



German striker Lukas Podolski juggles the ball while teammates Torsten Frings (C) and Phillip Lahm look on during a training session in Berlin on Tuesday.

## Both plan early hit

AFP, Berlin

Germany have launched into their World Cup campaign on the basis of flooring opponents by putting them under pressure and scoring early goals.

Nerves thus calmed, and with the home crowd all the more raucous by having something to cheer about from the opening stages, Jurgen Klinsmann's side have steadily progressed, dumping out Sweden to book a quarterfinal match with Argentina.

The hosts have proved to be the real early birds of the event.

In three of their four matches to date, they have scored an opening goal within the first six minutes - only Poland made them hang around before Oliver Neuville bagged a decisive injury-time strike.

But the Germans' early blitz may have been rumbled as the Argentinians say they will adopt the same strategy at Berlin's Olympic Stadium in an attempt to douse the massed ranks of home supporters' enthusiasm.

"We will look to get stuck into them from the outset," insisted midfielder Maxi Rodriguez, author of the brilliant goal which sank Mexico in the last round.

"Germany won't allow us to settle down or give us a moment's freedom - they are going to come at us in the opening quarter of an hour just as they did against Sweden," forecast Rodriguez, whose effort unlocked the door late on against the Mexicans, coming eight minutes into extra-time.

"That means Argentina will look to knock them down right from the start," he asserted.

The team that can settle quickest is likely to have the best chance of making the last four after a duel between two teams who met in the 1986 final - which Argentina won - and the 1990 trophy match - which

saw Germany triumph.

Both sides have been through the usual mantra of respect - but not fear.

"We respect them, but we have no fear," said Rodriguez. "We are looking good and we feel we can beat anybody."

German coach Jurgen Klinsmann has said exactly the same, since the final whistle sounded against the Swedes, who were mown down by Lukas Podolski's brace inside the opening 13 minutes.

Rodriguez says home advantage can be a double-edged sword.

"The pressure is very much on them as they are at home and a top candidate to win the title along with Brazil."

"But we think we can beat them - we know the German way of doing things, I think Argentina will find it easier against them than against Mexico as they (the Germans) have a very defined system."

"Whatever happens it will be a very intense match."

German defender Phillip Lahm says the hosts cannot wait for Friday to arrive.

"Everyone is fired up and we will get on with it straight away," said the Bayern Munich star.

"The early goal is part of our game plan."

In the opening 4-2 win over Costa Rica, it was Lahm who scored a fantastic goal in the sixth minute to put the hosts in command as he scored the opening goal of the tournament.

"We want to get the fans on our side immediately so we start at a furious pace," explained goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.

"Apart from the Poland game we have managed to do that every time."

Defender Christoph Metzelder said the home support pumped up

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ROCK, ROCK TILL YOU DROP: Argentine forwards Carlos Tevez (L) and Lionel Messi during a training session at Herzogenaurach on Sunday.

## Germany and Argentina connected thru' history

AFP, Berlin

Teutonic, never-say-die organisation and Latin heady flair and guile - it has to be the World Cup.

The organisers try their best to keep European and Latin American juggernauts apart for as long as possible at World Cups and, if they can't always save the best until last, a quarterfinal meeting with Germany still whets the appetite.

Germany's footballing reputation has lain in shreds for a decade but has been restored virtually overnight under the sunny disposition of Jurgen Klinsmann, a man whose smile was as wide as Berlin's River Spree following Saturday's win over Sweden.

Klinsmann has spent much of the past two years under fire for basing himself in the Californian resort of Huntington Beach since succeeding Rudi Voller, who having taken Die Mannschaft to the 2002 World Cup final against the odds was lambasted by the media after an early Euro 2002 exit.

Now he is back in favour - at least until Friday, when the three-time winners take on two-time champs Argentina, fortified by a win over Mexico which saw Maxi Rodriguez score a goal that deserved to win the title itself.

Whereas Atletico Madrid star Rodriguez was in short trousers the last time Argentine duelled with the Germans and not long out of

nappies the time before that, both occasions are indelibly etched on the memory of Klinsmann, who was Voller's strike partner in the 1990 final, while Voller also played in 1986.

In 1986, the brilliance of Diego Maradona, earlier bolstered by his slalom run and goal to finish off an England side bamboozled by his infamous opening "Hand of God" effort, allowed the South Americans to edge Germany 3-2 in the trophy match.

Andreas Brehme secured revenge for the Germans in Italy four years later following an ugly encounter, which Klinsmann's then Inter Milan teammate won, from the penalty spot after the Argentinians had two men sent off.

The countries also met in-group action in 1956 and 1966.

"This is a match pitting two of the greats together. We have enormous respect for each other," said Argentine coach Jose Pekerman after edging out battling Mexico.

For Klinsmann, with home expectations having suddenly shot through the roof, the Olympic Stadium will show where the hype ends and the true measure of his side's abilities comes into sharp focus.

"Let the Argentinians come. We're not afraid. We're capable of reaching the semi-final and the final itself."

