

WC preparation on track

AFP, Johannesburg

Organisers of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa denied Wednesday that preparations were behind schedule, insisting they had made more progress than previous hosts Germany at a similar stage.

"Comparatively, we are ahead of where Germany was at this stage," local organising committee chief executive Danny Jordaan told a press conference.

"We are on track, well ahead of plans based on a timeframe set by us and FIFA. We are comfortable when we say we are on schedule."

FIFA president Sepp Blatter voiced concerns last month that construction and renovation of the 10 stadia due to stage matches had still to begin in earnest, saying he had "yet to see the pickaxes and spades needed to start the work".

But Jordaan said the Soccer City stadium complex in Johannesburg's Soweto township, the venue for the final and opening ceremony of the tournament, was on course to be completed in 30 months' time.

"We do keep in touch on a daily basis with members of FIFA World Cup organising committee and give them monthly reports, and if there is anything wrong, they will know."

"It is therefore impossible that we can say things that FIFA does not know. They are confident and are happy with the progress we made so far," added Jordaan.

While construction of the Soccer City stadium itself has yet to begin, offices for FIFA within the complex are nearing completion.

Chairman of the organising committee, Irvin Khoza, said he was confident that stadia construction will start "early January or February".

"Our timeframe is realistic and come 2008, some of the stadia will be ready for the Confederation Cup to be hosted in the country," he told the press conference in Johannesburg.

Villarreal sign Fernandez

AFP, Madrid

Chile international midfielder Matias Fernandez will join up with Villarreal in January from Colo Colo, the Spanish first division side said Wednesday.

The 20-year-old Fernandez, who was born in Argentina but has lived in Chile since the age of five, will continue to play for Colo Colo until the end of December.

Villarreal's Chilean manager Manuel Pellegrini gave no financial details of the signing but Chile television estimated the deal to be worth 11 million dollars.



PHOTO: AFP
Arsenal forward Thierry Henry (R) tries to get by the outstretched tackle of CSKA Moscow defender Vasil Berezutskiy during their Champions League match in Moscow on Tuesday.

Arsenal caught cold in Moscow

AFP, Moscow



Arsene Wenger's winless record in Moscow continued here on Tuesday as CSKA Moscow beat Arsenal 1-0 in their Champions League Group G clash.

A fierce shot by Brazilian Daniel Carvalho in the first-half did for the Gunners as CSKA went ahead of last season's finalists in the group and inflicted the London side's first defeat since August 26.

Arsenal, though, will believe they should have got a draw after Thierry Henry looked to have levelled five minutes from time but his effort was ruled out for apparent handball - to add insult to injury he was also booked.

Wenger was left fuming by the decision, though, to his credit he added that Arsenal had been their own worst enemy in the match.

"Now we have something new - they (referees) cancel goals because they saw things that did not exist. That is a problem."

As for Henry, he had his usual moan when things don't go right for him as he did after the Champions League final defeat to Barcelona where the referee once again got the blame.

"The referee saw a handball when there wasn't a handball. You will have to ask him why this is so," said Henry. "He gave me a yellow for a deliberate handball but if you can see that on the replay I'll give you whatever you want."

"I know it was a clean and clear goal. The keeper and defenders did

not call it, only a linesman 60 yards away.

"I asked the referee and the linesman at the end what they saw and they could not tell me what they saw."

CSKA handler Valery Gazzaev was bursting with pride over the victory.

"I feel it was one of our best matches this season," said Gazzaev. "We have come closer, much closer to our main goal - a place in the knockout stage."

"Arsenal is one of the best teams in Europe and I'm happy we clinched a win against them. And I'm even more happy as it was a deserved win."

Carvalho struck in the 24th minute with a ferocious 62mph shot - laid off to him from a freekick by Sergei Ignashevich - which goalkeeper Jens Lehmann saw pretty late as the ball went through his flailing arms.

Carvalho almost beat the German international five minutes later when his lobbed volley from outside the area forced Lehmann to tip it over the bar.

Arsenal's only noteworthy attacking movement came shortly after that as Tomas Rosicky's cross was met by Henry and while his header wasn't the strongest it almost crept over the line as there was a moment of indecision between CSKA goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev and a defender before it was cleared.

However CSKA were causing havoc down Arsenal's right flank and they thought they had gone 2-0 up in the 35th minute when Wagner Love slipped in at the near post to put it past Lehmann but he was judged to be narrowly offside.

