerous," 20-year-old Ghana forward Asamoah Gyan said.

Ghana captain Stephen Appiah played against Brazil as part of Ghana's under-17 program that produced two world champion teams. But it's not like he has not been watching Brazil's amazing lineup for years anyway.

"A player sees these guys and gets excited. We have to be ready to play 120 percent," Appiah said. "They have players who in two seconds can change the game."

The Black Stars must face Brazil with star midfielder Michael Essien on the bench because of an accumulated yellow-card suspension. The Chelsea standout is as disappointed to miss playing Brazil as his teammates are not to have him.

"He's very sad. We're all very sad," Appiah said. "Essien is a great player. Now that he is gone, we have to think about who is here. I'm sure the coach will find someone who can replace him."

Djukovic admits that anyone he pulls off the bench will only fill Essien's place on the field, not the lost skills he would bring.

"Any player who comes on in place of Michael Essien will do his best, maybe not at the level like Michael Essien but I'm sure he can do it at close to this level," Djukovic said.

It's that faith in his entire lineup that is at the heart of the 60-year-old Serbian coach's conviction that Brazil can be defeated. Should Ghana pull off the big upset, it would match Brazil's earliest World Cup exit in 40 years.

"Any player for Brazil is dangerous," he said. "It will be very difficult to stop them. I believe and I'm confident that Black Stars can do it."

The Brazil-Ghana winner will advance to quarterfinal next Saturday at Frankfurt against either Spain or France.

Lose to Ghana? R u kidding?



AFP, Bergisch Gladbach

Five-time champions Brazil will not lose to African upstarts Ghana in their World Cup second round match as the confident prediction of their veteran left back Roberto Carlos.

The 33-year-old said that Brazil was made for winning World Cups as they had proved in the last 12 years - winning two and losing in the 1998 final to France.

"If I thought I was going to lose this match I would pack my bags this afternoon and leave," said the Real Madrid stalwart, who has been linked with a move away to Premiership champions Chelsea.

"It hasn't even crossed my mind about losing to Ghana."

"I have confidence in my team, in the tactics and in the strength of the squad."

"We have won all the tournaments that we have competed in."

Roberto Carlos also took enormous heart in the manner in which Brazil had trounced group rivals

Japan 4-1 in their last match.

"Against Japan (4-1 victory) we showed that Brazil could well be crowned world champions."

"These last 12 years Brazil have shown that they just don't lose in a World Cup finals (forgetting the defeat by France). Football is evolving but Brazil is still ahead. We are ready."

Roberto Carlos moved to douse speculation that Inter Milan's barrel-chested striker Adriano was boycotting the press because he was unhappy about not playing in the Japan match.

The defender became the third Brazilian to deny any rifts in the camp over Adriano, who scored the first goal against Australia.

"Adriano has every right not to talk to the press," said Roberto Carlos.

"I understand his and Juninho's attitude."

"I have spoken to Adriano and I understand the situation."

"He has taken a decision and he stands by it. I asked him if he was alright and he told me that he felt fine but that he would not talk to the media."

"He does want to talk about the World Cup, but if you ask him whether he will play or not, he will not reply."

"Adriano is sad because of some of the press. I ate with him at lunch and he was laughing and joking with everybody."

Roberto Carlos, who has been at Real Madrid for the last 10 years, also denied that there was any problems with egos in the squad.

"There are no problems with egos," he said.

"Everybody is here with the same goal."

"Whenever there are rumours about a bad atmosphere in the squad that only serves to motivate us more."

"The atmosphere is good and you will not hear anything different."

Roberto Carlos also insisted that he hoped it would not be his last World Cup and that he was setting his sights on breaking present captain Cafu's caps record of 140 for the national side.

"What motivates me is playing football and playing in an important competition like the World Cup," he said.

"I am happy to be here and while obviously I do not know if we are going to win my goal is to do so."

"I am saddened when people say that this is my last World Cup as I do not want to stop."

'Criticism unwarranted'



INTERNET, undated

Sven-Goran Eriksson has grown wearily accustomed to criticism of his team's performances and before leaving Stuttgart on Sunday he found himself in the familiar position of having to fend off hostile questioning. England's head coach acknowledged that the victory over Ecuador had been another unsatisfactory performance but he also accused his detractors of having unreasonable expectations.

"If we expected to be controlling games for 90 minutes and creating 20 chances then we are in the wrong place," he said. "Today (Sunday) we were among the best 16 teams in the world. Next week it is the best eight. Of course there are going to be times in matches when we are going to suffer."

"I've also seen Mexico make life extremely difficult for Argentina. This is the World Cup and it can happen that way. The important thing is that we are getting better and better with each game. This was certainly better than how we played against Sweden and I can assure

you will be better again in our quarterfinal. So, no, I am not concerned. I would be if we had lost two or three games and were heading out of the competition but the fact is we are now in the quarterfinals, among the best eight teams in the world. I am actually rather proud."

What Eriksson could not provide was an explanation for why his team looked so conspicuously below their best and why usually reliable individuals such as John Terry and Frank Lampard have struggled to replicate their club form. Terry almost looked embarrassed when he was asked to collect the man-of-the-match award and he publicly thanked Ashley Cole for the saving tackle that prevented Carlos Tenorio benefiting, one-on-one against Paul Robinson, from an early aberration.

"The further we go in the competition we know we are going to have to improve," said Terry. "We have improved but we need to continue that if we are going to go on. The good thing is that we have plenty more in the tank and other countries probably know that when they are watching us. The fans would settle for us going all the way and not playing well but I'm sure we will get better."

The feeling in the England camp is that some of the criticism is unwarranted but Eriksson candidly accepted that many of the allegations were justifiable.

"It's strange but it's also very encouraging," he said. "We've already qualified for the quarterfinals yet we know we can play better. And the best will come, I'm sure of that. We showed today that our fitness levels are very good -- we were better in the second half than the first -- and if we are talking about someone like Wayne Rooney, that was his first 90 minutes for two months so that will really help him."

"I thought that by the end we could have won more comfortably. Ecuador are a good team, very organised and physically strong. Ashley Cole saved us from going 1-0 down in the first half but after that we created a lot of chances. So I'm confident."



England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson is seen alongside FA director Trevor Brooking before the start of the England-Ecuador match in Stuttgart on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP