



Milla may play against Brazil

LOS ANGELES, June 22: Roger Milla, the 42 year-old Cameroon striker, might still become the oldest footballer to play at the World Cup finals, reports reuter.

Milla, sidelined with a hamstring injury, did not train last week and was not called up for Cameroon's 2-2 draw with Sweden in Pasadena on Sunday.

But coach Henri Michel said Cameroon's hero of the 1990 finals in Italy remained part of his plans. "He is a reserve to be held back until times of need. He is like a kind of joker or trump card for us."

Milla said he would be fit for the Group B game against Brazil on Friday. "I can play, why not," he said.

"It will be a difficult game but I am hoping to get a chance."

The oldest player to appear in the finals to date is Dino Zoff, who captained Italy to victory in Spain in 1982 aged 41.

Accolade for Zico

TOKYO, June 22: The Japanese government said today it was presenting Brazilian football star Zico with the Prime Minister's award for his contribution to Japan's professional football league, officials said, reports AFP.

Zico will be the first foreigner to receive the award which was established in 1966, the government officials said.

An award ceremony will be held at the Prime Minister's official residence Wednesday, they said.

Zico, whose real name is Arthur Anunes Coimbra, joined Japan's Sumitomo Metal company football club in May 1991. The amateur club, now called Kashima Antlers, joined the country's first professional football league when it was inaugurated last year.

Zico will also be given an honorary citizenship by the city of Kashima, the home ground of the Kashima Antlers east of Tokyo, city officials said.

Novelty earns FIFA praise

PASADENA, June 22: Three points for victory and the ban on tackles from behind have transformed the image of the World Cup finals UEFA president Lennart Johansson said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

"I am delighted with the innovations FIFA have made for the tournament," said Johansson, four years on from the negative play and low scoring of Italia 90.

"Awarding three points for a win has encouraged teams to play for the win."

"In the Sweden-Cameroun match on Sunday, Cameroun equalised in the 75th minute to make it 2-2. Under the old system of two points for a win both teams would probably have settled for a point and the match would have petered out for the last 15 minutes."

"But neither team wanted to lose two points on Sunday and they both continued attacking right till the end."

"At the same time banning the tackle from behind has given the attacking players more time on the ball, and we have seen the benefits of that immediately. They are creating more, wrong-doers are being punished. It is good for the game and good for the fans."

But Johansson, also a FIFA vice-president, said the world governing body could still do more to improve the flow of play. "I think that any player rolling around in apparent agony and play-acting should be booked, and that referees should immediately give the yellow card for shirt-pulling."

"We are also seeing an improvement in the flow of games due to a less publicised change. The referees here are younger and fitter than before."

"The oldest is 45, the youngest two referees both turned 34 only in May. They can keep up with play. It is a subtle, change, but one that also helps the game move."

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Nigeria announce arrival

DALLAS, June 22: Nigeria showed they are ready to take on the best when they opened their World Cup campaign with a crushing 3-0 win over Bulgaria on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The African champions, displaying gazelle-like speed in attack, ran the Bulgarian defence ragged and each of their goals was superbly taken

with a crushing 3-0 win over Bulgaria on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Just before the end Amunike was carried off on a stretcher. Teammate Finidi George had also gone off injured in the 77th minute after a goalmouth collision with Trifon Ivanov, who was also helped off but returned

with a crushing 3-0 win over Bulgaria on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Porto winger Kostadinov had a shot superbly saved by goalkeeper Peter Rufal in the 11th minute when he twisted past a defender in the box and let rip. A minute later his cross to an unmarked Stoichkov in the box was cut out by Uche Okechukwu.

And the flailing leg of another defender denied Stoichkov when he had a free header in front of goal in the 10th minute.

But once the Nigerians took the lead, their confidence grew and they looked threatening on every raid and gave the Bulgarian defence a torrid time.

Substitute Mutiu Adepoju almost scored a fourth with his first touch in the 69th minute when his rasping shot was turned round the post by Bulgarian goalkeeper Borislav Milakov.

Referee: Rodrigo Badilla (Costa Rica)

Yellow cards: Nigeria — Emmanuel Amunike (74)

Bulgaria — Yordan Lechkov (54)

TEAMS

BULGARIA: 1-Borislav Milakov, 2-Emil Kremenliev, 3-Trifon Ivanov, 4-Zlanko Tzvetanov, 5-Petar Hubcov, 6-Zlato Yankov, 9-Yordan Lechkov (10-Nasko Sirakov 59), 11-Daniel Borimirov (13-Ivalio Yordanov 72), 8-Hristo Stoichkov, 7-Emmanuel Amunike, 9-Rashidi Yekini.

NIGERIA: 1-Peter Rufal, 2-Augustine Eguavoen, 3-Ben Iroha, 6-Chidi Nwanu, 5-Uche Okechukwu, 12-Samson Siasia (21-Mutiu Adepoju 68), 15-Sunday Oliseh, 7-Finidi George (13-Emeka Ezeugo 77), 14-Daniel Amokachi, 11-Emmanuel Amunike, 9-Rashidi Yekini.

MATCH STATS

Nigeria 3 0 11 19 15 10 5 10 2 2 1 1 0 0

Bulgaria 0 0 11 19 15 10 5 10 2 2 1 1 0 0

STANDINGS

World Cup, Group D standings after Tuesday's matches (tableau under played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against points):

Argentina 1 1 0 0 4 0 3

Nigeria 1 1 0 0 3 0 3

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