There was no let up as once again

the tricky Yuri Zhirkov got in on the Arsenal right flank and only a desperate clearance for a corner by Kolo Toure stopped the hosts inflicting worse damage.

Arsenal, though, should have gone level shortly before half-time as Robin van Persie did well to wriggle into the penalty area but one on one with the goalkeeper he dallied too long and Akinfeev was able to dispossess him much to the displeasure of Wenger.

Rosicky was causing problems for the Russian side with his crosses and another one this time from the left was inch perfect evading the defence but also Toure and Gilberto Silva who were both just inches away from connecting with the ball.

The 23-year-old Carvalho - named player of the 2005 UEFA Cup final when CSKA beat Sporting Lisbon - was causing all sorts of problems and put clear in the 55th minute saw his shot saved by Lehmann.

However the Arsenal defence was all over the place and another mistake, this time by Swiss international Johan Djourou, let in Love but a cracking tackle on the byline by William Gallas saw it go for a corner.

Arsenal had a better spell of play after Wenger sent on Emmanuel Adebayor - for van Persie - and Gael Clichy, his first match since May, for the hapless Djourou.

Indeed they had the ball in the net in the 74th minute but it was ruled out for offside against Toure.

Elber set to hang up boots

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Former Brazilian international striker Giovane Elber, currently playing with Cruzeiro de Belo Horizonte, will retire at the end of December because of chronic pain in his right ankle.

"I feel it's now the time to stop," said the former Bayern Munich and Lyon player, now 34 years old.

"I feel a chronic pain that annoys me a lot and prevents me from improving my fitness. So I want to give the time that is left to me to lead the club to the Libertadores Cup," said Elber, the most successful foreigner in Bundesliga history after scoring 133 goals in 256 matches for Bayern Munich.

Elber underwent ankle surgery on his right ankle in 2004 when at reigning French champions Lyon.

Wicky out for a month

AFP, Hamburg

SV Hamburg manager received another bad piece of news on Wednesday with Swiss midfielder Raphael Wicky ruled out for up to a month with a calf injury.

Wicky hobbled off in Hamburg's 4-1 Champions League loss to FC Porto and is now unavailable for three to four weeks.

Hamburg have yet to win a match in the 2006/07 campaign lying third from bottom of the Bundesliga and bottom of their Champions League group.

Dudek facing ban

AFP, London

Liverpool are facing a potential goalkeeper crisis after the Football Association on Wednesday levelled a charge against Jerzy Dudek which could see the Polish keeper suspended for five matches.

Dudek, 33, was sent off in a reserve derby with Everton last week and was initially facing a three-match ban for violent conduct, due to start 14 days after the offence.

But the FA have reviewed the match video and opted to further charge Dudek with improper conduct - failing to leave the field after the initial incident and confronting the referee.

The sending off came after a challenge on Dudek by Everton youngster Victor Anichebe, an incident that has already prompted Liverpool to consider an appeal and has produced strong words of condemnation from Anfield boss Rafael Benitez.

Dudek, hero of the 2005 Champions League final, was dismissed for raising his hands to the Everton player, which prompted a melee with players from both sides.

Benitez criticised Anichebe's studs-up challenge on Dudek and said: "The tackle was terrible, and their player was only booked. That's crazy."

Brits look for lift

AFP, Paris



British footballing giants Newcastle, Spurs and Rangers have had difficult starts to the season but on Thursday will be looking to gain a timely boost as the UEFA Cup group stage gets under way.

Newcastle lie a poor sixth from bottom of the Premiership - Spurs are just a place above them - and will not be relishing a visit from Turkish outfit Fenerbahce.

Spurs also face a Turkish test as they travel to Istanbul to take on Besiktas while Rangers, who already trail bitter rivals Celtic by 10 points and were humiliated by 1-0 at home by Inverness Caledonian Thistle at the weekend, travel to Italy to play in-form Serie A side Livorno.

Newcastle's latest reverse, a 2-1 defeat by Bolton on Sunday, has left Magpies boss Glenn Roeder fuming

and calling on his expensively assembled side to pull themselves together.

"Our defending has been completely unacceptable and it has to stop," said Roeder.

"The only way to do that is for us to pull together and work harder on the training ground."