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## Ballack, Klose miss training

AFP, Berlin

Skipper Michael Ballack and top scorer Miroslav Klose missed Germany's training session on Tuesday but are expected to be fit for Friday's World Cup quarterfinal with Argentina.

Ballack and Klose, the leading scorer at the finals with four goals, sat out training to do individual fitness work, but the German Football Federation (DFB) medical team stressed both would be fully fit for the Argentina game.

The 29-year-old Ballack sustained a minor foot injury in the 2-0 second round win over Sweden but manager Jurgen Klinsmann said it was not a concern.

Second-string goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, 37, also missed Tuesday's training saying he was not feeling well.

## 'WAGs don't distract us'

INTERNET, undated

Joe Cole has insisted the presence of wives and girlfriends (WAG) in Germany has not been a distraction to England's hopes of World Cup glory.

Sven-Goran Eriksson has allowed his players to join up with their families at their hotel base in Baden-Baden on rare days off, normally the day after a game.

Several pundits, including former Celtic boss Martin O'Neill, have indicated they would not allow the same freedom and relaxation if in charge of the national squad.

But Cole believes it has been a beneficial move for the squad in switching off from football for a few hours during a period of up to five weeks away from home.

The Chelsea midfielder said: "It's a long time to be away from home and to be stuck away in a hotel. For most of our lives, we are

stuck in hotels.

"To give us a little break when we can go and see the family - just to talk about things you can't talk about with the other lads like who is looking after the dogs - is great. It's just normal things."

"It just gets your mind off it (the football). That's very important. Anyone who thinks it's a distraction is mad because when we are playing three games a week at home, you don't go and lock yourself away in a hotel room."

"You need to get a bit of normality. It's nice to see them enjoying it as well. It's good for me to see my girlfriend, my mum and dad and friends being really excited and enjoying it. I'm happy then that I've been able to give them that."

Cole is aware England will have to beat at their best now the tournament is approaching its climax but insists results remain the priority ahead of Saturday's quarter-

final clash with Portugal.

He said: "Of course, we are going to have to play very well to beat those teams ahead of us but we still haven't conceded a goal from open play and we are defending well as a team."

"We are in the quarterfinals of the World Cup. We are not jumping or singing from the rooftops. We are still mentally very focused and ready."

"We are not in the clouds playing wonder football. We are focused and we know there are still things to improve on but we have been getting better and better each game."

"Results is what it is all about. If we had played brilliantly against Ecuador at the weekend but were going to have to pack our bags and go home, we would have been gutted."

"We played well, we showed good fitness, we paced ourselves better throughout the game and got the job done."

## 'Riquelme a marked man'

REUTERS, Herzogenaurach

Juan Roman Riquelme has been a marked man at the World Cup but Argentina expect the playmaker to escape his shackles when they face hosts Germany in Friday's quarterfinal in Berlin.

Argentina needed extra time to overcome Mexico 2-1 in the second round and their struggles were partly due to Riquelme being closely marked and cut out from his fellow midfielders.

"(Opponents) look for him so that he can't wind the Argentina mechanism," said midfielder Maxi Rodriguez, whose superb 25-metre goal settled the Mexico match on Sunday.

"I think he's going to keep getting better." Rodriguez told a news conference that it suited Argentina for teams to attack them, which is exactly what they expect from Jurgen Klinsmann's Germany.

"They're going to want to take us by storm and we must do the same so that we don't suffer the same as Sweden," Rodriguez said.

Germany, who scored twice in the opening 12 minutes in their 2-0 second round victory over Sweden, should be regarded as the favourites, along with Brazil, to win the World Cup, he added.

"Germany have a system we know well, which is simpler than Mexico's. We need to be compact, not leave spaces like we did with Mexico. It's another final for us," Rodriguez said.



Coleen McLoughlin (top L - partly hidden), the girlfriend of English forward Wayne Rooney, and Elen Rives (C), the girlfriend of English midfielder Frank Lampard and Alex Curran (R), fiancée of English midfielder Steven Gerrard, sit together with other friends of the English team members ahead of England's World Cup game against Ecuador in Stuttgart on Sunday.

## Germany have got the belief

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany have the strength to beat Argentina and bring their 'black series' against top class opposition to an end, coach Jurgen Klinsmann said on Monday.

It is almost six years since Germany's last win over one of the game's major powers, a 1-0 victory against England at Wembley in October 2000.

After four wins from four games at this World Cup Klinsmann is confident the sequence, known in Germany as the "black series", will come to an end in Friday's quarterfinal against Argentina and send the Germans through to the last four.

"I'm very optimistic this is going to work out," Klinsmann said at a news conference on Monday. "It looks like the time to end this series and get into the semifinals."

"We are absolutely on a par with the top eight teams in this World Cup and we don't have to be scared of anyone. Argentina are one of the giants but we will stand up to them."

Germany's level of fitness has been noticeably higher than that of their opponents in their matches so far.

They have come out playing a fast, aggressive game and have scored early in two of the three group matches, against Costa Rica and Ecuador, and again in the commanding 2-0 win over Sweden

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