

**Spaniards run for cover!**

REUTERS, Kamen

Spain were forced to cut short their evening training session when a thunderstorm struck their World Cup base in Kamen on Sunday.

The players were a little over half an hour into the session when they were forced to run for cover after the downpour which was accompanied by loud claps of thunder and spectacular bolts of lightning.

The team trained also trained in the morning with coach Luis Aragones including midfielder Cesc Fabregas and captain Raul in the starting line-up in place of Marcos Senna and Luis Garcia.

**Poles in last 8!**

AFP, Warsaw

Polish players are through to the quarterfinals, Polish tabloid Fakt screamed in a double-page headline on its inside pages Monday.

Wait. Poland went out in the first round, and the team has already returned home.

But it's not those Poles who are through, but the two strikers who play for Germany, Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose.

The two, who between them have scored seven goals for Germany, are Polish-born and still have family in Poland. They speak Polish between themselves and have Polish other-halves.

And they could have played for Poland, but chose instead to wear the jersey of the country they grew up in, Germany, which they have helped propel into the quarter finals of the World Cup, being held on the two players' home turf -- or maybe not, depending on which way you want to look at it.

"This is a first: tens of millions of Germans are paying tribute to Polish heroes," wrote Fakt, alluding to the troubled history of the two neighbours.

Thanks to Podolski's and Klose's exploits on the pitch, Germans will have to drop their long-held image of Poles as nothing better than a bunch of lazy thieves, Fakt continued.

Another mass-circulation tabloid in Poland, Super Express, warned Germany that, although it has managed to lure the two Polish stars now, things will change with time.

In 20 years, the next generation of Kloses and Podolskis will be playing in England and Ireland, which, unlike Germany, flung wide the doors to their job markets to workers from the eight former communist countries that joined the European Union in 2004, including Poland.

**Oddo's barber shop tales**

INTERNET, undated

Massimo Oddo is proving to be a cut above the rest in Italy's World Cup squad with a pair of clippers.

Having not yet played a single minute in the Azzurri's World Cup bid to date, he's making himself useful in Germany as a makeshift barber.

Roma midfielder Simone Perrotta broke the news after sporting a new haircut ahead of Monday's last 16 clash against Australia.

"Yes I have cut my hair, but not for any superstitious reasons," stated Perrotta. "Actually, Oddo cut it for me."

It was then confirmed that Oddo has also worked on Alberto Gilardino, Gennaro Gattuso, Andrea Barzagli and Marco Materazzi.

Star man Francesco Totti is also considering letting his Lazio rival loose on his barber, even if only for financial reasons.

"I think I could let him cut my hair next, that way it would be cheaper for me," joked the Romanista captain.

However, not everyone is convinced. Serie A top scorer Luca Toni has postponed his appointment. "He needs to improve," said the striker.

**It's all Ukrainian!**

REUTERS, Cologne

Journalists hoping to find out Ukraine coach Oleg's Blokhin's thoughts ahead of his side's World Cup game against Switzerland were left baffled on Sunday.

The Ukraine team failed to provide a translator at his news conference, leaving the majority of the 40 or so international journalists clueless about what he was saying.

An unsurprising lack of questions drew the briefing to a rapid end, triggering anger about the lack of organisation.

"We need an English translator," shouted one journalist as Blokhin was leaving the room.

The coach's answer was surprising.

"Me too," he replied in English.

A FIFA spokesman said it was the team's responsibility to provide a translator and that soccer's world governing body only provided them for official post-match news conferences.



England captain David Beckham salutes the English supporters after the match against Ecuador on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

**Becks bites back**



AFP, Stuttgart

David Beckham hit back at his critics with a trademark free-kick against Ecuador that took England into the World Cup quarterfinals, and he was revelling in his moment of glory.

The England captain, who was physically sick during a match played in draining conditions, curled his shot past Cristian Mora in the 60th minute to hand his side a 1-0 win and a showdown with Portugal.

"It was nice to silence a few people who have been critical. I can handle my criticism and I'll prove them wrong," he said.

"It was a great feeling to get a goal and put us into the quarterfinal."