"Fenerbahce will be no pushovers and it is vital we get off to a good start to the group phase."

Fenerbahce, coached by Brazilian legend Zico, can travel to northeast England in a positive frame of mind given that Newcastle have taken just four points at home in four Premiership matches this term.

Certainly their Brazilian striker Deivid de Souza is confident of their chances despite them conceding a 2-0 weekend lead to be held 2-2 by unheralded Ankaraspor leaving them second in the table six points adrift of Vestel Manisaspor.

"As a team we have adapted to each other. We have the strength to beat Newcastle," said the summer signing.

Fenerbahce have several experienced internationals in their side who

can trouble Newcastle with Ghanaian playmaker Stephen Appiah and the talented but hot-headed Serbian striker Mateja Kezman, who endured a miserable spell at Chelsea.

Spurs spent heavily in the summer to add to an already talented squad but have really yet to get through manager Martin Jol was satisfied to get a point with only 10 men against Aston Villa on Saturday.

However while Newcastle's problem is in defence, the London side's main worry is the lack of goals with just five in eight matches which, given their strikeforce consists of Ireland skipper Robbie Keane, England striker Jermain Defoe and Egyptian Mido, is well below par.

Besiktas go into the match nicely placed in the championship in third place and boosted by a 1-0 win over Genclerbirligi on Sunday and with their technical director Jean Tigana enthusing about how the side is developing.

Porto thrash Hamburg

AFP, Porto



FC Porto reignited their hopes of making the knockout stage of the Champions League with a convincing 4-1 group G win over struggling German side SV Hamburg.

It was a first group win for the Portuguese giants, who won this competition in 2004, and it keeps them in contention with Arsenal, two points ahead, and CSKA Moscow, who are three points better off after defeating the English side 1-0 on Tuesday.

Argentine international forward Lisandro Lopez scored Porto's first Champions League goal of the campaign after just 14 minutes and Lucho Gonzalez converted a penalty on the chime of half-time.

Portuguese international Helder Postiga scored a third on 69 minutes and Lopez grabbed his second late on to complete a comprehensive victory.

The loss means Hamburg, playing in the competition for the first time since 2001, have no points from their first three matches and need a miracle to qualify.

The German club, third in the

Bundesliga last season, are not doing much better on the domestic front lying third from bottom of the table without a win to their name.

"I cannot find the words to describe the disappointment at how we played tonight," said German international Piotr Trochowski. "We shot ourselves in the foot. We have to start playing better and cut out the stupid mistakes."

Right from the off Hamburg were second best with Postiga spurning a good chance after just 55 seconds.

It was a warning that went unheeded with the Portuguese hosts going in front after just 14 minutes.

A stray pass from Collin Benjamin put Porto on the attack and they pounced on the error with Brazilian Anderson sliding the ball across the face of goal for Lopez to roll into an empty net.

Porto's second goal almost arrived a minute later when Postiga produced a neat turn in the penalty area and only a fine save from Sascha Kirchstein prevented Hamburg from going two goals down.

Hamburg looked to have equalised in the 36th minute but the goal was scratched off with Danijel Ljuboja blown up for a

foul.

Serbia and Montenegro international Ljuboja was then the villain at the other end with a foolish handball in the penalty area close to half-time.

For some reason Ljuboja left his arm fully outstretched at the backpost and the ball hit his hand and the referee whistled up for a penalty. Ljuboja's only saving grace was that he was not sent off for the offence as he was already carrying a yellow card.

"It is a tough time for us at the moment and it really hurts," said Hamburg coach Thomas Doll. "We are getting punished for lapses in concentration but that is what happens at this level."

Gonzalez converted the spot-kick on the stroke of half-time to effectively wrap up the points.

Porto looked a class above in the second half with their slick passing and movement too much for Hamburg.

Postiga capped a fine game with a diving header on 69 minutes to make it 3-0 and Lopez added his second to leave Hamburg players praying for the final whistle.



PHOTO: AFP
FC Porto forward Lisandro Lopez celebrates after opening the scoring against Hamburg SV in their Champions League clash in Porto on Tuesday.

French duo impress

Football
AFP, Paris

French duo Lyon and Lille rattled in the goals in Tuesday's Champions League action as the former enjoyed a 3-0 cruise over hapless Dynamo Kiev and Lille gave themselves a great chance of progressing to the knockout stage with a 3-1 victory over AEK Athens.

