

WORLD CUP USA '94

Injury robs Vogts' peace

ALLISTON, Ontario, June 10: German defender Thomas Strunz will miss the opening game of the World Cup June 17 against Bolivia because of a hamstring injury, team officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Strunz, 26, suffered the injury in Wednesday's 2-0 victory over Canada. Germany's last test match before beginning to defend their World Cup title in Chicago.

"There are always miracles but I can't imagine I'll be able to play," a disappointed Strunz told reporters at the team's headquarters at the Notawasa Inn in Alliston, an hour's drive from Toronto.

"You really prepare for the opening game, you concentrate hard on it, and then unfortunately something like this happens. But now I am looking ahead to the game against Spain," Strunz said of Germany's second game June 21.

There were good news too, however, from team physicians. Mario Basler, a newcomer who is quickly becoming an influential offensive midfielder, is likely to be fit for the game against Bolivia at Soldier Field.

Basler was carried off the field Wednesday with what was thought to be possibly a serious knee injury. But X-rays revealed no fracture and team physician Heinrich Hess said Basler should be back in full training within three days.

"It looked very bad and it was very, very painful," Hess said of Basler's injury. "But it turned out to be only bad bruising and a strain of interior ligaments."

"If his recovery continues to be so successful as in the first 24 hours, we can assume that he'll be able to play in Chicago," Hess said. "With Strunz, it's more than a muscle strain, although it's not a real tear, but he needs a week of rest."

Basler, 25, made his international debut in a 2-1 victory over Italy in March. He got the call from coach Bertl Vogts after only one full first-division Bundesliga season with Werder Bremen.

Although he has only a handful of national team games, Basler could be a starter at the World Cup after performances that have impressed Vogts.

Vogts was encouraged by the doctors' ruling on Basler and he tried to play down the disappointing news on Strunz.

But the German manager will be hard pressed to find an adequate replacement for the fast, piercing runs of Strunz on the right side, which has been vulnerable in the past for the German team.

The Stuttgart defender made his international debut in 1990, but had a slump later and has collected only a dozen caps since then.

His career was revived when Strunz moved from the bench of Bayern Munich to the starting eleven of Stuttgart in the 1992 season, and he regained the confidence of Vogts.

Vogts criticized the hard style used by Canada, although neither Strunz nor Basler were injured as a result of rough tackles.

"We have to live with it, they played very, very physically, they use the England style. They did not play like that against Brazil (1-1), but that's how you play against the world champion," Vogts said.

"We should have won by five or six goals, we wasted many chances," Vogts said.

"Strunz is a very important player for us, but we have players who can play different positions defensively," he said. "I'm confident that we won't have problems on the right side."

Vogts will have to reshuffle his defence, with possibly Thomas Berthold or Stefan Effenberg moving to the right.

Effenberg, who missed Wednesday's game because of a thigh strain, and Andreas Moeller, another midfielder who was suffering from a cold, resumed practising Thursday. Guido Buchwald, a central defender who also missed the Canada match, also returned to practice Thursday, albeit not at full power after a hamstring strain.

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Diego Maradona takes a break from a practice session at the Brandys University ground on Thursday to hug his children Dalna, 7 (L) and Gianinna, 5. — AFP photo

Pele writes off Maradona

NEW YORK, June 10: World Cup soccer legend Pele said on Thursday Colombia had the best team in the 1994 finals and predicted Diego Maradona would prove only a token threat, reports Reuters.

Pele instead nominated Italy's Roberto Baggio, Colombia's Faustino Asprilla and fellow Brazilian Romario as likely stars of what he said could become the best tournament in years.

"Colombia have a very organised side with one or two good young players, including Asprilla, and they've played together a long time. They're the best team, no doubt," said Pele.

"But anything can happen. If you remember 1982, everyone said Brazil was the best team and they failed to reach the final. Instead, Italy reached the final with the worst team in Spain."

Brazil's chances of emulating the achievements of Pele's era, according to their former captain, rest on them finding a "more compact" style and possibly taking a risk with the 17-year-old Ronaldo, being hailed by some as "the new Pele."

"He's a good player and if he has the opportunity to play I think he will be one of the stars of the World Cup. If I was the manager I'd give him a chance to play."

"Even now people worry about Brazil and I think either they, Colombia or Germany will be in the final."

Pele also nominated Ireland — "They are tough to beat" — and Nigeria as potential surprise teams.

But he could not resist a big at Maradona, one of the few to have inherited the Brazilian's mantle as the greatest players in the world.

"I really don't expect anything from him... it's too late," said Pele, reflecting on the Argentine's presence at his fourth World Cup.

"If you are in condition you can do it. At the age of 53, you can forget about asking Pele to do bicycle kicks or make beautiful goals," he said.

"But I could still playing midfield because I'm in good condition... once you hit the point that he hit, however, it's difficult to come back."

Pele's career ended in New York 17 years ago following a three-year stint with the New York Cosmos. During two decades in the professional game, he scored 1,282 goals in 1,364 games.