Steven Gerrard said after the match that Beckham went out with

"a point to prove" after taking some stick following largely anonymous games in the group stages.

Some commentators and ex-players have called him to be axed - an unthinkable proposition before the World Cup.

One of his main critics has been former England captain Terry Butcher, who has repeatedly urged Sven-Goran Eriksson to jettison Beckham, who earns an estimated 32 million dollars a year, for "under-achieving".

On the eve of the match against Ecuador Butcher suggested in his column for Britain's Sunday Mirror that pressure from sponsors was preventing Eriksson from dumping the marketable celebrity icon.

"England are now in danger of abusing their resources. It could also be termed as gross mismanagement," he said.

"Beckham is merely in the team these days for his delivery at set-pieces. His contribution outside of that is negligible."

England's 1966 World Cup winning hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst

also called for him to be replaced while the Independent on Sunday weighed in by saying the impression so far had been of 'a talent so in decline it is banished to the periphery'.

Eriksson has denied Beckham is an "untouchable" despite never substituting him for tactical reasons during a competitive fixture, repeatedly arguing that he is the world's most accurate striker of a ball at set pieces.

His 'Bend it like Beckham' goal against Ecuador went some way to justifying this, although, again, he was far from his commanding best during the rest of the game.

The strike was his first goal in 13 matches for England and his first deadball special for three years, and he admitted it had been a long time coming.

"To be honest, I haven't scored for a while," he said after winning his 93rd cap. "I haven't scored with many free kicks this season."

He was inspired by Real Madrid teammate Roberto Carlos and England colleague Wayne Rooney.

"Wazza (Rooney) said to me before the game 'You've been terrible the last two days, so you're going to get one tonight'."

"I got a text from Roberto Carlos saying 'Score me a free-kick', so it's brought me good luck and we're happy."

At 31, Beckham knows this could be his last World Cup and his position as captain is by no means certain when Steve McClaren takes over from Eriksson when and if England get knocked out.

But he doesn't want to talk about that, and instead wants to focus on the quarterfinal on Saturday, conscious that England need to raise their game if they plan to lift the trophy for the first time in 40 years.

"It was ugly at times and again, we haven't played to our full potential, but we'll take that (result)," he said of the Ecuador match.

"We're through to the quarterfinals. We've been a difficult team at times, but we know we can play better."

**Beckenbauer & Maradona**

**The two faces of football**



AFP, Berlin

Franz Beckenbauer and Diego Maradona crossed swords twice in World Cup finals with the end result being 1-1 and here on Friday one will be left smiling as their two great footballing nations, Germany and Argentina, fight it out for a place in the semi-finals.

The 60-year-old Beckenbauer and the 45-year-old Maradona are the greatest players their countries have produced but they will have to grin and bear the fortunes of the battle out on the pitch like the rest of the spectators.

Beckenbauer too had to sit it out in the 1986 final and the 1990 edition as coach of the then West Germany while Maradona pulled the strings in midfield, more successfully in the former than the latter as they ran out 3-2 victors in Mexico.

However just as Beckenbauer flourished, so Maradona's star waned and the rotund argumentative playmaker that turned out for the albiceleste in 1990 was just

a portent of the decline his life was taking.

Beckenbauer's side justifiably overcame the cynical approach of the Argentinians and suitably won with an Andreas Brehme penalty in what is seen as one of the worst finals of all time with two Argentinians sent-off.

Since then, Beckenbauer -- who like present German coach Jurgien Klinsmann had no prior coaching experience -- has seen his star rise and rise while Maradona's nickname of 'The Golden Boy' has been tarnished.

If anything exemplified the magnetism and political savvy of the great sweeper it was his stunning performance in overhauling odds-on favourites South Africa and delivering the hosting of this World Cup in the FIFA vote in 2000.

His final presentation was a masterpiece of salesmanship and left the South Africans stunned and outmanoeuvred.

"That was my greatest achievement," admits Beckenbauer, despite winning the World Cup both as a player and as a coach.

"I guess that I am the first to have won it on the pitch, off it as a coach, and the hosting of it."

Since then Beckenbauer has travelled the world promoting the

event and meeting with world leaders and the Kaiser is clear about which meeting had the greatest effect on him.

