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Westerhof confident

FOXBORO, Mass., July 4: Nigerian coach Clemens Westerhof on Sunday gave his team only an even chance of beating Italy in the second round of the World Cup. At least that's what he said, reports AP.

He seems to be thinking beyond the Italians — to the quarterfinals and Spain.

When asked at a news conference to rate the Italians, the Dutchman began talking about the Spanish, who his "Super Eagles" will meet next if they beat the Italians.

A reporter suggested that Westerhof had gotten off the track.

No, I am talking about Spain. That is our next opponent. I am thinking already about our next opponent, he said. "If we beat Italy, we meet Spain. If we beat Spain, we have Germany. It is normal. You have to think ahead."

Westerhof said Nigeria respects perennial European power Italy, but does not fear it.

"We are not afraid of them. We want to beat them. You must, otherwise you have to go home," he said. "We make our normal preparations and we are ready for the battle."

"We want to be the surprise of this tournament. And we respect everybody."

Westerhof said all his players were 100 per cent fit for Tuesday's clash with Italy, and have one edge going into the game.

The team has trained and stayed near Foxboro through most of the first round, where it was beaten by Argentina 2-1 but rallied to defeat Greece 2-0.

"This is our hometown," Westerhof said. "That the only point we have that is a plus for us. People know us already. We are at the same hotel. The boys are happy in the hotel. The crowd knows us. The papers say we are the home team."

Hometown or not, the "Super Eagles" will find themselves adrift in a sea of Italian flags Tuesday, with Italian fans expected to vastly outnumber the Nigerians.

Westerhof didn't care.

"My boys like that. The more other colors they see, the more challenged they are," he said.

Italians ready to take heat

MARTINSVILLE, N.J., July 4: Italy are gearing up for the "real" World Cup following their labored second-round qualification, reports AP.

Defender-captain Paolo Maldini said Sunday: "A totally new competition gets underway now, and we are prepared to begin it all over again."

"It's another World Cup from the second round, under the knockout system. Each game will be a final. I believe we can definitely do better under pressure," striker Giuseppe Signori said.

After much computation for points and goals difference in preliminary rounds, the verdict of second-round games is simple — the winners move into the quarterfinals, the losers go home.

The Azzurri, bitterly criticized for their less-than-impressive performances in matches against Ireland and Mexico, take on unpredictable Nigeria at Foxboro stadium Tuesday.

Three-time world champions Italy start as a favorite against the African champions but Maldini emphasized that he and his teammates will have to play with skill and imagination to earn a quarterfinal berth against Spain.

"We can't think to beat them on the physical plan. We must avoid the one against one, shoulder against shoulder play. We must catch them by surprise with quick moves. We must exploit the qualities of (Roberto) Baggio and Signori," Maldini added.

Baggio, the best world player of 1993, and Signori, the leading Italian league scorer, are talented forwards but have been shut out by rival defenses so far and failed to produce offensive spark.

Italy's two goals in preliminary games were tallied by midfielder Dino Baggio — no relation to Roberto — and by substitute forward Daniele Massaro.

"I can bet on Baggio's comeback. He must only improve psychologically, after the initial failures. He was burdened with too many responsibilities and faced very bitter, spiteful criticism," the Italian captain said.

Maldini, a regular left back, said he was ready to play at the center of defense along with AC Milan teammate Alessandro Costacurta "if Sacchi decides that he and his teammates will have to play with skill and imagination to earn a quarterfinal berth against Spain."

Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi was likely to change some players and schemes for the game with the Nigerian "Super Eagles" but was tight-lipped about the starting lineup.

"I have the 11 in my mind, but I'll make a final decision after talking to doctors," Sacchi said. "Some players still are overly tired from the previous games and Dino Baggio must pass a fitness test. I must field 11 players in their best physical and psychological form for beating a tough team."

Dino Baggio, who recently signed with Parma, suffered a light left thigh strain during the game against Mexico in

Revellers aren't worshippers

MADRID, Spain, July 4: Spanish police are hunting for a stone arm broken off one of Madrid's best known monuments in the revelry following Spain's victory over Switzerland in the World Cup, reports AP.

The vandalism prompted Madrid mayor Jose Maria Alvarez del Manzano to appeal to fans "to share their joy in a civilized way" if Spain win their quarter-final match Saturday in Boston against the winner of Nigeria-Italy match in Boston Tuesday.