Bulgaria looking for a break

AUSTIN, Texas, June 10: Bulgaria, who have never won a game at the World Cup finals, are bursting with a self-confidence that suggests they are about to make amends and cause a few surprises, reports Reuters.

While coach Dimitar Penev is quietly confident about his team's potential, the players believe they will make a big impact in the United States.

"We will improve our record without any doubt," midfielder Boncho Genchev said on Thursday. "I am not just an optimist, I believe it."

Bulgaria, are appearing in their sixth World Cup finals, but their record on the big occasion is a poor one with six draws and 10 defeats in their 16 matches.

More than anything else, Penev wants to change that.

Asked what his aims are for the 15th World Cup, Penev said simply: "First we should like to win one game, because we have never won one. After that we shall see."

London bookmakers are quoting Bulgaria at 40-1 to win the World Cup, the same odds offered on Romania, Sweden and Switzerland.

Penev, one of Bulgaria's best central defenders during a playing career which saw him appear in three World Cup tournaments and win 90 caps, knows he has ten players to accomplish his ambition.

"I think this is one of the finest Bulgarian teams," he said in an interview at their pre-World Cup base on Thursday.

"At other World Cups we have had some very good players, but the difference this time is that for four or five years a lot of our players have been playing abroad. They have gained a lot of vital experience and they have high expectations of themselves."

"I would say we have the possibility of going further than the first round this time, but we face good adversaries," he added.

Bulgaria open their World Cup campaign against African champions Nigeria in Dallas on June 21 and play Balkan neighbours Greece and twice world champions Argentina in Group D.

The Bulgarian players, with the likes of world-class strikers Bristo Stoichkov of Barcelona and Emil Kostadinov

strong team with players playing in Europe," he said.

"I must repeat that every day to my players. Otherwise we might underestimate them."

"They have a lot of good qualities, they are good technically and good tactically. They will be a danger to all teams. But so too will Bulgaria, according to English-based Genchev.

"I believe in my teammates, myself and our coaching staff," he explained.

"It's not chance or luck that all our top players are playing for leading clubs across Europe. I think we will not be ashamed of how we play here."

Thirteen of the 22-man squad play abroad, and another seven are from Bulgarian champions Levski Sofia, and all are eager to repeat their success at club level for their country.

"I won't say how we will do in any particular game, but there is a saying that your appetite grows as you see the menu and when the food is served up in front of you," said Genchev. "We are ready to eat."



HRISTO STOICHKOV of Portuguese championship runners-up Porto, have a self-belief that was missing when the country was behind the iron curtain.

Penev said he was having a hard job to remind them how tough the tournament will be.

"Nigeria are dangerous opponents. Not only are they African champions, they are a

World Cup organisers sued

CHICAGO, June 10: A Chicago soccer fan has filed a lawsuit against the World Cup organisers, claiming he was sent some of the cheapest seats in the stadium despite paying for the best, reports Reuters.

The litigant was not named in court papers filed on Tuesday, but published reports in Chicago identified him as Anton Naunheimer.

PROFILES: UNITED STATES

NEW YORK, June 10: Following are brief profiles of the United States' World Cup squad.

GOALKEEPERS:

Tony Meola, Age 25. Not attached to a club, 85 caps; experienced keeper who was the Americans' first choice during the last World Cup in Italy; played briefly for Watford in the English Second Division in 1990.

Brad Friedel, 23. Newcastle United, 25; a mainstay for the US Olympic team; was named US college-player-of-the-year in 1992; recently signed with English Premier league team Newcastle United.

Juergen Sommer, 25. Luton Town, 0; apart from playing for English First Division side Luton Town; has also played in Third Division on loan to Torquay United.

DEFENDERS:

Marcelo Balboa, 27. No club, 90; most experienced defender; played in all three US games in 1990 World Cup finals; badly injured knee against Iceland last year, but has battled back to regain his place as central defender; sweeper at hearts of American defence; has scored 10 goals for US.

Paul Caligiuri, 30. No club, 83; versatile defender who can play as sweeper or on flanks; played in all three of the United States' 1990-World Cup games in Italy; scoring against Czechoslovakia; played in Germany for Freiburg and Hansa Rostock in 1991-92.

Fernando Clavijo, 37. No club, 58; ten-year veteran of the American indoor leagues; made debut with US outdoor team in 1990; born in Uruguay, where he played for First Division Atenas at the age of 16.

Thomas Dooley, 33. No club, 39; veteran central defender or midfielder who played 10 years in the Bundesliga in his native Germany; helped Kaiserslautern to the German Championship in 1991; scored first goal in shock win over England last year and twice against Germany in Chicago; son of US soldier who married a German, he is captain of US team.

Cle Koolman, 33. No club, 11; rugged defender who played in Mexican First Division for two seasons with Juarez Cobras and later as captain of Cruz Azul; played five years with LA Lasers in indoor league; was place-kicker for his high school American football team.