Lyon's victory still leaves them to concede a goal in this year's tournament after three matches while Lille's victory put them in pole position to take second in their group as AC Milan recorded a 1-0 win with only 10-men to see off Anderlecht.

There were goals aplenty too in other matches as Real Madrid set aside Saturday's league reverse to trounce Steaua Bucharest 4-1 in Bucharest, while Group F top two Manchester United and Celtic both recorded 3-0 wins over FC Copenhagen and Benfica respectively.

Hamburg's catastrophic season continued apace as they went down 4-0 to FC Porto leaving them winless in all competitions this term -

Lyon had their match wrapped up by half-time with goals from inspirational captain Juninho and a superb individual effort by Swedish international Kim Kallstrom - Florent Malouda grabbed a third in the second-half for Gerard Houllier's men.

Houllier was delighted to have obtained such a result away from home.

"This team is progressing in leaps and bounds but its task is to carry on at the same rate," said the former France coach.

"I believe now that we have a 75percent chance of progressing to the next stage," added Houllier, who seemed to want to err on the side of caution.

However there was no doubting how high his Kiev counterpart held his team in.

"It is difficult for me to reproach my players as Lyon were simply too good," said Anatoli Demianenko.



PHOTO: INTERNET
Lyon players rush to congratulate star midfielder Juninho after the Brazilian scored a goal in their Champions League clash against Dynamo Kiev in Kiev on Tuesday.

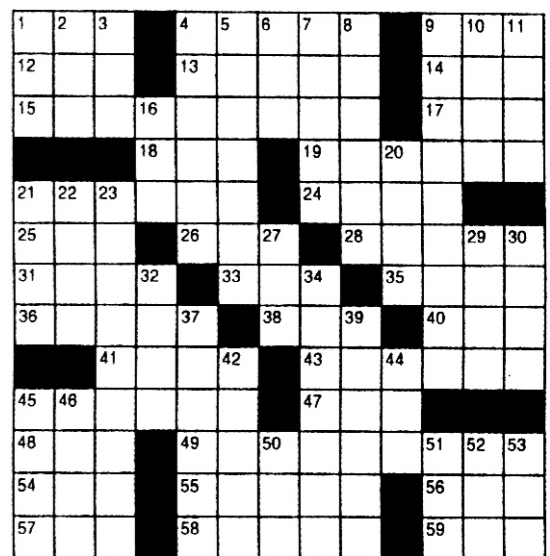
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Churn
4 Rain
9 Insane
12 Epoch
13 Private
14 Actress
15 Bleak
17 Charged
18 Consumed
19 Austria's capital
21 Taking up more space
24 Make-meet link
25 — budget enhancer
28 Croc's cousin
31 Elevator name
33 Bell and Kettle
35 Put together
36 Color qualities

DOWN
1 Standard
2 — Khan side
3 Waikiki garland
4 Veered from the perpendicular
5 Mean-while
6 "It's — -win situation"
7 Chutzpah
8 Battle preparation
9 Chief format
10 Shakespeare's river
11 "SNL" alum
16 Run-down horse
20 Dutch cheese
21 Wellington, for one
22 Busy with dictionary one
27 Dog's foot cohort
30 Tear in two
32 Glimpses
34 Hardly any time at all
37 Franklin et al.
39 Pale hues
42 Trap completely
45 Ceremony
46 Eternally
50 Debtor's letters
51 Make up your mind
52 Carnival city
53 Longing

Solution time: 24 mins.

P I P E B S S K H A N
R I E A L I T Y A I D A
O W E R S I T E P L A W
W A L K I N G P A P E R S
N I N N Y G N P R E F
A M O K J U G L O O
W R O P O T Y K A B O B
S H H A I M
R U N N I N G B A S A R D S
O R E O S A Y S O A N
A G A R O W S K A L E
M E T T E N E S S D E W



CRYPTOQUIP
Y O U G U W W A W U D E S P S P
Y D F K V F S Y E S H U V H
A K L A K Q D . G K Q W H C K Q D U C
I S ' D E Q F F K K V I Y L D S W O ?
Saturday's Cryptic: IF YOU'RE READING "HUCKLEBERRY FINN" WHILE ON AMTRAK, YOU MAY BE TAKING A TWIN RIDE.
Today's Cryptic Clue: O equals F
The Cryptic is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

8x3