Madrid soccer fans traditionally gather at the Cibeles fountain, which contains a statue of the Greco-Roman goddess Cybele riding a lion-drawn chariot, after local or national team victories. Cibeles is the Spanish name for the goddess.

Unidentified revellers hacked off one of the statue's stone arms and carried it away in the wee hours of Sunday morning as more than a thousand jubilant Spaniards clambered over the monument, many of them splashing about in the fountain as police cordoned off traffic.

Spain defeated Switzerland 3-0 Saturday.

It was not clear whether the fountain would be placed off limits in the event of a Spanish victory Saturday.

The fountain, located at the beginning of the sprawling Paseo de la Castellana, Madrid's main thoroughfare, was built during the reign of Carlos III in 1782. It has become one of the capital's most popular landmarks.

Cybele, or Great Mother of the Gods, was worshipped by the Greeks and Romans as the parent of gods, humans and beasts, and her cult was one of the most important in the Roman empire.



STUDY IN CONTRASTS: Swedish forward Kenneth Andersson stretches his hands in addition to a tell-tale grin as an unmistakable gesture of delight after his team's third and his second goal while Saudi defender Mohammad Al Khelaiwi emulates his rival only in anguish. Swedes comfortably got past surprise pack Saudi Arabia 3-1 at the Cotton Bowl to find a place among the last eight. — AFP photo

Oil over troubled water

BOSTON, Mass., July 4: The Nigerian Football Association put up a smokescreen on Sunday over a players' revolt that threatened to tear their World Cup squad apart, reports AP.

Player discontent over win bonuses and team selection has exploded into an open confrontation with coach Clemens Westerhof.

Westerhof sparked the latest outburst when he ordered players to quit their hotel 30 miles south of Boston to escape "an invasion" of journalists.

"They refused and the row brought everything to a head," said a source close to the Nigerian delegation.

The Nigerian FA and Westerhof denied there was any problem.

In a World Cup squad "you are together for a long time. You have different ideas about football, about lifestyles and about discipline," he said. "But in a team there are rules. If you can't live by the rules, you can't stay in the team."

Rumours of a players' strike over money ahead of the Italy game have been dismissed, with one source saying the FA have offered the team big money if they win the second round tie.

"So far the moment the trouble is over. Until the next game," said the source.

In March, the Nigerians refused to come out for a friendly against Ghana until they received a promised 5,000 dollar bonus for qualifying for the World Cup.

Each player "picked up a 3,000 dollar bonus after the 3-0 victory against Bulgaria in their opening World Cup game. The sum was raised to 5,000 dollars for the victory against

WORLD CUP NOTEBOOK

UNDATED (AP): Food is expensive in Romania, money is tight, but when it comes to soccer people say they can do without both: only bring us the Wonderful Cup.

About 100,000 people flooded the streets of Bucharest early Monday, waving flags, ringing bells and banging pans to celebrate Romania's victory over Argentina at the World Cup.

One jubilant male patient jumped out of an ambulance in his pajamas.

"I don't care what happens to me," he said. "I heard it on the ambulance's receiver and I feel like nothing's wrong with me anymore."

Residents poured onto the city's boulevards after the match finished at 1:30 am, chanting "Romania, Romania," and waving red, yellow, and blue national flags to mark the team's best ever performance in the month long tournament.

The 3-2 victory at Pasadena, Calif., marked the first time Romania advanced to the quarterfinals.

In the Transylvanian city of Sibiu, about 45,000 fans took to the streets, Radio Bucharest reported. Some cheered "we don't want money and food, we want the World Cup."

"May be I'm (poor), may be I'll have nothing for breakfast tomorrow," said Alin Ciobaca in Bucharest amid cheers of joy. "But I know I'll survive as long as they'll give us what they did this night."

The Nigerian soccer team is awaiting a visit Monday from one of its countrymen — Hakeem Olajuwon.

"We just need to find out what time is best," said team official Ilo Mainassara.

Nigeria, the surprise winner of their group, play Italy in Foxboro Mass. on Tuesday.

"I know him. I have seen him play on television," Nigerian midfielder Emmanuel Amunike said. "He is popular in Nigeria."

Asked if the Houston Rockets center and the NBA's MVP was as popular back home as Nigerian soccer star Rashidi Yekini, Amunike turned diplomat.

"We are not talking about soccer," he said. "In the NBA, in basketball, he is popular."