"Personally speaking it was meeting the Pope," he told a German magazine earlier this year.

"It was one of the most moving moments of my life."

Maradona for his part spent many moments berating the previous Pope John Paul II -- among many other targets -- in his highly popular chat show on domestic television.

Despite all Maradona's slip-ups and financial woes -- he has a tax bill owing in Italy of over 38 million dollars from his days at Napoli -- the present Argentine squad idolise him and listen intently to the cigar puffing footballing genius when he attends their training sessions.

"He is the heartbeat of Argentinian football, always has been and always will be," beams striker Carlos Tevez, who like his idol was born in a shantytown.

"He has a lot to pass on to us the new generation and he does it in both a serious and a humorous way. So much so that when we finish with him we feel a real morale boost," added the 22-year-old.

**British press cheers**



REUTERS, London

British newspapers celebrated England's 1-0 win over Ecuador in the second round of the World Cup with front-page pictures of jubilant captain David Beckham.

Beckham, who scored the winning goal with a free-kick midway through the second half, vomited on the pitch after his goal and was replaced late in the second half.

"Queasy does it," said The Sun in a front-page spread with a picture of Beckham celebrating his stunning goal. The Daily Express opted for "Nice and Queasy" on the back page.

The Daily Telegraph chose a more restrained: "Beckham special sees England through."

The Sun's Neil Curtis said if England were to have any hope of winning the World Cup, they would need "the skipper's trusty right boot".

"You have to hand it old Goldenballs, he still has the eye for the big occasion -- and the dramatic," Curtis said.

Henry Winter in the Daily Telegraph said Beckham's winner was "one of those redemption moments he specialises in."

"Cometh the hour, cometh the man," Winter wrote.

"Comprising that free-kick and some important clearances, Beckham's performance was all the more admirable as he was gripped by nausea."

But Mick Dennis in the Daily Express was more downbeat.

"Somehow England's odyssey continues. But Ecuador were truly shocking. They lacked ambition, belief and the basic rudiments of international football."

**A touch of colour**



REUTERS, Dortmund

Brazil bring colour, rhythm, panache and exotic fans to the World Cup, all good reasons to make them almost everyone's second favourite team.

They also bring their equally colourful 600-strong media pack.

Rather like a herd of wildebeeste crossing the Serengeti, the Brazilian media descends upon unsuspecting venues, flattening -- and interviewing -- everything in its path.

If their flamboyant behaviour may have caused a stir among the local population at Brazil's training centres in Germany, it was nothing compared to what took place at the pre-World Cup camp in Switzerland.

At the little resort of Weggis, a typically idyllic Swiss village lying on the banks of Lake Lucerne, cows graze peacefully on the hillsides, the streets are normally spotless and orderly, traffic rules are rigorously respected.

Most restaurants are shut by 10 o'clock in the evening.

The players, locked away in a luxury lakeside hotel, were barely noticeable, only emerging for training sessions.

By contrast, the media were impossible to miss.

For two weeks, Weggis's orderly traffic resembled a mini-Rio de Janeiro as hire cars stopped in the middle of the road without warning, ignored zebra crossings and ran roughshod over parking restrictions.

There is probably nothing in the sporting world which can compare to the Brazilian media corps in action.

Globo television sent a 150-team strong-team to Weggis, just to cover practices, and have dispatched the presenters of all four of their daily news programmes to Germany for the World Cup.

Training sessions are broadcast live back home, accompanied by a fever-pitch commentary.

But it is the radio reporters who stand out.

Radio is much bigger than in Europe and even stations from remote cities such as Macapa, which lies on the northern banks of the Amazon river, have sent reporters to Germany to cover such pressing matters as Ronaldinho's latest haircut.

It is common to walk into a hotel lobby and see dozens of radio reporters yelling into their cellphones for hours on end to the bewilderment of the locals.

With hours of airtime to fill, even the most apparently inane subject can be turned into a 20-minute item -- such as when reporters were given a free trip up Mount Pilatus by the Lucerne tourist board.

With no Brazilian players to talk

to at the summit, they filled out their reports by interviewing each other.

The radio pack really come into its own in the so-called mixed zone where players are available to the media after practice sessions or matches.