Alexi Lalas, 24. No club, 46; distinctive red-haired; goateed central defender; the team's bobemian; plays guitar in rock band and has released album of his own songs; dangerous header of the ball, he scored second goal in last year's 2-0 win over England.

Mike Lapper, 23. No club, 39; tenacious marker, who played every minute for the US in 1992 Olympics.

MIDFIELDERS:

Mike Burns, 23. No club, 18; a product of US Soccer's national programme; played in 1987 under-16 World Championships; was in US team that won gold medal in 1991 Pan-American Games and played in all the Americans' Olympic matches in 1992; solid in defence and attack; made his debut for national team last September.

John Harkes, 27. Derby County, 52; tireless midfielder who can tackle tenaciously and is also elegant passer; experienced in English Premier Division, where he played in 86 league games and scored seven goals in two seasons; was first American to play at Wembley, setting up goal for Sheffield Wednesday in 1993 FA Cup final; transferred to First Division Derby County for dollar 1.22 million for 1993-4 season.

Cobi Jones, 23 (24 on June 16). No club, 50; fast, dynamic player, who was in gold medal-winning US team at 1991 Pan-American Games; played in all three Olympic Games in 1992.

Hugo Perez, 34. No club, 77; Born in El Salvador, he is one of the most experienced members of the US team; played for Red Star of Paris in 1989 and Itihad of Saudi Arabia in 1992-3; was US soccer player-of-the-year in 1991; played in 1984 Olympics and 1986 and 1990 World Cup qualifying rounds.

Tab Ramos, 27. Real Betis, 50; Creative midfielder who was one of first of new wave of Americans to play overseas first with figure as and now, with Real Betis of Spanish Second Division; played in 1988 Olympic team and in 1990 World Cup finals; Born in Uruguay, where father played professionally.

PROFILES: NORWAY

OSLO, June 10: Following are brief profiles of Norway's World Cup squad.

GOALKEEPERS:

Erik Thorstvedt, Age 31. Tottenham, 84 caps, well-liked veteran star, second most capped player in Norway's history; Known as "Erik the Viking," throws gloves to crowds after every win at Tottenham; Only Norwegian to play on winning side in English FA Cup final - Tottenham 1991; Giant reach (1.94 cm tall); Often dives to stop apparently impossible shots.

Frøde Grodås, 29. Lillestrom, 12; First-choice substitute for Thorstvedt; has been cool-headed and decisive during qualifiers; Art-timer who is trained school teacher.

Olav Rise, 33. Rosenborg, 25; Middle initial "B" gives nickname "Bench"; He has been in the squad 75 times but played only 25 games; Got gold watch for 25th cap in May 1994 but joked it was like his career — too slow.

DEFENDERS:

Henning Berg, 24. Blackburn Rovers, 16; fast runner like many of defence; Coach Egil Olsen says defenders are his best sprinters; All-rounder, good in the air and team regular since debut in 1992, one of generation of good players born in 1969.

Stig Inge Bjoernebye, 24. Liverpool Rosenborg, 34; failed to impress enough to secure first team place at Liverpool despite pinpoint passes; speciality is long cross, targeting tall Jostein Flo who heads into goal.

Gunnar Halle, 28. Oldham Athletic, 44; Physical defender; Back after being battered by injury last season; he cracked a rib and punctured a lung in a game in April, the day he made his comeback after two knee operating; Prone to getting booked.

Aif Inge Hanland, 21. Nottingham Forest, 3; One of least experienced players but mainstay of under-21 side; strong tackler, fast and often a threatening addition to attacks.

Rane Bratseth, 33. Werder Bremen, 57; Captain and Dlynchpin of team playing final season; Known as "The Elk," has speed and calm to outwit world class attackers; Christian teetotaler, he threatened to pull out of World Cup after brewery used team in beer advertisement, the ads were scrapped.

Roger Nilsen, 23. Sheffield United, 20; Often produces cannonball shots from well outside area; scorer of three international goals, but sometimes erratic with fatal lapses of concentration.

Erland Johnsen, 27. Chelsea, 20; Centre back; Hard tackler and good passer with two international goals go credit but not regular player under Olsen; Named mainly as a substitute.

MIDFIELDERS:

Oeyvind Leonhardsen, 23. Rosenborg, 29; Team workhorse, tirelessly running and tying midfield together; scorer of eight international goals; Olsen worries his running could drain

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his energy in heat and humidity in US.

Lars Bohinen, 24. Nottingham Forest, 29; One of main stars; Strong runner along with Leonhardsen and inventive midfielder with good overview of play and deft touch in front of goal; Cousin of striker Sigurd Rushfeldt.

Erik Mykland, 22 (23 on July 21). IK SRT, 25; One of most creative in squad, warming his way out of tight corners and opening up play with neat passes; One of the smallest Players in squad (1.72 cm) known as "The Mosquito", absent-minded off pitch, he once took a beach bag instead of soccer gear to game. Kjetil Rekdal,