Ladbrokes of London rate both Sweden and Romania as 1:1 shots to win the World Cup after both teams qualified to meet each other in the quarterfinals. Tournament favorite Brazil have hardened from 15:8 to 13:8. In other betting Monday: Germany, 3:1; Italy, 11:2; Spain, 12:1; Nigeria, 16:1; Ireland, 20:1; Mexico, 33:1; the United States, 66:1.

The rallying cry for the Italian team is "Forza Italia" (Let's go Italy). The slogan has been appropriated by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian premier and president of the soccer club AC Milan.

Now there are reports of some Italians forming a "Forza Nigeria" club leading to Tuesday's second-round game between Italy and Nigeria.

"It's something political, something against Berlusconi who is a supporter of the Italian team," Italian defender Alessandro Costacurta said.

"I don't believe this group of people will ever give Italy their support. They will be against us, even in case we win the world title. It's just politics."

Look at the royal crowd. The Cotton Bowl played hosts to a few heads of state Sunday during Sweden's 3-1 victory over Saudi Arabia.

The sellout crowd of 60,277 in Dallas included Prince Faisal bin Fahd and Prince Sultan bin Fahd, sons of Saudi leader King Fahd, and Prince Bandar, the country's ambassador to the United States.

The head of the state of Texas had a seat, Gov. Ann Richards. Also in the stands was FIFA president Joao Havelange and Joseph Blatter, the general secretary of soccer's ruling body.

GOAL SCORERS

UNDATED (Reuters): Following are the World Cup '94 goal scorers after Sunday's matches:

6 goals— Oleg Salenko (Russia).

5 goals— Juergen Klinsmann (Germany).

4 goals— Martin Dahlin (Sweden), Gabriel Batistuta (Argentina).

3 goals— Kenneth Andersson (Sweden), Romario (Brazil), Hristo Stoichkov (Bulgaria), Gheorghe Hagi (Romania).

2 goals— Florin Raducioiu (Romania), Jose Camarero (Spain), Juan Golkoetxea (Spain), Ilie Dumitrescu (Romania), Georges Bregy (Switzerland), Adolfo Valencia (Colombia), Luis Garcia (Mexico), Fuad Anwar Amin (Saudi Arabia), Claudio Caniggia (Argentina), Hong Myong-Bo (South Korea), Daniel Amokachi (Nigeria), Rudi Voller (Germany), Philippe Albert (Belgium).

1 goal— Julio Salinas (Spain), Hwang Sun-Hong (South Korea), Soe Jung-Won (South Korea), Eric Wynalda (United States), Ray Houghton (Ireland), Marc Degryse (Belgium), Kjetil Rekdal (Norway), Roger Ljung (Sweden), David Embe (Cameroon), Francois Omam-Biyik (Cameroon), Rai (Brazil), Wim Jonk (Netherlands), Gaston Taument (Netherlands), Diego Maradona (Argentina), Rashidi Yekini (Nigeria), Finidi George (Nigeria), Emmanuel Amunike (Nigeria), Alain Sutter (Switzerland), Stephane Chapuisat (Switzerland), Adrian Knup (Switzerland), Ernie Stewart (United States), Dino Baggio (Italy), John Aldridge (Ireland), Bebeto (Brazil), Marcio Santos (Brazil), Dmitry Radchenko (Russia), Tomas Brodin (Sweden), Sami Al-Jaber (Saudi Arabia), Georges Grun (Belgium), Mohamed Chaouch (Morocco), Samson Siasia (Nigeria), Yordan Lechkov (Bulgaria), Daniel Borimirov (Bulgaria), Dan Petrescu (Romania), Harold Lozano (Colombia), Herman Gaviira (Colombia), Karlheinz Riedle (Germany), Erwin Sanchez (Bolivia), Josep Guardiola (Spain), Daniele Massaro (Italy), Marcelino Bernat (Mexico), Fahd Al-Ghshayan (Saudi Arabia), Roger Milla (Cameroon), Saeed Owairan (Saudi Arabia), Hassan Nader (Morocco), Bryan Roy (Netherlands), Dennis Bergkamp (Netherlands), Nasko Sirakov (Bulgaria), Fernando Hierro (Spain), Luis Enrique (Spain), Aitor Beguiristain (Spain), Abel Balbo (Argentina).

Own goal— Andres Escobar, Colombia (vs United States).

ARIGO SACCHI

second-round World Cup match, reports AP.

The winners of Tuesday's game at Foxboro stadium take on Spain in the quarterfinals. Italy, a three-time world champion, are less than the European superpower that arrived.

"Italy, they are a very good side," said Nigerian midfielder Emmanuel Amunike. "As I have seen the Italian team this year, they are not the team I saw last year. But you can't predict them. This is football."

The Azzurri struggled to reach the second round. Their leader, Roberto Baggio, hasn't scored in eight games and has been bitterly criticized for his performance.

The Nigerian team, making its debut in the World Cup finals, boosted its popularity and chances by winning Group D, beating out Argentina and Bulgaria.

"They did better than we in early games. But now it's a knockout system and we should have more experience and stronger determination in this phase of the competition," said Italian captain Paolo Maldini.

Maldini took over the captain's armband from AC Milan teammate Franco Baresi, Italy's charismatic sweeper who required knee surgery following the first-round match with Norway.

Italy finished third in Group E with a 1-1-1 record, scoring two goals and allowing two.

The Nigerian "Super Eagles," who have picked up the banner of African soccer from Cameroon's "Indomitable Lions" at the World Cup, beat 2-1 to the Argentines.

They play a fast, physical game, with a sometimes suspect defence that is compensated for by a swift counter-attack led by Rashidi Yekini and

PROBABLE TEAMS

ITALY: 12-Luca Marchegiani, 8-Roberto Mussi, 4-Alessandro Costacurta, 5-Paolo Maldini, 3-Antonio Benarrivo, 14-Nicola Bertini, 11-Demetrio Albertini, 13-Dino Baggio, 20-Giuseppe Signori, 19-Daniele Massaro, 10-Roberto Baggio.

NIGERIA: 1-Peter Rufai, 2-Augustine Eguavoen, 6-Chidi Nwanu, 5-Uche Okechukwu, 3-Ben Iroha, 15-Sunday Oliseh, 12-Samson Siasia, 14-Daniel Amokachi, 7-Finidi George, 9-Rashidi Yekini, 11-Emmanuel Amunike.

Referee: Arturo Brizio Carter, (Mexico)

Kickoff: 1705 GMT

Oliseh braces for big time

MANSFIELD, Massachusetts, July 4: Niger World Cup second round match against Italy on Tuesday holds an extra edge for Sunday Oliseh, reports Reuters.

The 19-year-old midfielder will be playing in Serie A next season and is hoping to make an early impression.

Already dubbed "Il Nuovo Rijkaard" — after Dutch international and ex-AC Milan player Frank Rijkaard — by the Italian press, Oliseh has moved to Reggiana from FC Lige.

"The fact that I'll be playing in Italy soon, is in the back of my mind. It's a great honour and the best thing that has happened to me," Oliseh said.

"Playing against Italy is a big challenge, but my first priority is just to concentrate on my own game and help Nigeria to win."

Oliseh has been the mid-field linkman for Nigeria in USA '94 after winning a place in the team at the African Nations' Cup Finals in Tunisia earlier this year.

His astute passing was a major factor in the "Super Eagles" being crowned African champions, and earned him a transfer to Italy.

He will become only the fourth African to play in the Italian league. His predecessors, Francis Zahoui (Ascoli), Roger Mendy (Pescara) and Kwame Ayew (Lecce) all had short, and disappointing, tenures with their Italian employers.

Rockets' star to boost 'Super Eagles'

FOXBORO, Mass., July 4: Nigeria's "Super Eagles" are geared up for visit Monday from a countryman whose stature back home nearly rivals their own.

Houston Rockets' centre Hakeem Olajuwon is expected to drop in on the Nigerians, giving them a boost on the eve of their second-round World Cup showdown with Italy, the team said Sunday, reports AP.

"We just need to find out what time is best," said team official Ilo Mainassara.

Olajuwon is a superstar in the United States, having been named the National Basketball Association's most Valuable Player in both the league season and playoffs in leading the Rockets to the NBA title last month.

At 7-foot-0 (2.13 metres), Olajuwon is also popular in Nigeria, but his height makes him a bit too tall for the sport that counts their — soccer.

"I know him. I have seen him play on television. He is popular in Nigeria," said Emmanuel Amunike, a 25-year-old attacker for the Nigerian team.

Asked if Olajuwon was as popular at home as such national soccer heroes as Rashidi Yekini, who plays for Portugal's Victoria Setubal Amunike turned diplomat.

"We are not talking about soccer," said Amunike. "In the NBA, in basketball, he is popular."

Wimbledon singles champions American Pete Sampras and Spaniard, Conchita Martinez arrive for the annual players' ball at the Savoy Hotel in London on Sunday. — AFP photo