As the players leave the training pitch, they walk alongside a barrier on the way back to the team bus.

On the other side is the several-hundred strong pack, microphones and even mobile phones at the ready so that the players' comments -- "I'm happy to be in the team, we respect the opposition, football is a little box of surprises," and such like -- are broadcast live back home.

The players handle it all with great patience and many are adept at providing the right answers -- "right" meaning ones which do not offend their teammates, their coach or the opposition.

Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Emerson, Juninho Pernambucano and Cafu are regarded as the most quotable.

Despite becoming increasingly exasperated at suggestions he is fat, Ronaldo has been prepared to face the media and is never afraid to duck questions.

Ronaldinho, Adriano and Kaka, while co-operative, have reputations for regurgitating the same answers to every question. Ronaldinho, with his ever-present grin, is regarded as the reporters' nightmare as he mumbles into the microphone, still grinning.

**Africans unite behind Ghana**



AFP, Wurzberg

African rivals have shown their support for Ghana's World Cup squad, with visits from star players and letters of support encouraging the Black Stars ahead of a second-round match with mighty Brazil.

"We have no rivals now. It's football. Africans are proud of Ghana making it to the World Cup. They support us," Ghana captain Stephen Appiah said. "The other African teams were eliminated. Now we represent Ghana and Africa."

A shock defeat of the reigning World Cup champions would be the greatest victory in African football history and match the best Cup runs by an African side, the quarterfinal runs by Cameroon in 1990 and Senegal in 2002.

"A good result for Ghana will be a good result for all Africa," said 1980s Ghana star Abedi Pele. "Brazil has more experience in big matches. But if Ghana can play a complete game for 90 minutes, they have a chance to make history."

"Yes, it's possible. It's football. Two teams play."

Retired Cameroon World Cup hero Roger Milla and Barcelona standout Samuel Eto'o of Cameroon have visited Ghana's

training camp here. Officials from Nigeria, Senegal and Togo among others have sent messages of support.

"We saw a lot of the older players come to our locker room. It motivated us. We would like to be like them," Appiah said.

Cameroon's Indomitable Lions put a scare into England before bowing out 3-2 in extra time in the 1990 quarterfinals while Senegal beat holder France in the 2002 opener at Seoul to launch a run ended by Turkey in the final eight.

Africa hosts the World Cup for the first time in 2010 at South Africa, so a strong showing would send a message for the whole continent to the world about the shape of things to come.

"It's a motivating factor for us to show them the kind of football we play in Africa," Appiah said. "If you want to be the best, you have to play against the best."

Ghana, among the world's poorest nations, celebrates a half-century of independence in 2007. As excited as Black Stars home nation backers are these days, the former British colony's party might still be going on next year.

"The whole country is upside down," Abedi said. "Friends tell me the flag of Ghana you cannot get. Everyone is supporting the team. You can sense people are so involved. The President of Ghana sends messages to the team every

day."

Away from the music and dancing, Ghana players focus on training and spend a lot of time in the hotel at this rural town in southern Germany. They are not nervous, for against the title favourites, they have nothing to lose.

"We're defending Ghana first and our continent. We will try our best to make Ghana and Africa proud," said Ghana coach Ratomir Djukovic, a 60-year-old Serbian. "The Black Stars, they have the capabilities to do it."

Brazil's superstar line-up, featuring Ronaldinho and Ronaldo, has won five World Cups and reached the past three finals, a disappointing 1998 loss to France in the title match all the keeps them from seeking four crowns in a row.

"I have a lot of respect for them, but on the field I don't have respect for the Brazilians. We are the same," Ghana striker Asamoah Gyan said. "We are the Brazilians of Africa."

The same flair and qualities that make the Brazilians unpredictable and dangerous make Ghana a foe not to be taken lightly or overlooked, Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira warned.

"Ghana, like Cameroon and Nigeria, are outstanding teams," he said. "We have to respect Ghana. They have talented players and they are not as naive as they were. Their players play all over Europe, and they have lost their innocence."



Portuguese skipper Luis Figo (R) head-butts Dutch midfielder Mark van Bommel during a frantic clash in Nuremberg on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP